



7 – 9 March 2013 in Reykjavik

The 41st Annual Congress of the Nordic Educational Research Association

Evaluation

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Reykjavik 2013



UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Evaluation

NERA 2013

Educational Research Institute

School of Education

University of Iceland

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ISBN 978-9935-468-02-4

Abstract

This paper describes the process of organizing the 2013 NERA Congress held March 7th to March 9th 2013 in Reykjavik, Iceland. Immediately after the conference the organizing and scientific committee conducted an evaluation survey. It is a quantitative survey where participants are asked about their opinion of the conference. The survey was sent out to all participants and open from March 10th to March 30th. The response rate was 76 % or 500 respondents out of 658 participants. The results indicate that a great majority or 92 % of the respondents rated the conference as good or excellent. A majority of the respondents were very satisfied with the keynote speakers, the theme of the conference and many of the respondents claimed to have had a good experience on the parallel sessions. However, a group of the respondents complained about the quality of the paper presentations. The results of the survey indicate that the conference was successful and that it honored the expectations of the respondents. In the final chapter the author discusses some of the results further among other things whether it is possible to engage and recruit newcomers in NERA networks, whether it is possible to improve the quality of the parallel sessions, whether there should be conference proceedings in the future and the conference language.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to bring forward and make some of the organizing procedures more visible for both the participants in NERA and for the coming organizing committees. Also it is an attempt to register a little part of the NERA history. Without admittance to written materials such as evaluation reports, minutes, letters and so on and so forth there is a danger of making the history of NERA invisible or even non-existent. This year NERA enters its 41st anniversary but only little material is available to write the story of NERA. With this paper we hope to make a minor contribution.

Organizing a NERA Congress can be a complicated task. The work must be appropriately coordinated and organized in order to cope with the many challenges involved. One of the major tasks is to collaborate with the NERA Board, the network conveners and all the other players taking part in the planning process. In the case of the 2013 NERA Congress the organizing job was done by establishing a work team with players from three units: 1) the organizing and scientific committee consisting of academics from the School of Education, 2) a professional conference office (Gestamóttakan – Your host in Iceland and 3) a project manager on behalf of the Educational Research Institute at the School of Education.

The planning of the conference started during the spring of 2011. Since then the conference gradually has taken shape and finally Wednesday March 6th 2013 the 2013 NERA Congress could open for registration, even though bad weather conditions delayed and in some cases cancelled flights to Iceland. Despite the bad weather conditions a total of 674 participants participated in the conference, which is the highest number of participants in the last four years.

During the conference colleagues and volunteers at the School of Education selflessly helped the organizers to execute many of the practical tasks. The organizing and scientific committee is deeply grateful to all of these people and the support from the dean of the School of Education, professor Jón Torfi Jónasson. Also the organizing and scientific committee would like to thank Gestamóttakan – Your Host in Iceland and the Educational Research Institute for their contribution. Without their help many practical matters would have been difficult or even impossible to solve. Finally we want to thank the participants for their patience and understanding for the problems created by the bad weather conditions. All this was of great help and an important component to make the conference successful.

Reykjavik, April 2013

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About the conference

The Nordic Educational Research Association (NERA) has existed in 41 years and was established in order to be a key factor in educational research in the Nordic countries. From the very beginning the association has been a meeting-place for researchers to develop and cooperate on all kinds of special interests within education. The aim of NERA is to

- “encouraging and enhancing communication and collaboration amongst educational researchers in the Nordic countries
- promoting excellent educational research with high relevance for educational issues, policies and practices within the Nordic and non-Nordic societies as well
- developing and strengthening the position of Nordic educational research in the European and international settings
- promoting communication and collaboration between Nordic educational researchers and educational researchers from other countries” (NERA, 2012)

NERA has from the very beginning in 1972 been organized in a network structure. The numbers of networks have been varying but today there are registered 25 networks all dealing with educational matters from different perspectives. The networks are as follows in alphabetic order:

1. Adult learning – at work, in education and everyday life
2. Arts Culture and Education
3. Early Childhood Research
4. Classroom Research and Ethnographic Studies
5. Curriculum Research Network
6. Educational Leadership Network
7. Empirical Research on Value Issues in Education
8. Gender and Education
9. General Didactics
10. Higher Education
11. Historical Research
12. Inclusive Education
13. ICT & Education
14. Multi Cultural Educational Research
15. Literacy Research Network
16. The Nordic Society for Philosophy of Education
17. Leisure-time Pedagogy
18. Research on Teacher Education and Beginner Teachers
19. School-Home Cooperation
20. Teacher’s work and life
21. Politics of Education and Education Policy Studies
22. Poststructuralist Pedagogical Research
23. Social Pedagogy
24. School Development
25. Youth Research

In the very early years of NERA conferences were more or less organized around the networks and therefore the structure of a conference was formed as network meetings where researchers within the networks informed peers about their work throughout the year. In many cases there were no common key note speakers – only presenters within the networks. Also, many networks were organized in such a way that they cooperated on certain themes or subjects during the year.

During the years, however, the structure of the conference has undergone a drastic change. The conference is nowadays more or less to be compared with any other international scientific conference with key note speakers, paper sessions, symposia, round table discussions and poster sessions though the network structure is still apparent and still plays a major role in the internal life of the conference. Combining the network structure and the components of a modern scientific conference is an organizing and logistic challenge that calls for an extra effort by the organizers and cooperation with the board of NERA and the network conveners.

Organizing the conference

A short look on the conference-planning literature

A look into the conference-planning literature makes it evident that a good deal of literature on planning conferences is directed towards business and management communities and not specifically towards academics. In some of the oldest literature such as the guide written by Herbert Kindler (1960) one can find useful sections on determining purposes and logistics for a jointly-sponsored conference. In the 1980'ties Janet H. Potvin (1983) published a paper that describes a systematic approach to conference planning and organization in order to simplify and make it easier to run an annual meeting successfully. Approximately a decade later Gideon Rivlin (1995) published a guide specifically addressing scientific conferences for academics. The guide contains much practical advice, especially about the planning process and about the kinds of control the coordinator must exert on individual sessions. The book is also useful in terms of step-by-step and day-by-day arrangements. The guide take in consideration matters as social events, services at the conference site, tourism and includes an interesting chapter on evaluating a conference by Geraldine Hessian (op. cit., pp. 79 - 83). The Rivlin-guide reflects in many ways the needs and the problems of organizing a modern scientific conference for academics.

Today one can also find quite some resources about organizing a scientific conference on the internet (e.g. Baject, 2003; Herrick, Prakash, & Shapiro, 2010; Papadopoulou, 2008; Rabinowitz, 2013). In most of these resources the authors write about different logistic necessities and the planning process including using modern technology to execute some of the more demanding tasks.

Studying the resources on organizing a conference it seems that two very important issues always pop up addressing the question of the purpose of the conference and how to conduct the conference. The importance of keeping the purpose of the conference visible is often stressed because it will assist the organizers to find the appropriate planning method. Also the purpose to a certain extend will influence on how much time allocation is required to achieve the objectives (Spence & Green, 2007; The Conference Guide.com, 2007).

The purpose and the theme of 2013 NERA conference

The aim and the purpose of the 2013 NERA conference was first of all to gather networks members and other educational researchers from the Nordic countries to communicate, collaborate on, promote and develop Nordic educational research in order to strengthen the Nordic educational research in an European and international setting. Furthermore, the aim of the conference was to promote communication and collaboration between Nordic educational researchers and educational researchers from other countries. Implicitly there also was a purpose of presenting and displaying the organizing institution - University of Iceland; School of Education – in order for the participants to become familiar with research work, projects and members of the faculty. Finally, the aim of the conference also was to be an opportunity for the participants to some extent to explore the history, culture and nature of Iceland.

To fulfill the aims of the conference the program should include a relevant theme, key note speakers that were able to contribute with appropriate and important insight, paper and poster sessions, symposia and round tables in which participants would have the opportunity to discuss educational research matters with peers from the networks and other academics. Also the program should include a social program as well as a possibility to see some sights of interest.

The conference theme was to be looked upon as the focal point for the program and it served to integrate various subject areas for the conference into a coherent whole. As the congress was to be held in Iceland where the impact of the common financial crisis in the western world especially has been visible, it was an obvious possibility to let the conference address the impact of the economic crisis on education. The Nordic response to the economic recession has generally been to protect education from dramatic financial measures to be taken. However, in the wake of such defensive actions the long-term development of education has to be reconsidered. One can therefore ask whether the egalitarian principles of Nordic education are losing ground in sharpened international competition.

This theme and the obtrusive questions about the challenging educational reforms in the near future were expressed in the following title: *Disruptions and eruptions as opportunities for transforming education*.

The title is among other things referring to the fact that the educational discourse in the Nordic countries has for a long time resonated with ideas of ethics, transformation and action competences, about developing the potential of the individuals and society. Theoretical advances suggest that education can benefit from the dynamics of participation in communities but also that we can explore the contributions individuals make collaboratively and creatively to the transformation of practice. As such the conference could be a forum for the participant to explore thoughtful perspectives and analyses of problems in the Nordic region, not only about learning to know but also about becoming human through the pursuit of activism (NERA, 2012).

The theme was together with the first call published and distributed in a flyer on the 2012 NERA Congress held in Copenhagen.

Key note speakers

Choosing key note speakers can be a challenging task. To find appropriate key note speakers the organizing and scientific committee first set up a list of potential key note speakers after quite a bit

of brainstorming. The result was a list of 12 – 15 names of academics in the US, The United Kingdom, the Nordic countries and Iceland. After further discussions four people were chosen from the list and letters of invitation were sent to these people. Behind the decision was a principle of getting one or two key notes from outside the Nordic countries, one or two from the Nordic Countries and at least one key note from Iceland. It soon became clear that professionals seem to have a tight schedule because some of the invited academics had to decline participation due to other arrangements. After some time the organizing and scientific committee had found and invited four key note speakers, who all accepted to present papers within the frame of the conference theme.

The first key note speaker was **Dr. Anna Stetsenko**, who is a Full Professor in the Ph.D. Program in Developmental Psychology at the Graduate Centre of the City University of New York. Her area of expertise is in Cultural-Historical Activity Theory and its application to education focusing especially on issues of learning development, the self, agency, identity and cultural mediation. The title of her key note paper was “From Participation to Transformation: New Perspectives for Education in the Changing World.

