Comparative Education And The Geographical Factor

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ABSTRACT: All the sub-disciplines of education, known as the foundations, have a need of a more sophisticated treatment of the essentially spatial nature of educational processes and their outcome; that is to say, the geographical factor. This is especially true of comparative and international education where the range of spatial scales is potentially greatest. Yet the geographical factor, in the form of a geography of education has yet to establish itself. In this article the essential affinity of geographical and educational studies is illustrated, as well as the symbiotic relationship between geography and history in relation to the issue of space-time. The fundamental issue of scale, both spatial and temporal is also discussed and the emergence of a geography of education needs to catch up with the advances in what the geographers call 'geographic information science' and develop a more sophisticated understanding of the geographical factor.

Introduction

The title of this article is the same as that of one of the writer's earlier contributions to the then barely emergent sub-discipline, 'The Geography of Education' (Brock, 1984). Despite geography being a more widely established discipline than comparative education by the mid-twentieth century, its exponents had paid little or no attention to the phenomenon of education in terms of spatial analysis of its distribution or performance. Meantime the pioneers of comparative education as a sub-discipline of educational studies at university level, notably Kandel (1933), Hans(1949), Mallinson (1957), King (1958), Bereday (1964) and Holmes (1965) operated almost exclusively at the national scale of observation and discourse. This, it would appear, was the scale at which they perceived the phenomenon of education to be operating. They presumed, it may be inferred, that policies and systems of education constituted educational reality. Curiously, when researching for his doctoral thesis The Case for a Geography of Education (Brock, 1992), the writer found that university geographers had not interested themselves in spatial disparities in educational provision because they assumed that what was decreed in national policies on educational provision actually translated on the ground without moderation or disparity. So both geographers and comparative educationists exhibited the same degree of misperception that, somewhat paradoxically, served to keep them apart. Meantime other foundations of educational study such as the history, philosophy, sociology and economics of education had established themselves, and formed part of the academic dimension of the training of teachers and in educational research at graduate level. More has happened in academic geography concerning theory and analysis of education phenomena (Taylor, 2011), but hardly any recognition in comparative education of the geographical factor, although a special edition of the journal Comparative Education is on the way this year (Brock & Symaco, 2013) addressing this.

In this article one will proceed to discuss the substantially similar identities of geography and education as disciplines; the essential symbiosis of geography and history; the common issue of scale; then identify the emergence of the sub-discipline 'the geography of education', and conclude with a comment on its prospects.

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Education and Geography Compared

The 'education' one is referring to here is 'education the discipline', also known more helpfully as educational studies. 'Education the phenomenon', that is to say the acquisition of knowledge and skills through learning and teaching, is what is actually happening on the ground through its three forms: formal, non-formal and informal.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate both the composite nature of geography and of education, and what the writer has proposed as the 'essence' of each.



Figure 1 Education: a composite and integrative discipline



Figure 2 Geography: a composite and integrative discipline

The two figures indicate a considerable degree of synergy between geography and education, not just because they are both integrative composite disciplines, but also because of the close relationship in terms of their essence. The key word in the definition offered by the writer in respect of the essence of education is 'dissemination'. The key word in the essence of geography is 'spatial'. The acquisition of knowledge and skills necessarily involves a spatial dimension in the form of dissemination, whether it happens: a) between the learner and the read or heard informal source; b) or in a one to one tutorial; c) or in a classroom; d) or through a televised lecture; e) or via the internet. These are simply differences of scale, and the scale at which phenomena are observed is a) fundamental to the efficiency of analysis, and b) to the effectiveness of any policies or actions that may follow. As Spencer and Thomas (1969) observed many decades ago, education systems are space adjusting techniques. This comment was related to national systems of formal education provision and one of their prime functions, social and political control. For non-formal education, such as apprentice training, this may also apply, but not - despite the presence of Orwellian 'thought police' in some countries - to the form of education responsible for most of our learning, the informal. Informal learning operates from the womb until death, which brings us to the issues of space-time and the temporal scale.

Space-Time: Geography and History

To paraphrase another of our literary greats, Philip Larkin: everything happens somewhere, sometime. The temporal scale in comparative education has been almost as marginalized as has the spatial. The space-time relationship is fundamental, as made clear by physicists for generations, and was recognised in the theory of geography by Parkes and Thrift (1980) and Norton (1984). Norton indicated that, with regard to geography: 'Temporal interests include cultural geography, innovation diffusion studies, time geography, arguments favouring a process-form approach and historical geography' (p.17). Education is culturally based and, in its formal and non-formal modes, politically delivered. The writer, in his *Case for a Geography of Education* (1992) concluded that its home within the composite discipline would best be cultural geography. But as Norton argues above, that is but one of several possibilities. George Bereday (1964) opted for political geography as a 'foster parent' for the nascent comparative education. The problem is that many of the sub-disciplines informing both geography and education are themselves composite. Because of the space-time issue one would argue here for the symbiotic geography-history relationship to be potentially the most fruitful combination from which to begin, bearing in mind the cultural and political dimensions of both when examining and comparing educational themes.

