World-systems Analysis in Comparative Education: An Alternative to Cosmopolitanism

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This paper begins by connecting cosmopolitanism to notions of universal and particular knowledge in contemporary conditions. Drawing on the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, we then outline a world-systems approach to knowledge. This approach focuses on the capacity of epistemological structures to either reinforce existing inequalities or produce more egalitarian ways of being. This work centres on links between constructions of universal knowledge and the ways in which their articulation has historically underpinned the inequalities of our current world-system. Through a brief review of work in comparative education elaborating a world culture of education, we argue that like cosmopolitanism, this approach inadequately engages with the historical and political angle of a world-systems approach. We conclude by arguing for world-systems comparative research that maintains a focus on the role of knowledge in the world-system, and how such knowledge may contribute to a more just, equal and democratic world-system.

The extent to which the field of comparative education can be described as cosmopolitan depends on how we understand the concept of cosmopolitanism. A superficial definition of cosmopolitanism simply invokes the inclusion, in some form, of people or groups 'other' than ourselves. This can be extended to a concern with global ideas and values that transcend the political boundaries of sovereign nation-states. In this paper, we begin by considering cosmopolitanism epistemologically, exploring its relationship with universal and particular knowledge in contemporary conditions. We then use the world-systems approach developed by Immanuel Wallerstein to account for the structure of knowledge across two dominant epistemologies, focusing on its potential to reinforce inequalities or underpin more egalitarian ways of being on a global scale. This work examines the ways in which articulations of universal knowledge historically have supported the inherent inequalities of the existing world-system. Through a brief review of comparative work elaborating a world culture of education, we suggest that like cosmopolitanism, this approach inadequately engages with the historical and political perspective that a world-systems approach provides. Instead, we argue for comparative research that focuses on the role of knowledge in the world-system and its potential contribution, within comparative education, to a more just, equal and democratic world-system.

Cosmopolitanism: The Persistence of Objective Universal Knowledge

Cosmopolitan thinking, from Greek Stoicism through to Kant and other Enlightenment cosmopolitans, informs contemporary moral and political positions that connect the individual to an abstracted humanity through a system of universal values (Vaughan-Williams, 2007). While cosmopolitanism moves social analysis beyond national boundaries and the simplistic dualism of national/international, recent cosmopolitan discourse seeks to develop an understanding that acknowledges both philosophical and realist cosmopolitan thinking (Beck & Sznaider, 2006). The distinction here is between cosmopolitan philosophy, involving the self-reflexive, intentional ideals, perspectives and actions of those with social agency, and actual cosmopolitanism in contemporary conditions, or "really-existing cosmopolitanization" (Beck & Sznaider, 2006,

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p. 8). The distinction between philosophical-normative cosmopolitanism and really-existing cosmopolitanism is made to counter claims that cosmopolitanism is simply the continuation of an idealised, elite, social agenda. These claims do this via a realist analytic-empiricism that brings to the fore an ostensibly value-free perspective on contemporary social change, but in a way that presupposes normative (and therefore political) philosophical cosmopolitan specification (Beck & Sznaider, 2006, p.13). What results is the articulation of an explicitly scientific epistemology within cosmopolitanism that can account for social change without referring to cosmopolitanism in the philosophical or normative sense, but in fact implicitly retains this distinction between empirical-realist and philosophical-normative understandings.

With respect to the role of the nation-state, Beck and Sznaider (2006) argue that an empirical-analytical approach that goes beyond, but does not discount, nationalism, is central to the conceptualisation of realist cosmopolitanism. To this end they advocate the replacement of "methodological nationalism" as the dominant lens for understanding the social world, with "methodological cosmopolitanism" (Beck & Sznaider, p. 3). For Grande (2006), transcending the nation-state in some way is the critical threshold of any cosmopolitanism viewed through a political science lens. This involves for example the shifting boundaries and differences between nation-states' area of political action that reach beyond territorially-defined limits. This is a dual process in which nation-states' sovereignty is simultaneously "transcended *and protected*" (Grande, 2006, p. 96, emphasis in original) within cosmopolitan political spaces. Moreover, Grande highlights how de-nationalising forces produce re-nationalising political responses, as one of the many tensions at work within the cosmopolitan moment.

