

EDUCATION IN A GLOBAL SOCIETY

A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE



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*For Barb Krushel in deep appreciation of her
dedication to this project, her patience and
collegiality, and, especially, her unfailing good
humor*

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About This Book: An Introduction, Overview, and Study Guide for Students

This introduction is written for you, the student. Please take the time to read it carefully; we have written it to help you get the most out of working with this textbook. We, the editors, will tell you why we compiled this book, why we went about things in the manner we did, why comparative studies courses are important for future teachers, what comparative education is, how this book is organized, what the main findings of the investigations are, and how you can read and study this book for your maximum benefit.

On behalf of our contributing authors, we also warmly invite you to an exciting and informative journey around the world. The teacher educators and scholars who contributed to this book want to share their worlds with you. Think of each chapter as a window allowing you a glimpse into their societies, to help you better understand the realities, successes, problems, and aspirations of teachers, students, parents, and citizens in countries and education systems that are sometimes strikingly different from, sometimes surprisingly similar to, your own experiences and to the future that awaits you as a member of the teaching profession.

COMPARATIVE STUDIES AS A COMPONENT OF TEACHER EDUCATION

Much of current education planning is focused on preparing students for the increasingly interdependent (economically, technologically, politically, ecologically, and so on) world and diverse (multicultural, multiracial, multinational, and so on) societies they will graduate into. This places an obligation on our profession. The need for

teachers to have a sound awareness of other nations—their social milieus, cultures, customs, political and economic processes, education systems, and so on—is now well understood by professional educators, parents, and policy makers. Accordingly, teacher education programs in colleges and universities around the world have responded by introducing courses of study and program components to help meet this need.

TYPES OF COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Such courses and programs fall under the generic heading of *comparative education*, but may have different labels in different institutions. The most common designations are *comparative studies in education* and *development education*. While we do not wish to gloss over the differences in these varieties of comparative education, this book will not cover extended discussions on terminology. Suffice it to say that all courses in comparative education have at least two characteristics. First, they describe education systems in different nations. Second, the roles of education systems within societies are examined—that is, how they interact with other components of the social structure, the functions they serve, and so on.

These two components constitute the minimum content of all comparative education courses and the core knowledge of programs (i.e. majors, minors, specializations, and so on, in undergraduate and graduate teacher education degrees and diplomas). The editors prefer the term *comparative studies in education*, will treat it as synony-

mous with comparative education, and will use the two terms interchangeably.

THE VALUE AND UTILITY OF COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN EDUCATION

There are many specific reasons why a particular course in comparative studies may be offered and different programs may emphasize some elements over others. But a general rationale for all such courses is likely to include the following.

First, there is a sense that current events are such that all societies and their citizens must become very knowledgeable about the world beyond their national borders. Most commonly, this imperative is cast in economic terms. Business and political leaders constantly warn us that the world's economies and financial systems are incredibly interconnected and our material well-being is dependent upon professionals and workers who have a sophisticated knowledge of this new global economy.

But this perspective goes beyond a merely selfish desire to maintain a "competitive edge" in protecting one's standard of living. It is part of a more inclusive belief that the world is becoming infinitely more complex and that events in one nation or part of the world have global ramifications.

As we embark upon a third millennium, we simply cannot afford the luxury of parochialism. There is no place to hide; the world is such that our professional, political, economic, social, cultural, and moral decisions and actions are intimately tied into new global realities. We must possess the knowledge and skills to act wisely and prudently. Unless people are able to grasp issues and events well beyond their homes and national borders, they will not be able to anticipate, understand, and intelligently respond to such events. The new millennium demands sophisticated citizens who are competent to deal with rapidly changing realities.

A second major rationale for comparative studies switches our focus from the global to the local. That is, as teachers you will want to be the most competent professionals you possibly can be. To

accomplish this, individual teachers and teachers' professional associations cannot limit themselves only to the knowledge and experience that local practitioners and education systems possess and generate.

