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## Revisiting Jullien in an era of globalisation

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper, we discuss some of the ways in which forces of globalisation have transformed the spaces in which educational policies are now developed and practices now enacted. We will consider further the widely held claim that the emergence of these transnational spaces requires new ways of thinking about comparative education. We will examine this claim, referring in particular to the questions proposed by Jullien almost two centuries ago. Taking these questions as a starting point, we will reflect on their usefulness in understanding contemporary developments in education and discuss what kind of theoretical and methodological approaches are needed to address these questions in an era of globalisation.

### KEYWORDS

Comparative education; globalisation of education; global policy networks; comparative education history; Marc-Antoine Jullien de Paris

### Introduction

Recent theories of globalisation have sought to understand the far-reaching and complex transformations that are now reshaping our economic relations and political configurations, as well as the cultural landscape in which people forge and make sense of their identity. Social institutions such as education are deeply implicated in these transformations. Not surprisingly therefore, both as an expression of and in response to these transformations, educational policy and practice are now subject to unprecedented degrees of change. Around the world, educational systems are encouraged to rethink their basic purposes and priorities. They are faced with the pressures of reforming their modes of governance – including their systems of funding, evaluation and accountability – their curricular priorities, their teaching methods and most aspects of their educational system.

Almost every national system has, in recent years, reviewed its policy priorities on education in an effort to better align them to what are often described as the imperatives of globalisation. At the same time, international organisations, such as the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation have become significant actors in the processes of policy development at the national level. Programmes such as PISA have become highly influential, with their assessment technologies now expected to apply to every country in the world, especially since the creation of PISA for Development. The ideas of international comparison and benchmarking they propose are now embraced by

most national systems interested in assessing and improving their educational performance. This has happened within the framework of a broader logic of neo-liberal rationality (Brown 2015), in which a trend towards privatisation, corporatisation and marketisation of schools has become dominant. And has enabled the emergence of a global market in education in which a whole range of corporate players, such as Pearson and McKinsey, has acquired considerable relevance. These developments have given rise to what Sahlberg (2011) calls a 'Global Education Reform Movement' (GERM), based on a set of globally dominant ideas relating to curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and educational governance, involving generalisations that are often portrayed as universally applicable.

What would Jullien have made of these global developments? How might we assess the contemporary relevance of his key educational ideas in an era of globalisation? How might we now think about Jullien's scientific spirit and his methods of comparative education? To what extent does his notion of 'learning from the best in other systems still makes sense? And what would Jullien have made of the emerging global pressures on national policy-making in education towards a globally convergent set of priorities, articulated in GERM's driving ideology based on a claim to scientific legitimacy? In this paper, we want to address some of these questions, paying particular attention to the implications of the various recent theories of globalisation for re-assessing some of Jullien's key educational ideas – relating to his conviction in the fundamental role that education needed to play in enlightenment and human progress; his confidence in the ability of science to deliver objective knowledge useful to educational planning, along the lines of his account of the comparative methods in education; and his belief in the need for national educational systems to learn from each other.

We will argue that the relationship between Jullien's ideas and what we have learned in recent years from the various theories of globalisation is much more complex than might first appear. In one sense, global processes have unsettled each of Jullien's key ideas. The notion of a universal meaning of human improvement and progress is no longer widely accepted. Yet the belief in the scientific spirit is stronger than ever before, with the rise of big data and technologies of comparison leading to the assumption that one best system in education is indeed possible. Methodological nationalism implied in Jullien's account has been widely criticised. At the same time, the time-space compression induced by globalisation has complicated the processes of policy-making in education, re-instituting the significance of the nation-states in driving the direction of educational reform.

### **Jullien and the aspirations of comparative education**

Jullien is widely considered to be one of the founders of comparative education as a field of study, partly because he explicitly addressed the spatial dimensions of education, especially in his *Esquisse et vues préliminaires d'un ouvrage sur l'éducation comparée* [Outline and preliminary views of a work on comparative education] (1817), but also because he was the first to use the concept of 'comparative education'. He explicitly viewed 'comparative anatomy' as a model with which to construct a comparative science of education. Jullien's use of the term anatomy was deliberate, for he viewed the practice of education in clinical terms, akin to medical practice. He emphasised the necessity of objective empirical accounts of education to place it on a scientific footing, just as medical sciences had begun to do in the early-nineteenth century. With an empirical analysis of education it was possible, he

believed, to diagnose educational challenges and attempt to solve them with the application of scientific generalisations that could be applied to every site of educational practice equally.

