

Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education (NJCIE)



NJCIE 2017, Vol. 1(1), 1-4

<http://doi.org/10.7577/njcie.2205>

Editorial

Historically there were two professional societies within the field of Comparative and International Education (CIE) in the Nordic countries. The oldest was the Nordic Association for the Study of Education in Developing Countries (NASEDEC) founded in 1981, which is no longer active. The second society is the Nordic Comparative and International Education Society ([NOCIES](#)), founded in 1992, which was initially the Scandinavian branch of the Comparative Education Society of Europe (CESE). While NASEDEC had a clear and specific interest in educational policies in the Global South, NOCIES has a broad scientific perspective not restricted to any particular geographical region in its research interests. The Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education (NJCIE) is aligned with the perspectives of NOCIES, which include a global focus on education. NASEDEC is no longer active; however, NOCIES is flourishing and continuing to grow. The society holds bi-annual meetings and conferences many of which have resulted in academic publications (see e.g. Holmarsdottir & O'Dowd, 2009; Jokila, Kallo & Rinne, 2015). This journal is also one avenue for the dissemination of research from members of NOCIES and other scholars, both in the Nordic countries and beyond. The field comparative and international education has a long history not only within the Nordic region but also globally.

The subject area of Comparative and International Education (CIE) was established in the 1950s (see Epstein, 2016 for a comprehensive history of one of the largest CIE societies) and includes different components under the large theme of Comparative and International Education. Within the Nordic countries, the field includes research and education at various universities, but not necessarily under the CIE heading. One of the oldest programs in the Nordic countries was at the Institute of International Education at Stockholm University, established in 1971 under the leadership of Torsten Husén. As the first Director of the Institute of International Education, Torsten Husén established the foundation for Comparative Education in Sweden, which also influenced the development of the field in other Nordic countries. While the chair of Professor of International and Comparative Education was created for Husén, the Institute of International Education (IIE) was his own conception.

IIE became an education and training center where students had the opportunity to learn firsthand from many of the scholars with whom Husén collaborated. For instance, he was part of the initial group that developed the International Association for the Evaluation of

Educational Achievement (IEA). Husén was chair of this group from 1962 to 1978 during which time the IEA grew from twelve countries undertaking a feasibility study to the point where it had undertaken and published the results of seven large-scale studies in over twenty countries. Today the IEA studies include TIMMS, PIRLS, ICCS among others and has been influential in developing other large-scale cross-national tests such as PISA.

As the premier journal for the CIE field in the Nordic countries, *NJCIE* sees it as fitting to include two articles that are linked to this historical foundation, focusing particularly on PISA and the Finnish education system, in the first issue. PISA and other large-scale cross-national tests have influenced a shift in the direction of education, both in the Nordic countries and beyond. This has led to new patterns of policy borrowing and the focus on external models of education as promoting *best practice* for domestic educational reform.

While the focus on such models is important, we have included in this issue the first article by Lesley Bartlett and Frances Vavrus, which challenges us to move beyond defining comparative studies by nation-states and to reconsider ‘units of analysis’. Instead of taking a traditional “compare and contrast” approach to comparison, Bartlett and Vavrus ask us to look at “linkages across place, space and time” in order to see “how processes unfold” and are influenced by “actors and events over time in different locations and at different scales”. Their overall argument points to the “need for attention to the vertical, horizontal, and especially transversal elements” in one’s own research.

Drawing on the discussion by Bartlett and Vavrus the next two papers in this issue point to the fact that policy reforms do not necessarily “have a home base, a territory, or a nationality and therefore do not ‘belong’ to a particular educational system” (Steiner-Khamsi, 2010, p. 327). More specifically the call for papers and the journal itself are concerned with the interplay of local, national, regional and global contexts, which are shaping education, and the ways in which local understandings can bring to light trends, effects and influences that exist in different contexts globally, highlight the general understanding of Comparative and International Education in *NJCIE*. This is pointed out in the article by Thomas Arnesen, Eyvind Elstad, and Knut Andreas Christophersen as well as the article by Jennifer Chung.

The article by Arnesen, Elstad, and Christophersen is linked to the idea of best practice based on Finnish students’ outstanding results on large-scale international tests such as TIMSS and PISA. For Arnesen and colleagues, the comparison between Finnish and Norwegian classrooms is valuable as these two contexts differ in terms of access to Internet and computer use in classrooms, which they see as linked to students’ self-control in technology-rich classrooms. Further, these authors argue,

Motivational conflicts can arise between the immediate rewards of net surfing and games and the long-term rewards of academic attainment, and these motivational conflicts can influence students’ self-discipline in their academic work. Through this lens, it is worthwhile to compare the associations between instructional factors and students’ academic self-discipline. (p. 19)

Through their use of structural equation modelling, the results show that the associations between instructional qualities and academic self-discipline are overall stronger in the Finnish sample than the Norwegian sample. Yet in the Norwegian case, students' appreciation for school was more highly associated with academic self-discipline than in Finland.