Phillips (1994 and 2000) raised an important issue with regard to the temporal dimension, when comparing educational themes, that of periodization. Somewhat in the same way that, in comparative education, the national spatial scale employed has been dominant, on the temporal front crude scales such as 'centuries' have often been used. The turn of a century, or even more so a millennium, is rarely of particular significance. Phillips argues instead for what he terms 'determining periods' in education when undertaking comparisons. Table 1 indicates his determining periods for post-war Germany and England and Wales respectively (Phillips, 1994).

 Table 1 Determining Periods for a Comparison between Germany and England & Wales

Post-War Germany (p.266) 1. The Allies and Education in Germany 1945-49.	<u>Post-War England & Wales (pp.269/70)</u> 1. Reconstruction and Secondary Education for All 1944-59.	
2. Two Decades of Non-Reform 1946-66.	rm 1946-66. 2. Growth and Consolidation 1959-65.	
3. The Great Coalition 1966-69.	Great Coalition 1966-69. 3. Radical Reorganisation (comprehensivation) 1965-76.	
4. The SDP years and Bildungs-Boom 1969-82.	4. Reform Debate and Concerted Action 1976-88.	
5. Neo-conservatism: The 1980s	5. The Education Reform Act & its Aftermath 1988 onwards	
6. Education in the New Germany 1990 onwards.		

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Phillips noted that his 'determining periods' were based on observation of the two systems as a whole, and mainly in terms of the sector of compulsory schooling. If disaggregated into components or stages of education the periods might have to be different; again a question of scale. Nonetheless: 'The broad periods which seem to emerge when the post-war educational development of the two countries with which I am concerned is analysed, provide points of illuminating comparison as well as some interesting contrasts' (p.270). He proposes the periods for direct comparison as follows:

- 1. Reconstruction, 1944/5 -59.
- 2. Consolidation, 1959-65.
- 3. Expansion, 1965 to the mid 1970s.
- 4. Reform Initiatives, mid 1970s late 1980s
- 5. Neo-conservative authority, late 1980s onwards.

Clearly the factors affecting education in Fig. 1 and the sub-themes of geography in Fig. 2 are potentially relevant for any educational comparison. Of these sub-disciplines/ factors, Brock and Alexiadou (2013) portray the geographical and historical as setting the scene, or clarifying the context, for as Crossley (2012) rightly argues, context is key to a sound comparison. But geography, because of its composite nature also informs the other factors set out in Fig. 2 as affecting education in a range of potential situations susceptible of comparative and/or international study where spatial disparity is relevant. Table 2 provides examples of the geographical factor at work , often implicit, moving clockwise as it were from '12 noon' on Fig. 2.

 Table 2
 Aspects of Geography Implicit and Explicit in Selected Educational Themes

<u>Aspect</u> Economic	Theme/Author(s) (see References)	<u>Scale</u> Cross-National
	Financing Education: Russia and China (Bray & Borevskaya, 2001)	
Applied	Forms of Decentralization of Education (Lauglo, 1995)	Sub-National
Demographic	Education and Migration in East Africa (Bell, 1980)	Regional
Behavioural	Mental Maps (Gould & White, 1974)	Individual
Socio-Cultural	Indigenous Education (King & Scheilman, 2004)	Community
Historical	England: School Provision Disparities 1750s-1950s (Brock, 2013)	Sub-National
Biogeographical	Education and Environmental Well-Being (Orr, 1994)	Global
Physical	Natural Hazard Awareness in India (Bangay, 2013)	National
Political	Political Geography and Suburban Schooling: USA (Johnston, 1981)	Local

The Issue of Scale

The column 'Scale' in Table 2 brings us to a fundamental issue common to both geographical and educational studies, and especially comparative education. It has already been 'flagged up' in relation to the preponderance of national scale presentations in comparative education and the need to consider periodization with regard to temporal scale. The examples selected for inclusion in Table 2 illustrate a range of scales from global to individual through regional, national, sub-national, community/local to individual. They are self-evidently geographical, but, despite the seminal paper on the potential value of multi-level analysis to comparative education by Bray and Thomas (1995), are often overlooked.

Spatial scales are not mutually exclusive nor are they necessarily discrete. They interact in relation to educational phenomena, as for example in Griffin's (2001) comparative study of the mediation, at local level, of school choice policies in three countries, England, Ireland and the USA. Furthermore, there is a scale additional to those in Table 2, that of cyberspace, that has become extremely important in relation to education (Dodge & Kitchin, 2001). The educational geography of cyberspace is especially significant in linking the global and local scales, largely bi-passing the politically powerful national scale. Indeed it connects the global with the individual unless, as is the case in some countries, governments succeed in blocking the information flow.

