

Chapter Seventeen

The Political Construction of European Education Space

António Teodoro

In recent decades, nation-states have responded in various ways to the challenges of the development process known as globalization.¹ One such way was the creation of regional blocs and entities, based on multilateral agreements between states. The European Union is one of the more advanced institutional forms in this area, implementing a wide range of interventions that involve an increasingly more active supranational role in all political, economic, and social spheres.²

THE POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF EUROPE

Although the idea of a united Europe began to form in the early twentieth century, when capitalist states transformed into liberal democracies, the World War II ushered in new forms of relationships among European states. In 1949, the Council of Europe was founded with the aims of both 1) overcoming the difficulties caused by military conflicts and 2) joining the European nations in common endeavors. The countries at the center of this united Europe, with the approval of their various constitutions, adopted the form of democratic and lawful states, based on Keynesian economic policies. The state acquired an interventionist character in economic and social spheres committed to ensuring the social rights of citizens—among them the right to education.

In the 1950s, Europe entered a phase of rapid economic development as well as extensive migratory movements. This situation favored cooperation with other sectors of society, notably education and culture. The importance of creating a European identity was closely tied to granting political rights to citizens at the European level.

In the 1980s, integration of new member states involved not just mere cooperation, but enhancing the interdependence of sovereign states. There also were initiatives to overcome the technocratic and bureaucratic image of a distant supranational governing body, which had hitherto prevailed. In addition to the free movement of individuals and goods, there were efforts to create a communal, European spirit, based on cooperation in the cultural and educational sectors.

With the approval of the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992, the evolution of the European Union assumed sharply federalist contours.³ This process of building the European Union, since the Treaties in early 1951 to the Constitutional Treaty of Lisbon in 2007, corresponded to different, complex and contradictory perspectives and interests. Implementation was done in a nonlinear way—with returns, drifts, adjustments and abrupt spiking. The origin of the European Economic Community, as part of the post-Second World War process, responded to the need to *normalize* relations among European nations, while at the same time strengthening the economies of European countries to be more competitive internationally.

Alongside the promotion of conditions that protected a lasting peace in Europe, the Union was also designed to contain the possibility of *instability* resulting from the increased participation and influence of the working classes in the political reality of Post-War Europe. Efforts also were needed to counter the attractiveness of the Soviet model of development—all of this in the context of a Cold War between the forces of capitalism and communism.

As designed by social democratic and Christian democratic elites, the European project first sought a compromise aimed at the general welfare: full employment and the creation of middle class majorities. Such initiatives were based on private property and the operations of a free market—all within a framework of a welfare state.

At the same time, European resistance arose to contest the conditions in which capital was accumulated—particularly with regard to the increasing benefits accruing to North American corporate interests. Both European capitalists and social democrats (advocates of the welfare state) sought to counterbalance an international economic framework in which the dollar was the primary reference point of financial transactions and in which North American products, businesses, and interests prevailed.

Treaties thus gave support to a vision essentially “neo-mercantilist,” one which defended the creation of a large domestic market, protected from external competition, and the strengthening of European companies in international markets.

The neo-mercantilist vision, it is argued, underpinned the initial drive towards the creation of the European single market and Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). For neo-mercantilists, a European competitiveness gap vis-a-vis the rest of the world was attributed to fragmented markets, a related inability to fully exploit economies of scale in production, and insufficient investment in research and technology. (For neoliberals, the problems were—and still are—more likely to be attributed to factors such as inflexible labour markets, and unsustainable and work-discouraging welfare states.) As van Appeldoorn documents, the neo-mercantilist project was closer to a “resistance” than “open” model of regionalism.⁴

However, the evolution of the global economic system and the substantial change in world conditions significantly influenced the development of the European process and its reconfiguration. As institutionalized, the European Union of twenty-seven countries has become more than just a regional body based on a specific model that combines articulated economic progress and social rights. This emergent model has been especially prominent since the late 1990s. It is an integral part of the global hegemonic neoliberal process. Despite the inherent tensions and contradictions,

the European Union (EU) constitutes itself as a disciplinary element, aiming at 1) accelerating the shaping of legislation and national practices to the guidelines of neo-liberalism, 2) acting aggressively to liberalize international markets in order to accommodate the interests of dominant economic groups, and 3) facilitating European participation in education policies based on trends related to the creation of a “knowledge economy.”

