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EDITORIAL

Mind the Gap: or better still, bridge it!

Over the last few weeks, I heard several interesting statements which merged into one topic as I was reading the texts chosen for this issue of *Studia paedagogica*. “Why finance research if it makes no money?” asked one discussion participant in reaction to the budgets of research institutions. “It’s just a theory,” said the detective in a crime TV series. “Everything is completely different in real teaching practice,” commented a teacher on a lecture given by an academic. “Researchers explain easy things in a difficult way while everybody else explains difficult things in an easy way,” stated a discussion chair at an academic conference. I have to admit that I’m constantly surprised by the tenacity with which the notion of a supposed gap between theory and practice returns to discussions of the education system. One wishes to exclaim, “Oh, how artificial such a divide is! How mistaken it is to take theory as a priori impractical.” But that would not do. The discussion of the education system needs to be supported with facts and a clear definition of the field in which it takes place. Hence, I deem it practical to open this issue of *Studia paedagogica* with some thoughts on what teaching practice actually is.

Practice is not “doing” of any sort. It is a process by which an idea is realized, embodied, or made use of. In other words, it is a process by which an idea is practiced. To achieve this end, both skill and understanding are required. Ever since Lewin, Argyris, Schön, Kolb, and others showed how understanding is created, verified, and used by practitioners it is no longer germane to distinguish strictly between academic and non-academic theory. Kurt Lewin (and how he contributed to practice!) even went as far as to say that “there is nothing more practical than a good theory” (Lewin, 1952, p. 169). Furthermore, it is increasingly difficult to find a concept of practice in which theory does not play an essential role. By way of an example, the key to understanding Kolb’s concept of the cycle of learning is the dialectic relationship between a specific experience and an abstract conceptualization. According to Vansteenkiste and Sheldon (2006), theoreticians are expected to propose ideas which enable others to conceptualize, understand, and handle real situations. On the other hand, applied researchers are expected to introduce facts and pieces of information that need to be coherently conceptualized.

Respected authors in the field of workplace learning, which is my main field of research interest, have been trying to elucidate the relationship between the experience gained and one's potential for performance in the workplace. They have shown that there is a conflict between an almost unlimited number of requests to manage various work roles on the one hand and, on the other hand, work experience that is constrained by physical, spatial, and time limitations. The consequences of actions or decisions manifest only after some delay, and therefore it is not always easy to connect their consequences to specific actions or decisions in the past. Further, experience gained in the limited space of a workplace cannot be automatically transmitted, and the accumulation of experience does not always equal benefits for the worker or their organization. On the contrary, habits gained in a workplace can limit individuals and impede organizational change. Dewey (1938, p. 25) commented that experience is not a self-explicatory idea. Rich and interesting experiences of practitioners, can also lead to chaotic habits rather than to deeper thought. Experience can also, under certain circumstances, be mis-educative and prevent an individual from developing further. If experience is not transmuted into understanding, it can lead to *eupraxia* (ευπραξία, "good praxis") just as well as to *dyspraxia* (δυσπραξία, "bad praxis"), the difference between which might even be unrecognizable.

I'm deeply convinced of the significance of research and researchers in overcoming the gap between theory and practice but also of their value for solving problems of real practice. Should this not happen, mistakes in coordination of research, insufficient research capacity, and lacking support of researchers are often the cause for the non-appearance of this desired outcome. However, even in such circumstances, research has many valuable things to offer. The texts that were chosen for this issue clearly show the desirability, added value, and potential for research and researchers to point out the problems of practice and their conceptualization. Hence, I'm pleased to have the chance to introduce this issue and its individual texts.

In the first text, Theo van Dellen critically reflects on the current state of lifelong learning in the Netherlands. Van Dellen analyzes the situation on micro, intermediate, and macro levels, while also taking into consideration contemporary European and global circumstances. Van Dellen convincingly argues that the current vision of lifelong learning is not a sufficient driving force in those countries where the political powers acknowledge only one factor, albeit an important one, which is to meet the demand and supply in the field of qualifications at the expense of offering complex support for learning and teaching. It would certainly be interesting to compare the situation of lifelong learning in the Netherlands with that in the Czech Republic.

