Introduction

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A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION

Abstract

International perspectives on education have existed since the first world travelers brought stories back from their travels abroad, but the ways these perspectives are presented and understood varies as much as the cultures and communities themselves. This introduction to international perspectives on education provides a framework, which relies on conceptual, comparative, problematized and cultural understandings of education, both within and across educational systems worldwide. Conceptually, international perspectives on education are framed by the dual elements of both globalization and contextualization. Within this broad framework, comparative perspectives of education worldwide are characterized by assumptions about educational access, accountability and achievement. Problematizing international perspectives on education requires recognition that many, if not most, perspectives fall along a sliding scale from acceptance of to resistance against the mass education model, which has become ubiquitous worldwide. Likewise, cultural understandings of education from international perspectives address both the culture embedded in local and native communities, but also a culture that has become endemic to the institution of education itself. This introduction to international perspectives on education concludes with a discussion of the possible futures for the international comparative study of education, and how topics and trends are both varied in their topics, but limited in their scope.

Introduction

The role that education plays worldwide is both breathtaking and conflicted. It is a tool for the development and emancipation of oppressed peoples and it is a tool for their enslavement. Education is a way to individually liberate minds and create opportunities for social, economic, and cultural development, and it is a way to monopolize opportunity and crush independence. And, not surprisingly, education varies between these extremes. This is the dilemma of international perspectives and the complexity of education as a global phenomenon.

Understanding international perspectives on education requires an examination of education both *across* and *within* systems, cultures, and communities. As a start, consider the two quotations below. These quotes from Nelson Mandela and Paulo Friere give us two voices both emanating from within specific contexts. Each of these quotes comes from a revolutionary thinker and leader. Each of these thinkers

was passionate about education and saw both its potential and its pitfalls. And, each of these perspectives is in many ways in complete contrast to the other. One presents the potential over the pitfalls and the other emphasizes the pitfalls over the potential. But, the contrasting visions regarding education from Mandela and Friere also demonstrate the struggles that exist in the study and analysis of education from international and comparative perspectives. Consider first the promise of education described by Mandela (1995, p.194):

> Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farmworkers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.

Now consider the pitfalls of education described as cultural invasion by Friere (1986, p.150):

> All domination involves invasion—at times physical and overt, at times camouflaged, with the invader assuming the role of a helping friend. In the last analysis, invasion is a form of economic and cultural domination. Invasion may be practiced by a metropolitan society upon a dependent society, or it may be implicit in the domination of one class over another within the same society.

In some ways, Mandela's statement suggests a recognition of the globalized nature of education and how to appeal to the benefits of education that result from its globally-valued status and ubiquitous presence. Friere's statement, in contrast, highlights the ways that contexts determine the role education plays, and his conviction that it will always serve the dominant groups and individuals in every society, economy, and nation. In other words, Mandela and Friere provide two ways to understand the contribution of globalization and contextualization to international perspectives on education.

Globalization and contextualization are the predominant conceptual frameworks for most international perspectives on education because they represent both the conflict and the compromise that is inherent in education worldwide. Globalization, which is sometimes defined as the internationalization of ideas and institutions, is a universal concern at all levels and in all functions of society (Astiz, Wiseman & Baker, 2002). Globalization refers to a variety of political, economic, cultural, and social changes that transform our world (Spring, 2008). Countries are increasingly interconnected by flows of information, trade, money, immigrants, technology, and culture. Transnational corporations and political organizations interested in education (e.g., the United Nations, World Bank, OECD, and IEA) have grown in size and influence, as have the organized social movements that either lobby for or oppose them.

International perspectives on education often point toward globalization as either an impetus or as an outcome of educational phenomena (Jones & Coleman, 2004; Kamens & McNeely, 2010). The balance between globalization and contextualization has been debated in the field of comparative and international

education since its beginning (Manzon, 2011). Comparativists constantly ask whether we are and should be more interested in global trends or in the unique situations and experiences that are influenced by global trends and factors (Arnove & Torres, 1999). And, as a result this question has become fundamental to all or most international perspectives on education.

However, the dual process of contextualization is equally important to international perspectives on education (Theisen, 1997). "Education" as an institution extends beyond and perhaps even engulfs the formal schooling environment. It occurs in private settings, such as homes and families, and other public settings such as playgrounds and workplaces. "Education" is also bigger than the phenomena of teaching and learning. It includes organizational, psychological, sociological, historical, and other phenomena as well (Cummings, 1999). From this perspective globalization has a moderated effect on schools and communities because there are layers of contextual or environmental influence. In other words, it has become impossible (or at least inadvisable) to analyze phenomena at any level of school or society without considering how these phenomena are contextualized (Crossley & Watson, 2003).

Context is not something that is limited to only one theoretical perspective or research method. Both macro and micro theories, research, and cases help researchers and policymakers understand the importance and impact of context on education (Ragin, 1989, 2008). Comparativists are particularly interested in educational change and the ways that formal education either impacts or is impacted by differentiation by race, class, gender, and other characteristics of individuals and communities (Manzon, 2011). In particular, they investigate the ways that expectations and assumptions both about education and about community are shared or commonly experienced in remarkably similar as well as remarkably different contexts.

