

Shaping Global Education Futures

- Key Agendas, International Organisations, and the Paradigm of Universalism

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The contemporary situation – two observations

Drawing on the growing rhetoric of a ‘global learning crisis’ and informed by innovative yet problematic technical work, we argue that the powerful movement to construct GLMs [global learning metrics] has several ‘unintended’ outcomes. These include the effective narrowing of the comprehensive global agenda on education (SDG 4), the undermining of a carefully negotiated country-led process to promote lifelong education opportunities for all, the devaluing of learning that is not measurable or comparable, and the weakening of the principle of educational equity.

Benavot & Smith (2019), p. 239

In the context of SDG 4, we are seeing “assessment for all” as a central vision, which is tied to the production of global metrics, forming a “transnational metrological field” (Grek, 2020, p. 161), and the construction of numbers “as the new doxa of transnational governance” that “legitimizes a whole series of informal and ad hoc arrangements, all accepted and all approved in the name of an education crisis” (p. 161). Stuck in the dogma of results-based management, the World Bank is likely to continue down the path of the measurement and assessment agenda, “a frenetic metrics machine” (Mundy, 2019, para. 6), promoting ever more targets and benchmarks, such as the “Learning Poverty” target, involving a Learning Assessment Platform, aligned with initiatives such as the Human Capital Project (World Bank, 2019).

Elfert, M., & Ydesen, C. (2023). Global governance of education: The historical and contemporary entanglements of UNESCO, the OECD and the World Bank. Dordrecht: Springer.

Structure of the lecture

Crises narratives as the engines of universalism + historical examples

The challenges for policy and schooling

Unpacking the universalist agendas – three historical paradigms

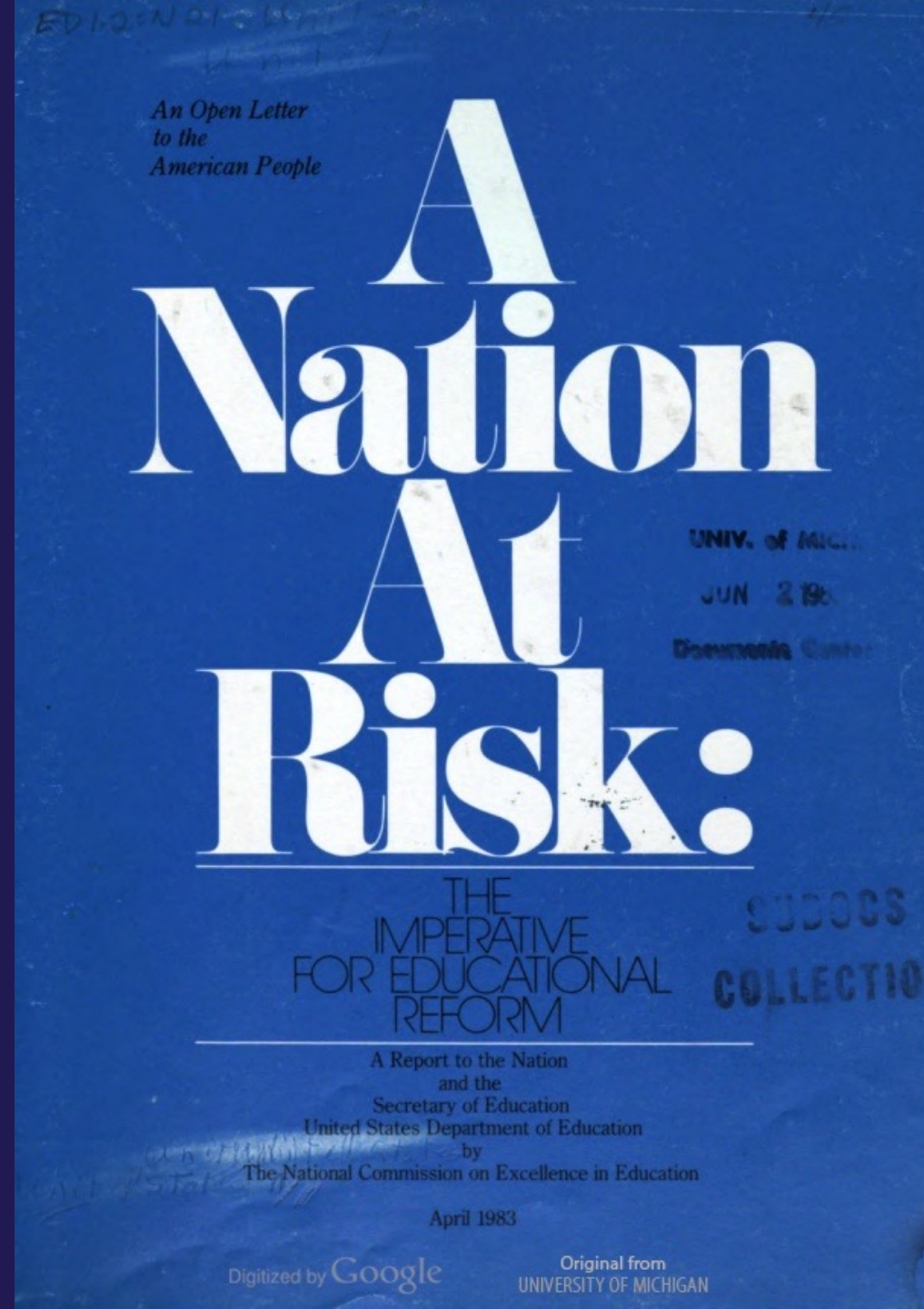
Moving beyond the paradigms and universalism(s)