These developments do not mean that the EU works today in a monolithic way and according to a “pure” model of capital accumulation, without *nuances* or contradictions. Rather, neoliberalism has become the dominant paradigm in the European Union. Thus, it is much more about tensions between this new regime of accumulation and the previous regimes centered in the so-called European social model, resulting from the social democratic project of the Keynesian era.⁵ Influential philosophers such as German Jürgen Habermas, and French Jacques Derrida, and German sociologist Ulrich Beck emphasize that—despite neoliberal hegemony—the EU can still be a space where an increased attention to the social model of welfare and solidarity prevails, with a strong participation of citizens in defense of their rights and democratic politics.⁶

THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION OF EDUCATION

In the aforementioned decades, the development of building the European economic-political space has been reflected in the way educational issues are addressed in supranational and national plans.

In the early twentieth century, these functions were assigned to education systems: social control and reproduction, regime legitimation, human resources production, and citizenship formation. Simultaneously, education served as an agency for social mobility.⁷ Within nation-states education also was a fundamental mechanism for creating a national identity by making invisible local and regional languages and cultures and downplaying overarching European as well as international loyalties and commitments. Furthermore, national educational systems were used to assimilate immigrant cultures, to encourage patriotic values, to promote established religious doctrines, to disseminate the standardized norm of the national language, to generalize new patterns and rational forms of thought, to inculcate moral discipline and, especially, to indoctrinate according to the creeds and economic policies of the ruling classes.⁸

After World War II, education was assigned new roles and functions, including the consolidation of a democratic political system, the reduction of social inequalities and—more importantly—the formation of manpower needed for the economic reconstruction of Europe devastated by war.⁹ Global reforms of educational systems were undertaken in practically all countries. Education reforms as well as those social and political related to citizenship rights, however, were not a principal focus of the European Treaty of Paris in 1951 and that of Rome in 1957. Education remained under the sole responsibility of each member state of the European Communities.¹⁰

Education, as a European-wide subject of regulation, did not emerge until the 1970s and specifically with regard to issues of vocational training.¹¹ Community authorities

recognized the existence of a “European dimension in education,” but always preserved the diversity and traditions of the national educational systems of member states. The concern not to harmonize and interfere with the politics of education in each state contrasts markedly with the first proposals for supranational governance of European education.¹²

The 1990s heralded deliberate mechanisms of supranational regulation of education.¹³ The Treaty of Maastricht, which entered into effect in 1992, had profound implications for the process of European integration. In this Treaty, educational issues received a more explicit and detailed attention, assigning to the European Community (Articles 126 and 127) the role of contributing to the development of a quality education. However, these articles excluded any process of restructuring the organization of educational systems of member states.

At the time, the European dimension in education was to be achieved through student, teacher, and researcher exchange programs as well as the increased mobility of workers from member states. All of these efforts aimed at building a meaningful European citizenship. In 1997, the approval of the Treaty of Amsterdam—while maintaining the same articles on education—extended the rights of citizenship. Active citizenship was considered a key element for the construction of Europe.

The need for free movement of services, goods, and capital has reinforced the parallel need for mobility of workers. As a consequence, the need to achieve comparability between qualifications and the educational systems of member states increased. This led to the standardization and harmonization of qualifications in vocational training, as well as the creation of equivalent educational standards and European standards of occupational qualifications. As noted by Hirtt, the emergence of initiatives to “harmonize” education policies emerged as a progressive implementation of the recommendations made since 1989 by the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT), a think tank composed of approximately 45 of the most powerful leaders of European industry.

Between 1997 and 2000, the EU intervention (based on Article 149 of the Treaty of Maastricht) sought to legitimize common European education policy from a flexible and vague concept of “quality.” The “sixteen quality indicators,” published in 2000 (two months after the approval of the Lisbon Strategy), embodied further steps to evaluate the efficient functioning of national systems, while respecting supra-nationally defined referents by the EU.

Over time, several structures, mechanisms, and processes have contributed to the extending EU regulation of education and training. The development and impact of EU programs provide strong evidence of the “Europeanization” of national education systems.

EDUCATION AT THE CENTER OF THE LISBON STRATEGY

With the formalization of the Lisbon Strategy a new phase emerged.¹⁴ As described above, the issues of education and training acquired centrality in EU policies. Priority areas of intervention were established, and an articulated program and strategy of

action were defined. These processes deepened the process of educational integration, other than that expressly provided for in the Treaty.

