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Educational Research:

Why 'What Works' Doesn't Work

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INTRODUCTION

PAUL SMEYERS AND MARC DEPAEPE

ON THE RHETORIC OF 'WHAT WORKS' CONTEXTUALIZING EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND THE PICTURE OF PERFORMATIVITY

1. THE INITIAL IMPETUS

In 1999, the *Research Community 'Philosophy and history of the discipline of education: Evaluation and evolution of the criteria for educational research'* was established by the Research Foundation Flanders, Belgium (Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek – Vlaanderen)[1]. From the beginning, the aim of the network has been to combine research concerning the history and nature of the discipline with the science of education. The scope of this work also takes into account clarification, evaluation and the justification of the different modes and paradigms of educational research. Since 2000, the research community has convened annually in Leuven and has discussed various topics such as: the use of particular research methodologies, methods or techniques within the educational context (and their pros and cons), the methodological aspects of qualitative research relevant to education; the implications of ICT for educational research, the justification of particular positions within philosophy and history of education *vis à vis* other (for instance 'empirical') research in this field, the relation of philosophy and history of education to 'pure' philosophy, to 'pure' history, literature, aesthetics, and other relevant areas such as economics, sociology, and psychology, the justification of educational research within society at large and finally, the curricular history of educational science as an academic discipline.

The academics involved in this network share the belief that there is a place within the discipline of education for so-called foundationalist approaches. This is not, however, to answer a need for a (new) foundation, but to systematically study a particular area from a discipline oriented stance. The level of discussion that the meetings generated resulted in a deeper understanding of educational research and also provided the opportunity for many Flemish doctoral students to work with some of the leading scholars within the philosophy and history of education. Though the proceedings of the various meetings were published each year, it was felt in 2002 that a selection of papers could be put together in a collection to air the main interests of the Research Community. The essays, published in 2003 under the title

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Beyond Empiricism: On Criteria for Educational Research, bear witness to the belief that educational theory cannot help but go beyond empirical educational research to provide a real understanding of education as a human practice. Educational research is discussed respectively as a social discourse, as a discursive practice, in relation to epistemological issues, and in the light of questions of ethics. To illustrate the variety of issues that put themselves forward, we will deal briefly with some of the content of the chapters of the 2003 publication.

The contexts of social discourses and practices that accompany, and frequently drive, changes in the methods and aims of educational research are examined in several chapters of *Beyond Empiricism* (Smeyers and Depaepe, 2003). Attention is, for instance, paid to the composition of research groups as a factor in shaping attitudes and approaches toward interdisciplinary collaboration and to the ways in which new information and communication technologies can support and foster new forms of collaborative enquiry. Other contributors examine the research careers and influence of a number of leading educational scholars in Belgium during the first half of the Twentieth Century, who shared, above all else, an emancipatory view of the power of science, even though their actual impact tended in fact to reinforce a well-ordered, rationally managed and scientifically supported society. Attention was also paid to the shifting national educational research policies in New Zealand over a number of administrations, government commissions and reports. Thus a particular trend is witnessed: the increase in the discourses of scientism, efficiency and usefulness in the shaping of criteria for government-funded research, which was labelled a culture of performativity.

Educational research is not only a social practice, but is also a discursive practice. An assemblage of ideas, institutions and cultural connections, instigates the formation of the criteria and evaluative measures of educational research. This kind of endeavour seems to relate to two seemingly opposite registers of modernity: social administration and the production of the autonomous individual in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. National systems of pedagogical research are therefore not merely expressions of human purpose, which intent on improving the world of schooling, but are directed by historically formed principles that order, differentiate and divide the objects of reflection and action. Furthermore, genres of writing and narrative inquiry are also examined. Consider, for example, the current policy efforts to base school quality, effectiveness and improvement upon evidence-based research. Evidently, in a discussion of educational research, epistemological issues cannot be dismissed. Attention is given to the importance of the notion of truth given certain postmodernist positions (such as the construction of truth in different historical periods and areas) and conversely to scepticism. Such attention also focuses on the relationship between causality and practical reasoning, to experiencing as a general and fundamental mode of human existence and in particular to knowing as one of its basic instantiations. Also, the contribution of philosophy of education should not be considered as merely a form of 'applied' philosophy as opposed to 'pure' philosophy, but rather as a crucial contribution to philosophy itself. Finally, the 2003 collection takes ethical considerations, as they pertain to educational research, into account. Consequently, it is argued that certain

understandings of identity politics foreclose ethical relations by constructing totalizing, and therefore limiting, the possibilities for recognition. But attention is also given to the relation between theory and practice, to the relevance for educational research of the intrinsic value of nature, and to the way in which the rhetoric of community can serve as sheep's clothing for the wolves of exclusion, normalization and antagonism.

