

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean Society of Comparative Education (MESCE) was born in Catania, Sicily, as a result of the vision and enthusiasm of a Sicilian scholar, Giovanni Pampanini who became the society's first President. He gathered a group of scholars in this city to help put together, in 2004, the society's first conference. The network of people involved in this area of educational enquiry continued to grow and by the time the second MESCE Conference took place in Alexandria, Egypt, in 2006 this society had already begun to make its mark in the international comparative education field. It had become a member of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES) and was designated regional host for the 2007 World Congress of Comparative Education which took place in Sarajevo. The idea to host the congress there was proposed by Giovanni Pampanini at the WCCES Conference in Cuba in the Fall of 2004. The Sarajevo congress was soon followed, between 11-13 May 2008, with the largest MESCE conference to date, this time held in Malta. This conference drew interest from various parts of the world and not just from the Mediterranean region. Keynote speakers were chosen from different corners of the Mediterranean, including the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean and also included the Editor of *Comparative Education Review* (CER). The conference returns to North Africa this year and will be held in Rabat, Morocco, thanks to the efforts of Samira Dlimi and her colleagues there.

Meanwhile, the Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research (EMCER) at the University of Malta, directed by Ronald Sultana, and which produces the *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies* (MJES), began to work closely with MESCE and this issue is very much the product of this collaboration. It should serve as a testimony to the Malta conference since it is a special issue dedicated to this event. It contains papers from the conference, mainly five keynote presentations and an additional paper presented at the conference which had been submitted, in the meantime, to the journal. The issue also contains the welcoming speech by the University of Malta's Pro-Rector, the short address by the outgoing MESCE President, Adila Pašalić-Kreso from the University of Sarajevo, as well as the inaugural speech delivered by the first President of MESCE. It also contains information pertaining to MESCE.

The two conference convenors, who now occupy the posts of President and Secretary General of MESCE, join Ronald Sultana, a keynote speaker at the conference, in guest-editing this issue. This special issue follows closely on the establishment of a MESCE website (see <http://www.mesce.org/>) that includes a

variety of resources, both visual and audio. Together with the MJES, which is strongly being supported by the society, this website is intended to serve as a point of contact for comparative and other educational and social science researchers ensconced within and beyond the region.

The Malta conference bore the title of *Intercultural Dialogue through Education*, and addressed two broad themes, namely, 'Intercultural Dialogue Within and Across Nations' and 'Education in the Mediterranean'. Other related themes included: post-colonial education; religion and education; multi-ethnicity and education; migration – inward and outward; North-South, South-North, East-West, West-East relations in education; and education for sustainability in the Mediterranean and beyond. Some of these broad themes are reflected in the papers included in this volume.

The choice of Ronald Sultana to deliver the first keynote is an acknowledgement of his status as a researcher in the field of comparative education in the Mediterranean through the setting up of the MJES and the establishment of a network of researchers in education from around the Mediterranean. His paper testifies to his standing and wide experiences in the field as it takes us through a 15-year, autobiographical journey in the areas of research and co-ordination of comparative education projects. Sultana's personal account identifies the limits and explores the possibilities of doing comparative research in the region. It also provides signposts for future research.

JosAnn Cutajar, the only non-keynote speaker featured in this volume, draws on her presentation in one of the parallel sessions. She focuses on one of Sultana's major concerns, namely the dependence of academics and academic institutions, found in small or intermediately developed countries, such as Malta, on Western-derived epistemologies and research. Cutajar argues that such dependence perpetuates subalternity. She proposes a post-colonial pedagogical strategy as a potential antidote to neo-colonial discourses.

One other paper by a Maltese scholar is that offered by Isabelle Calleja from the University of Malta's Department of International Relations. Her paper however focuses not on her home country but on the Cypriot conflict, which she has been researching on site for years. It is common knowledge that this conflict has physically divided the Turkish and Greek communities for more than 30 years. Calleja provides us with a study of the transformation experienced in the teaching of the History of Cyprus, as the country evolved from a long period of geo-political transformation, characterised by national, political and ideological division of the island, to a period marked by genuine attempts at border crossing and at a permanent solution to the crisis.

The Palestinian and Sudanese conflicts provide the backdrop for Mazawi's analysis of some of the context-dependent dynamics that affect teachers' lives and

work. His cursory review unearths two disturbing truths: (i) the absence of studies of educators' lives and work in the Arab region, exacerbated by the uncritical importation of models of 'educational leadership'; and (ii) the tourist-gaze approach to the construction of educators' work in the region. Mazawi, like Sultana and Cutajar, calls for a new research agenda that is critically engaged and contextually grounded; research projects that foreground educators' lives and work in the Arab region.

The work by CER Editor, Mark Ginsburg, from the USA, and Nagwa Megahed, from Egypt, examines the intersection of global discourses regarding student-centred and active-learning pedagogies with educational reform initiatives in Egypt. Ginsburg and Megahed's paper invites comparative and international educators to problematise how local, national and global discourses are constrained or empowered by global and economic developments, including initiatives disguised as 'democratisation' and economic liberalisation.

The final paper is by Paolo Landri, a sociologist and educational researcher from Naples who is deeply involved in the Italian and international sociology of education scenes and has recently been instrumental in establishing an Italian Sociology of Education journal. In his paper for this special issue, he focuses on emerging forms of governance of schooling in countries experiencing what he refers to as the southern model of welfare state – Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy. Landri's work describes the countries' performances and highlights some of the differences experienced in their attempt to translate into action aspects of decentralisation.

In addition to these papers we reproduce the texts of some official addresses. In his welcoming speech, Alfred Vella, Pro-Rector of the University of Malta, outlines the Mediterranean dimension of the hosting university. Outgoing MESCE President Adila Pašalić-Kreso provides a brief address which testifies to the great work she put in as President, especially the unenviable task of spearheading the organisation of the very successful and well attended World Congress of Comparative Education in her home city of Sarajevo. She and her colleagues pulled this off admirably and impeccably. For this and her other efforts in taking MESCE forward, she deserves our thanks. The presentation by Giovanni Pampanini is quite revealing in that it highlights the progress of MESCE and maps out options for future developments in the field. It also highlights the presence at the Malta conference of people active in educational research outside the Mediterranean region notably in sub-Saharan Africa, some of whom were at the conference. This point is quite significant in that it connects with Pampanini's efforts to broaden the organisation of comparative education world-wide by engaging in and helping set up the African Society of

Comparative Education. As the text of his address will show, his vision for comparative education is an all-encompassing global one. In an age when cynicism is rife, it is good to have people like MESCE's first President around, a person who assiduously continues to act on his possible dreams. Paulo Freire, who constantly exhorted us to dream the possible dream, would have been proud of him.

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