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AUTHOR	Szukala, Andrea; Löfström, Jan; Hedtke, Reinhold; Grammes, Tilman; Açikalin, Mehmet
TITLE	Editorial
YEAR	2025
DOI	<a href="https://doi.org/10.11576/jsse-8716">https://doi.org/10.11576/jsse-8716</a>
VERSION	Publisher's pdf
CITATION	Szukala, A., Löfström, J., Hedtke, R., Grammes, T., & Açikalin, M. (2025). Editorial. <i>JSSE - Journal of Social Science Education</i> , 24(4). <a href="https://doi.org/10.11576/jsse-8716">https://doi.org/10.11576/jsse-8716</a>
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## Editorial

**Andrea Szukala<sup>a</sup>, Jan L fstr m<sup>b</sup>, Reinhold Hedtke<sup>c</sup>, Tilman Grammes<sup>d</sup>, Mehmet A ikal n<sup>e</sup>**

<sup>a</sup>Augsburg University, Germany; <sup>b</sup>University of Turku, Finland; <sup>c</sup>Bielefeld University, Germany; <sup>d</sup>University of Hamburg, Germany; <sup>e</sup>Istanbul University, Turkey

Once again, we have reached the end of yet another year and we can all take some time to reflect upon what has passed. And it has been a year with quite a lot of turbulence in our societies. One such disturbance concerns academic freedom. In our view, academic freedom is essential to the mission of universities, as it enables independent research, open debate, and the pursuit of knowledge without external pressure. Historically, this freedom has allowed universities to contribute critically to social, scientific, and cultural development. Today, however, academic freedom is increasingly challenged in many parts of the world through political interference, legal restrictions, and pressure on teaching and research agendas. Defending academic freedom remains crucial for safeguarding critical thinking, democratic values, and the integrity of higher education. As an independent journal, free from commercial interests, we aim to contribute – as well as we can – to the safeguarding of academic freedom. We thank all those who contribute to the Journal of Social Science Education and wish you a fulfilling 2026, both personally and professionally. In the final issue of 2025, we present four original articles, a new country report, and a book review. We wish you an enjoyable and rewarding read.

The first article, “Reclaiming emotion and reflection in education for democracy: From descriptors to implementation in the Reference framework of competences for democratic culture”, Maija Hytti and Niclas Sandstr m examine the Council of Europe’s Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). They do this through a transformative learning lens, with a particular focus on the place of emotion and reflection in Education for Democracy. Their analysis reveals a striking tension between the framework’s holistic ambitions and its operational logic, where emotions are largely reduced to regulation and reflection to rational self-assessment. This narrowing, the authors argue, risks obscuring the affective-reflective learning processes through which democratic agency develops. By foregrounding this mismatch, the article makes a compelling case for rethinking competence frameworks so that emotional work and reflective depth can be treated as core conditions of democratic learning rather than secondary skills.

In “Partnerships between formal and non-formal educational settings: A way to implement a transformative and socio-critical education about environment and sustainable development”, Eve-Lyne Leclerc, Genevi ve Therriault, Andr a Gicquel,  milie Morin, Patrick Charland, Agnieszka Jeziorski, and Anderson Ara jo-Oliveira explore partnerships between formal and non-formal educational settings as a key lever for implementing transformative and socio-critical education for environment and sustainable development. Drawing on qualitative interviews with educators and teachers in France and Qu bec, the article identifies concrete conditions under

which such partnerships move beyond ad hoc collaboration toward genuine co-construction. Its central contribution lies in showing that partnership is not merely a logistical arrangement, but a pedagogical and political condition for fostering civic agency. By foregrounding the role of dedicated actors, time, and shared epistemological orientations, the study offers a grounded roadmap for making transformative EESD institutionally possible rather than normatively aspirational.

