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Should Comparative Education be Superseded by Comparative and International Education?

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Abstract

The paper investigates three issues surrounding the field of comparative education, namely the place of comparative education in teacher education, the question as to whether the field should be transformed into comparative and international education, and acknowledgement of the place of Comenius as one of the fathers providing an inspiring vision and ideal for the field. The paper finds that in view of the current momentous societal changes and educational expansion in the world, there is a compelling case for the field of comparative education to be transformed into comparative and international education, furthermore, that to equip teachers for their role as professionals in this world a place for comparative and international education in teacher education programmes is essential; and thirdly, that due recognition should be given to the place of Comenius as a trailblazer in providing the rationale for the field of comparative and international education.

Keywords: *Comenius, comparative and international education, teacher education, the teaching profession*

Introduction

Three loose ends in education scholarship gave rise to this paper. The first is that while teacher education has grown into a fully-fledged field of scholarship and while comparative education often appears (implicitly or explicitly) in teacher education programmes, in neither of these well-developed and dynamic fields (teacher

education and comparative education) do the place of comparative education in teacher education programmes feature as a priority research focus or a point of deliberation and reflection. Secondly, while there is a continual re-appraisal and re-appreciation of Comenius, one aspect of his contribution is overlooked, namely his vision for education creating a more congenial world, as an antecedent or providing the philosophical underpinnings for the field of comparative education is not acknowledged (e.g. cf. Hroncová, 2015). Thirdly, within the field of comparative education there is currently a contention that the field should re-invent itself as comparative and international education. The aim of this paper is to investigate the question as to whether the field of comparative education should be superseded by comparative and international education, examined especially from two overlapping perspectives, namely from the perspective of teacher education (where most comparativists are practising their trade) and from the perspective of the twenty-first century world, where comparative (and international) education can be seen as the fruition of the ideas and vision of Comenius. The paper commences with the rise of comparative education as a field of scholarship. This is followed by two sections on the presence of comparative education at universities, and the place of comparative education in teacher education programmes. Subsequently, the main features of the contemporary world as it is unfolding in the early twenty-first century are outlined. The case for a successor field of comparative and international education, against the background of this new world, is then examined. Finally, a conclusion is attempted, firstly rectifying the place of Comenius as laying the foundation for the vision driving a scholarly field of comparative and international education, and secondly on the contribution of and need for a field of comparative and international education in teacher education programmes.

Comparative and International Education as a Field of Scholarship in an Inviting World

The beginnings of the scientific study and comparison of foreign education systems: two theoretical-philosophical bases

After centuries of casual comparison by lay people and even extensive comparisons made by politicians, for political expediency, the study and comparison of foreign systems of education got on a scientific footing by the beginning of the twentieth century, due to three factors, namely the provision of a theoretical-philosophical framework, developments in the world (these two are elaborated upon in this section) and the institutionalisation of comparative education as a field

of study at universities (to be expatiated upon in the next section). As far as the construction of a theoretical-philosophical framework is concerned, two broad frameworks can be distinguished.

The basis of one framework was laid by Sir Michael Sadler (1861–1943) and later elaborated upon by Isaac Kandel (1881–1965), Nicholas Hans (1888–1969) and Friedrich Schneider (1881–1969) and a host of other theoreticians. Their view was that a national education system is the outcome of national societal contextual forces. This line of thought came to maturity in the interwar decades (though it is still strong today) and should be comprehended against the backdrop of rising nationalism and the consolidation of nation-states in Europe at the time.

