
Education, globalisation and the role of comparative research

Andy Green

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Andy Green

Professor of Education

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If knowledge is fundamental to globalisation, globalisation should also have a profound impact on the transmission of knowledge.

(Carnoy and Rhoten, 2002)

Globalisation itself is neither good nor bad. It has the power to do enormous good.... But in much of the world it has not brought comparable benefits. For many, it seems closer to an unmitigated disaster.

(Stiglitz, 2002)

Globalisation, by increasing the interdependence among the people of the world, has enhanced the need for global collective action and the importance of public goods.

(Stiglitz, 2002)

The foremost task of democratic politicians on the threshold of the next century will be to restore the state and the primacy of politics over economics. If this is not done, the dramatic fusing together of humanity through technology and trade will soon turn into the opposite and lead to global crack-up.

(Martin and Schumann, 1996)

Introduction

Comparative education has traditionally meant the study of national education systems. The field first developed in the early nineteenth century in parallel with the rise of national education, and it took the national system as its main object of enquiry (Noah and Eckstein, 1969). The twentieth-century comparativists who consolidated it as an academic subject, including Michael Sadler, Isaac Kandel and Nicholas Hans, continued to focus on the classification and explanation of characteristics of different national systems. But how far is this approach valid today? Doesn't the 'decline' of the nation state make national systems obsolete? And isn't the very idea of a 'system' anachronistic in a world of market triumphalism and global disorganisation? As Peter Jarvis asks in a recent edition of *Comparative Education*: 'Why should we undertake comparative analysis at all in this Global Village?' (Jarvis, 2000: 353).

These are tough questions for comparative educationalists because the concept of the national education system forms the keystone of the whole mental architecture of comparative education. It may be hard to think comparative without it. Nevertheless, the question has been rightly posed and needs answering. The purpose of my lecture is to explore how globalisation is changing education and the implication of this for comparative study. Why study education *systems* and why study *national* education systems in particular? What else should comparativists study, and how? What defines the field of comparative education? I approach these questions first historically and secondly methodologically.

The parallel rise of comparative education and national education systems

Writing about education in foreign countries has a long history, going back in fact to antiquity. Xenophon described the training of Persian youth for citizenship, comparing the aims and structures of Persian and Greek education; Julius Caesar, in his *De Bello Gallico* (book vi), commented on the educational aims

and procedures of the Druids and attempted some general explanations; and Marco Polo wrote about education in China. In the early modern era, well-travelled literati from Europe frequently wrote about their observations of education in other European countries and even in Asia, just as Asian writers commented on their experiences in Europe. For the most part these were un-systematic travellers' tales, what Noah and Eckstein refer to as a superior kind of journalism (Noah and Eckstein, 1969).

This tradition continued in the nineteenth century with the reports on foreign education by Europeans such as Victor Cousin, James Kay-Shuttleworth and Matthew Arnold, and by American educationalists such as Horace Mann, Orville Taylor and John Griscom. In a sense these were still travellers' tales but they had assumed a new form. They were somewhat more systematic at description and classification, although often still highly subjective; they also now played a significant political role, in the sense of being used for policy purposes. Reports on foreign education systems were used as an early and weak form of 'evidence-based policy making': they sought foreign examples of policies and practices to borrow, and empirical data on the effects of foreign policies and practices as evidential support for policies advocated at home. They were also conscious of the fact that they were studying a new educational phenomenon – the *national education system*. Marc-Antoine Jullien, often considered the founder of comparative education, set out in his 1817 text, *Esquisse et vues préliminaires d'un ouvrage sur l'éducation comparée*, to provide some systematic comparative classification of education systems, based on rudimentary questionnaire surveys.

Comparative education, in its nascent form as a 'discipline' or, as some prefer, a 'sub-disciplinary field of application' (usually of comparative social science), began with the notions of national systems because they were the emergent contemporary reality – the important things to understand. The national education systems which arose in northern Europe and the northern USA from the late eighteenth century were *sui generis*: radically different from the artisanal and clerical forms of learning that went before. As Margaret Archer described them in her classic book, *The Origins of Education Systems* (1979), they were systems of formal schooling at least partly funded and supervised by the state, providing

a putative monopoly of education to all school-age children in a given nation; and whose different levels became increasingly systemically co-ordinated and integrated over time.

These systems began with the national networks of elementary schools that were developed with state financial and legal assistance into a universal phenomenon. Post-elementary secondary and technical schooling subsequently expanded from its tiny elite base, to allow a small trickle of upward mobility and give credibility to the Napoleonic maxim of 'the career open to talents'. Except in the American North and West, the secondary schools represented a parallel system separate from the mass elementary school system until considerably later, but gradually institutions did become more articulated with one another, and systems emerged which were increasingly regulated by the state. As public schools came to predominate over private and voluntary institutions, governments increased their control over systems, providing the majority of funds, licensing and inspecting schools and teachers, organising teacher training through growing networks of dedicated Normal schools and, in most cases, overseeing national certification and standard school curricula. These were definitely systems in formation, and they had increasingly central functions within society.

They were also distinctly national, both in the sense of being state-driven and in the sense of meeting needs defined in national terms. National education systems developed, as I argued in *Education and State Formation* (Green, 1990), as part of the long process of state formation that stretched in a great arch from the late absolutist states, through the French Revolution and beyond to the gradual construction of democratic nation states in the nineteenth century. Through these national education systems states fashioned disciplined workers and loyal military recruits; created and celebrated national languages and literatures; popularised national histories and myths of origin, disseminated national laws, customs and social mores, and generally explained the ways of the state to the people and the duties of the people to the state. National education was a massive engine of integration, assimilating the local to the national and the particular to the general. In short, it created, or tried to create, the civic identity and national consciousness which would bind each to the state and reconcile each to

the other, making actual citizens out of those who were deemed such in law by virtue of their birth or voluntary adoption.

