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## DO WE NEED COMPARATIVE EDUCATION IN A GLOBALISED WORLD?

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**Abstract:** *Globalization, and presently predominant educational governance and research strategies, certainly pose a new challenge on the theoretical and methodical background of comparative education as an academic field. Large scale research on education systems conducted all over the world uses uniform methodologies facing allegedly a more only preliminary not yet completely uniform "world education system". However, in this global research, uniform items are "compared" only in respect to scales, and not as substantially different entities embedded in different contexts of complexity. Using a critical view on these tendencies and strategies, we find strong arguments for the necessity to reconsider why we still need a more complex understanding of comparison and the continuation and even further advancement of a comparative education field which is apt to take into account the complexity of a non-uniform education world.*

**Key words:** *globalisation, comparative education, education systems*

*"Research should look at the meaning of questions and not at the quality of data; rigorous methodology leads to bringing about a substantial loss of reality"*  
(Education psychologist Rindermann, 2006)

*Collecting data is a waste of time if it does not serve as a catalyst for theories*  
(Anthropologist Arthur Maurice Hocart (1883-1939))

*The art of comparing is, and remains, the king's road to knowledge*  
(Political scientist Ulrich Menzel)

In the history of Comparative Education (CE) we find several paradigm changes, with the pendulum sometimes swinging to and fro. On the one hand, it follows general science history, on the other hand, such oscillations might be innate to the very concept of CE. It proudly refers to its early "foundation date", and the endeavour to establish it as an empirical ("positive") academic discipline.

Usually, the “birthday” of this new field is considered the year 1817, when Marc-Antoine Jullien, called Jullien de Paris (1775–1848), published his “*Esquisse et vues préliminaires d’un ouvrage sur l’éducation comparée, et séries de questions sur l’éducation*”. He postulated the establishment of a European institute for comparative education research, and published the first outline of a standardized, internationally comparative questionnaire for a study which was first to be carried out in Switzerland, and then throughout Europe. Switzerland was chosen “because of the great variety of climates, languages, religions, political organizations, and governments in the twenty-two cantons of the Helvetic Confederation, an infinite variety of educational establishments and systems, reproducing every possible known form is to be found there” (quoted from: Gautherin, 2000, p. 6). As we know, CE evolved differently from the visions of Jullien for various reasons. Apart from the general historical development, there also seemed to be basic discrepancies in Jullien’s new discipline’s design. Jaqueline Gautherin speaks about the “shaky construction of his ‘science of education’, which is indeed a curious piece, arranged for several voices, that of the honnête homme confident of the progress of reason, that of the former revolutionary interested in social and political change, that of the administrator concerned with efficiency and rationality, that of the amateur scientist, and that of the traveller curious to observe the minutiae of school life. This ‘science of practical utility’ is not only torn between a concern for specifics and the requirements of universality, or between anthropological realities and lofty generalizations, dichotomies ... but also hesitates between disparate formal schemata, and cannot make up its mind between ‘knowledge, will, and action.” (Gautherin, 2000, p. 8). These inconsistencies of a “curious piece arranged for several voices” might be seen as a birth defect, which tears apart the envisioned discipline. But we should certainly also take into consideration that they are not so much the consequences of a basic antagonism, but rather an intuitive anticipation of a unique new and very challenging multidisciplinary, without which this new field can hardly develop its full potency. This disturbing ambiguity of CE has been a challenge up to today.

In the 1980’s, Edward R. Beauchamp questioned if comparative education was an academic discipline on its own, and he concluded: “My own reading of the substantial body of literature on the nature and methods of Comparative Education leads me to the inescapable conclusion that there is no such thing as Comparative Education, that is, Comparative Education as a field of study does not exist.” (Beauchamp, 1985; quoted from Epstein, 1988, p. 117). CE was in a crisis. In its majority it consisted of secondary analytical, descriptive, and historical studies. They were sometimes inspiring and problem oriented, but hardly empirical, and rarely explicitly comparative works. This was confirmed empirically by a large study (Rust and others, 1999)<sup>1</sup>. The authors analyzed over 2000 articles from three front-ranking comparative education journals (Comparative Education Review, Comparative Education, and International Journal for Educational Development)

