

## **IVth MESCE Conference**

**Rabat, Morocco**

**8- 10<sup>th</sup> November 2009**

The fourth conference of the Mediterranean Society of Comparative Education (ME.S.C.E) was held under the auspices of the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* (ENS) at Rabat, Morocco on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> November, 2009. The conference title was 'Education, Democracy and Social Justice - Curricular, Pedagogical and Policy Implications'. The conference was held at the end of last year rather than in 2010 not to clash with the World Congress of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES) to take place in Istanbul this coming June. ME.S.C.E is a full member of the WCCES whose executive meeting also took place in Rabat the day before the ME.SCE conference started. Members of the WCCES Executive Council participated at the ME.S.C.E conference, some even presenting papers at this event.

This was the largest and most representative ME.S.C.E conference to date. The programme was packed with plenaries, keynotes and parallel sessions with speakers from both sides of the Mediterranean shores. There were also presenters from other regions, such as North America, sub-Saharan Africa and South East Asia, to ensure that the conference involved a certain degree of international border-crossing with respect to ideas and experiences, in the best spirit of critical comparative education. There were presentations from Australia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Canada, Cyprus, France, Greece, Holland, Iran, Italy, Malta, Morocco, Palestine, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Taiwan, Tanzania, Turkey, United Kingdom and the U.S.A. There were also scholars from Southern countries (e.g. Algeria, Ghana) who are now ensconced in Western institutions.

Professor Samira Dlimi from ENS, Morocco and ME.S.C.E Secretary General, Professor Carmel Borg, from the University of Malta, were the conference convenors. They left no stone unturned to render this a superbly organized event, with simultaneous translations in English, French and Arabic being provided. The opening plenary was addressed by Professor Abdelhafid

## Conferences

Debbagh, Secrétaire Général du Département de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Formation des Cadres et de la Recherche scientifique, the Director of ENS, M. Abdellattif Moqine, Professor Dlimi and M.E.S.C.E President, Professor Peter Mayo, University of Malta. The keynote speakers were: Professor Abdellah Saaf, Université Mohammed V, Rabat, Morocco and President of *Le Centre des Etudes et Recherches en Sciences Sociales* (CERSS) Morocco, Professor Mehdi Lahlou, *Institut National de Statistique et d'Economie Appliquée* (INSEA), Rabat, Morocco and M.E.S.C.E. Vice President, Professor Fatma Gok, Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey, M.E.S.C.E. Executive Committee Member and convenor of 2010 WCCES Conference, and Professor Abdelmajid Kaddouri, Hasan II University, Casablanca, Morocco.

Topics addressed throughout the conference included Migration, Postcolonial Education, Organizational Culture, Pedagogies of Memory and Mourning, Youth cultures, Language Politics, Colonization and History, Women's issues in Education, Higher Education, Vocational Education, Bologna Process, Assessment Policies, Middle Eastern Politics, Inclusion Policies, Maternal Education, Self-Reliance and Education, Human Rights Education, Equity issues in Education and School Leadership, Gender issues in Education, Scientific Knowledge in a Global Era.

Sponsorship for this conference was provided by the ENS (Rabat-Morocco), Ministry of Education (Morocco), the Italian Cultural Institute and M.E.S.C.E. The Italian Ambassador to Morocco also hosted a reception for M.E.S.C.E. and WCCES Executive Council participants at his residence. A welcome reception was held on the eve of the conference courtesy of the Italian Cultural Institute in Rabat, Morocco. Information and photos regarding the conference can be found on the Society's website: <http://www.mesce.org/>

### **Presidential Address by Peter Mayo, University of Malta, MESCE President 2008-2010**

On behalf of the Mediterranean Society of Comparative Education, I welcome the Honorable Minister of Education, members of the executive committee of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies

(WCCES), other participants at the MESCE conference, including members of the newly formed AFRICE, to this, the fourth in a series of conferences, normally held every two years. These conferences focus primarily on different aspects of education in the Mediterranean region but also accommodate papers and roundtables on aspects of education in other parts of the world.

A word of great thanks is due at the very outset of my address to the hosts of this conference from the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* here in Rabat, Morocco. Particular thanks are due to Professor Samira Dlimi who worked very hard, and at times against the odds, to ensure that this conference takes place in the stipulated time with everything in place to ensure the packed programme's smooth running. I can also attest personally to the sterling efforts of our Secretary General, Professor Carmel Borg, to strengthen the organisational framework of this organisation, ensuring a sound financial basis, the creation of a superb hyperlinked website, the publication of the 2008 conference book and providing significant input into the organisation of the conference.

A quick glance at the programme indicates that this organisation is gradually coming of age. It has come a long way from its very first meeting which took place in the resident city of the comparative education scholar who established this society. The scholar is Dott. Giovanni Pampanini and the city in question is Catania, Sicily. MESCE, as our website points out, is Dott. Pampanini's brainchild, as is the fledgling African Society of Comparative Education, AFRICE, whose representatives we also welcome today. It would be no exaggeration to state that Dott. Pampanini has, through his vision and drive, contributed immensely to the spread and creation of structures for comparative and international education in the Southern regions of the world. It was also he who proposed the holding of the WCCES meeting in Sarajevo and to have the WCCES Executive Committee hold its meeting here in Rabat during the MESCE conference. For all this, he deserves our gratitude.

