Pedagogical Eclecticism

KLAUS ZIERER
University of Oldenburg

ABSTRACT: Eclecticism is no "terminus technicus" of pedagogy, as defined in a relevant lexicon, but it repeatedly appears in educational discussions. The contribution on hand is an attempt to define the eclectic approach as an important pedagogical approach. Therefor this article will make four arguments: First, I want to think about the term "eclecticism." Second, I will present a historical review on the "eclectic idea," including a framework of eclecticism. Third, I will pick up on modern theories of eclecticism as they relate to the framework eclecticism. Fourth and finally, I will summarize my main thoughts and draw some conclusions arising from this analysis.

RESUME: L'éclectisme n'est pas un "terminus technicus" (un terme technique) pédagogique comme le précise un lexique pertinent. Pourtant, c'est ce qui émane constamment des discussions sur l'enseignement. La participation active est une façon d'expliquer l'approche éclectique en tant que démarche importante pédagogique. Cette étude fera donc l'objet de quatre points. Le premier: je veux réfléchir sur le terme 'éclectisme'. Le deuxième: je dépeindrai un tableau historique sur "l'idée éclectique" dont une structure de l'éclectisme. Le troisième: je recueillerai des théories modernes sur l'éclectisme qui se rapportent à la structure de l'éclectisme. Et enfin, le quatrième: "je résumerai mes idées principales et tirerai des conclusions à partir de cette analyse."

Eclecticism is no "terminus technicus" of pedagogy, as defined in a relevant lexicon, but it repeatedly appears in educational discussions. Eclecticism appears to be indispensable to the field of pedagogy. It seems that every pedagogue, practitioner, or theorist, must be an eclecticist. But what is eclecticism? How does it work? Is there a procedure to eclecticism? Or is it an intuitive process?

To answer these and similar questions this article will make four arguments: First, I want to think about the term "eclecticism." Second, I will present a historical review on the "eclectic idea," including a framework of eclecticism. Third, I will pick up on modern theories of

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eclecticism as they relate to the framework of eclecticism. This analysis will include international studies drawn from different scientific fields connected through the eclectic idea. Fourth and finally, I will summarize my main thoughts and draw some conclusions arising from this analysis. The starting point for my analysis is the work of August Herman Niemeyer, one of the most important educational thinkers of the 18th and 19th centuries and considered to be the founder of modern pedagogical eclecticism.

Thoughts About the Term "Eclecticism"

The etymological genesis of the word *eclecticism* is the Greek adjective *eklektikos*, which means "selective" or "assortative" (Kluge, 1999, p. 14). Although this translation is still accurate, today it has both a negative and a positive connotation. The negative connotation of eclecticism is comparable with the pejorative "syncretism;" an unreflective and arbitrary choice without concern for the appropriateness of that choice. By contrast, the positive understanding of eclecticism means choosing things, which can be theories, thoughts, and so forth, and fitting them to a system after checking if they fit together. It is this latter understanding that is my starting point for the analysis to follow.

It is important to note that probably no member of the pedagogical scientific community would call himself an eclectic due to the negative connotations of the word. Hence, eclecticism has fallen into oblivion (Zierer, 2009). That said pedagogy would not have the status it enjoys in different sciences without eclecticism. A perfect illustration of this point is the work of August Hermann Niemeyer, great-grandson of August Herman Francke, founder of the world-famous Francke Foundations in Halle, Germany. Niemeyer wrote one of the first and most successful pedagogical textbooks, *Principles of Education and Teaching* in a decade during which pedagogy turned from being considered a popular and non-strict discipline into a science. One reason for pedagogy's transformation to a scientific discipline was Niemeyer's eclectic approach to the subject.

A Historical Review

It is important to understand the historic use of eclecticism, to appreciate the evolution of the concept to the modern period. Although there are many writers to refer to, I will present the most popular and colourful ones.

I want to start with Saint Paul, one of the most notable of early Christian missionaries (de Boor, 1994). In his First Letter to the Thessalonians, a book of the New Testament of the Christian Bible and arguably the oldest existent Christian document, Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica to encourage and reassure them. Paul's letter was a response to the Thessalonians running out of patience in the absence of the Parousia, or the Second Coming. False prophets were abusing the situation and were disturbing the peace. Hence, the Apostle Paul was forced to react. He wrote in his letter that the date of the Parousia was indefinable and that Christians should go on believing, hoping, and trusting in genuine prophets and the real words, and trusting in God.