The second framework spoke of a more global-human (rather than national) consciousness. Education is conceived as a means of bringing about a more peaceful and humane (humanly-congenial) world and improving or ameliorating the condition of humanity. Comparative education will then be the field of scholarly activity guiding the global education supply and reform project. Marc Antoine Jullien (1775–1848) is usually credited as being the groundlayer of this line of thought (cf. Fraser, 1964; Noah & Eckstein, 1969: 34–39). While he coined the term “comparative education” and surely set out a lengthy motivation for a scholarly field inspired by such a vision, the idea of education serving the objective of bringing about a peaceful world, improving the condition of humanity, could be traced back further. The idea that the supply of education will usher in an era of (global) peace was formulated by John Amos Comenius (1592–1670). Having lived through the devastating Thirty Years’ War, Comenius got his vision from a literal interpretation and belief in the biblical book of Revelation, foreseeing a Thousand Years of Peace. This Chiliasmic Ideal would be realised, according to Comenius, only when all children possessed all existing knowledge (pansophic knowledge). He believed humanity would only escape its state of division if all people knew everything (cf. Human, 1978: 235). This objective of education according to Comenius — that education should serve as an instrument to reform society, specifically to bring about peace, differed from both the education in schools and the ideas of education formulated hitherto, where the purpose of education was variously seen in terms of narrow national-political goals (to produce a loyal state subject) or even more narrow individual goals (the cultivation of an aristocrat) or religious schooling (to produce a believing Christian). Neither Jullien nor Comenius had any influence in their day, regarding their altruistic and noble vision for education. In fact, as explained above, in the first half of the twentieth century, comparative education scholars adhered to a paradigm consonant to the employment of education for narrow national purposes.

However, after the Second World War a new world was conducive to developments in both education and in the field of comparative education, which were aligned to the vision of Comenius and Jullien. The miraculous post-war economic recovery of Western Europe was ascribed to, i.a., investment in education, and the analogue was then to regard education as the main instrument to effect the modernisation of the large part of the Global South (which in the post-war decades became independent). Not only being hailed as an instrument to bring about economic growth or modernisation, in fact, in the post-war decades education came to be seen as a panacea, or wonder-cure for all societal problems.

Comparative education changed accordingly, becoming a social science (cf. Noah & Eckstein, 1969) and embracing paradigms such as structural functionalism, modernisation theory and human capital theory. The limitless belief in the societal elevating power of education resulted in a worldwide massive education expansion drive, this meteoric rise in enrolments is perhaps best documented by Phillip Coombs (1985). This worldwide education expansion project, which commenced in the decades after the Second World War, has been continuing up to the present day, and has gained even more momentum, being fuelled by at least three more forces: the Creed of human rights, the nascent knowledge society, and the compelling force of globalisation. Globalisation is creating a world where the information and communications technology revolution has wiped out all economic advantages bestowed by geography and endowment of natural resources, and where economic competitiveness (of nations) is determined by factors such as political stability and economic policy, and above all, the quality of human capital (i.e., the level of education of the populace).

In this new world, not only have governments poured substantial amounts of resources investing in education on national levels, but impressive global education expansion drives and initiatives took off, such as the Jomtien Declaration of 1990, the follow-up Dakar Summit of 2000, the Millennium Development Goals and finally the Incheon Declaration and Vision 2030.

All these developments gave the scholarly field of comparative education rich material for interrogation and turned the field into a significant and formative field of scholarship.

The presence of Comparative Education at Universities

The historical development and current status of the field at universities is very complicated (cf. Wolhuter et al., eds, 2013), the reconstruction of which falls

beyond the scope of this article. However, a common pattern is that comparative education is not taught as autonomous modules under the name of Comparative Education, but subsumed under themes such as Globalisation and Education, Human Rights and Education or Education and Development.

The teaching of Comparative Education (i.e. the objectives, methods and curricula of Comparative Education courses) has been virtually absent from the Comparative Education research agenda (cf. Wollhuter, 2008). Thus, while comparative education is a prolific field, the part of its existence most pivotal to its future, namely the teaching of Comparative Education, has eluded the attention of scholars in the field.

Comparative Education in teacher education

In this section, the following will be discussed in turn: the attention given and value assigned to the place of Comparative Education, by researchers on teacher education; the actual place of Comparative Education in teacher education programmes; the purposes of Comparative Education; and recent trends in teacher education and the impact thereof on the place of Comparative Education in such programmes.