Roger Dale has identified three phases (or stages) of development of the European Education Area (EEA): phase I refers to any period prior to the Lisbon summit in 2000, phase II covers the time period between 2000 and 2005, and phase III, from that date on. The systematization, synthesized in Table 17.1, helps illuminate the evolution and dynamics of the dominant priorities.¹⁵

In the period between 2000 and 2004, working groups of experts were created, the program “Education and Training 2010” started and the “open method of coordination” (OMC) was implemented. This acceleration of the construction of the European educational area had contradictory aspects and tensions that prevented immediate achievement of desired outcomes.

The “Education and Training 2010” program (preparations for it began in 1999) provided a set of objectives to be adopted by specific member states for their education and training system. Detailed work programs were issued, with indicators and benchmarks for future monitoring of the implementation of the program. In November 2003, the European Commission published “Education and Training 2010: Success of Lisbon” in which strategy hinges on urgent reforms. This document was to have a strong impact on educational policies throughout the EU. In it, Vivian Reding, European Commissioner for Education, analyzed national education policies and outcomes related to achieving knowledge economies.¹⁶ (She listed priorities for the following years and proposed control mechanisms to ensure that each member state respected them.)

Although political community intervention in the educational area had been declared as early as the 1980s, with action programs set in motion in the 1990s (ones with delineation of national boundaries), it was not until the mid-2000s that something unprecedented occurred. As stated by Fátima Antunes:

What we witness at this unprecedented moment is the establishment of a formal and explicit level of supranational governance as a locus of affiliation of the policies to develop at educational and training systems. These initiatives thus represent an attempt to build a systematic process of articulation of national educational and training policies around common priorities and objectives, and agreed and congruent or convergent with goals and strategies defined at EU level. It could be said that the previous stages, pursued in the three last decades, have allowed the slow gestation of the Europeanization process that now rehearses its maturity [translated.]¹⁷

THE OPEN METHOD OF COORDINATION (OMC)

The choice of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and the stated “reasons” are significant for understanding the political context that defines the guidelines adopted in the EU. The OMC—suggested by the European Council in Lisbon in 2000—initiated a new style of working relationship between the EU and member states, as well as among the member states, to achieve the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy (2000–2010). The OMC was applied in such diverse fields as economics, education and training, social

Table 17.1. Stages of Development of the European Education (Dale, 2008)

	<i>Governance</i>	<i>Mechanisms</i>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Europe</i>
Phase 1—Pre-Lisbon (until 2000)	Working Groups of Member States	Indicators	Common conception of education	Coordinator of national experiences/ defining “quality”
Phase 2—Lisbon (2000–2005)	OMC (Open Method of Coordination)	Benchmarks, best practices	Identification of common problems and policy coordination, different means	Orchestrator of a functional division and scale of educational governance
PHASE 3—post-Lisbon mid-term review (2005–. . .)	Single frame of reference (LLL—Lifelong learning)	Goals (eg, investment)	Common objectives, common pathway	Creator of new European sectors “Social Policy” and “Common knowledge”

protection, poverty, environment, technology, research, and the information society. This transnational form of work organization was based on guidelines expressed by benchmarks (reference values) and indicators created in response to the challenges of globalization. Such benchmarks were implemented so that national policies, within a process of “Europeanization,” might contribute to making the EU the “most competitive and dynamic economy in the world.”

The role of Member States, guided by national experts, involve sharing best practices, negotiate the benchmarks to be integrated in National Action Plans, and undertake mutual training programs. The European Commission assumes responsibility for turning guidelines into indicators and evaluating the performance of member states.

The OMC introduced a rupture in the mechanisms that theretofore were used to manage the processes of transfer of powers to the EU. Certain fields, including social policy, involved the “Community Method” (CM). The CM was expressed in various forms: legislation, directives, and European regulations. Lack of clarity in the distribution of powers between member states and the EU created all types of implementation and management issues. Today, integration of policy is governed less by means of law than by a coordination based on common political orientations and shared interests of member states.

As a case in point: In education, those responsible for changes in occupational training policies work together to share relevant knowledge. They are less concerned with laws than they are with various mechanisms and technologies that contribute to innovation, autonomy, flexibility, and entrepreneurship.¹⁸

At the same time, the OMC organizes and gives coherence to this form of governance in the form of political guidance and of monitoring at a supranational level, promoting the homogenization of European policies and their implementation. Monitoring, evaluation, and legal pressure—although not punitive—actually functions as a mechanism for convergence.