International perspectives on education largely take the role of comparisons, which provide a way to evaluate educational process and product (Baker & Wiseman, 2005). These comparisons are of the educational systems, contextualizing and penetrating characteristics of society, and specific situations in schools and classrooms. International comparisons of education allow for the unique and sometimes useful activities of benchmarking and modeling, but they also provide a forum for unnecessary criticism as well as inadequate comparability (Epstein, 2008). Still, comparison is the language of international perspectives on education, and although there are ongoing debates about the "why", "what", and "how" of international perspectives on education, the importance of comparison remains valuable to these perspectives whatever the point of view.

This introduction to international perspectives on education begins with a grounding in the importance of comparison for both international as well as specifically-situated analyses of and expositions about education worldwide. This is followed by several sections that discuss the contrasting perspectives of globalization and contextualization of education worldwide, the discipline-base of international comparative education research and study, the emergence of education as a global cultural phenomenon, and the future trends and topics that international perspectives on education point towards.

The Importance of International Comparison

It is natural to compare (Epstein, 1994). Comparisons are how progress is measured, accomplishments are tracked, and conditions are described. Comparison is the basic building block of information gathering, decision-making, and assessment. Comparison has always been a ubiquitous component of both formal and non-formal education (Wiseman, 2010). Comparative methods have been famously used by some of the greatest classical thinkers in the world from Socrates to today. International comparisons have a long tradition among scholars, professionals, and laymen throughout history as well, but the formal science of international comparisons of education has a more recent history. Structured and systematized educational comparisons began to be institutionalized as part of university study and educational policymaking at the beginning of the 20th century (Wiseman & Matherly, 2009). About 100 years later, international comparisons of education have become ubiquitous as well. Yet, even with the familiarity and constancy of international and comparative education research, data, and discussions, there is still significant discussion about what international perspectives on education are, what they should be, and where they are going.

Like much of educational research and study, international perspectives on education rely upon the theoretical and methodological base that the social science disciplines provide. As a result, many of the formal or systematically-applied international perspectives on education tend to have a particular theoretical and methodological approach to educational phenomena. Like much of educational science and research, international comparative education is founded upon core social science disciplines' theories and methods (Ross, Post & Farrell, 1995). Economics, sociology, and political science are some of the most frequently applied disciplines to the study of international education phenomena.

The comparative method is something that has been discussed, but not decided upon since the advent of formal and institutionalized international comparisons of education. Ragin's (1989) comparative method for the social sciences template for international comparative education, and is worthwhile to consider as one of the few attempts to bring comparative research under one methodological umbrella, so to speak. Yet, there have been many earlier attempts to systematize international perspectives on education. These earlier attempts addressed the importance of context where travelers' tales were told as accounts of the social and educational experience in "foreign" lands (Noah & Eckstein, 1969). Consequently, the defining characteristics of international perspectives on education are not the disciplinary bases for the theoretical and methodological frameworks that are used to study education worldwide. Instead, these frameworks provide a base for larger discussions of identity, culture, and value as both represented and disseminated by education around the world.

In order to understand what international comparative education is, the value and importance of different international perspectives on education needs to be identified. North American and European perspectives on international comparative education dominate the research and policy discussion, with African, Asian and Latin American approaches either aligning with or complementing the traditionally Western cultural and economically developed countries' agendas (Benveniste, 2002). Out of these predominately Western perspectives, which are modeled and

borrowed worldwide, comes an increasingly overt emphasis on comparison. Specifically, the most valued international perspectives on education are the result of comparison. Educational researchers, policymakers, and even the general public have placed increased importance on international comparisons of education for understanding, making decisions about and assessing the quality of educational systems, schools, teachers and students.

International comparison has become the main tool and avenue for understanding how mass education has expanded worldwide and what it does to change both individuals and societies. Formal mass education is increasingly and fundamentally how individuals, communities, and nations know who they are. International perspectives on education and the comparisons that result are also increasingly responsible for defining which knowledge has value and how knowledge economies develop. Even though knowledge production and dissemination has played an important role in societies and economies throughout history, the spread of mass education systems worldwide developed alongside the ability for knowledge itself to be the commodity rather than the tool. As a result, a framework for understanding international perspectives on education needs to recognize and address the role that education plays in the creation of or resistance to the development of certain knowledge economies. But, international perspectives on education are not limited to knowledge and economic production. The permeable nature of education and its importance not only to individuals but also whole societies has led to its elevation as a key tool for social development.

Education has been called a "social vaccine" (Baker, Collins & Leon, 2008), which can prevent or cure everything from national economic problems to the spread of HIV/AIDS. These extreme expectations often overreach the impact that formal schooling can reasonably have, but the impact of school is surprisingly strong given the odds against it in some contexts. In fact, the social impact of education is in large part determined by context. For example, identifying which educational "crisis" factors are shared with other nations around the world, and which are unique by context and community is just as important as knowing what teachers do and how students learn. Education's relationship to society determines what a "crisis" looks like and how the role of education and educational quality is both assessed and communicated to policymakers and public stakeholders. Therefore, international perspectives on education increasingly and comparatively address the social importance and impact of education worldwide as well as its role in knowledge production and economic development.

