



National Past And Worldwide Perspective: A Comparative Approach To The Research Of The History Of Education

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Abstract

In the science of history nowadays, the intercultural comparative approach is spreading more and more, thus further elaboration on it and its application in the research of history of education is useful and inevitable. This study offers a starting point to the doing of the widely interpreted history of education. There is a distinguished focus on the presentation of those books and studies that describe the past of the non-western education and in connection with that on the attributes of the genre and research methodology as well as on the consideration of the difficulties regarding comparison.

Introduction

Several objectives – that are often isolated in the sense of geography, approach, language, and more other reasons – with respect to the widening of the framework of history of education and the researches being comparative in space and time with intercultural approach, can be observed in the world nowadays. Our study offers a brief overview on the objectives, results and characteristics of these approaches by the evaluation of some typical and influential literature in the international history of education. We have used handbooks written in the past decades and analyzed their contents in a comparative way. Based on the concerning literature we summarize why it is essential to explore the national past and history of education, and besides but closely interwoven the worldwide perspective in the study of the history of education. Additionally, on the grounds of works from occidental and non-occidental authors, we present the most important changes in approaches in the past decades, emphasizing their mistakes and deficiencies.

The Necessity of a Worldwide Perspective

In the beginning of the 21th century it is needful to know and handle the economical, political, ecological, social and other kind of problems of our planet not only on a local level, but having a comprehensive approach concerning them. Each peoples, countries and continents need to take shared efforts as well for the sake of the future and survival of human civilization. Therefore it is necessary to unite the powers and knowledge, and in order to promote it, we need to know the most about others, about *the other*. This objective – being of special importance from the point of view of the history of education as well – may contribute to the clearer analysis of some problems. For the solution of these, a worldwide perspective is needed according to several researchers, for example Myers (1963), who, in Toynbee's track, analyzes the history of education in a broad context.

A handbook about the history of education, that had been written in such an overall approach, that spans the continents, has created a great stir in the past few years. The editors of this book have written in the foreword that, because of the above, the education of young people is of crucial importance these days (as well); though it is not sufficient to give the students such advices for life as "Live in peace with others." or "Accept the culture of others.", but for the promotion of it all, continuous building is required every day. The modern point of view of the history of education on a global level may favorably form the scientific approach and the multi-perspective viewpoint and the attitude towards our own country and towards the peoples of other countries (Salimova & Dodde, 2000, p. 12). The study of the really universal history of education helps to seek for common intellectual connections, connective cultural elements between different peoples, and point the unique characteristics at the same time; which all are parts of the educational past and educational heritage of humanity.

However, this argumentation is accepted by more and more of the education focused historians, according to Reagan (2005), history of education which is being done and taught in his home country, the USA and generally in the West, concentrates primarily on their own traditions and other, non-western cultures are taken into consideration only in very rare cases. In his opinion, it is obvious on the one hand; and on the other hand, we have to aim for the educational traditions and achievements of other societies and peoples being also presented in the studies of the history of education, as it „may help us to think more clearly about some of our own assumptions and values, as well as to help us to become more open to alternative viewpoints about important educational matters” (Reagan, 2005, p. XIII). A decade ago, the author has already outlined that phenomenon which is noticeable not only in his home country but all over the world: in the field of teacher training, only a few tutors, researchers are able to present an overall and realistic picture regarding the non-western traditions of education, which of course, cannot be imagined without knowing the past of education in the West. In his work he emphasized that thought of key importance stating that western researchers, despite all their efforts, are not able to abandon their western point of view even in the course of studying non-western cultures and observing history of education from a worldwide perspective.

Essential Readings about the Past of the Western and Non-Western Education

Before reviewing the points of focus of some foreign handbooks written in the past decades about the history of education, containing details not only from the West (Europe), but from other parts of the world as well; it is necessary to briefly describe the sphere of concepts. The relationship of the “East” and the “West” can be highlighted as a not recent pair of concepts as they were already in use in the Middle Age. For the European people of the Middle Age, right until the colonialism, this pair of words was appropriate to describe and enforce their own occidental identity and values, opposed to the Orient, or more precisely, everything that is *non-European*. The more distant, formerly unknown areas the European people ventured to, the more they realized that the world has several places which are rather different from the western culture; in addition, the countries of the East have gone through a very diverse way of history and they are far from being the same regarding their culture, their educational conventions, their ideal of the world and humanity. No wonder that Géza Ankerl (2000), an outstanding figure of researchers regarding the fields of comparative law, sociology and cultural history, entitled his compilation book “Occident exists, Orient not.” In his analysis of that book, János Farkas (2001) writes that “The Occident, therefore, as a concept exists, but the same cannot be said of the Oriental civilization. The Chinese, Indian, Arabian-Muslim civilization included in the concept of the Orient, are not only different from the Occident but also different from each other. These diversities are so significant that the concept of the Orient is empty in fact. It is merely an ideological construction, and its only function is that Occident can emphasize and make accepted their »civilizing quest« with its creation and application”. The history and features of the