The second key note speaker was professor of Education, **Kristiina Kumpulainen**, from Department of Teacher Education at the University of Helsinki. Her research interests focus on socio-culturally informed research, formal and informal learning, learning environments and new technologies, innovative schools and their pedagogies, teacher professional development, video research methodologies and interdisciplinary research for the promotion of learning in the 21st century. The title of her key note paper was “Understanding and promoting learning from the ‘connected learning’ perspective”

The third key note speaker was **Diane Reay**, who is a professor of Education in the Faculty of Education at University of Cambridge. She has a particular interest in social justice issues in education, Pierre Bourdieu’s social theory, and cultural analyses of social class. She has researched extensively in the areas of social class, gender and ethnicity across primary, secondary and post-compulsory stages of education. The title of her key note paper was: “Learning Lessons in Hard Times: Avoiding the mistakes of English Education”.

The fourth and last key note speaker was **Kristján Kristjánsson**, who is a professor in Philosophy of Education at School of Education at the University of Iceland. He was recently appointed Professor of Character Education and Virtue Ethics at the Jubilee Centre for Character and Values, at the School of Education at the University of Birmingham. His special interest lies in the areas of educational philosophy/theory, ethics and moral education. The title of his key note paper was “A gap in the value layer? Trajectories, challenges and prospects of moral education post-2008”.

The abstracts of the keynote lectures can be found in appendix I and on the conference website (NERA, 2012).

Conference management

Organizing a scientific conference like NERA is an administrative challenge and the conference management is issue for an important planning decision. First of all the institution had to evaluate and decide how much manpower could be used for the project. In the case of the 2013 NERA Congress it was decided to involve three basic working units: 1) A local organizing and scientific committee (OSC), 2) a professional conference office (PCO) and 3) an employee from the Educational

Research Institute at the School of Education. Making this decision also included a decision of delineating the area of responsibilities for each working unit.

The organizing and scientific committee was established during the months of January and February 2012. As a member of the NERA Board on the behalf of the School of Education at Iceland University Gestur Guðmundsson together with the management of the School of Education contacted academics within the institution that could be interested in joining the organizing and scientific committee. Several had to decline the offer because of being occupied with other projects. The organizing and scientific committee ended up involving four people from the faculty:

Gestur Guðmundsson (chair),
Kristín Jónsdóttir,
Puríður Jóhannsdóttir, and
Michael Dal.

Puríður Jóhannsdóttir and Gestur Guðmundsson were, however, on a sabbatical during the term of autumn 2012, which had the consequence that they in certain periods not were able to attend meetings. The group decided that the effect of this fact could be minimized by organizing and coordinating the work in the committee in such a way that most of the workload would take place during the early spring of 2013.

The purpose of the organizing and scientific committee was to define responsibilities, guide activities for the other actors involved in the making of the conference, and serve as the policy making body for the conference all together. Also the committee was responsible for organizing and executing the peer review of the paper abstracts send to the conference, editing the abstract book, be responsible for establishing a homepage, and make the program for the conference.

At a rather early stage it was decided to involve a PCO to take care of matters such as handling advance registration and staffing the registration, arranging and reserving hotels for hosting the participants, handling lunch and coffee breaks during the conference, arranging the conference dinner, social events and so on and so forth. The choice of PCO was *Gestamóttakan – Your Host in Iceland*, which the University has been using with a good result in other smaller arrangements. Conference arrangements like these must be handled by knowledgeable, skillful, willing personnel who are capable of negotiating with partners outside the university to make the best possible deals for the conference at the lowest equitable cost.

A detailed contract was created and signed by the PCO and the School of Education.

The Educational Research Institute contributed to the conference with an employee, Sigríður Kr. Hrafnkelsdóttir, who was titled project manager. The project manager was the daily manager of all the organizational aspects of the conference. This included coordinating the work of the organizing and scientific committee and the continuous contact with the PCO. The project manager was in this way the right-hand person of the organizing committee.

Making the budget

Generally, NERA conferences are not funded from outside. However, the 2004 NERA conference held in Reykjavik was extraordinarily supported by the Nordic Counsel but that was a rare exception.

Normally the only income of a NERA conference is generated by fees from the participants, which also was the case for the 2013 NERA conference.

During the last 5 – 10 years the conference fee has been increasing, and at the 2012 NERA conference in Copenhagen the early bird fee for members was NOK 2.988,-. Some of the NERA members made complaints concerning the conference fee, because they thought that the fee had developed into an unrealistic high figure.

The organizing committee for the 2013 NERA conference discussed the size of the fee and tried to facilitate a lower fee. Calculating the budget can be a difficult task, but by looking at the experience from earlier conferences it soon became clear, that it would not be possible to offer a significant lower conference fee for the 2013 NERA conference. The result was a minor general reduction in the fees.

If the fee is compared to other international scientific conferences around the world one quickly find out that the price very much equals fees charged at other conferences held in the western world. Also, it is a question whether the size of the fee has an influence on the numbers of participants. If a lower fee automatic generated an increase of attendance it could perhaps be worthwhile speculating in lowering the conference fee significantly. Academics attending conferences regularly have, however, experienced that a low registration fee or even free admission to a conference will not automatic increase the attendance. On the other hand it seems as if a very high fee could perhaps cut the attendance or perhaps tend to limit it to attendance from institutions with large faculty-development budgets (Furcron, 1981, p. 32; Hopkins, 2002). In the case of the 2013 NERA conference the attendance was rather good. Over 700 participants registered the conference and 674 participants attended the conference though very bad weather condition and cancelled planes troubled the travelling plans for a great deal of the participants (see also here below). The number of attendance was despite this considerable higher than the attendance at the conferences held in 2011 and 2012. Also it seems to be a big question what is considered to be a low and a very high fee. One of the factors deciding this can be the currency used for the conference (Rivlin, 1995).

At the 2013 NERA conference it was for many reasons decided to use Norwegian kroner as the conference currency. There is a tradition for using the currency in the country where the NERA conferences are held, but that was not possible for this year's conference. First of all the exchange rate of the Icelandic kroner is not at the moment registered in banks outside Iceland due to monetary restrictions set by the Icelandic government and the National Bank of Iceland. Using the Icelandic kroner as the conference currency would then have meant that participants would not be able to calculate the prices to their own currency. Due to extensive disturbances on the European monetary market it was considered to be an unnecessary risk to use Euro as the common conference currency, because it could mean considerable loss due to sudden changes in the exchange rates. In cooperation with the NERA Board it was therefore decided to use Norwegian kroner as the currency of the conference, because it has had a rather steady exchange rate over the last couple of years.

The budget was calculated to break even with an attendance of 500 participants. The budget was built up around eight fixed cost categories and a category covering diverse cost:

1) Meeting locals, 2) Computer assistance and website, 3) Printing and conference materials, 4) Abstract Handling and administration costs for Gestamóttakan, 5) Management and administration

School of Education, 6) Invited speakers, 7) NERA board, 8) Miscellaneous and 9) Diverse cost (including lunches, coffee breaks, welcome reception etc.).

The budget was calculated to a total of approximately NOK 1.400.000,-.

Abstract handling

On the conference website participants could find guidelines for proposals for paper sessions, symposia, posters and roundtables. In the guidelines it is stated that an abstract proposal for presentation must have a maximum of 350 words and indicate the following:

1. Title of paper
2. Author(s) of proposal
3. Research topic/aim
4. Theoretical and methodology framework
5. (Expected) conclusions/findings
6. Relevance to Nordic educational research.
7. Attachment to NERA-network and/or symposium

All presenters in symposia and paper sessions are expected to bring copies of their papers.

In the months of January to March 2012 digital registration forms for different kinds of abstracts were fully designed in cooperation between the OSC and the PCO. Five digital registrations forms were designed; one for paper sessions, one for roundtables, one for posters and two for symposia, that is one for registering papers describing the whole symposium and another for papers presented in each symposia. In the process of designing the different registration forms it was soon obvious that registering single abstracts in paper sessions, roundtables and posters would not create any major problems. The symposia, on the other hand, were a greater challenge because the abstracts had to be connected to both a network and a specific symposium.

In each registration form the participants were to give information about the title of the presentation, the name(s) of author(s), the name of their working institution, network, country, address, position, phone number, and include an abstract.

All the abstracts were gathered in a common database and saved in categories due to whether it belonged to 1) paper sessions, 2) symposia – and then what symposium, 3) round tables and 4) posters. Also, all the abstracts were categorized within the existing 25 networks and each abstract got a registration number. In the database it was possible to categorize the abstracts in different ways e.g. by authors, number of authors, network, title, registration number, type, and submission date.

Also, the database could produce basic information of each abstract and its author. Besides the paper abstract it was possible to see information of network, title, author e-mail, address, institution and position. In the basic information it was possible to mark the abstract as accepted or rejected. It was possible to change information, make changes in the abstract if necessary, even delete the abstract and get the abstract in PDF-format. A hover button made it possible to send a letter by e-mail to the author of the abstract, and pushing another hover button revealed what letters had

been sent. The basic information also included a log of communication where one could find information of date and time of communication with the author.

NETWORK
Adult learning – at work, in education and everyday life

TITLE
Applying the ICF to Identify the Need of Support to Students with AS in Higher Education

AUTHOR
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INSTITUTION
School of Education and Communication, Jönköping University

POSITION
Ph D student in Disability Research

PHONE
[redacted]

[\[change information \]](#)
[\[delete abstract \]](#)
[\[get pdf \]](#)

BASIC INFORMATION

ACCEPTED

SEND LETTER

LETTER SENT

COMMUNICATION

- 2013-01-07 15:01:35
- 2013-01-07 15:01:23

TEXT

Figure 1 The basic Information as it appeared in the database. Below under the title “Text” the full abstract would show.

About 580 abstracts proposals were sent to the conference. 25 abstracts were rejected, 39 abstracts were withdrawn before the opening of the conference, and 32 abstracts were withdrawn by the participants who did not arrive due to bad weather conditions. This meant that 484 abstracts were accepted for the conference. The abstracts were distributed as follows:

Paper sessions	421 (87 %)
Symposia	43 (3 %)
Posters	14 (8,8 %)
Roundtables	6 (1,2 %)

The review process of the abstracts was executed in two tempi. First the organizing and scientific committee accepted the abstracts and then the abstracts were categorized by networks and send to the network conveners. The network conveners then made a peer review and divided the papers into sessions containing four papers each.

The purpose of letting the network conveners decide how the papers should be distributed in the sessions was to secure that the papers were distributed in relation to their subject and not randomly.

As mentioned above 25 abstracts were rejected during the review process, mostly because they did not fulfill the demands of including theoretical framework or methodology.