As the role and importance of education has spread worldwide, so has a set of customs, traditions, rituals and expectations specific to formal schooling. These educational expectations and associated activities have been frequently copied, coercively assigned and passively evolved to the point where formal mass education – what is typically called "school" – has become an institutionalized characteristic of almost every community and system worldwide. For better or for worse, institutions like mass education have a "taken-for-granted" quality. In other words, they typically have stable rules, roles (e.g., student or teacher) or behaviors (e.g., whole class instructions) that are universally accepted as "normal" even when they deviate from traditional social and cultural norms. The normed expectations that result from educational institutionalization and their impact on both the educational process and

product is subject to many different interpretations, depending on one's particular ideology and perspective. This taken-for-grantedness also makes education as an institution difficult to analyze. But, international perspectives on education must identify the effect of core institutions like schooling *across* systems, cultures and communities as well as *within* those same systems, cultures and communities.

Globally Shared Expectations

Why do educational policymakers and the general public in countries around the world seem to remain constantly disappointed by their educational systems, but eternally hopeful in the promise that education holds? And, how does this knowledge transform international perspectives on education? Three key phenomena of international perspectives on education are relevant. One is "achievement envy." A second is the "accountability expectation." And, the third is "access entitlement" (Wiseman, 2005).

Achievement envy is a result of competition, whether it is economic, political, or otherwise. The dominant Western educational model includes the expectation that individual students, schools and systems compete, and alongside the competition expectation is the belief that progress is the result of change. In other words, international perspectives on education often address (either directly or indirectly) the normative expectation that progress happens when positive change occurs – whatever "the positive" is expected to be. In education, progress or positive change is measured (for better or for worse) by high levels of academic performance, which usually means high grades or high test scores. Students and schools who have high levels of performance are believed to have done it because they worked harder for it, or they somehow deserve it. In some countries' educational systems and cultures these expectations are based on a fundamental belief in meritocracy, and in others competition is a result of collective associations. The 19th century American education reformer, Horace Mann, is an example of the former. Mann called education "the great equalizer" because he argued for the potential of each individual to prove themselves through a common model of education available to all school-aged children.

The second phenomenon, which is characteristic of international perspectives on education, is the accountability expectation, and is an increasingly key part of the educational landscape in countries worldwide. In the United States, visible examples of the accountability expectation are each president's educational agenda since Reagan's *A Nation at Risk* (Commission on Excellence in Education, 1982). Other countries' educational systems have also incorporated formal accountability agendas as national or regional policy. Some examples of this include, Germany's move towards common standards and assessments following the release of the PISA 2000 results and the ensuring "PISA shock" in Germany as well as the technique of pairing high and low performing schools into mutually-responsible consortia, which in part propelled Shanghai students to the top of the PISA 2009 results (OECD, 2011). Increasingly, teachers are the focus of systemic educational reform worldwide. Much of the push to reform teacher preparation and hold teachers accountable for student learning is a result of international educational comparisons. Many educational policymakers, and increasingly the public at large in many

countries, strongly believe that accountability for students, teachers, schools and the whole education system is a key to progress.

The accountability expectation is the result of some key assumptions about education, and schools specifically. Beginning about a hundred years ago, educational reformers started to think about schools as organizations much like businesses are organizations. As a result, many educational systems have developed into systems where academic achievement scores are reconciled against international averages or benchmarks to see if the students and teachers made progress or not. And, as the product of the dominant Western model, mass education worldwide is embedded with an abiding belief in the individual – both in terms of educational rights and freedoms, but also in terms of individual responsibilities and consequences (United Nations, 1948).

The first two phenomena, which are expectations for high achievement and strict accountability, are bedrock ideals that many strong and productive institutions are built on. But, they both are compromised by the third phenomenon characterizing international perspectives on education, which is access entitlement. In educators' zeal to make progress and beat the competition, the model for mass education worldwide also is embedded with many seemingly democratic assumptions. For example, the idea that everybody deserves a chance to be "educated" is at the heart of Horace Mann's idea that education is "the great equalizer". And, most educational systems worldwide reflect these ideals, whether purposefully or not. For example, mass education systems in every country are characterized to varying degrees by universal enrollment, compulsory attendance laws, public funding for education, and a fundamental belief that schools create both national and global citizens.

This third phenomenon about access for all complicates the prior expectations about achievement and accountability. How can educational systems keep individuals accountable for high performance if each individual in the educational system does not have the same preparation or chances as someone else? What if students are physically or mentally challenged? What if they are educated in vastly different situations? What if students speak a different language at home than the formal language of instruction at school? What if they have no desire to attend school, but are forced to do so? In other words, the balance between what is often called "excellence" (achievement and accountability) and "equity" (access entitlement) complicates notions of what an educational system, schools and teachers can, should and will do.

Many nations and multinational organizations invest massive resources into educational testing every year, and what usually results are some rankings with relatively little analysis of the data, given the extent of data available for analysis. This is a key component to understanding international perspectives on education, and forwarding the comparative agenda reflected by these international perspectives. And, much of the comparative data available for analysis from and by international perspectives relates to the context in which education, especially formal schooling, occurs. In short, many educational systems have been set up as examples and models for other systems to follow, but international perspectives on education cannot forget the first rule about international comparative education: education is always deeply embedded in society and community.

