

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

*A Festschrift in Honour of
Professor Emeritus Vernon Mallinson*

EDITED BY : KEITH WATSON
AND RAYMOND WILSON

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INTRODUCTION

Keith Watson and Raymond Wilson

This volume of essays on contemporary issues in comparative education has a twofold purpose. The first is to honour Vernon Mallinson, Emeritus Professor of Comparative Education in the University of Reading and Visiting Professor of Education in the University of Kent at Canterbury. Mallinson's scholarly and distinguished contribution to the development of comparative studies in education, especially with his perspective on national character as a major cause of differences in societies and their education systems, has earned him an international reputation, especially in the context of Europe. We feel it is fitting to recognise this contribution on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday.

The second purpose is to look at a number of issues in comparative education as well as a number of educational issues from a comparative perspective. Sadly, this latter perspective is all too frequently overlooked in most of the educational debates of the present time. The parochialism with which we view and discuss educational issues is frightening, whether they are implications of contraction and falling rolls, the financing of students in higher education or the reform of examinations, the curriculum, the school system or teacher education. As Edmund King argues in one of the essays in this volume, we are in a situation whereby all education is becoming education for uncertainty⁽¹⁾ and to ignore the wider, international implications of this situation is to court disaster. As societies become more complex and the problems faced by these societies, whether industrialised or newly industrialising, become increasingly common, the need for more comparative and international perspectives grows. Why? Because much can be learnt from the reforms and developments taking place in other societies; because the way problems and crises are being tackled can illuminate the way we might tackle our own national or local problems; and because, in this time of economic recession and financial retrenchment, costly mistakes may be avoided. This has always been part of the stock in trade of comparative educationists since the beginning of the

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nineteenth century. As Nicholas Hans, amongst others, has argued, "The analytical study of these factors (which help to form a nation) from an historical perspective and the comparison of attempted solutions of resultant problems are the main purpose of comparative education".(2)

There is another reason why comparative studies in education should lay claim to some importance in the present age: it is that they can help us to appreciate, and reflect upon, our own situation from a broader and different standpoint. This was certainly Vernon Mallinson's viewpoint and in his influential Introduction to the Study of Comparative Education he wrote:

To identify the problems of education thus becomes the most important preliminary task of the research worker in (the comparative study of education). To become familiar with what is being done in some other countries than their own, and why it is done, is a necessary part of the training of all serious students of educational issues of the day. Only in that way will they be properly fitted to study and understand their own systems and to plan intelligently for the future which....is going to be one where we are thrown together into ever closer contact with other peoples and other cultures .(3)

Unfortunately, as a recent survey has shown,(4) far from all students training to be teachers being made aware of developments in other countries, the opposite is the case: fewer students are being introduced to comparative studies in education and fewer teacher trainers have a comparative dimension in their own work. What is important in most schools/departments of education is what is practical and utilitarian in the classroom and what can be measured easily.

The paradox is that this situation has arisen at a time when economically and politically Britain has drawn closer to the European Community and at a time when, as the Brandt Commission has argued, globally we have become ever more "interdependent". As a result of technological change, it is true to say that our world has conspicuously contracted during the course of the twentieth century. In Marshal McLuhan's metaphor, it has become a "global village", and it is imperative that we, as villagers, should understand one another. If we do not, as Alvin Toffler,(5) in one sense, and Olav Palme,(6) in another, have shown, we are heading for disaster. The fact is that neither science nor technology can do anything in themselves to resolve the complex social, cultural and moral problems that are the necessary consequence of the increasingly important part they play in our lives. Our most urgent need is to relate technological advance to the subjective, divergent and what often seem irreconcilable value-

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systems to which all of us owe allegiance, whether as Russians, Americans, Indians, Chinese or West Europeans. It is precisely here that, in an effort to answer this need, the justification for comparative studies lies. Education systems both shape and reflect the values of the societies in which they are embedded. By studying them comparatively we can at least arrive at a more tolerant and sympathetic understanding of one another, and more often than might be supposed, we can learn from reforms and developments in other systems some useful lessons for the development of our own system.

Throughout his professional career Vernon Mallinson certainly believed this to be the case and in his writings and teaching he inspired countless students to look sympathetically at other education systems and the societies which they reflected and shaped as well as to appraise their own. Perhaps his inspiration and ideas developed during the second world war, when, as a member of the Intelligence Corps, he served behind enemy lines in Belgium. Because of his love for, his service to and his writings about that country at the heart of the post war reconstruction of Europe, Vernon Mallinson was made an Officer of the Order of Leopold II, later of Leopold, both honours of the highest distinction.