FABRICATING EUROPE THROUGH EDUCATION

In the debate about “fabricating Europe,” Ronald Sultana drew attention to the convergence between the main education agendas set by the EU guidelines and the recommendations produced by the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT)¹⁹:

In March 1995, [. . .] ERT published a report entitled *Education for Europeans: towards the learning society*. Two years later, the EU released a White Paper entitled *Teaching and Learning: towards the learning society*. In 1997, ERT published *Investing in Knowledge: the integration of technology in European education*. This was echoed by a document put out by the European Commission that very same year, with the title *Towards a Europe of Knowledge*. The similarity of agendas is more than skin-deep, indicating a tightly woven policy network that extends at all levels of education, higher levels included.²⁰

According to Dale, changes in the nature of European educational policy based on goals and criteria of effectiveness with shared responsibilities—subject to strategies of

economic policy—constituted a new understanding of “subsidiarity.” These changes also created a new “European Space for Education” based on a division of labor in educational governance.²¹

This European Space frames its vision of education on international standards, including those set by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). For Martin Lawn, this new transnational governance structure is the symbolic expression of the legitimization of power of capital, free from the limits of the nation-state.²² It is not totally free, because the EU education agenda necessarily must be filtered through different sensitivities of member states. For policy analysts and comparative educators, Sultana’s question is most relevant: Who wins and who loses in this new European space?²³

Which populations will benefit from shifts in education policy? Dale believes that in the current third phase of education strategy development the focus of EU education policies will be on Life Long Learning (LLL).²⁴ This is understood as an integrative program of all education and training policies.

In February 2004, following the “Kok Report” on the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy, the European Council and Commission produced the document “The Success of Lisbon Strategy Hinges on Urgent Reforms.” It states, “much remains to be done in such a short time,” since all reports and indicators point to the same conclusion: “If we are to achieve the objectives in education and training, the pace of reform must be accelerated. There are still too many weaknesses that limit the potential of development of the EU.” They also suggest there is a significant delay by the EU in what concerns its “competitors”—especially in higher education—and that “there are still many warning signs.”²⁵

In this context, the Council and the Commission considered it necessary to pursue the Lisbon Strategy with much greater determination on three major axes: 1) focus reform and investment in key areas, 2) make lifelong learning a reality, and 3) build a Europe of Education and Training.

The interim report was subsequently approved in 2006 under the title “Modernizing Education and Training: A Vital Contribution to Prosperity and Social Cohesion in Europe.” This document analyzed the progress made in implementing the program “Education and Training 2010” and concluded there was a need to “accelerate the pace of reforms to ensure a more effective contribution to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy and development of the European social model.”²⁶ In this context, member states and the Commission agreed on a set of measures to increase effectiveness of the implementation of the education and training program.

Despite its complexity and the tensions that it generates, the EU lacked a pressing need to change the legal framework that forms these integrative processes. Thus, the Treaty of Lisbon, adopted at the European Council in late 2007, provided an institutional framework apparently identical to that already set by the previous Treaties (Articles 149 and 150) related to education and training. The Treaty of Lisbon is a complicated legal puzzle that is difficult to understand. However at least in terms of education, the treaty repeats the perspectives and formulations already extant in the previous project of the European Constitution.

Despite the limited nature of the changes introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon in education, it also created possibilities that were not available until now. As Louis Weber has warned, there may be greater concerns in the area of international trade, where formulations are less accurate and unanimity is no longer necessary for the adoption of trade rules, including social services, education, and health.²⁷

In fact, new wording of the articles concerning common commercial policy facilitates the performance capacity of the European Union in international trade. Of special concern is that the new wording changed trade rules with regard to education. Up to the present, the EU could only establish international trade agreements on issues of education and training if there was unanimous approval of member states. However, the Treaty of Lisbon ushered in the possibility to conclude these agreements based on a majority decision of the Council. Trade agreements pose serious problems for member states in the realm of education and social services. The ability to govern and organize their national education systems is constricted by EU agreements that turn education into a commodity traded on the international market. This is known as the “liberalization” of education and it is a key component of the neoliberal agenda that accompanies the forces of globalization.

FINAL REMARKS

The neoliberal globalization has accentuated the competition between the different regions of the world system. Education (including higher education), training, and research have become, from the European side, privileged stages of this competition, in the frame of the perspective pointed by the Lisbon Strategy of turning the EU into the most competitive economy in the world.