In the third article, Jennifer Chung discusses how transnational organizations, such as the OECD, fuel a "global edu-business" which leads to an increasing pressure on nation-states to improve and ultimately reform their education systems. Finland is considered a high performer in the PISA tests and, hence, a model many countries compare to their own education system. Importing the Finnish model of teacher education is considered by many countries as a significant contribution in increasing the quality of their own education systems and assessment results. Chung's study includes interviews with Finnish educationalists and through her analysis, she attempts to address the feasibility exporting the Finnish teacher education model to other countries. In her conclusion, Chung argues that Finnish teacher education can be successfully exported to other countries if it is implemented without political pressure, distilled from its original context, and if indigenized into the new context.

The fourth article in this volume is by Mette Helleve who presents an up-close case study of Norwegian student teachers' experiences with teaching practice in contexts completely different from their own. In her article, Helleve focuses on data from the 29 student teachers she has supervised over a three-month teaching practice period in Namibia and Uganda. The empirical basis in the article consists of practice reports and reflection notes in addition to interviews. Her focus is on the concept of *global consciousness*, which is analyzed through the lenses of *global sensitivity*, *global understanding* and *global self-representation* in a phenomenological perspective. Through an analysis of the development of the global consciousness of student teachers, it becomes evident that they struggle with their international teaching experience, constantly comparing it to their Norwegian context and to their own historical knowledge about Namibia and Uganda. Although the Norwegian Ministry of Education encourages such international activities, the effect on increased global consciousness is called into question.

The final article in this first edition focuses on the role that school districts play in collaboration with their school leaders for developing schools towards better learning systems. Jan Merok Paulsen and Øyvind Henriksen point out that in the Nordic countries, municipalities correspond fairly close with school districts in other systems. This article in particular centers on the relationship between school leaders and their municipal school owners in four Nordic countries (Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway) and specifically the relationship between the school superintendent and the group of school leaders. The analysis takes the form of a review of published work in journal articles, book chapters, and peer-reviewed conference papers, based mainly on the Norwegian findings drawn from a large-scale Nordic research project undertaken from 2009 to 2014. In their review Paulsen and Henriksen find

six important avenues, through which municipal school owners can exert positive influence for school capacity building: 1) building professional learning teams of school principals (within the context of the municipality organization); 2) ensuring a supportive group-climate in the same context, characterized by psychological safety, so that school leaders can speak up; 3) a trusting interpersonal relationship to the superintendent as reference-point; 4) paired with leadership support; 5) educational competence in the municipal apparatus; and finally 6) reducing mistrust between local school politicians and school professionals. (p. 80)

Overall, all the articles in this issue serve to remind us of the concern for evidence-based policy and practice, which arises within a climate of ‘improvement’, ‘raising standards’ and ‘making schools more effective’. Knowledge of ‘what works’ requires the need to set targets (Pring, 2004). Yet, as Pring (2004) and others (Hammersley, 2007, see also Thomas & Pring, 2004) argue this will be difficult unless we know where we have been and where we want to go. “While some approaches to policy studies adopt an instrumental stance to investigate what works”, Bartlett and Vavrus argue for a sociocultural approach, which “understands policy as a deeply political process of cultural reproduction engaged in and shaped by social actors in disparate locations who exert incongruent amounts of influences over the design, implementation and evaluation of policy” (2017, pp. 5-6). Such political processes, in one way or another, are in focus in all the articles included in this issue.

Editors

Halla B. Holmarsdottir & Heidi Biseth

References

- Bartlett, L. and Vavrus, F. (2017). *Rethinking case study research: A comparative approach*. New York: Routledge.
- Epstein, E. H. (2016). *Crafting a Global Field: Six Decades of the Comparative and International Education Society*. Switzerland: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-33186-7>
- Hammersley, M. (Ed.). (2007). *Educational research and evidence-based practice*. London: Sage.
- Holmarsdottir, H. B., & O’Dowd, M. (Eds.). (2009). *Nordic Voices: Teaching and Researching Comparative and International Education in the Nordic Countries*. Sense Publishers.
- Jokila, S., Kallio, J., & Rinne, R. (2015). *Comparing times and spaces: Historical, theoretical and methodological approaches to comparative education*. Jyväskylä: Finnish Educational Research Association.
- Pring, R. (2004). Conclusion: Evidence-based policy and practice. In G. Thomas & R. Pring (Eds.), *Evidence-based practice in education* (pp. 201-212). London: Open University Press.
- Steiner-Khamsi, G. (2010). The politics and economics of comparison. *Comparative Education Review*, 54(3), 323-342. <https://doi.org/10.1086/653047>
- Thomas, G., & Pring, R. (Eds.) (2004). *Evidence-based practice in education*. London: Open University Press.