

Jennifer Bruen, Tilman Grammes

Editorial: The Social Sciences in Higher Education

How we see ourselves as teachers is just as important as the competence and insight that we develop over time. It is crucial that as teachers in Higher Education we reflect on and update our practice, monitor and develop our own professional impact, and draw on evidence and research in order to inform our practice.

(Slowey, Kozina, and Tan 2014, 8)

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PART I: Towards specialist didactics¹ [*Fachdidaktik*] for the social sciences in the Higher Education classroom.

1 Introduction

Specialized journals examine the teaching and learning of the social sciences in Higher Education. These include, for example, the highly regarded *Teaching Sociology*, or, more recently the *Journal of Political Science Education*, *Journal of Legal Education* and *International Journal of Pluralism and Economics Education*, to name but a few. These journals capture a significant amount of knowledge and experience. However, there is little coherence in terms of research and a lack of a well-developed academic sub-discipline around Higher Education in the

social sciences. Furthermore, most of the discourses within the cited journals are located within a US context of college education (Nilson 2003). Thus, it is the intention of JSSE at this point to shift the focus to European discourse on Social Science Education. As such, this issue builds on a previous issue of [JSSE \(2009-2\)](#) in which the focus was on the training of teachers in the social sciences including those involved in the teaching of civics, politics and economics. In particular, [JSSE 2009-2](#) focused on developing the concept of specialized didactics (or *Fachdidaktik*) for the social sciences in teacher training. The purpose of this issue is to continue this debate and the process of developing principles which would form the core of such specialized didactics designed to improve the learning experience of students engaged in the study of the social sciences.

2 “Bildung” and transformative learning

The classical German understanding of the term *Bildung* can be equated with the notion of the transformation of the learner through education or “transformative learning”. The process of transformation [*Bildungsprozess*] differs significantly from the process of learning. According to Hans Christoph Koller (2011), current Chair of the German Educational Association (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaft* www.dgfe.de), while learning can be seen as the acquisition of new information, transformation or *Bildung* is a higher order form of learning which involves a change in the way in which information is processed. *Bildung* involves a fundamental transformation of the whole person, or what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as a change in the socialized norms that guide behavior and patterns of thought [*Habituswandel*], and not just the acquisition of particular competencies. Of significance is also the stimulus for the process of *Bildung*. It can be viewed as a form of reaction to a crisis as a critical incident [*fruchtbarer Moment*] which poses new challenges which cannot be adequately dealt with by existing means. Transformation is associated with what is foreign, what is new and unknown, what has not been previously experienced, and as such disturbs the “taken for granted” perspective and



Jennifer Bruen is a Lecturer and Director of Research in the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies, Dublin City University. Her research interests include language policy, language teaching and learning, and political and citizenship education. *School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies, Dublin City University, Dublin Ireland*
email: Jennifer.Bruen@dcu.ie



Tilman Grammes is Chair of Educational Science/Social Studies Education at Hamburg University and Editor of JSSE. Research interest among others: comparative and intercultural education, qualitative research. *University of Hamburg, Faculty of Education Science, FB 5 Von-Melle-Park 8 20146 Hamburg, Germany*
email: tilman.grammes@uni-hamburg.de



the epistemological framework of everyday knowledge. In other words, transformation or *Bildung* results from engaging with discomfort and dissonance (Koller 2011; see also Ricken and Maaschelein 2010).

3 Reflection on teaching and learning using case-study research

According to the recent OECD *Institutional Management in Higher Education* study on quality teaching, the vast majority of initiatives intended to support teaching quality address institutions' needs at a given point in time while initiatives inspired by academic research are rare (Hénard 2010, p. 5). This is regrettable. Clearly, short-term practical needs must be addressed. However, changes in teaching and learning should also be research-informed if they are to result in longer term benefits. Therefore, a core principle of specialized didactics for the social sciences in Higher Education concerns the need to empower teachers in the social sciences to gather information relating to their own teaching, reflect on it and communicate the results to their peers. In other words, it relates to a need to enable teachers to view their teaching and its impact on their students as research and to investigate and document it accordingly. This is a particular strength of all four contributions to the first section of this issue.