> *Do not quench the Spirit;*
> *Do not despise prophetic utterances.*
> *But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good;*
> *Abstain from every form of evil.*
> *(1 Thess. 5, 19-22)*

Paul himself behaved in accordance with this idea. He was influenced by Christian as well as Non-Christian thinkers.

The second example is Seneca, who was a Roman thinker and poet (Jung, 2002). He lived 4 BC to 65 AD. Seneca's philosophy was characterized by the concept of mental independence, expressed in his own words: *nullis nomen fero.* Seneca defined himself as a thinker free of specific schools of thought and accountable to his judgement alone. What was spoken, and not the speaker, was of significance. In this context, the old philosophers are important sources of knowledge – "Disputare cum Socrate ... dubitare cum Carneade, cum Epicuro quiescere, hominis naturam cum Stoicis vincere, cum Cynicis excedere," Seneca wrote in *De brevitate vitae* – but thinking alone is more than reading and re-thinking the old philosophers: "Qui ante nos ista moverunt, non domini nostri, sed duces sunt," he noticed in *Epistulae Morales.*

Seneca's famous "bee elegy," contained in his letter 84, is illustrative. In it, Seneca explains that reading achieves two functions. The first is that it prevents humans from being satisfied with that which they already know. Second, it enables humans to judge other thoughts and think beyond their existing borders. For Seneca, it is important to start thinking and writing for ones own after reading. Reading and writing build up an entity. As such, Seneca suggests that people should behave

like the bees: flying around and enjoying the flowers, which are melliferous, and producing something new, in the bees' case honey and in human's, new ideas.

The final example is the aforementioned August Hermann Niemeyer (Zierer, 2009). Niemeyer was very familiar with Saint Paul and Seneca, and referenced both in his own work (pp. 258-281). However, Niemeyer's contributions were distinctive in two ways.

The first main contribution Niemeyer made was that he was one of the first thinkers who made eclecticism popular in the modern era. Second, Niemeyer was one of the first to make eclecticism fruitful in the pedagogical field. Although he may not be the founder of eclecticism, he was and is without a doubt one of the most important eclectic thinkers. For this reason I call him *primus inter pares.*

Niemeyer's main work, *Principles of Education and Teaching*, provides a useful understanding of his eclecticism. In the context of his considerations on moral education, Niemeyer notes that "education [must] find the task of establishing a morally good character through its influence easier or catchier, depending whether it perceives more good or more evil, or at least both to approximately the same degree, in the child's nature" (Niemeyer, 1832, p. 56).

Consequently, the question arises whether the child is good or bad by nature. Here August Hermann Niemeyer differentiates between two positions, initially presented without comment. His approach could be described as hermeneutic.

> According to the verdict of many recent educationalists and moralists [quoting Rousseau, Basedow, Campe, Salzmann and others] the first is the case. To them the world of children is a state of innocence in which no trace of malicious tendencies and desires could yet be found. The verdicts of others [Fichte is mentioned] stand in the most glaring contradiction to this view; they assert a complete inability for all true good without the help of higher support and declare in this sense that all the thoughts and desires of man are bad from youth on. (Niemeyer, 1832, p. 56)

Ultimately, although Niemeyer found these arguments comprehensible they were not acceptable, as both positions lacked an empirical basis. Documentable experience is imperative to Niemeyer's eclecticism. The rationality of opinions alone is not sufficient. Ideas must first pass the test of experience, as Niemeyer argues in the following quotation:

> Education will not miss its purpose, as long as it does not neglect the undeniable phenomena of the world of children and youth, even

> assuming that the profoundest reasons for these phenomena remain in many respects dark and doubtful. The most important and non-contradictory ones are the following: (1) In all children one perceives dispositions towards good tendencies, fundamental attitudes and actions; (2) Furthermore, all children are not only subject to seduction, but have, more or less, a tendency towards some things that are called wicked or evil at a mature age, even though one is not immediately inclined to blame them for this. (p. 57)

One may recognize traces of dialectics and phenomenology in these explanations, in addition to aforementioned hermeneutic elements and first approaches toward empirical research, which principally refers to observation. Asked whether the child is good or bad, Niemeyer gave the following answer based on this blended approach: "It is in no way possible to say of children that they are positively good or positively bad; but you can say that the tendency to good and to bad lies in them, although in varying mixtures and relationships" (p. 57).

