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Book review

Education in the world of small states

Tertiary Education in Small States: Planning in the Context of Globalisation, M. Martin, M. Bray (Eds.), UNESCO/IIEP, Paris (2011).

M. Crossley, M. Bray and S. Packer with D. Atcho, M. Colin, M. Martin and T. Sprague, 2011, Education in Small States: Policies and Priorities, London, Commonwealth Secretariat.

The Commonwealth Secretariat. Commonwealth Education Partnerships, Nexus Strategic Publications, Cambridge (2011).

These three publications will be reviewed as a package with regard to education in the world of small states, but first it must be acknowledged that the *Commonwealth Education Partnerships* volume largely comprises other issues. An annual exercise made up of three distinct parts, it is: (a) a series of mini-articles on different partnerships (85 pp.); (b) country profiles of all Commonwealth member states (pp. 132); (c) a small final references section dealing with statistics and acronyms. This volume was commissioned and researched by Rupert Jones-Parry with Andrew Robertson, and the country profiles researched and edited by Richard Green. It is not the place of this review essay to comment on it in general, save to say that the issue of partnerships in education is one of key import for development, and one in which the Commonwealth Secretariat has an honourable record. Three of the 30 mini-articles are on small states: (a) 'Revisiting educational policies and priorities in Commonwealth small states' by Michael Crossley, Mark Bray, Steve Packer and Terra Sprague; (b) 'Education priorities in Asian and European small states' by Nazir Kazmi; (c) 'What makes for productive partnerships? Lessons learnt from COL-Commonwealth- Microsoft in the Caribbean' by Trudy van Wyk. The first is based mainly on one of the other volumes discussed in this review, that by Crossley, Bray and Packer (2011), which is itself an elaboration of: 'a paper prepared for Ministers and Senior Officials at the 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CEEM) held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2009.

The CEEM has been instrumental in highlighting and developing and interest in small member states at least since its 1982 meeting, as a result of which a report on '*Scale, Isolation and Dependence: Educational Development in Island Developing and other Disadvantaged States*' was prepared for the 1984 meeting of CEEM, and published (Brock, 1984a). Prior to the early 1980s the emergent literature on small states was concerned mainly with socio-economic issues, for example: Benedict (1967) and Selwyn (1975); with ecological issues (Dommen, 1980); or with regional studies, e.g. Brock (1984b) and Shand (1980). These were followed by geo-political analyses, such as Clarke and Payne (1987) and Hafiz and Khan (1987), and sustainable development, such as Bella et al. (1990).

Despite the mainstream efforts of the Commonwealth Secretariat since then, the works under review here promote a greater understanding of the wider, global, extent of the incidence of small states and the significance for them of the phenomenon of globalisation. Although still Commonwealth-based, Kazmi's discussion is not concerned with the two main regional groupings of small island states in the Caribbean and South Pacific, taking instead cases from South-East Asia, the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. Martin and Bray, as their title suggests, leaps to a truly global view. They show that, if one takes the most widely accepted definition of national smallness, that of a threshold of a population of 3 million, then one is looking at some 90 states and territories, not far off 50 percent of polities in the world. They group them into 8 regional categories: Africa (10), Arab States (4), Atlantic (8), Caribbean (22), Europe (17), South Pacific (20) and Asia (5), (pp. 26–27). They follow this up with a table of population categories: below 100,000 (32), 100,000–250,000 (14), 250,000–1 million (24), 1–2 million (9), and 2–3 million (10). They explain that 'certain non-sovereign territories are excluded because their populations are below 1000 and/or their constitutional arrangements do not fit the classification adopted for this table' (p. 27). The smallest is Pitcairn (c 60 people). Leaving aside the niceties of classification it is clear that nearly half the territories and states in the world are small.

It is very likely that they attract much less than 5 percent of the literature of comparative and international education, which makes the publications reviewed here of a rare significance. Furthermore the treatment of educational issues in such states and territories takes us a stage or two beyond the more basic discussions of the disadvantages and advantages of national smallness, useful as these have been, and still are. Central to this advance is the issue with which Trudi Van Wyk is concerned, that of the influence of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) for small states.

Van Wyk reports on a fourfold partnership between the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), the Commonwealth Secretariat (COMSEC), Microsoft, and the governments of three Caribbean states: Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and The Bahamas. Beginning in Guyana, and utilising the 'UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers' (CFT), local operational practices were identified in a flexible arrangement so as to reach all circumstances and needs over a three year period. The partnership network was extended to include The World Bank and UNESCO itself, and then taken to Trinidad and Tobago and The Bahamas, and on to 18 Caribbean countries and territories (p. 55). Each of the major partners has a particular role: COMSEC to provide the overall framework and understanding from its near global outreach; COL to increase digital literacy and ways of sharing such expertise; Microsoft to provide strategic leadership through innovative schools, their teachers and students. This project enabled many small states to experience and learn from the time frames and other negotiated components of partnership. It also

illustrated how some of the key disadvantages of systemic educational smallness can be overcome.

In some regions of course more macro forms of partnership have been in operation for a long time, such as the University of the West Indies (1948) and the University of the South Pacific (1968), and have in general been beneficial. But they tend to be more beneficial to the states where these universities have their main campuses. Regional brain drains may result favouring for example, Jamaica and Fiji. The two small European states discussed in Kazmi's article can now, in theory at least, benefit from membership of the European Union with its range of tertiary co-operation schemes, as well as in the realm of technical and vocational training. But politically generated regional innovations through organisations such as the EU, CARICOM and South Pacific/Australasian arrangements do not limit small states in their regions from experiencing the tentacles of globalisation, for better or for worse.