Crises narratives as the engines of universalism

- ▶ Many US-spearheaded conferences on education crises were held in the 1960s:
 - ▶ The Bellagio meetings in 1960 called on governments to adopt a human capital approach and expand their educational systems to boost growth
 - ▶ The 1961 OECD Policy Conference on Economic Growth and Investment in Education held in Washington D.C.
 - ▶ The International Conference on the World Crisis in Education at Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1967
- ▶ → These conferences formed the breeding ground of a global governing complex in education (systems analysis → comparative indicators and competences → PISA)
- ▶ The US government, the newly created IOs, and the big American philanthropic foundations and universities formed a network of global governance that promoted an economistic approach to education as a Cold War weapon of American dominance.

The crisis behind Int. Comparative Indicators in the 1980s

- ▶ The US performed poorly in the Second International Mathematics Study (SIMS) conducted by the IEA between 1980 and 1982.
- ▶ These results angered the US government which found that sampling made by the IEA had not been cleared by any government agency.
- ▶ This situation prompted the government's call for precise definitions, systematic methodology, and standardized procedures around international comparative performance indicators in education
- ▶ Then came the "A Nation at Risk" report in 1983 which essentially portrayed the American education system as a hazard in the geopolitical race with Japan and the Soviet bloc.
- ▶ The report prompted the United States to push for the development of international comparative indicators → the OECD created the International Educational Indicators (INES) project in the late 1980s



Extrapolated nationalism

By the mid 80s, the US changed its role in the educational collaboration of the OECD from passivity to aggressive missionary activities, characterized by "fight against communism" and religious fundamentalism. In the eyes of the new US delegates, Western Europe mainly consisted of semi-communist countries, and the Nordic countries were definitely behind the iron curtain.

Tröhler (2020) has argued that PISA has ‘a national background, namely the United States, which educationalized the Cold War, implemented school reforms and developed a test system that was intended to ensure the effects of these reforms. It was this national model that was globally extrapolated via the OECD, and now pretends to be global – instead of imperial’ (p. 21-22).

NB: Centeno (2017) argues it was precisely the economic crisis of the 1970s caused by the oil crises that prompted the OECD to “shape its identity as the producer of league tables, benchmarking, and statistics that interlinked social, economic, and political issues” (pp. 110–111).

Picture: Kjell Eide (1925-2011). Eide headed the OECD’s work on education planning and he served as the first board chairman of CERI.