His vision has no doubt been shared by others. We might now begin to speak of a movement concerning 'education in the Mediterranean' which gravitates around such organisations as MESCE and the journal it helps promote, the *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies* (MJES), the brainchild of its founding and still current editor, Ronald Sultana who invited MESCE representatives to serve on the Editorial Advisory Board. He also co-

edited with Professor Borg and me a special issue of MJES dedicated to the 2008 Malta conference which was subsequently turned into a book.

In an age of university classifications, dominated by Anglo-N. American-Australian and South-East Asian universities, and characterised for the most part by the hegemony of English and the high currency of certain contexts at the expense of others, I consider it imperative that we from the South while, unrelenting in our efforts to foreground, in the established literature, the perspectives that emerge from our context, also create our own structures to make these perspectives constantly visible and accessible.

The decision to convert the MJES into an online 'open access' journal was made by the Editor precisely with this view in mind. I think this is a step in the right direction, despite the prejudices against such outlets often expressed in the corridors of high ranking, status conscious universities and their academics in certain parts of the world. I am convinced that the future of academic publishing lies in this direction. It constitutes the means whereby academics reclaim the products of their own labour and condition in no small measure the range of its dissemination.

Initiatives such as these are complemented by others emerging from this part of the world, including that of the impending launch of a journal concerning Postcolonial Issues in Education which will be published in the Mediterranean island of Malta, a symbolic location for such a venture given the country's long histories of domination and colonisation.

Nevertheless swimming against the tide is no mean task. It is fraught with difficulties and major ones at that. I need not rehearse some of the well documented difficulties, including the various conflicts leading to the presence of X signifying the automatic absence of Y in projects such as the one we are undertaking. Financial sustainability is another. And yet success breeds success. The relative success of the Malta conference, not only in terms of participation, smooth running, range of topics discussed but also in terms of registering a profit, led, in some way, to some important actions: the setting up and maintenance of a MESCE website, the publication of keynote talks from the conference and the provision of some partial funding for this conference where the challenges have been many, not least the covering of such otherwise crippling expenses as the provision of professional translation facilities. These

facilities are essential if the conference is to be truly representative of the region, catering for both sides of the Mediterranean's shores.

We stuck to the unwritten policy of rotating between one side of the Mediterranean to another, starting off in Catania and then moving to Alexandria with the evocative location of the then newly built Bibliotheca Alexandrina, then to Malta and now to Rabat, Morocco. In my view, an east Mediterranean city would be ideal next time round, maybe an Istanbul, a Nicosia, a Dubrovnik or a Bled. I know our very committed friends from Istanbul have their work cut out with hosting the forthcoming massive WCCES Congress and might want to rule themselves out of the equation for the time being. However the excitement which I am sure the Istanbul event will generate in June might make them want to change their mind, once the dust has settled. It is important that we keep the momentum going.

It is important that we settle on the right choice, right in terms of:

- accessibility of location,
- attraction of the place (without exoticising or 'orientalising' it)

to draw members of other international societies and ensure that MESCE becomes not a ghetto but a space for dialogue concerning issues emerging not only from the Mediterranean but also from other regions, in the spirit of true comparative international education

- hosts who demonstrate the kind of commitment, as shown by Professor Dlimi and her colleagues over here, in leaving no stone unturned to make the conference a success.

We need to keep the rotation going in view of proper Mediterranean representation so that educators from all sides of the region feel a sense of ownership of the project. In this regard, it is worth reiterating that there can be no MESCE without active Arab participation. This reflects the fact that there can be no Mediterranean without the presence of the Arab world. The Rome based, Bosnian-Croat scholar, Predrag Matvejevic, once wrote: "We need to get rid of this European habit of speaking about the Mediterranean and think only of its northern shore: the Mediterranean has another shore, that of Africa and the Maghreb." (Matvejevic, 1997, p.119). These statements come across as truisms. It would not be amiss, however, to re-assert these truisms as we

constantly struggle against popular romanticizations, mystifications, orientalisations and omissions – all part of the politics of (mis) representation and absence.

The Mediterranean is formidable in its diversity and convergences, crisscrossed as it is by cultural crosscurrents that render our various cultures hybrids that have the potential of enabling us to connect with other peoples from the region. We need to explore however the power dynamics, suggestive of unequal power relations in the Mediterranean, that characterise these connections, lest we lapse into a facile notion of ‘interculturalism.’

What Ferdinand Braudel calls the *longue durée* of exchange in the Mediterranean left its imprints on the subjectivities of people in the region which even long periods of Northern European colonialism could not stamp out, despite the fact that this colonialism, as well as resistances and accommodations to it, enhanced the ever dynamic process of hybridisation involved. These can lead scholars to engage in ‘contrapuntal’ readings of situations, in Edward Said’s terms, borrowed from literature and music, which render research on education and other aspects of life in the Mediterranean most rewarding and instructive.

### Reference

Matvejevic, P. (1997). Address. In *Laboratorio Mediterraneo. Obiettivi e Mezzi per il partenariato Euromediterraneo. Il Forum Civile EuroMed.* (pp.122-123). Naples: Magma.