In higher education, the so-called Bologna process has developed in this context. Being initially the result of an intergovernmental agreement of cooperation between the ministers of higher education of four states (France, UK, Italy, and Germany), worried about the loss of capacity of European universities to attract students in face of its U.S. counterparts, the Bologna process, soon opened to other states, not just from the EU, but also to other European countries and peripheral regions²⁸ (note about the totality of the countries that participated in the Bologna process), under the coordination of the European institutions that, rapidly, saw in this process the way to establish the necessary conditions for the emergence of a new sociopolitical space of higher education in Europe, the so-called “European Higher Education Area” (EHEA).²⁹

The European Commission redefined in 2010 the orientations and objectives considered in the Lisbon summit, pointing towards a (new) strategy for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth. In that strategy, known by the acronym “Europe 2020,” the following EU headline targets are proposed:

75 percent of the population aged 20–64 should be employed.
3 percent of the EU’s GDP should be invested in R&D.

The “20/20/20” climate/energy targets should be met (including an increase to 30 percent of emissions reduction if the conditions are right).

The share of early school leavers should be under 10 percent and at least 40 percent of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree.

20 million less people should be at risk of poverty.³⁰

The definition of these targets has accentuated, in the EU, the dependency from education policies, training, and research of what’s defined as “a social market economy for the twenty-first century,”³¹ to what should be added the OECD’s omnipresence in setting the agenda and problem definers.

Immediately before the 2008 international economic crisis, Europe could be considered an institutional space of experimentation—one that enjoyed enormous prestige around the world. For Goran Theborn, Europe—a center of world commerce boasting 40 percent of the world exports—was widely considered as pioneering in several fields, from law to politics.³² Throughout the process that Nóvoa and Lawn named “fabricating Europe,” the EU was not only constructing a European Space of Education, but also creating a new European model of education.³³ This model had implications well beyond Europe itself. Suddenly the state debts that exploded in 2010–2011 curtailed the assertiveness that Europe was expressing as a “normative area,” Europe entered a precipitous downward spiral leading to a global crisis of the EU itself—in which the survival of the Euro zone became the central issue.

The European Space of Education, as constituted at the beginning of this century, reflected a new political space strongly stimulated by European institutions (and generally accepted by national governments). It was run by experts and bureaucrats in a persuasive and gentle way and depoliticized by the use of standards and comparative statistics. The OECD agenda, which the EU accepted as its own, constructed a political space that facilitated the emergence of multiple networks. These networks range from schools and universities to research centers encompassing important and extensive transnational flows of people (students, teachers, researchers), ideas and practices crisscrossing the borders of the Member States. These networks also attracted (mostly) students from other regions.

This is a time of profound skepticism about the future of the European project. Some scholars insist that Europe needs to be more European: ideally, democratic, communitarian, able to balance successfully the unity and diversity of human expectations and experiences within the variety of cultures of free peoples.³⁴ In this idealized context, what is the meaning of the evolution of educational issues in the EU? Contradictory tendencies coexist: on the one hand, there is the centralization and strengthening of the EU involving the harmonization of education policies, but on the other hand, there are strong movements favoring deregulation and privatization of public social services, including education and health.

What policies will emerge from this tension? Will possible progressive agendas bring to the foreground the emancipatory dimensions of the educational process? Research in the area of public policy—and educational agenda as actors in general—highlights the need for special attention to issues raised by this chapter and the various chapters in this volume.

NOTES

The Portuguese original was translated to English by Maria Manuel Calvet Ricardo.

1. This chapter closely follows work performed within the project “Educating the Global Citizen: Globalization, Educational Reform and the Politics of Equity and Inclusion in 12 Countries. The Portuguese case” (Ref POCI/CED/56992/2004 and PPCDT/CED/56992/2004) and the *Rede Iberoamericana de Investigação em Políticas de Educação—RIAIPE* (Ibero—American Network for Research in Education Policy). Thanks to Fatima Marques, Graça Anibal, and Vasco B. Graça, my doctoral students, who—with their work and refined critical sense—have greatly contributed to the knowledge of these new modes of regulation of educational policies in Europe. Finally, I would like to thank Robert Arnove, Carlos A. Torres, and Rolf Straubhaar for their suggestions on a previous version of this chapter.

2. Present name. In 1951, in Paris, the treaty establishing the Economic Community for Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was signed; in 1957, the Treaty of Rome designated this regional entity as European Economic Community (EEC) and, in 1992, the Treaty of Maastricht adopted the present name of European Union (EU).