The Crisis surrounding Education Statistics

- A host of actors at the global level increasingly found UNESCO statistics to be of insufficient quality and the OECD and IEA were being positioned to take leading roles in developing comparative statistics on education.
- The crisis led to the reconfiguration of the UNESCO Divisions of Statistics in 1999, which was transferred from UNESCO headquarters in Paris to Montreal in 2001 and restructured as the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).
- Background: The United States – followed by the United Kingdom and Singapore – had withdrawn its UNESCO membership in 1984.
- The reviews of UNESCO statistics were largely produced by American organizations (e.g. Board on International Comparative Studies in Education (BICSE) 1988) while the United States strongly backed and supported the INES project in the OECD.
- The UIS went to Canada to win the Americans and British back and compensate for Canada not getting a UN regional office.
- This was also a way of appeasing the World Bank that had threatened to build its own division of statistics, and the World Bank ended up supporting and funding the UIS, which was not too far from Washington and in the same time zone.

The emergence of PISA– key developments

- EAG (1992) - a milestone in the development of education data, indicators and statistics
- In 1995, UNESCO, the OECD, and Eurostat joined forces in collecting data on key aspects of education, thus consolidating a liaison formed when the OECD adapted the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Systems.
- According to Ron Gass, Director of CERI, Tom Alexander, “... pulled off a major coup because he succeeded in absorbing...” IEA methodology into the INES programme, allegedly because “...the IEA fell into difficulties financially”
- Swedish Professor Jarl Bengtsson’s recruitment of Schleicher for the OECD in 1994 – a new regime of expertise - a tremendous boost to the OECD’s reach in education.
- Jacques Hallak, Director of IIEP, explains how both he and Postlethwaite were ‘a bit sad that Andreas established PISA at the OECD and not at the IIEP’ → Hallak’s point testifies to the organisational constraints and opportunities offered to actors in the global education architecture → an example of how structure and agency come together in the contingent formation of policy instruments.
- Schleicher has been able to build a platform that has allowed him to orchestrate a tremendous boost to the OECD’s reach in education. Part of this story is also Schleicher’s appearances in other important fora like Pearson’s advisory panel where he sits together with Michael Barber, chief education advisor to Pearson, formerly at McKinsey, and Eric Hanushek of the conservative

