

HEQA - Christian Ydesen and Sherman Dorn

[00:00:00] **Jack Schneider:** Welcome to *HEQ&A*, the podcast of the *History of Education Quarterly*. I'm your host, *HEQ* co-editor Jack Schneider. Every few weeks, we'll dive into recent work from the journal, asking authors how their projects challenge or extend what we know about a topic, exploring what's interesting and surprising about it, and then taking a step back to consider broader implications. In the second half of the show, we turn our sights to teaching. So, if you're an educator, make sure to stick around until the end. And now let's hear from one of our authors.

[00:00:49] **Christian Ydesen:** My name is Christian Ydesen and I'm a professor at Oberg University in Denmark. I'm one of the authors of "No Child Left Behind in the Global Architecture of Educational Accountability,"

[00:01:00] **Sherman Dorn:** and I'm Sherman Dorn, professor at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College of Arizona State University, and I'm also an author of "NCLB in the Global Architecture of Educational Accountability."

[00:01:14] **Christian Ydesen:** Well, looking back at the more than 20 years, uh, that has passed since the No Child Left Behind Acts came into existence, the article is basically an exploration of to what extent the No Child Left Behind resonates with international education policy debates, and the workings of global education governance.

[00:01:33] We argue basically that the history of NCLB belongs not just within American education politics, but also within a global education policy context. And we see that in three main areas. So the first one, uh, is the tensions between centralized goals and local practices and authorities. And the second are the links between education policy goals and a set of rhetorical arguments centered on human capital theory. And the third one is the idea about competitive comparisons among education systems. So these common features can be attributed to the development of a global soft governance layer in which multilateral surveillance between OECD member states plays a major part. So we also find that in the US such a development began before No Child Left Behind, it accelerated during the No Child Left Behind era, and it

even remained after the No Child Left Behind was replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015.

[00:02:35] **Sherman Dorn:** In an international context, we look at American policy differently from the way American scholars have typically written about the modern history of school accountability. In the US, scholars have emphasized important policy and political questions that stand out in an American context, such as the decades long shift in national policy emphasis from controversies over racial segregation and desegregation in schools to questions about equality framed differently now as academic achievement in specific subjects.

[00:03:09] Our article highlights different patterns, such as questions about education governance, that many countries have grappled with. In the American context that shows up as federalism or the relationship between states and the federal government and who should have control over which matters.

[00:03:27] **Christian Ydesen:** Being one of the leading architects, uh, of the OECD and also one of the most engaging member countries, the US has uploaded, you could say, a host of programs, agendas, and ideas to the OECD arena ever since the organization was established in 1961. But what's interesting is also to explore how some of these international transformations of education policies with a global reach are then downloaded back into the United States. Our article is about one possible exploration of such a process. It is, uh, I think it's safe to say a very under research topic in contemporary historiography.

[00:04:07] Well, I would say that one of the interesting aspects of the article is how it teases out the interactions between local, national, and international agendas in education. I think the article resonates with an insight from the literature on global governance and education, namely that it's necessary to study the interactions and overlaps between international, national, and local context and the entanglements of a host of actors to acquire an adequate understanding of policy and schooling practice developments. But it's also important to say that education reform agendas should certainly not be viewed as top-down impositions but rather as iterative constructions across various actors and pressures that could have commonalities at the international level, but which are more varied at the national and local level. This is especially true in a federal system like the United States.

[00:05:00] **Sherman Dorn:** American educators often think that our education policy is created and happens here in the US and that there are few, if any, connections with the broader world. We argue that the history of No Child Left Behind fits into a global story, a story of attempts to leash school policy to human capital designs, and to assert a new style of public management in education.

[00:05:24] Something that we are borrowing from social scientists and calling multilateral surveillance. Our article points out the way in which shifts in policy can still leave debris in the wake of what's gone. In the case of No Child Left Behind, the passage of a new law in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act eliminates some of the most irritating NCLB policies, at least from the perspective of state politicians and some members of Congress. So it eliminated a formulaic approach to accountability in some ways, both in the number of ways individual schools could fail to meet, quote, adequate yearly progress and quote expectations that are in the law. And also a lockstep set of interventions that states had to carry out when schools failed to meet adequate yearly progress expectations.

