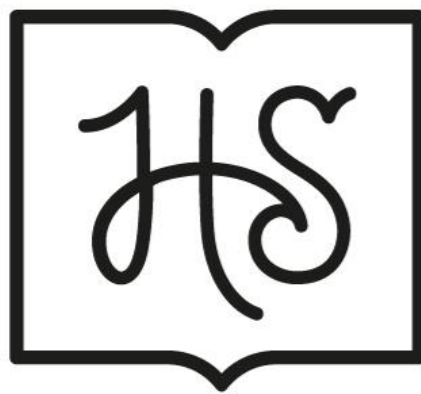


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# Thinking Education beyond Borders – The Pedagogic Correspondence Legacy of Wilhelm Rein as an Access to Historical Transnational Contacts and Networks of Educational Reform

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## ABSTRACT

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*Thinking Education beyond Borders – The Pedagogic Correspondence Legacy of Wilhelm Rein as an Access to Historical Transnational Contacts and Networks of Educational Reform*

The article wants to present the first research results from a project in progress that aims on the scientific edition of and basic research on the pedagogical correspondence legacy of Wilhelm Rein (1847–1929), who was one of the internationally most influential educationalists and teacher educators of his time. It wants to approach the phenomenon of networking education from a historical perspective and emphasize that transnational contacts and networks are not a new phenomenon in the field of education but that common objectives and motives traditionally have brought together educationalists from diverse realities. The sources analyzed date from 1869 to 1929. They constitute one of the most extensive surviving professional correspondence legacies that prove and display widespread cross-country and cross-cultural historical professional contacts and networks among educationalists that have partly substantially influenced the development of modern educational theory and practice of educational systems from all over the world. This contribution will give first insights into the source corpus and the (research on) the network structures in question.

## 1. Introduction

This article intends to outline the first basic research results from a digital humanities project in progress that aims at the scientific analysis, editing and digital edition of the pedagogical correspondence legacy of Wilhelm Rein (1847–1929). The project *Digital Edition Correspondence Legacy Wilhelm Rein – Documents of International Educational Networking* contributes to basic and network research in the realm of a cross-national and cross-cultural history of education. Focused on *pedagogical reform* as a central paradigm understood

as a connective but ambiguous motif, it wants to generate basic findings on transnational educational network and contact structures and on transnational reception and transfer of educational theories and practices in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, it will provide a searchable annotated bio-bibliographical online edition of the source documents.

## 2. Reform as a key motif of education

The research sketched herein focuses on *reform* as a central educational motif. It is based on a broad concept of *pedagogical (or educational) reform* understood as a multilayered ambiguous motif that is – following Luhmann and Schorr (1988) – inherent to education (also Koerrenz 2014, pp. 31–36) and thus of major significance for the development, interpretation and analysis of pedagogical discourses in general. It takes a continuous development as an immanent dynamic of pedagogy; at the same time one has to assume that the term *reform* may have different connotations depending on the discourses and actors that make use of it. In other words, the thought that education has to undergo changes, can follow various motivations depending on theoretical, cultural or ideological backgrounds and it can pursue ideas of restoration, conservation, adaption or progression. It is assumed that reform concerns do not only determine theories and practices of pedagogical currents typically assigned to the so-called *Reformpädagogik* (Education Nouvelle, Progressive Education) (e.g. Koerrenz and Winkler, 2013, pp. 88–101), but that they generally influence and affect pedagogical development. Progress and change are thus understood as inscribed in pedagogy. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify periods particularly marked by new reform concerns. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, new approaches and practices developed worldwide, which have had a significant impact on our current educational landscape. Reforms in teacher training, schooling, adult education or early childhood education, for example were linked to the establishment and professionalization of educational science, the increasing importance of the above-mentioned positions of progressive education and, in general, to a strengthening of the motive of pedagogical reform as a pedagogical paradigm (Hofstetter and Schneuwly, 2006, Hofstetter, 2010, Koerrenz, 2014).

Contemporary actors followed the hypothesis (still widely accepted today) that innovations in education also bring about innovations in the realities of life and in human, social and cultural consciousness. This led to the fact that the ascribed importance of the demand for pedagogical reform extended beyond the area of the explicitly pedagogical (see *ibid.*, exemplary for France see Trouillet, 1991, pp. 2–4, p. 19; with a focus on progressive education see Skiera 2010, pp. 45–101). Pedagogical reform appears as a transnational motive that could stimulate discourse across disciplines and countries and influence the development of new types of theories and practices.