Western people turning to the Orient from the Ancient times till today have been surveyed by Katalin Mund (2004) in her recently published study.

The attributes *occidental* and *oriental* are found quite often in the titles and subtitles of the foreign handbooks concerning the universal history of education. In the English-speaking world recently, beside the attribute *occidental* (that refers to the countries of the European continent and the North-American continent, and additionally, parts of the Australian continent as well); the term *non-occidental* is more and more frequently used pointing to all the other continents. Reagan (2005), for example, has created one of the most complex handbooks available these days about the history of the educational traditions of non-occidental cultures. His book, *Non-Western Educational Traditions. Indigenous Approaches to Educational Thought and Practice* is an essential reading within the foreign literature of the topic.

In the Foreword, the author indicates that his work is meant primarily for students taking part in the teacher training program and for keen professionals as a textbook; (there are questions and exercises at the end of each chapter), which has determined the size of the chapters. Besides the extension of the comparative study of education in time and space, and introductions from the field of historical philosophy and epistemology are characteristics of the book as well as sub-chapters that outline the possible future extensions of researches. Important clarifications of concepts are found in the book, for example, ethnocentrism and constructivist epistemology in terms of the conceptions of culture. Three of the ten major chapters of the book deal with the methodology and theoretical questions concerning research. In the major text, making the core of the book, Reagan summarizes the different attributes of history of education of the non-western cultures. The past of the education of the African, Mesoamerican (Mayan and Aztec), native North-American, Confucian Chinese, Hindu and Buddhist, Romany and Muslim are mentioned.

Similarly to Reagan's work, the Kenyan pair of authors, Sifuna and Otiende (2006) outlined¹, in a wider sense of space and time, the history of the theory and practice of education until the 20th century. In addition to the characteristics of Prehistoric, Ancient Egyptian, Indian, Chinese, Jewish, Greek, and Roman education that have been presented in other works as well, the authors discuss the traditional African education in detail; and based on their researches they show a unique way of education to the readers from the point of view of the natives instead of the approach of the colonizers. They present the history of the Muslim education from Kenyan angle as well, since the integration of the Islamic ideals and institutions of education in the country has led to the reduction of local traditions just as it would have been the western.

The studies that have been written after a conference on comparative history of education in 1994 also draw the attention to the importance of the choice of the right

¹ Note: the book was first published in 1992, unlike this study, for example Asafo-Agyei Okra, to be mentioned later in quoted that text in the work of his own.

approach and to the necessity of comparison to be extended both in space and time. The book entitled *East-West Dialogue in Knowledge and Higher Education* analyzes the Oriental influences specifically from the point of view of the formation of the western higher education (Hayhoe & Pan, 1996). The introductory study of the book already raises the question if it is possible for a European to study appreciatively and understand substantively at all the Chinese classics and erudition. The main question to which the whole book seeks answers for is the following: Despite the great cultural differences between peoples of the Earth how is it possible to behold, improve, and transmit the various values. More of the authors of the book allude a phenomenon that knowledge, scientific achievements and the forms of (higher) education have spread and become determinant in the past centuries was basically the consequence of political relationships and power settlements. Winchester (1996, p. 17) begins his study in a witty manner with these lines: „Had Genghis Khan not met with sufficient military resistance in Western Europe, or perhaps had he not died so young, the Yuelu Academy [established in 976] might have been the model for the higher education institutions of the world.” Pinayur Rajagopal (1996) expanded that after the Muslim invasion in India, from their vast and genuine knowledge, the old sciences only remained like hidden brooklets; and after the second great occupation, the British colonization, the country has developed its higher education system (as well) based on an external (British) model. On the contrary, China, being able to more successfully resist to the great invasions; always had the chance to make a choice between the local (ancient Chinese) and the foreign education model. The author considers the history of mathematics in the two huge Asian countries so significant that he draws the attention to what we usually mention as history of mathematics is nothing else than the history of only the *European* mathematics (that points the responsibility concerning the choice of the approach, as well of the researcher dealing with the history of education). According to Rajagopal (1996), if we change our point of view and become able to see the complicated intercultural processes of the transmission of knowledge in the sense of both time and space; then it will be necessary to reconstruct the history written as the rise of mankind and technological triumph of the west (Rajagopal, 1996, pp. 26–27). This is all true in regards of the history of education as well.

