

## Introduction

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### Towards the Next Epoch of Education: The Problem of Periodisation of the History of Comparative and International Education

#### Abstract

For the scholarly field of Comparative and International Education, which uses the reconstruction of its historical evolution to define itself and to chart a trajectory for its future development, the periodisation of its history assumes special importance, more so in times when a next or nascent epoch of education needs to be factored in this stock-taking exercise of past, present and future. This paper surveys the present stock of periodisations in use in the field and found these wanting. One urgent need is that the present phase in the development of the field should be identified, named and described. Besides providing an outlook for the future development of the field, one requirement for building this construct of the present phase in the field, is that it should take cognisance of the nascent epoch in education. This paper offers a set of ideas of the main features of this epoch, in the belief that the discussions contained in the remained of the papers of this book, will contribute towards forming a clear idea of this new or nascent epoch in education and thus contribute towards gaining an intellectual hold on the present phase in the evolution of Comparative and International Education.

Keywords: Comparative and International Education, history, periodisation, education systems, societal context, twenty-first century

*Who controls the past controls the future.*  
A quote from George Orwell's 1949 novel, *1984*.

#### Introduction

Comparative and International Education has as its object of study education (systems), such systems in their societal contexts, and a comparison of education systems in their societal contexts. Comparative and International Education has proven itself difficult to define, and as a dynamic and ever changing field. David Turner (2019) contends that it is futile to search for a definition of the field of comparative and international education and that the field of comparative and international education gets defined by the discourse taking place (among scholars) in the field. Given this nature of the field, the reconstruction of the historical

evolution of Comparative and International Education gains an importance even more than the historical evolution typically found in the beginning chapters of (introductory as well as more advanced) textbooks surveying scholarly fields of inquiry. It is in the historical evolution of the field that the identity of Comparative and International Education becomes visible, that the main lines of inquiry and topics that scholars have focused on becomes clear, and through which new lines of investigation are suggested (Wolhuter, 2001, p. 1).

In the reconstruction of history, periodisation is a key tool, to gain a grip on the complexity of history. However, the periodisation of its history has never been seriously interrogated by scholars in the field of Comparative and International Education, and even in the scholarly discipline of History, it has only very recently been moved into the focus of scholarly attention (Lorenz, 2017). In reflecting in this paper on periodisation in the reconstruction of the history of Comparative and International Education it will be taken that periodisation serves the general function of taxonomy in any field of science, namely basically to render comprehensible, or to reduce to comprehensible proportions, a large and complex set of phenomena. Furthermore, periodisation should create time units with maximum internal homogeneity and maximum heterogeneity between time units. In Comparative and International Education in particular, periodisations should highlight the main moments in the evolution of the field, with respect to all phases, including and especially the present, the descriptor of the phase should encapsulate the main features of the field (that is in the theoretical-methodological echelons of the field, as well as in the object of study, education systems and societal contexts). Moreover, from such a descriptor and from the depiction of the entire time line of the field, it should be possible to extract current challenges and deficiencies in the field and it should also be possible to extrapolate a future dimension: a vision or élan or trajectory for the future development of Comparative and International Education.

In this paper it will be argued that the current systems of periodisation extant in the field of Comparative and International Education are dated and problematic, and especially within the context of the new and next, coming epoch in education, new periodisations should be devised. A ground theorem of the field of Comparative and International Education has always been that education is shaped by societal contextual factors (see for example Crossley, 2019); the same can be said of the field of Comparative and International Education: it is being shaped or should be sensitive to changes in both societal and education system contexts (Wolhuter & Jacobs, 2022).

The paper commences with an outline of salient, defining features of twenty-first century society, and the new epoch in education it will in all probability induce. Then current systems of periodisation currently in use in the field will be surveyed and assessed. In conclusion pointers for a new system of periodisation will be given.

## **The (probable) defining features of the next epoch**

### *The next epoch of the societal context of education*

Based on trends identifiable in early-twenty first century society, the following contours can be drawn as probably defining the next epoch in the world. An ecological crisis is present, threatening not only the survival of the human species,

but even that of the planet. To address this challenge, the notion of sustainable development has gained currency, operationalized by the global community as the Seventeen Sustainable Goals. Demographically the earth is experiencing a population explosion, though it has constantly been losing momentum during recent years and decades, is still pressingly felt in large parts of the Global South. The global population is getting more mobile. Another salient trend of the early twenty-first century is the continued, accelerated technological progress, two facets hereof being the information and communications technology revolution, and the robot revolution. Economically the past decades have been one of growing affluence, and although the incidence of poverty has also declined, inequalities have been growing. Two other economic trends which loom large with respect to the future is the rise of knowledge economies and the fourth industrial revolution. A knowledge economy is an economy where the driving axis of the economy is the production and consumption of new knowledge. The signature feature of the fourth industrial revolution is the blending of the physical, the biological and the digital worlds.