It is no surprise then that the first comparative educationalists were preoccupied with systems and with nationhood. They organised their classifications of education around national systems; they collected data at the national level where they could; and they sought national characteristics to explain variations between systems. They reckoned, rightly, that the state was a major force in fashioning education systems, and therefore analysed national political forms, as well as other national factors such as language, climate and religion, to understand differences between systems.

Jullien was the first to try to classify the characteristics of different national systems, focussing on institutional forms and processes (Jullien, 1817). Emile Levasseur, a French statistician later in the century, made more systematic quantitative comparative comparisons using data on enrolments (Levasseur, 1897). He also sought to explain variations in country systems with reference to religion, race, climate, and levels of democracy. He found, for instance, as the historian Carlo Cipolla was later to confirm, that protestant northern European nations typically had higher enrolments than southern Catholic nations (Cipolla, 1969). There was some occasional interest in within-system differences. Joseph Kay, another educational traveller, noted, like Jullien before him, that comparison across regions within states might be fruitful, particularly where there were interesting sets of variations as between cantons in Switzerland (Noah and Eckstein, 1969). However, it was mainly cross-national study of systems that preoccupied these early comparativists.

The major comparative scholars of the first half of the twentieth century, from Sadler down to Kandel and Hans, were equally concerned with characterising and explaining national systems, although they did this more rigorously and with more concern for the complexities of causation than their forebears. Sadler was famously concerned with the social contexts external to institutions. He believed, contrary to modern orthodoxies about 'school effects', that these were more important than internal institutional dynamics to the understanding of how the education process worked in each country. Kandel also explored the cultural and historical 'forces and factors' behind system variation, including

the roles of State and Church, and the effects of class, race, and social and economic organisation.

Both viewed education through the lens of the nation state. According to Sadler: 'All good and live education is an expression of national life and character. It is rooted in the history of the nation and fitted to its needs.' (quoted in Noah and Eckstein, 1969: 41). Kandel, likewise, argued in the preface to his major work, *Comparative Education*, that his work was 'based on the point of view that education systems are dominated by national ends, and that it is the duty of educators and teachers to understand the meaning of nationalism and all the forces that contribute to it' (Kandel, 1933: xxiv). Kandel was a liberal internationalist and aware that nationalism could take what he called a 'sinister' direction, although given that he wrote in the 1930s he was perhaps less alert to the imminent dangers than he might have been. However, his approach was imbued with a nation-state perspective. There is little discussion in his works of national minorities or intra-state cultural differences. Although he notes 'that there is considerable danger in employing such a generalization as national character' (1933: 23), he didn't, for all his scholarship, entirely escape the trap.

These early pioneers treated national cultures and institutions from an historical vantage point, stressing long-range patterns and continuities and what institutional economists now call 'path dependency'. Arguably they veered towards a kind of national cultural determinism and they were perhaps rather less attuned to historical discontinuities and structural divisions of class and ethnicity than they might have been had their scholarship extended more to the works of the founding fathers of sociology. However, when their historical humanist legacy was superseded in the 1960s with a more social scientific approach this was, on the one hand, through the new scientism of Noah and Eckstein (1969) and, on the other, through the pragmatic problem-solving approach of Brian Holmes (1965). These indeed pulled comparative education closer to social science, although somewhat at the expense of historical depth, as Andreas Kazemias has noted (2001). However, much of the new comparative education remained narrowly empirical – either positivist or policy-reform oriented – and still adrift from much of the more theoretically nuanced work in other comparative social science disciplines.

Perspectives also remained largely national. The national system remained the main unit of comparison, although the focus now was as much on outcomes as causes. Increasingly, as governments became more obsessed with measuring national performance, and as the IEA and other bodies obliged with major international surveys of achievement, comparative education was drawn into a kind of cross-national Olympics – ranking education systems in terms of their effectiveness. Countless monographs from the OECD, CEDEFOP and other bodies also focused on the description and classification of national systems. Apparently, the more internationalised education research became, the more it focused on comparing national systems.

So what happened in the remaining decades of the last century to cause us to ask whether education systems may now be in decline and cross-national analysis obsolete? The brief answer is globalisation.

Globalisation and its myths

Globalisation can be defined as the rapid acceleration of cross-border movements of capital, goods, labour, services and information – a process that has intensified since the 1970s as a result of three major factors: cheap energy and transportation; the growth of information and communications technologies; and the impact of the financial and trade liberalisation. The latter began with the post-Bretton Woods flotation of exchange rates and gathered pace with the rise of neo-liberal politics under Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. All three factors lay behind the rapid increases in Foreign Direct Investment and multinational enterprise that became the hallmark of the current phase of globalisation. What was decisively new about the process was not only the sheer scale of financial movements (with capital markets moving over one trillion dollars on a normal day – Thurow, 1996) and the colossal market domination of multinational corporations (responsible for some 53 per cent of world value-creation (much of channelled through untaxable off-shore accounts, see Beck, 2000)). It was also its extension beyond capital, goods and labour, to services, knowledge and culture. Globalisation is not purely a matter of economics. Equally

important, though more complex, are the effects of globalisation on politics and culture.

Internationalisation, as Hirst and Thomson remind us (1996), is by no means a new phenomenon. International trade has a long history and movements of capital and people reached high levels even before the First World War (in terms of capital movements not reached again until the 1970s and in terms of people movements still not surpassed). However, the recent surge of globalisation is both quantitatively and qualitatively distinct. So much is agreed in current debates about globalisation. What is not agreed is how far these economic trends will converge around a single world economic model and how far they will change the political and cultural landscape. Does globalisation mean the end of the nation state as the main unit of political and social organisation? Does it mean the end of cultural differences and the creation of a MacWorld of homogeneous cultural space? So far social and political science has found little agreement.