The *institutionalization* of new educational approaches and structures normally takes place on a national level and differs from country to country. Nevertheless, most of these developments have occurred under mutual influence (Caruso, 2014, Droux and Hofstetter, 2014). National reforms in education are generally affected by transnational discourses and contacts between actors of various professional backgrounds. (*Ibid.*; Oelkers, 2010).

Concerning the linking networks and the very actors and countries involved, there is still a considerable need for research. Recently, studies on historical networks in education are reinforced (Roldán Vera and Fuchs, 2019, p. 9). The research interest of such studies is normally – or rather necessarily – transnationally oriented, viz. it aims on the analysis of cross-national developments. Conventional sources, however, like primary or secondary professional literature only give a very limited access to the inner structures of such networks. They mainly reflect official professional discourses and positions. Thus, they do not show much more than the tip of the iceberg. For a comprehensive research on educational network structures one should be able to refer to sources, which prove the knots and edges of such structures and that authentically reveal uncensored professional positions and discourses that have influenced the interchange between the actors involved. Correspondence documents like those that have survived in the legacy of Rein count among the sources that largely fulfill such demands.

The outlined project wants to approach transnational reform discourses in education via the editing and analysis of the named correspondence documents. It follows the assumption that they record central coeval contacts and discourses that have influenced pedagogic developments in and between different nations. This assumption results as a first hypothesis from the professional biographies of the correspondents involved and from first provisional content analyses of the sources. The main questions are (a) if and how far the motif pedagogical reform as a connecting paradigm has facilitated the professional discourse between different actors within the contact network of Rein and (b) if and how far the ambiguity of this paradigm viz. varied interpretations have led to professional misunderstandings and disagreements.

### **3. The source corpus – The pedagogic correspondence legacy of Wilhelm Rein**

The cross-national correspondence legacy of Rein dates from 1869–1929 and comprises more than 6.300 documents of 3.280 correspondents from more than 40 nations. Its research potential also results from the importance of Rein for the international development of pedagogy and educational science. Rein, the first full professor of pedagogy in Germany, directed the *Pädagogisches Universitäts-Seminar*, a teacher training seminar at Jena University that included a training school and coupled theoretical and practical elements of teacher education. Rein had earned an international reputation as a teacher educator and educational reformer. His publications have been internationally accepted. His work *Pädagogik im Grundriss (1890)* (Outlines of Pedagogics) has been translated into several languages. Rein increasingly considered an international readership and transnational perspectives on educational problems and questions, which is illustrated e.g. by the presentation and broad reception of his *Encyclopädisches Handbuch für Pädagogik* that he has issued in two editions (1895–1899: seven volumes and 1903–1910: eleven volumes). He put emphasis on “bringing into discourse actors of all countries and pedagogical positions, of all types of schools and other institutions of the educational system” (Zeißig, 1911, translation: Grundig de Vazquez).

Although Rein's professional positions and ideas have been considerably influenced by Johann Friedrich Herbart (one of his correspondence partners, W. Alexejeff, has called him "letzter bedeutendster Herbartianer" (last major Herbartian) in a letter (Alexejeff, 1929, p. 1) to his wife, Marianne Rein), his professional work has reached far beyond the school of pedagogical herbartianism. As an influential "scientific coordinator" (Coriand, 2009, p. 79; Coriand and Koerrenz, 2009 – translation: Grundig de Vazquez) he counted among his professional contacts educationalists from different fields, schools, institutions and positions. Thus, his extensive professional network surmounted cultural and national but also ideological, status and gender borders. Under his influence Jena and its pedagogical institutions became a "place of international relations" (Graff and Schotte, 2009 – translation: Grundig de Vazquez) of particular success, but also a place of inter- viz. trans-professional contacts.

Rein's correspondence legacy documents many of these contacts and gives an insight into substantial parts of professional transnational discourses and exchange between educational schools and movements during this period. It adds to correspondence legacies already edited<sup>1</sup>. Prospectively, it may be extended by other legacies of his correspondence partners. The pedagogic subjects treated by the writers reflect typical topics, motifs and concerns of the time. Rein's heterogeneous professional contacts have been located in the crossroads of networks of different scope, duration and degree of internationality.

