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Nordic Internationalists' Contribution to the Field of Comparative and International Education

Abstract

This paper stems from a PhD dissertation research focusing on the Nordic representatives' contribution to the field of comparative and international education (CIE) since the middle of the 20th century to the present days. Following the idea of the clear-cut distinction between the two component parts of the field in the region in question, the purpose of this study is to identify and point out the key achievements of six Nordic internationalists in the field of CIE from Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark. Firstly, they are regarded as a group which collaborated and rallied around the Nordic Association for the Study of Education in Developing Countries (NASEDEC) for nearly 20 years. In this respect, the crucial role of the national donor agencies, which assist developmental aid to education in financing and promoting international research, is examined. Secondly, the work and research activities of the internationalists under review are analyzed in order to find the individual contributions to the field and their prevailing characteristics. Thus, by making an attempt at searching for the internationalists' scientific achievements, the author finds what the applied development of the field of CIE in the Nordic countries looks like.

Keywords: developing countries, donor agency, education for development, internationalist, Nordic, practice

Introduction

The Nordic countries, i.e. Denmark, Finland, Norway Sweden and Iceland, "have much in common, historically, culturally and linguistically. They have had a common labour market and strong co-operation in many areas for many years" (Fägerlind & Strömqvist, 2004). The field of CIE is not an exception from that. Bearing in mind the fact that Nordic countries have small territories and population, they have comparatively small institutions, units or sections involved in CIE (Daun, 2009). Consequently, Nordic scholars need to co-operate with each other, although Iceland has never or rarely had any representation in the regional forms of co-operation, which is the reason to exclude it from this study. At the same time, Nordic countries are internationally recognized for their "high levels of democracy, education, income and public wealth" (Holmarsdottir & O'Dowd, 2009), obliging them to be committed to development co-operation mirrored in the support of many of the world's poorest countries (ibid.).

From the 1960s onwards when the Nordic parliaments passed their first acts on developmental aid and established their national donor agencies to administer it, there has been observed an upsurge in the international research activities in this region. They have been carried out by professionals from the Nordic countries interested in promoting education for development mainly in the Third World countries and the countries in transition commissioned by the donor agencies. Daun (2009, p. 291) asserts that "people with direct experience from development work in the South are well represented here". The focal point of the Nordic internationalists

is NASEDEC. Six prominent internationalists from the Nordic countries have been selected and their contributions have been identified in relation to their participation in NASEDEC and research involvement with the donor agencies. Furthermore, each of the selected internationalists' contribution is given by briefly outlining a few areas of scientific achievement in the field of CIE in order to find their uniqueness of perspectives and practices.

Nordic Association for the Study of Education in Developing Countries (NASEDEC)

From among the four Nordic organizations which are associated with the field of CIE throughout the region, NASEDEC is the oldest and the one which has had the most members and activity (Brock-Utne & Skinningsrud, 2013). It was established in 1981 at the University of Oslo "to serve, according to its statutes, as a forum for contact and exchange of experience between researchers, students and practitioners from the Nordic countries [...], to promote teaching and research on education in developing countries, and to serve as a point of contact for non-Nordic institutions and individuals" (Takala, 1996, p. 1). The formation of this association comes in response to the intensified interest of the internationally oriented scholars from the four Nordic countries in the educational development aid to developing countries. This interest arises partially from the international Six Subject Survey (1966-1973), which has been conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), whose chairman at that time was Torsten Husén, a professor at Stockholm University. It is not surprisingly, then, to say that he was the first president of NASEDEC, followed by his successor Ingemar Fägerlind. In addition, NASEDEC represents a clear indication of specialization in educational development taking place by the late 1970s not only in this region, but also worldwide. According to Chabbott (1998, p. 214), "the study of developing countries has occupied considerable space in major CIE journals and conferences leading to the establishment of at least one specialized journal", called the *International Journal of Educational Development (IJED)* founded in the same year as the Nordic association. NASEDEC becomes a synonym of organizing conferences as the uppermost form of activity, claims Takala (1996). A large number of the Nordic international development professionals publish their field-related articles on IJED pages (Buchert, 1994; Brock-Utne, 1995; Lauglo, 1996; Takala & Piattoeva, 2012; etc.) and/or are members of its editorial board (Jon Lauglo since 1995; Holger Daun since 2004; etc.).

