

Part 1

Comparative Education & History of Education

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THE CRISIS IN WORLD EDUCATION AND COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

Abstract

The radically and rapidly changing societal context has placed education at the crossroads, necessitating a re-thinking of education. At the same time, urgent challenges confront humanity, such as the environmental crisis and the creation of social capital (to keep together an increasing diverse society) — to mention but two. In all these education is a key variable, and — rightly so — the vehicle selected by humanity to meet the new future. This paper surveys these global societal contextual factors in the twenty-first century, and the implications thereof for education. Comparative and International Education is put forward as the best available means to deal with the challenge of creating a system of education geared for the imperatives of the new age.

Introduction

We are living in exciting times, of mind-boggling changes. Ever increasing levels of economic affluence, the information and communications technology (ICT) revolution surging ahead, and constantly entering terrain unimaginable a few years ago, increasingly diverse and complex societies, and more and more opportunities for individuals to exert individual choices, open up new vistas all the time. At the same time urgent challenges confront humanity, such as the environmental crisis and the creation of social capital (to keep together an increasing diverse society) — to mention but two. In all these education is a key variable, and — rightly so — the vehicle selected by humanity to meet the new future. The changing societal context has placed education at the crossroads, a re-thinking of education is necessary all the time. The aim of this paper is to take stock of the societal changes characterizing the early twenty-first century, to hold up the current state of education worldwide against this mirror of societal trends; and to determine the implications of all these for Comparative Education. This paper is based on a recently published book which was edited by the three authors on a book which was recently published, and which deals with the international education crisis: Calogiannakis, P., Karras, K., Wolhuter, C. C., Chiang, T-H., Tendo, M. (Eds.) (2014): *Crisis in Education: Modern Trends and Issues*. Athens: HM Studies and Publishing.

The changing societal context impacting on education

Twenty-first century society is characterised by dramatic changes, all impacting on education. In all aspects of society: geography, demography, technological development, economic system, social system, political system and religious and world-view, radical changes are taking place.

Geography: The environmental crisis

Geographically, the most urgent problem requiring attention is the ecological crisis. Increasing population numbers and rising affluence place the environment under more and more pressure. The main facets of the environmental or ecological crisis are air pollution, global warming, pollution and depletion of fresh water resources, soil erosion, deforestation, pollution of the oceans and depletion of marine life, destruction of bio-diversity and the disruption of the ecological balance brought about by relocation of species (of plants and animals) by human action (whether deliberately or by accident).

Demography: Population explosion, an aging population and a mobile population

Friedman (2008) makes a case that the three biggest challenges facing humankind are the population explosion, the environmental crisis, and the information and communications revolution. The global population has recently (October 2011) passed the 7 billion mark. While the growth rate is decelerating, e.g. it went down from 1.2 percent per year during the decade 2000-2010, to an estimated 1.0 percent per year for the decade 2010-2020 (World Bank, 2012: 44), 84 million people are still added to the global population every year. The global average masks large differentials in the growth rate: from 0.1 percent per year in the Euro area, to 2.4 percent per year in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Worldwide the average age of people is rising. Finally people today are more mobile than ever before, as can be seen in for example increasing number of immigrants in most countries making most countries more multicultural in population composition.

Technology: ICT Revolution

The expanding frontiers of science and the exponential increase in technological innovations will significantly affect the future. One very salient facet of technological progress is the information and technological (ICT) revolution. An instantaneous, easily accessible 24-hour global network is taking shape. Practically every office and many households have a computer. A large proportion of jobs and work now entails information processing. Instead of standardised mass production, computer driven customisation (catering for individual tastes) takes place.

Economy: Increasing affluence, economic liberalisation, economic internationalisation, the rise of a knowledge economy

In 1990 one of the most forceful and sustained economic upturns in history commenced. The global economic output rose from US\$ 29.6 trillion in 1995 to US\$ 60.5 trillion in 2008 to US\$ 69.9 trillion in 2011. Simultaneously a global process played itself out, and although it began in the West, it has spread to the East and to the Global South. The role of the state in the economy is being reduced, and market forces are given the right of way. A third change is that the world economy is steadily becoming more integrated. A final trend is the rise of a knowledge

economy, that is where the production and consumption of new knowledge becomes the driving axis of the economy.

