

J. F. Herbart on the Art of Teaching: *Bildsamkeit* and Pedagogical Tact

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Abstract

Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) was a profound systematic thinker of early 19th century Germany whose work on pedagogical tact and educability speaks to the history and historiography of the foundations of modern education. His uncompromising commitment to pedagogy for and with the enlightened human being informs current policy developments toward systems of accountability and standardized instruction by invigorating a humanistic view of teaching and learning grounded in Enlightenment philosophy.

Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) was one of the most renowned philosophers in early 19th century Germany. For many historians, his writings on pedagogy mark the beginning of education as a science. For historiography, the reception of Herbart's scholarship provides a fascinating example of how ideas are translated through time and space. The German *Herbartianismus* of the late Nineteenth Century, and its American export, bear little resemblance to Herbart's original ideas (Siljander, 2012). Rather, each co-opted Herbart's name and authority to support curricular movements quite alien to his central concepts. Given the current interest in German education and philosophy, it is thus instructive to reframe Herbart's ideas through the lens of the intellectual and political events of his day. What emerges is a more profound thinker than is represented in popular historical texts—and a benchmark for understanding the adaption and application of ideas in different socio-geographic contexts.

Building upon the Enlightenment concept of educability (*Bildsamkeit*) Herbart sought the methods necessary to promote the full and harmonious development of human powers both for the good of the individual and

the benefit of the state. This was to be a process of self-formation that would lead to the creation of moral beings and rational citizens. As English (2013) explains, “self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*) is connected to the ability to critique not only one's own thoughts and actions, but also the values and norms that govern society at large” (p. 3). Central to this project was a new understating of teaching, what Herbart termed pedagogical tact, that blended theoretical knowledge and practical experience into the dynamic art necessary to cultivate each child's diverse interests and talents. It is also helpful to read Herbart's views on pedagogy against the convulsions wrought by the Napoleonic Wars (Clark 2006). In the wake of Prussia's defeat intellectual and political

leaders sought to rebuild the nation through a system of public education. Social order had to rest on rational thought and cooperation through the education of an enlightened citizenry. Precisely because citizens are not born but made (Tröhler, 2016b, p. 284), schooling was to be organized around a common instructional plan designed to develop the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to meet civic responsibilities. A formal, politically legitimized administrative curricular structure would create and oversee curricula and teach the beliefs and values of the future German society (Tröhler, 2016a, p.11). The ideal captured in the concept of *Bildung* was the development of autonomy necessary for a free, virtuous, and reasoned mind (Kinkel, 1908).

The Historical Herbart

Herbart was born on 4 May 1776 in Oldenburg to Lucie, a “remarkable woman with a lively sense of imagination ... with quick decision-making, power of will and persistence in what she wanted” (Kinkel, 1908, p. 8). Fusing her own intellectual curiosity with the genius of her son, she worked side by

side with Herbart studying Greek, science, and mathematics under a series of private tutors. Herbart entered the city's *Gymnasium* at age 13 as its veritable protégé: At the age of 17, he gave a graduation address on national growth and the decline of morality. At his own graduation a year later, he spoke on the highest good and the principles of practical philosophy in Cicero and Kant at the age of 18 (Kinkel, 1908, p. 11). The following year he published his reflections on Kant's practical philosophy. Herbart also had significant musical talent: He played concerts for Duke Friedrich August of Schleswig-Holstein and published numerous compositions throughout his life. These achievements together with his own unique education would inform his later three-year service as tutor to the sons of the regional governor in the Swiss canton of Bern.

Following his father's wishes, Herbart entered the University of Jena in 1794 to pursue a career in the law. His mother followed him to support his studies and remained by his side over the coming years advancing his career. Herbart soon gravitated to philosophy and came under the orbit of Fichte, who directed his readings in Kant and German Idealism—a movement from which he would later turn. In addition, thanks to his mother's social networking, frequenting local salons and literary circles, he enjoyed the company of Schiller, Goethe, and numerous other leading intellectuals of the day (Kinkel, 1908, p. 13).

