

Developing Knowledge and Networks A Report on the History of Education Doctoral Summer School

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Introduction

The History of Education Doctoral Summer School (henceforth HEDSS) is a four-day conference that is held annually. According to the website, it is open to post-graduate students working in ‘the histories of educational spaces and discourses’ and is especially of use for those of us working with such evidence as images, artefacts and archives. The summer school is led by a group of internationally-renowned historians of education who are on site to offer advice to students on their research. The summer school also provides the opportunity for doctoral students to discuss their research projects with other history of education students from around the world.

HEDSS is in its tenth year. Last year, in Riga, the conference was supported by Stichting Paedagogica Historica; History of Education Society, UK; European Educational Research Association (EERA); International Standing Conference for the History of Education (ISCHE); and the University of Latvia. Next year, the conference will be in Liverpool. Thus far, it has taken place in a different European city every year.

The authors were fortunate to participate in the HEDSS-9 programme in June 2018, in Riga. The following is their report on what was a rewarding experience, both professionally and personally.

Places and spaces

The openness to visitors that one feels in Riga recalls its late thirteenth century membership in the Hanseatic League, through which the city served as a gateway between east and west. Architecturally, the city’s Art Nouveau style reminds a visitor of its economic expansion in the early twentieth century. This notion of Riga as an ongoing centre of exchanging goods and ideas made it an ideal setting for HEDSS.

On our first day, accomplished doctoral students at the University of Latvia who were also our local guides walked us around the city. On our tours, we learned much about Latvia’s rich cultural history and, moreover, about each other. We chatted

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about our backgrounds, our interests, our surroundings and more. These aspects of the programme are not simply a touristic luxury; they reflect one of the many significances of HEDSS. Beyond guiding our intellectual development, the programme builds friendships within the field. It provides moments in which one can share a stroll along Jurmala Beach or a lively debate about how one might make a Lauku torte. It also gives the opportunity to share experiences of doctoral studies. These were some of the many conversations in which lasting connections were forged, for each of the authors has kept in touch with colleagues from the programme.

The HEDSS group comprised 27 doctoral students from universities in 16 countries on four continents. At least six of those students are studying in nations other than where they were raised. Karen, for example, moved from America to England by way of Switzerland and Germany. Some students are exploring other spaces through their doctoral work. One student in Germany is drawing from archives in Buenos Aires; another in Italy is examining an aspect of Indonesia's colonial history. This geopolitical diversity greatly enlivened our conversations and expanded our perspectives.

The presentations

A core component of HEDSS is the opportunity for every student to present their work to the group. Contextualising our research and then articulating key methodological questions for an international group of historians of education, with only 20 minutes and five slides, is both a challenging and enriching experience. These presentations offer the chance to practice presenting in front of a small and friendly crowd, and to receive helpful and insightful feedback. This comes not only in the moment but also during the informal conversations that inevitably arise afterwards, continuing to prompt more ideas.

The opportunity to hear how other doctoral students conceptualize their sources, construct their frameworks and articulate their arguments was beneficial. It expanded our subject knowledge of the types of research being conducted internationally and of the various methodologies being used by historians of education. It was exciting to find connections between others' work in seemingly different areas and countries, and to develop new ideas about our own work. Dowry books and prostitutes in Georgia at the end of the nineteenth century, for example, was not something that had crossed Catherine's mind prior to this event, but she found similarities to her work on girls' education in Surrey during the same time period.

Nazlin was thrilled to have as a discussant tutor someone whose work on teachers and classrooms she had read and quoted in her presentation. She was one of the first to present, which was nerve-wrecking on the one hand but excellent on the other, as it meant that she could really concentrate on the rest of the summer school. During the next few days, she had the opportunity to discuss individually her research with other peers and the tutors whose work she had already known. The opportunity to engage with such intellectual breadth and depth in an intimate setting is not just professionally and personally constructive but also an intellectual treat.

Our research projects

To offer a sample of the research presented at HEDSS-9, we share with you our work, in alphabetical order by surname.