Some useful distinctions can be made, however. As Ulrich Beck notes (2000), globalisation – an objective, empirically-verifiable process – is different from ‘globalism’, a political ideology which advocates the transformation of the world along neo-liberal market lines. It is the latter which is responsible for the major myths that surround contemporary debates on the issue: that the globalisation process is linear, universal and inevitable; that it necessarily leads to the demise of national politics and cultures; and that it is invariably a ‘good thing’.

Globalisation is hardly a seamless phenomenon. In fact it is characterised above all, like capitalism generally, by uneven development, both spatially and temporally. Although its impacts are felt elsewhere in the world, it is fundamentally about transformations in just three regions of the world: North America, Europe and Asia, and even within these changes are uneven. We can, after all, see quite diverse models of capitalism developing, even under the global sway of the market model, from the so-called ‘bandit capitalism’ of post-Soviet Russia, to the new and distinctive forms of capitalism in the state-developmental East Asian countries and in mainland China (Albert, 1993; Brown, Green and Lauder, 2001; Castells, 1997; Dore, 2000; Hutton, 1995; Thurow, 1993). The global economy is not wholly convergent and nor does it change in an uninter-

rupted and linear fashion. As Harold James reminds us in his recent book on *The End of Globalisation* (James, 2001), the last major historical surge of internationalisation, in the half century prior to the First World War, led to the 1929 Wall Street Crash and the subsequent world slump. Unfettered market triumphalism was the ideology of that previous era of globalisation and, as the great historian of Liberalism, Karl Polanyi, argued (1957), this played no small part in the final collapse of European Liberalism and the subsequent slide into a second world war. It was national capitalism, not globalisation, that predominated subsequently during the three decades of miraculous economic growth that followed reconstruction and pre-dated our current era. Clearly globalisation is a not a one-way, or a one-speed, historical street.

The inevitabilist vision of the hyper-globalists and free market ideologues is profoundly ahistorical and undialectical, just as was the progressivist market triumphalism of their nineteenth-century liberal forerunners, and probably just as dangerous. It is also prone to the same kinds of economic determinism. The arguments of Ken'ichi Ohmae (Ohmae, 1990) and company that economic globalisation will lead to a *borderless world* – a world without frontiers, and beyond national politics and national culture – is largely fantasy.

Eric Hobsbawm may have been right to argue, famously, in 1980 that 'the nation state is no longer the primary vector of historical development' (Hobsbawm, 1990), but since he wrote that nation states have been proliferating at an unprecedented rate, not least with the collapse of the former communist regimes. There were eighteen new states in the first half of the 1990s alone (Smith, 1996). At the same time, for many countries, including those advocating a 'fortress Europe', borders become more, not less important. Nation states may not be capable at present of playing the broadly progressive role they played in two great eras of state formation following the French Revolution and the Second World War, and they may be increasingly forced to share their sovereignty. But they are clearly not about to disappear and for one very obvious reason. Despite the proliferation of supra-national political organisations and the tentative emergence of what Beck calls 'transnational civil society' (Beck, 2000), there are still as yet no transnational political entities of sufficient democratic legitimacy or effectiveness to reduce the need and desire for national states as

the primary units of societal organisation and political loyalty (Green, 1997). If the nation state had given way to effective supra-national governance we might not now be facing a reckless and self-interested US-led war against Iraq.

Nor is the world becoming culturally homogenised except at a very superficial level. It is true that the reach of global media is extending, and that people's aspirations are increasingly shaped by images and goods deriving from distant cultures; arguably this was a major factor in the final collapse of the Soviet State (Hobsbawn, 1994). It is also true that the transnational companies like Coca-Cola and Nike do, as Naomi Klein argues (2001), seek to create global brand images and that this fosters a common global idiom. There is increasingly a global consumer culture. However, this again is not an uncontradictory process. Global brands are domesticated and adapted (Italian children renaming Disney's Mickey Mouse Topolino – Beck, 2000); anti-globalisation protestors in Canada use 'culture-jamming' to subvert the images of the brand advertisers and reclaim local cultural space. A much more accurate metaphor for cultural change than homogenisation is the notion of 'glocalization' developed by cultural analyst, Roland Robertson (1995). Time/space compression often means the hybridisation and pluralisation of cultures – dominant cultural forms mutated by receiving cultures, mixing with local cultures which globalisation make ever more globally visible. A global *mélange*: Thai boxing by Moroccan girls in Amsterdam; Asian rap in London, Irish Bagels and Chinese Tacos.

The third great myth of the globalists is, of course, that globalisation is an unmitigated good. In one sense globalisation is neither good nor bad: it all depends, as Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz (2002) argues, on how it is managed. But the way the world is managing it currently – or rather the way the dominant powers are not managing it – is clearly bringing enormous material benefits only to some, while subjecting us all to enormous dangers in terms of environmental devastation, political instability, cultural conflict and social fragmentation.

That the material benefits of globalisation are spread unevenly is pretty clear. Whilst material standards rise ever higher in the heartlands of globalisation – including the East Asian Newly Industrialized Countries, which have been major beneficiaries of the process – poverty is mounting inexorably in several conti-

nents in the world – adding over 100 million to the world’s poor in the 1990s alone (Stiglitz, 2002: 5). Inequality increases not only within most states, but also, and more dramatically, globally. According to one estimate, while the wealthiest 20 per cent of world population were three times richer than the poorest 20 per cent in the mid-nineteenth century, the ratio is now a staggering 86 to 1 (Martin and Schumann, 1996). This is not, of course, attributable to globalisation per se. The poorest populations are generally living in those 100 or so countries that have barely begun to integrate with the global economy. As the saying goes: there is only one thing worse than being exploited by a multinational and that is not being exploited by one. However, it does have everything to do with the uneven development of globalisation in its current unregulated, market-driven form.

