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Globalisation, the Learning Society and Comparative Education

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ABSTRACT *Extending the logic of industrialism thesis, it is argued here that the world now has a global infrastructure, information technology empowered by those who control capital. Globalisation has resulted in the development of learning societies as a superstructural phenomenon. Four dimensions of the learning society are analysed in this article and the implications of these are explored for the study of comparative education. The thesis of the article is that the field of comparatives is broader than education itself, and that reasons for comparative studies have changed little since early adult education comparativists met in 1966 and agreed on a number of major themes.*

In an earlier article in this journal (Jarvis, 1999a), I argued that the universities had to respond to the international division of labour generated through the forces of globalisation in innovative ways. In a sense, that argument reflected the one contained in the logic of industrialisation thesis, first propounded by Kerr *et al.* in the 1960s (Kerr *et al*, 1973). While that thesis was not totally correct, I want to expand upon that article here and argue that the logic of industrialism thesis contained a basis from which to understand globalisation and, consequently, the learning society. However, the learning society is a contested concept, so that it is also necessary to understand it if we are to examine ways by which comparative education might relate to it.

The general thesis of this article is that comparative education needs to continue to adapt and to find its place in studies of the newly emerging learning society, one which is far broader than the educational institutions themselves. Indeed, there are many other providers of learning opportunities than education. But, significantly, the learning society itself might be regarded as an object for comparative study, as the following argument demonstrates. Consequently, the article has three parts; the first examines the process of globalisation, the second analyses different interpretations, or dimensions, of the learning society and, finally, comparative education is examined within the context of the learning society.

The Processes of Globalisation

The logic of industrialisation thesis was first published at the beginning of the 1960s in *Industrialism and Industrial Man* (Kerr *et al*, 1973). In it the authors argued that the industrialising processes at the heart of society would have a world-wide impact, producing a convergence in the social structures in the different countries of the world, a more open and global society. The driving force of these changes was, they argued, the process of industrialisation. This thesis was widely debated for a number of years and, like many major studies, it had many strengths—but it also had weaknesses. Like Marx, but from an entirely different

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viewpoint, the authors implied that each society has an infrastructure and a superstructure. The infrastructural driving force of change was the industrialisation process itself and, not surprisingly, education was part of the superstructure, responding to the needs of the infrastructure and being forced to change according to its demands. However, it was the identification of the infrastructural forces that was a major weakness; they did not foresee the changes that were to occur in the 1970s which were to alter the face of industry and commerce itself.

But another aspect of Kerr *et al's.* argument which is important to this article is where they located education in their framework. They were only really concerned about higher education, which they regarded as the handmaiden of industrialism. They wrote of it thus:

> The higher educational system of the industrial society stresses the natural sciences, engineering, medicine, managerial training—whether private or public—and administrative law. It must steadily adapt to new disciplines and fields of specialization. There is a relatively smaller place for the humanities and the arts, while the social sciences are strongly related to the training of the managerial groups and technicians for the enterprise and for government. The increased leisure time, however, can afford a broader public appreciation of the humanities and the arts. (Kerr *et al.*, 1973, p. 47)

The argument claimed that the educational system would have to expand to meet the needs of industrialisation, and this process would create an increasing level of education for all citizens, albeit there would be greater emphasis on those subjects relevant to the infrastructural demands. The process about which they wrote has now occurred. It is not just higher education that has expanded but the whole of the post-school sector, so this article is not only about higher education but it is also about education as a whole and, indeed, for the ways in which lifelong learning and the learning society are being conceptualised. Industrialisation is not now the driving force of change, although there are still infrastructural forces—but they are world-wide rather than country-wide—and education remains part of the superstructure. Indeed, the learning society as a whole is superstructural.