From 1797 to 1800, Herbart embraced his role as tutor to the Steiger family. Charged with the instruction of three boys, aged 8, 10, and 14, he perfected his instructional skills in what amounted to a pedagogic laboratory for his future works on education. His philosophical thought was also taking shape. By 1798, his friend Böhlendorff spread the word that Herbart was formulating a new system (Kinkel, 1908, p. 24) and it was during this time that he met and observed Pestalozzi's classes at Burgdorf. Although he found Pestalozzi's psychology vague and underdeveloped, he was impressed by his efforts to develop the mind's faculties through practical, sense-based learning within the natural environment. Pestalozzi was concerned with elementary

instruction while Herbart's interests lay mostly with *Gymnasium* and university students. Even so, he became an authority on Pestalozzi, publishing and lecturing on his methods, culminating in his expansive 1802 text *Pestalozzi's ABC of Sense-Perception*. Indeed, he credits reflection on Pestalozzi's concept of intuition as he a stimulus to his own mathematical view of mind (Herbart, 1903).

Herbart focused the Steiger boys' schooling on general learning, the perfection of character, and the development of rational thought. Specific skills could be acquired in later life, as needed. The classics were particularly useful for understanding human nature. In concert with the neo-classicism of the day, and the lessons of his own schooling, Herbart was convinced that Greek and Latin were a gateway to the powerful ideas of the ancients, an invaluable resource for the growth of moral insight. In a like manner, scientific instruction began with curiosity about nature, prompting the development of reason by revealing common principles and lawful relations, not as facts but as instruments of judgment.

In 1800, when his mother fell ill and his parents' divorce was imminent, Herbart relocated to the estate of a friend near Bremen where he prepared for the culmination of his university studies. After a mere two years of preparation, he successfully defended his dissertation on Pestalozzi 15 October 1802. Based on his impressive performance, the faculty invited him to defend his 12 theses in his habilitation disputation, through which he achieved full professor status the very next day. By 1802 he lectured in Göttingen and over the next six years he proved a highly popular teacher. Where other professors read their texts, Herbart employed an open Socratic style, engaging students in the effort to get them to think for themselves. His scholarly productivity was also impressive, resulting, in addition to his main educational work, the *General Pedagogy* (1806), important texts in philosophy that earned him the reputation as one of Germany most promising scholars.

Although initially happy in Göttingen, Herbart's situation changed in 1808 when the

conquering French authorities imposed draconian rules on the university. The unexpected offer of a professorship at the University of Königsberg arrived at the right moment. That fall he was appointed to the chair of philosophy previously held by Kant. A condition of his appointment was the establishment of a teacher training seminar. This was just the expertise Prussian authorities needed to rebuild the country after its defeat to Napoleon. Indeed, the following year he was drafted into the government department charged with establishing a national system of schooling. Under the leadership of Wilhelm von Humboldt, he worked on the curriculum of secondary education, emphasizing the need to guide future teachers in the kind of practical experience he had enjoyed as tutor to the Steiger children. He and Humboldt shared a commitment to the classics, the political importance of individuality, and the educational ideal of *Bildung*.

In 1810 the *Didaktisches Institut* was founded. A few talented students were required to work privately with pupils through the week before demonstrating their perfected lessons to Herbart and the group. This small-scale experiment continued until the end of the Napoleonic Wars, when funds were made available to establish a boarding school adjacent to the university. Opened in 1818, the *Pädagogisches Seminar* was intended as model for future normal schools suitable for the preparation of *Gymnasium* teachers (Kenkies, 2012, p. 270). But waning government interest in educational reform undercut Herbart's grand plans of exporting his pedagogic ideas to the country. Ultimately, his academic work faced a similar fate. For while Herbart's production of scholarly works was unmatched, his overarching goal of formulating an empirical psychology based on the principles of mathematics gained few adherents. Thus, while he published *Introductory Textbook of Philosophy* (1813), *Textbook of Psychology* (1816), *Psychology as a Science* (1824/1825), *General Metaphysics* (1828/1829) and *The Concise Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1831) during his years in Königsberg, he failed to secure the prestigious

chair of philosophy at the University of Berlin vacated after Hegel's death. Disappointed, Herbart returned to Göttingen in 1833 as Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy. Here in the final years of his life he published a systematic, compact overview of pedagogy, the *Outlines of Educational Doctrine* (1835). After suffering two strokes, he died on 13 August 1841 age 64 (Dollinger, 2011).