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<sup>1</sup> These journals are: “Comparative Education Review”, “Comparative Education” and “International Journal for Educational Development”.

from the 1960's up to the 1990's, and they revealed that in the 60's and 70's nearly 50 percent of all articles in these journals had been secondary analytical studies (literary reviews), and only about 15 percent each were to be classified as empirical or explicitly comparative research texts. In the 1980's and 90's the share of empirical papers grew, but the share of explicitly comparative papers remained roughly at the same level as before (Ibid).<sup>2</sup> A similar analysis of the German journal *tertium comparationis* revealed similar figures, with a still higher share of secondary analytical and less empirical studies (von Kopp, 2003, chapter 3). These figures suggest a worrisome neglect of empirical, and a constant alarming neglect of explicitly comparative work over the given decades.

The feeling of a crisis in CE had culminated towards the turn of the 1990's and it was Stephen P. Heyneman in his presidential address at the CIES-congress in 1993 who analyzed it comprehensively and critically, and at the same time outlined his vision of the basic principles of the way out of it (Heyneman, 1993). He pointed out that in recent years CE had faced a fast growing amount of important and urgent questions, which, however originated not from the "centre" of its academic representatives, but from the "periphery", from public officials, from institutions, areas, and other disciplines which had all become increasingly interested in and concerned with comparing education (politics, economy, sociology, economics, etc.). CE, was his argument, had no adequate answers, or had ignored these questions. We can see this presidential address as a turning point within CE which marks the definite start towards a new CE ("NewCE"). Its goals and *raison d'être* derive from the context which is dominated by a new (elite) class of international professionals, who are bound together in growing networks of intensified transnational co-operation and control over the sources of CE (compare Münch, 2009, p. 60). In the last two decades, education research and its context have changed substantially. Empirical studies and tests came to dominate CE, and I should like to ask anew Beauchamp's question in the light of these changes, and especially if NewCE has strengthened the position of CE as an academic undertaking – though inclusive, open to welcome "peripheral" disciplines, and based on the principle of interdisciplinarity.

## Globalization

'Globalization' is nowadays often used as a slogan. However, it is a reality which can be well documented empirically, although in social science literature we find different interpretations of its character, and of its dating and phasing (Menzel, 2004, p. 33ff). In any case, as a reflection of the recent acceleration of globalization, only between 1985 and 1995 the occurrence of the term "globalization" in social sciences literature increased about twentyfold (Menzel, *ibid*). Market, media, and political internationalization, have all added to a grown awareness of globalization. Supranational organizations (OECD, UNESCO, EU, etc.) intensely push forward globalization, among other things, in the field of education. But also in everyday

<sup>2</sup> A study on the comparative education journal "tertium comparationis" a few years later suggested a similar tendency for Germany: von Kopp, 2003.

life more and more international contacts – not least increasing migration – expose not only researchers, but also students, parents, and teachers to the comparison of different attitudes, values, and pedagogical system experiences. Hence, generally we could assume that we can count on a fast growing demand for comparative education research. On the other hand, if globalization pushes for convergence and standardization (perhaps even uniformisation) of world society: what would be left over at the end for comparing?

In education research, in the first line is PISA, which is an agent of globalization. In PISA, the global ambitions are not only expressed quantitatively (69 countries took part in 2009) but also qualitatively: Its intention is nothing less than to accomplish a “world education revolution” which is allegedly founded in “generally valid basic principles”, and is lastly based on “institutionalized cognitive rationality” (Baumert et al, 2001, p. 21). If we take these propositions seriously, then we have to ask, how close the PISA testing comes to mirroring rationality principles of a revolutionizing schooling in various system and culture contexts in a new and relevant way. Despite it dominating most public discussions in recent years both nationally and internationally, PISA to my mind did not contribute substantially either to new comparative theoretical and methodological, or to comparative practical pedagogical knowledge and better schools. Its measuring and scaling is not comparative education.