The process of globalisation, as we know it today, can be seen to have begun in the early 1970s. In the face of competition from Japan and the oil crisis, corporations began to relocate manufacturing and to transfer capital around the world, seeking the cheapest places and the most efficient means of manufacturing and the best markets in which to sell, their products. This resulted in the continued decline in manufacturing industries in much of the First World and the need for new occupational structures emerged. Theorists began to suggest that there is actually a world economy (Wallerstein, 1974, *inter alia*) based on the capitalist system of exchange. This theoretical approach was questioned in part by Robertson (1992) who was more concerned to show that globalisation is a cultural phenomenon, and by Castells (1996) who argued that the state still has a place to play in a not completely free global market. Even so, the world market expanded rapidly, aided and abetted by the rapid development of electronic communication systems. The information technology revolution took off, with one development leading to another, as Castells (1996, p. 51f.) demonstrates. He makes the point that 'to some extent, the availability of new technologies constituted as a system in the 1970s was a fundamental basis for the process of socio-economic restructuring in the 1980s' (1996, p. 52).

Another factor that reinforced this process was the Fall of the Berlin Wall for from the time it occurred there has literally been 'no alternative' (Bauman, 1992) to capitalism; the global economic infrastructure was reinforced. Now the world-wide infrastructural driving force of social change is information technology empowered by those who control capital.

Castells (1996, p. 145) argues that this has resulted in three major economic regions, Western Europe, America and the Asian Pacific, with other areas of the world associated with them, although he sees Russia as a fourth potential region.

These processes changed the structure of the work-force, with a decline in manufacturing jobs and an increased demand for knowledge-based workers in some countries, but with new industrial workers in others. Indeed, Reich (1991) postulated that there would be three major groups of workers—knowledge-based, service-based and routine production. He indicated (Reich, 1991, pp. 179–180) that the proportion of symbolic analysts (knowledge workers) in the American work-force increased from 8% in the 1950s to about 20% in the 1980s. He then argued that this will continue to increase. Rifkin (1995) said that knowledge workers are:

> ... the creators, manipulators and purveyors of the stream of information that makes up the post-industrial, post-service global economy. Their ranks include research scientists, design engineers, civil engineers, software analysts, biotechnology workers, public relations specialists, lawyers, investment bankers, management consultants, financial and tax consultants, architects, strategic planners, marketing specialists, film producers and editors, art directors, publishers, writers, editors and journalists. (p. 174)

Castells (1996, p. 147) also suggests a similar division of labour to Reich, with four main types: the producers of high value (knowledge workers); producers of high volume (based on low-cost labour), producers of raw materials (based on natural products); redundant producers (devalued labour). He maintains that each of these types of workers is to be found in most societies, with differing proportions occurring in each country and region.

It is significant to note that at both the global level, and within the economic regions, there is this division of labour. The wealthiest countries have a large proportion of knowledge workers. As other countries industrialise, they generate more knowledge-based workers but their work-force remains predominantly agricultural and manufacturing. Additionally, other countries are socially excluded with most of their work-force being redundant labour and they have subsistence economies; these are among the world's poorest, for this is the inevitable result of globalisation (Bauman, 1998).

However, it is the fact that there are increasing numbers of workers utilising knowledge that has led to the emergence of the learning society.

Learning Societies

Since education is driven by the infrastructural forces, it has to respond to a great extent to the demands of the international division of labour. However, education is social and both public and private, depending upon the provider, whereas learning is something that is individual and private. Education is designed to provide specified learning opportunities and is institutionalised, either as state institutions (public) or as corporate ones (private). Both forms of institution emphasise the knowledge necessary for the work-force to compete in the global market economy. The knowledge societies predominate in the countries of Western Europe, the US and the Asian Pacific (Stehr, 1994). But the term frequently used in these societies is 'the learning society'. Learning can be related to knowledge in two quite distinct ways. The learning is the content of what has been learned; it is, in this sense, the knowledge. But even more significantly, much of that knowledge is changing with great rapidity, as Lyotard (1984) noted when he suggested that knowledge is narrative, and this demands that the members of those societies continue to be taught, or to learn, new information and

acquire new knowledge and skill in order to keep abreast with the changes in their society. Significantly, the concept of the learning society does not distinguish between education and learning but the learning society is probably more accurately described as being both educative and learning, as will be discussed below. There are, however, dangers in losing education under the learning umbrella since they are profoundly different concepts.

It should be recognised that there are no real boundaries around learning societies, so that the symbols and practices of a learning society can, and will, be transferred to less developed societies, by the transnational companies amongst others, since they will almost certainly transfer practices from one area of their influence to another. Additionally, there is much more cultural borrowing today as government delegations from one country visit others, as participants in international conferences share knowledge and ideas, and as international consultants take their expertise across the globe.

