

*Thematic Article***Preface**

Hungarian Educational Research Journal  
2016, Vol. 6(3) 6–10  
<http://herj.lib.unideb.hu>  
© The Author(s) 2016  
Debrecen University Press



**Tamas Kozma <sup>1</sup>& Ildiko Olah<sup>2</sup>**

DOI: 10.14413/herj.2016.03.01.

Wolfgang Mitter, of whom this compilation is about, was born in 1927 in Czechoslovakia, (Trutnov, now part of the Czech Republic), and died in 2014 in Oberursel, Germany. He spent his life among beautiful mountains and in scenic villages, where he kept on returning until the end of his life. He had grand esplanades in Austria, Slovenia, the Tatra Mountains, and in the Hungarian mountains as well. He had said the reason behind this was that it was more cost-effective this way. In truth, both his heart and his memories attached him to Central Europe.

Mitter professor's career tied him to colleges of teacher training and university faculties of arts (1954-64 Kassel, 1964-72 Lueneburg and Hamburg, 1974-2007 Frankfurt a.M.). He found his true workplace when he began his work at the German Institute for International and Comparative Education (DIPF, Deutsches Institut für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung). Here, he became one of the four directors (Comparative Education) and served as the director of the institute for two terms.

This institute, the Frankfurt DIPF granted him the opportunity to be the educational representative of the German “change through rapprochement” policy (Willy Brand, 1974). He had visited the so called Socialist countries on numerous occasions from the 70s of the previous century until the political turn of the 1989/90. He became affiliated with the local pedagogical pieces of research, the institutes, and the researchers and greatly contributed to the modernization of these researchers and pieces of research after the regime change.

Equally important was, both for him and his colleagues, the reunification of Germany. The integration of Germany's eastern half – the Soviet occupied former German Democratic Republic – was not an effortless process. Due to the political fights and decisions made under pressure even those notions were divested in East Berlin that could have remained and were considered valuable in the academia of occupied Berlin. An important deed of

---

<sup>1</sup> University of Debrecen, Hungary. Email address: kozmat@ella.hu

<sup>2</sup> University of Pecs, Hungary. Email address: ildiko.olah@gmail.com

Mitter's career was safeguarding the values of the Academy of Pedagogy (founded on Soviet standards), for example the former pedagogy trade union library. (Today it is the Frankfurt DIPF's library and museum of the history of education.)

Yet, Mitter did not remain the educational diplomat of the "change through rapprochement" and the German reunification. These activities – from the teacher training to his university professorship and education diplomacy – he understood and practiced as international and comparative pedagogy. In this field of science he was and remained the disciple of the previously well-known German scientist Oskar Anweiler. Both belonged to the school which did not think of comparative pedagogy as merely cultural diplomacy, but considered it a scientific discipline; searching for the place of comparative pedagogy in the fields of teacher training programmes and social sciences.

That is how Mitter became the internationally prominent figure of comparative pedagogy. From 1981 to 1985 he was the chairperson of CESE (Comparative Education Societies in Europe), between 1991 and 1995 he was the chairperson of WCCES (World Congress of Comparative Education Societies), and between 1997 and 2000 he was the chairperson of WAER (World Association of Educational Researchers, now WERA). During his chairmanship comparative pedagogy – as scientific activity and as educational development – reached its peak. This fortunately coincided with the formation of the European Research Area, and the unfolding of its organizations (ECER, European Educational Research Association), that fill this place as representatives of education. Mitter grew up, created and became an international scientific figure in a Europe that experienced the horrors of world war divisions, and so he put his faith in a unified Europe and globalising world. It was an era of great hopes and vigour. Mitter did not take part in the reunification of Europe solely as a researcher. He had personal reasons for his motivation as well, the fate of his family; he was committed to the cause of achieving a unified, viable Europe.

The HERJ's following studies are devoted to the memory of Mitter. The preparation of approximately 2 years preceded it. We began as soon as we were informed of Mitter's passing and we publish it now – to honour his memory. As our starting point we contacted the authors of the Festschrift, which was written to commemorate the 70th birthday of Mitter, edited by his beloved institute the DIPF. Many of the former authors replied, welcomed the initiative of HERJ and recalled Mitter both orally and in written format. The great interest and substantial feedback showed that we were on the right track to organize a memorial issue dedicated to Wolfgang Mitter.

In the following, we present eight studies written in the memory of Mitter. Among the authors there are Europeans and Americans as well, which reflects Wolfgang Mitter's great authority and effect in international erudition. It also reflects Mitter professor's accomplishment in fields of practicing and managing science, in the domestic sphere (Germany) and on the international scene as well. All writings are presented with scientificity, even if their genres and styles differ from one another. Among them we can

find pieces of research and recollections, of historical type and those looking towards the future. What connect them are their scientific demand, comparative aspect and international mind-set.

