**Wanted, dead or alive: educationalists.**

**On the need for academic bilingualism in education**

Gert Biesta

"How can there be *a* language of education,

when the contexts in which it is used are various,

and 'language' does not exist independently from context?"

(Oelkers 1997, pp. 127-128)

This chapter has its origin in a number of personal experiences that stem from my move from the Netherlands to England in 1999 and from England to Scotland in 2007. In the Netherlands I had worked at a number of different universities in faculties or departments of education or, with the proper Dutch word, faculties or departments of 'pedagogiek' – which in German would translate as 'Pädagogik'. In 1999 I took up a position at the University of Exeter in England where I worked at what first was called the School of Education and subsequently became the School of Education and Lifelong Learning (and since has been renamed the Graduate School of Education). In 2007 I moved from England to Scotland to work at the Institute of Education of the University of Stirling, since renamed the School of Education. This chapter is, however, neither about my academic career nor about the high pace in which schools and departments of education in the UK tend to change their names, albeit that the question of names and naming is not insignificant for what I wish to explore. This chapter rather is about the remarkable difference between the educational vocabularies used on both sides of the North Sea or, to put it in a slightly wider perspective, between those academic traditions that have developed in the German speaking world (and in countries influenced by these traditions) and those that have developed in the English speaking world (and in countries influence by these traditions).[[1]](#footnote-1)

Rather than confining myself to a straight comparison between the two traditions (on this see Biesta 2011), I will make the case that the way in which the field of education has developed in the English speaking world – predominantly as the interdisciplinary empirical and theoretical study of educational processes and practices – has limited the development of forms of theory and ways of theorising that, from a Continental perspective, could be characterised as distinctively *educational.* It has therefore also limited the capacity of educational practitioners to develop an educational perspective on their work. What I aim to argue in this chapter, therefore, is that the English speaking world may be in need of *educationalists*, that is, of those who have the ability to generate *educational* ways of understanding, approaching and 'doing' education. There is not only a need for scholars who can bring such ways of thinking into the contemporary educational conversation, but also a need for engagement with traditions of educational theory and theorising from the past. Hence there is a need for educationalists, both from the past and from the present or, in short, both dead and alive.

To suggest that the English speaking field of educational research and practice would benefit from engagement with ideas from the German speaking tradition is one thing; to think about how this might actually be achieved is quite another. The task is not simply one of translating German texts into English – although this may be important as well and it is actually remarkable how little this has been done so far – but much more about bringing two significantly different educational vocabularies into conversation with each other. To do this effectively, requires what I wish to characterise as 'academic bilingualism,' that is, an ability to converse in both vocabularies. The task of translation is, after all, never one of replacing words with other words but is about the transformation of one system of meaning into another system of meaning. It is a matter of semantics.

In my view Jürgen Oelkers is one of a still rather small number of educational scholars who, from early on in his career, has not only sought to be in conversation with both traditions but has also actively published in both German and English, thus bringing ideas from the English language tradition – such as analytic philosophy of education (for example Oelkers 1985) and pragmatism (for example Oelkers 2009) – into the German discussion – and bringing Continental forms of theory and theorising into the English speaking world (for example Oelkers 1994; 1999). His work thus provides an interesting example of what it might mean to be conversant in different educational vocabularies. This is why, in this chapter, I will use some of his work to explore these matters in more detail. But let me return now to some of my own experiences of what perhaps could be characterised as a case of being 'lost in translation'.

**Lost in translation, in search of education**

The first point at which I began to realise that the move from the Netherlands to England might involve more than just teaching and writing in a different language, was when, in a conversation with colleagues, I asked whether something was an educational question and found my colleagues being rather puzzled about what my question could mean. While they acknowledged that many questions can be asked about education, the idea that one could ask *educational* questions about education was not an obvious option. When I tried to make clear to my colleagues what I meant by the idea of an educational question, I immediately found myself talking about different traditions of theorising, about the history of the field, and about authors who had influenced my thinking and had shaped my outlook on education. I thus realised that the issue was not one of words but of concepts and thus of a difference in educational semantics. Many years later I got a strong confirmation of this difference when the reviewer of a manuscript I had submitted to a British journal wrote that my suggestion that there was a need to ask educational questions about education was as nonsensical as the belief that one could ask cookery questions about cooking (see Biesta 2011, p. 190). The fact that the reviewer thought that the idea of distinctively educational questions was nonsensical – that it made no sense – precisely shows that for this reviewer the option was outside of the very system of meaning from which he or she was operating.