However, the learning society is, as noted earlier, a contested concept and I want to suggest that there are at least four different interpretations that may be placed upon this term, each emphasising one of its dimensions: futuristic, planned, reflexive and market.

The Learning Society as a Futuristic Society

When Hutchins (1968) wrote his classic book on the learning society, he looked to the future and suggested that the learning society:

> ... would be one that, in addition to offering part-time adult education to every man and woman at every stage of grown-up life, had succeeded in transforming its values in such a way that learning, fulfilment, becoming human, had become its aims and all its institutions were directed to this end. (p. 133)

For Hutchins, education would come into its own and the new learning society would be the fulfilment of Athens, made possible not by slavery but by modern machines. It was the realisation of this computer revolution that led Husen (1974) to very similar conclusions. He argued that '*educated ability* will be democracy's replacement for passed-on social prerogatives' (Hutchins, 1974, p. 238). He recognised that the knowledge explosion would be fostered by a combination of computers and reprographics and he foresaw the possibility of '*equal opportunities* for all to receive as much education as they are thought capable of absorbing' (Hutchins, 1974, p. 240). Despite Sweden's long history of adult education, Husen regarded the learning society as being educational and based on an extension of the school system.

A similar position has been adopted by Ranson (1994) who has suggested that:

> There is a need for the creation of a learning society as the constitutive condition of a new moral and political order. It is only when the values and processes of learning are placed at the centre of the polity that the conditions can be established for all individuals to develop their capacities, and that institutions can respond openly and imaginatively to a period of change (p. 106).

Ranson's writing does not cite either of the earlier authors mentioned above although he approaches the subject from a similar perspective, starting with school education rather than an adult or lifelong education framework. It is futuristic and rather idealistic. By way of contrast, Boshier (1980), while still looking forward to a learning society, actually started from the position of an adult educator recognising it to be more than school education. He explored the post-school institutions in New Zealand to discover the structural basis of such a society, but he still regarded it as an educational phenomenon.

The Learning Society as a Planned Society

In recent years governments have been concerned to plan for the learning society, and there has been a multitude of reports, papers and even legislation throughout the world. This is not the place to review all the official reports published on education that particularly refer to lifelong learning, or indeed of all the reports by commercial and industrial bodies calling for more emphasis to be placed on lifelong learning—that would constitute a book in itself. Nevertheless, there are similar themes running through them all as a result of the significance of the global market—competitiveness, competencies, widening participation, and the need for workers to keep on learning so that countries can maintain their place in the economic world, and their people their standard of living. In addition, most statements make some reference to the need for people to learn so that they can grow and develop and participate more in the democratic processes of their society. For instance, in the introduction to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report (1996) the following comments are made:

> Success in realising lifelong learning—from early childhood education to active learning retirement—will be an important factor in promoting employment, economic development, democracy and social cohesion in the years ahead. (p. 13)

In the European Union White Paper (European Union, 1995) a similar claim is made:

> The crucial problem of employment in a permanently changing economy compels the education and training system to change. The design of appropriate education and training strategies to address work and employment issues is, therefore, a crucial preoccupation. (p. 18)

In the European perspectives (Collomb & Seidal, 1998), we read the following:

> For Europe to be competitive, working adults need Lifelong Learning: a continual replenishment of their education. Adult Education and Lifelong Learning are essential ingredients in today's integrated Europe. (p. 8)

Even in the rather more utopian Delors Report (Delors, 1996), we see that the significance of the economic institution in society is recognised:

> Under the pressure of technological progress and modernization, the demand of education for economic purposes has been constantly on the rise in most countries ... (p. 70)

Perhaps it is only in Germany where this relationship has not been fully recognised and developed by theorists. Dohman (1996) makes the point that:

> The fact that Germany's education policy has remained relatively unaffected by international efforts to realize lifelong learning ... appears to be due to the German's tendency to over-rate their educational system, their desire to preserve it and their somewhat apprehensive-skeptical attitude toward unsupervised learning. (p. 96).

