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## Failures of Crystallization: On the Possibility of Existence of the Methodology of the History of Education

### ABSTRACT

The starting point for this paper is a general interest in the faint presence of methodologically oriented analyses within the history of education. The methodology of history of education is a rare term on the map of scientific categories (likewise the theory of history of education). One can multiply reasons for such situation, pointing institutional deficiencies of science or stressing the fact that this term is for some researchers unwelcome and should be criticized. Although such statements are worth tackling, the present considerations focus on different research trail, being an analysis of obstacles for crystallization of the methodology reflection within history of education. These are, e.g., the lack of paradigmatic clarity and also definitional instability of contemporary methodology of history as such. Nevertheless, one should not treat this situation as disadvantage, rather as a need of different historical imagination. Responses to this need should be developed and potential contexts of such historical imagination are presented in the final part of this paper.

### Keywords:

history of education, methodology of history of education, methodology of history

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*In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it.*

(Benjamin, 1968, p. 255)

*For historians, pedagogical issues are merely an external subject of research, not the history of their own science.*

(Sztobryn, 2000, p. 3)

*It is not that theory-influenced history of education is not being done, but that this work has not been incorporated into bounded world of “history of education”.*

(Weiler, 2011, p. 250)

## INTRODUCTION

The moment before leaving: a quick look in the mirror. After all, there could be a small crease somewhere, a shortcoming or a fold that spoils everything. Maybe even the whole concept will prove to be not as appropriate as it seemed at the stage of intentions. And yet, the plan was prepared diligently, a tailor-made creation... Anyway, even if everything is as it was supposed to, then the weather may be different...

A scientific discipline is often reflected in its methodology, also in the case of the history of education (cf., e.g., Sztobryn, 2000, p. 321). The problem is that it is not as often a “piece of furniture” of scientific equipment as it might seem. Google Search returns 8 results for “methodology of history of education” and 4 for “methodology of educational history”; Google Scholar indicates 36 and 4 positions respectively for the same searches.<sup>2</sup> In this situation, the question about the methodological issues of research paradigms is actually pointless. Are these issues completely scientifically unexplored or uninteresting? It is hard to believe. At the same time, it must be admitted that adjudication on interest in an issue based on the number of views in search engines has obvious disadvantages (there are probably even more disadvantages than advantages). Even those resulting from differences in the dictionaries of communities or scientific circles, or those arising from the terminological idiomaticity of individual authors’ narratives. The same issues are then determined differently by various researchers, to which search engines are not very sensitive. Well... the suspicion towards the history of education about being stuck in methodological silence has been formulated and it should be followed. This is what this text does, being an analysis of the status and nature of methodological considerations within the history of education.

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2 Accessed: 20.02.2020.

## METHODOLOGY AS THEORY

However, the matter is not simple. Already at the basic level of analysis, the issue of defining the methodology of historical sciences becomes problematic. If we reach for Jerzy Topolski's classic book *Methodology of History*, in its introduction we will find a set of difficult-to-resolve definitive doubts. The author states here, e.g., "In the literature of the subject there is no uniformity in the definitions of the various branches of study which here have been termed methodological, and also of the totality of such study" (1976, p. 31). In the pool of terms that could include the methodology of history, the author indicates terms such as "theory of history" and "philosophy of history". Let us note that in the traditional scientific imagination, the theory and methodology of a discipline are distinguished and usually considered within separate subdisciplines. In addition, as Topolski notes: "The closer we approach the methodologies of the various disciplines (or even their groups), the more clearly we notice differences between the domains studied by them" (p. 26). The considerations contained in the *Methodology of History* clearly show the thesis about the strong correlation between methodological considerations of historical sciences and the findings regarding the subject of the research. Hence the difficulty in formulating methodological generalizations within history as such. Though, for the purposes of his argument, Topolski formulates the following criteria for identifying elements of history methodology: "it is suggested here to treat the totality of reflections on cognitive operations and results of such operations and the subject matter of historical research as issues in the methodology of history" (Topolski, 1976, p. 40). By gaining through that a little more terminological precision, let us return to the question about the methodological silence of the history of education.

Thus, terms such as "theory of history", "philosophy of history", "history of historiography", and "methodology of history" are used to describe a matter of a similar, and often the same nature. I think that an analogy is right here for the context of research on the past of education. Making artificial distinctions between the methodology of the history of education and the theory of the history of education, or even the theory of the historiography of education does not seem justified – which we conclude while squandering the peace of disciplinary divisions.

