

Part 7

Thirty Years since the Fall of the Berlin Wall: Educational Reforms Worldwide

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Teacher Education in a Post-1989 World: A Comparison between Lithuania and South Africa: Global Isomorphism, Regional Hegemony/Homogeny, or Resilient Local Context?

Abstract

Taking the example of post-1989 teacher education reform in Lithuania, and comparing that with teacher education reform in South Africa, a country that also underwent a total societal reconstruction at the same time as Lithuania, this paper defends the thesis that the configuration of education at grass roots level, is the outcome of a dialectical play of forces at various geographical levels, including the global, the regional or supra-national, the national and the sub-national or local.

Keywords: context, global, Lithuania, South Africa, regional, teacher education

Introduction

With the example of teacher education in Lithuania and by taking South Africa as datum line, this paper investigates the validity of the concept of the East Bloc as taxon in Comparative and International Education. Secondly the paper serves as an illustration of the thesis (expounded by one of the authors, Wolhuter, 2019) namely that the concept of “glocal” is too vague and represents an oversimplification, and that Comparative and International Education scholars are in need of a much finer calibrated instrument for their analyses and explications as to how the education systems in the contemporary world are shaped by dynamic dialectic playing out itself over a hierarchy of several contexts.

Societal contexts

Globally

The early twenty-first century is defined by a number of features, including the ecological crisis, demographic trends, the information and communications technology revolution, growing affluence, the rise of knowledge economies, the

demise of the once omnipotent nation state, democratization, and the neo-liberal economic revolution (cf. Steyn & Wolhuter, 2019). Demographic trends refer to the population growth in the Global South, the Global North approaching zero and even, in some places, negative population growth, and the increasing mobility of people. A knowledge economy is an economy where the production and consumption of new knowledge has become the driving axis of the economy.

Eastern Europe

For four decades since the end of the Second World War, the countries of Eastern Europe fell under the totalitarian socialist governments, and were cut off from each other as well as from the rest of the world. As from c. 1990, these countries were the scene of instant democratization and a change to free market economies. The new environment also meant an end to international isolation, and on the other hand, social space for the development of national identities and for religion was opened.

Lithuania

Situated at the extreme Western tip of the erstwhile East Bloc, Lithuania has a small population of 2.79 million (February 2019). Due to low birth rates and high emigration rates, the country has a negative population growth rate. Lithuania joined the Bologna process in 1999, and became a member of the European Union in 2004. Culturally and linguistically it is a relatively homogenous society, with about 87 percent (2018) of the population speaking Lithuanian as home language. For most years since 1991, the country was characterized by strong economic growth rates. Lithuania is a post-industrial society, with a service based economy. Religiously the majority of the population are Christians, of the Roman Catholic denomination.

Africa

Virtually all of the fifty three states of Africa are recent entities, having attained independence from their erstwhile colonial masters in Europe, around 1960. After a dismal performance during the first decades after independence, the fall of the Berlin Wall (and demise of the East Bloc and its influence in the Global South) has triggered political democratization and a neo-liberal economic revolution in the African region as well. The past three decades Africa has kept rising in economic performance, and its combined economic, demographic and geographical weight is making it an ever larger player in global politics (cf. Wolhuter & Wiseman, 2013).

South Africa

As from 1994 South Africa has undergone a socio-political transformation comparable, though not identical, to the decolonization wave that swept through the continent in the decades after the Second World War roughly from North to South; in fact, South Africa was the last African country destined for this fundamental change. The global context of the neo-liberal economic revolution and the democratization that has characterized the world in the period after 1989, shaped and at the same time placed constraints on the re-configuration of the South African economic and political landscape. While an upper-middle income country with per capita income and enrolment ratios at all levels of education far ahead that of the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa, poverty is widespread, and education still quantitatively undersupplied, of poor quality and unequal participation (cf. Wolhuter, 2014).