While the German position might be one of over-valuing its education system, the apprehensiveness toward uncontrolled learning is apparent in a number of different reports, for people's learning must be influenced even if it cannot be entirely controlled. Indeed, in the British government's policy, there is certainly more than a sense of focusing the learners on what they should learn, in what they should gain qualifications, and for what they will receive maximum funding. This has become clear in nearly all the reports that have been published in the UK during this period, but recognition that the society is global means that governments cannot regulate such processes entirely, only seek to influence them.

In the Kennedy Report (Kennedy, 1997) into further education, for instance, the

relationship between learning for work and learning for life is clearly established but, significantly, the Report questioned whether the learning market is the most efficient distributive mechanism, and suggested a middle way between bureaucratic centralisation and the market:

> We have no desire to return to the centralised and bureaucratic planning approaches of the past. We would wish to see local strategy emerging, developing and being sustained by partnership approaches, involving all the key stakeholders, which recognise both the independence and inter-dependence of partners (Kennedy, 1997, p. 39)

The Report recognised that funding is a most important lever for change and, perhaps, for creating some partnership agreements. Nevertheless, the power of funding lies only in as much as neither the providers nor consumers could afford to operate without it and, secondly, that there is no competition between partners to gain student enrolments, etc. While partnerships are to be applauded, there is also, however, a sense in which the funding of partnership arrangements seeks to re-create monopoly type situations. This is clearly illustrated in Kennedy's emphasis on data-gathering in order to provide relevant education. Kennedy, therefore, seeks to offer a rather modern answer to a late modern problem. But the generation of partnership arrangements reflect the fact that the barriers between educational and other providers are being lowered, and this diversity itself reflects a late modern situation.

In the British government report *The Learning Age* (Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), 1998) it is clearly stated that the learning society is something to be created (p. 13) and that it will be educative in nature;

> In the Learning Age we will need a workforce with imagination and confidence, and the skills required will be diverse: teachers and trainers to help us acquire these skills ... All of these occupations ... demand different types of knowledge and understanding and the skills to apply them. That is what we mean by skills, and it is through learning—with the help of those who teach us—that we acquire them. (DfEE, 1998, p. 15)

Consequently, educational institutions are being encouraged to introduce new courses leading to vocational qualifications, often at higher degree level, and in this case the learning is certificated and public (see Jarvis, 1999a). However, the lecture hall is not the only site for learning, as the development of work-based learning recognises. More significantly, the laboratory is no longer the main place in which research occurs. Many part-time research students today are writing up research conducted by themselves in the work place—they are practitioner researchers (Jarvis, 1999b) who are recognising that the innovations that they are making in their work are actually research situations. The practitioner researcher has arrived, but not all universities are able to recognise these changes and embrace this new breed of researcher, one which is the epitome of the learning society.

However, the educational institutions are not responding sufficiently rapidly to the demands of the infrastructure. Transnational corporations are, therefore, commencing their own corporate universities (Meister, 1994) which are also planning their education/learning for, not only their work-forces, but for the corporations suppliers and distributors as well. These new universities will play a significant role internationally in the future since some of them, such as Motorola, already have campuses in different countries throughout the world.

This tremendous growth in new information and the very rapid changes that are occurring in society might reflect the idea that the learning society is intrinsic to modernity. Both of these approaches foresee an educative society and, as such, it is a phenomenon of which Illich & Verne (1976) were afraid, since they feared people would become imprisoned

within a classroom to be educated rather than being free to learn from different and less restrictive sources. Significantly, they also started their analyses with one part of the public institution—the structures of society, and while it might be unwise to separate structure from agency, once the structures are loosened or weakened, then the agent becomes more significant—or individual learning assumes a more significant place than education, and herein lies the foundation for the other major approaches to the learning society, because the rapid changes that are occurring in society have resulted in the weakening of societal structures.

