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## *Editorial / Editorial*

### ***Educational History in the Nordic Region: Reflections from a Swedish Perspective***

**Daniel Lindmark**

e-mail: [daniel.lindmark@umu.se](mailto:daniel.lindmark@umu.se)  
*Umeå University, Sweden*

In this selective overview, themes that have become prominent in recent research will be presented. I will summarize the infrastructural basis of the discipline and comment on the foundation and character of the community, including scholarly collaboration in the region. The present overview will take into account research presented at the Nordic Conferences in Educational History and articles published in the *Nordic Journal of Educational History*. Finally, special attention will be paid to selected large-scale projects attempting to challenge established national perspectives.

#### **1. Infrastructure and Disciplinary Orientation**

Internationally, educational history has been under pressure lately, with its financial support drastically reduced in a number of instances. In the Nordic countries, however, the field has never been a discipline in its own right. Although there are positions at Uppsala University in Sweden and the Danish School of Education, the history of education as such defies simple disciplinary categorization. Rather, it should be viewed as interdisciplinary, where scholars of history, pedagogy and sociology each contribute their specific competencies. A survey of educational history research in Sweden for the period 1990-2002 found that 110 doctoral dissertations were defended, representing no less than

sixteen disciplines. At the same time it should be noted that two-thirds of them were clustered around the disciplines of Education, History, and the History of Sciences and Ideas (Larsson 2003).

In recent years, however, the infrastructure of educational history has evolved considerably. Initiated in 1998 by educationalists at the Stockholm School of Education, Nordic conferences are now arranged every third year. At the first three, educationalists dominated the proceedings, but by the fourth conference in 2009, the contingent of historians had grown equally strong and together the two disciplines represented three-quarters of all attendees. In 2005, a network was set up by scholars at Uppsala University, featuring a website and an email list announcing news in the field, calls for papers, new publications, upcoming conferences, open positions, postgraduate courses, etc.<sup>1</sup>

At the fifth Nordic conference, held at Umeå University, Sweden, in 2012, a Nordic periodical was proposed and realized in the spring of 2014, when the first issue of the peer-reviewed, open access e-journal *Nordic Journal of Educational History* was launched. Technical administration is based at Umeå University and the editorial tasks are carried out in cooperation with Uppsala University. Hosting a wide range of Scandinavia-based scholars, the editorial board also includes international colleagues. The first issue contained selected papers from the Fifth Nordic Conference in Educational History, and the journal intends to publish similar theme issues from future conferences<sup>2</sup>.

So far, all Nordic conferences have been held at Swedish universities and the sixth will be no exception, hosted by Uppsala University in August 2015. Hitherto about four-fifths of attendees have been Swedish. This is partly due to choice of conference site but also reflects the vital status of educational history in Sweden, attributable to several key factors. In 2001, the Swedish Research Council founded a Committee for Educational Sciences (CES), which in turn identified educational history as one of the fields deserved of encouragement and funding.

Since 2005, the CES has financed a multidisciplinary postgraduate program in educational history at Uppsala University, which offers courses and seminars to some forty doctoral candidates in a dozen disciplines from throughout the country. Since the students are already enrolled in various doctoral programs, the postgraduate program serves as a network hub rather than the foundation stone of educational history as a discrete discipline. The only doctoral program in which educational history has taken steps toward discipline formation can be found in Umeå, where the Umeå Group of History and Education has inte-

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<sup>1</sup> Go to: <http://utbildningshistoria.se/>. Associate Professor Johannes Westberg, Uppsala University, is network coordinator.

<sup>2</sup> The *Nordic Journal of Educational History* can be visited at <http://ojs.ub.umu.se/index.php/njedh>.

grated its twin research profile into a single system. At the undergraduate level in general, the teaching of educational history is almost exclusively restricted to brief surveys as part of teacher education and introductory courses in education. Advanced level courses only appear in exceptional cases.