## THEORY AS FAUX PAS

Let us admit that it is difficult to diagnose the state of the discipline more conveniently than entering its name in the Internet search engine. How little energy,

and the result so accurate. In one episode of the series about the adventures of Mr. Bean, a scene is presented in which the main character, unable to sleep, counts sheep in the photo. The task is not easy, so with the next failure the hero counts the vertical row of the herd, then the horizontal, multiplies using the calculator, looks at the result and immediately falls asleep satisfied. How sleepy for a researcher a digital result can turn out to be.

Fetishizing quantitative data feeds the image of mathematics as a distinguished language for describing the truth about the world. Of course, the advancement of the theoretical discipline in some sphere can be studied differently. Queries from specialist magazines, which are treated as a body of disciplinary reflection, turn out to be fruitful. The sensitive issue here is, of course, the choice of periodical titles. Not only because the pool of researched magazines will be a function of the researcher's reading discernment, so the resultant of his reading biography (anyway, we can move this issue aside, since the question about the substantive horizon of the author accompanies all the effects of research work). In addition, however, the fact that the histories of education are usually national or profiled in terms of some community problematizes this choice. This circumstance increases the specificity of a given research material and makes it difficult to compare it with another, and thus to generalize.

Among English-language magazines with a wide reading range, and reputable publishers or indexing databases, one can take into account such a pool of titles: *History of Education Quarterly* (USA), *History of Education* (UK), *Historical Studies in Education* (Canada).<sup>3</sup> And that is what Roland Sintos Coloma did in the text *Who's Afraid of Foucault? History, Theory, and Becoming Subjects* (2011). The author followed traces of Michel Foucault's theory in mentioned periodicals (volumes from 1999–2008 were analyzed) as he considered the work of the author of *The Archeology of Knowledge* irreplaceable in historical sciences as such and thus authoritative for assessing the theoretical involvement of historians of education. In the background of these considerations, therefore, there arises the question about the theoretical advancement of historical and educational research, evaluated on the basis of references to the theory of history in the analyzed texts.

It turned out that not only Foucault's traces in the texts studied by Coloma are quite slim; the same applies to the involvement of educational historians in the theory of history. The author suggests the existence of a kind of "epistemological innocence" of researchers of the education, their indifference to metanarrative,

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3 An expert reader of the scientific press would also add here *Paedagogica Historica*, or *History of Education Review*.

and perhaps even reluctance towards theory. Anyway, Coloma highlights the latter diagnosis with a mention that may not be represented in research but very suggestive nonetheless. He mentions that his historical text was once described by an experienced academic historian as “too theoretical” (2011, p. 188). In this remark, it was not meant that the theoretical theses were incorrect; it was rather that there were too many of them. Well... in the same volume there is the text of the editor of the whole issue, Eileen H. Tamura, in which we will find a similar passus:

What set me thinking about the role of theory in educational history was a statement made by a distinguished historian of education who, after reading an essay of mutual interest, stated, ‘This is not history’. [...] evident was her [the author of the essay – E.M.] strong use of critical theory, which was foregrounded throughout the essay (Tamura, 2011, p. 151).

As Tamura continues:

The comment made by the seasoned educational historian, however, led me to this question: What methodologies should be embraced or at least accepted by educational historians? (Tamura, 2011, p. 151).

It is noteworthy that the entire issue edited by Tamura was named: *Theory in Educational History* and turned out to be a valuable collection of analyses in this topic. What is more, the main part of the analysis has been provided with a set of answers of important figures from the history of education. It is worth mentioning that the reply to texts section is not its publishing standard; this fact emphasizes the polemical potential of the issue and allows for a wide range of comments. No wonder that also here we find arguments very similar to the abovementioned “it is too theoretical”. For example, Wayne J. Urban in his commentary on the Coloma’s text indicates, among others:

What I mean to say is that Michel Foucault and many of the others cited by Coloma seem to be used by him more to reinterpret or even to attack existing work in history and the history of education than to add to it. Until he himself adds to that body of work, however, his exhortations are unlikely to be heeded by most of its practitioners (Urban, 2011, p. 235).

