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INTRODUCTION

Exploring Histories of Knowledge and Education: An Introduction

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In the last few years, the history of knowledge has emerged as a rapidly growing subfield of historical inquiry, with the establishment of new research centres as well as the publication of journals, books, and special issues of academic journals.[1] To a certain extent, the desire to address the role of knowledge in the past can be viewed in light of contemporary social and political processes. A new digital public sphere has shaken the epistemological pillars of democracies in the Nordic countries and the Western world at large. The information superhighway of the Internet has become crowded with vehicles of disinformation, a turn of events few predicted 25 years ago. This course of events has provoked new academic interest in the social and political dynamics of knowledge in society.

Concepts like *fake news* and *alternative facts* have become symbols of this full-on attack on established notions of truth-seeking, but disinformation and knowledge resistance go far beyond the political spin of populist politicians. As Robert N. Proctor has pointed out, knowledge (or the lack thereof) should clearly not be understood simply in cumulative terms, but rather as a complex social and cultural phenomenon.[2] As such, knowledge has a history, or histories, which conveys important insights for the present.

However, the sudden rise of knowledge as a key concern for social activists and policymakers is not the exclusive reason that the history of knowledge has expanded so rapidly in scholarly circles. It has also proved fruitful in its integrative capacities within academia, bringing together scholars from different backgrounds to address new problems. As Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad and Anna Nilsson

1 *Journal for the History of Knowledge*, affiliated with Gewina, the Belgian-Dutch Society for History of Science and Universities, was established in 2020. Recent special issues dedicated to the history of knowledge in other journals include: *History of Humanities* 6, no. 2 (2021); *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 42, no. 2–3 (2019); *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 4, no. 2 (2020); *History and Theory* 59, no. 4 (2020); *Slagmark* no. 81 (2020).

2 Robert N. Proctor and Londa Schiebinger, eds., *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Lukas Verburgt and Peter Burke, "Introduction: Histories of Ignorance," *Journal for the History of Knowledge* 2, no. 1 (2021), 1–9.

Hammar have noted, knowledge can function as an umbrella term that unites researchers from different fields in joint conversation.[3]

For the last five years, historians at Lund University have taken an active role in developing the history of knowledge, establishing the Lund Centre of the History of Knowledge in 2020. One of the stated ambitions of this research centre has been to develop the 'integrative and generative capacities' of the field.[4] In other words, the history of knowledge (in German: *Wissensgeschichte*) should not be seen as a mere expansion of the history of science (in German: *Wissenschaftsgeschichte*).[5] To a significant degree, the history of knowledge has nonetheless taken shape primarily in discussions with researchers from intellectual history, history of science, and, in a Nordic setting, the history of ideas. Other subfields of historical scholarship have been less vocal in embracing or rejecting this newcomer in the discipline of history. Until recently, few studies in educational history have explicitly engaged with the conceptual frameworks developed within the history of knowledge.

This is somewhat surprising, considering how closely the concepts of knowledge and education are intertwined. Granted, historians of education have more or less explicitly dealt with bodies of knowledge or the content and curricula of school subjects for decades.[6] Without using the label "history of knowledge", such studies nevertheless show that historians of education are no newcomers to the study of knowledge in the past.

It is also surprising that research in the history of knowledge has not paid greater attention to education and schooling, considering this rich tradition of dealing with the transfer of knowledge. The articles presented in this issue demonstrate the breadth and analytical potential of studies that bring the concept of knowledge to the foreground of educational history.

Work on this special issue began in April 2020, in dialogue between the editorial board of the *Nordic Journal of Educational History* and the Lund Centre for the History of Knowledge. Soon after I accepted an invitation to act as the editor of a special issue on the history of knowledge for the journal, plans for a themed issue of another journal, *History of Education Review*, edited by Tamson Pietsch and Joel Barnes, were presented. At this time, few publications had yet sought to merge the frameworks of history of knowledge and education, so there was a self-evident need for a bridge-building effort. With these two special issues taking shape simultaneously,

3 Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad and Anna Nilsson Hammar, "Introduction," in *Forms of knowledge: Developing the History of Knowledge*, ed. Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad, and Anna Nilsson Hammar (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2020), 9–10.

4 Östling, Larsson Heidenblad, and Nilsson Hammar (2020), 14.

5 Sven Dupré and Geert Somsen, "The History of Knowledge and the Future of Knowledge Societies," *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 42, no. 2–3 (2019), 186–99.

