Editorial

Meinert A. Meyer

In Greek mythology, a bull, being Zeus in disguise, meets Europa on the beach. She finds him attractive, powerful and astonishingly friendly. So she climbs up on his back and he swims with her from Asia to Crete, giving the name “Europe” to the continent.

Does Greek mythology help us with our topic of “Didactics in Europe”? What does educational Europe look like? Who would be the bull? Of what help is it to have the focus on Europe if there is a wide diversity of didactic constructions among the European nations? In other words: Does didactics need European unification? Is it not best to leave educational theory construction and research out of the unification process? In this issue of “Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft”, we try to find answers to some of these questions in a bottom-up procedure. We present didactics in its intercultural diversity as it is taught and practised today in Sweden, the United Kingdom, Spain, Russia and France. The keyword article, however, searches for common ground.

Didactics (general and domain-specific) is a discipline, a theory of teaching and learning, a field of research on teachers and students, curriculum, lesson planning, classroom instruction, student counselling and student assessment, schooling etc., and research is dialogue, including conflict, in a community of scientists. That is why we assume that “European or national didactics” is a strange alternative since research should not be restricted voluntarily. Yet such a restriction characterises most of general didactics in Germany, so to speak, on a voluntary basis. German didactics has been and is national didactics. Criticising this state of affairs, we can identify the scope and objective of this issue: Didactics in Europe means a survey and, at the same time, a construction of the discipline without national restrictions.

Constructions are always idea-driven so we may ask what could be the driving idea for European didactics. In previous decades, the European unification process was inspired by great hopes. Educationists should fill the educational policy vacuum and thus give their contribution to the unification process to help avoid Europeans remaining strangers to one another.

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Today, Euroscepticism is *en vogue* while the process of unification continues. In this situation, the protagonists of further unification have become less ambitious concerning the realisation of our driving ideas and, at the same time, a European pragmatism has developed. In 2002, Novoa and Lawn published a book entitled “Fabricating Europe: The Formation of an Educational Space”. They sought development from interstate relations to transnational networks.¹ And today, Lawn and Grek (2012) suggest Europeanising education since the field has become transnational, while mobilising and governing the European educational space. But they identify developmental risks accompanying this process. The process of Anglicisation often disguises the lack of consensus with respect to cultural concepts. Against this, they suggest increasing the transnational flow and supporting networking.²

We follow Lawn and the other engaged Europeans. Networking allows us to see differences, even fragmentation, and at the same time to search for common ground. The present publication is a product of the suggested type of European networking in the field of didactics. We can thus acknowledge the diversity of the European educational landscape and at the same time ask which national problems and problem solutions can be generalised. The papers demonstrate this dual strategy: Swedish carefully reflected student-orientation, British practitioner research, Spanish interplay of theory and politics, tradition-oriented Russian teacher-centredness, and French theory construction—all of the papers characterise national trends and can nevertheless claim relevance for Europe as a whole.

We assume that in the long run competing theoretical frames, hermeneutics, (neo-)pragmatism, analytical philosophy etc. will be fruitful, even if the reader of this special issue were to conclude that today there are many interestingly different ways of constructing and practicing didactics. We hope that combining the approaches will sharpen our understanding of what systematic European didactics may look like in the future since this procedure allows us to accept the individual, subjective perspectives of the invited authors, including the author of the keyword article, and to nevertheless seek structures opening up an educational transnational space beyond fragmentation.

In his keyword article, Meinert Meyer from Hamburg tries to identify a systematic dimension for didactics in Europe, but starts by looking back at the founding father of the discipline, Jan Amos Comenius (1592–1670), who dreamt of a “universal culture” as the supreme teaching aim. Meyer sees bridges linking Comenius’ systematic approach to the present-day situation of European didactics. He starts his systematic construction with the so-called didactic triangle, the teacher, student and content in relation to each other, and then presents reflections on comparative didactics. He suggests a revival of the currently underdeveloped curriculum theory in Germany, and fosters an expansion of discussions about the typically German concept of “Bildung” on the European level. Systematic didactics depends on a common practice of teaching, studying and learning, and on a constructive frame behind that. Meyer concludes his keyword article with a reference to Immanuel Kant who was the first European to demand experimental schools in order to improve schooling in general.

