

## THE RISE AND FALL OF COMPARATIVE EDUCATION IN SCOTLAND

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Comparative Education is studied throughout the world today. The World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES) has a membership of approximately 30 societies. Some of these include more than one country, as in the Comparative Education Society of Asia and the Nordic Comparative and International Education Society; some have a language link, e.g. the French-speaking Comparative Education Society (AFEC) and the Dutch-speaking Society; some are Sections of a larger educational organisation as in the case of the German Commission for Comparative Education, part of the German Education Society, and the Italian Section of the Comparative Education Society in Europe. There is a World Congress every three or four years, the twelfth such meeting being in Cuba in October 2004.

The European Society for Comparative Education, which offers membership to individuals rather than societies, held its 21st congress in Copenhagen in the summer of 2004.

There is a British Association for International and Comparative Education (BAICE) and two major Comparative Education journals are published in Britain, *Comparative Education* and *Compare*. In the English language there are various other journals, notably the American *Comparative Education Review*.

So what contribution has Scotland made and is Scotland making to the development of this major field of study?

### THE GLORIOUS DAWN

Scotland had the advantage of being among those first in the field, for when its Chairs of Education were created in 1876, in Edinburgh and St. Andrews, both new Professors of Education affirmed the value of studying the educational systems of other countries. In St. Andrews, Meiklejohn included in the outline of his course 'the notions regarding education and the processes employed in producing it followed by all nations that are called civilised' and, more specifically, 'the educational aims, beliefs, habits and processes of the national systems which exist in Germany, France, England and other countries.' In Edinburgh, Laurie's inaugural address referred to gaining 'much instruction from the educational organisation of other countries.' The Edinburgh University Calendar of 1880 included a reference to 'History of Education or Comparative Education' (the use of the term Comparative Education at that date is noteworthy since Sandiford claimed in 1918 that this designation had only recently been created in America). The specific contents of the Edinburgh course in 1884 included 'organisation and aims of Education in Germany, and a sketch of the present state of Education in England, France and the United States.'

Further development was shown in a course offered by James Drever in Edinburgh, the Edinburgh University Calendar of 1909 introducing it as 'Present Day Problems of Education – Contemporary Education Systems in Europe and America'; the course contents, according to the 1912–13 Calendar, were 'Secondary School Systems of Scotland, England, France, Germany and America.'

Unhappily, one cannot be sure how these courses were taught and which comparative approach was taken, though Drever claimed to use both lectures and discussion. In both universities the classical Roman and Greek systems of education were also considered suitable for comparative study. The evidence from exam questions of the time might raise doubts as to the depth of the approach, for in the early part of the 20th century an Edinburgh exam in Education lasted 2 hours and

seven questions had to be answered; in Aberdeen, in a three hour exam, 10 from a list of 12 questions had to be dealt with. From candidates trying to gain the LLA qualification of St. Andrews University in the late nineteenth century questions on foreign education seemed to demand simply factual knowledge. But additional work in the shape of an essay or 'thesis' may have provided for greater depth.

The choice of countries to be studied is interesting. It reflects the widespread interest in German, particularly Prussian, education at that time and may also have related to the fairly common practice of Scottish scholars going to study in Germany. Principal Donaldson's opening address in St. Andrews in 1901 may be taken as an example of the comparative approach in those days: German undergraduates, he affirmed, were equal to postgraduate Scottish students: and the German provision of a good general education for those going on to technical studies was something to be admired, and contrasted with the less admirable situation in England, since 'The English pay no regard to general education.' But Germany quite soon ceased to be regarded as useful comparative material while France and the United States remained common centres of interest. Subsequently, education in the Soviet Union attracted attention and, during later 20th century debates about the comprehensive school, Sweden was added to the list of popular countries for comparison. Oddly enough, in spite of the founders' intentions, education in England seems to have become rather neglected in later comparative studies. John Clarke, Lecturer in Education in Aberdeen University, did highlight in 1904 major differences between Scotland and England, with special reference to the matter of ecclesiastical control of schools (a very popular comparative education topic), but although informal cross-Border comparisons have frequently been made in both countries, systematic work by comparativists seems to have been rare – the British Isles comparisons made in 1977 by Bob Bell and Nigel Grant being an interesting exception. Yet Ian Findlay's book on *Education in Scotland*, published in the World Education series in 1973, provided comparativists in England and, indeed, in other countries, with an excellent foundation for their study – the more recent volume of *Scottish Education*, edited by Bryce and Humes, might however prove somewhat daunting, though the slightly earlier *Education in Scotland*, edited by Clark and Munn, could well serve comparative purposes, especially as it does refer to contrasts with English education. Possibly, too, some of the recent work of the Centre for Educational Sociology at Edinburgh University exemplifies renewed interest in comparisons between the two countries.

