

## FRANK SIMON: A PERSONAL STORY ABOUT EVERYDAY EDUCATIONAL REALITIES

*Frank Simon: una historia personal  
sobre las realidades educativas cotidianas*

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**Abstract.** Frank Simon (1944) is an Emeritus professor of History of Education in Ghent University from the year 2009. Internationally he is known by a large group of scholars because of his involvement with the journal *Paedagogica Historica* and the role he played inside the International Standing Conference for the History of Education (ISCHE). In this article he speaks about some personal events that have shaped his life, and about the people that have inspired him during his academic career. He also gives his views on the future of the history of education as a discipline, and the historical work that still must be done.

**Keywords:** Frank Simon; History of education; Biography.

**Resumen.** *Frank Simon (1944) es profesor emérito de Historia de la Educación en la Universidad de Gante desde 2009. Es conocido internacionalmente por un amplio grupo de académicos por su implicación en la revista Paedagogica Historica y por el papel que jugó en la International Standing Conference for the History of Education (ISCHE). En este artículo habla de algunos acontecimientos personales que han moldeado su vida y sobre la gente que le ha inspirado durante su carrera académica. También da sus puntos de vista sobre el futuro de la historia de la educación como disciplina y el trabajo histórico que todavía debe hacerse.*

**Palabras clave:** *Frank Simon; Historia de la educación; biografía.*

On 27 March 2016 we met the Belgian professor of history of education Frank Simon in a hotel room in the centre of The Hague. This time he travelled to the Netherlands for visiting an exhibition of the Dutch

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painter Karel Appel, together with his partner Myriam. About a year earlier, in 2015, he was also in The Hague, looking for documents in the National Archives about the Lancasterian teaching in Brussels.<sup>1</sup> The Hague is not an unfamiliar place for him: in 1964/65 he already spent some time there for his Master Thesis about the history of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the Belgian region of Bruges.<sup>2</sup> As an historian he would spend much more time in archives. It resulted in a long list of highly original, and sometimes ground breaking publications in Dutch, English, French, German, Portuguese, and Spanish. He also became known as an editor of the international journal of the history of education *Paedagogica Historica* (PH), a journal that was born in Ghent University in 1961, the institution where he graduated in history in 1965, where he obtained his doctoral degree in history in 1979 with a doctoral thesis about teacher unions<sup>3</sup> and where he became a full professor in history of education in 2000. Besides his work as an editor of PH, he became internationally even better known during the time that he served as a member on the board of the International Standing Conference for the History of Education (ISCHE), and from 2006 till 2009 as the president of this board.

While PH already started as a multi-lingual journal (one could publish in English, French, and German), Frank Simon would quickly expand his linguistic horizon by also learning to speak Spanish, which enabled him to connect with the history of education in Spain and Latin-America. In 2009 he retired from the university and became an emeritus professor, but his research, as may be clear from the opening text, did not end. To the contrary, there are still many projects to be done. The chance that you will meet him in some kind of event related with history of education, in whatever part of the world, is still quite large. In this article he is looking back at his life and his work, remembering key events, and the people that were important for him, but he also shares his thoughts about the future of history of education.

<sup>1</sup> Frank Simon, Christian Vreugde, Marc Depaep, "Perfect Imperfection: Lancasterian Teaching and the Brussels Educational System (1815-1875)", in *Classroom Struggle: Organizing Elementary School Teaching in the 19th Century*, ed. Marcelo Caruso (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), 91-124.

<sup>2</sup> Inter alia Frank Simon, *De stemming van de grondwet van het Verenigd Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in het arrondissement Brugge, (14 augustus 1815)* (Leuven: Nauwelaerts, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> Frank Simon, *De Belgische leerkracht lager onderwijs en zijn beroepsvereniging, 1857-1895* (Gent: Centrum voor de Studie van de Historische Pedagogiek, 1983) (Ph.D. Thesis, Ghent University, 1979).



Image 1. ISCHE, Rutgers University, Newark, USA: 25 July 2008. From left to right: Christine Mayer, María del Mar del Pozo, Frank Simon (Photograph by S. Braster)

## BOOKS, BULLETS, AND DEATH

— *You were born in 1944 at the end of the War. What is the first memory you have?*

No memories of the War of course. I am born in January 1944. The quarter where I lived has been liberated in September 1944. My uncle was 16 years old and he had joined the British-Canadian army. So he was one of the liberators. My uncle is a good link to history, because he had many books about the war and I started to read all of them. Books about Stalingrad and so on. My memory has been formed by books of the war, but I have few memories of my childhood. That is a sad thing, I do not remember many things about my childhood! I do not know why. It is probably because my father died when I was 11 years old. After that you become another person. Immediately you are an adult. In a minimum of time you are changing completely... completely.

— *You were becoming the man in the house.*

Yes, it had many consequences. My father was a bus operator. We had four buses and two coaches at home. So we were middle class. We had a very easy life. But then my father died and we suddenly had no income anymore. But we got money from my grandmother. She was still alive and was also involved as a bus operator. So she gave us money. But nevertheless, when I was 11 years old, we had a bathroom, we had a car, we had everything in the second half of the 1940s and the 1950s. In those days many people did not have a car and a lot of people did not have a bathroom. But after the death of my father my mother became poorer, and poorer, and poorer. So it was not such an easy life.

— *Your father died suddenly?*

Yes. A heart attack. But he knew that he was condemned. He was born in 1912. He went to the cardiologist around 1953 and then the doctor said to him: “45 years... that is an age you will not reach”. And indeed, he was only 43 years old when he died. He died in his bed. I was with him at that moment. Just there was a sound. Really the last sound of a dying man. It is still in your head. In a couple of minutes it was finished. And then your personality changes. Really... Then you are on your own. From that moment you decide everything what you want to do. On your own... You don't listen to your mother anymore (*laughs*).

— *You were born in Bruges weren't you? And there you were going to the primary school?*

Yes, I went to the primary school in Bruges for a period of six years. The school was next door where we lived. It was a Catholic school. I was a good pupil, but... these are very personal things... My father was divorced from his first wife. At first I did not know that, but afterwards my mother told me. He was only about five or six months married with his first wife. I didn't know what happened. During the war he married my mother, this was in 1941. And then my first sister was born, but she died, and soon after I was born. And then 11 years later, and six months before my father died, my second sister was born. She still lives in Bruges, in an apartment, that was built in the fields where I was playing as a child.

— *Did your mother remember her first daughter?*

She did not tell much about it. My mother was not so much of a talker. But I know she had a very difficult childhood. My two grandfathers were soldiers in World War I, and the father of my mother, he had a small museum. Bullets, bombs, everything from World War I. His living room was full of it, so this was also history. My first meeting with history was the war, which is not so exceptional for Belgian people.

— *In the primary school what was your favourite subject?*

It has always been reading, a little bit of history, but I really don't remember so many things, except that I never learned a thing (*laughs*). I was never studying. It went so easy at the primary school. I was playing with the other boys. I was cycling. And playing football.

But what I know was that, as my father was divorced, I was a bastard.



