MESCE: MEDITERRANEAN SOCIETY OF COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

Origins

The Mediterranean Society of Comparative Education (MESCE) was launched in Catania (Italy) during a conference, *Comparative Education in the Mediterranean*, held on 4-6 March 2004, organised by Giovanni Pampanini. MESCE is very much Giovanni Pampanini’s brainchild.

Declared aims

MESCE (see http://www.mesce.org/) was registered in Catania and has the following aims:

- developing the perception of a Mediterranean framework for education;
- fostering dialogue and mutual knowledge among scholars in education and teachers and educators of all the Mediterranean countries;
- promoting the setting up of research programmes, co-operation and intellectual exchanges in education among scholars from all the Mediterranean countries;
- exploring possibilities for greater co-operation among scholars in education and scholars in other disciplines, both humanistic and scientific within a Mediterranean context;
- carrying out studies in Comparative Education in the Mediterranean;
- reinforcing the politics of education aimed at guaranteeing all children and adult citizens the right to education in the widest sense possible;
- avoiding, through education, the dangers of ignorance, intolerance, incomprehension, and racial hatred;
- guaranteeing to citizens of the Mediterranean the right to discuss their participation in and make an informed choice regarding different development models and ways of civil cohabitation in multicultural societies in and around the Mediterranean basin;
- paving the way, through education, for cultural studies and intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean with respect to European and Arab cultures and the other cultures (e.g., Chinese, Indian and sub-Saharan) present in the Mediterranean area; this is done with a view to fostering greater understanding.
Other initiatives in the Mediterranean

This organisation emerged against a background of interesting initiatives that were carried out with respect to education in the Mediterranean region. My colleague Ronald Sultana, who now directs the Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research at the University of Malta, had initiated a series of research seminars focusing on education in the Mediterranean, the first of which in 1999. These were known as the Selmun Seminars because of the venue involved, the 18th century Chateau at the Selmun Palace Hotel in Malta. Papers from some of these seminars were published in edited volumes produced by such publishing houses as Peter Lang, New York. Earlier, Ronald Sultana launched the *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies*, a peer reviewed academic journal published twice a year. The journal is now in its thirteenth volume. Other activities included the hosting of a number of conferences on education in the Mediterranean such as *Il Mare che Unisce. Scuola, Europa e il Mediterraneo* held at Sestri Levante in October 1998, and the one convened, a year later, by Giovanni Pampanini at the Gran Hotel Baia Verde in Catania, and which led to the publication of the volume *Un Mare di Opportunità. Cultura e Educazione nel Mediterraneo del 111 Millennio* published by Armando Editore. These initiatives were in no way related to MESCE, but were indicative of the type of activities being carried out in the region in the last decade. Initiatives of this type served to place the Mediterranean on the comparative and international education research agenda. In addition, a number of scholars were publishing papers on specific aspects of Mediterranean education in international refereed journals, mainly journals in international or comparative education. They were also published in other types of journals, including the *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* produced by the University of Malta’s Mediterranean Institute. This journal is interdisciplinary, but it occasionally carries articles focusing on education. In addition to these activities, we witnessed a number of conferences, sponsored by the DVV-International, on Adult Education in the Mediterranean, conferences which bring together both practitioners and researchers from both sides of the Mediterranean and which are intended toward the setting up of a Mediterranean Adult Education Association.

**WCCES 2007 – Sarajevo; WCCES 2009 – Istanbul**

Meanwhile MESCE followed up on its Catania conference with its involvement in a series of activities including a high profile congress. At the World Congress of Comparative Education in Cuba in 2004, Giovanni Pampanini proposed the candidature of Sarajevo (BiH) as the venue for the following World
Congress. This proposal was accepted and this meant that MESCE would serve as
the host regional organisation for the congress. The congress was impeccably
organised by the team from the University of Sarajevo led by Adila Kreso, my
predecessor as MESCE President. MESCE members were very much involved as
regional convenors for the Sarajevo World Congress that took place in September
2007. MESCE will also be the host regional organisation for the next WCCES
which takes place in Istanbul in 2009. The organising team at Istanbul will be led
by MESCE Executive Committee member Fatma Gok from Bogazici University.

II MESCE Conference – Alexandria 2006

Prior to the Sarajevo congress, MESCE organised its second meeting, this time
on the Southern side of the Mediterranean. The magnificent newly built
Bibliotheca Alexandrina in the heart of the ancient Egyptian city of Alexandria
was the venue. The Alexandria conference was by far the larger of the first two
MESCE conferences. Adopting the general theme Community Participation,
Decentralisation and Education for Democracy in the Mediterranean Area/
Countries, the conference was intended to place MESCE on a firm footing.

The choice of Alexandria, Egypt, as the venue was appropriate to ensure a
strong Arab participation, given the lack of funds that prevents Arab academics,
ensconced in Arab universities, to participate at conferences abroad. As expected,
there was a strong Egyptian presence. More pleasing was the fact that there was
a strong female presence at this conference, both in terms of speakers and
convenors. Alas, with the exception of one participant from Lebanon, there were
hardly any other Arab countries represented. There were a few representatives
from Southern Europe. These were from Italy, Turkey and Malta. In addition, there
were presenters from Canada, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, as well as Germany. There
was the distinguished presence of the Editor of Comparative Education Review
(Mark Ginsburg) at both this meeting and the subsequent one in Malta. At the time
of the Alexandria conference, he was residing in Cairo in view of his role as
Director of the Reform Division of the Egyptian Education Reform Programme.

