

# The International Race over the Patronage of the South: Comparative and International Education in Eastern Europe and the United States

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## **Abstract**

The authors contend that the impact of the Cold War on multilateral organizations (especially UNESCO) as well as on the academic programs in Comparative and International Education or Development Studies in Education has been largely understudied. Both world-systems (USA and its allies, Soviet Union and its allies) laid claim on the project of world peace that UNESCO was meant to pursue. Furthermore, the boom in area, language and development studies in the 1960s was closely associated with the international race between the two world-systems over the patronage of those postcolonial countries that were viewed as “non-aligned” or neutralist. The salutary effects upon education policy in the United States are described, along with the portrayal of education as an inferior aspect of the capitalist system, behind the “iron curtain.” The authors note the new research field of post-Cold War studies that emerged in U.S. academe over the past decade, and find that such studies are surprisingly scarce in comparative and international education which, by virtue of analyzing other educational systems, was at the center of the dichotomy.

## **Introduction**

The history of comparative education is often told in terms of revolutionary paradigm shifts that revamped disciplinary focus, methods, and geographical reach (e.g., Altbach 1991). Until the 1960s, comparative education in North America was firmly based in the discipline of history, enamored with one-country studies, and fixated on educational systems in Europe. By the end of the decade, the field was transformed into comparative *and* international education, with a composition of researchers and practitioners who were multi-disciplinary, cross-national and international in orientation. The name of its professional association was changed accordingly, from Comparative Education Society (CES) to Comparative and International Education Society (CIES). According to standard accounts, disciplinary “orthodoxy” in history gave way to a “heterodoxy” (Paulston 1993), inclusive of different social science disciplines. Once history was abandoned as the only legitimate disciplinary foundation for the comparative study of educational systems, methodological changes followed suit. For some, the units of comparison became smaller, moving from national educational systems to culturally-bounded educative sites or communities. For others, they became broader, as the narrow focus on cross-national comparison in North America and Europe was suspended, and academic curiosity and professional interests were redirected towards the Third World.

This textbook summary of developments in comparative and international education is supported by institutional data. The 1960s was in fact a decade of growth for graduate

programs in international education. Universities that already offered comparative education programs broadened their curriculum by adding aspects on international education or development studies. In addition, several universities took advantage of the funding made available for area and international studies and established new graduate programs that advanced the field of development and education (see Wilson 1994). That something critical happened at this time that transformed the field of comparative education is certain. However, exactly what happened, and when, is less clear.

This article challenges classic historical accounts of North American comparative education for failing to consider important details: the impact of the Cold War upon the field and the relationship between comparative versus international education. A second and related challenge is to the flawed belief that Comparative Education –the older branch of comparative and international education programs– was until the 1960s exempt from international technical assistance, international cooperation, or “academic colonialism.” Two renowned comparative researchers in early twentieth century, Paul Monroe (U.S.A.) and Sir Michael Sadler (United Kingdom), were also prominent policy advisors for their respective (colonial) governments. Another luminary of early comparative education, Isaac L. Kandel, devoted the second half of his professional life to UNESCO and provided, what is known as “technical assistance” today, to countries that gained political independence from colonial empires. The fact that the encounter between comparative education and international education was erroneously depicted as a brand new development during the 1960s is a puzzle that deserves further scrutiny.

How did the Cold War affect comparative and international education as a research field and a professional practice from the 1950s until the mid-1980s? By the mid-1960s, the two agendas in international technical assistance—national defense at home and international presence in non-aligned countries abroad—had become interwoven. Seen pragmatically, the Cold War had a salutary effect on comparative and international education: it pumped money into area studies, created language and culture fellowships, and generated positions in technical assistance. For those who preferred to write books at home rather than work in development projects abroad, the field of Sovietology opened a lucrative avenue for comparative research (see Foster 1998). But did it also advance the field of comparative and international education intellectually or methodologically? Not all revolutionary changes took place in the 1960s, and not all that emerged in the 1960s was new and better. Most importantly, the impact of the Cold War on area studies and development studies in education is conspicuously missing.