Powerful western states, most of whose economies originally grew under protectionist regimes, maintain their subsidies on agriculture, progressively impoverishing the agriculture-dependent states, whilst preaching ‘free trade’ to everyone else where it suits them. The global enforcers of ‘free-market’ globalisation and the so-called ‘Washington Consensus’, the WTO, IMF and the World Bank, serve the interests of the powerful states and corporations, first and foremost. WTO trade agreements reflect mainly rich-country interests in intellectual property rights and open markets in manufactures and services; IMF loans are designed primarily to ensure debt repayment to rich-country creditors; and ‘one-size-fits-all’ World Bank structural adjustments programmes involve unnecessary fiscal austerity and over-hasty liberalisation of finance and trade that are administered to weaker countries for whom they do more harm than good, whilst benefiting investors in richer countries with wider market access (Stiglitz, 2002). The uneven benefits of unregulated globalisation arise inevitably from the unequal terms of engagement which some poorer, less organised societies – lacking the strong states of the East Asian winners – face in their encounters with the global market. The old historical adage about free markets favouring the strong still applies (Hobsbawm, 1969).

Political and social instability is another present danger of globalisation. Part of this instability arises from the globalisation of finance, as we saw in the Asian financial crisis. The volatility of these markets is extreme – removed from

rational judgements about economic fundamentals they are now driven by the crowd psychology of mass investors and the speculative instincts of the professional players whose success depends on anticipating what other will do. As George Soros has said (Soros, 1998) – and he should know– world financial markets are one step from total chaos, and while the virtual global money dance goes on, untold disorder and disruption results in countries (like Korea) which suddenly fall out of favour with the global investors.

Instability arises from another source also. One of the deep ironies of the global age is that just as the nation state is weakened as an historical force, recrudescient nationalisms and religious fundamentalisms are proliferating. The new nationalisms are not the ‘historically progressive’ liberal sort of the classic early nineteenth-century age of state formation, where most new states were multinational, and where national identity was usually by notions of political belonging and civic responsibility. More often they are ethno-cultural and religious movements finding expression in xenophobia, racism and violence. Cultural domination and global inequality ferment defensive reactions within disrupted communities, and particularly those which equate global culture with American hegemony. These communities fight back through re-affirmation of traditional identities and beliefs. Horsman and Marshall (1994) talk – not lightly, I think – about the revival of tribalism across the world.

This brings me to my last danger. Globalisation inevitably disorganises social structures and dislocates communities. It has an irrepressible energy to invent and re-structure. It shifts jobs; uproots populations; transforms institutions and evaporates social conventions. As Karl Marx said of an earlier and milder phase of international capitalism: ‘All that is solid melts into air’ (Marx and Engels, 1968: 38) Much of this is progressive, and not all that is swept away was so worth keeping. However, there is a danger that this kind of ‘turbo-capitalism’ – as Edward Luttwak (1999) has dubbed it – is also capable of devouring its own foundations.

Max Weber famously argued that capitalism had essentially ethical roots in the Protestant culture of northern Europe – it grew out of social bonds and values that existed prior to and quite independently of it. Today we talk of ‘social capital’ – the networks, norms and relations of trust that facilitate collective

action, under-girding societies and successful economies (Putnam, 1993). This social capital, the deposit of centuries of social evolution – the by-product of a different era – is arguably eroding under the pressure of globalisation. According to Robert Putnam (2000) – scion of the social capital debate – this is most evident in the USA, the home of liberal globalist ideology and one of the countries most at risk from economic polarisation and social fragmentation. However, this is not only an American phenomenon. All countries caught up in the globalisation process witness the weakening of social bonds. Increased mobility and inequality slacken community ties and erode social capital.

Globalisation and education

So how has globalisation impacted on education? The answer must be fundamentally, but not in the ways that are often argued.

Globalisation itself has not yet substantially eroded national control over education. It is true that supra-national bodies have increasing influence in some areas. The OECD and World Bank have some impact, particularly on weaker countries, through their relentless global marketing of favoured educational policies, often backed by substantial financial clout. Within Europe, the Commission is undoubtedly keen to extend its sphere of influence, not least in its attempt to support the creation of a European knowledge economy through lifelong learning. However, education still remains officially a matter of national competence, which few member states are willing to cede. The fact that the Commission is obliged to advance its agenda through voluntary rather than regulatory means, through the so-called ‘open method of coordination’, only underlines the point.

Governments still seek to manage their national systems – indeed, in some ways, more actively than before with ever proliferating targets and audits. They know that education remains one area where they still have some control. As Robert Reich (1991) has pointed out, despite the waning of the ‘national economy’ and despite the internationalisation of most of the factors of production, human skills remain relatively immobile and national. Governments increas-

ingly see them as state resources to be deployed in the battle for competitive advantage in the global market. They are not about to give up this prerogative. Nor can they entirely ignore the need for the original Durkheimian function of education in transmitting national cultures and promoting social cohesion. This may be more difficult in modern pluralistic societies, where national and group identities increasingly part company from what is left of the saliency of statehood and citizenship (Delanty, 2000). However, as the centrifugal forces of globalisation relentlessly disrupt and fragment societies, governments simply cannot afford to exempt education systems from their responsibilities for promoting social cohesion. There are no other public agencies left which can do it (Green, 1997).

Nor are education systems all converging on a single model, despite the influence of transnational agencies and the proliferation of policy borrowing. New global policy rhetorics – like lifelong learning – are certainly emerging, but in practice they are interpreted and applied in quite different ways in different places, as my earlier research with Alison Wolf and Tom Leney showed (Green, Wolf and Leney, 1999). Education systems in Europe, for instance, vary considerably in their degrees of centralisation and market penetration; their approaches to selection and early specialisation in secondary schooling; and their dominant forms of upper secondary provision.