Part of the connection between comparative education and cosmopolitanism lies in the latter's concern with values and morality, and hence the social and socialising purposes of education systems. Any attempt to elaborate a universal set of moral values through such an approach almost inevitably results in a minimalist specification of values that could claim global consensus. Appeals for global consensus on other more substantive grounds (e.g., intellectual, political, social or economic), which might be seen as diminishing individuals' agency, raise suspicions. In certain quarters cosmopolitanism has invoked fears of a 'world government' imposing homogeneity on a global scale (see Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton, 1999). Contemporary cosmopolitanism's recognition of the ongoing sovereignty of nation-states presupposes that the subjectivity of a vast number of peoples, within and between sovereign nation-states, can build a set of values that have objective and universal status. Pogge (2009) argues that this sort of morality frequently becomes institutionalised in various ways, commonly in religious organisations but also in other forms.

The idea of moral universalism advanced by cosmopolitanism can be read as a particularist ideology of European hegemonic powers, akin to 'European universalism', which according to Wallerstein (2006) has supported the world-system through centuries of modernization. A Wallersteinean approach views the application of European social values beyond European boundaries as having worked to legitimate invasion, colonisation, and forms of intervention as benevolent acts of saving non-Europeans from themselves. Even societies that were widely recognized for their social sophistication were deemed incapable of progress without the European universalism of modernity. European values have become increasingly removed from theological knowledge, and more concerned with humanistic principles. More recently, empiricism emerged as the basis for universalism. This scientific universalism, the most recent manifestation of European universalism, asserts objectivity across all phenomena and time (Wallerstein, 2006). Such claims of universalism, or assertions of universal truths, function as meta-narratives that encapsulate the

ideology of those groups with power in the world-system, and so are simultaneously particularist in the sense that they exclusively represent the ruling social strata (see Wallerstein, 2001b).

The 'value-neutrality' of scientific universalism implies that objective phenomena can be extracted from local and cultural contexts through methods of observation and quantification. With European universalism having moved over time from the premise of social values to asocial scientism, a question arises as to how any proclaimed universal morality of contemporary cosmopolitan thinking relates to that of scientific (and therefore European) universalism. Given the dominance of scientific universalism (Wallerstein, 2004), it is difficult to see how a cosmopolitan position could be articulated or take hold without being skewed towards an unproblematic and paradoxically value-free or value-neutral form of knowledge.

In the section that follows, we elaborate Wallerstein's world-systems theorising which engages directly with these types of questions. In particular, world-systems analyses of the historical development and function of knowledge and epistemology within the capitalist world-economy, require a focus on the political dimensions of cosmopolitanism, within comparative educational research. More critically, however, we draw attention to some important distinctions within the Wallersteinean project of understanding knowledge and its potential contribution to a more democratic and egalitarian world-system.

Universal Knowledge and the Modern World-System

Wallerstein's world-systems analysis is centred on the historical analysis of capitalism as a world-system and its transition towards an alternative, but uncertain, future (e.g. Wallerstein, 1999). A critical part of this work explores the relationship between dominant epistemologies and the historical expansion and operation of the capitalist world-economy. The historical and politically activist critique of capitalism that is characteristic of world-systems analysis thus involves an elaborated account of the development of the two epistemologies associated with science (nomothetic) and philosophy or humanities (idiographic) (e.g. Wallerstein, 2004, 2006). Wallerstein (2006) emphasises how the social sciences were split between these two epistemologies, translating into differential status of particular subject disciplines within the social sciences. The role of knowledge and epistemology in this account is made clear, for example, in the following:

> Among the specificities of the capitalist world-economy was the development of an original epistemology, which it then used as a key element in maintaining its capacity to operate … It is the modern world-system that reified the binary distinctions, and notably the one between universalism (which it claimed that the dominant elements incarnated) and particularism (with it attributed to all those who were being dominated). (Wallerstein, 2006, p. 48).

For Wallerstein then, an argument for the opening, rethinking or "unthinking" of the social sciences (Wallerstein, 1996, 1999, 2001), as a crucial step in the construction of "historical social sciences" (Wallerstein, 2001a), is a political imperative. The imperative rests in the argument that existing structures of knowledge have supported the hierarchical inequalities of the world-system within and between nation-states, through the establishment of universal norms which have justified inequalities tied to race, sex, nationality, and other dimensions (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1988). In education, this is particularly concerned with how the dominant nomothetic epistemology has given legitimacy to flawed notions of meritocracy (see the section 'A world-systems approach to comparative education' below, p. 5).