### **The long decade of the 1960s**

One of the fallacies perpetuated in historical accounts of comparative and international education is that the development branch of the field emerged as a response to the post-colonial context of the 1960s. At Teachers College, Columbia University, for example, separate graduate studies were established as the Technical Assistance Program, later renamed International Educational Development (Butts 2006). In the first few years after their establishment, comparative and international development programs in education relied on external funding made available for building area studies at U.S. universities. This changed with the passage of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958, which was created by the U.S. Congress as a response to the Cold War. Originally,

NDEA funding was not directed towards the post-colonial world; this responsibility was given to the Peace Corps, founded three years after NDEA. It was the Peace Corps' mission to first understand, and then influence the hearts and minds of people abroad. However, ultimately, the NDEA also moved into this arena.

The NDEA-funded Title VI grants provided fellowships and language training, and institutionalized area studies at universities. A review of the NDEA budget for 1963 illustrates the pre-occupation with socialist countries: 16% of the budget for Modern Foreign Language Graduate Fellowships was spent for Chinese and 13% for Russian, followed by Arabic (11%), Japanese (10%), Spanish (10%) and other languages (Office of Education 1963: Figure 20). The Ford Foundation augmented government support for area studies and international research at U.S. universities in the 1960s, and at the same time extensively funded higher education exchange. At Teachers College, Columbia University, the period of greatest financial allocation to International Educational Development was between 1958-1973, when NDEA and the Ford Foundation actively promoted area studies. Unsurprisingly, the NDEA as well as projects funded by USAID were highly controversial. Freeman R. Butts summarized the criticism in the introduction of the 1967/68 report of Teachers College's Institute of International Studies:

The air of disenchantment surrounded other aspects of American foreign policy, notably, of course the Vietnam War. By association, American educational influence came under attack in some nations as "academic colonialism." Similarly, American social science research efforts in general were sometimes viewed with covert suspicion as agencies of the American military-governmental-industrial establishment and sometimes with open hostility as under-cover enterprises of the C.I.A. (Butts 1968: 1)

### **The race over the patronage of "non-aligned" or neutralist states**

The 1958 National Defense Education Act went into effect a few years before the majority of countries in the Third World declared independence from colonial governments. However, the main agenda of the NDEA, which was to defend the nation against communism by building U.S. expertise, language/area knowledge and intelligence of socialist countries, was implemented on a global scale. Soon after, the battlefield consisted of former colonies that had recently gained political independence from European empires, but not yet chosen alliances.

The majority of countries in Asia and the Middle East had achieved independence before 1953, and these regions also now became territory for the expansion of U.S. and Soviet influence. The wave of independence movements in Africa peaked in 1960, when seventeen nations established sovereignty. The West was hampered by the fact that most of the newly independent nations associated colonialism with European capitalism, making the argument that Soviet intentions were exactly the same harder to convey. In any event, Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, declared that neutrality was unacceptable: Countries of the Third World were required to choose sides (Borstelmann, 2001, p. 111-113).

Both superpowers used technical assistance as a strategy to gain access to, and secure influence in, these newly independent countries. In the capitalist West, technical assistance was labeled international cooperation, and in the socialist East ‘fraternalist support for countries that haven’t chosen the socialist path of development’ (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006). At times an abbreviated synonym—internationalist aid—was also used. UNESCO became, against the intentions of some of its chief architects, the only universal association that bridged the two world-systems. Yet, U.S. relations with the developing world—particularly Africa—in the late 1950s and early to mid-1960s, were inextricably linked with the issue of desegregation at home. Both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations were many times required to formally apologize for instances of racial discrimination suffered by diplomats from newly-independent African nations. The brutal suppression of Civil Rights activists in Birmingham, Alabama was a subject of discussion at the first meeting of the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1963. Martin Luther King’s receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize the following year constituted a powerful recognition that race relations were no longer a domestic issue. UNESCO activities thus presented an invaluable opportunity to build alliances, while presenting the status of African Americans in the best possible light (Dudziak, 2000, p. 153-248).

Meanwhile, having consolidated power in Eastern and Central Europe, the Soviet Union was now in a position to advance the socialist agenda in the developing world. Marxism-Leninism described a world in which the communist revolution had never taken place in capitalist countries because the worst excesses of the system had been displaced to the colonies. This notion proved highly attractive to new leaders in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, fermenting resentment of the West, and as an argument for where their loyalties should now reside. It also placed the United States in the position of needing to train “ambassadors” — private citizens with the knowledge and expertise — to advertise the American way of life, and spread American influence.