The internationalists form the backbone of NASEDEC and some of them are also members of its governing board. Simultaneously, they are associated with other organizations such as the IIEP of UNESCO, Paris, The Centre for the Study of Education in Developing Countries, Hague, The World Bank, etc., thus facilitating the co-operation with potential invited speakers at NASEDEC conferences organized in rotation every year. In an interview with Brock-Utne (September, 2015) she explains that the development agency in the country where the conference is hosted always comes up with a good grant for researchers from the developing countries to attend the conferences. The region of the world which receives the most research attention on the part of the Nordic internationalists and where the majority of the participants from the developing countries come from is the Sub-Saharan

Africa including Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, Botswana, etc. This is also the region which receives the biggest share of Nordic development aid to education through the national aid agencies.

Having analyzed the probable connections of the Nordic internationalists with NASEDEC, their participation in the Association conferences and published reports, the findings show that their contribution could be viewed separately into two areas: 1) managerial and/or organizational activity; 2) NASEDEC conference participation in the form of seminar report/paper presentations and/or editing NASEDEC conference proceedings.

In relation to the first area the following examples can be mentioned:

- a) Ingemar Fägerlind succeeded Torsten Husén to the position of president of NASEDEC.
- b) Birgit Brock-Utne was a member of the governing board of NASEDEC from 1994 to 1999. She was charge of organizing NASEDEC conference held in 1995 at Agricultural University of Norway, Ås, Norway on the topic "The Role of Aid in Implementing Education for All".
- c) Jon Lauglo was a member of the governing board of NASEDEC between 1981 and 1982 and 1985 and 1990. He was a member of the organising committee of the 1995 annual conference of NASEDEC. He was actively involved in planning the conferences of NASEDEC in 1981 and 1982.
- d) Tuomas Takala was the president of NASEDEC between 1994 and 1996 and a member of the governing board between 1991 and 1994.
- e) Lene Buchert was a member of the governing board for 12 years from 1984 to 1996 and co-organized all the conferences held in Denmark.

Four conference proceedings containing seminar reports or papers written by the Nordic internationalists have been analyzed in order to point out only a small part of their merits in the second area. The publications in the conference proceedings come as a result of the Nordic internationalists' participation in NASEDEC conferences given below the proceedings. They are the following:

1. Buchert, L. (Ed.) (1992): *Education and Training in the Third World: the Local Dimension*. Hague: Centre for the Study of Education in Developing Countries.

Participation in 1991 NASEDEC conference in Hornbaek, Denmark.

2. Takala, T. (Ed.) (1994): *Quality of Education in the Context of Culture in Developing Countries*. Department of Education, University of Tampere, Report Series B, nr. 12, 1994.

Participation in 1994 NASEDEC conference in Tampere, Finland.

3. Brock-Utne, B. & Nagel, T. (Eds.) (1996): *The Role of Aid in the Development of Education for All*. University of Oslo. Institute for Educational Research.

Participation in 1995 NASEDEC conference in Ås, Norway.

4. Malberg, L., Hansén, S. & Heino, K. (Eds.) (2000): *Basic Education for All: a Global Concern for Quality*. Åbo Akademi University.

Participation in 2000 NASEDEC conference in Vasa, Finland.

In addition, the book *Education Reform in the South in the 1990s* (1998) edited by Lene Buchert was published in co-operation between NASEDEC and UNESCO.

The following publications by the sixth Nordic internationalists are examples of their research activities included in the NASEDEC conference proceedings.

- a) Ingemar Fägerlind & Holger Daun (1992): *The Context for Educational Policy-Making by the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) and Its Educational Cooperation with Tanzania*. In Buchert, L. (Ed.) (1992).
- b) Birgit Brock-Utne (2000): *African Languages in the Area of Globalization*. In Malberg, L., Hansén, S. & Heino, K. (Eds.) (2000).
- c) Jon Lauglo (1992): *Policy Issues in Vocational Training*. In Buchert, L. (Ed.) (1992).
- d) Holger Daun (1994): *Holistic Education, Quality and Technocratic Criteria of Competence – Cases from Guinea-Bissau and Senegal*. In Takala, T. (Ed.) (1994).
- e) Tuomas Takala (1994): *Equity and National Unity vs. Cultural Diversity in the Educational Reform of Independent Namibia – the Long Shadow of Apartheid*. In Takala, T. (Ed.) (1994).
- f) Lene Buchert (1995): *The Concept of Education for All – What Has Happened after Jomtien?* In Brock-Utne, B. & Nagel, T. (Eds.) (1995).