In other words, the problems that exist in the world outside of a school's walls come right into the classroom everyday because teachers and students live in the world – they do not exist in an educational vacuum at school. So, if there is school violence, then chances are there are triggers that exist in the wider community. If teachers are teaching out of field or are less than experts in their fields, then maybe they teach in an educational system and broader society that undervalues teacher professionalism. In other words, there are many ways that the community and context outside of the formal education system, and of schools specifically, is both represented by the educational system as well as permeates individual schools. Every educational system around the world is a product of its unique social, political and economic context – and the individual schools that comprise each system respond to that context as much as or more than they shape it. The Finnish system provides a relevant example.

Finnish educators have said repeatedly that two of the keys to their success are equity and expertise. Opportunities and expectations in Finnish schools revolve around the ideas that all individuals are provided the chance to learn in a community that values their ideas and abilities at the same level as others. Educators in Finland are highly professionalized and selectively trained (Sahlberg, 2011). The system for educating teachers is centralized and standardized – and taken seriously by all both inside and outside of the formal education system (Finland Ministry of Education, 2003). It is also important, however, to remember that Finnish society is unique itself in terms of its demographics, resources availability, and educational emphases. This provides an example of how international perspectives on education need to rely not only on the internationally comparable data that is readily available from national education systems and multilateral organizations, but also on the unique contextual elements that define communities where schools are located and populated.

Another example of the importance of context to international perspectives on education is China. The Chinese students who participated for the first time in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) outperformed the rest of the world – including Finland (OECD, 2011). But, PISA only tested a sample from Shanghai, which is a particularly well-prepared educational community. In addition, Chinese educators and students have endured a political and social system that is historically built upon test-taking and test-passing in order to be socially, economically, and politically mobile – just ask the Chinese men and women who took civil service or college entrance examinations to escape the rural farms they inhabited during the Cultural Revolution. Some approaches to international perspectives on education assume that all comparison leads to policy borrowing, but this is an unrealistic assumption (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Few educational systems are geared towards serving a society where advancement and privilege are all based on an individual's ability to memorize and recite information that conforms with the government agenda, even when that is the reality.

Another example of how the social and political context outside of school shapes how great or how small an educational system becomes is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's educational system is one of the few in the world that is completely single sex (Wiseman, 2008). Saudi boys and girls go to separate schools, have separate teachers (who are only male in boys' schools or female in

girls' schools), and are culturally and often physically separated from non-family members of the opposite sex in their lives outside of school as well. For this reason, many in the international education community have been concerned about the access, opportunity and achievement of girls versus boys in Saudi Arabia. But, the evidence suggests that schools may be where Saudi girls have the most advantage.

Saudi girls enroll in school at equal rates to boys and have teachers and school resources that are roughly equal to boys or better (Wiseman, 2008). This is a remarkable development given that in the 1970s only a fraction of girls enrolled in school compared to boys, and most of the adult population of the country was still illiterate. Now literacy rates in Saudi Arabia have skyrocketed compared to the 1970s. And, even though Saudi Arabian students still perform very poorly compared to their regional and international peers on math and science tests, they lead most countries in girls' performance advantages over boys. In other words, girls in Saudi Arabia outperform boys a significant amount of the time. Girls also persist longer in school than boys, and attend college or university at higher rates than boys.

By all of the standard measures girls and boys are equal, and girls have even managed to take the lead in educational achievement and attainment. But, there is a problem. The schools and society at large are still completely gender-segregated with all of the attendant difficulties for working, transportation, socialization, and both political and economic power (Wiseman, 2007). Some have questioned whether or not all of the advances girls have made relative to boys in the Saudi educational system are significant, if these advances do not translate well outside of schools and into the labor market, the government, or society. This, too, is a dilemma for international perspectives on education because the Saudi culture and context in many ways seems to conflict with the individual, competition-driven and democracy laced charter of mass education systems worldwide.

These examples show us that there is much more behind the international comparison of education than just the numbers. For example, going by achievement rankings alone, it could be construed that many educational systems are failing school-age children and, as a result, failing the nation (Martens & Niemann, 2010). But, achievement rankings alone do not paint an accurate picture of what is happening in schools internationally or in specific educational systems. In short, international perspectives that focus on only one approach to educational comparisons across and within systems are misguided. This does not mean that internationally comparative education data should be ignored or that less complex methods of comparison are unhelpful. It means that international perspectives on education require triangulation of data and resources at a minimum in order to validly and reliable represent the reality in educational systems worldwide.

Part of the problem with educational systems worldwide is that there is too much variability within many systems. Too many differences in curriculum standards, too much variation in teacher training programs, too much variability in school conditions and classroom resources where children learn everyday. There is a lot of really useful internationally comparative education data available, which can help educational policymakers, educators and reformers try to "fix" what is wrong with education in particular systems. There are three areas where the data can help individuals and systems "fix" what can be fixed and "improve" upon what is

perhaps already working. These three areas are: infrastructure, capacity, and sustainability.