Youguang (1996) highlighted in his own writing that social evolution cannot be compared to biological evolution. In his opinion, each culture has its own way and cannot be put in a standard row as a typical direction of development of all the cultures (Youguang, 1996, p. 45). He and one of the other authors of the book, Barlosky (1996) drew the attention to the fact that the understanding of science and scientific achievements is different in the Occident and in the Orient due to differences of an ontological and epistemological nature. The latter researcher pointed out – with reference to Ji Shuli’s (1992) former presentation of Chinese sciences – that the occidental sciences describe the oriental ways of thinking as being mystical and magical schemes (Barlosky, 1996, p. 53).

Many works can be listed from the past years among foreign monographs that are concerned with the universal history of education in a wide sense. It is worth to mention, for example, the set of four volumes edited by Lowe Roy (2000), entitled *History of Education. Major Themes*. The authors have overviewed the most important topics studied by researchers of the history of education in the western world, more precisely the English language area, in the past three decades. The fourth volume discusses the researches concerning the history of the scholar system and contains particularly much detail on universal history, for instance the chapters titled *Ethnicity and Education* and *Imperialism and Education* among them.

Other books, for example, *Philanthropy in the World's Traditions* writes merely in connection with its main topic, but in a rather wide sense; they write about the universal history of education in a manner of taking into account the world's different cultures (Ilchman, Katz & Queen, 1998). This volume presents that not only the Christian Western world, but several other cultures and religions of the planet serve reach examples regarding the history of philanthropism. The studies in the book focus on the religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Muslim, Jewish, Native American and many others. From the point of view of the history of education, Tucker's chapter about Japan, explaining the Confucian ethics and education is of special importance (Tucker, 1996, pp. 169–197). The editors of the volume indicate already in the introduction that they are trying a wider and more comprehensive way of comparative analysis of culture, not only philanthropism in their work.

Those works that discuss the past of education of peoples, continents or countries not belonging to the circle of western cultures, serve as a significant basis of our researches and international outlook. From the point of view of philosophy and epistemology, Asafo-Agyei (2003) work is important as it starts with the study of Ghana's history of education, gives a comprehensive overview on the way of thinking typical of the African educational philosophy itself. The author clearly states in the foreword of his work that those books available in the libraries in the USA regarding the matter of education and its past in Africa, mostly concerned with the successfully implemented (western) educational reforms in the continent. The non-African researchers dealing with Africa almost without exception associate the *European* notion and meaning regarding the concepts of philosophy and educational philosophy. Asafo-Agyei – similarly to several other authors – raises the serious question: Why should one use western criteria and conceptual schemes in the process of getting acquainted with non-occidental cultures? He explains that the philosophical knowledge in Africa in the course of thousands of years, live in proverbs, myths, folk-tales, beliefs, conventions and traditions as well as in artistic symbols, social-political institutions and in practice (Asafo-Agyei, 2003, p. 15). He mentions for instance the Ghanaian people; the Akans – in the focus of the study – who are analphabet, but their drum language as well as their monodies also, carrying philosophical thoughts and the deepest questions of existence, are incomprehensible as a philosophical message for the western audience. In the author's opinion, the African

history of education cannot be described by the usual method, namely the western perspective applied in the past centuries; it is necessary to find new points of view, African approaches. Asafo-Agyei highlighted Ghana's example; former works summarizing the history of education of the country, usually write about it as a geographical place where the education was brought by the European (at first the Portugal, then the Dutch, later the English). As the researcher points out, these written sources only mention that the institutionalized, educational institutes were organized and established from the 17th century by the arriving Europeans based on the European model in the cities of the beach called Gold Coast (and there only). Almost exclusively the children of merchants and mulatto children from mixed marriages (and they only) were attending these schools. Those works, therefore, that date the beginning of the history of education from the arrival of the missionaries, and do not take into consideration the reach – but verbal and practical – educational past and traditions in the area, are conceptually incorrect (Asafo-Agyei, 2003, p. 29). The author referred to the closing document of the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists held in 1959 and quoted its suggestions for solution worded by Commission on Philosophy (see also: Minogue & Molloy, 1974) as a chain of ideas that may greatly contribute to the explanation and knowing of African (educational) philosophy and history of education.