However, in certain key respects, globalisation does alter the prospects for traditional national education systems.

Most important is the impact of globalisation on the demand for skills and qualifications. With increased global economic competition, advanced economies can no longer compete with low-wage economies in cost-competitive manufacturing and retain their living standards – hence the rush towards the high value-added sectors which constitute the so-called knowledge economy (Brown, Green and Lauder, 2001). There has been much hype about the miraculous new virtual or ‘weightless’ economy. The new economy sectors never provided that many jobs – the software industry in the US, for instance, still employs less than a quarter of the number employed by General Motors – and there was never a prospect of it shifting everyone into highly skilled, highly paid work. Now, with the bursting of the IT bubble, Charles Leadbeater’s prescrip-

tion (1999) for 'Living on Thin Air' seems rather foolish. However, it is still the case that, on balance, work is becoming more skills intensive, and there is increasing pressure on individuals to gain higher qualifications or risk marginalisation in the job market (Ashton *et al.*, 1999). Hence the demand on governments to provide more learning opportunities intensifies.

However, governments are caught in a double bind here. As global economic competition escalates demand for learning, so it diminishes government capacity to meet that demand. Global market pressures force governments to keep control of public spending to avoid uncompetitive tax levels which will deter foreign investors and drive domestic firms and jobs abroad. The European Union, following the same global market logic, reinforces the point through its notorious 'Growth and Stability Pact' which obliges Member States to keep their budgets deficits below 3 per cent of GDP. These dual effects – of rising demand for skills and qualifications and diminished national state capacity to deliver them – create an international market for education increasingly attractive to private sector investors.

Higher education is to date the most internationalised and commercialised of the educational sectors. As international demand for them rises, so university research and teaching become internationally traded commodities offering potentially rich returns to those institutions which compete best in the market. Facilitated by new educational technologies, and supported by supra-national bodies such as the European Commission, international higher education teaching and research have grown exponentially and look set to continue to do so. In most countries, up until now, this has involved mainly welcome additional revenues for public sector institutions, but the potential for private sector involvement is clear: even in 1999 the OECD estimated the value of trade in higher education services at \$30 billion. The US private sector has already cashed in on this in a big way. Not only are many of the leading universities private businesses, but there has been a huge growth in the commercialisation and corporate branding of university life, so that most American campuses are festooned with advertising logos and their faculties are stuffed with corporate chairs. Nike alone have sponsorship deals with more than 200 campus athletics departments. The threat to academic independence from the gagging deals that often go with cor-

porate sponsorship of research and entire campuses hardly needs emphasising. The iniquitous 'non-disparagement clause' which went with Reebok's sponsorship of the University of Wisconsin is well known because students and faculty campaigned against it, but there must be many less blatant cases which never come to public attention (Klein, 2001).

School education is neither so internationalised nor so open to commercial exploitation as higher education for obvious reasons. The majority of children will not cross borders to go to school and internationalised virtual schooling is not an option where child minding and socialisation remain primary purposes of schooling for both parents and states. Nor have the profit opportunities seemed good enough to date to attract major corporate investment into the delivery of home student learning, although this is now growing. Edubusinesses such as Edison and Tessaract in the US have not been notably successful in running public schools and school districts because they have found it difficult, not surprisingly, to maintain standards and turn a profit at the standard levels of per student funding (Fitz and Beers, 2002). In Britain, Education Action Zones have received relatively little private sector investment and only a handful of failing education authorities and schools have been taken over by for-profit businesses. However, the number is growing. Tower Hamlets LEA has recently been handed over to the trading wing of SERCO (Regan, 2002).

Creeping forms of privatisation are increasingly evident, particularly in English-speaking countries. In the US Charter schools, less tied by regulations and standards than the public schools, offer better opportunities for profitable edubusiness, along with textbook and teaching aid production. The most notable example of this, reaching over 8 million school students, is Channel One's TV broadcasts, which smuggle in advertising with current affairs programming. In the UK the major form of privatisation to date has come with the commercial contracting out of services such as school meals and cleaning, and with the Private Finance Initiative, which involves private sector financing and operating of public service facilities that are rented back by the state. By November 2000, there were 71 such education projects planned worth some £680 million and involving 673 schools (Fitz and Beers, 2002). But there is also increasing involvement of private companies like Nord Anglia in mainstream

delivery activities such as curriculum development, school inspection and school improvement.

Britain has been more active in the privatisation of services than most countries. Nevertheless, as Fitz and Beers conclude in their recent study, ‘the privatisation of public education ... has so far moved at glacial speed’ (Fitz and Beers, 2002). However, one should not underestimate the commercial potential and political temptation that may push in this direction. While the European Union maintains the ‘Stability’ Pact’s punitive stance towards public spending, European governments will be tempted to find ingenious ways to plug public service gaps with private investment as the UK government does with the PFI, which conveniently takes public investment off balance sheet. Equally, at a time of dwindling capital investment opportunities, potentially lucrative markets in services are increasingly attractive to investors and corporate pressure for the opening up of these markets persists. International agencies are responding. While the terms of WTO’s General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) still remain somewhat ambiguous in relation publicly provided services, there can be no doubt that major interests lie behind the move to extend the international market in education provision.

Globalisation, then, does not reduce national interests in education, nor the desire of governments to serve them. However, what it does do is raise the demand for skills and qualifications whilst reducing state capacity to meet them. The most ubiquitous national response to all this is, in fact, lifelong learning – that most globalised and chameleon of educational discourses, which both masks and legitimates multiple policy changes, including privatisation. As competition and technological change drive up the employer demand for skills, and as individuals increasingly compete for career-enhancing certificates, so governments have to find new ways to meet the demand. Lifelong learning is an ingenious solution, made possible in part by the new learning technologies. By declaring learning a lifelong and ‘life wide’ process – occurring everywhere from the school to the home, the workplace and the community – governments are able both to respond to individual demands for more diverse learning opportunities which mesh with their modern lifestyles, and to shift the costs, which they can no longer bear, onto employers, individuals and their families and commu-

nities (Green, 2000).