After NASEDEC existence for nearly 20 years “the conservative government which took over in Denmark at the beginning of the new millennium did not want to grant money for NASEDEC, and made cuts in the development aid budget. At that time the NASEDEC secretariat was based in Denmark. The organization never recovered from this blow” (Brock-Utne & Skinningsrud, 2008, p. 116).

Four Nordic national aid agencies

Most of the research-related activities of the Nordic internationalists who are members of NASEDEC are commissioned and financed by the Nordic national aid agencies. They are SIDA or Sida (since 1995) (Sweden), NORAD (Norway), FINNIDA (Finland) and DANIDA (Denmark). O’Dowd, Winther-Jensen & Wikander (2015) claim that “the economic contributions of the Nordic countries in general are above the UN recommended 0.7% of the GNP with Norway and Sweden as the highest contributors” adding the figures of Norway and Sweden: 0.94%, Denmark: 0,81%, and Finland: 0.46% of the GNP. The world-known generosity of the Nordic aid agencies, especially those of Sweden and Norway, has led to the establishment of the firm positions of the Institute of Education, University of Oslo, Norway and the Institute of International Education (IIE), University of Stockholm, Sweden, which are regarded to be “the Nordic centres of developmental education from the 1980s and onwards” (ibid). The four Nordic aid agencies share the mutual goal of reducing the level of poverty in developing countries and in this way they contribute to a better global development.

The connection of the Nordic internationalists with the aid agencies could be found in their employment position within their organization: the ones who have worked with SIDA/Sida and NORAD “have been employed within the education divisions of the agencies” in contrast to the other ones associated with DANIDA and FINNIDA who have occupied the positions of education advisors (Takala, 1996). They combine these activities with playing the roles of either team leaders, consultants and/or evaluators of agencies’ support to the education sector or international projects, maintaining their university positions, which leads to what

Kenneth King (1995, p. 10) term “multiple roles of academics”. SIDA/Sida is the most active aid agency in respect to providing a platform for publishing the research studies of the internationalists through the series “SIDA Education Division Documents” and later since 2002 “Sida: New Education Division Documents”.

There can be mentioned only a few of the numerous studies and evaluations of the Nordic internationalists commissioned by the Nordic national aid agencies:

1. Ingemar Fägerlind (1989): Supporting Zambian Education in Times of Economic Adversity, An Evaluation of Swedish-Zambian Cooperation in Education 1984-1989. Education Division Documents, No. 44.
2. Birgit Brock-Utne (1988): Education Policies for Sub-Saharan Africa: Adjustment, Revitalization and Expansion. The Bureau of Education and Scholarships for Overseas Studies. Oslo: NORAD.
3. Jon Lauglo (1991): Vocational Training in Tanzania and the Role of Swedish Support. Education Division Documents, No. 48. Stockholm: SIDA.
4. Holger Daun (1992): Neo-liberalism, Structuralism and Primary Education in Mozambique. Education Division Documents, No 58. Stockholm: SIDA.
5. Takala, T., Boesen, I., et al. (1994): Mid-term Review of the Finnish Education Sector Support Programme in Zambia. FINNIDA.
6. Lene Buchert’s contribution to the international research activities in relation to the Nordic aid agencies could be justified with the fact that she is the Nordic scholar who provides empirical evidence for the aid policies of two of the Nordic agencies in her article Education and Development: A Study of Donor Agency Policies on Education in Sweden, Holland and Denmark (1994) (interview with Lene Buchert, October, 2015). This was followed up with other publications on aid-related issues such as Recent Trends in Education Aid: Towards a Classification of Policies. Paris: UNESCO/IIEP (1995), etc.

Prominent internationalists in the Nordic countries

The criterion which has been used in this study to select the internationalists and analyze their contributions to the field of CIE is limited to the availability of scientific resources and responsiveness on their behalf. During a two-month study period at the Department of Education, University of Oslo, Norway, four out of six internationalists were interviewed in person or by phone; e-mail correspondence with the other two internationalists was maintained, data on curriculum vitae, professional development, relevant publications, etc. was gathered; their work in terms of practical research and teaching was analyzed to outline their contributions to the field of CIE.

