

ECER 2025 Belgrade – Network Special Call

NW 17 – Histories of Education

Charting the way forward. Integrating historical perspectives and inquiries into contemporary educational debates

Abstract

Education is a future-oriented enterprise, implying possibilities, and potentially utopian ideals of what a positive future should look like. Educational theory and practice are thus a bridge between the lived present and desired future. But education is also an enterprise firmly rooted in the past. In this special call we invite reflection on the overall conference theme, 'charting the way forward', from perspectives informed by the past. We invite methodologically and theoretically focused contributions which draw on historical evidence and historical/interdisciplinary approaches to interrogate the extent to which education can and should direct and inform our futures.

The Call

We welcome submissions in the forms of individual papers, panels, workshops, round tables and posters which address one or more of the following questions/themes. We are open to a range of historically informed approaches and strategies and encourage participants to explore:

Past perspectives and future educational projects

We invite critical reflections on the extent to which our knowledge of the past can and should inform our understandings of the present and our plans for the future. Questions are raised as to which knowledge we can draw on and the ways in which it is drawn on, and if and how it can be applied to contemporary educational challenges. Contemporary educational research might downplay contextual time and thus provide universal solutions to educational problems ignoring variations related to different pasts and contested histories (Cowen 2002; Rizvi & Lingard 2010). We encourage papers which engage with contemporary educational problems adopting an historical approach, and those which on the basis of historical enquiry explore whether and how past educational experiences can inform future actions. We invite reflections on the nature of time (Barad 2007, 2010, 2017; Cowen 2002; Duncheon & Tierney 2013; Ingold 1993; Jordheim 2014; Fraser 1988, Goodman 2017, 2018, 2020; Hoffmann-Ocon, Kössler & Reh 2024; Latour 1993, Lauer 1981; McLeod 2017; McLeod, Sobe & Seddon 2017; Nóvoa & Yariv-Mashal 2003; Seixas 2012; Serres & 1995; Thyssen 2028; Thyssen & Pruneri 2018; Van Ruyskensvelde et al. 2021) and the ways in which this might affect the relationships between educational pasts, presents, and futures.

Historical insights into politically and culturally contested educational theory and practice

An historical approach to education can potentially enable us to place developments in perspective and liberate us from the conviction that things have always been as they are now and will thus remain that way (McCulloch 2016). Moreover, history of education can follow the results of what seemed in the past innocent and neutral educational innovations highlighting the role of people, institutions and ideas in their development and implications (Depaepe 2017). Its potential 'usefulness' (Westberg, 2021) lies in its ability to help us identify and interrogate areas of contestation, and continuity and change in these. By tracing the processes which have led to dominant hegemonic discourses, history can reveal the power dynamics that influence educational policy and research and thus interrogate claims to legitimacy in contemporary educational discourse (Tröhler 2013).

Exploring past uncertainties to inform educational challenges

The general call acknowledges ambiguities and uncertainties as a source of challenge in mapping and predicting the future. Contributions that reflect also on how ambiguities were managed in the past and what the results of educational responses to past perceived uncertainties were, may allow for deeper understandings. We invite critical explorations of how uncertainty has been tackled in different educational pasts and what this tells us about the nature of education as a discipline. Did educational discourses in the past have a place for doubts, and how were these expressed with regard to policy, theory and practice?

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