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INTRODUCTION

Contrasted views of New Education on knowledge and its transformation. Anticipation of a new mode or ambivalence?

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The calls for a renewal of education and pedagogy are secular. They took other forms and became more insistent in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when the school, in which the future of the nation lay, became an affair of state. A number of Western nations won over to democracy then attempted to generalise schooling to provide universal access to (elementary) knowledge, diversifying and densifying their scholastic offerings. To ensure their consistency and effectiveness, this institutionalisation was accompanied by impressive administrative and legislative infrastructures. Although itself the result of reformist pressures, this institutionalisation in turn provoked intense contradictions. These became even more profuse and intense as state-controlled school systems were consolidated and structured. And, with increased urbanisation and industrialisation, the social context as a whole underwent a profound change, generating further social tensions and preoccupations at the turn of the nineteenth century.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, it was the turn of the reformist movements themselves to become institutionalised to make their voices better heard, to test their theories, to promote their pedagogic doctrines: through editorial vehicles, social and scientific events, associative networks and movements. Beyond this diversity there was an analogous denunciation of the inadequacy of established educational practices and systems for the specific needs of childhood and a demand for a radical change in educational ideas, in furtherance of an Education that was resolutely new; a New Education, a Progressive Education, Reformpädagogik, escola nova, escuela nueva, a functional education, or an active school to use the terms by which these movements themselves recognised each other. The New Education (now understood as a generic term encompassing the terms mentioned above), diversified though it was, emanated above all from cultured, pedagogic, humanist, intellectual, scientific urban environments, with the conviction that it was through education that humanity could, indeed must, be transformed.¹

Although it had always been used in pedagogy, the adjective “new” won over a new audience in the early twentieth century when, given all possible shades of meaning, it was put before everything. A number of contemporaries accepted it and often derided

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it at the same time, like John Adams in 1922, one of those who at the time personified the transition between old and "new":

On this side [of the ocean] we have always had the New Art: lately we added the New Theology, the New Nationalism, the New Psychology – and now we have the New Education, with its variant the New Teaching, not to speak of the New Children.²

The questioning that underlies this issue of the journal can be summed up thus: what transformations of knowledge does New Education promote? “New” implies transformation, which we retain in this issue for its multiple meanings. By focusing the attention on an evolution, the notion invites the concerned historian to identify not only the changes but also the permanencies, the former only having meaning by virtue of the latter and hence also questioning the idea of a radical break. It calls up the forms of this evolution, here also reflecting the possibilities of formations. The prefix trans-suggests the idea of cutting across boundaries, thus encompassing multiple facets of the questions concerned, while bringing attention to bear on the way in which they interconnect, and the nature of the resulting transitions and changes. And it is here that our attention is drawn to knowledge (savoirs). The questioning plays deliberately on the ambiguity of the English term “knowledge” (certainly less grand than the notion of “savour”, but grander than the term “Wissen”), to allow the authors full scope as to how they interpret it, directing their investigations sometimes towards the reference disciplines or theories, sometimes towards the school disciplines, the knowledge to teach and learn and for teaching and learning, and also towards knowledge built on the New Education, endowing the analysis with a welcome historiographic introspection.³ What knowledge was used, created, promoted, and adapted by the protagonists of the movement? What are the changes they advocated and towards which they worked? What transformations effectively emerged and how were they interpreted by them and can they be interpreted by us nearly a century later?

At the beginning of this collaborative enquiry, there is surprise at the way in which the reformist movements and their protagonists – pedagogues, practitioners, intellectuals, administrators, scientists – positioned themselves in regard to this knowledge and the reformist aspirations that mobilised them on this subject. We can sum up our original concept as follows, intentionally stated in an over-simplified, even provocative way.

While being driven also by moral, even religious, ideas and doctrines, New Education was intimately linked to the emerging social sciences, especially pedology, child study, educational science and child psychology.⁴ Its supporters referred to

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³These are questions that had to be discussed first at the symposium attended by most of the authors in this book, as part of Network 17 Histories of Education of the Conference organised by the European Educational Research Association (EERA) in Geneva in September 2006. The historiographic challenges were highlighted particularly by Depaepe and Simon at the end of that symposium, when they agreed to take on the role of critical discussants.

