

COMPARATIVE AND
INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION:
SURVEY OF AN INFINITE FIELD

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COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION: SURVEY OF AN INFINITE FIELD

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PREFACE

The field of comparative and international education has developed through periods of “comparative isolation” (Ross, Post, & Farrell, 1995, p. 4), regional variation (this volume), diversification across units of analysis and topics of research (Bray & Thomas, 1995), and “osmosis,” which speaks to a dialectic of intersection and distinction in related work across professional and scholarly boundaries (Davidson, Park, Dzotsenidze, Okogbue, & Wiseman, 2019). However, none have spoken about the cohesiveness or singularity of comparative and international education. It is a scholarly field and a professional area that is both blessed and cursed with widespread diversity in topical focus, methodology, theoretical framework, practical implementation, regional and cultural context, and educational impact. This volume of the *International Perspectives on Education and Society* series titled, *Comparative and International Education: Survey of an Infinite Field*, focuses on the scope and diversity of the field of comparative and international education.

Previous volumes in the series have emphasized the wide scope and broad diversity in the field of comparative and international education (e.g., see the *Annual Review of Comparative and International Education*, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018) and have discussed the challenges of maintaining and professionalizing a field that is measurably and explicitly permeable by related fields and disciplines. The scope and diversity of an “infinite” field are by definition limitless, but there are key categories that can be considered. This volume emphasizes the regional variations in comparative and international education, and focuses predominantly on the more scholarly (i.e., more “comparative” and less “international,” see Epstein, 1994) side of the field. But, within the comparative side there are also units of analysis, methodology, theoretical framework, research topics, and historical development among others.

A regional focus on the diversity and scope of comparative and international education provides a productive (albeit focused) lens on the infiniteness of the field. The chapters in this volume demonstrate the difficulties of a singular approach to discussing what comparative education means and how it is implemented. As such, the chapters each demonstrate the diversity of approaches to comparative and international education, and in particular the ways that cultural and social context are as much a contributing factor to that diversity as are the different practical educational issues in each region or community. Turner’s opening chapter asks the key question: “What is comparative education?” And, all the following chapters provide their own answers to that question; sometimes explicitly and other times as part of an assumed comparative education approach. There is little discussion of the “international” in comparative and international education, but rather a clearer emphasis on the comparative.

What this volume contributes to the body of work on comparative and international education is further evidence of the historical development of comparative and international education as a field, and of the diversity that occurs even within traditionally defined divisions along regional or geographic lines. This is, in fact, what the “international” component of comparative and international education is often assumed to represent: variation in education across national boundaries. In many ways, this is a somewhat old-fashioned approach to the “international” component because boundaries among educational systems, practices, and expectations are less driven by regional variation or national culture than they are by social network (which can be global) or linguistic diaspora (which can also be global).

There is also a conflict about who or what the prime movers of comparative and international education are. National histories tend to emphasize the influence of specific national individuals or organizations that pushed for intranational as much as international educational comparisons. Yet, there is no evidence that comparative education emerged spontaneously or independently in any nation or region. Instead, there is ample evidence that global factors have consistently and historically led to the emergence of comparative and international education in individual countries, systems, and communities.

In fact, the origin of comparative and international education in most regions is a combination of international development efforts, political and social resistance, and an ameliorating or technical-rational approach to borrowing “best practices” from abroad. Each of the chapters in this volume addressing the history of comparative and international education in a specific region or country, in fact, refer at some point to broader global factors, which laid the foundation or provided the context for the intranational development of comparative and international education. The challenge, in fact, for many chapter authors in this volume is how to synthesize or summarize a history of the development of comparative and international education across regions, cultures, nations, and societies. As is usual in these kinds of discussions, the strength of diversity is an ever present point, but at some point diversity leads to divisions and irreconcilable differences. The challenge for this volume and others like it in this series has always been to redirect readers toward those factors that complement each other or unify research, scholarship, or professional activity under the moniker of “comparative and international education,” broadly speaking. This volume meets that challenge head on and succeeds in doing so.

