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"New Education" for the Congo? The indigenist approach, New Education and prescriptive pedagogy

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Abstract This article responds to a question put forward approximately a decade ago by the history of education research group at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven: Did the child-centred ideas of New Education, as promoted by Ovide Decroly, influence the education policy in the former Belgian colony of Congo? Naturally, ideas were circulating that could have been linked with indigenism, taking into account African traditions and local oral traditions. Some hold that in everyday educational practice, as much in Belgium as in the Belgian Congo, the paternalistic perspective remained uninterrupted. Offering a more nuanced picture, this article is based on the biography of Gustaaf Hulstaert, a noted missionary educator, and also analyzes his textbooks and manuals.

Keywords Colonial education policy · Colonial textbooks · Indigenism · Teaching congregations · Missionaries · Belgian Congo

It is always interesting to gauge the extent to which developments or changes in a scientific or cultural field in the colonizing country penetrated their colonies. In Belgium, New Education (*Reformpädagogik*) emerged during the period between the two wars, alongside the continued existence of prescriptive pedagogy. The two trends were to be found in the Belgian Congo. New Education found a natural ally in the politico-cultural indigenist

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philosophy, represented by the Flemish missionary Gustaaf Hulstaert, the "culture broker" of the Mongo people in the Central Basin of the Belgian Congo (Hulstaert 1961; Van Langendonck 1992). From 1936 to 1946, he took on the position of school inspector within the Catholic Church, and discovered publications on New Education. Although he found the ideas convincing, he was unsure how it could be integrated, given his comparative inexperience and his attachment to prescriptive pedagogy, which was inherent in his status as a Catholic missionary.

The case of Hulstaert is interesting from a theoretical perspective, particularly in relation to the development of a history of education. He offers a good example of the way that pedagogical ideas and theories, applied in everyday practice, were appropriated in a colonial and missionary context. In contrast with the Brothers of the Christian Schools (BCS), who were active in the same region, Hulstaert sought to develop the school system based on the students' African culture. In this respect, he was a follower of New Education. Indeed, there was a certain analogy between *vom Kinde aus* ("child-centred") and *vom Schwarzen aus* ("indigenous or Black-centred") education (Briffaerts, Depaepe and Kita Kyankenge Masandi 2003). However, slogans do not necessarily reflect reality. Just as the so-called New School Movement in Belgium (on both the Catholic and the "official" side) did not result in education that was truly child-centred, it cannot be said that Hulstaert's ideas resulted in a genuine African pedagogy, and still less a genuine African practice. Hulstaert's thinking was dominated by the Western values of the Christian faith. As a missionary, he took on board, both consciously and unconsciously, innumerable tenets of the prescriptive Catholic pedagogy that he had himself experienced as a student.

These paradoxes were also present in other educational trends, such as the new Catholic education in Belgium, from which he sought inspiration; at the same time, he struggled against them, for example opposing the methods used by the BCS. Finally, in Belgium, New Education resulted in a school that was more "modern", in the sense of being "more adapted", rather than truly "new" (Depaepe 2000, 2012). Taking into account the difference in context, the same can be said of Hulstaert's indigenist education project; the education that resulted from it was adapted, in the sense of being better suited to efforts to evangelize and colonize, more than it was focused on helping children towards emancipation and independence.

Therefore, we suggest a fundamental reason why the indigenist approach and New Education share parallel traits: they were both appropriated in accordance with the model of the well-known grammar of schooling (Depaepe 2012), which had little effect on the traditional pedagogy of teaching or classroom practice, or the pedagogical and moral order of good behaviour at school. In the rest of this article, we draw on a biography of Hulstaert, on the writings of his contemporaries, on archival sources, and on Hulstaert's own textbooks and manuals, to offer a more nuanced picture of the way he balanced/integrated his belief in indigenism with the ideas of New Education and the prescriptive Catholic teaching of his childhood.

The pedagogical context in the Belgian Congo between the wars

Cooperation between the state and Catholic missions played a decisive role in the development of education in the Belgian Congo (1908–1960). This cooperation went back to the period of the so-called Congo Free State (1885–1905), when the administration of Leopold II requested that Belgian missionaries contribute to the colonial project. Under his reign, the education system included both official schools and free schools. The latter were

missionary establishments, both Protestant and Catholic, while the former were entrusted principally to Catholic missions. The same applied after 1908, when the Congo became a Belgian colony. The Colonial Charter was based on the principle of freedom of education, as set out in the Belgian Constitution. In practice, this decision meant that Catholic missions could continue their work without concerning themselves about developing education supply, and could happily proceed towards an almost monopoly position (Depaepe and Van Rompaey 1995).

In 1925, the Belgian Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) took over the Belgian Trappist mission to the Congolese equator. Their four mission posts had a central primary school (five years), supplemented by a number of satellite chapel schools (two years). A school convention with the Catholic missions, which required a uniform teaching programme for the whole colony, was under discussion and would be imposed in 1928. In 1929, the BCS took over the direction of the Monitors' School in Bamanya, which later became the standard primary school. Congregations of nuns, which had been in Bamanya since 1898, first took the initiative to develop teaching for girls.