Social trends: *Decline in prominence of primary and secondary social groupings, rise in importance of tertiary social groupings, emergence of multiculturalism*

The pervasiveness of the primary social grouping in society, the nuclear family, has been declining. Ditto for the secondary social grouping, namely the work place. On the other hand tertiary social groupings (i.e. functional interest groups) are becoming more prominent, i.e. because of the emancipation and empowerment of such groupings by the information society. The steady stream of immigrants from the Global South into the countries of the Global North and the erosion of the power of the nation-state (discussed below) all contribute to the replacement of the long standing idea of one officially sanctioned culture within the borders of the state, and the rise of multiculturalism — giving positive recognition to the existence of cultural diversity within the borders of the state (*cf.* Magsino, 1995).

Political trends: *The demise of the nation-state; democratisation*

The information and communications revolution, the globalisation of the economy, and the downsizing of the state out of economic necessity all have contributed to the tearing down of the power of the state. In the vacuum left, the locus of power has shifted in two opposite directions: upwards towards supranational and international structures, and downwards towards sub-national and local structures, eventually right down to the individual. Concomitant to these changes, a worldwide process of democratisation gathered force the past quarter of a century.

Religious and life- and world view trends: *The persistent but new and more complex presence of religion and the values revolution*

Despite frequently made claims that the modern age is a post-religious secular age, religion persists as an important factor in individual lives, as large scale surveys in societies all around the world show. In an age of individualism people no longer always neatly fit into neat categories such as “Christian” or “Shik Muslim” but an infinitely more rich and complex tapestry of individualized religious convictions are taking shape. The increasing individualism, is sparking a diversity of value systems that are replacing the traditional, homogeneous societies that were previously characterised by specific, uniform value systems.

Implications for education: need for a total rethink of education

The above set of societal changes imply that a radical rethink of education, as it is today, is urgently needed. The present array of (national) education systems has acquired their quintessential features as a result of a process of evolution in response to a context of a different clutch of societal trends, which means they have become quite outdated. Each of the above enumerated societal changes asks for a corresponding change in education. Every aspect of education requires a rethink, be it the objectives of education, systems of administration and management, curricula, institutional fabric, the student corps, the teacher corps, ways of teacher education, methods, assessment, language of learning and teaching, physical infrastructure, or support services. For example, the objectives of (national) education systems — it is so that national education systems came into being from the nineteenth century in

order to socialise the youth into loyalty to the nation-state (which became a force on the world scene since the nineteenth century (*cf.* Cohen, 1970; Welch, 1991). The demise of the omnipotent nation-state means that membership of other smaller and larger political units should figure more prominently in the formulation of objectives of education systems. The trend of individualisation and the rise of a knowledge economy imply that conformity as educational objective should make way for individualisation to be values and for the nurturing of creativity.

The ageing population profile, combined with the knowledge revolution mean that education should no longer be conceived of as a once-off event, squashed in a few years during childhood and adolescence, but should be conceptualised as a lifelong process, adult education and lifelong learning should be given more attention. The religious trends identified above mean it makes sense to no longer use public schools to foist down the official state-sanctioned religion into the throats (or minds or hearts) of children — as the modern trend in education worldwide is; but the persistence of religion as a force in the lives of the majority of people in the world also make the contemporary trend of forced, uniform or religious-neutral public schools problematic (*cf.* Van der Walt *et al.*, 2010). The information and communications technology revolution opens new possibilities for education and make the desk, script and chalkboard centred education appear as an anachronism.

The role of Comparative Education

As they grapple with the assignment of re-inventing education, policy makers and education practitioners worldwide do not have a ready made, completed model available. They are embarking on a road which has not yet been travelled. They are moving slowly, inch by inch forward.