The second paper, by Per-Olof Wickman from Stockholm, focuses on the students’ perspective and on domain-specific didactics (“Fachdidaktik”), coupled with a (neo-)pragmatist framing. Wickman analyses the communicative activities that occur

in educational settings. Four methodological components are described: the empirical method of inquiry (inspired by John Dewey's educational research), the notion of selective traditions (as can be found in instructional practice producing habitual inclusions and exclusions of content, methods etc.), organising purposes (in order to realise the learning progressions of students), and Wickman's own (neo-)pragmatic approach to didactics labelled "practical epistemology analysis" (a method with which to analyse the learning situation of students as a prerequisite for lesson planning): The students will start their learning with "proximate purposes", depending on their previously acquired knowledge and their understanding of the classroom situation. Yet the teacher should accept this frame as an initial practice and not lose sight of the "ultimate purpose" of the students' learning activities. Practical epistemology analysis thus helps the teacher monitor how his teaching enables the students to learn a particular content.

We see a bridge here from Sweden to France. Wickman's example, a physics teacher and his class working on the concepts of friction and movement, demonstrates using different terminology what Sensevy means when he introduces the concept of "reticence" in the teacher's and the students' joint action (see below). The teacher accepts that his students start their learning with an everyday concept of friction and movement—this being nothing new in natural science didactics. What the teacher then does, however, makes the difference. He gives his students the time they need to gradually develop a better understanding of the phenomena and—more importantly—he starts the instructional dialogue by speaking the students' language, not that of physical science—without neglecting his ultimate end in view.

Colleen McLaughlin, formerly of Cambridge and now Sussex, describes what does not exist in the United Kingdom: didactics. What she can bring in is a long list of historically developed topics, problems and perspectives for the advancement of research on curriculum, instruction, teacher education and practitioner research. She explores current debates on didactics in the UK and examines how they are mirrored in discussions about teacher education and professional development. Teachers should know their impact on their students, as Hattie puts it,³ and this means they should be capable of reflection. McLaughlin shows that the best method of operationalising this demand is teacher research. She presents Lawrence Stenhouse's teacher-as-researcher conception and convincingly argues that this is a model for the development of pedagogy in general and for links to continental didactics. Stenhouse had come to accept that large-scale curriculum research and implementation does not necessarily bring an improvement in local educational practice, and that one needs practitioner research to achieve a lasting quality improvement. We can follow this argument, knowing that in Germany this is a controversial position.

Fernando Marhuenda from Valencia and Antonio Bolivar from Granada describe a different world, namely general didactics in Spain's past and present. The paper describes and explains the relations between "academia" (what a wonderful concept with respect to university teacher education!) and political development from the Franco dictatorship to the present-day democratisation of universities. The authors show the complex and often antagonistic relations between different academic and administrative fields: general didactics, domain-specific didactics, the psychology of education, sociology and the philosophy of education. A special emphasis is put on a description of the relations between

didactics and school organisation as something particular to the field, different from the situation in most other European states. While McLaughlin does not comment on the influence of UK educational research on other European countries, Marhuenda and Bolívar show the impact of Europeanisation as well as relations with Latin America in order to specify the typically Spanish culture of didactics as an academic discipline. Here too we see a bridge to Europe. While the existence of didactics in Spain was endangered, the discipline appears to be firmly rooted in other countries, e.g. in Norway, Sweden and France. However, in these countries didactics mostly means domain-specific and not general didactics. Finding an adequate role in educational policy, and defining teacher education at university level with or against the ministries of education seems to have been (and will continue to be?) the Spanish perspective on didactics. Marhuenda and Bolívar see a chance for the survival of general didactics in Spain through a recovery of the study of educational practice. German didacticians should think about this!

