

Marc Depaepe. *Order in Progress: Everyday Education Practice in Primary Schools—Belgium, 1880-1970.* Leuven University Press: Leuven, 2000.

Over the last three decades history and the social sciences have witnessed a number of exciting theoretical developments. Regrettably, the history of education has not always reflected these new developments, preferring instead to restrict its understanding of historiography to stale theoretical frameworks and epistemological parochialism. *Paedagogica Historica*, the multi-lingual international journal published in Ghent, Belgium, under editors Marc Depaepe, Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, and Frank Simon, University of Ghent, is an important exception to such historiographical inertia.

Since 1990, *Paedagogica Historica* has sponsored a broad program of publication that has redefined the history of education in Europe and has promoted new directions for theoretical and empirical research in history of education. Under Depaepe and Simon, *Paedagogica Historica* has been the driving force behind the resuscitation of the International Standing Conference for the History of Education and ushered in a generation of European historians of education who reflect new trends in the field to an English-speaking audience: Jeroen Dekker, Johan Sturm, Czeslaw Majorek, Christoph Luth, and Peter Drewek; also Antonio Novoa, University of Lisbon, Antonio Vinao, University of Murcia, Miguel Peyrera, University of Granada, Heinz-Elmar Tenorth, Humboldt University, and Agustin Escolano, Valladolid University. Vinao, Novoa, Pereyra, and Tenorth also appear in the admirable, *Paedagogica Historica*-inspired, *Cultural History and Education*, edited by Thomas Popkewitz, Barry M. Franklin, and Miguel Pereyra (Routledge, 2000). It is time to acknowledge the existence of an international community of historians of education whose centre is not in the United States but on the continent, and which is gathered around Depaepe, Simon, and the Universities of Leuven and Ghent.

Marc Depaepe's credentials as the leader of this new wave have been established not only via his editorial genius but as a

historian of education already in possession of an immense *oeuvre* and whose articles are well known to readers of *Historical Studies In Education*. Now we have his first monograph in English: *Order In Progress: Everyday Education Practice in Primary Schools—Belgium, 1880-1970*. Depaepe lists the assistance of a number of collaborators, but we will call the work his. Depaepe is concerned that in the excitement generated by the new history of education and the extraordinary diversification of the material to which it devotes its attention—it “multiplies the forms of curiosity,” in Furet’s nice phrase—historians of education may forsake less fashionable research at the micro-level into everyday classroom reality.

Depaepe laments that about educational processes that took place in the everyday reality of the classroom, at the “chalkface,” or on the “educational work floor,” we remain for the most part in the dark. If we are ever to reconstruct an educational *histoire totale* this void needs to be filled in historically. But there is a difficult methodological problem. Historians must rely on the testimony left behind in diaries, letters, novels and biographies, school and class photographs, copybooks, examinations, lesson plans, inspection and visitation reports, school prospectuses and regulations, alumni newsletters, school newspapers, descriptions and remnants of school furniture, teaching materials and the like, and articles in educational journals. Little of this kind of source material has been systematically collected or preserved, so that educational practices in the school space as well as in the classroom remain a “black box” for educational historiography. In *Order In Progress*, Depaepe has opened the black box and, curiously, emerged with a study of articles in education journals.

The discourse of professional education periodicals celebrates the turn toward the child and privileges words and concepts like progress, freedom, emancipation, creativity, self-fulfillment. But education processes and practices in the school and classroom, the “grammar of educationalization,” in Belgium and everywhere in the West shows a startling stability and continuity over the decades, and something else. In the end, in spite of reformist, progressive rhetoric, the child has been constructed as a “pupil” and kept in a state of “infantilization” in a teacher-

centred, timetable-dominated, age-graded “pedagogical and didactic island.” Depaepe uncovers a number of educational discourse’s paradoxes. Take Depaepe’s title, “order in progress.” It echoes Jorge Luis Borges’ “the secret adventures of order,” an ingenious metaphor for the intricate relations between order and freedom. Which is to say that for Borges the rituals of freedom may be understood as an invention of the social order. Similarly, of *Order In Progress* we may say that in the history of education the rituals of progress may be understood as an invention of the social order.

In the discourse of pedagogical journals the stated rationale of educational innovation is always toward PROGRESS. In practice, the effect of educational innovation is always toward discipline and socially desirable behavior: normalisation, ORDER. The language of educational reform, the dominant language of education everywhere, promises to enhance the autonomy of the pupil; the effect, in practice, is extended dependence. In the name of progress, harsh discipline in the classroom is done away with. But discipline reappears as psychological manipulation and emotional blackmail. The pedagogue learns to talk the language of “geniality” and child-centred education yet still exercises sovereign authority through examination, observation, classification, and other subtle, repressive, and coercive practices. In their quest for social status the teacher adopts ever more psycho-pedagogical technical knowledge and becomes “a ‘learning clinician’” but with little gain in status, and a resulting dilution of his traditional aura of “noble calling.” There is more along the same lines. Depaepe, it should be said, refrains from drawing cynical conclusions: he is more the ironist than the cynic.

