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New Digital Resources for Historians: The Invented Archives

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New Digital Resources for Historians: the Invented Archives

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1) Introduction

Historians, be they professionals or amateurs, find themselves ever more obliged to refer to the Internet when conducting. There are, undeniably, hundreds of thousands of sites dedicated to “history,” but very few of these are genuinely thought out, built up and geared towards a true exploration of the past. That is to say, very few employ a viable, authentically historical approach.

How can historians identify the sites offering genuine historical insights? There are various different ways of evaluating online resources. Historical websites present particular problems, which experts have been trying to evaluate and resolve for some time¹.

This article aims neither to establish hierarchical divisions between online resources nor to offer a definitive prototype for what a historically educational website should look like. My present aim is to define the kinds of resources the internet can offer to history, examining the ways in which these resources are collected and made available for research purposes.

To this end, I have chosen to limit my attentions to sites offering information on one specific research field, namely, the history of education, analysing the sources made available.

¹ F. Chiocchetti, *Le guide alle risorse storiche online: una rassegna critica*, in “Cromohs”, 7 (2002), 1-22, http://www.cromohs.unifi.it/7_2002/chiocchetti.html. cf. also essays published in in A. Criscione, S. Noiret, C. Spagnolo, S. Vitali, *La storia a(l) tempo di internet: indagine sui siti italiani di storia contemporanea (2001-2003)*, Patron, Bologna, 2004.

2) Classic Studies in Pedagogy

The sources most commonly drawn on when conducting research into the history of education are studies published by pedagogues and educationalists in the past. These texts hold an undeniable value for those interested in the history of ideas in general and of pedagogic theory in particular. However, as a consequence of the history of pedagogy having been aligned with and, at least partially, supplanted by, other types of research, these classic texts are increasingly going out of print. Indeed, in some cases it is difficult to find editions which are less than fifty years old, and re-prints are often issued in an unsatisfactory form, with low editorial standards.

At least theoretically, the internet offers an invaluable opportunity for keeping this kind of source available to researchers. E-books are now very widespread, although they vary a great deal in both scope of availability and quality. However, as far as electronic libraries and data bases are concerned classics in education studies continue to occupy a marginal position. There is no single international project dedicated to this kind of source material.

In Germany, the Bibliothek für Bildungsgeschichtliche Forschung (BBF) offers a large range of texts in PDF format². The texts on offer fall into three categories: educational and pedagogical texts in German dating from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, the key periodicals published in the field from 1760 to 2001 in German-speaking countries and, finally, encyclopedias and lemmatic texts on pedagogy published from 1797 to 1942. All of the documentation in question is available in the *Scripta Paedagogica Online* in PDF format and accompanied by an accurate introduction. The German initiative is so unique. Elsewhere, no special sections or programmes dedicated to the history of pedagogy are available. It is the only pedagogical institution who has built a similar enterprise. At best, the texts in question may feature in enormous on-line databases. There are now numerous national and International projects involved in book digitalization. Texts on education-related fields frequently appear in large-scale projects such as *Gutenberg*³ and *Liber-Liber*⁴. The main limitations of the editions available in these archives, which those wishing to use them should always bear in mind, is that they are not always prepared to acceptable standards.

As far as French pedagogical literature is concerned, the key texts can be downloaded in their entirety in PDF form (except in some rare cases, where a text version is also available) from Gallica, the electronic library resource run by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France⁵. A very small number of other invaluable texts, such as the *éducation* entry in the *Encyclopédie* are also available in *Frantext*⁶, where it is possible to run a search for a particular word or phrase in a corpus of 3,737 works.

For English language texts, the situation is similar, although the situation is somewhat simplified by the fact that texts can be found, not just in digital libraries, but in extensive textual databases, run by public and private organisations. Texts of interest for the history of education and of pedagogy are available in PDF form in ECCO (*Eighteenth Century Collections Online*)⁷, in the two series of *Early American Imprints*, and in EEBO (*Early English Books Online*)⁸.