Two publications of Lee Shulman (1986, 1987) laid the groundwork and proved to provide the parameters for the study of the curricula of teacher education programmes. Shulman (1987: 8) identified seven categories of knowledge as a basis for teaching, i.e. categories of knowledge that the teacher should have. While it is a neat and extensive scheme, such a plan does not explicitly make space for the inclusion of comparative education in teacher education programmes, and it can therefore be alleged that this scheme was conducive to the fact that scholars of teacher education have failed to acknowledge the significance of comparative education in teacher education programmes.

The actual place of comparative education in teacher education programmes corresponded closely to the fortunes of the field at universities, as portrayed in the previous section of this paper. So while the picture of the strength of the field is a chequered one, a worrying trend is that comparative education does not appear in stand-alone courses, but is subsumed under other courses. This is a cause for concern, for if offered in this manner, the student is never introduced to the full scope, possibilities, theoretical foundations and methods of the field of comparative education.

Another factor which has had a detrimental effect on the place of comparative education in teacher education programmes is that theoreticians of the field have

always formulated the significance, purpose and functions of comparative education in terms of its role as an intellectual pursuit, in terms of the borrowing of best policies and practices to improve the national education project, i.e. in terms of education system planning and reform (e.g. cf. Bray, 2014, 19–46), i.e. far from the realities of the teacher in the classroom.

The next factor that has negatively impacted on the place of comparative education is a trend in teacher education programmes during the past few decades whereby teacher education has changed from thorough grounding in the sub-disciplines of Education to training of the student-teacher according to a checklist of techniques which he/she will need as a teacher, much akin to the training of artisans and technicians (cf., Schweisfurth, 1999: 84).

Yet, both teachers and teacher educators claim that teaching is a profession. A profession, by its lexical definition, is “...a type of work that needs specialised training or particular skills, that is respected because it involves a high level of knowledge” (Cambridge Online Dictionary, 2016). Further defining features of a profession assume that its practitioners enjoy a high level of personal autonomy, that they perform work which by its very nature means that where stereotype, ready-made, rigorous prescriptions and methods cannot mechanically be used, decisions in each case are based on engaging with the specialised knowledge base which the practitioner of the profession possesses. Members of a profession perform their services to a substantial degree in the general public interest, receiving its compensation through limited fees rather than through direct profit from the improvement in goods, services, or knowledge which it accomplishes. Finally, they are bound by a distinctive ethical code in their relationships with clients, colleagues, and the public (Anon, 2016). If these requirements can be accepted, then firstly the trend where teacher education is viewed as the training in a repertoire of techniques which the teacher should imitate mechanically should be questioned. Secondly, there is something amiss in Shulman’s categories of knowledge which the teacher should possess. In rendering a service of public interest, the teacher, interacting and guiding learners, teaching them and organising his/her class, supposedly endowed with substantial autonomy in performing this service, should be cognisant of where his/her class and school fits into the (national and global) education system, the place of that education system in society (what society, or the public wants to achieve by means of that education system), and the very features of that society. That is where comparative education comes into play: providing the student with a system wide perspective on education, and explicating the interrelationships between education and society, and in doing the latter, introducing the student to the features of society and its interrelationships with education.

Twenty-First Century World

It is the last point in the previous paragraph that will now be unpacked, namely the key features of the unfolding world of the twenty-first century. The title of Thomas Friedman's book *Hot Flat and Crowded* (2008) summarises his thesis about the three greatest challenges facing humanity at this point in time, namely an ecological crisis (particularly global warming, an information and communications technological revolution, and a population explosion).

Scientific and technological progress is speeding ahead, an important facet of this is the information and communications technology revolution. Economically, there is growing affluence in the world. Two other changes are the neo-liberal economic revolution and the rise of knowledge economies, i.e. where the production and consumption of new knowledge has become the driving axis of economic development.