This, more than any other development, challenges the notion of the 'education system'. We have been used to thinking about education in terms of schools and colleges and other institutions. In years to come these may well cease to be the main locus of learning activity. To this extent the idea of the educational system does become marginalised. We will have to start to think more about informal learning, workplace learning, and learning in the community and home (Broadfoot, 2000).

Implications for comparative education

So what are the implications of globalisation for comparative education? One conclusion we could draw is that cross-national comparison is now redundant. Ulrich Beck has taken this view (Beck, 2000). Social science, he says, has for too long been the creature of the nation state; since the founding fathers first treated society and state as co-extensive, the state has operated as a kind of 'container' of all concepts and data. Now, in an age of globalisation, says Beck, a 'nationally based sociology is becoming obsolete'. The message is clear: social science should abandon the 'methodological nationalism' of its intellectual past rather as Marx claimed to cast off his 'erstwhile philosophical conscience' in abandoning Hegel. The new mission should be to analyse world society and transnational space.

This is a tall order for comparative education. Like social science in general, and indeed probably more so, comparative education as a field has its origins in national thinking. From Jullien, Lefebvre and Sadler, through to Kandel, Hans, Mallinson and King, comparative education has taken the national system as its main object of enquiry and 'national character' as its main explanandum. This exclusively national way of thinking is now surely outdated. Explaining educational structures and outcomes in terms of national character and culture was always a somewhat essentialist exercise, in danger of reifying national culture as some irreducible and homogenous property. Now, with growing social diversity, the globalisation of culture and the creation of transnational cultural spaces,

this approach will surely not do. Comparativists should cease taking national states as the only – or even main – units for comparison.

There is certainly a call for more studies of education and learning across sub-national regions and communities: like the so-called ‘home international’ studies conducted by David Raffe and colleagues in Scotland, or Karen Evans’s multi-layered comparisons of youth learning and transitions in matched cities in different countries. Recent doctoral theses are using new approaches: for instance Jack Keating’s multi-dimensional comparisons of regional differences in upper secondary curricula within Australia and the UK (Keating, 1999). Much more comparative work could be done in this area. In Belgium, for instance, the language group forms the main basis for educational administration, and is thus a natural unit for comparing the combined effects of different structures and cultures on outcomes. Likewise Switzerland, with its French-speaking and German-speaking regions with different educational structures and cultures, provides an ideal laboratory for comparative work.

There is also room for more studies across supra-national regions. Bob Cowen’s work on ‘rims’ opens up a new perspective in regional comparison (Cowen, 2000). Similarly, the work of David Ashton and colleagues on European and East Asian skills formation systems (Ashton and Green, 1996; Ashton *et al.*, 1999) opens up the possibility of explicitly cross-regional analyses of skills formation, drawing on the now burgeoning regional studies of political economy (e.g. Albert, 1993; Berger and Dore, 1996; Dore, 2000; Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1993; Hutton, 1995; Streeck, 1997; Thurow, 1993). The High Skills Project (Brown, Green and Lauder, 2001) set out to analyse ‘national routes to the high skills economy,’ but like the earlier studies by Ashton *et al.* (1999) and Crouch *et al.* (1999) found as much potential for comparison of regional and sectoral differences. One can now imagine many more ambitious studies that would take the supra-national region as the predominant unit. There is substantial evidence, after all, that education and skills formation systems do tend to cluster along regional lines (Green, Wolf and Leney, 1999). If this is the case, comparativists could learn a great deal about how contexts shape educational change by studying how far pan-regional characteristics, net of the policy diffusion effects between the countries within them, do in fact explain cross-region-

al variations in systems characteristics.

Lastly, the salience of international cross-sectoral comparison also suggests another important point regarding units of comparison. So long as the units being compared have ‘societal’ characteristics (i.e. in terms of characteristic institutional structures and rules) there is no reason for limiting comparison to territorially defined units. Diasporic language groups, distributed communities and ‘virtual communities’, are all – in theory at least – amenable to comparative educational research.

This evident potential for comparison at different non-national levels does not mean, however, that Beck is correct to argue that cross-national study is obsolete. School systems, unlike some higher education systems, are still very national institutions. Their structures and processes are shaped primarily by national legislation and the national institutional and cultural contexts in which they operate. To understand the structural (i.e. institutional and cultural) factors that determine their forms and outcomes may often require that we compare across countries – especially where there is too little system variation within countries to allow within-country comparison (Noah and Eckstein, 1969).

Nations are still the preferred units for comparative social science for good reasons. Many of the data are still collected at national level. Many of the operative societal variables are measured as national level aggregates because they proxy for structures and institutions – labour markets, industry structures, political systems, cultural traits – which are still essentially national. Countries do still vary regularly and substantially on a whole range of demographic, economic and cultural indicators. As Ronald Inglehart tersely concludes from his exhaustive study of data for 25 countries in the World Values Survey (1990) ‘The peoples of different societies are characterized by enduring differences in basic attitudes, values and skills: In other words they have different cultures’ (1990: 3). These cultures are not monolithic and nor are they immutable. However, in given times and places they act as important determinants of social and political behaviour which cannot be left out of account.