In this statement, apart from the suggestion of the bad intentions underlying the launch of the theory in the context of the historiography of education, there is the thesis about the superiority of the conventional, additively understood work of a historian (after all, for Urban, only its implementation gives Coloma a chance that historians of education would consider the theories formulated by him) over

the reinterpretation of what has already been historically discussed. In a sense, therefore, it is also the thesis about the superiority of working with sources over the theory of historiography. In addition, Urban suggests that showing how little theory of history is in educational work is not something that a serious reader of this type of specialist magazine would not be aware of. This is also not a cause for concern. What should cause concern is too much theory:

[...] most historians do not foreground the theory, or explanatory framework they use, preferring instead to refer to it in their footnotes or endnotes. Coloma would have historians do much more theoretical work than they usually do. I am comfortable with the existing amount of theory/interpretation and fearful that more theory or theorizing will take away from the evidential aspects of that work (p. 237).

So here we are dealing with an attitude close to the one that the mentioned texts of Coloma and Tamura want to oppose in principle. Thus, Wayne J. Urban considers the issue of the burden of narrative and conditioning of the writing practice, or the conviction about the finite capital of the researcher's forces, as decisive here. Are these arguments trivial?

## IDENTIFYING SILENCE

Edited by Eileen H. Tamura, the *History of Education Quarterly* from 2011 "spoils" the spectacular thesis about the desert theoretical landscape of the educational literature. The texts contained in the volume are quite important, but the most commented was Coloma's. In one comment, American historian John L. Rury points to the repeated admonition of American historians for a lack of interest in theoretical issues, and notes that disputes related to research approaches of recent decades have not really affected the history of education as such. The whole opinion is interesting and balanced. The suggestion of a way to solve the issue of absence of Foucault's theory in the methodological imagination of the history of education is interesting. However, the last aspect ends with the following note: "Coloma is content to simply identify the silence, and to interpret it as evidence of the subfield's 'isolation'. This hardly seems to represent the sort of theoretically informed methodological sophistication that he calls for" (2011, p. 227). Well... *Touché!* The diagnosis of a lack of theory in history seems to be barely a good start. What's next? A suggestion to complete it? One can explain this lack earlier and look for its reasons.

Let us consider the sources and – at the same time – the consequences of the lack of methodological analyses in the field of general history. Piotr Witek

draws attention to several important issues in text that well organizes the issue of methodology of history (Witek, 2012). The author – citing, among others, Jan Pomorski’s analysis – indicates the category of methodological culture as a component of the quality of each historian’s work and its direct relationship with the competence of self-critical approach to research. It should be noted that methodological reflection is not reserved here only for “professional methodologists and theorists of history” (Witek, 2012, p. 79). In addition to the important point of this remark, which makes methodological searches also located in historical practice, we note the characteristic indication of methodologists and theoreticians of history as those who in the academic division of work reflect on the methodological issues of history in an equitable way. So, it seems, there is no way to draw some demarcation line between the theory and the methodology of history. Importantly, however, a distinction should be made between the methods of historical research and its methodology – the first is a workshop matter that deals with auxiliary sciences of history (such as heraldry, historical geography or archival science), while the second – as has already been stated – seems to be the basis of historical imagination of a researcher. However, the mistake of identifying method with methodology is common and leads to difficult consequences. On the basis of this error, methodological reflection is expected to have strict directives for research, which it fails to formulate. The methodology of history is problematizing the theoretical foundations of a research workshop and not a set of procedures for dealing with sources. Anyway, and in the context of the latter, it is worth mentioning the warning of Reinhart Koselleck that sources can be explained only when we have a theory of history (Koselleck, 2000, p. 311). The researcher’s mere realization of the difference between the method and the methodology of history does not automatically lead to deeper methodological reflection. It can be quite the opposite. As Witek points out, since the methodology of history does not improve the study itself as a manual for the historical source, it becomes an unnecessary ballast which is perceptually often not easy to lift and embedded philosophically out of necessity, so maybe even more eagerly abandoned.

Let us assume that the scenario is different, that this reflection, free from methodical delusion, appears. One should still ask a question about its quality. It will not be high when “the methodology of history is [...] everything that has the aftertaste of some more general, usually common sense historical knowledge, which can be described as a product of the everyday methodological awareness” (Witek, 2012, p. 81), acquired by the way of “silent training in the act of impetuous imitation” of research procedures found within a given specialization (2012, p. 81). This imitation is strengthened, as Witek states after Wojciech Wrzosek, by

some kind of environmental inertia in the matter of ways of reaching research results. To put it simply: these pathways are learned as part of the research practice of a given specialty, which is replicated and constitutes a benchmark for assessing achievements, but at the same time limits within one model of historical science. The result is the “silent functioning” of the research practice of historians, which manifests itself in the fact that “individual research procedures and patterns are not and need not be verbalized and realized by historians, nor theoretically justified so that they can be successfully and cognitively used in their daily scientific practice” (2012, p. 80).

