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Comparative Education: Mississippi and Uruguay

Research Question

Education is a topic of concern not limited to any one nation, region, or continent. Rather, it is on the agenda of every politician, legislature, and international development council. Through comparative study, social scientists can measure educational systems against one another and use this knowledge to improve education in both or all systems studied. In this study, I will compare the educational system of Uruguay to that of Mississippi. Because education is a wide subject with many aspects, I will focus on answering one question: How has policy affected education in Uruguay and Mississippi?

Theoretical Framework

Comparative education on an international scale is a concept that requires clarification because the term is used in various forms in reference to numerous topics. Here the term refers simply to cross-national analysis for the purpose of furthering understanding on the educational systems in both Uruguay and Mississippi. Michael Sadler says that comparative education is practical because studying “the working of foreign systems of education is that it will result in our being better fit to study and understand our own” (Phillips and Schweisfurth 2007: 14). W.D. Halls gives comparative education three goals: to provide an educational

morphology, to determine the relationships and interactions between education and society, and to distinguish the fundamental conditions of educational change and persistence and then relate these to more ultimate philosophical laws (Phillips and Schweisfurth 2007: 15). Through studying the educational systems of different nations, one can see how certain policies function in a system and learn from the consequences, whether positive or negative (Phillips and Schweisfurth 2007: 16). Mazurek and Wizner state that comparative education is forced upon educators by the very nature of the global society today and that one must be familiar with life outside of the local in order to best educate a new generation (Mazurek and Wizner 2006: 5).

Case Selection

For the sake of my research, I will compare the educational systems of Uruguay and Mississippi. I selected these cases because they share several characteristics such as an agricultural economy, coastal location, small by comparison to neighboring economies, among others. Through the close study of each and then through comparison, I will add knowledge to the existing available research in the comparative and international education realm. By the end of my study, I should be able to determine how education has been affected by governmental policy decisions in each case, and whether or not successful education policy could possibly be transferred from one case to another.

Hypothesis

While it is said that education and governmental policy affect each other, this study assumes that governmental policy shapes education, not the other way around. I hypothesize that education policy in the legislature has effects on curriculum, resources for teachers and students alike, and the availability of education. I will also attempt to show the regional differences, if any, in the implementation of policy.

Methodology

First, I will investigate the educational system in Mississippi. I will read current education policy on the state level and lower district level. After gaining the appropriate credentials, I will conduct interviews with policy makers and educators to gain perspectives and evaluate the effectiveness of current governmental policy as seen by those on both sides of the decision-making process. I also hope to arrange visits to actual schools in different regions, so I can see first hand how policy is implemented. I will then repeat the process for Uruguay. I will research educational system theory and interview individuals in Mississippi while I am in the United States, but I hope to gain access to individuals and primary sources when I am studying in Uruguay.

Secondly, I plan to measure both Uruguay and Mississippi by using the standards set by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). I will use these organizations because they “provide detailed descriptive information in a form which facilitates comparison” (Phillips and Schweisfurth

2007: 89). UNESCO created a list of six goals for the global community to reach by 2015. This list is called Education for All Goals and corresponds well to the United Nations Millennium Goals, which shows education's relationship to global development and importance in a functional society. OECD is useful because it promotes the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Schneider 2009). This is an international, standardized assessment that measures the ability of students to perform in areas such as math and science. The United States and Uruguay both participate in PISA testing, and the score for Mississippi is available separate from the rest of the United States, which is particularly useful to my cause.

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