4 Exploring experimental methods: Simulating reality

In their paper, Professor Yu-Wen Chen, of the *Graduate School of Public Policy, Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan*, and her co-researchers, Lena Masch and Kristin Finze, explore the value of "dictator games" or more generally the use of simulations in postgraduate teaching. Chen observes and reports on the impact of their use of such methods to investigate the possible existence of discriminatory tendencies among non-Muslims in Germany towards Muslims. Chen argues at the outset that such experimental methods have distinct advantages over other research methods. Specifically, this paper documents the experimental design, data collection, data analysis and report writing processes and assesses the learning outcomes associated with such an approach. Recommendations as to how the approach might be used to even greater effect conclude the article. For classroom games in economic education see Bostian and Holt 2013.

5 The learner as a point of departure

The social sciences are primarily concerned with social interaction and communication by people in the world. Therefore, teaching and learning in the social sciences may be more likely to be impacted by teachers' and learners' understandings and conceptualisations of human beings and the world around them than teaching and learning in other disciplines. As a result, an awareness of such pre-conceptions underpins much successful teaching and learning in this field. This point is highlighted by Linda Murstedt, Maria Jansson, Maria

Wendt and Cecilie Ase of the *Department of Education and the Department of Political Science, Stockholm University, in Sweden*. In their contribution, *Liberal Liability: Understanding students' conceptions of gender structures*, Murstedt et al focus on students' pre-conceptions and conceptions of gender structures. Their interest lies in the learning processes at work when students engage with course content which has a gender perspective. In particular, they consider the influence of any pre-conceptions regarding gender equality and inequality on such learning processes.²

Operating within a conceptual change framework, Murstedt et al consider students' attempts to offer alternative interpretations of media images of male and female politicians based on explanations other than a structuralist gender perspective, which focuses on gender-based, structural social inequalities. Murstedt et al note in their findings that their students frequently lose sight of the structuralist perspective in their group discussions. Instead, they operate within a liberal paradigm interpreting some of the images as representative of individual discrimination, individual personality or demographics, or individual choice, rather than as a reflection of social norms and structures. Murstedt et al suggest that the automatic adoption of a liberal framework impedes interpretation from a structuralist perspective. They recommend explicit teaching about both frameworks in order to enable students to conduct analysis from more than one perspective. This is an approach supported by Louise-Lawrence (2014) who grapples with similar issues in her classroom and makes similar suggestions in terms of the refinement of pedagogic practice in gender studies.

Enhancing the ability of the social sciences student to view issues from multiple perspectives should be a further key element of specialized didactics in this field. It has perhaps been more developed in the political sciences to date than in other areas of social science education. This is evidenced by use of methods in this field such as *Structured Academic Controversy* or *Structured Controversial Dialogue* in the classroom to enable students to view issues from different angles, to engage in informed debate and to reach reasoned consensus (D'Eon and Proctor 2001; Hahn 2009; Moloney and Pelehach 2014; Zainuddin and Moore 2003). These approaches are gradually being adopted in other disciplines in the social sciences, however, including, for example, in the teaching and learning of languages.

"Learner situatedness" or meeting the learner at their point of departure applies to more than their pre-conceptions in a particular area. It also relates to understanding the diversity of many different kinds present in any university classroom. This includes cultural diversity, different learning styles, backgrounds and expectations as well as relevant prior learning. The ongoing internationalisation of Higher Education has the potential to enrich considerably the learning experience of all



involved. It results in an increased diversity of many kinds on university campuses combined with a proliferation of sometimes radically different experiences of and approaches to learning among students. These range from autonomy-oriented to more teacher-centred modes of learning. This makes it increasingly important that a lecturer be given the tools to assess and manage the diversity in front of them. This is particularly essential as it relates to whatever is the core epistemological framework in their discipline. This diversity could encompass, as in the example above, preconceptions of gender structures or, in additional examples, understandings of the nature of language, and expectations around language teaching and learning (for further discussion, see Sudhershnan and Bruen, forthcoming; Holland, Schwart-Shea, and Yim 2013).

