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Introduction. Education in the history of state and power: Transnational, national and local perspectives

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INTRODUCTION

Education in the History of State and Power: Transnational, National and Local Perspectives Special issue: The Eighth Nordic Conference on the History of Education

Mette Buchardt & Maria Simonsen, special issue editors

Education has a long history of being closely affiliated with authorities. Political and economic elites have taken a particular interest in education as the venue where mindsets and worldviews were formed. Throughout history, different stakeholders have emerged, and power structures have shifted. Some of the key agents in these processes have been the church and clerical authorities, princes and sovereigns, the builders of nation-states, various groups of professionals, international organizations, as well as private agents and interest groups. In the modern age, the principal actors in the educational arena have been the state, regional and local authorities.

This special issue, containing key contributions from the Eighth Nordic Conference on the History of Education in May 2022, focuses on new research perspectives on the history of state and power relations in a local, national and transnational sense. Raising historical awareness of these developments and trajectories seems key today in a world where education is often promoted using standards, comparisons and ubiquitous technologies. Historical research in this respect offers the prospect of rewinding our understandings of education pointing out all the lost possibilities and alternatives as well as providing sensitivities for understanding resilience, counter-movements and the shifting role of the local and national in a globalized world.

Local, national and trans-Nordic perspectives on the history of educational knowledge and power

Knowledge production, circulation of knowledge and actors of knowledge are a central part of understanding local as well as national and transnational power relations. The history of universities and academic versus practical knowledge production forms part of such questions. Also, they play a massive role in the institution that hosted the Eighth Nordic Conference on the History of Education.

The 2022 conference was hosted in collaboration between the history-oriented research centers at Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, Aalborg University, namely *Centre for Education Policy Research (CfU)* at Department for Culture &

Learning and the research groups *Knowledge, Sustainability and Heritage* (KSH) and *Conflict, Coercion and Authority in History* (CCA) at Department for Politics and Society. It took place in the northernmost of the five bigger cities in Denmark, namely Aalborg, where Aalborg University's (AAU) main campus has been located since 1974. That AAU is placed geographically and sometimes also politically at a distance from the capital, Copenhagen (where AAU since 2003 has actually had a branch also), increases the importance of paying attention to not only local trajectories, but also how the national and transnational dimensions play into local practice historically and at present. In continuation, in this special conference issue, we introduce a research article on the history of Aalborg University, one of the first publications in a bigger research project that aims to write the history of AAU. The article "Between tradition and experiment. The idea of a new university," authored by Maria Simonsen, tells the story of how a new university was created in the academic periphery of Denmark, and which changes in understanding of what is academic knowledge this led to. As such the article also points to and is part of the recent development of university history into a broader history of knowledge.

Simonsen's text was one of several contributions at the Eighth Nordic Conference on the History of Education that approach the history of education, state and power using the perspectives from history of knowledge. Since 2015, several Scandinavian historians have integrated perspectives from the history of knowledge in their studies. Historians from Lund University, led by Johan Östling, in particular, have shown how this field in collaboration with other fields can create dynamic and innovative analyses of historical periods, events or phenomena.¹ It is therefore a pleasure to bring Östling's keynote-panel paper from the conference in an elaborate form. Östling's article "Contemporary Nordic Histories of the Universities: The Renewal of An Old Field" on the one hand reflects on the historiography of universities in the Nordics, and on the other elucidates the mutual and overlapping research interests between the history of education and the history of knowledge. Also, Johan Samuelsson's article "Skolan som försöksverkstad: Spridning av kunskap och erfarenhet av försökundervisning i svenska pedagogiska tidskrifter 1920–1960" can be understood as part of the recent focus on knowledge production in Nordic history of education, lifting the question of how experimental educational knowledge was circulated in the heyday of Swedish progressivism by means of pedagogy journals.

The Nordic states between the welfare-state model, the nation-state project and the colonial past and present

A central theme across the conference keynotes and papers was the question of how to understand education and state relations in the Nordics and beyond in light of the different features of the state. In this issue, Pirjo Markkola contributes with her keynote on "Education as Lived Welfare. A History of Experience Perspective on Children and the Welfare State" and offers an account of how newer methodological developments within the history of experience and the history of affect and emotions can shed new light on the historical relationship between Nordic welfare states and education and upbringing. Markkola addresses the question of redress and historical

¹ Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad and Anna Nilsson Hammar, eds., *Forms of Knowledge: Developing the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2020).

justice processes. This question is also taken up in Matilda Keynes, Beth Marsden and Archie Thomas' article "Does curriculum fail Indigenous political aspirations? Sovereignty and Australian history and social studies curriculum." While concentrating on the question of decolonialization and redress processes in an Australian context, the article offers perspectives and ways to go forward in order to explore similar processes in the Nordic region where historical justice questions also involve the question of the colonization of the North Atlantic and Sapmi. Keynes et al.'s article shows that the Nordic Education History Conferences and fora are no longer confined to the Nordics – scholar-wise and topic-wise. Another take on the Nordic welfare-state history regarding institutions is Taina Sillanpää's article on the modern history of Finnish kindergartens, drawing attention to the role of state education beyond the school institution.

However, the Nordic states are not only understood as welfare states: They are also nation-states. With his keynote paper "Giving Language to Taboos. Nation and Religion in Modern Educational Reasoning," Daniel Tröhler invites theoretically and historically to revisit the overlooked historical relationship between crafting nation and crafting education and the even more overlooked role of religion in this context. So does Nina Volckmar with a historical comparison of mainly Catholic Ireland and mainly Lutheran Norway.

With a conference consisting of approximately 90 participants, participants from universities and other research institutions in 9 states around the globe, the Nordic Education History Conference has become a place where novel methodology and challenging problems are exchanged, something that is reflected in the selections of papers that we are proud to present as articles in this special conference issue. We look forward to continuing the development at the next future conference hosted by Stockholm University. Until then: Enjoy the reading.

About the editors

Mette Buchardt is a Professor and Head of Centre for Education Policy Research (CfU), Aalborg University, Denmark. Her research comprises the interdisciplinary field of education policy history and welfare state history, including education- and social reform in the European states, e.g. modernization and secularization, and the influence of migration on welfare state development historically.

Maria Simonsen is Research Associate Professor in History, Aalborg University, Denmark. Research interests include the history of the book, publishing studies from the nineteenth century onwards, the history of knowledge and history of the university. She has published widely on the history of Scandinavian encyclopedias. Currently she is undertaking a three-year research project on the history of Aalborg University.