

'IN BLACK AND WHITE': A HISTORY OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN COMPARATIVE AND HISTORY OF EDUCATION SOCIETY

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Introduction

Professional and scholarly associations are important windows on the societies in which they are located. They provide one with a view of the significant issues, debates and problems which exist in those societies. The Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society (SACHES) illustrates this well. It emerges against, and in some ways in response to, the region's complex colonial and racial dynamics and, in its development, reflects the substantial challenges that the field of Comparative Education encounters. The purpose of this paper is, in the first instance, to describe the formation and development of SACHES, but, secondly, to locate this history within the larger social and academic politics of South Africa and the broader southern African region.

The Development of the Character of Comparative Education in Southern Africa

As a result of South Africa's colonial history and its relationship with Europe, Comparative Education, as a formal field of study, enters the academy at a later stage than it does in the metropolitan world. Educational borrowing, and more self-conscious comparison, is a profoundly important component of the country's educational history, but Comparative Education itself only becomes a field of study in the second half of the 20th century.¹ It is really only in the middle of the 1960s, at least a decade and a half after Comparative Education had become institutionalised in Europe and the United States, that it is introduced into universities and colleges in South Africa. The moment of its entry, as Bergh and Soudien (forthcoming) explain, is also fraught with difficulty because central to the apartheid state's plans is the intention to use education for the purposes of racial separation. Key elements of these plans included the notorious Extension of University Education Act in 1959 (Anderson, 2002:22) which mandated the exclusion of people of colour, students and faculty, from white universities and instituted the establishment, in time, of ten new ethnic universities, including the Universities of Zululand (for people classified as Zulu), the Western Cape (for those classified coloured), Durban-Westville (for people classified Indian), the University of the North (for people classified Tswana) and the University of Transkei (for people classified Xhosa). Significantly, this apartheid state expected the higher education community to provide the intellectual ballast for its policies and to ensure their production and reproduction. The Afrikaans component of this community, while not entirely trusted by the state, nonetheless enjoyed a

¹ Borrowing is present virtually from the beginning as a national educational system is bedded down. The educational archive, for example, shows JH Hofmeyr, a leading Cape Colony politician, urging in 1907 that South Africa, if it wished to industrialize rapidly, follow the example of Japan in developing vocational and technical training (Malherbe, 1977:164). There is also the University of Cape Town Inaugural Lecture in 1918 of Fred Clarke (1918), one of the first professors of education in a South African university, which is preoccupied with international issues and their relevance for South Africa, and there are instances of important early South African education policy-makers, such as CT Loram, who did their doctorates at Teachers College, Columbia, defending their proposals for vocational education by invoking lessons learnt in the United States about black education (Hunt Davis, 1984).

favoured relationship with it and was particularly required to play the role of its intellectual hand-maiden.

The entry of Comparative Education into this environment was, not unexpectedly, for two reasons, controversial. Firstly, the apartheid state did not trust educationists in general, and some comparative educationists in particular. It created, as a result, its own cadre of experts or quasi-"academic-practitioners", ignoring the experiences and knowledge base of academics at universities. This development had two consequences: some scholars found themselves deliberately ignored, while others, such as those who enjoyed a modicum of recognition and who went out of their way to demonstrate their loyalty to the apartheid state, were drawn into its inner circle. Focusing their attention in this latter group, significant critics such as Herman (n.d) have characterized the posture of the Afrikaans universities and their approach to Comparative Education with respect to the political authority of the apartheid state as being compliant and even complicit with its apartheid philosophy - the approach they took, he argued, "... was a convenient way to avoid critical sociological, economic and political issues facing South African education under apartheid..." Elsewhere, he has suggested that "academics in education faculties at Afrikaans-medium universities have to a large extent been seen to acquiesce with Apartheid structures" (1993: 22).² While it is true that Afrikaans universities began to close ranks, a process intensified by the hostility of the historically English-speaking white universities', who were more liberal, and also more ambiguous in their attitude towards apartheid, it is also true, thus revealing the second dimension of this period of controversy, that there was a debate taking place within this community about the place of Comparative Education in the Fundamental Pedagogics (FP) (based on phenomenology and also an attempt to articulate education as a distinct discipline)³ panoply. Correct as it might be to say that there were important Afrikaner scholars who sought to shoe-horn the field into FP, there were significant others who resisted attempts to appropriate CE into the government's racist ideology. In the camp of the former were formidable figures such as Potgieter (1972: 8) and Van Zyl (1986: 43-5), who attempted to re-configure it as a part-discipline of FP with a concern "not [for]... building up a specific system, but [for]... the pedagogical interpretation and evaluation of existing systems which must naturally be seen in their particular historical perspective...."