We might even suspect that the real relevance of PISA is less in education. For the German theorists of international law, Armin von Bogdandy and Mathias Goldmann, PISA and TIMSS came into the focus of their research not for their pedagogical contents and aims, but “the OECD’s PISA Policy” seems to be “a paradigm for a New International Standard Instrument”. Their value as models for international policy lies in their pioneering of a new “Governance by information”<sup>3</sup>, meaning a “process which impacts on a given policy field by shaping the cognitive framework of policy-making through the collection, processing, and dissemination of information in the respective area” (von Bogdandy & Goldmann, 2008, p. 3). Since its genuine – supra- and transnational – sphere of action has only a few established and generally acknowledged rules, the present phase of globalization is characterized by a only rudimentary form of global governance in the form of a loosely knit and multifaceted co-existence and co-operation of communication and acting on different levels of liability. Under these conditions of international politics, it seems to be promising to frame a specific, “softer form of governance” (Goldmann, 2008, p. 1) than can be found within the nation states: not sets of existing formal rules and laws, but a process which through co-operation and the establishment of facts, practices, and habits attains gradual accountability. Seen in this way, PISA is a “laboratory” for learning how to deduce “soft rules” for establishing hierarchical, supervisory, fiscal, legal, market, peer, and public reputational “accountability mechanisms” of global governance (Goldmann, 2008, pp. 15–20).

As for the “standardization” of education which would make comparison

<sup>3</sup> Other authors speak of “Governance by persuasion”, “Governance by opinion formation”, “Governance by rating and ranking” – von Bogdandy / Goldmann 2008: 3 footnote 10).

unnecessary, the reality of globalization outside the laboratories of test designing is not simply about detecting and constructing convergence and uniformity. It is accompanied by, and it produces itself, contradictions and “antagonistic constructions” (Münch, 2009, p. 60), centralization and decentralization, convergence and fragmentation, etc. on various levels. Certainly, globalizing structures and processes induce convergence and standardization to a degree. But this is not a linear process, and in order to analyse and classify the related processes relevantly, CE – a comparative education which is adopted and continuously adapting to the contradictory changes – is needed more than ever. How could we otherwise explain that, for example, Germany’s education system during the last two decades implementing globalization and Europeanization, is splitting off at the same time, more than ever over the past decades, into increasingly diverse school systems. Today it can be characterized as a labyrinth of “16 ... education systems, in 16 mini-education-states ... several thousand different curricula, and nearly a hundred variations of teacher training” (Der Spiegel, 2010, pp. 56–67). It seems to be difficult for any comparative research to identify behind this chaos the ‘invisible hand’ of “generally valid basic principles” without contextualized interdisciplinary analysis.

### New Empiricism and ‘New Comparative Education’

Empirical studies have come to dominate education research. Especially international and large scale assessment (LSA) test based research (like IEA and PISA) has advanced during the last decade, and it disposes of an increasingly sophisticated methodology. Seen from the point of view of the former (in many respects: justifiable) criticism of negligence of empirical research, this new accentuation seems to have advanced CE to a higher level of a scientific discipline, efficiency, and respectability. However, in spite of the grown methodological sophistication of international empirical research, there are reasons for scepticism if the new CE (NewCE) made really substantial progress and respectively went in the right direction. I should like to direct attention to some important aspects: The quality of statistics, the quality and functions of large scale assessment LSA studies using the example of PISA, evidence of data and its interpretation, and complexity as a challenge for empirical research.

### Statistics

Heyneman, in his already mentioned critics of the “old” CE, ascribes deficiencies of statistics explicitly to countries like Nigeria, Pakistan, Egypt, Brazil, Bangladesh, and regions like Africa, and Central and Eastern Europe. This list somewhat diverts from the problems with statistics in the rich and economically leading countries where – after reading the above list – we expect more than we get. It goes without saying that generally in the leading rich countries statistics are more sophisticated

(sometimes also more sophisticated in their manipulations), and – handled with care – generally very useful for comparative research, but they are not without errors, missing data, doubtful compilations. They virtually always need re-analysis and reprocessing by means of up-to-date comparative education research which is well founded in the continuity of theoretical and methodological development. At any rate, they are far from being qualified for an immediate comparison.