Table 1. Distribution of abstracts among networks

1. Adult learning – at work, in education and everyday life – 37 (7,6 %)	14. Multi Cultural Educational Research - 23 (4,8 %)
2. Arts Culture and Education - 18 (3,7 %)	15. Literacy Research Network – 14 (2,9 %)
3. Early Childhood Research - 27 (5,6%)	16. The Nordic Society for Philosophy of Education – 18 (3,7 %)
4. Classroom Research and Ethnographic Studies - 23 (4,8 %)	17. Leisure-time Pedagogy 8 – (1,7 %)
5. Curriculum Research Network - 11 (2,3 %)	18. Research on Teacher Education and Beginner Teachers – 30 (6,2 %)
6. Educational Leadership Network - 28 (5,8%)	19. School-Home Cooperation – 6 (1,2 %)
7. Empirical Research on Value Issues in Education - 21 (4,3%)	20. Teacher’s work and life – 15 (3,1 %)
8. Gender and Education - 15 (3,1 %)	21. Politics of Education and Education Policy Studies – 36 (7,4 %)
9. General Didactics - 13 (2,7 %)	22. Poststructuralist Pedagogical Research – 8 (1,7%)
10. Higher Education - 31 (6,4 %)	23. Social Pedagogy – 5 (1 %)
11. Historical Research - 9 (1,9 %)	24. School Development 17 – (3,5 %)
12. Inclusive Education - 26 (5,4 %)	25. Youth Research – 9 (1,9 %)
13. ICT & Education - 27 (5,6 %)	26. No network – 9 (1,9 %)

A major focus of a NERA conference, besides from the exchange of ideas, is the networking. Networking is an absolute and necessary part of the ground work of a NERA conference and a key to further collaboration, establishing professional relationships, funding, and other professional benefits.

Table 1 shows information about how the abstracts were distributed among the existing networks. It is worth noticing that only 9 abstracts were not connected to a network. The most attended network was network 1 “Adult learning ...” with an attendance of 37 abstracts and network 23 “Social Pedagogy” had the least attendance. Otherwise, it is noticeable that there is a rather even distribution of abstracts between most of the networks.

Finding room capacity and planning the program

In January 2013 it was in general terms determined how many papers and sessions were registered and ready to be delivered on the conference. The next step was to allocate and plan rooms for each session and organize the program of the conference.

The first assignment was to find a suitable place for having the key note lectures. It was soon obvious that more than the calculated 500 participants would attend the conference. When the registration was finished a little more than 700 participants had registered, but some of the participants dropped out among other things due to bad weather conditions and the final number of participant was 674. It was necessary to find a lecture hall that admitted an audience of this size. At the School of Education there are two lecture halls each allowing an audience of approximately 250 persons. It was soon clear that using these two lecture halls would not be an optimal option, because that would mean that more than half the participants needed to experience the key note lectures on a big TV-screens. It was therefore decided to have the four key note lectures at Hotel Hilton, which has a

lecture hall for an audience of 680 participants. This decision had an impact on the program planning because it would then be more practical to gather the key note lectures around the sessions before lunch. The result was that two key note lectures were held in the morning before lunch on Thursday March 7th and Friday March 8th. A disposition that does not correspond with the NERA conferences held during the last 5 – 10 years where key note lectures have been convened all three days of the conference and distributed over the mornings and the afternoon. However, making this decision required paper sessions, symposia, round table sessions, and posters to be executed during the afternoons and the whole day of Saturday March 9th.

It also showed out that the number of papers, symposia and round tables was so excessive, that it would be impossible to convene all paper presentations in the facilities of School of Education. Therefore it was decided to rent rooms at a nearby public school for Saturday March 9th.

Lunch was all conference days served at the gymnasium on the University premises.



Figure 2. Lunch at the gymnasium at the University premises

The final program for the sessions were put together and published on the conference website. In the week before the opening of the conference the abstract book was edited, put together and published on the conference site.

Participants and registration

The NERA 2013 congress attracted 674 participants as compared to 600 participants in 2012, 348 participants in 2011 and 553 participants in 2010. 16 of the participants attending the conference represented 8 publishers from different countries. These persons did not attend the academic program.

Participants mostly came from the Nordic countries but 47 or 7 % of the participants came from other countries such as The United States, The United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium, Greek, Canada and even Japan. Most of the participants came from Norway and Sweden and fewest of the participants came from Denmark (see figure 3).

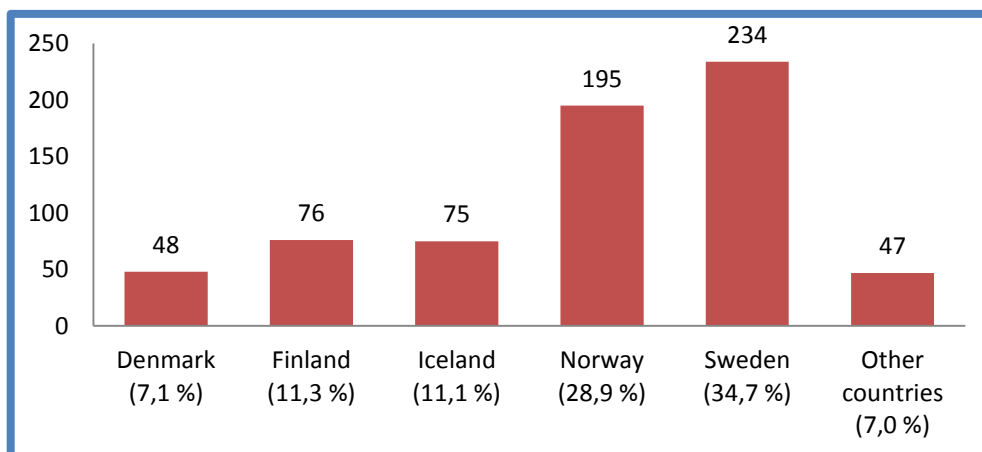


Figure 3. The column chart shows the distribution of the participants between countries.

The PCO arranged and managed the registration of the participants. The registration was done digitally and a special database registered the participants when they registered. The early bird registration ended January 19th 2013 and a majority of the participants was registered as early birds. The registration fees were as follows:

Registration fees

	Early bird registration by 19 January 2013	After 19 January 2013
NFPF/NERA member fee	NOK 2.800	NOK 3.400
Non-member fee	NOK 3.700	NOK 4.200
NFPF/NERA student member fee	NOK 2.100	NOK 2.600
Student non-member fee	NOK 2.600	NOK 3.100
Non-member fee + 1 year NFPF/NERA membership	NOK 2.800 + 590	NOK 3.400 + 590
Student non-member fee + 1 year NFPF/NERA membership	NOK 2.100 + 380	NOK 2.600 + 380

Executing the conference

The conference started with pre-conferences Wednesday March 6th. A pre-conference is an opportunity for gathering network members before the main conference. A pre-conference is organized by the networks.. The numbers of pre-conferences vary from year to year. At the 2013 NERA conference three networks had asked for the opportunity to have pre-conferences, Network 3: Early Childhood Research, Network 14: Multi Cultural Educational Research and Network 16: The Nordic society for Philosophy of Education. The same networks which held pre-conferences at the 2012 NERA conference in Copenhagen.

The members of the pre-conferences arrived already Tuesday March 5th which for many reasons was a good decision, because Wednesday March 6th the weather conditions suddenly changed to the worse. A heavy snowstorm hit Iceland and flights got very much delayed or were even cancelled. Conference registration was planned to start in the late afternoon of Wednesday March 6th and also a welcome reception at the School of Education was scheduled to take place. Due to the bad weather conditions many participants could therefore not attend the welcome reception simply because they arrived very late in the evening or were stranded in different airports. Only about 100 – 120 participants attended the welcome reception.

Luckily most of the participants succeed to arrive late in the evening March 6th or the following days. However, the bad weather conditions resulted in a loss of participants of around 35 - 40 persons. These participants did not succeed in changing their flight tickets and had to cancel their participation at the conference. Many of the late comers needed to get their presentation date rescheduled. All this meant that the conference program had to be changed quite a bit in order to get as many as possible to be able to present their papers. Also, this meant that the participants had to be awake for program changes. Despite a logistic difficult situation most of the program changes were successful and all participants with paper presentations were (re)scheduled in the final program.

The main conference started Thursday March 7th with two key note lectures at Hotel Hilton. After the lectures most participants walked to the School of Education where lunch was served. Also a coach was available for the participants that were not able to walk the short distance of 10 – 15 minutes.

After lunch paper sessions, symposia and round table discussions were held in the facilities of the School of Education. The same program items were executed Friday March 8th and Saturday March 9th there were no key note lectures, only sessions held at the School of Education.

The program also included network meetings, coordinator meeting and the NERA General Assembly, see also the program in appendix 2.

The conference dinner was held Friday march 8th at the concert house, Harpa, downtown Reykjavik. The dinner was not included in the conference fee and participants had the opportunity to buy dinner tickets when registering or on the conference site. 380 participants joined the Conference Dinner.

Different excursions were arranged and available for participants. The excursions were not included in the conference fee and participants had to pay an extra fee for participating in an excursion. On Thursday March 7th an excursion was arranged to The Blue Lagoon and a post-conference tour was arranged for participants Saturday afternoon March 9th.

Conference assessment

Almost immediately after the closing of the conference an evaluation survey was digitally put in effect and sent out to all the participants by e-mail except to the 16 participants representing the different Nordic publishers as they did not take part in the networks and the sessions. The survey was conducted with help of the survey program SurveyMonkey (SurveyMonkey, 2012).

The purpose of the survey was to get answers to the following main research questions:

1. To what extent did the participants think that the conference honored their expectations?
2. Did the conference fulfill the purposes of NERA?

Design and methodology

The survey was formed as a quantitative study based on a survey with multiple choice and open questions. As such the study is a systematic empirical investigation of the participants' views on the conference using statistical and computational techniques. The survey consisted of 28 matters divided into 11 questions.

The first section of the survey addressed the congress in general terms and was formed as a multiple choice. The second section was concerned with how the Nordic perspective was emphasized at the conference and was build up around a multiple choice question and two open questions. The third section addressed the profile of the respondents and in the fourth and last section the participants were asked of the importance of the NERA Congress and the possibility to add other comments about the conference.

The survey was open from March 10th to March 30th. The first message to the participants was a general request to take part in the evaluation survey. During the open period 6 other reminding messages were sent out to participants who had not yet responded.

Respondents

The survey was sent out to 658 participants. 500 participants answered the survey. The response rate was therefore 76 %, which is considered to be sufficient and even rather good.

