

Editorial: *Navigating in a Measurable Epistemic Landscape*

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Policy instruments such as indicators and the whole audit and performance-monitoring nexus have become a significant element of the shift from government to the governance of national education systems through new institutional forms (...).

- Grek (2009, p. 25)

During the last decades, measurability has become a governing element in educational institutions through changes in the epistemic landscape. Consequently, the kind of knowledge preferred within this epistemic landscape places results, performance and effectiveness at the forefront of educational objectives in educational institutions. In turn, the changing epistemic landscape spurs changes in how humans navigate within these educational contexts (Grek, 2009).

In the context of academia, researchers are apt to institutional practices of displaying their research in minimized versions within

the institutional forms of an economy of publications, leaving little or no space to philosophical underpinnings to the research conducted. The matter of institutional practices and logics in academia was highlighted in *Confero's* first issue (Nylander, Aman, Hallqvist, Malmqvist & Sandberg, 2013). In this previous issue, ambiguities in the publishing system were discussed i.e. the dual nature researchers encounter through the ethics of the research community in terms of e.g. helping colleagues with peer reviews as well as the logics of turning the work of researchers into profitable entities played out in the economy of publications.

In higher education the trend towards measurability, standardization and effectiveness has been highlighted from various perspectives. In the thought-provoking essay *The Formation of Thinking* by Jonna Hjertström Lappalainen, in this issue of *Confero*, the author is navigating contemporary debates on thinking in higher education with an anchoring in philosophical viewpoints. Lappalainen starts off with a thorough discussion on how thinking could be understood and thereafter connects this to the changing higher education. The author argues that the idea of thinking as a generic skill in education, rose during the 1990's in the Western education system as a part of the implementation of *The Bologna Declaration* (European Higher Education Area, 1999). The essay discusses and defines the idea of thinking with support from Dewey, Socrates, Plato, Kierkegaard, and Arendt and connects this idea to teachers' professional work today. Lappalainen criticizes the idea of regulating thinking within administratively articulated legal documents and shows how this idea saturates the Swedish higher education system, in a manner that aims to measure and assess the ability to reflect and think, following a focus on achievement rather than content in course syllabi. Lappalainen refers to Arendt while concluding that "thinking has now been reduced to the handmaiden of knowledge" (p. 29).

Furthermore, in the school context the so-called 'governing by numbers' is visualized through the results in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) derived from the OECD (the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) – placing emphasis on this supra-national organization as an actor,

within education, in a globalized school context. Accordingly, the public holds its breath awaiting the status of students' knowledge displayed in visually agreeable measurements, in national media, on matters that are truly complex. In the second essay of this issue of *Confero*, Svein Sjøberg aims well-articulated critique towards the PISA - project in *The PISA-syndrome – How the OECD has Hijacked the Way We Perceive Pupils, Schools and Education*¹. As Sjøberg states, the PISA - project has got its grasp and strong global influence on national education systems. PISA has set a standard for educational quality and has also become a kind of compass for politicians to use in arguments for educational reforms. Results from PISA have great impact on our views of e.g. education spurring competition between nations in who succeeds and who does not. Thus, Sjøberg argues that we must be careful with how we use and interpret the results from PISA:

PISA claims to measure skills and competencies that are important for the future economy and employability of contribution to the personal, human and social development of the child with an overall aim to help them become well-informed and well-functioning individuals and citizens. (...) PISA assumes that this complex set of purposes of the school can be reduced to one common. Standardized and measurable metric, independent of country, culture and context (p. 39).

Accordingly, PISA has become a part of today's landscape of measurability, which surely requires its compass when navigating this landscape. In this manner Sjøberg's essay is an important contribution towards a deeper understanding of the influence of global policy actors e.g. the OECD and their projects e.g. PISA.

Furthermore, the PISA-results have formed the basis for national reforms and political initiatives on the road to a European knowledge economy previously formalized as an approach in the *Lisbon Strategy* (2000) set by the European Council in 2000 and later updated in 2005.

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Moreover, a certain kind of preferred knowledge embedded in certain epistemic values² connected to institutional practices that underpin this knowledge are testimony to significant changes in educational institutions. Changes influenced by global policy actors e.g. the OECD. An institutional practice, which underpins the objective of quality in education, raises questions of measurability and preferred values within education is the practice of quality assurance. The focus of Kaminski's essay *The Hidden Ideology in Objective Measurements – an example from a Specific Tool for Quality Assurance in Schools* is the practice of quality assurance (QA) and the hidden ideology it entails. In the third essay of this issue of *Confero*, Kaminski critically analyses a specific tool for quality assurance used by a municipality in Sweden, which is promoted as a tool to measure and verify the quality of a school. Using analytical concepts such as 'pseudo quantities' (Liedman, 2012), 'scales of measurements', 'goal rationality' and 'the prism metaphor' Kaminski argues that the practice of quality assurance is ideological, rather than a tool for quality assurance which provides descriptive information and objective measurements of quality. In the analysis, Kaminski reveals the hidden ideology within the tool for quality assurance and describes in what way it may govern schools. Throughout the essay, Kaminski raises issues with the practice of quality assurance and the hidden ideology within the tool, and philosophically considers its political as well as professional implications (in school, the education system and society as a whole).

Thus, the aforementioned aspects of governance e.g. measurability and the objective of quality in education, driven by the discourse on an educational crisis (Popkewitz, 2011), affect the very nature of the epistemic landscape of these educational institutions and in turn how humans navigate through this changing landscape.

For this special issue on *Navigating in a Measurable Epistemic Landscape* we invited contributions from scholars with various disciplinary backgrounds to debate the measurable epistemic

² The philosophical underpinning of the concept of 'epistemic value' is derived from Plato's *Meno* focusing on the questions of why and in what sense knowledge is important

values, logics and practices of educational institutions such as school and university. Hence, we further the discussion of *Confero's* first issue *Managing by Measuring: Academic Knowledge Production under the Ranks* (Nylander et al., 2013) by highlighting the measurable epistemic landscape of the broader educational system.

References

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