#### CONSOLIDATION

Once thus established, Comparative Education seems to have continued to be accepted mildly as an appropriate subject of study in Scottish Universities, retaining some associations with the History of Education. In the early twentieth century, as the Diploma and Degree in Education were created in the four universities between 1916 and 1919, Comparative Education was taught at both Diploma and Advanced level, under such titles as Modern Educational Systems and Problems. (The titles seem chosen to indicate the relevance of the courses to the realities of life in the schools of Scotland.)

But in spite of the promising beginning and the considerable development of Scottish University courses in Education after the First World War, no marked progress in the study of Comparative Education as an independent discipline seems to have followed. Courses tended to focus on the structure of educational systems in other countries, with particular attention to the role of central authorities for education and with rather little human interest in the study of differences. Admittedly, for those taking the new degree in Education the claims of Psychology were often paramount, from the career point of view as well as from intrinsic interest. Then too, the men at the head of the four Departments of Education were not specially attracted by Comparative Education: Dr Boyd's classic work, *The History of Western Education*,

first published in 1921, did comment on theories of education and educational innovations in France, Germany and America (the project method seemed to him ‘a worthy expression of the practical genius of the American people’) but his focus was on general principles of education rather than on the characteristics of any one system. In Aberdeen a generalist approach similar to that found in Glasgow was favoured by Norman Walker, while in Edinburgh Godfrey Thomson became renowned for his work in psychometrics and William McClelland in St. Andrews/Dundee focused on selection for secondary education. Possibly A.F. Skinner, who succeeded McClelland in 1941 but later moved to Toronto, showed by his editorship of the *Canadian Journal of Comparative Education* some influence of the Comparative Education tradition in Scotland.

#### RENAISSANCE

The period between the wars seems indeed to have been a time of consolidation — or fossilisation — in the study of Comparative Education in Scotland. But in the period following World War Two changes in teacher education induced considerable changes in the status and teaching of this subject. In England especially, the expansion of teacher education in the latter part of the 60s, the development of the new BEd degree qualifications for teachers (which incidentally led to the re-naming of the Scottish universities’ degree as MEd) contributed to a blossoming of Comparative Education. Colleges wanted to provide this option for their students; teachers in Colleges welcomed opportunities to gain further qualifications as subject specialists. Scottish Colleges of Education similarly developed optional courses in Comparative Education for their students or at least included some comparative elements in lectures forming part of the general courses in Education. At this time too, the practice of organising Comparative Education visits to other countries proved a welcome development for students as well as for staff.

In these encouraging circumstances the British Section of the Comparative Education Society in Europe was founded in 1966, a year after an inaugural conference on ‘The Place of Comparative Education in the Training of Teachers’ had been held in the University of Reading. The 1965 conference attracted among its 77 participants, four from Scotland; Miss M.B. Blake from Notre Dame College, Glasgow; Alistair Gammie from Aberdeen University, C.M. Morrison from Dundee College of Education, Lawrence Stenhouse from Jordanhill College, Glasgow; and two others with Scottish connections teaching furth of Scotland at the time, Brian Peck, from Trinity College, Dublin and myself, from Queen’s University, Belfast.

The Comparative Education Society in Europe (CESE), created in 1961, originally aimed at being exclusive, accepting as members only those considered to be elite researchers in Comparative Education. The British Section adopted a more open policy, welcoming all those interested in the development of Comparative Education studies — mainly teachers in universities and colleges, and, occasionally, some school teachers. Annual conferences began to be held, initially alternating between Reading University and other universities in England; but the choice of venue also extended into Scotland, a Comparative Education conference being held in Edinburgh in 1972, on the theme of The Politics of Education, and a further conference in Edinburgh, in 1978, on Education in Multicultural Societies; in 1986, in Glasgow, there was a Comparative Education conference on Learning Opportunities for Adults.

Scots, and some people teaching or having taught in Scotland, have also contributed to the British Society as office-bearers: Nigel Grant as Vice-Chairman 1971–3, Chairman, 1973–77; myself as Vice-Chairman 1966–68, Chairman 1968–71, President 1975–6; Lawrence Stenhouse, President 1976–77; Trevor Corner, Vice-Chairman 1984–86, Chairman 1986–87; Lalage Bown, President 1985–6, Wynne Harlen, President 1988–89. (President is an honorary office, for one year, requiring mainly the delivery of a President’s address.)