These data bases differ from all the electronic libraries mentioned so far (with the exception of *Frantext*) inasmuch as it is possible to carry out word and text searches of the entire corpus or of a selection, using advanced search tools. These tools enable users to search by author, publisher,

² <http://www.bbf.dipf.de/index.html>.

³ <http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/>.

⁴ <http://www.liberliber.it/home/index.php>.

⁵ <http://gallica.bnf.fr/>.

⁶ <http://www.frantext.fr/>.

⁷ <http://www.gale.com/EighteenthCentury/>.

⁸ <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>.

place of publication or keyword, limiting the corpus of texts to be examined to those concerned with education or pedagogy.

Italy, by contrast, is somewhat behind in the development of these kinds of research tools. As there are not yet any specialised digital libraries or textual data bases comparable to those described above, the few editions of classics in educational studies available online are poorly edited. I here refer to the pedagogical texts contained in the *Biblioteca Italiana*⁹, together with the small selection of periodicals available in the *Biblioteca Italiana*¹⁰ at the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense¹¹. In Spain, the situation is somewhat better inasmuch as, even though there is no specialised database, many pedagogical classics can be found on the Biblioteca Virtual de Patrimonio Bibliográfico¹², where texts can be consulted and downloaded in PDF form.

3) Famous and Exemplary Biographies

One genre which is particularly common in the history of education field is that of biography. Biographies of pedagogical thinkers have always provided a valuable companion to texts dealing with the history of pedagogical ideas. However, the sites which offer this kind of data are rarely constructed by pedagogues and rarely have students of pedagogy in mind. They therefore frequently pay little attention to the educational theories of their subjects.

The main resources available are to be found in dictionaries of national biography, most of which are at least partially available online. This is true of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (available online as the *Dictionary of National Biography*)¹³, of the *American National Biography Online*¹⁴, of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*¹⁵, and of the *ADB & NDB Register*¹⁶. Various other important resources of this kind have been specifically developed for the internet and various important educationalists and pedagogues appear in the midst of thousands of other biographies. This is true of the *World Biographical Information System Online* (WBIS Online), the most extensive biographical database available to date¹⁷.

The few specialised electronic resources of this kind do not stand comparison with these immense resources. The largest such collection available on line is managed by the Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique (INRP), a French organisation which undertakes research into and organises initiatives with regard to pedagogy, didactics and education. Biographies of the French ministers of education from 1802 to 2004 feature among the resources developed by the Service d'Histoire de l'Éducation¹⁸. This resource is both rich and reliable, inasmuch as it provides information specifically geared towards educational historians.

Otherwise, websites dedicated to the history and works of pedagogues and educationalists are usually based on individual subjects and derive from projects of a very different kind. Most of the sites in question are didactic in function, having been developed to accompany university or secondary

⁹ <http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it/>.

¹⁰ <http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it/>.

¹¹ <http://emeroteca.braidense.it/>.

¹² <http://bvpb.mcu.es>.

¹³ <http://www.oup.com/oxforddnb/info/>.

¹⁴ <http://www.anb.org/>.

¹⁵ <http://www.biographi.ca/EN/index.html>. The same dictionary is also can be consulted in French language: <http://www.biographi.ca/FR/index.html>.

¹⁶ <http://mdz1.bib-bvb.de/~ndb/>. Si tratta degli indici dei due principali dizionari biografici tedeschi, la *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie*, ADB (1875-1912) e la *Neue deutsche Biographie*, NDB, (in corso di pubblicazione dal 1953). La ADB è consultabile *on line* in formato immagine, mentre della NDB sono consultabili i soli indici.

¹⁷ <http://www.saur-wbi.de/english/aboutthe/page01.htm>.

¹⁸ <http://www.inrp.fr/she/ministres.htm>.

education courses. They normally contain biographical information which is over-generalised, irrelevant imagery and no primary sources.