Alexander W. Wiseman
Series Editor

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AS AN INFINITE FIELD

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ABSTRACT

The scope and breadth of the field of comparative and international education (CIE) is immense. There are few, if any, limitations on theme, issue, theory, method, or data that are relevant to CIE. In addition, every context or combination of contexts – social, political, economic, cultural – are available for both CIE scholars and professionals to do research on or work in. The flexibility and scope of the field can be a benefit, but create serious challenges to those who work in and study it. It also poses problems for those attempting to professionalize the field by creating areas of specialization or ownership. At the same time, the development of the field has historically been one of push and pull between international educational agendas and organizations with local or stakeholder-driven needs and situations. This chapter highlights those challenges and introduces the volume's chapters.

Keywords: Comparative education; international education; secondary analysis; development education; multidisciplinary; scope of field

Claiming that anything is infinite is a bold statement at best and overreaching at worst. But, to claim the field of comparative and international education (CIE) is infinite is, perhaps surprisingly, appropriate. There have been numerous reflective

pieces discussing the diversity, breadth, and borrowed nature of the field (Astiz & Akiba, 2016; Wiseman, 2018; Wolhuter, 2015). Like most sub-fields of educational studies, the scholarship on CIE or from comparative and international perspectives relies upon the methods and theories of other disciplines – most often social or cognitive science disciplines like sociology, political science, international relations, economics, or psychology. The focus of CIE is neither relegated to a specific unit of analysis, like elementary, secondary, or tertiary (e.g., higher) education; nor is it at a specific system level such as campus, district, state, regional, national, or international (Bray & Thomas, 1995). CIE talks about education as an institution as well as an organization (Wiseman, Astiz, & Baker, 2014). It emphasizes the cultural contexts of educational organizations themselves as well as the cultural, social, economic, and political contexts in which they are situated (Harris & Jones, 2018). CIE is historical, longitudinal, cross-sectional, and ethnographic (e.g., McNess, Arthur, & Crossley, 2015; Zapp, 2018). Theoretical perspectives relevant to CIE range from the micro to the macro and engage every aspect of development, culture, society, organizations, psychology, and cognitive science (Paulston, 1999). In fact, if someone were to ask a comparativist of education what is typical of CIE, it would be a nearly impossible question to answer.

For many years the annual speech by the president of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) in the United States was an attempt to further define or encompass what CIE had to offer. CIE was called “twins” and the field was debated as a scholarly endeavor versus a development framework (Wilson, 1994). Even after that high-level debate over the definition of the field, there still is no one definition of CIE. Although there are several definitions provided by scholars in the field (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014), which are often used as temporary solutions for the problem of a definition for this field of study, there remains no global professional coherence or indisputable ownership over the field of CIE, although some professional trends are evident (Wiseman & Matherly, 2009). After more than 100 years of being a distinct field of study and practice and more than 200 years of development (Epstein, 2016), CIE is broadly inclusive of all methodologies, all theoretical frameworks, all disciplinary foci, all units of analysis, and all topics of focus. In other words, CIE comprises infinite combinations of factors, whether scholarly or professional, and there is no one group, approach, or canon of literature that defines it. And, therein lies the problem.

This book takes stock of the evolution and current state of the scholarly field of CIE after over 200 years of development. This book contains chapters written by comparativists in each of the major world regions (Latin America, North America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the Middle East-North Africa region, Oceania, South Asia, South-East and East Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa) as well as chapters written on several major themes of the development of the field of CIE and its theory and methodology, higher education, teacher education, vocational education, peace education, and the rise of the global testing culture in education. Each chapter takes stock of the history and state of one facet of the field or one region of the world, and contributes to a discourse documenting the development of CIE as well as charting a future course for the field as well.

In 1990, 155 countries and representatives of over 150 organizations pledged “every person – child, youth and adult – shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs.” Known as the Jomtien Declaration, this event marked the beginning of Education for All (EFA), a movement dedicated to improving education to lift developing nations out of poverty. However, several decades later, limited progress has been made. While some nations have experienced significant increases in literacy and educational access, EFA has yet to achieve the goal of universal education. There are nearly one billion illiterate people in the early 21st century; nearly all of them are concentrated in the developing and emerging world. In part, this is because educators and policy-makers in these nations lack the capacity to design and implement reform policies that are appropriate for their unique situations.