them continually to promote a better knowledge of the child and the laws of child
development, both moral and cognitive, to detect the child’s physical and psychological
aptitudes and needs and adjust the educational practices, textbook content, teacher
profiles and training courses accordingly. But the status and nature of this knowledge
was also the subject of discussion and even dispute. Lodging a challenge first against
the state school system, whose predefined infrastructures and curriculums it
condemned, New Education called into question the knowledge at the heart of that
system and the form that it took: the formative value of bookish knowledge and
constituted knowledge was readily challenged; formal knowledge, subject content,
school curriculums and textbooks were commonly abandoned for educational situa-
tions from everyday life, or even outdoors, and for a more practical and concrete
orientation of education; less emphasis on intellectual activities than on manual and
physical activities; and less recognition of formalised teaching than of natural learn-
ing. The teacher training institutions and indeed the academic institutions and the
disciplinary system were also vilified, in so far as they would contribute to reifying
certain knowledge, to guaranteeing certain disciplinary hierarchies, and to ossifying
certain teaching practices. Pedagogues and scientists at the origin of both the New
Education and the educational sciences seem to show a certain ambivalence towards
constituted knowledge, if not at times a form of anti-intellectualism. Would knowl-
edge itself, in the name of the knowledge newly constructed by the instigators of this
renewal, as such be called into question?

The contributions presented here provide subtly different and contrasting
responses to the issues raised. A careful reading of the contributions shows that these
transformations (or calls for transformation) of knowledge are concentrated in a
particular historical context while occurring over a period that relativises their inter-
pretation in terms of a radical break (and therefore their completely novel character);
they flout geographical boundaries while simultaneously resulting from movements
that presuppose them. They concern all of the social spheres – and the knowledge that
embodies them – while leaving a particular hallmark on the way childhood and child
development were viewed. They depend on protagonists who are themselves part of
a history on which they depend even though the mission they take on to change
humanity through education imubes their militancy with a degree of timelessness.
Questioning, in short, the very relationship with history of the protagonists studied
here.

Knowledge flows – elements for a topography

The points of view favoured by the contributors are complementary, and thereby lend
themselves to mutual enrichment and interpellation. Several are centred on a country
(De Coster, Depaepe and Simon; Jarning; Karakatsani and Théodorou; Stauffer) or an
institution of significance in a particular context (Aldrich; Savoye). Others seek to
describe the emergence and development of a concept or ideal (Brehony; Del Pozo),
or the way in which prominent figures position themselves in regard to these questions
of knowledge (Bernhard; Hofstetter and Schneuwly). Added to this is a more general
theoretical analysis, based on a critical review of the work on New Education in
German- and French-speaking countries, which questions the nature of the knowledge
about New Education itself (Helmchen). Most of the articles are based on an analysis
of publications (reviews, books or textbooks, and to a lesser extent, reports) that set
out to examine scripturalised knowledge, which was deemed worthy of being so – if
only to ensure that it was discussed, disseminated and perpetuated – by the protagonists of this renewal themselves.\(^5\) Thematic analyses dominate, sometimes also adopting a comparative approach. Quantitative analyses form the basis of the contribution by Stauffer, and complement that of De Coster, Depaepe and Simon, who turn their attention to a recent period and make use of oral sources as well.

Apart from the latter, all contributions concentrate on the early decades of the twentieth century and especially the years 1920–1940.\(^6\) This was a time known\(^7\) to be characterised – to continue the typographical metaphor – by the “compactness” of the reformist manifestations. The teaching State was by then well established, and it was this powerful empire and the norms imposed by it which they rose up against. Nearly a century on, it is possible to set that period in a wider ranging continuum. The establishment of the teaching State can be interpreted as an unprecedented social, political and pedagogic innovation, which also originated new concepts and uses of knowledge, the consolidation of which was inevitably accompanied by a rigidity that the reformist movements found easy to denounce, but which they themselves inherited, if only because of the positions they held and the institutions and networks in which they were active, bespeaking the fact that they themselves were also in a position to promote the renewal.

Beyond these differences, what assuredly marks out this pivotal period on which our attention is focused here (years 1920–1940) is the sheer extent of the call for renewal, which permeated all of the social activities, education in particular; it is the intensity of the mobilisation of its protagonists who put everything into achieving their ambition;

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\(^5\)This reflection echoes that proposed by Depaepe and Simon during the symposium mentioned in note 3. Their reflection sets out the possible pitfalls of a history based on “self-discourse(s)” of the sources, the protagonists of this history themselves becoming historians of their activities and discourses, to which we first have access through the publications they appeared in, mainly their own.


it is the increased concentration of the transnational exchanges around a body of ideas and concepts; it is also the institutionalisation of the efforts of these reformists, manifested in new disciplinary alliances, new scientific approaches, new experimental institutions, alternative schools; it is the conviction that the past could no longer serve as a reference and that before the inheritance could be passed on it had to be re-examined, if only to still see a future evolving from a world in ruins at the end of the First World War, a conflict that had proved to the whole of humanity its potential for barbarism. The resulting indignation was to make the interwar years that key period of utopia, endowing a renewed childhood and education with redeeming virtues, before the rise of nationalism; then the Second World War silenced its banner bearers one by one.