Born in Barnsley, in South Yorkshire and a graduate of Leeds University, Vernon Mallinson was always proud of his Yorkshire origins, not least, perhaps, because one of the greatest of all comparative educators, Sir Michael Sadler, was also born in Barnsley and later became Vice Chancellor of Leeds University (1911-23). (7) Whether or not Sadler acted as an inspiration, Mallinson's progression at Reading University (1945-75) from lecturer through to Professor of Education was very much in the tradition and wake of another famous comparative educator, H.C. Barnard (1937-51). Between them they shaped the development of and left their stamp on comparative education studies at Reading, the only university in the U.K. outside London, that was ever able to boast of a chair in comparative education.

As the bibliography of Vernon Mallinson's publications, found at the end of this volume and compiled by Graham Geoghegan, the Education Librarian at Reading, shows, his range of interests has been enormous, and the development of his thinking and his output of materials has likewise been varied. The chapters in this volume reflect these wide interests and at the same time reflect the development of his thinking and writing. They are written, in the main, by experts in the field of comparative education, many with international reputations and all with some close knowledge of, or connexion with, Vernon Mallinson either as colleagues, friends or former students.

The chapters that follow offer a shrewd appraisal of education as it is today in developed and developing countries. Their authors are too realistic to indulge in a facile optimism, and they face the fact that the expansion of

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education does not guarantee economic growth or necessarily lead to a more equal society. At the same time, they indicate what possibilities do exist within the field of education for the promotion of both the material and cultural welfare of nations. The first few are devoted to themes as they evolved in Vernon Mallinson's writings; the remainder are concerned with the practical outworkings of a comparative analysis in modern times.

It is appropriate that the first chapter is concerned with Michael Sadler and is written by the foremost authority on Sadler's work, Hafray Higginson, since Sadler's influence on the development of comparative studies in education and on Vernon Mallinson's thinking, both in perceptions of cultural and other influences on schools and in his view of national character, were considerable. Sadler, as Higginson shows, is remarkably contemporary, even though many of his most important writings were published at the end of the last century and in the first three decades of this. He picks a topic of current interest - how best to educate the masses, especially at secondary level - and shows how the questions on this topic raised first by Sadler, and later by Mallinson, remain unresolved. Higginson also shows that while we can learn from overseas and can borrow ideas, we cannot borrow wholesale because of the different cultural factors prevailing in different societies.

One of the most lasting aspects of Vernon Mallinson's work in comparative education is that of "national character". The term itself, while frequently used by comparative educators throughout the first half of the twentieth century as a means of distinguishing why different education systems are different, has angered critics and puzzled friends alike. This is partly because of the apparent vagueness of the term, partly because it cannot be quantified and used in accurate, statistical measurement, partly because the understanding of national character is subjective rather than objective. William Kay, a former student of Mallinson, seeks to unravel some of the complexity surrounding the topic and to show, from the literature of psychology, that far from being a discredited idea, it has much validity for educational analysis.

For many years it appeared that the cultural, historical approach of Vernon Mallinson, laying emphasis, as it does, on national character, was at loggerheads with the scientific analysis and problem (solving) approach of Brian Holmes. It would appear, however, that the differences are ones of degree rather than essential substance as can be seen from Holmes' chapter, which seeks to reconcile the two approaches. In fact it is one of the clearest statements from Holmes on the how and why of his problem (solving) approach to comparative education, and it is fitting that it should appear in this volume of essays honouring Vernon Mallinson, since the latter, a humanist to the core, was so often puzzled by the empirical demands of scientists in comparative studies.

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National character and literature are intertwined since literature frequently reflects the daily life and attitudes of "ordinary" people and Mallinson is one of the few scholars to refer to the need to understand the literature of a country before, or as a means to, understanding the education systems and the "philosophy" behind it. (8) Margaret Sutherland examines this suggestion and explores some of the literature that she has found most useful in the study of education. This author knows of only one journal for teachers which regularly addresses itself to the literature aimed at children. This chapter, therefore, is a challenging one because it not only shows the value of looking at literature as a means of understanding schools and society, but it opens up many new avenues for thought and study in this direction.