Educational variation often mimics what goes on outside of schools in the wider society, but educational policymakers, reformers and educators can still use the information from comparative assessments to inform decision-making. In short, the infrastructure for education needs to be much more established and stable if policymakers and the public are going to hold students and teachers to the highest standards of accountability. Next, is the area of capacity. International perspectives on education can address the capacity of students for learning, teachers for teaching, and how educational capacity can be built and stabilized beyond what currently exists.

Finally, whatever changes are made, whatever solutions are implemented, have to be sustained beyond the introductory phase. This means that local communities of parents, teachers, and students must "own" their education, and must invest in its development and improvement to the point where they take-for-granted the new and improved infrastructure and capacity for teaching and learning.

Problematizing International Perspectives on Education

Although there are many strengths and positive outcomes of mass education, sometimes the best way to learn about something is to look at its weaknesses. At the same time that an increasingly homogenous and institutionalized life course dominated by the school strengthens individuals by increasing their potential and providing them with skills, it also disrupts traditional transmission of culture within families. Both families and whole cultures have come to ideologically reject mass education, while simultaneously aligning the schooling with the expectations of mass education, for a variety of reasons.

Individual schools as organizations must be understood within their institutional environment: the social, cultural and legal expectations that govern what schools can and cannot do (Coburn, 2004; Scott & Meyer, 1994). Individual schools have their own organizational form and culture, but they still closely follow the expectations set by the institution of schooling. The institution defines the legitimate role of teachers and students, and provides the criteria used to judge whether teachers and students (or principals, counselors and others) have acted according to the established norms.

Cultural conflict is also institutionalized through schooling and education as much as it is ameliorated by it. Global models of mass education are culturally "adapted" in some degree in each nation they are found (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). This leads to internal inconsistencies in many systems. On the one hand, in many countries the public wants their schools to be free and open to all; so much so that schooling is compulsory until individuals are teenagers in many systems. On the other hand, countries' leaders and public representatives often express a (perhaps political) desire to have the best education system in the world, or at least feel that schools are both pushing and preparing students to perform at the highest levels possible in academic, labor market, and civic responsibility arenas. Yet, participation (i.e., equity) and performance (i.e., excellence) are instead at odds many times – as has already been discussed.

Another conflict arises in many educational systems' approaches to the professional-staffing of schools. In many countries like Japan, teachers are looked to as education professionals and experts in their field. Local school boards and parents would not consider themselves capable of evaluating teacher credentials, just as local city councils do not decide whether or not a doctor is qualified to practice medicine. However, even though there are special schools and colleges dedicated to specialized knowledge about curriculum and teaching, as well as a host of state requirements for certification, many parents and community members feel that they can judge what a quality teacher is. Hence, some systems have adopted alternative routes that give local districts considerable leeway in whom they hire as educators.

There are many other facets of schooling that encode conflict about educational ideals that have accrued over time. The institution of schooling, from its start, has been affected by the dominant cultural debates of the day. To understand international perspectives on education requires looking back at what ideas and conflicts were institutionalized early on in the system. Early leaders in many countries' politics and education proposed radical changes in the way society was structured and the way individuals were politically incorporated as citizens. Yet, these changes are rarely quick because another hallmark of institutional change is isomorphism (i.e., gradual or incremental change). In fact, it took nearly 200 years (until the 1960s) for mass education to become fully institutionalized around the world. For example, after reaching a critical mass sometime in the 1830s, it took over one hundred years (1950) for U.S. enrollment rates alone to reach the "universal" level (at or above 90%) (Snyder, 1993).

Mass education was originally introduced to control, not empower. For example, the early European systems of mass education were organized and enacted by Kings, Emperors or other autocratic rulers who wanted a more loyal, productive and well-trained citizenry. It was not until much later that the notion of citizens' rights (what is now called human rights) came to be so strongly emphasized. For example, Boli-Bennett and Meyer (1978) found that after 1870, national constitutions tended to contain explicit reference to the "child." Later national constitutions also tended to spell out the state's role in providing education to children. For example, does every child have the right to an education? Does every child have the responsibility to attend school? Or, put another way, does the state have the right to make children go to school? Nations that adopted their constitutions after putting a system of mass education in place tend to explicitly protect the rights of the child. This sequence of events can have important implications.

A national constitution can create a system of compulsory education by making it the duty of students to attend school, or the duty of the state to provide free education to all students. For example, when Japanese society emerged from self-imposed isolation in 1869, the nation of Japan started out with a constitution that explicitly gave the state the right to compel citizens to be educated and made it the duty of all citizens to go to school in order to become better citizens. Over time, the Japanese Imperial Rescript on Education came to be venerated as religious dogma. Students were required to bow their heads before a picture of the emperor at school each morning while the principal read the rescript (Rohlen & LeTendre, 1996).

After defeating Japan in World War II, the American Occupying Forces oversaw the re-writing of the Japanese Constitution, where education was defined as a right of the individual instead of a requirement of the state (Beauchamp, 1985). But, there are still societies and nations where mass education is still used as an overt tool for political dominance. For example, the North Korean school system continues to function in this way – subjugating the individual to the state (Hoare, 2003).