Writing in the midst of the industrial revolution, Jullien's faith in the value of a scientifically grounded approach to education was based on the various intellectual currents of the Enlightenment philosophies. This included a belief in the notion of human perfectibility that could only be achieved through the systematic application of insights garnered through the use of the scientific method. While Jullien's understanding of these methods was limited, he was convinced that the demands of reason were located in the virtues of empirical generalisations. In this sense, his view of science was also normative, recommending a particular way of thinking about human affairs. In his *Esquisse* he designed a plan to analyse 'scientifically' and comparatively educational institutions and practices in different European countries with the ultimate aim of developing a series of universally applicable educational principles that could be used as model for educational reform in different contexts. Jullien's educational philosophy thus involved a deep commitment to social and cultural improvement through education, conceived largely in the image of Rousseau's ideas – but to these he believed he added a method for their practical realisation.

Strongly influenced by the principles of the Enlightenment, Jullien had a firm belief in human progress and saw reason, science and education as fundamental drivers of human advancement and salvation:

In the long run, education alone is capable of exercising a decisive and radical influence on the regeneration of man, the improvement of societies, true civilization, and the prosperity of states. Each generation, if entrusted to teachers worthy of their mission, should be the more perfect continuation of the generation it replaces. Thus would the human race advance with firm and confident step along the broad avenue of progress where the body social, wisely and strongly constituted, would no longer be a prey of the grievous upheavals, periodic crisis, and fearful disasters that all too often lead to backsliding. (Jullien, quoted in Gautherin 1993, 3)

This sentiment illustrates how Jullien's view of human progress was based on a unitary idea of history and of the human subject (Lyotard 1979). Within the Eurocentric logic of his times, he was interested in using education as an instrument of social engineering to construct a new kind of human person for a new society in post-revolution France. Jullien developed the first attempt in France to construct a science of education based on rational inquiry (Gautherin 1993). Using the natural sciences as a model, he expected to deduce from the systematic analysis of empirical observations certain 'firm principles and specific rules' that could be expressed as a series of scientific laws that govern education. But rather than an analytic approach that would stress understanding, his conception of science was also normative and teleological. Jullien's science of education was aimed at improving the methods used to instruct young people and children. The telos in his plan was the regeneration of man and society based on his notion of a 'true civilization'.

These melioristic aims also permeated Jullien's comparative approach to education. He was strongly attracted to the work of Pestalozzi and visited the Yverdon institute several times. He attempted to study Pestalozzi's method scientifically. According to Gautherin (1993), this meant making a detailed description of the institute's daily life in such a way that the components of the method and its effects could be rationally explained and, thus, detached from the figure of Pestalozzi himself. The ultimate aim was to deduce from the observation of Yverdon an abstract model that could be transported to France and applied by schools and teachers with similar objectives in terms of the physical, intellectual and

moral development of students. Later, Jullien's ambitions stretched to a plan to compare educational institutions across Europe, to establish a series of Pan-European institutions and to deduce from this comparison a set of educational principles that could be used universally to improve education. The final aim of his approach was thus social transformation. He expected to form a new kind of 'man' for the new times. In this logic, the importance of the comparative method was legitimised by the possibility of learning from others and transferring best practices. Ultimately, he believed in the possibility of finding universal solutions to the human challenge of educating the new generations.

## Theories of globalisation

Two centuries later we live under conditions that are dramatically different to those of the early-nineteenth-century Europe in which Jullien proposed his ideas. These conditions are now widely affected by the processes of globalisation. These processes have, however, been theorised in a variety of different ways. What is common to these theories is that they all acknowledge that the world is becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent. According to Friedman (1999), there is a trend towards 'inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before – in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations and nation-states to reach round the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before' (7). Even though globalisation is not experienced and interpreted in the same way everywhere, its various forms affect us all, in one way or another.