All present relevant international education statistics are based on ISCED 97 (International Standard Classification of Education in its 1997 version). Its categorizations and data merge with PISA data in today's leading international publications on education, such as *Education at a Glance*, *Eurybase*, etc. Although it's true that ISCED 97 provides us with a relatively detailed standardized pattern for comparing international education systems – which, however, leaves the assignment of the data to categories to the individual countries. Following the UNESCO definition, ISCED97 "... aids policy-makers and others who are looking to learn from the international experience in developing education systems, and to benchmark their performance with other countries". But without a comparative analysis based on the extensive knowledge of the respective education systems, direct comparisons are risky, and, depending on the question of comparative interest, often misleading. For example the secondary, postsecondary, and tertiary systems, which in each system usually have distinct and very complex structural and functional arrangements, are in those statistics very poorly differentiated. Artificially standardised data on a seemingly homogenous "upper secondary education" sector obscure, e.g. in the case of the hierarchical system of Germany, important social and professional career implications of certificates from different institutional types. In Japan, to give another example, a quantitatively and nominally homogenous upper secondary education sector is in reality extremely organized into a strict hierarchy (which, in addition, can change every few years). The problems behind these very sketchy examples are found generally in the whole apparatus of international education statistics.

## PISA

More often than statistics, LSA studies meet with criticism. Some of it is substantial: For example, for the German mathematician Meyerhöfer, progress in the respective methodology is nothing but "increasingly filigree statistical constructs with a constantly growing number of test persons", and he even doubts the accuracy of measuring: "Because we discover for TIMSS and PISA grave haziness of scaling, co-measuring of test-ability, errors, language distortions, and destruction of mathematical ratio, my work queries the appropriateness of these tests as an instrument for measuring" (Meyerhöfer, 2005, pp. 5–6; also: Rindermann, 2006). He also points to the fact that the large numbers tested, and the level of standardization of tests do not necessarily produce accuracy and reliability of the test, and in this respect the PISA scale points might not be very different from those of general school tests and marks as they have long been used in schools. This

assumption, it seems, has never been checked and analyzed (Mayerhöfer, 2005, p. 217ff).

Other criticism argues that PISA testing is nothing more than the old intelligence tests in a new form. The German, Heiner Rindermann, connected this argument in an interview with a comparison of international data and the allegation of “uneven distributed intelligence” among populations (Rindermann, 2007). Although he linked levels of tested intelligence to levels of modernization, he was confronted with accusations of racism. Apart from this, however, as a psychologist he had many more detailed technical questions on the construction and validity of the test (Rindermann, 2006).

There is also substantial criticism on the socio-political dimension of the new empiricism. The German sociologist Richard Münch in his studies pointed at grave contradictions of topical empirical research designs and their interpretations. As a general context, he sees the emergence of a new global elite and its claim for power, as well as its definition of economy, governance, and science. This argument reopens the criticism with which some comparativists reacted immediately at Heynemans presidential address. Steven Klees, for example, also a member of CIES, saw in Heynemans argumentation (and in his background as a former member of the World Bank) the interests of a neo-conservative movement which lobbied for the LSA studies (at that time mainly IEA-studies) which he characterized as “methodically questionable” and “in their outcomes inadequate” (Klees, 1994, p. 3 and 10). Münch’s criticism is, however, not only a repeat of earlier political arguments, but empirically analyzing experiences over the last decade of LSA research and its transfer into education governance patterns. There is such a multitude of examples that this transfer ends up in twisted constructions. As Münch shows in a detailed analysis, evaluations based on “quality benchmarking” – designed to support competition by incentives – do not at all direct systematically financial means to the most successful institutions (Münch, 2007). Whatever the reasons – contradictions and antagonisms evoked by inadequate reforms, or clashes between “global” and local elites and their power positions (as Münch assumes) – “decentralization” can end up in centralization, “autonomy” far from seldom means in reality more dependency, “competition” often ends with monopolies, etc. (compare von Kopp, 2008, pp. 23–25). The constant stream of this kind of “newspeak” hazes reality and hampers critical analysis. Subservience of research under these structures Münch calls “normality science”, and it goes without saying that there is no place left for critical and classical scholarship (Münch, 2009, p. 60).

