

## **Globalisation: Old and new normative strategies in education**

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The recession has concealed from many commentators in the West the overwhelming economic force of the last decade, the inexorable rise of China. Commensurate with this has been the economic and political decline of Europe and especially of the European Union. The European normative strategy in education was always an unrealised ideal. But, if the European moment has passed in education, as in much else, what normative strategies are in the process of emerging into the next phase of globalisation? The rise of Islam offers a firm normative discourse within which education has thrived at many points in the past. America too offers attractive possibilities at least in terms of secularism and diversity. But what of China? The People's Republic has exhumed Confucianism as a normative underpinning over the last decade. How will this effect education in China and beyond? Will it be used to legitimate authoritarianism and patriarchy? Or will women eventually hold up half the sky?

### **Introduction: Changing patterns of global economic and political strength**

The intellectual centre of this paper is an evaluation of the normative strategies that have informed education at an international level. Normative strategies implies not only underlying values, but the ways in which those values are reproduced and legitimated. Whilst normative strategies may differ radically over time and place, it is the contention of this paper that all education systems are impacted by them. This impact may be as much in terms of failure as of actual influence on policy and practice. These norms are seen to have been informed in the past by wider European values. Their impact on educational practice has been in the main flawed. As Europe itself now drifts from the centre of world affairs, the paper asks whether a new set of educational normative positions are likely to emerge. To establish the context for this question, the paper begins with a brief assessment of the wider, economic and political decline of Europe. It then assesses the failure of the European normative impulse in education. It concludes by considering alternative and emergent normative positions at an international level.

The economic crisis of late 2008 and the subsequent recession in the West have concealed from many commentators the major shift in the global economy that occurred in the first decade of this century. There is an almost wilful ignorance in the way in which the economic rise of China is bracketed with that of India and Brazil and more colourfully that of Russia and South Africa. At the beginning of 2012 China is the world's second biggest economy. It is a matter of time before it overtakes the USA to become the largest. The last ten years have seen the inexorable economic rise of China. With the world's largest accumulation of capital and a population of 1.3 billion this economic strength will rapidly be matched by political sway. In Africa as well as

the Pacific seaboard China is already the most important global power (Saul, 2009; Tett, 2009).

At the same time as China's rise has been the decline in the importance and impact of Europe (Judt, 2007; Sheehan, 2010). Demographics are probably central here as Europe represents a much smaller percentage of the global population in 2011 than it did in 1911. The economic decline of Europe is partly disguised by the massive industrial strength of Germany. German protection has so far prevented two European countries, Greece and Ireland, from going bust. Other European economies, both within and outside the EU, look decidedly fragile, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Serbia. In political terms too Europe's power is in decline. The landmarks along the way of this descent are well known:

- the prolonged failure to deal with the genocide on the EU's own borders during the wars of the separation of Yugoslavia;
- the failure to transform the Euro into a continent-wide currency; its descent into crisis in 2011 exposing the weakness of its political leadership;
- democratic deficit resulting in anti-European results in referenda even in founder member states;
- the failure to include Turkey within the Union and the associated xenophobia and anti-internationalism in many states including France, Germany, the Netherlands and Austria.

Perhaps even more remarkable than these failures has been the dramatic decline in the influence of the EU and individual powerful states in world affairs. The incoherence of EU administrative arrangements and the corruption of its finances are certainly part of this. But, despite the permanent Security Council seats of France and the United Kingdom, the world pays increasingly less attention to European views and events. Obama's administration has hardly been marked by successful foreign policy, but it has become embarrassingly clear that the United States no longer considers Europe to be a major consideration in its international strategy.

Before going on to discuss the impact of these changes on educational normative strategies, it might assist transparency to clarify two theoretical assumptions on which this paper is based. The first is that political and, especially, economic power has influence on patterns of culture at a global level and that among these patterns are the normative assumptions that inform educational systems. The second is that, for at least the last century, educational systems in different states have gradually developed to show increasingly similar trends in such matters as curriculum, examination, organisation by age phase. This tendency towards isomorphism means that changes in the hierarchy of global economic dominance may be expected to be reflected in changes to educational value systems in many different part of the world. Both these theoretical assumptions are, of course, open to debate.