Various technological developments in transport, communication and data processing have driven the processes of globalisation, reshaping the constitution of our social, economic and political relations. They have transformed, for example, the nature of economic activity, by changing the modes of production and consumption. More than two decades ago, Harvey (1989, 9) showed how globalisation involves improved systems of communication and information flows, and rationalisation in the techniques of distribution, and how this has enabled capital and commodities to be moved through the global market with greater speed. Yet, he noted that while globalisation describes 'an intense period of time-space compression', it has also had 'a disorientating and disruptive impact on political-economic practices, the balance of class power, as well as upon cultural and social life' (9). In this new era, global capitalism has become fragmentary as time and space are often rearranged not only by applications of new technologies but also the dictates of multinational capital.

Almost all aspects of life have been reshaped by these shifts. Considerable significance is now attached to information and global networks. The new economy is knowledge-based, post-industrial and service-oriented. In the governance of not only production but also social institutions, the rigidities of Fordism have been replaced by a new organisational ideology that celebrates flexibility as its foundational value, expressed most explicitly in the ideas of subcontracting, outsourcing, vertically disintegrated forms of administration, just-in-time delivery systems and the like. This transformation attaches considerable emphasis on the virtues of speed and instantaneity, as well as market efficiency and effectiveness, applying them not only to economic but also social realms.

Global economic and technological restructuring has major implications for the re-constitution of cultural and political meaning. Castells (2000) speaks of an 'informational mode of development' through which global financial and informational linkages are accelerated: they convert places into spaces and threaten to dominate local cultural practices. As a

result, a ‘new social morphology of our societies’ has emerged through the diffusion of a networking logic – substantially modifying ‘the operation and outcomes in the processes of production, experience, power and culture’. The new economy, Castells maintains, is ‘organized around global networks of capital, management, and information, whose access to technological know-how is at the roots of productivity and competitiveness’ (Castells 2000, 82). This view implies, then, that nation-states are no longer the only or even the primary drivers of the global economy.

Under the conditions of globalisation, the assumption of discrete national cultural formations can no longer be taken for granted because there is now an ever-increasing level of interactions across communities. With the sheer scale, intensity, speed and volume of global communication, the traditional link between territory and social identity appears to have been broken, as people, for example, can more readily choose to detach their identities from particular time, place and traditions. The media and the growing transnational mobility of people have had a ‘pluralising’ impact on identity formation, producing a variety of hyphenated identities that are less ‘fixed or unified’. This has led to the emergence among some of a ‘global consciousness’, which may represent the cultural basis of an ‘incipient civil society’ (Hall 1996).

This account of globalisation suggests a number of themes that are central to its exploration. First, globalisation involves redefining the meaning of time and space. It is concerned with ‘dis-embedding’ (Giddens 1990) the nature of social relations and the organisation of society. It draws attention to the ‘relativisation of space’ through the development in communication technologies and the worldwide spread of capitalism. It lifts social relations from local contexts of interactions, and makes global forces and connections relevant to the social constitution of localities. Second, globalisation does not only involve compression of space but also of time, by accelerating the pace of change. Flows of capital can now be completed with the click of a computer key, and transport technologies enable the mobility of people and goods at unprecedented rates. Global media enables rapid circulation of information. Third, globalisation permits the global convergence, as well as hybridisation, of ideas, information, ideologies, cultural tastes and practices, enhancing both the potential and risks of standardisation. Global capitalism has stretched the potential reach of the commodities and products that once only had local or national markets. And, finally, globalisation enables ever increasingly levels of global interconnectedness, but in ways that make it difficult to identify the lines of connection and theorise their significance in particular cases. In this, power often becomes invisible and diffuse, making democratic processes more remote and abstract.