The reception of Herbart's educational ideas was intimately related to his professional reputation. Staying true to his theorized conception of pedagogical knowledge, he understood that teaching philosophy as a tool for understanding the world and focused on the intellectual development of his students rather than the transmission of set views on knowledge (Kinkel, 1908, p. 33). When he left Königsberg for Göttingen in 1833, he received many accolades. But above all, for colleagues and students alike, he was a true child of rationalism with an incorruptible commitment to truth and rational thought (p. 48). These ideals live on in his written works, finding their clearest expression in his *First Lecture of Pedagogy* (Herbart, 1802/1986), and his later 1806 treatise *General Pedagogy Derived from the Purpose of Education*. By the age of 28 Herbart had woven ethical and psychological ideas about human nature and the social good into a comprehensive and practical theory of education. While the entire orbit of this expansive system is beyond the reach of this paper, two of Herbart's central concepts serve to capture the spirit of his thought and its enduring value for educators of the present day: pedagogical tact and individuality.

Herbart's Science of Education

In part, the influence and authority of Herbart's educational thought flowed from his larger reputation as a systematic thinker the fields of philosophy and psychology. As Kim (2015) explains, Herbart's "interpretation of space had an important influence on Helmholtz's empirical theory of vision, and on Natorp's 'logicization' of Kantian spatio-temporal intuition. Herbart's arguments against psychological faculties were taken over by Wundt, and his notions of the *limen* and the

‘subconscious’ were fundamental to Freud’s psychoanalytic theory. In philosophy, Herbart anticipated key ideas of phenomenology.” Indeed, drawing upon these wider ideas he sought to establish education as an independent science grounded in the laws of mind.

Following the example of Newton, Herbart’s goal was to establish a mathematical science of the mind. Just as the physical world was governed by measurable forces, mental states and their intersections could be quantified to explain the development of the cognitive structures. What he termed the apperceptive mass served as the mechanism of thought. In contrast to faculty psychology, Herbart argued that mental powers were formed in the course of experience. This constructive process was the result of the struggle to create meaning through the subject’s interactions with the external world. Ultimately, Herbart’s central argument was that the active mind within had to perfect itself into the free, rational, and autonomous moral agent and teachers could help bring about this development by facilitating educative experiences. The role of pedagogy was thus to expand and strengthen the apperceptive mass that constituted the student’s horizons, their circle of thought (*Gesichtskreis*). This meant assimilating new content into a pre-existing mental structure and thereby continuously forming it. Interest had to be engaged, properties understood, and new objects of knowledge integrated into the cognitive whole under a common set of rules and principles.

Herbart’s efforts to form a science of education must be read against Enlightenment conceptions of human nature and knowledge. Rather than imposing truth and goodness from without, he followed Kant in developing understanding and character from within. Comenius’ *Great Didactic* (1910) drew upon the child’s everyday experiences in order to teach fixed truths about God’s Creation so that all would understand their religious duties. The German Enlightenment reversed this project. The internal powers of mind were to be developed so the individual could form their own rational judgments about the world and their conduct within it. Through the aesthetic

representation of the world, human judgment is to be formed by exemplary representations of the world through which students learn modes of understanding world as such, the *Modi des Weltverstehens* (Sivesind & Luimes, 2017, p.21) For Herbart, education was about "what students should become" (Sivesind & Luimes, 2017, p.24) rather than what they should know. Human self-formation had to be at the forefront of the teacher’s mind and instruction transforms content into knowledge of the world, i.e. turning subject matter into meaning, as Hopmann (2007) explains: “Any given matter can represent many different meanings, and any given meaning can be opened up by many different matters” (p. 116). Consider, for example, a flower. Once plucked and in the classroom, it is no longer what it is in the world, yet it offers pathways into poetry about flowers, films, or the chemistry behind photosynthesis. How the content is approached and to what educative end-in-view it is used is entirely a matter of *Didaktik* and pedagogical tact. The essential art of teaching rests on utilizing, as Hopmann (2007) pinpoints, “different approaches to one and the same subject matter based on the different possibilities to unfold an educative meaning for different learners“ (p.117). Professional autonomy is captured in the very act of choosing and sequencing content, and it calls for experience-based judgment and flexible decision-making. In the modern German tradition, this process is known as *Didaktik* (see figure 1).