It is somewhat surprising that this source corpus has been so little explored even it has been known to researchers for at least more than 50 years. One could refer, for example to a letter from Elisabeth Kutzer (1902–1988), first headmaster of Hermann-Lietz-School Hohenwehrda (1941–1968). In 1969 she contacted the descendants of Rein to enquire letters from Hermann Lietz to Rein. During the 1970s, Horst-Erich Pohl and Klaus Goebel have edited and analyzed individual documents from the corpus (Pohl, 1972; Goebel, 1976). In his historic-biographical work about the *Pedagogy of Wilhelm Rein* Pohl has cited chosen letters concerning certain aspects of Rein's biography or the development of his (Rein's) pedagogical positions (Pohl, 1972). For his complete edition of the letters of Friedrich Wilhelm Dörpfeld, Goebel has transcribed the correspondence between Dörpfeld and Rein (Goebel, 1976, p. 415, p. 533). In the sequel it seems that the original sources were not of scientific interest for more than three decades. In 2009, the author of this contribution started analyzing individual letters by French correspondence partners of Rein in the course of her research on the French reception of pedagogical Herbartianism (Grundig de Vazquez, 2015, pp. 317–318; Grundig de Vazquez, 2016; Grundig de Vazquez, 2018) and she has published the facsimiles of seven letters in the appendix of her Ph.D thesis (Grundig de Vazquez, 2015, pp. 345–356). Beyond that the correspondence legacy of Rein is still mostly unexplored.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. those of his correspondence partners Friedrich Wilhelm Dörpfeld, Wilhelm Flitner und Friedrich Paulsen (Goebel, 1976; Glaser, 2013; Bartholome, Kabara and Pronczynsky, 2013).

#### 4. Scientific edition of the source corpus

To take into account the internationality of the source corpus, the central approach of the analysis and edition is a transnational<sup>2</sup> historical one. It is understood as a research perspective that transcends locally limited historiographies and that interprets geopolitical borders as merely attributed limitations of historical developments that have to be overcome (Pernau, 2011, pp. 17–19). This goes beyond international comparative approaches that normally consider national historiographies as individual viz. independent lines of development (Caruso, 2014). A transnational view on the history of education concentrates on phenomena of pedagogical reception that transcends borders and boundaries. It wants to make comprehensible national developments by embedding them into an overall picture of the development of the history of education. This complex overall picture is seen as an individual historiography itself. It is more than the mere sum of national historiographies (Ibid.), which in turn are not only parts or reductions of a transnational perspective. A transnational historiography of education is on an equal footing with its national counterparts and opens new research prospects (Mayer, 2019). Both perspectives are closely intertwined and interdependent (Popkewitz, 2019). History of education is seen as a phenomenon, which on an international level is characterized both by the overcoming of boundaries and a demarcation between different cultures, nations and educational systems (Mann, 2006). To generate a profound historical understanding, the research on pedagogical reception should therefore combine comparative and transnational approaches (Popkewitz, 2019) and gain knowledge about the actors involved, their connecting structures and the topics and discourses pursued. Thus, for the analysis of the transnational correspondence documents, a methodologically combined historical network research will be applied, that links elements of transnational historiography, of historical network research, of qualitative-quantitative content analysis and of hermeneutic text analysis. In the case of the project outlined, the research will focus on four interlinked key issues

- (1) Educational-historical network research
- (2) Educational reform as a connective and ambiguous paradigm
- (3) University pedagogy/didactics
- (4) School Education: Education by instruction

The main interest is in the analysis of educational viz. pedagogical reform. It is embedded into an educational-historical network research<sup>3</sup>, which aims at mapping and understanding the structural and content related dimension of the network that had developed around Rein. With regard to structure, it is of interest who was involved at what point during which period. How are they related to each other and how intensely or frequently did they correspond? With

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<sup>2</sup> Concerning the concept and the genesis of the transnational in history and historical research on education e.g. Roldán Vera and Fuchs, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> On the subject of methods, potentials, criticism and examples of use of educational. Historical network research see e.g. Grunder, Hoffmann-Ocon and Metz, 2013; on the method of historical network research in general also: Bixler and Reupke, 2016, Düring and Kerschbaumer, 2016, Marx, 2016).

regard to structure *and* content, pedagogical motifs, discourses, practices, dynamics or events that have influenced the development and constellation of certain contact structures are analyzed. The research on approaches, interpretations, theories and practices of *pedagogical reform* is focused (a) on the analysis of university pedagogy and early traces of university didactics and (b) – with regard to school education – on concepts and implementations of education by instruction as a progressive concept in schooling.