A growing infrastructure has promoted interdisciplinary contact and cooperation. This in turn has meant that boundaries between discipline-specific traditions tend to become less rigid. However, there is still a certain degree of variation in terms of thematic focus, theory and method, differences that can at least partly be linked to disciplinary orientation. In the landscape of Swedish educational history research, three major research groups are affiliated with different disciplines. At Linköping University, educational history is found within Child Studies; at Uppsala University, research is carried out in collaboration with scholars in History and Sociology of Education, respectively; and at Umeå University, «History Didactics» is the closest thing to a disciplinary partner for educational history researchers.

## 2. The Nordic Region as a Cultural Community

As a rule, the Nordic region (*Norden* in Scandinavian languages) refers to the nation-states of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland, and territories with varying degrees of political autonomy, including the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Sápmi and Åland. In certain instances of contemporary political, economic and scientific cooperation, the Baltic States are also included. The idea of the Nordic countries as an historical and cultural entity emerged in the wake of 19th-century nationalism, which saw the creation of numerous organizations whose goal was to foster Nordic cooperation and exchange, especially in the cultural sphere. In the educational arena, Nordic student and teacher organizations were created to arrange meetings and courses and sponsor inter-Nordic exchange programs. The first Nordic teachers congress was held in 1870 in Gothenburg, Sweden, and the sixth in Copenhagen in 1890, drew 5,300 participants. After the First World War, the «Norden» Associations initiated a history textbook revision project involving the five Nordic countries. In the research community, Nordic disciplinary organizations flourished. Since 1905, the Congress of Nordic Historians has arranged regular conferences that only recently have been challenged by national and international conferences as the most important arena for Nordic historians. In 2015, the Nordic Educational Research Association held its 43rd conference and continues to publish the periodical *Nordic Studies in Education*. Consequently, a Nordic infrastructure for historians of education is firmly in place by dint of the established pattern of scientific collaboration throughout the region.

The most fundamental basis of inter-Nordic cooperation is the linguistic proximity of the Scandinavian languages Danish, Norwegian and Swedish. Many Nordic conferences and journals still welcome Scandinavian languages, but in recent years English has become increasingly prominent. This gradual change reflects a general trend of internationalization, including the desire for international colleagues to freely participate in Nordic conferences. To some degree it also expresses the ambition to provide a linguistic platform upon which participants can communicate on equal footing. The use of Scandinavian languages means that native speakers of e.g. Icelandic and Finnish have to use a second or third language, while most Nordic scholars master English as their second language. The language policy of the *Nordic Journal of Educational History* reflects these new circumstances by publishing articles in Scandinavian languages (Danish, Norwegian and Swedish) as well as English.

The cultural community of the Nordic region is of course not merely a 19th-century ideological construct resting on linguistic proximity. The Nordic countries share a long history of both conflict and cooperation that includes political unions in a variety of configurations – the personal union of the Kingdoms of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, 1397-1523; the constitutional union of Denmark and Norway (including Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands), 1536-1814; and the personal union between Sweden and Norway, 1814-1905. In addition, the Kingdom of Sweden included Finland from the 13th century to 1809.

The one constant that unites the various states and territories of the Nordic region is the Lutheran church. The heavy impact of homogeneous, unchallenged Lutheranism has even been identified as a major factor behind the constitutive characteristics of the Nordic welfare model (Knudsen 2000; 2002). While the social insurance system instituted by Otto von Bismarck in Germany was restricted to the labor force, the Nordic model embraced all citizens. Allegedly, the universal approach of the Nordic countries emanated from the organization and ideology of the Lutheran state churches. In their function as state officials, Lutheran ministers were employed to organize poor relief and other social benefits. It is claimed that the parishes' responsibilities in this respect can still be recognized in the persisting tradition of strong local government in the Nordic countries. Many 21st-century historians continue to try to define genuine Nordic cultural characteristics and trace them back to common denominators in the shared history of its constituent states. In educational history, especially the sub-field of literacy research, the Lutheran church has played an equally important role, as described below.