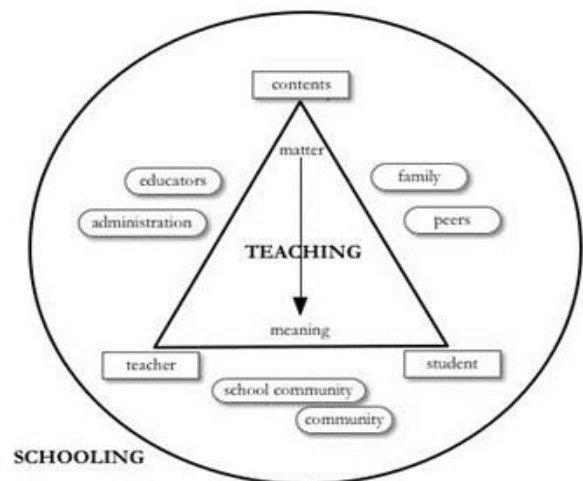


Figure 1: *Didaktik* model of teaching in the context of schooling, figure by author.

Pedagogical Tact

Addressing university students on the nature of pedagogy as a discipline in his *First Lecture of Pedagogy* (1802), Herbart introduces the concept of tact, an idea similar to the Greek notion of *phronesis*. His goal is to unite theory (*episteme*) and practice (*techne*) by demonstrating that teaching must be understood as an art informed by science. Like *phronesis*, tact is a power of mind and character that permits the individual to make rapid, creative, intelligent, and informed judgments in infinitely diverse contexts. Pedagogical tact thus stands opposed to any technocratic manual of actions. What Herbart offers the future teacher is not a skillset, but a humanistic ideal, something to aspire to and create within themselves. This clearly parallels his distinction between education and teaching, i.e. the transmission of knowledge. Only the educated teacher can hope to foster the pedagogical ideal of *Bildung*.

Herbart's argument begins with a distinction between the theory and art of education. Theory is an organized set of axioms and principles; art a set of means-end skills brought together for some practical purpose. One is a product of philosophical thought, the other requires immediate action (Herbart, 1802/1986, p. 55). Theory provides knowledge of the universal at the expense of the particular; grounded in the particular, practice is effective yet circumscribed and routine. One can almost hear a Kantian maxim; theory without practice is empty, practice without theory is blind. In specific conditions, an effective art might be discovered through "accident, through empathy, or indeed parental love," but an expert educator must "know how to treat each temper, each disposition and each age differently" (Herbart, 1802/1986, 55). Educational theory provides such insights, deepens knowledge and broadens perspectives, yet, it cannot operate effectively unless it is applied to the concrete conditions of the learning situation. This demands a unique form

of thought that "occupies the place that theory leaves vacant, and so becomes the immediate director of practice" (Herbart, 1903, p. 20). Students were to realize their innate potential through a sequence of multiple, different, and intellectually inspiring tasks that would help them perfect their inner abilities and talents. Each person had to create their own nature. Teachers could aid and prompt students, but it was up to the individual to realize their own potential. Pedagogical tact enabled the teacher to choose the most appropriate material for the student to engage with. It included an assessing each student's readiness and learning horizons based upon knowledge about their background, progress, and ability. Each educational experience had to be dovetailed for the specific learning situation. This complex, multifaceted challenge is what qualifies teaching as a profession.

The appraisal of a teacher hinges on how tact emerges within that person and whether the person remains truthful to the laws that science provides. Tact forms "through deliberation, thinking, inquiry" (Herbart, 1806/1986, p. 57) whereas teachers prepare themselves—not individual future actions, but their art of teaching on a whole—through science. It further needs ingenuity to do what each situation requires, because each action is only relevant to the degree that it contributes to the enterprise of pedagogy (Herbart, 1806/1986, p. 58). The important point was to provide the tools necessary for this intellectual construct.

It is by reflection, reasoning, inquiry, in short, by science, [that] the educator must prepare not his future action in individual cases so much as himself, his tone of mind, his head as well as his heart, for correctly receiving, apperceiving, feeling, and judging the phenomena awaiting him and the situation in which he may be placed. (Herbart, 1903, p. 21)

"Only in action," he continues,

do we learn the art and acquire tact,

aptness, quickness, dexterity; but even in action only he learns the art who has in previous thinking learned the science; has made it his own; by it has attuned himself; has predetermined the impressions to be made upon him by future experience. (Herbart, 1903, p. 22)

By itself, theory could not produce “an infallible master of the educator’s art” (Herbart, 1903, p. 22). But it can teach how to learn from pedagogic successes and failures. Armed with an appreciation of the moral ends of education and the psychological principles governing learning and development, theory empowers the reflective educator to analyze, assess, and methodize their practice in increasingly powerful ways. The parallel with moral autonomy is instructive. The virtuous person, Herbart insists, is not one who mechanically obeys conventions but, through the “long, attentive, and impartial contemplation of human relations to himself and to all that surrounds him” (Herbart, 1903, p. 26). has developed a principled understanding of the moral order:

This tact, which impels the man of character to swift and resolute action, is especially needed also by the educator, in order that he may know on the spot what is to be done and do it rightly and with energy. If an educator lacks this tact his personality will not have weight; never will he prevail by authority. (Herbart, 1903, p. 26)

This is a telling insight for those who would challenge the professional standing of the teacher.