The problem of whether a child is good or bad by nature is clearly answered by August Hermann Niemeyer in a hermeneutic, dialectical, and phenomenological critique of the various opinions prevalent at his time, which is not merely the result of a weighing up of opposing positions. Niemeyer's position is a synthesis: "Eclecticism creates something new by classifying and systematizing the existing positions and surpasses itself in the process of systematization" (Horn & Wigger, 1994, p. 29).

Niemeyer summarized this procedure with the motto "Check it all! Keep the best!" This approach may be operationalized and understood using the following steps:

- *What is "all"?* "All" means do not stick to a dominate system or school of thought. Instead, try to consider all possible approaches.
- *How do you "check"?* Before you test and evaluate different theories you have to describe them to make sure that you have understood them. After this, the checking process may begin, in which you discuss approaches and decide which ones are acceptable and which ones are not. Decision making is guided by both rationality and experience.
- *What is the "best"?* Theories which pass the checking process will be adopted. However, the selection of the "best" depends on the topic and the discipline in question, therefore the best choice cannot be generalized. However, August Hermann Niemeyer shows that the "best" can be a synthesis of competing concepts on a meta-level.

- *How do you "keep" the best?* Finding the acceptable, good or best theory is not the only challenge of eclecticism. It is also a challenge to put the different theories together and create a system.

Although these steps were perfectly defined by August Hermann Niemeyer, they were also hinted at by Seneca and Saint Paul. Hence, it seems that eclecticism is a useful tool for pedagogical fields – both in theory and practice.

This historical review is important for two reasons: First, it shows that the idea of eclecticism has existed since ancient times. Second, it reveals that these different authors have a great deal in common. Niemeyer's motto "Check it all! Keep the best!" can stand as a framework of eclecticism across the authors.

Interestingly the motto "Check it all! Keep the best!" continues to appear in scholarly work and research across the globe. In the next section, I will highlight a few examples, refining and redefining them using the work of August Hermann Niemeyer.

A Framework of an Eclectic Approach

There are many studies connected to eclectic thought, all of which cannot be referred to here. Hence, I have picked a selection of the more exemplary positions. These are: From the English-speaking field, Joseph Schwab (1978) and Agnes Tellings (2001) are worth noting. From the German-speaking field, Heinz-Elmar Tenorth (1987) and Lothar Wigger (1995) will be discussed. In addition to these pedagogical authors, I will refer to two philosophers, including Michael Albrecht (1994), who has written a broad conceptual history of the term eclecticism, and Ken Wilber (2002), who is currently one of the more famous and popular thinkers in America.

I will first describe the positions of these authors and then discuss the common features of their writings. I will then analyse their positions using Niemeyer's criteria for analysing concepts.

About the Possibility and the Necessity of Eclecticism

The starting point of the eclectic thoughts for Joseph Schwab is the incongruence between theory and practice. He defines this incongruence using two principles. The first principle is that while theory is general, practice is determined by particularity. The second principle is that a theory is generated through educational research. Research is determined through the objects, which are analyzed, and the perspective

represented by the researcher (Schwab, 1978, p. 323). Every theory is characterized by generality and particularity. Therefore, every theory can be complemented by another theory, and no theory can be adopted as practice. The subsequent incongruence between theory and practice must be reconciled. Joseph Schwab sees an eclectic approach as being able to find this reconciliation between theory and practice: "The eclectic arts are arts by which we ready theory for practical use ... by which we discover and take practical account of the distortions and limited perspective which a theory imposes on its subject" (p. 323). Agnes Tellings takes a similar position. She starts by discussing the insecurity of pedagogues, "not knowing what to do since different theories and models seemingly concerning the same domain dictate different actions in one and the same practice" (Tellings, 2001, p. 277). If integration of different theories is possible, an eclectic approach is desirable.