The Cold War only became violent in the context of smaller proxy wars—Korea, Vietnam—and other instances where armed struggle was structured into the dichotomy of socialism versus capitalism. On the larger scale it was a war of ideas, in which internal squabbles on one side—the Suez Crisis, the Prague Spring—became propaganda victories for the other. Demonstrations of technological advancement—such as the Soviet launch of Sputnik in October of 1957, or the Apollo moon landing in 1969—became testimony to the superiority of the Soviet or U.S. political system. These events also influenced the choices made in the non-aligned states over which country was the guarantor of long-term security. In this context education became essential.

#### **UNESCO: Who owns the project of world peace?**

The history of UNESCO has been well documented by comparative education scholars; most prominently by Phillip W. Jones (1988, 1999, 2005) and Karen Mundy (1999). Most historical accounts of UNESCO, however, focus on the changing priorities that resulted from the large number of newly independent post-colonial states joining the organization. What is not accounted for is the impact of socialist countries on the UNESCO agenda. Starting in 1954 when the Soviet Union re-joined the organization, other socialist countries were, after numerous failed attempts, admitted as member

states to the United Nations. The entry of socialist countries marked the beginning of a race between the two super-powers and their respective allies for the patronage of post-colonial, “non-aligned” or “neutralist” states.

Both the United States and the Soviet Union played an early and active role in the establishment of the United Nations in 1945, and the formation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1946. UNESCO was originally conceived based upon a common vision of peace and security achievable through collaboration. As the Cold War began, however, the UN became territory in which conflicts between East and West were continually played out, as each side strived to define itself as the representative of global justice, peace and stability (Mundy, 1999).

The rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union began over the question of membership. The Soviet Union insisted that all fifteen Soviet Republics be recognized separately, a demand only withdrawn after the United States countered that all forty-eight states should be given membership as well. Ultimately the Soviet Union was represented by three seats in the UN, belonging to Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine. This competition over numerical allies continued and expanded into other states as former colonies emerged as independent nations in the 1950s and 60s.

The first director of UNESCO, British biologist Julian Huxley, was an ardent anti-communist whose views on eugenics prompted a continual focus on population control in the developing world. Huxley viewed UNESCO as agency for promoting his own personal vision of global, evolutionary change (Huxley, 1948; Jones, 1988, p. 29-31). Meanwhile, the Soviet Union and other East Bloc states withdrew from UNESCO in the early 1950s, only rejoining after Stalin’s death in 1954.

There was no doubt for the Soviet Union and its allies that the project of world peace was, from the onset and by definition, a socialist enterprise. Despite these claims, however, being admitted as a socialist country to the United Nations was not an easy endeavor. For example, the Mongolian People’s Republic tried for fifteen years, and was only accepted as a member state in 1961. In this case, stubborn rejection was not only the response of Western market economies, but also the Eastern neighbor, the PR China. Admission to UNESCO and UNDP was an important priority for the socialist government of Mongolia, and thus portrayed as a victory (see Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe 2006):

Our country [the Mongolian People’s Republic] was one of the first to give its full support to the ideals and tasks of the United Nations. This is quite natural since, being a socialist state, it had, long before the foundation of the UN, been devoting its foreign policy to the task of consolidating world peace and to the development of co-operation among nations on the basis of the principle of the peaceful coexistence of states with different social systems. (Dugersuren 1981: 141)

It was also uncontested for the Soviet Union that the strong influence of “U.S. imperialism” on the UN was a threat to international safety and peace. It therefore elevated itself to the role of international peacekeeper, a role that was backed up by its

political allies in the Second World and several “non-aligned countries” in the Third World. The authors of the 102-page booklet *The Soviet View of the United Nations* (Vavilov, Matveyev & Oleandrov, 1974), published in English, clearly had a sympathetic audience in mind when they forcefully made a case for viewing the UN as an organization that was thoroughly built on socialist beliefs of international peace and solidarity. The booklet was published in the year of the UNESCO “revolution” when several member states demanded a new international economic order. The revolution was prompted by the withdrawal of the United States, Great Britain and Singapore in 1984 which, in turn, enabled UNESCO to further shift its emphasis towards Third World countries, and to a lesser extent, countries of the Second War. An excerpt from the booklet provides an idea of why the United States and its allies felt cornered, and as a result withdrew from the organization:

Co-operation and understanding between the socialist and the non-aligned countries have put an end to the abnormal situation in the United Nations that had existed earlier when a group of states supported by imperialist military blocs had had a majority of votes in the General Assembly and other UN bodies and had tried to impose their decisions on other groups of countries. (Vavilov, Matveyev & Oleandrov, 1974)