The Learning Society as Reflexive Society

Reflective learning and reflective practice have become commonplace ideas among educators in recent years, echoing the work of Schon (1983). But reflective learning is itself a sign of the times. Underlying this is another approach to society epitomised by Giddens (1990) and Beck's (1992) *Risk Society*. However, Giddens, and others, have argued that reflexivity is fundamental to the nature of modernity, for with its advent modernity overrode tradition of all forms. Giddens (1990) writes:

> The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character. We should be clear about the nature of this phenomenon. All forms of social life are partly constituted by actors' knowledge of them. Knowing 'how to go on' ... is intrinsic to the conventions which are drawn upon and reproduced in human activity. In all cultures, social practices are routinely altered in the light of ongoing discoveries which feed into them. But only in the era of modernity is the revision of convention radicalised to apply (in principle) to all aspects of human life ...(pp. 38–39)

Society has become reflexive and the knowledge that people acquire is no longer certain and established for ever—its value lies in its enabling them to live in this rapidly changing society. As society is changing so very rapidly, everybody is required to learn new things in order to keep abreast with everything, but in everyday life a great deal of this non-institutionalised learning is incidental as individuals adapt their behaviour to the changed conditions or the innovations that have been introduced. Since this learning is non-vocational there is a tendency for it to be treated as private and not to be recognised publicly. This is not the case with the knowledge-based occupations (and the service orientated ones as well) which are themselves reflexive within late modern society, so that practitioners are required to keep abreast with the changes occurring in their occupational field and to utilise new techniques and procedures. Much of this occurs in work-based learning, which is slowly leading to educational institutions adopting new attitudes to learning that occurs outside the classroom and the lecture hall. Slowly the public education institutions are beginning to accredit work-based learning, and with it the accreditation of prior experiential learning—learning from prior experience for educational qualifications (Jarvis, 1996). But for how long they will retain their monopoly remains another question. Judging by the direction of recent events, the answer will be that this monopoly will soon be broken and education will be but one more provider of information in the learning market and the educational qualification will become the public recognition of a very private process. However, there is a danger here that the education institutions are assuming a role in a non-educational process and public accreditation penetrates the private world!

In addition, there has been a growth in learning networks, rather like those learning webs

advocated by Illich (1973, pp. 75–105). Then he was regarded as radical, but now these ideas are becoming more realistic with the development of the Internet and of all forms of electronic communication. This has led to greater opportunity for those who have the technological knowledge, skill and equipment to access up-to-date knowledge and for those who are knowledge producers to share their ideas and research.

As some forms of knowledge change more rapidly than others (Scheler, 1980) the process of learning is both individuating and fragmenting to society as a whole. Neither is it something which all individuals desire; they sometimes seek an unchanging world (Jarvis, 1992, pp. 206–207), and a harmony with their environment. Endeavouring to discover the certainty of an unchanging world is a reaction to the learning society, as it is to modernity itself.

From the perspective of rapidly changing knowledge, there is a fundamental shift in the conception of knowledge itself, from something that is certain and true to something which is changing and relative. This means that underlying this form of society lies experimentation itself, leading to people reflecting constantly upon their situation and the knowledge that they possess to cope with it. Constantly they need to learn new knowledge, but learning new things and acting upon them always contains an element of risk—for inherent in learning is risk but, paradoxically, learning is also a reaction to the risk, of not always knowing how to act in this rapidly changing world. Reflexivity is a feature of modernity (Beck, 1992). Reflective learning is a way of life rather than a discovery made by educators and something to be taught in educational institutions. The learning society is not then a hope for the future but an ever-present phenomenon of the contemporary world, but one that it is not always recognised because the learning is not accredited!

The Learning Society as a Phenomenon of the Market

Contemporary society is also a consumer society and the history of consumerism can be traced back to the 18th century (Campbell, 1987). Campbell traces it back to the romantic period in the 18th century, when pleasure became the crucial means of realising that ideal truth and beauty which imagination had revealed and, significantly, this Romantic Movement ‘assisted crucially at the birth of modern consumerism’ (Campbell, 1987, p. 206), so that a longing to enjoy those creations of the mind becomes the basis for consuming new phenomena. In other words, there can be no market economy unless there are consumers who want to purchase the products that are being produced. Advertising plays on imaginary pleasure, and learning becomes fun! Now, as Usher & Edwards (1994) point out, one of the features of contemporary society is that of experiencing—it is a sensate society. This is nothing new, as Campbell has shown, but it is the type of society in which the longings of the imagination can be realised through consumption, so that the basis of advertising is the cultivation of desire.