The avoidance of theory in diachronic research seems to be a universal mechanism, or more precisely: it is a realization of the universal threat of research inertia. As a conclusion of this thread, here is the summary of the five damages that this “silent” research paradigm causes within a given field of historical knowledge:

1. Difficulty and limitation of the possibility of correcting research proceedings;
2. Exclusion of innovative ways of doing research;
3. Enclosing one’s beliefs, practices and habits in the “fortress” (it can be seen that the metaphor of the fortress presupposes the necessity to defend it first, and then the question of where it stands and what its value is);
4. Lack of awareness of one’s own embedding in a specific system of cultural coordinates (place, time, tradition, value system) and, as a result, the absolutization of one’s own historiographic paradigm;
5. No distinction between methods and methodology of historical research (Witek, 2012, pp. 81–82).

## **PATH OF CRYSTALLIZATION**

In *Methodology of History*, Jerzy Topolski, referring to the advanced analysis of the methodology of history in details (in Polish science), formulates, among others, such a remark:

Among the various historical disciplines, economic history, the history of science together with the history of historiography, the history of education, and to some extent the history of military art are the only ones that can boast of more or less developed methodological reflections (1976, p. 39).



In this list of appreciated fields, the presence of research history of education is significant for us, which shortly before the first edition of Topolski's book (Polish edition: 1968) was enriched by two extensive volumes of historical and educational syntheses edited by Łukasz Kurdybacha (vol. I: 1965, vol. II: 1967), and a little earlier the synthesis by Stefan Wołoszyn (1964).

An almost parallel event is important in this context. In 1964, a symposium of the Department of History of Education and Schooling of the University of Łódź and the Department of Education of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań took place, from which a report was issued a year later. It is cognitively valuable. To the speeches of two speakers whose statements became the starting point of the discussion (they were Stefan Truchim with a statement entitled *Z zagadnień metodologicznych historii wychowania* and Stanisław Michalski pondering the topic *Historia wychowania w zespole nauk pedagogicznych*) referred Jerzy Topolski, but also Aleksander Kamiński and Karol Kotłowski. In the opinion sent for the discussion, Topolski indicates the necessity and the difficulty of integration of the history of pedagogical thought with the history of schooling and education. He emphasizes that the combination of the history of ideas and the history of social activities presents many difficulties, an example of which is the failure of a similar fusion of the history of economic thought with economic history. Another issue is that, although Topolski's history of education is a field of history, he gives priority to professional education in developing it: "pedagogical preparation (with appropriate sociological elements) should be put in the foreground within the history of education" (Truchim, 1965, p. 64).

The theses mentioned here arise in the scientific aura of Polish socialism, especially Kurdybacha's project is thus ideologically oriented. It is important because socialism, according to its program, focused on the ways of compiling a historical narrative. Therefore, apart from ideological issues, it can be said that these were fertile times for the methodology of history. As the American-German historian of historiography Georg G. Iggers wrote:

Nevertheless the contribution of Marxism to modern historical science must not be underestimated. Without Marx, a good deal of the body of modern social science theory, which defined itself in opposition to Marx, along with the work of Max Weber, would not be thinkable (Iggers, 2005, pp. 78–79).

Reinhart Koselleck will name that similarly, indicating as a beneficial feature of the communist camp that in its system of doing science the subject of constant reflection is the relationship between theory and practice, especially in the context of history (Koselleck, 2000, p. 314).

The aforementioned historical and educational syntheses were provided with methodological discussion, but these comments were not their goal; monographs dealing only with the methodology of the history of education in Polish science did not appear. There was, however, a chance to change this state of affairs in the late 1980s, when an important Polish historian of education, Jan Hellwig, conducted a research project financed from state funds and related to the topic: *The Methodology of the History of Education [Metodologia historii wychowania]*. The project description was:

The reason for undertaking research is the lack of studies in this field in Poland and also the lack of systematic research. The aim of the research is the need to reconstruct the history of education in the aspect of historical truth, in particular the most recent history.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1991 text, Hellwig stresses again that the methodology of the history of education requires development, in the absence of a concept in this regard (which also leads to a lack of syntheses of history of education as such).