In her article “Dystopian or utopian futures? Upper secondary school students’ perspectives on gender, equality, and the future through history education”, Håra Jess Haltorp discusses the role of history teaching in the formation of Swedish upper secondary school students’ ideas and expectations of how society will look in the future. In the students’ reflections, questions of equality are central, and these are often connected with issues of gender and sexuality, especially. It appears the students easily express pessimistic views on how citizens may impact social developments. The students have dreams and hope, but these are often countered by worries and fears, some of them dystopian. The task for history educators is to find ways in which history could support young people’s empowerment as agents, showing also how “ordinary small people” may exert influence in society. Here is the dilemma that, on the one hand, it may be difficult to make an impact as a single person, but on the other hand, history shows that individuals or a small number of people may also turn developments in a new direction. History teachers are faced with the task of balancing these two perspectives to give students a realistic but also positive view on the possibility of people making a difference. As Haltorp states, history education has the potential to expand the “narrative agency” of students and their ability to imagine and act upon alternative futures.

Isabella Varricchio and Maria Olson’s article “Ways of relating philosophy to society and contemporary issues - Curricula constructions of the philosophy subject in the Nordic Upper Secondary School” studies the relationship between philosophy and the social sciences. Their point of departure is that the relation between philosophy and contemporary issues is diverse and long-standing, yet rarely reflected upon. Philosophical education in schools is seldom the subject of academic discussion. The paper addresses this shortcoming and compares the philosophies of philosophical education in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, as well as their position in school curricula. To do so, the authors combine qualitative content analysis with idea and ideology analysis. They identify four predominant curricular concepts, which they refer to as the ‘Scholar Academic’, ‘Humanism’, ‘Social Efficiency’ and ‘Social Reconstruction’ ideologies. One group of curricula emphasises the connection between philosophy and society, current issues and pragmatic everyday questions, addressing learners primarily as citizens. The other group highlights personality development and the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge (making it less compatible with social science education). The article calls for the further development of society-conscious subject-didactics of philosophy.

We are also proud to publish a new country report that fills a gap in the JSSE series of country reports, where we now cover an even more extensive part of Europe (see list of country reports [https://www.jsse.org/index.php/jsse/Country\\_Reports](https://www.jsse.org/index.php/jsse/Country_Reports)). This new addition covers Iceland, a country with a relatively small population (less than 400,000 inhabitants) and a staunch democratic tradition, dating back to the 10th-century legislative assemblies held in the vale of Thingvellir, in South-West Iceland. In her paper, Súsanna Margrét Gestsdóttir gives an overview of the Social Studies curriculum and teaching in Iceland. It also includes a chapter on learning materials and teacher education. The Social Studies subject (*samfélagsfræði*) is an integrated subject, like Social Studies (*samfunnsfag*) in Norway. This is to say, there are elements in the Social Studies curriculum

from disciplines like history, ethics and environmental issues. The content of teaching is only loosely described, as the schools have a lot of freedom to build their own kind of content. In upper secondary schools, however, teaching is often subject-based and not as much integrated. A central theme in the Social Studies curriculum, and in all education generally, is democracy and human rights. As in many countries, also in Iceland, there appears to be a discrepancy between the aims of progressive teaching of democratic citizenship and civic consciousness on the one hand, and the reality in the classroom on the other hand. To solve the problem of this discrepancy, education of teachers would need to encourage student teachers to trust their ability to manage a classroom, also when political issues and controversial topics are discussed.

Lastly, we present Nina Kolleck's book review of the edited volume *Pilot Monitor of Civic Education: Indicators for Data-Informed Reporting* (The German book: *Pilotmonitor politische Bildung. Indikatoren zur datengestützten Berichterstattung*). The review discusses a comprehensive and ambitious attempt to establish an indicator-based monitoring framework for civic and political education in Germany. The volume addresses a long-standing lack of reliable and comparable data by developing empirically grounded indicators across schools, higher education, teacher education, and extracurricular civic education. Kolleck highlights the book's methodological approach, which combines conceptual reflection with empirical analysis while acknowledging the normative complexity of civic education. Rather than relying on standardised outcomes alone, the volume proposes a multidimensional framework encompassing structural, institutional, and learner-related aspects. The review emphasises the cross-sectoral perspective as a key contribution, while also noting limitations related to data availability and the exclusion of micro-level pedagogical quality. Overall, the book is presented as a significant contribution that lays the groundwork for sustained, data-informed governance of civic education.

Best wishes from the editors of this issue,

Andrea Szukala

Jan Löffström

Reinhold Hedtke

Tilman Grammes

Mehmet Açikalin