CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES
COMPARATIVE EDUCATION
AND THE TRAINING OF TEACHERS

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Comparative Education, as a subject of study, is more often found at
the post-graduate than at the under-graduate level of university studies.
However, within some programmes of the teacher training education some
space and time is allocated for the introduction to the subject of Com-
parative Education. In such courses the field of Comparative Education is
introduced in its historical perspective, and students learn about the few
chosen foreign educational systems and institutions, as well as about the in-
ternational institutions responsible for educational data gathering and
research. On top of that, one or more methodological approaches in the
field are usually explained.

In the teacher training programmes there is hardly any space and time
left for the specific issues with which Comparative Education is also con-
cerned, such as minority education, education of women, economics and
politics of education, educational transfers, cross-cultural education, and
others. It is felt, however, that the training of teachers should include im-
portant matters with which they will have to deal in their classroom, and
which pertain to problems of social relations in the contemporary world.
Cross-cultural relations certainly fall into that category.

Cross-cultural issues involve the knowledge about, understanding of,
and attitudes towards those with whom an individual shares his living
space. Behaviour of an individual, and of the group to which that in-
dividual belongs, towards other individuals and groups between whom
there is present some sort of a contact, falls into the sphere of civic educa-
tion, and even more importantly, to that of the moral education. In what
way the believes, attitudes, and the resulting behaviour, towards other in-
dividuals and groups, could be made into the more realistic and qualitatively
better, would depend largely upon the knowledge about and understand-
ing of specific contents of differing cultures.

The emergence of prejudicial, biased opinions and feelings, and the
resulting hostile attitudes, behaviours, and actions, especially in cases of
culturally different population co-habiting the same, or nearest,
geographic or political area, depends, to a large extent, upon the opinions,
attitudes, an feelings of those whom the society has entrusted with the education of the youth. Teachers, as it is almost universally accepted, are transmitters of the culture, instructors of the knowledge to be gained, and introducers to the feelings to be felt, that is educators who should be able to help young people to grow into complete personalities. This presupposes the need that teachers themselves grow into complete personalities and that they gain necessary insights into problems of cross-cultural relations. They should also be free from prejudices and negative attitudes be they based on race, colour, creed, gender, age, occupation, social status, or any other. Therefore their own education should be geared to these tasks.

Comparative Education in its theoretical, scientific approach to the matters concerning cross-cultural issues, could serve as a basis for the later application of the gained knowledge in the teaching practice. It could also provide the means for gaining insights, building views, and raising positive feelings as they relate to cultural differences.

Cross-cultural contacts are in the contemporary world unavoidable. The world is fast becoming a global village. And yet, each of its segments is striving for its own betterment regardless of the rest, as if the world did not present a common ecological unity. As such it can be bettered or destroyed, which would depend upon the ways and means in which contacts among its population are seen as preferable, desired, designed and performed. Wars and conflicts could be one way in which the world’s population frustrated by injustices and deprivations would deal one with another. Mutual help could be the other way. If «partners» would understand each others’ needs, and would be willing to forego economic, and/or political, interests based on ethnocentricty, or any other «entricity», it could be this other way. This may seem, however, as an overly optimistic, utopian dream. But, it must be pointed out that, the world, consisting of its many cultural specifics, each of them carefully guarded, preserved and transmitted to the younger generations, will not come to regard the other cultures as valuable as their own as long as it is largely unaware of their existence. Also, the mere awareness of their existence, without the knowledge of their contents and values they have for those who live with them and by them, would not improve peoples relationships (Godler, 1986).

It follows that questions of political culture become intertwined and conflictual with questions of the universal morality of the mankind. Education, as understood by the most, could, and moreover, should become the bridge between the two. It could provide the ways and means for building the morality of each individual, if its contents would include matters which positively influence each person’s knowledge, his attitudes, and identification of values. These contents could be derived from the best of the cultures which surround an individual, at least immediately. Care should be taken, however, that they are imparted by adequate teaching methods, using appropriate teaching materials, and, above all, by well educated teachers. This, in turn, calls for the changes to be made in the ap-
proach to educational concepts, particularly in terms of the teacher training education, to which the Comparative Education could contribute.

The contents of Comparative Education studies designed for the teacher training programmes should, therefore, include relevant anthropological-cultural studies, based on the sound social science principles. Their presentation should include elements of the sensitivity training. As suggested (McDougall 1985: 84-87), this can be achieved by special teaching methods: vicarious contact, perceptual differentiation, exhortation and teaching empathy. In this way, the Comparative Education would no longer be only an introductory, general informative course, but would have better and more meaningful effect especially in terms of understanding the cross-cultural relations issues.

REFERENCES