A more analytical topography, this time looking at the way in which knowledge circulated in time and space, shows, as others have done, the international scale of the movement. The countries under the microscope are numerous: Germany, Belgium, Brazil, Spain, France, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, the Soviet Union, and the USA. Some contributions set out from the start to examine the subject in a context that extends beyond national borders, because of the very fact that the phenomenon studied had an intrinsically international dimension. Others describe the way in which knowledge (concepts, theories, doctrines, methods) was transformed as it circulated, being reinterpreted according to the contexts and needs that prevailed at its inception (see in particular Del Pozo; also Brehony).

An analysis of the logic of that circulation enables us to distinguish centres and peripheries. The “centres” operate in relative autonomy, being distinguished by what could be called a propositional force, which enriches and echoes that emanating from other centres, in a certain reciprocity. These centres were situated in Germany, in Belgium, the United States, Great Britain and Switzerland. Of course the metonymy here is misleading, since it would be more proper to mention not countries, but specific sites or institutions: Hamburg, Jena and Leipzig, Brussels, Columbia, London, Geneva. The “peripheries” evince flows that are more unilateral, which draw their reference, and claim it, from these centres mentioned (can a new form of colonialism be detected here?): examples of this are Brazil, Greece, Norway and Spain. Italy was also an “exporter” of pedagogic ideas, through Montessori in particular, but, as in France, no institution constituted a stable centre of reference in the country, which functioned somewhat like an autocracy, that early fascism would reinforce. It will be noted that this geography coincides with others that would make interesting subjects for analysis, with the counter-examples being identified as well: between the North and South of Europe (with Norway being the exception); and between Catholic and Protestant countries (with Belgium being the exception).


One indication of the unilateralism of the relationship lies in the number and frequency of translations, especially in Brazil, Greece and Spain, countries that displayed from this point of view a surprisingly dynamic editorial activity, which enabled them to rally to the reformist movement, the key works, concepts and theories of which they imported.\textsuperscript{10} In her attempt to identify these flows, Del Pozo shows the importance of such translations and uses the telling image of concentric circles which bring to mind certain theoretical postulates of Schriewer.\textsuperscript{11} These concentric circles, with strong interconnections, are made up first of an "outside ring [that] would represent the work of foreign pedagogues who provide information about the process. The middle ring would be the intermediaries; these are the Spanish pedagogues who translate, in a literal and figurative sense, the foreign works, in order to adapt them to the mentality of the Spanish teachers but also with the purpose of building a new, national pedagogic body of thought. The innermost ring consists of the teachers who experiment with and adapt the method in their classrooms." From a closer reading of these translations themselves, we can qualify the unilateralism mentioned above in this way: while certainly reinforcing the centres in their role, the translations helped to redefine that role, by the operation of selections (of sites, authors, works, concepts), by resort to new media which are themselves the product of other cultural and linguistic vehicles, and which moreover may even convey quite fundamental reinterpretations of the concepts, doctrines and original theories, the latter having undergone adaptation and reappropriations in accordance with the specific needs of the new context in which they are enunciated.

\textbf{Knowledge transformations – elements for a typology}

The plea for change can be read into all of the analyses gathered here.\textsuperscript{12} As we know, beyond the diversity of forms, systems, movements, theories, doctrines, it was the denunciation of the established pedagogic systems, concepts and practices that was the first symbolic rallying symbol of the reformist movements. What issues of knowledge were involved there? What new knowledge was constructed, claimed and promoted? What knowledge was at the centre of this reformist fever? The knowledge brought to light here is of a different nature, disciplinary and scientific reference knowledge, and pedagogic knowledge bearing on the three dimensions on which the reformist movements focused their enthusiasm: the school system as a whole, its organisation and functioning; the means of and approaches to teaching; and the curricula and textbook contents. The call for change concerned all of these aspects of knowledge, with nuances, even contradictions depending on the contexts and protagonists. Indeed the contributions in this issue show that the New Education contained within it its own contradiction: although there was unanimity on the postulate of change, the form that it took and the role played by knowledge in it were seen in very different terms by its first protagonists, as we shall see.