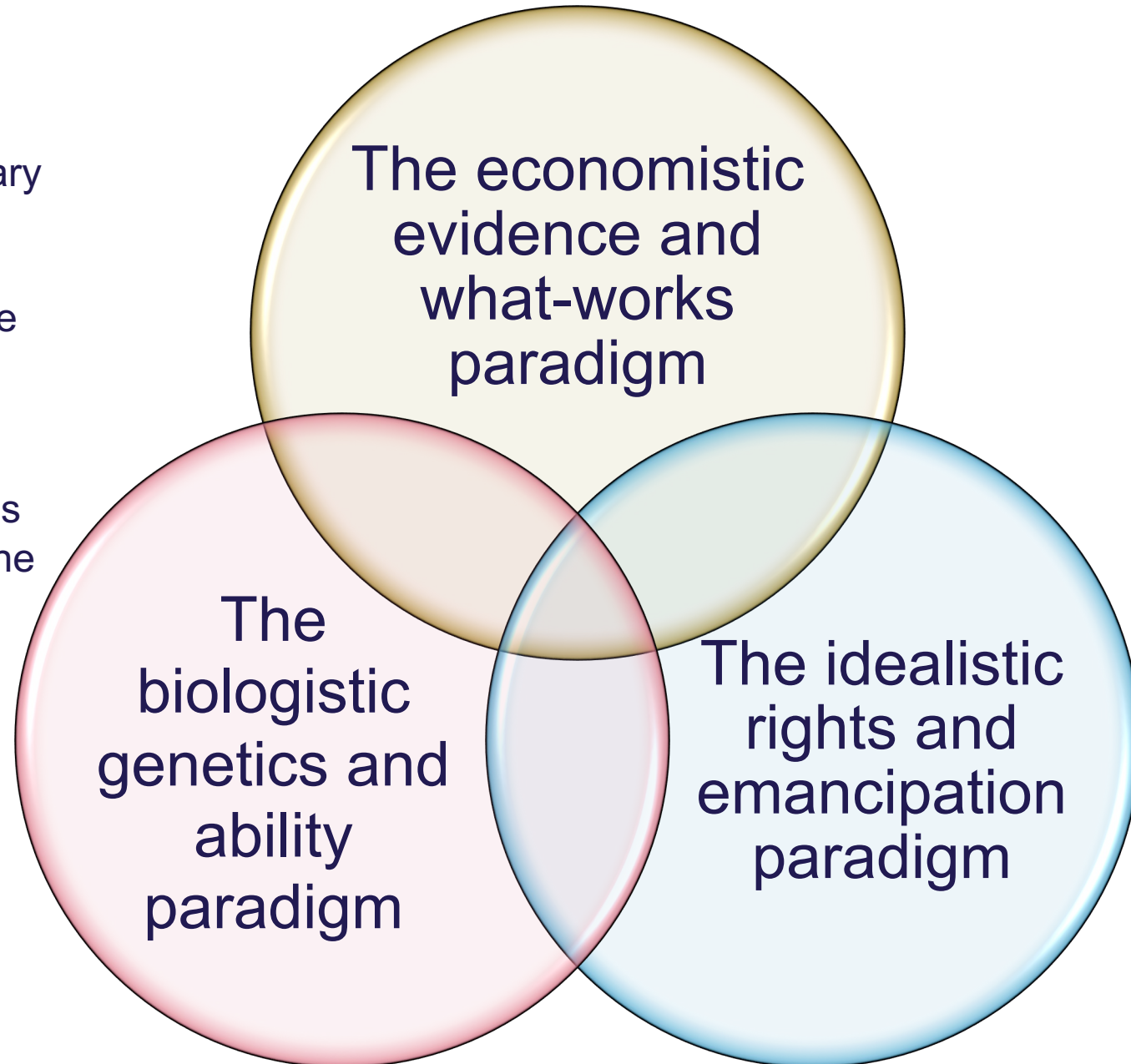
The challenges for policy and schooling

Many programmes in education are intimately connected with particular ideas and approaches which claim universality... with detrimental effects when rolled out in large scale, because they have limited, reductionist, or even amputated relevance in local contexts. Some examples are:

- International large-scale comparative assessment programmes with amputated concerns for national and local contexts, reflecting distorted or even irrelevant results or rankings
