

Comparative Education Research

Approaches and Methods

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Comparative Education Research Approaches and Methods

Edited by

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Bob Adamson
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Comparative Education Research Centre
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COVER

Detail, "Autumn School", from an impressionist landscape by Vietnamese artist, Dao Hai Phong, reproduced with the kind permission of the painting's owners, Richard and Louisa Barton.

Dao Hai Phong was born in Hanoi in 1965 and graduated from the Hanoi College of Fine Art in 1987. Village scenes and depictions of Hanoi streets executed in very bright colours such as blue, yellow, green or red are characteristic of his paintings. Phong's work has been exhibited in Hanoi, Hong Kong, Italy, Laos, Singapore, Switzerland, the UK and the USA.

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Contents

List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	ix
Abbreviations	xi
Foreword Anne HICKLING-HUDSON	xiii
Introduction Mark BRAY, Bob ADAMSON & Mark MASON	1
I: Directions	13
1. Actors and Purposes in Comparative Education Mark BRAY	15
2. Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches to Comparative Education Gregory P. FAIRBROTHER	39
3. The Place of Experience in Comparative Education Research Patricia POTTS	63
II: Units of Comparison	83
4. Comparing Places Maria MANZON	85
5. Comparing Systems Mark BRAY & Jiang KAI	123
6. Comparing Times Anthony SWEETING	145

7. Comparing Cultures Mark MASON	165
8. Comparing Values Lee WING-ON	197
9. Comparing Educational Achievements T. Neville POSTLETHWAITE & Frederick LEUNG	215
10. Comparing Policies Yang RUI	241
11. Comparing Curricula Bob ADAMSON & Paul MORRIS	263
12. Comparing Educational Organisations Clive DIMMOCK	283
13. Comparing Ways of Learning David A. WATKINS	299
14. Comparing Pedagogical Innovations Nancy LAW	315
III: Conclusions	339
15. Scholarly Enquiry and the Field of Comparative Education Mark BRAY	341
16. Different Models, Different Emphases Different Insights Mark BRAY, Bob ADAMSON & Mark MASON	363
Contributors	381
Bibliography	387
Index	433

List of Tables

Table 1.1	Statistics on Primary Education, Selected Asian Countries	26
Table 1.2	Average School Life Expectancies (Primary–Secondary Education), by World Region (Years)	27
Table 1.3	Teachers’ Salaries in Primary Education, in Equivalent US\$ using Converted Purchasing Power Parities	32
Table 4.1	Distribution of Health and Education Spending between Government and Non-Government Sources, by Region	94
Table 4.2	Key Indicators of Selected Asian Economies	97
Table 4.3	School Time Allocated to Compulsory and Optional Subjects, for European Union Students Aged 12–14 (2001)	100
Table 4.4	Comparison of Nations and US States on Percentage Deviation from Expected 1990 Grade 8 Mathematics Scores and Expenditures on Education per Capita	104
Table 4.5	Demographic and Sociocultural Characteristics of the Swiss Cantons	106
Table 5.1	Proportions of Pupils in a Six-Year Primary School System, by Province, Mainland China, 1991/92	129
Table 5.2	Providers of Primary and Secondary Schooling in Hong Kong, 1993/94	131
Table 5.3	Secondary Schools in Hong Kong, by Medium of Instruction, 1993/94	133
Table 5.4	Schools in Macao, by Ownership and Medium of Instruction, 1992/93	137
Table 9.1	A Hierarchy of Reading Literacy Skills	219
Table 9.2	Number of Mathematics Items of Each Type and Score Points, by Reporting Category, Population 1	219
Table 9.3	Sub-scores for First Four Pupils in a Class	226

Table 9.4	Results for a Relative Comparison of a School with Similar Schools and all Schools in Hong Kong	227
Table 9.5	Achievement of Hong Kong Students in TIMSS 1999 Compared with International Averages	228
Table 9.6	Pupil Reading and Mathematics Scores by School Location and Region, Vietnam	229
Table 9.7	Percentages of Grade 5 Vietnamese Pupils Reaching Different Skill Levels in Reading and Mathematics	231
Table 9.8	Percentages and Sampling Errors of Pupils Reaching Functionality Levels in Reading and Mathematics, Vietnam	234
Table 9.9	Percentages and Sampling Errors of Pupils at Each Benchmark by Region, Vietnam	235
Table 9.10	Selected Results from the PISA Study	235
Table 9.11	Percentages of an Age Group Studying Science (SISS)	236
Table 11.1	Curriculum Ideologies and Components	267
Table 11.2	Curriculum Manifestations and Typical Research Methods	274
Table 12.1	Dimensions of National/Societal and Organisational Culture	289
Table 13.1	Average Correlations between Learning Approach Scales and Academic Achievement, Self-Esteem and Locus of Control	307
Table 14.1	Mean Innovation Score and Related Descriptive Statistics along Each of the Six Dimensions of Innovation for the 83 Cases analysed by Law et al. (2003)	329
Table 15.1	Disciplinary Groupings and the Nature of Knowledge	344