6 Ceding control: A learner-centred pedagogy and shifting classroom dynamics in Higher Education

This principle is core to any pedagogy which aims to engage, disturb and transform the everyday cognitions, thinking and performance of a learner. In their article entitled *From Teacher Centred Instruction to Peer Tutoring in the heterogeneous, International Classroom*, Klarissa Lueg and Rainer Lueg of Aarhus University in Denmark, document a move from teacher-centred instruction to reciprocal peer tutoring (RPL). RPL involves collaborative learning in small groups where the roles of tutor and tutee are interchanged under the guidance of the teacher. Lueg and Lueg track this change in approach over a period of two years on a core “Business Models” module offered on the *Masters Programme in Management Accounting and Control* offered by Aarhus University. In doing so, they have two primary objectives. The first is to provide an example of best practice, for others interested in implementing a similar change. The second is to contribute to an evidence-base regarding the impact of such a change. Despite the inevitable challenges associated with implementing change of this nature, Lueg and Lueg demonstrate how RPL can address many of the difficulties associated with increasingly heterogeneous Higher Education classrooms which display the kind of “multidiversity” or heterogeneity discussed previously, be it linguistic, cultural or psychological. (Jacobson 2012)

7 The classroom as a microcosm of the wider world

According to one of the central tenets of critical pedagogy, the classroom, including the Higher Education classroom, can be viewed as a microcosm of the wider world (Pennycook 1997) in that it is rooted in that world and one of its objectives according to a critical pedagogical approach is to empower students to critically analyse this world and their place within it. In addition, an understanding of critical pedagogy further incorporates the notion that power relations and dynamics present in the wider world are also at work in the classroom.

The contribution by Veronica Crosbie of *Dublin City University* in Ireland, entitled *Cosmopolitan capabilities in the Higher Education Language Classroom*, explores this feature of the classroom in the context of an English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) module entitled “Globalisation and English”. The module was offered to 29 students from a diverse range of countries and disciplines within the social sciences. Using several instruments pertaining to the art of documentation such as focus group interviews, classroom observations, students’ reflective reports, examinations, learning artefacts and presentations generated over the course of the module, Crosbie reflects on the impact of a range of pedagogical approaches designed to develop the awareness, knowledge and attitudes associated with cosmopolitan or global citizenship. The students themselves engaged at a micro level in terms of syllabus and content negotiation, peer teaching and peer evaluation. They also reflected actively on their position in society both in local and in global terms.

8 Why the social sciences are different

While many if not all of the above principles could be related to specialized didactics for fields other than the social sciences, it is argued here that they have particular resonance for the social sciences in Higher Education. As touched upon above, the social sciences are primarily concerned with the study of contemporary society. Therefore, any specialized didactics must remain both dynamic and research-informed in the light of contextual shifts in contemporary society and the ever changing demands being placed on Higher Education and its social science graduates (see for example Teichler 2011). In the words of Craig (2014, p. 33-34), referring to the study of political science in particular:

This creates a particular set of dynamics in the teaching and learning relationship that are not necessarily found, or not necessarily present to the same degree, in other disciplines.

Additionally, borrowing from the arguments of Anderson and Day (2005), which they related specifically to history as a discipline, the social sciences in general are characterised by a wide-ranging focus and a diversity of concerns using a variety of theoretical frameworks. A similar point is made by Rickard and Doyle (2012, p. 359) in their review of the study of International Relations (IR) in Ireland as follows:

... IR scholarship and teaching at Irish universities does not fall under any single hegemonic theoretical, methodological or ideological perspective. Instead, the field is characterised by vibrant theoretical and methodological debates...

Perhaps more than in the natural sciences, there is less agreement on what constitutes the core knowledge or



canon of many disciplines in the social sciences. Research is increasingly clustered around particular issues or methodologies (Engartner 2009). However, questions remain around the implications of this tendency for the novice student and their introduction to the academic study of the social sciences. If we take the area of human rights as an example, it can be perceived as spanning anthropology, law, sociology, social psychology, and history to name but a few. As a result, the design and delivery of a course on human rights is more susceptible to a lecturer's understanding or position on the relevant issues and a student's preconceptions regarding such issues. However, we should note, as Craig (2014) points out, that it would be overly simplistic to directly compare such features of much study in the social sciences, particularly in Higher Education, with an idealized model of the natural sciences as exclusively concerned with the disinterested pursuit of a delimited body of objective knowledge. While, perhaps less obviously than the social sciences, the natural sciences also continue to struggle with the existence of uncertain knowledge and ambiguity.