Information flow is, in effect, the coming together of education and geography. Utilisation of cyberspace is just the latest phase in the process of globalisation that has been proceeding for centuries. As Spencer and Thomas (1969) observed several decades ago: 'The world's peoples have been tied into a single interlocking communications system of shipping routes, postal services, telegraph cables, telephone lines, railroad lines, newspaper and magazine publications, airline routes, radio and television networks and communication satellites' (p.282). The numerous small states of the world, those with populations of less than 3 million, may be taken to illustrate some aspects of this incremental succession of space-saving innovations. A demographic threshold is necessarily the most appropriate criterion when considering education, but a minority of the 90 or so small states and territories listed by Bray and Martin (2011) are large in land area. Nonetheless the majority are small island states and territories in the Caribbean, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, South Atlantic and South Pacific regions. The fact that most are now independent states arises in part from their strategic locations in colonial times, especially the maritime British Empire, but also to the relatively long standing development of their educational provision. Many were coaling stations in the days of civil and military steamships. Their significance led to their being connected later by telegraph, telephone and now international communications technology. At the same time their mostly small scale land areas and populations engendered ease of acquisition of universal primary education within highly idiosyncratic and often multi-cultural populations (Brock, 1980). Now, in the early twenty-first century, the communications revolution that is globalisation is enabling many of these small states to play a significant role in international educational research and innovation (Crossley, Bray & Packer, 2011). Such innovations involve multilateral projects in: neighbouring islands (van Wyk, 2011); regional cooperation as with the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC); and global internet services such as from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL). Not only is what is gained from these developments benefitting the small developing states, but they are producing ideas and techniques that can inform larger nations with archipelagos such as much of the Philippines and the Western Isles of Scotland.

An Emergent Geography of Education

This youngest of the family of sub-disciplines of education has emerged from the work of both geographers and educationists, some who are in both camps, and a few others from related social science disciplines. As far as publications in English are concerned there would appear to have been a nascent interest in the spatial dimensions of education within the 'golden era' of social science expansion in the 1960s and 70s. This was an era of relative affluence, and liberal attitudes to educational expansion and research. Both the humanities and the social sciences not only received greater funding than ever before, but also became subject to new modes of analysis. As far as the social sciences were concerned these included: a) establishing a more accurate and quantified database; b) the construction of nomothetic models; c) engaging in an issue-based approach; and d) recognising a behavioural dimension. When applying geographical approaches to educational issues these translated, for example into: a) school mapping, b) the identification of generalised educational surfaces; c) spatial implications of alternative policies of educational provision; d) mental maps.

Possibly the first to publicise the term 'geography of education' was Ryba (1968) coming from an education background, and a member of the recently formed Comparative Education Society in Europe (CESE) within which a British Section had been established. The publication in 1969 by sociologists Taylor and Ayres *Born and Bred Unequal* gained a wide readership, highlighting as it did the clearly unequal chances of educational and social advancement as between different social classes and locations in England. The first specialist geographers to explicitly target educational disparity, at least in the UK, were likely Coates and Rawston (1971), in their chapter on 'Aspects of the Geography of Education' (pp.243-280). They examined a number of examples of disparity in education in what they referred to as 'Britain', though in fact only covered England and Wales – then a single education system covering two countries. Coates and Rawston investigated several themes: disparities a) in the incidence of different forms of private schooling; b) in respect of articulation between secondary and further education; c) the differential take up of higher education across the local education authority areas. The discourse is liberally illustrated by maps, cartographic representation being a fundamental feature of geography.

Whether any of these publications had anything to do with a remarkable output in terms of the geography of education in 1972 is not clear. In that year the University of Toronto hosted a meeting of the International Geographical Union (IGU). It included a publication edited by Adams and Helleiner (1972) that contained a brief statement by Ryba on the geography of education and educational planning, and a contribution by Gerry Hones on 'Problems in the Application of Central Place Theory to Educational Planning with Special Reference to the Bath Area of the UK. This was a summary of his doctoral thesis that itself was an example of the aforementioned application of nomothetic theory in the social sciences. Hones and Ryba presented a paper to that 1972 meeting of the IGU asking: 'Why Not a Geography of Education'? As a result a Geography of Education Working party was set up within the Commission on Geographical Education, under their responsibility. It went on to produce five (5) Bulletins between 1973 and 1981. That this happened within the geographical community rather than that of education was probably the reason why the momentum was not sustained sufficiently despite contemporary inputs from other countries such as Debesse (1972) in France, Maxfield (1972) and Lowry (1973) in the USA and Thomas –Hope (1975) in Jamaica.

