

Overhoff, Jürgen; Overbeck, Anne: *New Perspectives on German-American Educational History. Topics, Trends, Fields of Research*. Bad Heilbrunn: Julius Klinkhardt Verlag 2017. ISBN: 978-3-7815-2138-4.

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Scholarly exchange and transatlantic debates in all fields of science between German-speaking countries and the USA have long traditions. Within the History of Education, research projects and publications established a well-respected pursuit to historicize, compare or analyze these processes. The reviewed book edited by Jürgen Overhoff and Anne Overbeck denotes and establishes a new book series on research on German-American Educational History, the first volume of which aims to focus on „Topics, Trends, and Fields of Research“. Situated in a milieu strongly tied to the Institut für Erziehungswissenschaft / Department of Education at the University of Münster in Germany and its Arbeitsstelle für Deutsch-Amerikanische Bildungsgeschichte / Center for German-American Educational History in collaboration with the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures of the University of Pennsylvania, USA, the editors brought together well-established scholars from both sides of the Atlantic. As stated in the cover description, „[t]his volume seeks to sharpen the notion of an entangled and intertwined German-American educational history and aims at identifying new and interesting fields of research“. The spectrum of the book touches research subjects on species history, travelling ideas, conceptual exchanges between scholars as well as synchronic and diachronic comparisons.

To name but a few experts in the field that the book covers, Patrick M. Erben, Bethany Wiggin, Heike Bungert and Frank Trommler draw a nearly chronological picture of eighteenth and nineteenth century German-American life in the USA. Their perspective on educational history could be labeled as an „international and interdisciplinary approach“ (p. 20). Interestingly, every single paper reminds this reader of current (European)

debates about schooling and education while situated within historical contexts and *specifica*. Patrick M. Erben (pp. 24-42) draws attention to struggles in language learning among German immigrants and their attempts of assimilation during the first half of the eighteenth century in Pennsylvania. Bethany Wiggin (pp. 43-62) points to almanacs and print shops as „important loci of popular education and multipliers of literacy“ (p. 50). Media as educational tools and influential places of knowledge distribution are made visible here. Heike Bungert (pp. 63-82) discusses how culture and education were connected in German migrant societies in the second half of the nineteenth century in the USA. „What constituted German culture, what was to represent German Americans, and what fit in the U.S. context, [...] was highly controversial“ (p. 79). Frank Trommler (pp. 83-103) focuses on the cultural transfer of German „Kultur“ (culture) and „Wissenschaft“ (science) as „a reciprocal undertaking, shaped no less by the recipient than by the originator“ (p. 87). Interestingly, in the period of World War I in these areas rhetorical elements filtered into public communication and fundamentally affected the transfer.

Taking into consideration some of the following articles the volume in its structure and arrangement clearly supports the thesis of Dietrich Goldschmidt¹, that „[i]n spite of the gradual emancipation of the United States from Europe, American pedagogical thought and practice could not do without the reception and appropriate integration of ongoing impulses from the Old World“ (p. 10), especially from Germany.

Two articles working on more recent topics are now discussed in detail: Ewald Terhart summarizes the American curriculum tradition since 1945 and the German „Didaktik“ as well as their reciprocal influences (pp. 159-174); Johannes Bellmann focuses on the reception of John Dewey in Germany after PISA (pp. 175-192) and the discursive power examined in three dimensions (educational theory, research, and policy). Both papers show in an

¹ See Dietrich Goldschmidt; *Transatlantic Influences. History of Mutual Interactions between American and German Education*, in: Max-Planck-Institut für Bildungsforschung (ed.), *Between Elite and Mass Education. Education in the Federal Republic of Germany*. New York 1983, p. 1-65.

exemplary way why German-American Educational History is a fruitful area of research and the benefits they could generate for further research.

Ewald Terhart, a well-known expert, particularly in German-speaking countries, on „Didaktik“ and research on teaching presents an historical overview from 1945 onwards of American and German traditions in pedagogical thinking on „the art of teaching“ (p. 160). Drawing on concepts like borrowing and lending prominent in current research projects within comparative educational research², Terhart highlights an interest in seeing how things work ‘on the other side’ and leads on to certain forms of mutual exchange and influence (see pp. 160f). Decade by decade he works through trends, changes, and cumulating periods of exchange. Not claiming any novelty, his paper is an informative overview that allows readers to gain a deeper insight into historical changes, providing at the same time a frame for new research.

Johannes Bellmann problematizes a widespread misunderstanding in Germany about the comparability of PISA and American Pragmatism mainly drawing on John Dewey. He states that „educational reform cannot be successful without a rhetorical reform that creates a common language. A progressive idiom seems to be particularly suitable for providing such a common language that is not only understood in the field of educational practice, but also in educational theory, research, and policy“ (pp. 175f). Dewey as a trigger seems to be a good example to analyze misled language usage of literacy, competence, and standards in educational theory, research, and policy. Bellmann shows impressively how analytical language research augments knowledge in the field of History of Education.

The volume at hand presents a broad, well selected, and nicely arranged tableau of current research in German-American Educational History bringing together experts from different disciplines while at the same time touching various fields of research. As a first book within a newly launched series, it provides more than an impression of what can be expected to come in future volumes. Although the subtitle promises the presentation

of new topics, trends, and fields of research in a specific historical and comparative perspective, scholars well informed in German and/or American Educational History will be familiar with one or another case described. Nevertheless this book provides a profound and inspiring point of departure for young researchers as well as experts to take up the call for „more research on this particular aspect and many other facets of German-American educational history ought to be conducted in the near future“ (p. 23).

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²See e.g. Gita Steiner-Khamsi / Florian Waldow (eds.), *World Yearbook of Education 2012: Policy Borrowing and Lending in Education*, London 2012.