### 3. Alphabetization of the North: Matter of Common Nordic Interest

The history of literacy began garnering increased attention in the 1970s, and at the Congress of Nordic Historians held at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, in 1981, the alphabetization of the five Nordic countries was one of the main themes. In his conclusion to the pre-published conference report, Egil Johansson (1981) stressed the importance of the established Lutheran churches in the early and universal alphabetization of the peoples of the north. His explanation underscored the Protestant aspiration of enabling all members of the church to read Scripture for themselves, while also indicating diverging patterns in the basic organization of popular education. In Sweden-Finland, parents and heads of the household were made responsible for teaching children and servants to read and master the catechism, while the clergy checked the level of reading skills and catechetical knowledge at recurrent examinations at church and in the home. In Denmark-Norway, on the other hand, a parish school system was instituted in 1739 to provide the instruction necessary to qualify for inclusion as a full member of the church, as stipulated in the Confirmation Act of 1736. Representing different religious ideologies (Orthodoxy in Sweden-Finland and Pietism in Denmark-Norway), the two systems were supported by new ecclesiastical manuals, including catechisms composed in 1689 and 1737, respectively. This comparative aspect was followed up in a series of articles in the *Journal of Scandinavian History* in 1990. Even though new research has somewhat modified the idea of two distinctly different models, the consensus image prevails.

In the last decade, the history of literacy has attracted renewed interest in the Nordic research community. When Session 28 of the International Standing Conference on the History of Education was hosted by Umeå University in 2006 with the theme of «Technologies of the Word: Literacies in the History of Education» (Lindmark, Erixon, Simon 2008), new Nordic research networks were organized, resulting in conferences, projects and publications. At the 2007 Congress of Nordic Historians in Reykjavik, a session on reading in the early modern period was arranged. Turning to print culture and book history, the same network, moderated by scholars in Denmark, organized another session at the 2008 SHARP (Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing) conference in Copenhagen. Entitled «Religious Reading in the Nordic Countries (c. 1550-1850)», this session resulted in an international publication (Appel, Fink-Jensen, 2011).

With financial support from the Joint Committee for Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities and the Social Sciences, a series of workshops kicked off in 2009 on the theme of «The Common People and the Processes of Literacy in the Nordic Countries: Excursions to the Scribal and Print Cultures

in the 18th and 19th Centuries». In 2011, the workshops were upgraded to a three-year research project, thanks to funding from the same financier through the NORDCORP program (Nordic Collaborative Research Projects): «Reading and Writing from Below: Toward a New Social History of Literacy in the Nordic Sphere During the Long Nineteenth Century». This increasingly formalized collaborative effort, directed from Helsinki, also resulted in an international publication (Kuismin, Driscoll, 2013). Similar perspectives have been applied in a national project funded by the Academy of Finland, 2011-14, and hosted by University of Jyväskylä, «The Benefits of Literacy in Everyday Life: The Impacts of Improved Literacy on the Opportunities for Social Advancement in Remote Local Communities (c. 1800-1930)».

While the Denmark-based network focused on early modern books and reading, Finnish scholars trained their interest on popular writing in the 19th century. In both cases, however, studies lifted the profile of educational history by dealing with both the formal and informal acquisition of literacy skills. A third network displayed a similar combination of educational and cultural history. In 2009, the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation funded a three-year Nordic network on «Vernacular Literacies». Coordinated from Umeå, this network leveled its gaze on modern and contemporary periods. While historians dominated the first two networks, the third had a more linguistic touch. In 2012, the «Vernacular Literacies» and «Reading and Writing from Below» networks arranged a joint international conference, after which a selection of papers was published (Edlund, Edlund, Haugen, 2014).

In addition to these joint approaches, there have been quite a few individual studies of great significance, including longitudinal studies of literacy practices in the Norwegian countryside before 1850 (Fet 2003, Apelset 2004). At the time of writing, Åsa Karlsson-Sjögren, Umeå University, is running a research project together with colleagues in Uppsala and Örebro, «Segregation and Integration: Gender, Class and Citizenship in the Swedish Education System, ca. 1800-1850» funded by the CES (2014-2016), in which the gender patterns established in previous research on the distribution of writing skills is revised through analysis of school attendance figures.