### **Enlightenment, education and human progress**

These theoretical themes, and the historical conditions associated with globalisation that they seek to explain, raise a number of pertinent questions with respect to Jullien’s aspirations and methods of comparative education. To what extent are his aspirations and methods still relevant, and perhaps also more plausible? What kind of new questions in comparative education do we now need to ask in relation to the increase in global connectivity and mobilities, the development of modern educational systems throughout the world and a complex global infrastructure of education policy? How do recent shifts in political philosophies unsettle some of the main tenants of the Enlightenment upon which Jullien’s project

is based? To what extent are the contemporary forms of melioristic approaches aimed at educating twenty-first-century learners as a new kind of universal, rational, self-governing individual in line with Jullien's plans? In short, what are the ruptures and the continuities between Jullien's educational aspirations and methods and the current efforts of global policy actors to pursue the key aims of what has been referred to as GERM?

Jullien's view of comparative education was based fundamentally on assumptions of the Enlightenment. This period in the history of Western thought and culture is constituted by a set of interconnected ideas, values, principles and facts that provide both an image of the natural and social world and ways of thinking about it. It is worth noting, however, that Enlightenment is a diverse movement, with a plurality of ideas and ideologies, emerging both from the rationalist and empiricist traditions. Jullien favoured the latter tradition, highlighting the importance of systematic empirical observation for generating reliable and practically useful knowledge. He regarded scientific knowledge as the key to expanding all human knowledge. He thus rejected older forms of knowledge, based on religious authorities such as the Bible, as well as all forms of speculative metaphysical doctrines. Legitimate knowledge was based on cognitive experience, scientific experiments and the use of reason in making inferences from the data collected.

One of the most powerful ideas of the Enlightenment is that the natural and social conditions of human beings can be greatly improved through the application of scientific knowledge. Human progress is viewed as continuous and historically linear, in the quest for ever-increasing wellbeing and general happiness of communities. For Jullien, the processes of modernisation are thus assumed to be the ongoing search for the highest achievements of humanity to date. He was convinced that the history of human societies needed to be viewed in terms of linear progress and improvement. The purpose of the scientific inquiry into education was to provide the tools for thinking about ways of improving the provision of education by collecting comparative data from across a number of sites to discern the best methods of pedagogy and educational governance.

Theories of globalisation have unsettled these ideas of Enlightenment in a number of ways. It is worth noting that Jullien's writings were largely focused on Europe. He is unlikely to have had little knowledge of educational traditions in other parts of the world; and in any case, he would have interpreted this knowledge through the prism of colonialism. Within that logic, educational practices in non-European places were seen as being in primitive stages of development in the linear conception of progress towards 'true civilization'. Educational travellers saw themselves as time travellers (Sobe and Fisher 2009) and this justified the expectation that the European traditions needed to be transported to its colonies. In the current post-colonial era, these assumptions can no longer be justified; nor indeed can the view that there is only one single best path to modernity and progress (Seth 2007). There are now competing value claims about what constitutes a good society, while the principle of respect for cultural diversity demands that the colonial imposition of the idea of 'one best system' determined at the imperial centre is neither morally justifiable nor practically realisable. Cultural contact and exchange has now become inevitable, but so has the notion that the political terms of the cultural exchange need to be negotiated rather than imposed by the powerful on the powerless. In this sense, Jullien's historically linear and teleological view of human progress is no longer plausible.

At the same time, however, the belief in the perfectibility of human beings and institutions has not entirely disappeared and can be seen in the contemporary attempts to develop a



universal logic of educational reform, based on neoliberal principles that assume markets to be transcendental. While the rhetoric of diversity abounds, attempts of technologies that steer education towards standardisation through a universal set of educational principles appear implicit in GERM, which is increasingly ‘accepted as “a new educational orthodoxy” among international development agencies, consultancy firms and private philanthropies’ (Sahlberg 2011, 4). So while the Enlightenment principles are no longer embraced in their totality, global circulation of educational ideas and ideologies and global relations of power in educational networks have driven educational priorities towards a convergent direction, embracing the rationalist logic of the markets and their significance in making decisions about both educational aims and governance. In this way, while Jullien’s ontological views about human progress are no longer accepted as plausible, his belief in the search for a perfect educational system remains intact, as indeed his faith in the importance of normative comparative education based on the scientific method, a means to identify and transfer ‘best practices’ from one context to another.