156 participants did not answer the survey and two participants opted out the survey. All together 158 participant did not answer the survey. The participants who **did not take part** in the survey were distributed among the participating countries as shown in the column chart here below:

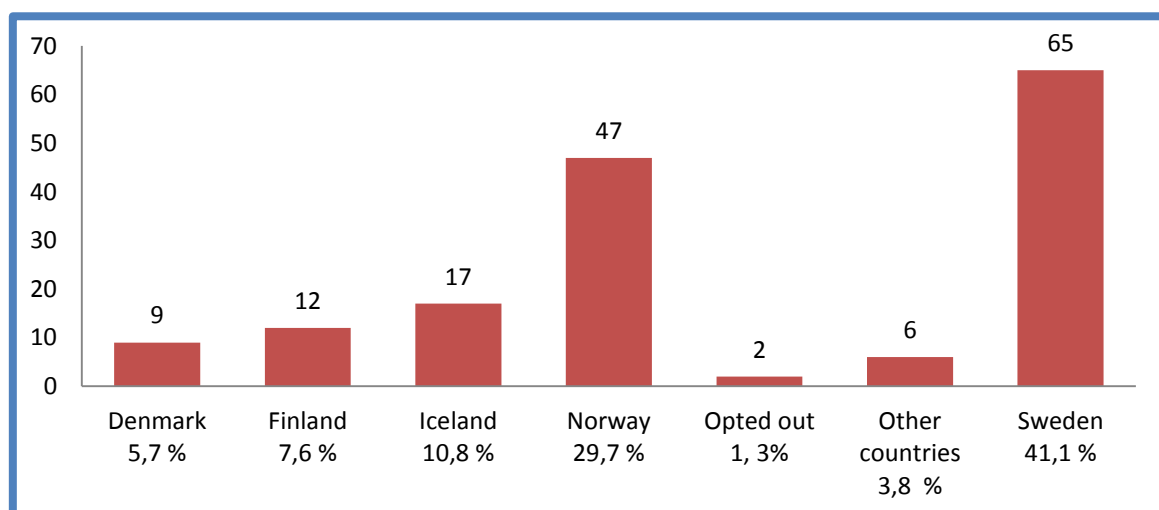


Figure 4. Column chart showing the distribution of the non-respondents between countries.

A great majority or 352 (73 %) of the respondents were females and 130 (27 %) of the respondents were males. However, 18 respondents did not answer this question.

When it comes to the age of the respondents a majority of the respondents were over 50 years old.

		Response Percent	Response Count
- 30 yrs.		3.7%	18
31-40 yrs.		15.5%	76
41-50 yrs.		26.6%	130
50+ yrs.		54.2%	265
		answered question	489
		skipped question	11

Figure 5. The age of the respondents.

In the survey participants were asked about their nationality. There is a clear correlation between the nationality of all the participants and the respondents. The chart here below shows how the respondents are distributed between countries.

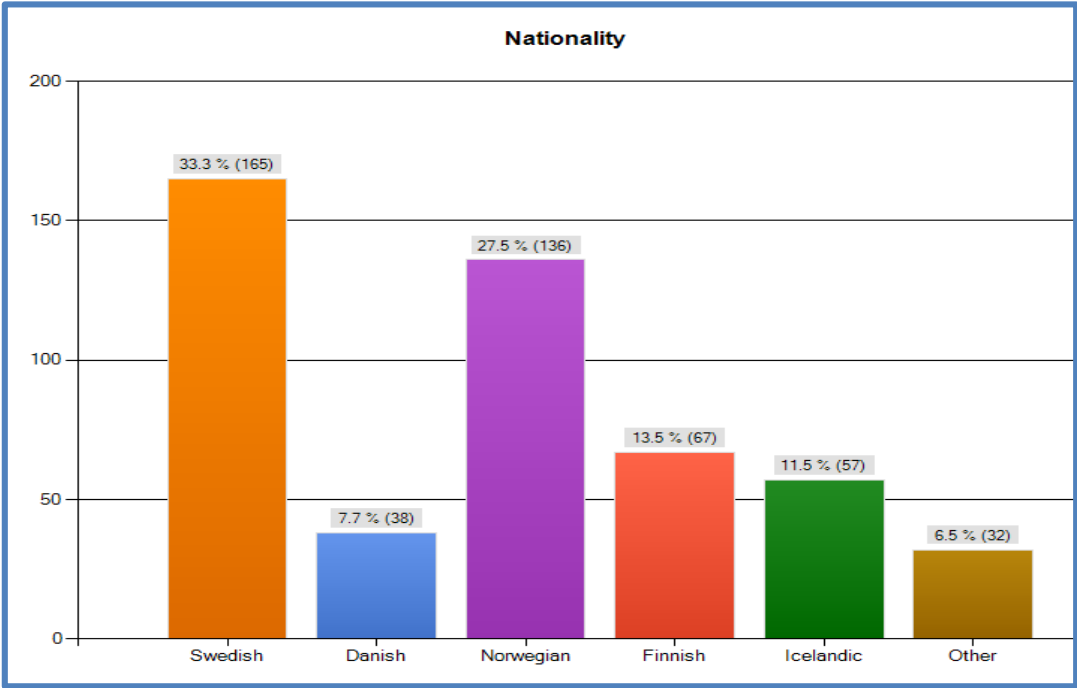


Figure 6. The nationality of the respondents.

Most of the respondents claimed that they had an academic position as a professor or associate professor at an academic institution. However, 148 of the respondents or 30,3 % claimed to be Ph.D. students.




		Response Percent	Response Count
(Ph.D.) student		30.3%	148
Other academic staff (e.g. Professor, Associate / Assistant professor)		66.0%	322
Non academic		3.7%	18
		answered question	488
		skipped question	12

Figure 7. Position and status of the respondents.

The participants were also asked how many times they have attended a NERA Congress before NERA 2013. A great majority 213 (43,1 %) of the respondents claimed that this was their first time on a NERA Congress.

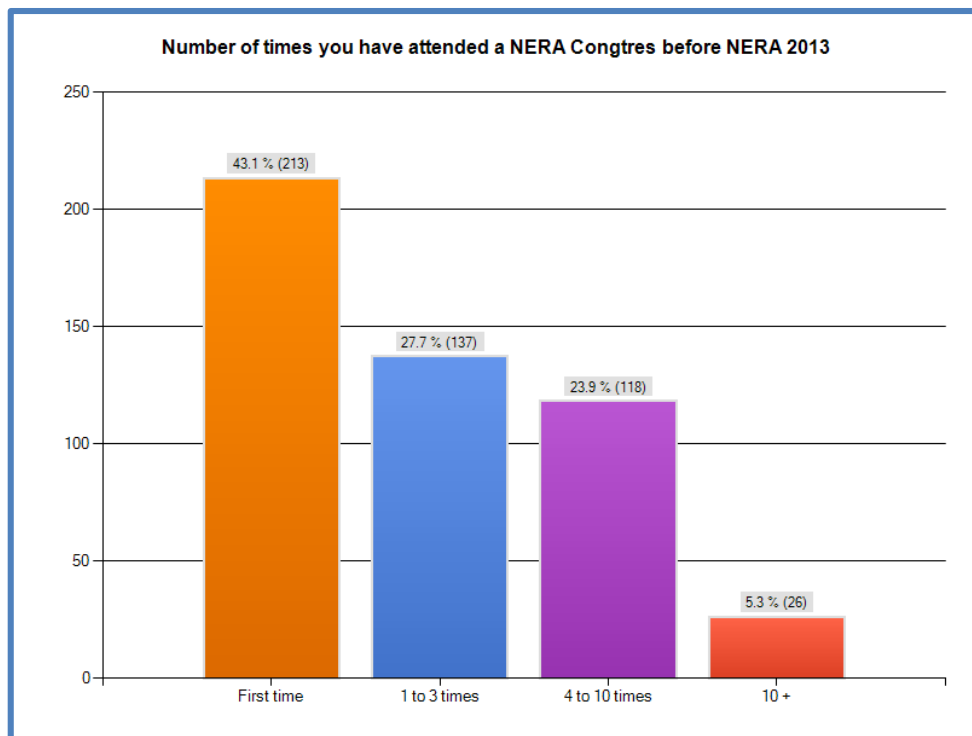


Figure 8. An overview of times the respondents have attended NERA.

Only very few of the participants claim that they have been attending the NERA Congress more than ten times, but more or less half of the respondents claimed to have attended a NERA Congress 1- 10 times before.

Results of the survey

The survey consisted of three main sections concerning the conference. One section where participants were invited to rate the congress in general terms, a second section where participants were asked to rate emphasizes made on the NERA conference and finally a third section where participants were requested to rate the functions of the NERA conference and were invited to make other comments.

Rating the conference in general

In the first section of the survey the participants were invited to rate the conference in general terms out from the following choices: Excellent, Good, Fair and Poor. 494 of the respondents answered this section and 6 respondents skipped the section.

Firstly was asked about the congress in general. A big majority of 92 % of the respondents (455 respondents) claims that the congress in general was excellent or good. When the respondents were asked to rate the congress theme, and the key note speakers, the results were much the same. A great majority rated the items very high. However, when the same question was asked about the parallel session a majority of respondents or just over 90 % rated the parallel session as Good or Fair. Only 42 respondents or 8,6 % of the respondents rated the parallel sessions as Excellent.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	l alt
The congress in general	24,03% 118	68,64% 337	6,92% 34	0,41% 2	491
The congress theme	35,73% 174	55,03% 268	9,03% 44	0,21% 1	487
The key note speakers	40,30% 191	47,26% 224	10,76% 51	1,69% 8	474
The parallel sessions	8,61% 42	68,85% 336	21,93% 107	0,61% 3	488

Figure 9. Rating the conference in general terms.

Also the respondents were asked to rate the material produced for the congress such as the timetable of the congress, the program and the electronic abstract book. In all cases a majority of the respondents rated the material as good or excellent. About a fourth of the respondents rated the printed program as fair or poor and around a fifth of the respondents rated the electronic abstract book as fair and poor.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	l alt
Timetable of the congress	20,82% 101	63,09% 306	14,02% 68	2,06% 10	485
The printed programme (also on the website)	22,04% 108	53,06% 260	20,82% 102	4,08% 20	490
The electronic abstract book on website	24,68% 114	55,19% 255	17,32% 80	2,81% 13	462

Figure 10. Rating of the materials of the conference.