Experiences such as these triggered my interest in trying to understand the differences between the British educational vocabulary and the one I had grown up in – one which was strongly influenced, both directly through the work I had read as a student and more indirectly through the way in which the field of education in the Netherlands had historically taken shape, by German educational thought. They also triggered my interest in trying to understand, historically and sociologically, how and why these traditions had developed so differently. But it was an experience I had when I moved from England to Scotland that showed me that this was not merely an interesting matter for educational theorists and historians but had direct practical ramifications. Whereas in England my teaching had mainly focused on doctoral work and vocational education, in Scotland I became involved in the education of experienced teachers towards achieving Chartered Teacher Status, a higher qualification within the Scottish educational system which was introduced in 2002 (see Bryce/Humes 2003; Kennedy 2007). In order to achieve the Chartered Teacher status students have to follow a recognised programme at Masters level. One of the things they are required to do as part of such programmes is to show that, through the conduct of a small scale research project, they are able to improve their own professional practice.

The interesting thing I encountered when working with students on these projects was that while most of them were able to *change* their practice, they found it tremendously difficult to make a case for why such change would also count as *improvement*. Quite often the answers they generated came no further than saying that they had implemented new government policy and, given that the policy had been prescribed by the government, it must therefore count as an improvement. Yet the question that remained open was both *why* that particular change would count as improvement and *on what terms* it could be identified as improvement. What, from my perspective, I found lacking in most cases, was the ability to deploy a distinctive educational vocabulary for evaluating such change in light of what could be seen as educationally desirable 'outcomes.' What was lacking, in other words, was a vocabulary that focused on the finalities or the *telos* of educational practices; a vocabulary that would allow educational practitioners to engage with the question of educational *purpose*. This experience not only confirmed my view that the vocabularies available in educational practice do matter, but also provided support for my claim that the language of learning that has gained prominence in the English speaking world over the past decades is indeed a language that makes it (more) difficult to ask questions about the content and purpose of education, that is question about *what* students should learn and what they should learn it *for.* (For my critique of the 'learnification' of educational discourse see Biesta 2010.)

It were experiences such as these that not only made me aware of the deeper differences between the tradition I had come from and the tradition I encountered in the UK, but that also led me to further investigations into the history of the study of education in the UK and the sociological and intellectual organisation of the field. To this I will now turn.

**The development of educational studies in the UK**

I have above characterised the academic 'field' of education in the English speaking world as the theoretical and empirical interdisciplinary study of educational processes and practices. Two things stand out in this approach. One is that the academic 'field' of education derives its identity from its object of study – and in this regard one could argue that the field of education is empiricist or literally 'object-ivist' (for this claim see Biesta 2011, p. 188). The other is that the academic 'field' of education is understood as *inter*disciplinary. This not only means that the study of education relies on input from a range of academic disciplines. It also means that education itself is not seen as an academic discipline in its own right, but only as an applied field of study (and consequently as an applied field of practice). On both accounts the identity of what is commonly referred to as 'educational studies' differs fundamentally from the way in which the field has developed in the German speaking world where education – as 'Pädagogik' or 'Erziehungswissenschaft' – is generally seen as an academic discipline in its own right. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere in more detail, the identity of the discipline of education is not founded on its object of study but on a particular *interest*; an interest which, at least from the time of 'geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik' onwards, has been articulated as an interest in the relative autonomy of educational practice (see Biesta 2011, p. 187).

The question this raises is why 'educational studies' has developed in this particular way – a question which both asks for *causes*, that is for the contingent historical developments that have led to the particular configuration of 'educational studies,' and *reasons*, that is, the arguments that have been given for this particular construction (for the distinction between reasons and causes see Toulmin 1977). While I do not have the space to engage with this question in an exhaustive manner, I will try to say something about both causes and reasons. (For more on the history of 'educational studies' in Britain see Richardson 2002; McCulloch 2002.)