### **The European normative strategy in education: Some examples of its failure**

Imperialism and globalisation swept European educational norms around the world: universal primary education, the expansion of higher education, the importance of science. This section, however, assesses the impact of these norms on educational practice within Europe itself. That the perspective here is that of Intercultural and Critical Education is only partially the reason that this assessment is negative, indeed dismissive. Norms and normative strategies, of course, are not ethical absolutes, they are part of the political process whereby educational institutions and practices are shaped within each given local and national circumstance. Norms themselves are areas of profound conflict often based on self-interest or the cohesion of groups, both of which are exceptionally strong forces within education before and after the introduction of compulsory schooling. An exhaustive, scholarly examination of European norms would need to derive from the examination of both major philosophical and sociological statements and the policy papers of European states. The normative strategies assessed here are considerably less systematic than this: they do, however, represent aspirations that have become widely voiced within and beyond European education systems (Hume, 1993; Sloan, and Burnett, 2003; Taylor, 2007).

The European normative strategy in education was always an unrealised ideal: indeed it is tempting to ask why otherwise cynical teachers and researchers should spend their lives pursuing it. As a normative strategy intercultural education seeks the representation of a wide variety of languages and cultures within the curriculum, seeks the legitimacy of children and young people to be educated in their own heritage languages, expects equality of treatment and opportunity for children within educational institutions irrespective of their national or cultural background. Few European states have been entirely devoid of these aspirations and few have failed to make any progress in these directions. Yet the treatment and achievement of Bangladeshi children in London, Turkish children in Munich, Magrebian children in Andalusia are reminders that progress is slow. Looking at the continent as a whole perhaps the most extreme and glaring failure of this normative strategy is the treatment of Roma children and young people especially in the states of Eastern Europe. Segregated, stigmatised and vilified, there is not even the pretence of equality of provision or opportunity. Roma people rightly see schools as the invasive institutions of the state intent on destroying their families, language, communities and values. They reject the rejection. Few Roma children in Bulgaria, Slovakia or Romania complete the years of compulsory schooling.

At the inception of mass education systems in Europe was the normative strategy of the career open to talent, what has more broadly become equality of opportunity. European states can point to tangible achievements in this area, perhaps most significantly in the education of girls and women over the last century. Yet mechanisms whereby rich and powerful groups can maintain and reproduce their dominance can be identified in school systems across Europe. Tripartite systems in Germany and Romania, supplementary or evening schooling in Greece and Cyprus, expensive and/or time-consuming university education almost everywhere. Whilst greater gender equality may have been achieved in European education, this itself is fractured by social class, as the most successful girls are overwhelmingly from privileged backgrounds. Private education in the UK provides an extreme example. About 8% of the population attend

these schools yet they represent about half of the admissions to the elite Cambridge and Oxford Universities. Of the current UK cabinet over half, including the Prime Minister and Chancellor, attended private schools.

Respect for individual difference in education is part of the wider Enlightenment normative discourse of individualism. It provides part of the legitimation for a range of educational practices often politicised into the rhetoric of choice or needs. Thus, in all European countries students choose the subject they will take at university. This choice is actually constrained by previous attainment levels and by family preferences but for the student the illusion of individual destiny often remains intact. Similarly selective, tripartite, religious- or language-based secondary education, which characterises most European states, is legitimated on the basis of parental choice and individual distinctiveness. That the actual function of these arrangements, indeed, in many cases, the political intention, is the reproduction of economic and social stratification, in some cases indeed, of racial segregation, is frequently disguised beneath the rhetoric of choice. Across Europe children with extreme learning difficulties, with inappropriate school behaviour and with physical or sensory disabilities are ascribed to the normative strategy of difference and need. In educational practice in all but a few states this results in them being condemned to segregated and often inferior educational provision to the moral detriment both of the children concerned and those in the mainstream (Daniels and Garner, 1999).

Another component of the commitment to difference is the normative approach that respects background and diversity in knowledge. This can often be seen in the language policy of state systems. A good example might be the commitment of the Finnish state to the teaching of Swedish as a second language. A more problematic example would be the existence of Romanian, German and Hungarian first-language schools in Transylvania. In Northern Ireland and Glasgow the schooling system is divided by religion thereby reproducing ignorance and animosity between the two communities. Across Europe the commitment to epistemological differentiation and independence is undermined by the tendencies towards centralisation and isomorphism. Thus in most school systems and in some university systems the normative strategy of diversity is overwhelmed by the dead weight of rigid, compulsory state-endorsed knowledge and associated assessment arrangements.