Lothar Wigger (1995) takes pedagogical pluralism as his starting point. By analyzing pedagogical argumentations he draws the conclusion that pedagogical argumentation must be eclectic: An eclectic approach makes it possible to connect to many different theories as a plurality of possibilities requires an eclectic approach.

Heinz-Elmar Tenorth (1987) gets to the same conclusion from a different view. He compares pedagogy with the concept of dogmatics, because of pedagogy's relative scientific dignity. This comparison shows that pedagogy does not have a central dogma but rather many different dogmas leading to competing pedagogies. Tenorth's plurality of pedagogical knowledge necessitates an eclectic approach in two respects. The first is that an eclectic approach can be an effective and rational way to make a decision between different possibilities. The second is that an eclectic approach can help the theorist or practitioner to avoid irritations and ideological distortions. An eclectic approach may be seen as an essential skill for handling pedagogical knowledge.

A similar picture arises from the philosophical discourse. Michael Albrecht (1994) starts his analysis of the term eclecticism with the question, "How has a scientist behave to the history and the knowledge of his science, in fact there are many different theories?" Truth, he writes, is "not the matter of a single person" (p. 669) but every person can be aware of truth. To address this fact, an eclectic approach seems to be necessary. Ken Wilber (2002) argues the same point. Wilber characterizes his philosophy as "integral" and notes "I have a general rule: Everybody is right. Every single system ever offered has some degree of truth in it" (p. 13).

The common theme of all of these positions is that eclecticism is the consequence of plurality and difference. An eclectic approach is necessary when a situation arises requiring a choice. Choice and judgement are predominant in educational theory and practice. The reason for this lies in the generality and particularity. This leads to the narrowness of every theory, caused by the deficiency of the human being, and to the concreteness of every practice, which is determined in the connection to time and space.

What is "All"?

It is helpful to recall the standpoint of August Hermann Niemeyer in answering this question. Niemeyer approves reading the ancient thinkers, such as the Greeks and the Romans, as well as more current philosophers, such as Immanuel Kant, Johann Friedrich Herbart, and so forth. By doing so, Niemeyer discloses a landscape of the pedagogical discipline.

Likewise, the other mentioned authors argue: Joseph Schwab (1978) introduces the term "commonplaces," defined as a landscape in which all theories can be placed according to a theory's narrowness. Every theory is a part of the landscape, and identifiable within the landscape. The dependence of one theory to other theories is shown as well (p. 338 forward). In the same way Agnes Tellings (2001) uses the term "level" for systematizing different sources. She distinguishes between a "practical-theoretical level," an "object-theoretical level," and a "foundational level." Tellings also distinguishes areas in which integration of theories can take place. These "domains" (a conceptualized part of reality) and "dimensions" (a particular aspect of a domain) are both parts of a theory (p. 278).

These attempts to organize the plurality of theories become an innovative specification in the philosophy of Ken Wilber. According to Jürgen Habermas, perhaps one of the most important philosophers of the present time, Wilber develops an epistemological quadrant-model. The model distinguishes four main types of knowledge. The first is a subjective approach, driven by the individual and focussing on the validity of truthfulness (e.g., Jean Piaget). The second is an inter-subjective approach, which argues in a collective view and focuses on the validity of cultural fit and justness (e.g., Hans-Georg Gadamer). In both these approaches hermeneutical and phenomenological views dominate. The third is an objective approach, which focuses on propositional truth

and is also driven by the individual (e.g., Burrhus Frederic Skinner). The fourth is an inter-objective approach, which aims for a functional fit in a collective (e.g., Talcott Parsons). Empirical views dominate each of these approaches. Every theory can be classified using this quadrant-model, so that a landscape is developed showing the narrowness of and the need for theory (Wilber, 2002).

The common denominator of these attempts at systematization, each with their own strengths and weaknesses, is the desire to develop a landscape, helping an eclecticist to orientate himself amidst a wide range of theories. The landscape arises from the situation of choice and should help in making judgements about theories, including recognizing important perspectives and avoiding blind judgements. The landscape is also the result of an eclectic approach, as it makes the landscape more accessible.

How do you "Check"?

For many critics this question is the key-question of eclecticism. Answering this question is how eclecticism can be distinguished from epigonality, syncretism, and so on. *Checking* is the basis for accepting or rejecting a theory. So how do current thinkers answer this question?