The lecture concludes on the notion that forming tact relates to a way of pedagogical thinking (*pädagogische Sinnesart*) that is unique to pedagogy and the teacher, a way of seeing the world, so to speak. It emerges from the balance of theory and practice, and it contributes to the debate of education theory and education practice that has been “an integral part of development of education

science in the 18th century” (Kenklies, 2012, p. 265) and to this day. His contribution to this debate is what makes Herbart an “iconic author of German education science” (Kenklies, 2012, p. 265), no less because he distinctly argues against education practice void of any theory. Herbart demands that teachers “realize their own horizons and the dependency on their own thoughts and practices ... by acknowledging the existence of other ways of educating (Kenklies, 2012, p. 270). This is what others coined restraint in teaching (Hopmann, 2007; Westbury, 2000): education theory generates awareness that protects teachers against the jogtrot and it tasks them as much as the student to exhibit morality in acting as moral persons. Autonomy as foundation of the teaching profession and the enlightened human being is the expression of such morality (Kenklies, 2012, p. 271).

Herbart’s lecture remains a foundational reading to this because it speaks to core understandings of what it means to teach for the purpose of education (*Bildung*); it continues to be at the core of what future teachers read at universities and in programs that follow the *Didaktik* tradition. Keeping the concern for the learner’s growth at the forefront of each consideration, tact informs “the agile teacher’s action towards wise, situational judgment“ (English, 2013, p. 49). As such, it is improvisational yet grounded in education theory and it gives productive meaning to teachable, golden moments that emerge from a teacher’s creative, ingenious reaction to a situation (English, 2013, p. 51). In that way, the teacher develops the “educated conscience of pedagogical responsibility” (English, 2013, p. 52), a specific way of pedagogical thinking that knows about the limits of teaching, as Herbart taught his students: “World and nature do more for the student than education may pride itself on.” (Herbart, 1802/1986, p. 58)

Individuality

Herbart’s *General Pedagogy* opens with that paradox at the center of his theory; how to educate another for self-determination. As English summarizes, Herbart unpacks the

paradox of educating for self-determination through determination-by-another through “developing and listening closely to *their own* inner self-critical voice.” (English, 2013, p. 48). Reflective practice tasks teachers with questioning their judgments and with forming an inner censor that knows about the limits of teaching.

Developing individual potential not only promotes personal happiness and wellbeing, but it also serves the diverse needs of the modern state. With these strictures in mind, Herbart repeatedly warns about the consequences of not allowing character to form in its own way and against authoritative schooling that asks students to replicate their teachers as “small children treat their dolls the way they are treated themselves” (Herbart, 1806/1986, p. 76). He also opposes over-education. He calls for restraint, for abstaining from everything that is expendable: no breaking the child’s will, no dominating its mood or disturbing its cheerfulness. The teacher must not “cripple the action of the future man” (p. 84) but instead develop the student’s ability to think for themselves rather than serving the needs and interests of others.

Developing pedagogical tact necessitates the same self-formation in the teacher that Herbart advocates for students. “What a teacher strives towards depends on his horizon” (Herbart, 1806/1986, p. 71), so developing and forming this horizon is essential to becoming a teacher. As a role model, they “seriously and purposefully engage with a student with work that meets (the student’s) interest and against which all games become petty (...) and disappear.” (p. 72) Given the complexity of these tasks, Herbart’s standard for teachers is high. As role models, they must exemplify what guides their students. Only a teacher who can demonstrate the role of self-reflection in the government of their thought and behavior is equipped to lead students and to “cultivate the inner struggle for self- education and self-growth” (English, 2013, p. 184). No profession could be more important to personal and national progress. “Comfortable excuses” (p. 74) about the teacher’s ability or the student’s intelligence cannot be tolerated. “The residue of

pedagogical experiments are the mistakes of the student as a man” (p. 74).