#### 4. Research Presented at the Nordic Conferences on Educational History

Since the Nordic Conferences in Educational History represent a vital arena for research in the field, I will briefly present some of the major themes featured at the last two conferences<sup>3</sup>. In 2009, the Fourth Nordic Conference in Educational History

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to my own notes and recollections, the present overview is based on written reports by Broady, Larsson, Westberg, 2010 for the 2009 conference, and Sjögren, 2013 and Norlin, Sjögren, 2014,



was arranged at Uppsala University. The conference gathered 170 participants from seven countries, and 128 papers were presented. Keynote speakers were Professor Marc Depaepe, University of Leuven, Belgium, and Professor Ning de Coninck-Smith, Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Denmark. While Depaepe opened up historiographical, theoretical and methodological perspectives on history of education research in general, de Coninck-Smith presented results from a specific project on the architecture of schools in the Danish welfare state, 1940-70.

The banner theme was «The Social and Cultural History of Education», which reflected its high profile at the host university while connecting with Nordic educational research in general, where sociocultural perspectives have long dominated. Transnational strategies in higher education featured in two sessions that emphasized Sweden's dependency on the exchange of students, teachers and research, first with the European continent and in the 20th century increasingly with the United States and other Anglo-Saxon countries. Transnational perspectives were also represented by a session on the international history textbook revision initiated after the First World War.

In terms of theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches and thematic focus, the sessions offered plenty of diversity. Curriculum history, particularly when linked to aspects of educational transfer, attracted much attention. At three sessions, papers were presented on themes including curriculum reform in Norway and the introduction of standardized testing in the Swedish and German school systems of the early 20th century. Three more sessions were devoted to the history of elementary school teachers by a network of scholars seeking to promote the idea of a large-scale Nordic research project focusing on the evolution of their profession in a changing society between 1860 and 1960. The presentations offered local, gender and multiethnic perspectives.

Two sessions on «Sorting and Documenting Students» presented papers focused on mechanisms of differentiation in school systems, including ethnic categorization and the use of terms like *dyslexic* and *uneducable*. Another three sessions were dedicated to student cultural and institutional activities, analyzing sports in secondary schools, social interplay in the schoolyard, peer socialization and other previously neglected aspects of educational culture.

Minor themes also broached at the 2009 conference included literacy acquisition, adult education, vocational training, military education, student welfare, teacher training and professionalization, school finances and marketization, and

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for the 2012 conference. Selected papers and all abstracts from the 2009 conference were published in Larson, Westberg, 2010, while the 2014 Spring issue of *Nordic Journal of Educational History* contains selected papers from the 2012 conference.



schooling and nation-building. Even though broad in terms of empirical focus, social, cultural and political aspects dominated. Few papers dealt with the content and methods of teaching. While some focused on students, interest mainly concerned social and cultural aspects of student life in educational institutions. Primary and secondary school far outweighed tertiary education. Compulsory education was challenged by formal and informal alternatives. As far as periodization was concerned, the twentieth century's dominance was total.

At the fifth Nordic conference, hosted by Umeå University in 2012, three keynote speakers were invited to address one aspect of the threefold conference theme, «People, Environments, and Educational Media». The lecture given by Professor Astri Andresen, University of Bergen, Norway, dealt with student welfare in the age of weighing and measuring. Professor Ian Grosvenor, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom, focused on spatial aspects of schooling in the modern era, while Senior Lecturer Charlotte Appel, Roskilde University Centre, Denmark, presented her research on early modern educational media. The conference gathered approximately 100 participants from the five Nordic countries, most of whom also presented papers.

The intention of the conference theme was to zero in on micro-aspects of educational history. The organizers maintained that the broad picture had been drawn long ago, including curriculum history, the history of the great school reforms, pedagogic innovations, educational ideals and ideologies, etc. Now the time had come to color in the details. Beginning with the concrete and the material, historians of education could achieve new insight into the school experience by detailing its micro-history.