Image 2. ISCHE, Utrecht University, The Netherlands: 28 August 2009 (Photograph by Utrecht University)

## THE BOY IN THE LAST ROW

My father was a very religious man. And when he died, I went with my bicycle to the priest. It was not so far. I told the priest: “My father died”. And then he came to our house for arranging the funeral, but he said: “No. It is impossible. A divorced man. It is impossible. He is not a Catholic”. And my father went to church every Sunday! Really, a very religious man, but also a liberal. Because his ideas were liberal, not Catholic. That was not exceptional. At that time you had many Catholic liberals. But the priest said: “No. Not in the church!”. [...]

There was a mass of people at my father’s funeral. Afterwards I realised why. It was because we were amidst the Second School War.<sup>4</sup> There was a school war in Belgium between 1954 and 1958 [a political crisis about the issue of religion in education]. My father died in 1955, so this was really amidst the clash between the Catholics and non-Catholics.

So there were many, many people. My father was a Catholic, but he was also a member of the liberal party. The members of his party mobilised a lot of people. So the funeral was really almost like a procession from our house to the graveyard. Many, many people. At this time the funeral was still with horses, and not with cars. But this was also part of the ritual. I am not at all religious, and this is the reason of course. This was a rupture. So when my father died, I certainly lost my faith. But I also lost the ritual, because I always went to church with my father.

And then, coming back to this priest, I had to have my confirmation. After that you were part of the Catholic church. And then there was also the catechesis. You had to study it: question, answer, question, answer. I was a good student, but in the Catechism Competition I was never the first. Always the second, or the third. Probably it was forbidden to put me the first, because I was a bastard. And then, when the confirmation was coming, they put me —instead of on the first, second or third row— they put me at the end, on the last row. It is unbelievable. These things you don’t forget. These are really milestones in your life.

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<sup>4</sup> The history of education in the low countries, both Belgium and the Netherlands, is characterised by struggles between liberal and socialists political groups that favoured public education, and Catholic and other denominational groups that favoured religious education. See also: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second\\_School\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_School_War).



## THE EPILEPTIC BOY AND THE TREE

But for the rest, at the primary school, I did not have to study. This, I remember. Normally, when you come at home, you study for school. No, no, I never did that in primary school. It was not necessary.

— *So you were just looking outside the window. At the tree in the schoolyard.*

Yes, this I remember! We had one tree. At this time [at the beginning of the 1950s] there was also ‘inclusion’. Now we speak a lot about inclusion, but in my classroom we always had two or three disabled children. One child was epileptic, and the other children were really teasing this pupil. Sometimes he had an epileptic attack. Or he became very, very angry, and he started to shout and beat. For the pupils this was very amusing. And when he was very angry, they let him run around this tree in the schoolyard. These are images that you still remember.

But inclusion? It existed. There were two or three pupils, who were really disabled. We were with 30 to 40 pupils at that time. You had certainly pupils who were really abnormal, in the terms of the Belgian psychologist Ovide Decroly (1871-1932). Really mentally disabled children. That was the “inclusion” at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s. They were all in the same classroom.

## THE TEACHER OF THE SIXTH GRADE

— *The teachers were Catholic?*

Yes, the teachers were Catholic. In Belgium there were the so called denominational schools.<sup>5</sup> This was a denominational school. I was going there because my father was a Catholic. And it also was close to our house.

— *There was no public school nearby?*

No. Then you had to go to the city of Bruges. I went to a parish school. It was called *Christus Koning* (Christ the King). In this parish you had

<sup>5</sup> These are schools founded and governed by private organisations on a religious basis, while public schools were governed and maintained by public authorities, municipalities.

only one boys school, one girls school, and a kindergarten that was mixed. The kindergarten was with sisters: sister Clothilde, and sister Agnes.<sup>6</sup> I was only there two years. But we learned to read at kindergarten. It was a very good school.

There is something else I remember now of my childhood... I have slept in the home of the teacher of the sixth grade. When my father died, I just finished the sixth year. And the teacher of the sixth grade came to our home. And for the first night I was sleeping in his home. He had three or four children . Because my father died at home, he stayed at home for three or four days before he was buried. So my mother decided, okay, go to the teacher and sleep there. This was a very good teacher.

## THE HISTORY TEACHER WITH THE PIPE

— *How did your passage to the secondary school go?*

I never had a problem. Many of the pupils of my primary school had to attend a seventh or even an eighth year. But I was a good pupil, so I went immediately from the sixth year in primary school to the first year in secondary school. But many pupils had a seventh year. So when I came to the “Koninklijk Atheneum” of Bruges, a public school [a state secondary school], a non-Catholic school of course, many pupils were born in 1942 or in 1943. And I was born in 1944, so I was always the youngest one. But it did not matter, I had no problems.

— *What was your favourite subject in the secondary school?*

Let's call it humanities. Not that I had problems with mathematics, but I was not very lucky, because the first two years when I was at the “atheneum”, we had several mathematics teachers. Every teacher had a different method, and that is not good. That is the worst thing you can have, and certainly for mathematics.

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<sup>6</sup> Almost 60 years later Frank Simon co-authored a book about teaching sisters. See: Bart Hellinckx, Frank Simon & Marc Depaepe, *The forgotten contribution of the teaching sisters: a historiographical essay on the educational work of Catholic women religious in the 19th and 20th centuries* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2017).



But coming to history, we had a very good history teacher. Not such a brilliant or charismatic teacher, but content, content, content! Unbelievable. Art history, everything. We had him from the first year until the last year. So for six years we had the same history teacher!

This was really very important. Afterwards we still had some contact, but at a certain moment, about 30 years ago, a group of seven pupils from the “atheneum” decided that after his retirement, we should invite him to have dinner with us. And from that moment on, once or twice a year, we had a dinner with our history teacher! And after he died we still had that dinner. With an empty chair..., remembering our history teacher. [...] He always smoked a pipe. In the classroom of course (*laughs*). I still see these images before my eyes. His name was Constant Martony, an ardent supporter of Football Club Bruges.<sup>7</sup> He wrote textbooks, inter alia a textbook in four parts about the history of Western culture.<sup>8</sup>

I remember the last two years of my secondary school, the end of the 50s, the first years of the 60s. At that moment there were many insurgencies in the colonies. So we had colonial history! We always had this link between history and the current events. And I believe this had an influence on why I have studied history. The first reason I studied history was because of my teacher.

But there was another reason. Because we were poor I had to choose a discipline where I would have very good results. Otherwise I would lose my study grant. So I had to choose a discipline—and I have even doubted to choose linguistics or literature—where you were 100 percent secure that it could be done in four years, like history. I did not have so much time, because I was playing football at the same time. And of course I liked history. But this was the second reason. It was a pity because it was a rather negative choice.

And of course, I knew pupils in the “atheneum” that were just two or three years older. I looked at them and I said “if *this guy* can succeed at university, then I can do it too”. But my mother and my grandmother

<sup>7</sup> He was born in Bruges in 1918.

<sup>8</sup> Constant Martony & Roger Denorme, *De ontwikkeling van de Westerse cultuur*, 4 vols. (Antwerpen: De Sikkel, 1953).

protested: “No university. We have no money. So earn money, as quickly as possible. Perhaps you can simply be a primary teacher, that is only three years”. But I said: “No, I go to the university”. Even when I was playing football at the same time.