Joseph Schwab (1978) developed a "polyfocal conspectus" for handling plurality. Essentially, this concept contains two circular processes. The first circular process is to become acquainted with a theory, including its perspective, method, and objectives. The second circular process is to become acquainted with a different theory, to recognize its narrowness and the need for addition to both theories (pp. 341- 345). Lothar Wigger's work (1995) can be connected to the idea of polyfocal conspectus. Wigger addresses the criticism of arbitrariness, often used against eclecticism. Wigger illustrates that pedagogical argumentation is always "receiver-orientated and success-orientated," (p. 167) meaning that it must be eclectic. Otherwise you can not connect to other theories and get noticed by the scientific community.

Agnes Tellings (2001) approach is similar to Joseph Schwab's model. Tellings's focus lies in making different theories compatible. In Tellings's framework, it is necessary to create a detailed description of every applicable theory. If the identified theories can be integrated through reduction, synthesis, or a horizontal or vertical addition then a decision is possible (p. 198).

Ken Wilber (2002) describes another means of integrating theories. Wilber refers to "orienting generalization (p. 11 fwd.). This framework necessitates another checking process. The first step involves the collection of all important knowledge for your research, especially out of the four quadrants. In the second step you try to find the common denominator of the theories, so that all frictions and inconsistencies are deleted. The result is an "orienting generalization?"

Comparing the different positions it is possible to detect a common structure of eclectic checking. The first challenge is to understand the different theories. Hermeneutical approaches are important. If a choice between different theories is necessary, arguments play an important role. This is the second challenge. It is not possible to use validity, reliability, and objectivity as quality criterions. Instead, argumentation must meet criterion around adequacy, coherence, plausibility, and consistency. Hence, the eclectic checking process is divided up into an understanding process and an argumentation process. The result of these processes may take different forms, discussed below.

What is "the Best"?

This question cannot be answered generally. It depends on discipline-specific characteristics, but also on context. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw conclusions on a meta-level. As previously discussed, Niemeyer showed that the result of an eclectic approach can be a synthesis of multiple theories. Joseph Schwab's "polyfocal conspectus" also includes a multi-theory integration (1978, p. 345).

At the end of both Niemeyer's and Schwab's processes, you have an integration of a theory with other theories. The *best* approach is neither the fade-out of plurality nor the assimilation of different theories. It is the culmination of different theories considering the limits of their respective foci. Agnes Tellings's argument (2001) is more sophisticated. She distinguishes between four forms of integration: a) synthesis, in which "theories are joined and transformed into a new theory in which core elements of the original theories are recognizable but which also contains totally new elements;" b) reduction, in which "one theory is reformulated in terms of another theory and, thus, both theories become one;" c) vertical addition, in which "theories or elements of theories ... are placed vertically above each other," and d) horizontal addition, in which "theories or elements of theories that are assumed to cover complementary dimensions within one domain, or that are assumed to

cover different domains thus rendering a more complete picture of, for instance, human development, are connected to each other" (pp. 279-281). As already mentioned, Ken Wilber (2002) affords another possibility. Wilber argues that through the use of abstraction of the knowledge on a level which contains neither inconsistencies nor discrepancies, you can integrate different theories and arrive at orienting generalizations.

This synopsis shows that eclecticism does not aim to eliminate or change a theory. Instead, it aims to integrate and connect theories. This integration can take place in the following ways:

- *Synthesis*: Integration is the result of abolishing contradictions between theory A and theory B or from connecting theory A and theory B. The new theory, C, contains much, but not all, of theory A and theory B, C may also contain something entirely new. An example of this approach is John Keller's ARCS-model (1983).
- *Reduction*: Integration is the result of embedding theory A into theory B. The new theory, C, contains both theories A and B. An example of this approach is Lawrence Kohlberg's (1981) steps of moral development.
- *Orienting generalization*: Integration is the result of determining the common denominator between separate theories A and B. An example for this is the approach taken by Wolfgang Brezinka, which includes putting different definitions of the term "education" together by searching for common elements among the definitions (1993).
- *Vertical and horizontal addition*: Integration is the result of subsuming theories A and B, which fit together in an areal or chronological way. An example of this includes textbooks or studies about different periods in history on the same topic.
- *Coexistence*: Theory A and theory B can not be connected, but both are important and, thus, must both stand. An example of this includes the different theories of learning, such as constructivism, behaviourism, and cognitivism.

