Education and the State – Historical Perspectives on a Changing Relationship

Veranstalter: Carla Aubry / Michael Geiss / Veronika Magyar-Haas / Jürgen Oelkers, Department of Education, University of Zürich
Datum, Ort: 15.09.2011-17.09.2011, Kartause, Ittingen, Switzerland
Bericht von: Madeleine Michaëlsson, Sociology of Education and Culture (SEC), Department of Education, Uppsala University

The conference „Education and the State", dealt with the development of state educational systems from a historical perspective. Its point of departure was that a wide variety of philosophical and theoretical concepts, with different national, international and transnational backgrounds, are necessary in order to explain different institutional arrangements, expressed through laws, ordinances and programmes. The influence of both private and public sectors was considered important in order to understand the structural necessities and cultural connections within the educational system.

By way of an international comparison, MIRIAM COHEN (New York) presented „The Growth of Mass Schooling in Great Britain, France and the United States". The issue of education as a question of state development was addressed with a special focus on centralisation, decentralisation and national differences. Cohen illuminated the relationship between private initiatives and state responsibility and highlighted differences such as the redistribution of money, the improvement of state efficiency and the way education programs were implemented.

The presentation by GABRIELA OSSENBACH SAUTER (Madrid) paid attention to primary or elementary schools and focused on the question of how so-called „backward countries" such as Columbia, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina and Uruguay acted to create national identities via the school system between 1870 and 1920. The main sources for this comparative study were pedagogical and political discourses about the state's responsibility for public education and the relevance of citizenship, as well as the relation between the state and the Catholic Church. The lecture was followed by a critical discussion concerning the degree of abstraction needed for such comparative studies about different nation states with diverse political changes and legal systems.

The main issues dealt with in the study by DEIRDRE RAFERTY (Dublin) were the Church-state relation and power. In her presentation „A Hybrid People: The Irish at School, 1830–1930", she showed how the explicit political expression of schooling in Ireland was closely connected to religious and national identity. State education was managed by the national board, which was also in control of all issues such as textbooks, curricula and teacher training. Catholic and Protestant pupils were brought together, and the standardised national classroom indicated that secular education was taking place. Summing up, Raferty concluded that the heritage from this period was a confused aggregate of state dominance, influence from Britain and competing churches.

The presentation by PHILIPPE EIGENMANN (Zürich) dealt with a school reform in Zürich that was enacted in 1996 and was part of the Europe-wide autonomy policy in education that emerged in the late 1980s. Eigenmann investigated what happened at individual schools during the implementation of this reform. The analysis showed that the organisation of the reform paradoxically led to dedemocratisation and an increase in school administration. Various committees and subcommittees were set up to implement the project as well as control mechanisms needed to supervise the committees' work. Eigenmann concluded that the political promises of less administration, more decentralisation and increased participation, which had been powerful arguments during the political promotion of the reform, were not fulfilled with respect to concrete and actual practices.

In his talk on „The Exercise of Power in an Authoritarian School", THOMAS EWING (Blacksburg) examined the alleged disciplining of a girl in the Soviet Union, with a special focus on the aspect of self-disciplining. The source of his study was the diary of a young schoolgirl, written between 1932–37. Ewing illuminated the way in which power was exercised in a world of complete censorship. But

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.

the diary also reflected how far pupils undercut the official doctrines and what everyday life in Stalin's schools looked like.

JUDITH KAFKA (New York) presented a historical overview on „School Discipline Policy in the United States", which for a long time had been an unregulated matter. In the 20th century it became a far more regulated realm. Kafka reconstructed this transformation in idea and practice. Violence in urban school systems during the 1950s caused complaints and made the question a public issue. Many groups demanded more discipline at schools. However, the teachers wanted more specified rules to follow. And the state followed its already existing institutions.

In his paper on „The State of Education in the States: The Evolving Federal Role in American School Policy", PATRICK MCGUINN (Madison) dealt with the changes in American education policy between 1965 and 2011. McGuinn emphasised how the widely discussed „No Child Left Behind Act" (NCLB) meant a dramatic expansion of the federal role in education. Starting with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965, McGuinn also reconstructed NCLB's prehistory and the changes in intergovernmental relationships during the past 46 years.

The presentation by MICHAEL GEISS (Zürich) dealt with Baden's writing bureaucrats in the 19th century. He showed how educational administration was based on writing and creative writing abilities, although often it was said to be connected to narrowmindedness, ineffectiveness and power. The bureaucrats' publications dealt with a large range of subjects such as the history of education, educational administration, didactics and child psychology, and were discussed in the national teachers' press.

CARLA AUBRY (Zürich), in her presentation „Organising Equity: The Provision of Schooling and the State", focused on how resources were gained, distributed and redistributed in the town of Winterthur, Switzerland, in the 19th century. The rights to political participation were closely linked to administrative power, access to common properties and distribution of resources. The techniques of transforming material resources into the immaterial good of education were significant because they enabled educational opportunities while at the same time restricting them.

VINCENT CARPENTIER (London) analysed the relationship between public expenditure on education and economic growth in the 19th and 20th centuries from an international comparative perspective. The growth of public funding of education and the fluctuation of the public effort in relation to economic cycles reveals different patterns. Before 1945 it was countercyclical. From then on, education was seen as an investment and as being valuable for economic growth – public expenditure in politics changed from a corrective to a driving force.

