EDUCATION INQUIRY
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EDUCATION INQUIRY

Education Inquiry is an international on-line, peer-reviewed journal with free access in the field of Educational Sciences and Teacher Education. It publishes original empirical and theoretical studies from a wide variety of academic disciplines. As the name of the journal suggests, one of its aims is to challenge established conventions and taken-for-granted perceptions within these fields.

Education Inquiry is looking for lucid and significant contributions to the understanding of contextual, social, organizational and individual factors affecting teaching and learning, the links between these aspects, the nature and processes of education and training as well as research in and on Teacher Education and Teacher Education policy. This includes research ranging from pre-school education to higher education, and research on formal and informal settings. Education Inquiry welcomes cross-disciplinary contributions and innovative perspectives. Of particularly interest are studies that take as their starting point, education practice and subject teaching or didactics.

Education Inquiry welcomes research from a variety of methodological and theoretical approaches, and invites studies that make the nature and use of educational research the subject of inquiry. Comparative and country-specific studies are also welcome.

Education Inquiry readers include educators, researchers, teachers and policy makers in various cultural contexts.

Every issue of Education Inquiry publishes peer-reviewed articles in one, two or three different sections. Open section: Articles sent in by authors as part of regular journal submissions and published after a blind review process. Thematic section: Articles reflecting the theme of a conference or workshop and published after a blind review process. Invited section: Articles by researchers invited by Education Inquiry to shed light on a specific theme or for a specific purpose and published after a review process.

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Editorial

Nafsika Alexiadou & Linda Rönnberg, Editors

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Thematic section

This thematic section is edited by Christina Segerholm who provides an introduction to the section in “The Quality Turn. Political and Methodological Challenges in Contemporary Educational Evaluation and Assessment”. Segerholm initially describes the historical background and places the overall theme in a wider context and outlines the content of the articles.

Xavier Pons takes a sociological approach to analysing “School External Evaluation in England, France and Switzerland”, against the context of soft governance measures of quality control in European school systems. Pons uses a combination of historical institutionalism and sociological theories concerning regulation and professionalisation to analyse and interpret a large amount of qualitative data on school evaluations in three European countries. The analysis confirms the powerful impact of history and established institutional designs in determining the paths different countries take in adopting what seems to be the same set of policies on school evaluation. Institutions in different countries mediate the meanings of policies and regulation tools (such as evaluations), and reconfigure policies to suit the local circumstances. Policy actors in national settings select the ‘supranational messages’ they wish to incorporate in their own domestic situations, and integrate them according to their needs.

In “Standards-Based Accountability in the United States”, Laura Hamilton, Brian Stecher and Kun Yuan provide a critical evaluation of research around quality of standards, the ways in which accountability has shaped the practices of teachers, and its effects on the achievement of students in the USA. The authors examine the policies on standards-based accountability since its inception in the 1990s and its later incorporation in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Hamilton and her colleagues review the successes of these policies as linked to school improvement, but also the unintended consequences that have brought about less positive outcomes.
The article provides a critical appreciation of the issues in the USA, and provides knowledge needed by decision-makers in any system that is introducing or refining standards-based accountability systems.

Peter Dahler-Larsen concentrates on the political and ‘unintended effects’ of testing in his article “Constitutive Effects as a Social Accomplishment”. Using qualitative data from research in a school that teaches the Danish language to immigrant students, the author explores the constitutive effects of testing on the working life of the people involved in the process. The analysis and discussion of the empirical evidence reveals in its complexity the contestable, performative, socially productive and constitutive capacity of tests, which shed light on the political nature of the process of testing, against the wider framework of Danish immigration policies.

In “Classroom Assessment and Education” Barbara Croussouard problematises the relationship between quality and assessment and brings into focus questions surrounding instrumentality, politics and the actual quality of education that assessment aims to support. Drawing on research in Scottish primary schools, the author analyses the challenges of formative assessment practices that do not address the essentially political and socially constructed nature of education. In so doing, she probes the effect of assessment discourses and practices on pupil subjectivities, as well as on the wider issue of achieving a commitment to social justice.

In the next article, “Assessment, Evaluation and Quality Assurance”, Royce Sadler reviews contemporary debates around the meaning of terms that are increasingly common in the Higher Education space internationally: quality assurance, evaluation, appraisal, and assessment. Against the context of this debate, Sadler introduces the emerging concept of ‘grade integrity’ that is intended to convey confidence in the process of evaluating Higher Education student achievement, in as objective a way as possible. The paper provides a platform for defining the term, but also analyses the challenges it involves and, in doing so, outlines the possibilities for a more reliable system of quality assurance in Higher Education.

Finally, in “Quality, Standards and Accountability: An Uneasy Alliance”, Thomas Schwandt finishes off with some concluding reflections and provides a route to critically examine our own standpoints.

Open section
This Open section contains four articles. Maria Hedlin’s article “Admission Policy of Swedish Teacher Education Favouring Men” examines the 1962 parliamentary decision to reform schools, emphasising the ideals of meritocracy and equality of opportunity. The article considers the evolution of ideas surrounding femininity, masculinity and professionalisation, and provides a critical discussion of gender construction around perceived teacher competencies. Teacher education admission policies in Sweden are reviewed from this perspective and examined against national education narratives of equality of opportunity, and nationhood.
Secondly, in “Being a Skilled Reader” Stig-Börje Asplund combines a conversational analysis approach with a reception theory perspective to analyse four male engineering students’ engagement with literature discussion. The author goes beyond the working-class stereotypical responses of the boys who use homophobic language in discussing texts, and reveals their complex constructions of meaning and competencies while reading. The article brings to the fore the ways in which the boys’ identities emerge as readers, but also in terms of their sexuality becomes important in how they engage with the literature, and this opens up questions about how we represent and understand working-class boys’ behaviour in schools.

In “Predicting the Use of Praise among Pre-service Teachers”, Anna Carin Jons- son and Dennis Beach explore the ways pre-service teachers make judgments and use their subjective beliefs with regard to perceived intelligence having an innate or incremental nature. Using findings from two empirical studies and interpreting these through implicit theorising perspectives, the authors find that pre-service teachers construct pupil intelligence in particular ways that determine their process of feedback praise. The implications of the different sets of beliefs about the nature of intelligence are crucially important for the process of giving praise, and for teaching and learning.

Finally, Kerstin Bergqvist’s article “Own Work’ in Primary School – A Teaching and Learning Practice in the Context of Administration and Control” examines a teaching and learning practice called “own work” in the context of primary classroom settings in a Swedish comprehensive school. It asks: what picture of schoolwork do we obtain if we take a close look at everyday classroom activities and consider what students and teachers do and say about them? By studying observations and tape-recorded conversations between the teacher and individual students, activities and how participants looked upon successful work and learning are discussed as being contingent on certain administrative and controlling functions of the institution.
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