Schooling in all its aspects—pedagogical strategies, curricular content, evaluation, classroom management, organization and administration, and so on—is conducted in fundamentally different ways around the world. Research into how children learn, what constitutes "best practices" in pedagogy, how schools serve social and class interests, and so on, is being conducted in many societies and in many different national and cultural contexts. All around the world teachers, departments of education, education research institutes, professors of education, and others are working conscientiously to produce pedagogy, curricula, and diagnostic tools to better serve students, parents, society, and the teaching profession.

Without drawing upon this collective wisdom, without benefiting from the experiences or our colleagues in other societies, without becoming informed of each other's experiments, successes, and failures, our individual professional practices are doomed to be parochial and myopic. We can only know how competent we are, how "good" our professional choices and practices are, if we know the full range of options available and have a fully documented story of the successes and failures of all the alternatives. Individual teachers, schools, and education systems can gain such insights only by consciously reflecting on their practices and theories in the light of information and experiences gathered from around the world and then testing these in the crucible of their own schools. In this sense, comparative studies are an essential strategy for the improvement of local practices.

The third major rationale complements the second, but is more expansive. Improving local practices is a concrete benefit that is the result of enhanced technical knowledge possessed by educators. The educator who is informed about education theory, practice, and research around the world gains more than technical knowledge; also

gained are valuable insights that might be labeled “professional” knowledge. Comparative studies do more than merely provide educators with strategies for becoming more effective teachers.

Our earlier discussion emphasized that comparative education courses and programs always do more than merely describe the educational systems of different nations. They also provide analyses of the roles of education systems within societies and how education systems interact with other components of social structures. Such insights allow educators to appreciate the larger social context of the education enterprise. That is, we become aware of the pressing issues of our time, not just in our profession but in our society and around the world.

Such understanding is very important because it is a foundation for fulfilling our responsibility, as privileged members of society, to work toward a better world and to be proactive in public debates about the evolution of schools and societies in a positive direction. This is a great and sometimes ignored responsibility. However, we want you to know that we use the phrase “privileged members of society” very consciously in describing professional educators.

As future teachers, you will be just that. You will be members of a profession; you will have autonomy; you will have authority and control over your society’s most cherished possession, its children; you will have the responsibility of evaluating and certifying your students, and your professional judgment will greatly influence their future lives. But you will have an even greater, more general responsibility.

You will be, by definition and by virtue of your credentials, a formulator of public opinion and a leader in the debate of public issues. Your years of advanced education, your position of trust, the power you exercise in your classroom, the respect you command in your community, and the political influence and moral authority your professional associations wield, make it inevitable that yours will be a respected voice in the public domain. It is a burden, responsibility, and privilege that comes with the career you have chosen.

There is a word for this role and responsibility; one that sadly has been out of vogue recently. Your education, social roles, and professional status make you a member of the *intelligentsia*. You, and the professional associations you will be a member of, will be expected to take a leadership role in the social debates—be they political, economic, cultural, or other—of your time. This is not an elitist concept. It is simply a recognition that you have had the benefit of considerable advanced education, that you occupy a position of trust and authority in your community, that you have accepted an inherent duty of continued professional development, and that your career is one of public service.

This is simply the fundamental difference between a job and a profession. A job demands technical competence. A profession demands technical competence and something more, a vocational element. Comparative studies serve our profession well here; they give us a global perspective on world issues and the choices that have to be made as we embark on a new millennium.

APPROACHES TO COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Courses in comparative education tend to fall into two general categories: survey courses and courses dealing with specific issues. Survey courses have three basic objectives. First, they seek to introduce students to the field of comparative studies in education. Students begin to learn about the nature of this interdisciplinary field, to appreciate its value, significance, and relevance, and to understand how comparative studies are pursued. Second, examinations of selected countries are undertaken as case studies. These case studies provide the database and substantive content for the third learning objective: comparing national systems of schooling; discerning common themes and trends; appreciating differences; understanding problems and controversies; and drawing conclusions, insights, and lessons.