A final normative aspiration within European education, again derived from the Enlightenment, is the commitment to science, or more abstractly to the pursuit of truth. The science research institutes attached to universities in the UK, Switzerland and Germany are among the pre-eminent institution of this type in the world. They are currently only bettered by those of the United States, though competition from Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan and China is increasing. At school level the commitment to science is often less strong. This is partly because of the widespread inadequacy of science teaching at this level but also because of the persistence of traditionalistic elements within European education. At school level countries as different as Greece, Belgium and Norway are still disproportionately influenced by religious forces and institutions (Coulby and Zambeta, 2008). The way in which this leads to divisively structured systems has already been mentioned. But this influence has also meant that

schools and indeed some universities are half-hearted in their commitment to the Enlightenment ideal of truth or even of facts. Thus religious education is compulsory even in state schools in England and Greece and universities as prestigious as Oxford or Louvain retain Faculties of Theology. The normative aspiration to truth has not prevented the (sometimes compulsory) teaching of error.

### **Normative strategies in the next phase of globalisation**

If, then, the European moment has passed in education, as in much else, what normative strategies are in the process of emerging into the next phase of globalisation? This paper concludes with a brief examination of three possibilities, those derived from Islam, from the USA and from China. It is not assumed, of course, that these normative strategies will be any more successful in practice than those of Europe.

Independence in Pakistan, Indonesia and Bangladesh and the oil-wealth acquired by Iran and the Arab states of the Gulf have all resulted in a resurgence of Islamic impact within the globalisation of culture. Migration from these states as well as from Turkey and the Maghreb has brought Islamic people and influence into the cities of Western Europe. Islam offers a firm normative discourse within which education has thrived in many places and at many points in the past, Damascus, Baghdad, Seville, Cairo, Istanbul (Hourani, 2005; Irwin, 2006; Mansel, 1997; Rodenbeck, 1998). Islam is already a fundamental of education in some states. It is important to avoid stereotype here: the case examples are the universities of Egypt (many of which pre-date those of Europe) and the Gulf States rather than the madrassas of Northern Pakistan. In eschewing foolish notions of clashes of civilisations, it helps to remember that much of Europe's epistemological foundations in science, mathematics, philosophy and the classics were derived from institutions of Islamic learning (Findley, 2005; Halstead, 2004; Wheatcroft, 2004). The return to traditionalistic culture and values is not a unique characteristic of Islam: it typifies among other examples school curriculum reform in Japan, Protestant revival in the USA and the reaction against state socialism in many Eastern European countries. In few countries, perhaps France, perhaps the USA, have schools and universities the institutions *par excellence* of modernity been able to withstand the impact of traditionalism.

For those familiar with European normative structures, the USA offers attractive and apparently complementary possibilities. Among the mighty Enlightenment wisdoms embodied in the United States Constitution was the separation of church and state. In educational terms this has meant that the teaching of religion and the practice of religious worship has been banned from the school system of the USA. Emerging from a history of genocide of the indigenous people, enslavement of black people from Africa and belligerence against neighbouring countries, especially Mexico, the USA has, through difficulty and conflict, developed a respect for diversity in schools and society which has little to learn from Europe. Critical and intercultural educationists might regret the abandonment of Spanish-language classes and Hispanic studies in some southern states (Arizona, Texas) but it is difficult to find a group in the USA that suffers anything like the educational discrimination and stigma of Europe's Roma. In

curriculum terms the stress on the practical and the pragmatic at school level and the pursuit of social inclusiveness as well as global excellence in universities has proved a model that many states have sought to emulate.

This paper began by stressing the importance of the rise of China (Fewsmith, 2001; Massonnet, 2000; Nathan, and Gilley, 2003; Roberts, 2003; Studwell, 2003; Terrill, 2003; Tyler, 2004) it is appropriate then to conclude by examining the nature and impact of Chinese normative systems. An endearing feature of the Chinese, both before and after 1911, is that whilst they may be highly resistant to normative advice from the West, they are reluctant to proffer such advice to other states. Thus in the countries now under Chinese influence (Burma, say, or Zimbabwe) there is an insistence on managerial competence and superficial probity but little other normative packaging. Up until 1947 the exploration of Chinese normative systems would have been a straightforward matter of examining Confucianism (Confucius, 1952; Confucius, 1970; Confucius, 1974). The People's Republic explicitly rejected this legacy both at its inception and, more violently and catastrophically, during the Cultural Revolution. Before Mao's death and the ensuing revisionism, China had adopted normative strategies that categorically contradict Confucianism, the most important of these being the stress on the absolute equality of women and girls and their rights to a sound education. Some commentators see this as the main cause of China's economic success, as against states like India or the Islamic theocracies. Over the last two decades, The People's Republic has revived Confucianism as a normative underpinning and its teaching is of growing importance at both school and university. It is not difficult to argue that the centralised and authoritarian aspects of Confucianism never disappeared. How will this effect education in China and beyond? Will it be used to legitimate authoritarianism and patriarchy Or will women eventually hold up half the sky?

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