During the conference the participants were offered services such as lunch and coffee break, support from AV-personnel and volunteers and information about changes and corrections in the program. The latter was executed through changes in the program on the conference website and information boards at the conference site. It seems as if the respondents had different opinions on lunch and coffee breaks. About 68 % of the respondents rated this service as good and excellent. However, 32 % rated it as fair or poor. The support from AV-personnel and volunteers was rated very high. About 90 % of the respondents rate this service as good or excellent. Around 70 % of the respondents rated the services involving changes and corrections of information as good or excellent whereas about 30 % of the respondents rated this service as fair or poor.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Total
Breaks and	17,49%	50,62%	25,93%	5,97%	
Support from AV-personnel and volunteers	41,34% 191	49,35% 228	8,01% 37	1,30% 6	462
Information about changes and corrections (website and information boards)	17,99% 86	52,72% 252	22,18% 106	7,11% 34	478

Figure 11. Rating the services at the conference.

Finally, the participants were invited to rate activities and services surrounding the conference such as the social program, the registration and hotels. These activities and services generally got a high rate because in all the cases a majority of 80 – 90 % of the respondents rated the services as good or excellent.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Total
Social programme	32,72% 143	53,09% 232	12,36% 54	1,83% 8	437
Registration	41,27% 201	51,33% 250	5,75% 28	1,64% 8	487
Hotel	24,66% 108	58,22% 255	14,61% 64	2,51% 11	438

Figure 12. Rating the services surrounding the conference.

The results of the rating of the congress in general terms indicate that respondents as a whole were rather satisfied with the congress in general, the material produced for the conference, the services provided during the conference and the services and activities surrounding the congress. Very few of the respondents rated the services provided and activities on the conference as poor. A stacked column chart indicating the results of the answers to the first section of the survey illustrates clearly this point of view.

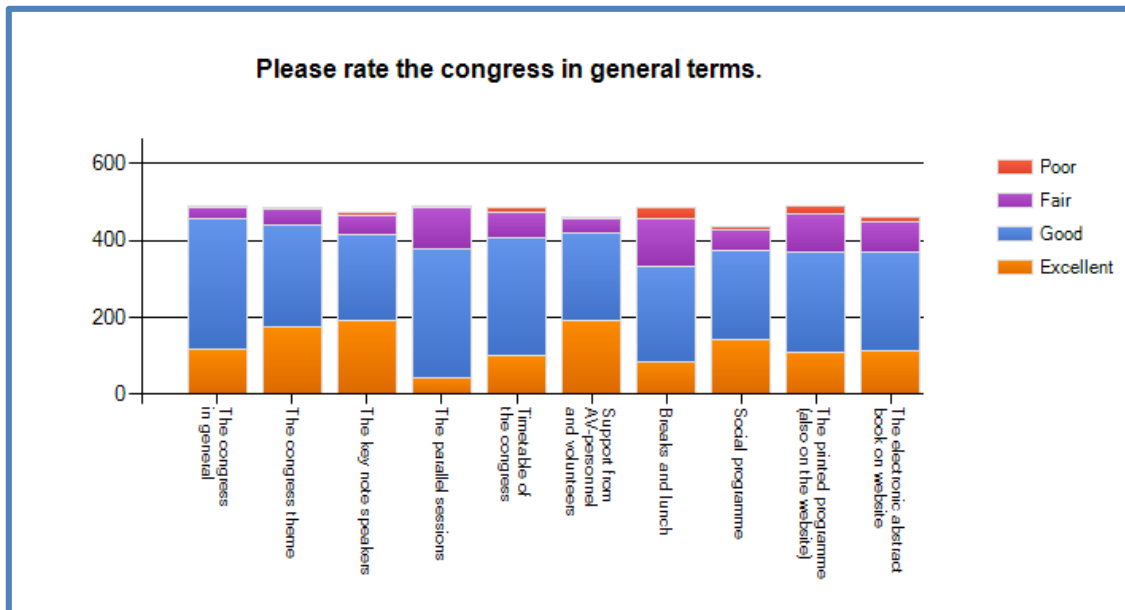


Figure 13. Rating the congress in general terms - all categories.

The blue and the orange colors in figure 13 represent the numbers of respondents that rated the different categories as good and excellent whereas the purple and the red colors represent the respondents rating the different categories as fair or poor.

Emphasizes – best and worst experience(s)

In section two of the survey participants were invited to assess whether the Nordic perspective and the Nordic languages were emphasized too much, appropriate or too little. A great majority or 458 (93 %) of the respondents answering the question claimed that the Nordic perspective was emphasized appropriate. However, almost a fourth of the respondents (115) were of the opinion that the Nordic languages were emphasized too little. 73 % or 351 of the respondents answering the question claimed that the Nordic languages were emphasized appropriate. Almost all the respondents (96 %) found that the activities of the conferences in the different sessions were based on the current NERA network, see also figure 14.

In section two the participants also were asked to express what their best experience(s) had been during the NERA 2013 conference. 177 respondents skipped this question and 323 (almost 65 %) of the respondents wrote shorter or longer comments. Firstly, the comments were analyzed and put into five categories according to the topic they dealt with. The first category was “Key note speaker”. A little over the half of the respondents answering the question (169 persons) mentioned that they had the best experience listening to the key note lectures. Typical comments were like the statements here below:

Very interesting themes discussed and the key note speakers were excellent.

The excellent key note presentations.

Some of the respondents mentioned specifically one or two of the key note speakers.

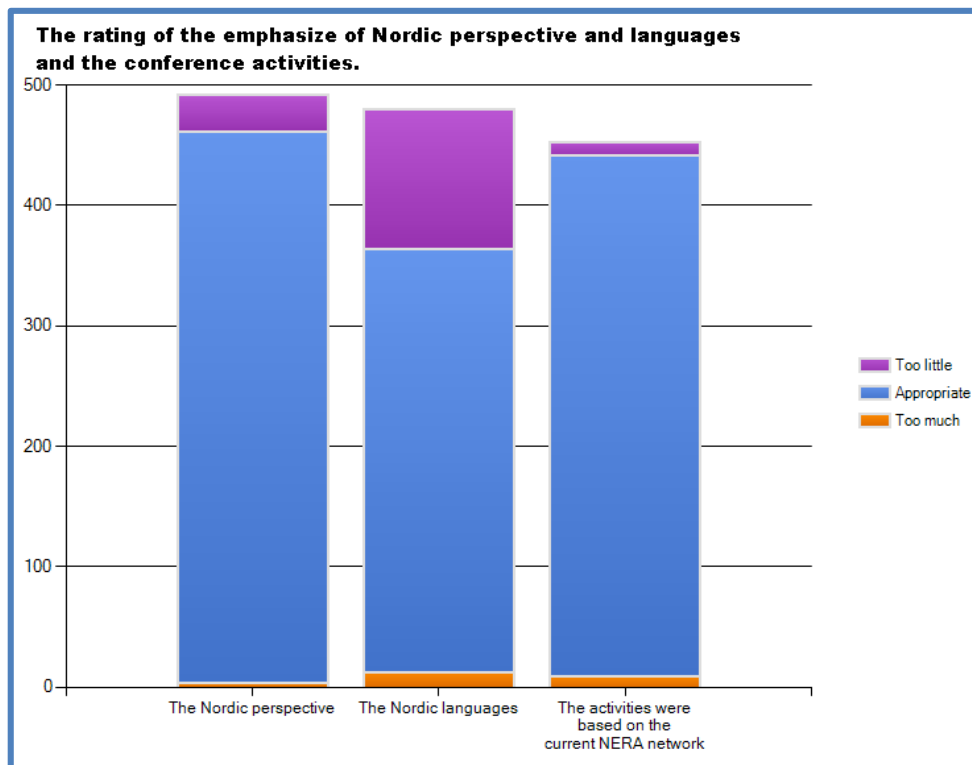


Figure 14. The rating of the emphasize on Nordic perspective, languages and conference activities.

A little less part of the respondents or 41 % (133 persons) answering the question mentioned the parallel sessions as one of their best experiences during the conference. Quite a few of the respondents even mentioned their own presentation and the feedback from the audience. Other stated the importance of discussing interesting projects during the parallel sessions. Below there are some typical comments from the respondents:

Giving my first paper presentation, which went quite well!

The feedback on my presentation

Interesting themes and discussions during paper seminars

A lot of the researchers who I listened to had very interesting project.

Around a fourth of the respondents answering the question mentioned networking as one of the best experiences during the conference, 17 % or 56 persons mentioned the social program and 46 of the respondents (14 % of the respondents answering the question) mentioned other activities such as the post conference Tour, the tour to The Blue Lagoon or even the bad weather conditions. Typical examples of responses could be as the following comments:

The first evening was great,,,

The weather conditions were exiting, extraordinary! (...) good service during the Golden Circle after-conference excursion.

The congress dinner and the post conference tour were also very nice.

The column chart (figure 15) here below illustrates what respondents think were the best experiences at the conference

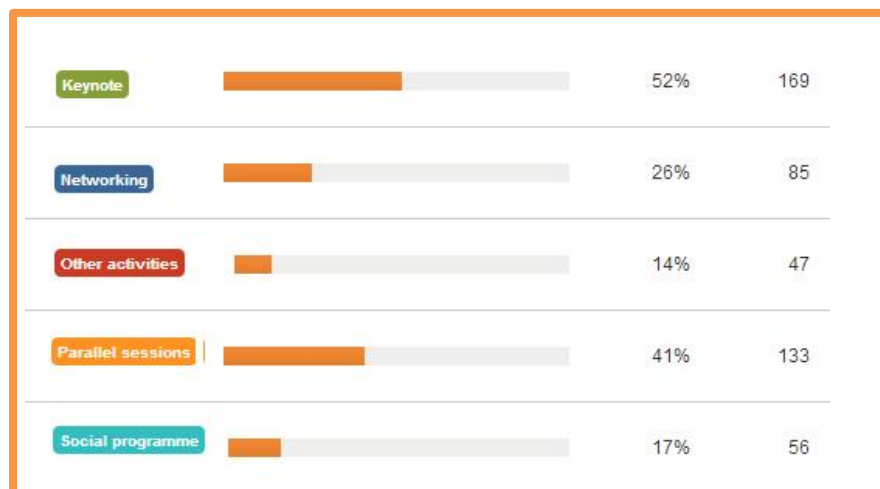
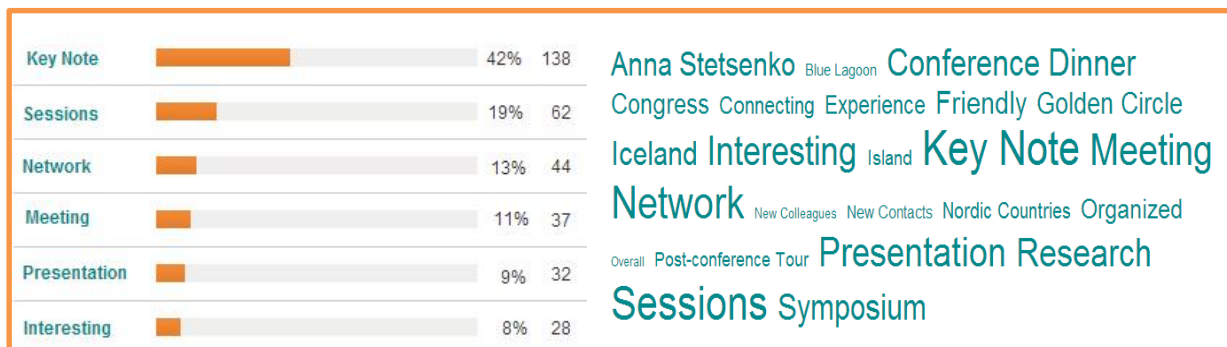


Figure 15. The column chart illustrates what respondents think was their best experience at the conference.