A second category of courses focuses on spe-

cific issues in contemporary schooling, examined in an international context. In such courses, pressing issues in education are illuminated through an examination of how they are manifested in and grappled with in different societies and different national contexts. The scope of issues addressed by the current literature is quite remarkable; for example: equality of educational opportunity; educational achievement; evaluation and examinations; the treatment of minority groups; women in education; formal, nonformal, and informal education; delivery modes; teacher training, certification, and supply; citizenship education; politics, ideology, and schooling; language and literacy; schooling and the economy; education, modernization, and development; education reform; accountability; effective schooling; school administration and governance.

THE NEED FOR THIS TEXTBOOK

Almost all current textbooks in comparative education are tailored to the second category of courses. Many of the texts are excellent and are wholly appropriate for comparative education courses dealing with issues in education. However, they are not well suited for survey courses in comparative education. This is because books taking an “issues” approach assume students possess a great deal of background knowledge about individual countries and national systems of education. That is not always the case. As students, you know very well the difficulty of keeping abreast of local, let alone national and international, developments in education and society. Consequently, texts taking the issues approach cannot stand alone as assigned course texts in survey courses.

For approximately two decades, research in comparative education has exhibited a trend toward ever-increasing specialization. The consequences of this have been both positive and negative. On the positive side, specialization has brought remarkable progress in extending the depth of investigation in narrow and precisely defined subfields. Those subfields are the issues that have been noted in our discussion above. There are many

suitable texts on the market that address, in detail, the plethora of issues that have been identified.

On the other hand, this concentration on in-depth studies of specific aspects of education in an international context has resulted in a marked lack of survey textbooks discussing school systems and societies around the world. For students in comparative education courses, the results have been unfortunate. In the absence of overview texts, students must access a wide variety of books, journals, encyclopedias, and government reports in order to piece together a coherent overview of both schooling around the world and the social context of the nations within which schooling is defined and practiced.

Now you understand the editors’ motivation for compiling this textbook to provide you with a comprehensive overview of many countries around the world and their educational systems.

The nations and education systems represented in this book encompass a sizable percentage of the world’s population: countries that are home to about 2.8 billion people. You will also notice a balance between “dominant” nations—for example, in terms of population, economic, and military power—and less prominent nations. But, above all, our one overriding consideration in the selection and organization of nations was to provide you, within the limited space a textbook can reasonably allow, with a sampling of the diversity and complexity of the world’s nations and education systems. These nations have been grouped in five sections by regions. They could have been grouped in a number of ways, but our experience is that people tend to “think regionally,” that is, to mentally group nations geographically. Therefore, we felt you would be more comfortable working with this structure.

Our goal is also to encourage you to look beyond the nations represented herein. While each chapter provides an overview of education structures, practices, and so on, as well as a clear picture of the social climate within which each national school system exists, that is not the full extent of the book or each chapter. *Education in a Global Society* presents even more important

analytical thrusts: interpreting the cultural forces and social milieu that shape the nature and direction of schooling; understanding the major current debates on the objectives, practices, structures, and functions of education; and discerning the directions in which education around the world is evolving.

Thus *Education in a Global Society* is designed to serve as both an encyclopedic resource (describing national systems, curricula, and programs) and an analytical treatise (defining the social forces shaping national school systems, examining debates about education, projecting the futures of schools and societies). The analyses in this book are a beginning, a foundation, for your continued study of education systems worldwide.

To ensure that your journey begins with the best possible preparation, we invited extraordinarily talented and accomplished scholars and educators to contribute to this book of readings.

A NOTE ON CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

Because our contributing authors literally speak for the nations represented, the question of who should have that voice was a central consideration. Our strategy was to invite scholars who are themselves residents of the nations they write about and are active professionals within the education systems of their nations. Only a few exceptions to this rule were made. However, even in those cases the contributors are scholars who have extensive professional experience in the nations they write about.

This is important. It allows the cultural uniqueness of the nations and their education systems to come through to readers because contributors are speaking as cultural and education “insiders” of the nations represented. Our quest was to obtain and convey a truly intimate knowledge of societies and schools, one that only an “insider” can adequately capture. The contributor, by definition, will not be observing and interpreting that culture and schooling system from the worldview of another cultural perspective.