EFA, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and other international initiatives like these reflect one of the key influences on CIE. The influence of international agendas on education for development is evidence of the impact of globalization, broadly speaking, on the research and professional practice associated with the field. Globalization permeates countless fields in education and affects all manner of people. Be it educators, parents, practitioners, or students, the effect of global education policies can be widespread among a variety of stakeholders. With the continuing nature of education reform efforts, many constituents find themselves left behind, and unaware of the effect a policy may have on their community. Global educational policies often go unimplemented or improperly applied because their designers fail to incorporate the local context into their plans. As a result, critiques of CIE from inside as well as outside of the field abound both related to scholarship and practice.

Whether the critiques be focused on the application of comparative and international perspectives to educational issues and problems worldwide or the policy and practice itself occurring within specific educational communities, three key areas are often highlighted. These are:

1. There is often a lack of participation among local stakeholders in decision-making.

Too often local stakeholders have little say in both the design and implementation of the reform efforts taking place in their communities and schools. Often this is due to the fact that data is available to analyze without the voice of the local or community stakeholders involvement (e.g., [Miske & Joglekar, 2018](#)). While this is an argument that can and is often made concerning the pitfalls of development work, it is also relevant to any discussion about the development of CIE in regional, epistemic, or otherwise contextualized communities. For example, [Gorostiaga and Espinoza \(2019\)](#) look at the ways that history, context, and culture intersect to create CIE in Spanish-speaking Latin America. [Aguilar and Assis \(2019\)](#) likewise examine these intersections in Brazil. In both cases, there are international organizations that influence the development or re-development of CIE in these communities. International organizations partly introduce comparative and international perspectives and approaches to education as part of their

externalizing influence, but also they bring framework that local comparativists can then adopt and adapt to the unique features and demands of their local contexts. It is within this dynamic intersection between global models and local differences that the infinite possibilities for the development of CIE arise.

2. There is a lack of communication between individuals and organizations studying education comparatively or internationally.

This is due both to epistemic siloing as well as a lack of opportunity to connect and share ideas (e.g., [Kubow, 2018](#)). Turner (2019) identifies several reasons why there is not only a lack of communication about CIE, but also why specific debates about its method and theory have been either one-sided or irrelevant. He suggests that without the possibility of CIE attaining disciplinary status, the trend of de facto comparative education, and scholars settling for social justice-oriented theorizing without asserting the role of the global then the field of CIE has run up against an obstacle to further development. Turner is not suggesting that communication is lacking as much as that the content of the communication is less substantive than it could be, and that it is important to more actively and passionately engage each other as scholars in order to develop the field. In short, the assertion is that in the face of an infinite array of possibilities the dilemma for CIE is that it and those who comprise it have taken the path of least resistance rather than continue to develop CIE as its own disciplinary science.

3. There is a lack of practice-oriented research in the CIE sector.

Theoretical research is powerful, but it must be relevant to a specific context to have value and meaning in local communities and schools worldwide (e.g., [Ashton, 2018](#)). As this is true for development studies of education's impact on local communities, so this is also true for the development of the field of CIE. Jacob et al.'s (2019) work on the rise and fall of comparative education societies shows that a connection to the globally conceptualized field of CIE is often, but not always, enough to sustain a regional CIES. The World Council of Comparative Education Societies may be a hub for CIE-related societies to preserve and disseminate their histories, but it may not be able to facilitate practice-oriented research in those societies. While the diversity in context, language, culture, and region across CIE societies worldwide provides ample (perhaps infinite) opportunities to create practice-oriented applications in local communities and schools, the role of societies in doing so is questionable and unproven.

Solutions are sometimes suggested to the aforementioned problems, which involve collaboration on two, equally important levels:

1. Individuals and organizations from across epistemic communities must collaborate to produce meaningful research or practical solutions from comparative and international perspectives.

Scholars from CIE, educational policy, sociology, anthropology, political science, international relations, human geography, history, economics, and others must share their field's or discipline's insights if the specific context is to be fully understood. Most of the chapters in this volume summarize the ways that education experts and scholars from across disciplines and backgrounds intersect in order to develop a new or renewed interest in comparative education.

