

Transnational Trends of Educational Assessment: Tracing the American Influence on Scandinavian Education

By **Sverre Tveit** (SRA2015), September 30, 2016

Sverre Tveit used his Sylff Research Abroad (SRA) scholarship to explore American influence on Norwegian and Swedish secondary education testing policies, by undertaking archive investigations at the Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Columbia University, New York, as part of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Oslo. A summary of research is presented below.

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The doctoral dissertation

Tveit's doctoral dissertation, entitled *Policy Legitimation in National States Educational Assessment Reforms: The cases of Norway and Sweden*, investigates the emergence of national testing and examination procedures in the two Scandinavian countries during the twentieth century. It researches how the Norwegian and Swedish governments used policy-borrowing to legitimate contemporary educational assessment reforms. The data includes national policy documents and policymaker interviews in Norway and Sweden, along with policy documents from European and global organizations, policy networks and research projects that informed these countries' policymaking.

A principal theme in educational assessment policy deliberations is the roles (purposes, processes, functions) of educational assessment. Based on a review of previous research, in particular into the widely used distinction between formative and summative assessment, the dissertation contributes to identify principal tensions of educational assessment policies, both in the context of investigation and beyond. The thesis promulgates a conceptual framework for distinguishing between roles of educational assessment, in order to facilitate comparative analyses of purpose emphasis and associated tensions of educational assessment policies.

Contemporary policy deliberations in the two countries are interpreted in view of historical developments within and beyond the national contexts. As such, emphasis is put both on national and transnational history of educational assessment, in particular the role of global research and policy collaboration, and national policymakers' use of global agencies and policy networks to legitimize reform. While acknowledging that there are other spaces, actors and factors that shape governments' policy deliberations, the dissertation focuses on policymaking in the intersection of national demands and global influence when legitimating reforms. The Sylff Research Abroad scholarship was instrumental in order to undertake the historical part of the investigation, which is addressed in the first of the dissertation's four articles.

The article

The article *(Trans)national Trends and Cultures of Educational Assessment: Reception and Resistance of National Testing in Sweden and Norway during the Twentieth Century* captures the legacy of transatlantic research collaboration that shaped contemporary testing and examination policies in the Scandinavian region. The twentieth century was a time of increasing international relations in education policy and research. Research centres and international research projects became central nodes for solving policy problems in national education systems. Educational measurement thus became fundamental in the governing of education. The growth of intelligence expertise in the United States during the interwar years paved the way for new approaches to educational measurement that were circulated through new institutions, such as the United Nation's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The article outlines analytical-conceptual frameworks for understanding transnational trends with respect to the various roles of educational assessment emphasised in national assessment instruments, which emerged in conjunction with the increased international collaboration during the twentieth century. One of the frameworks identifies three trends that can be related to transnational research and policy endeavours: First, the *meritocracy* trend, focusing on fair certification and selection procedures for individual students, was emphasised in international research projects such as the International Examinations Inquiry (IEI) in the 1930s. Second, the *accountability* trend, which places more emphasis on the governing of education systems and their role in global competition among national states, became more prominent when international comparative testing programmes (e.g. PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS) were organised in fixed cycles from the 1990s onwards. Third, the *Assessment for learning* trend, emphasising the role of assessment instruments and procedures in supporting student learning, emerged at the change of the millennium.

By analysing Sweden and Norway's participation in large-scale international assessments, and investigating archive documents and second hand literature that capture these developments, the article demonstrates how the three transnational trends shaped the emphasis on roles of educational assessment in the countries' national assessment instruments. The paper illuminates how different engagement with transnational research projects and trends of educational assessment shaped the accumulation of purposes. Conclusively the article discusses how the differences between these two Scandinavian countries may be illustrative of wider patterns in European countries' cultures of educational assessment with respect to when standardised tests "broke through" in national states' national assessment instruments.

The article is published in the book *Student Assessment Cultures in historical perspective (working title)*, edited by Dr. Cristina Alarcón and Dr. Martin Lawn, to be published by the German publisher Peter Lang in November 2016.

How SRA improved my capability to undertake my research

The Sylff funded research stay in the United States was instrumental for writing the dissertation's article outlined above and furthermore to consolidate the theoretical framework of the entire dissertation. In particular archive work at Columbia University, where evidence from the work of the IEI in the 1930s is stored, offered new insights. Furthermore, the research stay facilitated meetings with scholars from other American universities that were frontrunners in the development of educational measurement expertise during the twentieth century, such as the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and University of California, Berkeley. Last, but not least, I had the privilege to present an early version of the article outlined above to the History Division of the American Educational Research Association's annual meeting in Washington DC in April, 2016.

Without the support from the Tokyo Foundation, these accomplishments would not have been possible. I am largely indebted to the Sylff Research Abroad scholarship for the opportunity to substantiate the American influence on Scandinavian education, which is an important part of the findings of the PhD dissertation that will be submitted to the University of Oslo later this year.

Researching the contemporary policy implications of earlier research collaboration allowed me to acquire a meta-perspective on our responsibility as researchers, as we bring ideas and expertise across countries and from one continent to another. Having identified vast implications of such research collaboration in the 1930s for our daily lives today makes me humble with respect to my and other Sylff fellows' opportunities and responsibilities when *we* as future leaders contribute to the exchanges of ideas between brothers and sisters and thus take part in the nation's development across the globe.



Sverre Tveit submits his PhD thesis entitled as *Policy Legitimation in National States Educational Assessment Reforms: The Cases of Norway and Sweden* in December, 2016, to the University of Oslo, Department of Education, Oslo.