Image 3. The football team of the “atheneum” Bruges wins the cup of the state schools of West-Flanders 1960/61 (Personal archive Frank Simon)

## THE STUDENT AND THE FOOTBALL PLAYER

I was 17 years old when I was in the university. I had a university career for four years in Ghent. Going to Ghent from Bruges was 20 to 25 minutes by train. We could not afford a student room in Ghent. It was too expensive. So I paid my study with a very small inheritance from my father. And I played football... I paid my studies by playing football. I started in the first team of Cercle Bruges in 1962/1963. In the second

year of my university career, I was playing in the first class of the Belgian Football Championship. It was paid per point won. So I could pay my studies and I could even afford a small car.

You had two football teams in Bruges: Football Club Bruges and Cercle Bruges. Cercle Bruges was the Catholic one. Football Club Bruges was socialist-liberal. It was my father who affiliated me. And because my father was a religious man, he went to the Catholic club in Bruges, I was in the first team of Cercle Bruges from 1962/63 till 1975.<sup>9</sup>

Playing football had many advantages. One of my history professors in Ghent was also living in Bruges like me, and he was a supporter of my team. Two or three years ago, I have heard from one of his former assistants that they always had to look very carefully at my work [...]. Football opens many doors.



Image 4. Frank Simon and Cercle Bruges (second row on the right)

<sup>9</sup> Frank Simon played his first match for Cercle Bruges on 24 March 1963 and his last on 2 March 1975. He played 334 competition matches. His position was defender. A remarkable fact was that between 18 February 1968 en 5 October 1972 he did not skip a single match. See: <http://home.scarlet.be/~tsd51501/SIMON%20FRANKY.htm>

## THE HISTORY STUDENT THAT KNEW LATIN

In secondary education I studied Latin and Greek. With Latin and Greek you could go to the arts. And after that you could do history in four years. I specialised in contemporary history, but in fact it was multidisciplinary. I had two years classic Latin, two years medieval Latin, palaeography, and so on. Nowadays students are specialised in contemporary history, or in medieval history, or in modern history. But many don't know Latin anymore! In my time we knew Latin and it has been so helpful. Especially when I went to parish archives. All these parish priests were writing in a kind of kitchen-Latin, but you could understand it. Many contemporary historians have lost this. Even palaeography proved to be useful, because it also included reading texts that were written with gothic handwriting. [...] Times have changed.

In the university we had also human geography. And colonial history. The first lesson was about the Aztecs and Mexican history. This was my first connection with a Latin-American country. In this lesson we received some sheets in Spanish (*laughs*). We were only with 15 students, but everybody knew Latin and French, and we started. Translating a sheet of paper from Spanish. These are things you never forget! When a professor would do this now, to give the students a sheet of paper in a language they do not understand, immediately they would go to the rector! I am sure there will be a big protest in the whole university. In fact, when I was teaching at the Free University of Brussels, I let my students read texts in French and English. And some of my students have gone to the rector to protest. They had to read English! But, of course, they did not succeed with their complaining.

In Ghent we learned from professor Jan Dhondt (1915-1972) to think in recurrences. To look at the behaviour of people in different periods. Of course it is never the same in history. Your behaviour is never the same, but nevertheless you can find some recurrences, and it gives history a kind of an added value. I should almost say, and this is true, *as an historian, you must think sociologically*. This is what we learned in contemporary history.

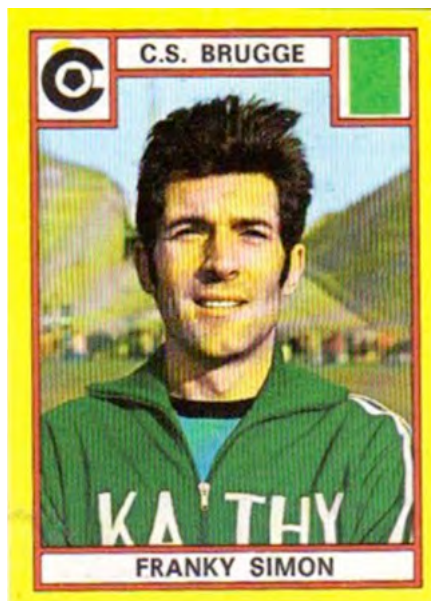


Image 5. Panini Football Card

## A MASTER THESIS ABOUT HOW PEOPLE SURVIVE

I finished my university studies in 1965. My final work (what now is called a master thesis) was about Bruges during the period 1814-1830. Between 1815 and 1830 Holland and Belgium had the same king, Willem the first. For that work I stayed in The Hague for a month to visit the National Archives, the location of the main sources about this period. I also spent two weeks in the Archives Nationales in Paris. In those times, in France, it was not so easy to go to the archives for a student. You needed permissions and everything was very bureaucratic. But my professor was a good friend of the ambassador in Paris, so it could be done. I also had a grant.

— *Was going to the archives in Paris your first trip to the foreign?*

No, my first trips abroad were with my father. We were travelling to Holland and France for touristic reasons, but also for smuggling of course (*laughs*). And on these trips the priest had to be there too. Why? Because he had a long dress, and all the butter, cheese and the bottles of wine were hidden under his long dress. My father was a very good friend of this priest.



He was from another parish (“Sint-Pieter”). That was the place where we had our garage for the buses. This parish priest had another very big advantage: he could celebrate a mass in 30 minutes instead of the usual one hour. And after the mass, the parishioners went right to the pub, not for drinking Belgian beer, but small glasses of gin, filled to the brim. [...]

In this master thesis about the so called Dutch period, there were of course chapters about education. But the subject of my thesis was more about trying to describe the mentality of the people of Bruges in that period. The end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in our region was characterized by a succession of political regimes (“Austrian”, “French”, “Dutch”). Many people had experiences with several periods. How did these people think, how did they manage, how did they deal with all these different regimes? How did the nobility, the entrepreneurs, people in public services, etc. deal with all these changes? So politically this is very interesting.

— *Did you choose the subject of your thesis yourself?*

It was a continuation of work of other assistants of professor Jan Dhondt. They were all mentality studies: about the Austrian period, the French period, and the Dutch period. It resulted in my first publications.<sup>10</sup> I was very happy to study this period, because then you see how people survive. And sometimes how flexible people had to be to survive. And this has also happened in World War I, and in World War II.

There was a very good student, one year before me, his name is Helmut Gaus. He became a professor at Ghent University, a specialist in mentality history. He was linking the everyday history with the Kondratieff cycles.<sup>11</sup> Is it so that when you have economic crises, that people are reacting more conservative? So he always tried to find a link between the Kondratieff cycles and mentalities.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Frank Simon & Yvan Van den Berghe, Philippe Veranneman, “Een politiek publicist in de Revolutietijd, Brugge 1790-1815”, *Biekorf* 67 (1966): 134-141; Frank Simon, *De stemming van de grondwet van het Verenigd Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in het arrondissement Brugge, (14 augustus 1815)* (Leuven: Nauwelaerts, 1968).

<sup>11</sup> Nikolai Kondratieff, *The long wave cycle* (New York: Richardson & Snyder, 1984) (translated from Russian).