6 Examples from Sweden include: Niklas Ammert, *Det osamtidigas samtidighet: historiemedvetande i svenska historieläroböcker under hundra år* (Lund: Lund University, diss., 2008); Magnus Hultén, *Naturens kanon: Formering och förändring av innehållet i folkskolans och grundskolans naturvetenskap 1842–2007* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, diss., 2008); Johan Prytz, *Speaking of Geometry: A study of geometry textbooks and literature on geometry instruction for elementary and lower secondary levels in Sweden, 1905–1962* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, diss., 2007); Anna Larsson, "Mobbning: ett tidsbundet socialt problem," *Socialvetenskaplig tidskrift* 2 (2010), 134–48; Cecilie Boge and Anna Larsson, "Understanding Pupil Violence: Bullying Theory as Technoscience in Sweden and Norway," *Nordic Journal of Educational History* 5, no. 2 (2018), 131–49.

readers will hopefully find them complementary rather than repetitive. In any case, the original research contributions stand as a testament to the budding interest in history of knowledge among historians of education as well as to the many possible approaches to research within this framework.[7]

The role of knowledge in education

Like the history of knowledge, the history of education is a vital research field, not least in the Nordic region. In the twenty-first century, researchers in Northern Europe have established international conferences, research collaborations and the journal *Nordic Journal of Educational History*.[8] The research field is interdisciplinary with contributions by scholars of history, pedagogy and sociology.[9] Educational history is often conceptualised in broad fashion, encompassing a wide range of practices "aimed at framing, planning and transmitting cultural and social heritage", as well as the conditions that these practices rely on or sustain.[10] In other words, knowledge is not merely a desired outcome of education – the stuff that learners acquire through educational practices – but deeply intertwined with the political and ideological justification of educational programs (the 'why' of education). It concerns, among other things, the rationale behind governance of education on a state level, the techniques involved in the concrete practices of teaching and learning, and the collection of data for evaluation of educational practices (or student achievements). However, some differences can also be discerned between the history of knowledge and the history of education as research fields. One concerns the institutional relationship to the subject of history. While the history of education in the Nordic countries has had strong ties to the subject of pedagogy and teacher training, the history of knowledge has so far retained a position within the discipline of history.[11] Perhaps it is too soon to give a verdict on whether this has influenced the research practices within these two fields, but it is reasonable to assume that the history of knowledge may strengthen the 'history' of educational history, bringing education closer to questions regarding society at large.

It has been said that all societies are in fact knowledge societies.[12] If we adhere to a definition of education as "the entire process by which a culture transmits itself across the generations",[13] it is clear that knowledge – tacit and explicit, practical and

7 Joel Barnes and Tamson Pietsch, "The history of knowledge and the history of education," *History of Education Review* 51, no. 2 (2022), 109–22. https://doi.org/10.1108/HER-06-2022-0020

8 Björn Norlin and David Sjögren, "Enhancing the Infrastructure of Research on the Nordic Educational Past: The Nordic Journal of Educational History," *Nordic Journal of Educational History* 1, no. 1 (2014), 2.

9 Daniel Lindmark, "Educational history in the Nordic region: Reflections from a Swedish perspective," *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación* 2, no. 2 (2015), 7–22.

10 Norlin and Sjögren (2014), 4.

11 Johannes Westberg, "Vad är utbildningshistoria? Ett forskningsfälts historia, framtid och relation till pedagogikämnet," *Utbildning & Demokrati* 26, no. 3 (2017), 7–37; Anton Jansson and Maria Simonsen, "Kunskapshistoria, idéhistoria och annan historia: En översikt i skandinaviskt perspektiv," *Slagmark*, no. 81 (2020), 13–30.

12 Johan Östling, Niklas Olsen, and David Larsson Heidenblad, "Introduction," in *Histories of Knowledge in Postwar Scandinavia*, ed. Johan Östling, Niklas Olsen, and David Larsson Heidenblad (London: Routledge, 2020), 1.

13 Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (New York: W Norton & Company, 1972), 14.

theoretical, concrete and abstract – forms the content of what is valued not only as true but also as important for future generations to learn, regardless of educational institutions or formalised curricula. Knowledge has such an important part in educational processes that it may seem superfluous to stress this relationship. To explore the history of knowledge in society is, by definition, to also approach the history of education. Therefore, a broad definition of educational history that includes the transmission of knowledge in society as well as the social and cultural relevance of knowledge and education is needed.[14] As Simone Lässig has pointed out: "The history of knowledge does not emphasise knowledge instead of society but rather seeks to analyse and comprehend knowledge *in* society and knowledge *in* culture."[15]

One of the vantage points for this special issue is to explore what happens when educational researchers turn their attention to the history of knowledge. Do new methods emerge, or rather do we transfer research practices from one field to another? The contributions in this issue address these questions by offering a number of empirical and methodological examples. Together, they illustrate that history of education and knowledge are never singular. What we are dealing with are explorations into the *histories* of knowledge and education.