Anatoli Rakhkochkine holds the Chair of International and Intercultural Didactics at Leipzig University, although he comes from Novgorod. His paper is provocative: The conviction that teachers are responsible for students' success prevails throughout Russia, and the "leading role" of the teacher is generally accepted. This implies that instruction is teacher-centred, together with research. However, Rakhkochkine shows that in the early Soviet years reciprocal learning, learning from the "collective" etc. were elements of Soviet research. In the tradition of Lev S. Vygotskij, Pjotr J. Galperin and others, the leading role of the teacher creates special demands concerning his personal qualification. He has to be a model for the students, but he must also be an effective manager of instruction. Russian didactics thus provokes a competing comparison of teacher-centred instruction and learning by experience. Here we can add that the quantitative research of John Hattie shows that the most important factor in the academic success of students, excluding informal learning out of school, is the teacher's personality. It may therefore be that we have to revise our conviction that teacher-centred instruction is outdated.

As mentioned, Gérard Sensevy from Rennes presents a systematic construction of didactics and he makes it understood with interesting classroom examples. He develops his programme with respect to his recent publication *Le sens du savoir* ("The Sense of Knowing"),⁴ a book with nearly 800 pages. In this book, he constructs a model of the teaching-studying-learning process with reference to the French domain-specific didactic tradition that is largely unknown in the rest of Europe (Guy Brousseau, Yves Chevallard and others), using pragmatic theories of knowledge (Charles Saunders Peirce, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead and others), and language philosophy (Ludwig Wittgenstein, John Searle and others). However, in this paper, narration and interpretation find no room. Instead, Sensevy develops his didactic model, the Joint Action Theory in Didactics in a "dogmatic" way that allows a fresh description of the teaching-studying-learning process. Instruction can be constructed as a system with three subsystems: the teacher, the student and the knowledge at stake, definable as the power of acting. It is a "learning game" in which the two players—the teacher and the student—have different roles but depend on each other. While in the instructional process the teacher has to be reticent with respect to the content, the students have to be cooperative, accepting the rules of the learning game on the basis of their current, partially inadequate knowledge. Under this condition, a didactic "contract"—the agreement of teacher and students on conjoint

action—identifies a system of (largely implicit) expectations, and a didactic “milieu”—the learning dispositions and the learning environment of the students—qualifies their principally antagonistic role. From our point of view, Sensevy presents a didactic theory which should be tested in other European countries—on the basis of empirical research as he himself practices it.

The collective review of recent publications in the field of domain-specific didactics by Hans-Ulrich Grunder from Solothurn shows that the development of didactics in Europe is a promising enterprise, even though it demands the long way of successful networking in the European educational space.

We can identify research projects on the basis of European networking. It is time to intensify the European dialogue on didactic theory construction. It is also time to compare the classical and present-day representative authors of our discipline in the different countries and languages: John Dewey, Lawrence Stenhouse, Guy Brousseau and Yves Chevalard, Wolfgang Klafki, Lev Vygotskij and others. It is time to compare lesson planning and to arrange cooperative classroom research in order to acquire, among others, more information on the quality of teacher-centred and student-centred instruction. Finally, it is time for a European discussion on the concept of “Bildung”.

We can come back to the myth of Europa. She was quite audacious when she climbed up on the bull’s back and let him swim to Crete. That is why we should understand the myth as an invitation to also be audacious in our search for a European didactics space.

Endnotes

- 1 In a parallel vein, pragmatism thrives in the network “Didactics, Teaching and Learning” of the European Educational Research Association (EERA). For an example, see Hudson and Meyer 2011.
- 2 See Lawn and Grek 2012, p. 6 f.
- 3 See Hattie 2009, 2012.
- 4 See Sensevy 2011.

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