Order In Progress has many excellent qualities, including a marvellous bibliography (but no index). Depaepe makes enviable use of education journals. He demonstrates how much can be learned by the energetic and resourceful combing of an under-utilized type of evidence. However, I do not think *Order In Progress* fulfills its author’s own objective. Though the main title is clever, the subtitle is misleading. This book is not a history of “everyday education practice.” It gets us no closer to

everyday classroom practice, or the everyday realities of classroom life in Belgium primary education, than the discourse of educational periodicals. In the end, *Order In Progress* is a history of educational mentalities of education workers: school officials and teachers. Closer to the realities of everyday classroom life than *Order In Progress* is Depaepe et al., eds., "The Challenge of the Visual in the History of Education," the brilliant special issue of *Paedagogica Historica* (vol. 6, 2000), which should be read in conjunction with I. Grosvenor, M. Lawn, and K. Rousmaniere, eds., *Silences and Images: The Social History of the Classroom* (New York, Peter Lang, 1999).

In any event *Order In Progress* seems to be reacting against the old history-of-ideas-oriented research agenda and shows a certain antipathy toward Grand Theory. Depaepe, a peerless intellectual historian, here seems to think historians of education have depended too much on conceptualizations drawn from the "outside." The historian of education needs conceptual tools of course, but these, he thinks, should be drawn from the "innerside" of the history of education, like educational periodicals. I think this is a mistake. In fact, Depaepe preemptively warns readers that they may find *Order In Progress* "thin." And with the exception of the Introduction and the first chapter, a comparative analysis of the most important work published recently in the micro-history of education in North America, the English Commonwealth, and continental Europe, *Order In Progress* is thin. What *Order In Progress* lacks is exactly "outside" conceptualization. The social theory of Gramsci, Bourdieu, Durkheim, or Weber, all of whom Depaepe has doubtless read, could have overcome the thinness of *Order In Progress*. To abandon conceptualisation from the "outside" is to abandon the socio-critical power of theoretical discourse. (There are glimpses of Foucault visible in *Order In Progress* which suggest the sort of theory Depaepe could have usefully employed.)

Depaepe has read enough in educational periodicals to conclude that school processes have proceeded almost everywhere in the West according to their own dynamic,

according to an almost uniform “grammar of educationalization.” He often observes that the history of educational processes and practices is marked by conservatism: stability, continuity, is the rule, not transformation or rupture. This is inevitable to such an extent that even those educational processes and practices that appear to be challengers to the established order of things like Reform Pedagogy, the New Education Movement, and Progressive Education, to quote Depaepe, are “absorbed into existing and dominant pedagogical forms.” How does Depaepe make sense of this phenomenon of educational stability and continuity? No practice is unconnected to some discourse outside itself. What is “inside” is inaccessible without some “outside” discursive context; conceptualizations from the “outside” are required to make sense of practice, including discourse. If Depaepe will not utilize the interpretive potential of a Gramsci, Bourdieu, Durkheim or Weber, then who? Depaepe is left with Tyack, Cuban, and their “grammar of education.” This will not do.

Education is a crucial segment of the state-administered reproduction of fundamental societal relations. Educational reality—“educationalization”—with its rituals, practices, and discursive order, is a central aspect of the reproduction of the social order. The larger social and cultural structures of society transcend the particular intentions of the historical participants. Close up, on the “educational work floor,” we see individual educators acting freely, intentionally, purposefully. But at a distance, at a different order of magnitude—ours, the historians—we see structures that transcend the particular intentions and wills of the historical participants. Social structures and cultural systems set limits on what individual educators can effect. The important substantive issue at stake here is not whether this particular “conceptualization” is the right one, but whether any meaningful social history of education can be written absent a macro-sociological theory of education framework that engages the problematic of social and cultural reproduction, resistance, and the role of the State.

Depaepe’s ultimate ambition, as indicated above, is to construct a “history of the totality of the educational past,

conceived as an *histoire totale*.” Depaepe and his collaborators and colleagues have opened up a vast terrain for historical exploration. It needs to be subjected to the sympathetic criticism, encouragement, and complementary research which it deserves. We conclude that in the realization of this *histoire totale*, a bridge between educational grand theory on the one hand and concrete, educational praxis on the other is needed, which Depaepe has supplied by examination of the views and concepts codified by educational periodicals. Thus, *Order In Progress* can take its place as a contribution to that project.

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Stephen Heathorn. *For Home, Country and Race: Constructing Gender, Class and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880-1914.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. Pp. xii, 300.

This book is a massively detailed and singularly perceptive analysis of the elementary school curriculum between 1880 and 1914. This was a crucial period in modern British history—the heyday of the Empire and jingoistic fervour, but also a period of burgeoning social unrest exemplified by the rise of socialism and militant trade unionism among the working class, the “condition of England” question, and the Irish troubles, paralleled by the first signs of economic decline vis-à-vis other powers. If these problems were to be addressed, the elementary schools, both state and voluntary, offered an obvious site for attempts at reform, attended, as they were, almost exclusively by children of working-class parents.

Heathorn argues that somewhere about 1880 the political and educational elite began to use the educational system to attempt to unite working-class youth in a national collectivity infused