Very little information is available on the educational training of missionaries to the Congo, but the yearbooks of the church there reveal that during this period many of the brothers and sisters had followed teaching courses in Belgium. In contrast, very few of the missionary priests were trained in teaching. Only after World War II did the Catholic University of Leuven begin to produce the first education graduates. Hulstaert was self-taught in the field of education, as were other pioneer authors of school books in the Congo. Among these authors were both Protestants, including J. Weeks, K.E. Laman, W. Stapleton, and E.E. Carpenter, and Catholics, including A. De Clercq, E. De Boeck, J. Van Wing, R. Butaye, and L. Bittremieux. The question therefore arises: Where did Hulstaert obtain the knowledge required for the educational responsibilities to which he devoted himself for over 20 years?

Hulstaert: Culture broker

Hulstaert worked with the Mongo, a people living in the Congo Basin. His educational approach, including the drafting of school books in local languages, was therefore based on the history of this people, who have lived in the middle of the equatorial forest for several centuries. Colonists had introduced Christianity and it was represented by Anglo-Saxon Protestants and Belgian and Dutch Catholics. The language spoken in the region, including several dialects, belongs to the Bantu C61 group (Hulstaert 1961).

Hulstaert was primarily a colonial figure, but he developed a complex intellectual and ideological approach. One of his most remarkable achievements, in 1937, was founding the Aequatoria Centre in Bamanya, lez Mbandaka (called Coquilhatville until 1969). This centre's objective was to improve and disseminate knowledge about the language and culture of the neighbouring peoples. During his long stay in the Congo (1925–1990), he personally acquired an encyclopaedic knowledge of the language, peoples and nature of the region. From 1931 onward, he published a multitude of books and articles (principally in the review *Aequatoria*, which he founded in 1937), expressing avant-garde ideas and criticizing the harmful consequences of colonization. In this way, through his involvement in discussions of colonial policy, Hulstaert became involved in very broad cultural, social and political trends. Although he criticized the principles and practices of colonialization, sometimes severely, what prevailed were his reflections and options for a "sound colonialization", closely related to evangelization; they are still of illustrative value for studies

of the colonial mentality. But underlying all these discussions lay his visible and constant attachment to a Catholicism imbued with the characteristics of his time and his missionary vocation.

Hulstaert's pedagogical "knowledge"

As an educator in the Apostolic Vicariate of Coquilhatville, Hulstaert held several positions in succession: he was director of the primary school for the palm oil plantations of the Huileries du Congo Belge from 1927 to 1933, director of the small seminary (middle school) from 1933 to 1934, and inspector of schools in the diocese from 1936 to 1946. He was therefore active in the educational field for almost 20 years: 1927 to 1946. As in so many other fields, Hulstaert trained himself, absorbed information in the field, and acquired the necessary basic knowledge through his reading. In his view, this basic knowledge included the rudiments of school educational theory, the local teaching language, "the mental structure" of children, and the underlying culture of the people.

As he studied education, he took inspiration from sources in his own country, Flanders. Based on the catalogue of the library that he built up in Bamanya, we know that he purchased, among other works, the four-volume Dutch publication *Didaktiek* by Otto Willmann, a major work of Flemish Catholic pedagogy based on a draft written between 1929 and 1935 by the principal inspector G. Siméons and the teaching priest Frans De Hovre. It appears that this study was ordered by Cardinal Mercier, not only in his capacity as supreme representative of the Catholic authorities in Belgium and founder and emeritus professor of the Higher Institute of Philosophy of Leuven, but in particular as the central figure of neo-Thomism, of which De Hovre was a disciple. Mercier therefore took great pleasure in writing the preface, in which he praised the two men for their work (Willmann 1929, pp. 5–7). Since 1919, the *Vlaamsch Opvoedkundig Tijdschrift* (Flemish Pedagogical Journal, VOT) had been calling for strict Catholic prescriptive education which, based on belief in the sole true ideology, it considered superior to any other educational system.

And that was not all: in the light of this proclaimed absolute truth, Catholic pedagogy could take over at will the elements of other theories that it considered appropriate, as long as they were seen from the perspective of the secular values of the Catholic ideal of education (see Depaepe 1997). Willmann's approach to education also appeared as the first part of the "theoretical pedagogy", a series of books published by the VOT, of which Frans De Hovre and Alberic Decoene were the chief editors. Clearly, this trend was also reflected in De Hovre's (1935) popular work, *Paedagogische Denkers van Onzen Tijd* (Pedagogical Thinkers of Our Time), which was issued by the same publisher, and included introductions which had appeared previously in the VOT on educationalists and educational systems. This bestseller was also in the Aequatoria library. Hulstaert (1943) used long extracts from it for an article on general education.