Teaching and learning in the social sciences, as in all disciplines, is taking place in a context where tensions exist between the desire that a university education should result in transformative, deep learning as opposed to surface or rote-learning on the one hand, and the notion of students-as-customers, on the other (Killick 2013, p. 722) with the inherent danger that a "corporate" view of Higher Education could potentially foster in the student the expectation that the education they have "purchased" should be learned for them or at the very least fed to them in easily digestible, bite-size chunks. The "Bologna process" and the packaging of courses according to the European Credit Transfer System could potentially reinforce this perception (see also Grammes 2009). Indeed, falls in levels of learner autonomy and motivation have been observed for example in the previous edition of JSSE (2009-2). On the other hand, advances in our understanding of the learning process and transformative learning in particular, and a gradual bridging of the gap between the theory and practice of education is reaping valuable rewards in many classrooms.

The contributions to this edition are excellent example of such advances and, in addition, underline the importance of good practice in "documentation and description" (see also JSSE 2014-1), something we also return to in the second part of this issue. Indeed, the importance of engagement with learning and of "learning by thinking about what we are doing"³ is a recurrent theme in this issue. Similarly, the recognition of the importance of research-informed approaches to teaching in the social sciences offers hope for the eventual emergence, in this field, of coherent, specialized didactics.

It is precisely with such issues that our contributors grapple. The importance of addressing them is difficult to

overestimate given the significance of the social sciences in Higher Education. In terms of numbers alone, given the average numbers of relevant Chairs, a country such as the UK or France could offer between thirty and fifty courses in, for example, political theory, introductions to sociology, or entrepreneurship in Higher Education annually. Our knowledge of what happens in these classrooms remains incomplete. This is particularly true in terms of the variety of outcomes and impact on students and, as touched upon in our introductory paragraphs, documentation and discussion is lacking concerning what could be regarded as best practice.

Our hope is that this issue will promote research and scholarship on the impact of teaching in the social sciences on the learning process and learning outcomes. The contributions to this issue deal with student centered teaching and learning in classroom settings. Undoubtedly, the future of Higher Education will be impacted upon by advances in digital learning (Dougherty and Andercheck 2014). For example, "MOOCs" or Massive Open Online Courses have recently generated much debate (Colbran and Gilding 2014). The Khan Academy movement (Khan 2012) offers home tutoring in the form of short explanatory video clips (*Erklärvideos*) on aspects of the social sciences including macro-economics. Explanatory video clips can be found on Youtube and similar sites, some of excellent quality. Recordings of lectures are being made available on university platforms allowing the student to determine when to view his/her professors' lecture. The implications of such changes for the study of the social sciences at University remain unclear. JSSE (2015-3) will be devoted to the impact of digital tools on education in the social sciences. Contributions could reflect on the use of, for example, e-learning (Freedman 2012), MOOCs, distance learning, international webinars, digital portfolios, instant feedback through interactive classroom response systems (CRS or clicker) (Holland, Schwart-Shea and Yim 2013).⁴



PART II: Insights into citizenship classrooms: The art of documentation and description

The second section of this edition is a continuation of the reflections in [JSSE 2014-1](#) on the art of documenting and describing the political (social studies, citizenship, civics ...) education classroom in secondary schools. It is recommended that it be read in tandem with this edition.

1 The “art of seeing” and critical moments in education for active citizenship

A particular focus is on what Aviv Cohen calls the “art of seeing” or classroom observation, a technique on which both Cohen and Maria Rönnlund, and Kuno and Ikura also report. Cohen, in his article, *Methodological aspects of documenting civics lessons in Israel*, uses it to uncover the impact of a teacher’s conceptualisation of citizenship, and indeed his understanding of his students, on the delivery of a civic education course in a socioeconomically disadvantaged secondary school in Jerusalem. Approaching this task from a grounded-theory perspective, Cohen concludes that the participant teacher’s understanding of citizenship as a concept permeates their teaching. For example, their view of a citizen as ideally a knowledgeable, respectful and discerning individual capable of political engagement when necessary impacts upon their delivery of the curriculum. Cohen’s observation of the civic education classroom in this instance and the materials used by the teacher suggest that it also impacts upon their choice of content within parameters laid down by the national curriculum and the final examination, the *Bagrut*. He argues for the need to sensitise teachers to the possibility of their conceptions of citizenship and indeed, their perceptions of their students, influencing their teaching. Of interest is also the fact that, in his PhD thesis, Cohen (2013) adds thick descriptions of two additional Israeli classrooms.