Spatial aspects attracted particular attention at the conference. Two sessions focused on dedicated spaces in higher education – the auditorium, the lab, the sports arena – and another addressed schools as psychosocial environments, including schoolyard interaction, new architectural solutions and sanitary conditions. As for material, the implementation of new teaching technology was discussed, including the introduction of maps and illustrations in textbooks and the development of new educational media in a session on the history of selected course subjects. Most papers, however, addressed the people of educational history themselves: students, teachers, nurses, school welfare officers, guidance counselors, etc.

Quite a few papers veered far from the main conference themes. School finances dominated three sessions, where the distinction between local and national funding appeared to be crucial. Vocational education was another salient feature, most significantly the transition from vocational training to the labor market. It was obvious that many of these papers were inspired by present-day

issues in the educational landscape of the north, including the debate spurred by the results of the PISA surveys.

Indeed, modern and contemporary history again dominated proceedings, with only a handful of papers addressing early modern education, most of which were presented in a session on the history of literacy. There was also a session discussing enhanced inter-Nordic cooperation in the field of Saami educational history. Two major projects underway in Norway and Sweden, respectively, sought common denominators in research and the dissemination of results (see Section 6, below).

Regardless of how it was formulated, the Nordic conferences described above display a continuity of thematic orientation. Since both exercised an inclusive policy in terms of thematic focus, chances for the main theme to overshadow all other contributions were limited. And of course, no seismic shift could be expected after only three years, especially since many research projects are conducted over long period of time. Nor do sessions and abstracts for the upcoming 2015 conference, dedicated to «Interdisciplinary Perspectives», indicate any major reorientation. The methods and content of teaching remain marginal themes, although more visible than before. This is also true for tertiary education and early modern history of education. Educational financing, vocational training and Saami education appear to maintain their prominent positions, while transnational perspectives, citizenship education and the history of educational governance and assessment seem to have gained a stronger foothold. This indicates that the micro-history of education encouraged by the 2012 conference has been replaced with more of macro-perspectives in the upcoming conference. Consequently, the social and cultural history of the last century may not be as dominant as it has been in the last few years. However, the dominant impression of the preview of the 2015 conference is the wide variety of themes, in itself representing a certain degree of continuity from previous conferences.

## 5. Research Presented in the *Nordic Journal of Educational History*

Since the *Nordic Journal of Educational History* serves as a publishing channel for the Nordic conferences, its contents accurately reflect their dominant features<sup>4</sup>. In the premiere issue (Spring 2014), three out of four articles address 20th-century primary and secondary schooling, including curriculum history aspects of knowledge assessment in Sweden, academic subjects in vocational training programs in Swedish upper secondary schools, and the demographic

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<sup>4</sup> All issues of the journal are freely available at <http://ojs.ub.umu.se/index.php/njedh>. The website, all editorials, and the majority of the articles are in English.

and social profile of primary school teachers in Iceland. The fourth discusses the foundation of a pioneering teacher's institute in early 19th-century Norway.

The second issue (Autumn 2014) includes articles not previously presented at the 2012 Nordic conference, two of which delineate theoretical approaches to educational history. Focusing on the Finnish-speaking region of northern Sweden, one develops a theoretical framework for the «national metasystem for education and fostering», while the other one discusses three approaches (philosophical, historical and Foucauldian) applied to Nordic research with a special focus on Denmark. Two more articles focus on educational ideas, one analyzing the «principle of personality» put forward by C.J.L. Almqvist, a visionary educationist of early 19th-century Sweden, and the other investigating the rise of educational psychology in interwar Denmark. The fifth article deals with interaction between two educational institutes in late 18th-century Copenhagen.

