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Historische und systematische Schulbuchforschung - Ein Rezensionessay

Eva Matthes / Carsten Heinze (Hrsg.)

Das Schulbuch zwischen Lehrplan und Unterrichtspraxis

Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt 2005

(341 S.; ISBN 978-3-7815-1410-2 ; 32,00 EUR)

Eva Matthes / Carsten Heinze (Hrsg.)

Die Familie im Schulbuch

Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt 2006

(375 S.; ISBN 978-3-7815-1488-9; 34,00 EUR)

Eva Matthes / Carsten Heinze (Hrsg.)

Elementarisierung im Schulbuch

Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt 2007

(407 S.; ISBN 978-3-7815-1553-6 ; 36,00 EUR)

The *Internationale Gesellschaft für historische und systematische Schulbuchforschung* (International Society for Historical and Systematic Research on Textbooks), established in 1997, is aiming at the promotion and advancement of textbook research. Although one is increasingly convinced of the relevance and the interest of this kind of research, for supporting the educational praxis in the present as well as for penetrating the educational praxis in the past, it is still hard to convince policy makers that textbooks are an essential part of our cultural heritage. Repeated attempts, with varying success, of the Belgian *Archief- en Documentatiecentrum voor Historische Pedagogiek* (Archives and Documentation Centre for the History of Education at the K. U. Leuven) regarding the keeping and opening up of their historical collection of textbooks might be called an illustrative example of this. Unnecessarily to say that the *Internationale Gesellschaft für historische und systematische Schulbuchforschung* has every right to exist. With the organization of annual conferences, and the publication of the series *Beiträge zur historischen und systematischen Schulbuchforschung* that resulted from this, the association wants to offer scholars within the field of theoretical and methodical or, as indicated in her title, systematic and historical textbook research both an international and interdisciplinary forum. Furthermore the association wants to encourage the dialogue between scholars on the one hand and authors and publishers of textbooks, teachers, pupils and all those interested in textbooks on the other hand.

At present the *Beiträge zur historischen und systematischen Schulbuchforschung*, which is edited by Marc Depaepe (K.U.Leuven), Carsten Heinze, Eva Matthes and Werner Wiater (Universität Augsburg), is containing six volumes related to the following topics: a state of the art and perspectives of textbook research in Europe; pedagogic innovations in textbooks; interculturality and cultural integration; the position of textbooks between curriculum and educational praxis; (the representation of) the family in textbooks; and the phenomenon of 'elementarization' or 'pedagogization' in textbooks. The next volume, to be published in September 2008, will deal with the question of the identity of textbooks. The eighth volume, to be published in autumn 2009, will contain a selection of papers presented at the conference on "illustrations in textbooks" that will take place in the Bavarian School

Museum in Ichenhausen from 25 to 27 September 2008. Generally, contributions to this series can be divided into the following sections: theoretical and methodical foundations of, or approaches to, textbook research (i.e. reflexions on the usage and the essence of textbooks, systematic as well as historical); historical perspectives (mostly case studies); pedagogical or systematic perspectives; and a specific focus related to the general theme of the volume (e.g. Africa as focus within the theme of interculturality and cultural integration; the subject of history as focus when the relation between textbook, curriculum and educational praxis is at the centre; and Russia in transition as focus when the representation of the family is receiving attention). The series is a carefully edited edition, of which especially the two most recent volumes contain a lot of clear and relevant illustrations.