### **Jullien’s scientific spirit and the comparative approach**

As has been mentioned, Jullien’s scientific approach to education was based on applying the logic of the natural sciences to education, thinking that he could eventually deduce a series of universal scientific laws about education. His method consisted of efforts to:

build up, for this science, as has been done for other branches of knowledge, collections of facts and observations arranged in analytical tables so that they can be correlated and compared with a view to deducing therefrom firm principles and specific rules so that education may become virtually a positive science ... (Jullien, cited in Gautherin 1993)

Yet, as Gautherin (1993) suggests, the descriptive, analytic and explanatory functions of Jullien’s science were secondary to his normative agenda. In the taxonomy of the sciences, Jullien placed education within the applied branches.

From our current perspective, Jullien’s approach to science can be seen as unsophisticated, in its methods to obtain empirical data, in its analytic tools and its blindness to the specificity of the social sciences: their complex relation with its object of study (the phenomena of double hermeneutics) and the difficulty in defining causality and universal rules of social behaviour.

However, on the other hand, it is possible to see the normative and teleological aims implicit in Jullien’s approach as the first steps of the kind of work that is now being done globally by actors such as the OECD, Pearson, McKinsey and others. The continuity of his normative agenda for educational research is evident in the work of international organisations, consultants and private companies that aim their work at finding ‘best practices’ in the ‘top performing systems’ and promoting global universal solutions through a number of slogans and mechanisms such as ‘the efficacy framework’ (Pearson) or the claim that they have found the three most important keys to success in education (Barber and Mourshed 2007). Claims to scientific status are used by these global policy actors as a way of providing an aura of authority to their proposals. The telos within current global policy initiatives is the grand narrative of the twenty-first-century learner and preparing a new kind of individual for a new society: the knowledge worker for the knowledge society.

Current normativity of comparative education can also be seen as unsophisticated in its methodological approaches. Its quest for silver bullets and its discourse based on the



notion of best practices as a narrative of salvation and transformation of educational systems that need to be restructured and adapted to the need of new social conditions, falls into oversimplified analysis often based on a very particular way of selecting data that confirms pre-defined normative claims. As Morris (2016) suggests:

many of these claims – such as good teachers produce high levels of pupil performance, or good systems have good leaders – are self-evident analytical claims, and not empirical claims (i.e. they are necessarily connected – good teaching is largely defined by its impact on pupil learning outcomes). Hence it is difficult to construct a null hypothesis from the claims that ‘successful systems have good leadership or good teachers.’ (10)

Moreover, critical reflexivity within the social sciences – such as the evident difficulty to establish causality and to predict the future from the past – is ignored in predictions about the possibility of a certain amount of economic growth being derived from an increase in PISA scores. For example, Schleicher has suggested: ‘if all 15-year-olds in the OECD area attained at least level 2 in the PISA mathematics assessment, they would contribute over USD 200 trillion in additional economic output over their working lives (Schleicher 2014, 21). This is a claim that is not ‘falsifiable’, in the Popperian sense (Popper 1963), and can only be regarded as belonging to the realm of speculation.

In addition, the current status of global developments in normative comparative education can be seen as a continuity of Jullien’s approaches in terms of how the relation between education and its social, cultural and political context is conceptualised. Educational practices continue to be seen as if they were functioning in a socio-political-cultural vacuum; as an independent aspect of social reality that can be decontextualised and recontextualised unproblematically. Thus, it is believed that a universally ideal educational system can be deduced from a unitary/ethnocentric approach to progress; a belief in the possibility of deducing pedagogical rules that have a similar status to natural laws (they work everywhere in the same way); and the lack of attention to political, cultural and overall social differences. This position is very visible in the creed that by collecting ‘best practices’ from Finland (or other PISA ‘winners’), it is possible to construct a series of rational scientific neutral recommendations that can potentially improve education in all or most parts of the world, and that these best practices from different educational settings can, collectively, construct a vision of a universal ideal educational system.