As could be expected, there was an interest within the research community in a wide scope of issues that pertained to educational research and the discipline of education. Interesting as this may have been, it was felt in 2004 that even more exciting work could be produced if the efforts of a number of colleagues could be combined and directed towards a particular goal. This was also a conclusion, which followed from the development within the philosophy of (social) science itself, a conclusion which we will briefly examine.

2. LESSONS FROM THE PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORY OF (SOCIAL) SCIENCE(S)

During the grand days of the philosophy of science debate, there was a lot of discussion about paradigms. Hempel, Popper, Kuhn, Lakatos, Feyerabend, but also Gadamer, Ricoeur, Taylor and Habermas, were all, in one way or another, engrossed in questions pertaining to the nature of science or social science. They were also interested in the nature of scientific explanation concerning the social sciences and the way in which explanation related to understanding. They argued for different positions, but were united in the belief that there is no logic of discovery and no unity in science. Concerning the method to be followed (or the kind of explanation to be sought) there was less unanimity. Things have moved on in various directions. Some authors argue that the work that has been done since then belongs to an 'historical turn', a 'social turn', a 'pragmatic turn', a 'political turn', an 'ethical turn' and even an 'aesthetic turn'. To have an impression of how the scene looks now, it is interesting to skim through philosophy of science publications that deal with social science as well as science in general. One way to deal with this is to go through the *Philosopher's Index,* a bibliographical source for journals, and also, but to a lesser extent for philosophy books, which covers publications from across the world. Though particularly strong on publications in English, it also includes many journals written in other languages.

A bibliographical search of journal articles indexed as 'Social Sciences' in the *Philosopher's Index* for the period 1998–2003, gives 92 records. There are a number of research strands which can be distinguished. Lots of papers deal with the implications of particular philosophical positions for social science in general or for particular kinds of social science. Of equal importance are those papers in which particular philosophical positions, considered relevant for social science, are deepened, or alternatively, relevant social science concepts are scrutinized concerning their philosophical presuppositions. Finally, there are papers where the focus is on the relationship between the social sciences and society. Though there is

much that could be articulated, and it goes without saying that the records could be organized in different sub-groups, this at least gives some general idea. It will suffice for the point that we would like to make and which has to do with the question: what is relevant for whom? Clearly, a lot of these papers are for the internal readership of the philosophy of social science, in the sense that they are hardly relevant for social scientists generally or for the practitioners' understanding of a specific social practice. But before going more into that, let us have a look at another area.

A bibliographical search of journal articles indexed as 'Philosophy of Science' in the *Philosopher's Index* for the same period gives 978 records. Here, a number of research strands can be distinguished. In a lot of papers, particular concepts from the philosophy of science are discussed either in relation to each other, or to general philosophical stances. Then, there are those papers where certain concepts are discussed which are supposed to be helpful at explaining particular phenomena. In a number of cases these are very technical debates, which concern, for instance, putting the irrelevance back into the problem of irrelevant conjunction. Other papers deal with meta-issues such as the development of the philosophy of science and what it has achieved or should do, including the relevance of science for society. Other studies deal with the way science was conceived in a particular period or how societal developments influenced or even shaped it. Finally, and these are extremely interesting, are the large number of contributions where particular concepts to explain phenomena are placed *within* the discussion of a particular science. Again this brief overview suffices for the points we would like to make. First of all, there is much more variety here than in the context of the philosophy of the social sciences. Second, in the area of the social sciences, there seem to be more papers where the author is particularly trying to convince her opponents of the fact that she is right and the others are wrong (that this or that philosophical position is better, more sophisticated, more inclusive, and so on and so forth). Third and finally, there are in the philosophy of the natural sciences, a lot of examples of studies where particular concepts to explain certain phenomena are placed *within* the discussion of a particular science and practice.