With regard to the causes it is important to acknowledge that in Britain the field of educational studies has mainly developed in the context of teacher education. While teacher education in England was initially strongly practice based, some more theoretical strands began to emerge around the turn of the 19th century (see Tibble 1966a). These included the study of method, the history of education and, increasingly, educational psychology, a field which became more firmly established as a subject of study in the 1920s. Sociology and philosophy only gained prominence from the late 1950s/early 1960s onwards (see also McCulloch 2002). Until the Second World War there were two routes into teaching (see Hirst 2008 whose account I closely follow here). One was to study in a university for a bachelor's degree in a relevant curriculum subject and then take a one year course at a University Department of Education for the Post-Graduate Certificate in Education. The other was to train at a College of Education for three years taking a combined course of academic studies in a curriculum subject plus practical training, leading to the College's own Certification in Education.

Two important things happened after the Second World War. The McNair Report (Board of Education 1944) recommended that every College of Education should be brought under the supervision of a local university, each major university establishing for that purpose an Institute of Education for the Colleges under its area. The Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education 1963), which focused on the whole provision of Higher Education in the UK, recommended that all the Colleges of Education should redevelop their courses in arrangement with local universities so that all three years students would be awarded an Ordinary Bachelor of Education degree and students taking a fourth year would go on to receive an Honours Bachelor of Education degree. The aim was to create eventually an all graduate profession of schoolteachers. As a result of this, teacher education became strongly connected to and eventually (almost) fully integrated into the university sector, albeit not in all cases wholeheartedly (see Richardson 2002, p. 16). Yet these developments – and also the very practical need to design curricula for the new university-based teacher education programmes – inevitably raised questions about the academic status and identity of teacher education and of the 'field' of education more generally.

While in principle the focus could have been on innovative ways to develop teacher education as a form of professional education – one could argue, after all, that the actual history of the modern university is much more rooted in professional education than in intellectual pursuit for its own sake (think, for example, of the fields of medicine, law and theology) – the road taken was one in which the "academic, university interest" (Richardson 2002, p. 18) prevailed. According to Richardson (2002) a key-figure in this development was R.S. Peters. His inaugural lecture as professor of philosophy of education at the University of London Institute of Education – which Richardson characterises as a "pre-emptive strike" (ibid.) – was given six weeks after the publication of the Robbins Report. Richardson suggests that by focusing on the theme of education as initiation, Peters was able to discuss "both the education of children and of those intending to teach them" (ibid.). With regard to the latter Peters defended the view that conceptual clarification within educational studies was "pre-eminently the task of a philosopher of education" and this, as Richardson shows, led him to propose "that the field should comprise a balance among the disciplinary perspectives competing for attention: economics, sociology and psychology" (ibid.). Moreover, "to ensure teachers escaped the threat of 'conceptual blight,' philosophers would need to adjudicate among these disciplines in order to establish the basis of a coherent concept of education" (ibid.; see also Peters 1963).

Peters's outline of *a possible* structure for the field of educational studies was met with approval by officials from the Department of Education and Science, and by C.J. Gill, the Chief Inspector responsible for the education of teachers (see Richardson 2002, p. 18). This led to the convening by the Department of a closed seminar held in Hull in 1964 at which selected professors of education from England, led by Peters and with guidance from Gill, "hammered out the structure within which educational studies in England and Wales would expand and develop over the coming two decades" (ibid.). In the event economics was relegated in favour of history "which now joined philosophy, psychology and sociology in a quarter of 'foundation disciplines' defining the scope and nature of teaching and much research in the field" (ibid.).

In one sense one might say that it was this single event that led to the particular construction of the field of educational studies in the UK as an interdisciplinary field based on input from a number of academic disciplines, and with philosophy positioned as the adjudicator. Of course, history is never as simple as that, something which is reflected in a comment from the historian of education Brian Simon who suggested that Peters's intervention "simply crystallized contemporary developments in the field" (Simon, quoted in Richardson 2002, p. 18). This doesn't do away with the fact that Peters apparently was able to seize the opportunity to consolidate these developments. And it also doesn't do away with the fact that this consolidation has been hugely influential in the further development of the field of educational studies in the English speaking world. While on the one hand, therefore, one could simply conclude that Peters consolidated a particular approach to educational studies that was already 'in the air,' so to speak, there is still the interesting question where Peters got his outlook on the field from. For at least a partial answer to this question we need to cross another sea, this time the Atlantic Ocean, to look at developments in the USA in the early 1950s.