2. CIE scholars and development professionals must listen to the people on the ground.

Experts must also be fully partnered with context-specific education stakeholders and other practitioners to adequately understand how to adapt policy. They must work with local policy makers to understand the institutions and political realities in the area being studied. Global educational policies often go unimplemented or improperly applied because their designers are unable to incorporate the targeted context into their plans. No policy designed for all nations can be designed with one specific context in mind. Unable to take a given nation's culture, history, institutional background, or economic situation into account, policies such as EFA, the SDGs, or others can never be enacted without substantial adaptation at the local level. In other words, international organizations and multilateral agencies must be driven by the local context – rather than just taking context into account – when making policy recommendations. This is understandable, as each locality has its own unique context, making it virtually impossible for the United Nations or the World Bank to adapt their efforts to each community. Indeed, within countries many national-level reform policies suffer from similar problems of scale when they are applied to disparate regions.

In areas with high levels of adaptive capacity and structurally solid institutions, adapting policies to the local context does not provide a significant challenge. However, in the developing and emerging world – where education is needed the most – the ability to adapt policies is too often lacking. It is the very lack of quality education that produces the conditions that prevent EFA, the SDGs, and similar measures from having their intended effect. Simply put, local policy-makers, educators, and students need help.

Equally troublesome is the lack of opportunity for local educators, parents, or students to contribute in the development of these policies. The design of educational delivery systems requires input from these important stakeholders. Without local participation there will be little buy-in, diminishing the prospects for even the best developed adaptations. These issues cannot be addressed by CIE alone, nor can local contextualization and stakeholder partnering be the only approach to CIE scholarship and research. For better or for worse, large-scale, international education data are increasingly available in the twenty-first century, and the availability and accessibility of this data only expands over time; it does not contract. This contributes further to the infinite nature of CIE as a field because it allows for the remote analysis of educational phenomenon around the world.

THE IMPACT OF SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS ON COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

On a final note, it should be highlighted that although the information in this volume is not large-scale data, it does provide a repository of information on CIE, which can be used by future researchers to better understand the development of the field. Likewise, there is an abundance of large-scale, international education data available for secondary analysis, but there is surprisingly little research on the impact that these secondary analyzes have on educational policy and practice. This lack of research is largely the result of an obsession among researchers and policy-makers on estimating the impact of teacher and school factors on student achievement rather than investigating the global phenomenon across systems. The question then arises whether and to what extent secondary analyzes of data about education systems or about comparative education impacts policy and practice worldwide. If there is data available for every country or region, and that data is available to an unlimited number of potential analysts, then the research output is also potentially infinite.

Previous research suggests that one of the main impacts of secondary analysis availability is the capacity (i.e., knowledge and skills) to analyze that data, but that there is little to no impact on stakeholder-level practice because the data is not available or disseminated in a way that makes it accessible to policy makers and practitioners (Williamson, 2016). The resulting implication is that secondary analyzes have a bigger impact on policy and assessment infrastructure within educational systems than on stakeholder practice, as a result of secondary analysis results dissemination, and that the depth of impact is contextualized by the degree or extent of secondary analysis results dissemination.

In other words, the impact of secondary analyzes of large-scale international assessments is largely mediated by the nature and frequency of dissemination of the results and recommendations that come from these analyzes. This means that the findings of secondary analyzes are important, but only to the degree that they are available to policy and practice decision-makers at the system, school, and classroom levels. Popular, practitioner, and scholarly media all play an important role in mediating the dissemination of secondary analyses' results beyond the research community to the broader policy making, educator, and public-at-large communities.

The ability of media to be both instant and available to the widest possible audience often impacts the perception and use of international test results more than any secondary analysis research from a university-based research group or policy agenda from a national Ministry of Education. An under-investigated factor contributing to the broad and strong impact of international achievement studies on national education policy comes from widespread, publicly disseminated publications and other media reporting the results of secondary analyses of this data. Therefore, secondary analyses of large-scale, international education data lead to infinite analyses across infinite systems, using an infinite combination of variables. Likewise, the results of this kind of CIE research may be disseminated in so many ways and through different media outlets that the influence

on local stakeholder practice and well as national policy makers is multiple and varied.