<sup>12</sup> Helmut Gaus, *Warum Gestern über Morgen erzählt. Die Hilfe der langen Wellen der Konjunktur für die Trendbestimmung von Morgen* (Leuven/Apeldoorn: Garant, 2001).



What was going on in the head of a person you can only know if you were talking to these people. In written sources it is more difficult. Although it is also possible, in educational journals for instance, but nevertheless this is why I was interested in oral history: for studying everyday educational realities. I had already been busy with that a long time ago. But it exploded at the end of the 1980s and in the middle of the 1990s when Marc Depaepe and I wrote an article—the first international article we wrote together—with the title “Is there any Place for the History of ‘Education’ in the ‘History of Education?’”.<sup>13</sup> It is a very short article, but everybody is referring to it, because it was the beginning of many other articles. In this article we also mentioned the container concept “pedagogization”, derived from the German “Pädagogisierung”, that, especially at the instigation of Marc, has been coined as “educationalization”.<sup>14</sup>

## THE SOLDIER THAT WROTE HISTORY

After finishing my master thesis in 1965 I had to go to the army for one year. I was a player in the international military football team. So I was travelling again. We had to play against Holland, England, Luxembourg, and Turkey. In 1967 we won the Kentish Cup. I was having many holidays because I needed to “rest” between matches. That was a little bit annoying for the other soldiers.

In the army I was in the cultural service. We were projecting films for the soldiers. I had a special in-service training for a week in Brussels. They taught me how the projectors worked. And then we were showing films to the soldiers, but most of the time this 35mm film broke. And then you had to fix it on the spot with 100 soldiers waiting (*laughs*). But I had a very good colonel. He told me to write the history of the barracks. So what did I do in the military service? I wrote history! And I have published it.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Marc Depaepe & Frank Simon, “Is there any Place for the History of ‘Education’ in the ‘History of Education’? A Plea for the History of Everyday Educational Reality in- and outside Schools”, *Paedagogica Historica* 31, no. 1 (1995): 9-16

<sup>14</sup> See: Marc Depaepe, *Between educationalization and appropriation. Selected writings on the history of modern educational systems* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012); Marc Depaepe & Frank Simon, “Sobre la pedagogización. Desde la perspectiva de la historia de la educación”, *Espacios en Blanco. Revista de Educación* 18 (2008): 101-130.

<sup>15</sup> Frank Simon, “Geschiedenis der kazernes Knapen en Rademakers te Brugge”, *De Gidsenkring* 5 (1967): 1-24.

So again I had to travel, because the archives were in the military museum in Brussels. I could stay there. At that time I already had a lot of experience with working with archives and with documents. You can have a nose for archives when you are in an archive, but you have this nose of course because you have been consulting so many documents. *And the most joyful moment you can have as an historian is to find something you did not look for!* And in the long run you are specialised in finding things you did not look for. That is your feeling and your joy as an historian. You can argue that finding something is a coincidence. It is not. It is because you have all this experience with archives. Visiting archives opens a whole new world. And that is why you are doing it, and why you keep on doing it, and why you never stop doing it.

## TEACHING HISTORY AND SELLING DRUGS

Then I was working three months in the Centre for contemporary history at Ghent University. I made an extended bibliography of newspapers of the province West-Flanders. Very useful but sometimes boring. I also worked three months in a department of art history: cataloguing the library. I was also three months paid by the National Fund for Scientific Research. I earned about 10.000 Belgian Francs a month. And for one month I worked as a history teacher in the “atheneum” in Geraardsbergen. This was my first experience as a teacher.

— *Do you remember your first day of teaching?*

No. The only thing I remember is that I had to go there by train. It was one hour and 20 minutes. The train was stopping everywhere, in every little village. Then I understood immediately why they posted me there. Because they probably could not find another one (*laughs*). This is the only thing I remember as a “first day teacher”. I was a substitute, replacing a teacher of history.

I also remember that, as a starting teacher, I had to work very, very hard. Preparing a lesson, that is not so simple as people may think. And I had 21 hours in three days. For an old and experienced teacher that is fine, but for a young teacher... that is a drama. But okay, the students admired me after they found out that I played football. So not because I was a good or a bad teacher. This I remember.

But then I went in a completely other direction. For a historian it was difficult to find a decent job in your discipline. During four years I practiced the profession of medical representative for a pharmaceutical company. That was a complete different world. It was interesting, but after a while, it was a little bit boring. I just had to make publicity for drugs. Visiting medical doctors, physicians, really a routine job. It had an advantage: I could read history in the waiting room. But I did good business: I earned four times more than in the national fund. I earned 40.000 Belgian Francs. I am probably not a sales man, but it went very well. But the day I could promote in the firm, I said “No, I’m leaving”. My sales figures were very good, but that was because I was playing football! All these doctors knew that I was a football player, so we talked about football, not about the drugs I was selling. Nevertheless I learned a lot about methodology, placebo’s, physiology, electro-cardiograms, etcetera. It was good to be out of the university, to live in the other world, but it was four year lost for my career. And the university is a fantastic world.

#### THE UNIVERSITY ASSISTANT AND MAURITS DE VROEDE

I stopped in 1971 and I went back to the university. I was going to have a talk with professor Maurits de Vroede (1922-2002), a historian at the Catholic University of Leuven. But before seeing him, I went to the men’s toilet. Somebody was there, and I asked this man: “Do you know where De Vroede’s office is?”. And he said: “Yes, I know, follow me”. And then we both entered in the office of De Vroede. The man in the toilet was De Vroede himself! So my first meeting with De Vroede was in the men’s toilet. These things you never forget.

It was typical for De Vroede. He was very severe, but he also had a kind of humour. One time, I was starting a text with the biography of a teacher. “That is no history”, said De Vroede. A whole discussion. You always had to fight with De Vroede. He needed an enemy. But at the end he agreed with you. Sometimes he insulted people, but Marc Depaepe and I, we could do everything with him.

We were working on the project cataloguing and characterising Belgian educational journals (1817-1940). That was a coordinated project between the universities of Ghent and Leuven. It was a project conceived by De Vroede from Leuven, but the financial side came more from pro-

fessor Karel de Clerck from Ghent.<sup>16</sup> De Clerck was linked with the socialist party and could get easily money when socialists formed part of the government. In 1973 I became an assistant with another professor in Ghent, Robert Plancke (1911-1993). With Plancke you did not have to do scientific work, only to help with the index bibliograficus of the *Paedagogica Historica* [the international journal for the history of education that was first published in Ghent in 1961]. Plancke was a very strict person: you had to work from nine to five. But, thanks to De Clerck, a supporter of my football club Cercle Brugge, I could leave earlier because I had to train for the football matches. [...]

I was not a pedagogue, I was a historian, so I also had to study didactics and some other courses on education. But my biggest source of inspiration were these educational journals. What you can read in these journals, that is fantastic! That is the whole educational world. And it was also useful for oral history that I practiced after having finished my dissertation. Because all these teachers I interviewed, they had already read these journals before my arrival. And then sometimes listening to the interviewees I realised, that is not *you* speaking, that is the *educational journal* that is speaking.