\textsuperscript{10}Norway now seems to be developing its own path, rather like France and Italy.
\textsuperscript{11}Schriewer, "Fortschrittsmodelle".
\textsuperscript{12}We now consider that the contents mentioned (themes, institutions, countries) enable the reader to identify the appropriate contributions without explicit reference to their authors' names. Therefore, to avoid overburdening our text, we do not give a systematic account of these references, which are very numerous, as this introduction is constructed from a cross-disciplinary analysis of the contributions included here.
Reference knowledge

As regards reference knowledge, a first observation, already analysed elsewhere, must be made: in attempting to change the perception of educational phenomena and to base that perception on a thoroughly scientific knowledge of childhood and the laws of child development, New Education played a part in the emergence of a disciplinary field specifically centred on educational phenomena. In other words, it helped to construct the educational sciences and the scientific knowledge being developed on childhood and child development, on teaching practices and their relevance, on the education system and its effectiveness. But it also contributed undeniably to the ascendency of psychology, as is shown by the analyses here.

The Herbartian paradigm had long been preparing for it: psychology emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century as the science of reference in the nascent field of education, a psychology that was initially steeped in philosophy, but then differentiated to lay claim to other scientific filiations. Brehony retraces its evolution, from a rationalist model to an empiricist model, taking as an example the progression of the child study, adopted on a large scale by numerous protagonists dealing mainly with young children, and then its academic contestation in furtherance of a professionalisation of scientific research. The new dominant model of psychology that emerged – psychology of the child and of education and learning – has two essential pillars (cf. Aldrich; Hofstetter and Schneuwly; Jarnig; echoed by Karakatsani and Théodorou; Stauffer):

- a “naturalising” conception of the child and of development that fits perfectly with the “Rousseauist” educational concepts developed to counter the traditional school; and
- an “individualising” conception of education – in particular through the test and examination approach – which responds at the same time to the desire for a system better adapted to the needs of the child and to the imperatives of efficient management of educational systems, the expansion of which involves differentiation.

However, this dominance of a certain psychology was countered, even at times contested, in two ways. First through a more explicit consideration given to knowledge from the social sciences and from history, combined with a discourse stressing on one hand the importance of the systems and their social role, and on the other hand the educational values of solidarity and socialisation: the development in Spain of the concept of the project method; the strong emphasis in the escola nova on the managerial and administrative dimensions of the system; and the ideological change promoted by Clarke at the Institute of Education in London. Then through the elaboration of psychological concepts incorporating the educational dimension in the theorisation of development itself: Vygotsky of course represents this orientation, but also, with less focus on a disciplinary approach, Gramsci and his propositions on the relation between development of the person and role of education fundamentally contesting the “naturality” of development (Bernhard).

Knowledge concerning the system and institutions

After a period of marginalisation, the proponents of New Education gradually came to play a central role in the established system itself, favouring integration, at the very

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13See in this regard the articles published in Hofstetter and Schneuwly, *Passion, Fusion, Tension*. 
heart of the state educational institutions, of concepts derived from the movement, thereby renewing the pedagogic discourse and producing new knowledge. It was new not only in its form and content, but also in the way it was produced institutionally, generally at the crossroads between fundamental science, applied or state-mandated research and administrative inquiry with an administrative or political aim. Thus we have the reports produced in Great Britain, Norway, Switzerland (Claparède), Italy (with Gentile), France (under the Popular Front) and of course Brazil, where the entire system was remodelled on the concepts of New Education; to a lesser extent also in Greece where a few protagonists succeeded in introducing some concepts into the public system.

The contributions bring out two main threads of the reforms advocated:

- a certain homogenisation of the pathways, a verticalisation of the system (notably Norway; Great Britain) but also, in reactionary versions, a reinforcement and consolidation of the oligarchic system on the basis of an innatist discourse (Italy in the Gentile era, Bernhard); and
- a differentiation of the pathways according to specific needs, what Claparède calls “école sur mesure” (school made to measure), associated mainly with approaches and methods, testing, standardisation (Brazil; Great Britain; Greece; USA), but also the abandonment of examinations deemed ineffective and inegalitarian (France).

From this point of view, a marked evolution is seen in the postures and functions of the key figures in the New Education movement, who redefined the way in which they constructed knowledge about the system and its institutions. Initially at odds with the establishment, contested to its foundations, they become its props, gradually raised to the status of experts, protagonists thereafter of the administrative and even political authorities, there to refine the functioning of these bodies from within.