And so British comparativists joined in the Ottawa meeting of 1970 when the organisation which became the World Council of Comparative Education Societies was created. (My own Report to the British Section on this occasion indicated moderate enthusiasm for the new development.) Scots or people teaching in Scotland have attended and, to varying extents, contributed to the World Council conferences; but Scotland has not been individually represented at the annual meetings of the Executive Committee of WCCES (my own attendance at these meetings has, oddly enough, been mainly as a representative of another minority interest, the French-speaking Comparative Education Society). Admittedly, the Secretary of WCCES since 1999, Mark Bray, now of Hong Kong, was at one time a Lecturer in Edinburgh University and participated in the 1978 conference there.

The British Society has changed its name more than once in the course of the years, reflecting new trends in the discipline it studies; it soon became simply the British Comparative Education Society (BCES), then the British Comparative and International Education Society (BCIES) then in the most recent transformation, the British Association for International and Comparative Education, (BAICE). In its earliest years, responding to the circumstances of teacher education at the time, the Section was concerned to help members in the development of good teaching methods in Comparative Education; one issue of its *Bulletin* in 1970 contained data from a circular to members which had asked for information about the use of various aids in teaching this subject – films, film strips, books (fiction). But this *Bulletin* evolved into the more typically scholarly journal, *Compare*, first published also in 1970, though a more modest publication, a *Newsletter* on the lines of the earlier *Bulletin*, is occasionally circulated to members.

In this period of promising development, one Scot's work in Comparative Education rapidly became a best-seller – Nigel Grant's *Soviet Education*, first published by Penguin in 1964, continued in subsequent editions to its fifth version in 1979. Nigel established himself as a widely recognised authority on education in Eastern Europe. He did much to foster the development of comparative studies, attracting many foreign students, in Edinburgh University and subsequently in Glasgow, where he became Professor of Education in 1978. Nigel was a well-known participant in European conferences, well-known also for his assertions of Scottish nationality – many still remember his forceful interventions to denounce yet another misuse of the terms English and British. (He also gave, on occasion, a fascinating lecture during which he demonstrated by the skilful use of geographical co-ordinates that the centre of Europe lies in Scotland.) His contribution as a member of the Editorial Board of *Comparative Education* was greatly valued and his eminence in Comparative Education was recognised by an issue of that Journal as a Festschrift in his honour in May 2000.

#### SHADOWS RETURN

But despite the admiration and enthusiasm inspired by Nigel and the reinforcement of Comparative Education's position in Edinburgh by the work of Kenneth King, the evolution of teacher education in the 60s and 70s, in Scotland as in England, had other aspects which were less favourable towards the development of Comparative Education – oddly enough, it suffered from an increase in freedom of choice for students which, together with the re-shaping of the degree requirements in Scottish University Departments of Education, meant that Comparative Education no longer held the privileged position of a compulsory study for the University degree in Education: it became an option among others. In addition to competition from the ever-popular Psychology courses, it was strongly challenged by such alluring alternatives as Educational Sociology.

Further development in teacher education during the last decades of the 20th century, together with validation of College courses. by the CNA (Council for

National Academic Awards) served further to disadvantage Comparative Education studies: attention became more strongly focused on classroom skills, on the prescribed competences for teachers. However sympathetic the GTC in Scotland might be to Comparative Education studies, the inexorable effects of government policies meant that these studies (like other academic interests) had little place in preliminary teacher training. (In England the introduction of school-based training courses further reduced the viability of these less obviously relevant studies: few teacher-mentors are likely to discourse on Comparative Education.) While it might have been expected that the European dimension in education would support some interest in education in European countries, this dimension has scarcely flourished in schools and in teacher preparation. Consequently Comparative Education has become mainly restricted to postgraduate study in universities; and for people pursuing further study with a view to career advancement, the subject may well lack attraction in comparison with more 'practical' topics.

Yet an admirable rearguard action was fought in Dundee University in the 1990s when Education was for a time a subject which undergraduates could choose as one of their first degree courses: John Stocks provided a Comparative Education component of this course, and it, like the course as a whole, proved popular with students. The tradition of including the study of Education at first degree level is worth reconsidering.

Admittedly, some university students will find themselves directly interested in what happens in education in other countries, when they spend a year or a term abroad in Erasmus schemes, or on a placement which is part of a degree in modern languages. Perforce, such students must become aware of how education is provided in foreign lands and reflect on differences with their own earlier experience. And there are, of course, school trips abroad. But this is scarcely progress in the development of Comparative Education.

In 2004 BAICE's membership included five people living in Scotland. At the CESE conference in Copenhagen four participants were Scottish or had taught in Scotland.