We therefore consider any unevenness in tone

and expression between chapters to be a strength of this book. We have edited only for continuity of structure between chapters, length of manuscript, and, because English is a second or third language for many of our contributing scholars, clarity of expression. We always tried to avoid editorial changes that might affect cultural nuances. We did not want to homogenize the distinct voices of many nations into an even monotone.

THE STRUCTURE OF CHAPTERS

However, to assist you in comparing the societies and education systems presented, drawing out common themes, and identifying areas of difference, we felt it important that each of the contributing chapters have a specific and consistent format. Accordingly, authors were asked to write their chapters within the following framework.

The first section of each chapter begins with the heading “The Social Fabric.” In this section, authors were first asked to describe and then to explain the major and most significant social realities that constitute the distinguishing features of their nations. Included are elements such as a basic demographic, economic, political, cultural, and religious profile; identification of the major forces and events that shape the contemporary social milieu of the nation; and insights into the unique cultural and social realities of the nation.

It is important to understand why we asked our contributors to begin with an opening focus on the social context for education objectives, practices, and structures. A basic premise of this textbook is that a nation’s education system cannot be understood in isolation from the social milieu that defines and nurtures it. The demographic, economic, political, cultural, religious, and historical peculiarities of a nation determine the unique manifestations of schooling in that society. To understand schools requires that the social context that shapes education must be made clear first.

Authors then turn their attention to their nations’ education systems, and the nature, contents, processes, and structures of schooling in each nation are described and explained. In this

second section of each chapter, entitled “Schooling,” guiding educational philosophies, educational objectives, formal legislation and policies, pedagogical practices, student characteristics, curricula, evaluation, teacher education programs, the professional responsibilities of practicing teachers, bureaucratic and administrative structures of education, the organization and governance of schooling are among the topics elaborated.

A primary objective of the second section is to provide a clear and comprehensive description of the education system in each nation. However, there is more to it than that. Accordingly, the authors take care to make the link between education system and social milieu to illustrate the degree to which their nations’ education systems are a reflection of the broader social milieu outlined in “The Social Fabric” section.

By this point in each chapter, you will have a very good knowledge base of both the nation and its education system. However, you will develop something even more important; you will begin to have a good “sense” of why things are as they are in that nation. The social forces that have shaped and continue to shape the nation, the characteristics of the education system, why that system is as it is rather than having evolved in another direction, the professional preparation and working lives of teachers, and the contents and processes of schooling will be clearer to you. This is because you will have taken a critical step in trying to “get inside” the cultural and social reality of that nation. This is very important. It begins to allow you to see that society from the perspective of one who lives there. You begin to feel less of a clinical, detached, outside observer.

Of course, this is a very difficult task to accomplish without prolonged physical immersion in a culture. It is too much to ask that this be done through reading, thinking, and discussion alone. Certainly a claim is not being made that you are now able to empathize with and understand that society in a way that its citizens do, but you have gone some distance in that direction. That is important; in fact, very important, because you are now in a better position to appreciate the com-

plexities brought out in the third section of each chapter.

“Major Issues, Controversies, and Problems” is the section where you will grapple with the pressing issues facing each nation represented in this text. First, authors document and discuss issues, controversies, and problems faced by their countries and education systems. Their analyses will make sense to you because, as we have emphasized above, the first two sections have provided you with the background knowledge to understand the issues presented. What are the major issues, controversies, and problems that are taking place in their societies? How are they impacting upon the nature and evolution of the social fabric defined and discussed in the opening sections of their chapters? How are these issues affecting the educational system that was outlined and discussed in the second sections? How are education debates connected to larger social debates? These are the sorts of questions that are addressed in the third section of each chapter.