Others within the Afrikaans community were more inclined not to seek this alignment for Comparative Education and worked within the more conventional political science and sociological frameworks of the discipline. Dekker and Van Schalkwyk (1989), who wrote a popular Comparative Education text, *Modern*

² A similar reading of the Afrikaans' universities' posture by Dutch and Belgian universities – long Afrikaans' speaking academics' point of reference (playing the same role as British universities for white English-speaking academics) led to the decision of Dutch and Belgian universities to sever their ties with South Africa.

³ For correctness sake, it must be stated that FP is in itself politically neutral. It is not an educational blueprint for apartheid. Inherent in it, however, is the idea of the deficient child, who is the object of the education process. It is the purpose of this education process to bring the child towards responsible adulthood. For responsible adulthood to come about it is necessary to have the "genuine appreciation of values, norms and authority", which only a proper adult can provide (Landman and Gous, 1969:4-5). In framing itself in these terms, FP made itself available to the Afrikaner's Christian National Education ideology which did propagate white supremacy.

Education Systems, worked, for example, in the systems and forces tradition of Hans, Kandel and Schneider.

The situation at the new historically black universities at the time of the entry of the discipline into higher education was complex. Dominated by Afrikaans faculty members, they tended to take their lead from the intellectual shifts that were taking place in the alma maters of their professors. Comparative Education in these institutions, as a consequence, was little different in character to what it was in the Afrikaans universities.

Given their historical relationships with the United Kingdom and, contradictorily their financial and political dependence on the apartheid state, English-speaking white universities were in an equally complex position. While much was made in these institutions of the right of the university to academic freedom, their general orientation to the state tended, as Michau (1982: 68) remarked, towards pragmatism. This was particularly evident in the approaches taken towards Comparative Education. In the few institutions where the subject was introduced, such as the Universities of the Witwatersrand and Cape Town, a range of approaches to Comparative Education developed. Interestingly, while the texts available in these institutions (and also the fact that many academics would have had their training with doyens in the field such as King and Holmes in the United Kingdom) ensured that the kinds of discourses that were dominant in the United States and United Kingdom would reproduce themselves in these institutions too, namely systems theory approaches, there were also substantial Marxist and neo-Marxist analyses emerging.

The final historical point to be made in describing the early days of the field relates to developments outside of South Africa itself. Significantly, the only higher education institution that exists outside of South Africa at the time is found in Basutoland (to become Lesotho after independence in 1962) where the Pius XII College is established in 1945. This college essentially operates under the aegis of the University of South Africa until 1964 when it becomes the University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland (later to become the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland) (<http://cheche.nul.ls/about/history.htm>).

Important in bringing this assessment of the early days of Comparative Education into South Africa to a close is recognizing how local circumstances influenced the conditions of the field's development. Particularly important, is recognizing how fractured the field was at **its moment of birth**.

Resistance against the Apartheid State

These **differences in approach to Comparative Education**, predictably, are exacerbated as political conditions in South Africa deteriorate during the middle of the seventies. As Bergh and Soudien argue (forthcoming), shifts in discourse coalitions took place, which coincided with the "heterodoxy of the time." This heterodoxy, an eruption of new political and sociological movements and accompanying social analyses, expressed itself in the emergence of the black consciousness movement and a resurgence of radical and working-class activism around the country. The Soweto student uprising catalysed a range of student, civic, labour and political movements. In attempting to comprehend these developments, the social sciences themselves undergo a major radicalization, culminating in a break in the English universities with their traditional pragmatism, a new caution amongst Afrikaner academics and a powerful upsurge of militancy at the historically-black universities. Indicative of this for our purposes was Herman's (1986) inaugural address in 1986 which urged Comparative Education to break out of its North-South paralysis and to focus its

attention on the questions of social development. Similar developments were taking place at the liberal English-speaking white universities where the issues of the Third World were assuming greater prominence (Steinberg, 1987:64). The Afrikaans universities could not stand aloof from these developments. While, generally, they remained faithful to the ideology of Christian National Education, faculty members, particularly those who in the earlier period had expressed their discomfort with the new Afrikaner dogma, began looking for new ways of teaching Comparative Education (see Bergh and Soudien, forthcoming).