## 5. First research results

First findings on the four key issues named above are an outcome of a first preparatory phase of the project. This phase has concentrated on the collection of basic metadata concerning the names of the correspondents and the dates and places of origin of the source documents. The first research results presented in this contribution are based on first reviews of the basic metadata and rather random insights into the contents of the correspondence texts.

### 5.1. Research topic: Educational-historical network research

Regarding the professional correspondence network of Rein, one can draw first conclusions on spatial and temporal aspects, on scope and actors involved. It became apparent that the correspondence covers a period of sixty years (1869–1929). 6.057 documents have survived (5.137 letters to and 756 letters from Rein; 164 condolence letters). 3.281<sup>4</sup> correspondents from (at least) 40 countries have been involved (see fig. 1).



Figure 1: Overview over the countries involved in the correspondence network. © Grundig de Vazquez, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Wilhelm Rein and 3280 other natural or legal persons.



At this point of the project, it is possible to map the total of contacts and to screen them according to individual countries or certain dates or periods. The view on the total of the contacts, however, does not yet offer a realistic picture of the chronological or geographical microstructure of the network. It rather shows a superimposition of structures of different durations and scopes (see fig. 1). Such layers and structures have to be differentiated, for example according to the dissemination of certain topics in terms of time or location.

With respect to amount and frequency of the correspondences one can already rate the correspondents as knots of the network (considering only the amount of the letters sent by the individual correspondents). In quantitative terms alone one can divide the series of letters into seven groups and attribute the individual writers to these groups:

- Very comprehensive series (40–59 letters per writer): 5 writers
- Comprehensive series (20–39 letters per writer): 17 writers
- Average series (10–19 letters per writer): 54 writers
- Short series (5–9 letters per writer): 160 writers
- Very short series (3–4 letters per writer): 228 writers
- Two letters per writer: 378 writers
- One letter per writer: 2.439 writers

It is obvious that mostly individual letters up to short series have survived. The more comprehensive the series are the less series of this kind exist. This is not surprising. Comprising a few close or very close contacts, various regular and many superficial or one-time contacts, Wilhelm Rein's professional network represents a common contact structure. However, quantitative ratings alone do not yet allow reliable conclusions on the professional importance or influence of the correspondents concerned or on their profile or significance within the network. Firstly, the corpus that has survived is not complete. Some letters and series are fragmentary, few letters of Rein himself are part of the legacy and only two complete both-way letter exchanges (with Friedrich W. Dörpfeld and Edmund Scholz) have survived. Secondly, a systematic content analysis with regard to topics and motifs of the correspondence texts still is to be done. Relevant data and findings on content have to be related to the quantitative data mentioned above to draw scientifically justified conclusions on the importance and influence of the actors involved. Nevertheless, considering the different volumes of the letter series it is already possible to draw first hypotheses, if one takes into account some basic assumptions:

- All letter series are potentially incomplete.
- More comprehensive letter series potentially offer better conditions for the thematic classification and content analysis of the correspondence texts.
- The volume of the letter series *might indicate* the importance of the writer in the network.

- One *cannot* extrapolate *directly* from the volume of the letter series to the importance of the writer.
- The volume of the letter series *might indicate* the intensity of the professional exchange or the epistemological value of the content.
- One *cannot* extrapolate *directly* from the volume of the letter series to the intensity of the professional exchange or the epistemological value of the content.
- The volume of the letter series *might indicate* the professional (or personal) distance or closeness between the writer and Rein.
- One *cannot* extrapolate *directly* from the volume of the letter series to the intensity of the communication or cooperation between the writer and Rein.
- Writers represented only by one or two individual letters or by very short letter series might have been in a very close personal contact with Rein. This applies particularly for local writers that have lived or worked close to him.
- Individual letters that Rein has received on the occasion of special events (e.g. birthdays) *might indicate* a regular contact in person.
- Data gaps of certain letter series might be closed by data from other letter series.

Most of the writers of the very comprehensive and comprehensive letter series count among the Herbartian school of pedagogy (inter alia Wilhelm Dörpfeld, Theodor Vogt, Ernst von Sallwürk, Otto Flügel, Johannes Trüper and Theodor Wiget) and thus among a similar *thought style*<sup>5</sup> like Rein. Also, being teachers, seminar teachers or principals of teaching seminars, they have worked in similar professional contexts.

Among the other correspondents, there are proportionally only few designated Herbartian pedagogues. Instead, one can find educational reformers of different theoretical approaches and focuses from all over the world, who worked in the fields of adult and teacher education, of university and school pedagogy or counted among schools of progressive education. Many of them have been former (guest) students of the teaching seminary at Jena University.