## FROM FOOTBALL TO TEACHER UNIONS

I was combining my doctoral thesis about teacher unions with the tasks I had to fulfil with regard to the educational journals. Obviously I collected the data about the unions in the journals. I made many photocopies. So I already had a lot of material for my doctoral thesis, but I did not have time to work on it because I was playing football. When I stopped with football in 1975, then I focused on my dissertation. I was writing it between 1975 and 1979.

My promotor was professor Romain Van Eenoo, a historian at the University of Ghent. De Vroede and De Clerck were in the committee. In those days you had to defend your doctoral thesis in the same study field as your master thesis. So I had to do my Ph.D. in history. It could not be in education. Professor Han Leune from the Erasmus University Rotter-

<sup>16</sup> Frank Simon was the editor of the *liber amicorum* for De Clerck. See: Frank Simon (ed.), *Libera amicorum Karel De Clerck* (Gent: CSHP, 2000).

dam, a sociologist of education, has been very helpful with my thesis. I have talked with him, and I used his theoretical framework. Leune wrote his thesis about teacher unions in 1976. There was a generation of historians of education that did their dissertation on teacher unions: Martin Lawn, Wayne Urban, Harry Smaller.

I had to cut my doctoral thesis. The period I was studying started in 1857, but instead of stopping in 1914, I stopped in 1895. Because of financial cuts in the University of Ghent only a few assistants could be hired in 1979. So I had to sign a contract with professor De Clerck that I would finish my thesis at that end of the year. And then I wrote, I wrote, I wrote. But it was okay. And then I could promote. Only 18 assistants could be appointed, and I was one of them. I published my dissertation four years later, in 1983.

## EVERYDAY LIFE AND TEXTBOOKS

In the second half of the 1970s I met Marc Depaepe.<sup>17</sup> De Vroede involved him in the last phase of the educational journal project.<sup>18</sup> Marc did research on classroom organisation so his area of interest was also everyday educational reality. When I was working with Helmut Gaus, Bie de Graeve and Antonia Verbruggen-Aelterman, I was giving in-service training for history teachers. Our subject was about everyday life of the workers.<sup>19</sup> We also interviewed many textile workers in Ghent. We were looking for everyday life. We read the work of Michel de Certeau about the practice of everyday life.<sup>20</sup> We asked the teachers a battery of hundreds of questions: education at home, at school, do you have a car, a bicycle, etcetera. Everyday life. So Marc and I could easily connect. After having published some articles with De Vroede, we wrote our first article together in Dutch in 1993 and the first international article in 1995.

<sup>17</sup> See: Simonetta Polenghi & Gianfranco Bandini, "Interview with Marc Depaepe", *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación* 3, No. 1 (2016): 445-453.

<sup>18</sup> M. De Vroede, *et alii*, *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van het pedagogisch leven in België. Deel IV. De periodieken 1914-1940* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 1987) 2 vols.

<sup>19</sup> Helmut Gaus, Bie de Graeve, Frank Simon & Antonia Verbruggen-Aelterman, *Alledaagsheid en mondelinge geschiedenis. Studie en toepassing in het secundair onderwijs* (Gent: Interfacultair Centrum voor Lerarenopleiding, 1983).

<sup>20</sup> Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien* (Paris: Union Générale d'éditions, 1980).

School inspectors were also involved in this in-service teachers training. At first these inspectors forbid the teachers to work with oral history. “Oral history was no history!”, they argued. For this generation of inspectors of course. Why? Because many inspectors were textbook authors, and there was no oral history in these textbooks. In Belgium we had many textbooks. Every village in the 19th century had its own textbook and its own printer for publishing it. School inspectors were making money with writing textbooks. It is a tradition in Belgium. You could make a living with a textbook. Of course the inspectors were not openly pushing the teachers to use these books, but of course the teachers were using them. My history teacher, Constant Martony, who wrote textbooks too, was always clashing with the inspectors, perfectly understandable because he has never been an inspector.



Image 6. Marc Depaepe and Frank Simon in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 17 November 2009  
(Photograph by S. Braster)



## MARC DEPAEPE AND THE BLACK BOX

My first ISCHE conference was in Sèvres in 1981. The first ISCHE conference was in Leuven in 1979, but I was not there. I was busy writing my thesis. I just heard later that a conference was held. In Sèvres I shared a room with Marc Depaepe. These were rooms of the university. [...]

— *In the 1970s you were working in teacher unions, how did you move to the black box of schooling?*

Marc and I wrote about the black box in the already cited article “Is there any place for the History of ‘Education’ in the ‘History of Education’?”, and then we really framed a little bit our careers.<sup>21</sup> We have always worked together. And we were, probably in every article, keeping an eye on the educational journals. Also in the book *Order in progress*<sup>22</sup>, with Marc as main author, that we presented for the first time in Buenos Aires. It was also published in the yearbook of the Argentinean History of Education Society.<sup>23</sup>

And then there is also the link with Spain. We met Agustín Escolano. And Antonio Viñao, who is really a wonderful historian. We had contact with Antonio, because we were working on the same subject, the black box of schooling. [...] We were influenced by Clifford Geertz (1926-2006), the American cultural anthropologist. It has been very fruitful for us to work with the Spanish, the Latin-Americans, and the Portuguese. António Nóvoa for example. So we got more inside the anthropological side of education. That is something that we have learned from Latin-America: history and anthropology go together very well.

<sup>21</sup> Marc Depaepe & Frank Simon, “Qui ascendit cum labore, descendit cum honore. Sobre el trabajo con las fuentes. Consideraciones desde el taller sobre la historia de la educación”, in *Poder, fé y pedagogía: Historia de maestras mexicanas y belgas*, eds. Federico Lazarin Miranda, Luz Elena Galvan Lafarga & Frank Simon (Mexico: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2014), 27-54.

<sup>22</sup> Marc Depaepe, K. Dams, Maurits de Vroede, B. Eggermont, H. Lauwers, Frank Simon, R. Vandenberghe, & J. Verhoeven, *Order in progress. Everyday educational practice in primary schools. Belgium 1880-1970* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> Marc Depaepe & Frank Simon. “Orden en el progreso. Día tras día en la escuela primaria Belga (1870-1970)”, in *Historia de la educación. Anuario 2000/2001* (Buenos Aires: Sociedad Argentina de Historia de la Educación, 2001): 41-71.

My connection with Marc still works chemically. Philosophically we can be on different sides, but that is no problem. We are very complementary. From his Catholic background he can see things in the sources, and certainly in the educational journals, that I cannot see. But on the other side, if there are links with free thinking, then the reverse also applies, you have to see the networks. [...] *For interpreting a source your whole life is behind it.*

Between 1981 and 2004 I worked also part time at the Free University of Brussels, a free thinkers institution. You had to subscribe the ideas of Henri Poincaré (1854-1912) about not believing in dogmas.<sup>24</sup> When you were hired at the Free University of Brussels, you had to agree with the statements of Poincaré. Nowadays the ideological cleavages are not so sharp anymore. [...] I remember that professor Marcel Nauwelaerts (1908-1983) asked me to be an assistant at the Catholic University Leuven, I said: “No, that is impossible for me. I cannot have a job at a Catholic university. That is impossible”. [...]

