

Editorial

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As summer approaches, we can finally take a pause and momentarily step back from our duties at the universities. In this second issue of 2025, the Journal of Social Science Education is proud to present four original articles and a country report focusing on the historical development in the Czech Republic. We believe all of them bring new ideas and angles on social science teaching and learning. As the summer invites us to slow down and look anew at our own practices, we hope this issue can give inspiration and offer perspective on how our teaching can better support the development of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes that students need to navigate and shape our societies. In these times, it seems more important than ever.

Thomas Klijnstra, Geerte Savenije, Chiel Huijskes and Carla van Boxtel's contribution in this issue is called *Climbing the STAIRs: Assessing students' social scientific reasoning skills*. In the article, they address the challenge of assessing complex social scientific reasoning in upper secondary social science education. Recognising that students need to develop and demonstrate reasoning about social problems, the authors developed short, formative assessment items called STAIRs (Social Science Teaching Assessment Items of Reasoning). Drawing on a framework that operationalises social scientific reasoning into key subskills, the study focuses on causal analysis as a core construct. The STAIRs were designed using four key principles: alignment with targeted subskills, meaningful contexts, clear instructions, and differentiation across proficiency levels. The items were iteratively validated through focus groups with assessment experts and teachers, think-aloud sessions with

students, as well as large-scale classroom testing involving 338 students. Findings indicate that the STAIRs successfully elicited students' reasoning at varying levels of proficiency, highlighting common reasoning flaws such as conflating correlation with causation. The study concludes that STAIRs offer promise as formative tools for diagnosing students' reasoning and providing targeted feedback, while also underscoring the importance of careful design, context selection and teachers' professional development.

Ann-Sofie Jägerskog and Malin Tväråna's study *Going beyond the model: Characteristics of civic visual literacy* explores the meaning and characteristics of civic visual literacy within social science education. Recognising that students frequently encounter visual representations—such as flowcharts and scatterplots—this research investigates what students must discern to critically interpret, analyse, and use these models for reasoning about complex societal systems and issues. Drawing on data from 94 recorded group discussions across four learning studies with around 450 students in Swedish schools, the study uses phenomenography to identify three model-generic aspects crucial for civic visual literacy: entirety, expansion, and agency. These aspects highlight the importance of seeing visual representations as integrated wholes, understanding the broader societal context beyond what is depicted, and recognising the dynamic, changeable nature of social systems. In addition, model-specific aspects (mutuality in flowcharts and deviations in scatterplots) and content-specific influences were found to shape students' interpretations. The findings demonstrate that civic visual literacy should be understood as a subject-specific, context-dependent competence that enables students to move beyond passive decoding of visuals to critical examination and transformative reasoning. By specifying what civic visual literacy entails, the study provides insights for designing social science teaching that empowers students to interpret and challenge societal structures. The paper concludes that supporting students' development of this literacy is essential for preparing them to address societal challenges as active, reflective citizens and thus foster civic agency.

In their article entitled *Covering the news to develop students' understanding of political responsibility in social studies classrooms?*, Roger Olsson and Martin Jakobson analyze the way in which social science teachers use media coverage (as opposed to simply integrating news to illustrate lessons) within their lessons and the way in which the latter can contribute to an understanding of political responsibility - in particular the distinction and articulation of its individual and collective/social dimensions. Their corpus consists of 25 lessons taught by 6 Swedish teachers, half of whom work in lower secondary schools and half in upper secondary schools. The authors begin by pointing out that media coverage occupies a small place in teaching, even though students' uses of (digital) media as well as their declining interest in politics would suggest that it should be strengthened. While noting the different ways in which these press reviews are conducted, the authors highlight a number of limitations shared by all the teachers observed in ensuring that press reviews enable pupils to fully grasp the issues surrounding political responsibility. On the basis of these observations, they finally sketch out the broad outlines of a teaching model that would make it possible to overcome these limitations.

In *Educational content selection in human rights education at the early childhood education and care level*, Anette Ringen Rosenberg investigates how educational content is selected for human rights education in early childhood education and care (ECEC). Using a directed content analysis of 73 online posts suggesting ideas for observing UN Day, the research highlights that discussions about specific educational content are often missing in ECEC practice. Fewer than half of the ideas

explicitly connect activities to human rights, and many focus instead on values, diversity, or fund-raising without clear legal anchoring in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. To address this gap, the study proposes five content selection dimensions—children’s ages, progression, human rights knowledge anchored in social studies, and children’s own interests—derived from social studies didactics and judicial perspectives. The findings suggest these dimensions can structure teachers’ subject-didactic thinking, support progression in children’s understanding, and help safeguard children’s rights in meaningful ways. Ringen Rosenberg’s research emphasises the need for greater theoretical and practical support for ECEC teachers to critically discuss and select Human rights-related content, contributing to children’s early development of judicial consciousness and their capacity to understand and claim their rights.

Civic learning in Czech educational debate: Changes of the concept in the 20th century between educational sciences and school practice is somewhat of an unorthodox country report in its focus on past civic education in Czechoslovakia (for a post-communist country report on the Czech Republic, see Labischová & Hubálek, in Vol. 24 No. 1, 2025 of the JSSE). Tomáš Kasper & Dana Kasperová’s study reconstructs the historical development of civic learning in Czech education during the 20th century, focusing on two crucial periods: the interwar democratic era and the communist totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia. Using extensive analysis of curriculum documents, teaching journals, legal decrees, and ideological materials, the research traces how civic learning shifted from an inclusive, pluralistic model integrating democratic and moral education to an instrument of ideological indoctrination under Marxism-Leninism. The study demonstrates how civic education reflected broader societal transformations, from fostering national and cosmopolitan coexistence to promoting socialist patriotism and political conformity. It highlights key tensions between official discourse and classroom realities, the role of teachers as both agents and subjects of ideological control, and the often overlooked perspectives of students. Despite methodological challenges and the limited preservation of authentic classroom accounts, the analysis uncovers continuities and disruptions in civic learning discourse across political regimes. The study argues that critically reflecting on this history is vital for understanding current civic education challenges in the Czech Republic and the wider post-socialist region, where European civic ideals were reintroduced after 1989 but often without deep engagement with local traditions. This research invites further exploration of how civic education can reconcile historical experiences with contemporary democratic goals, contributing to more resilient and reflective approaches to citizenship education in a changing Europe.

With that, we wish you a good reading experience and a relaxing and recuperating summer! See you again in the autumn.

Best wishes from the editors of this issue,

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