List of Figures

Figure 0.1	A Framework for Comparative Education Analyses	9
Figure 4.1	Bereday's Model for Undertaking Comparative Studies	86
Figure 4.2	Points of Convergence in Different Settings	87
Figure 4.3	Mapping the Dynamics of Globalisation through Regional Organisations	93
Figure 4.4	Comparison of Lesson Structures	113
Figure 5.1	Systems of Education in Macao as Portrayed in a 1989 Official Document	135
Figure 5.2	Systems of Education in Macao as Portrayed in a 1993 Official Document	136
Figure 8.1	Varied Methodological Emphases in Comparative Studies of Values	211
Figure 8.2	Sampling Design in Case Study Format Research	212
Figure 8.3	Four Inferential Strategies in Case-Oriented Comparative Research	213
Figure 9.1	Science Achievement in Selected Asian Countries	237
Figure 9.2	Pupil Reading Achievement Variance Partitioned by Province, School, Class within School and Pupils within Classes, Vietnam	238
Figure 11.1	A Framework for Comparing Curricula	270
Figure 11.2	Curriculum Evaluation: An International Aid Agency's Projects	277
Figure 11.3	Interpretations of Task-Based Learning from Policy Intention to Implementation	279
Figure 12.1	Four Elements of Educational Organisations	287
Figure 14.1	The Six Key Dimensions in Pedagogical Practices that Use ICT	328

Figure 14.2	Diagrammatic Representation of the Innovation Profiles for Two of the SITES M2 Cases, Showing the Wide Differences between Cases	330
Figure 15.1	Oliveira's System-Based Classification of Education-Related Disciplines	348
Figure 15.2	A Macro Mapping of Paradigms and Theories in Comparative and International Education	351
Figure 16.1	Diagrammatic Representation of a Two-Location Comparative Study	364
Figure 16.2	Diagrammatic Representation of a Comparative Study with a Single Location in the Centre	365
Figure 16.3	Diagrammatic Representation of a Seven-Location Comparative Study	366
Figure 16.4	Diagrammatic Representation of a 25-Location Comparative Study	367
Figure 16.5	Comparisons Across Time Using the Bray and Thomas Cube	369

Abbreviations

ANZCIES	Australian and New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASI	Approaches to Studying Inventory
BAICE	British Association for Comparative and International Education
CEPES	European Centre for Higher Education
CES	Comparative Education Society
CIES	Comparative and International Education Society
CIESC	Comparative and International Education Society of Canada
DFID	Department for International Development
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
GSP	Gross State Product
IAEP	International Assessment of Educational Progress
IBE	International Bureau of Education
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
IESALC	International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean
IICBA	International Institute for Capacity-Building in Africa
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
IITE	Institute for Information Technologies in Education
LPQ	Learning Process Questionnaire
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	National Research Coordinator

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
QUEST	Quality in Educational Systems Trans-nationally
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SAR	Special Administrative Region
SISS	Second International Science Study
SITES	Second International Technology in Education Study
SPQ	Study Process Questionnaire
TBL	Task-based Learning
TIMSS	Third [also Trends in] International Mathematics and Science Study
TRC	Teachers' Resource Centre
UIE	UNESCO Institute for Education
UIL	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization
UNEVOC	UNESCO International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WCCES	World Council of Comparative Education Societies

Foreword

This is an important new book, and a welcome contribution to the world of education research. A work of this kind is long overdue. It systematises the field of comparative education, probing what it means, why it is important, and how it is possible rigorously to compare education systems and structures, places, eras, cultures, organisations, curricula, pedagogies, achievements and values. It does this by means of reviews of literature and trends in the field, by probing research purposes and methodologies, and by analysing the nature of the field itself. Studying this book will improve researchers' comparative education skills, broaden their horizons and help them to understand and articulate more clearly where they are located within an academic "tribe" and in relation to other fields of research.