Both of the other publications with which this review is concerned, and especially that of Martin and Bray, recognise the significance of the global frame of reference for small states and of globalisation itself, albeit a contested concept (Burbules and Torres (2000) and Barber (1996)). The now well – appreciated relationship between the global and the local arising from globalisation is less likely to generate the 'tribalism' of the local that Barber perceives because of the intrinsic local character of at least the smaller range of small states. A fundamental point is that the global context is just as significant for small states as for large ones, indeed perhaps more so in terms of advancement. Crossley et al. (2011) select three global issues in respect of their significance for small states: climate change; financial interconnections; and international migration, labour markets and skills. With respect to climate change they identify a number of scenarios likely to affect small states, especially islands, both adversely and differentially: rise in sea level; constraints on fresh water; agriculture and marine-based resources; negative effects on tourism and human health. They suggest that combating these influences will require creative and innovative educational responses of a participatory nature. In this regard national and territorial smallness could be an advantage.

With regard to global financial interconnections, the degree of economic dependency experienced by the majority of small states is seen as a significant problem. With education being mainly a public service, constraints are inevitable and relate to the third global contextual issue, international migration. This has left many such states dependent on an ageing workforce especially in the agricultural sector. The degree of correspondence between curriculum and economy has never been very positive in small states (Brock and Smawfield, 1988) but here again creative thinking will be required leading to imaginative reform. Crossley et al. point to the poor record of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as a problem in respect of adjusting to the likely new circumstances induced by globalisation. This is of course a near universal problem but smallness of national scale leaves less room to manoeuvre. On the plus side in the global economic scenario these authors point out that the small states of The Commonwealth enjoy a higher status than less developed countries in general. Only one, The Gambia, is ranked as 'low income'. Most are 'higher or lower middle income', and eight are 'high income'. On the human development index (HDI) about a third of small Commonwealth states rank as 'very high' and 'high', the remaining two thirds are 'medium', and only The Gambia is 'low'. Such relatively positive economic situations should enable the support of innovative educational reform, but do not of course guarantee it. Universal primary education (UPE) has long been achieved in most of these states, made easier to accomplish by their very smallness. On the other hand long established

educational structures and systems are notoriously subject to inertia in all countries.

The innovative and creative thinking in respect of educational change that Crossley et al. identify as necessary will likely depend on the various types of partnership already mentioned above in relation to Trudi Van Wyk's article. But they also rightly highlight such important issues as context sensitivity in both cultural and environmental respects. Such issues present a challenge to global-scale ICT initiatives such as the COL, and will depend on innovative teachers and students standing their ground where necessary against institutionalised systemic inertia.

The tertiary sector of formal education has a great deal to offer to innovative primary and secondary schooling in all countries than has been forthcoming hitherto. Leach (2003) recorded some Commonwealth examples, but not in small member states. Traditionally universities and other HEIs have been concerned only with schools teaching students to their academic entry requirements rather than being partners in innovative basic education. Both Crossley et al. and Martin and Bray recognise the importance of greater involvement and give examples of its emergence.

Martin and Bray's volume is concerned specifically with tertiary education in small states in the context of globalisation. There is an edited volume with additional contributions from ten other authors, including Crossley. Indeed, Crossley's main contribution on 'Strengthening educational research capacity in small states' (pp. 101–118) is particularly significant. Hitherto much of the research on small states has been by outsiders, creating a kind of intellectual dependency to add to the economic kind.

Though an outsider himself, he emphasises that a lively research and development capacity within small states is a key element underpinning economic growth, as in successful emergent states and territories like Singapore and Hong Kong. Most are of course beyond the threshold of 3 million population, but the message nonetheless applies to those below it. For smaller states, however, there is a greater need to prioritise in terms of targets, some necessarily urgent. For example the implications of rising sea levels is urgent for some, such as The Maldives, and the need to maximise economic diversification is urgent for others. Educational innovation needs to reflect the priorities in question. In all cases this will require interdisciplinary research, the value of which has only recently been understood in the powerful larger nations that tend to be role models for research elsewhere. Crossley highlights a number of priorities arising from the 'Mauritius Strategy' (UNESCO, 2007). These include: sharing ICT information and techniques; preserving local and indigenous knowledge; disaster preparedness; and promoting sustained capacity building (Crossley, 2011, p. 104).

Early in the first chapter Bray highlights the economies of small states and the concept of vulnerability brought forward in the Georges Report of 1985 that highlighted: narrow resource base; lack of economies of scale; relative openness; remoteness; natural disasters; and international capital markets. Crossley is implying that a quarter of a century later these still need to be the subjects of locally generated research. Bray has already noted the issue of interdependence, long since recognized by Brookfield in his seminal work *Interdependent Development* (1975), who worked mainly in the South Pacific. Bray also focuses on 'societies of small states' They are, almost by definition, highly idiosyncratic and can be multicultural to a surprising degree (Brock, 1980), hence the imperatives of compromise, minimal conflict and stability. Bray highlights four key areas of concern for post-secondary institutions in such context: (a) need more resources than schools, therefore high unit costs obtain; (b) brain drain; (c) recognition of qualifications; (d) need to address very specific labour needs in mostly concentrated economies. He follows this up with five

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