Times of transition?
Education between persistence and change

PH Zürich
28.-30.06.2023

Call for Papers

Change is an omnipresent theme in contemporary discourse on schools, teacher education and educational research. Indeed, change is an inherent trait of educational institutions, which in essence are designed to help learners develop, and thus change. However, change as a concept frequently pursues a specific agenda that mirrors how people, institutions and even entire societies are expected to evolve. Moreover, placing so much attention on the idea of change bears the risk of overlooking aspects of persistence, stasis and invariance that are equally influential in shaping educational systems – for example regarding the continuance of educational inequalities and organisational inertia of school systems.

The 2023 annual conference of the **Swiss Society for Research in Education (SSRE)** and the **Swiss Society for Teacher Education (SGL)** is dedicated to examining the complexities of this many-faceted topic. A variety of disciplines and methods are considered in order to gain insight into the interplay between persistence and change at schools, in teacher education and in educational research.

The conference is an in-person event at the **Zurich University of Teacher Education (PH Zürich)** and takes place from **28 to 30 June 2023**. Academics in the field of educational research are invited to submit proposals for contributions that aim to shed light on the topic of persistence and change in educational practice, education policy, and educational research. The application deadline is **29 January 2023**. Proposals with a different focus may be considered if they address particularly innovative and original questions.

Content

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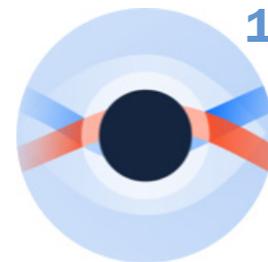
Topic of the congress

Persistence and change in education

The idea that change is the only constant in our world today tallies with numerous individual and collective experiences, particularly in the post-pandemic era. On first sight, this notion is extremely convincing. Indeed, phenomena like the digital transformation, the dissolution of traditional gender roles, climate change and the participation of civil society in community decision-making processes have become standard discussion points in societal discourse and are indications that multiple lifeworld areas are in flux. The world of education is no exception.

In educational systems, there is a tendency to link this motif of permanent change with an endeavour of continuous improvement and optimization of teaching, schools and quality, or with regard to the optimisation of individual or collective learning achievements. In such endeavours, the dynamics of change are channelled in a specific direction, be it in the form of implicit (and more or less widely shared) objectives or as explicit standards and requirements.

However, in the midst of all the rhetoric of change we should not lose sight of all that remains permanent, invariable and stable – despite, because of, behind or buried beneath the narrative of change in educational practice and policy. This simultaneity of persistence and change is the guiding motif of this conference. Due to the general enthusiasm about change, phenomena of persistence tend to vanish from sight in media and professional discourse, or strategies are developed to actively erase them. Manifestations of actual or necessary change are countered by a strong tendency to remain the same. And it is not only (purported) change that poses challenges in research: stability and order are also mark crucial research puzzles. Examples include the persistence of educational inequality and complex systems of path dependence in established organisational forms of schools (including training programmes and occupational profiles) as well as the original mission of a school education, which is to transfer and replicate cultural and social values and norms.

Against this backdrop, the notion of persistence describes phenomena in which stasis and invariance can be grasped as active processes of structural reproduction or as enduring conditions that prove to be stable, resistant or immutable, even in the face of calls for change. Although these phenomena generally exist beyond the hype of permanent change, they nonetheless demand the attention of actors involved in educational systems and in educational research, especially if they self-identify as critical scholars. This «flip side» of change can be linked to topics relevant to educational practice and educational research that "lie dormant" despite – and possibly because of – the constant thematisation and examination of change.