- The implementation of 'fashionable' and one-sided education policies in pursuit of specific goals such as the 21st-century skills and competencies agenda
- The off-rolling of students from school, found to be volatile in terms of improving test scores

Unpacking the universalist agendas

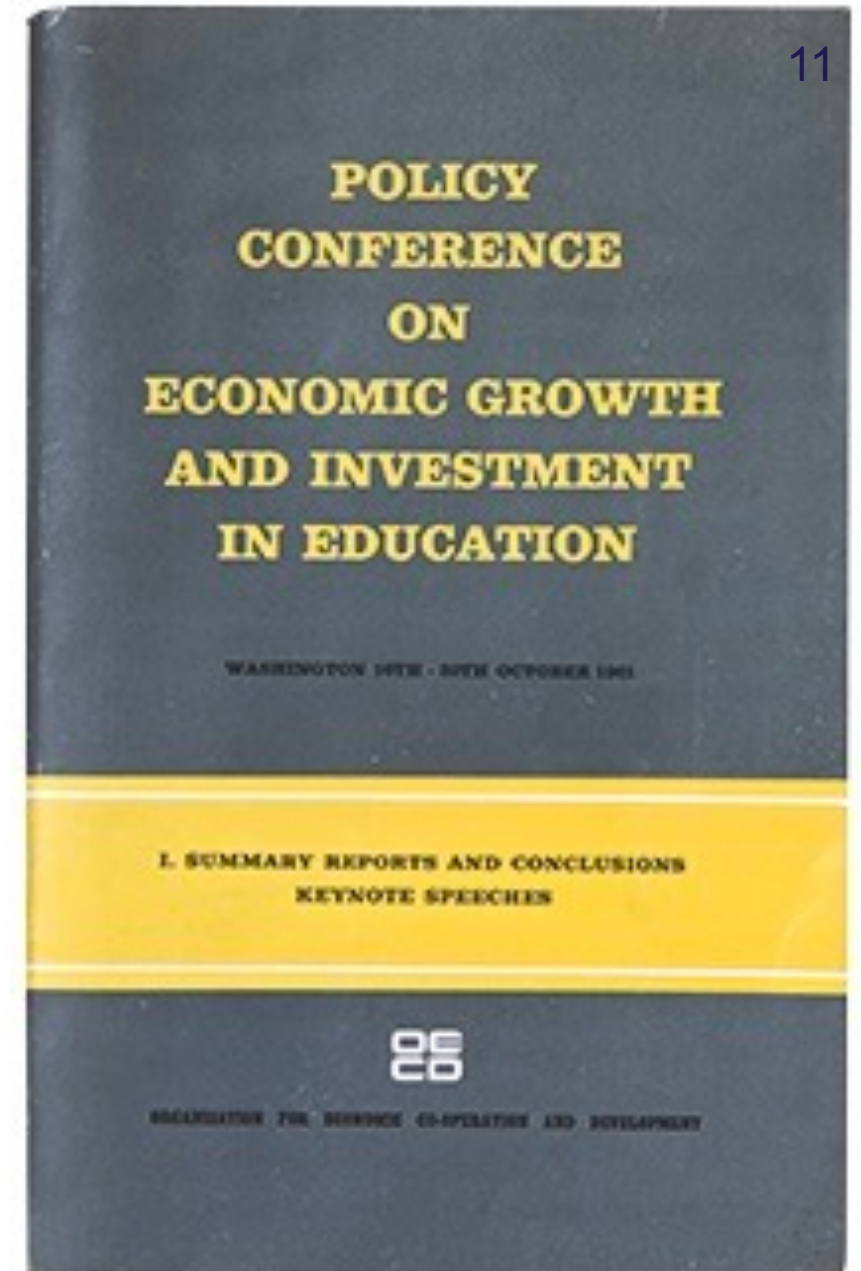
Charting the research literature on contemporary and historical education policy indicates the presence of three *longue durée* knowledge paradigms in education; paradigms which are shaped by different ideas and imaginaries about the very purposes of education.