The work in this book resonates with my own experience since, like its editors and some of its writers, I have had the deeply rewarding experience of studying aspects of China's history and culture as an overseas scholar at the University of Hong Kong. The excellent research that this university continues to produce is exemplified in this book, a product of its innovative and dynamic Comparative Education Research Centre (CERC) which has spanned colonial and decolonising times. The editors point out that the book is influenced by its origins in CERC, and that it is a stage in the ongoing development of a field which has many more dimensions to be explored and developed. This book emanates from the world of British and Chinese comparative education scholarship, and is to some extent shaped by world views and experiences that come from this unique confluence. Its stimulating insights suggest what could continue to be done by pushing the boundaries of the field in other academic settings. I would like to see scholars from other regions follow the inspiring example of this book and produce additional volumes that will explore different ways of thinking, knowing, experiencing and analysing in comparative education research. Within the framework of this creative field there is room for a wide variety of approaches. This union of diversity and intellectual boundaries can surely help us to

collaborate in tackling the daunting problems of combining social justice with excellence in education in a globalising world.

The book is highly relevant to a world faced with the contradictions, problems and complexities of the current globalising economy. It is a world in which the wealthy have the resources and surpluses to help the billions of impoverished people feed, clothe, house and educate themselves more adequately, but in which the gap between rich and poor has become wider, the conditions of the impoverished more desperate, and the life-worlds of the planet more devastated. The United Nations Development Programme in its annual *Human Development Reports* has described conditions that are a stinging indictment of the negative impact of global economic injustices on the well-being of many of the world's peoples. It may well be, as some researchers point out, that the last third of the 20th century will go down in history as a period of global impoverishment marked by the collapse of productive systems in the less developed world, the demise of national institutions, and the dis-integration of health and educational programmes. This occurred in spite of the large post-World War II expansion of education. In such a context, comparative educators and their research can make a difference. They are well placed to explore why some approaches to providing education have not met goals of equity or quality, and why others do meet these goals. This book, with its clear and thorough frameworks of analysis, and emphasis on the importance of taking context into account, will help comparative educators carry out their tasks.

Because of my cross-cultural background as a Caribbean scholar who has studied and worked in several countries, I have "lived" comparative education, participating in both the advantaged education systems of wealthy countries and the struggling ones of the less developed world. From my current standpoint in Australia it is clear to me how wealth confers the privilege of being able to choose to pour massive resources for innovation and improvement into aspects of education. It is also clear how much more the wealthy could do to help poorer countries and groups improve their education systems. Yet it is not at all certain that, should they offer to increase their help, they would do this appropriately or adequately. Much foreign aid entrenches an unsuitable Western industrial model of education which can both reinforce and exacerbate socio-economic problems. Were this book to be used creatively, planners and researchers of decolonising countries should be able to develop a more systematic and informed comparative approach

to considering the suitability of options and approaches in educational restructuring. Scholars, students and planners who collaborate in systematic reviews of education systems could increase their ability to achieve educational change that negotiates and helps to shape the powerful currents of the new global age.

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Introduction

Mark BRAY, Bob ADAMSON & Mark MASON

Approaches and methods have naturally been a major concern in the field of comparative education since its emergence as a distinct domain of studies. Different decades have witnessed different emphases, and the 21st century has brought to the field new perspectives, tools and forums for scholarly exchange. The new perspectives include those arising from the forces of globalisation and the changing role of the state. The new tools include ever-advancing information and transportation technology; and the new forums for scholarly exchange include the internet and electronic journals.

Setting the scene for this book, this Introduction begins with historical perspectives. It highlights some classic works in the field, and notes dimensions of evolution over time. Although many different categories of people may undertake comparative studies of education, these remarks focus mainly on the work of academics, since that is the main focus of this book. The Introduction then turns to patterns in the new century, observing emerging dynamics and emphases. Finally, it focuses on the contents of this book, charting some of its features and contributions.

Some Historical Perspectives

At the beginning of his classic book, *Comparative Method in Education*, Bereday (1964, p. 7) asserted that from the point of view of method, comparative education was entering the third phase of its history. The first phase, he suggested, spanned the 19th century, “was inaugurated by the first scientifically minded comparative educator, Marc-Antoine Jullien de Paris in 1817”, and might be called the period of borrowing. Bereday characterised its emphasis as cataloguing descriptive data, following

which comparison of the data was undertaken in order to make available the best practices of one country with the intention of copying them elsewhere.