Positioning her study in the context of Article 12 of the United Nation’s *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the “participation article”, which states that children have the right to participate in decisions which impact upon their lives, Rönnlund focuses in her contribution on the degree and nature of student participation in decision-making in secondary schools. In particular, she considers the range, depth and breadth of such participation. Range refers here to the nature of the decisions themselves, depth to the actual impact in practice of student participation in decision making and breadth to the number of students involved in such processes.

Reporting on research conducted over the course of a year in three secondary schools in Sweden involving classroom observation and observation of student council meetings, Rönnlund uses “critical moments” [*fruchtbare Momente*] in her analysis of decision-making processes to identify factors which potentially restrict the range, depth and breadth of student participation. These include a lack of communication between teachers

and students, resultant misunderstandings concerning the nature of collaborative decision-making in schools, and some dissatisfaction among the student body with the use of a representative system involving a class representative.⁵ Rönnlund proposes several solutions in the conclusion to her contribution. These are intended to create a more socially just school and classroom culture and ultimately to strengthen democratic competencies among the students

To the western educationalist, Japanese secondary school classrooms can appear to be large or even overcrowded. This makes the culture of individuality in such classrooms all the more surprising and disturbs a western pre-conception of collectivist Asia. A strong tradition of the “art of seeing” in Japanese educational culture focuses on observing and documenting the development of the individual child. Yumiko, the star of our next contribution, being one of them. Professor Hiroyuki Kuno of *Nagoya University* and Mr. Go Ikura of the *Ministry of Education* and the *Asahi Secondary School* in Japan focus in *Investigating Society “Close-Up”* on recording and documenting the reactions of a “case-student”, Yumiko, to a unit designed to uncover the attitudes of different stakeholders towards the building of a footbridge over a major road near the school in question.⁶

This approach is commonly used in Japan to evaluate the impact of different teaching units. JSSE started the discussion on lesson study a decade ago (Lewis, JSSE 2004-3). Today, as the wide-ranging references to this article and data from the *World Association of Lesson Study* (WALS, www.walsnet.org/) and their journal *The International Journal for Lesson and Learning Studies* (*IJLLS*) indicate, it is gradually becoming more widely used internationally (Olander and Sandberg 2013). The approach permits the documentation of observations and reflections by a case-student which can complement the more overt documentation of the materials used and exercises engaged in by the learners. In other words, it helps the teacher/researcher to gain insights into the internal learning processes stimulated by a unit of teaching. As such, the lesson study approach contributes to the professionalization of the teaching profession by developing the diagnostic competencies of teachers.

Feedback of this nature can be invaluable in refining and enhancing a unit for future classes. The purpose of the teaching unit which is the focus of this study is to develop in the students an ability to view issues from multiple perspectives and to take the initiative in problem solving. As such, the teaching approach is active and student-centered with the students required to interview members of the community and local policy makers in order to uncover differing perspectives on the issue of the footbridge and attempt to find a compromise position. The cognitive thought processes of the case student are documented using diary study and a review of her utterances in class.



PART III: Case archive - German political education in the 20th century

"One Winter, we choose flying as the theme [*Leitmotif*] for our geography classes..." Finally, in our case archive to this edition we present a project report from Nazi Germany: Adolf Reichwein's "Human Flight" [*Der fliegende Mensch*]. This report causes us to consider the question of whether progressive forms of political education are possible, even under a totalitarian dictatorship. Adolf Reichwein is a relative unknown internationally in the field of education studies. However, in a German-speaking context, he is considered to be a classic educationalist and one of the most significant members of the international progressive education movement of the 20th century. The report *Human Flight* deals with his pedagogical practice in a country school located close to Berlin, the then centre of Nazi power in Germany. His contemporaries were fascinated both by the topic of his report, the view of the planet from "the third dimension", as it is referred to in the report, and his explicit concern with "the art of documentation".

In his work, he experimented with photographs and stills and can be seen as a founder of "media pedagogy" or media education as well as "museum pedagogy" or education centering on museum visits. The first commentary by Ralf Schernikau focuses on the internal structure and inner logic of the project report which has its humanities roots in the classic epoch of the Weimar Republic of Herder, Goethe and Alexander von Humboldt. The second commentary by Tilman Grammes adds contextual material, and is aimed at a non-German readership. It is intended to facilitate seminar work with the case/report in teacher education. The work of Adolf Reichwein is highly controversial, one indicator of a true classic.