As a consequence of these developments, old alliances and loyalties were loosened and occasionally ruptured, the most dramatic of which was a break between the Afrikaans and historically black universities. Bergh and Soudien (forthcoming) describe the impact of these developments as yielding new coalitions. These were strengthened after 1994 when the new democratic government came into power.

The realignments that took shape in this new period were critical in reconfiguring the Comparative Education landscape. The effervescence – an urgency in debates, research and teaching – that marked the field in the eighties gave way to a different kind of social engagement. While certain Afrikaner academics began to turn their backs from and even denied their membership of older discourse coalitions, it was the turn of the liberals to confront the complexities of their new relationship with the democratic state. From having been critics, the liberals and radicals were called upon to assist in the building of the new order. The challenges of this precipitated a turn away from the kind of Comparative Education that had been practised in the eighties. Theorizing had to be replaced by planning and development. The impact on courses in the field was immense with the name of Comparative Education all but disappearing from titles of courses and only one chair, after Herman retired in the middle of the first decade of the new millennium, that at the University of the Northwest, remaining in the entire country and even in the region. By the turn of the millennium, Comparative Education as a taught course had largely been removed from the formal curriculum. It no longer existed in the major English-speaking universities and in leading black universities such as the University of the Western Cape. It continued to be offered in particular Afrikaans' universities such as the University of South Africa, the University of the Northwest and in some universities in the region such as the University of Namibia (see Faculty of Education, University of Namibia Prospectus, 2005), the University of Lesotho (see http://cheche.nul.ls/faculties/education/dept_edu.htm). Interestingly, the University of Zululand continued to have a CE department, but not a chair to lead it. Significantly, the focus in these universities, as had explicitly become the case elsewhere with the replacement of CE with courses such as Education and Development, had turned to issues of development.

A Quick Survey of the South African Comparative Education Literature

Following this overview, the question is asked, appropriately, of how self-conscious the field is of itself. Importantly, it needs to be noted, the meta-analytic discussion of CE as a field is relatively well developed for South Africa but less so for the broader region. The field has been the object of study in South Africa since at least the early 1970s when scholars in the mainly Afrikaans *Fundamental Pedagogics* tradition, as was explained above, sought to locate Comparative Education within it (see Potgieter, 1972). An early doctoral study by Wessels (1974), *Doelstellings-problematiek van die Vergelykende Pedagogiek*, moved the discussion somewhat to look at its relationship with debates in the broader field. Between 1974 and 1992 overviews of the field in

general were included in publications by Wessels (1974), Stone (1981; 1984), Barnard (1981; 1984), Bondesio and Berkhout (1987; 1992), and Vos and Brits (1987; 1990). During the eighties and nineties at least five articles and papers dealing with some aspects of the academic field of Comparative Education in South Africa were produced, Ruperti (1970), Steinberg (1982; 1986), Herman (1986; 1993) and Pretorius (1992a). Ruperti reviewed the state of the field in South Africa in 1970. In 1982, the 'Interchange' section of the journal *Perspectives in Education* was devoted to what was taught in Comparative Education at the Universities of South Africa (Stone, 1982), Zululand (Vos, 1982), Cape Town (Steinberg, 1982), Natal (Michau, 1982), and the Research Unit for Education System Planning of the University of the Orange Free State (Vermaak, 1982). In the late 1990s, a group of comparativists under the guidance of Anne-Marie Bergh and her colleagues at the University of South Africa, initiated a small research study looking at approaches to teaching in CE. In the new millennium, Bergh and Soudien (2006 and forthcoming) and Herman (2002) and Wolhuter, Herman and Weeks (forthcoming) have reviewed the field. An important comment to in closing this section is recognising the significant extent to which comparison is depended upon in recent policy work in formal arenas like the state Education Department and many state agencies. Intensive comparative studies are being undertaken in areas like education performance, systemic forms, approaches to funding and governance and so on.