A simple text analysis was performed in order to clarify what keywords were used most often in the text produced by the respondents. The column chart here below indicates the six most frequent words and to the right the most frequent words are set up in a cloud view.



In section two the participants also were asked to indicate what the worst experience(s) had been during the NERA 2013 congress. 280 or 56 % of the respondents answered the question and 220 (44 %) skipped the question. Presumably the 220 respondents skipping the question did not have any worst experience and 53 of the respondents who answered the question declared that they had no worst experience. All together it then seems as if 273 (54,6 %) of all of the respondents did have any worst experience.

Also 53 or 18 % of the respondents answering the question said that the parallel sessions were their worst experience. Some of the respondents meant that many of the parallel sessions were too hectic and that the presenters were not very well prepared. Presenters tend to have too many slides and too many points to make. Other respondents were of the opinion that the presenters' presentation techniques were rather poor and insufficient. Three of the respondents complained that there was

not much interest in topics concerning matters outside the Nordic region and that the global perspective was missing. One respondent wrote that nobody attended the session that he/she was presenting in. Also respondents mentioned that often the presenters did not distribute a written paper or handout of the presentation as stated in the guidelines for the conference. A couple of respondents wrote that they did not feel connected to the network and presenters did not get enough academic response which got one respondent to conclude that the concept of the conference is passé. Here below are some typical comments from the respondents:

The very poor presentation technique of many presenters really affected my overall assessment of the congress. Maybe the organizer needs to remind PHD students that writing their pieces is only the first step. They also need to be able to communicate their work.

Some poorly presented work on smaller sessions.

Presenters reading from a paper.

Quality of projector - did not work properly for my presentation.

Difficulties to organize a personal plan on which sessions to attend. Maybe next time personal planning of attendance could be provided in advance via website (similarly to eera/ecer),

Approximately a fifth (20 %) or 59 of the respondents answering the question mentioned the bad weather conditions that had a considerable impact on the first days of the conference. Some of the respondents explained that due to the bad weather condition their flight was cancelled from Oslo. In order to reach the conference they had to take another flight late in the evening through Copenhagen to Keflavik. However, this new flight was delayed and the persons in question needed to stay over one night and one day in Copenhagen. This meant that they did not arrive to the conference before Friday evening for the conference dinner. Others simply missed the first conference day. Some of the typical remarks were as follows:

The weather Thursday at The Blue Lagoon, but it turned out to be exotic!

The terrible weather, cold and windy; 1 1/2 days of delay due to flying conditions.

My plane was cancelled from Norway and I was 27 hours late.

The delay and cancelled flights meant that the organizing committee had to reschedule unusual many paper presentations. Though the committee used quite some resources on distributing information about the new schedule 14 persons or 5 % of the respondents answering the question were complaining of lack of information. Also some of the same persons complained about lack of information on where to find the different rooms at the University and some of the respondents mentioned difficulties finding the University of Iceland because they first went to the main building in the snow storm at the main campus and not to The School of Education. Other typical comments were as follows:

There should have been more signs showing the crowd where to walk. Hard to find the location of rooms to the parallel sessions. Should have been more staff standing around in strategical places pointing you in the right direction.

I was not aware of my time as a chair. Found it accidentally in the program. Also, one session had been moved from the first program on the web to the second.

Finally a few respondents complained about conference fee, missing coffee during coffee breaks, lunch, and the program. A number of 12 respondents or 4 % of the respondents answering the question were of the opinion that some of the key note lectures were the worst experience during the conference. One respondent criticized the English key note speaker saying that it was all sentiments and feelings, no evidence, no science. However, the same respondent expressed at the same time that she/he agrees with the key note speaker’s view on the flaws on the English school system, but the respondent fails to see the relevance of the statements in the context of the conference. A few of the respondents did not like some of the other key note speakers.

The column chart (figure 16) here below illustrates the amount of dislikes and worst experiences during the NERA 2013 conference

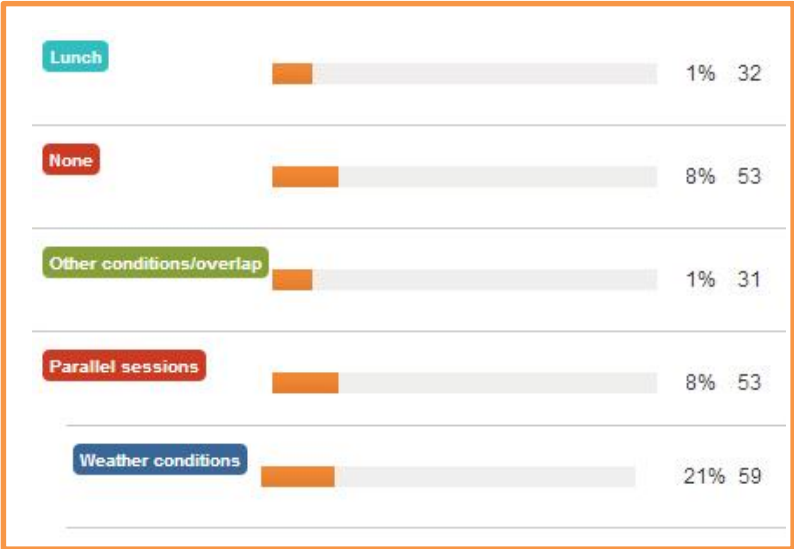
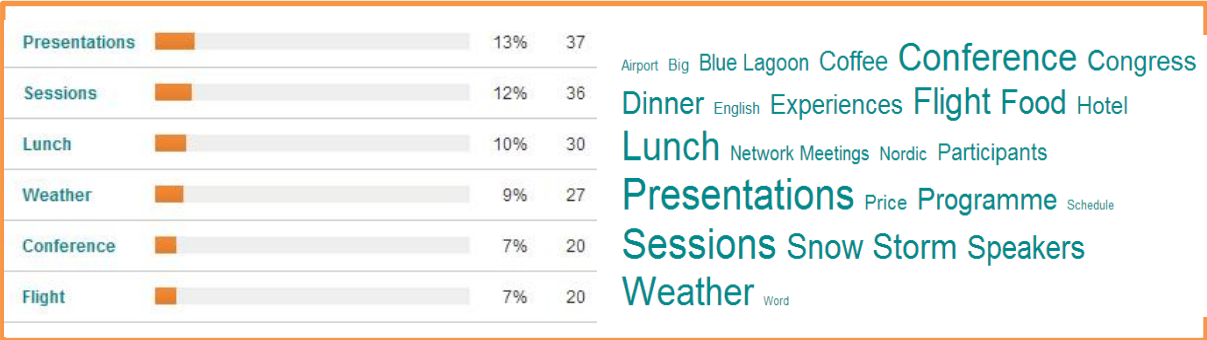


Figure 16. The column chart illustrates what respondents think was their worst experience during the conference

As was the case for the question concerning the best experience during the NERA conference a simple text analysis was performed on the text produced concerning the worst experience. The column chart here below indicates the six most frequent words and to the right the most frequent words are set up in a cloud view.



The importance of NERA and other comments

In the third and last section of the survey the participants were invited to rate the importance of the NERA conference within the context of strengthening the idea of Nordic educational research, providing an opportunity for presenting in Scandinavian languages, meeting research colleagues from the Nordic countries, and strengthening and developing Nordic research networks. It was possible to rate the importance within four categories 1) very important, 2) important, 3) of some importance, and 4) not important.

Almost all the respondents except from 6 persons answered the question and a great majority of 94 % of the respondents claimed that NERA is important (31,6 %) or very important (62,3 %) for strengthening the idea of Nordic educational research. Only 30 persons or around 6 % of the respondents see NERA of some importance or not important at all. Almost all the respondents (98%) understand NERA as an important or very important meeting place for research colleagues from the Nordic countries, and almost the same majority recognizes NERA as important or very important for strengthening and developing Nordic educational research networks. The results show us that respondents seem to be conscious about the importance of NERA to develop and strengthening Nordic educational research, but when it comes to the question about the importance of presenting research in Scandinavian languages, the respondents are not as unanimous. A total of 297 or 61,5 % of the respondents claim that NERA only have some importance or does not have an important function in providing an opportunity for presenting in Scandinavian languages. However, a total of 186 or 38,5 % of the respondents claimed that NERA has a very important or important function in this matter.