This particular project report from progressive education within Nazi Germany before the beginning of the Second World War completes our series of lesson documents from German political education in the 20th century, which started in [JSSE 2010-3](#). Taken as a whole, the five contributions constitute an archive which could form the basis for seminar study (see box "case archive").

Comparative educational research in the field of social studies documents the local traditions of teaching and learning cultures and their respective educational narratives. Documentation is the first step in the direction of deeper understanding and research. We encourage all readers of JSSE to contribute similar lesson reports, which can be classified as "classical", current or controversial.

Case archive

Lesson reports from German political education in the 20th century (free to download):

1) 1918-1933 Weimar Republic

Pedagogy of the League of Nations in the Weimar Republic

How I dealt with the League of Nations with 14-year-old girls from an elementary school (8th grade) in Berlin

(Konrad Götz, 1928. Kommentar: Matthias Busch)

JSSE 2011-2:

www.jsse.org/index.php/jsse/article/view/1166

2) 1933-1945 National Socialism

Human Flight [*Der fliegende Mensch*]

(Adolf Reichwein, 1937. Kommentar: Ralf Schernikau, Tilman Grammes)

In this issue

3) 1968 (FRG)

How to Deal with Party Politics at School?

(Rudolf Engelhardt, FRG 1968. Kommentar: Horst Leps)

JSSE 2010-3:

www.jsse.org/index.php/jsse/article/view/1131

4) GDR

Problem Solving in the Classroom: The Fox and the Grapes

(Elisabeth Fuhrmann, GDR 1984. Kommentar: Tilman Grammes)

JSSE 2011-1:

www.jsse.org/index.php/jsse/article/view/1152

5) Post 1989/current

The Chestnut Case: From a Single Action to a Broad Campaign

(Ingo Lokies, FRG 1996. Kommentar: Julia Sammoray, Christian Welniak)

JSSE 2012-2:

www.jsse.org/index.php/jsse/article/view/1202

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Endnotes

¹ Here the term "didactics" implies "...a notion that captures all the knowledge that has to do with a [University] classroom, and everything happening inside it" (Menck 2000, 3). "*Didaktik* is at the centre of most school teaching and teacher education in Continental Europe, but at the same time almost unknown in the English speaking world." (Hopmann 2007; cp. Westbury et.al. 2000) The German term *Fachdidaktik* from the continental tradition of didactics (Swedish: *Fackdidaktik*, Marton 1986) has been translated as "subject matter didactics" or, where it relates to the social sciences, "curriculum studies in the field of social sciences/civics". The term *Hochschulfachdidaktik* used here, a composite term of *Hochschule* (Higher Education) and *Fachdidaktik*, is rare even in the German language. The European *Wergeland Center* in Oslo launched the CLEAR project (*Concept Learning for Empowerment through Analysis*



and Reflection formerly known as the *Intercultural Glossary Project*) to provide an online resource for education professionals. It facilitates discussions around such key concepts, as well as methods for the study of concepts:

www.theewc.org/content/resources/clear.project/https://www.clear-project.net/.

² The seminal work of Harvard educational psychologist, William Perry, and what has become known as the “Perry scheme” (Perry 1970, Moore 2001) of epistemological change in the beliefs of college students could provide a framework for future research on teachers and lecturers diagnostic competencies.

³ Or in the words of John Dewey “We do not learn from experience ... we learn from reflecting on experience” www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/42738.John_Dewey

⁴ Please see call for papers at:

www.jsse.org/index.php/jsse/announcement/view/12.

⁵ For the purpose of contrast, see the concept of “class monitor”, e.g. in China, as reported by Changqing 2012.

⁶ This case can be compared with the relatively similar topic outlined in the “Chestnut Case” (explored in JSSE 2012-2, see Case Archive which concludes this edition.) Such comparison could be used to address questions from the field of comparative cultural research around dealing with conflict in classroom discourse, avoidance of indoctrination, the impact of political culture, be it consensus-based as in Japan or conflict oriented as in Germany, on approaches to controversial topics in the classroom, etc.

