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GLOBALISATION, EDUCATION AND POLICY: ChangiNg Paradigms

1. INTRODUCTION

The chapter analyses the nexus between globalisation, policy and comparative education research during the last three decades. It focuses on the changing prominence given to various topics in educational policy and comparative education and the way conceptual thinking in this area has changed and developed, due to forces of globalisation and ideological transformations. An attempt is made to link both the shifts in focus on various educational planning policy themes and issues, dominant ideologies, and the major paradigm shifts in comparative education and policy in each decade during the period. In doing so, the chapter analyses and evaluates the following three broad interlinked themes:

- The shifts in methodological approaches in globalisation, policy and comparative education policy research
- Central issues and shifts in focus in comparative education policy research and globalisation
- Structural changes in globalisation, policy and comparative education.

The chapter demonstrates the emergence of the following three major paradigms shifts in education and policy between the 1970s and 2000:

1. The major paradigm shift of the early 1970s between positivism (empirical/quantitative research) and anti-positivism (non-empirical/qualitative research) began to question the very construct of ‘value-free’ empirical research and the scientific dominance of empiricism. This paradigm shift reached its heights in the 1980s, as illustrated by post-structuralist and post-modernist education and policy articles. Described as a ‘postmodernist revolt’ (Mitter, 1997) against the dominating theories of the Enlightenment and modernity, such a paradigm shift in policy directions challenged the meta-narratives in education and policy, the ‘regime of truth’, the disciplinary society, and promised to empower the learner, by re-affirming the centrality of the learner in the curriculum, and diversity of learner needs (Zajda, 2002; Zajda, 2003b).

2. In educational planning and policy reforms the shift has been from the ‘linear’ model of expansion in education, based on the ‘more is better’ metaphor, and the human capital theory, which had dominated policy-makers and reforms during
the 1960s and the 1970s to the qualitative, more holistic, ‘global security’ focused, and ‘integrative’ aspects of policy directions and policy reforms (Williams, 2000). ‘Human capital’ is a term for ‘the practical knowledge, acquired skills and learned abilities of an individual that make him or her potentially productive and thus equip him or her to earn income in exchange for labour’ (Johnson, 2000). Gary Becker, who was awarded Nobel Prize in economics in 1992, pioneered a model for investment in people as investment in human capital in the 1960s.

3. The key policy issues as reflected in education and policy reforms during the last three decades could be described as the restatement of an egalitarian-inspired imperative – the equality objective – ensuring that the equality and quality of educational opportunities enjoyed only by the best-served few are available to all. Specifically, the central policy issues dealt with the provision of compulsory education for all children (including the changing nature of universal primary education, in developing countries), equity, school choice, and the influence of home background on academic achievement.

2. MAPPING OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND CHANGE

   Education policy articles published range from the analysis and evaluation of education, international comparisons of school reforms and educational plans/curricula to reports of special commissions and international agencies. Policy statements often refer to primary, secondary, vocational and higher education indicators (cross-country comparisons, enrolment patterns, public expenditure on education etc) and other aspects of education, including international dimensions in the curriculum, multiculturalism, school effectiveness and outcomes and globalisation. I have focused on the following three broad interlinked themes:

   − The shifts in methodological approaches in education policy research, including issues arising from comparative education research.
   − Central issues and shifts in focus in education and policy.
   − Structural changes in education and policy.

3. GLOBAL TRENDS

3.1 Revolutionary change

   The early 1990s were defined as a ‘revolutionary era’, marking the collapse of totalitarian regimes in the USSR and its client states. Mitter (1993) in ‘Education, Democracy and Development in a Period of Revolutionary Change’, uses democracy and humanism to reconsider policy shifts on the global arena. He finds that in many countries the notion of ‘democracy’ has eroded, leading to ‘nationalism, ethnocentrism and racism’ and that young adults react with