In so far as there was a significant take-up in the following decades, it was increasingly connected with the self-evidently spatial issue of school-choice, the most potent initial outcome of the onset of neo-liberal policies associated with the near contemporaneous regimes of President Regan in the USA and Prime Minister Thatcher in the UK. While the intellectual impetus came from the USA, the fact that Mrs Thatcher wielded more power over a unified national system (England and Wales) than did President Regan, (due to the Constitution of the USA defaulting power to the individual states and school districts), meant that much more happened initially in England. Thatcher's key Education Reform Act of 1988 emasculated the Local Authorities and inevitably invited a spatial revolution. Burdett (1988) was quick to recognise the revolutionary potential for the 'geography of school choice'. This also attracted the interest of social scientists such as Ball (1993and Ball et al., 1997), and even a Special Edition of Comparative Education (Vol. 34:2). Clearly anything with strong spatial dimensions qualified as implicitly geographical; a category of publications that would reward more attention, as inferred in the content of Table 2 above. The Edinburgh geographer Liz Bondi (1988) had begun to revive a more explicitly geographical contribution to the study of education by co-editing and contributing to the first book to have the 'geography of education' in its title and containing a wider range of issues: from school reorganisation; to parental choice in two Scottish cities compared; to catchment and neighbourhood issues and disparities in attainment within cities. Bradford (1990), the Manchester geographer, also published on school choice, while Bondi (1991) presented a comparative study of the effects of aspects of school choice in the UK and USA, as did Edwards and Whitty (1992).

From the turn of the millennium there has been some return to spatial analysis of educational issues in the geographical community. Gibson and Asthana (2000) examined local markets and the polarisation of public sector schools in England and Wales, and Taylor (2002) made a substantial contribution with a book on *The Geography of the 'New' Education Market*. In 2007 the Journal *Urban Studies* devoted its 44:7 edition to 'The Geography of Education', one of the few times this term has been used. The edition was edited by Butler and Hamnett of King's College, London and, while being about fifty per cent British in terms of content, it also contained articles on Berlin, Copenhagen, California , Sydney and New Zealand. The work of Hamnett and Butler, taken further with their study of the role of distance in educational inequality in East London (2011), is one of two key growth points in the geography of education in British universities. The other is at the University of Loughborough where, under the leadership of Sarah Holloway, a real critical mass of research and publications has been created over the past few years. The publications to date under the collective heading of 'geographies of education' number over twenty (20) already, and there have also been

two international conferences on this theme at Loughborough: in 2010 and 2012, with a third in the planning. Holloway and Jons (2012) begin to explain this flowering as follows: 'In the twenty-first century Anglophone geographers have exhibited a growing interest in education and learning (Holloway et al., 2010). Geographies of education and learning consider the importance of spatiality in the production, consumption and implications of formal education systems from pre-school to tertiary education and of informal learning environments in homes, neighbourhoods, community organisations and workspaces' (p.482).

Conclusion

Will the geography of education become a sub-discipline? As can be seen above there is plenty of evidence for its voracity and indeed something of a momentum in its critical mass of literature. However this is presently coming almost entirely from the geographical community. Clearly the earlier lack of perception as to the wealth of spatial disparity of educational policies arising both from their formulation and their mediation on the ground has been rectified. The educational community, including comparative education, has not made the same advance though there is some evidence of the value of concepts such as space, location and scale. Still the so-called cultural turn in geography is well in advance of the so-called spatial turn in education that remains largely at the level of semantics. At least the geography of education figures in a recent publication aimed at reviving the potential significance of the disciplines of education (Furlong & Lawn, 2011) where Taylor contributes a chapter to that effect, though his title 'Towards a Geography of Education' indicates in itself that the status of sub-discipline is not yet secured. What is preventing it?

Evidence as to where the problem lies can be found in the title of the first article in the edition of the *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers New Series* in which the aforementioned article by Holloway and Jons (2012) is published. It is 'Geographic Information Science: Tribe, Badge and Sub-Discipline' (Haklay, 2012) and is the first of three articles in the issue constituting a subsection 'Boundary Crossings', a term which alludes to interdisciplinary enquiry. The key word is 'tribe', which takes us back to Becher's eminently pertinent classic *Academic Tribes and Territories* (1989) where the analysis shows how academics establish tribal identities by creating membership societies and specialist journals. Career advancement is through publication in these specialist journals which are read largely by tribal members, and hardly ever by other tribes or outsiders such as policy makers and administrators. The feature 'boundary crossings' in the journal mentioned above is a rare move to recognise the imperative of interdisciplinary enquiry that has already been grasped by research funding agencies. So the geographers are on the way to Haklay's sub discipline 'geographic information science'. It is now up to educationists, and especially those in comparative education, to embrace the geographical factor and engage in a more sophisticated discourse on the spatial dimension of educational activity, especially the issue of scale.

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