The Soviet Union came to see UNESCO as a valuable means of swaying unaligned nations. The Soviets also saw participation in UNESCO technical assistance projects as a way of gaining access and insight into technological developments in the West, even as they benefited from the associated prestige. By collaborating with other UN countries on nature conservation, ocean exploration or the study of natural disasters, the Soviet Union could advertise the success of their own science and technology, even as they appropriated innovations as needed. The Soviet Union also eagerly participated in UNESCO-sponsored cultural exchanges, designed to promote understanding between East and West. This also enabled them to present Soviet culture as collaboration between diverse groups spread across Europe and Asia. The image of the Soviet Union as a multi-national or multi-cultural collective was a valuable asset in portraying themselves as the best guarantor of world peace (Gaiduk, 2006).

### **The impact of the cold war on comparative and international education: Damaging or salutary effects?**

In comparative education societies in North America and Western Europe the question of how the Cold War impacted the field of Comparative and International Education has remained anathema. However, comparative education researchers from post-socialist countries have addressed—at times under pressure to justify themselves retrospectively—this important question.

In the “East”, former proponents of socialist comparative education in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) re-examined the developments of socialist comparative education from a post-Cold War perspective (John 1998; Kienitz, 1994; see also Busch 1983). According to these scholars, the period of the early 1970s was critical for further developments in comparative research. In 1972/73, the GDR Comparative Education Society engaged in a fascinating methodological debate on whether comparison should be universally applied, given that capitalist school systems are, from the Marxist-

Leninist perspective, at a lower stage of development. The debate is documented in the journal *Vergleichende Pädagogik* [comparative education], and the two exponents of the debate were the editor-in-chief H.-G. Hoffmann (against comparison) and the deputy editor-in-chief Werner Kienitz (for comparison).

Hans-Georg Hoffmann (1975) argued that comparison should only be exclusively applied for “intra-system” comparison, that is, for comparison with other socialist countries and particularly with the Soviet Union, acknowledged as having attained the highest level on the socialist path of development. The argument was made that developments in capitalist educational systems should be observed and reported, but not compared. This anti-comparison position gained ardent support from Ilse Gerth (1973), in charge of international relations at the Academy of Educational Sciences of the GDR. Subsequently, in line with positions held by the communist party, these opponents of cross-national comparison obtained a stamp of approval by the association of socialist comparative education researchers. At their annual meeting, held in Leipzig, the debates of 1972/73 were reiterated and Kienitz’ initial suggestion to compare educational systems in both East and West was officially disbanded (Kienitz 1972). Hoffmann (1975) summarized the distinctions between bourgeois and socialist comparative education discussed at the meeting of socialist comparativists, and concluded that socialist comparative education should abstain from comparison across political systems. Starting in 1975, GDR researchers refrained from using the term “comparative education” for inter-system or cross-national comparison, and instead resorted to the term “Auslandspädagogik” (education in foreign educational systems). At the same time, they ceased to engage in country-comparison and instead developed one-country studies, that is, extensive documentation of educational systems in capitalist countries with the sole purpose of documenting how far capitalist educational systems lagged behind socialist ones. The organization of the journal *Vergleichende Pädagogik* reflected the outcomes of the methodological debate. The articles and reports were divided in several sections: Education in socialist fraternal countries, education in capitalist countries, education in developing countries, and for a while a separate section on education in the German Federal Republic was enlisted. The method of comparison was only applied to comparable educational systems, that is, in articles and reports published in the first section dealing with “education in socialist fraternal countries.”

As leading socialist comparative education researchers in the GDR (Werner Kienitz, Bernd John) acknowledged after the end of the Cold War, comparative education was instrumentalized for ideological purposes. The GDR was, for a variety of reasons—including the perceived threat of constant indoctrination by the German “bourgeois” society in the Federal Republic of Germany—the closest political ally to the Soviet Union. Its proximity was also reflected in positions held in comparative education research. Other socialist comparative education societies, notably those in Hungary and Poland, were less ideologically tainted. They engaged in study-visits to Western capitalist countries, and acknowledged the usefulness of comparative educational research for educational development in their own countries.