From the point of view of the history of education, it is absolutely necessary to highlight the achievements and objectives of the Latin-American countries. Although the works of the researchers from a distant continent can only reach the Hungarian researchers and readership only partially, delayed and often indirectly, and the necessity of Spanish and Portugal language skills make even more complicated to work with them, it is important to emphasize that the Latin-American colleagues have greatly contributed to the familiarization of a really universal and realistic history of education with their magazines, books, scientists' companies, research institutes (See e.g.: Gondra & Silva, 2011).

Those works that juxtapose the oeuvre of pedagogic philosophers lived in the western world in different eras of history and various geographical areas; also significantly promote the familiarization of the universal history of education meant in a wide sense. Differently from the former summaries concerning the history of education and the history of the philosophy of education, in these volumes not only the well-known (by professionals) European (North-American) objectives and flows of ideas concerning pedagogy can be tracked but they give an overview on the academic achievements of outstanding people of other cultures. These volumes have been created by international research teams in almost all the cases and the identical principles of editing enable the comparison of oeuvres and for example the influence analyses. Of course, in the case of such books, there is always a question why those philosophers have been selected by the editors and their consultants. (It is important to note that in these volumes the oeuvres of Hungarian educational politics and / or pedagogic philosophers are present in more instances.)

One of the most important and often referenced books that summarize oeuvres in the English-language world is entitled *Fifty Major Thinkers on Education: From Confucius to Dewey*, edited by Palmer (2001). Among the fifty philosophers introduced in the book, the Chinese Confucius, the Arabian al-Ghazálí and Ibn Tufajl, the Puerto-Rican Eugenio María de Hostos, the Indian Rabindranath Tagore and Mohandas Karamcsand Gandhi, and the Afro-American William Edward Burghardt du Bois are those who represent the non-occidental culture. The pair of this volume is also edited by Joy Palmer (2001), it introduces modern pedagogic philosophers and entitled *Fifty Modern Thinkers on Education: from Piaget to the Present*. According to the editor's foreword, from the oldest times to the beginning of the 21th century, these two volumes together introduce the approach to education of those people who had the greatest influence on the formation of pedagogy and public education in the world. After short biographies, the authors of the studies describe, by consistent viewpoints, each philosopher's influence on intellectual life and practice; and there are notes and bibliographies presented at the end of each study to help the readers with their further inquiries and researches. An important index at the end of each chapter refers to those thinkers also introduced in the book who had influence on the given philosopher the chapter is about, and also refers to the ones affected by him. The editor explained in her foreword that in the course of working on the book, how much research and how hard decisions the two thousand years of time demanded on the choice of the most important ones among several outstanding philosophers; and she notes that the book does not exhaust the topic. As she writes, an essential viewpoint was to put such thinkers into the book who had a broad influence and affected others' way of thinking in the history of pedagogy (Palmer, 2001, p. XIV).

There are comprehensive books introducing the past of education in the world in many ways not only in English, of course. The Mexican author, Francisco Larroyo's thick volume about the history of education has had several prints (Escalente, 2011), originally written in 1947 *Historia general de la pedagogía*² with a similar approach, and being consistent with its title, the book is indeed about the universal history of pedagogy. In the book, the author describes the history of education of the different continents, in chronological order, widely embedded into the history of society and culture. His handbook is a monumental task, but due to its broad theme, it gives only a relatively short overview of each field, but makes further inquiries easier with its reach and diverse, multilingual bibliography which can be considered as a masterpiece.