The third issue of the *Nordic Journal of Educational History* (Spring 2015) was dedicated entirely to educational finances. Having been boosted by a research project on «The Economics of Education: The Financing of the Swedish Common School, 1842-1936,» directed by Associate Professor Johannes Westberg, Uppsala University, and funded by the CES (2010-13), the field has grown beyond the original scope of the project, resulting in a comprehensive monograph on financial, material and practical aspects of the erection of 19th-century schools (Westberg, 2014). Only one out of five articles in the issue relates to the elementary school system founded in 1842, Westberg's own analysis of teachers' farm allotments as a means of funding mass schooling in 19th-century Sweden. Two articles address the state funding of adult education, including continuing education, study circles and evening schools, and the last two articles deal with financial aspects of academic exchange programs run by the American-Scandinavian Foundation and the Swedish Institute, respectively. Both the adult education theme and the academic exchange theme are supported by externally funded research projects. In a comprehensive, co-authored introduction, the authors situate their contribution in an international context of educational history and educational finance research.

## 6. Challenging National Boundaries: Selected Research Projects

As demonstrated above, educational financing has grown into a prominent research theme thanks to a cluster of research projects. Before concluding this outline of currents in Nordic educational history, I would like to mention three major research projects representing three different ways of dealing with the legacy of national framing in Nordic educational history.

In 2009, the Danish Carlsberg Foundation chose to finance a large-scale research project on Danish elementary education in a uniquely long-term perspective, «Schools in Denmark: A History of Everyday Life, Conditions, and Visions over 500 Years,» its results presented in five volumes beginning on the bicentennial anniversary of the elementary school system of 1814. The project was directed by Ning de Coninck-Smith and hosted by the Danish School of Education. A large interdisciplinary group of researchers was recruited along with a reference group of Nordic scholars. Five comprehensive and profusely illustrated volumes went into production in cooperation with Aarhus University Press under the series name «Danish School History.» The first two volumes were published in 2013 (Appel, Fink-Jensen, 2013; Larsen, Nørr, Sonne, 2013), and the following two in 2014 (Gjerløff, Faye Jacobsen, 2014; Gjerløff, Faye Jacobsen, Nørgaard, Ydesen, 2014). Volume 5 will appear in print in June 2015.

The ultimate aim of the project was to write a new history of Danish elementary education by problematizing what «school» really meant to different individuals at various points in time and highlighting the «relations between social changes, educational visions and policies, and local interests and disagreements» (de Coninck-Smith, Nørgaard, Appel, n.d.). Inspired by studies in the history of the childhood, participants wished to apply a perspective from below and focus on people and everyday practice in various types of schools, rather than writing a history of educational legislation and ideology. In other words, the intention was to offer an alternative to the national framework within which Danish school history had commonly been situated. Regional perspectives were emphasized and education in Danish colonies and dominions perused. From the published volumes it is clear that the project has fulfilled its objectives, setting a new standard and serving as a source of inspiration for any similar undertaking in the other Nordic countries. It is noteworthy that the theme of the Fifth Nordic Conference in Educational History in 2012 clearly reflected the ideals of the Danish elementary school project.

Educational history, like historical research in general, is often conducted in a national context. Other projects have also made a conscious attempt to transcend national borders. Saami Studies is a field of research that has long attracted scholars to interdisciplinary and inter-Nordic approaches. Since the indigenous population of Northern Fennoscandia can be found strewn across the territory of several nation-states, inter-Nordic collaboration is not merely preferable but necessary in order to achieve a coherent result. Yet many projects remain hobbled by «methodological nationalism» in their exclusive use of sources culled from a single, national context.

In 2012, the research council Formas voted to finance the project «Educational Democratization and Ethnification in Swedish Sápmi – 1942 to the Present» (2012-13), to which the CES provided supplementary funding a year later (2013-16). This large project is directed by Professor Patrik Lantto and hosted by the Centre for Sami Research at Umeå University, Sweden. The project involves two senior scholars, four postdocs and two doctoral candidates and includes studies on the policy, practices, and consequences of two educational systems that replaced the Nomad School system of 1913, i.e. the Saami Folk High School of 1942, and the Saami School of 1962.

