

Editorial Introduction

Education, Value-system and Global (Dis)orders

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This special issue responds to an escalation of perceived turbulence in the global order (Bromley et al., 2020; Mundy et al., 2025) and explores how education reflects these changes worldwide. Liberal norms are being called into question across the political spectrum (Furuta et al., 2023); international organizations face growing backlash and major membership withdrawals (Salajan & Jules, 2025); and forced displacement due to crises and conflicts has intensified (Sugarman, 2023). Against this backdrop, one may wonder whether the post-1945 liberal values diffusing through school systems and curricula across countries (Meyer, 1977), simultaneously tasked with shaping national loyalty and producing international citizens committed to peace (Fabo, 2026), still hold. While existing scholarship has demonstrated that local crises and tensions can hinder the enactment of liberal values in education reforms and curricula (Russell, 2018; Fabo and Russell, 2025), it is worth questioning how global crises reshape national contexts. This question becomes especially pressing amid the political instrumentalization of immigration in public discourse worldwide (Wimmer et al., 2025), heightened tension in education aid through funding cuts (UNICEF USA, 2025), and schooling interruptions amid wars and crises (Burde et al., 2019).

This volume was intended to gather contributions that reflect, empirically or theoretically, on the role of education in contexts of a contested global order, encompassing displacement, conflict, and challenges to liberal values. The pertinence of this special issue lies in the complementarity of its articles. Authors, mostly emerging scholars, often in collaboration with more established researchers and practitioners, bring together reflections on the role of education in contexts of immigration, emergencies, and national-identity building, examining how schools navigate international frameworks, national boundaries of belonging, and cultural embeddedness. These pieces pose questions at philosophical, ethical, and practical levels, allowing us to interrogate the core purpose of education at the moments of its greatest challenge.

While authors are mostly affiliated with universities in the United States — a potential scope limitation worth acknowledging — the regions covered and their varied research interests offer a unique glimpse into diverse educational and value systems. These regions include the Czech Republic, North and South Korea, Sweden, Jordan, Kenya, and Ukraine. This rich regional coverage is crucial to the issues we raise, as the contributions reflect different national approaches to global disruptions and evolving civic and ethical paradigms.

In the Czech Republic, **Pavel Flekač** and **Antonín Staněk (article 1)** critically examine the evolving role of teachers as "relational and reflective professionals" amidst contestation over civic values, revealing a shift toward constructivist pedagogical frameworks. They find that teachers are expected to serve as "reflective, relational, ethically accountable and embodied professionals", yet observe a significant gap between the shift in policy ambition and the avenue for implementation in practice. **Noël Um-Lo's (article 2)** ethnographic work in North Korea reveals how ethnic nationalism blends with neoliberal values to shape unification ideals. Youngbeen Ahn (**article 3**) uses critical document analysis to compare Jordan and Kenya's transformation of humanitarian aid. The author argues that "algorithmic morality" — governance driven by digital systems — is profoundly transforming the sector, raising ethical and practical concerns about accountability and values. **Mary Allison Steel (article 4)** uses Sweden as a case study to explore how human rights frameworks and human capital logics together shape refugee education reform, analyzing the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s policy documents. Finally, **Joshua DeVincenzo and colleagues (article 5)** provide early results of trauma-informed education programs in conflict-affected Ukraine, drawing on mixed-methods evaluation to reveal promising, if still consolidating, outcomes of online programs that support teachers in emergency settings.

We purposefully put into conversation articles that each carry empirical data and conceptual considerations, alongside practitioner-grounded field accounts, striking the balance between theory and practice that remains essential to our field. The selected contributions are further embedded in diverse ontological, methodological, and disciplinary traditions, enriching debate and understanding of how international and comparative education mobilizes ambitious and varied perspectives through cross-national dialogue. Taken together, these contributions reveal education as a contested terrain where power dynamics continuously shape who belongs, who is excluded, and how teachers, intergovernmental organizations, and governments serve as vectors toward which collective futures. In doing so, they foreground the political responsibility assigned to teachers and carried by institutions, domestic and international, in realizing, constraining, and potentially transforming these projects. If anything, these pressures make the work gathered here more urgent, and its pursuit more courageous.

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