**What if . . .**

In a sense the developments in the field of teacher education in the USA were quite similar to those occurring in Britain. As Waks (2008) makes clear, teacher education before the mid twentieth century mainly took place in normal schools or teacher colleges, but rarely in university. Yet in the 1940s American normal schools were converted into teachers colleges, and in the 1960s these were converted into state universities. For the first time, then, "school teachers required a proper university education" (Waks 2008, p. 1). Waks credits James Conant, president of Harvard, with envisioning "a new kind of university-based school of education, drawing scholars from mainstream academic disciplines such as history, sociology, psychology and philosophy, to teach prospective teachers, conduct educational research, and train future educational scholars" (ibid.). Funded by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation these ideas were put into practice through the appointment, in 1952, of the philosopher Israel Scheffler and the historian Bernard Bailyn to Harvard's Graduate School of Education as part of a deliberate attempt to introduce "young scholars ... who had not been trained in the field of Education but in the Liberal Arts subjects" (Scheffler 2008, p. xi). Scheffler not only started to connect analytic philosophy with education thus inaugurating the development of an "analytical revolution in the philosophy of education" (Waks 2008). He also lays claim to having turned Richard Peters into a philosopher of education. Here is Scheffler's own (obviously coloured) account of this.

My first sabbatical took me to London in 1958 and 1959, where, at a meeting of the Aristotelian Society, I for the first time met Richard Peters, then teaching at Birkbeck College. Before coming to London I had read three of his lectures published in *The Listener*, entitled Authority, Responsibility and Education. (...) I had much admired those lectures for their clarity, wisdom and philosophical acumen, and was delighted to meet the author, hastening to tell him that he was, in fact, now a philosopher of education. He bristled at my description, insisting on his identity as a philosopher of psychology, and of political theory. Recalling a quip of Roy W. Sellars that here are two ways of making someone religious, one being conversion, the other definition, I told Peters that, by virtue of the authorship of his three lectures in *The Listener*, he was not, by my definition, also a philosopher of education. (...) Shortly after I returned home, my Dean asked me to meet with an official of the Rockefeller Foundation who has in town and wanted to talk with me. He asked me for my advice on what the Foundation might do to help improve the humanistic offerings of the School of Education. In conveyed both to him and to my Dean the strong recommendation that they invite Richard Peters to come as a Visiting Professor to the School of education for an extended period, to teach philosophy of education in my Area. Thus my definition of his identity as philosopher of education was realized, at Harvard at least. He did in fact come, and I asked him to teach his own version of my Introduction to Philosophy of Education course, the focus o which was epistemology; he agreed and designed his course to address ethics and education. (...) Sometime later, after Professor Louis Arnaud Reid's leaving the Chair of Philosophy at the Institute of Education in London, I was invited to write a letter to the authorities there concerning Peters' candidacy for the Chair. This I was only glad to do, and I was overjoyed that he was in fact appointed to that position, cementing his identification as philosopher of education on both sides of the Atlantic and, allied with Paul Hirst and others, leading the reform of Education in the U.K. with brilliant results. (Scheffler 2008, pxiv-xv)

If Scheffler's account is correct, or even if it is just partially correct, it provides at least an interesting insight into the way in which Richard Peters developed his identity as a philosopher of education. And what is perhaps even more important for the line I am pursing in this chapter, is the fact that he 'found' this identity in a context in which the study of education was explicitly and intentionally being developed along interdisciplinary lines, that is, according to the model that became prominent in Britain in the 1960s.

That this was not just a 'local' matter – i.e., that of Peters being exposed to the idiosyncrasies of the particular approach to the study of education taken at Harvard – can be glanced from the fact that in the early 1960s the very same James Conant led a two-year study of teacher education, financed by the Carnegie Corporation and resulting in a report The Education of American Teachers (Conant 1963), that was highly influential for the development of teacher education in the USA and that indeed put forward the case for the configuration of educational studies and the education of teachers as being based on the input from 'proper' academic disciplines. As Waks puts it, the Conant report concluded that "effective teaching of academic content in education could only come from properly trained professors bringing to bear on educational topics the best, most current methods from well-established academic disciplines" (Waks 2008. p. 3). And the point here was not only to bring in such a disciplinary perspective on the study of education, but at the very same time "to free teachers from domination by educationists" (ibid.).

