

Part 1

Comparative and International Education & History of Education

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Problematizing “Glocal” as a Catchword in Comparative and International Education

Abstract

“Glocal” has become a catchword in Comparative and International Education, as the compelling force of globalization has forced the Comparative and International Education scholarly community to reconsider their field. This paper traces the strong hold that the nation-state as level of analysis has had on scholars in the field, and how that notion and attendant conceptual tools have come under pressure. The variety of theoretical or paradigmatic responses to the global versus “local” in the field is surveyed. The paper concludes that the concept of “glocal” is a rather naïve escape from a complex situation, and such a response has the potential to incur great damage to the field. In conclusion a new theoretical framework, encompassing not only both the global and the “local”, but the entire hierarchy of contexts creating an evolving new global tapestry of education systems is suggested to render the field of Comparative and International Education streamlined to fulfill its mission in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: comparative and international education, globalization, glocal, levels of analysis, paradigms

Introduction

Scholars in the field of Comparative and International Education have a penchant for the theoretical bases and for the paradigmatic frameworks of the field. In fact, the signature feature of the field at least since 1990, according to Paulston’s (1997) phraseology of the historical evolution of the field, has been that of paradigmatic proliferation. The compelling force of globalization has stirred feelings of an existential crisis among the Comparative and International Education scholarly community (Wolhuter, 2015b). A common answer (which the community borrowed from other fields of scholarship and from public discourse) is to proffer the notion of the “glocal”. The aim of this paper is to critically assess the use of “glocal” as threshold concept in Comparative and International Education. The paper uses a historical approach – tracing geographical unit(s) of analyses during various phases in the historical evolution of the field. How geographical units of analyses in the field have been disrupted by the appearance of the force of globalization is then

depicted. The field (and related fields) stance viz-viz the phenomenon of globalization is the outlined, and the concept of the “glocal” and found to be far to naïve, furthermore appearing to be a symptom of laxity among scholars in the field. A more nuanced and complex framework with respect to the dimension of geographical levels of analysis is called for in the contemporary societal context, and scholars in the field should urgently attend to this assignment.

Geographical levels of analysis in the history of Comparative Education

In the historical evolution of the field of Comparative and International Education, the following seven phases can be demarcated:

- a phase of travellers’ tales;
- a phase of the systematic study of foreign education systems with the intention of borrowing;
- a phase of international cooperation;
- a “factors and forces” phase;
- a social science phase;
- a phase of heterodoxy; and finally
- a phase of heterogeneity (cf. Wolluter, 2019).

During the primitive, pre-scientific phase of travellers’ tales in the field, no particular geographical level or unit was salient. The practitioners of the second phase, that is the systematic study of foreign education systems with the intention to borrow best ideas, policies and practices to improve the domestic education project, have always had the nation state as principal unit of analysis. This applies as much to classic progenitor of this phase Victor Cousin (1792-1867) who admired the Prussian education system as model to be emulated by his native France, as modern-day, PISA inspired comparisons, e.g. the United Kingdom taking Hong Kong as education example (cf. Forrestier & Crossley, 2015). The nation-state retained its position as principal unit of analysis in the field during the phase of international cooperation. This too is evident right from the landmark publication of Marc-Antoine Jullien, the “father of Comparative Education” (cf. Fraser, 1964). The central slate of Jullien’s *Plan* was, after all the collection of data of the education systems of *countries*, so as to guide particular *nations* to improve their education systems.

By about 1930 Comparative Education entered the “factors and forces” phase, the basic tenet of the field was now to place the focus on societal contextual forces (geography, demography, social system, technology, economy, politics, religion and life and world view) as these shape education systems. Invariably these education systems were *national* education systems only. For example, one of the seminal Comparative Education textbooks of the era was Nicholas Hans’ (1949) *Comparative Education: A study of educational factors and traditions*, which dealt with the education systems of England, the United States of America, France and the Union of the Socialist Soviet Republics. Undisputed leader in the field at the time, in fact during the entire first half of the twentieth century (cf. Wolluter et al., 2009), Isaac L Kandel, describes the essence and reason for existence of Comparative Education as follows: “Comparative Education would be meaningless unless it tried to discover the meaning of nationalism as it furnishes the basis of education system”

(Kandel, 1933). In his book *Studies in Comparative Education* (1933), till long after the Second World War considered to be the standard textbook in the field of Comparative Education, he proffered the notion of “nation character” and that the central assignment of the Comparative Education scholar is to reveal and to reconstruct the “national character” of each nation or country, as it is this “national character” which forms the basis for the comprehension of each system of education. This approach (on the set of distinctive contextual forces giving rise to an equally unique education system in the case of each nation) and its exclusive focus on the *national* education system can be related to the interwar era, being characterized by rising nationalism (especially in Europe but also beyond) and by the rise of the nation-state as powerful force in (world) politics.