We think the latter is an important lesson that could be learned from philosophy of science: to concern oneself with specific problems in particular areas seems extremely fruitful. Maybe the time has gone to have general discussions about paradigms, about method (probably a residue from a positivist stance), about understanding and explanation, about why we are right and they are wrong, or to celebrate the eternal truths we think we share as social scientists. The abstract debate is of no use to us, and it will not help others to change their minds. Here and elsewhere, it is important to consider what can be done in a particular social or scientific practice – clearly we should accept that science too is a cultural practice. But there is more, as describing what others do in a particular area or considering how they conceptualize the reality as they find it, is probably not sufficient. Such a negative attitude or critical stance may not be strong enough to convince others of what needs to be done.

There is a further issue, in this case, from the discipline of history itself that we should take into account. Giving language and structure to facts, visions, and events from the past, seeing relationships, making connections, asking questions – in short, constructing an acceptable story from what happened, about how it could have been and how, presumably and roughly, it must have been, is the historian's task. But how should we commence? How does one get a hold on the interactions between people, their relational and behavioural patterns, their ways of thinking and mentalities if they have 'evaporated' and can hardly be retraced except via the twisting detour of indirect testimonies and sources? And how might we bring order into this colossal chaos of fragmentary remnants? How, in other words, can one completely encompass and grasp the educational past – itself a very diffuse category that constantly requires differentiation in time and space? The response that can be found in virtually all the classic handbooks from the history of education – and it perhaps appears even more regularly in the naive derivative works that were used to train teachers at various levels of education – is the claim that history is created by autonomous subjects. Leading educators act, according to the traditional discourse of the history of ideas and are not so much under the influence of social and cultural processes. Rather, they generate such processes. Great figures in education are largely perceived as great thinkers, whose ideas have led and guided the practices of raising children and educating them. Such figures seem to be the crystallization and accumulation points of diverse and even supra-historical ideas that, admittedly, could have derived their inspiration in time and space from 'somewhere' else, but who have precipitated new and authentic syntheses. Such a line of argument not only presupposes a unity and consistency of thought (found in the work of these scholars) but often inserts an almost linear, systematic progress (namely improvement) as regards education, into the framework. This transmitted history of educational thought resembles a chain in which the classic authors produce, under the inspiration of their predecessors, important and valuable insights that are reflected in books and journals and elicit further writing. To this, various environmental factors were added that might have served as catalysts or facilitators of the dissemination process. The idea of a kind of *Zeitgeist*, which creates the favourable climate in which educational ideas can develop and be transmitted, exemplifies this.

The question that arises here, however, is how should the conceptual unity of such a concept of inclusion be conceived? There is no list of empirical criteria and even if there is a consensus among historians, which is doubtful, the problem will not be resolved. This is not so much because such a conceptual category is itself the product of specific historical and social circumstances, but because as a conceptual tool to understand the past, it has epistemological limitations. The human construction of the historical reality of the past always bears the mark of a particular perspective, and is also necessarily, a kind of reduction: either dated linguistic concepts are used or the present day wording is applied which does not really fit the earlier context. The historical reality is a reality that, in the words of Michel de Certeau, is first created through the 'historiographical operation' present in the interpretation itself. The historical researcher imposes meanings, a particular kind of

rationality, coherence, intelligibility, and even contingency onto the past of which the past is ignorant. The past, and therefore also the educational past is, in other words, no more than an *a posteriori* construction of the historian through a defective language. As the historical theoretician Ankersmit (1996) has made abundantly clear, intertextuality in history is the source and the birthplace of historical reality. The interpretive trail that leads to history is ultimately the historical reality itself. It seems therefore very likely that, if we are not capable of grasping the relativity of the categories we use, we will indeed run the danger, as Umberto Eco has so poignantly expressed, of winning nothing and losing everything. An historical researcher simply cannot permit herself to be blind to the way in which the historical conditions of her own time co-determine the finality and the direction of the narrative constructions about the past nor to the discursive practices to which they give rise. Jean-François Lyotard and others have argued that because of our historical 'thrownness' in the world, we are only capable of producing 'small' and thus very fragmentary stories. But, with such heterogeneity of genres and plurality of stories we can readily live. Indeed, a supra- or extra-historical Archimedean point from which history – also in the chronological sense – could be grasped is not available, and whoever thinks he has found it, opens the door for a revival of ideological fundamentalism and fanaticism. So again, we arrive at the conclusion that only by taking the particular into account, may we possibly arrive at interesting insights. At the same time, the historical discipline warns us that the concepts and frameworks we use, mark and limit our interpretations. Despite the fact that we are necessarily aware of the fragmentary nature of our work, there is nothing else we can do. Interestingly, a similar conclusion is reached when philosophy of education is the object of reflection.