I have to mention at this point that hybrid forms of the above approaches are also possible. However, it is not possible to judge which one of these different eclectic approaches is the best, the most rational, or the most effective. Such a judgement is dependent on discipline-specific and case-sensitive variables. The content determines the method. This general rule is also valid in this context.

Instead, it is possible to operationalize the eclectic checking process. Every eclectic result is based upon a special argumentation:

1. In the case of a synthesis it is necessary either to handle the different theories as thesis and antithesis or to show their cross saturation.
2. In the case of an orienting generalization it is necessary to demonstrate that there is a common denominator.
3. In the case of a reduction it is necessary to argue that one theory can be embedded in the other.
4. In the case of a horizontal or vertical addition it is necessary to show that the theories amend themselves in an areal or chronological way.
5. In the case of a coexistence it is necessary to disclose that there is no form of integration possible and no conflict remaining.

How do you "Keep" the Best?

While August Hermann Niemeyer manages to build up a system in his textbook, this question is still disputed. The following answers are given by the aforementioned authors.

Joseph Schwab (1978) does not just aim to integrate different theories with his "polyfocal conspectus." He also tries to design a system in which different theories can be located and connected to each other[1] The proximity to the term "commonplace," mentioned earlier with regard to Joseph Schwab, seems to be important at this point and marks the ending of the "polyfocal conspectus" (p. 345).

Ken Wilber (2002) does not see his integral approach completed by formulating orienting generalizations. In fact, it is necessary to put these orienting-generalizations together to build a system. Wilber describes his system using metaphor, referring to "sparkles of knowledge," which have to string to a "necklet" with the aid of a "fiber" (p. 12).

Summa summarum, the problem may be that it is difficult and not totally clarified if and how eclecticism and systematic join together. While the mentioned authors agree that it is necessary to bring different theories together in a system, it is debatable if knowledge can be brought into a system generally. Furthermore, the question remains, should it even be necessary to build up a system? Or is it perhaps better to be free from a system?

It is not possible to answer all these questions in this article (Zierer, 2009). However, if eclecticism is going to be systematic, two thoughts are important. First, it is not possible to construct a general system because

such a system would depend too much on the structures and the contents of the specific discipline. The context of a specific discipline would influence the sequencing and principles of the proposed general system. Accordingly it applies: The concrete situation determines the system. Second, the consequences of constructing a general system would be non-eclectically, if a system, which is built up with the aid of an eclectic approach, raises a claim to be the only real and right system. This is because it is in eclecticism's very nature to not to be deterministic. Hence, if eclecticism tries to build up "the" system, it would drive itself ad absurdum.

Attitudes of Eclecticism

This framework of eclecticism, based on Niemeyer's sentence "Check it all! Keep the best!" is borne by different attitudes which must be held by an eclecticist. Without these attitudes eclectic thinking and acting is not possible. It is not meant that these attitudes are only applicable to an eclectic approach. But, if someone suggests working eclectically, these attitudes must be present.

A detailed reflection on these attitudes is useful since they were only mentioned indirectly through the previous explanations. Michael Albrecht (1994) focuses on the issue of attitudes (pp. 668-670. He describes four attitudes:

- *Openness*: Truth is not determined by a single person – this is a posit of eclectic thinking. Reference to this attitude toward "truth" can be found in all the authors discussed here. August Hermann Niemeyer argues that every school of thought has something which is good. Joseph Schwab notes the narrowness of every theory. Ken Wilber (2002) comments that "nobody can be wrong by one hundred percent" (p. 13). If it is like this, it is obvious that preoccupation within other positions and theories is not eclecticism. Hence, openness is indispensable.
- *Tolerance*: Openness is not sufficient by itself. Open-mindedness does not assume tolerance of other ideas or theories. It is possible to be open to, but intolerant of, a different position. Not so for an eclecticist, who must never disregard differing theories for fear that he could be wrong himself and not understand these different theories correctly. Therefore, tolerance is another important attitude.
- *Moderation*: From openness and tolerance follows that an eclecticist is not interested in fights between schools of thought. He is only interested in the object of study. Preferences and repugnances should be

avoided equally. Significantly, Gilbert de Landsheere (1999) characterized the August Hermann Niemeyer's methods as a "moderate approach" (pp. 509-524). The same description holds true for the "polyfocal conspectus" of Joseph Schwab, the "methodical requirements" of Agnes Tellings and the epistemological quadrant-model of Ken Wilber.