### Evidence of data and its interpretation

Education science, apart from its other functions, legitimizes education policy, governance, and pedagogical action. A key element of legitimacy today is the claim of an “evidence-based education” (von Kopp, 2008, especially pp. 20–23). This concept in its present meaning first came into use in the early 1990’s in medicine as “evidence-based treatment” (in German “evidenzbasierte Medizin”, or “empirische

Medizin" respectively), and was soon taken over into education.

Although we all probably agree that we prefer medical treatment based on evident efficiency over arbitrary treatment or treatment based on superstition, still, there is serious criticism in medicine itself, which should be taken seriously in general also in other fields. One typical problem with evidence seems to be the widespread mathematical analphabetism of the "stakeholders" (as they are called today): "The term risk appears in the title of more than 10,000 medical articles published every year ... It should be alarming that, at the same time, most physicians and patients do not understand the crucial statistical numbers which medical research provides them. Collective innumeracy impedes the efficacy of evidence-based medicine and the ideal of shared decision making. From our studies ... we estimate that some 80 % to 90 % of doctors are innumerate, that is, do not understand the outcomes of standard tests, and are confused about the meaning of basic concepts, such as sensitivity and false positive rates" (Gigerenzer, 2007/08, p. 54). In a survey, doctors were asked: "What is the probability that someone who tests positive, actually has ... cancer? The correct answer is about 5%. However, the physicians' answers ranged from 1% to 99 %" (Ibid).<sup>4</sup>

I doubt that the situation for the "stakeholders" in education is better – which in fact is not a shame, because the correct interpretation of statistical and probability data is quite difficult, even at a basic level – and rather neglected: What seems to be needed therefore is Statistics Education in school Mathematics, because: "... the curricula in Western countries are almost entirely preoccupied with the mathematics of certainty, from algebra, to geometry, to trigonometry. The central role statistical thinking plays for educated citizens in a modern technological world has not yet been recognized in ... school..." (Gigerenzer *ibid.*, p. 56).<sup>5</sup>

### Complexity as a challenge for empirical comparative research

A complementary aspect of evidence is "indicators", today used so widely in education research and NewCE. They mean signals giving condensed information about the functioning of given systems. It goes without saying: Education policy and governance need indicators. But in many contexts I found an understanding based on naive machine analogies ("a red dashboard light warning that something

4 Gigerenzer is psychologist and director of the Center for Adaptive Behavior and Cognition at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development – in German: "für Bildungsforschung" The example in detail: "German physicians with an average of 14 years of professional experience were asked to imagine using the Haemocult test to screen for colorectal cancer. The prevalence of cancer was 0.3%, the sensitivity of the test was 50%, and the false positive rate was 3%. The doctors were asked: What is the probability that someone who tests positive actually has colorectal cancer? The correct answer is about 5%. However, the physicians' answers ranged from 1% to 99%, with about half of them estimating the probability as 50% (the sensitivity) or 47% (the sensitivity minus the false positive rate) (Gigerenzer et al., 2007/08: 54)."

5 Consequently, Gigerenzer and colleagues developed a first textbook of stochastics for high schools, and they work on methodologies of teaching probabilistic thinking to younger students: *Ibid*



is wrong with the car" – I heard this allegory at an international education conference from an expert<sup>6</sup>). Relevant indicators, vis-à-vis the complexity of today's society, cannot comply with such simplistic models which pretend an "all inclusive certainty". Education Comparativists are well aware of this fact. Similarly to the quoted Gigerenzer, Edmund King postulated an "education for uncertainty" (King, 2000, p. 268). For empirical research this means to take increasingly into consideration systematic empirical modelling, and designing research of non-linearity, complexity, and contextualization. This lastly could boost the knowledge on conditions of quality education, which de-contextualized, average-measurement-focused-testing cannot provide.

