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## Continuity and Change in Education

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The title of this final chapter follows the wording in the subtitle of the whole book. The chapter focuses on the lessons of the book for the understanding of continuity and change in education. Building on the methodological points made in the previous chapter, this one benefits from both temporal and locational comparisons. Although focus on continuity and change is most obviously a matter of temporal comparison, locational comparisons assist analysis because, even when they are ‘snapshots’ of particular places at particular points in time, they may still contribute to understanding. For example, much can be learned about the implications of colonial transition in Hong Kong and Macao at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by comparing it with patterns in other colonies at their stages of colonial transition in earlier decades.

The literature on change is much more voluminous than that on continuity. This is partly because change is more obvious and often more threatening. A parallel exists in history books which focus much more on war than on peace. In the education sector, in addition to many books and articles, whole journals focus on change. They are published in diverse parts of the world, and include:

- *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, which is published in the USA on behalf of the American Association for Higher Education and has evolved from a publication launched in 1970;
- the *Journal of Education and Social Change*, published by the Indian Institute of Education and launched in 1987;
- *Change: Transformations in Education*, published in Australia by the University of Sydney and launched in 1998; and
- the *Journal of Educational Change*, published in the Netherlands by Kluwer and launched in 2000.

In addition, several journals focus on the related domain of reform. They include:

- the *International Journal of Educational Reform*, launched in 1992 and now published in the USA by Scarecrow Press; and
- *China Education Reform*, launched in 2003 and published (in Chinese) by the Hong Kong Education Publishing Company.

No counterpart journals focus explicitly on continuity in education.

However, within the literature on change and education, in practice much discussion does also focus on continuity. Thus, much of the literature on reform concerns the obstacles to reform; and the framework on which the first part of this chapter is based was

presented by Thomas and Postlethwaite (1983a) in a book which was subtitled *Forces of Change* but which in practice was also about continuity. The book by Thomas and Postlethwaite is especially relevant to the present discussion because it focused on East Asia and included separate chapters on Hong Kong and Macao.

### **The Thomas and Postlethwaite Framework**

Thomas and Postlethwaite began (1983b, p.7) by indicating that they used the terms ‘force’ and ‘cause’ synonymously. A force or a cause, they stated (p.7), is “a factor whose presence is necessary for an event to occur”. Without each of the forces that press against each other in a kind of dialectical exchange, they added, events cannot happen in the way that they do. Use of the phrase “each of the forces” reflected the authors’ commitment to the principal of multiple causation. According to this principle, an event is not simply the result of a single force but is always the result of many forces, some of which may be more powerful than others and therefore more worthy of note.

The principle of multiple causation, Thomas and Postlethwaite proceeded to observe (1983b, p.7), applies to both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the timing of an event. By ‘horizontal’ they meant that several forces converge simultaneously to mould an event; and by ‘vertical’ they referred to the sequence or accumulation of causes over time. This, they pointed out, is the philosopher’s principle of infinite regress: the idea that behind each cause is an earlier cause which led to the later one. Thomas and Postlethwaite did not attempt the impossible task of identifying all forces that converge horizontally to cause an event. Nor did they endeavour to trace far back into the past to uncover all the links in a vertical web that recedes into ancient times. Instead they restricted their main focus to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and to the major causes of the events they analysed.

Thomas and Postlethwaite distinguished between enabling and direct forces for change. An enabling force was identified (1983b, p.10) as:

a causal condition that provides an opportunity for educational innovation but is not directly involved in the change. In other words, an enabling event can take place without affecting the schooling process.

A direct force, in contrast, was identified as one that applied specifically to the process of schooling. Such a force, Thomas and Postlethwaite added (1983b, p.10) was:

a characteristic – such as an attitude – or an act of a person that motivates others to promote a given educational change, that furnishes an alternative to current educational practice, or that provides resources for implementing the change.

The converse of an enabling force was described as a disabling one, i.e. a condition that obstructed change; and the possibility was noted that direct forces could be either positive or negative. For the present chapter, inclusion of disabling forces and direct negative forces is important because analysis here focuses on continuity as well as change.

For Thomas and Postlethwaite, however, the main focus was on change. With this in mind, they constructed an analytical framework with seven dimensions of change, namely: the magnitude of intended change; availability of alternatives; motivation or philosophical commitment; social and organisational stability; resource accessibility; organisational and technical efficiency; and adequacy of funding. Figure 15.1 gives examples of each category in the seven dimensions. These are of course not the only ways in which change