In the long run, mass education has generally proven to be a tool for democracy. The danger in creating a mass system of education designed specifically to indoctrinate is that in order to accomplish its ends, the system must empower individual students to some degree, which is the very thing an oppressive system does not want to do. By achieving universal literacy, the state creates a population that can read its propaganda, but also a population that can read the smuggled-in books and texts that speak of revolutionary ideas like "freedom." Oppressive state education systems like those of North Korea or Pre-war Japan are precarious (Carnoy & Levin, 1985). For a time, perhaps many decades, they can suppress individual freedoms. But these same systems create tremendous forces that shift over time to become strong forces for system-wide change—slowly but surely.

Mass education is also linked with increased awareness of individual rights and is often the institution that contributes to expanding those human rights. In 1948 the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 26 of this declaration outlines a general plan for national education systems around the world. In brief, it says that education should be available to everyone because it is a basic human right. Article 26 also emphasizes the importance of primary education, in particular, noting that it should be free and compulsory. It asserts that higher education (historically a bastion of elite, white, Western, male privilege) should be accessible to all based on merit. Article 26 finally says, "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" (United Nations, 1948). While not specifically binding to nations around the world, this declaration of education as a human right has served as a fundamental model and has shaped the development of national education systems in a profound way since its inception.

In more recent years, the United Nations (1989) adopted a Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 28 of this convention specifically calls on nations to provide for the education of all children, to increase access to school and to help prevent dropouts. This document is further evidence that at a world level, both the rights of the child and the idea of mass education have become deeply institutionalized. International perspectives on education must recognize that mass education has become firmly established in Western developed nations like the U.S., Canada and those in Europe, and has expanded rapidly even in the poorest, least developed nations. While significant exceptions can still be found, global culture now recognizes the essential necessity of education for the well-being of citizens everywhere. In other words, the worldwide expansion of mass education has led to a global culture of education, where schooling is both a normative expectation and key identity and life course component for individuals and societies worldwide.

However, there are those -- philosophers like Ivan Illich (1983) or Paulo Freire (1986) -- who have gained notoriety in part for their attack of mass education systems. In fact, there are many different groups and individuals who are highly critical of mass education, in general. While much good is done under the aegis of mass education, Illich and Friere point out that there are negative consequences of the institutionalization of education—largely because of its taken-for-grantedness. As a result, they argue that mass education is unjustified state control of individuals. They say that when it is compulsory, mass education is optimistically defined as the right of the state to create better citizens, but is instead likely to be used by rulers to indoctrinate children and control society.

Around the world, mass education has spread powerful values about the inherent worth of children, learning, and education. Over time, formal education has gone from being the preserve of the rich and pampered to the birthright of every citizen. Perhaps because many people at the beginning of the 21st century still remember racially segregated schools, many see progress towards equality of education as slow and halting. Yet, within the last one hundred years there has been a global change in which almost every formal barrier to education based on race, religion or ethnicity has been removed or attacked.

For example, a racist system of "Bantu" education designed specifically to suppress black South Africans prevailed until nearly the end of the 20th century, but has now been replaced with the right of all children to attend any school they wish, even though this is not often practically feasible, yet. Many gender disparities in education are rapidly disappearing, too, and in some nations girls outperform boys in educational achievement, even when boys are culturally and historically advantaged (Wiseman, 2007). Yet, we do not live in a contented world. One major reason for this is that educational progress is clearly linked with economic prosperity. In the poorest nations in the world, the attainment of universal education is still just a goal, and those denied or unable to participate are usually poor, racial and ethnic minority, girls and women (Lewis & Lockheed, 2007).

Debating World Education Culture

How ideas about education and schooling itself spread worldwide (even in the most remote and culturally unique communities) is often the subject of heated debate among policymakers and researchers in the field of comparative and international education. There are accusations of cultural imperialism as well as assumptions that local cultures and communities are being systematically corrupted by dominant social, political and economic agendas. However, the growing availability and importance of information and communication technology worldwide have brought shared ideas, knowledge and expectations about education to areas of the world that were once distant (either geographically, politically or culturally) from the rest of the world. International perspectives on education come from different vantage points such as the disciplinary bases or cultural contexts discussed above, but they will often be characterized by a shared set of assumptions about what formal mass education is, and ideally should be.

Common models of education exist around the world in spite of the remarkable differences in culture and community. Many explanations are possible, but this phenomenon has become one of the core topics in international comparative

education research and study. Some have made a persuasive case that individuals "imagine" themselves as part of a community, even though they may not have personally met or directly communicated with any of the other members of that community (Anderson, 1996). Education and schooling potentially play a significant role in the development of imagined communities. Yet, there is still much to debate regarding world education culture. While many contexts and environments seem especially receptive to imagined communities, others may resist shared expectations about schooling and education. Yet, even in resistance, there is still a tacit acknowledgment that the shared expectations about education exist.