One of the distinctive characteristics of world-systems critique is the call for a reconstructed, unified epistemology – or "unidisciplinarity" over "multidisciplinarity" (Wallerstein, 1999, p. 196). This is underpinned by historical work on the development of the dominant epistemologies and their role in the world-system, and the rejection of the ensuing "false debates" around the "antinomies between universalism and particularism … [that are] … totally unresolvable in the form that they have been classically posed" (Wallerstein, 2004a, p. 147). Wallerstein (2004) describes this unified epistemology as incorporating both universalist long-term and particularist short-term analyses in a "constant dialectical exchange, which allows us to find new syntheses that are then of course instantly called into question" (Wallerstein, 2006, p. 49). This approach rejects relativist conceptualisations of knowledge, but without also rejecting the philosophical possibility of universal claims to knowledge that are not simply the universalisation of alternative particularist knowledge. Indeed, the approach calls for new, albeit tentative and transient, universals, a unified epistemology in which we "universalise our particulars and particularise our universals simultaneously" (Wallerstein, 2006, p. 49).

Wallerstein's world-systems analysis is based on the thesis that the capitalist world-system is in a period of crisis and transition toward an uncertain but alternative form (e.g. Wallerstein, 1991; 1995; 1999). A part of this argument is the idea that the dominant and universal ideology of the world-system, liberalism, has irrevocably lost legitimacy. This universal ideology, shared by all modern nation-states, included utopian visions of inevitable and endless progress, with lives of material abundance and leisure to be realised just over the horizon. This process was to be directed by rational policy makers in government, whether they arrived in power via electoral politics or revolution, and supported by scientific and technological advances. According to Wallerstein (1998), the failure of the majority of nation-states to deliver such promises has undermined support for the modern nation-state as "an essential pillar of the modern world-system" (p. 32). In this way, the universal and nomothetic knowledge of liberalism – progress and economic development for all nation-states via the application of common strategies – worked to legitimise inequalities within and between states. This was achieved precisely via the universal and scientific character of liberalism, such that all failings could be attributed to the failure of those in power to correctly apply the required measures, rather than the capacity of the system as a whole to deliver such utopian promises universally. In the context of the systemic crisis and transition of the current system, linked to the loss of legitimacy of nation-states, comes the imperative to generate new universals that can contribute positively to the creation of an alternative world-system that is more just, equal and democratic.

A World Culture of Education as Cosmopolitan Liberal Idealism

In the broad field of comparative and international education, some of the characteristics of both cosmopolitanism and world-systems analysis coalesce in specific research trajectories. Walker and Serrano (2006), for example, counterpose cosmopolitanism with historical approaches in social policy that have sought to assimilate social and cultural diversity into the dominant culture. For them, cosmopolitanism moves beyond multiculturalism by radically advocating the "valuing all cultures equally" (p. 60), and so encouraging minority groups to "view their differences as assets" and "use their differences to advance themselves" (p. 63). In this sense, cosmopolitanism is clearly positioned as an advance on assimilationist approaches that are frequently coupled with politically conservative calls for 'tolerance' that have become widespread in contemporary contexts (see for example Ang, 2001).

Walker and Serrano (2006) go on to argue that teaching and promoting such a cosmopolitanism has the potential therefore to reinforce, rather than dissolve, particularist identities without

resorting to chauvinistic nationalisms. This connects with Appadurai's ideas of hybridised and fluid identities in an era of globalisation, in which individuals are linked to multiple groups in multiple locations or spaces, including virtual spaces (see for example Marginson & Mollis, 2001, p. 496). In this sense, comparative work might examine how educational systems contribute to these multiple identities formed by students, and the ways in which students identify themselves within these, and with any over-arching global or world-system level identity.

An alternative and well-established line of comparative and international research, associated with the neo-institutionalist school of researchers at Stanford University (see Baker & Le Tendre, 2005, pp. 6-12), sets out the case for a world culture of education as a way of accounting for the worldwide development and convergence of national and local educational phenomena. Jones (2007), for example, recently referred to the "global architecture of education" (p. 325), whereby ideas about educational structures, policies, and practices are diffused, adopted, transferred to nation-states across the world. Baker and LeTendre (2005) similarly stress that the concept of a world culture is inherently and unavoidably dynamic, bound up in the concept of schooling as a global institution across multiple contexts, such that while local, regional and national factors will shape its manifestation, "the basic image of a school – what it is and what it should do – is commonly defined in the same way globally" (p. 9). This sort of dialectical interchange between the local and global is also common to diverse work examining the 'transfer' of educational policy across national and local boundaries, even if this literature shows substantive differences in its interpretation of this dynamic and its operation (compare for example Anderson-Levitt, 2003 with Arnove and Torres, 2003).

