

SOURCES AND RESEARCH PRACTICES IN THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION:

Challenges and Perspectives

When we study history of education, we depend on various sources to the past. They open, decide, colour the stories we are able to tell. We read our sources, creating our narratives with them. In this conference, we would like to ask how the stories we tell and the interpretations we are able to develop are related to our understanding of and work with empirical sources, who question us just as we question them.

Sources have been at the centre of the work of historians and are regarded as the foundation of historical research that validate the discipline's methods and heuristic character. They include all types of documentation that can record past activities and range from written documents and oral testimonies to visual and material records. While for positivistic historiographies they were the sacred touchstones of scholarship, contemporary discussions have disputed their truth claims both because of their own constitutive ambivalence—as always complex, impure, overdetermined records—and of their preservation within specific archive politics.

Especially in the history of education, researchers today employ a broader range of sources, leading to the emergence of new subfields within the discipline. Historians of education are devoting increasing attention to the interpretation of sources, their plurality, the creation of narratives based on their content, and the ethical dilemmas posed by their uses. Besides, these evolving approaches are being discussed and examined extensively within the academic community and are of particular importance.

In our field of study, research practices are being transformed by shifts in theory regarding sources and analytical methodologies as well as by technological affordances and public debates on what history is or stands for. Two issues deserve closer examination:

I. Broadening the scope of the history of education by expanding the range of sources. In recent decades, statistical data, oral testimonies, life histories, visual and material sources, and digital humanities tools have gained traction. How are the new sources sought and explored? How could the traditional written ones be revisited? How do new sources and the reinterpretation of more traditional sources (re)construct our knowledge about the educational past?

II. New frames to interpret sources. Evolving interdisciplinarity resulted in critical awareness of familiar research frames, widening conceptualisations and criteria by which sources are selected and analysed. The different “turns” in humanities and social sciences (e.g., spatial, visual, material, affective, transnational) come up with compelling new ways of working with historical sources. In what way does the use of sources against the

background of emerging frameworks change our conceptualisation of the educational past? What new questions and challenges are raised by analysing the sources through different interpretive lenses?

This call for papers aims to continue that reflection, seeking to frame, update, and expand current debates and research practices in the history of education. The theme of ISCHE 47 invites historians of education to reconsider their relationship with sources and to reflect on how they shape their interpretations of the educational past, on the one hand, and challenge the limits of theories, concepts, methodologies, and approaches, on the other.

Participants are encouraged to explore the evolving role of sources, not only as indispensable tools of historical inquiry but also as subjects of critical scrutiny—examining their diversity, generativity, limitations, and even the potential exhaustion or decline of certain sources in the study of education and related fields. Participants are also invited to place their analysis within the broader context of reflecting on research practices in the history of education.

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

1. Historiographical traditions and new methodological and interpretive pathways in working with/through sources: How are established historiographical traditions being challenged or reconfigured through innovative uses of sources, or how are new approaches redefining the historian's relationship with non-traditional materials?

2. Public and private archives, libraries and collections: perspectives, problems and challenges: Historians of education use a variety of sources, preserved in public archives and libraries as well as private collections. The nature of the sources preserved in these cultural institutions often varies, also significantly. Manuscripts, documents, records, letters, textbooks, children's books, but also school exercise books, diaries, etc. They are the result of specific conservation policies, as well as evidences of past events and processes. Which methodological questions do the use of particular sources raise regarding access, preservation, and historical meaning-making?

3. Studying educational systems and policies: How do statistical data, policy documents, administrative records, official reports, school funding statistics, and other kind of sources shape our understanding of educational governance, reforms, and state interventions over time? Which other sources can be mobilized to study educational policies and statecraft?

4. Traces of everyday life and of the sensorial in educational processes: How can ego-documents, photographs, private correspondence, and other kind of sources help us to reconstruct lived experiences of students, teachers, and school communities, as well as their social habitus, rituals, taboos and unwritten rules? What role do material objects (e.g. school desks, blackboards, school uniforms, teaching aids), bodily practices, and sensory experiences play as sources for understanding the embodied nature of education?

5. Studying pedagogical theories and agents: How do sources such as pedagogical treatises and journals, lecture notes, public correspondence, or intellectual networks illuminate the development and circulation of educational thought?

6. Working across spheres and sources: What are the methodological challenges in doing studies across and connecting different spheres in the educational field (e.g. educational policy making and everyday schooling) in research? Which possibilities and challenges follow the aim of combining different sources—for example written, material, visual—in the same study, possibly for working across spheres?

7. Digital sources, sources' databases, and use of Artificial Intelligence in historical research: What are the possible impacts of digital archives, AI tools, and data-driven approaches in reshaping research practices, including questions of accessibility, bias, and source interpretation?

8. Memories, memory-work, and social representations of education as sources in the history of education: The use of oral histories, autobiographies, commemorative practices, collective memory and the like in constructing narratives about the educational past, including their affective and representational dimensions.