Finally, inquiring into change and persistence concerns more than educational practice and education policy, including its analytical concepts, methodologies and forms of organisation. In addition to dealing with the challenge of diagnosing and theorising processes of change and stability, educational research is inherently confronted with analogous tensions. These tensions include processes of canonisation (both conceptual and methodological) that are at odds with the seemingly unstoppable evolution, differentiation and pluralisation of theoretical perspectives and empirical approaches. Challenges for educational research include methodological implications of ongoing social and pedagogical transformations (e.g. the challenges relating to teaching and learning in migration societies), emerging novel dynamics and fractures in the landscape of social research resulting from the rise of big data and computational sciences, or the advent of mixed methods research. Moreover, increasing pressure to adapt and change also arises through interactions with other educational fields, for instance, when actors in educational practi-
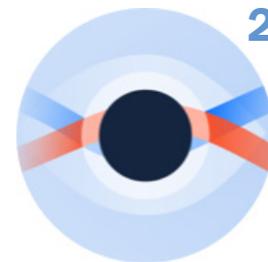
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ce or education policy call for more «practical relevance» in pedagogical research.

The thematic spectrum expands considerably if, to begin with, we operate on the assumption that "changes never come singly" and that it is therefore necessary to distinguish and relate the various fields in which change occurs simultaneously (although most likely not uniformly) while also recognising the probability that the fields and the processes of change exercise an "intersectional", reciprocal influence on each other. The resulting challenges for schools and higher education institutions charged with implementing change are equally worthy of scholarly investigation as the challenges in educational research to make these processes a topic of observation and description – a description that is of relevance and real value to the actors responsible for the change processes. In addition, the thematic spectrum also expands if we place current phenomena of persistence and change in a historical perspective and consider contemporary discourses of change in relation to historical precursors.

Based on these considerations, the joint SGBF and SGL conference in June 2023 aims to explore the complex interrelationships between persistence and change in educational systems; the conference is tentatively structured around the three perspectives of educational practice, education policy and educational research – and the actors involved in these fields. If these three points of reference are seen as the corners of a triangle, it is possible to formulate areas of inquiry that can be located in the vicinity of one of the corners; however, it is also possible to devise areas of inquiry that are positioned in the centre of the triangle, as their thematic focus addresses the interplay of groups of actors in relation to the phenomena of interest.

The following questions illustrate the diversity of potential topics at the conference and are meant to inspire contributions that actively engage with the described thematic areas.

Educational practice

Considering the roles and perspectives of professionals who bear the main responsibility for schools and higher education institutions on a daily basis, we may ask:

- Where do phenomena of change originate? What interests do which drivers of change pursue? What factors occasion and instigate the thematisation of change as an imperative? What other forms of initiation or roots of change can be identified?

- How is change implemented in reality? There is a wide range of differing ideas on the characterisation of change processes, and the various suggestions for dealing with change have unequal degrees of urgency. Are the processes creeping or disruptive in nature? More evolution or revolution? What is the role of categories such as "levels" (of competency) or "tipping points" that link moments of change with an exaggerated sense of urgency and thus generate pressure to act?

- What course does a proposed change take between hopes for a (forward) development and professionalisation and fears of a (backward) trend and disqualification? What are the contributing factors? Where do ideas on these characteristics originate? What purposes and interests do they serve?

- The following questions are even more specific and centred on actors at educational institutions: Who is actually steering the change? Who is operating as a partner? How is it possible to exercise influence? Under what conditions are the persons involved "merely" affected by change, and when are they forced to change or instrumentalised by change? Who gets to assume the role of a "gamechanger", and what does the answer say about the "game", the belief that change is possible and the form of

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the change processes? Who do demands for change address and how do the affected individuals understand the demands and, if necessary, accept them? By contrast, what leads them to delegitimise, reject or disregard change/calls for change? What conditions must be secured to avoid situations of sham participation in change processes?

Education policy

When change is viewed through the lens of education policy, a different set of questions arises:

- What intentions and measures related to education policy are upheld and pursued as change, and what notions of causality characterise them?

- In what dimensions does political influencing occur? How can such actions be used to a positive effect? Are there commonalities in the change initiatives proposed by cantonal, national and transnational political actors?

- How do the different actors coordinate their activities for change in education policy, and how do conditions of persistence arise?

- What positions related to education policy are widespread in public opinion, and how does the collective process of agenda-building in education policy take shape?

- What are the prevalent discourse coalitions in education policy regarding change and persistence in educational systems, and what strategies are used for shaping opinion in the public sphere?