Education

Globally

The affluence which followed the onset of the neo-liberal economic revolution, the new emphasis placed on the value of education in a Knowledge Economy, and the information and communications technology revolution resulted in an explosion of enrolment numbers all over the world, at all levels of education, but most markedly on the higher education level. In the short space of sixteen years, from 2000 to 2016, higher education enrolments globally more than doubled, from 99.5 million to 215.9 million (UNESCO, 2019). The neo-liberal economic revolution also brought with it a call for relevance in curricula, and carried into the education sector its principles of performativity, efficiency, and the profit motive (cf. Davies & Bansel, 2007).

Eastern Europe

The main features of post-1990 education reform in Eastern Europe were the deideologisation of education, decentralization, opening of spaces for internationalization and nationalism, and differentiation and diversification. Ideological indoctrinating pressures on education were lifted, and replaced by a new philosophy of “humanization of education” informing education policy and practice (Mitter, 1992, p. 21). The old ideal of the “total communist person” as educational objective was discarded, and respect for individuality and individual skills as a true and tangible humanism became evident (Wolhuter, 1996, p. 27).

Lithuania

Post-1989 Lithuanian education aims reflect the new political and economic context as outlined above. According to the Concept of Education in Lithuania (1993) the ultimate goal of education is a personality with developed physical, psychological and spiritual powers, ready to live in a democratic society, capable of creative acceptance and development of humanistic national and universal cultural values (Želvys, 2019).

The neo-liberal economic revolution eventually shifted the focus of attention from sociocultural towards the economic mission of education. Outcomes-based approach and cost-effectiveness became the main driving forces of educational changes during the last two decades. Furthermore the country has been hit by reduced enrollments, due to demographic dynamics (declining births and a strong stream of emigrants) as well as by a decline in quality of education, at the level of higher education in particular, due to decreasing public funding of higher education, which shrank from 1.2 percent of GDP in 2010 to 0.6 percent of GDP in 2017 (Statistics Lithuania, 2018). The ongoing reforms of consolidating secondary and tertiary education networks are aimed both at improving the quality and ensure the economical effectiveness of the national system of education.

However, substantial educational reforms towards more inclusiveness is being implemented in Lithuania. Lithuania highlighted the priority to promote changes in the educational systems, aimed at ensuring quality education for every learner, and creating a good school for all. Legislation on what has traditionally been conceptualised as special education has developed progressively over the past 30 years to reflect Lithuanian shift in its democratic and humanistic tradition and the resultant development of inclusive education as a quality education for all. This led

to creation of a decentralised system that passes responsibility for ‘special schools’ to municipalities, assuming that they will change into resource centres for other neighbourhood schools; the requirement for all schools to be made accessible to each child; the provision of funding and other resources, including teacher competence, to support students with special educational needs in regular schools.

Africa

Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, was the last part of the world where mass systems of public education were established. In most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, institutions of formal education, i.e. schools, were established for the first time by nineteenth century missionaries from Europe. In the early twentieth century colonial governments too got involved in the supply of education. However, by the end of the colonial era, education was still very sparsely supplied, and of low quality. After the attainment of independence (c. 1960) African governments embarked on an impressive education expansion drive. In the post-1990 context the private education sector was given space and took off. While enrolments in the public education sector increased unabatedly, the reduced availability of funds meant that quality of education deteriorated.

South Africa

South Africa underwent a socio-political reconstruction comparable though not identical to the rest of Africa, but with a time lag: 1994 in the case of South Africa, around 1960 for most other countries in Africa. Furthermore South Africa had to make this change within the parameters set by the neo-liberal economic revolution. While South Africa had in 1994 enrolment ratios significant higher than the rest of Africa, education was unequally supplied, and deemed to be too authoritarian (i.e. teacher-centered) (cf. Wolhuter, 1998; 1999). The ground pillars of post-1994 education change were democratization, multiculturalism, decentralisation and desegregation (Wolhuter, 1999). Integral to these pillars were the advancement of a learner-centered, inclusive education system, built on the principles of inclusion and social justice. The specific purpose of an inclusive education system is to provide equal access and quality education to all children (Nel, 2018). Furthermore a change was effected from content-based education to outcomes-based education (Ibid.), which, currently, after several reviews, reverted back to a more content-driven education approach again (Booyesen, 2018).