There are also biographical websites designed to celebrate the lives and works of famous individuals, which have the grave defect of being updated very rarely. A number of new projects are now arising, however, which are concerned with reconstructing both the life and works of an author online. One such example of particular value is the *Pestalozzi-goes-Internet* site, dedicated to the famous Swiss pedagogue¹⁹. The site in question, which is partially available in English translation, is run by a group of German academics, each of whom is personally responsible for an individual section.

¹⁹ <http://www.heinrich-pestalozzi.info/>.

4) National Educational Law and Policy

Educational law and policy have, for a long time, occupied a pivotal role in the history of education. Notwithstanding this, resources of this kind have only been available since quite recently. Such resources as are available derive not so much from historical research as from archives constructed by various organisations and institutions. Most significantly, the majority of national ministries of education publish current laws, syllabi and other details on the running of schools, together with details of the most recent research that they have funded.

The main limitation of these resources is that the indicators contained is that they usually offer a comprehensive overview geared towards a specific end instead of specific details suitable for specialised analysis. Data are usually analysed on a national or, at best, on a regional or provincial level. In other words, the information offered has been assembled for very specific purposes, which do not necessarily coincide with those of historians.

One exception to this rule is to be found in Thomas, the Library of Congress, which provides a textual and multi-criteria search facility. It provides a corpus of all laws and regulations in the USA from 1973 onwards, including those pertaining to education and the school system²⁰.

A very similar set of limitations can be observed in the online resources provided by international organisations involved in financing and monitoring literacy and education worldwide. Organisations such as UNESCO and UNICEF are specifically aimed at promoting the education of disadvantaged populations, and the databases and information which they provide online are specifically focused on their own activities in developing countries. Similar resources are available on the website of the Bureau International d'éducation di Ginevra (BIE), which has now been incorporated into UNESCO, together with which it publishes the *World Data on Education* every year²¹.

The *Eurydice* network, an initiative set up by the European commission in 1980, which handles information with regard to educational systems in Europe, is worthy of particular mention. Eurydice publishes and updates *Eurybase*, the *Information Database on Education Systems in Europe*²². Information on each country is provided, at the very least, in both the country's language and English. Key information of legislation, teachers, pupils and funding is provided, together with a brief historical excursus.

The Organizzazione per la Cooperazione e lo Sviluppo Economico (OCSE) provides information of specifically economic kind, publishing details of research carried out in all the school systems of the member states²³. Detailed information is provided on students, teachers, school buildings and the job market. Once again, the key limitation of the data on offer is that it has already been processed for a specific process, namely the comparison of situations in different nations.

PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) examines the levels of students in compulsory education²⁴. Results of the surveys conducted in 2000, 2003 and 2006 are available online. Simple and advanced-level search engines are available for data from the fifty plus countries involved in the programme. It is possible to select a single indicator and analyse a cross section of results, or to study results country by country. Notwithstanding this, the search mechanism is limited to a fixed list of criteria and the data cannot be freely accessed and processed. Search results are processed by the server, which sends results in excel format via email.

²⁰ <http://thomas.loc.gov/>.

²¹ http://nt5.scbbs.com/cgi-bin/om_jsapi.dll?clientID=1439778712&infobase=iwde.nfo&record={1FF03}&softpage=PL_frame.

²² http://www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/DB_Eurybase_Home.

²³ http://www.oecd.org/topicstatsportal/0,2647,en_2825_495609_1_1_1_1_1.00.html.

²⁴ http://pisaweb.acer.edu.au/oeed_2003/oeed_pisa_data_s2.php.

5) Teaching Materials

Historians first began considering teaching materials as valuable primary sources in the 1950s. Textbooks, exercise books, diaries, school reports, registers and drawings thus gradually came under the scrutiny of educational historians. However, whereas a pedagogical classic or a law may also offer significant revelations if analysed individually, textbooks and school reports must be studied in large numbers if any reliable data is to be obtained as to the educational environment within which they were produced and used. For this reason, extensive and varied research into these materials is still underway. However, at least some interesting results have already been obtained.

