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Editorial

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We are pleased to present the first issue of 2025 with four new original articles and a country report from the Czech Republic. Less pleasing is the societal development where political, social and economic structures – and democracy itself – are being questioned by populist movements and leaders. Naturally, such upheavals in general society have consequences for Academia. In mid-March, the JSSE was informed by the US Department of Education that the current administration and the Musk-led “DOGE” are – in an attempt to reduce government spending – slashing funding for the database ERIC, where educational research from all over the world is being indexed and made available for researchers and teachers. In their budget cuts, ERIC will now stop indexing many journals, and the JSSE is among them. We are probably only at the beginning of the process where US research will become increasingly pressured to follow governmental guidelines that please the current administration.

In relation to this, the JSSE is proud of its independence and our open access policy, which allows us to depend on collegial efforts rather than governmental subsidies or commercial business models. So, a big kudos to all of you who make the JSSE what it is: editors, advisors, authors and reviewers (a special thank you to the reviewers 2023–2024, which can be found at the end of the issue). However, an independent journal comes with a price. All work is being done through voluntary work – often in late nights and on weekends – and in many cases, the wait for a submitted article can be long and sometimes frustrating. In an effort to change the long waiting times, we have made some changes that we hope will soon be evident for all of you who are committed to the JSSE. They came naturally as the journal moved its headquarters from Bielefeld, Germany, to Porto, Portugal, and we are very happy about the new arrangement. First, we have changed the work of the editorial group and elected three new editors-in-chiefs, which hopefully will make a difference in the daily operations. Between 2025–2027, Professor Andrea Szukala (Augsburg, Germany), Professor Isabel Menezes (Porto, Portugal) and Professor Johan Sandahl (Stockholm, Sweden) will serve as editors-in-chiefs. Secondly, the JSSE will, starting in 2025, mainly consist of open-call articles rather than special issues. Over the years, we have increasingly seen a flow of single articles. However, we will also edit and publish special issues when suggested themes are considered to be interesting enough and have a sustainable number of good articles. We warmly invite you to suggest such issues – all information can be found on the webpage. Thirdly, we will aim to publish preprints as soon as they have gone through the

review process. We hope this will meet the needs of young (and not-so-young) scholars. Also, keep an eye out for some changes in the design of the JSSE in the near future!

Returning to this issue, we have four original articles and a country report. In the first article, entitled “*Controversial issues in Swedish social studies education: Success and failure in teachers’ task perceptions*”, Anna Larsson and Kristina Ledman analyse 18 interviews with social science teachers in Sweden teaching in Years 7, 8 and 9. They were asked about their experiences of teaching controversial issues, defined as subjects that “arouse strong feelings and divide opinion in communities and society”. Based on these accounts and the self-analysis by those involved, it emerges that such teaching requires a particularly high level of commitment from the pupils, particularly emotionally, which can be tricky. However, the following are considered to be successful teaching sessions in which the pupils show an ability to broaden their perspectives, correct erroneous perceptions, show empathy and, above all, succeed in holding a civilised debate. On the contrary, teachers report a feeling of failure when a conflict breaks out between students when most of them stick to their initial groundless opinions and when parents complain afterwards, calling the teacher’s actions into question. The teachers nevertheless sometimes recognise that some misunderstandings stem from their own actions. All in all, the authors show that even though teaching about controversial issues is particularly challenging and risky, it has great potential to promote students’ learning, as well as for teachers’ reflexivity on their own actions.

In the article “*Exploring the implementation gap in citizenship education: An analysis of policy processes from a post-colonial perspective*”, Maria Barretos and Isabella Amaral discuss the challenges of carrying out citizenship education policy. The article focuses on experiences in a specific state in Brazil and is based on interviews with educators. The focus of the article is the implementation gap that exists between the formal level, mandated in official documents, and what takes place at the school level. In the interviews, it was found that the concept of citizenship education in itself may be understood differently by different stakeholders; the notion of “a good citizen” is also understood differently, sometimes very traditionally. This diminishes the transformative potential in the modern conception of citizenship education. Apart from the conceptual stumbling stones, there are other hurdles in the implementation gap that have to do with material conditions, such as learning materials and resources for training the teachers. Barretos and Amaral suggest that analyses like this may, however, contribute to more successful solutions in citizenship education in schools because the challenges have to be identified before the implementation gap can be addressed efficiently.

The article “*Shifting shores: Transformative learning with the city*”, authored by William Smolander and Raine Aiava, responds to the call for papers on post-humanism in social science education that was opened in JSSE in 2023. The article describes how city space was approached in a geography project in an upper secondary school course. Geography is an interesting case as a subject: in different countries, it is sometimes in natural sciences, sometimes in humanities and social sciences. The ambition of the project that Smolander and Aiava describe was to question the conventional approach of the geographer as “a distant observer” of the world and open to how people are always intimately involved with the world. In the article, the walking tour in the city entailed personal engagement with the landscape, “thinking-with the city”. Using their experiences from the geography project, the authors suggest that post-human theoretical and methodological approaches may enrich teaching and learning in social sciences more generally.

In the last article, “*Exploring civics in early 20th century Sweden: A study of final exam questions at four teacher training colleges between 1915 and 1937*”, Lars Andersson Hult and Anders Persson

delve into the history of how civics as a school subject took shape in Sweden in the early 20th century. Correctly speaking, civics did not yet exist as a school subject, but exams in the teacher education context also addressed topics like economy, law and justice, social issues like health, and democracy. It has been shown that exams, especially so-called high-stakes exams, have a considerable impact on how a school subject is framed and understood. In this case, according to Andersson Hult and Persson, exams in teacher training colleges paved the way for establishing civics in the curriculum as questions on societal topics were part of student-teachers' training. Thus, teacher educators were already addressing topical societal themes when it was not yet mandated in the formal curriculum. This can be seen as an example of the dynamic interplay between the formal curriculum and other institutional factors, such as teacher education, in the process of how a school subject is established and constructed.

Finally, a country report. In the centre of Europe, the Czech Republic was a blind spot in the list of JSSE country reports. "*Civic and social science learning in the Czech Republic: Current state, challenges and prospects*", Denisa Labischová and Tomáš Hubálek bring a change in the list as they describe the development of the civic and social science curriculum in the Czech Republic. After the peaceful revolution of 1989 in Czechoslovakia, the need for a reform of the education system was actualised as an object of debate. The process of democratisation that took place in politics and society raised the question of how democracy and human rights would figure in the school curriculum, particularly in civics and social sciences. After decades of centralised rule, it was also now discussed how to allow more space for education providers' local choices. In 1992, the state of Czechoslovakia was dissolved and divided into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The process took place peacefully, which is noteworthy, considering that the dissolution of states has often been violent throughout history. Labischová and Hubálek discuss the changes in the curriculum for civics and social science in basic education and secondary education, as well as the education of civics and social science teachers and professional resources like teachers' professional associations and civics and social science textbooks. This country report will be followed by a second part, by Tomáš Kasper and Dana Kasperová, where civic learning in interwar Czechoslovakia and in the Czech Republic in the communist period until 1989 is discussed (forthcoming in JSSE 2025-2). Readers wanting to learn about the developments in Slovakia are referred to Jana Sulikova's articles in JSSE 2016-3 and 2018-2, which discuss the history and social science textbooks in Slovakia and their relationship with questions of nationalism and European integration.

We wish you a good read!

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