The three subsequent phases in the history of the field are the social science phase (from 1960), a phase of heterodoxy (or paradigm wars) from about 1970, and finally a phase of heterogeneity (of increasing diversity of paradigms) since 1990 (cf. Paulston, 1997; Wolhuter, 2019). In what has become a standard analytical tool in the field, the Bray & Thomas (1995) cube, distinguish between the following (geographical) levels in the field: Level 1. World regions/continents; Level 2. Countries; Level 3. States/provinces; Level 4. Districts; Level 5. Schools; Level 6. Classrooms; and Level 7. Individuals. Yet despite this impressive vista, the nation state has tenaciously remained the main unit of analysis in Comparative Education scholarship. In an analysis of all articles published during the first fifty years of existence of the top journal in the field, the *Comparative Education Review*, Wolhuter (2008, p. 325) found that in each period in the existence of the journal the nation state was the level of analysis of the overwhelming majority of articles.

Comparative and International Education confronted by the force of globalization

It was, while still comfortably cushioned in their theoretical and analytical edifice of the nation state, that comparativists too were confronted by the reality of the compelling force of globalization sweeping over the world. While there is no universal definition of globalization, the following description of Held (1991, p. 9) will be used as a working definition in this paper: “globalization refers to the intensification of worldwide social relations”. The reality of this force did not only disrupt the established schema of privileging (if not according exclusive status) to the *national* as the parameter of the shaping force of education systems – this will be topic of discussion in this paper, it also brought comparativists before a fundamental existential crisis regarding the justifiability and definition of the scope of the field of Comparative Education (cf. Wolhuter, 2015b), the discussion of which falls outside the scope of this paper (but has been done elsewhere, cf. Wolhuter, 2015a).

Comparative and International Education scholarly community’s response to globalization

The responses of the Comparative and International Education scholarly community to the force of globalization could be arranged along two dimensions. The first dimension represents a range of value-judgments of globalization, similar to those found in other social sciences and in the public discourse. Belgian

comparativist Roger Standaert (2008) distinguishes between three stances: anti-globalization, pro-globalization, and other-globalization. The first then represents a negative judgment on globalization (and its effect on education), the second judge globalization to be a benevolent force, whilst protagonists of the third see in globalization *per se* potential advantages, but plead for a different kind of globalization than that currently manifesting itself in the world. In Comparative Education literature the anti-globalization stance seems to dominate (cf. Wolhuter, 2008, pp. 334-335).

The second dimension deals with the relative agency accorded to global versus local contextual forces shaping education, and by extension then education too. On the one hand there are those proclaiming isomorphism, seeing a homogenization of education all over the world, under the influence of the (uniform) forces of globalization. In the Comparative and International Education scholarly community the most well-known protagonists of this position are the Stanford comparativists John W. Meyer, Francisco O. Ramirez and John Boli, a classic publication in this regard is their 1985 article published in the *Comparative Education Review* (Meyer et al., 1985). However, this position is also maintained by those using the theoretical framework of neo-institutionalism, which is by no means uncommon in the field of Comparative and International Education (cf. Wiseman et al., 2013). On the other end of the spectrum there are those scholars who tenaciously hold on to the position of the “local” as being immune to the forces of globalization in giving shape to education systems. As an example the publication of Takayama (2010) could be cited. Other scholars have attempted to allocate in their schema place for both global and local forces. An example is Bruno-Jofré (Ed.) (2012), using the metaphor of the “refraction”: that is global forces refracted by different spaces. Such a metaphor sounds like suggesting a rather passive role for the local, and no dynamic interaction between local and global. The metaphor of the “dialectic between the global and the local”, appearing in the sub-title of R. F. Arnove, C. A. Torres and S. Franz’ (Eds.) *Comparative Education: The dialectics of the global and the local*, do allocate a place for both global and local, as well as for the dynamic interplay between the two. But, from the point of view of the theme of this paper, the main shortcoming of that book, which is the most common prescribed text for Comparative Education courses at universities in the world, is that the chapters nowhere unpacks the notion of the dialectic of the local and the global in education.

At this point in time, when comparativists are shaken out of their comfort zone and set ways by the compelling force of globalization, many have seized at the notion of the “glocal”, following a trend in other social sciences and in the public discourse at large. The lexical meaning or definition of “glocal” is “reflecting or characterized by both local and global considerations” (Oxford Living Dictionary, 2019).

Conclusion

“Glocal” when used by comparativists gives recognition to both “local” and “global” context in shaping education; although the role of each as agency is not clear. Furthermore, the exact meaning of “local” is unclear. “Local” in its general use in public and scholarly discourse in the social sciences certainly has a much more, narrower circumscribed meaning than “national” which is presumably the

meaning in Comparative Education discourse, given the persistent place of the nation state as dominant unit of geographical analysis. However, the Comparative Education literature contains examples of studies demonstrating the salient and active role of context as shaping force of education, at a range of levels: global, supra-national, national, sub-national (province/state), district and even local community level (cf. Wolhuter, 2008). These contextual forces as at their various levels in this hierarchy, as they shape education (systems) should be combed out by scholars in the field, as scholars reconstruct the more complex but infinitely richer tapestry of education systems now evolving over the globe. Conversely, scholars in the field should also tease out the societal effects or dividend of education (the one part of the subject of the field woefully neglected by scholars in the field thus far, cf. Wolhuter, 2008), using this hierarchy of contexts as theoretical framework. In this way scholars can build a corpus of knowledge corresponding to reality and promising to fulfill into the twenty-first century the most noble purpose of the field, namely pursuing the philanthropic mission laid down by founding father Jullien (cf. Wolhuter (Ed.), 2019).

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