

ISCHE Standing Working Group

Notre tout puissant Empire du milieu: histories of secondary education

Annual Report

The Standing Working Group “Notre tout puissant Empire du milieu: histories of secondary education” was adopted by the General Assembly during the ISCHE 43 general assembly held in Milan on September 2, 2022. The convenors are Antonio Canales Serrano (Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain), Luis Grosso Correias (Universidade de Porto, Portugal) and Felicitas Acosta (Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, Argentina)

1. General Purpose of the SWG

This SWG intends to examine secondary education (or, according to Lucien Febvre, “notre tout puissant Empire du milieu”, 1939) in terms of specific historical contexts: its social and political mission, formative goals, curriculum organization, subjects taught, teaching methods, material structure and culture, teacher training, adolescence and youth supervision, among other issues.

The topic demands attention for many reasons. Secondary education has been seen socially as “the survival of a conception of culture formulated when education was the right and possession of a few people” (Isaac L. Kandel, 1926), a situation that has completely changed. Also, bearing in mind the diversity of syllabi or educational tracks that were developed in Western countries from the mid-19th century onwards, the relations established with new forms of social, economic, and labour organization require revision. Finally, given its intermediate position, the connection with primary education output and higher education input derived from continuously increasing the years of compulsory education over the past century, has also changed secondary education into “basic” education leading to successive reforms during the twentieth century. All these transformations require historical systematization and conceptual analysis.

2. Activities

For the upcoming ISCHE conference this SWG welcomes papers in two sections. The proposals may either address one or the other:

Section 1: Historical studies on secondary education (including transversal approaches)

- History, circulation of discourses, and practices that shaped secondary education.
- Curriculum organization, tracks, teaching methods, assessment, and outcomes.
- Students, adolescence, and identity.
- Teachers, teacher education, and professional development.
- Social class, gender, ethnicity, equity, and empowerment.
- School types, facilities, and material culture.

Section 2: The endless quest for secondary education reform

- Secondary education reforms from the nineteenth century to the dawn of PISA era
- Secondary education expansion, the role of secondary education in compulsory schooling, and the relations with other education levels
- Educational policies, international organizations and (comparative) perspectives related to secondary education.
- History of current issues regarding secondary education.

We are also planning a pre-conference workshop on theoretical and methodological issues regarding the history of secondary education.

3. Activities related to the SWG

Since the SWG has just started, it has yet to develop specific activities. However, on November 10 and 11, organized by Professor Antonio Canales, co-coordinator of this SWG, the workshop 'The Shaping of Modern Secondary education up to the First World War: National Configuration' was held at the Complutense University of Madrid, Spain.

The workshop brought together the three SWG coordinators and historians of education, specialists in the subject and members of ISCHE: Gary McCulloch (UCL, London), Antonio Viñao (Universidad de Murcia, Spain), Simonetta Polenghi (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore) and Stefano Oliviero (Università di Firenze, Italy) and Filiz Meşeci Giorgetti (İstanbul Üniversitesi-Cerrahpaşa, Turkey). Each participant presented on the development of secondary education in their country for the period mentioned. The workshop constituted a platform for conceptual discussion and planning on the ways to advance the research and the SWG's future activities:

- The organization of a pre-conference
- Presentations for the conference in Budapest
- Joint publications