Announcing the purpose of her speech at the Forum of Historians of Education in 1994, as well as the purpose of the text based on it, Danuta Drynda states: “The history of education is still a controversial science. This article is an attempt to prove this thesis” (Drynda, 1995, p. 9). The author reduces a multitude of terminological and methodological dilemmas to one wide-ranging dilemma:

Either the scientific community of Polish humanists will accept the differentiation of disciplines and subdisciplines, which in principle would mean agreeing to the scientist concept of the division of sciences according to the criteria: the specific subject of research, methodology and creation of own theories and consequently exposing the subdisciplinary ‘specificity’, or agree to merge subdisciplines in one field of knowledge, which in turn will not require a precise and unambiguous definition of the subject of research, will be an approval of the openness of the domain boundary to the penetration of other disciplines but also will be consent to theoretical and methodological eclecticism. To which of these two possibilities today is the professional environment of Polish historians of education inclined? (1995, p. 160).<sup>5</sup>

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4 <http://bibe-retro.ibe.edu.pl/index.php?order=tytul&ascdesc=asc&page=3&show=102> [accessed: 20.02.2020].

5 Significantly, a collective work edited by Tadeusz Jałmużna and Iwona and Grzegorz Michalski under the title *Metodologia w badaniach naukowych historii wychowania [Methodology in the History of Education Research]*, which begins with the texts of Jan Hellwig, Krzysztof Jakubiak and Danuta Drynda, was published two years earlier. This volume is substantively important, but it cannot be treated as evidence of crystallization of the methodology of the history of education. This is also evidenced by the opinion of Drynda quoted here from 1995.

Therefore, we note that specifying the subject of research in the case of the history of education leads, according to the researcher, to scientific imagination of positivist provenance.

Consequently, the ground for disciplinary crystallization of methodology of the history of education was excellent in Poland in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century;<sup>6</sup> researchers moving on its basis on the international horizon, a favorable circumstance was also the publication of the book *Methodology of History*. Topolski himself wrote in 1965: “It is understandable that the historian of each specialty must follow the discussion on the methodological foundations of the history of education with great interest” (Truchim, 1965, p. 62). And yet this crystallization did not occur. What was missing? Most likely... a twig.

### WITH A PINCH OF SALT

This last statement refers to the famous fragment on crystallization from the reflections of Stendhal (Henri Beyle). It sounds like this:

At the salt mines of Salzburg a branch stripped of its leaves by winter is thrown into the abandoned depths of the mine; taken out two or three months later it is covered with brilliant crystals; the smallest twigs, those no stouter than the leg of a sparrow, are arrayed with an infinity of sparkling, dazzling diamonds; it is impossible to recognise the original branch (1915, pp. 22–23).

In this metaphor, Stendhal wants to convey the operations of the mind, which, by gaining an outline of the idea, uses everything it encounters to realize it, develop it, and improve it. Of course, Stendhal writes about the mind of a man in love; what is the relationship with the methodology of the history of education? Is it not so that we can derive methodological theses from any gesture of a historian? The point here is that one general concept of the methodology of historical sciences on which the history of education could crystallize its own methodology was not available. I mentioned, referring to the Stendhal’s metaphor, that the methodology of the history of education was not created due to the lack of one “twig”; the thing should be put differently: there were too many of them. Let us look at the

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<sup>6</sup> It should be stressed that nowadays the ground for disciplinary crystallization of the methodology of the history of education may be even better, e.g., taking into account vast bibliography of studies by Ewa Domańska. A conscientious application of this output would be a significant extension of the methodological imagination of the history of education (cf. Domańska, 1994, 1999, 2006, 2012, 2018).

dissertation of 1968, *Methodology of History*, waiting for the following editions and translations – if it did not designate scaffolding to understand the methodological issues of history, then it had to become an important context for them. However, it could not become the basis for any final definitions. Note that Topolski lists the following three branches as parts of the methodology of history:

1. reflections on cognitive operations in historical research, i.e., on the science of history interpreted as the craft of the historians (pragmatic methodology of history);
2. reflections on the results of research, i.e., on the science of history interpreted as a set of statements on the domain under investigation (apragmatic methodology of history);
3. reflections on the subject matter of historical research, i.e., on history in the sense of the past events (objective methodology of history) (Topolski, 1976, pp. 30, 32).