**Knowledge relating to pedagogic methods**

Here we undoubtedly arrive at the crux of New Education, “how to teach” being the question that galvanised the movement most. Even before confronting the problems of the contents to be taught (or learned), our protagonists were preoccupied with the way these contents were to be approached. Savoye shows this through the revealing example from French secondary: the reformers gave “less priority to overhauling the knowledge taught than to changing the way it is transmitted”; Del Pozo, from her analysis of a new method of teaching: “incorporating the projects into existing scholastic structures, making it a relatively easy matter to integrate these projects into existing curricula”. From the contributions, the following closely interacting main themes emerge:

- greater value placed on play, on real spontaneous activity, on freedom and autonomy, on personal expression, on the interest and needs of the child as the motivating forces behind educational action (as with the Froebelian reformists, with Claparède, etc.);
- a redefinition of the organisation of work, around projects (Brazil, Spain) related to motivation and socialisation; elsewhere there are the “centres of interest” (Belgium) or the “method by complexes” (Soviet Union); and
• an incitement to collaborative work, among pupils as well as teachers (pedagogic teams, Savoye).

The working methods themselves are thus remodelled, to favour interest – the motivating force of all learning – in an environment as favourable as possible to self-development but in interaction with others. There follows from this a redefinition of the scholastic space, which is no longer seen as distinct, protected, for accessing formalised and prefabricated knowledge; it is a matter of promoting a school open to life, predefined by the specific challenges in the daily life of each learner – learners thus encouraged themselves to contribute to the process of defining the knowledge at the heart of the educational enterprise.

Amid this criticism of the mechanical nature of the traditional methods, discordant notes began to be struck within New Education: in Spain, one argument went against the individualising vision of learning that contained the seeds of the project approach and accentuated its socialising virtues, through teamwork. More radically, Gramsci sharply criticised the “Konzentration idealistischer Reformpädagogik auf das formale Bildungsprinzip” (concentration of the idealistic Reformpädagogik on the purely formal principle of education) (Bernhard) which adjusts the teaching process to the nature of the child when, according to him, only basic capacities constructed by training and repetition and the assured mastery of knowledge open the way to more creative and critical activities. And Vygotsky denounces the soviet version, the method by complexes, affirming that it creates no transforming tension between what the pupil already knows and the construction of new psychological capacities.

**The knowledge to teach**

The knowledge to teach is assumed to be fundamentally redefined, by renewal of the pedagogic methods and processes, since that knowledge is no longer prefabricated and scripturalised, confined to uniform curriculums and compartmentalised into disciplines. However, the contributions here show that the curriculums and scholastic branches, contrary to what we might think given the didratis they were subjected to, were not central to the reformist propositions of the proponents of New Education. It is as if knowledge, constituted and systematised, organised in school disciplines justifying its progression and its mode of teaching and learning, was no longer the point of view from which to examine the essence of the school and teaching. So the knowledge to teach does not seem to be central to the reflections of the proponents of New Education. This is perhaps the true “Copernican revolution” in education that Claparède pleaded for. Although one certainly notes attempts to rewrite activities through a project (or centre-of-interest) approach: “to organize all of the educational activity around a camp or a farm removed from the school” (Del Pozo), in fact, the curriculum itself seems to remain largely intact.

In the name of banishing knowledge regarded as fixed, pointless, verbal and/or unconnected with the interests of pupils, “bookish knowledge” (Claparède), the reformists became the promoters of “interdisciplinary” approaches, crossing disciplinary boundaries and even more radically taking exception to all reference to school disciplines. Teaching being “comprehensive”, the contents must be so well (Brazil); an idea present also in the “Gesamttunterricht” associated with the immediate environment (Norway) and in the context of the secondary system in France, an idea that dominates in the writings of Claparède, advocating for the experience of children to
take precedence in the conception of learning. This general criticism does not quite lead to specific proposals aimed at reorganising the contents of teaching, including school curriculums and disciplines. It seems to have been accommodated in order to concentrate on approaches that empty, as it were, from inside systematised knowledge into school disciplines by moving the accent from content to form, as in the Gramsci analysis (Bernhard).

From the point of view of school disciplines, a dual movement can nevertheless be noted:

- that, already mentioned, of the “dissolving” of the disciplines in the “interdisciplinary”, the contents being defined according to a project related to daily life and the immediate environment;
- that, very marked, of the appearance of new school “disciplines” which favour the opening up of the school, its pragmatic orientation and greater emphasis on the expression of self of the child (knowhow and life skills being favoured). They are called “Heimatkunde” or “heimstadlaere”, social life, manual work, gardening, and “industrial arts”, disciplines that would leave a lasting mark on Western study plans.