It also works 100 percent with Marc, because from the beginning we had an open agenda. I know what he was working on, and he knows what I was working on. We are very good friends in the profession. Many colleagues don't have an open agenda. Sometimes between colleagues it is very difficult. Some people you trust, and other people you cannot trust.

Marc wakes up at 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning, and I work at night. We have written many articles in hotel rooms when we were at conferences. He could write in the day, and I could write in the night. We are very complementary. These are small things, but for creating an article it is so important: the cycle goes on and on.

With Marc it has always been perfect. And we were also very happy to have good collaborators. Angelo Van Gorp for instance. He wrote his doctoral thesis about Decroly.<sup>25</sup> And again we had to enter in the class-

<sup>24</sup> In 1909 Henri Poincaré wrote: “Thinking must never submit itself, neither to a dogma, nor to a party, nor to a passion, nor to an interest, nor to a preconceived idea, nor to anything whatsoever, except to the facts themselves, because for it to submit to anything else would be the end of its existence”. Quoted in: Marc Noppen, “I will never submit myself”, <http://vubtoday.be/en/content/i-will-never-submit-myself> (accessed 30-3-2018).

<sup>25</sup> Angelo Van Gorp, *Tussen mythe en wetenschap. Ovide Decroly (1871-1932)* (Leuven/Voorburg: Acco, 2005).

room, otherwise it is impossible to understand Decroly. Many of Decroly's insights on education were probably insights of his teachers. And now that drives us to the subject of women teachers. It is a good subject, it is growing, it is flourishing.

## NEW DIRECTIONS IN HISTORY OF EDUCATION

— *In all the years you have been in history of education what do you think has changed?*

When I started it was the history of ideas. I started with professor Plancke. When we had our seminars I was teaching Herbert Spencer, and other assistants Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Locke, etc. You know, the whole gallery of philosophers. It was the same with Comparative Education. "You do Belgium, I do France", and so on. Plancke was a classic philologist, so when I arrived in the seminar there were no historians. One person was specialised in English, one in French, one in Russian, one in Spanish and Portuguese. So for me, coming from history, this was a strange construction. And you also had Jacques Souvage (1932-2007), who was really a genius in languages and was involved in the publication of *Paedagogica Historica*. So all the philosophers were interpreted from a more linguistically and more philosophically point of view. It was not my habitat, because I came from contemporary and social history. Professor De Vroede from Leuven was much more an institutional historian and this also clashed a little bit with Ghent. Professor Dhondt from Ghent was more a social historian. So my nest was social history and not the history of ideas.

This was the advantage of working with Professor De Clerck: you could do more what you wanted to do. So Marc and I, and De Vroede, could change the history of education in Belgium a bit more in the direction of educational realities, oral histories and so on. The oral histories were coming from sociologists, and certainly from Manuela du Bois-Reymond, a sociologist from Germany that was working at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands. We were also influenced by Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), who wrote about collective memory.<sup>26</sup> And of

<sup>26</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (ouvrage posthume publié par Jeanne Alexandre née Halbwachs) Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950).

course by De Certeau about everyday life. And then you had the whole Foucauldian approach. Marc and I, however, are not Foucauldians. But we use it. It is almost impossible not to use it. And then there is Thomas Popkewitz with the history of the present,<sup>27</sup> and then you have that new cultural history.<sup>28</sup> Marc and I could find each other in these matters, but nevertheless you cannot fix a label on us. We make a mix.

Then in 1995, I met Ian Grosvenor. There was an open call for papers from the University of Birmingham about the visual and everyday educational reality. I was there.<sup>29</sup> And I must say, Ian's influence has been considerable: emphasise the visual, use and interpret photographs and films,<sup>30</sup> look more to the material things.<sup>31</sup> We had a Socrates project together with Christine Mayer (University of Hamburg), Carmen Sanchidrián (University of Malaga), Mineke van Essen (University of Groningen), and Cathy Burke (University of Cambridge) who also has a very interesting way of thinking. And now there are the new approaches in history of education with more focus on the senses, affections, emotions. We have it more and more.

There is also more focus on the digital. We will have a different history, history of education. We can come again to long term history, so to speak fulfil the objectives of the *Annales*, Professor Dhondt from Ghent was an adept of the *Annales*, So, with the technology we have now, long term history can be reconsidered. I think that this is a track for the youngsters. For instance if all educational journals are digitalised, then I hope that all these young people will reread all we have written, and that they, perhaps using the same hypotheses, use

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Popkewitz, "Curriculum history, schooling and the history of the present", *History of Education* 40, no. 1 (2011): 1-19.

<sup>28</sup> Sol Cohen, *Challenging orthodoxies: Toward a new cultural history of education* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Kristof Dams, Marc Depaepe & Frank Simon, "Sneaking into school: Classroom history at work", in *Silences and Images. The Social History of the Classroom* eds. Ian Grosvenor, Martin Lawn & Kate Rousmaniere (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 13-46.

<sup>30</sup> For example: Karl Catteeuw, Kristof Dams, Marc Depaepe & Frank Simon, "Filming the black box. Primary schools on film in Belgium, 1880-1960: A first assessment of unused sources", in *Visual History. Images of Education*, eds. Ulrike Mietzner, Kevin Myers & Nick Peim (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), 201-231.

<sup>31</sup> For example: Frederik Herman, Angelo Van Gorp, Frank Simon & Marc Depaepe, "The school desk: From concept to object", *History of Education* 40, no.1 (2011): 97-117.

these sources to study the long term. And possibly link education with Kondratieff cycles, the long term waves in economy.

## DRAWING LESSONS FROM HISTORY

I know just one colleague in history of education who is working with Kondratieff cycles. That is Vincent Carpentier from the stable of Richard Aldrich (1937-2014) at the London Institute of Education. Richard had a nose for these things. He also connected history of education with neuroscience.<sup>32</sup>

Philosophically I was very close to him: we were both on the same side. We discussed about the work of the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, and so on. The only thing we never agreed on was that Richard always wanted to draw lessons from history.

On the other side, and now I am talking about the time when I was teaching history, young people are asking for lessons from history. It is so difficult to tell them that there are no lessons. It is impossible. You can see some similarities in time of course. Richard was on the side of policy, and it is good that in a public debate people are asking for lessons from history. But no. It is a classic saying [Aldous Huxley]: “the only lesson to be learnt from history is that there are no lessons to be learnt from history”.

There is an interesting talk from Patrick Boucheron, an historian that has been accepted in the College de France in Paris in 2015. He gave an inaugural lecture with the title *Ce que peut l'histoire*.<sup>33</sup> He says that now time is going so fast, people are so busy, so what a historian is going to do in such a time? If time is going very fast then the past is expanding and the future is shrinking. We have only time for today. And then he says that for history this is not so good. People are also consuming time and they are quickly consuming history. So what do you do as an historian? You can say I just do my job as an historian. I can only do history when there is really history, so not too close. You can only

<sup>32</sup> Richard Aldrich, “Neuroscience, education and the evolution of the human brain”, *History of Education* 42, no. 3 (2013): 396-410.