The second text, a quantitative study authored by Mualla Bilgin-Aksu, Turkan Aksu, and Soner Polat, reveals the interconnected web of relationships among self-esteem, seniority, and other characteristic features of administrators

and the trust they have in their school teachers. The authors of the study interpret the contemporary situation in Turkish schools as a negative one and connect it with certain interventions of the governing sphere into the work lives of administrators. They also present a more positive finding by showing that seniority as an administrator in the current school is positively correlated with trust. Jana Straková and Jaroslava Simonová also use the term “trust” in their study, examining it at the level of the work of teachers and its outcomes. Their text demonstrates how valuable strong data are when one wishes to understand the complicated situation in education. Even this text contains some bad news: Czech teachers have relatively low levels of academic optimism. On the other hand, the analysis reveals a positive influence of trust, self-efficacy, and contentment on the academic achievements of students. In summation, the authors of both studies show how significant certain soft characteristics of leadership are for smooth school functioning.

While the previous two texts can provide some suggestions for educational policy, the third study, written by Claus Holm and Anders Martinsen, focuses directly on educational policy and its consequences. Since educational policy is a long-term research interest of both authors, who are essential members of the Asia Europe Meeting Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning, it is not surprising that they can convincingly identify hidden conflicts between educational policy and higher education.

The next study, authored by my esteemed departmental colleagues Milada Rabušicová, Kateřina Pevná, and Zuzana Vařejková, provides another valuable piece of understanding in the puzzle of intergenerational learning. Their text probes into the world of surrogate grandparents as actors in intergenerational learning, concluding with an eloquent typology of seniors as sources of learning.

As has become customary, this issue also includes an interview. In the current one, Milada Rabušicová and Jan Nehyba interview Peter Jarvis, who is a seminal figure in the world of andragogy, even though he himself questions the term and does not use it much. The interview enables our readers to comprehend the genesis of Peter’s ideas and opinions of other world-class scholars and their concepts. This interview strikes me as charged with Peter’s humanism and optimism related (not solely) to the function of education and learning.

The following three studies were chosen from a selection of texts sent to *Studia paedagogica* by the Emerging Researchers Group, which is connected to the European Educational Research Association through our strategic cooperation. All three texts examine current pressing issues.

Gisela Oliveira analyzes the transition from the university environment to a work environment. Her subject is one of the most-discussed topics in education, and it is of prime importance, especially on the European scene where it is related to increasing social problems caused by the growing number of unemployed youth (at least in some countries). Oliveira proposes a holistic interpretation of one phase of the professional career of youth.

Anneli Bergnell Karlsson brings our attention to the role of didactic material in the process of teaching pre-school children. Based on data gathered from observations of real teaching situations, she models interaction situations and reveals the positive and negative sides of using selected didactic material, which in her case are multimodal illustrations.

Julia Häbig provides a different perspective on cooperation between schools and parents as seen through the eyes of students. Despite the fact that this topic has been intensively studied for decades (and it would therefore seem that nothing new can be discovered), empirical studies can still result in new findings. More specifically, Häbig's study will disappoint those who believe that bringing together parents and teachers is automatically a positive phenomenon. The study shows that 13-year-old students perceive the resulting strengthened control as problematic and would much rather have support and acknowledgement of their achievements.

The issue concludes with a review in which Zuzana Šmideková examines an influential publication on a newly emerged field in education that draws heavily both on practice and education. Her review shows how certain tools are developed in the field of learning through information and communication technologies which enable modification of the process of teaching based on available data. Even though this new field cannot solve all the problems of teaching, learning analytics is still one of the research designs of the future.

I believe that even this brief summary of the texts chosen for the current issue of *Studia paedagogica* can give our readers some hope that research is the much-needed bridge which unites theory and practice. Should there be some practitioners among our readers who do not find a topic of their interest here, luckily, there is nothing to stop them from starting their own research to help them understand and conceptualize their specific problems.

Petr Novotný

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