That neither insights from philosophy of education nor, more generally, from educational theory can simply be applied in educational contexts is, I think, recognized by practitioners and theoreticians. Such recognition can be attributed to epistemological and ethical forces. As regards the kind of theory one needs, however, opinions differ. According to some scholars, the insights we need are beyond what empirical research can deliver. Yet philosophy, or more generally, theory may also be limited. Philosophical argument may show that some questions do not make sense. The philosopher can defy and provoke by offering another reading, another interpretation. However, she cannot impose a compelling argument for either educational practice or theory. For Socrates, at least in one particular reading, the answer has to be kept open. Others will follow this and stress that every answer is necessarily tentative. Perhaps it might be better therefore to embrace the position that in the end one cannot but offer *a particular stance*, a particular judgement, a commitment to this or that in life. Instead of being neutral, only looking for presuppositions, trying to solve puzzles, one indeed shows how things 'have to be'. Taking this advice right from the very beginning may lead to the conclusion that what has to be offered in our philosophical reflections is above all else, no more than one 'solution' that we are able to commit ourselves to. This would imply that educational theory should flesh out its so-called perfectionism. Do Madonna, Beckham and Michael Jackson live up to this kind of standard, or is that

reserved for poets and writers such as Heaney and Murdoch and, with them, all philosophers? Is it really not the case that the content of education should be filled in, *in some sense* by us? Or is it left to the philosopher of education to simply get in people's way by criticizing others again and again?

A similar argument can be made for the discussions we have as historians and philosophers of educational research. It is too easy to ridicule research, and we have no longer to be convinced of the truth in Marx' dictum that we are led by interests of a largely social nature. What we need is a detailed analysis of educational policy and practice combined with suggestions about how things could be done otherwise. We have to change direction, and an analogy can be drawn with what is happening in philosophy of education and educational theory, and move away from meta-theoretical preoccupations. In other words, at least in some sense, we might return to the barricades! Foucault also wrestled with this problem. In his concept of the 'care of the self', defined as the use of one's reason in order to find out how one is and how one should be, courage plays a crucial role. He also emphasizes Socrates' usefulness to his city, on his importance to his fellows and on his importance to his friends. At the same time, Foucault is convinced that history is governed by the blind operations of impersonal powers. Power is not exercised by subjects but creates them; though power flows through individuals, it is rarely under their control. For Foucault what counts as an individual, is dependent on whatever our many varieties of information regarding people describe. For him everything good seems to have a bad side, but also everything bad can turn out to be good in the right circumstances. Therefore, the subject does not disappear. Rather, its excessively determined unity is put in question: it is not the final reality underlying history, but not exactly a fiction either; not ultimately free, nor exactly a puppet. The care of the self refers to techniques aiming to make oneself into a kind of person one could be proud of being. For Foucault, the model of the care of the self was the creation of art. But, there is an important qualification to be made here. The private and the public, the aesthetic and the political, like life and work, are tangled up with one another. By transforming himself, Foucault effected the greatest changes in the lives of others and by living in a way consonant with his ideas, he managed to express his deep love for the excluded and the marginalized in practical terms. Granted, 'theory' is always there if one conceptualizes the reality one lives in. But this kind of theory takes the deeper Socratic irony a step further. It seeks to change the reality beyond the traditional dichotomy of practice and theory and it fully accepts that it is beyond 'good' and 'evil'. In such a case, education can only teach us how to come to terms with power relationships and power in general.