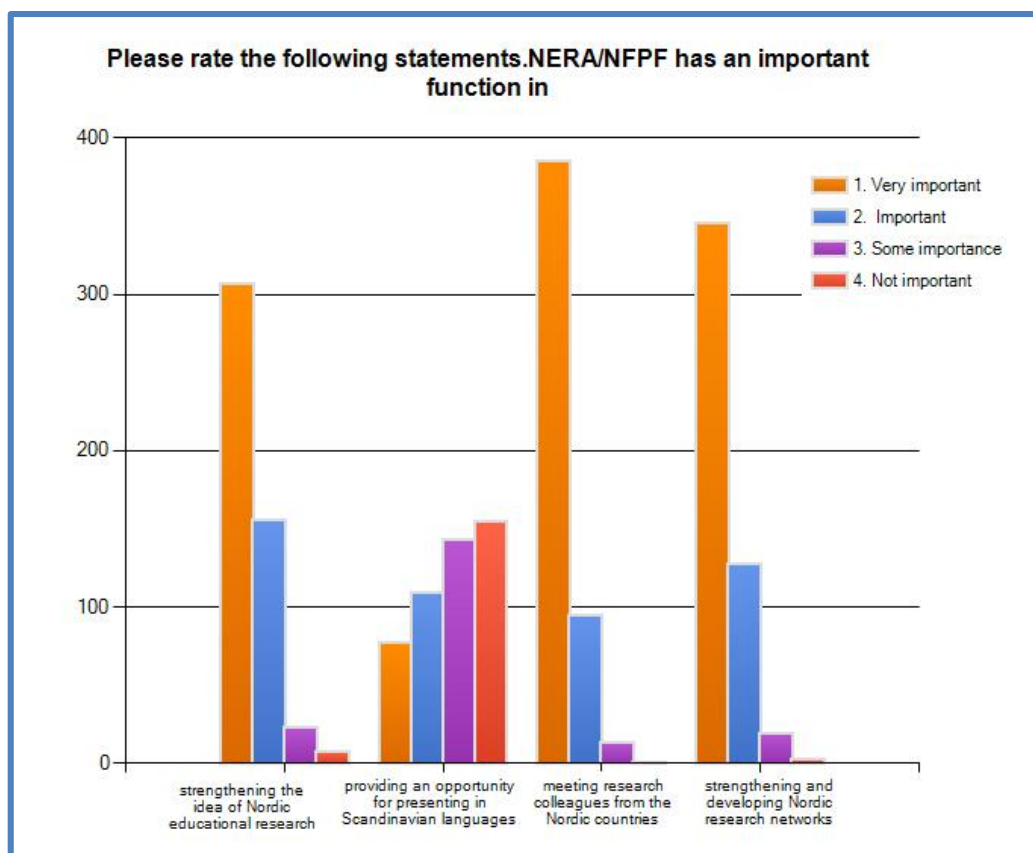


Figure 17. Rating the importance of the NERA conference concerning the Nordic perspective.

Finally, the participants had the chance to write other comments. A majority or around 76 % of the respondents did not choose to write further comments. Out of the 118 respondents who did comment further on the conference 66 respondents (55 % of the persons making a comment) sent a thank you note to the organizers of the conference. This was done by a simple "Thank you!" or more profound points of views as the following:

Over all a very positive experience! A great place for a time presenter -a friendly, yet creative atmosphere. Thank you very much!

Thanks a lot for organizing the congress and for combining a good academic and an inspiring social program. I will come back to Iceland.

Other respondents chose to express and questioning different aspects they found important or missing at the conference. One expressed a need to having "multi scientific perspectives, not only educators speaking to each other". Another respondent was wondering why wider questions concerning society are not addressed more often. A tendency, that seems to make the research community introvert. A respondent noticed that

many of the issues important to Nordic researchers are also important to researchers in the northern regions of other countries: Canada, Greenland, Alaska, so perhaps maintain the focus on Nordic, but add a broader view of connectivity, networking and collaboration opportunities with people in those regions experiencing similar challenges.

Another respondent explained that he/she has attended three NERA conferences and it seems as if

...fewer and fewer presenters give any handouts or fully written papers. This is not a good development and should be addressed in some way.

The NERA conference has during the years more and more developed into being a conference with an international touch. A respondent was reflecting on this matter and noticed:

Meeting colleagues from outside the Nordic region is also important- their participation could be encouraged. Why were the Baltic Region not represented? The Baltic nations have increasingly been attending conferences - at least in Nordic conferences?

A few comments were about the lack of organization during the conference. One respondent was complaining about the food arrangements during the sightseeing tour:

The food arrangements during the Golden Circle were a disaster. If you know that around 200 participants will go on an 8 hour long excursion make a proper lunch, not what we got on Saturday. During the excursion the dinner could have been replaced with a sandwich box or something. Then we could have made use of the time in the bus. It took over 2 hours to eat dinner on Saturday and we were all tired. It would have been smarter to let people go to the hotel 2 hours earlier instead.

Some comments were made on the organization of the parallel sessions.

Wish it would have been more parallel sessions. If you made one presentations and chaired one you only had the opportunity to participate in three sessions by own choice ...

Sometimes there should have been more time for the parallel sessions - the last one was very rushed as the previous meeting had over run. This was a shame as the presenters were excellent and were unable to complete their presentations.

In many sessions there were four presentations, and then the time for each presenter was too short. Half an hour in total for each paper presentation + questions is a minimum.

Otherwise some expressed worries about language matters. One mentioned that there is a risk of Anglo-Saxon perspectives taking over the intake of the conference. The same respondent made a point of that there is a need of an arena in which research questions can be discussed in the Scandinavian mother tongues. Another respondent noted that too few chose to make presentations in Scandinavian languages. Too many presented in “broken English”.

Opposite to these respondents a few respondents thought that everyone on the conference should be forced to present in English. Another argued that the flow of scientific knowledge should be free. To fulfill and complete this principle presentations should be made in a language understood by all participants.

All together it is possible to categorize the 118 comments into four categories: 1) Thank you notes, 2) question about missing subject at the conference, 3) comments on the organization of the congress, and 4) worries about the language used for presentations on the conference. The following column chart illustrates how the comments are distributed among the categories. In the background the most used words in the comments are presented in a cloud view:



Figure 18. Other comments - categorized. 118 respondents made comments. The percentage refers to the number of respondents answering the question.

Discussion

The overall picture of the statistical material in the survey indicates that a great majority were satisfied with the conference and the affiliated activities. Compared to the NERA 2012 congress evaluation based on only 160 responses, the respondents at NERA 2013 express an even higher degree of satisfaction. In 2012 approximately 80 % of the respondents generally rated the congress as good or excellent whereas in 2013 92 % of the respondents rated the congress as good or excellent. These data indicate that the 2013 NERA congress to a certain extent honored the expectations of the participants. The data also indicate that there exist some matters within NERA that need to be further discussed.

First timers

The survey among other things reveals that 213 or about 43 % of the respondents are attending the conference for the first time, which may be considered as a surprisingly high percentage. A simple cross tabulation of the data shows us that the most of these first timers are from Norway (70 persons) and Sweden (57 persons). Also, the data shows us that about 45 % (94 persons) of the first timers are Ph.D. students and 49 % (103 persons) are other academic staff members. The data indicates also that 70 % of the first timers are 41 years or older.

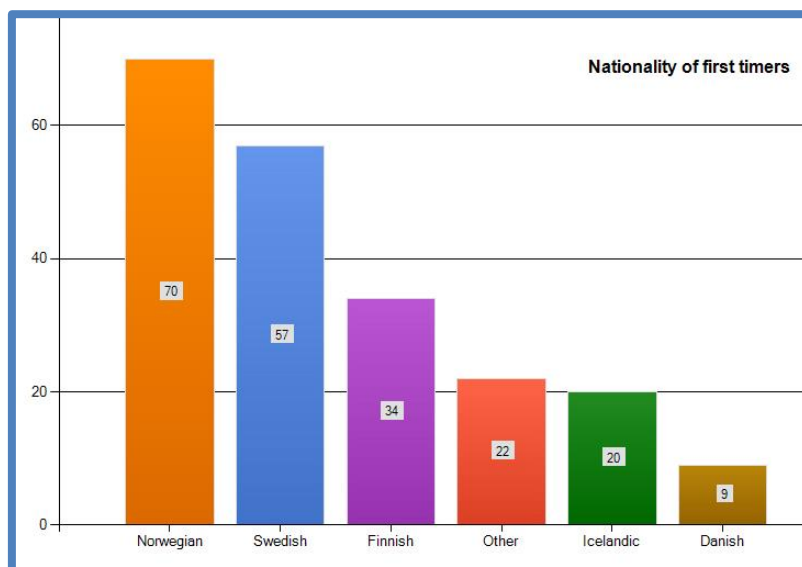


Figure 19. A total of 213 respondents were first timers on the conference. Here one can see how many came from other countries.

As stated in the annual report from the NERA Board (2013) the annual NERA congress is the main vehicle for recruitment. If almost half of the participants are first timers it is necessary to develop methods to get this group of attendees interested in joining NERA in a more continuous way. According to the Board's Report from 2012 it seems as if a group of members pay their membership fee although they fail to participate in the conference, others especially Ph.D. students seem to pay only when participating. This year 148 Ph.D. students responded the survey which is 30,3 % of the respondents and about two thirds of these were first timers. In other words it seems as if here is a great potential for recruitments of members.

If about 40 – 45 % of the participants are first timers on the conference another 55 – 60 % of the participants must have participated in the conference before. The distribution between first timers

and experienced participants must have some influence on for example the work in the networks. First timers have of course not had the opportunity to explore and participate in the network activities and are therefore not beforehand a natural part of a network. One of the respondents was reflecting on this fact:

This was my first time at a NERA congress. I wish I knew before sending my abstract and doing my presentation that this was more a discussion congress rather than a congress expecting me to present a final work. A positive surprise, next time I will use the experience to make an including presentation and open up for more discussion. Then I and the audience will learn more, I guess!

Other first time respondents stated the same point of view which indicates that many of the first timers seem to be eager to take part in a network applying to their professional interest. On the basis of the collected data material one can therefore conclude that one of the important tasks of NERA is to activate newcomers and first timers in the network structure. The cooperation between the NERA board and the network conveners could and should play a major important role in this matter.

The collected data material also reveals that some of the first timers came to the conference expecting a typical scientific conference. From that point of view parallel sessions should be more “professional” only referring to research with final results from a range of educational areas. One of the first time respondent’s was complaining of “a too uniform participation”. It is not exactly clear what the respondent means by this comment but it is probably referring to the network structure of the conference and the experience of being together with researchers from a certain subject area. The same respondent continues his note with the following words:

(NERA) should be a place where higher education researchers in education could be gathered from different areas of education. It is not so now. Curriculum subject researchers are absent.

Another first time respondent noted that he or she did not see a

real opportunity to really connect to a network if you were not already a member. This was generally not mentioned as an option, I felt, and so the effect of meeting new research colleagues is perhaps not as strong as it could have been.

This comment leads to a reflection on how the conference is introduced and presented for the participants. As it is today the conference is announced without any or only little introduction to the networks. At the NERA assembly held at the 2013 congress the question of activating the networks and make them more visible was discussed. Obviously there is a desire within NERA to strengthen the networks, which is reflected in the decision of reserving a fixed amount of NOK 75.000,- to invest in network activities. Bearing this in mind and the above comments from the respondents it probably would have a positive effect if the announcements for each conference were followed by simple and clear instructions on how newcomers can join a network before the start of a conference – and of course make it an important issue among the network conveners, so they also are ready to welcome new network members.