It is at this point that you will most fully realize one of the important reasons why comparative education courses and programs are included in your professional training. You recall that, earlier, we highlighted the point that comparative studies courses offer educators a global perspective on the issues and choices education systems face as we embark on a new millennium, and they seek to provide educators with insights and analyses that will yield an awareness of the pressing issues of our time—not just in our profession but in our society and around the world.

In the third section of each chapter you will begin to develop this broader perspective. Some of the issues, debates, and problems will be alien to you—concerns of places and peoples unlike the society you live in and the education profession you recognize and plan to enter. But we promise you that is the exception. More often, much more often, the education and social issues, debates, and problems you read about will be eerily familiar, invoking a sense of *déjà vu*. You will be struck by how educators in distant nations and in remarkably different cultures are struggling with the

same professional and social issues that concern you as a professional and a person. You will see how much you have in common with your fellow educators around the world. We are bonded more by similarities than alienated by differences.

So what then? The next and obvious step is go beyond understanding to action. But what is to be done? What are the best courses of action in the never-ending task of building a better education system and society? That is the focus of the concluding section of each chapter—"The Future of Society and Schooling." Building upon their discussions and analyses, authors briefly project and speculate upon the direction in which society and schooling will evolve in their nations. Please compare and consider your own analyses, speculations, and projections with theirs.

A BLUEPRINT TO ASSIST YOU

Each contributing chapter provides information and insights in the context of a specific nation and its education system. The cumulative effect of reading all the contributing chapters is a scope of understanding that will help you address the issues relevant to your professional life from a global knowledge base. But your role in this is far from passive. We stress that it is ultimately you, the reader and student, who will integrate for yourself the data, analyses, and lessons from the separate chapters into a coherent, meaningful whole. However, we would like to facilitate that process for you a bit. Indeed, we already have—by ensuring that there is structural consistency between each of the contributing author's chapters. You will not find it difficult to make comparisons and draw out similarities and differences between nations. We are sure that the structural continuity between chapters will allow you to discern thematic coherences and give you a basis for understanding both similarities and differences among the individual nations represented. Your own framework for comprehending these similarities and variations in schooling and society around the globe will emerge.

However, we do not want to put all the respon-

sibility on you, so, to help prepare you for your reading of *Education in a Global Society*, we would like to share with you some of the major lessons and insights we have drawn from our reading of these chapters.

But, please understand that what follows is not intended to be a definitive summary of what this book is about. Rather, it is merely a general blueprint to assist you in reading and finding meaning in the chapters that follow. We only wish to summarize and share with you some of the themes that seemed most important and interesting to us. Our hope is that in sharing these with you we will prepare you to read the chapters and assist you in interpreting and integrating the material.

We therefore would like to list and briefly discuss seven major themes, elements common to virtually every chapter—factors, issues, problems, and so on, that virtually every author feels are important and are addressed in each chapter. You may be surprised by how many similar discussions took place. We encourage you to look for, and think about, these common themes as you read this book.

Finally, we will also provide you with a brief description of each of the five sections into which we have grouped our represented nations that will highlight the unique themes and anomalies found in that section.

MAJOR THEMES

We are struck by the fact that all contributing authors feel the following issues, forces, and developments are very significant. These constitute themes that are reflected in all chapters.

Change

One thing that all authors address, yet have perhaps the greatest difficulty in conveying precisely, is the notion that schools are caught in an era of incredibly rapid change. This change is not localized, it is ubiquitous.

The sense we get from the authors in this regard is almost a feeling of helplessness. It seems

that change is so pervasive, so fundamental, and so rapid that education communities do not know how to cope with it. Indeed, looking at the chapter titles, you will be struck by how often the word “change,” or a synonym for it, appears. When we break down the changes rocking education establishments around the world into specific components, we find the following addressed most frequently.

1. *Uncertainty on how to prepare students for the future.* This is quite unsettling. We are charged with inculcating the next generation with academic and cultural knowledge, instilling attitudes, habits, and skills that will serve students well in the world of work and prepare them to cope with their responsibilities as members of society. Yet, there is a crisis in the profession because the future is uncertain: What knowledge is of most value? What skills will the economy demand? What values will be appropriate in the new social order students will graduate into?