The main source drawn on for this kind of analysis is school textbooks, a number of which are available on this very website²⁵. Resources available vary a great deal both in nature and in scope of application. They vary from data bases, offering tens of thousands of titles, such as *Emmanuelle*²⁶, *Edisco*²⁷, *Red Alfa Manes-Patres*²⁸, *Manscol*²⁹ and *Mascofo*³⁰, to virtual libraries, such as the University of Hiroshima Library, *Istoriéd*³¹ at the Het Nationaal Onderwijsmuseum in Rotterdam³² and Gettysburg College Library,³³ in which textbooks can be consulted partially or in their entirety. Electronic catalogues of school books in private and public libraries represent a third useful resource.

The extensive provisions of materials pertaining to school textbooks online cannot be compared to those treating of other documentation necessary for the study of the history of education. The few sites available, nonetheless, demonstrate how invaluable the internet can be as a tool for organising and analysing original sources. The project under way to digitalise and reproduce the extensive libraries and archives online of the Spanish *Institutos de bachillerato*, founded in 1845, is of particular note.

The growing number, worldwide but especially in Europe, of museums dedicated to schools and education are also failing to make up for the deficiencies already underlined. These institutions vary greatly and are usually run by volunteers with the assistance of public grants. They seek to reconstruct day-to-day life in a classroom or school, usually using materials collected locally but not necessarily pertaining to the same institution.

Many of these museums have websites, but these normally only offer information on their own exhibits and activities. There are a few exceptions, which may be of greater use for historiographical research. One such example is the Bolzano school museum, which hosts an extensive collection of wallcharts, published for school between 1850 and 1950. These charts can be studied online, together with detailed historical and explanatory notes and various essays seeking to reconstruct their historical uses³⁴.

²⁵ <http://www.history-on-line.eu/databases.aspx>.

²⁶ <http://www.inrp.fr/she/emmanuelle.htm>.

²⁷ <http://www.history-on-line.eu/edisco.aspx>.

²⁸ <http://www.history-on-line.eu/manes.aspx>.

²⁹ <http://www.bibl.ulaval.ca/ress/manscol/>.

³⁰ <http://web1.uottawa.ca/cgi-bin/crccf/bin/edbnet.pl>.

³¹ <http://www.historied.net/>.

³² <http://www.onderwijsmuseum.nl/start.htm>.

³³ <http://www3.gettysburg.edu/~tshannon/his341/colonialamer.htm>.

³⁴ http://www.comune.bolzano.it/cultura_context03.jsp?ID_LINK=751&area=48.

6) Visual and Audio Resources

The use of images in historical research is no longer much of a novelty. Instead, the use of audio resources, such as interviews, songs and speeches, has been relatively limited. Notwithstanding this, various resources of this kind are already available online. Indeed, the Internet would seem to be a medium particularly suited for handling these kinds of materials, since it is intrinsically concerned with handling different languages and with functioning as a multimedia.

Once again, the archives dedicated to collecting the materials in question and making them available online are predominantly conservational in purpose and can be geared towards serving various different purposes. The BBF portal includes two sections entitled *Pictura Pedagogica On line* and *Vox Pedagogica On line*. The first consists in a picture library, containing thousands of prints, photographs and drawings belonging to numerous specialised libraries. The material, only a part of which has been developed with specifically educational and didactic ends in mind, can be consulted through various indices, such as date, source, author or subject.

Vox Pedagogica, instead, provides a range of interviews with 10 experts in the field, referring to their own experiences in the development of the discipline of the history of education and of the German school system. The interviews, although they are few in number, can be consulted easily, inasmuch as they are indexed by subject and divided up into small and easily accessible audio files.

