

## **Jeroen Dekker: a remarkable journey, a permanent dedication to ISCHE**

It is not easy to pay tribute to someone, especially when that someone is called Jeroen Dekker.

What we know of a person is only a small part of his/her journey. What remains to be unveiled is always infinitely more.

I want to leave three notes about Jeroen Dekker, comprising what is merely a point of view; that is, a view from a point or, in other words, a look from where I stand.

### A historian who thinks of childhood in the *longue durée*

Jeroen Dekker is Full Professor and Chair of History and Theory of Education at the University of Groningen (Netherlands). It is from this position that, over the last three decades, he has offered a major, decisive contribution to the history of education.

I am unable to read his writings in Dutch, but books like *The Will to Change the Child* (2001) or *Educational Ambitions in History* (2010) are key milestones in long-term studies on childhood.

The way in which Jeroen Dekker constructs his arguments, solidly based on historical sources but without renouncing theoretical problematization, is an example of the best historical tradition.

Whenever I read his works on children and young people 'at risk', I remember the old words of French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard: 'The margins are what hold the pages together'. It is from the 'margins' that one can understand the paths of childhood, education, and school.

### A scholar committed to the international community

Jeroen Dekker has an important international career. His lectures and writings influenced several generations of historians in many different regions of the world.

But this international influence must be seen in the light of a concrete, ongoing commitment to researchers and research groups. His strong presence at ISCHE illustrates well his commitment to the international community of educational historians.

I closely followed his mandate as President of ISCHE, between 1997 and 2000, and the work he carried out to consolidate our scientific association, particularly in terms of academic and editorial consistency.

When I organized the ISCHE Conference in Lisbon, in 1993, I expressed, from the beginning, my intention to start a Supplementary Series of *Paedagogica Historica*, in order to publish a selection of the best papers and not, as before, a collection of all accepted papers. I received the support of Jeroen Dekker, along with Richard Aldrich

and Marc Depaepe, which resulted in the appearance of this series' first volume: *The Colonial Experience in Education*, edited by António Nóvoa, Marc Depaepe and Erwin V. Johanningmeier, in 1995.

Closer relations between ISCHE and *Paedagogica Historica* consolidated the mandate of Jeroen Dekker as ISCHE President, allowing the reinforcement of a new editorial structure, with the choice of a new partner (Taylor & Francis), and the definition of rigorous publication rules.

This decision, which was enforced in 2003, already during my mandate as ISCHE President, was decisive not only for our academic reputation, but also for all historical work in education on an international level. It is an achievement that owes much to the lucidity and commitment of Jeroen Dekker.

Simultaneously, as shown by a quick reading of the volumes of *Paedagogica Historica*, it turns out that, in addition to having authored numerous articles, Jeroen Dekker was editor or co-editor of about twenty special issues. Here is an impressive work of reading, evaluating, choosing, and organizing texts for the benefit of the international community. There are few academics that, like him, are able to present such an impressive curriculum of dedication to a scientific association and its generational renewal.

#### Colleague and, not withstanding, friend

The phrase, of French origin, I believe, in which one scholar addresses another in the following terms, 'Cher collègue et, non obstant, ami', is well known. The boundaries between the academic and personal dimensions are clearly drawn. In a competitive and often disloyal environment it is rare that friendship is allowed to thrive.

Jeroen Dekker refutes this outlook. He is a polite, generous, always elegant man who values good friendship. All those who know him, over many years at the ISCHE conferences, appreciate his affection and attachment, his willingness to support young scholars, the way he works collaboratively.

It is not easy to find someone with the human qualities of Jeroen Dekker. And when these qualities are added to his academic qualities, his international influence, and his commitment to ISCHE, we have every reason to distinguish him with an honorary life membership.

This is what we do now, rightly, deservedly, recognizing one of the best of us, paying tribute to our colleague and friend Jeroen Dekker. I am certain that all members of ISCHE will feel proud of this distinction.

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ISCHE President, 2000-2003