For her doctoral thesis, Nazlin is studying the relationship between teacher training and teachers' classroom practice during the interwar period. More specifically, she is looking at the training of elementary school teachers at the London Day Training College (LDTC), which became the Institute of Education (IOE), University of London in 1932, and how this training impacted on pedagogical practices in classrooms in London elementary schools. She has chosen to look at the interwar years as this period represents attempts made to establish changes in pedagogical practices, as evidenced in the work of some of the leading educationalists who were at the LDTC and IOE. She is using the LDTC and IOE archives to study how elementary school teachers were trained and the elementary school log books and HMI reports to obtain evidence on teachers' classroom practice. Of significance for this study is understanding the connections and disconnections between training and pedagogical practices, particularly in the social, political and educational context of this period in London.

Through her project, 'Respectable femininity: Education and employment for girls in Surrey, 1870 – 1914', Catherine explores various forms of education provided for girls of all classes in the county of Surrey. The metropolitan north east of the county was lost to London in 1889; for the purpose of this study, she remains with the pre-1889 border throughout. She explores what it meant to be a girl or woman within the new opportunities for knowledge and employment brought about by the advent of compulsory education and the development of secondary and tertiary education for girls and women. Equally, the forms of employment changed over the course of the period owing to technological changes as well as societal. What was the relationship between these alterations? Using archives held at the Surrey History Centre, Wandsworth, Kew, Lambeth, the London Metropolitan Archives, Chertsey, Richmond and Kingston, she has thus far addressed reformatory and industrial schools as well as the five girls' schools belonging to the Church Schools Company and begun work on the Battersea Polytechnic Women's Department. Newspapers, magazines and literature adds to the material available in conjunction with the works of historians addressing relevant events and ideas. In order to thoroughly explore the question, themes including philanthropy, suffrage, motherhood, nation and empire, health, Christianity, race, degeneracy, juvenile delinquency and class are addressed.

Karen's research combines historical and sociological approaches to understand the economic, social and political re-positioning of an internationally-located educational institution over time. Her project also seeks to make sense of how its students are positioned amongst discourses of 'elites' circulating today, and how they are emplaced within the historical and sociological analysis of the institution. This in-depth study of one economically elite, international secondary school in Switzerland draws on analyses of private letters, internal school memos, annual reports, meeting minutes, yearbooks and interviews. It explores the school's reinvention from one that provided an education for American civic leadership in the 1960s to one that educated the globally wealthy by the 2000s. She argues that this shift paralleled broader changes in the configurations of 'elite' groups from those with national political power to those with global economic power. Karen's research further asks how students construct, negotiate and at times contest their relationships with those from their nation-state and with classmates from other countries.

Such active boundary-maintenance work locates these students' subjectivities within and beyond national class structures and borders. Thus, this study extends scholarship that has focused on how national fields of power shape the subjectivities of elite groups and offers further insights into how members of such groups forge multi-sited understandings of themselves and of the educational institutions they attend.

Outcomes

Meeting other historians of education in the making has been invaluable. There was the surprise of new perspectives that opened our minds. The opportunity to then speak further about these ideas during the programme was helpful and continues to be so as we have carried on conversing over email and on social media.

Sharing news and feeling part of a larger, more global community has been a wonderful and worthwhile outcome for us. There was much excitement, for example, in seeing familiar faces in the audience during presentations at ISCHE. The programme also strengthened our local community. Karen had previously taken one of Nazlin's courses online, but HEDSS was the first time they met in person. It was especially nice for them to meet again in London, also with Catherine for she uses the Institute of Education's library for research.

Conclusions

In welcoming us to Riga in early June, Professor Iveta Kestera of the University of Latvia and chair of the organising committee told us of a Latvian tradition: how one spends his or her time leading up to the white nights will shape the rest of the year. This seemed extremely appropriate. We have, of course, continued with our studies, with renewed vigour and expanded perspectives. The conversations and friendships that started in Riga have continued to grow. We look forward to further developing these networks and the productive conversations that arise from them.