- How important are majority conditions for education policy initiatives of change or, by contrast, for tendencies to remain the same?

- What political value is placed on educational practice and educational research?

- How viable are (new) governance models in education, and what consequences could be drawn from studying these models?

Educational research

Yet another range of questions can be identified with view to educational research itself:

- On an analytical level, we might ask: How can we conceptually and empirically distinguish between actual change and simple political, pedagogical, and social "talking about change"? What characterises "real" change? Under what conditions does change take place? What factors promote structural and sustainable processes of change? By contrast, when is change likely to be superficial or even just a pretence? In light of the questions outlined here, scholars in the field of educational research – whether they aim to shed light on change processes or whether they are interested in initiating and empirically monitoring specific formats of change – face the key challenges of distinguishing true change from superficial/faux change, of formulating precise descriptions of different phenomena and of developing an awareness for their own complex role as observers, initiators, facilitators of, or impediments to, change.
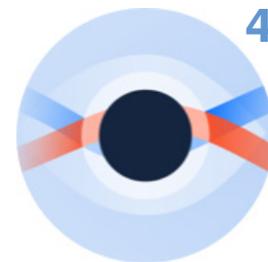
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- What measurements and instruments have been developed in the field of educational research to adequately gauge phenomena of change, and what forms of change cannot (yet) be mapped? Why are some methodologies more suited to examining change processes, and how can this be explained?

- What are the findings on implied "education-relevant" fields of change, how were they attained and to what degree can they be said to impact educational institutions? How can these findings be framed – also, and especially, from a historical perspective?

- Beyond the inevitable delay with which newly developed knowledge follows the phenomena investigated, is there a gap between the knowledge potential that educational research delivers and the knowledge needs of actors in educational institutions?

- What influences can be identified (seen, for instance, from the perspective of big data) in educational research, and how can these influences be addressed?

Thematic examples

In addition to the three perspectives named above, a focus on the manifold interplays between these areas yields relevant questions for research and debate. For example, we may ask:

- How can we assess the calls for change that have dominated schools and teacher education programmes for the past 20 years under the mantle of "competency-based learning outcomes" in terms of their effectiveness? This, regarding the "increase in competencies" in graduates of teacher-training programmes but also concerning the significance that the competency-based paradigm has gained in curriculum design and on the level of "real" school and teaching practices. Aside from the discussion of "competencies" in the classroom, what other changes can be verified? Which of these changes could be classified as intentional and which as a trans-intentional side effect? An investigation of the "competency-based approach" is likely to concern all three perspectives.

- How can the notion of "education for sustainable development" be related to climate change and its consequences? What kind of research achieves which results – and to what end?

- To what extent do developments in the digital transformation resulting from the pandemic benefit which educational actors? What tendencies of inclusion and exclusion, what opportunities and challenges arise for the concept of education in an information society?

With this broad thematic range, the conference endeavours to challenge positions and perspectives that, on first sight, seem highly plausible and almost self-evident, and to distinguish and differentiate them for educational systems and educational research. Indeed, because educational systems (as a subsystem of society) are built on principles of continuity and continuation, it is especially critical to consider the various phenomena that can be observed, examined and possibly subjected to targeted manipulation attempts under the thematic umbrella of change and persistence.

Submission of proposals
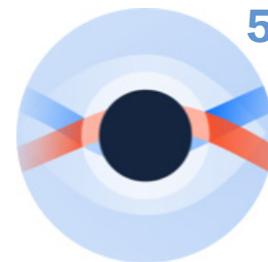
Session formats

Possible formats for the conference include individual presentations, posters or symposia and discussion panels.

Individual presentations, for which one or more authors may be responsible, generally last from 15 to a maximum of 20 minutes, followed by 10 to 15 minutes for questions and discussion. The academic committee will group presentations with similar topics into thematic blocks.

