

William K. Cummings .
The InstitutionS of Education: A Comparative Study of Educational Development in the Six Core Nations.

(Oxford Studies in Comparative Education).

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Cummings' aim is to sketch the broad architecture of modern schooling. Utilizing a comparative method, he highlights distinct trajectories of change among six nations: the United States, England, France, Japan, Germany, and the former Soviet Union. He outlines in impressive detail how each provides an archetype for education. By doing so he claims to transcend the prevailing American-centric "unilinear" theories of modernization with a "parallel cyclical linear" model. In reference to the New Institutionalists based at Stanford, Cummings concedes that Western nation states have diffused educational templates internationally, leading to some convergence of school systems around the world. Nonetheless, he places far greater weight on ongoing variations, insisting on the survival of distinct organizational forms. His singular contribution is to document six persisting types, denoted by the capital S in "institutionS."

This book, jammed with information, is difficult to summarize, but its argument runs something like this. From the 1500's to the 1800's, the military and political consolidation of small European fiefdoms created large nation states. By the mid 1800's, the leaders of these re-structured political economies came to value literacy for the masses. A minimal level of cognitive competence was now deemed necessary for nurturing devout and economically productive citizens. By creating new stakeholders, modernity altered the content of education. Churches and families declined in influence relative to the state and the workplace, schools stressed personality development in primary grades, and cognitive development in later grades, and adopted standardized subjects like national language, reading and writing, math and science.

While all European school systems were charged with the task of helping to forge new industrial nations, each built upon its existing tradition in unique ways. National governments cobbled together distinct hodge-podges of private bodies, typically run by churches or private tutors, to create new systems. Unique formations emerged from the degree of central governance, from the rapidity of change, and from each nation's images of the ideal person. Where administration was relatively centralized, as in Germany, education was strongly segmented and teachers had little autonomy. Where governance was decentralized, as in the United States, tracking was weaker and teachers were granted more discretion. Where change was abrupt, as in Russia, planners created relatively inclusive systems. Where change was gradual, as in England, rulers preserved distinct paths for the elites versus the common folk. Where ideal persons were portrayed as elites, as in England and France, educational systems were more restrictive. Where those people were expected to have more diverse functions, as in Russia and the U.S., the curriculum was more holistic.

Such differences created "representative" schools in each nation. England was distinguished by its public grammar school, the U.S. by its liberal arts college, France by its *lycée*, Germany by its *gymnasium*. Political adversaries in each nation then maneuvered around these founding schools.

For instance, English socialists pushed for comprehensive high schools and red-brick universities to be built alongside grammar schools and Oxbridge. These politics, played out in different contexts, gave each of the six nations a peculiar educational formation. Once institutionalized, these patterns were later diffused to their respective colonies or political blocs. As imperial nations systematized their colonial administrations, they built school systems that bore the imprint of their empire.

These divergent structures foster traditions of pedagogy, learning and teaching. Nations like Japan conceive learning as stemming mostly from effort, while others see it as the product of ability. Japan's content-driven curricula provide a sharp contrast to France's emphasis on rhetorical and logical expression, and gives rise to its prevalent after-hours cram schools. England's gentlemanly image of the gifted and generalist teacher differs from that of the United States, where chronic shortages of educated personnel gave rise to the professionally-trained specialist. The older European model of a prestigious curricula coupled with essay-style evaluation is contrasted to a newer American system premised on a more diverse student body and a sprawling but less consensual curricula. The result is not only a more standardized form of evaluation (i.e. multiple-choice formats) but a conception of learning founded on professional psychology, oriented to the development of generic cognitive and emotive processes, rather than the inculcation of time-honored truths. This newer model, Cummings notes, is spreading around the world, making the field of educational evaluation busier than ever.

Overall, this is a wonderfully analytic effort, free of ideological posturing and rhetoric that spoils so much educational research. Cummings' wealth of knowledge is both eclectic and impressive, his tenuous grip on quantitative methods notwithstanding. In comparison to the Stanford school, his descriptions are thicker, his causal statements less elegant, his caveats larger. Some readers will appreciate this, others may yearn for more precise explanations. I was disappointed by some digressions from his central thrust, such as his conclusions about the coming impact of societal "mega-trends" on modes of learning. Cummings missed an opportunity to connect those forces to his theory of institutionS. Nevertheless, this is a thorough and provocative treatise by an accomplished researcher in the field of comparative education.

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