[00:06:17] But it left in place quite a bit, including annual testing of students in grades three through eight. The infrastructure of multilateral surveillance remained and remains also at the state level through many policy changes.

[00:06:38] **Jack Schneider:** The second half of the show is dedicated to thinking about teaching. We ask authors to put on their guest lecturer hats and take students into the weeds. What should they pay attention to, methodologically speaking? What else should they be reading if they want to take a deep dive into the historiography? And where are there opportunities for further research?

[00:06:58] **Christian Ydesen:** Well, I think one of the most important takeaways in terms of methodology is the potential in working across archives. That is combining archives from different contexts and across borders. It allows for a deeper inquiry because the archives hold very different content, but also because it allows the tracking of correspondence through our cross context, and thus a glimpse perhaps even into the negotiations, the boundary work, and the reception history of policy instruments as they move across borders and across contexts.

[00:07:30] **Sherman Dorn:** In this piece, we look at what education officials talk about in international contexts. We read those statements for what they tell us about long-term and subtle changes, and how people talk about education and in what contexts. So for example, when three education professors from Australia, West Germany, and Sweden evaluated American education policy for the OECD in 1979, part of the story is their critique of quote, absurd consequences of regulations, end quote, as they put it. And also for us, the long-term significance is the simple fact that there are education professors from three countries evaluating American education for an international organization.

[00:08:17] **Christian Ydesen:** Well, in terms of his historiography, I would call attention to some of the great historical work made on the history of international organizations and the formation of a global education space, mainly after World War II. I can mention works by Tom Popkowitz, Daniel Toyer, but also Clara Morgan, Mira Centano, Marin Elford, Orem Levy. What's interesting in their work, I find, is that they demonstrate how international organizations and their powerful education programs came to function the way that they do. And that includes their strategies for survival, the extrapolations of nationalisms into these organizations, their ideological roots and the funding to name a few dimensions.

[00:08:59] **Sherman Dorn:** For the historiography of American accountability policy. Of course, there are the other articles in the special issue in which, uh, Christian and my article appears. But also I'd recommend several articles by Scott Baker over the years where Baker traced the major education policy felt on the ground in North Carolina, and how that shifted from desegregation in the 1970s to accountability by the end of the century.

[00:09:24] There were several histories of national policy like Maris Finovskis' *From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind*, and there's also a book published after our article appeared that I'd recommend in connection with it. Beth Popp Berman's new book, *Thinking like An Economist, how Efficiency Replaced Equality in US Public Policy*.

[00:09:45] It doesn't focus entirely on education, but if we'd been able to read it while we were writing the manuscript, we probably would've cited it for its intellectual history of public policy management.

[00:09:58] Speaking as, uh, an American education historian in almost every topic in recent education, policy history in the country, you can ask what was happening elsewhere in the world. If you are an American educator or history student interested in teacher education, culture wars, how we have taught reading, how we've taught sex education, what we define as the purpose of schooling, the changing role of colleges and universities, or almost anything else. It's a good thing to remember that we're just one country. We have no monopoly on good ideas or on painful mistakes. Thinking about comparative history as one way that we can make sure we pay attention to more than one voice and more than one explanation.

[00:10:44] **Christian Ydesen:** Well, as someone coming from outside the US context, I can only support that statement by Sherman.

[00:10:55] **Jack Schneider:** Check out *History of Education Quarterly* online. The journal is published by Cambridge University Press and it's carried by most academic libraries. You should also be sure to follow *HEQ* Twitter handle: @histedquarterly, which regularly sends out free read-only versions of articles, and the show's Twitter handle @HEQandA. And don't forget, subscribe to the show so you don't miss forthcoming episodes. We're available on iTunes, Stitcher, and wherever you get your podcasts. HEQ&A is produced at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. Our producer is Jennifer Berkshire and our theme music is by Ryan Shaw. I'm Jack Schneider. Thanks for joining us.