The country level, therefore, remains important for comparative analysis – but it is only one of a number of levels at which comparison can be effectively used. The question of units of comparison should not in any case be decided *a*

priori, but rather according to research criteria. As Neil Smelser has argued, the main criteria for choosing the unit of comparison should be that it is: (1) appropriate to the theoretical problem; (2) causally related to the phenomenon being studied; (3) that there are data available at this level (Smelser, 1976). This allows for comparison at various different levels, including multiple levels. The difficulty is to make sure that where the level of observation differs from the level of explanation false extrapolations are not made from the evidence at one level to justify explanations at a different level – thus falling into the trap which economists call the ‘ecological fallacy’ (Smelser, 1976).

The main methodological challenge for comparative educationalists is not, in any case, about levels of analysis; it is about the nature of comparative analysis and whether to do it at all. Peter Jarvis’ question: ‘Why should we undertake comparative analysis at all in this Global Village?’ (Jarvis, 2000) may be not so hard to answer.¹ Globalisation, as argued above, is not so far removing difference from the world as to make comparison and contrast impossible. So long as there are still contrasting societal units to compare, comparison is still possible. Globalisation may alter the spacial dimensions of what we take to be a meaningful societal unit, but even Beck would not argue that society has ceased to exist, or that world society is irreducible.

The harder question to answer is what is comparative analysis? It can be argued that all social science is essentially comparative. Durkheim famously wrote that ‘comparative sociology is not a particular branch of sociology, it is sociology itself, in so far as it ceases to be purely descriptive and aspires to account for the facts’ (Smelser, 1976: 2). But for Durkheim accounting for the facts meant understanding the pattern of relationships between collectivities – or what he terms ‘social facts’ – since this is what distinguishes sociology from other disciplines such as psychology. The study, statistical or otherwise, of variations in individual traits and behaviours is therefore, rightly in my view, not generally considered to be comparative study, although it may share certain objectives with it, as Smelser argues (1976). The difference, as Charles Ragin lucidly argues, is meta-theoretical: comparativists believe that societies are ‘real’ phenomena; methodological individualists believe they are simply statistical abstractions (Ragin, 1981).

Collectivities, or societies, are, as Durkheim conceded, made up of individuals and their actions; but they represent more than the sum of those. The patterns of variation between collective or societal properties and behaviours, and the determining relationships between them, cannot be explained by the mere aggregation of individual characteristics and actions. This requires analysis of the effects of structures and characteristics which are integral to the collectivity or society itself, and which have meaning only at that level. Many societal characteristics cannot be considered, for instance, in individual level statistical analysis, either because they only show up as constants and cannot therefore be used to explain variation, or because they are meaningless at that level. Distributional properties, for instance, such as income or skills spread have no meaning at the level of the individual (Green and Preston, 2002 forthcoming). Comparative research is thus about analysing the pattern of relationship between characteristics of societal or collective entities, whether they be at national or other levels.

There are, of course, many ways of using comparative methods to understand relationships of cause and effect. John Stuart Mill famously wrote about the Method of Agreement, the Method of Difference, and the Indirect Method, which is a combination of the two (Mill, 1970). All methods of comparison in social science, whether quantitative or qualitative, are, in a sense, variations on this theme, although it is rarely possible to meet Mill's ideal requirements that all possibly operative variables are considered, because we cannot know in advance what they all are. Comparison works by the manipulation of variables, holding certain variables constant, so as to test the independent effects of other observed variables on outcomes (Smelser, 1976).

Quantitative comparison does this statistically, establishing probabilistic relationships between independent and dependent variables, and has the advantage that it can simultaneously test correlations amongst a large number of variables. However, quantitative analysis faces major limitations in cross-societal comparison. There are often insufficient data for many of the societal units that might be studied, thus reducing the number of possible cases in the sample to a point where there are more variables than there are cases. This makes statistical analysis unreliable. Statisticians may respond by widening the sample to a very dis-

parate range of countries or units, to achieve sufficient cases, but this introduces new problems about comparing societies that are essentially incomparable except at meaningless levels of abstraction. Statistical comparison across societal units is sometimes possible, but often cannot take you very far.

If comparative analysis is defined as comparing across societal entities, as argued here, then Charles Ragin is probably right to argue that the characteristic method must be that of qualitative comparison, or what he calls the 'comparative logical method' (Ragin, 1981). This method does not work with samples or populations but with all relevant instances of the phenomenon in question, or with a set of these cases that the researcher decides are relevant, and which will set the limits of generalisation for the explanation. Consequently, there is no temptation to compare large samples of dissimilar cases where the number of variables is so wide as to defy analysis. The logical method has a number of other advantages. First, whereas statistical analysis finds it hard to deal with multiple causation, logical comparative analysis tends to work with configurations of conditions. The logical method requires explanation of all cases under consideration. A number of valid sets of preconditions for the outcome of interest can be identified, whereas statistical analysis will only tend to bring out the most dominant (Ragin, 1981). Second, whereas statisticians only examine the relationship between specific variables, logical comparative analysis examines cases holistically and in their 'real' context. Qualitative analysis can therefore pay more attention to the actual mechanisms of causation, whereas statistical analysis alone cannot go beyond determining the probable strength and direction of causation. Logical comparative analysis cannot, of course, claim that its findings can be generalised beyond the cases under review, but in avoiding the universalising tendencies of statistical approaches, it tends to respect the unities of time and place which are, arguably, essential to any credible historical or sociological analysis.

Logical comparative analysis can be conducted in a number of different ways and for different purposes. In their very illuminating article on comparative historical sociology, for instance, Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers distinguish between three primary types of comparative 'logics-in-use' (Skocpol and Somers, 1980). The first type, described as 'parallel demonstration of theory'

and exemplified by Perry Anderson's *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (1974), involves using comparison to illustrate the application of previously derived theories in different historical cases. The process of applying the theory to given cases may enrich and refine the theory, and may demonstrate the explanatory power of the theory, but comparison is not used here either to generate or validate the hypotheses. In the second type of 'contrast-oriented comparison', exemplified by Reinhard Bendix's *Nation-Building and Citizenship* (1977), what matters most is that the historical integrity of each case is respected. Comparison is used to demonstrate the variety and particularity of historical conditions, thus throwing into relief the essential characteristics of each unique case. Theorising tends not to be as explicit as in the 'parallel' type, and comparison is not generally used to generate the explanations, which are usually derived at the level of each case, although within a common comparative frame of reference.