INRP is, once again, rather different. The digital video library is monographic in character and aimed at bringing together the *Iconographie dans les ouvrages pour l'enfance et la jeunesse de Gutenberg à Guizot* collection. The archive provides a complete overview of images published and in textbooks and used in public schools from 1750 to 1834. The prints are divided up by subject and can be searched on the basis of various criteria.

In the section entitled *Histoire et archives orales de l'enseignement*, it is also possible to view over 400 files regarding policies implemented by the Ministry of Education after the second world war (a part of which will be available online).

In addition to these specialised databases, audio-visual resources for the history of education are also available online on the websites of the various National libraries, such as the Library of Congress (Prints & Photographs Online Catalog and SONIC, Sound ONline Inventory and Catalogue), the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Banque d'images) and the British Library (Images Online). Many institutions dedicated to research into didactics and education also offer audio-visual resources online. Cf., for example, Indire, who have prepared a database of over 17,000 images (DIA), put together for didactic purposes but replete with materials relevant for the study of the history of education³⁵.

What makes these non-specialised resources particularly useful for historians is the fact that they offer detailed indices and multiple advanced search facilities, which make it possible to narrow down research criteria, especially from a chronological point of view. These sites also contextualise all of the images published, providing precise details as to their production, publication and conservation.

³⁵ <http://www.indire.it/archivi/dia/index.php>.

7) Historiographical Resource

Historiographical e-journals, bibliographies, webliographies and research hubs can be very useful both while researching and while writing up findings.

There are many online journals concerned with the history of education, almost all of which originate in the English-speaking world, partly because such publications are accredited and counted as peer-reviewed in the countries in question. These include the American "History of Education Quarterly Index"³⁶, the Australian "History of Education Review"³⁷ and the "Revue d'histoire de l'éducation du Canada"³⁸. The "Revista Brasileira de História da Educação," published in Brasil by the Sociedade Brasileira de História da Educação³⁹, is a rare example of such a journal coming from elsewhere. *ressante è costituita dalla brasiliana "Revista Brasileira de História da Educação", gestita dalla Sociedade Brasileira de História da Educação*⁴⁰.

Many periodicals make it possible to consult indices and abstracts for back issues without publishing the articles themselves (unlike Jstor, for example). Such is the case with "Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche"⁴¹ and with the French "Histoire de l'Éducation," also published by the INRP.

The portal of the Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique provides an invaluable series of thematic databases which are highly useful for research in the history of education field. The first of these belongs to the Bibliographie d'histoire de l'éducation française and is a collection of texts on the history of education published in France between 1998 and 2001. The second, Emmanuelle 5, lists works on school textbooks and their publishing worldwide from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present.

The first ever blogs run by educational historians have also begun appearing recently. These blogs provide up-to-date information on research underway and upcoming conferences. They also offer the opportunity to consult ever-growing online communities of colleagues working in the field. Two such blogs are of particular interest, inasmuch as they unite a broad community of scholars. The first is connected to the already-mentioned *Red Alfa Patres-Manes*, a database of school textbooks, and brings together academics from Spain, Belgium and numerous South American countries⁴². The second, entitled *H-Education*, is run by the History of Education Society (HES-USA), and receives comments from academics who are predominantly based in North America and Europe⁴³.

³⁶ <http://ojs.ed.uiuc.edu/index.php/heq/index>.

³⁷ <http://www.her-anzhes.co.nz/index.html>.

³⁸ <http://www.edu.uwo.ca/HSE/indexf.html>.

³⁹ <http://www.sbhe.org.br/>

⁴⁰ <http://www.sbhe.org.br/>

⁴¹ <http://www.unicatt.it/centrircerca/Storiaeducazione/Annali/>. Abstracts and article titles can be found in a database.

⁴² <http://redpatremanes.blogspot.com/>.

⁴³ <http://www.h-net.org/~educ/>.