The *Beiträge* demonstrate that the interdisciplinarity the association is striving for implies that the association is offering a forum to scholars with different backgrounds, rather than she is really aiming at bridging the gap between disciplines. In theory that shouldn't be a problem, as 'real' interdisciplinarity is hard to achieve. This certainly applies to attempts to cross the borders between theory and praxis. Therefore it is certainly a merit that the *Internationale Gesellschaft für historische und systematische Schulbuchforschung* is succeeding in presenting a sample of current systematic as well as historical textbook research. This diversity is her fortune. Nevertheless, the question remains whether this diversity has also a surplus value. After all, too many contributions to the *Beiträge* don't go beyond a superficial description of the content of textbooks. When we take a look at the three most recently published volumes this is particularly applying to the volume *Die Familie im Schulbuch*. The volume *Das Schulbuch zwischen Lehrplan und Unterrichtspraxis* is, as far as this is concerned, more in balance, with a number of strong articles regarding both systematic and historical issues. The volume *Elementarisierung im Schulbuch* is certainly discussing one of the most important aspects of textbook research, though we also notice some missed opportunities. It would be interesting for instance if one would try to reveal some of the formal 'rules' and structures on the basis of which historical processes of elementarization (via simplification, omission, and the like) have taken place. To a certain extent this is not only applying to the content of textbooks but also to stylistic characteristics (e.g. the way of presenting a text and the integration of illustrations) as well as material characteristics (e.g. the cover and the layout).

Luckily, the uneven quality is not obstructing the series of some favourable tendencies, in addition to the interdisciplinarity (with reservation) mentioned above. Firstly, the *Beiträge* contain gradually more and more contributions in which one is trying to contextualize the primary sources, the textbooks, within a wider range of developments. Because of this, a purely descriptive story is probably making way for a more complex, but at the same time also more balanced interpretation, based on a number of sources in combination with a study of literature. Furthermore, from the very beginning the *Internationale Gesellschaft für historische und systematische Schulbuchforschung* has recognized the value of systematic as well as historical analyses of other learning materials, such as wall charts, exercise books and computers.

A second tendency which is only to be applauded, however carefully, is the gradually increasing internationalization of the association, which, as one might expect, also will be reflected in the *Beiträge*. After all, rather than the association is really

succeeding in gaining a voice in the international debate, the epithet 'international' in her title is emphasizing her longing to it. In order to become truly international the *Internationale Gesellschaft für historische und systematische Schulbuchforschung* will have to tear herself loose from her straitjacket in which she is stuck due to the anchoring and collaboration with the Bavarian School Museum in Ichenhausen. Although the *Beiträge* not only contain German contributions— something for which one might pat the publisher on the back – English articles are strongly in the minority. Up to now mainly Marc Depaepe and his team from the Leuven University (in collaboration with Frank Simon from the Ghent University) and Arsen Djurovic, from the Belgrade University in Serbia, were responsible for the few English articles. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Djurovic took over the position of vice-president of the *Internationale Gesellschaft für historische und systematische Schulbuchforschung* from Depaepe, who filled in that position for ten years. However, we might call it a good omen that the eleventh annual conference of the association took place in Belgium, after ten years of conferences in Ichenhausen. Crossing the border immediately resulted in a more international conference, and yielded even more non-German members of the association.

As the volumes in this series are proceedings of the annual conferences the quality of the volumes is depending on the quality of the papers presented at these conferences. As they are small-scaled the editors have not much room to pursue a strict and high-standard policy regarding the selection of papers. Therefore, a more structural collaboration with other important players in the field of textbook research, like for instance the *Georg-Eckert-Institut für internationale Schulbuchforschung* in Braunschweig and the centre MANES of the UNED in Madrid, could be helpful to raise the quality of the series as well as to gain internationally on weight. However, as mentioned with regard to 'interdisciplinarity' one might say that 'internationalization' does not guarantee qualitative research. At the most it offers a condition for quality, as diversity, meeting different cultures in past and present, enables us to catch the complexity of textbooks as a source for systematic and historical textbook research. After all, a textbook is, as stated in the beginning of this review, a cultural product.

To conclude, the *Beiträge zur historischen und systematischen Schulbuchforschung* is a series of which the relevance should be beyond questioning. The tendencies mentioned above seem to indicate that this series has a high potential. Therefore, we strongly recommend keeping an eye on this series!

Angelo Van Gorp (Leuven / Belgien)

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