

EDITORIAL

Comparative and international perspectives on education in small states

This special issue of *Comparative Education* focuses on education in small states. It seeks to place in sharp relief the strengths and weaknesses of different aspects of educational provision in political jurisdictions having a very small population – populations which encounter specific challenges, threats and opportunities. Despite the many similarities that are revealed in the collective articles, it remains difficult to generalise when discussing the characteristics of small states. As Bray and Packer (1993 xxiii) point out:

small states display wide diversity in geography, economy and culture. Moreover it is not always easy to discern which features of individual small states are reflections of small size and thus can be generalized, and which features merely reflect the specific cultural, economic or other features of the particular states in question.

This notwithstanding, a specialist literature on small states began to emerge from the 1960s onwards. Most of the early material dealt with the economies and political systems of small states. There was a time when a somewhat arbitrary population figure of 1.5 million, or less, was established to delineate a small state. The Commonwealth Secretariat was among the first organisations to indicate a strong interest in such issues – given that a large number of new nations with a population ranging from under one million to two million could be found in its midst. Suffice it to mention the large concentration of Commonwealth small states in the Caribbean and South Pacific regions. The cut off point of 1.5 million was, however, called into question, because of its ‘arbitrariness,’ by authors who developed more of a social constructionist view of small states (see, for instance, Hindmarsh 1996).

Colin Brock, who had worked in the Caribbean, was among the first writers to be commissioned by the Commonwealth to undertake a survey of the educational systems of small states (Brock 1984; Bray and Packer 1993). In 1985 an influential pan-Commonwealth meeting on small states was held in Mauritius, in the Indian Ocean. This resulted in an influential publication compiled by Bacchus and Brock (1987) containing inputs by educators and administrators from different small states in the Commonwealth. Since then, the Commonwealth Secretariat has commissioned a sequence of publications tackling such themes as the training and professional support of educational personnel (Commonwealth Secretariat 1987), the dilemmas of multifunctional administrators (Farrugia and Attard 1989), ministries of education in small states (Bray et al. 1991), examination systems (Bray and Steward 1998) and educational administration and management (Baldacchino and Farrugia 2002). Acknowledging the Commonwealth’s enduring commitment to the small states agenda, Crossley and Holmes were commissioned, in 1999, to review the extent, scope and impact of Commonwealth work on education in small states to that point in time (Crossley and Holmes 1999). This was carried out with a view to helping in the identification of possible priorities for the future.

The Baldacchino and Farrugia (2002) publication, in the Commonwealth Secretariat’s series, reflects a particularly interesting initiative that highlighted the ongoing importance of local capacity building in small states. This is an edited collection of papers summarising research projects carried out by educational administrators from various small states across the

Commonwealth who attended one of four courses (of one academic year's duration) held at the University of Malta. These were run on a full-time basis leading to the award of the Diploma in Educational Administration and Management in Small States (1994–1998). Each participant was the beneficiary of a scholarship provided by the Commonwealth. The course was the brain-child of Professor Charles J. Farrugia, one of the contributors to the Mauritius meeting and himself a frequent contributor to the literature on education and administration in small states (see, for instance, Farrugia and Attard 1989; Farrugia 2007). The University of Malta, of which Professor Farrugia was pro-Rector until recently, is therefore an important contributor to the field of education in small states. This is especially true of the work of its Islands and Small States Institute which provides courses leading to degrees at the M.A. and Ph.D. levels, with education featuring among its research areas. Other such centres or study concentrations can be found in locations as diverse as the University of Bristol, the University of Hong Kong and the University of Prince Edward Island in Canada (see www.smallstates.net).

UNESCO has also made a significant contribution to the development of research on education in small states through roundtables such as one held in Mexico focusing on educational planning and management (UNESCO 1990), and through the work of the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP). There is also now a growing small states literature on skills and qualifications (Bennell and Oxenham 1983), literacy (Barton 1994), career guidance and counselling (Sultana 2006), and human resource development. In the latter case a special issue of the *International Journal of Educational Development*, guest edited by Godfrey Baldacchino and Mark Bray (Baldacchino and Bray 2001), was based on papers from a 1997 conference held in Malta and hosted by the Islands and Small States Institute.

One area given scant attention to date (see Jules 1994; Rogers 2006; Parperis 1996) in the small states literature is Adult Education. This is somewhat surprising given that adult education traditionally draws on multiple resources and avails itself of the multifunctional use of facilities and personnel, an important theme in the literature on small states. It is for this reason that the Islands and Small States Institute, University of Malta, Adult Education Programme, Faculty of Education, University of Malta and Education for Development, Reading, collectively organised an international conference on Adult Education in Small States and Islands (ACESSI) in 1995. A selection of papers from this conference was subsequently published in a special issue of *Convergence*, in 1996, guest edited by Peter Mayo and Lino Briguglio, the latter being the Director of the Islands and Small States Institute. Papers focused on countries that included Malta, Cyprus, Jamaica, Lesotho and Botswana.