Knowledge, movement and power

Historians of knowledge have pointed out that knowledge is never a fixed entity. Ideas and beliefs are always in motion, formatted by various media technologies and cultural practices, spread by certain actors on specific arenas. Knowledge moves, flows, circulates across space and time, between individuals and institutions, geographical locations and social groups.[16] Many concepts have been used to describe such flows: communication, circulation, dissemination, and transfer. Each has its own theoretical presuppositions. In this issue, we have adopted an eclectic approach, with various concepts used to describe different movements, depending on the character of the processes involved.[17]

Philipp Sarasin and Andreas Kilcher have argued that the movement of knowledge is always embedded in social contexts. They therefore hold that knowledge arises and circulates under the conditions of complex power relations. It can be too valuable to be passed on voluntarily or rejected because it undermines established truths.[18] In a similar vein, Michel Foucault noted in his famous lecture on the order of discourse, that exchange and communication are "positive figures working inside

14 Heather Ellis, "Editorial: Science, Technologies and Material Culture in the History of Education," *History of Education* 46, no. 2 (2017), 143.

15 Simone Lässig, "The History of Knowledge and the Expansion of the Historical Research Agenda," *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 59 (2016), 58.

16 Isak Hammar and Johan Östling, "Introduction: The Circulation of Knowledge and the History of the Humanities," *History of Humanities* 6, no. 2 (2021), 596.

17 For discussions regarding these concepts, see for example: Johan Östling et al., eds., *Circulation of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018); James A. Secord, "Knowledge in transit," *Isis* 95, no. 4 (2004), 654–72.

18 Philipp Sarasin and Andreas Kilcher, "Editorial," *Nach Feierabend: Zürcher Jahrbuch für Wissensgeschichte* 7 (2011), 9–10.

complex systems of restriction".[19] In other words, studies of the history of knowledge in education may contribute to the study of the "micro-physics of power".[20]

The dynamics of power and knowledge have been addressed extensively in modern historical scholarship, including the history of science and education. Works by philosophers and sociologists of science have long acknowledged various aspects of the power-knowledge nexus.[21] However, from an educational perspective, it may also be valuable to include a very general observation made by Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth about the usefulness of knowledge as an analytical concept. It is true that knowledge is a broad term, running the risk of becoming all-encompassing or imprecise. In his plea to study the use and social function of knowledge in society, however, Barth compared it to another notoriously broad analytical concept: culture. He argued that one of the defining characteristics of knowledge, as opposed to culture, is that knowledge is always unequally distributed in society.[22] While it is generally meaningless (from an anthropological perspective) to talk about individuals of a certain population being more cultural than others, knowledge is tied to hierarchical exclusion and attempts of inclusion with profound cultural effects.[23] As Simone Lässig and Swen Steinberg argue, "power might use knowledge for its own ends, but knowledge also contains a certain emancipatory potential."[24] Thus, the question of who knows what, and why, appears as a fruitful starting point for inquiries into the role of education in wider relationships of power, identity and cultural practice.

Arenas of knowledge

Following the programmatic discussions introduced by Sarasin and Kilcher, and continued by Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad and Anna Nilsson Hammar, it is possible to discern at least three potentially fruitful approaches to the study of the history of knowledge in education.

First, one way to better understand how and why knowledge circulates, is to examine the various *arenas* that have been used for the circulation or communication of knowledge.[25] Traditionally, the history of education has focused broadly on the school system (primary and secondary education), but formal and informal education takes place in all parts of society. The study of communication

19 Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 62.

20 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Second Edition (New York: Vintage, 1995), 26.

21 For example: Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (London: NLB, 1975); Ludwig Fleck, *The Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

22 Fredrik Barth, "An Anthropology of Knowledge," *Current Anthropology* 43, no. 1 (2002), 1–18.

23 See also Fredrik Barth, "The Guru and the Conjurer: Transactions in Knowledge and the Shaping of Culture in Southeast Asia and Melanesia," *Man* 25, no. 4 (1990), 640–53.

24 Simone Lässig and Swen Steinberg, "Why Young Migrants Matter in the History of Knowledge," *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 3, no. 2 (2019), 215.