In parallel with the positions that De Hovre defended, Hulstaert began this article with the observation, which he saw as inevitable, that modern trends contained only fragmentary truth because they had denied the link with philosophy—meaning ecclesiastical or neo-Thomist philosophy:

> The best educationalists in Europe and America consider one of the principal shortcomings of the modern school to be the absence of any clearly delineated objective. The most perspicacious relate this shortcoming to a deeper reason: the lack of a basis, or the divorce of teaching from philosophy. (Hulstaert 1943, p. 98)

He added: "The 'virtuosi' of the modern are the parasites of hyper-civilization…. our modern education is largely anti-pedagogical because it renders personal development difficult, and even impossible" (p. 99). He undoubtedly subscribed to the prescriptive and anti-modern Catholic pedagogical approach; this approach was both resolutely totalitarian, with its penetrating and pronounced ideology, and authoritarian, given its emphasis on obeying the authority of the educator, who also clearly represented this ideology. We will come back to this later. For now, we emphasize that, along the same lines as De Hovre, Hulstaert also referred, for historical context, to the idols of Catholic pedagogy. These were, in addition to Willmann, referred to above, Monsignor Felix-Antoine-Philibert Dupanloup and Cardinal John Henry Newman. From Duplanoup, he borrowed the contrast between "instruction" and "education". From Newman, he borrowed the idea that the spirit can only develop through the dialectic of new knowledge and knowledge the person has already acquired (Vancaeyseele 2004, p. 102).

In developing his applied pedagogy, he sometimes drew inspiration from the educational system used in British colonies (Dent 1944; Jones 1936). The report of the Phelps Stokes Commission for Eastern and Central Africa was not yet in the library, but he knew about it through an article published in *Africa*. He followed developments in this context in *Overseas Education* (from 1943), *The Colonial Review* (from 1942), and the *Revista de Ensino*, published in Angola. Nevertheless, Hulstaert was convinced that, as a central pillar in the work of converting indigenous populations to Christianity, teaching should be based on the Bantu culture. It was necessary at all costs to prevent the Catholic religion from being merely a thin veneer accompanying Western civilization. In his view, the starting point of the mission's work should be the indigenous culture, regional languages and mental universe of indigenous populations. Hulstaert's knowledge of the general Bantu culture in its local forms, and therefore very specifically the Lomongo language, was truly remarkable after so few years of study. His reading covered many fields, including the philosophy of culture, politics and psychology. Very early on he began to develop ideas on the cultural responsibility of missionaries and colonizers.

His approach was clear: one must have total and absolute respect for the language and culture of the local peoples. He would henceforth call this the "indigenist" approach; for decades to come this term would characterize his practical attitude and ideological options, in contrast with assimilationism, which he saw as the wish to destroy Bantu culture and replace it with Western culture, preferably using Latin and French.

> Europeanism dazzles the local people…. More courage is required not to be taken in by a facile demagogy. While it is not at all easy to protect children from themselves…, it is even more difficult when dealing with groups of individuals wishing to break the salutary links with tradition and who are intelligent enough to know what they want. (Hulstaert 1942, p. 39)

Not all colonized peoples think that way. Some of the Congolese approved of him; others did not. For example, J.-F. Iyeki (1952) indicated that "Both in the eyes of the administration and in relations between ourselves, we have every reason to acquire an intellectual affinity which would enable us to assimilate the civilization brought within our reach by Westerners" (p. 462).

And yet, calling for the promotion of indigenous culture was not immediately revolutionary. Contrary to their basic theory, most "adaptationists" or indigenists were willing to defend certain foreign cultural elements in view of the professed added value of religion and Christian morals, such as monogamy. Accordingly, Hulstaert continued to spread the Christian faith, to baptize, and to require strict education in the Roman Catholic catechism.

He and his colleagues believed that African society needed to integrate Catholic values, as they were put forward at the time, to guarantee that society would develop in positive ways. For Hulstaert, school was the main arena for applying his views: "Primary education, and indeed education as a whole, needs to engage resolutely in the path of adaptation. The indigenist approach must play the role in practice that is acknowledged in theory" (Hulstaert 1945, p. 90). What were the more practical implications of this position?

New Education and Mongo education

Hulstaert considered that educational activities in the colony could only be legitimate if they raised colonialized individuals from their own culture towards a higher spiritual (religious) level and allowed them to find their places independently in contemporary society, without subjecting them to the colonial economic and social system. He wrote about this on 30 January 1941, in a letter to Father Romanus Declercq in the Mbingi mission:

> This attempt needs to be accompanied by a bold movement to remove from school its utilitarian and Europeanizing side, which now characterizes it throughout the colony. The students need to be "re-indigenized", in terms of their traditions and languages, among other aspects, and to understand that becoming better is not at all synonymous with Europeanization, and that they have nothing to gain from imitating Europe. (Aequatoria archive, box No. 61, p. 170; Mf, CH 99)

Re-indigenization in the field of education implied knowledge of the basics of traditional education. On this subject, Hulstaert found inspiration in the work of Edward Van Goethem (Van Goethem n.d.; Hulstaert 1989), the apostolic vicar of Coquilhatville, who had undertaken broad research into the traditional education system of the Mongo. To provide a legitimate basis for his approach, which might appear to be backward-looking, Hulstaert made the link with what he had recently learnt concerning "modern" trends in education. For example, on 19 September 1942, he wrote this to Father Vesters in Basankusu:

> Some time ago, when I read *Nieuwe banen in het onderwijs* [New directions in education], my final conclusion was that modern pedagogy is therefore in favour of a total change of system, in practice, along the lines of traditional Mongo educational methods, namely occasional instruction, without a system within our meaning… The soul comes from us, the teachers, educators and friends. (Amsc, Hulstaert papers)

This would not conclude the debate, but it foreshadowed such a conclusion.