Parallel sessions

The data material shows us that only 8,6 % which equals 42 of the respondents found the parallel sessions excellent whereas 69 % or 336 respondents expressed that they experienced them as good and 22 % or 110 respondents experienced the parallel sessions as fair or even poor. Even though

many of the respondents claimed that the themes discussed on some of the parallel sessions were interesting and relevant and the respondents were satisfied with the response on their presentation, some of the respondents made complaints about the parallel sessions. Some were complaining of the poor quality of the presentations at the parallel sessions. For example one commented on the pace of the sessions:

Many of the parallel sessions were too hectic. The speakers were not good enough prepared and had too many slides and too many points to make.

Other mentioned that some of the speakers in parallel sessions had bad slides, bad presentation techniques and lack of handouts and papers. One of the respondents addressed the problem in this way:

Without paper beforehand, often no paper or handout during the presentations, combined with poor pedagogical presentations, the outcome was sometimes minimal.

Some of the respondents experienced the parallel sessions as too short and that the presenters did not get enough academic response to their presentation. Other said that some of the parallel sessions were poorly convened.

Also two respondents complained about the poster session not being taken very serious and expressed disappointment in the organization and structure regarding the poster presentation. Both of the respondents claimed that they

will not submit a poster again unless NERA give the poster session dedicated time and a chair.

Though the data material tells us that a vast majority liked the parallel sessions it is necessary to take in the above points of critique. One of the superior and unique advantages of attending a conference is the opportunity it presents for personal participation in some of the professional activities. The parallel sessions are the ultimate forum to engage each participant's mind and attention. A well planned conference can engage the attention of each attendee, and, through the spoken word and the use of visuals, involve the participants in a deeper learning experience that is possible through most any other mass communication medium (Finkel, 1976). That is why parallel sessions must be successful if the conference as a whole shall be considered a success. However, the organizers cannot beforehand guarantee that presenters are prepared or have the necessary pedagogical competences to present a research material in a meaningful way.

The parallel sessions (papers, symposia and posters) were organized in full cooperation with the network conveners. This was done in order to place relevant papers in relevant sessions so the chance of presenters being forced into so called "buzz groups" (Furcron, 1981) – a term referring to groups where the attendees do not want to make any relevant response to the paper presentations – is decreased. Also, the peer review was done in full collaboration with the network conveners.

The critical comments from some of the respondents raise questions about how successful this procedure really is. Is the review process rigorous enough? Or should the review process be executed in another way? These questions have also been raised in the past. At the 2007 NERA congress held in Turku in Finland a group of network conveners discussed and came with suggestions of certain topics that need to be addressed in abstract proposals. These topics have since then been guiding the

making of proposals and the peer review, see also the guidelines on the NERA 2013 conference website (2012).

If we compare the NERA peer review process to peer reviews executed in other international conferences, one must admit that the process could be a little more sophisticated. Today the peer review is more or less made by the organizing committee and the network conveners. Does this secure a sufficient review process? A difficult question to answer but if the network conveners had the function and responsibility of finding one or two peer reviewers for each abstract within or outside the network the peer review could be more efficient than it is today. Also, it would be a great help for both the network convener and other reviewers if NERA had a more detailed guideline or even a checklist for reviewers.

In the guidelines for writing abstracts it is stated that all presenters in symposia and paper sessions are expected to bring copies of their papers. In general it seems as if this request is not at all fulfilled during the conference and some of the respondents' complaints especially address this problem. A few respondents even suggest that there should be produced conference proceedings with possibility of contributions from all or a majority of the presenters. This of course would require another peer review process and probably also other requirements for submitting a proposal. Such conference proceedings could be published digitally or in paper.

The numbers of presentations have always been rather high on NERA conferences. However, the question is how quality and quantity operate together in NERA conferences. According to some of the respondents time has come to prioritize quality a little more and one of the respondents makes the following suggestion:

Suggestion: reduce the number of accepted presentations while expending the poster presentation.

This of course requires that poster presentations also are given priority and the necessary time and space.

About 15 % of the presenters at the NERA 2013 congress presented two or more papers on the conference. If a participant is allowed to present three or even four papers on an annual conference the quality of the presentations may be a subject to discussion. On the other hand one cannot hand eliminate the possibility of getting three or four excellent papers, but the question is whether it should be allowed out from a more general point of view. Imagine if all presenters each participated in the conference with two or more papers! That of course would make it difficult to organize and the available audience would decrease to each presentation. The question is whether NERA should consider limiting the numbers of proposals in order to secure better quality in the parallel sessions.

The questions raised here above concerning parallel sessions have in many cases been discussed by the NERA Board in the past, but it seems as if the statistical material indicates that the questions have not yet been satisfactory answered or solved.

Language matter

A recurrent question concerning the NERA congresses is the question of conference language. In the beginning of the last decade it was decided that English should be the main language on NERA congresses but it is also possible to present papers on one of the Nordic and Scandinavian languages as long as it is announced beforehand. The journal *Nordic Studies in Education* publishes articles, information and debate on topics with in education in the Nordic countries in collaboration with NERA. At the millennium the journal the same journal was known as *Nordisk Pedagogik* – the Scandinavian equivalent for the current title. The journal is published quarterly and accepts contributions written in the Scandinavian languages and English.

The statistical material in the survey indicates that a majority of the respondents thinks that the Nordic and the Scandinavian languages are emphasized appropriately during the NERA congress. The argument for using English is clearly that NERA has developed into being an international conference with participants from other parts in the world. Today most academics regard English as the common ‘academic Lingua Franca’ and in that perspective English should be the conference language. One of the respondents stressed this point of view in the following statement:

The flow of scientific knowledge should be free. In my opinion, presenting in a language which is not understood by all participants is against this principle.

As contradiction to this point of view Nordic linguistics have articulated some concern about less use of Scandinavian in academic works. In more than ten years linguistics have discussed the loss of language domains in the academic world referring to a question about languages “missing” their importance in some areas. When discussing certain academic subjects, language users tend to use another language – e.g. English – when defining and explaining the matter of the facts even though it would be possible and even better for the discussants to use their native language. The main concern is that it can develop into a situation where the native academic language only exists among and only is used by the older generation when they are together on their own terms and in their own surroundings (Jarvad, 2004). There is then a possibility of academics missing their ability to communicate more complicated research matters to their fellow citizens in their native language. A respondent stressed this point of view in the following statement:

There is a risk that the Anglo-Saxon perspective takes over. There is a need of an arena in which research questions can be discussed in our mother tongues.

Another general concern expressed by linguistics is that academics are not able to communicate their messages in a foreign language in a personal and exemplary way. A concern respondents share and is expressed in the following statement:

Too few chose to present in Scandinavian languages. Too many presented in "broken English".

The statistical material from the survey indicates that even though most participants think that the Nordic / Scandinavian languages are appropriately emphasized during the conference there is a need to continuously to discuss on what terms and to what extent Nordic/Scandinavian languages are visible and usable on the NERA conferences.

Organizational matters

The organizing of the conference was done in collaboration of three units, the organizing and scientific committee (4 persons), a PCO (2 persons) and a project manager from the Educational Research Institute at the School of Education. All together this construction involved seven persons where two persons in fact were on their sabbatical during the process. That is one person took out a full sabbatical and the other used part of his sabbatical to organize the 2013 NERA conference. Also the project manager came into the project rather late in the process. Due to internal problems of finding an adequate person the project manager was not engaged before December 2012. The evaluation of organizing the conference involves a question of whether this choice of manpower was sufficient and whether the amounts of calculated work hours were realistic.

In the beginning the organizing committee was very much aware of delineating the different tasks between the units. However, because of the limited number of persons involved in organizing the conference it was obvious that a more continuous collaboration was necessary. From the beginning of January 2012 and until the executing the conference in March all three units had common meetings at least once a week. In that way the organizing process got to be much more dynamic, and decisions were easier to make and logistics were easier to solve because all organizing partners were gathered and made them together. Also, it meant that all partners were updated at the same time, which made it easier to prevent double tasking that is two different people solving the same task without knowing of each other. However, seen in retrospect this also meant that the organizing and the scientific committee got involved in matters that not initially were defined as their task. A result of this was that the members of the organizing and scientific committee used more work hours than there was accounted for in the original budget.

Though members of the organizing committee sometimes wished for more manpower to solve different tasks the general opinion of the committee is that it was an advantage to operate in a comparatively little group rather than be a part of a bigger organizing group. In this way members worked more as a team and solved each task in a responsible way.

This way of thinking was also spread out to involve the contact to the network conveners. The abstract handling and program planning were done in close cooperation with the network conveners – a collaborative process which made it much easier for the organizing committee to arrange the final program and distribute all the sessions.

Conclusion

The statistical material from the survey reveals that a great majority of the respondents was satisfied attending the conference. Also, it indicates that the conference to a great extent honored most of the respondents' expectations. Many respondents expressed satisfaction with the choice of key note speakers, and the materials produced for the conference such as the program and the abstract book. Many respondents experienced the parallel sessions as good, but some also complained about poorly prepared papers and bad presentation techniques. A majority of respondents expressed their satisfaction of the services provided before and during the conference such as registration, support from AV-personnel and volunteers and lunch and breaks. The activities surrounding the conference, such as the social program, conference tours etc. were mostly rated as good or excellent.

Altogether the statistical material allows one to conclude that the conference was successful. However, there are some points that need to be further discussed by organizers and the NERA Board.

First of all there is the question of recruiting first timers and how to get them involved in the networks. The recruitment strategy could change in order to increase the number of NERA members and it could perhaps be a good idea to clearly announce how new participants can join a network.

Secondly, it is a question whether it is possible to ensure that the parallel sessions are of better quality. How does quality and quantity operate together in a NERA conference? To ensure a better quality of the presented papers it is necessary to discuss and evaluate the procedures of peer review. Also, the request of bringing along the presented papers for the session does not seem to be practiced. The question is whether it is in the future would be possible to publish conference proceedings as an integrated part of a NERA conference. Such a decision demands an improvement in procedures concerning abstract handling and peer review.

Thirdly, it is a question whether participants should be allowed to present more than one (or two) papers on an annual conference.

Finally there is the matter of conference language. Should the Nordic / Scandinavian languages be more visible on the conference or should English be the required conference language? The policy of the NERA Board on this matter needs to be more explicit in order to make it clear whether the Scandinavian languages or whether English is stressed – or both.

When organizing a conference like NERA it is always a question how much manpower is needed in the organizing process. In the case of the 2013 NERA congress a rather little group of persons were involved in organizing the conference, which among other things made the decision making easier and the work methods more dynamic. Other institutions might prioritize differently and use their manpower in other ways that fit their needs and requirements.

The 2014 NERA congress will be held in Lillehammer in Norway. We hope that the result of this evaluation survey can be of some help for the work in the organizing committee. Good luck.

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