As a very simple and concrete example, growth in enrolments and in gross enrolment ratios can be taken. Imperatives such as an increasingly advanced and complicated (technologically and otherwise) world, the knowledge economy and the Creed of Human Rights (stipulating the right to education as a fundamental human right) mean that education should be made available to everyone, at least basic (that is primary and lower secondary school education). Since 1950 primary school enrolments worldwide have grown as follows (figures in thousands): 1950: 177 415; 1960: 243 487; 1970: 411 304; 1980: 541 566; 1990: 596 863; 2000: 654 722; 2010: 695 207. The aggregate global gross primary enrolment ratio has also surged impressively: 1950: 59%; 1960: 62%; 1970: 89%; 1980: 96%; 1990: 99%; 2000: 99%; 2010: 107% (over 100% due to large numbers of overage children in primary schools). Yet in 2011, there were still 57 million children of primary school age in the world who were not at school (UNESCO, 2013). And if this very basic level of primary school education has not yet been brought to everyone, even larger percentages of the world population do not attend secondary and higher education. In 2010 the global aggregate gross secondary education enrolment ratio stood at 70% while the global aggregate gross higher education enrolment ratio was 30%. Even the very, very basic goal of universal adult literacy has not yet been achieved. From 2000 to 2010 the global adult literacy rate crept forward from 87.32% to 89.44%, while the number of illiterate adults worldwide were but marginally reduced, from 787 252 516 in 2000 to 781 386 451, i.e. almost a billion adults in the world are still illiterate (UNESCO, 2015).

In pursuing the drive for the expansion and the improvement of education, in the absence of an already tested model, the only means available to educational policy makers and education practitioners is Comparative Education.

Comparative Education can be defined as having a “three in one” perspective on education (Wolhuter, 2014):

- an education system perspective;
- a contextual perspective;
- a comparative perspective.

The particular instance of education, of an adult/education educating/teaching a child/education and – being of interest to other scholarly fields of Education, such as Educational Psychology – normally lies beyond the resolution power of Comparative Education. Comparative Education focuses on the education *system*.

The focus of Comparative Education is broader than must the education system *per se*. The education system is studied within its societal context, and is regarded as being shaped by, or as being the outcome of societal forces (geographic, demographic, social, economic, cultural, political, and religious). The impact of these societal forces on education, as well as the effect of education on these societal systems, are subjects of study of Comparative Education (Calogiannakis & Kazamias, 2009; Karras & Wolhuter, 2015).

Finally, Comparative Education does not contend with studying one education system in its societal context in isolation. Various education systems, shaped by their societal contexts, are compared; hence the comparative perspective.

The international-comparative method is an accepted and widely implemented method for the investigation of public policy questions, also in the field of education (Crossley & Watson, 2011: 103). The international-comparative method entails the comparison between education systems and institutions as they are found and function within the different (national) societal contexts (Manzon, 2011: 169). In this way, different countries can learn from one another’s experience in the field of education (Kaur, 2010: 1). In Comparative Education, research has to take into account the contextual factors (i.e. geographic, demographic, social, economic, political and philosophical) thoroughly (Schriewer, 2006: 312), otherwise the danger exists that attempts at deriving best education practices from foreign education systems get lost in contextual realities (De Wet & Wolhuter, 2007).

Conclusion

The current epoch is one of a new and rapidly changing society. This society has assigned to education an array of tasks as never before, and society seems to depend on education more and more. Yet the current education systems in the world is a relict of a past, having acquired its form in serving a set of contextual imperatives totally different from the present. This means a rethink and rebuilding of the education systems of the world is essential, and urgently needed at that. As the nations and people of the world strive to extend equal education, quality education and relevant education to all, they are venturing into uncharted waters, with no existing map. All they can draw on is each others’ experience, as they grapple with contemporary challenges relation to the supply of education. In this exercise, the scholarly pursuit of Comparative and International Education acquires new and enhanced relevance.

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