3. Present name. In 1951, in Paris, the treaty establishing the Economic Community for Coal and Steel Community.

4. Storey, 2004.

5. Mitchell, 2004.

6. Habermas and Derrida, 2008; Beck, 1992.

7. The educational system was, up to that moment, based on a dual system: the lower classes received minimal training limited to primary education to be good subjects, while the upper classes had access to secondary education (high school) and the university, in order to effectively govern the State. See Starkie, 2006.

8. Green 1994.

9. Starkie, 2006.

10. Ertl, 2006; Nóvoa, 1998.

11. Novoa, 1998.

12. Starkie, 2006.

13. Hirtt, 2005. More detailed information on the objectives of this informal forum, and how their promoters self-rate themselves, can be found here: <http://www.ert.be/home.aspx>.

14. During the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, the Heads of State and Government launched a strategy called “Lisbon,” with the aim of making the European Union (EU) the most competitive economy in the world while achieving the goal of full employment by 2010. Developed in several subsequent European Councils, this strategy rests on three pillars: 1) an economic pillar preparing the transition to a competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy, 2) a social pillar which should facilitate the modernization of the Europe social model—investing in people and combating social exclusion, and 2) an environmental pillar, added at the European Council in Göteborg in June 2011.

15. Dale, 2008.

16. Hirtt, 2005.

17. Antunes, 2005: 129–30.

18. EU Commission, 2002; and Novoa, 2002.

19. Nóvoa and Lawn, 2002.

20. Sultana, 2002: 122.

21. Dale, 2008.

22. Lawn, 2002.

23. Sultana, 2002.
24. Dale, 2008.
25. EU Council, 2004.
26. EU Council, 2006.
27. Weber, 2003.
28. In April 2012 the following were members of the Bologna Process—European Higher Education Area: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium (Flemish and French communities), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Holly See, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.
29. See Sarah Croché, 2009.
30. European Commission, 2010.
31. Idem, p. 5.
32. Therborn, 2002.
33. Nóvoa and Lawn, 2002.
34. Beck and Grande, 2007; Habermas, 2001; Giddens, 2007.

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Fourth Edition

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A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowman.com

10 Thornbury Road, Plymouth PL6 7PP, United Kingdom


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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Insert CIP data

™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

Introduction: Reframing Comparative Education: The Dialectic of the Global and the Local <i>Robert F. Arnove</i>	1
1 Technocracy, Uncertainty, and Ethics: Comparative Education in an Era of Postmodernity and Globalization <i>Anthony Welch</i>	27
2 Institutionalizing International Influence <i>Joel Samoff</i>	55
3 The State, Social Movements, and Educational Reform <i>Raymond A. Morrow and Carlos Alberto Torres</i>	89
4 Culture and Education <i>Vandra Lea Masemann</i>	113
5 The Question of Identity from a Comparative Education Perspective <i>Christine Fox</i>	133
6 Equality of Education: Six Decades of Comparative Evidence Seen from a New Millennium <i>Joseph P. Farrell</i>	149
7 Women's Education in the Twenty-First Century <i>Nelly P. Stromquist</i>	175
8 Control of Education: Issues and Tensions in Centralization and Decentralization <i>Mark Bray</i>	201
9 A Theory of Literacies for Considering the Role of Adult and Community Education in Postcolonial Change <i>Anne Hickling-Hudson</i>	223

10	The Political Economy of Educational Reform in Australia, Britain, and the United States	247
	<i>Edward H. Berman, Jack Keating, Rosemary Preston, Penny Burke, Richard Van Heertum, and Robert F. Arnove</i>	
11	Higher Education in the Era of Globalization: Toward a Heteronomous Model?	293
	<i>Daniel Schugurensky</i>	
12	Education in Latin America: From Dependency and Neoliberalism to Alternative Paths to Development	315
	<i>Robert F. Arnove, Stephen Franz, and Carlos Alberto Torres</i>	
13	Education in the Asia-Pacific Region: Some Enduring Challenges	341
	<i>John N. Hawkins</i>	
14	Higher Education in the Middle East	369
	<i>Shabana Mir</i>	
15	Education in Eastern and Central Europe: Re-Thinking Post-Socialism in the Context of Globalization	379
	<i>Iveta Silova and Ben Eklof</i>	
16	Education for All in Africa: Not Catching Up, but Setting the Pace	403
	<i>Joel Samoff with Bidemi Carrol</i>	
17	The Political Construction of European Education Space	445
	<i>António Teodoro</i>	
18	Comparative Education: The Dialectics of Globalization and Its Discontents	459
	<i>Carlos Alberto Torres</i>	
	Index	485
	About the Contributors	000