INTRODUCTION

Wilna A.J. Meijer & Elias Hemelsoet

For many years, Marc Spoelders was the editor in chief of *Scientia Paedagogica Experimentalis*. In that position, he has brought scholars from all over the world together in discussions on educational matters. In that connection, two concerns were crucial to him. First and foremost, educational research has, in one way or another, to engage with educational practice. That does not mean that all research should be directly applicable, but rather that it needs to express an authentic involvement with what is going on in educational practice. Secondly, Marc Spoelders considered it important to draw attention to voices that are too often forgotten in the ‘academic machinery’. In particular, he has always provided opportunities to researchers from countries that are generally less visible in the academic discussion to have their voices heard, in the belief that their stories may open windows to a different view, broadening established horizons through refreshing approaches. Also, and this relates to his first concern, he wanted the voice of educational practitioners themselves to be heard in the academic context. This special issue on fundamental educational thought reflects such intimate, significant and fruitful interaction between educational theory and educational practice.

In 2013, shortly after his retirement as professor in the discipline ‘pedagogiek’ at Ghent university, Marc Spoelders suddenly deceased. The 50th volume of this journal is dedicated to him, pays homage to him, commemorating his life and work – and it intends to reflect and debate the discipline of pedagogiek as he understood and valued it. This first volume is about *Fundamentele pedagogiek*: fundamental or foundational educational thought, addressing the practices of education and upbringing and children’s and students’ lives in historical, ever evolving contexts.

In Flanders, as in the Netherlands, the discipline of ‘pedagogiek’ or ‘algemene pedagogiek’, i.e. the combination of history and theory (or philosophy) of education, was marginalised during the previous
decades. The discipline was situated in the academic departments of behavioral and/or social sciences and the hegemony of the paradigm of standard empirical science in these departments, exemplified especially in the discipline of psychology, may have been a factor responsible for marginalisation. Further, the explicit orientation, during the previous decades, of academics in history and theory of education on disciplines in other faculties, viz. history and philosophy, seems not to have helped to stop its decline.

What was lost in the process, is the original practical orientation of fundamental educational thought. This ‘theory-practice relation’ as, e.g., captured in Herbart’s concept of ‘Takt’, is a classical idea that may be as significant today as it was in Herbart’s days, centuries ago. Tact consists in the power to judge one’s situation of action. So, whatever academic educational thought and educational theory may have on offer, it is eventually the practitioner’s, the educator’s tact that joins theory and practice together. As every action situation is necessarily historical and as such unique, it is not possible to deduce directly from theory how to act in a particular situation. The situation itself always has to be judged on its own merit, in its own context, and as to its specific problems. Educational tact is the practitioner’s theoretically formed and experienced power of judgment. Educational theory does not produce ready-for-use recipes which educators might apply blindly, but it may help to sharpen, school and direct the perception and interpretation of one’s own situation.

The concept of tact can be linked to the geisteswissenschaftliche, hermeneutical idea of the theory-practice relation, as in Schleiermacher’s concept of the ‘Dignität der Praxis’. Educational practice, being permanently subject of historical cultural change, continually demands reflection, in other words: educational theory. Instead of perceiving the relation between theory and practice as a matter of linear application, the hermeneutical view perceives the relation between theory and practice as a dialectical one. This follows from the assumption that both educational practice and educational theory are historically evolving phenomena. Theory thinks existent practice through and reflects on its specific questions, problems and possibilities. The resulting understanding will contribute to shaping and changing practice. Changed practice, in turn, produces material for
further reflection, etc. Theory and practice are, in mutual relation, part of an ongoing, evolving tradition.

In these volumes 50 and 51, colleagues of Marc Spoelders, who are also his friends and often his students as well, contribute a piece in his memory and in his spirit. In the first contribution, Fernand van Damme and Anne-Marie Cotton give an impression of Marc Spoelders’ life and work. He is portrayed as a person, as an educationalist in the academy, and, last but not least, as the inspiring teacher that left a lasting impression on his students: homo paedagogicus, in person as well as professionally. These volumes end with a coda: a contribution of Marc Spoelders at the Humboldt University. In between these two pieces, the biographical and the bibliographical, the various contributions of his friends, colleagues and students are well-placed.