A general summation of this could be that we have to continue to criticize particular explanatory models and particular developments in educational practices. Indeed, we have to be attentive to developments that might be harmful and take internal or external power relationships into account. But there is more. The debate about 'method' as such is no longer fertile (if it ever was). 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. This would involve refraining from being

habitually critical and consequently coming up with suggestions. In this way, we would present ourselves as true participants within educational research and practice. This would generate political research that is beyond positivism and nihilism, which does more than just the *Spielerei* of ever more and more futile research, and is as receptive to what was valuable in the past, as to what is worthwhile in the present.

3. THE *NEW* 'GOLD' STANDARD AND THE PICTURE OF PERFORMATIVITY

The lesson learnt from the development of the philosophy of science was that, in the future, we should combine our efforts and develop a particular theme at each conference. There are a number of reasons why the choice fell on 'What works'. It was clear from Smith's contribution in the 2003 publication *Beyond Empiricism* that this theme had been 'in the air' for a while. Smith argues that while a particular empirical conception of statistical and quantitative research methods is supposed to identify what works in school, it may in fact work against school improvement and the quality of education. There is, however, a recent development that makes this theme even more pressing. We will illustrate it by referring to a particular development in the United States and with the use of the metaphor 'picture' we will clarify our reasons for thinking that this issue is of the utmost importance.

Recently, *Educational Theory* (2005, number 3) published four papers, which deal with the so-called new 'gold standard' for scientific research in education. The interest of the contributors has to be understood in the context of the report of the National Research Council (of the United States), that is, *Scientific Research in Education* (2002). According to a host of critics, this report too embraces a limited view of causation and causal explanation and thus advances a position on educational research methodology that differs little from the previously described retrograde view. That view seeks to reinstate experimental–quantitative methods as the 'gold standard' of educational science. Margaret Eisenhart opens the discussion with the observation that determining causation is a fixation in U.S. society: 'Educational researchers are no exception. We are desperate to know what events and processes lead to what educational outcomes, so that we can promote the outcomes we want and eliminate the ones we do not want'. (Eisenhart, 2005, p. 245) She welcomes approaches that insist on descriptive knowledge as essential if causal analysis is to succeed and on the fact that causal mechanisms cannot be isolated. Instead, they have to be understood as specific to context and intentionality so as not to lose their causal power. She argues that it is short sighted to encourage attention to one tool only. One should build on shared commitments and work collaboratively from a variety of perspectives to improve student learning, especially for those who are struggling in school and society. In the same issue Pamela Moss argues that the value of general principles does not lie in serving as a guide for action, bur rather in becoming a guide for reflection. Thomas Schwandt also draws attention to some potentially grim developments: that educational practice will become little more than managing the challenges of implementing proven practices; that the practical is

absorbed by the technical and that in the name of scientific integrity the focus falls on what schools do (or fail to) and not on the systemic social injustices and inequalities that are largely responsible for the inequalities seen in school performance. He argues: 'educational researchers must begin to think of themselves not simply as scholars within a discipline but as professionals who engage in practical action and bring their knowledge to bear on the complex, at times ambiguous, and often contested issues of practice'. (Schwandt, 2005, p. 297) It is therefore time to engage in questions such as: To whom does an educational science serve and how? Who stands to gain and who to lose? And how is educational science implicated in a political agenda? Finally, Kenneth Howe laments over issues pertaining to the 'unity of science' idea of which the core principles are best exemplified by the physical sciences with randomized experiments, ignoring the interpretive turn and the associated concept of intentional causation and embracing the idea that politics is external to educational science. *Experimentism*, so he argues, 'is conservative because it must investigate "what works" within the manoeuvre space permitted by the social, political, and economic status quo' (Howe, 2005a, p. 242) Evidently, what the gold standard underscores is effectiveness and efficiency, in other words a climate where output and performativity are high on the agenda.