To this end, much discussion exists about why national educational systems adopt or "borrow" policies and methods from other – often remarkably different – educational systems. Policy borrowing even takes place when institutionalized educational models are otherwise resisted. Models and uses of schools worldwide are in all instances shaped by political agendas, economic conditions and the ability of local communities to both adopt and resist external forces and internal pressures. Dominant political and economic organizations and influences impact less dominant communities or educational groups. The emphasis is on the ways that power (political and economic, in particular) contextualizes educational change. However, there is other evidence suggesting that shifts in educational systems are more complex than mere power differentials. While normative shifts are difficult to investigate, they provide an interesting foil for the arguments that power and dominance are the only or main influences affecting the way that education develops and changes worldwide.

Of the three institutions (schools, family and the nation), only the family is an ancient one. Schools and nations have histories that are only a few hundred years old. For example, Italy and China as countries and cultures have histories that span thousands of years, but they have only been nations since 1861 and 1949 respectively. With the sole exception of the family (Kingston, Hubbard, Lapp, Schroeder & Wilson, 2003), schools are the major socializing institution in societies around the world. This means, that more than the church, clan, or other group, schools govern the lives of children and adolescents, and mold their behavior and outlook.

Although many empires (like Tang China or Tokugawa Japan) had systems of education long before the modern nation came into existence, these educational systems were restricted to social elites or served only portions of the population (Shibata, 2004). The roots of national mass education systems go back to Europe in the late 1700s, and lie in the desire to socialize people as citizens of a particular nation. The Danish king tried to set up a system of schools as early as 1721, but the Prussian emperor was even more successful in establishing mass education when he issued a universal compulsory education law in 1774.

As the Prussian empire conquered and spread across Europe, the Prussians found that one of the best ways to incorporate people into the Prussian state was through education. Many countries became part of this larger, international trend in which nations – primarily in Northern Europe and North America – began to develop universal, compulsory education or mass education (Ramirez & Boli, 1987). In fact, Horace Mann established the common school movement in the U.S. partly

as a result of his visit to Prussia and the ideas about schooling that he brought back to the U.S. with him.

During his visit to Prussia, Mann saw an educational system that was state-financed (i.e., "free"), state-centered universal compulsory education, which had at its aim instilling loyalty and obedience through a military model of school (think about the model of desks in rows, facing forward, and the leader standing in front giving orders). But Mann had more progressive ideas for the implementation of this model of schooling. He saw education as the "great equalizer" that would level the economic playing field, instill moral order, and provide a new future for his state and nation. Of course, to do this every school age individual has to attend school. Thus was born the concept of universal, compulsory education.

Not only did mass education make nations possible, it also made our modern economy a global reality. Parents can no longer transfer their craft or guild or status to children as they could in the past. Without success in school, only the rare individual can achieve wealth and status in most countries' economic and social systems. Except for the ultra-wealthy, few parents can secure lifetime employment for their children. Even wealthy families often spend enormous amounts of money buying extra tutoring and private education (Baker, Akiba, LeTendre & Wiseman, 2001; Stevenson & Baker, 1992). Among professional and middle class parents, pumping time and effort into their child's education is synonymous with good parenting (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Oswald, Baker & Stevenson, 1988).

As a result, over the course of time, schooling has expanded to take up more and more of the early life course – a term used to describe the standard phases of life (Pallas, 1993). For example, kindergarten is now the legitimate start of schooling, and pre-school has rapidly expanded for a variety of reasons to enroll a majority of children, especially in developed, Western countries (Dickens, Sawhill & Tebbs, 2006). If indeed schooling is such an integral part of each individual's life course, then to a great extent individuals' futures, and senses of self, are determined by the educational system.

Within the modern global system, countries have the right to organize schools to socialize children (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Meyer, 1970), and the responsibility for the socialization of children has been increasingly shifted to schools more than families in countries and societies around the world (Pallas, 1993). Schools exert tremendous power, so much so that even in infancy, many families actively prepare their children for "going to school" and look toward school as the place for socialization rather than the family itself (Parlakian, 2003).

This shift in power, from the family to the school, has had enormous repercussions for the way society is organized and functions (Coleman, 1987). Overall, it has allowed the development of more egalitarian and meritocratic societies (though obviously ones which still have inequality) where individuals are often formally judged and become socially and economically mobile as a result of demonstrated academic achievement more than by family connections, gender, race, and socioeconomic status (Rubinson, 1986; Shu, 2004). It has created universal expectations for social norms and beliefs, which provides children with a window into a much larger set of ideas than most families can provide (Boli & Ramirez, 1986).

At the same time, this shift has meant that it is harder for families to remain together as a unit. Driven by employment that is largely dependent on educational success, Americans in particular are mobile. Strong family bonds have weakened, and family or kin rituals are replaced with grade promotions and graduations (Kamens, 1977). And, more seriously, children and adolescents are frequently "infantilized." This means they are considered too immature to take on the social roles that their counterparts in traditional cultures may. These roles range from independently caring for siblings and themselves to working outside of the home (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968).

In spite of the complaints, the institutionalization of mass education has benefitted individuals worldwide. The stark portrait of children raised in countries where mass education has not been institutionalized stands as powerful correctives to the idealistic philosophers of "deschooling" (Lewis & Lockheed, 2007). However, the real negative effects of schooling in totalitarian dictatorships or under racist regimes cannot be denied. Mass education is an exceptionally powerful institution, and such power provides the opportunity for a variety of social uses, both negative and positive.