#### BUT WHAT GOOD COMES OF IT AT LAST?

Does the apparent decline of Comparative Education really matter? What, after all, are the aims of this study? What can be gained from it?

Theoretically, Comparative Education was first adumbrated in 1817 when Marc-Antoine Jullien published in Paris a 'Sketch and preliminary considerations for a work on Comparative Education.' The aim then was to gather 'collections of facts and observations, drawn up in analytic tables, which would make it possible to bring them together and compare them in order to deduce firm principles, definite rules, so that education may become an almost exact science.' He proposed the use of questionnaires on various aspects of educational provision in neighbouring states of Europe; the data so obtained were to be studied by a committee of experts and consequent proposals for reform might thus be produced to improve education in these countries. (It could be suggested that with the creation of the European Union, the collection of data by Eurydice and proposals for harmonisation of courses in different European countries, we are at last coming near to putting Jullien's proposals into practice. But the question then arises whether, as countries become increasingly interested in the same aims and methods — indeed as courses and qualifications are harmonised throughout Europe — we may reach the point where Comparative Education will no longer be possible in Europe, sameness having been achieved.)

(Jullien, incidentally, was innovative in referring to 'éducation comparée' using the past participle, or adjective, of 'compared', by analogy with Cuvier's scientific work, *L'Anatomie Comparée*. In English the adjective form 'comparative' has become preferred — and French scholars have debated whether these grammatical



differences do indicate subtle differences in approach and whether, indeed, the French variant 'éducation comparative' could be adopted. On the other hand, German speakers have adopted the present participle — referring to the 'comparing' (vergleichende) educational science. It has also been argued that Jullien might have been better advised to use the term 'pédagogie comparée': a strong case for this term was made by one eminent comparativist, Vexliard (1967). But although 'pedagogy' is happily used in many European languages to refer to education in a wide sense its overtones in English tend to restrict it, perhaps unfortunately, to a limited range of aspects of education.)

Though the study that Jullien proposed was not seriously developed till much later in the century and his expectations of developing an exact science were not fulfilled, it seems probable that, despite the differences in their chosen methods, both he and the Scottish pioneers of Comparative Education expected to gain from such study ideas for possible improvements in their own system of education. In the latter part of the 19th century, Matthew Arnold's researches and Michael Sadler's Special Reports for the Board of Education in England were clearly aimed at improving education at home. Yet it was also recognised from early times that it is not reasonable to expect to transfer directly from one system to another — the whole context has to be considered. As John Clarke put it in 1904, 'Can we with advantage or with safety adopt, wholesale, methods foreign to our genius and history, however admirable they may be in themselves, and however well adapted for the purposes they serve in other countries, where circumstances are greatly different?... We should be ready to welcome improvements whatever their origin — England, France, Germany, America. But we must be extremely careful lest we mistake the form for the substance, the husk for the kernel. The principle which a foreign usage embodies, if a good one, should be apprehended as such, separated from forms which are not essential to it, and wrought into the forms which we have by laborious process ourselves evolved as those best suited to our own conditions.' If proof of this point were needed, the results of the attempt to 'Americanise' Japanese education after the Second World War would seem to provide it. Or, on a smaller scale, we can imagine what considerations might give pause to an attempt at 'borrowing' by a Scottish teacher who sees with admiration, in some Asian countries, the practice of having pupils clean the school premises.

Taking an alternative view, it can perhaps be argued that Comparative Education is one way of overcoming barriers to experiments in education. It is commonly felt that the education of the young is too important to allow us to experiment with different methods whose consequences are unforeseeable. Yet if other countries use widely different methods and policies, they are, in a sense, carrying out experiments for us, showing us what happens if certain procedures are adopted. Admittedly, such 'experiments' are scarcely scientifically controlled and they have a considerable number of unclearly defined variables. But their comparative evidence may still be useful and develop our awareness of being part of a world-wide endeavour.

Certainly, from a less scientific point of view, people have for centuries listened with interest to 'travellers' tales' of what education is like in other countries and have as a result looked at their own provision of education more clearly and critically. From this modest approach more systematic observations have been developed, even, for the comfort of those yearning to feel they study a truly scientific discipline, the collecting of statistics. Here the great international organisations — UNESCO, OECD and the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) — do provide us richly with statistical data. Is this the major gain from Comparative Education? The 'league tables' which result from such international studies, showing scores obtained by groups of pupils taking carefully prepared tests in a number of countries (tests on various school subjects, including civic education) do provide much of interest, even if the performances of our home group may

generally offer little support to nationalist pride. Yet it has repeatedly been shown that to interpret such tables requires further knowledge of whole school systems and knowledge of how the curriculum is interpreted (even such details as the number of class hours given to teaching the subject which is being tested).