8) “Real” and “Invented” Archives

Be they public or private, archives tend to make little effort to make the materials they contain available online. This is a problem which effects all branches of historical study, not just the history of education. Even the most innovative of archives do no more than the more innovative libraries, limiting themselves to publishing their catalogues online. Although publishing catalogues does at least enable researchers to determine whether or not the documentation sought is present in the archive, they are nonetheless subsequently obliged to be physically present in the archive in question if they wish to consult the material of interest.

As always, there are a few exceptions which prove the rule. Together with publishing their catalogues online, these archives also provide electronic format copies of selected documents. The selection criteria determining which documents are to be published is not always well-defined. These online publications naturally derive principally from the larger, national archives, which frequently digitalise texts of pedagogical interest. Thus, for example, the Archives Publiques de l'Ontario have published an online exhibition entitled *Devoirs et leçons: L'histoire de l'éducation en Ontario*⁴⁴. The prints, photographs, legal texts and films published trace the history of the Ontario school system from the mid-nineteenth century too the present day. The picture as far as private archives are concerned is, generally speaking, far bleaker. Even specialised archives rarely publish more than one digitalised page per document online. Were these archives to publish more materials online, they would solve many of their funding problems, saving a great deal of the money required to keep archive resources open and accessible.

Real archives, then, provide only a limited degree of assistance to those undertaking historical research in general and research into the history of education in particular. To compensate for this lack, educational historians have begun preparing alternative resources. Such endeavours are still at an experimental stage so far, but their results are already noteworthy. The first such initiative is the already-mentioned Service d'histoire de l'éducation dell'INRP, which provides an extensive list of online resources on its website⁴⁵. They provide some invaluable sources for reconstructing the history of education in France from the mid-1700s to nowadays. They provide access to a list of the names of those elected to the agrégation from 1821 to 1950, the image published in French language textbooks owned by INRP 1750 to 1834, the inventory of teaching manuals published from the sixteenth to the twentieth century contained in French libraries and archives, together with the already-mentioned biographical data base of ministers for education and the Emmanuelle database of school textbooks.

The material in question was not particularly collected to be made available online. It rather bears witness to the work under way and already completed by the academics responsible. In some cases, it represents a sort of virtual appendix to works which have been at least partially completed and are under review or in print. For this reason, the databases are rarely well-organised and the data is normally published in the form of html tables. Research fields are therefore limited. Notwithstanding this, the value of the resources offered is beyond doubt. Each archival or printed source is given in precise detail. Every section is closely followed by an expert and details are given in every section as to how the data given has been assembled. The materials in question can thus be freely used for purposes which may be far removed from those for which they were originally assembled.

The Bibliothek für Bildungsgeschichtliche Forschung presents a rather different model. Together with pedagogical texts, periodicals and encyclopedias, the portal also hosts two extremely complex and

⁴⁴ <http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/french/exhibits/education/index.html>. Another very recent site from Canada makes it possible to carry out simultaneous searches in the catalogues of all the public libraries and archives in the country: is the *Site Web de Bibliothèque et Archives Canada*, <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/index-f.html>. The Canadian project follows the lead of its American counterpart, *American Memory*, portal of the Library of Congress, which provides online access to publicly and privately owned materials on America history (around 9 million items), <http://memory.loc.gov/>.

⁴⁵ http://www.inrp.fr/she/bases_tables.htm.

interesting other resources. The first (*Treptow an der Rega Schulprogramme/Jahresberichte*) brings together documentation published by the schools in Treptow an der Rega (now in Polish Pomerania, named Trzebiatów) from 1834 to 1939. The documentation published includes syllabi, registers and historical information on the elementary, secondary and technical schools in PDF format, accompanied by detailed notes.

The second is a database (*Lehrerverzeichnisse*) of Prussian and German teachers, of both sexes, working in schools from the middle of the 1800s to 1945. The database traces the careers of over 138,000 teachers, which can be accessed through a multi-criteria search engine. The documents in question are now only directly accessible in a digital form. The lists of teachers published annually by the ministry of education are also now available in PDF.