Social trends include the rise of multicultural and diverse societies, and the decline in importance of the primary (family) and the secondary (workplace) social groupings in society. On the other hand tertiary (functional groups for example sport clubs, hobby clubs, or single issue lobbies) are rising in importance. Political trends include the demise of the power of the nation-state and the power vacuum left being filled from two opposite sides — on the one hand international or global (such as the World Bank or the United Nations) or supra-national structures (for example the European Union) and on the other hand geographically lower or smaller order structures at provincial or district or local levels. Other trends in the past decades are democratization, and a general trend of individualization. Trends in the spheres of religion and life and world philosophy include the persistent presence of religion, new forms of manifestation of religion (individualized, less organised, religion blending with spirituality) and the rise of the Creed of Human Rights as moral code of a globalized world.

### *The resulting next epoch in education*

The above identified new societal context asks for a new, next epoch in education. Main features of this imperative, which contrasts with the historically developed features of education systems include individualization, empowerment of each student, making space for creativity, education for global citizenship, and education for human rights. Furthermore, the possibilities which the technological prowess of the nascent fourth industrial revolution open (see Fullard et al., in this same volume), as well as other contextual features such as the ecological crisis, ask for a new consideration and appreciation of the objectives of education and the place of value education.

## **Periodisation in the reconstruction of the historical evolution of Comparative and International Education**

Arguably the most often used periodisations when considering the historical development of Comparative and International Education are those of Noah and Eckstein (1969), naming five phases till the end of the 1960s, and that of Roland

Paulston (1997) focusing developments since the 1960s. Noah and Eckstein (1969) named their phases a phase of travellers' tales, a phase of the systematic study of foreign education system with the intention of borrowing, a phase of international cooperation, a "factors and forces" phase, and a social science phase. The last three phases, taking the story from the 1960s were named by Roland Paulston as a phase of orthodoxy (this is the same as the social science phase of the Noah & Eckstein phraseology), a phase of heterodoxy, and a phase of heterogeneity. Heterodoxy is a phase of the 1970s and 1980s, characterized, according to Paulston, by the appearance of rival paradigms challenging the orthodoxy of the 1960s. The phase of heterogeneity, commencing around 1990, is, according to Paulston, characterized by a proliferation and a toleration of the number and variety of paradigms making up the field. Wolhuter (2001) combines these two periodisations covering the entire history of the field, suggesting that the phases do not represent a sequence, i.e. one stage replacing the preceding, but a progressive expansion of the field, with each stage continuing up to today. However, these two phaseologies, used separately or combined, viewed as a series of successive, mutually exclusive phases or as a progressive expansion of the field, is problematic. It is especially the last phase of Paulston, heterogeneity, that can be criticized on a number of counts. Tallying with a common view as to acceleration in history (Lorenz, 2017), the shorter time periods in succession of phases in the two periodisations sounds logical, however, the abrupt stopping in 1990, lumping the entire period 1990 till present then in one phase, is at variance to both the rest of the periodisations and to the notion of acceleration in history. To suggest that the field has been static contradicts for example the increasing rate of growth in the number of publications in the field (Easton, 2015). To suggest that the proliferation of paradigms is the be all and the end of all in the field the past thirty two years is a gross exaggeration, and turns a blind eye to much activity in the field, more so to seismic changes in the contextual forces shaping education, and to the (Nascent) new age epoch in education. No critical interrogation is encapsulated in such a summary of the field, even less so does any suggestions as to the future trajectory of the field or any elan emanates from it.

