



Call for Papers

Education and Conventions: Potentials, Empirical Findings, Challenges and Desiderata of Convention Theory in Education

Guest Editors: Christian Imdorf (Leibniz University Hannover), Arne Böker (Institute for Higher Education Research Halle-Wittenberg), Romuald Normand (University of Strasbourg), Christian Schneijderberg (University of Kassel) and Rebecca Ye (Stockholm University)

Related to the "Économie des Conventions" (e.g., Batifoulier et al. 2021; Diaz-Bone & Salais 2011), the multifaceted field of (French) institutionalist and pragmatic sociology offers innovative explanatory and analytical approaches to a number of current challenges in education research. Concepts and research strategies from the "sociology of conventions" (Diaz-Bone & Larquier 2022; Imdorf & Leemann 2023), the "sociology of critique" (Boltanski & Thévenot 1999; Boltanski 2011) or the actor-network theory (Latour 1996) are increasingly used to investigate processes of standardization, quantification and datafication of education, conflicts and controversies about educational quality and educational justice, dynamics of economization and privatization of educational provision or the interplay of science, politics and practice in the establishment and transformation of educational arrangements.

In terms of social theory, these approaches are characterized by their emphasis on the competence of social actors to deal reflexively with uncertain situations and the importance of the plurality of widely accepted knowledge orders (including notions of justice, reality and quality of education) (Boltanski & Thévenot 2000, 2006). Convention theory in education thereby represents an alternative to structuralist theory traditions, which tend to focus on rules that act outside of individuals (Durkheim 1893) or on the role of incorporated class-dispositions (Bourdieu 1984, 1996), as well as rational choice theory, which advocates a more individualist and utility-maximizing model of actors and society (Boudon 1974). Rather, the new pragmatic and institutionalist approaches emphasize the agency of individual actors (e.g., students, teachers, or headmasters) and collective actors (e.g., schools, universities and their units) when coordinating their social actions in the context of situational cultural orders. Methodologically, conventions research offers perspectives and approaches that cut across the division of "qualitative" and "quantitative" research.

In previous research on education, the concept of conventions has been used in three ways (Imdorf & Leemann 2023). First, (a) conventions as orders of justification and principles of justice direct attention to issues of educational justice and inequality, elite education, and discrimination. From this view, conventions are analytical tools to better understand how inequality is performed, how justice is disputed, and how inclusion is justified. Next, (b)

conventions as orders of worth and principles of quality allow for examining how quality comes into being through (e)valuation and how recruitment and selection of students are enacted by practices of classification. This research focus allows us to understand educational quality of schools and educational pathways, beyond normative presuppositions, and to gain a situationally complete view of evaluation and classification processes in educational organizations. Finally, (c) conventions as grammars of action and forms of coordination allow for explaining processes of educational institutionalization and resistance to organizational reforms, or mechanisms of educational governance. This contribution to educational sociology brings into view educational institutions in their societal context along with the actors, processes, and results of educational governance, politics, and policies.

The aim of the special issue is to discuss the potentials, empirical findings, challenges and desiderata of convention theory in education research (from early childhood, kindergarten, schools, to higher and further education, including special education across all segments). Convention theory brings in an institutionalist and pragmatist perspective, and, this way, contributes a profound social science approach to education research. This social science approach to education research emphasizes situations and settings organized through conventions. For this reason, individualist perspectives on education are not in focus. Life course research can be addressed, but a certain distance from it (or an alternative analytical focus) is offered by the consistent situational analysis of educational decision-making and behavior. This compels an understanding that goes beyond individual actors in social contexts, but profoundly reconstructs life-course relevant situational contexts. Because situational analysis focuses on the interpretative co-performance of social actors oriented towards conventions, there are also limits to quantifying analyses of educational transitions and trajectories. Rather, the social governance of the latter comes into analytical view.

Research questions to be discussed in articles may primarily concern, but are not limited to:

- How can individual, organizational and / or systems issues in education research be dealt with more convincingly in terms of convention theory than with "traditional" theories (from economics, education, sociology, etc.)?
- How can conventions research approaches be made fruitful for addressing current challenges / problems in education (e.g., Kindergarten, school or university worlds, educational regimes, inequality orders, tests/examinations)?
- In particular, how can understandings of meritocracy and (always contested, ambiguous and uncertain) processes of assessment in educational contexts be rethought and analyzed by conventions research?
- What methodic and methodological challenges and consequences arise for the empirical implementation of the theory-led conventions research project?
- How can international comparative educational research benefit from conventions research?
- How can the relationship between scientific research and educational practice be rethought and reshaped by conventions research?