As pedagogues have always known, a complex multitude of top-priority-factors and conditions on the micro-levels of education are relevant for its quality, and lastly, the individuals are the main focus of education. In order to discuss how this can be translated into empirical comparative education research, I should like to turn once again to the latest discussions in medicine: There is increasingly evidence – and concern – that medical treatment based on statistical average data is effective only for certain fractions (in some cases, only the minority) of patients, depending on certain characteristic groups of patients. In some cases, such treatment with drugs that normally heal, can even be harmful. The (very young) strategy of coping with this phenomenon is known as "personalized therapy" – a somewhat misleading term, because it does not imply that (at least at present) there could be a special treatment fit to the individual conditions of every single person, but rather for certain groups with certain common physical conditions and predispositions. I think empirical education research – when copying the model of evidence basing from medicine – should not ignore these findings, and direct its attention to look for possible models of coming to an empirically based "personalized pedagogical diagnosis" which would include comparative data on typical learner profiles, as well as more up to date empirical data on profile-related didactics, supportive strategies, etc.

Such research is already done in fields other than medicine. Recently, the American technology writer Stephen Baker traced the efforts of mathematicians to compose significant patterns of consumer behaviour (all the relevant data can be found on the internet, especially in social networks and in databases on "loyalty bonuses" and electronic "trading stamps" of big stores). It seems that only a tiny elite of mathematicians is able to process this complexity of data meaningfully. Baker calls these specialists "numerati" in allusion to the role of "literati" in ancient China (Baker, 2008). Education research, of course, is not primarily interested in consumer behaviour (although research on education expectations and demands of parents and students as education "consumers" is an important aspect) but in a

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6 Similarly, the following quotation of a German politician when a journalist denoted him and his fellow politicians as "machinists of power". He exclaimed: "That's to the point! excellent term"! and continuing referring to the last two years of government work: "... at the latest after two years we got it which car journals are in danger to overheat, where to refill cooling water, where to lever, where to oil, where to grease, where to cushion, how to adjust the hydraulic system." (Der Spiegel, Nr. 36, 2009, p. 63).

multitude of aspects and factors which determine success or failure of individuals in the education system. True, probably many of us feel uneasy in the face of fishing for data (although we ourselves often quite carelessly expose so many of them to the net). However, such evidence of “personalized profiles” would not be interested in data of concrete, identifiable individuals, but in typical groups of constellations and conditions which go hand in hand with school success in order to support the favourable, and to prevent the unfavourable ones. The target of such comparative research would result in “large scale” evidence on the micro-level of social and cultural, as well as school contexts, on conditions of cognition, rationality, volition, and emotion in learning environments.

Complexity has been treated up to now mostly as a problem, a barrier, a hindrance for empirical research, because the conventional (binary-linear) type of data collection and processing (which is fully compatible with the linear-mechanistic thinking I mentioned above) quickly encounters its quantitative limits. Consequently, science often resigned or postponed the problem of complexity, and started to design simple but internally highly sophisticated models. This also happened, for example, in the research on cognition. “Emotion, context, culture, and history were de-emphasized in early cognitive science because, although everyone believed they were important, everyone also knew that they complicated things enormously. It was argued “that getting the program started required a simple model of cognition. The field therefore deferred consideration of affect, culture, context, and history until such time as there was a good model of how an individual worked in isolation. It was hoped that these things could be added later” (Hutchins, 1999, p. 367)<sup>7</sup>. However, this strategy of modelling cognition, did not add “these things” and, as the most aspiring outcome of cognition research – modelling artificial intelligence – shows, created “deaf, dumb, and blind, paraplegic agents as models of human cognition” (Hutchins, 1999, p. 368).

## What Kind of Comparative Education Do We Need?

Summarizing the preceding argumentation and the experience in my research, I have to conclude that NewCE has gained a dominant position in CE and changed its profile strongly, but it has not changed it substantially, and it has followed conventional paths. LSAs have substantially improved their methodology. But the huge input of money and research energy did not translate into added value for comparative knowledge on education and education systems in a globalizing world. True, due to its dominant position in the field, and its strong policy affiliation, NewCE promotes comparative education research also outside and on the periphery of the discipline. Unfortunately, the researchers and administrators as groups responsible for PISA have done little to prevent wrong or overstretched interpretations from the side of political clientele, which lastly could discredit serious CE.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Hutchings refers here to Howard Gardner: *The Mind's New Science*. Basic Books, 1985.