<sup>33</sup> Patrick Boucheron, *Ce que peut l'histoire*, <http://books.openedition.org/cdf/4507> (accessed 30-3-2018).

do history when there is some distance from the present. But you can also do history in another way. More problem oriented and then you are really entering into the present day. But Patrick Boucheron says: take a rest, step out of that time that is going too fast, but take a position of critical engagement.<sup>34</sup>

I believe that this is what Marc Depaepe and I also like in history: to have a critical engagement. But that is not the same as drawing lessons from history. It is more about (self) reflexivity and so on.



Image 7. Presidents of ISCHE. From left to right Marc Depaepe, Jeroen Dekker, Frank Simon, Wayne Urban, and Richard Aldrich

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<sup>34</sup> Frank Simon. "Afterword: inexhaustible cultural learning", *Paedagogica Historica*, 53, no. 3 (2017): 342-346.



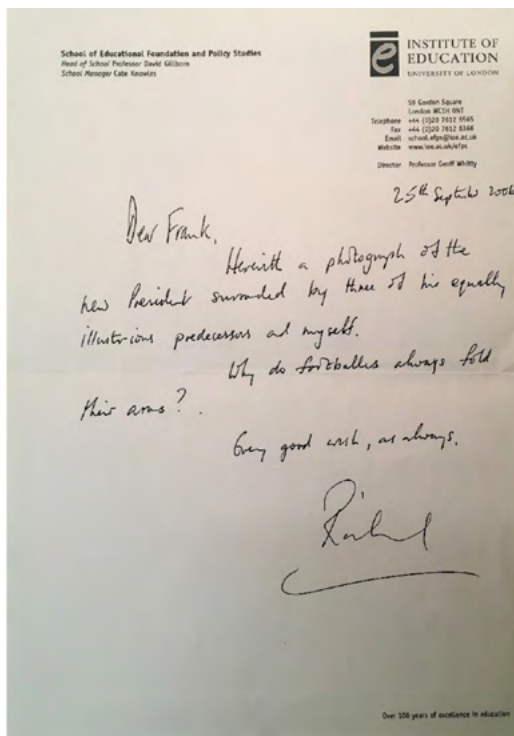


Image 8. Letter of Richard Aldrich to Frank Simon, 25 September 2006

## THE FUTURE OF HISTORY OF EDUCATION

I am very enthusiastic about History of Education. Not institutionally. Institutionally history of education is a victim. We will be encapsulated with other disciplines. Perhaps Spain is a little bit of an exception, but I do not know for how long. But I am certainly enthusiastic when it concerns research. We will have more and more research on history of education, because within the field of cultural history more historians are dealing with history of education now. Normally historians do not like history of education. They do not see it. They think it is done by people from a minor scientific level. That is still the reputation that education has. [...]

Do you know how many turns we had in the last 20 years? It is unbelievable! Biographical, emotional, material... It is crazy all these turns.

Now we have the animal turn. Linking education with animals is very popular at the moment.

But on the other hand, it shows that so much is going on within cultural history, and also within the theory of history, and the history of sciences. So I believe that the history of education will flourish, and we will have young people researching history of education. On a different level than we have done it. They will probably not be assistants of history of education, but something else. But we should make that they never forget history.

That also goes for teacher training: the teachers should be aware that when they step inside a school, when they go to the office of the director, when they enter into the classroom, when they teach the pupils, that this is always historical. They should be aware that they are working in such a rich historical habitat. But many teachers are not aware of that. It is just their daily job. It is very important for teacher training colleges to teach their students to have this historical reflex. We have it as historians of education, but we should manage that everybody has it.<sup>35</sup>

## HISTORY OF EDUCATION AND ART

History for me is also about literature and visiting exhibitions. For instance, the book *Perfume* of Patrick Süskind, or the novels of Patrick Modiano the writer of transformed memories.<sup>36</sup> This has an unbelievable influence. You read the book, you appropriate it and it transforms your vision on history. [...]

I went to an exhibition in Mons (Belgium), the cultural city of Europe in the year 2015. There I saw the work of Christian Boltanski, a French conceptual artist. In an exhibition he was putting boxes against the wall. Every box is a mine worker. And then you see the daily life of

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<sup>35</sup> Karel Van Nieuwenhuysse, Frank Simon & Marc Depaep, "The Place of History in Teacher Training and in Education. A Plea for an Educational Future with a History, and Future Teachers with Historical Consciousness", *Bildungsgeschichte. International Journal for the Historiography of Education* 5, no. 1 (2015): 57-69.

<sup>36</sup> Patrick Süskind, *Das Parfum; Die Geschichte eines Mörders* (Zurich: Diogenes Verlag, 1985); Patrick Modiano, *Romans* (Paris: Gallimard 2013).

mine workers, entering in the pit. All their coats are on a hanger, moving around. And in the end you see an enormous heap of black coats. And there he made the connection between all the people that were murdered by the Nazis. And then you think: this artist brings us more inside history than a historian can do. Richard Aldrich would probably say: "This is a lesson learnt from history" (*laughs*). But no, it is so creative. For us historians, it is impossible to do. But these artists can do it, and they like to do it, and perhaps we should also like to do it. But we would not succeed. And if we were to succeed, than we would not be historians anymore.

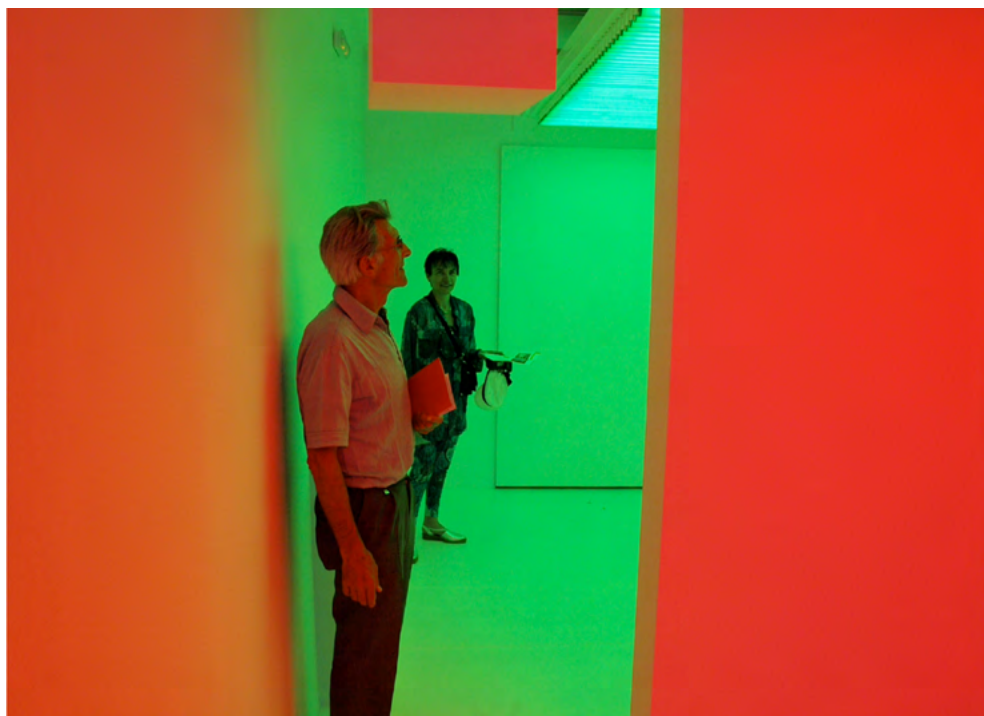


Image 9. Museum of Abstract Art, Cuenca, Spain, 30 July 2009 (Photograph by S. Braster)

## KONDRATIEFF AND DECROLY

— *What is the article you would like to write in the future?*

I would like to link education with the Kondratieff cycles, because I think it does not work with education. I do not believe in the upcoming economy followed by the upcoming of new education, and if the economy goes down, then education would be more conservative.