Even so, the publication of international statistical comparisons of this kind may have the benefit of drawing politicians' attention to Comparative Education; a relatively lowly place for a country in international tests of mathematics, for instance, can lead its Ministers of Education to enquire fretfully why this is so and what, if anything, can be done about it. Unhappily, this interest tends to be short-lived; there is little evidence of national policies in education being guided by Comparative Education studies, though OECD's series of Reviews of National Policies for Education in the 1980s made a gallant attempt at providing comparative insights by sending international teams to examine data officially provided by the country and to discuss them with representatives of the country's Ministry.

Yet since people can pursue vastly different interests in Comparative Education, it is not surprising that the study has at various times suffered an 'identity crisis', as Dan McDade (another Scottish MEd teaching in exile) pointed out in a brilliant review of the evolution of Comparative Education over the thirty years from 1952 to 1982. In general terms, for some people the major interest is in trying to find the solution to a problem in education by analysis of how it is treated in a number of countries; for others, the attraction is rather in appreciating how educational provision in some other country or region differs from their own and has its own distinctive 'personality'.

Or indeed, instead of a 'problem' there may be interest in some particular topic or theme – at present a popular choice is globalisation. The vast range of themes possible is well illustrated in the celebrated work by Nicholas Hans, *Comparative Education; a study of Educational Factors and Traditions*. He discussed a comprehensive set of factors whose effects he traced in a number of countries; his list included natural factors (linguistic, geographical and economic), religious factors (Catholic, Anglican and Puritan traditions – Scotland was extensively mentioned in the Puritan section) and secular factors (humanism, socialism, democracy). Any one of these can provide motivation to search for a characteristic pattern of events. And Hans even managed to include reference to a topic which has subsequently received considerable attention (by me and many others) – the education of girls, and the factors which have favoured or militated against female education in different parts of the world.

But instead of surveying a number of countries, other comparativists have preferred to concentrate on one country or region and try to discover the characteristic 'personality' of that educational system. The work of Vernon Mallinson, for example, emphasised the influence of what he considered to be national characteristics on the provision of education – and critics have complained of a tendency to develop national stereotypes in this approach. Yet there is a fascination in recognising – or believing one recognises – national differences, characteristics which shape the education given, the manner in which it is given, and which then are transmitted by the next generation. Edmund King's highly successful *Other Schools and Ours* gains considerably by the interest it shows in the influence of a country's characteristics and circumstances on the products of its schools. (Could George Davie's work on *The Democratic Intellect* claim the interest of those devoted to this genre of Comparative Education?)

There are in fact many ways in which Comparative Education offers interest and insights, just as there are many research techniques. It is unwise to try to restrict it to a few favoured methods and and yearn after 'scientific' research techniques. At the London conference of 1977 Lawrence Stenhouse, making a plea for the use of the case study method, offered rather useful comments on the discipline itself.

‘Comparative Education is not, I think, a science seeking general laws; nor is it a discipline of knowledge either in the sense that it provides a structure to support the growth of mind, or in the sense that it has distinctive conventions by which its truths are tested... general principles are, within comparative education as within history, not the characteristic products of the study, but rather means towards the illumination of the particular... In its essence Comparative Education is less concerned with predictions and possibilities than with that which is accepted as actually occurring in time and space. It is descriptive rather than experimental. It deals in insight rather than law as a basis for understanding.’

And for the individual satisfaction of comparativists, while much must depend on the study of documents of various kinds (and, as was noted long ago, even works of fiction may make a contribution) much pleasure can be found in acquiring one’s own ‘traveller’s tales’ by personal observation in other educational systems (controlling these impressions, necessarily, by reference to other sources of information) and thus discovering similarities and differences in education while escaping from the familiar classrooms, lecture rooms, seminar rooms; e.g. sitting at the back of a science classroom in Russia and recognising good teaching (even if the language is a bit of a barrier at times); watching a teacher with a class of 80 children in a country school in South Africa, admiring the fragments of slate on which some of the children write; travelling in a horse-drawn ‘bus’ to a country school in the depths of Tyrone; being present at a ‘Youth Consecration’ ceremony in the DDR (when that part of Europe existed); noting the informal way in which students arrive and depart from lectures in a French university ‘amphi.’ It does extend experience; and, as has been said in another context, in education you do meet a better class of person.

Comparative Education can give knowledge of different practices and methods; offer information as to possible results of different policies in education; clarify our perceptions of our own work. It is a major component of the whole study of Education. Besides, it’s enjoyable. So is a further Scottish renaissance of Comparative Education possible?

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