The debate: New Education versus prescriptive education

These new directions in education, which he mentioned in his letter to Fr. Vesters, had been drawn together by Victor D'Espallier (1933), in a book Hulstaert had in his library in Aequatoria. In it, the author endeavours to translate the "more modern" concepts of New Education into Belgian, or where appropriate, Flemish teaching practice. In its multiple manifestations, New Education was intended to ensure that education and teaching were based on the needs of the child. The principal theory of what was known as the "pedocentric" approach in educational circles required the student to be central to schooling,

rather than the teacher or the subject that was being taught. This principle was diametrically opposed to the principles of Catholic prescriptive pedagogy, which, its supporters said, had to be focused on Christ, not on children. As Hulstaert indicated intuitively in the passage quoted above, New Education shared some ideas with the indigenist approach.

It was also quite evident, however, that the way the movement's principles were being applied by the Belgians and Flemish in 1930 was ultimately fairly conformist and bourgeois, and not very radical (Depaepe 1997). That was also very certainly the case for the Catholic pedagogy into which D'Espallier, in the purest tradition of De Hovre and his followers, endeavoured primarily to integrate new ideas, methods and techniques at the pedagogical level, without undermining the basic ideology of the Catholic educational approach. In that respect, the term appropriation can undoubtedly be used. Instead of opting for the radical approach to children (and their emancipation), an attempt was made to continue the traditional education process through school and the logic inherent in the school system, later described as the grammar of schooling (Depaepe 2012). The historical and social conditions had not been fully met to allow the emergence of a "deschooling society", which would later become the dream of Ivan Illich.

In our view, this principle can also be applied to the development of Bantu pedagogy, where Hulstaert was not the only practitioner. In addition to Van Wing and Van Goethem, mentioned earlier, we should also mention his correspondence with Oswald Liesenborghs, who was not a missionary but in fact an academically trained educator. Through his African psycho-pedagogical project of 1938 to 1940 (Depaepe 2009), he clearly intended to follow the New Education movement and the professed pedocentric approach, but this did not prevent him from approving the analogy between "Black" and "big children", based on the psycho-genetic idea of development, which also operated at the cultural level. Accordingly, "black-centred" education, like "child-centred" education, usually took on the form of "raising children, while preventing them from developing" (Briffaerts et al. 2003).

Liesenborghs wrote several articles in the colonial revue *Kongo-Overzee* ["Congo Overseas"]. Inspired by the new pedagogical ideas of Ovide Decroly, among others, he wrote that Belgian schools in Africa needed to ensure that they did not run counter to the interests of the indigenous community by distancing it from its "environment". School, as conceived by the Belgian colonial administration, was fortunately endeavouring to oppose excessive "Europeanizing tendencies". He added that "the Blacks, excellent imitators, cannot resist the desire to imitate the Whites, particularly in their perception of the absence of any obligation to engage in slave-like labour" (Liesenborghs 1939, p. 61)! In his view, this desire needed to be managed so that the indigenous populations could form a community whose activities generated benefits. Secondary education should be reserved for an elite, and only those who were "chosen" would be able to aspire to it. And he pointed to a factor that "transforms the Black into a proud being at the intellectual level, and even an exploiter of his own race": the possibility of doing far better than others. He continued, "If the masses were developed at the same time as the elite, the distance between intellectuals and ordinary people would be reduced. The latter would become more intelligent and it would therefore be difficult to deceive them" (p. 68). Moreover, indigenous dialects could be developed into cultural languages only "if those practising them became the purveyors of a higher culture" (p. 65).

It was not surprising, therefore, that Hulstaert did not directly acknowledge the potential tension between New Education and prescriptive Catholic pedagogy, even at the theoretical level. On the one hand, he endeavoured to give voice to pedagogical reformers in the context of the missions, clearly taking inspiration from New Education, as illustrated

by an article written by Sister Magda, alias Alma Hosten (Z.M. 1939) in *Aequatoria*. On the other hand, following in the footsteps of De Hovre, he continued to criticize the absence of an ideological basis for New Education.

Moreover, a collaborator of *Aequatoria*, who signed using the initials M. M. (as Sister Magda also did), considered that not enough was being done for African children. It would be possible to avoid many prejudices concerning the Congolese people's supposed lack of interest and intellectual laziness if the educational objective was clear and the content was inspired as much as possible by the "life of the Blacks". If that were done, children would "show curiosity, and a feeling for analysis of educational issues," and "there would not be sufficient time to reply to their questions" (Z.M. 1939, p. 32). Sister Magda called for African children to be taken as the starting point for lessons. With her call for the global method of teaching reading (based on words rather than letters), on the one hand, and greater use of illustrations in reading books, on the other, she was, de facto, expressing a criticism of Hulstaert, who had not gone that far when developing his school books.