Whilst learning was equated with the educational in people’s minds, they remembered their unpleasant experiences at school where it was no fun to learn, a barrier to further education was erected and it was one which every adult educator sought to overcome. But once learning became separated from education, then learning could become fun—and there is a sense in which this has become a more popular thing to do in the UK since the creation of the British Open University. Now people could learn all the things that they had wanted to learn, and they did not have to go to school to do it. They could read books, watch the television, listen to the radio and go and talk with other people if they wanted. The Open University marketed a commodity and other organisations have followed. The Open University’s foundation marked a crucial step in this process—it moved education of adults away

from the school setting and into the consumer society. Now it is possible for individuals to learn all the things they have wanted to know by purchasing their own multi-media personal computers and surfing the Web, watching the television learning zone programmes, buying their own 'teach yourself' books and magazines and, even, purchasing their own self-directed learning courses. But the providers of these learning materials are now not all educational institutions, and educational institutions are having to change their approach with a great deal of alacrity in order to keep abreast with a market generating information about all aspects of life every minute of the day, so that people have to choose not only what channel they are going to watch but what medium they are going to employ to receive their information!

More significantly, learning has become an aspect of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984):

> Knowledge becomes important; knowledge of new goods, their social and cultural value, and how to use them appropriately. This is particularly the case with aspiring groups who adopt a learning mode towards consumption and the cultivation of a lifestyle. It is for groups such as the new middle class, the new working class and the new rich or upper class, that the consumer-culture magazines, newspapers, books, television and radio programmes which stress self-improvement, self-development, personal transformation, how to manage property, relationships and ambition, how to construct a fulfilling lifestyle, are most relevant. Here one may find most frequently the self-conscious auto-didact who is concerned to convey the appropriate and legitimate signals through his/her consumption activities. (Featherstone, 1991, p. 19)

Knowledge production has become an industry, cultivating the desire of people to learn so that they can be seen to be modern. The learning society has now become a learning market. Significantly, information is a public commodity contained in every form of media transmission, but learning remains a private activity and knowledge has become personal knowledge (Polanyi, 1962). Herein lies a problem with private learning since one of the features of the market is that the consumption has to be public—conspicuous consumption—and so offering educational qualifications for private learning has now become an institutional activity.

It is also important to note, especially when we discuss this topic from the perspective of comparative education, that this is a learning society of which education is only one part. This is clear from the four descriptions above—the first two are educative but the final two are learning-based. Education has long been seen as having the monopoly of control of the people's learning; it has acted as a government agency, a public institution, and it has been an agency of social and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). By way of contrast, learning is private and less amenable to control. Education might be regarded as one institutionalised form of learning but, as we have argued above, in the learning society there are other approaches to learning. The learning society might, therefore, assume varying forms and perform different functions in the different countries, or regions, of the world, so that it becomes a legitimate subject for comparative study.

Comparative Education and the Learning Society

If the above interpretations have any validity, they might point to some new directions for comparative studies, both in education and learning. The following paragraphs do not seek to be either exhaustive or prescriptive but illustrate some of the implications of the arguments detailed above, in which there are both global and learning society perspectives.

The phenomenon of globalisation sets its own agenda for comparative studies. For

instance, the global infra-structure is not affecting the whole world uniformly, and the international division of labour means that different sectors of the work-force are making different demands on education and learning. Additionally, the social and cultural reproductive functions of education mean that curricula need to retain specific aspects of a nation's cultural heritage if education is to retain some of its traditional functions, rather than reflect the global infrastructural forces—but none of these things might occur uniformly, if they occur at all.

In addition, Kerr *et al.* (1973) claimed that the curricula of higher education would relate to the infra-structural demands of a society and that the humanities would be relegated to leisure time pursuits. Within the context of the learning society, it will be interesting to explore this idea internationally and comparatively in greater detail, especially since recent findings in the UK suggest that a common reason for undertaking learning, even leisure time learning, is work-related (Bienart & Smith, 1997).

Even so, there has been a tremendous growth in leisure time learning, through such organisations as the universities of the third age. Swindell (1999) has recently begun to compare these institutions in Australia and New Zealand and an extension to his work would allow comparison between those who undertake leisure time learning whilst they are still at work with those who have left paid employment. Universities of the third age are a feature of the learning society and the extent to which they emerge throughout the world raises many issues for comparative education.