In other words, educators are in a dilemma because their job is to teach, but as a global professional community we are not confident of what we should be teaching. We are not sure how the content of schooling can keep up with the rapid changes around us. Very often, this crisis is framed in the language of vocational training; that is, what job skills are needed by today’s students to succeed tomorrow in a rapidly changing economy. One institutional response to this has been an emphasis upon vocational education. Another is a proliferation of comprehensive schools.

2. *Curricular change.* The above noted uncertainties do not seem to be preventing wholesale innovations in the area of curriculum. Virtually all education systems are embarking upon almost wholesale revisions of their curricula. This is placing an enormous strain on the profession. Teachers are at a loss on how to keep pace.

3. *Pedagogical strategies.* School systems across the world are debating pedagogy, and experimentation in instructional strategies is rampant. Some nations are experimenting with what might be called “progressive” approaches, including ele-

ments such as student-centered teaching and individualized assessment and progress. Others are turning to “traditional” approaches rooted in teacher-centered instruction, uniform curricula, standardized evaluations, and so on. Between these poles, a myriad of alternative and hybrid approaches can be identified in specific nations.

The common theme, however, is that the nations of the world seem to be turning away from monolithic, system-wide, pedagogical strategies. To greater or lesser degrees, depending upon the individual nation, an increased diversity in pedagogical strategies is becoming manifested in schools.

4. *Technological changes.* The need to make teachers and students both aware of technological advances and competent in using new technologies is universally acknowledged. However, there is not a consensus on which technologies are most crucial or how to teach technological awareness. Thus, while coping with technological change is a demand made on both teachers and students, what needs to be done and how it should be done is far from clear.

5. *Administration policies and regulations.* For education systems, there is little bureaucratic or legislative stability in the world today. Fundamental revisions in the structures, rules, regulations, policies, and laws under which schooling is carried out seem to be the norm. Sometimes these changes constitute quite dramatic attempts to revamp virtually the entire education system of a nation. Other times we see incremental changes. Regardless of what the case is in any particular nation, the results—to greater or lesser degrees—are the same: administrative reconstitution of schools and redefinition of educators’ duties. The usual justification is that social, economic, or technological changes make these administrative, policy, and legal changes necessary and desirable.

6. *Increased demands on the profession.* Whether this takes the form of more students per classroom, increased teaching hours, or extracurricular duties, the demand for teachers and administrators to do more seems to be universal. The justifica-

tion for this is often an economic argument. Declining resources are said to dictate such necessities, and this leads into our next major theme.

However, before we leave the theme of change, we emphasize this list of six categories of change is far from exhaustive. Its function is only to illustrate a key point—that societies around the world are in a state of flux. The world is in an era of incredibly rapid social change, and national systems of education are undergoing changes as profound as any other component of society. We also encourage you to look deeply into each chapter to identify additional areas of change that seem to be prominent and significant.

Demographic Transformations

Although this theme could logically be placed under the preceding discussion on change, it warrants a separate category. Nations around the world are witnessing a redrawing of their population profiles. This has tremendous consequences not just for schools, but for the entire social system. Everything from the economy to social security is being affected. These demographic changes assume two major forms.

In some nations, the issue takes the form of an aging population. As ratios of youth to elderly and workers to retired increase, the social welfare systems of many nations are reaching a crisis point. Other nations have the exact opposite problem—a burgeoning population of children who require quite different services. The consequences for education are dramatic.

In societies with aging populations, the expansion of post-secondary education and nonformal education is redefining traditional notions of education and schooling as people become “lifelong learners.” Societies with youthful populations worry about how increasing numbers of children can be accommodated in school systems that are already stretched to the limit in terms of resources. And, once these children graduate, will there be jobs for them in the volatile global economy?

But the global demographic landscape is

changing in ways other than a redistribution on the basis of age. All nations are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of culture, race, ethnicity, religion, and social ideologies. Even traditionally homogenous national populations are feeling the impact of minority populations and alternative political, social, and cultural views. The result is that school systems around the world are grappling with how to accommodate the minority populations increasingly found in their classrooms and the increasingly diverse worldviews emerging within their societies.