Other existing periodisations of the field are as unsatisfactory. Martin Carnoy's (2019) recent portrayal of the history of the field over the past fifty years, in general and at Stanford University in particular, consists of an accumulating number of theoretical orientations and thematic foci added each decade. These are then human capital theory in the 1960s and 1970s, modernization theory in the 1970s, a(n) anti-) neo-colonialism orientation in the 1970s, world society theory in the 1970s and 1980s, engagement with the state and education: legitimation, reform and knowledge in the 1980s, the state and education in the 1980s, Comparative Education and the impact of globalization in the 1990s, the impact of evaluation and Comparative Education in the 2000s, and international assessments in the 2000s. Carnoy uses his historical reconstruction as a basis for the reflection of the future development of the field at Stanford and beyond, in the conclusion chapter of his volume. In a recently published volume on leading perspectives in the field, edited by Beverly Lindsay, the preface states that the intention is to reflect on the past and to envision the future, Martin Carnoy (2021) offers the past reconstruction in the first chapter, which he describes a personal journey and summarises the history of the field over the past sixty years as three trends: Comparative and International

Education becoming a social science, an interest in Globalisation, and the rise of International Testing as focus of research.

Besides taking account of the contextual changes currently taking place, as well as the resulting changes in education, or new demands posted to education, offering suggestions as to beacons for a new periodisation of Comparative and International Education, or at least for the typification of the present era, should take note of what currently characterizes the field. It is to this that the paper will now turn to.

### **Current state of Comparative and International Education: Key features**

Perhaps the best way to glean the current state of the field and to identify its key features — to return to the earlier citation of David Turner wrote about what constitutes Comparative and International Education — is from content analysis done of articles published in top journals in the field. Two such studies, done on and published in the two top journals in the field (at least top as measured by impact factor) will be discussed here. In the first study, Wolhuter (2008) analysed all 1157 articles published in the *Comparative Education Review* during the first fifty years of its existence, 1957-2006. The conclusion was that the field shows two strong, seemingly opposite trends, namely a tenacious holding onto established traditions and at the same time a broadening. While the world trend of the nation-state losing its once omnipotent status, and of the locus of power moving in two opposite directions, towards regional and global units on the one hand, and on the other, to decentralised and local structures and to the individual, the nation-state remains the most frequent unit of analysis, and considerable scope exists for also including these other smaller and larger units. Literature studies as method of information collection still dominate research in the field. And despite a multitude of paradigms, most Comparative Education studies take place within the factors and forces paradigm, viewing education as the outcome of contextual forces. On themes of research, it seems as if Comparative Education still has not escaped the black box character of the field (which it has had since the era of the factors and the forces), namely to concentrate more on societal shaping forces of education systems, to the neglect of firstly what is taking place in education institutions and systems, and secondly the outcomes of education.

This paper also analyses frequency of themes in terms of five year cycles. In the last five years covered by the analysis, 2002-2006, the articles dealing with societal forces shaping education, the rank-order was: 1. Political factors, 2. Social forces, and 3. Global forces. With respect to articles dealing with education systems *per se* the rank-order of frequency was: 1. Students, 2. Curriculum, and 3. Institutional fabric.

The second study is a recent publication by Jing et al. (2021) surveying all articles published during the past decade, 2010-2019, in the journal *Compare: A journal of Comparative and International Education*, currently, in terms of impact factor, the top journal in the field. They found the most common foci of articles as follows (in order). The authors usually addressed the following research topics: gender, the disciplinary development of Comparative Education and International Education, internationalisation, citizenship education, globalisation, education

policy, teacher education, culture, globalisation, policy, citizenship, education for all, international students, and decentralisation.

## Conclusion

Periodisation is a tool, it can even be stated an indispensable too, to get an intellectual grip on the past, to reduce the infinitely complicated past to manageable, comprehensible proportions. In the field of Comparative and International Education, which defies any attempts to pin it down to a simple definition, the reconstruction of the evolution of the field (and by implication periodisation) assumes even more importance, because of its role in portraying the identity of the field and to serve as basis for reflection as to chart a future trajectory of the field. The periodisations extant in the field are however outdated and not suited for the purpose called for. One major caveat is the incorporation of the nascent new or next epoch in education, and the contextual imperatives constituting the antecedents of that epoch. At least one (the present and latest) phase in the development of the field should be identified, named and described. Besides providing an outlook for the future development of the field, one requirement for building this construct of the present phase in the field, is that it should take cognisance and reflect the new or nascent epoch in education. The author trusts that the discussions contained in the remained of the papers of this book and at the conference will contribute towards forming a clear idea of this new or nascent epoch in education and thus contribute towards gaining an intellectual hold on the present phase in the evolution of Comparative and International Education.

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