The contributions to these volumes reflect in various ways the concern of the classical educational discipline: its explicit objective to be significant for educational practice. The educational discipline, Paedagogik or pedagogiek, is – at least in Continental Europe – an academic discipline in its own right, and not only, e.g., a part of teacher training. As such it is as a rule situated in faculties of ‘social sciences’ or of ‘psychological and educational sciences’. In that context, the discipline of psychology today generally follows the academic standard of the empirical sciences, focusing on ‘value-free’, objective empirical research, with the accompanying standard of publications in high-rated international scientific journals. Contextualized, historical and practical reflection on actual educational problems and issues is often hindered and impaired by the hegemony of this academic culture. These volumes intend to present examples of exactly that kind of reflection: contextually and practically relevant educational analysis and thought, but certainly no less systematic and critical for that matter. The contribution of Jan Dirk Imelman focuses on the foundations of the discipline of education understood in that way.

Imelman, emeritus professor Foundations of Education at the Universities of Groningen and Utrecht in the Netherlands, reflects on the fact-value and theory-practice relationship that is so crucial for
W.A.J. Meijer & E. Hemelsoet

educational thought in its classical, ‘geistwissenschaftliche’ or hermeneutical, vein. Imelman is known for the persistent advocacy, throughout his academic career, of the so-called triadic educational theory that Spoelders, as persistently, valued for its practical educational significance and never stopped to confront his students with, in the characteristic dialogical, thought provoking manner of the homo paedagogicus. It is unavoidable, certainly in today’s academic context, to reflect on the position of an educational discipline that defines itself in relation to educational practice, a historical-hermeneutical and hermeneutical-practical discipline. Imelman presents us with a thorough philosophical, anthropological, and ethical reflection on the foundations of education and educational thought, by confronting educational theory as a practical theory with the technological model implied in the model of standard empirical science.

Wilna Meijer builds upon this contribution and approaches the theory-practice relationship from a different angle. Throughout a report of various re-readings of Johann Friedrich Herbart and Theodor Litt, she evaluates the significance of the classics in philosophy of education. Within triadic educational theory, classics play a particular role in that they are both ‘educator’ and ‘learning content’. Although they seem to belong to the past and are primarily interests of historians, a hermeneutical perspective reveals their everlasting educational value. Throughout her longstanding career in educational theory at Groningen University, Meijer has reread Herbart in the context of the debate between ‘New Education’ and Neo-Herbartianism; the discussion on the multicultural and multi-religious society; and the debate between postmodernists and modernists. While every rereading imparts particular insights to these various historically and contextually contingent discussions, the overall insight is that education – as Herbart phrases it – is an essentially temporal matter. Additionally, Litt is still convincing today in his idea that historical consciousness is important for educators because it enables them to keep a critical distance from the perplexity of their own time. Meijer sheds light on how both authors agree when it comes to the time of education itself, especially in emphasizing the importance of open-mindedness and of keeping the future open for the future adults to decide upon.
Introduction

Subsequently, two contributions focus on examples of particular educational practices within the triadic educational tradition. In a small explorative study, Pieter Van Biervliet focuses on the beliefs of teachers about their profession. Teachers were requested to provide a metaphor characterizing the profession of a teacher throughout an inquiry performed by students of primary school teaching during their internship. The most commonly-used metaphor type by primary school teachers, is the travel metaphor such as: a captain at the helm, a guide in the big world, a compass, etc. Van Biervliet distinguishes differences in metaphor choice compared to the year which the teacher teaches, to their gender, to their teaching experience, and to their view of the theory of teaching (cf. the so-called subject matter-centred, teacher-centred or learner-centred approach). He wraps up his contribution contemplating on which metaphor would best fit Marc Spoelders’ view on the educational profession.