However, on the other hand, normative comparative science has become much more efficient in its capacity to measure and to manage data. Outcome-based technologies of comparison, such as PISA, have created conditions for these type of normative mechanisms to have huge influence on educational developments. PISA is probably the biggest driver of curriculum reform in the world; PISA scores have become the main instrument of normalisation and almost the telos of educational policies when attaining better PISA scores is seen as the main objective of policy intervention.

Furthermore, what has radically changed is the political context of legitimation of normative comparative educational science. If in the times of Jullien it was the grand narratives of human progress, rationality, liberty, equality and access to truth that legitimised a science of education that was placed at the service of the state, both the narratives of legitimation and the masters of the comparative science of education have been displaced. It is the logic of performativity and the narrative of efficiency that have taken up the front of the stage. Improving input-output ratios of performance has become the main aim of current endeavours to compare and transfer best practices.

As Lyotard (1979) noted some time ago, the criterion of performativity ‘entails a certain level of terror, whether soft or hard: be operational (that is, commensurable) or disappear’ (xxiv). Efficiency becomes an aim in itself. The ultimate aim of education policies is to be more efficient in attaining better scores in standardised tests. Once the output of education can be measured (including, of course, the process by which all that cannot be measured ‘scientifically’ ceases to be important), education policy is defined as a set of strategies to work upon inputs to improve outcomes and becomes a commodity that is sold and bought in the global educational market. The master is no longer the state and its logic of representation of the public good. A new master has taken up comparative normative science in education: corporations. The aim is no longer salvation or progress, but accumulation of (mostly economic) power.

### Policy processes and the nation-state

As we have noted already, the main purpose of Jullien’s hopes for comparative education was to produce reliable scientific generalisations that could be applied across a whole range of educational sites. Educational systems could draw upon scientifically grounded knowledge to promote reforms that would steer their societies towards a more progressive historical direction. Although it is not possible to specify where Jullien believed the centre of political authority of educational systems to lie, it is highly likely that he assumed it to be the nation-states (of Europe, with which he was familiar). Within the system of modern states, considerable cultural importance has been attached to education. Educational systems often carry the narratives of the nation. As Gellner (1983) points out, it was the mass educational systems that provided a common framework of understanding, which enhanced the processes of state-coordinated modernisation. Through the diffusion of ideas, meanings, myths and rituals, citizens were able to ‘imagine’ the nation and filter conceptions of their ‘other’.

Although education continues to serve this function, recent theories of globalisation have destabilised this assumption. Many globalisation theorists (e.g., Steger 2003) note that the nation-state is no longer the only site of educational deliberations, since the lives of its citizens are now inextricably linked to cultural formations that are produced in far-away places. The nation-state has, of course, not disappeared but the structure and scope of their authority has changed markedly. The exclusive link between the nation-state and political authority is now broken. Nation-states could no longer claim exclusive authority over their citizens. Changes in international law, regional political associations and the structure of global economy and institutions have altered the fundamental constitution of the state system. In her highly influential book, *The Retreat of the State*, Strange (1996) argues: ‘the impersonal forces of world market, integrated over the post-war period more by private enterprise in finance, industry and trade than by cooperative decisions of governments, are now more powerful than states’ (13).

Even if the authority of the state has not entirely declined, and even if many states remain influential and strong, its nature and functions are changing. The state is no longer the only site of policy development and source of political legitimacy; transnational processes intersect in a variety of complex ways with the mechanisms of policy development, dissemination and evaluation at the national level. If the assumption that policy authority is always located within the structures of the state can no longer be taken for granted, then it follows that, in analysing the ways in which values are allocated in and through policy, we can no

longer merely attend to issues internal to the state. We also need to ask how the interior of the state is being reconstituted by forces emanating from outside its borders, becoming 'relativised' (Waters 1995) by the processes of globalisation and marketisation (Ball 2012).