The impressive amount of data all in all did not go beyond the measuring of averages, it did not pave the way for new sophisticated and micro-level related “personalized education diagnosis” in the above discussed sense. It has also theoretically and methodically failed to overcome the limits of the philosophy of “mathematics of certainty”, which Gigerenzer and others ask for. Therefore the dominant paradigm of “NewCE remains in the sphere of linear thinking and “binary idiocy” (Sloterdijk, 2004, p. 31), and it is not really prepared to adequately model the rapid changes and uncertainties of the globalizing world.

To caution against an overly simplistic model of standardization is not necessarily a “conspiracy” of researchers who believe “that empirical research with universal standards of excellence violates natural complexity ... and is politically unacceptable” (Heyneman, 1993, p. 383). But we must also see that the concept designed by Heyneman in 1993 heralded the dawn of an “economization” in the field of comparative education, which came to be criticized by so many pedagogues and researchers. The point for me here is not, if behind this was a “conspiracy” or not (this is not to be decided here) but that this “marketization” did not bring us nearer to standards of evaluation and standardization which would be better fit to grasp the complexity of education reality. It promised more efficiency, more grass-roots autonomy, and more diversity, but the “real marketizing” – with NewCE being a powerful “transmitter” in the field of education – did in the reality of education practise and research, partly supported monopolization and partly fragmentation.

In its very essence, CE is in theory, research, and practise about “border crossing”. Its paradigmatic plurality and its positioning between humanities, social sciences, education policy, and education practise, is constitutional. NewCE with its dominance of the PISA-type empiricism was probably a necessary reaction on the former negligence of empirical research in comparative education research. But in establishing a dominance over the whole field, it has not supported – but rather suppressed – a balanced consideration of the different “voices” and methods – empirical, historical, ideographic, hermeneutic, “thick descriptions” – inherent in and of central importance for CE. Only respecting the balance, CE will have the potential to develop further into a unique and innovative “interdisciplinary discipline”, and have a sustainable impact on education research and education policy.

As for education policy and governance, certainly they are a legitimate part of the “voices”, but the power centre of the discipline has shifted away from a centre based on an academic self concept. This does not mean that Heyneman’s “periphery” of practitioners is not important, they are part of the education establishment, which indeed is internationalizing, and consequently they are becoming increasingly interested and involved in CE. But their dominance over defining what research is should be challenged. True, an overemphasized academism often retarded

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8 When the results from PISA 2006 were presented, German’s federal minister, understanding that the mean score points of Germany had risen in comparison to the two previous studies (especially in science, less in the two other areas), jubilated “The message of the day is that we have the best schools in Europe.” (Der Spiegel, 2007, No. 49, p. 86).

the development of CE (as of other fields). "Self-generated" research without immediate practical reference, sometimes endless and tedious self-circulating discussions – in the words of Heyneman: "the research community's eternal squabbling" (Heyneman, 1993, p. 385) were, however, never the *raison d'être* of CE. But they were, and are, a part of the often tenacious process of establishing, evaluating, and re-evaluating a discipline which defines itself as academic in the sense of upholding the standards of science. Research, which is not primarily based on the rules and ethics of an academic discipline, will gradually degenerate. In the end, a CE giving up its academic pretensions and being pushed into the position of a service industry, a "Service-CE", in order to do the preliminary work for the officials who pose the questions, would gradually devalue its answers, and in the end will not serve the officials because the seriousness and validity of the answers is directly dependent on the academic and theoretical power of research.

Wolfgang Hörner summarized the classical functions and tasks of the discipline as idiographic, melioristic, evolutional, and experimental (Hörner, 2010, pp. 5–6). Apart from this, as a teaching discipline it provides, to a high degree, "the kinds of skills that individuals who directly face the challenges driven by changes in global order need to have – 'how to think and act flexibly and strategically, how to move readily from one project or region to another, how to grasp a new situation quickly, and how to start solving pragmatic problems'" (Epstein, 1997, p. 118). Perhaps still more important: CE could have the potential and the function to become a "relevant voice of criticism and dissent" not only, as Torres argued, "in face of the distortions of globalization" (Torres, 2001, p. viii) but, I would add as a basic function of science based on research and knowledge: to be critical against all forms of belief in the given, and in any other, form of authoritarianism. Therefore CE could resume and pass on the heritage of the critical and emancipator idea of humanistic education.

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