Herbart’s ideas of pedagogy offered a radically new understanding of the relationship between theory and practice, an exciting agenda for practical research, and a powerful justification for the authority of the teacher. These powerful insights proved central to the development of the German educational thought. As Kenklies (2012) summarizes, in the *Didaktik* tradition,

pedagogical tact is what enlightens education practice through its theory and in doing so, strengthens the teaching profession as a reflective practice that theorizes itself. It accepts the categorical difference between theory and practice and offers a better understanding of both. (p. 274)

Herbart also remains iconic for his demand that teachers “realize their own horizons and the dependency on their own thoughts and practices . . . by acknowledging the existence of other ways of educating (Kenklies, 2012, p. 270). This call for open mindedness has been identified as the imperative of restraint in teaching (Hopmann, 2007; Westbury, 2000); the recognition that educational theory protects teachers against routine, tasking them—as much as the student—to exhibit intelligence and creativity in their work. The teaching profession must model the autonomy the enlightened reason (Kenklies, 2012, p. 271). Above all, Herbart’s writings remain foundational because they speak to the core understanding of what it means to educate for *Bildung* and employ pedagogic tact to inform theoretically grounded, wise action in diverse learning situations.

Travelling ideas: The German Herbartianismus and its United States export

Thirty years after Herbart’s death in 1841, Tuiskon Ziller (1817-1882), Chair of Pedagogy at the University of Leipzig, and Wilhelm Rein (1847-1929), who held a similar position to Ziller at the University of Jena,

spearheaded the German Herbartian movement (*Herbartianismus*) determined to improve public education through the employment of scientifically informed instruction. By that time, Herbart's metaphysical and psychological theories had been discredited and replaced by positivistic and experimental studies of sensory and cognitive processing. Even his basic goal of moral development was easily ignored. However, his Herbartianism had a very different tenor to its namesake. Where Herbart looked to the preparation of university students for the *Gymnasium*, Ziller—responding to the social, economic, political realities of the late Nineteenth Century—sought the improvement of the population through standardized instruction in the elementary school. His chief insight, in line with Herbart's teachings, was that this could best be achieved through a general education that enriches the child's circle of thought. Wilhelm Rein also led the way in producing the materials for this extensive curricular reformation. He formulated what was to be the most enduring feature of the Herbartianist movement, the five-point lesson plan—preparation, presentation, association, generalization, and application. Herbart's structures on the formation of the apperceptive mass were thus turned into a series of technocratic steps indicating how external content can be imparted into the student's mind.

Ziller and Rein's work spread internationally, most notably to the United States where it dominated educational thought for more than a decade. Its introduction can be traced to Edmund J. James who returned to Illinois State Normal University in 1875 with his doctorate from Jena after studying in Berlin, Leipzig and Halle. In the following years, a number of his students—including Charles DeGarmo, Charles and Frank McMurry—traveled to study under Rein (Oelkers, 1989). The program in Jena included a *Theoretikum* with lectures on ethics, psychology, the pedagogical horizon, subject-matter, and cultural-historical steps of teaching. The *Praktikum* offered hands-on practice with teaching units and the *Kritikum* discussed observed lessons. Upon their return they quickly popularized these central concepts,

stimulating a flood of curricular materials for American schools. Framed by DeGarmo's *Essentials of Method* (1889) and McMurry's *Elements of General Method* (1892), the movement quickly gained momentum. By 1895, with the support of prominent reformers such as John Dewey and Nicholas Murrey Butler, the National Herbart Society was born. But the high tide of Herbartianism soon receded. Many, such as Dewey, who had aligned themselves with the cause in opposition to traditional views of instruction found the core ideas of cultural epochs ill-formed and out of phase with developments in child psychology. Herbart's notion of the apperceptive mass was particularly problematic. But if these elements rapidly dropped out of curriculum theorizing, the Herbartian emphasis on logical organization of content became a mainstay of efficiency era planning. The five-step lesson plan was an ideal means to regulate what and how teachers taught. What had started as pedagogical tact eventually evolved into an instrument of technocratic control (Dunkel, 1970).