A distinguishing feature of the neo-institutionalist approach is the identification of key points of convergence of mass education systems over time, signalling a move toward universal standardisation in the organisation of schooling, curriculum design and content, teaching, learning and assessment (for some examples see Boli, Ramirez, & Meyer, 1985; J. W. Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997). This is characterised by the shift to the world-level to account for the spread of "homogenous mass education [systems]" (Boli, et al., 1985, p. 151) across national boundaries, despite vastly different socioeconomic and political contexts. The world culture of mass schooling is accomplished, in part, through nation-states' participation in international agencies and non-governmental organisations. For example, in considering the general process and aspects of modern state formation within the world-system, Meyer et al. (1997) note that basic "functional justifications of schooling are rarely questioned," regardless of evidence contradicting them (p. 149). A world culture perspective thus presents the spread of mass school education as a part of the global spread and institutionalisation of world cultural models of modern state forms and state institutions. These models in turn include a core role for schooling in creating members or citizens of the modern state.

Like the cosmopolitan approach to globalisation, this work does not discount the nation-state entirely. Rather, it acknowledges the ongoing interplay between global conceptions of education, including global policy prescriptions, and their adoption at the national and local level. The object of analysis is, however, centred on global trends and global convergence. One illustrative line of research has systematically documented global trends in the form and content of national curricula (Benavot & Braslavsky, 2006; J. W. Meyer, Kamens, Benavot, Cha, & Wong, 1992), and elaborated the mechanisms by which such common curriculum frameworks have been promoted and adopted across the world (e.g. Valverde, 2004). Building on this earlier work, Meyer (2006) has set out some major trends in what might be tentatively called a world curriculum. This curriculum empowers individuals while providing them with increasingly decentralised choices,

prepares citizens for an imagined 'supra-national society,' and constructs the nation-state as a good citizen in world society (pp. 265-70).

Meyer's (2006) liberal idealist argument can be read as a version of contemporary cosmopolitanism by positing a linear progression in the development of curriculum towards the preparation of citizens for an imagined global society. Such an approach gives inadequate credence to the persistent hierarchical inequalities within and between nation-states that are a structural feature of the contemporary world-system, and the political and economic work required to overcome these. This type of cosmopolitanism depoliticises, in important respects, what we argue is and ought to be a political endeavour within comparative educational research. We make this claim mindful of the Klees' (2008) recent address to the US-based Comparative and International Education Society, which emphasised the inescapable connections between comparative work and "the central dilemma of our time (what to do about poverty, inequality, and development) and for our field (What is education's role in all this?)" (p. 303).

A World-Systems Approach to Comparative Education

Almost thirty years ago, Arnove (1980) elaborated a call for world-systems analysis in comparative and international education, highlighting the increased level of sophistication such an approach provides in understanding and explaining educational expansion and reform globally. The response to this call has been limited, perhaps due in part to the presence and weight of neo-institutionalist discourse across the field of comparative education (see Arnove, 2009). Wallerstein's world-systems theorising offers substantial insight through an understanding of the historical development of a single, capitalist world-economy, and the associated requirement to maximise the accumulation of capital and maintain hierarchical inequalities within and between states and societies to support this process. Moreover, the political edge that such a perspective brings, both as critique of global educational policy trends, and as investigation of alternative policies and practices to support more egalitarian outcomes, make it an important area of research in comparative education.