Some critics are eager to point out that our highly regulated, extended period of age-based education has many negative consequences. In earlier times, teachers often organized classrooms or learning groups based on the student's ability, friends and kin. For example, a little girl who could read very well might be placed in a group of older students where she had an older sister or cousin. In this way, the child could maximize her potential, while having a "safe" person to moderate the age disparity. This kind of grouping and arrangements came in myriad forms, and are still practiced in alternative schools. But, in the highly institutionalized (i.e., legally and culturally determined) school, there is no room for such arrangements.

It is also common to criticize schooling for transmitting a culturally-dominant, Western, "middle class" sense of self. This sense of self is important in providing the continuity necessary in a rapidly changing and ever more fast-paced global society (Pallas, 1993). The sense of self is a crucial element of modern (or post-modern) societies. But, what about students who have a different sense of self? This might be a child who is a "late bloomer" – developmentally on the left side of the bell curve – a black South African student in a predominantly white South African school, or a French Muslim child in a class of largely secular, non-religious peers. Mass education provides a base for students' identity and a foundation for their future social, political and economic participation, regardless of how they and their families see the issues (Ramirez & Meyer, 1980). Here, the school can come into immediate and direct conflict with family (and even community) efforts to preserve a way of life.

While it is true that in some ways, schools transmit social norms based on racial and ethnic majority, middle class values, they also transmit tremendous skill and opportunities for individuals to shape their own life course. The standardization and mass provision of schooling transformed society and led to vibrant democracies peopled with literate citizens. Old social orders – nobles and peasants – have largely faded away. The rise and expansion of universal education has not made a global utopia, but it has profoundly transformed global culture by making the individual (not the race, clan, religion, country or sect) the unit by which we measure

humanity. The very concepts of "human rights," "human capital development," "citizenry," and so forth arise from an understanding that each human being has an untapped potential – a potential that can only be accessed by education. These beliefs have swept around the world at a speed that is remarkable in the history of human cultural change.

Future of International Perspectives on Education

International perspectives on education have been characterized both by tremendous growth and variety since those first travelers' tales. This ebb and flow of growth and rejuvenation is a natural cycle, but one that often causes uncertainty or questioning among educators, scholars and professionals in the field. Debates ensue in any field about its future and what is best for it, but the future of international perspectives on education is especially contentious because it is fraught with disagreement about who has the power or authority to make system-wide educational change and how they will go about doing it globally, nationally, locally and even in individual classrooms and communities.

The future of international perspectives on education is determined, in part, by where international comparative education research comes from and what it represents. Emphases in international perspectives on education are traditionally on the phenomenon of policy borrowing and contextual differences. This suggests that the mechanisms for comparison and the professionalization of international comparative education study and influence are ripe for analysis. International comparative education research and study will continue to play a significant role in the development and reform of educational systems and schools worldwide.

Given the spread of mass education and the enormous technological advances it has made possible, the possibility exists to offer highly individualized education via the Internet and other forms of technology to most students. Yet, in public schools children typically all sit down in front of a teacher in a way that would not be out of place in schools of the late 1800s. In other words, individualized instruction is not often implemented in mass education systems, even when the means for implementing it are available. Take the average second grade as an example. Chances are at that at least one student in the class can read at a fifth grade level, and at least one student is still reading at a kindergarten level. If the range of topics is expanded, even more variation will occur. Why is there such wide variety in the same classroom? Despite considerable advancements in the field of developmental psychology, K-12 school systems are still organized on the basis of biological age – a strategy designed nearly 100 years ago – not by ability or learning style. Why has change been so difficult to bring about in this case?

The answer lies in the institution of mass education itself. It seems that the institution that changed the world (schooling) is very hard itself to change. Institutions, once established, are change-resistance (Jepperson, 1991; Meyer & Jepperson, 2000). The process of de-institutionalization takes decades and requires large scale social mobilization and change in fundamental belief patterns among huge segments of society. Education, as an institution, now permeates so much of life that expectant parents in much of North America, Europe and East Asia plan developmentally appropriate activities for their infants from the moment of birth (Parlakian, 2003). These patterns illustrate that the family itself has incorporated the

basic routines of schooling: explicit curriculum, strict attention to age-based developmental norms, active instruction and the core idea that every human child can learn. From the moment of birth, most people inhabit a social world where the institutional norms of mass education prevail.

The future of mass education is not clear, but despite deschooling movements or the rapid advance of technology, there is no sign that the physical place called "school" will disappear. Rather, in nations without educational systems, systems will eventually be organized. In the developed world, schooling will continue to be organized up and down the life course.

For instance, preschool attendance has skyrocketed and more than 50% of high school students attend some form of tertiary education (Rosenthal, Rathbun & West, 2005). While school itself may become more varied (gifted programs, distance learning, homeschooling) the most basic patterns are unlikely to change. There may be more diversity and innovation, but not the kind of heterogeneity common in the late 1700s. Schools, for the foreseeable future, are here to stay. And, while they are often resistant to change, people can and have changed them. At the heart of every society is a school system, and global society is no exception.

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