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History of Education Summerschool 2025 KU Leuven, Belgium

**Voices and silences
in historical studies
in education:
A memorandum**



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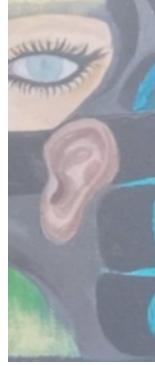




The Fourth History of Education Summerschool jointly organized by Prof. Sarah Van Ruyskensvelde (KU Leuven), Prof. Pieter Verstraete (KU Leuven), and Prof. Johannes Westberg (University of Groningen) – took place in Leuven in September 2025. This international Summerschool brings together doctoral students and early career researchers in the history of education to exchange ideas, sharpen methodological skills, and engage critically with pressing historiographical questions.

The overarching theme of the Summerschool’s fourth edition was “Voices and Silences in the History of Education”. Historians of education have long been attentive to the stories of institutions, policy makers, and reformers. Yet many educational experiences remain unrecorded or marginalized in the archives—those of pupils, parents, teachers, or broader communities who rarely left written traces. This Summerschool invited participants to reflect on how to identify, interpret, and give scholarly attention to such silences, and how to critically examine the voices that dominate educational historiography.

The Summerschool was structured around a combination of keynote lectures, workshops, and collaborative discussions. Senior scholars contributed by presenting theoretical frameworks, methodological tools, and case studies, thereby equipping participants to think about silence as both an empirical challenge and a historiographical construct. Alongside



academic sessions, participants also took part in group activities and social events designed to foster exchange and build an international network of emerging historians of education. As part of their active contribution, participants were invited to produce a short memorandum reflecting on the Summerschool's central theme. The assignment asked: Why and how should historians of education pay attention to silences in their work?

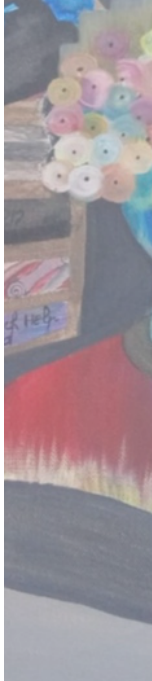
As part of their active contribution, participants were invited to produce a short memorandum reflecting on the Summerschool's central theme. The assignment asked: Why and how should historians of education pay attention to silences in their work? Participants were encouraged to draw on their own research projects, as well as on the discussions and insights developed during the Summerschool. The memorandum provides a valuable window into the collective reflection fostered in Leuven, and highlights the

diverse ways in which young scholars grapple with the methodological and ethical implications of voices and silences in the history of education.

The memorandum can be found below! Please do not hesitate to have the document circulate and comments, questions, remarks, critiques are more than welcome. These can be shared by sending an email to one of the organizers involved (cf. above) or to the central e-mailaddress:

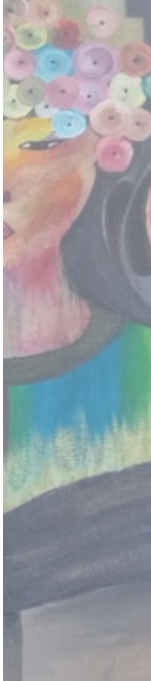
hoesummerschool2025@kuleuven.be.

The fifth edition of the History of Education Summerschool will again be hosted by the KU Leuven in September 2026. The call for participation to this Summerschool will be launched in December 2025 and will focus on the topic of "Scales, borders and boundaries". The call is open to PhD-students as well as Master students working on a historical topic that examines our educational past/s.



Summerschool History of Education: A Memorandum

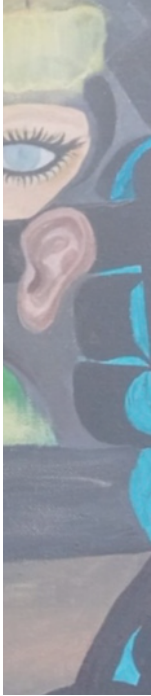
During the 2025 Summer School “Voices and Silences in Historical Studies in Education” at KU Leuven, a group of master’s and doctoral students met under the guidance of established historians of education. We discussed why we, as historians of education, should care about forgotten voices. Why should we attempt to uncover gaps, and how should we approach, inspect, and interpret such silences? Since we were engaged in different disciplines, the program facilitated thought-provoking discussions and collaborative learning. This memorandum reflects on the outcome of the program and offers suggestions for scholars who encounter and investigate historical silences.



Why should we care about forgotten voices?

As historians of education, we approach the study of education with a view to grasping how education has impacted and been shaped by society, and how various voices have shaped education. In moving beyond master narratives, we aim to analyse the lives of those in the margins, such as women, gender-nonconforming communities, those with disabilities, and indigenous groups.

Such research is critical because people experience education in multiple ways. Education is closely connected to knowledge-making, and groups or individuals may be given access to or denied access to the knowledge-making process. Education is also a daily practice, or a metaphorical system, and takes place in a physical space. Broad insight is therefore needed to understand 'education' in all its shapes and forms, to recover "silent" voices.



How should we approach and interpret silences?

How should we go about identifying or reconstructing forgotten voices in an archive? We suggest that a good starting point is to critically reflect on the archive itself. Archives are not merely places to access information; they are mediated by power. For example, power determines the process of archiving. This process includes the selection of source materials, the categorisation, and the storage of collections. Researchers should therefore reflect on the hegemonic discourse that underpins an archive. Such awareness authorises reflection and invites “active reading”. It assists with the decision to read with, against, or along the archival grain.

Uncovering silent perspectives in archives and from other sites requires thinking outside of the box. Researchers should not only pay attention to traditional archives and official documents, but should draw on a variety of historical sources and should probe assorted theoretical discussions to uncover distinctive perspectives.

It is not always possible to give voice to silences. Silences are sometimes deliberate and may be a form of power in themselves. For instance, silence may be an act of resistance, a protest against dominant voices, or a means to achieve power. Therefore, working with silences may be an exercise in academic humility, an acceptance that we cannot know everything. In trying to deal with silence, one must sometimes learn how to embrace it.



What is the role and responsibility of the historian?

This summer school has encouraged us to reflect on the silenced and neglected voices in the history of education, on ways to recover them, on our positionality and on our responsibility as historians. We have learned to approach silences as more than non-data, and rather as a form of speech, carrying meaning in itself.

Active reading and listening requires recognizing that the way we interpret the past is inevitably shaped by our personal background: our origins, our lived experience, our cultural context, our education, and our constructed worldview. The question we should reflect on is which silences we are able (or unable) to illumine and represent. For this reason, we should aim to become as aware as possible of our own biases, blind spots and positionality. It is essential to remain open-minded and self-aware. This is a never-ending training as it helps to increase awareness over time.

This memorandum is therefore a plea to continue this reflection and we encourage others to read and listen intently.

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