25 Östling, Olsen, and Larsson Heidenblad (2020).

of knowledge in society brings educational perspectives from various parts of public life to the attention of researchers. In a 2020 study on the history of sex education in Norway, Kari Harnæs Nordberg showed how schools can be analysed as 'arenas of knowledge', with different actors and stakeholders. Nordberg shows how different bodies of sexual knowledge, in this case ranging from biological to 'Christian' and psychological knowledge, figured in the struggle for influence over Norwegian sex education.[26]

All the articles in this special issue deal with institutionalised education, and illustrate how these institutions interact with other parts of society when knowledge transfers across such spaces. This movement or circulation of knowledge appears as a crucial element in the interaction between educational institutions and society at large, in order to colonise various areas of people's lives.

This is not least evident in the relationship between politics and education. The term *educationalisation* has been used to describe efforts to address social problems by educational means. In his article on the introduction of traffic education in Swedish elementary schools, Joakim Landahl shows how the growing problem of road safety during the emergence of mass motoring required schools to address the problem. Teaching traffic safety included knowledge about rules and regulation, as well as making pupils aware of the gravity of traffic hazards. As the cover image of this special issue suggests, the solutions included simulation of situations in controlled environments (such as the school yard) and measures to increase children's self-control. The introduction of school safety patrols resulted in that children became more active agents in the education of traffic safety.

Arenas of professional knowledge are not isolated entities, but connected to wider networks of interchange. In his article, Daniel Andersson analyses how Christianisation has been taught in Swedish schools during the twentieth century. Andersson takes interest in the relationship between the production of knowledge in academia and the circulation of knowledge in schools. Examining history textbook content about the process of Swedish Christianisation, he argues that secondary education textbooks during the early twentieth century were fairly harmonious with research findings in academia. However, during the second half of the twentieth century, the arenas diverged as historical scholarship introduced new scientific standards while textbooks evolved into a distinct pedagogical genre. Thus, the same author could make different characterisations – not only in form but also regarding factual description – depending on genre and arena. By the end of the century, the knowledge arenas again converged. Andersson's study implies that the "knowledge gap" between the arenas was caused by the nature of new research and values that have framed Swedish education.

Another intriguing example of how knowledge changes when it moves across borders is presented by Marcelo Caruso, who draws attention to the important topic of knowledge *of* education. Widening the geographic scope well beyond Northern Europe, his article explores the colonial history of pedagogy in India. The import of Western pedagogic knowledge during the nineteenth century, and

26 Kari Harnæs Nordberg, "Sex Education and the State: Norwegian Schools as Arenas of Knowledge in the 1970s," in *Histories of Knowledge in Postwar Scandinavia*, ed. Johan Östling, Niklas Olsen and David Larsson Heidenblad (London: Routledge, 2020), 191–207.

the institutionalisation of the "art of teaching", was a prolonged process spanning several decades. Western pedagogic knowledge was imported into a setting with ancient traditions in the art of teaching. Caruso argues that although the status of pedagogic knowledge in Britain was low, the colonial situation in India reframed it and contributed to its *de-subalternization*. Since those proficient in pedagogic knowledge could obtain better employment and social status in the colonial setting, pedagogic knowledge in India came to occupy a more ambivalent place in the epistemic hierarchies than in the metropolis.

Forms and formats

Secondly, to grasp the use and communication of knowledge in education, it is necessary to pay attention to its forms and formats. Due to its diversity and plasticity, knowledge can be practical or theoretical, embodied or tacit, academic or mundane, simple or complex, concrete or abstract. In fact, the different words used to describe such forms or kinds of knowledge is a testament to the varieties of knowledge that abound in educational history. The articles of this issue give numerous examples of the various forms of knowledge that may be important to address in the history of education, including statistical data, pedagogy and textbook history, as well as the use of computers, traffic safety and home economics.

These forms are contingent of formats. Sarasin has argued that knowledge is in fact always *formatted*. If we accept that knowledge does not exist in pure form, but is always materialised and mediated in various formats, then these formats are important to address analytically. Textbooks (Andersson), schoolyards (Landahl) and industry meetings (Guerrero Cantarell) are three of the spaces that have served as arenas for circulation of various forms of knowledge. That these formats matter is an argument presented more clearly in the article on small forms, where Jona T. Garz, Fanny Isensee and Daniel Töpper provide a compelling case for a three-dimensional analysis of paper technology, including its physical format.