A comparative educational research agenda that contextualises educational phenomena within the world-system and its structural inequalities, implicates the very structures of knowledge that have enabled such inequalities to exist. It is the dominant status given to particular forms of scientific knowledge across the curriculum of school and university systems, linked to their nomothetic epistemology, which has helped to propel the capitalist world-system and defend positions of power. Moreover, the dominance of the nomothetic epistemology, scientific universalism, has legitimised a flawed conception of meritocracy that in turn supports educational systems and credentials being used to perpetuate social and economic inequalities. Thus the structures of knowledge are critically linked to the development of the capitalist world-economy, having become thoroughly institutionalised and deeply embedded in the functioning of education. As expressed by Wallerstein (2006):

> The search for the good was now excluded from the realm of superior knowledge, which meant that there was no ground on which to criticize the logic of these inferences, since one was thereby being anti-intellectual. The structural social constraints that prevented people from entering the higher realms of the meritocracy were basically eliminated from the analysis or allowed to enter it only on the terms of accepting the assumptions of the two cultures in the investigation. (p. 78)

In other words, the historical dominance of 'scientific universalism', constructed as being somehow 'outside culture', has functioned to exclude challenges to the differential status given to particular knowledge within educational institutions and society. Moreover, the concept of meritocracy itself is positioned as beyond critique, given its claims to scientific validity using objective measures of criteria to determine differential outcomes. Scientific universalism thus gives legitimacy to a flawed meritocracy by excluding from consideration the particularist and idiographic knowledge that works against its effective operation for particular groups in society. Together, scientific universalism and meritocracy justify inequalities within and between nation-states, according to the failure of states and individuals to acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions ostensibly available to all. With scientific universalism claiming ideological neutrality as the only source of universal truth, it has "shielded the powerful from a moral critique by devaluing the plausibility and objectivity of moral critiques" (Wallerstein, 2006, p. 79).

A world-systems approach offers an historical theory of knowledge that aligns with, but also goes beyond, long-standing sociological critiques of curriculum content that highlight the particularist nature of dominant high status curricular knowledge, and the consequent sectional or power relations behind official curricula. Moore and Young (2001) cite the limitations of postmodern critiques of curriculum in particular, arguing that this approach "precludes the possibility of an alternative theory of knowledge" (p. 451). As noted above, Wallerstein's rejection of relativism makes the same point, but in a way that calls for a new epistemology that is "both nomothetic and idiographic, or rather it can be neither" (Wallerstein, 2004a, p. 148). As a theory of knowledge, a world-systems approach locates the tension between constructivist and realist conceptualisations of knowledge that Young (2008) has recently documented as another manifestation of the historical division of knowledge into nomothetic and idiographic epistemologies, adding to Wallerstein's call for an unified epistemology. World-systems analysis, as a knowledge movement rejecting these epistemological antinomies (Wallerstein, 2004b), seeks better tools for understanding social reality. This is not a call to replace one particular (or universal) knowledge for another, but rather the construction of a "multiplicity of universalisms that would resemble a network of universal universalisms" (Wallerstein, 2006, p. 84).

Conclusion

The political dimension is clear in Wallerstein's large body of work, with its consistent focus on the long period of transition of the current world-system, and the heightened potential agency in this transition to influence its trajectory toward a more equal, democratic and just, alternative world-system. This approach to world-systems analysis positions "the evolution of the structures of knowledge [as] simply a part of – and an important part of – the evolution of the modern world-system … [in which] … the structures of knowledge have entered a period of anarchy and bifurcation" (Wallerstein, 2006, p. 70). Wallerstein (2006) gives the example of cultural studies as having developed as a rejection of the Western, white and male perspectives that were elevated to universal status within the idiographic humanities. This illustrates the unsettling of the epistemological divide, which plays a critical part in the evolution of the whole world-system. Like this development in the structures of knowledge, cosmopolitanism can be seen as another, more recent symptom of the world-system in structural crisis.

Cosmopolitanism may contribute towards the rethinking of knowledge in ways that traverse both the global and the local, by integrating generalisability with what is deeply individual, the external with the internal, science with humanism. A world-systems approach, however, demands this and more. The point of better understanding social reality that world-systems analysis seeks to provide is always to use this knowledge to shape its evolution. This is an understanding of the

historical development and operation of the world-system as the primary unit of analysis, and intervention in its transition as an historical system toward an undetermined alternative. The structure of knowledge is central to this process, with the capacity to support a political project that addresses the central dilemma of our time, building a more egalitarian, just and democratic world-system. Such a project demands the we operate at three levels, "as an analyst, in search of truth; as a moral person, in search of the good and the beautiful; and as a political person, seeking to unify the true with the good and the beautiful" (Wallerstein, 2006, p. 80). The task for comparative researchers is to combine this better understanding with our potential agency to influence the shape of education systems in the future world-system. These systems are in the business of knowledge creation and citizen formation, and so will play a critical role in this historical transition.

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