As the most recent PhD student of Marc Spoelders, Ruth Rondas draws attention to a somehow unusual educational setting, that is characterized by one-to-one tuition: higher instrumental education. Apart from the fact that a teacher only teaches one student at a time in playing an instrument, the status of this teacher seems to be different than in other settings. The instrument teacher is an expert both in a technical and an artistic sense, often depicted as a ‘maestro’. While the musical talent and expertise status of these teachers is often lauded, the literature generally draws a negative picture when it comes to pedagogical skills. This article describes the characteristics of one instrumental music teacher and maps out the teacher’s classes using the triadic educational theory. It is verified to what extent the term ‘maestro’ applies to the instrumental teacher and whether a more positive designation for the expert teacher can be suggested.

Following these educational practices, three contributions shift attention to current debates that matter to educational theorists. First, Roger Standaert reflects upon the impact of neoliberalism as it is expressed in terms of ‘an ideology of effectiveness’ in educational policy making. To an increasing extent, expanding Europe has become an important stakeholder in the legislation of the nation states. While most European legislation has an economic scope, it may be that cultural and educational matters will also be subject to intervention
from Europe, partially as a derivative of their economic influence. Standaert explores how globalisation functions as a layered mechanism within the context of educational goals and objectives. He traces the consequences of such a perspective for a European educational policy in connection with the member states against the backdrop of prevailing contextual differences. Finally, he relates European policy to a global perspective and makes an educated guess on the position of the EU within the global world.

Elias Hemelsoet focuses on issues related to cultural and socioeconomic diversity in our schools and forthcoming educational inequality. More in particular, the desirability of a social mix, which is often put to the fore as a solution for prevailing problems, is reflected upon. The existence of segregated schools goes against a longstanding ideal according to which each school reflects the diversity present in society. In his contribution, Hemelsoet examines the potentially added value of pursuing a social mix, arguing from the case of Roma children in Ghent schools. While other research provides both arguments in favour of and opposed to a social mix, it is argued that positive or negative effects of segregated schooling do not provide a straightforward answer to whether a social mix is desirable or not. From a fundamental educational perspective, an in-depth insight in what matters to people and reasoned ethical reflection are at the heart of the question of desirability. Consequently, an alternative approach is being developed, which focuses on the question ‘how to go on’ to reframe the discussion.

Third, Christina Krause and Renate Eichhorn connect current educational discussions about educational equality and inclusion to the new scientific findings on health education and the health and well-being of children and educational professionals. The ability and eagerness of children to learn which is at the basis of development and changing, is thereby taken as a starting point. Notwithstanding this universal ability and eagerness, it is a high challenge for educational institutions and the professionals working there to take into account the individual dispositions of each child, in particular those of highly skilled and low skilled students. The authors discuss the question how educational professionals in kindergartens and schools can be qualified
Introduction

for the new challenges related to children’s health and well-being and to health education.

In the concluding article, Nancy Vansieglehem takes us back to the fundamental question on how to conceive of education in our present age. While this contribution seems to dissociate from whichever educational tradition, it very well resonates Marc Spoelders’ aversion of the ‘settledness’ which may be discerned in many educational and ideological traditions and his constantly recurring plea for criticality. Vansieglehem states that the profound transformations European societies have undergone, stress the need to rethink the concept of education. At different places, scholars, educationalists and policymakers point at the need to rebuild the school as a ‘community of learners’ or a ‘community of inquirers’ as the essence of this reconceptualization. But what is specifically understood by this new idea of school-reform? Recalling Dewey’s Laboratory School, this new framing of the concern with experiment-based-education is discussed. The hypothesis is that from a conceptual point of view, the experience of community of learning itself is not at stake through this reconceptualization. Against this background it is argued that there is another interpretation of the ‘laboratory’ school that is possible: a community of ‘hybrid’ entities.