

The 40th Anniversary of the European Education A Personal Note

It happened probably in the late 1980s or the early 1990s – right before or after the political turn in Central Europe – that I met Hans (Professor Lingens) at a CESE Conference. (CESE, the Comparative Education Societies of Europe was one of the known, probably the best known scholarly societies of comparatists in our continent). After a short but deep discussion during which we mutually cleared up our common cultural roots – we discovered our Protestant, Lutheran background – Hans invited me to join the international advisory board of the European Education. He was at that time the editor of that journal – an American one that concentrated on the education of Europe while having been published in California.

At a glance it was confusing to me. Why should a Californian journal be interested in European educational issues? More challenging was though their question how could it be done. Europe – with her confusing systems of national educations and with her confusing national cultures and myths (to say a euphemism) – might attract Europeans those days. But others outside of Europe? And especially Californians (or Americans at all)?

During my many years with Hans and later with Bernhard (Dr Streitweiser) and colleagues I have learnt a lot. Among others I found an answer to my initial question. Comparing educational systems, practices and policies – the core of the activities of the comparatists – is not really comparing; it is more a kind of translating and interpreting. Translating in the close sense of the world (in the case of the journal, translating papers from one language to the other, namely to English). But translating in the sense of ‘interpretation’. For Europeans, like my colleagues on the board and me myself, the second, broader meaning of the word ‘translation’ was even more important than the first meaning, a narrower one.

Education (as we all know it from our foundation courses) is not only a professional activity – it is a societal activity. Or, rather, it is *the activity* of a community by which it can survive. So education is bound to the community which acts on it; and this simple fact is reflected in every details of the education, including the *discourse* on it. If I say ‘classroom management’ in American English, I have to address my Central European audience (be them Slovaks, Serbs, Romanians or Hungarians) with a lecture on *Didactics*. ‘Pedagogy’ is a word of (good) practice for an American teacher – it is a miscellaneous mixture of philosophies and real life experiences for a Central European.

While I am writing these lines, a colleague of mine, a young professor from Texas gives an introduction to American higher education to my doctoral students. ‘Retention rate’, ‘affirmative action’, ‘professional degrees’ and the like are among the many expressions they have to clear up. Even if my graduates have a fairly good command of English they do not know the cultural backgrounds. They would need constant interpretations.

Are we able to do it? Can we act as interfaces among cultures, societies and educational practices and policies? We have to do so in a globalising age. European Education is and has always been an outstanding forum for this exercise. At its 40th anniversary I wish all the bests to the new editors and their renewed journal to fulfill that important task.

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