AN INTERNATIONAL COMMENT

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First of all, permit me, on behalf of the Direktor-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, to congratulate the Comparative Education Society in Europe upon its twentieth anniversary of devotion to the cause of education. May I likewise, on his behalf and on my own, express great satisfaction with what has obviously been a most successful and productive tenth European Conference on Comparative Education. The excellent quality of papers presented, the richness of discussions, the extraordinary range of critically important subjects covered, the superb organization of the conference, all these are indisputable evidence of the vigour and seriousness of your Society.

The very seriousness with which you have addressed major educational subjects, and the vigor with which you have debated them, puts before a speaker in your closing session an awful temptation to have the last word, comfortably safe from rebuttal and riposte. I shall try to resist that temptation, but should I yield in a moment of weakness, please forgive my lapse from propriety. I am, after all, in Prof. COWEN’s term, an interventionist.

I find it difficult to approach the subject of an anniversary with any degree of confidence. As a kind of social solidarity ritual it is sometimes customary to inventory achievements and progress over the past X years. But I have the feeling that yours is not that kind of society. Further, it is not currently fashionable to admit great progress in the field of education during the past twenty years, or that its range of tasks and concerns has expanded at a rate to match the concomitant explosion of knowledge, or that while remaining national — even regional and local in its foundations and its applications, it has taken on international dimensions which, twenty years ago, were to some extent anticipated, but hardly fully grasped. As most of the papers and discussions in this conference have in fact done, in one field or another, it may be more appropriate to signalize this twentieth anniversary by looking ahead, with past experience as a helpful guide to the interpretation of what may come.
In the course of your discussions you have addressed this kind of question both directly and indirectly. One of your workshops has directly explored the relationships between futurology and the educational sciences, while others have sought to explore systems analysis in the educational sciences, methods of analysing the geographical dimension of education, the contribution of economics to the educational sciences, action research in intercultural education, and media education. The three main themes with which you began equally oriented themselves toward the future: the place of comparative education in the educational sciences, educational sciences and teacher training, and the plurality or singularity of educational science/educational sciences.

As you may already know, the 38th session of the International Conference on Education, to take place 10-19 November here in Geneva, will address questions of the probable future development of education over the next two decades, along with the subject of the interaction between education and work. Since we at the International Bureau of Education have been thoroughly engrossed, over the last year or more, in preparation for this session of the Conference, it may be useful to try to draw some notions — hopefully useful ones — from our two somewhat different exercises in comparative education.

First it may be well to look at the similarities and differences in our two conferences. Both, it seems clear, aim in the first instance at the sharing of knowledge and information in the field of education, particularly in recent and short-run anticipated developments. Both seek to shed light on current problems of education, and upon the systems and modalities for addressing those problems. Both are fully professional (in the broader sense) in character, in that such business as organisational budgets, programmes and policy is either absent, or secondary in character.

But in order not to draw spurious conclusions, important differences which point up the complementarity of our activities should be adduced. You are specialists in many fields of the educational sciences; your preoccupation is largely with research, teaching, and with the application of research to practice and policy, together with the institutions necessary to these activities. The participants in the IBE are, on the whole, policy-makers and decision-makers, usually seconded by specialists appropriate to the particular subjects to be discussed. The information they seek, and the uses to which they intend to put it, are somewhat different, responding in some ways in a more linear mode to Professor FURTER's canon of the primacy of the end-user (and possibly also to Professor WEILER's hypotheses of legitimation). Further, IBE participants seek to come to consensus on a number of principles, measures, and actions to be recommended to ministries of education and international organizations (including UNESCO) for application at national levels or through international co-operation, to particular educatio-
nal problems. In the present case the subject is interaction between education productive and work.

These factors, while they highlight a few areas in which the two activities may have little to offer each other, equally suggest some significant areas of common interest.

First of all, you have questioned yourselves about the place of comparative education amongst the educational sciences, or should I say, in light of your discussions, the other educational sciences. You have equally looked at the place of the educational sciences in the total set of activities referred to as "education". You have asked the question, educational sciences or science of education?

Some more light might be shed on these questions if we look briefly at the set of global needs and problems which educational authorities in Member States of UNESCO have identified as the context of educational development over the next twenty years: the first and universally recognized need is that of peace and international harmony and understanding. Virtually all responses reaffirmed the primordial role of education in addressing this goal, while recognizing that education alone could not achieve it. The second need expressed is that of the capacity of individuals and societies to adapt to the process of change. In this context, the role of education is seen not only in its task of preparing individuals and then societies to cope with technological change and the growth of scientific knowledge, but also with the consequence for human life of these kinds of change. The third set of needs can be summarized as the reduction of socioeconomic inequalities. In this case, they see two facets of the problem of education: the democratization of education itself, through improved access and chances of success, more equitable and effective distribution of services, especially on a geographical basis, and the like. But they see education equally as an instrument for the elimination of sex bias, for intercultural understanding and respect within multicultural and polyethnic societies, and as a force in redressing socioeconomic disadvantages. In parallel with strongly stated needs for economic development, the need for development of the full potential of the individual is stated with equal force.