Arenas for communicating knowledge thus involve specific material and spatial manifestations. For many years, the classroom, with its desks and blackboards, was the central "media technology" of schools across the world. Audio-visual equipment, such as overhead projectors, filmstrips and VCR projectors, could be added to the list. However, it is reasonable to assume that more quiet or subtler forms of technology, including the paper and pencil, also distinctly affected teaching and learning methods; in other words, the communication of knowledge. In this issue, Garz, Töpper and Isensee bring attention to the materiality of educational practices by scrutinising 'small forms' for recording and transmitting statistical knowledge in the Prussian school system. They propose a methodological approach to the study of communicative practices in educational history that takes into account historical context, materiality and usage of data. By examining pre-printed forms collected by the Prussian educational administration, their analysis of small forms as material and historical artefacts illustrates the agency of paper technology as well as the possibilities of compliance and resistance that were played out between the Statistical Bureau (which designed and collected the forms) and school teachers (who were obliged to use them).

Actors of knowledge

Third and finally, a fruitful approach to the study of knowledge in educational history is to reconceptualise the range of actors involved in producing and sharing knowledge. Rather than understanding 'knowledge actors' exclusively as scientific or academic elites, this perspective acknowledges a broad range of actors who have been involved in the production and circulation of knowledge in society. As David Larsson Heidenblad has pointed out in a recent monograph, the circulation of knowledge in society does not occur by or of itself, but rather because "specific people did specific things at specific times, which triggered chain reactions".[27]

To understand such chain reactions, we should take into consideration the dynamics between senders and receivers of knowledge, which is of great importance in educational settings. Teachers provide an obvious example of "knowledge brokers" in schools, but the definition could potentially include other groups of people not traditionally associated with expertise.[28] From the perspective of education, one group not traditionally understood as knowledge actors are students or pupils. However, as Lässig and Steinberg have pointed out, while children and youth often possess limited abilities to act, they are not mere passive recipients of knowledge, but "possess a certain potential that allows them to translate or even actively produce knowledge".[29] As such, children have contributed to bring knowledge from schools to other areas of society, via friends, parents, or other adult guardians. This is an intriguing area for future research, for which historians of knowledge and education should develop adequate methodologies that may bring forward the contributions of pupils and students to the circulation of knowledge in society.

The articles in this special issue bring forward a range of knowledge actors in the field of education. For example, Karen Andreasen and Annette Rasmussen analyse the actors and organisations involved in the advocacy of home economics as a new field of knowledge in Denmark during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The broad range of parties involved – representing rural interests, women's organisations and trade unions – aligned with the biopolitical concern of the state to form new schools for home economics. Regarding the knowledge content of home economics, Andreasen and Rasmussen argue that the development of this field of knowledge was contradictory in terms of discipline and emancipation. On the one hand, it reinforced the place of women in the private sphere, preventing them from exercising public influence. On the other hand, the development of home economics increased the social status of women by providing opportunities for education and professionalisation, with subjects such as nutrition, chemistry, hygiene and horticulture developing into scientific and educational areas that are still significantly participated in by women in Denmark.

The gendering of knowledge in education is also brought forward by Rosalía

27 David Larsson Heidenblad, *The Environmental Turn in Postwar Sweden*, (Lund: Lund University Press, 2021), 21. See also Johan Östling, Anton Jansson and Ragni Svensson Stringberg, *Humanister i offentligheten: kunskapens aktörer och arenor under efterkrigstiden*, (Göteborg: Makadam, 2022), 25–26.

28 For an intriguing example, see Brian Van Wyck, "Guest Workers in the School?: Turkish Teachers and the Production of Migrant Knowledge in West German Schools, 1971–1989," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43, no. 3 (2017), 466–91.

29 Lässig and Steinberg (2019).

Guerrero Cantarell in her article on how the Fredrika Bremer Association (FBF), one of the oldest women's organisations in Sweden, actively promoted women's education in technology and computerisation during the last two decades of the twentieth century. Guerrero Cantarell argues that the FBF sought to redefine the concept of technology by associating it with features that would appeal to women. The efforts of the organisation to promote this 'feminised' concept of technology included schools and other public arenas in society. By doing so, the FBF drew attention towards the gendering of technology and the role of women in technology in Swedish society.

To conclude, the cases presented here point to the rich possibilities that arise when educational history turns its attention to knowledge. By bringing new approaches to the study of educational arenas and the ways knowledge has moved within, across and beyond institutional settings, readers of this special issue will hopefully find inspiration in the diverse approaches that the authors have used to address issues of knowledge and education. The possibilities are, as evident, manifold.

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