There were even more distractions for the potential crystallization of the methodology of the history of education. The Polish tradition of perceiving the subject of the history of education is derived from the post-war findings made on the occasion of the 7<sup>th</sup> General Congress of Polish Historians in Wrocław on September 19–22, 1948, and the speech of Bogdan Suchodolski titled *Stosunek pedagogiki do historii wychowania* [*The Attitude of Pedagogy to the History of Education*] (Suchodolski, 1948; *de facto* Suchodolski's theses have their sources in the views of the pre-war authors). Every consideration of the subject of the history of education is henceforth formulated in relation to the division named at that time: the history of pedagogical thought, the history of public education, and the history of culture (at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sławomir Sztobryn supplemented this division with the metahistory of education; cf. 2000). Crystallization of the methodology of the history of education could not be accomplished by this dispersion. Each element of this entity was associated with a different cognitive interest.

## **SILENCE IS GOLDEN**

Or maybe methodological silence does not require any justification? Maybe there is nothing to talk about here? The very existence of a history of education may be problematic. There are, after all, discourses similar to science of education which are characterized by the impossibility of subdisciplinary isolation of reflection on

the past of their own subject. How can we, for example, separate the past of philosophy from its contemporary practice? It is similar to the history of the fields of art or theology; it is also in some sense similar to pedagogy. The gesture of emerging of the historical element in these areas always seems to bear signs of arbitrariness and is like dissecting an organ with a naive hope that it will not die, both the organ and body from which it was removed. Kathleen Weiler answers her own question about what sets the boundaries of the history of education, which Foucault's humanistic commitment, after all, was unable to break: "journals, organizations, and conferences" (2011, p. 251). Is it not so that we can see here the sociology of the history of education with its institutions? Let us mention in this context the classic lead from the title of the text by Roland Barthes *History or Literature?* (1964). Maria Janion wrote about this title that it "makes us choose: either history or literature. You can reconcile them only at the price of the restriction" (1982, p. 193). Therefore, Barthes claims that the effect of literary work is both historical and resists this history: "Everyone senses that the work *escapes*, that it is *something else* than its history, the sum of its sources, influences or models: a hard, irreducible core, in the undefined mass of events, conditions, collective mentalities" (1964, p. 155). If the history of literature is possible, then only in the form of the history of literature understood as an institution, in the form of the history of the function of literature. Maria Janion, commenting on *History or Literature?*, states: "For Barthes, history of literature is possible only as a sociology of literature" (1982, p. 192). And if activities and institutions are its field of interest, then certainly individuals are not.

So we are talking about perceiving the diachronic perspective as a gaze that, by its very existence, violates the observed object. The phenomenon whose history of research here is reduced to a tailor-made scientific discipline, bound by an academic standardized methodological apparatus or restrictions on the definition boundaries of the subject of research. As a side note, we can observe that educational institutions are most likely to undergo such strategies. Looking through numerous syntheses, it can be seen that in the history of historiography of education one can find periods of growing and declining interest in this regard. And yet, as Karol Kotłowski sharply stated in the context of the seminar mentioned above:

Studying the history of education is not only the study of an educational institution, but also what is of particular value to a pedagogue, i.e., the goals, methods and effects of pedagogical impact. The traditional history of schools, understood only as the history of the edifice, teaching staff, students, etc., resembles the history of the theater, which deals not so much with the repertoire and success of theater plays, but with the equipment of the room in which the performance takes place and the history of the costumes in which the actors perform (Truchim, 1965, p. 13).

Let us return to the main thread: does the historical and literary perspective of Roland Barthes also describe the status of the history of education as well?