While, as said, this is only part of a wider story of the development of educational studies in the UK and the wider English speaking world, it at least begins to shed light on the events and actors that have been influential in shaping the particular configuration of the field. And while history can not be turned back, I find it tempting, at least for a very short moment, to ponder the question 'what if...', that is, what if the Rockefeller Foundation had not given money to Harvard for strengthening the role of Liberal Arts subjects in their School of Education, what if Scheffler had not gone on sabbatical to the UK, what if educationists in the USA wouldn't have had such a bad name, and what if Peters, instead of accepting Scheffler's invitation to come to Harvard, had decided to go to Germany? While it may not have changed the cause of events, it would at least have exposed him to another possible configuration of the field, one in which education does not just appear as a field to be studied through the lenses of other academic disciplines. That this option was not only rejected – or perhaps it is better to say: not really considered – at the level of the social and institutional organisation of the field but also received intellectual support, can be glanced from a chapter that Paul Hirst contributed to a book published in 1966 on the editorship of J.W. Tibble called *The Study of Education* (Tibble 1966b). I briefly want to dwell with Hirst's argument in order to show the argumentation that was developed to defend the particular configuration of educational studies in Britain, and, more specifically, to defend the absence of a disciplinary status for education itself.

**Educational theory and the disciplines**

Hirst's chapter in *The Study of Education* – a book that contained the proceedings from a national conference chaired by Tibble and organised by the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers on the nature of educational studies (see Hirst 2008, p. 306) – starts from the observation that questions as ‘What is educational theory, as a theoretical pursuit, trying to achieve? How does this theory relate to educational practice? What kind of theoretical structure has it got and how in fact do the various elements that are obviously a part of it fit in it?’ have received ‘far too little sustained attention’ (Hirst 1966, p. 30). As a result "educational studies have tended to become either a series of unrelated or even competing theoretical pursuits, or a confused discussion of educational problems where philosophical, psychological, sociological or historical and other issues jostle against one another, none being adequately dealt with" (ibid.). This echoes Richard Peters’ characterisation of the field in 1963 as an "undifferentiated mush" (Peters 1963, p. 273). This is why Hirst aims to move towards "a more adequate framework within which research and teaching in this area can develop" (Hirst 1966, p. 30).

Hirst puts forward a very specific and very precise notion of educational theory. Starting from O’Connor’s (1957) distinction between theory as "a set or system of rules or a collection of precepts which guide or control actions of various kinds" and theory as "a single hypothesis or a logically interconnected set of hypotheses that have been confirmed by observation" (Hirst 1966, p. 38) he, unlike O’Connor, opts for the former rather than the latter as the most appropriate notion of theory for education. "Educational theory is in the first place to be understood as the essential background to rational educational practice not as a limited would-be scientific pursuit" (ibid., p. 40). The reason for this has to do with his view about the function of theory in practical activities. Whereas "(i)n the case of the empirical sciences, a theory is a body of statements that have been subjected to empirical tests and which express our understanding of certain aspects of the physical world," in the case of "a practical activity like education" theory "is not the end product of the pursuit, but rather it is constructed to determine and guide the activity" (ibid., p. 40). Hirst thus makes a distinction between educational theory in a narrow and a wider sense. The first concerns "the body of scientific knowledge on which rational educational judgments rest" while the second refers to "the whole enterprise of building a body of rational principles for educational practice" (ibid., p. 41). And he emphasises that the difference between ‘scientific theory’ and ‘educational theory’ is not a difference of degree or scale but expresses a *logical* difference between judgements about "what is the case" and "what ought to be the case" (ibid.) – or, to be more precise, about "what ought to be done in educational activities" (ibid., p. 53).

While Hirst is articulating a conception of educational theory that is rather close to educational practice – thus giving the impression that he is after a form of theory and theorising that is properly educational – the fact that he is developing his argument for educational theory in the context of the presence, so we might say, of a number of disciplines that claim to have to say something about education, leads him to the conclusion that the reasons that inform the "rational principles for educational practice" must be judged solely according to the standards of the particular disciplines they stem from. "The psychological reasons must be shown to stand to the strict canons of that science. Equally the historical, philosophical or other truths that are appealed to must be judged according to the criteria of the relevant discipline in each case." (ibid., p. 51) And it is this line of reasoning that leads Hirst to the conclusion that educational theory is not and cannot be "an autonomous discipline" because it does not generate "some unique form of understanding about education" in addition to what is generated through the fundamental disciplines (ibid., p. 51). A couple of years later we find this argument expressed strongly and succinctly and in a kind of 'matter of fact' way by Tibble in a book called *An introduction to the study of education* (Tibble 1971a).