Particularly interesting was the presentation concerning the prestigious and
ancient Al-Azhar University by Ibrahim Marai and Mohamed Fathy from the same
Cairo university. It proposed a renewed role for the traditional Muslim University
through e-learning for training of Imams all over the world. Being so topical in
light of recent events in the Western world, this presentation led to a huge debate
concerning the nature of Islam and the role of Imams. Instructive were debates
about the role of ‘civil society’ in Egyptian education, especially with regard to
women. The debates involved Raouf Azmy, Nagy Shenouda Nakhla and Omima
Gado, Cairo. Traugott Schoeftaler, Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Foundation for the Dialogue Among Cultures, addressed the topic of organising future conferences of this kind around the theme of ‘Dialogue among Cultures’, without ignoring the political economy dimension. With the exception of a few papers, there was a slight bias toward quantitative data at the Alexandria conference which was convened by Faten Adly from the University of Cairo. Simultaneous translation, in Arabic, French and English, was provided on a voluntary basis by researchers from the same university where Faten Adly is based. Faten Adly edited the book containing the proceedings of the conference which was produced in hardcover this year and which contains papers on a range of topics, written in Arabic and English.

III MESCE Conference – Malta 2008

The third MESCE conference took place quite recently. Over a 130 educational researchers from various parts of Mediterranean and beyond participated at the conference which took place at the New Dolmen Hotel, Qawra, Malta, from 11-13 May 2008. Malta replaced Tunisia, originally designated as the venue for the conference, since the Tunisian colleagues did not follow up on their earlier expression of interest.

There were two broad conference themes at the Malta conference, namely, ‘Intercultural Dialogue Within and Across Nations’ and ‘Education in the Mediterranean’. Papers selected revolved around such themes as: ‘Education in the Mediterranean’, ‘North-South, South-North, East-West, West-East Relations in Education’, ‘Migration – Inward and Outward (Diaspora)’, ‘Post-Colonial Education’, ‘Religion and Education’, ‘Multi-Ethnicity and Education’, ‘Inter-Ethnic Education’, ‘Inter-Cultural Dialogue Within and Across Nations’, and ‘Education for Sustainability in the Mediterranean and Beyond’. Carmel Borg and the undersigned, from the University of Malta’s Faculty of Education, were the conference convenors.

The keynote speakers were: Ronald Sultana (Editor of the Mediterranean Journal of Education Studies and Director of the University’s Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research) and Isabelle Calleja from the University of Malta, Mehdi Lahlou from the University Mohammed V, Morocco, who, alas, did not show up, Zelia Gregoriou from the University of Cyprus, Andre‘ Elias Mazawi from the University of British Columbia, Paolo Landri, from the Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II and Mark Ginsburg (Editor of Comparative Education Review), from the Academy for Educational Development (USA). The full programme could be accessed at: http://www.educ.um.edu.mt/mesce/cprogramme.html
Unfortunately an application to the Anna Lindh Foundation, to fund the participation of an Arab scholar at this MESCE conference, was not successful, despite the conference’s focus on ‘Intercultural Dialogue Through Education’ as its all pervasive theme. In contrast, the Malta based Strickland Foundation acceded to a similar application of ours and provided adequate funds to support the participation of an Arab scholar.

A new executive committee was elected at the III MESCE conference with the two convenors, Peter Mayo and Carmel Borg, now occupying the roles of President and Secretary General respectively. Morocco was chosen as the venue for the next conference.

Peter Mayo
University of Malta & MESCE President
MESCE: SOCIÉTÉ MÉDITERRANÉENNE D’ÉDUCATION COMPARÉE

Origines


des deux côtés de la Méditerranée dans le but de créer une Association Méditerranéenne pour l’Education des Adultes.

Le MESCE a organisé sa deuxième rencontre en Égypte, auprès de la magnifique Bibliothèque de Alexandrie récemment construite. Choisisant le thème «Community Participation, Decentralization and Education for Democracy in the Mediterranean Area/Countries» (La Participation Communautaire, la Décentralisation et l’Éducation pour la Démocratie dans les Pays Méditerranéens), la conférence a posé des bases solides pour le travail du MESCE.

La troisième conférence du MESCE a été réalisée à Malte, du 11 au 13 Mai 2008 et environ 130 chercheurs, issus de tous les pays de la Méditerranée, ont participé.

Objectifs déclarés

MESCE a été fondée à Catania et vise les aux objectifs suivants:

• développer la perception d’un cadre méditerranéen pour l’Éducation;
• encourager le dialogue et la connaissance réciproque entre les spécialistes de l’Éducation, les enseignants et les formateurs de tous les pays méditerranéens;
• promouvoir la mise en place de programmes de recherche, de coopération, et d’échanges intellectuels dans le domaine de l’Éducation entre les spécialistes de tous les Pays méditerranéens;
• examiner les possibilités pour une coopération entre spécialistes de l’Éducation et ceux d’autres disciplines, humanistes ou scientifiques, dans le contexte méditerranéen;
• réaliser des études sur l’Éducation Comparée dans les Pays méditerranéens;
• renforcer les politiques éducatives visant à assurer le droit à l’éducation pour tous les enfants et les adultes dans le plus vaste sens possible;
• éviter – à travers l’éducation – les dangers de l’ignorance, de l’intolérance, de l’incompréhension et de la haine raciale;
• assurer aux citoyens des Pays méditerranéens le droit de participer et de faire des choix éclairés à l’égard des différents modèles de développement et de la cohabitation civile des sociétés multiculturelles dans et du tour du bassin Méditerranéen;
• préparer le terrain – à travers l’éducation – pour des études culturelles et un dialogue interculturel dans le bassin méditerranéen en respectant les cultures européennes et arabes et les autres cultures (Chinoise, Indienne, Sub-saharienne etc.) présentes dans la zone, et cela dans une perspective de compréhension mutuelle.
Note

1. La traduction de ce texte de l’anglais au français était assurée par Mme Silvia Schenone (MLAL).

Peter Mayo

Université de Malte & Président de MESCE