A History of SACHES

Formally, SACHES was established in 1991 at the annual conference of the Kenton Education Association (KEA), a general education society with which it has retained close links, and even overlapping memberships. The organization, guided by its founders Harold Herman, Peter Kallaway, David Gilmour and Crain Soudien, came into being as both a comparative and history of education society.⁴ Its founders felt the need for a society that would devote itself to the issues of comparison and history because, critically, especially with respect to the former, none of the existing societies in the region paid particular attention to the issues of CE. KEA, the leading English-speaking education association, focused its work on curriculum and sociology of education. The Afrikaner education society, the Education Association of South Africa (EASA), on the other hand, regularly included CE in its sessions, but it did not enjoy the kind of credibility that would have easily encouraged liberal and radical scholars of CE to seek refuge within it. The Southern African Society of Education (SASE), which served academics working within historically-black universities and colleges, the third major general education society, also did not have a significant CE interest. While none of these three organizations, to be fair, was, at the time of the formation of SACHES, racially exclusive, they tended to operate with, respectively, a predominant, English-speaking white, an Afrikaans-speaking white and a black membership.

Against this backdrop SACHES emerged as a society that sought not only to focus on CE but simultaneously to emphasize an inclusive racial and geographic agenda. Unlike the other societies, with the exception of SASE which had members in the wider region, it specifically sought to establish itself as a regional organization with the objective of building a membership in the immediate region, i.e., in countries

⁴ Significantly, and there is not sufficient space in this review to address this matter here, the history element of the society's work did not develop at the same pace and commitment that was evident with respect to CE.

such as Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Uganda and Lesotho, but also to attract participation from Kenya and Tanzania. In the context of a traditional South African reserve towards the idea of being African, it deliberately projected itself as an African association. Given the historic divide between South Africa and the rest of the country, this is an enormously important point to recognize.

The association started with 35 members in 1991 with Harold Herman as its first president, Peter Kallaway the Vice-President, Nick Taylor the Secretary and David Gilmour as the Treasurer. In time Crain Soudien replaced Nick Taylor and this executive, based in the Western Cape, developed as the organization's founding leadership. A number of important initiatives that would come to give the organization its character developed out of the work of this executive and a small group of key members such as Anne-Marie Bergh and Petro van Niekerk at the University of South Africa in Pretoria. The first was to seek membership of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES) and the second was to establish a journal called the *Southern African Review of Education (SARE)*.

In terms of the first initiative, obtaining acceptance by the WCCES at its Council meeting in Prague in 1992 was a considerable challenge and required considerable diplomatic and behind-the-scenes work on the part of a number of people. SACHES was forced to confront the fact that South Africa's racial history, even as the country was attempting to divest itself of that baggage, and even as it sought to position itself as the one society that self-consciously addressed the issues of the country and region's divided racial history, remained the most critical feature of its identity. **Come into being as a deliberately inclusive organization as it might have, this fact was not apparent to, or accepted by key individuals inside of the WCCES** who raised questions about SACHES' links with South Africa's apartheid past. Crucially, the process of establishing the organization's credentials as an open and inclusive organization, awkward as it was both in the WCCES and SACHES, served to emphasize for all concerned how central the issues of race and difference, and the importance of working through these, were to the organization. Having gained acceptance into the WCCES in the course of 1992, importantly, the organization came to be known, and in many ways distinguishable, within it for promoting inclusion, both within the region and in relation to the questions of the marginalization of the south – precisely the opposite picture projected about it in its first official engagements with the WCCES.

The establishment of SARE as a peer-reviewed journal was an important initiative in SACHES. The journal was preceded by conference proceedings edited by Herman and Bergh (1995) and formally emerged under the editorship of members led by Kallaway at the University of the Western Cape in 1995. The journal has subsequently come to be published in conjunction with an important journal devoted to alternative education in the region, *Education with Production*, the vehicle of the eponymously named movement in the region under the leadership of the renowned educationist Patrick van Rensburg, who was also elected as the society's first Honorary Fellow. The journal has developed into an important vehicle and under the guidance of Aslam Fataar at the University of the Western Cape, secured accredited status with the South African Department of Education. After Kallaway, Sheldon Weeks and his colleagues at the University of Botswana took over the editorial leadership and he continued to produce the journal until Linda Chisholm became the editor in 2005. The journal continued to be published annually until the early 2000s

and is now published twice-yearly. By the end of 2006 it had gone through twelve volumes and is soon to be registered as an on-line journal.