At the same time, nation states have continued to reassert their authority. And indeed, in many ways, their authority has become indispensable in coordinating and controlling global mobility, interactions and institutions. As Wood (2003) has shown, 'the more universal capitalism has become, the more it has needed an equally universal system of reliable local states' (152). Indeed, it is impossible for global capitalism to dispense with many of the social functions performed by the state, such as security, social stability and infrastructural provisions that have proved essential for economic success. Global capitalism depends more than ever then on a system of multiple and more or less sovereign states Wood (2003) insists that:

The very fact that 'globalization' has extended capital's purely economic powers far beyond the range of any single nation state means that global capital requires many nation states to perform the administrative and coercive functions that sustain the system of property and provide the kind of day-to-day regularity, predictability, and legal order that capitalism needs more than any other social form. (141)

What this discussion shows is that, under the conditions of contemporary globalisation, we are not so much experiencing the demise of the system of nation-states, but, rather, its transformation. What is challenged is the traditional conception of the nation-state as a fundamental unit of world order, a unitary phenomenon characterised by its relative homogeneity with a set of singular purposes. A fragmented policy arena permeated by transnational networks as well as domestic agencies and forces have replaced this. As Held and McGrew (2005) argue, 'the contemporary era has witnessed layers of governance spreading within and across political boundaries' (11), transforming state sovereignty into shared exercise of power. With the emergence of new patterns of political interconnectedness, 'the scope of policy choices available to individual governments and the effectiveness of many traditional policy instruments tends to decline' (13). The transformed state is now increasingly located within various webs of global and regional networks that challenge the traditional authority of the state, as well as require the state to perform the new functions of policy coordination and the development and delivery of programmes.

This analysis suggests that the spatial dimensions of education that comparative education seeks to understand have drastically changed since the times of Jullien. Thus, comparative education needs to focus on relational ties and policy networks that span the world. If networks are open structures, able to expand without limits, are highly dynamic and consist of a set of nodes and connections characterised by flows and movement, then comparative research in education cannot afford to ignore the question of how social imaginaries circulate globally, under what condition they become popular and hegemonic and how policies and programmes are constructed around complex information flows across various nodes of networks. If information flows about educational ideas circulate in a global space that is characterised by asymmetry of power, then the question of how do some policies and programmes become authoritative must be of more than a cursory interest to comparative educators. Indeed, if the questions of transnationality have become central to their work, then it is clear that they need new intellectual resources and research methodologies that are better able to account for global policy networks and information flows in education.

## Concluding discussion

Throughout this paper we have contrasted Jullien's ideas about comparative education with the current situation of globalisation. We have stressed how his view of science was based on normative and teleological principles, his belief in social progress through education was based on the Eurocentric logic of the Enlightenment and his comparative approach was geared towards finding what works in certain places to transfer it to other sites, with the ultimate aim of finding universal solutions to the human problem of education.

We have also argued that increase in connectivity and mobilities, the development of modern educational systems throughout the world and a complex global infrastructure of education policy, together with changes in political philosophies that question some of the main tenants of the Enlightenment and the restructuring of the state and its role in education policy, seem to have challenged Jullien's projects. Yet, on the other hand, we have suggested that there are certain continuities and discontinuities between Jullien's ideas and current approaches aimed at educating twenty-first-century learners as a new kind of universal, rational, self-governing individual. Continuities are related to normative, teleological and, in some ways, unsophisticated approaches to comparative education, and to the development of a global education policy infrastructure that was to a certain extent envisioned in Jullien's plans.

Discontinuities deserve some further and deeper analysis. What we are experiencing today is a process of increasing sophistication in terms of the technical capacity to produce and manage huge amounts of data (Lingard and Sellar 2014; Lingard, Sellar and Savage, 2014; Ozga, 2009; Sellar 2015). Most of this data is related to measurements of performance; that is, the capacity of students to achieve in standardised tests. Of course that there is a huge amount of data that is not about students' performance: training of teachers, investment, salaries, effective teaching times and so on. But this data only becomes relevant in as much as it is correlated with students test scores and can illuminate 'best practices' (to attain better scores). The logic of performativity (Lyotard 1979) has become dominant in the educational field. Education policy is conceived as a set of interventions to improve the efficiency of the system; that is, to obtain better outputs with less inputs. Efficiency becomes an end in itself, when the improvement of PISA scores is increasingly defined as the aim of education policy intervention. Once the desired output of educational practices becomes standardised around the globe and defined in terms measurable outputs, education policy is redefined as a set of operations upon inputs (such as teachers) that can be improved by transferring what works from the best performing systems.