My colleague Helmut Gaus has combined fashion with the Kondratieff cycles. He analysed fashion journals. For example he was looking at dresses, long and short, and colours, red and black, With digitalised journals you can do so many things now. So for education we could do it also. My hypothesis is that at a logistic level there could be some connection between education and the Kondratieff cycles. But what is going on inside the classroom, the relationship between the teacher and the pupil, the educational paradigms... I really don't know if there would be a connection. But I would like to do this kind of research. Also in the pipeline is the biography of Ovide Decroly, In the meantime Sylvain Wagnon is writing about Decroly.<sup>37</sup> You have written about Decroly.<sup>38</sup> And now we also have articles about Decroly written together with Alessandra Arce Hai, a Brazilian psychologist.<sup>39</sup> I went with her to the Decroly school and she was very happy. Perhaps we will have a book in Portuguese about Decroly. She is putting it all together. It is good for us that more people are writing about Decroly now.

And writing a biography is fantastic. There is no methodology, so you can do what you want (*laughs*). It will clash with some people, because they cannot understand that there is no methodology. But a biography is so interesting. You need to have an eye for the personal, for the small things, otherwise it is impossible to write your history. But Decroly is in the pipe line. We will see...

<sup>37</sup> Sylvain Wagnon, *Ovide Decroly, un pédagogue de l'Éducation nouvelle: 1871-1932* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2013).

<sup>38</sup> María del Mar del Pozo Andrés, "Desde L'Ermitage a la escuela rural Española: Introducción, difusión y apropiación de los 'centros de interés' decrolyanos (1907-1936)", *Revista de Educación*, Número extraordinario (2007): 143-166.

<sup>39</sup> Alessandra Arce Hai, Frank Simon & Marc Depaepe, "Translating Ovide Decroly's ideas to Brazilian teachers", *Paedagogica Historica* 51, no. 6 (2015): 744-767; Alessandra Arce Hai, Frank Simon & Marc Depaepe, "From practice to theory, Ovide Decroly for Brazilian classrooms: a tale of appropriation", *History of Education* 45, no. 6 (2016): 794-812.



Image 10. MUPEGA, Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 22 July 2009  
(Photograph by S. Braster)

## THE PROFESSOR AND HIS STUDENTS

— *How were the relations with your students?*

First of all, you are teaching a course that many of them do not like. You are not dealing with historians, but with future educationalists, pedagogues, and so on. They like to do something and they do not like too much reflexion. Well most of them, I am generalising. So you have to turn it in such a way that they focus a little bit on history. I hope I have succeeded by using images in my teaching. It is through an image that you can reach a student. It is learning them to look in a different way at a picture. That looks like an easy thing, but in fact it is very difficult.

— *How close you can get to the students?*

My door was open all the times. They could come in. That was no problem. But I gave my teachers training course in the 1990s when the students numbers were rising. I had 1.200 students. That was really impossible. And even with these numbers I did open book exams (and no multiple choice exams). They were not so happy with that system. But I was happy about it, because then I could see if they understood the content or not. There were also about 250 to 300 pedagogues I had to teach. This has been very difficult. These numbers are too high. But for the students that were doing a master thesis, it was ok.

Frederik Herman was a master student of me. He did his Master Thesis in Ghent and his Ph.D. thesis in Leuven.<sup>40</sup> With Frederik I had a good relationship when he was a student. He was primary teacher before. I had better relationships with students just like Frederik who were starting as primary teachers and then turned to history.

I had many social workers as master students. This kind of students like to discuss. Unbelievable! And the questions they were asking were very fundamental. They made you think about your own discipline again. With these students that were already a little bit older, I had better relationships. It was also because they did not have exams, but they had to write papers. Then we could discuss about their subjects. For half of an hour, for three quarters of an hour, for an hour. And then you learn very much yourself. It is fundamental, you are not only the teacher. You are also the pupil and the student is the teacher, I think this is the basis. *When you are not a pupil or a student yourself, then it is difficult to be a good teacher.* You can learn many things from your students.

If you do not have this attitude, then do not start as a teacher. With older students it is easier to have this attitude. And if they feel that you have this attitude, then they come out with all their experiences. As a primary school teacher, as a street worker. Then their whole personality appears. And then they trust you and it is good. But first of all, you need to have this attitude. Otherwise it is impossible.

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<sup>40</sup> Frederik Herman, *School culture in the 20th Century. Mentality and reality history of the primary school* (Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2010).





Image 11. Summer Course, Foz, Spain, 23 July 2009 (Photograph by S. Braster)

## THE MAN THAT CAN KEEP A SECRET

— *This is a bit of a difficult question. How would you like to be remembered?*

I do not know. It is so difficult, because you are always thinking what another person thinks about you. In fact you do that your whole life. You always have that in your mind.

I do not know if I have a strong ego or something like that, but in my connections with other people, I think they have the impression that they feel very easy with me. That is probably because my starting position is a modest one. I like more that people are sharing their thoughts with me, then I think about it, and then when I see that per-

son two or three months later, I can discuss about the things they said two or three months ago.

I do not believe that I impose my opinion on another person. I would always like to have a one to one relationship, on an equal level, and I would certainly like that the other person did not feel that I wanted to dominate somebody. It is more in this sense that I would like to be remembered. That I was very accessible and that people could tell me all things that they probably could not tell to somebody else. I am very convinced that I can keep things for myself, and only for myself. So people can give to me some secrets of their own, And I will keep those secrets and nobody else will have any idea of those secrets. *Simply because they can trust me.* This is very important in life.

### **Publications**

A list of publications of Frank Simon, starting in 1992, can be downloaded at the University of Ghent: <https://biblio.ugent.be/person/801000313386?sort=year.desc&sort=datecreated.desc&limit=10&start=0>

His publications can also be found on ResearchGate: [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Frank\\_Simon4](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Frank_Simon4)

### **Methodological note**

This article is based on an interview that was conducted on 27 March 2016 in The Hague by both authors. The interview was recorded and transcribed with software downloaded from <https://transcribe.wreally.com/>. The interview was about three hours and a half. Not all parts of the interview were used for this article. The authors have chosen to present this interview as a personal conversation. The choice of printing text in *italics* was also made by the authors. Frank Simon has seen the text before publication, and approved of the open formula, and the use of spoken language. Footnotes were added to give a better insight in the work of Frank Simon. ■

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