But in the contents also, New Education itself produced knowledge showing the limits of the dominant discourse. This can be detected from tendencies in the stances taken by Clarke stressing the collective knowledge to transmit; or in the development of the concept of the project method in Spain in which there was criticism of the involvement of the knowledge to learn as that replaces the systematic construction of the curriculum. This counter-argument is especially developed in Gramsci and Vygotsky. For the former, the thinking of the pupil must be brought into contact with the educational contents proposed in the study plans, but by an approach that follows neither positivist instrumental rationality, insensitive to the conditions and effects of knowledge transmission, nor a libertarian conception, which sidesteps the difficulties of knowledge. For Vygotsky, the teaching and learning of knowledge systematised in disciplines is the very condition of a transformation of certain psychological functions – language, memory, concepts – into a more conscious and self-willed mastery.

The protagonists: leading players and reflections on the transformations of knowledge

The articles here shed light on the essential contribution made by a range of individuals and groups from which some great figures emerge. Who are these protagonists and how does their profile – social and political positioning, disciplinary and institutional associations – influence their relationship to knowledge and to its transformations?

Anyone attempting to identify all of the protagonists of such a history is confronted by players from many different and sometimes mixed backgrounds. First we distinguish the precursors, those involved in the transition, figureheads conspicuous in the interwar period, and those who were to carry on the movement during the second half of the twentieth century (see in this regard the typology proposed by Jarning). Particularly representative of the first was Adams, who with his Herbartian psychology applied to education\(^{14}\) opened up a breach for New Education and whose Modern developments

in educational practice was to be read in Spain and Brazil; Findlay, the Herbartian who sympathises with the Child study movement; certain Greek pedagogues, trained along with the Herbartians at Jena and with the reformer Linz; or even Kristvin grounded in the rural tradition and opening up perspectives linked to reformed structures, methods and contents. The existence of these precursors shows that the break postulated later was relative, as they emerge clearly as transitional and their texts convey fallow knowledge that the figureheads, to whom we shall return in a moment, were able to exploit to develop their own, with the resulting benefit of a condensation of ideas and concepts, which was to lead effectively to something new. They in turn were to produce heirs, even generating disciples, who were to take up the torch after the Second World War, contributing to the diffusion – which can also be interpreted as a dissolution – of the new pedagogic concepts, while the pedagogic reforms became institutionalised, at the risk of becoming more rigid (Jarning; Karakatsani and Théodorou; Savoye; Stauffer), reappearing again in the form of alternatives from the 1960s onwards, though now taken over by the neo-liberal ideology (De Coster, Depaepe and Simon).

One can also look at it from a political perspective (outlined by De Coster, Depaepe and Simon) which would place the players in a continuum that extends from clearly fascist, inegalitarian options (Gentile), through individualising positions, accentuated to a greater or lesser degree (Montessori, Claparède, Ferrière, Nunn, Kléanthous-Papadimitriou), to positions stressing the social dimension of the human being and education (certain Spanish protagonists associated with the Spanish Republic such as Sáinz, and of course Gramsci, Clarke, Vygotsky). It would be interesting to try to establish a parallel with the significance given to constituted knowledge as an object of teaching: from the “actualist idealism” of one such as Gentile in which everything is created from the child in the actual situation, to the position of Vygotsky or Gramsci evincing the necessary productive tension for personal development between an actual state and social exigencies imposing the recognition of constituted knowledge, materialised in the scholastic branches.

In respect of the social and professional backgrounds of the figureheads illuminated in this issue, three main groups can be discerned. Although any categorisation here is fraught with danger, these figures are characterised by the fact that they go up against established boundaries to espouse many different roles and functions, and to promote in the new generations new ways of thinking about the world and how to deal with it:

- Practical reformers: we borrow this expression from Savoye. Here it denotes those characterised first by the fact that they act as practitioners and it is as such that they endeavour to reform educational practices, which also includes reform of the related discourses and concepts (cf. Del Pozo: “besides using a novel pedagogical vocabulary, [they] sought out their own ways of ‘creating pedagogy’”). Some of them are anonymous, but their commitment gives them a pervasive presence in several of the analyses here (Del Pozo; Jarning; Karakatsani and Théodorou; Savoye; Stauffer) and they support, in the background, those who did gain a name. This name recognition is an indication that they were, or sought to be, raised to the status of reformer (while still claiming to be rooted in the ground, this in a way being the basis of their legitimacy): Bayón and Alpera in Spain; Bloch, Bouchet, Ginat, Guénot, Nathan, Roger, and Weiler in France, the revisionist Froebelians in England such as Henrietta Brown Smith or Elsie Rhie Murray. Their writings go well beyond a straightforward
reporting of experience and engage in the theorisation of the movement, indeed in the constitution of a new pedagogy.