Problems, which relate to these and other broad needs, generally center upon shortages of financial, physical and human resources, especially in relation to demographic pressures, but include some which, it seems to me, have special significance for your future discussions, specifically the erosion of civic and moral values, and the difficulty of linking research to practice at all levels from policy formation to classroom practice. Problems related to the interaction between education and work are equally identified, both as educational and pedagogical problems on the one hand and problems for education and for the workplace on the other.
I have sketched these broad problem areas out, not as any kind of Mosaic tables fixing norms for future educational development, but as a set of perceptions furnished by those who have major responsibilities for managing and directing official education systems in Member States of UNESCO.

A final point, since I do not propose to discuss here the range of educational prospects seen by Member States: by and large, educational authorities see the next ten to twenty years not necessarily as a period of striking and fundamental new educational reforms, but rather as one of the pursuit and implementation of reforms already defined at legislative and policy levels in the mid and late seventies, with educational innovation directed toward anticipated problems and potentials within the framework of reform already adopted.

To return, then, in the light of these perceptions, to the questions you would have posed for yourselves: there appear to be certain clear demands on the educational sciences (or on educational science), defined as broadly as the agenda of your conference has implied. Preoccupation with the effects of change (rapid and accelerating change, as recognized in your discussions and in many of your conference papers) suggests new demands on a broad range of resources within the educational sciences to meet subsets of problems already recognized or clearly anticipated. The perception argues somewhat against the notion that the task for educational scientists is to perfect known tools to solve known and long-standing problems.

If, as I understand your general conclusions, you regard the scope of action for the educational sciences as expanding rather than contracting, then these broad problems and the consequent demands on the totality of educational effort appear to provide demonstrable justification, not only for the application of knowledge generated in these disciplines, but equally for the expansion of the knowledge base and for its extension into new areas. The single factor of a recognized need for endogeneity in educational sciences development, pointed up in one of your papers as a need in the European region as well as in the third world, sets even more demands for meeting a complex set of problems of cultural identity within intercultural matrices.

The identification of the problem of application of research to practice is significant. This is no new problem, but its reaffirmation is vital, since it signals recognition of the role of research in the total educational process, at the same time identifying a systems problem of significance equally for researchers and consumers of research.

These juxtapositions of perceptions would therefore seem to suggest a few conclusions: that despite all criticisms leveled at educational sciences by the users of their product (as well as by a healthy self-criticism), the need for educational sciences if fundamentally unchallenged and its place assured. The basic question, and especially for you, is whether the educational sciences
in their present state of their anticipated scope, are in measure to address the demands placed upon them. As some of your discussions have suggested, it may be essential to set limits on the field of action of the educational sciences and to renounce some kinds of demand as beyond a realistic present or anticipated capacity of the educational sciences.

As regards the contained question of the place of comparative education in the educational sciences, it is difficult to add to the rich discussions of your first theme or to the splendid presentations of Professors COWEN and FREY. However, in the arena of international co-operation, conditioned as it is by still-to-be satisfied needs for endogenous development, the place of comparative education, as now more broadly defined, is abundantly clear. Within the existing and anticipated modalities of international communication in matters of education, comparative education emerges as the sine qua non in establishing the sets of interface which permit such communication. It must function as an ordering agent and even in some cases as a gate keeper to other educational sciences of preoccupations with application of research to practice on an international scale are to be met. Further, to call into question the place of comparative education within the national setting calls into question the viability of the process of international co-operation itself, except perhaps in the sense of traditional serendipitous exchange amongst specialists, or, at the other extreme, the unplanned byproduct of political interchange on an international scale.

Finally, educational science or educational sciences: such perceptive and powerful arguments have been adduced on both sides of the issue, and masterfully ordered by Prof. MITTER, you have made it a polydimensional question — that I hesitate to say anything at all. But if, as stated earlier, the evolution of educational science/sciences in response to new demand is expected to continue and perhaps accelerate, may it not be premature to try to reach any firm conclusion in this matter?

In this attempt to juxtapose perceived educational problems and needs with the potentials and resources of the educational sciences, and of comparative education among them, I may have exaggerated the challenge. But the problems are there, the demand is there, the educational sciences are there. "If not us, whom? If not now, when?"