With the use of the 'picture' metaphor we will elaborate on this idea a little bit further. The following quote from Wittgenstein seems apt to indicate what is at stake: 'A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably' (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 115). Here, Wittgenstein is trying to liberate us, from a certain conception of how language works; he suggests a way to correct ourselves, which consists in looking and seeing. But, at the same time, Wittgenstein reminds us of the importance, when looking for definitions of our concepts in aesthetics or ethics, to ask ourselves how we learnt the meaning of a word. Thus he stresses the importance of an inherited background. 'Pictures' seem to be at work in various cultural contexts. The concept is helpful because of its narrative capacity. Although it opens up certain possibilities, it necessarily restrains others. In referring to a picture that holds one captive, Wittgenstein is not necessarily saying that it is completely wrong, but that it is limited. It creates (by dint of particular rules and paths) the possibility of freedom, which is necessarily disciplined and rule-governed. Yet in some cases we may be interested in changing the picture we have. It seems crucial to keep in mind that for Wittgenstein there is a difference between imagining something and a 'picture'. One can imagine that things are different, one can actively try to see different aspects, yet this is not what a 'picture' is about (Cf. Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 301). Living without feeling threatened in order to achieve a peaceful existence, can be realized in many ways (unilateral disarmament, pre-emptive first strike, nuclear deterrence). The various possibilities one can imagine to reach this aim are not 'pictures' in Wittgenstein's sense, yet they all rely on the 'picture' of what it would mean to live in peace. Similarly, the imagining various ways people can be educated is not a picture of how it has to be. A picture has the capacity to narrate the world and the human being in stark contrast, it may also lead to forms of madness, to self-deception and self-delusion, to disorders and to unwarranted scepticism. Trying to

impart it in a deliberate sense will not do for Wittgenstein. It supposes something else at the background that the person cannot create but has to find (see Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 362), something that is shared with others on the basis of certain experiences. At the same time Wittgenstein is interested in changing the picture we have:

> I wanted to put that picture before him and his *acceptance* of the picture consists in his now being inclined to regard a given case differently. That is, to compare it with *this* rather than *that* set of pictures. I have changed his *way of looking at things*. (Indian mathematicians: 'Look at this.') (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 144).

The 'picture' that holds one captive is one of output, of quality indicators, which is to some extent useful, but it obliterates other dimensions, which were and are seen by many as belonging at the heart of education. The current 'picture' is often a source of bewilderment to those who work in education. This is related to the idea that education without risk is possible and desirable. Due to the fact that in many fields, it has proved possible to minimize risks, risk culture spills over into other cultural areas, as if everything could be organized along the lines of air traffic control. It is important to realize that it is the general climate of performativity that is at stake here; it is not about particular things one does in this context, one could imagine other ways of dealing with it, but that would not change the all-pervasive background. As Wittgenstein argues, what already lies open to view in the 'picture' of what education should be about may be changed.

Wittgenstein's discussion of the 'picture' refers to something that is deeper than 'seeing as', which is a matter of the will, deeper than imagining, which is much more something that could be a free exercise. He reminds us that a different way of leading one's life is possible and that this is not just a matter of making a decision but is instead an appeal to something we share with others, that is already there in our practices. Yet at the same time, Wittgenstein seems to hope that the individual can make a difference, at least for herself. Clearly Wittgenstein feels a kind of hope that it is possible after all to resist certain temptations of the time. What is changed through a different picture, is, as was argued, not just this or that use of a concept, but a whole area of concepts relying on the change of a whole set of practices. It is, from this perspective that we would like to read the contributions that are made in the chapters of this book.

4. WHY 'WHAT WORKS' DOESN'T WORK

There are of course several ways in which the issues involved in why what works or does not work in educational contexts (practice or theory) could be organized. We have chosen to arrange the chapters along the following lines. First, attention is given to an understanding of how particular elements clearly worked in the past. Then the question is raised over whether something similar may be said concerning

what we experience regarding what works now. Evidently, in both historical contexts, attention will focus on factors that are to be held responsible for the fact that something did not work. This will lead us to point observations which go beyond a strict means-end schema and prompt us to take into account certain conditions or constraints which operate on and are highly significant to our understanding of what is going on. Finally, we will direct our attention to what is possibly changing and what we need to do in the field of education (be it practice, theory or research) which points to what surpasses the rather simple cause and effect rhetoric and thus transgresses the picture of performativity that keeps much of the talk about education captive. We want to remind the reader that this collection is about educational research in its many manifestations and that these investigations are approached from a historical and philosophical stance. For the reasons mentioned in the preceding pages, the various contributions almost always scrutinize a particular area or a specific problem before drawing more general conclusions or alluding to more abstract insights.