In the introduction to Volume 6 of 2008 *Paedagogica Historica* magazine, Paul Smeyers and Marc Depaepe write: “The debate about ‘method’ as such is no longer fertile (if it ever was)” (Depaepe & Smeyers, 2008, p. 630). This would mean that any methodological considerations in the history of education are superfluous. However, this thesis is not as radical as it may seem at first glance. Let us hurry with the quotation: “We hold the belief that, in our work as historians and philosophers of educational research, relevance and progress can only come about if we unravel what is involved in particular cases of educational practice and research” (2008, p. 630). The history of education thus conceived must be sensitive to the multitude of educational practices present for its researcher. It seems that such an attitude would be guided by a methodology that is difficult to unequivocally capture. What is more, the duty of the history of education that the authors of the text want is to formulate suggestions for the educational contemporaneity, which is also a systematic attack on historians’ aspirations for an impartial narrative that is still stuck in their bloodstream. The more so because these authors are not talking about a thoroughly corrective activity; as they indicate: “This would involve refraining from being habitually critical and consequently coming up with suggestions” (Depaepe & Smeyers, 2008, p. 630). Let us reinforce this thought with a fragment of reflections on the history of education by already quoted here Kathleen Weiler: “What is at stake in the writing of history, then, is not a reflection of a prior reality, but an intervention in creation of a sense of reality” (Weiler, 2011, p. 250). The history of education is therefore a creation, not in the sense of narrative creation of the past, but in the sense of real creation of the present. It is a gesture of crossing borders rather than respecting them, as Chris Lorenz would call it (cf., e.g., 2009). That is why Franciszek Bronowski was right when, on the occasion of the Łódź symposium of 1964, he described one of the duties of a researcher of the education in this manner: “he should notice and emphasize the pedagogical aspect in seemingly distant and even foreign issues of education. Taking a different attitude sooner or later will negatively affect his scientific output” (Truchim, 1965, p. 56). Thus, what is currently not perceived as a history of education would have to be considered potentially binding. The methodological effort of the history of education should therefore be focused on building tools to search for what is obliging for it today, which requires intervention and should be the direction of research intentions.

Similar conclusions can be made using the thought gesture that the author of the classic book *History of Sociological Thought*, Jerzy Szacki (1979), once made towards sociology. In the early 1970s, in a text with a significant title *Socjologowie*

*wobec historii* [*Sociologists' Attitudes towards History*], he states that there is no problem with the relationship between sociology and history as such (Szacki, 1991, p. 294). The author in the justification of this thesis adds, after Fernand Braudel, that it will always be possible to find a history that will contradict some sociology, as well as the one that will agree with it. Hence, the course of Szacki's argument is not woven by considering the field of historicity in sociology, but by an interesting motif devoted to the formula of historicizing "in the name of" something. There is a question behind this statement: "to solve what problems history is needed for sociologists or – in other words – what types of sociological problems, if any, contribute to the growing interest of historical sociologists" (p. 297). Therefore, the same question should be transferred to pedagogy, although it does not have to be an easy transfer. As Lech Witkowski wrote: "Although pedagogical sciences have a history, they are often practiced ahistorically. History is only the context of erudition, not modifying categories and cognitive attitudes, not affecting our understanding of ourselves and our actions. It is not intended to assess the legitimacy of the 'commitment' that currently dominates, so on ad hoc basis, in discipline. Pedagogy, therefore, lives the reality of its own history as a fact, although it is unable to live the historicity of its alien reality – alien, because contrary to its idea and demanding abolition – for the implementation of the humanistic message" (2010, p. 83). Another thing is that such a difficulty does not negate the effort – on the contrary: it increases the importance of the task.

## **TOWARDS DIFFERENT IMAGINATION**

A characteristic axis of the methodological considerations around Polish history of education, which have been going on for decades, and not all of the most important fields of debate could have been mentioned here, is the question whether the study of the history of education is the duty of education researchers or historians. On the one hand, this axis is quite unfortunate, because it engages the interests of circles of academic disciplines, and these often underestimate the substantive issues. On the other hand, it can be a prospective dilemma for the history of education, since it cannot be finally resolved, which means that a developmentally favorable remark about key findings does not pass. However, this issue is also symptomatic in other respects. We note that the category of boundary is the leitmotif, or rather the operator of these considerations, but also the methodology and theory of the history of education. The analyses conducted here referred to the boundaries of the subject of history as a key issue for the formulation of the methodology, to the

“permitted” limits of the presence of theory in history, to disciplinary history of education and their placement within pedagogy, history or in some linking the features of both areas “in between”. I think that all these border motives share a similar demarcation imagination, where the identity of a phenomenon is determined by a territory that is clearly separated from the one that it does not occupy. However, this is not the only possible imagination.