It is clear that ‘education’ is a field subject, not a basic discipline; there is no distinctively ‘educational’ way of thinking; in studying education one is using psychological or historical or sociological or philosophical ways of thinking to throw light on some problem in the field of human learning. (Tibble 1971b, p. 16)

**The missing dimension**

While, from a British and North American perspective, the development and configuration of the field of educational studies looks entirely plausible – and we might even say entirely rational – the way in which I have reconstructed this development hints at a lack or absence. Rather than to think of the identification of this lack simply as an artefact of my reconstruction, I have identified a number of arguments that have been given *against* the idea of education as a discipline in its own right, *against* the idea of educational theory as having something substantive to offer rather than being entirely dependent upon a number of (non-educational) disciplines, and *against* the domination of teachers by educationists. This suggests that the idea of education as a discipline in its own right is not just absent in this particular configuration of educational studies, but was more or less explicitly rejected – albeit that those who were rejecting this option may not have been (fully) aware of alternative configurations and their advantages and disadvantages. Why these arguments are there and why they have been influential in shaping educational studies are questions for further investigation. It is highly likely that such investigation will find a combination of reasons and causes, of social and interpersonal dynamics and argumentations that, in particular contexts and under particular conditions may well have articulated the best way forward, at least the pragmatically best way. While for all the reasons given we may therefore wish to think of educational studies as a closed and self-sufficient system – and the fact that it has been operating effectively and productively since the 1960s seems to be a pretty strong argument for its self-sufficiency – I wish to suggest that, seen from the 'outside,' there is at least one 'missing dimension' in the particular configuration of educational studies that may be more troubling than what decades of 'success' appear to suggest.

The 'missing dimension' I have in mind has to do with what above I have referred to as the empiricist or objectivist character of educational studies. It has to do with the fact that educational studies understands itself as the study of education, thus suggesting that its object of study – education – is simply 'there' to be studied. But unlike trees and planets, education is a social practice that exists in and through the interpretations of those involved in the practice. This already shows that even if educational research would walk into a scholl in the hope to find their object of study, they still need to make decisions about what it is in the school building that would count as the very education they wish to study. The point here is that the study of education requires a notion of education in order to identify its object of study. Once this object has been identified one can, of course, deploy a range of disciplinary perspectives to investigate 'education' – and here there is clearly a place for psychology, sociology, philosophy and history and any other relevant discipline – but the only thing that such disciplines cannot do, and this provides a *prima facie* argument for the need for a distinctively *educational* way of thinking and theorising, is to identify what would count as education. The task here is not only that we are able to *theorise* in an educational way; it also requires that we are able to *contextualise* our theorising; and that we are able to *historicise* our contextual theorising. It is at this point that I wish to turn to Oelkers because of the fact that this is precisely what he has done in some of his contributions in the English language. While I do not have the space to discuss this in detail, I briefly wish to indicate the kind of contribution Oelkers has made to this threefold task, which I will do by focusing on two journal articles: "Influence and development: The two basic paradigms of education" (Oelkers 1994) and "Is there *a* 'language of education'?" (Oelkers 1997).

In "Influence and development" Oelkers makes three important moves. First of all he provides a critical reconstruction of two highly influential ways in which modern education has been conceptualised and theorised. One approach – to which Oelkers refers as the paradigm of 'influence' – stems from Locke; the other – to which he refers as the paradigm of 'development' – goes back to Rousseau. Oelkers not only provides detailed accounts of both approaches and their historical origins and development, but also makes the case that in most contemporary theories, education "still is being conceived either as 'influence' (on body and mind) or as 'development' (of body and mind)" and that "most controversies in education still have to do with the struggle of these two paradigms" (Oelkers 19997, p. 92). yet Oelkers not simply contributes to our understanding of alternative ways to theorise education. He also contributes to the historicisation of such theorising – and this is the second move in "Influence and development" – by arguing that the notions of pedagogical influence and pedagogical development could only be articulated against the background of the idea of "a distinct and demarcated inner space which can open up or close itself to the outside" (ibid., p. 101). Oelkers thus shows that the paradigm of influence and the paradigm of development are not simply theorising some natural state of affairs, but only became possible on the basis of an idea of the person as independent from "social and legal circumstances" (ibid.). While this view had its precursors in "the Christian concepts of the person and the soul" Oelkers argues that it was only with the Reformation "that a radical singularization of the 'interior' becomes possible, and it is mainly pietism that makes a doctrine out of the metaphor of the individual soul as the 'mansion' of the Lord" (ibid.). The third move Oelkers makes in "Influence and development" is the articulation of a theoretical alternative – a third paradigm we might perhaps say – in which education is theorised as *moral communication* (see also Oelkers 1992), thus showing that the options for theorising education are not exhausted by the obviously influential paradigms of influence and development.