In conclusion, Hulstaert remained above all a Catholic missionary who tried, as far as possible, to integrate a theoretical basis into what he considered to be a fundamental task of the mission, without concerning himself about the danger of a disconcerting eclecticism. On 24 December 1942, he wrote to Father Raf Van Caeneghem:

> School is a powerful tool for evangelization. And yet it is the domain of lay persons. I can only legitimize school as EDUCATION for all beings, natural and supernatural, individuals and social beings. Its transformation into a pure means of propaganda in the service of religion has shocked me. Education must serve the interests of individuals and societies. The value scale needs to be the reference point…. The development of the intellect is extremely positive and indispensible, as individuals have to develop in all fields; but intelligence must not prevail over will, erudition over reflection, or reflection over judgement. In particular, everything needs to be directed towards people (individuals and society) in accordance with God's wishes. Harmony and unity must be reinforced. Why does school do so much wrong? Because, as in most cases it is badly organized, it breaks up the unity of society by failing to give due importance to the activities and aptitudes of human beings.… An excess of knowledge has greatly harmed discernment. Reflection has declined in favour of knowledge. The colonialization of reflection has undermined morals, and faith has been asphyxiated by knowledge. (AAeq, box 58, no. 220; mf 79, p. 016)

However, we see strong grounds for doubting that all of Hulstaert's pedagogical theories were integrated into his practice. Research on this subject is almost nonexistent. A systematic study of his 10 years as inspector could be very instructive, particularly because the decade included the war years. Belgian studies on Belgian colonialization criticize Hulstaert for a certain lack of respect towards the Congolese, despite his professed indigenist approach. Here, Bambi Ceuppens (2003) has shown that his tendency to be an apologist for the local society rather than work to improve conditions for the individual must be linked not only to ultramontane Catholicism, but also to his favouring of a Flemish nationalist ideology. Despite his real concern for indigenous populations, Hulstaert and his followers still advocated a form of cultural colonialization, and often implicitly helped the colonial system to which they were opposed. In contrast, according to Honoré Vinck (2012), Hulstaert's sociopolitical preferences in ideological matters, his (anti-)colonialism, and his nationalism had their origins in the application of certain theological principles

inspired by neo-Thomism. Furthermore, his pessimism with regard to Western civilization was inspired by the Romanian writer C.V. Gheorghiu and the German historian Oswald Spengler.

In the classroom: School books

To implement his ideas about education, Hulstaert revised or created all the basic books for the schools in the surrounding ecclesiastical region of Coquilhatville, which covered a thousand kilometres between Coquilhatville and Ikela. They remained in use until well after Independence. However, only the reading and grammar books showed any real innovation. For religion, Hulstaert confined himself to re-editing the books of the Trappist Fathers, adapting the spelling and certain linguistic terms (in the Holy Story and prayer books). Only the catechism was reformed in 1935, but without any real cultural adaptation. In contrast, in 1961 to 1963, he wrote a commentary on the catechism, partially adapted to the Mongo culture.

In the section below, we consider his main works: a series of three reading books and three grammars of Lomongo, all intended for primary school.

He clearly spent enormous amounts of time and effort preparing these materials. We have precise dates for the reader for the second year of primary school, *Buku ea njekola II*. Although the text was ready in July 1930, it was printed in Belgium and only reached the schools in 1934. A reader, *Buku ea mbaanda I,* followed much later: it was ready in 1930, dated 1935, and printed in 1936. The next stage consisted of grammars: *Etsifyelaka I* and *II* were printed directly by the mission printers in 1937. *Etsifyelaka III* had to wait until the end of the war. Further editions of these grammars and readers were printed in Mbandaka. Other readers followed: *Bekolo beki Biloko I* (Ogre Stories, 1937 and 1953), *Bekolo beki ulu* (Fables of the Tortoise, 1950) and *Bekolo beki bakambo* (Fables of Justice, 1954). Another in the series was *Nsong'a Lianja*, by Hulstaert's colleague, Edmond Boelaert (1949).

He was pursuing a conscious and intentional strategy to give greater importance to all materials related to language and literature: "Oral style has to serve as a model. The remarkable wealth of this treasure among the Congolese peoples and its relatively high artistic level give grounds for hoping for a magnificent future for African literature", he wrote in 1942 (Hulstaert 1942, p. 39). With these publications, he completed the range of school books in Lomongo for language teaching. They had been produced in only a few years by a single individual based on highly specific pedagogical and linguistic choices. School books on other subjects—science, history, botany, biology, hygiene, etc.—would follow, mainly in the 1950s, often in provisional form and in collaboration with his colleague Frans Maes, a former student at the Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Leuven, always adopting the same pedagogical approach.

New terminological features and pedagogical and teaching innovations?

Adapting to new concepts involved introducing some innovations. Hulstaert began by standardizing the language (Lomongo) for use in schools and churches. He established a new spelling, renewed the terminology used for all the subjects taught in primary and secondary schools, developed a new method of teaching reading adapted to the spirit of the local language, and, finally, created a new stock of reading lessons.