Herbartianismus had initially dovetailed with the positivistic thought and the *Zeitgeist* for the natural sciences (Dunkel, 1970, p. 82) but forty years later, it faced the same accusations originally levelled against the original Herbart. Its teachings were called old, speculative, dilettante, and obsolete. Like the original, *Herbartianismus* was attacked for being too focused on individuals at the expense of societal rules. It was charged with being too moralistic, too intellectual, and incompatible with the emerging personality research and social pedagogy of the 1920s. Moreover, as Herbart's psychology was attacked as being too speculative, so the Herbartians' view of mind and learning was discredited by advances in experimental psychology. In 1908, while Rein describes their paradigm as bendable and preceptive, less a theory and more theorems and tenets, the "ruinous debate was already ongoing" (Oelkers, 1989, p. 82).

Notwithstanding its broad success in Germany, German *Herbartianismus* had vanished by 1926. Its rise and disappearance

are a story of a paradigm shift from initial optimism to the same cries of crisis that had secured its rise. Indeed, it fell before the same criticisms that were levelled against Herbart. Its teachings were characterized as speculative, dilettante, and obsolete. Like the original, it was attacked for being too focused on individuals at the expense of societal rules. It was charged with being too moralistic, too intellectual, and incompatible with the emerging methods of psychological research (Oelkers, 1989).

A standard claim is that German *Herbartianism* misconstrued its master. Oelkers' (1989) more plausible thesis is that Herbart's initial work was adapted to the changing times and the needs of the day. But what might have been feasible for building the foundations of public schooling was unfit for the purpose of teacher education in the present day. German and American Herbartianism teach valuable lessons about the translation of ideas through time and place. Both have little to do with Herbart's writings and his pedagogical thought. It was easy to distort his arguments and interpret his pedagogical insights through the lens of current concerns. A more valuable project, perhaps, is to reconstruct Herbart's thought in its original context to reclaim his conceptually powerful philosophy of education.

A Renaissance: Herbart's education philosophy for education reform

Interest in German-speaking philosophy of education, and particularly in Herbart's work, is high and rising. His contributions to pedagogic thought have been rediscovered by a new generation of scholars seeking alternatives to currently prevalent views on teaching and learning (Banks, 2005, p. 208; Hopmann, 2009; Kim, 2015). This renaissance reinvigorates an earlier peak of interest in the 1980s (Metz, 1995) and validates the import of his ideas for contemporary discussions about the future of public schooling. In search for alternatives to the American accountability paradigm of the past 20 years, debates about transitioning from narrow accountability toward a more

humanistic vision of public schooling are ongoing.

Equity and excellence had been the pillars of education reform before the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001) shifted this balance in favor of excellence. In doing so, it disregarded the original policy intent of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016, p. 6) and even though the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) is less narrowly constructed and less punitive, it replicates the NCLB accountability paradigm in which equity remains a mere means to excellence's end.

Herbart's pedagogy as a science places the teaching in the hands of experienced practitioners. Pedagogical tact is their intellectual ability to identify a case of something is situational judgment based on experience and theory alike, both informing pedagogical action (Hopmann, 2009). In that sense, Herbart is practical without being technocratic and firm on educability as the grounding on which teaching for morality and rationality rests. Competing purposes of education are constitutive to education as a field and a practice, not a problem to be solved (Labaree, 2017), and Herbart's pedagogical tact accepts dissonances as a precondition for creating educative experiences.

Herbart's philosophy of education of Herbart's life can teach teachers to think situationally in their pedagogical practice, and there is a desperate need of thoughtful teachers (English, 2013, p. 158) given the scholarly debate of public schooling in both the United States and German-speaking and Nordic Europe. The history of educational thought that formed the first systems of public schooling might provide an inspiration for finding alternatives to the "what works" paradigm that commands technocratic structures and so-called achievement tests. How to assure the quality of public schooling remains open for debate; Herbart's work offers insight into the art of teaching that carries wisdom and power to transform social interaction into teachable, golden moments. It makes the profession interesting and worthy, engages educators and students alike, and focuses on each of their own

self-formation processes.

Herbart's work informs scholars of education history and historiography that seek to understand the foundations of modern German-speaking and Nordic education. Scholars interested in education reform find inspiration and clarity in Herbart's uncompromising commitment to pedagogy for and together with the enlightened human being. It foregrounds situational judgment and experiential understanding of schooling. It affirms that the world as we experience *is* the real world. That calls upon education to capitalize on people and education as a reflective practice that readily meets its responsibility for each student as an individual. This is particularly relevant in view of the current policy developments in the German-speaking world that move away from the roots of *Didaktik* and toward systems of accountability reminiscent of the past 40 years of American education policy.

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