The BBF databases bring together archival materials held by the library and by other German libraries specialising in pedagogy. They are geared towards simplifying research by making frequently consulted material which would otherwise be difficult to access available online. The BBF database is unusual inasmuch as its aims are primarily “conservational”. It provides original, in a certain sense “raw” materials, which are nonetheless accompanied by a state of the art research engine. Both the BBF and the INRP databases are examples of what Roy Rosenzweig calls “invented archives.” In other words, they are collections of documents from different sources assembled for a specific purpose in a single website, an autonomous online archive⁴⁶.

A third, much smaller, electronic archive is devoted exclusively to the history of education in British Columbia, an English-speaking region of Canada. *Homeroom* is managed by Patrick Dunae, an educational historian, with the help of academics and, above all, of students⁴⁷. The website is concerned, for the time being, at least, predominantly with document conservation, inasmuch as no effort is made to elaborate on the texts published. The only explanatory notes appearing on the site refer to the criteria and methods used in assembling the archive, which bear witness to the extreme archivist and philological rigour.

⁴⁶ La definizione è di R. Rosenzweig, *The Road to Xanadu: Public and Private Pathways on the History Web*, in “*Journal of American History*”, 88, 2, 2001, p. 560, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/resources/essays/roadtoxanadu.php>.

⁴⁷ <http://www.mala.bc.ca/homeroom/>.

9) Writing the History of Education Online

The present overview of online resources on the history of education has demonstrated that only a few of the websites available are specifically designed by historians for historians. In the worst case scenario, the sites serve only to occupy a URL and are entirely static, offering little to no practical application. In other cases, when documents are available in e-text format, they are designed to meet ends which are far removed from those of academic research. Indeed, the great majority of sites are institutional, not academic, in origin.

The material on offer is almost always informative and descriptive (e.g. on the websites of school museums), generalised (e.g. online university courses) or governed by an internal logic (e.g. indicators provided by national and international government and research bodies). All of which goes to say that they have not been prepared with a view to serving ends other than the institutional purposes they have been designed to serve. The sources on offer have not been, and are not designed to be, processed for research purposes. There are very few projects geared towards offering resources online for specifically historical purposes, and it is even rarer to find such sites dealing with the history of education. This does not mean that educational historians may not take advantage of textual data bases compiled for other purposes, such as those containing biographies of pedagogues, philosophers and politicians. However, these resources must be used knowingly, in full awareness of the criteria which determined their compilation.

All of the examples (including the BBF and the INRP) which have been exemplified in the present overview have one characteristic in common. Websites dedicated to the history of education all keep original sources and historical narrative separate. Moreover, online publications tend to follow traditional methods. Although the medium changes, educational historians behave in much the same way when they are preparing a text for publication online as they would for a traditional publication. They rarely draw on the rich multimedia resources available on them hardly every offer hypertext links to the sources they draw on. Indeed, online essays are themselves a rarity, and frequently simply reproduce works already in print or are more or less lost in the larger websites in which they occur.

It is no coincidence that the only essays easily available online are written for educational purposes and are published on university or secondary school websites. As yet nothing has been written in the field of history of education which bears comparison to the e-texts written by Robert Darnton⁴⁸ and Edward Ayers⁴⁹. The projects in existence rather represent an opportunity for researchers to meet each other online and publicise their findings.

The present portal has been aimed to address this issue – to experiment with new means of studying and writing educational history online⁵⁰. It is down to you, to the academic community making use of this research tool, to determine whether or not we have been successful.

⁴⁸ R. Darnton, *An Early Information Society: News and the Media in the Eighteenth-Century Paris*, in "The American Historical Review", 105, 1, 2000, pp. 1-35, <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/105.1/ah000001.html>.

⁴⁹ <http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu/>.

⁵⁰ <http://www.history-on-line.eu/>.

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