EDITORIAL

The world-famous quote by John Donne, "No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main," is almost four hundred years old. Nevertheless very accurately captures the central idea of this special issue of *Studia paedagogica*. The key aim of the issue you are now reading is to abandon the perspective in which an individual actor is perceived as an "island, entire of itself" and which studies actors' independent actions related to learning and teaching processes. In this issue, we see individuals as structures of interrelated ties and as "part of the main" – as part of a social network that we understand in the light of the relational sociology of Harrison White as configurations of social relationships between individual or corporate actors (White, 2008). This led us to create this monothematic issue, entitled *Social Networks in Educational Processes*, with the aim of opening a space in which researchers of social networks could present this research direction that has been gaining in importance and in which they can, through their research, show how social networks can be used in educational contexts.

Social networks have been mainly used in two directions in educational research. First, they have been used as a methodological approach whose proponents frequently rely, to give just one example, on "social network analysis" (Wasserman & Faust, 2019). Within this approach, social networks are understood as analytical structures that comprise individual actors and institutions, both of which are called *nodes*, and the interactions that exist between them. This enables the researchers to study the positions of individual actors within the social networks and quantify the nature of unidirectional and mutual relationships that interconnect the actors. In educational research, social networks have been employed on numerous levels ranging from small social structures (such as classrooms, see for example Kindermann, 2007) to specific macro-structures such as institutions that connect authors publishing in educational sciences (see for example Juhaňák, 2017).

Second, social networks have been used by authors as the theoretical background for their research. In this area, social networks are understood as "an analytical construct" with "observed and nonobserved dyadic relationships between actors" (Fuhse, 2009, p. 52). Within this second approach, social networks are discovered by authors through research of interactions represented by communicative processes and mediate what is happening

between individual or corporate actors in social networks, and through meanings emerging from the interactions (Fuhse, 2009; see for example Engle et al., 2014; Karam et al., 2019). By observing interactions and studying meanings that lie at the background of these interactions, researchers can create estimates about the nature of social networks and describe in detail the processes ongoing within them.

Studies printed in this issue approach social networks from both of these directions. The first four studies employ social networks as a methodological framework; the last three studies use them as a theoretical framework.

The first study, titled *The Role of Language Competence in Building Peer Relationships in Early Childhood: A Social Network Perspective*, by Femke van der Wilt, Dominik Froehlich, and Chiel van der Veen, examines how children's language competence affects their peer relationships in the context of early childhood classrooms. The authors use the social exchange theory and the theory on homophily to investigate the role of language competence in the early peer relationships of 334 children from 18 early childhood classrooms in the Netherlands. The findings of the study show that children are more likely to form relationships with children with high levels of receptive vocabulary knowledge and similar levels of receptive vocabulary knowledge. On the other hand, the authors report that levels of oral communicative competence do not play a role in young children's network formation. The authors interpret their findings through the lens of the social exchange theory in which actors tend to build relationships with others who can provide something valuable. The authors claim that the possibility of understanding within interactions is a valuable thing worthy of exchange that is also associated with decreased chances of peer conflicts.

The study concludes with a list of practical implications for strategic thinking about the creation of peer groups in which pupils are not excluded from certain learning opportunities and peer interactions.

The second study, *Exploring the Role of Positive Leadership for Mobilizing Innovative Practices: A Social Network Approach*, was authored by Stephen MacGregor, Chris Brown, and Jane Flood. The study explores how school staffs' perceptions of positive leadership influence the potential for mobilizing innovative teaching and learning practices, especially practices that advance well-being and positive mental health for students and teachers. The authors arrive at one of the many interesting findings presented in the study by comparing instrumental and expressive networks in selected schools. Based on this comparison, they show that some school staff are not strongly influenced or easily reached by these leaders. Consequently, such members of staff can question a leader-centric perspective. The study concludes by pointing out that its findings show that innovative practices are mobilized throughout school networks and can facilitate implementation of innovative practices.