Proposals for individual presentations must include the following:

- Name, institution, and contact details of the author(s)
- Title of the presentation
- Disciplinary field
- 3 to 5 keywords
- A summary (max. 500 words) with key statements on the research question, methodological approaches, and discussion points
- Reference list (5 to 10 references) following APA guidelines

Posters may be designed by one or more authors, who are responsible for having the poster printed in A0 format and for setting it up at the conference in the designated area. Posters are introduced in five-minute presentations.

The requirements for poster proposals are the same as those for individual presentations.

Symposia and discussion panels bring together scholars from at least two different institutions on a clearly identifiable common topic.

Symposia are organised and coordinated by one or more persons. They last 120 minutes and contain several presentations (usually three, in exceptional cases four) on a shared topic, followed by a discussion. Each presentation lasts 15 to 20 minutes. The individual talks should each address a different research project and the speakers should be from different institutions. In addition, at least one of the presenters should be a researcher at the qualification stage of their academic career. Multilingual symposia are both possible and welcome. The discussant initiates the discussion round with a critical input and then moderates the following debate. At least 45 minutes should be planned for the discussion.

Discussion forums can deviate from the more standardised procedures of symposia; they allow for very discursive formats and use other methods to stimulate substantive debate (e.g. round-table discussions, collaborative workspaces, panel discussions).

Proposals for symposia and discussion forums must include the following:

- Name, institution, and contact details of the person responsible
- Name, institution, and contact details of all presenters in addition to their role in the symposium/discussion forum
- Title of the symposium/discussion forum

Submission of proposals

- Description of the topic, key issues, and discussion in relation to the various presentations as well as organisation of the symposium/discussion forum with the names of the discussion leader
- Proposals for individual talks in a symposium/discussion forum are subject to the same requirements as individual presentations
- Maximum 2'500 words

Submission

Proposals may be written in German, French, Italian or English. At the conference, the presentations are held in the language announced in the programme. PhD students are especially encouraged to submit a proposal.

A maximum of two proposals (presenter and first author) may be submitted per author. A maximum of one symposium may be proposed in the role of responsible person.

Proposals are submitted on the website **persistence_and_change2023.ch**.

The submission deadline is **29. January 2023**. Final decisions will be communicated by 15 April 2023.

All proposals are evaluated by two reviewers. The decision to accept or reject a proposal is made by the academic committee, under consideration of the reviewers' opinion.

Proposals are evaluated on the basis of the following criteria:

- Significance and relevance of the topic and research question for the conference
- Clarity and innovative character of the problem discussed
- Quality and topicality of the analytical and theoretical framework
- Adequacy of methodology

For symposia and discussion forums, criteria of overall coherence and multiperspectivity (with regard to projects, institutions, methods, languages, the presenter's qualification level) are also considered. If the content of a symposium lacks overall coherence, the academic committee may accept individual contributions as individual presentations at the conference.

Proposals for individual presentations or posters that do not deal directly with the conference theme may be approved under certain conditions; in such cases, the innovative character and originality of the proposal are alternative evaluation criteria. However, the content of symposia and discussion forums must have immediate relevance to the topic of persistence and change in education.

Organisation & contact

Sponsoring institutions

Swiss Society for Research in Education (SSRE)

Swiss Society for Teacher Education (SGL)

Executing institution

PH Zürich, Zurich University of Teacher Education, Office of the Vice-Rector for Research & Development

Academic committee

- Prof. Bruno Leutwyler (PH Zürich, Zurich University of Teacher Education, Vice-rector R&D, Chair of the academic committee)
- Prof. Emanuela Chiapparini (BFH, Bern University of Applied Sciences)
- Prof. Kenneth Horvath (PH Zürich, Zurich University of Teacher Education)
- Prof. Tobias Leonhard (PH Zürich, Zurich University of Teacher Education)
- Prof. Zoe Moody (HEP VS, University of Teacher Education of Valais, and University of Geneva, President SSRE)
- Prof. Wolfgang Sahlfeld (SUPSI, University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland)
- Prof. Pierre Tulowitzki (PH FHNW, University of Teacher Education/University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Northwestern Switzerland, Vice President SSRE)
- Prof. Monika Wicki (HfH, University of Teacher Education in Special Needs, Board member SGL)

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