Social trends include the diminishing in the pervasiveness of the primary social grouping in society (the family) as well as the secondary social grouping (workplace). On the other hand, the importance of tertiary social groupings (that is functional social groupings) is on the rise. A final social trend is the rise of multicultural societies, and the empowerment of minority groups. Politically, the world scene is currently being characterised by the demise of the once omnipotent nation-state and the movement of the locus of control in two opposite directions: upwards towards supra-national and international structures and downwards towards sub-national and local structures and eventually to the level of the individual. Two other political trends are democratisation and the rise of the Creed of Human Rights.

The increasing individualism, the rise of minority interest groups and prolific mass media of contemporary society, compounded by increasing population mobility and democratisation and rampant individualism, are sparking a diversity of value systems that are replacing the traditional, homogeneous societies that were previously characterised by specific, uniform value systems. However, there will have to be some limits to, and reconciliation between the plurality of value systems, in order to ensure peaceful co-existence. As no model currently exists, the task of the future is to develop a master plan for maximum diversity between the extremes of uniformity and irreconcilable diversity.

International Education

It is in the framework of the twenty-first century world taking shape and the impressive international education project and its lofty, extensive goals in this globalised world (explained above), that some scholars of comparative education have begun to ask the question whether Comparative Education should not be superseded by Comparative and International Education. While the term “International Education” has a long history in the field, and taking on many different meanings, “International Education” is here used as explained by Phillips & Schweisfurth (2014: 60), namely that International Education refers to scholarship studying education through a lens bringing an international perspective. In this scholarly field of Comparative and International Education, these two constituents, Comparative Education and International Education, exist in a dyadic relationship. Whereas Comparative Education then entails single unit studies of education systems (be it on national, sub-national, or even individual institutional or classroom levels) and education system-society interrelationships, as well as comparisons between two or more such units, these comparative studies should then feed into International Education, as a comprehensive, global-level study of the international education project. The main parts of International Education will be the societal antecedents of the world-wide education expansion and reform project (such as globalisation, democratisation, the information and communications technology revolution, and the neo-liberal economic revolution), global policy regimes, the objectives of the global education expansion project (such as peace, entrenching a culture of human rights, sustainable development, interculturalism, and the creation of human capital), a study of global education expansion and reform initiatives (such as those of Jomtien, Dakar and Incheon, enumerated above), a description and evaluation of the world-wide education expansion and reform project, and the challenges it is facing, and a study of the outcomes of global education expansion and reform. With the scholarly field of Comparative Education then evolving into Comparative and International Education, the idea is that single/limited area studies and comparisons then eventually feed the all-encompassing, global study of the international education project.

Conclusion

During the past seventy years, an impressive international education expansion project has been developed globally, and is still gathering momentum. This project

has been called into existence, and is enjoying substantial (public and private) investment, to pursue a wide, and increasing, in fact open-ended, range of societal goals; in a rapidly changing world, where the need for education is increasing. In this operation, the role of the teacher and teacher education is pivotal. The corresponding field of study introducing the teacher to this international project, the rationale thereof and for understanding the place of the teacher therein, and equipping the teacher for the establishment of a (classroom) practice and professional decision taking, is that of Comparative Education. In view of the current global changes — societal changes and an international education expansion project that is both increasing in extent and is becoming more and more urgent, in response to societal imperatives — this field is currently taking a quantum leap transforming itself into Comparative and International Education, thus rendering itself of even greater significance. It is lamentable that thus far policy makers and teacher education programme designers have, in many parts of the world, too often not been mindful of the value of Comparative and International Education in equipping the teacher of the twentieth-first century for his/her role. Finally, in this age of, e.g., menacing global terrorism, in this scheme of things, inside and outside the field of Comparative and International Education, recognition should be given to Comenius as trailblazer for the idea of education as the means of establishing world peace and ameliorating the condition of humanity: the basic idea or vision that is becoming, after more than four centuries, more and more the rationale for both the international education expansion project and the education for teachers therein, as well as the fundamental rationale and inspiring vision for the field of Comparative and International Education.

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