The title of the third study, *Classroom Space and Student Positions in Peer Social Networks: An Exploratory Study*, signals that its authors, Tomáš Lintner and Zuzana Šalamounová, explore social networks through their spatial organization. Based on an analysis of social networks from 17 classrooms comprising 363 students attending lower secondary schools (ISCED 2A) and the students' seating arrangements, the authors identify the relationship between the student's seating position and their position within their respective peer social networks. The study shows that using social networks in this way enables the identification of spaces in the classroom that are advantageous both from the perspective of peer relationships and in terms of academic achievement.

The fourth study, titled *Similarity-Attraction Theory and Feedback-Seeking Behavior at Work: How Do They Impact Employability?*, is the last one to use social networks as a methodological framework. Authored by Dominik E. Froehlich, Simon Beausaert and Mien Segers, the study investigates how similarity attraction relates to feedback seeking in the workplace and to employees' employability. The study thus leaves the environment of the school class-rooms and moves our exploration of social networks into the workplace. The study uses data gathered from 2,058 feedback-seeking relationships of 118 employees in seven complete organizational networks from three European countries. The study then inquires as to how often feedback-seeking behavior is used as an opportunity for informal learning and who is approached to provide the feedback.

The findings of the study show that employees are more likely to ask colleagues and supervisors similar to themselves for feedback, which might be caused by the so-called network ties that are very much structured by intra organizational boundaries such as functional organizational structures. Nonetheless, the study's conclusion points out that having a highly homogeneous feedback-seeking network is not always beneficial for one's employability, since feedback from colleagues with different backgrounds or a general awareness could be heterogeneous and enriching.

The following three studies move away from using social networks as a methodological framework, instead employing them as a theoretical framework that guides their own thinking about the educational reality. The first of these studies, titled *"I'm Telling!": Exploring Sources of Peer Authority During a K-2 Collaborative Mathematics Activity*, is authored by Jennifer Langer-Osuna, Rosa Chavez, Faith Kwon, Jim Malamut, Emma Gargroetzi, Kimiko Lange, and Jesse Ramirez. The study explores peer interaction during collaborative mathematics activities and identifies which sources of authority are called on by children to affect the behavior of their peers and how each source of authority used influences the collaborative dynamics of the groups.

The study shows that the direct threat of adult authority overwhelms resistance to directives and shuts down opportunities for shared work. It also documents that peer resistance is sustained and all children can remain engaged in the collaboration if students position themselves and one another within intellectual authority.

The studies section is closed by a text by Kateřina Lojdová, Kateřina Vlčková, and Jan Nehyba titled *Stories of Teachers' Identity: Between Personal and Professional Experience*. The authors use a corpus of 262 research studies published in English between 2010 and 2020 selected from the Web of Science database that examine teacher identity and narrative research. The authors approach the concept of teacher identity as a dynamic, multifaceted, negotiated, and co-constructed phenomenon and their study identifies which factors affect the definition of teacher identity and in what ways. They divide the identified factors into professional factors, which are exclusive for the teaching profession and influence the formation of the so-called professional identity, and personal factors, such as gender, ethnicity, and parenting experience, which are not directly linked to the teaching profession and help to shape the so-called personal identity, which interacts with the professional identity. The text concludes by claiming that identity is a "crucial tool" of teachers that needs to be understood if classroom practices are to be improved.

A qualitative research study written by María Angélica Mejía-Cáceres and Laísa Maria Freire, *Influences of Educational Policy on the Pre-Service Education of Teachers in Science and Environmental Education: A Latin American Context*, is published in the Emerging Researchers section. Its authors rely on a critical discourse analysis of laws, decrees, and resolutions about pre-service teacher education in Colombia to point out the similarity of interactions between educational policies and curriculum. The study illustrates how policies are based on ideological productions that can influence and condition certain social relationships and interactions. In their findings, the authors highlight the existence of a dialectical interaction between global and local policies and on how the educational system can sacrifice educational quality for economic market-driven demands.

We would be delighted if the studies included in this issue of *Studia paedagogica* motivated you to consider how social networks and their uses can enrich the current understanding of educational reality. We would be even more delighted if you then discussed your perspective within your own social network.

Zuzana Šalamounová and Jennifer M. Langer-Osuna
editors of the special issue

Literature

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