First content analyses show that lesser comprehensive letter series do not necessarily offer lesser research data or information than more comprehensive series do – especially when they are analyzed in mutual reference. To give an example we will have a look at the letter series of Michael Ernest Sadler and Catherine Isabell Dodd. The British educationalist Sadler, one of the founders of comparative pedagogy, focused during his career on the history and administration of education. In the mid- 1890s he was Secretary of the Oxford's Extensions Lectures Sub-Committee. Between 1893 and 1903 he has been in a continuous exchange with Rein concerning aspects of Oxford and Jena university extension courses, of university teacher education and of primary school curricula.

With 48 letters, Sadler has left a very comprehensive letter series. In addition, the correspondence proves mutual lecture and study invitations and visits. In 1903 Sadler became special professor in History and Administration of Education at Manchester University where

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<sup>5</sup> The term *thought style* is used in the meaning of “Denkkollektiv” following Ludwik Fleck, 1980.

he met Catherine Isabel Dodd, who was also in contact with Rein. Dodd, a former school teacher, had come to Owens College of Victoria University of Manchester in 1892, where she was one of the first female university teachers of the time. In 1903 she founded the experimental College House School and in 1906 she became head of the Oxford Cherwell Hall Teacher Training College. J. F. Herbart has significantly inspired her pedagogical ideas. As of 1891 Dodd had traveled several times to Jena to study Herbart's pedagogy, where she worked at the training school of the teacher seminar and participated (first as a student, later as a lecturer<sup>6</sup>) in the Jena university extensions (Dodd, 1905, p. 2). Her theoretical and practical work in Manchester and Oxford was influenced by her Herbartian positions and by the experiences she had made in Jena<sup>7</sup> (Dodd, 1898, Dodd, 1906). Her *Introduction to the Herbartian principles of Teaching* (1898) contained a foreword from Rein and has been published in several editions.

In Manchester, Dodd and Sadler started to work together. In June 1904 they invited Rein to speak at the university and to officially inaugurate a new wing of the Experimental College House School (Dodd, 1904, Sadler, 1904a, 1904b, 1904c). Rein accepted the invitation. In 1905 Sadler commended Dodd as vice-president to the newly founded London University teacher seminar and Dodd approached Rein to support this recommendation (Dodd, 1905). However, she remained in Manchester until 1906 when she went to Oxford.

The letter series of Catherine Dodd comprises five documents. Being a short series and showing gaps of several years, it nevertheless is rich in data on Dodd's professional work (her relationship to the Jena pedagogy, the influence of herbartian ideas on her work in British teacher education, her cooperation and contacts with other educationalist). The data from the Dodd letter series partially complements the data from the Sadler series (and vice versa). It is not possible to derive from the comprehensiveness of the series who of these two authors has been on closer professional contact with Rein.

### ***5. 2. Research topic: Educational reform as a connective and ambiguous paradigm***

Most correspondents seem to have aimed on reformation in education. Nevertheless, one can assume that they have followed different interpretations and connotations of *reform*. Based on a broad understanding of *reform* (see e.g. Koerrenz, 2014) the term could refer to a critical reflection (1) on the transitions between past, present and future, (2) on current circumstances and (3) on humanity. If we follow this interpretation, one can say that some of the correspondents count among the most influential reformers of their time. They had different professional, ideological or social backgrounds but they reflected on similar motifs and topics.

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<sup>6</sup> The courses offered by Dodd between 1901 and 1908 (mostly English language courses) are documented by e.g. the advertisement for the Jena University extensions in *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Pädagogik* and *Deutschen Blätter für Erziehenden Unterricht*.

<sup>7</sup> In Oxford she introduced school trips (school travels), which she got to know in Jena (Scholz, 1908, p. 298). School trips have been introduced to several countries by former students of W. Rein, e.g. by Joseph Mayer Rice in the USA or by Kristiane Iversen in Denmark. Iversen and Dodd were acquainted with each other. They studied together at the Jena teacher seminar. Iversen and Rice counted among the correspondence partners of Rein. They reported (inter alia) on school trips in their home countries.

