

WALTEROVÁ, E.

***Srovnávací pedagogika. Vývoj a proměny v globálním kontextu. (Development and Changes in a Global Context).***

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Eliška Walterova's book "Comparative Education: Development and Changes in a Global Context" - *Srovnávací pedagogika. Vývoj a proměny v globálním kontextu* - is for its mere extend a remarkable work. Most notably, however, it is a remarkable work for its scope and its endeavour to cover a whole discipline with due analytical profoundness.

As the title suggests, the author assigns to herself the very demanding task of giving an over-all view over the development, the present state, and the tendencies of a whole academic discipline. Though, in Comparative education itself now and then arise discussions if comparing educational facts in various education systems, countries and cultures is an independent academic discipline or if it is rather a certain methodology used in the general discipline of pedagogical research. E. Walterová rightly reminds us the fact that comparison is a basic procedure of every science and research. Though, there are specialized academic subjects applying the method of comparison not only as a methodology but also as independent academic disciplines. Seen on an international scale, there are universities which established separate chairs or departments of Comparative Education. Other universities do not have such separate units, and as far as foreign education systems are studied at all in those institutions, it is done rather unsystematically, sometimes randomly and often in accordance with personal preferences and incidental international contacts of individual faculty members.

The fact, however, if a formally acknowledged academic discipline develops out of the enthusiasm for scholarship and academic research of lone fighters, be it single persons or groups, or if it is constituted by a bureaucratic decree in some universities as a discipline and a subject for students to be included in their course of studies, is not really decisive for the destiny of a discipline: Research activities become an academic discipline by the constantly increasing flow of relevant scholarship which promotes the factual knowledge in a given field and which forms an autonomous system of theoretical and methodological understanding and thus guaranties a constantly evolutionary progress in the given field.

No doubt, in the field of Comparative Education it is the rather small number of works like the one Eliška Walterová has written which definitely boost the further flow of scholarship and progress and supports it as a discipline and its acknowledgement in the academic world.

It is one of the great advantages of the book, that the author not only informs us about the discipline and its discussions but offers us a broad and systematic choice of relevant and characteristic contributions, often in form of quotations, of important educational comparativists on their view of the state of the discipline. In the same proven way of accurate and systematic manner as in the other parts of

the work, and with plenty references to the important thinkers of the discipline, the author proceeds in the field of definitions, terminology, and the description of the historical development of comparative education.

In Czech universities comparative education as an academic discipline and as a subject of comprehensive and systematic interest in world education – apart from extensive contacts among educationalists from the Socialist countries - was for long treated as a minor matter. Within a very short time following the change of regime in 1989/90 this changed definitely and we witness quite a number of recent books and articles on aspects of concrete comparison and on the methodology of educational comparison. Eliška Walterova's book outreaches many of these works by putting comparative education in a systematic way as well into the historical context of its development in the Czech context and worldwide as also into the broader context of today's dominant influence of globalization of society.

The historical overview is presented on the basis of diligent studies, and the author does not content herself with merely pointing at the start of this discipline (already at the begin of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) but outlines to a certain degree of detail the inner logic and the contextual connectivity of the emergence and the evolution of the discipline including a convincing periodization of this evolution.

It is no doubt especially deserving that the author in the chapters on the single world regions informs about not only the present state of the discipline but also about its history in regions and states which normally in European scientific papers often are dealt with only sketchily or which are totally ignored. Closer attention certainly deserves for the Czech reader the systematizing overview over the domestic comparative education.

The parts on history and present stage of the discipline are augmented with a characterization of the role of international and trans- and supranational organizations and agencies that have become mayor co-players also in the field of education. To a degree they exert very concrete influence over educational policies in the different countries. The tools of exerting this influence are partly direct ones (common, coordinated decisions of delegates of the member states of these organizations, financing certain projected and approved reforms in single countries etc.), sometimes they are indirect ones (for example through the influence of worldwide large scale assessments like IEA and PISA, expert reports on school systems like those done by the OECD, the spread of private assessment and test services, and others). Not least it is comparative education which systematizes such influences and transfer models, spreads their knowledge over the globe, and thus contributes to a certain worldwide homogenization of education. On the other hand the author rightly and with a deep understanding points out, that next to the homogenizing tendencies of today's globalizing development the significance and the meaning of tradition and cultural influences does not loose ground at all and will not so in the future - in the contrary, they might gain importance. The author points in a clear and convincing manner to the fact that comparative education finds itself positioned in a constellation of multifaceted, sometimes even conflicting interests and trends of convergence as well as divergence: On the one hand there

is the endeavours to broaden the knowledge on examples of “best practice” from which all school systems can learn and possibly even find a common way to attain the improvement of schooling and schools, and on the other hand it is wishful to broaden the knowledge of and the respect for various and culturally diverse ways. In this context the author also directs attention to the interdisciplinary character of comparative education. The term inter- or multidisciplinary is not seldom used as an empty formula. However, comparative education - and this E. Walterova’s work exemplifies nicely - cannot get away with not being in its very self-conception and with all seriousness an inter- and a multidisciplinary venture.

The author offers a work which brings to the fore convincingly and competently the not always unambiguous connectivity of a highly complex discipline in its historical flow and in its actual state. The book addresses in the first place educational comparativists and the pedagogical community as a whole, but it too will serve well all those who as specialists of other disciplines in their genuine work are theoretically or practically confronted with questions of education such as sociologists, economists, politicians, administrators and others. The book can be recommended also to a more general public, that is all those who take interest in questions of education and schooling in an international perspective. Last but not least the book can be recommended strongly as an important and valuable and well readable study material for every student of pedagogy.

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