

# THE FUTURE OF COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IN A GLOBALISED WORLD

DAVID N. WILSON

**Abstract** – This article examines the history and future prospects of comparative and international education with particular reference to the impact of globalisation and Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs). Connections and interactions between comparative educationists and the technologies of printing and electronic communications are examined in a historical context. The global nature of communications in comparative and international education is demonstrated both spatially and historically, using information from all regions of the world. The changing nature of technologies is noted to have broadened the audience for comparative insights. The development of textbooks, journals, conferences, international agencies, the Internet, web-based communications, and professional comparative education societies is related to the themes of communications and globalisation.

**Zusammenfassung** – In diesem Artikel werden die Geschichte und die künftigen Aussichten der vergleichenden und internationalen Bildung untersucht mit besonderem Augenmerk auf den Einfluss von Globalisierung und Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologien. Verbindungen und Interaktionen zwischen vergleichender Erziehung und Print- und Elektronikkommunikation werden in historischem Zusammenhang beleuchtet. Die globale Natur von Kommunikation in vergleichender und internationaler Bildung wird unter Nutzung von Informationen aus allen Weltregionen sowohl räumlich als auch historisch aufgezeigt. Es wird darauf hingedeutet, dass die sich ändernde Art der Technologien das Publikum für komparative Einsichten erweitert hat. Die Entwicklung von Textbüchern, Zeitschriften, Konferenzen, internationalen Agenturen, dem Internet, auf dem Netz basierender Kommunikation und professionellen Bildungsgesellschaften stehen in Bezug zu den Themen Kommunikation und Globalisierung.

**Résumé** – Cet article présente l'historique et les perspectives d'avenir de l'éducation internationale comparée, avec un accent sur les effets de la mondialisation et des technologies d'information et de communication. L'auteur approfondit dans le contexte historique les liens et interactions existant entre l'éducation comparée et les technologies imprimées et électroniques de communication. Il montre le caractère mondial de la communication en éducation internationale comparée tant au niveau spatial que temporel, en s'appuyant sur des données issues de toutes les grandes régions mondiales. Il signale en outre que la nature évolutive des technologies renforce l'intérêt pour les résultats en recherche comparée, et met en rapport la multiplication d'ouvrages, de revues, de conférences, d'organismes internationaux, d'Internet, de la communication via le réseau planétaire et des organisations professionnelles d'éducation comparée avec les thèmes de la communication et de la mondialisation.

**Resumen** – Este trabajo examina la historia y las perspectivas para el futuro de la educación comparativa e internacional, específicamente en cuanto a los impactos de la globalización y de las tecnologías de información y comunicación. En un contexto histórico, estudia las conexiones e interacciones que existen entre la educación com-



parativa y las tecnologías de comunicación impresa y electrónica. Está demostrada la naturaleza global de los modos de comunicación en la educación comparativa e internacional en términos de espacio e historia, puesto que usa informaciones desde todas las regiones del mundo. La naturaleza cambiante de las tecnologías evidentemente ha ampliado la audiencia para los descubrimientos comparativos. El desarrollo de libros de textos, revistas, conferencias, agencias internacionales, Internet, comunicación a través de la web y de sociedades profesionales en educación comparativa está relacionado con los temas de comunicación y globalización.

**Резюме** – В данной статье исследуется история и перспективы развития сравнительного и международного образования со ссылкой на влияние глобализации и информационных и коммуникационных технологий (ICTs). Связь и взаимодействие между сравнительным образованием и печатными и электронными коммуникационными технологиями рассматриваются в историческом контексте. Глобальная природа средств коммуникации в сравнительном и международном образовании показывается как пространственно, так и исторически с использованием информации со всех регионов мира. Отмечается, что постоянно меняющаяся природа технологий тем самым расширила круг участников процесса сравнительного понимания. Разработка учебников, журналов, проведение конференций, создание международных организаций, развитие Интернета, сетевых web-коммуникаций, а также создание профессиональных обществ по сравнительному образованию тесно связано с темами коммуникации и глобализации.

Although the term globalisation has come into increasing usage during the past few years, most writers neither define the term nor mention that globalisation is not a new phenomenon. One could assert that globalisation is as old as empires, and that both Imperial Rome and Genghis Khan manifested globalisation. One might also assert that comparative education may be the first global academic and practitioner-oriented field, or at least the second after geography. What is new, in my judgement, is the increased pace of change and pervasiveness of the phenomenon. It is also evident that more writers focus upon the negative aspects of globalisation than upon its positive aspects.

This article can be termed a prosopographic study, that is a study which identifies and relates a group of persons within a particular historical or literary context (Merriam Webster 1979: 918). The article draws on several prosopographic studies undertaken second half of the 1990s which have examined the growth and spread of comparative and international education from both historical and sociological perspectives. My previous studies focused upon comparative education and comparative educators (Wilson 2000a, 2000b, 2001a). A continuum will examine the evolution of our field, and will project discerned trends into the future.

The increasing use of the new Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) is examined in terms of their impact upon the field. This

delineates the increasing global presence of comparative and international education and educators, which is important for the future of the field. ICTs are making the field of comparative and international education and its practitioners known to a much wider audience. Comparative and international education has a definite role to play in communicating research findings and insights from practical experience to academics, policy-makers and educators throughout the world. The new ICTs – in particular the Internet – make this a reality, and this in turn can only enhance and broaden the impact of the field.

## Definitions

Many authors use terms like globalisation without bothering to define them, assuming that their readers share their understanding of the terms. I will not make that assumption, and share my preferred definition of globalisation, by Lubbers (1998: 1), who stated that globalisation is a process “that widens the extent and form of cross-border transactions among peoples’ assets, goods, and services, and that deepens the economic interdependence between and among globalizing entities, which may be private or public institutions or governments”.

Concerning ICTs, many definitions abound. Elsewhere (Wilson 2001b: 3) I have written that ICT is merely a delivery system for “content”, albeit a system with two-way interactivity. ICT consists of both hardware (delivery) mechanisms and software (usage) capabilities. What is new is the integration capability in ICT by which delivery tools and content are merged into a seamless system.

A third essential definition relates to the changing nature of technology. The so-called New Information Age has changed aspects of natural resources, manufacturing and even service industries. Menzies (1998: 4) highlighted Drucker’s prediction that the “knowledge society” would result in a “paradigmatic shift from an industrial economy to one shaped by knowledge, information and the [new] communication technologies”. Tjaden (1995: 14) asserted that the most important asset in an Information Age enterprise is knowledge rather than capital. While capital remains an important input, knowledge “can be used to obtain capital, or any other needed assets”. I doubt if I have to remind comparative and international educators that our business *is* knowledge.

I would be remiss if I did not also provide definitions for comparative and international education. I have always preferred the definition provided by Noah and Eckstein (1969: 127), who described comparative education as “an intersection of the social sciences, education and cross-national study [which] attempts to use cross-national data to test propositions about the relationship between education and society and between teaching practices and learning outcomes”. The operational definition that I prefer for international educa-