- *Modesty*: Because an eclecticist is only human, he is as likely to make mistakes as anyone else. Therefore, an eclecticist's theory is only one among many. The claim that only an eclecticist can be right is itself not eclectically, it is factious.

These attitudes may be found in integration, which Agnes Tellings (2001) formulates as the philosophical postulate for eclectic thinking. Integration is based on the conviction that a new theory can be developed out of different, by competing theories (p. 277). You cannot assume the existence of a new theory until the integration has concluded.

Forecast: Eclecticism as a Scientific Method?

Eclecticism is popular in the field of educational studies. It often appears in the discourse and there have been many attempts to define it in more detail, especially to attack common prejudices. This article is intended to be a contribution to the ongoing debate.

Against this background a final question arises, hinted at previously: Is eclecticism a scientific method? Although I cannot address it in detail here due to lack of space, it is too important a question to leave without comment.

A method is an instrument "to work on a theoretical orientated question of knowledge from the phase of the discovery over the phase of data acquisition to the phase of analysis" (Tenorth & Tippelt, 2007, p. 504). It is important to consider that a method is always connected to a subject. From this arises a challenge to develop general theories: the subject defines the method. According to Holm Tetens (1999) the term "scientific" can be described using four dicta: first, the ideal of truth, second, the ideal of explanation and understanding, third, the ideal of epistemological justification, and fourth, the ideal of intersubjectivity (pp. 1763-1773). Hence, in my opinion there is no doubt that an eclectic method, like the one I have I developed and described above, is a scientific method. The eclectic method meets all aforementioned criteria for a scientific approach.

The eclectic method is not directly comparable with other empirical methods. Criteria such as reliability, validity, and objectivity cannot be applied to eclecticism. Eclecticism is comparable to scientific methods such as hermeneutics, phenomenology, and dialectics – sharing all their possibilities and disabilities (Danner, 1998). Plausibility, consistency, adequacy, and coherence are the main criteria with which to judge and measure an eclectic approach. Out of an eclectic approach objectivity arises from the tension between subjectivity and generality, as argued by Otto Friedrich Bollnow (1963).

Hence, eclecticism can be characterized as a scientific method and it is useful in situations in which a choice is required, particularly for pedagogical questions. August Hermann Niemeyer's statement "Check it all! Keep the best!" can be used as a guideline for an eclectic approach and can be described in the following procedure: First, draw a landscape; second, check the theories being considered, comprehend them, and argue their points; third, compile the results of the integration of the second step; and fourth, develop a system based on your findings. All of these steps are based on the attitudes of an eclecticist. The challenge of making choices and decisions around theories is a genuine problem, pedagogy and pedagogical science is confronted with. As a consequence, every pedagogue must be an eclecticist – the practitioner, because he deals with real life situations and has to choose from a wide range of objectives, contents, methods, and medias; the theorizer, because he also has to choose from a wide range of theories and methods. Both must check all and keep the best!

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Klaus Zierer was born and raised in Germany. His previous degrees are: Diploma for Teaching at Primary Schools (1. Staatsexamen), University of Munich, 2001 and PhD (Dr. phil.), University of Munich, 2003. Since 2004, he has been a Primary School Teacher and then in 2008, a Member of the Institute for School Education at the University of Munich. In the year 2007 he began his Postdoctoral Lecture Qualification (Habilitation) about pedagogical eclecticism at the University of Munich, which he finished in November, 2009. In this context he was Visiting Research Fellow at the Department of Education at the University of Oxford. Since 2011 he is Professor of Education at the Carl von Ossietzky University, Oldenburg, Germany and an Associate Research Fellow of SKOPE, University of Oxford. His research interests are philosophy of education, school education, and general didactics.

Author's Address:
Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg
Ammerländer Heerstraße 114-118
26129 Oldenburg
GERMANY
EMAIL: klaus.zierer@uni-oldenburg.de