By focusing on Saami schooling in the Swedish part of Sápmi alone, this project might be viewed as tainted with a certain hue of methodological nationalism. At the same time, it employs strategies to situate its results in a wider Nordic context. Contact has been established with the Norwegian Saami School History Project, and linking the two projects together is under consideration. A joint follow-up involving Norwegian and Swedish scholars is under preparation, and project leader Lantto has been appointed visiting professor at the University of Tromsø, Norway's Arctic University, to strengthen cross-border research cooperation. It is obvious that inter-Nordic collaboration in the field of Saami educational history has not yet reached its full potential.

I would like to briefly present a third project in which national borders have been transcended. In 2008-11, the CES funded «History Beyond Borders: The International History Textbook Revision, 1919-2009». Further co-funded by Umeå University up to 2013 and coordinated by Professor Daniel Lindmark, this project involved ten researchers in Sweden and Germany, including four doctoral candidates.

By focusing on history teaching and textbooks, the project investigated the evolution of collaboration in the educational field in 20th-century Europe. Each of the four dissertation projects addressed interaction between national, Nordic, European and global levels. One analyzed UNESCO and Council of Europe resolutions on history teaching and their implementation in Swedish secondary schools (Nygren, 2011). A second investigated mutual history textbook revision projects on the Continent during the Cold War from the perspective of cultural diplomacy (Faure, 2015). The third dissertation compared the Norden Associations' history textbook revision in the five Nordic countries, 1919-72 (Åström Elmersjö, 2013), while the fourth studied the views of history teaching represented by interwar peace education proponents in Sweden and her Nordic neighbors (Nilsson, 2015).

While the Danish School History project eschewed a national perspective by focusing on individuals and local practices and writing history from below,

the Swedish Saami school project strives to overcome national boundaries by collaborating with similar ongoing projects in other parts of Sápmi and planning future joint inter-Nordic collaborations. The History Beyond Borders project, finally, was specifically designed as a transnational project. However, none of these projects succeeded in enlisting full-scale cooperation between researchers in all the Nordic countries. In this respect there is still a lot to learn from the long-standing tradition of Nordic collaboration in the field of history of literacy research (see Section 3, above).

## 7. Concluding Remarks

In the Nordic countries, educational history is a highly diverse, interdisciplinary field. Supported by a well-functioning infrastructure, the Nordic arena is still under development. While the Danish School History project has boosted educational history research in Denmark, Swedish dominance in terms of the number of active scholars and externally funded research projects represents a possible obstacle to maintaining the idea of a *Nordic* research infrastructure, especially since the networks, conferences and journal are all managed from bases in Sweden. Hopefully, its strong footing in Sweden will serve to inspire scholars in the other Nordic countries. By prioritizing inter-Nordic cooperation, historians of education would be able to take advantage of the relatively good funding opportunities offered by Swedish and Nordic funding agencies.

The Nordic Conferences in Educational History have become a solid platform for communicating research results and the *Nordic Journal of Educational History* has rapidly become a competitive publishing alternative. The lively activity of the digital Nordic network serves as a repeated reminder of the nascent Nordic research community in educational history. In the foreseeable future, these three tools will be of great significance in enhancing Nordic research and promoting inter-Nordic cooperation. However, in a time of increasing globalization, the Nordic arena will meet intensified competition from international platforms. Therefore, it is imperative to constantly improve the Nordic infrastructure and keep up to date with the wishes and needs of Nordic historians of education.

The Nordic research infrastructure offers a way out of a possible national isolation. At the same time, open-ended academic exchange is necessary for maintaining high scholarly standards. The Nordic arena cannot replace international cooperation. Therefore, language policy must be handled with the greatest circumspection. At the same time, the above outline testifies to Nordic scholars' close contact with international research. This is true for general trends, such as last years' dominance of the social and cultural history, and specific



perspectives, including the material and spatial turns. While we have yet to see much of the visual and sensory turns in Nordic educational history research, they are probably just around the corner<sup>5</sup>. However, the most likely development of the interdisciplinary research field of Nordic educational history is a continued wide variety of themes where both national and international trends make themselves visible without dominating the scene.

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<sup>5</sup> As for visual aspects, see e.g. Burke, Grosvenor, Norlin, 2014 and Evertsson, 2014.



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