- Practitioners also, but in a more administrative dimension, the administrators played an essential role in the knowledge newly conceived and promoted by and for the New Education. They are distinguished by the fact that they focus their attention on the school system itself, bringing their reformist preoccupation to bear on its efficiency. Here the list is particularly long: the Brazilians Texeiro, Azevedo, Laurencio Filho; the Norwegians Ribbskog and Kristvik; the Greeks Ginos, Delnouzos and Manolis Triantafyllidis, and the Spaniards Luzuriaga, Sainz and Comas. They all had important posts in administration or teacher training, and even in the political or scientific arena. They accomplished an immense amount of work as intermediaries in two senses of the word: between the New Education movement and the school systems in which they worked; and between practitioners and theorists, themselves participating in fact in both categories, yet another indication of the deep interpenetration of functions.

- Finally those we call the concepteurs or theorists, for some even utopians, who stand out by the fact that they helped, mainly through their writings, to condense the constructed knowledge and principles promised by the reformist movements. Their social functions helped to establish them as leading figures, just like those who were firmly rooted in the scholarly and academic world (Claparède, Vygotsky, Adams, Nunn, Isaac, Clarke, Eng, Hall, Sully, Rusk) or in associative or political networks (Ensor, Ferrière, and in quite another way, as party head, Gramsci), or even at the borderline between the two (like Decroly). We note that some administrators also had a secondary academic role, such as Texeiro or Ribbskog. Almost all of these theorists and utopians, alongside their main function “in the public eye”, directly nurtured their conceptualisation of administrative or practical mandates: the clinician Claparède, the defectologist Vygotsky, the official report writer Nunn, the headmistress Isaac, the headmaster Ferrière, the militant Gramsci; the list goes on and on.

It is usually these theorists or utopians who became the key figures, the nature of their writings and their insertion at the centre (and not at the periphery) helping to raise their profile (reflecting what De Coster, Depaepe and Simon refer to as higher, in contrast to lower pedagogy?). In this regard the articles here contradict certain preconceived ideas. The transformations of knowledge promoted by the reformist movements were the product of joint action by all those involved: the practitioners on the ground, the practical reformers, the administrators and those who theorised the principles and experiences. New Education distinguishes itself perhaps precisely because the knowledge which it promoted and which was to betoken the modernity of our education was the result of a close collaboration between a multitude of players from wide-ranging backgrounds, in whose complementarity, though not devoid of tensions, lay its richness, indeed its originality. The production of knowledge – and the controversies that accompanied it, even within the movement, as we have seen – was the fruit of a close interpenetration of the different spheres in the field of education. It was this very interpenetration that characterised, by repercussion, the emerging field of educational sciences. As Jaring points out in his concluding overview, the educational sciences took hold after the Second World War in a more differentiated form, although they remained deeply impregnated by the modes of knowledge worked out previously, as revealed in some of their prescriptive intonations.
The child-to-pupil transformation associated with the generalisation of “scholastic form” – contradictory positions taken within New Education itself

The contributions provide us with a better understanding of the relationship with knowledge exhibited by the proponents of New Education. They also enable us to identify a consistency behind the paradox pointed out in the original concept of this issue, and, moreover, to delineate, within New Education itself, contrasting, even contradictory, relationships with knowledge.

We know that the first theorists and propagators of New Education based their thinking on a new, resolutely scientific comprehension of educational phenomena and took massively from the scientific knowledge under construction, the new experimental psychology in particular, of which they were also the first architects. A number of them were acknowledged scholars, who distinguished themselves by their eclecticism and erudition, and who could not therefore be accused of being anti-scientific. Fortified by this knowledge, all of the protagonists advocated for significant reform of the school system. However, the contributions show contradictory positions and evolutionary changes as to the shape of this reform.

The dominant tendency that takes root in the movement’s communication networks advocates a break with the old system. This break transposes to the level of the child the logic that drives its promoters (in their experimental scientific approach to the phenomena they studied): the child must not take for granted what pre-exists but rather adopt a critical posture that enables him/her to become an active participant, inventor, discoverer, and builder; the physical, psychological, sensory activity behind his/her learning, of all learning, presupposes, for him/her, the momentary abandonment of constituted knowledge, scripturalised in rules, study plans, textbooks, which would overvalue the so-called traditional school, institutionalising its norms on a grand scale, in disregard of, according to the proponents of this concept, the laws of natural development of the child. And it was this dynamic that would enable each one to develop, in a movement that aims less at a transformation of self than at access to the essence of self. We stress that the injunction to renewal is concentrated at this level in a “become who you are” (Ferrière) rather than in the exploration of new “horizons” and new theories.\(^\text{15}\)

These protagonists are thus characterised less by an anti-intellectual posture, as we mentioned initially, than by their wish to break with the scripturalisation and systematisation of knowledge in scholastic contents. It is in a way the very definition of the school as a space apart, reserved for the transmission of “disciplinarised” knowledge that is called into question; and with it, the transformation of the children into pupils, at the foundation of scholastic form as it was widely applied in the nineteenth century in state education systems. This view is perfectly consistent with the more general view of child development that barely distinguishes between phylogenetic, ontogenetic and historical aspects. In a context imbued with evolutionism, development is conceived of as natural and therefore it occurs according to immutable laws, with often in the background the idea of recapitulation of human evolution, in which phylogenesis and history are generally mixed up.