Knowledge paradigms materialize in the produced knowledge, data, and evidence feeding into policies, programmes, and technologies... and they all claim universality.

The economic evidence and what-works paradigm

- ▶ This paradigm revolves around the desire to regulate the population and society in general and the economy and economic growth in particular.
- ▶ It essentially expresses an instrumental reason often guided by ideals about development and modernization.
- ▶ As Gilman (2003) notes, the key attributes of modernization theory were its global aspirations in terms of scope and, in terms of content, that 'bureaucracies, technical experts, and social engineers of various stripes should impose economic and political order on cities, nations, and the world' (p. 18).
- ▶ The purpose of education within this paradigm is to deliver an apt and educated workforce with the right competences for the labour market (human capital theory).
- ▶ In terms of research, data, statistics, standards, and benchmarks become important tools for regulation and for making individuals, organizations, and institutions comparable, guided by ideals about the optimization, modernization, and development of society.



An economic approach to education

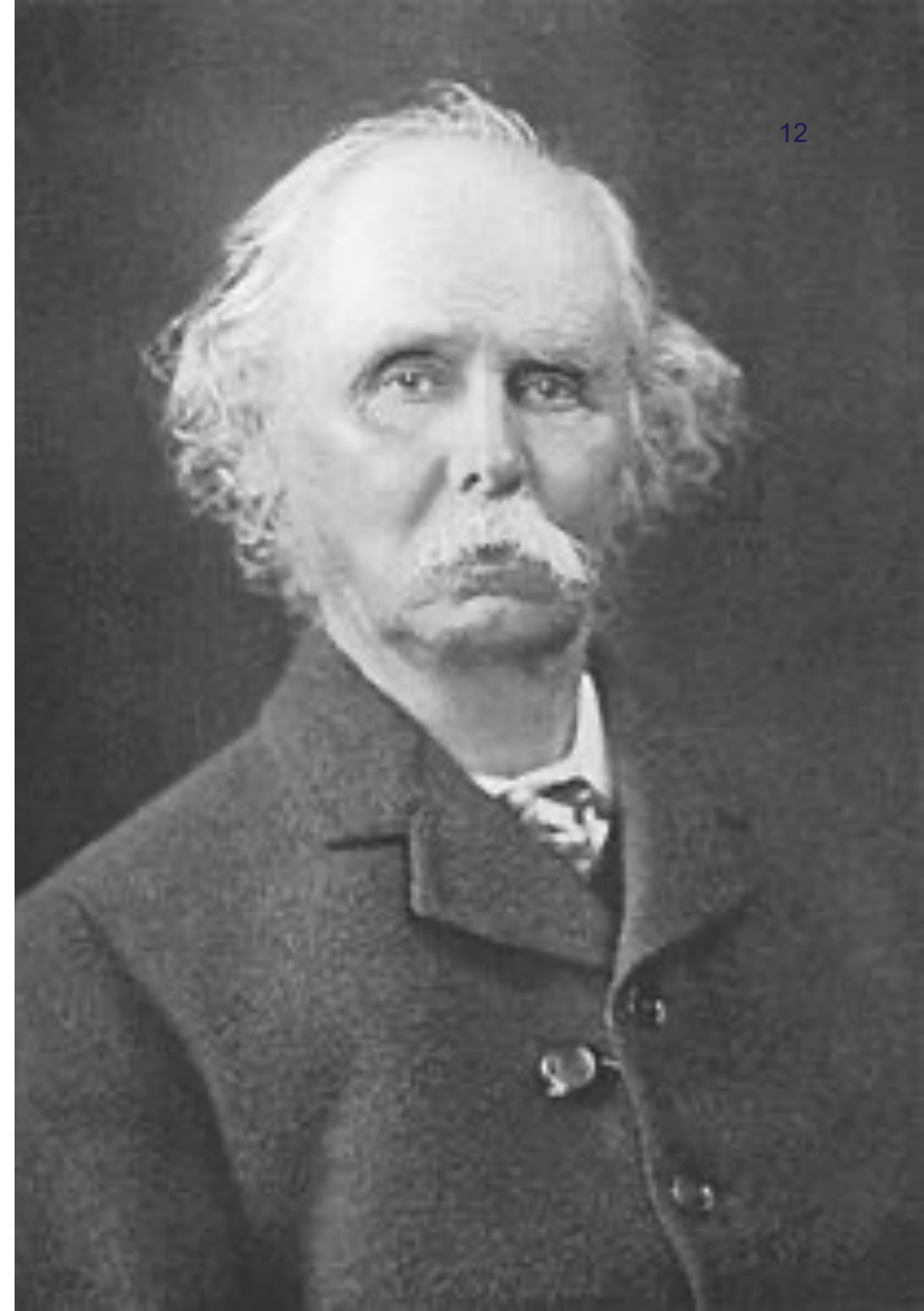
We may then conclude that the wisdom of expending public and private funds on education is not to be measured by its direct fruits alone. It will be profitable as a mere investment, to give the masses of the people much greater opportunities than they can generally avail themselves of. For by this means many, who would have died unknown, are enabled to get the start needed for bringing out their latent abilities.

Alfred Marshall (1842–1924) 'economics textbook' 1890 (§7)

If in a school system for example, one decided to increase ability to read by a specified amount a successful study could show which of several possible systems was 'best', that is, cost the least" (p. 3)

Kershaw, Joseph A. and Roland N. McLean. Systems Analysis and Education. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1959

Yufan, Du (2022) "Application of the Data-Driven Educational Decision-Making System to Curriculum Optimization of Higher Education", <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/5823515>



The idealistic rights and emancipation paradigm

- ▶ The ideals guiding this paradigm are humanistic and universalist ideals, such as human rights, sustainability, and social justice, as well as inclusive and equitable quality education along with lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- ▶ It is essentially a critical and normative approach guided by a focus on the political and emancipatory nature of education, often with an inherent ambition to empower and equip students to lead rich and fulfilling lives.
- ▶ Education is seen as a vehicle for moulding, changing, improving, evolving, or even revolutionizing society or the world, but also a site of power that can be used positively for empowerment and emancipation or negatively to subdue and oppress.
- ▶ In terms of research, the paradigm surfaces in normative and critical analyses, taking various starting points in ideals about the world in general and education in particular.
- ▶ The main driver is the improvement of education and the conditions for stakeholders in the premise of education itself, rather than serving purposes external to education.



