

Cummings, W.K. (2003). *The Institutions of education*. Oxford, UK: Symposium Books. Pages: 278. Price: \$38.00 (USD) paper.

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William Cummings, well known in comparative education circles and who has an extensive personal acquaintance with education systems in many parts of the world, has undertaken a task few contemporary comparativists attempt. He has tackled the job of synthesizing a vast amount of data and, by applying a theoretical framework, has provided a coherent picture of educational systems worldwide. Rather than classifying systems according to regions, the more traditional approach, he has adapted institutional theorizing from anthropology, sociology and economics. Through that approach and a historical analysis he has identified six distinct institutional education systems (in six core nations) and associates them with the emergence of particular representative schools. "These first schools embody values and norms that are later imitated and replicated in successor schools as a particular institution of education is systematized and expanded" (p.9). His intention in this undertaking is to understand the ups and downs of educational reforms and "to look deeply into the origins and development of successful and failed reforms" (p.7). In this work, he has made a significant contribution.

The first chapter (Thinking about educational revolutions and reform) provides an overview of his six core nations' educational systems, their underlying organization and philosophical underpinnings. In it he also outlines the core propositions in his version of institutionS theory. Echoes of Weber are evident. For some this chapter may be adequate although things are painted with a broad brush, necessarily so under the circumstances. In chapter 2 (The great transformation and the demands for modern education) and chapter 3 (The call for new schools) he presents a historical treatment of the emergence of modern mass education. The case is made that the reasons vary in the six core systems and so different representative schools emerge. Chapter 4 (The systematization and expansion of modern education) focuses on "the differentiation/integration of various educational opportunities both through vertical and horizontal divisions, and the segregation/inclusion of different social groups in

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the various educational opportunities, primarily through horizontal segmentation/tracking” (p.102) This chapter deals with accreditation, standards, finance, admissions, and examinations; namely administrative aspects. A comparatively short chapter 5 deals with expansion of systems and worldwide diffusion. Given that the core nations were chosen partially because of their education systems’ influence in the world, one might have expected this chapter to be somewhat more developed.

Part 3 (chapters 6-9) focuses on the nitty gritty of delivery with chapters on curriculum, teachers, teaching and learning, and evaluation and examinations. As with chapter 5 these are relatively short and only provide an overview to illustrate points made in other chapters. They serve their intended purposes. Readers wanting more in-depth treatment would look to other sources. Part 4 looks to the future. Chapter 10 describes the economic and technological contexts while chapter 11 imagines new futures in a ‘post-modern’ context. Questions such as who will sponsor education, where will it take place, how will values be cultivated and others are addressed. Some possible answers are provided but not developed. These may be good beginning points to stimulate discussion.

Overall, this was a huge undertaking and in many aspects a very successful one. At times I found myself feeling frustrated that some sections were underdeveloped while others seemed somewhat repetitive. Given the wide overview, of necessity there are broad generalizations with which one could quibble. Also, probably for the same reason certain historical knowledge is assumed in the text. Readers of this journal will find that the focus on higher education is limited other than in the US where college is identified as the representative school. Nevertheless I would highly recommend this book to anyone who does not have a sense of the big picture and wants to familiarize oneself with education as a global phenomenon that continues, regardless of globalization tendencies, to be rooted in historical and cultural contexts often not adequately acknowledged by North Americans.



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