The book starts with chapters which in one sense or another, deal with the question 'Why what works worked?' Depaepe and Van Gorp focus on the 'good practices' of Jozef Emiel Verheyen. They look at the relationship between educational science and practical pedagogy as that relationship adheres to principles from the so-called New Education. This leads them to question whether or not the preference for 'progressive' education was successful and effective for educational and societal innovation. The case study they present concerns J.E. Verheyen (1889–1962), who was a remarkable educational entrepreneur from Flanders. With the support of the governmental authorities, Verheyen was given the task of elaborating an educational science at the university, mainly because he was well connected within the educational field and adhered to reform ideas. From 1923 to 1928, Verheyen was the director of an 'experimental' school in Zaventem, which was a regular elementary school inspired by the New Education Movement. However, in reality, what presented itself as the most advanced form of 'educational reform' during the Interwar period in Flanders, remained very tame in its concrete application. Both in school and in society, the limits of the meritocratic worldview were not left behind. Even though the will for renewal was there, Verheyen's modernism was always situated within the frame of the socially acceptable. The function of schools as socialization and selection institutions was not questioned. The child was forced to bend itself to the moral code for its general welfare; she had to abide by the prescriptions of the school community and to train herself in self-control, submission and disciplined behaviour. The problem of the effectiveness of Verheyen's pedagogy has, therefore, to be situated at the level of 'discourse'. Students found Verheyen a nice and charming professor, not always with a deeply scientific attitude, but with a heart for the real needs of the practice of education and for the children it was entrusted with. His narratives about the new education were welcomed as long as they did not hinder modernization. Verheyen used the poetic and 'romantic' but common (and canonized) language of the New Education, in which teachers easily recognized themselves as believers. The message of the progressive heritage of child-centredness, with Rousseau at the origin, was the

pedagogical credo they simply wanted to hear. In order to be able to be of service to modernity, aphoristic language was stripped from the underlying conceptual frameworks so that it became useful for everyone's purposes and could be integrated within its own structure.

In his contribution Van Gorp argues that if there is one thing that seems to 'work' it is educational hero worship. At least, so he claims, it is an indication that 'some thing' works. The question is, however, to fill in the meaning of the 'what' and consider the extent of what it does. How can we explain this hero worship, and, maybe even more importantly, how does it precisely work? Are there also failures or weaknesses that have to be attended to? Starting from the observation that Ovide Decroly (1871–1932), who was not a Catholic, not only became a 'hero' for non-Catholics but was also revered by Catholics as well. Decroly's educational method played an important role within this frame and this chapter focuses on these issues. Van Gorp tries to provide an explanation for Decroly's exalted status within the Catholic educational community. He also examines the differences and similarities between Catholic and non-Catholic hero worship. Last but not the least, he examines the consequences of this hero worship for the hero himself. It is argued that, as a result of the canonization of the hero, the reception and implementation of the Decroly-method was characterized by a current curve between eclecticism and orthodoxy, between depersonalization and personalization. To a certain extent this demonstrates that 'the method' worked, either in an eclectic or in an orthodox way. In the former approach the method was operative for it was appealing to the hero's ideal of 'education in evolution'; in the latter approach it was effective because it was appealing not to the ideal of their hero, but to the ideals of the decrolyens themselves. At the same time it might be argued that both approaches did not work. After all, the eclectic approach meant that the method was dismantled and depersonalized, with the result that we might wonder whether it is still the Decroly-method we are talking about. With regard to the orthodox approach we might say that, from the hero's point of view, it failed, for the hero was the victim of his own weapon.

The next chapter, by Fendler, focuses on the already mentioned U.S. federal standards for educational research as found in publications of the What Works Clearinghouse (U.S. Department of Education, http://www.whatworks.ed.gov/). These research standards are based almost exclusively on the book *Experimental and Quasi-experimental Designs for Research* by Campbell and Stanley (1963). According to 'What Works,' the only educational research worthy of federal funding is that which is designed as an experiment using a random sample of people as subjects. One of the foundational assumptions underlying the random-sample research design is that the results of such research are meant to be generalizable beyond any particular research study. The purpose of a 'random sample' is that it is supposed to represent the society at large, and therefore the findings of one study are supposed to be applicable elsewhere. Since the publication of these federal mandates, university researchers have criticized the standards for both being antiquated and exceedingly narrow in scope, and for being methodologically and ethically inappropriate for research in education. Fendler is in agreement with most