The Missionaries of the Sacred Heart had inherited an educational and religious terminology from the Trappist Fathers. It was neither well developed, fully thought through, nor systematic (Vinck 1990). In an article dating from 1950, Hulstaert reported as follows:

> For the primary schools in the vicariate, we have managed to establish a terminology allowing all teaching to be given in the indigenous tribal language. The words borrowed from European languages are limited to a few terms: exercise book, book (*buku*), rule (*object*), letter, comma (*koma*), syllable, ocean. For the term "sea", we borrowed the word *mbu* from the Bakongo, the Congolese tribe living on the ocean shore, as well as terms from the metric system, for which it was clearly wise to retain the European words with simple phonetic adaptations. All the other terms necessary for teaching in the various subjects have been developed based on the indigenous language. Our schools therefore have a complete terminology for reading and writing, arithmetic and elementary geometry, agriculture and botany, hygiene and gymnastics, and grammar (grammatical elements, forms and tenses, grammatical categories, syntax and analysis). Primary teaching can therefore be provided entirely in Lomongo. (Hulstaert 1950, p. 330)

In Hulstaert's view, the language actually spoken by the people was the only effective and worthy vehicle to be used in education. He wished to awaken among students a special interest in their maternal language, in contrast with the invasion of languages introduced by foreign nationals in the region. In his *Buku ea mbaanda I* of 1935, he introduced a special lesson on "our language". The Flemish priest and poet, Guido Gezelle, had coined the well-known saying, "Let them be Flemish, those whom God created Flemish"; bearing that in mind, he wrote this:

> God gave people language so that they could speak and live together as family and friends on earth, so that they could converse with others, and so that they could teach others all the good things…. Although certain individuals appreciate highly Lingala, we only appreciate our own language, which is Lonkundo. It is a very agreeable language to us, and contains many rational aspects. We like it very much, and it was transmitted to us by our ancestors. Our language has a certain beauty. We can use it to express everything. We appreciate our language and we remain lovingly attached to it. (Vinck 2002, pp. 119–120)

As this simple presentation makes clear, Hulstaert was also opposed to using French as a language for teaching in primary school. Throughout his life, he opposed the BCS (Vinck 2003) on this point. His reasoning was clear: in his view, the Brothers were not sufficiently (or not at all) interested in local culture and their approach to teaching was foreign to the school system in the diocese where he was the inspector. Hulstaert considered that children could only be taught to think in their own language, which he believed the Brothers had not used sufficiently, if at all. To him, the inherent consequence of the Brothers' approach was to make children into "parrots" who unthinkingly recited the lessons they had learned by heart. Though some tried to change the system, French remained the main language the Brothers used in their primary schools.

Hulstaert was convinced that his method was relevant. In a letter dated 26 June 1929, he explained his approach to his colleague Paul Jans: "What is the best method? Difficult to say. But as mine is based on [the characteristics of] the language and is therefore adapted to it, it also improves teaching of writing and reading" (AAeq., box 131, No. 117; Mf 9/158, p. 93.685; and Vinck 2002, p. 48). But what, precisely, did he mean by his "linguistic" method? He did not explain it anywhere. It is therefore surprising to see that he took no

account of the structure of words in Lomongo (or in Bantu in general): prefix-root-infix-suffix. Instead, he gave examples of learning to read based on the method of analyzing the syllables of Dutch (or French) words. For example, he wrote *Ba-ba-te-la* (They-own-for, or guardianship), when, respecting the Bantu character of the term, he should have written: *ba-bat-el-a*, with "ba-" being the prefix, "-bat-" the root, "-el-" the extension, and "-a" the ending (*Buku ea njekola I*, p. 43).

Had he in fact noted this problem? Or had his habits conditioned him into forcing the structure of the African word so clumsily? From the outset, he was aware of the essential function of the seven vowels in Lomongo (instead of five in the other Bantu languages), but for practical reasons he did not plan separate lessons for the two positions "e" and "o" of the phonemes. He waited until the second edition (1945) to introduce these distinctions and, based on them, to rearrange the order of the lessons.

The choice of spelling is also an element in the typical reading method for a language. Simple phonetic spelling, based on a stable and unequivocal relationship between the sound and the letter used, undoubtedly helps people enormously in learning to read and write. From the very beginning, he took inspiration from the spelling proposed by the African Institute in London (Westermann and Ward 1933). He also addressed the problem of the order in which subjects were to be taught, and arranged his lessons from the simplest to the most complex, defining the degree of difficulty according to the characteristics of the Lomongo language. All of these elements probably constituted the essence of what he called his "linguistic method".

But other aspects are more important than spelling. In an in-depth analysis, Van Wing (1930) illustrated the harmful pedagogical consequences of failing to respect African semantics:

> Palms are trees… and the master endeavours to have these phrases translated into Lingala or Kikongo. In many Bantu languages, there are no words corresponding to French terms such as "tree" and "animal". For many Bantus, palms are a species which is not included in a generic category of ligneous plants called "trees"…. In such phrases, the master therefore imposes judgements which, in the eyes of the students, are flagrant contradictions. (pp. 180–181)

Given his exceptional knowledge of the flora and fauna of equatorial forests, Hulstaert never fell into this trap.