While the organization was attempting to secure admission into the WCCES, it inaugurated the tradition of holding its annual conferences on a rotational basis in the region. Because the bulk of its membership came from South Africa, it was agreed that its annual meetings would take place alongside of the KEA meeting inside of South Africa every second year and in the alternate years in one of the countries in the region. Meetings have taken place in Zambia, Botswana (twice), Namibia and recently in Tanzania. The 2001 meeting in Botswana was particularly important because SACHES assisted in bringing together all the major research associations in the region, including the Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland Education Association (BOLESWA) (which became BOLESWANA with the addition of Namibia in 2004) in a single conference. Significantly, KEA and EASA convened outside of South Africa for the first (and since then, only) time in its history.

The highlight of SACHES' history was winning the bid to host the 10th Congress of the WCCES. This meeting took place in Cape Town in 1998 under the leadership of the Western Cape Executive, chaired by Kallaway who became president after Herman had served two (two-year) terms and co-ordinated by Crain Soudien. The congress was a great success and continues to be remembered for the quality of its organization and the level of scholarship it generated. Officially, in excess of 800 delegates from 60 countries attended the meeting, and, critically, the African continent was well represented with scholars who came from its furthest reaches, Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and so on. Kallaway with the assistance of the organization's executive, inter alia Herman and Soudien managed to secure the support of funders such as the Royal Netherlands government, the British Council and the Association of Development for Education in Africa (ADEA) who assisted in bringing not only delegates from the continent but also important education ministers, permanent-secretaries and high level officials. The mix of scholars and policy-makers who were present gave the meeting a sense of urgency and *gravitas*. Important initiatives came out of the meeting, not least of all the establishment of a fund for the support of comparative education scholarship in the region. Membership of the organization, after this event, stood at approximately 100 paid-up scholars from across the region.

After the excitement of 1998, predictably, the organization went into a period of stasis. Sheldon Weeks became the President at the Bi-Annual General Meeting in Cape Town with Professor S Sabatane from Lesotho as his deputy. The leadership of the organization moved to the north and was distributed between the Universities of Botswana, Pretoria, South Africa and Witwatersrand. At its 2002 Bi-Annual Meeting Brigitte Smit, from the University of Pretoria, became the President and she served for one term before being replaced by Professor Thobeka Mda who was elected at the corresponding meeting in Tanzania in 2005.

Particularly challenging has been holding the membership intact and drawing in new members. The organization, interestingly, remains challenged by the issues of the region. Despite the intense efforts of its leadership, and here the work of Weeks must be recorded in editing the society's electronic newsletter, the contradictions of South Africa's relative privilege in relation to the region, and the consequent access of its scholars to greater levels of support from their universities, has configured and projected the role of South Africans in the organization in complex ways. In terms of these developments - the difficult issues of regional dominance, in the context of the country's racial problems, despite being the subject of regular discussion at meetings -

it has been difficult to plot a way forward for the organization. Central has been an abiding anxiety within the leadership of the organization to avoid becoming a patronage agency – offering largesse to the region in the form of, for example, travel bursaries and stipends – while recognizing that its members don't all have equal access to resources. In this challenge, the organization is confronted with the essence of the development conundrum confronting the region as a whole. What will it take to stimulate its core business of building scholarship in an environment of generalized poverty?

Critically, as SACHES approaches the end of its second decade of existence, it is as conscious as it has never been before of the nature of the issues which provide it with its *raison d'être*. Struggle as it is having to with maintaining its membership, it has stimulated and is hosting an internal discussion in its journal and its meetings which is directly addressing the questions of where it can go, what it can do and how it might deal with the challenges of being a relevant scholarly society in a time and space that is not especially conducive for its development. Its annual meeting in 2006, for example, while a small meeting, debated, with intensity, the state of the field, its relevance and its future. The presidential address (Mda, 2006) opened up many questions about the ways in which the organization ought to be asserting itself in relation to the many opportunities that are arising in the region to put comparative expertise to good use. Importantly, while the difficulty of sustaining the organization presents itself as a threat, the opportunity (which might not be proportionate in its potential) for thinking through immensely difficult questions has made itself available in a way which can only be for the longer-term good of the society and the region.

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