Responses to the forces of pluralism range from embracing diversity to outright resistance in the form of assimilationist policies. However, regardless of dominant groups’ attitudes and responses, a new reality is being forced upon all societies. As countries become increasingly diverse in terms of culture, race, and social ideas, their very character is becoming redefined.

Financial Constraints

If it is clear that the world’s education systems are not sure of how to cope with the changes buffeting them, it is equally clear that they will not get adequate financial resources even if they agree on what should be done. A financial crisis has gripped the world’s school systems; in some cases, it has crippled them. In virtually all nations, the financing of education is a very major concern and issue.

In all cases the underfunding of education was linked to broader economic concerns: the general state of the global economy and the particular state of the national economy. Needs are seen to be outstripping available resources, and there is little indication the situation will improve in the near future. In many countries, the situation has reached a crisis point.

This is an interesting phenomenon in view of our preceding discussion on change. The important roles assigned to schools to meet the challenges imposed on the next generation by a rapidly changing world, the increasing demands placed on the education community, and the number of structural, bureaucratic, legal, curricular,

and program changes taking place in the world's education systems all point to the conclusion that education should receive financial priority. This is not the case. Within each chapter you will find documentation on how education is unable to meet its objectives because of a lack of adequate financial support.

As a consequence, difficult decisions have to be made about which education projects, programs, and initiatives should receive priority. This debate is consuming educators all over the world and causing much tension, dissention, and frustration. We encourage you to enter this debate, to evaluate how financial constraints are manifested in your nation and your education system, to compare your situation with that of other nations, and to project solutions and resolutions in light of the knowledge you gather from the experiences of other nations and other school systems.

Inequality of Educational Opportunity

In a world of rapid change and inadequate resources for education, perhaps it is to be expected that there will be winners and losers in the race for access to "better" schools, teachers, and programs. Indeed, that is the case. The most disturbing theme running through this book is the huge and depressing lack of equality of education opportunities for all children.

The particular forms assumed by inequality of opportunity vary. Sometimes there is outright discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, or religion. Sometimes the problem takes the form of regional inequalities, as in the case of urban versus rural communities or prosperous jurisdictions versus impoverished areas. Then there are more subtle manifestations, such as bias on the basis of social class or cultural background. These become particularly evident as public education systems become increasingly replaced with private schools catering to selective clientele.

Different as these forms of inequality are, the general phenomenon is pervasive. All nations seem to be struggling with how to provide all chil-

dren equal access to, and services within, the educational arena. Unfortunately, solutions are more elusive than ever, and some societies have literally abandoned the ideal of equality of educational opportunity for all. Perhaps this is understandable in light of the preceding discussion on financial constraints.

Nevertheless, educators continue to resist this trend and work toward innovative, if partial, solutions. Carrying on the battle is becoming increasingly difficult, however. Schools are becoming institutions where, for some, forwarding specific agendas and gaining competitive advantages are the real goals.

Schools as Arenas of Social and Ideological Conflict

Even as changes accelerate and financial hardship grips societies and their schools, one constant remains. Schooling, in the form of credentials earned, continues to correlate significantly with economic success and social status. Indeed, the instability resulting from profound social and economic change has made this increasingly the case. The result is predictable. Dominant groups—identified by economic status, race, gender, and so on—consciously attempt to "use" schools for the advantage of their children.

This, of course, heightens inequalities in educational opportunities. The groups with the greatest resources secure access to the most prestigious institutions, their children enjoy greater academic success, and upon graduation the returns on their education are largest. However, education is a contested arena in more ways than a simple cost-benefit formula equating better schooling with getting a better job.

Some of the most bitter battles in education are being fought over issues that have little to do with economics. Because schools are value-transmitting and consciousness-shaping institutions, political, religious, cultural, and all manner of socioeconomic-ideological groups aspire to have their views legitimized and propagated