Education is pulled away from humanist narratives and is re-legitimated within the logic of markets, from above and from below. From above, the aim of education is redefined. If, in times of Jullien, human progress, salvation, equality, liberty and access to truth were the legitimising narratives, it is now 'the capacity of countries ... to compete in the global knowledge economy' (Schleicher 2007, 9) that is at stake and justifies investing resources in education. From below, education policy (macro and micro) is reconceived as a commodity that is bought and sold in the market. Policy consultancy, the provision of educational services (i.e., running of schools), evaluation, learning technologies and pedagogical consultancy have all become commoditised. Knowledge on how to improve education is produced in order to be sold and is bought in order to augment performance in standardised tests. And in this way the circle is closed, the logic of markets has encapsulated education.

What are the moral consequences of these shifts? Education is increasingly being conceptualised as learning literacy, mathematics and science, the subjects that are mainly included in standardised tests. Probably the conceptualisation is even narrower; it is about learning to get high scores in standardised tests in these areas of knowledge. At first sight, the problem is that there might be other subjects that matter, such as arts, humanities, physical education and so on. But we want to point our critique at another direction, at a deeper level. What seems to be missing from this account of education is not only a series of disciplinary subjects, but the human subject itself.

Education can be seen as dealing with cognitive aims (that is, with the students learning) and with ontological aims (that is with the students becoming) (Dewey 1916; Quay 2015). In this vein, Jackson (2012) distinguishes between mimetic and transformative educational traditions. Mimetic traditions are related to the transmission of factual and procedural knowledge, while transformative traditions seek to accomplish ‘a transformation of one kind or another in the person being taught – a qualitative change often of dramatic proportion, a metamorphosis, so to speak’ (87). Thus, education is not only about learning maths, science and literacy, but also about transforming the child into a different person. In other words, education is political; it is ultimately about social transformation.

What is the motif of social transformation in current global normative comparative education? As we mentioned, at the level of legitimation the global knowledge economy seems to be the star signifier. But how does that aim relate to test scores in PISA and national or regional standardised tests? In the logic of the market, social transformation is couched in purely individualistic terms. Desire for consumption is what unites the new human subject at a global level. Consumption is offered as the best way to achieve success, happiness and wellbeing. Thus, in order to become full members of the consumer society, students need to invest in themselves to develop the competencies that will allow them to occupy a position in the knowledge economy. That is the guarantee of access to full social participation – being part of consumer culture. These competencies, according to the logic of GERM, are literacy, numeracy and scientific rationality.

Jullien’s dream of having a universal educational model is closer to reality than ever. But the political motif has shifted. Jullien contributed to the construction and global diffusion of what Foucault described as the disciplinary societies. These are now being replaced by what Deleuze (1992) calls ‘societies of control’. The corporation has replaced the factory, and is increasingly taking control of education. The state does not recoil, it transforms into a partner of the corporation. The governing logic is not democratic representation, but, rather, the power of stakeholders. We are shifting, as Sandel (2012) noted, from market economies to market societies.

Under such globalising conditions, Jullien’s aspirations for comparative education may be viewed from a variety of perspectives. Empirically, his views about the importance of science in generating principles of educational practice are currently enjoying a renewed fervour. That the scientific methods needed to explain the natural world are equally applicable to the study of social phenomena, such as education, is now considered perfectly plausible, especially in light of the availability of ‘big data’ to develop systems of learning and assessment analytics. Such analytics are now widely used to compare the performance of educational systems, even when they are characterised by profound historical and cultural differences across nations. It is suggested that our increasing technical capacities can now be put at the service of making each educational system more efficient. Normatively,

however, the question of ‘efficient for what – to what end’ is not so easily answered. For Jullien, this question was resolved by referring to the Enlightenment’s objective of human progress. This universal point of reference is no longer available to us. Indeed, in an era of globalisation, it is no longer possible – if indeed it ever was – to sideline the political deliberations that are necessary in arriving at judgements about educational values. What is at stake is the meaning of education itself.

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