

## BOOK REVIEWS

Esteve Oroval Planas (ed.), *Economía de la Educación (Economics of Education)*, Barcelona, Ariel Educación, 277 pp., 1996, ISBN 84-344-2601-3.

This book is intended to introduce Spanish-speaking readers, particularly undergraduate education students enrolled in Spanish universities, to the international literature on the economics of education. The Editor's strategy to achieve this goal is to present "*the main issues faced today by economics of education in the form of texts selected from the most outstanding authors at the international level*" (p.9). 'International' is, in this case, a restricted term. Of the thirteen articles included in this collection, all but one have been previously published exclusively in U.S. or British journals, and their authors work in U.S. or British universities. The remaining article deals with educational financing in Spain, and its author is a professor from the Universidad de Barcelona. That restriction notwithstanding, the book supplies an excellent overview of the discipline by providing a good sample of its main theoretical and methodological approaches.

In the short history of the economics of education as an independent field, its debates have been concentrated on three major areas: the relationship between education and labour markets, the contribution of education to economic growth and social development, and the comparative analysis of alternative models of educational financing. Issues of equity, efficiency, productivity, private and public investments and rates of return, labour forecasting, market mechanisms, unemployment, decentralization, etc., tend to be discussed in the context of these three major thematic areas. This is also the case with most of the contributions to this volume.

Indeed, three of the five sections of the book correspond directly with these areas: section 2 ('education, occupation and the labor market'), section 3 ('education and growth'), and section 5 ('educational financing'). Section 4, although entitled 'equity and education', deals in reality with issues of educational financing (and its two articles would fit better in section 5), and the first section provides a good discussion of the discipline's state of the art.

The main criterion to select the articles was that they had not yet been translated into Spanish. Originally published in English between 1981 to 1994, five of them were published during the 1980s, and the other seven during the early 1990s. Thus, Spanish students are accessing works which English-speaking readers have read and discussed years ago, and which have been superseded by newer



books and articles that contain more recent information and address more updated developments.

This is not a fault of the editor of the book; if anything, it shows how difficult it is for Spanish-speaking academics and translators to keep pace with the large number of works published in English year after year. This is not to say that the discussions presented in the readings of this book are obsolete. Rather, many of the articles provide conceptual and theoretical frameworks that are necessary starting points upon which to build, and some of them are classics that will probably overcome the passing of time.

This is the case of the article selected as the opening piece (very appropriate, in my view). It is by Mark Blaug (University of London) and is entitled 'Where are we now in the Economics of Education?' This famous work, originally published in 1985, reviews the main assumptions of the first and second waves in economics of education, and examines the arguments of human capital theory and segmented labour markets theory, the shortcomings and insights of Bowles and Gintis' contribution in *Schooling in Capitalist America* and the relationship between labour forecasting and educational policy. Mark Blaug reappears in chapter 6 (becoming the only author with more than one contribution to the anthology) with 'Education and the employment contract' (1993), in which he further develops the analysis of the incomplete employment contract examined in the first article. Although this second article is insightful, its overlap with the first one makes one question the wisdom of selecting it, instead of a work by a different author. The selection of the critical response by Steven Klees to the first Blaug article, entitled, as a tribute to Blaug, 'The economics of education: a more than slightly jaundiced view of where we are now' is clearly appropriate, although surprisingly not inserted immediately after Blaug's article, but as chapter 3.

A number of articles throughout the book deal with the concept of human capital (Becker, Hashimoto, Weale), others with the monetary and non-monetary contributions of education in the context of other (noneducational) variables (Psacharopoulos, Levin and Kelley), and others on the financing of vocational education and training (Carnoy), of higher education (Leslie and Brinkman, Barr), of independent schools (Le Grand) and of the Spanish educational system (Calero).

The success of an introductory book like this depends on an adequate selection and translation of paradigmatic works in the field. By and large, both objectives were successfully achieved. The articles selected constitute a good representative sample of the diversity of the discipline. The article by Hashimoto, however, is excessively technical and probably inaccessible to the intended readers, who have no background in economics. Moreover, although space limitations always constitute a serious constraint, the volume would have benefited from a better

balance in the number of contributions by English speaking and non-English speaking authors.

The latter could have been particularly from Europe and also from Latin America. This would in turn have helped to expand the book's potential readership. The translations by Santanachs and Calero are commendable. As a minor detail, it is not clear why English terminology is kept when there are corresponding terms in Spanish (for example, using 'input' and 'output' instead of 'insumo' and 'producto').

Spanish students will not find, in this book, the development of an argument, or a systematic overview of diverging perspectives. They will find, however, the Spanish version of several important articles originally published in English. This is an achievement in itself. Nevertheless, the volume could have been further improved by including short biographical notes on the authors, a glossary of the most relevant terms, and a concluding analytical chapter. Indeed, although the Editor's prologue is useful for pedagogical purposes in summarizing the chapters, it could have been useful to end the book by placing all the works in perspective, and updating the evolution of the field with a short review of more recent contributions.

This is particularly important in the contemporary context of globalization dynamics, the retrenchment of the welfare state, structural adjustment, neoliberal policies, and the increasing commodification of cultural goods.

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