"Influence and development" already provides an excellent example of threefold approach that I have suggested is needed in order to engage with educational theory and theorising. After all, in not only provides a detailed account of different ways in which education can be and has been theorised, but also provides a historical contextualisation by, on the one hand making clear what had to be 'in place' before the notions of influence and development could become intelligible as conceptions of education – which is the question of contextualisation – and on the other hand by considering this from a wider historical perspective. In the other paper to which I wish to draw attention – "Is there *a* 'language of education'?" – Oelkers pursues the task of contextualisation in a more systematic manner. What is perhaps most interesting about this paper for the discussion in this chapter is that the 'target' for the discussion is the work of Israel Scheffler, and more specifically his book *The Language of Education* (Scheffler 1960), as it provides a direct example of Oelkers's 'bilinguialism,' that is, his ability to converse across two very different traditions of educational theory and theorising. What makes the paper also interesting is that it is a reflection on the question whether there is one language of education that would cut across all different traditions, or whether educational language is always contextual – which is the suggestion I have been pursuing in this chapter. At one level Oelkers agrees with Scheffler that language does not exist outside of context. He notes that "(i)n all of his works, Scheffler rejected Platonic conceptions or replaced them with pragmatic analytical concepts, fro which the abandonment of *substantial unity* is essential" Oelkers 1997, p. 128; emph. in original). Oelkers's concern, however, is that if there is no 'substantial unity' public discourse about education becomes impossible. Scheffler's way out of this dilemma, as Oelkers shows, is by taking a position "*outside of discourse*" (ibid.) which focuses on "the logical status of pedagogical assertions" and thus displays an interest in clarity, rather than unity (see ibid.). This allows Scheffler to conduct analysis across systems but Oelkers, in my view correctly, concludes that this does not mean "that the analysis can presuppose *one* language of education" (ibid.). Scheffler, so Oelkers argues, can uphold the idea of *a* language of education because he is only interested in the formal characteristics of such a language, not in its substance (see ibid.). Oelkers seems to prefer a much more 'performative' approach, one in which 'the language of education' is explicitly *not* understood as a closed system (see ibid., p. 133) but rather as an ongoing open, public – and perhaps we might add: messy – conversation about what matters educationally. The language of education that Oelkers envisages is therefore not a language that understands the multiplicity of positions, points of views and interests, but one that "stimulates understanding, and does so not least of all through means of rhetorical simplification and therefore through potential misunderstanding" (ibid., p. 134). It is a language that makes possible "the advancement of a problematic communication that is suggestively definite and vague at the same time" (ibid.).

**Conclusion**

The notion of 'problematic communication' rather nicely captures what we might hope for in bringing two radically different constructions of the field of education into conversation. In this chapter I have not only tried to shed some light on the particular way in which educational studies has developed in the English speaking world. By identifying a 'missing dimension' in this particular configuration I have also tried to make the case why such a conversation is urgently needed, not only in order to give educational studies a more robust *educational* identity but also in order to generate conceptual resources that will allow educational practitioners to develop distinctively *educational* ways of engaging with their practices. While a conversation between the different configurations is likely to proceed "through potential misunderstanding," the work of scholars such as Jürgen Oelkers demonstrates that despite such difficulties important advances can be made.

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1. Which countries fall under the first and which fall under the second category is a question that requires further (historical) study, also because in some cases the influence of and orientation towards different academic traditions has changed significantly over time. The Netherlands is one example where an initial orientation towards German 'Pädagogik' has almost entirely been superseded by an orientation towards the English speaking world. It could even be argued that the orientation in Germany itself is currently shifting in this direction, for example as evidenced in recent discussions about the question whether the notion of 'Erziehungswissenschaft' (in the singular) should be replaced by the notion of 'Bildungswissenschaften' (in the plural). (I would like to thank Johannes Bellmann for alerting me to this.) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)