Because the Bantu languages are quite specific, it is not always easy to trace the pedagogical and didactic modifications advocated by the pioneers of Congolese school books as they relate to textbooks from their home countries. To our knowledge, no one has yet conducted a relevant comparative study on this subject. However, we are reluctant to abandon the idea that school books throughout the world follow a series of identical models almost intuitively (Boyer 1999). This phenomenon can probably be explained by the near universality of the "grammar of schooling" we referred to earlier. We cannot go into this issue in greater depth here, but this issue makes it all the more interesting to investigate Hulstaert's sources of inspiration when drafting his school books.

Hulstaert's school books: Sources and content

Hulstaert drew on multiple sources for his textbooks. His personal knowledge of Mongo culture and history, already extensive, was one vast and original source for him. Still, in order to implement his very original and innovative approach, he depended heavily on his

predecessors and, somewhat ironically, also on his "adversaries". By comparing his work with the publications of other missions, which he may have known about, we can identify influences and borrowings. We know he had copies of the school books of the Marist Brothers, the Scheutist Fathers, the BCS and the Fathers of Mill Hill, along with those of such Protestant missions as the Disciples of Christ Congo Mission and the Congo-Balolo Mission.

The Marist Brothers had been in the Congo since 1911 and were specialists in teaching. They ran schools in Buta, Bunia and Stanleyville and had published a collection of school books in the Congo. They applied methods that were in fashion in Europe. Hulstaert adapted nine texts from their reading books. He also obtained all the school publications then being produced by the Scheutist Fathers in the ecclesiastical circumscription of Li-sala—but we find no evidence that he depended formally on their books. In contrast, some books of the BCS were already in use in the region before he arrived there, and in 1930 and 1931 he was still ordering books from them: textbooks in calculation and French for his school in Boteka. Perhaps he had heard good things about the BCS in discussions on New Education, not only in Belgium, but abroad.

We see two pieces of evidence for this idea. First, based on their interest in new educational ideas, the BCS had developed a school programme for 1936, one that was highly appreciated and thus ready for Hulstaert to use as well. The ideas of Ovide Decroly, the well-known Belgian education innovator, may have been a determining factor here (Depaepe, De Vroede, and Simon 1992). During his study tour in Columbia in 1925, Decroly had praised the BCS for their "progressive" pedagogical approach. Given that the principles of New Education take the child's specific environment as the starting point for all school pedagogy, Hulstaert's indigenist ideas may have in fact been closer to those of the BCS than he himself wished to admit, given his other longstanding opposition to their work. Whatever the situation, we see no indication that he actually made use of their school books in his work as an author.

The Protestants in Bolenge had produced some readers in Lomongo that were used briefly in Catholic schools before Hulstaert's books were introduced. The titles have not been identified, but they very probably included *Bonkanda wa mbaanda w'école I* and *II* [Reader for Grade I and II] of 1924 and *Lisolo la bonkanda* [Books with Talks] of 1927. Hulstaert knew these books very well. We can identify a direct and fairly extensive dependency on them, for several lessons. He corrected the language, and summarized or selected paragraphs from the model. Accordingly, we have been able to identify parallels with the lessons in *Buku ea mbaanda I* (Lessons Nos. 18, 41, 59, 105, 115, 122, and 129).

Through this work, Lafontaine (and Aesop) became known in the Congo. The fables had a prominent place in readers in European schools, and had also been translated into African languages. These texts, although adapted, are found in the school books published by the Marist Brothers, the BCS and the Scheutist Brothers—and Hulstaert consulted all of them. The Protestants had also been using them for a long time. It is possible that they inspired him, as lesson 40 in the *Buku ea mbaanda I* is very close to Ruskin's (1921) *Mongo Proverbs and Fables*. Hulstaert also took material from earlier publications of Mongo fables and proverbs, such as those by his colleagues P. Brokerhoff, A. De Witte, and P. Vertenten. In addition, he had at his disposal many notes on oral literature assembled by Monsignor Van Goethem (n.d.).

What influence did Belgian school books have? Our impression is that Hulstaert did not use them, although we were not surprised to find several parallels with them. A study of Congolese school songs, which generally had the same moralizing educational role as Belgian school books, showed that although those themes were expressed in different

images, they did not differ much from those found in Belgium (Depaepe 2004). However, we noted a time lag: during the colonial period, subjects from the 19th century were often used again, including terms taken from poems and songs of the period.

While Hulstaert's books retained certain similarities with other school books, they often differed from the established authorities. For example, they often gave more prominence to flora and fauna and indigenous society, made far less mention of colonial society and never referred to European culture, except for Catholic traditions. Hulstaert stands out for his use of traditional literary texts. A fable almost always ends with a moral conclusion. However, that might raise problems from the viewpoint of Christian morality, so some textbook authors converted these pagan moralities into Christian teaching, in contrast with the traditional version. However, in general, Hulstaert respected the original version fairly well, even when the texts were vulgar or formally non-Christian (*Buku ea mbaanda I*, Lessons Nos. 77, 80, and 85).