The challenge, then, for CIE scholars and practitioners is to bring this information on the field and its infinite possibilities to the attention of others in the field and those doing related work outside of CIE itself. This volume is one attempt at doing so.

OVERVIEW OF THE VOLUME

This volume on *Comparative and International Education: Survey of an Infinite Field* includes chapters that fall into several categories: conceptual, global, and by world region. The conceptual category is solely comprised of Turner's chapter on "Comparative and International Education: Development of a Field and its Method and Theory." The global category is likewise represented by a single chapter: Jacob et al.'s "Global Trends in the Rise and Fall of Comparative Education Societies." These chapters in many ways express the contrast between the conceptual development of the field and the practical expression of the field through professional association. The world region categories may be divided as follows: the Americas, Europe, Asia, Oceania, and Africa.

Chapters examining CIE in the Americas include those by Aguilar and Assis, Gorostiaga and Espinoza, and Jacob et al. Aguilar and Assis's chapter, "Comparative Education in Brazil: Understanding the Research Field," reconstructs the path that comparative education took in Brazil using a timeline to identify structural elements in the emergence and reconfiguration of comparative education, specifically through periodization. Gorostiaga and Espinoza's chapter, "Comparative Education in Spanish-speaking Latin America: Recent Developments and Future Prospects," examines both the epistemological and political dimensions of comparative education in Latin America by discussing the development of societies, the contributions of international organizations, and recent relevant articles published in the recent past, which reflect the developments and prospects of the region. Finally, Jacob et al.'s chapter, "The History of Comparative and International Education in North America," documents the significant role influential leaders played in the development of CIEs in Canada, Cuba, Haiti, Mexico, and the United States.

The chapters falling within the Europe category are those by Popov and Genova and Martínez-Usarralde and Fernández-García. Popov and Genova's chapter, "Comparative Education in Eastern and Central Europe," takes an historical approach by examining the origin of comparative education studies in Eastern and Central Europe, the establishment of comparative education as a science, the state of comparative education during socialism, and the post-socialist development of comparative education. Martínez-Usarralde and Fernández-García's chapter, "Comparative and International Education in Western Europe," focuses on the importance of the field in Western Europe and the consolidation of CIE in the European context.

The development of CIE in Asia is represented in the chapters by Ofori-Attah, Li, Batra, and Symaco and Chao, Jr. Ofori-Attah's chapter, "Comparative Education in the Arab World: Origin, Development and Research Interests," discusses the ways that CIE has grown in the Arab world, which is under some debate as to what comprises the Arab world, according to the author. Li's chapter, "Comparative Education in Central Asia," provides a general review of knowledge production in Central Asia with respect to comparative education and related policy priorities. Batra's chapter, "Comparative Education in South Asia: Contributions, Contestation, and Possibilities," discusses both the trajectory of comparative education in the region, but also critical distinctions in comparative education that are relevant to South Asia comparativists. Symaco and Chao, Jr, write in their chapter, "Comparative and International Education in East and Southeast Asia," that the ASEAN economic community has both contributed to and benefited from the development of comparative education in both East and Southeast Asia.

The last two categories of Oceania and Africa are addressed by the chapters by McCormick and Johansson-Fua and Wolhuter, respectively. The chapter by McCormick and Johansson-Fua, "Perspectives on Comparative and International Education in Oceania," deconstruct the debates about "regionalism" that have going on for quite some time. These address issues of decolonization as well, which is quite relevant to the Oceania community. Wolhuter's chapter, "Comparative Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Young Field on a Promising Continent," highlights that sub-Saharan Africa has experienced one of the largest educational expansion periods in history, which emphasizes the importance of CIE development in Africa as a whole as part of the overall development of educational policy and practice on the continent.

This volume brings these diverse histories of CIE together and creates a tapestry of the field, which accounts for regional variations and contextual shifts. It does so, however, by recognizing that there are infinite ways to achieve the same educational goals, and that the practical approaches to those goals may vary significantly from one region or community to the next. This volume also asks the reader to struggle with the relevance of CIE at the global level, while recognizing its significance and impact at the local or stakeholder levels. It also is a resource that is invaluable for scholars of CIE and those wanting to understand how the field has – or has not – been able to develop from the last century into the next.

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