The other major area of comparative studies, and the one country more than any other that is associated with Vernon Mallinson, is Belgium. As a result of his wartime experiences he developed a great affection for a country he has adopted as his own. Few Englishmen have written so lucidly about Belgium. It is fitting, therefore, that in this book there should be a chapter on educational developments in Belgium since the late 'sixties, when Mallinson's major works on the country first appeared. John Owen, for many years associated with Reading through what is now the Buckinghamshire College of Higher Education, whose PGCE students were validated by Reading staff, and associated with Belgium through visits and research work, takes as his theme, Choice and Reform in Belgian Education. He takes us through the intricacies of modern Belgium and shows how, with all the reforms of the past decade, there is still a considerable degree of choice for parents and for pupils alike. How far should children attend Roman Catholic schools, how far should they attend "neutral" schools, how far should they negotiate over the curriculum? The discussion makes interesting reading in the light of current debates in the U.K. about uniform, comprehensive education, the freedom of parents to opt for different types of school, and the recent debate about the provision of school transport. The discussion is also interesting in the light of current attempts to provide technical and vocational education for youngsters at secondary level, and in negotiations about closures and mergers of schools. Owen offers us one of the most up to date accounts of educational reform in the complex nation state of Belgium.

The state is the theme of Kenneth Smart's chapter on West Germany. It is important and interesting to examine this because on it hinges so much of the idea of national character and the role of the modern nation state. It is also interesting to take Germany as an example, because, while it is at the heart of Europe and while in some ways educationally it resembles the U.K., its historical, religious and political developments have evolved along very different lines. Smart's concern is to look at the concept of "the state". What is it?

Whom does it represent? Who makes the decisions and who is accountable? He gives a very clear exposition of the constitutional, legal and administrative framework of West Germany. There is a particularly interesting discussion on the relationship between local (State/Land) authorities and the central (i.e. federal) government, especially in the light of the present confrontation between central government and local authorities in the U.K. There is also a fascinating discussion about the role and responsibilities of the teacher which anyone advocating that U.K. teachers should become civil servants would be well advised to read.

From the particular to the general, Sixten Markland reviews Vernon Mallinson's thesis of the Western European idea in education. The belief that there is such a thing as a Western European idea, and that there are certain features common to all Western European education systems is one that Mallinson has built on over the years. It is an attractive idea and Western Europe lends itself to comparative analysis admirably, though as Markland points out there is a danger of interpreting Europe too narrowly.

One feature common to all the educational thinking and reforms in Western Europe since the second world war has been the belief that by widening access to the secondary level of education and by equalising educational opportunity more children of the lower socio-economic groups would be able to enter the universities and reach the top jobs in society. Bill Halls' account of the progress towards equality of educational opportunity in Western Europe during the past twenty years is both masterly in its historical and social analysis as well as showing how comparative studies can throw light on a very emotive issue. There has been much criticism in the U.K. that, in spite of comprehensivisation and the widening of opportunities at the tertiary level of education, there has been little progress towards a more equal society. Halls shows from his study of other countries in Western Europe that their success has been even more limited. He gives a pessimistic, but realistic, view in the hope, as he says, that "one of the failures of education may nevertheless stimulate fresh efforts to realise the ideal".

While it is common to respect developments in Europe, even if we do not always understand them or only know a little about them, it is all too common to denigrate education in the U.S.A. as inferior or lacking in academic rigour. Nigel Grant not only explodes some of the commonly held myths about higher education in the U.S.A. but, once again using comparative studies for practical purposes, argues that in the changing economic, social and financial climate we find ourselves in, we have much to learn from the flexibility and creativity of the United States' experience. He cites several very specific ways in which lessons from the American experience could bring benefit to British developments.

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It has long been recognised by comparative educationists that no education system can be studied or understood in isolation from its social, historical, cultural and political milieu and two chapters in this volume seek to expand on this aspect of comparative education in the contemporary world. Colin Brock is concerned to apply the geographical factor to educational analysis, while Keith Watson looks at the impact of demographic, socio-economic and political changes on educational provision. Brock's concern is that for too long geography has been both misunderstood by non-geographers and that its impact on educational planning and provision has too easily been ignored. He gives a detailed literature survey and shows how geographical analysis can be applied to education. Watson is more at pains to show how those in school systems - teachers, administrators, curriculum planners, etc. - have had to respond and react to external changes over which they have neither influence nor control. He draws examples from both developed and developing countries.