Priority will be given to submissions that reflect a competent use of convention theory and clearly state their contribution to explaining educational phenomena (the research subject) and the added value of the chosen theoretical perspective.

The special issue will be published in the international peer-reviewed journal *Historical Social Research* (HSR). HSR is a salient outlet of conventions research publications and has a tradition in publishing special issues devoted to convention theory. Previous special issues are on health and society¹; markets, organizations, and law²; quantification³; law⁴; as well as a more general introduction to convention theory⁵. HSR is a delayed open-access journal (open access available six months after publication). There are no fees or costs for authors to publish their research in HSR. For more information about the authors' right see <https://www.gesis.org/en/hsr/publish-with-us/authors-rights>.

Deadlines and timeline:

- Deadline for abstracts: **1 November 2023**
- Decision to authors to submit a full paper: until early December 2023
- Deadline for articles (first versions): 30 March 2024
- Peer-review until early-May 2024
- Deadline for articles (final versions): mid-October 2024
- Publication: Spring 2025 (earliest date)

Submission of abstracts:

Please send your abstract in English (900 to 1,300 characters, including spaces), together with 3 to 8 keywords, as a PDF file to c.imdorf@ish.uni-hannover.de and to schneijderberg@incher.uni-kassel.de. The abstract submission deadline is 1 November 2023.

Before you send us your abstract, please have a look at the manuscript guidelines for HSR: <https://www.gesis.org/en/hsr/publish-with-us/manuscript-guidelines>.

¹ Please see <https://www.gesis.org/en/hsr/full-text-archive/2021/461-conventions-health-and-society>.

² Please see <https://www.gesis.org/en/hsr/full-text-archive/2019/441-markets-organizations-and-law>.

³ Please see. <https://www.gesis.org/en/hsr/full-text-archive/2016/412-conventions-and-quantification>.

⁴ Please see <https://www.gesis.org/en/hsr/full-text-archive/2015/401-law-and-conventions>.

⁵ Please see <https://www.gesis.org/en/hsr/full-text-archive/2012/374-the-economie-des-conventions>.

References

- Batifoulier, P., Domin, J. P., & Raully, A. (2021). Erosion of solidarity in France and welfare conventions. *Historical Social Research*, 46(1), 35–58.
- Boltanski, L. (2011). *On Critique: A Sociology of Emancipation*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Boltanski, L., & Thévenot, L. (1999). The sociology of the critical capacity. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2(3), 359–377.
- Boltanski, L., & Thévenot, L. (2000). The reality of moral expectations: A sociology of situated judgement. *Philosophical Explorations*, 3(3), 208–231.
- Boltanski, L., & Thévenot, L. (2006). *On justification*. Princeton University Press.
- Boudon, R. (1974). *Education, Opportunity, and Social Inequality. Changing Prospects in Western Society*. New York: Wiley.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1996). *State nobility: Elite schools in the field of power*. New York: Polity.
- Diaz-Bone, R., de Larquier, G. (2022). Conventions: Meanings and Applications of a Core Concept in Economics and Sociology of Conventions. In: Diaz Bone, R., Larquier, G.d. (eds), *Handbook of Economics and Sociology of Conventions*. Springer, Cham.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-52130-1_2-1
- Diaz-Bone, R., & Salais, R. (2011). Economics of convention and the history of economies: Towards a transdisciplinary approach in economic history. *Historical Social Research*, 36(4), 7–39.
- Durkheim, E. (1893). *The division of labor in society*. The free press of Glencoe, Illinois.
- Imdorf, C., Leemann, J.R. (2023). Education and Conventions. In: Diaz-Bone, R., Larquier, G.d. (eds) *Handbook of Economics and Sociology of Conventions*. Springer, Cham.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-52130-1_69-1
- Latour, B. (1996). On actor-network theory: A few clarifications. *Soziale Welt* 47 (4), 369-381.

Acknowledgement

The guest editors thank Fritz Thyssen Foundation for funding a workshop on the topic of the upcoming special issue that took place at Leibniz University Hannover in September 2022.