In the “West,” the phase of critical self-reflection has yet to be initiated in U.S. comparative and international education. In the early 1980s Japanology replaced Sovietology in U.S. educational research, or as Philip Foster (1998) has formulated, “for

North American scholars the 'Japanese challenge' has replaced the 'Soviet challenge'." (p. 7). What endured from one "challenge" to the other was the fascination with the contrastive method in comparative education and the disinterest in understanding how political and economic constellations affect educational structures, beliefs, and practices. Given the stubborn ignorance on political and economic dimensions of education, it is not surprising that appeals have been made to revisit developments in U.S. educational development retrospectively, and to examine the impact that the competition between the two superpowers may have had on domestic developments. It is not a coincidence that the new research field of post-Cold War studies has emerged in U.S. academe, as manifested in new academic journals (e.g., *Journal of Cold War Studies*) and a proliferation of academic books on the topic. To date, several U.S. policies during the period of the Cold War have been re-investigated (Dudziak, 2000; Borstelmann, 2001; Westad, 2005), demonstrating the salutary impact that the tensions between the two superpowers had on social reforms in the United States, and as mentioned earlier, in particular in the area of race relations. Even though education was an important area in which the superiority of socialist systems over capitalist countries was constantly propagated, there exist few studies dealing with developments in the field of education that were visibly impacted by inter-state competition. Surprisingly, there are even fewer studies on the field of comparative education which, by virtue of analyzing other educational systems, was at the center of the dichotomy.

A reflection on how comparative education researchers in both world-systems situated themselves within a bipolar "intellectual space" is very much needed and very topical given that 2006 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the U.S. Comparative and International Education Society and the 50<sup>th</sup> volume of the journal *Comparative Education Review*. In an attempt to invigorate a debate on how U.S. comparative and international education dealt with the "other," and as result prioritized specific topics and methods at the expense of others, we plan on editing a special issue on the topic which is to be published in the journal *European Education* (forthcoming, Fall 2006).

Before exploring in further publications how American educational researchers dealt with socialist education, it might be an opportune moment to present for now how socialist comparativists viewed U.S. comparative and international education. The following is an excerpt from the GDR journal *Vergleichende Pädagogik* published under the heading "the development of associations of comparativists abroad" on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Comparative and Education Society:

The oldest and strongest association of comparativists is the *U.S.-American Comparative Education Society*. It celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1966. In 1956, when it was founded, the American society had 152 members from the United States and three from other countries. In 1962, there were 519 members from the U.S.A. and 47 from other countries. Currently [1967], the number of members [...] is close to 1,400 members. [...] One of the noteworthy activities are the scientific "expeditions" of the Society. In large teams of researchers they visit various countries and regions after preparing themselves accordingly and then evaluating their experiences in comprehensive publications. For example in 1958, from 150 applicants a group of seven scholars was selected to study

educational development in the Soviet Union. This group studied for six weeks, according to a touring schedule established prior to their visit, various aspects of the Soviet people's education. The voluminous tome "The Changing Soviet School" (Boston 1960) is a result of this study tour. This book vividly illustrates, however, the prejudices, wrong interpretations and fabrications of bourgeois American comparativists; the book was, for good reasons, criticized by Soviet scholars. In general, anti-communist tendencies are clearly discernible in the activities of this Society as well as its intimate relation with the imperialist-neocolonialist cultural foreign policy of the U.S.A. (Kienitz 1967, p. 103)

It is essential to re-examine the developments in U.S. educational research during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s – a period of major social and educational reforms – from a post-Cold War perspective if for no other reason than to refute the generalized defamation of U.S. comparative and international education as a field that advanced the "imperialist-neocolonialist cultural foreign policy" of the U.S. government (Kienitz 1967, p. 103), and replace it with more nuanced analyses.

### **Conclusion**

The perspective provided by the end of the Cold War has allowed for a wide range of reevaluation and reinterpretation across academia. As scholars continue to better understand the impact of the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union upon research and education policy on both sides of the Iron Curtain, the field of International and Comparative Education will emerge as having had a fundamental role in determining understanding. Comparative Education scholars can continue to contribute by describing how education became contested ground as a means of self-portrayal, and de-legitimizing the capitalist or socialist "other" to allied nations in the Third World. In the United States, increased funding for area studies as well as the identification of school segregation as an impediment to promoting a positive image of the United States abroad, are examples of the salutary outcomes the Cold War provided. Meanwhile, behind the "iron curtain" East Bloc nations understood education as an area where the superiority of socialism could be demonstrated. The implications of the Cold War are thus evident world wide, and continue to constitute an important element for consideration by education researchers, even as the centrality of education makes the research of comparativists essential to understanding the Cold War.

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