*Christel Adick* recognizes and precisely describes the 'soft power' (Joseph Nye) characteristics of German cultural and educational politics (diplomacy). The Goethe-Institutes, a German Schools Abroad network's or the German Academic Exchange Service's image is always twofold. On the one hand, it successfully builds friendship groups around Germany; on the other hand, it significantly contributes to the new image building of Germany. From the perspective of comparative education these institutions, their actuation and programmes can be regarded as a peculiar fulfilment of educational transfer.

Wolfgang Mitter visited East-Central European countries readily, gave presentations at universities and organized scientific events. *Laszlo Brezsnyanszky* reviews the 50 years of the University of Debrecen's (Hungary) Pedagogy Department, based on his institutional research. Between 1912 and 19760, from its foundation there have been four professors of this department. All four have understood pedagogy differently both as practice and as research. However different these understandings might have been, the image of pedagogy was basically shaped by German pedagogy. Thus, they were active in the same intellectual sphere as the one from which Mitter emerged.

*Stephen P Heyneman* was division chief in charge of Education, Health and Social Protection in the Technical department of the World Bank. In his study he recalls his visits to the former Soviet Union, and after its dissolution to Russia "Newcomers were on both sides of the table", writes the author. The representatives of the Russian side presumed to know education in an international comparison (governance, finance, study material development) and had specific concepts of what they wanted. These ideas however, were not based on personal experience, but on readings and preconceptions. He, the representative of the World Bank, also had prejudices and theoretical knowledge about the regime change. That is how the rebuilding of education systems had to be commenced in Russia and other countries of the former Soviet empire.

For a long time Mitter was the co-editor of the reference book entitled *Educational Systems of Europe*. In his essay *Wolfgang Hoerner* evokes the editorial debates. One recurrent question of these debates was: is it possible to compare the education system of European nation states, at least in the scientific sense. Considering comparative education's four models (idiographic, meliorist, evolutionist, experimental) Europe's education systems can be understood as cases, comparable based on their history, governance, structure, and new development trends. Thus the reference book introduces case studies, but these cases (of the respective national education systems) are analysed based on these aspects.

*Vandra L Masemann* got to know Wolfgang Mitter in 1987, after he had become the chairperson of the German Society of Pedagogy's comparative department. They worked together from 1991 to 96 in the WCCES (World Council of Comparative Education Societies). She recalls Mitter as a scientist and scientific manager, who always strived to reconcile former foes under the comparative aegis and to bringing the former adversaries together around a table to negotiate and defuse tension. Masemann also recalls the companion and colleague with whom it was enjoyable to spend leisure time with in the breaks of conferences and congresses, because he was fond of excursions in nature and (as a former teacher) he had a vast knowledge of historical and geographic knowledge. As joint author she has proven himself to be tactful, cooperative, and rather helpful over the course of preparing the concerted documents.

Wolfgang Mitter was not only the superior *Botho von Kopp* but also his friend. Botho von Kopp was the one who edited a memorial issue in celebration of Mitter's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. The thoughts that the author summarized in this study are the recalled conversations that he had had with Mitter over their shared years at DIPF. A central theme of these conversations was about the possibility of predicting the future. Idealist German philosophy teaches that mankind's history – and subsequently the history of education – is the unfolding of ideas over time. In truth, the future is unpredictable and can bring unexpected turns. Comparative pedagogy strives to get a solid grasp of this unpredictability when, based on their history it attempts to predict the education system's possible development course.

*Dietmar Waterkamp's* starting point is also that the future is uncertain. Europe's history has been, in previous centuries, defined by the religious world view; since the Enlightenment it has been defined by the world view of freedom. The religious world view suggests safety, whereas the world view of freedom leaves the children drowning in uncertainty. Once, the role of schools and pedagogy was to mediate the religious world view, now it is to mediate values which can offer safety to children (the world is good, beautiful and true). These values are to be mediated to the children through the education of different sciences, to grant them safety.

*Horst Weishaupt* asks the following question; how the present demographic changes affect the national (German) education by international standards and domestically. He emphasises three changes. The first is age groups with decreasing numbers that have replaced the previous baby boom age groups. The second is the changed labour market that requires new, well-qualified workforce. The third is international scale migration. The author demonstrates through examples from Germany, how these changes affect the transformation of the school network, especially small rural schools.

All authors' respective writings are dedicated to pay tribute to the memory of Wolfgang Mitter and can be read in the current issue of HERJ. From these studies education's impressive international panorama and its inventory of problems unfold, genuinely, often in a personal fashion. We express our sincere gratitude to the authors for their

contribution to the Wolfgang Mitter memorial issue. Let us also recognize with great thanks the contributions of the following researchers of the Doctoral School of Education at the University of Pecs (Hungary). *Adrienne Acs, Katalin Farady, Ildiko Jenak, Ilona Millei, Klaudia Szabad and Orsolya Uherkovich*. They supported the editorial works of the Guest Editors with intensive internet research as well as personal enquiries.