The last two chapters relate to the practical application of comparative education studies and to reform. It is often suggested that comparative education is too theoretical, or is interesting but lacks practical relevance. Paul Mercier shows that this image is far from the truth and cites examples, such as curriculum development, the in-service training of teachers and the preparation and training of headteachers, where comparative studies have actually stimulated practical change and reform.

Reform has always been one of the chief purposes of comparative studies in education: using ideas, experiments and developments from other countries in order to enlighten and encourage developments in one's own. Edmund King, while not selecting any specific examples, gives an apologia for comparative education, showing that in the changing context of a technological society and in the changing relations between North and South, education is no longer for certainty. Its processes and purposes need to be reformed, but such reform as may be introduced should only come after, or as a result of, comparative studies.

The contributions to this volume are informative and up to date, but their analyses are more challenging and provocative than conclusive. Taken together, they offer a range of insights into the problems that beset education as it is today, both at national and at international levels, and it is fair to say that they offer a lively introduction to the issues that are now being most urgently discussed by comparative educationists in five continents.

No one knows better than Vernon Mallinson that if comparative education is to continue to develop and make a full contribution to the study of education, it can do so only by being responsive to important living issues. It is, therefore, entirely appropriate that this volume of essays

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should be dedicated to him.

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Chapter One

AN ENGLISH EDUCATION FOR ENGLAND

J.H. Higginson.

Possibly I should begin this contribution to the Festschrift with three admissions. First, I treasure with Vernon Mallinson, as a near contemporary, memories of the same Alma Mater, and also a European decoration, in his case Belgian, in mine, French. Second, we have long shared an admiration for the far-sightedness of an English pioneer in foreign studies, about whose influence he has written a comprehensive appreciation.⁽¹⁾ Third, the title of this contribution is borrowed from that same forward-looking Englishman who wrote a paper on this theme for the Contemporary Review in the early days of the first world war.⁽²⁾ It is a title that seems to me to sum up much of the teaching and writing of Vernon Mallinson as I have known it over the years. To make such a claim implies no reduction in the breadth of vision, and certainly no insularity, in the author of The Western European Idea in Education.⁽³⁾ Rather, it is to say that Vernon Mallinson's scholarship affords a superb illustration of a dictum that he and I both cherish:

The practical value of studying, in a right spirit and with scholarly accuracy, the works of foreign systems of education is that it will result in our being better fitted to study and understand our own.⁽⁴⁾

In this paper, I propose to examine the contents of Michael Sadler's essay on An English Education for England, bearing in mind Mallinson's fundamental convictions about the influence of "the cultural heritage" and "national character": and to imply what relevance arguments put forward in the context of the first world war may have to the educational situation in the United Kingdom today.

Sadler's essay is carefully constructed. Initially, there is an obvious reaction to the surrounding context of the war between Germany and Britain, and this provokes a philosophic clarification of the values to be associated with "the cultural

heritage". Sadler then attempts to look ahead and identify what the educational priorities should be when the time for reconstruction comes. The projection of thought of this son of a Radical from the West Riding of Yorkshire, schooled at Winchester and Rugby, and fired by sitting at the feet of Ruskin in Oxford, is distinctly interesting. His preoccupation is with the "education of the masses" - indeed the whole essay elaborates the quotation with which he concluded his 167 pages of analysis in 1901 of The Unrest in Secondary Education in Germany and Elsewhere, where he writes:-

The problem for statesmen of this age is how to educate the masses .(5)

First, in Sadler's view, should be reform in what at his time of writing was still thought of as Elementary Education. Inevitably, this would lead to a reconsideration of Secondary Education. Next should come Further Education of young school-leavers, a part-time education in continuation classes for young wage-earners. As a background to these advances, comes the question of enough teachers, adequately prepared. Notably, from one who at the time was Vice-Chancellor of a Redbrick University, (Leeds), there is no attention to University education, and not even a tacit recognition of a principle dear to Sadler, as he expounded to an American audience many years later:

Education must produce an élite. The élite must emerge from the whole range of human society. How then can these two functions of education - the furtherance of a common interest and the fostering of an élite - be effectively combined? (6)