This concept is called into question by the proponents of a more historical view of education, themselves won over to New Education. They are distinguished by at least three elements:

1. Ontogenesis is conceived of as being defined by social ends and therefore in a way as teleological, these ends being defined historically and socially; phylogenesis and history function according to entirely different laws. Ontogenesis could not therefore be “natural” and still less recapitulative; it is the work of education.

2. This education takes a particular form in school given the particular knowledge involved. Scholastic form, and the status of pupil which is its social and legal counterpart, is not considered as a limit, but as a condition of the construction of this knowledge.

3. Scholastic form involves scripturalised, systematised, “disciplinarised” knowledge, “planned freedom” as Clarke calls it, the formula containing the tension between development as auto-movement and education as artificial development.

New Education thus contains its own contradiction: scholastic form and the knowledge it produces are on one hand contested on the basis of knowledge that is, above all, psychological and biological, concerning the child and the methods that would be suited to him/her; on the other hand it is defended as necessary on the basis of knowledge that is, above all, historical and sociocultural.

By way of an overture

The analyses proposed in this issue help to enrich, if not transform, what we know about the relationship between New Education and knowledge. They also enable us to question the way in which this knowledge is constructed, to study the theoretical and methodological reference points professed by the theorists and historians of the movement, then and now.

In their analysis of the discourses held by the protagonists of the alternative movements in the last decades of the twentieth century, De Coster, Depaepe and Simon mention that these do not refer to the educational sciences, which are considered as being of little relevance for thinking out and constructing their “œuvre”. It is unity of theory and practice that is the guide for human action, in the educational field as well, they say. This does not stop these “new” “practical reformers” (whether they be Freinetists, Montessorians or others) from referring to a number of texts on New Education, ignoring their theoretical foundations, while putting them in a new intellectual context, now drawing sustenance mainly from contemporary sociology and political science. Nurtured as no other on multiple theories and knowledge, ancient and modern, the alternative Education was thus presented as being itself constructed in an immediate relationship between theory and practice; like the way, moreover, in which knowledge would be treated in the schools overseen by the movement. The relationship to knowledge of these highly qualified militants, some of whom were later to play key roles in administration, contrasts with the relationship to scientific and expert knowledge that had been constructed by the New Education at its height and that perhaps allowed it to penetrate the public systems. One could even ask if the apparent ease with which the alternative revolutionary movement was taken over by
the neo-liberal ideology, noted by De Coster, Depaepe and Simon, was not also linked to certain theoretical weaknesses; in taking little or no account of the original theoretical context of the pedagogical principles to which they refer, they also obliterately, in a sense, the sociohistorical conditions of their emergence; this decontextualisation could favour their transposition, their takeover as well as their dissolution, shown by a number of present pedagogical reforms, quite obviously heirs to those from which they tried to differentiate themselves.

Helmchen postulates that the dissolution of canonical knowledge promoted by New Education -- or at least part of the movement -- in so far as it diminishes its importance by the way it organises the processes of learning, seems to respond to the social demands of flexible individuals in modern society. At the same time, New Education appears as a melting pot of new knowledge and in particular scientific knowledge linked to educational questions. The history of New Education thus seems an especially appropriate place for tracing the development of education in general and the role of scientific knowledge in the social system.

This analysis of the transformations of knowledge promoted, expected or constructed by New Education is in our eyes fertile ground for examining how much our school systems are impregnated by the concepts in vogue a century ago. New Education profoundly transformed all educational knowledge by contributing new knowledge, and above all by reorganising it and by ushering in a change in its mode of production. It foreshadows the new knowledge regime that essentially still dominates in education today. Often without recognising this filiation, the proponents of the present renewal, however, themselves also aspiring to mark an epoch, operate in a theoretical tabula rasa and vilify the past. Here there is still material for historians to analyse for a better understanding of how, in the field of education, knowledge about knowledge is constructed and transformed, drawing from the work of historians from other social fields and other sciences to jointly construct this social history of knowledge, a task to which the contribution that closes this issue also extends an invitation.

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