Let us look at the book which was a breakthrough in the theory of historiography by Fernand Braudel on the Mediterranean. Thus, for historical understanding, the author deconstructs the common understanding of the sea border:

To meet the historian’s demands, however, the Mediterranean must be accepted as a wide zone, extending well beyond the shores of the sea in all directions. We might compare it to an electric or magnetic field, or more simply to a radiant center whose light grows less as one moves away from it, without one’s being able to define the exact boundary between light and shade (1972, p. 168).

Let us notice, therefore, that it is impossible to indicate any field inside and outside the described object. The border here is reduced to the imagination of the space of interaction, which, anyway, is not the same everywhere. From this perspective, questions about the boundaries of the subject of history of education seem to have a completely different sense than that reduced to searching for its thematic field. The matter of its interior (especially the institutional interior), but also – and perhaps in the case of the history of education, even above all – the spheres of influence on the objects in its orbit is not the field of discipline, which makes historical reason also to embrace the present. As Sławomir Sztobryn once wrote: “The border between historical and theoretical pedagogy is therefore only hypothetical: we suspect its existence, but we cannot clearly indicate it. This tradition of combining of diachronic and synchronic research into a coherent whole was more easily noticeable when pedagogical reflection was being developed in the orbit of great philosophical systems. A classic example here is the philosophy of J.F. Herbart, and in Poland (still underrated) B.F. Trentowski” (2006b, p. 84).

Similar to the work done by Braudel, the concept of the border was performed by Yuri Lotman. In the famous dissertation *Culture and Explosion* (first published in 1992), we will find the following passus written in the context of analyses of the communication space:

Any semantic space may only be represented in a metaphorical sense in a two-dimensional manner with clear and definite boundaries. More realistic is its representation as a specific semantic mass whose boundaries are framed by a multiplicity of individual uses. Metaphorically, this can be compared to the boundaries on a map



and its locations: during real movement through the geographical locality a clear line on the map blurs into a spot. The intersections of semantic spaces which generate new meanings are linked to individual consciousness (2009, p. 19).

So if one accepts this vision of disciplinary boundaries in the imagination of the disciplinary history of education, perhaps the exclusion of that unitary perspective can be avoided, which I mentioned after Roland Barthes and Maria Janion. However, Lotman's vision has more to offer here. The author describes in his book, among others, the communication situation in terms of the intersection of the spaces of its actors (A and B), modeling the understanding of the category of the border. Let us notice without further discussion that in this situation two contradictory aspirations coexist: to broaden the common sphere to facilitate understanding, and to strengthen the message (its value), which increases the difference. In commentary mode for this situation, Lotman states: "The space of intersection between A and B becomes the natural basis of communication. Meanwhile, or so it seems, the non-intersecting parts of these spaces are excluded from the dialogue. However, here we find ourselves faced by yet another contradiction: the exchange of information within the intersecting parts of the semantic space suffers from the self-same flaw of triviality. It appears that the value of dialogue is linked not to the intersecting part, but to the transfer of information between non-intersecting parts. This places us face-to-face with an insoluble contradiction: we are interested in communication in the very sphere which complicates communication and, in actual fact, renders it impossible" (Lotman, 2009, p. 5). This subtle imagination of boundaries seems extremely adequate for the description of the commitment of the history of education as in the present. I also find this imagination in an important book by Lech Witkowski titled *Przełom dwoistości w pedagogice polskiej: historia, teoria, krytyka* (2013) [*Duality Turn in Polish Pedagogy: History, Theory, Criticism*], which has been apparently harmfully situated outside of the history of education. Although the author in extensive descriptions reports on the methodological pre-assumptions that weave his considerations and motivate him to work with the limits of scientific disciplines, I would describe the program of this book with a quote from Mikhail Bakhtin (also in the mode of strengthening the imagination of boundaries promoted here). That passage reads as follows:

One should not imagine the field as a certain spatial whole, having borders, but also having internal territory. The field of culture has no internal territory; it's all situated on the borders. The borders run everywhere, they cross every point [...]. The life of a cultural act actually takes place at the borders: the seriousness and significance of this act is in there. When moved away from the borders it loses ground, becomes empty and arrogant, degenerates and dies (1982, pp. 26–27).

This fragment can also be found in the book by Lech Witkowski *Uniwersalizm pogranicza: O semiotyce kultury Michała Bachtina w kontekście edukacji* (2000) [*Border Universalism in M. Bakhtin's Semiotics of Culture: the Question of Educational Implications*].

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