UNESCO's education for peace programme(s)

- ▶ International textbook revision, 1946
- ▶ Atoms for Peace, 1946
- ▶ Education for Living in a World Community, 1947
- ▶ Education in great issues related to peace and advancement, 1953
- ▶ Major Project on the Mutual Appreciation of Eastern and Western Cultural Values, 1956
- ▶ → main idea: Education must be re-shaped, so as to fit men and women to live peacefully together.



The biologicistic genetics and ability paradigm

- ▶ The core ideas in this knowledge paradigm are the evolutionary progress of humankind and that the human body and its traits and abilities constitute the nodal point for education activities and planning → The idea is that education practices and theories can be *scientifically* deduced from knowledge about nature, that is, the human body and brain.
- ▶ The paradigm has a very long history, going back to phrenology, the eugenics movement, and practices of IQ testing, and it has recently resurfaced in neurobiology, neuroscience, and neuropedagogy (i.e., the translation of research findings on neural mechanisms of learning to educational practice and policy and to understand the effects of education on the brain).
- ▶ According to this paradigm, the purpose of education is to align education policy and schooling with what is biologically determined and possible and put everyone in their right place in society.
- ▶ Regarding research, this paradigm in education has been heavily influenced by science disciplines such as psychology, genetics, and neurobiology. It becomes essentially an amalgam of psychometrics and the life sciences.
- ▶ Bauman (1989) epitomizes this paradigm when he wrote about ‘the modern gardening state, viewing the Society it rules as an object of designing, cultivating and weed-poisoning’ (p. 13).

Kathryn Asbury
and Robert Plomin

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G is for Genes

The Impact of Genetics on
Education and Achievement



WILEY Blackwell

Some examples

Some interesting work has been carried out in the United States of America which suggests that it may be possible in certain cases to raise intelligence quotients by administering Glutamic Acid over a period of about six months. Although this investigation is still in an experimental stage there seems sufficient evidence to justify its use and it is hoped to explore the possibilities of this treatment in Birmingham.

Sometimes it is the duty for the Medical Officer – following upon reports from the Head Teacher of the Special School and the Educational Psychologist and after carrying out mental tests himself – to recommend that a child shall be permanently excluded as ineducable.

Excerpts from annual reports of the School Medical Officer in Birmingham, 1950-53

Work by one of the pioneers of behavioural genetics, Robert Plomin, has shown that most of the variation in performance of children in English schools is accounted for by within school factors (not between school factors), of which the largest factor is genes.

Dominique Cummings 2013

Life is an intelligence test. During the school years, differences in intelligence are largely the reason why some children master the curriculum more readily than other children.

Plomin & Stumm, 2018

Moving beyond the paradigms and universalism(s)

The tendency has always been strong to believe that whatever received a name must be an entity or thing, having an independent existence of its own; and if no real entity answering to the name could be found, men did not for that reason suppose that none existed, but imagined that it was something peculiarly abstruse and mysterious, too high to be an object of sense.

John Stuart Mill, 1869

Concepts are not waiting for us ready-made, like heavenly bodies. There is no heaven for concepts. They must be invented, fabricated, or rather created and would be nothing without their creator's signature.

Deleuze and Guatarri, 1994

→ Dismantling of the transcendentalism of the paradigms offers an emancipatory potential

Moving education (research) forward

We can identify governing complexes – in the intersections between institutions, organisations, actors, agendas, technologies, ideologies, and paradigms – coming together to order and classify contexts (seemingly universally valid explanations) → create transparency about the role and usage of educational research in the governance of policies and schooling practice.

History of education is one way of achieving a critical reflective space for decision-makers, stakeholders and researchers in education → it is a reservoir for teasing out antecedents, steppingstones, conditions, trajectories... and transparency vis-a-vis contemporary policies, practices, technologies.

In this lecture, I have argued the presence of a historical trajectory going back to World War II, which was shaped during the bipolar world order of the Cold War, and which laid the foundation for the crucial role for numbers, data, and indicators that we see today.

Decision-makers, stakeholders and researchers in education need to be aware of the paradigms – their possibilities and limitations – and ask the question ‘which solutions do education programs, practices and policies imply and are they relevant in a given context?’

Empower stakeholders and restore old virtues of research; namely transparency and critical reflection.