A book edited by Kadriya Salimova and Nan L. Dodde which is considered as a novelty and precedent was published in 2000, Moscow (in English); gives an overview of history of education in 18 countries with extensive and similarly structured studies. A group of authors of Austrian, Azerbaijani, Chinese, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Indian, Japan, Polish, Russian, South-African, Swiss, Syrian, Turkish, and US origin were provided with the opportunity to describe how had their own people and country

² Note: The book studied by us was the 15th release in 1973.

contributed to the enrichment of achievements concerning education. Despite the consistent viewpoints regarding the writing and editing of studies, the researches explore the differences between the various geographical areas, in an unbelievably diverse way; therefore a great piece of work has been created which can serve as a basis for the doing of the comparative history of education and intercultural researches. As the authors highlighted, the studies reviewed together outlined that in every age and place of history, mankind is product, modifier and creator of the historical processes at the same time; and the ideas of pedagogy and education have a significant role in the lives of individuals as well as in the fate of peoples and countries, and ultimately in the formation of history.

In today's French it is primarily the educational and historical philosopher, Houssaye's (1994, 1996, 2002, 2008) merit that similar books about the pedagogic philosophers from different parts of the world, not only about European (western) have been created in the past two decades with the (not just virtual) involvement of significant international researcher teams. The volumes, similarly to the formerly mentioned works, are made up of thematically consistent studies from which the pedagogic ideas of the reputable minds of history of education can be learned.

Characteristics of the Works of Universal History of education

The literature overviewed in this study so far confirm that for the comprehensive, culturalist-based, intercultural-comparative examinations and the presentations on results concerning the universal history of education more kind of methods and approaches are exist. One possibility, followed in the book edited by Salimova and Dodde (2000) is that researchers look through the history of education of different countries, creating the basis for a later comparison.

However, all such initiatives are welcomed, it is essential to work out a framework of concepts and interpretation. The unquestionable advantage of such overviews is that it offers a wider view on various cultures; and conduce and deepen the cooperation between researchers from different parts of the world, highlights details of history of education that had not been known before, helps to reveal the similarities and unique things and special educational phenomena in the different countries. All of these may contribute to the completion of intercultural relations, to the evolution of global ethics; may ultimately weaken, hinder for example prejudices, incorrect stereotypes, chauvinism and racism.

At the same time, this type of universal overviews of historical education has several mistakes and deficiencies due to difficulties having within the set of a framework of interpretation and the definition of concepts; as the editors of the books; the writers describing their countries have their own concepts, and their unique knowledge of history, pedagogy, and philosophy. What makes it more complicated is the difference regarding how time is divided to epochs in culture and culture and their concepts of

(historical) time. Another weakness of those universal introductions of history of education is that they are unable to represent the whole history of the educational past of mankind, because that could not be granted even if the description of all the countries were represented in such comprehensive works; as it would inevitably wash away the diversities within the past of certain ethnical groups, nations living there in more states (perhaps not having their own state), not to mention the already disappeared and assimilated peoples. An additional important defect of the works introducing the universal history of education as the past of public education in separate countries is that the intercultural relations, spanning the borders are left almost completely in the background. At the same time, one of the most important goals of the broadly interpreted history of education is to point the intercultural relationships, influences and their dividing lines.

Another approach to the universal history of education is the method that collects in a bunch the oeuvres of outstanding representatives from distinct countries of the world. In the past decade this way of editing is typical for instance in the case of French publishers, which could be rather useful from the angle that it gives a more comprehensive description of the past of pedagogic thinking and educational philosophy, and partially reveals how the pedagogic thoughts and scholar models have wandered in space and time in the course of history. Such monumental summaries can be great starting points for the wider expansion of researches regarding influence and reception; for the more subtle comprehension of the history of cogitation.

Similarly to the handbooks that juxtapose the history of education of certain countries, those assemblies that present the oeuvre of certain, of pedagogic thinkers, no matter if they are drawn from the widest range, will always be deficient at the same time. In this case as well, there is the problem of the subjectivism during the selection: one of the most recent, monumental, portrait gallery of four volumes, sponsored by UNESCO included the presentation of Ágoston Trefort and József Eötvös from the Hungarian history of education which is glad, but thought-provoking as well if we consider others of our notable persons for example the educational politics, not included in the book (Morsy, 1985-1995).

In spite of the above mentioned deficiencies, problems, difficulties of interpretation, books that introduce the history of education of different countries (of Europe and of other continents), and assemblies that summarize the oeuvre of the referenced pedagogic thinkers, school establishers from the past of certain peoples, imply rather important steps towards a more complete, really *universal* history of education. In order to make it more than just utopian, not really promising business, it is necessary for the historians of education, research teams and scientific organizations of the world to elaborate on many-many viewpoints, questions regarding methodology and contents.

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