Teacher education

Globally

Three global trends in teacher education are evident. Firstly, there is a drift from teacher training colleges to universities being tasked with teacher education. Secondly, there is an increase in the duration of teacher education, with Finland and the European Union and in its slipstream all countries which joined the Bologna process, of requiring a Master’s degree (or five years of university study) for teachers at (at least in senior) secondary schools. A third trend, lying at odds with the first two which suggests more rigorous teacher education, but in line with the neo-liberal economic revolution, is that teacher education programmes is no longer conceptualized as only equipping students with a series of measurable skills or techniques (much akin to the training of technical apprentices), rather than educating

students to think critically through the study of academic/theoretical foundations (Schweisfurth, 1999).

Lithuania

In Lithuania, post-1990 teacher education reforms were characterized by a deideologization and internationalization. One part of this was the introduction of new subjects such as Philosophy of Education and Comparative Education in teacher education programmes; a road out of the isolation and inward lookingness of the Soviet era, and of embracing the wider world. Teacher education takes place at universities and colleges, and the Bologna process is evident in shaping teacher education. The decrease of school-age population in the country is both a challenge and an opportunity for a teacher training system. On one hand, limited demand for new teachers leads to a reduction of governmental grants for teacher training studies and closing down of teacher training institutions/study programs. On the other hand, decrease in quantity of students provides better opportunities of upgrading the level of studies. For example, the decrease in enrolments of student teachers makes possible consideration being given to upgrade the minimum qualification required of teachers being a Master's degree.

Lithuania highlighted the priority to promote changes to ensure quality of teacher education. It requires that educators and education support professionals have appropriate competences and are ready to work in the rapidly changing innovative school. Changes within education system are closely related to educational paradigm shift from teaching to learning and collaboration-based learning. In Lithuania, in order to recruit relevant resources, including expertise and competencies, for quality teacher education three university 'teacher education centres' have been appointed. Innovative teacher education increasingly focuses to innovative education of creative and able to critically think prospective teachers and teacher educators and to already practicing teachers as well as to the learners and their changing needs at school.

South Africa

Due to demographics and political factors, the first post-1994 years necessitated a reduction of teacher education enrolments. During the years up to 1994 the number of teacher training colleges were exponentially increased, inter alia as part of an exercise by the then governments to win "the hearts and minds" of Black South Africans. The surplus of teacher education capacity made the phasing out of teacher training colleges easier, and making universities the sole site of teacher education, meaning with Namibia, South Africa is now the only country in Africa where a university degree is the minimum requirement for new teachers. Tying in with the pragmatic swing in teacher education reform worldwide, related to neo-liberal economics, but in the case of South Africa more motivated as statement against an inherited system of education deemed to be too authoritarian, the change to outcomes based education brought about a major change in teacher education programmes as from 2002, where seven roles teachers are expected to play formed the basis of the curricula. However, in the aftermath of the failure of outcomes-based education, within the realities of the South African context, the latest directive for teacher education programmes (Department of Basic Education, 2015) signal a return to the basic disciplines of Foundations of Education and Content Pedagogy.

Furthermore, an integral requirement of the current teacher education policy is that student teachers must attain a pedagogical competency to accommodate diverse learning needs in one classroom.

Conclusion

The employment of Eastern Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall as a (temporal-spatial) taxon in Comparative and International Education is not without merit, but the merit thereof has its limits. The developments of teacher education in post-1989 Lithuania, shows that such developments were affected by factors common to post-1989 Eastern Europe, such as deideologisation of education. On the other hand such teacher education developments were also shaped by global forces (such as the neo-liberal economic revolution, which affected education and teacher education globally). Secondly, the triumph of the Western liberal model, which followed the fall of the Berlin Wall, had a sudden forceful effect on education in parts of the world other than Eastern Europe too, as the example of South Africa shows. Lastly, the comparison of Lithuanian with South African teacher education post-1989 reforms show that national contextual factors too have played their part in shaping education developments.

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