The paper „Make the Nation Safe for Mass Society: Debates about Propaganda and Education in the USA in the 20th Century" by NORBERT GRUBE (Zürich) dealt with the concepts and ideas of intellectuals, philosophers, politicians, and especially mass communication researchers concerning the creation of national homogeneity or even conformity in the United States in the first half of the 20th century. In the historical context of mass society, two world wars, economic depressions and social crises in the United States, governmental propaganda was partially seen as a means to achieve national coherence. While efficiency became the new aim of pedagogy, schools and mass communication research, propaganda was regarded as a new tool to educate mass society. Grube analysed the intersections between political propaganda and education and gave an outlook on the era of the Cold War.

The contribution „Closeness and Distance in the Conceptualisation of Society" by VERONIKA MAGYAR-HAAS (Zürich) sketched the crossover of the theories of the state, social theories, and anthropological ideas. Her analysis focused on the social-philosophical approach of Helmuth Plessner. His criticism of community (1924) and his positive understanding of society were presented as an answer to the historical situation in Germany in the 1920s, but the topicality of Plessner's critique was outlined, too. Plessner's relationing of the social systematically takes the relevance of human dignity

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.

into consideration. By way of Plessner's anthropology of the open, it is possible to criticise homogenising ideas in the context of society concepts, and it assumes a heterogeneous sociality which makes it possible to recognise others by keeping distance, which was discussed under the term „education" during the talk. In this sense, the state would have an educational task, not only concerning school education but also to safeguard humane and dignified conditions.

HOLGER ZIEGLER (Bielefeld) reconstructed the transitions in the role of the state in the context of social work in the second half of the 20th century in connection with the rise of the „regulatory state". In this sense, the state regulates rather than produces welfare; it governs by directing, so that state functions are shifted from „rowing to steering". Referring to the analysis of Pat O'Malley and Christopher Pollitt, Ziegler was able to show how managerialism as a central strategy of advanced liberal policies replaced trust in professionals by organisational forms of regulation. He argued that the governing of social work in the context of the regulatory state is a mode of „management by measurement" in the sense of governing by numbers. This was a well-known phenomenon to the contributors, although they are working and researching in quite different national contexts.

The relationship of utopia, state and education was analysed by JÜRGEN OELKERS (Zürich). Starting out from social utopias in the sense of „Staatsromane", Oelkers sketched the development of utopia in terms of the history of ideas with multifaceted sources regarding ancient Greek philosophy, the utopian works produced in the Middle Ages as well as social utopias in the modern sense. In doing so, he could show how widely varied the utopian narrative is, if the research scope is not limited to the classical writers such as Morus, Campanella or Bacon. Oelkers pointed out that the concept of utopia is closely linked to ideas of better education. He argued that democracy is not a utopia but a living reality that can convince even its critics.

This very well organised and international conference offered different and exciting perspectives at many levels. The presentations demonstrated a number of ways to explore the historical implications between education and the state. Methods, theories, study designs and sources varied significantly between the surveys, which also offered an excellent base, not only for discussions on the results, but also for an epistemological debate. Research strategies varied from huge quantitative surveys to small case studies. Through this broad representation of research traditions, the studies illuminated this area of knowledge in a very rich way. It also became evident that a complex relationship, such as that between education and state, requires many different approaches to become clearer. The conference generated new research questions, such as demarcation issues concerning the state and administration, the local and the central, the need for further international comparisons and the difficulty of capturing changes over time.

Conference overview:

Jürgen Oelkers (Zürich): Opening remarks

Miriam Cohen (New York): The Growth of Mass Schooling in Great Britain, France and the United States

Gabriela Ossenbach Sauter (Madrid): State Intervention in Backward Countries: Case Studies of State Education Systems in Hispanic world

Deirdre Raferty (Dublin): A Hybrid people: The Irish at school, 1830-1930

Philippe Eigenmann (Zürich): Noble Aims, Humble Impact. Reorganizing Public Schools in Zürich, 1995-2000

Thomas Ewing (Blacksburg): The Exercise of Power in an Authoritarian School

Judith Kafka (New York): School Discipline Policy in the United States

Patrick McGuinn (Madison): The State of Education in the States: The Evolving Federal Role in American School Policy

Michael Geiss (Zürich): To Write Like a Bureaucrat: Educational Administration as an Intellectual Phenomenon

Carla Aubry (Zürich): Organising Equity: The

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.

Provision of Schooling and the State

Vincent Carpentier (London): State Education, Growth and Austerity: An Historical View

Norbert Grube (Zürich): Make the Nation Safe for Mass Society: Debates about Propaganda and Education in the USA in the 20th Century

Veronika Magyar-Haas (Zürich): Closeness and Distance in the Conceptualisation of Society

Holger Ziegler (Bielefeld): „Governing by numbers“ – Social Work in the Age of the Regulatory State

Jürgen Oelkers (Zürich): Utopia, State and Democracy

Tagungsbericht *Education and the State – Historical Perspectives on a Changing Relationship*. 15.09.2011-17.09.2011, Kartause, Ittingen, Switzerland, in: H-Soz-u-Kult 19.01.2012.

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.