The different elements of the learning society itself point to other ways that comparative studies might develop; there are both the educational and other ways people are learning that might be studied. It is impossible to provide a total agenda of new fields open for comparative scholarship but a few of them will be listed here for both the educational and the learning.

Institutionalised Education

Within the framework of institutionalised education a variety of different studies might be conducted, such as analyses of: the different government policies and strategies seeking to influence people to learn, and the different laws that are being enacted; the manner in which the control of lifelong learning is institutionalising it into lifelong education; the differing ways in which educational institutions are becoming part of the learning market and how this is affecting the way that they operate; the ways in which the educational system is becoming more open, more accessible and more lifelong; the way that the educational system responds to the demands of the global infrastructure in different countries—especially how the higher education sector responds since it might resist these pressures, as Dohman (1996) suggests Germany is doing; the developing role that transnational corporations will play in the education and training of the work-force; the manner in which cultural differences are being manifested in the educational systems; the ways that educational institutions recognise private learning through systems of accreditation of prior experiential learning; the new forms of partnership between education and other sectors of society, such as the transnational corporation, that emerge; the new institutionalised forms of education that arise, such as the corporate university (Meister, 1994).

Learning

In precisely the same way, comparative studies in learning might be undertaken. Once again,

it is impossible to outline an agenda, although it is possible to provide examples, such as analyses of

- the way that different cultural styles influence both the process and the content of learning;
- the extent to which it is necessary for institutions selling their learning materials throughout the world to adjust the content and process of learning in order to make them more relevant to the cultures of their potential learners;
- the place of reflection in learning in different cultural settings;
- the influence of gender on learning style in different countries;
- the extent that varying forms of self-directed and leisure-time learning are occurring;
- the different ways in which the culture of consumption is manifesting itself in learning activities;
- the extent to which lifelong learning is occurring in different countries of the world and whether this is related to the different levels of employment.

It would have been easy, however, to spell out a vast range of new topics that open themselves to comparative study in the future, some of which might examine the extent to which societies are converging and education is being standardised by these global processes, or whether the world is fragmenting and self-directed learning is more relevant because it is more flexible. However, this article seeks only to point the way to a new agenda for comparative studies, especially in lifelong education and learning.

Some of the above topics have been studied a little by a small band of adult educators who have been conducting comparative studies on the education of adults since before the Exeter (New Hampshire) Conference of 1966 (Liveright & Haygood, 1968). These studies continued with seminars held at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) in Toronto for a number of years, and are still on-going as an international seminar. However OISE does not publish much of its research in the traditional comparative education journals. They also have to refocus their activities, as does school-based comparative education, on lifelong education and lifelong learning as the educational scene has been transformed. It would be beneficial to the field as a whole if we could see a drawing together of these two perspectives, each enriching the other, in the near future. The question remains, however, why should we undertake comparative education studies in this global village?

Perhaps the answers to this have hardly changed with respect to education from those given by the early pioneers of comparative adult education study:

- to generate international understanding that might lead to peace and brotherhood (and sisterhood);
- to understand some of the barriers to cross-cultural understanding;
- to understand the need to improve the educational level of some countries and ways by which this might be undertaken;
- to understand the place education has in economic development but to recognise that education has wider functions in personal development;
- to see how education might be utilised as a means of solving problems and attacking social ills;
- to understand how education can be used in community development;
- to understand the ways in which new institutional forms of learning respond to people's learning needs;
- to understand how different educational institutions can share responsibility for lifelong learning (Liveright & Haygood, 1968, pp. 110–113).

This far-sighted agenda that those early adult educators formulated emerged before the

present emphasis on learning, so that there might be other reasons why we might compare learning. Among these are: to develop a greater understanding of the cultural differences between people and to understand how these affect their behaviour; to develop a greater toleration of different peoples and cultures; to develop a critical awareness of difference, etc.

Conclusion

These are broader aims than many formulated by the early comparativists, although they reflect many similar sentiments. But by comparing and understanding difference, both in institutions and cultures, in both education and learning, greater levels of toleration might be developed as we 'learn to live together' (Delors, 1996, p. 91–93) in this global village. Additionally, it might facilitate the development of a more critically aware people who can play their part as active citizens in formulating policy and creating the more democratic world envisaged by many who look forward to the creation of a global learning society.

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