In the absence of further substantial contributions, Adult Education is one of the themes identified for further development in this Special Issue of *Comparative Education*. The issue also pays attention to basic education, higher education, entrepreneurship training, post-primary education and the impact of globalisation on educational restructuring and aid delivery in specific small state regions. The regions covered by the authors assembled here include the South Pacific, the Caribbean, Africa, Europe and the Mediterranean. Needless to say some contributions deal with generic issues concerning small states the world over. This is the case for the introductory piece by M. Kazim Bacchus. This is Professor Bacchus's last contribution to the field, since sadly he passed away in 2007 at a time when he was working on the final amendments for this paper. We are therefore publishing the piece as originally submitted by Professor Bacchus in recognition of his standing in the field of comparative and international education, in the light of his contribution to Caribbean scholarship (Bacchus 2005), and given his seminal work on educational development in small states. One of his former students, the prominent Argentinean scholar of comparative education, Daniel Schugurensky, has also provided a tribute to Professor Bacchus that accompanies the article.

When invited by the Editorial Board of *Comparative Education* to guest edit this Special Issue, I immediately contacted Professor Bacchus with a view to obtaining a submission from him. I owe much of my own interest in the area to him, dating back to the mid-1980s when I was one of his students at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada. This interest was aroused further on my return to Malta through my acquaintances with other Maltese scholars in the field. In this introductory piece, Bacchus outlines some of the challenges facing education in small states in a twenty-first century characterised by the intensification of globalisation.

The issue of globalisation is also given prominence in a regionally focused paper, the contribution by Coxon and Munce, focusing upon the South Pacific. This paper critically explores one regional Pacific initiative in ways that tease out tensions between the 'global' education agenda of international development agencies and the contextual specificities of education within small Pacific states. Attention is given to the nature of a regional, Pacific basic education project, and how important basic education issues, identified by South Pacific educators, were or were not addressed by this initiative.

Atchoarena, Da Graça and Marquez then analyse the situation of the small archipelago of Cape Verde situated off the West African coast. This provides an illustrative case study of the development dilemmas that small island developing states (SIDS) are currently facing. The authors first provide a review of the new SIDS agenda and then explore the strategies that Cape Verde is developing to meet increasing demands for secondary and tertiary education. Specific consideration is given to post-primary education, identified as strategically important for SIDS, to distance education and to the potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

The article by Godfrey Baldacchino brings issues of entrepreneurship education to the research agenda. In this challenging piece Baldacchino argues that despite much rhetoric surrounding entrepreneurship, there seems to be little evidence that people from small jurisdictions have developed and honed their entrepreneurial skills through their educational experience. Baldacchino broadens the discussion by focusing on five European island regions. These comprise Malta, Iceland, the Scottish Isles, Åland and Saareema. There is much that can be instructive for small states that emerges from a study such as this, financed by the European Commission through its Leonardo da Vinci Vocational Training Programme.

The theme of globalisation re-emerges once again in the contribution by Didacus Jules, another scholar from the Caribbean, well-known for his prominent role in the Grenada literacy campaign. This was an example of revolutionary educational provision in a small island state, paralleled by similar revolutionary provision in the African small states of Guinea Bissau and São Tomé & Príncipe. Here is, perhaps, one area that needs further careful study from a small state perspective. Jules has also been the coordinator for the International Council for Adult Education's Task Force for Literacy, and he recently retired from his position as Permanent Secretary for Education in Saint Lucia. This wide-ranging professional background places him in an ideal position from which to examine the impact of globalisation on educational restructuring in the Caribbean. His article is a forward-looking piece which argues for forms of radical reform that could help to establish the small states of the Anglophone Caribbean as centres of excellence in educational provision.

Taking a more tightly focused approach, the contribution by Nkrumah-Young, Huisman and Powell deals with the challenges of funding in higher education from a small state perspective. This paper explores the dynamics of the institutional fabric of systems that are often dominated by one traditional flagship university, in this case the University of the West Indies, engaged in a variety of struggles while coming to terms with a colonial past.

This brings us to a contribution that deals with Adult Continuing Education in a Euro-Mediterranean context with specific reference to Malta. In this piece, Mayo, Pace and Zammit outline some of the key issues that make their presence felt in adult continuing education in countries with very small populations and land areas. Once again, this draws attention to the

impact of globalisation, and to such familiar themes as the roles of the multifunctional educators and of the multifunctional use of facilities. These authors also address issues of migration and xenophobia in frontier island contexts. The paper then focuses upon an in-depth discussion of two specific areas: ‘adult education and work’ and ‘adult education and sustainable development’. The Special Issue then concludes with a final conceptually and theoretically oriented contribution from Michael Crossley, that explores possibilities and priorities for the future advancement of educational research in small state contexts.

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