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“Heroes and Thinkers” in educational encyclopedias from 1774 till 1945

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Summary

Who are the great thinkers on education and the leading educational practitioners? This is a frequently asked question in the history of education and in the (German) educational science. Usually questions and answers rotate about the (difficult) term “classic”. Also, this study asks about the central persons for education and educational science and wants to offer an answer based on empirical findings. Therefore, the study explores all 29 German-written educational encyclopedias and their biographical entries published till the middle of the twentieth century. Which persons were of importance for the history of education in general and for educational encyclopedias in particular? Which persons have an entry in the reference books of the discipline? Are there any cycles or canonization processes to observe?

In its quantitative part the work analyzes the continuing, vanishing, and emerging persons in the field of education and educational science. Hence the persons were sorted to categories like geographic origin, religious denomination, sex, discipline and professional impact. With the result that most of the encyclopedias constantly update their person entries and prefer contemporary persons – most of them are male, German and Protestant. Compared to several studies focusing the twentieth century, it can be shown

that some persons vanish and others strengthen their positions in the memory of the discipline.

The qualitative part examines the construction of significance for a range of persons – Johann Pestalozzi, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Rein, Helene Lange, and the group of first women to have an entry in an educational encyclopedia – in changing social and historical contexts. The analysis shows a variety in the judgements and opinions about the portrayed persons depending on the encyclopedia and the author. As another finding it can be outlined that Josef Dolch's differentiating terms of "heroes" and "thinkers" work fine as a heuristic, thus it offers an alternative for the somewhat problematic term "classic".

Although the study has a specific historical interest it links to the contemporary and provides many links for further research.