Broad comparative research would be needed to determine the scope and extent of such manipulations. Briffaerts (2003, p. 195) compared the school books of the Sacred Heart missionaries with those of the Dominican Fathers; he doubts that the differences he noticed between Hulstaert and other authors were more than mere coincidences. In any case, they give no grounds for suggesting fundamental differences in their pedagogical effects (see Depaepe, Briffaerts, Kita, and Vinck 2003). We now come to our third question. How were Hulstaert's pedagogical ideas and activities received, and what influence did they have?

Reception and influence

How many children held one of Hulstaert's readers over the 35 years they were in use? This is difficult to estimate. Over that time, the system of distribution and use was anything but uniform. In some periods and places, each student had a copy, to be passed on to the next class at the end of the school year. In other cases, students bought the books and took them with them throughout their time in primary school.

Information on the successive publications and editions of the *Buku ea mbaanda I* can give some idea of how widely they were used, but unfortunately figures are only available for the third and fourth editions (see Table 1).

Did the ideas in Hulstaert's books really have an influence on the students? Consider that in that culture, school books were almost the only means of transmitting facts and new ideas. Thus, he must have had a major impact. Evidence to answer this question could come from either a survey of former students or analyses of the publications in contemporary local periodicals—studies no one has yet undertaken. However, it is easier to identify his cultural and societal choices in the texts. His school books show us the author as in a mirror. His religious conservatism, professed throughout his life, is reflected in the lessons on religion, in which he displays not the slightest originality and makes no attempt at the adaptation that was so dear to him in other fields. However, his Mongo nationalism shines through on every possible occasion. The historiographer of the Mongos took his first steps in a series of knowledgeable and original texts on their ethnic subdivisions. The confirmed linguist that he later became found expression in his correct and careful language, in which he is respectful of the form of the language that his sources conveyed to him.

In 1946, after 18 years, Hulstaert's engagement in teaching came to an end. He was admittedly somewhat discouraged by his continuous disputes with the BCS and by other forms of resistance to his opinions. It was also time to turn to his major publication

Table 1 Hulstaert's readers: Editions and numbers published

	1st edition	2nd edition	3rd edition	4th edition	Total
Buku ea njekola I	*5,000*	*5,000*	12,000	12,000	34,000
Buku ea njekola II	5,000	*5,000*	12,000	–	22,000
Buku ea mbaanda I	2,500	*2,000*	–	–	4,500
Total					60,500

Source: Authors' calculations, based on archival information (Amsc: invoices from printers Proost and De Bièvre and the mission printer at Coquilhatville), and De Rop (1956), p. 67

Note: The figures in italics for the first and second editions are estimates.

projects: dictionaries, grammars, descriptions of dialects, texts of oral literature. It is easy to understand that primary textbooks were no longer at the forefront of his interests.

Conclusions

Authors who address colonial school education are generally tempted to condemn it as "education for submission" (Briffaerts 2014; Depaepe and Van Rompaey 1995). Is that also true for Hulstaert's principal school books? His conception of what was most essential in education encouraged him to target and promote the development of personal intelligence, which could lead to students thinking independently and developing their own attitudes. In the lesson on language (*Buku ea mbaanda I*, lesson 17), he distances himself from the opinion of the "Whites"—a bold position to take in the context of colonial education. His indigenist approach and Mongo nationalism were intended to imbue the Congolese with confidence in themselves and pride in their history and culture. On the other hand, his school books call for unquestioning submission to the church authorities: two lessons on the Pope contain seven uses of the word "power". In this respect, he did not depart from the doctrine taught in Western Catholic schools.

However, we see far less evidence of submission to the colonial authorities in his school books than in those by other authors. Hulstaert mistrusted the state and its interventionism. We see how specific his position was when we compare his works with contemporary texts. In Lisala, the reading manual for 1932 begins with a lesson on state authority. In Niangara, a 1948 text proclaimed that "People everywhere shall submit to the will of Leopold III". In 1955, the author of the Lisala teachers' guide openly stated that "The teacher shall prepare the children for submission" (*Mateya ma bominisi* 1955, p. 93).

Thus, it is no surprise that, given his stubbornness and his often idiosyncratic ideas, Hulstaert clashed with the Catholic hierarchy, and especially the internuncio, Monsignor Dellepiane. In the history of colonial education and teaching, Hulstaert the missionary will remain a controversial author. Another controversy concerns his classification as a follower of New Education; he was undeniably sympathetic to some of its didactic principles, but in practice they did not prevail over Catholic tradition (Vancaeyseele 2004). In any case, Hulstaert was and remained primarily a missionary priest. His focus on children could only be applied insofar as it was acceptable within the restrictive framework of the Christ-centred Catholic teaching then being advocated in Belgium, as set out in the publications of pedagogues from the University of Leuven.

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Hulstaert's textbooks in the Mongo language

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