Thus, the source texts transnationally document pedagogical discourses from diverse professional perspectives. Recurring and connective subjects have been, for example, adult education, educational science, female education, foreign language education, university pedagogy, educational psychology, educational reform, progressive education, professional teacher education or social pedagogy. Text samples of letters of more known correspondents show that they usually treated key subjects of their own professional positions: Wilhelm Flitner, Ferenc Kémény, Charles A. and Frank M. McMurry, Friedrich Paulsen, Joseph M. Rice or Eduard Spranger discussed questions of the (development of) educational science. Adolf Damaschke, Henriette Goldschmidt, Ludwig Gurlitt, Georg Kerschensteiner, Hermann Lietz or Cecil Reddie reflected on progressive education. Reinhard Buchwald, Poul la Cour, Johannes Tews or Heinrich Weinel focused on adult education. Concerning the pedagogical positions of the correspondents lesser known nowadays, there is need for research. Especially with regard to school teachers (that have primarily been working in the field of school practice) it is difficult to verify the information derived from the correspondence by e.g. primary or secondary literature.

### **5. 3. Research topic: University pedagogy / higher education didactics**

Educational historiography usually dates the beginnings of higher education didactics (Hochschuldidaktik) in Germany (and beyond) no earlier than from the 1960s. Motifs of university didactics, however, have already emerged in the context of late 19<sup>th</sup> / early 20<sup>th</sup> century university pedagogy that was promoted e.g. by the former *Gesellschaft für Hochschulpädagogik* (society of university pedagogy). Already thirty years ago, Leitner (1984, 1990), Queis (1990) and Schmithals (1990) have pointed out these roots of modern higher education didactics. Still, there is little known on the scope, emphasize and significance of early approaches on university didactics in the realm of university pedagogy as an antecedent of today's higher education didactics. The correspondence legacy of Rein offers source documents that enable to trace relevant positions, connections and developments. Letters of several influential actors of early university pedagogy have survived. Ernst Bernheim, Nicolas M. Butler, Georg Kerschensteiner, Karl Lamprecht, Conrad Matschoss, Ernst Meumann, Wilhelm Rein, Hans Schmidkunz and Otto Willmann count among them. Bernheim has criticized university lectures as rigid forms of teaching (Bernheim, 1898) that would compel the audience to passivity. Paulsen comprehensively reflected on different forms of university education and referred to Bernheim's criticism (Paulsen 1902/1966, pp. 136–186). Willmann explicitly claimed a necessity to establish higher education didactics as an academic discipline (Willmann, 1913; Coriand, 2009). In addition, the formation and conception of university teacher seminars and training schools (e.g. the Jena seminars of Stoy and Rein or the Leipzig Seminar of Ziller) can be seen as an institutionalization of approaches of higher education didactics. Among the correspondence partners of Rein were outspoken critics (Schmithals, 1990, p. 79) of the named society of university pedagogy like Friedrich Paulsen and Adolf Harnack. Their correspondence might offer a contrasting perspective on this research topic.

#### **5. 4. Research topic: School Education: Education by instruction**

The concern to link self-determination, personal and cultural development to intellectual development and knowledge transfer significantly shaped the reform pursuits of different educational schools of the time. Teachers, teacher educators and school principals, who were in touch with Rein, reflected on theoretical foundations of approaches of education by instruction and reported on its basic organizational conditions. With focus on their respective institutions and countries, they discussed the implementation, use and development of teaching methods and reflected on the importance of school life as a realm of education by instruction. This research topic analyses the significance of a transnational and trans-theoretical exchange among teachers for the organization, reflection and evolution of their classes and schools. The source texts also make visible structural factors that have facilitated or complicated the pedagogical work of teachers in different countries.

#### **6. Outlook**

The current research results imply the complex structure of Rein's correspondence network. They refer to the high research potential of and the need for research on the named source texts. It is obvious that the source corpus offers an access on the professional positions of the correspondents, on interdependences and overlaps between these positions and on their transnational reception. The source texts also shed light on historical educational practices, because some of the writers discuss or describe didactical concepts, teaching methods or aspects of school life. Due to the long period of 60 years documented, the analysis is not limited to a static mapping of the educational motifs, discourses and practices. It rather offers the potential to retrace the dynamics of their development. The source texts hold furthermore dates and information on social, cultural and political backgrounds of educational developments of the time. Thus, they offer research perspectives for comparative or transnational historical research in different fields of education or beyond. Wilhelm Rein's correspondence network has connected progressive and conservative educators, educationalists, psychologists, philosophers and politicians from several countries, schools and times. The project outlined wants to contribute, via basic research and the implementation of an expandable research tool, to the strengthening of transnational and comparative approaches in the history of education.

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