The third type of comparison is described as 'macro-causal analysis' and it is here, and only here, where systematic controlled comparison is used to generate and test hypotheses and explanations of cause and effects relationships. This, as Skocpol and Somers rightly argue, represents the most powerful form of comparative analysis and can involve works of huge complexity and power, such as Barrington Moore's magisterial *Social Origins of Democracy and Dictatorship* (1966). The difficulty with such works lies in maintaining an analytically driven discourse, which moves constantly between positive and negative cases, whilst also maintaining sufficient narrative detail about time and place so that the sense of historical period is not lost. Historians and historical sociologists will often disagree about the point at which such theorising moves beyond the genuinely 'historical'.

The methods of logical comparison which address cause and effect relationships are mostly variations on the 'indirect method', which Mill thought peculiarly suitable for phenomena that have multiple causation (Mill, 1970). Basically, the investigator examines multiple instances where a particular phenomenon occurs, noting whatever conditions they have in common, and compares these with a range of instances where the phenomenon does not occur. If certain conditions are common to the first set and are absent in the second set,

and if the cases are otherwise similar, you can assume that these conditions represent causes of the phenomenon in question *in these cases*. The method is always open to the accusation that there are ‘third causes’ which it has failed to observe, but this can be the case also, although it is less likely, in quantitative analysis, where a correlation may be due to an unobserved variable which affects both of the correlated variables simultaneously. Neither of the methods can determine for sure what is cause and what is effect, although quantitative methods have more chances of doing this where there is a longitudinal element and qualitative methods where there is some examination of the causal process. Only natural experiments and randomised controlled trials, with controlled samples and time frames, can escape these flaws, but even there social scientists may fail to understand what attribute of the intervention is having a given effect.

Macro-causal comparative analysis is, therefore, one – uniquely powerful – form of comparative analysis amongst several others valid forms, all of which aspire broadly to explanation. In relation, then, to comparative education we may broadly agree with Jurgen Shriewer’s contention that ‘as a social scientific method, comparison does not consist in relating observable facts but in relating relationships or even patterns of relationship to each other’ (Shriewer and Holmes, 1988). In order to warrant claims to comparative method, comparative education must go beyond classification and parallel description of cases. This may optimally be done through macro-analysis of causal relationships, but it may also involve ‘contrastive’ and ‘parallel’ methods, where these are at least seeking to confront theoretical propositions with empirical observation.

The problem with contemporary comparative education research is that much – or even most – of it is not actually comparative in any of the above senses. This is well illustrated by Angela Little’s recent survey of articles published in *Comparative Education* between 1977 and 1988, which shows that over 50 per cent have been single country studies. Some of these may be what Leach and Preston call ‘comparisons in a single nation’ but Little concludes that ‘only a small percentage [of articles] have adopted an explicitly comparative approach’ (Little, 2000: 285). Probably the vast majority of published studies in comparative education generally are either non-comparative analyses of single countries or parallel descriptions of education practices and policies across a group of

countries (which would fall into Hopkins' and Wallerstein's category of multi-national studies: 1970). Whatever the merits of these types of study, and they may be great, neither necessarily uses comparative methods to analyse or test hypotheses about cause and effect relationships, or even to confront theory and evidence comparatively to produce what Weber called 'understanding'.

We may believe, as I do, that it is not helpful to police disciplinary frontiers or to draw sharp lines around field of study. But any field or discipline needs some core and distinguishing methodological criteria. In comparative education, and indeed any field of comparative research, these must include the use of comparison to further explanation or to test claims about cause and effect relationships. In the absence of natural experiments in social science, the comparative method is the next best thing to scientific 'proof' and comparative education as a field would lose much credibility as a rigorous academic pursuit if it did not use this systematically.

Comparative education needs to compare, and to do this systematically, if it is avoid the accusation that it too often degenerates into a catalogue of travellers' tales, policy advocacy and opportunistic rationalisations of unscientific policy-borrowing. One way that it can do this is to draw more on the mainstream of comparative history and social science research for its concepts, methodology and evidence. But it is striking, when you revisit the central texts of the comparative education canon, how removed comparative education has been from some of the main currents in comparative history and social science. It is hard not to conclude that comparative education has been at times somewhat insular; sometimes too preoccupied with self-referential internal debates, including those perennials about the limits of policy borrowing and the boundaries of comparative and international approaches. We would do well to take more account of relevant comparative work in cognate fields, as well as to remember the important work in comparative education carried out by 'unbaptised' comparativists who do not go to comparative conferences and who do not see themselves as professional comparative educationalists (Alexander, 2001). Opening up comparative education in the twenty-first century should mean embracing all those who use comparative methods and whose work can help in understanding educational problems.

Comparative analysis remains the most powerful tool for (causal) explanation of societal aspects of the educational process. Globalisation does not reduce its usefulness, although in creating educational spaces which belong exclusively to neither nations nor systems, it makes us look to broadening our units of analysis. The major challenges posed for comparative education today, as ever before, are essentially twofold. The first is to make the field genuinely comparative. The second is to bring it back from its relative isolation into the mainstream of comparative social science/historical sociology where it rightly belongs. The enormous richness of the current social science debate around globalisation should at least help to make the second challenge attractive.

Note

1 See also: R. Dale, (200) 'Globalisation and Education: Demonstrating a 'Common World Educational Culture' or Locating a 'Globally Structured Educational Agenda?' *Educational Theory*, 50 (4): 427–48.

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