Each of the sixth selected Nordic internationalists’ individual contribution is discussed below by outlining a few areas of scientific achievement in the field of CIE.

1. Ingemar Fägerlind’s major contribution to the field of CIE is the co-authorship of *Education and National Development: a Comparative Perspective* (1983, 1989) together with Lawrence Saha. It marks the turning point in the major activities reorientation of IIE towards the shift from the initially dominating interest in school achievements which was later gradually replaced by an interest in international education planning, especially in developing countries (Dahl &

Danielson, 2014). Moreover, this publication is placed among the most frequently assigned readings by single/first authors in the introductory comparative education course in the CIECAP database (30 universities reporting, 2003-04 and 2005-06) (Wiseman & Matherly, 2009, p. 348).

2. Birgit Brock-Utne is the founder and director of the Master's Programme in CIE at the University of Oslo, Norway from 1998 to 2008 which specializes in "Education and Development". She is also the author of the Programme main textbook *Whose Education for All? The Recolonization of the African Mind* (Brock-Utne, 2000; 2006). This reading is one of the most authoritative critical publications written by Brock-Utne and focuses on the relationships between the aid agencies and their aid recipients, the problems arising from the use of language of instruction and the phenomenon of globalization in the context of education systems in Africa.

3. Jon Lauglo's main contribution to the field of CIE lies in exploring the theme of vocational training and practical subjects particularly at secondary schools in developing countries. He uses the term "vocationalisation" of secondary education, which he defines as "curriculum change in a practical or vocational direction" (Lauglo, 1988, p. 3). According to him, the major purpose of "vocationalisation" is the improvement of vocational relevance to education, which is achieved by introducing vocational or practical subjects as a minor portion of the students' timetable during the secondary school course and the most important reason why governments introduce this type of training.

4. Holger Daun's contribution to the field of CIE could be restricted to dealing with the theme of globalization and educational reconstruction in line with the definition of the phenomenon proposed by Phillips & Schweisfurth (2014, p. 63), who claim it to have "enormous implications for the field of CIE", "education internationally" and which now "has become a subject of research and much discussion in itself". One of the most ambitious project of Daun as an editor in this direction is the publication *Educational Restructuring in the Context of Globalization and National Policy* (2002).

5. Tuomas Takala is in charge of the university course Education in Developing Countries: Problems and Possible Solutions and the research group International Perspectives on Educational Discourses, Policies and Practices, School of Education, University of Tampere, Finland. The course main objective is "to give the participants an understanding of the key educational problems in developing countries and of the efforts of these countries, as well as of development cooperation, in finding solutions to the problems" whereas the research group aims at performing interconnected studies which investigate the discursive formation of educational policies on international and local arenas and the intended and unintended effects of policies on educational practice (Takala, 2015).

6. Lene Buchert has succeeded and been coordinating the Master's Programme in CIE at the University of Oslo, Norway since 2009. In the course curriculum could be found a systematic presence of the theme of Education for All which resulted in The Jomtien Declaration. According to Buchert (1995, p. 538), it "can be seen as the culmination of international educational thinking on education in 1990 based on practices in the 1980s". The study of this particular theme and the issue of the role of numerous national aid agencies in educational development among other

important concepts correspond to her main academic interests and contribution to the field of CIE.

Conclusion

Using the matrix of four different research circumstances by Phillips & Schweisfurth (2014, pp. 67-68), in the end, I think the group of the Nordic internationalists belong to the third quadrant where “the researcher has a depth of understanding of a context which is very different from his or her own”. Consequently, the Nordic internationalists under review gain considerable competences and practical experience with education in one specific region, which is the Sub-Saharan Africa, to such an extent that the context becomes as familiar as the home situation. Thus, their research activities contribute to the practical development of the field of CIE.

In conclusion, the research and teaching activities of the Nordic internationalists substantially contribute to the professionalization of the field of CIE in their region. The grounds for claiming this is asserted by Wiseman & Matherly (2009, p. 335), who define two basic characteristics of the extent to which the field of CIE has reached professionalization: the existence of university programs and professional associations. The formation of NASEDEC and the internationalists’ involvement in it, the university programmes in CIE, their publications in *International Journal of Educational Development*, their research activities commissioned by the Nordic national aid agencies in combination with each internationalist’s unique “lenses” through which they look at development education matters all undoubtedly contribute to the professionalization of the field of CIE in the Nordic region.

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