Before scrutinizing each of the strands of Sadler's proposed strategy, it is worth noting how the convictions of the former Director of the Office of Special Inquiries and Reports had been shaped. By the time of writing this paper he had made extensive studies of education both in Germany and in the U.S.A., as well as elsewhere. Though there may well be practical lessons to be learnt from these studies of other systems, Sadler is cautious about cultural borrowings. He warns against trying to apply, with too little discrimination, American or Continental ideas to English educational practice. In one lucid paragraph he makes explicit the views he has formed, after half a century of research, about English education, as a result of his foreign studies. Thus he writes:-

From the experience of the United States and from the experience of Central Europe....we can obviously learn a good deal in matters of educational thought, just as we can learn a good deal from American and

German experience in methods of industrial and commercial organization....Great Britain is one of the bridges between East and West and is open in some degree to new ideas (and to their educational applications) coming from the Continent of Europe and from America. But, in spite of this, the English view of education is distinct from the view now prevailing in America and in Germany. It is not merely a via media between two extremes, a middle way between State control of ideas, on the one hand, and the untrammelled unfolding of the individual personality on the other. It is a distinct doctrine, or rather a practice in which a doctrine is latent. (7)

Vernon Mallinson's discussion of pragmatism, in his survey of basic schooling in England and Wales, can be read as an illumination of this dictum about English education - "a practice in which a doctrine is latent". (8)

A substantial portion of Sadler's essay is devoted to discussing the philosophic basis of English education - the relation of education to the individual and the relation of the State to education, a twofold process. He launches this discussion with some comments on Montesquieu's judgement that we English would do well to cling to our liberties because if we lost them, "we might fall into worse entanglements of repression than almost any other European nation". Sadler and Mallinson are at one in their distillation about English education. (9) Sadler crystallises his comments on Montesquieu by saying:-

We in England have been called upon to see a new and deeper significance in the idea of political liberty and a fuller and more costly meaning in freedom of teaching. These are perhaps the chief lessons of the War. (10)

When it comes to translating ideals into practice, of transforming values into structures, Sadler voices his awareness of the complexity of the problems. He writes:-

Many of us, whose work has lain mostly in other stages of education, are conscious of having felt instinctively, from the very beginning of our study of educational questions, the capital importance of the elementary school problem, but have been dismayed by the bigness of it; or dimly aware that the elementary school question is interwoven with much larger questions of industrial organisation and of social tradition, and therefore not to be dealt with by methods of educational administration alone. (11)

An English Education for England

So "the elementary school problem" has deep roots in the economic structure of English society as it has survived from the Industrial Revolution. Crucial to reform at this level of schooling must be the reduction in size of classes. Sadler makes his point graphically:-

If we do no more than walk through a typical town school for young children we see rooms crowded with pupils, serried rows of faces before the teacher's desk. And sometimes we find that children of the age at which powers of questioning, of self-expression and affectionate trust are the most subtly different and the most sensitive in their tendrils, are packed together in greatest numbers under a single teacher's care. (12)

In this practice, Sadler discerns the perpetuation of an earlier phase of thought on social problems, and he points out that the large class in the elementary school has a long history. It began when charitable people thought of poor men's children "in the lump" - an anticipation of the "lumpen proletariat". Teach the children to read, to write, "to skip about quickly in arithmetic", and this was thought to be enough for their social status. The professional apprenticeship for young people wishing to become teachers, as it was provided in the Normal Schools, was a natural ally of the mass process. An over-simplified psychology reassured observers who would otherwise have been critical. Having weighed the pros and cons of this nineteenth century initiative in educating the masses, Sadler observes:-

But the English people, like others, gradually discovered that elementary education is a more complex matter than they had at first believed: that it is intimately connected at every point with social, economic, and spiritual issues which at first sight seem remote or separable from it.... (13)

One of the great weaknesses of prevailing practice in school education is its sedentary nature - "our traditional methods of instruction are too sedentary". He exemplifies how schools, under the impact of war, have had to adapt themselves to out of school activities and how the change in educational methods has stimulated the minds of both teachers and pupils. It seems that under the stress of war the English may have stumbled on an educational discovery. Sadler's account reads almost like an anticipation of that influential book by the former soldier, Caldwell Cook, who produced his challenging volume The Playway at the end of the first world war. (14) The crux of Sadler's reforms in elementary education comes when he foresees a much needed link with secondary education. If the