Bereday's second phase, which occupied the first half of the 20th century, "interposed a preparatory process before permitting any transplantation". Its founder, Sir Michael Sadler in the UK, stressed that education systems are intricately connected with the societies that support them (see especially Sadler 1900). Sadler's successors, among whom Bereday identified Friedrich Schneider and Franz Hilker in Germany, Isaac Kandel and Robert Ulich in the USA, Nicholas Hans and Joseph Lauwerys in the UK, and Pedro Rosselló in Switzerland, all paid much attention to the social causes behind educational phenomena. Bereday named this second phase the period of prediction.

Bereday's third phase was labelled the period of analysis, with emphasis on "the evolving of theory and methods, [and] the clear formulation of steps of comparative procedures and devices to aid this enlargement of vision". The new historical period, Bereday added, was a continuation of the tradition of the period of prediction, but it postulated that "before prediction and eventual borrowing is attempted there must be a systematization of the field in order to expose the whole panorama of national practices of education" (1964, p. 9). Bereday's book itself greatly contributed to this analytical approach. The book remains core reading in many courses on comparative education, and still has much to offer. Indeed one contributor to this volume (Manzon, Chapter 4) commences with Bereday's four-step method of comparative analysis.

However, even at that time not all scholars agreed with the categorisation of periods that Bereday presented. Nor, if they did accept the categorisation, did they necessarily agree that the phases were sequential in which the period of prediction had followed and displaced the period of borrowing, and in turn the period of analysis had followed and displaced the period of prediction.

Similar remarks may be made about the set of five stages in the development of the field presented in 1969 in another classic work entitled *Toward a Science of Comparative Education* (Noah & Eckstein 1969, pp. 3–7). The first stage was travellers' tales, in which amateurs presented information on foreign ways of raising children as part of broader descriptions of institutions and practices abroad. The second stage, which became prominent from the beginning of the 19th century, was of educational

borrowing; and was followed by the third stage of encyclopaedic work on foreign countries in the interests of international understanding. From the beginning of the 20th century, Noah and Eckstein suggested (p. 4), two more stages occurred, both concerned with seeking explanations for the wide variety of educational and social phenomena observed around the globe. The first attempted to identify the forces and factors shaping national educational systems; and the second was termed the stage of social science explanation, which “uses the empirical, quantitative methods of economics, political science, and sociology to clarify relationships between education and society”.

The characterisation was widely agreed to have been useful, but the presentation of stages as sequential, with later ones displacing earlier ones, was less widely affirmed. To be fair, Noah and Eckstein did themselves state (p. 4) that the stages were far from being discrete in time, and that “each of these types of work in comparative education has persisted down to the present and may be observed in the contemporary literature”. However, their characterisation of different historical periods had greater emphasis than this remark about the coexistence of different stages. With the benefit of a few more decades of hindsight, it is apparent that all five categories remain very evident in the literature. For some individual scholars they might provide roughly distinguishable stages in personal career development, with gradation from simplistic notions to more sophisticated analyses; but the field as a whole remains eclectic and disparate in approaches and degrees of sophistication.

Nevertheless, with this pair of books and related works in the 1960s (e.g. King 1964; Bristow & Holmes 1968), the field of comparative education embarked on a period of considerable debate about methodology. The debate was not conducted evenly in all parts of the world, and patterns in English-speaking countries were very different from ones for example in Arabic-speaking, Chinese-speaking or Russian-speaking countries (Benhamida 1990; Hofman & Malkova 1990; Djourinski 1998; Wang 1998). Yet scholarship in English-speaking countries exerted significant leadership, and thus deserves particular comment. Moreover, even in that era – a pattern which has become even more visible during the present century – English was asserting itself as a language of international discourse for scholars from multiple linguistic traditions. Thus, for example, another important work in English emerged from a 1971 meeting of international experts at the UNESCO Institute for Education in Hamburg, Germany. The meeting was convened by Tetsuya Kobayashi, a

distinguished Japanese scholar of comparative education who at that time was Director of the Institute, and brought together participants from Germany, France, Israel, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland, as well as from such English-speaking countries as Canada, the UK and the USA.

The resulting book, entitled *Relevant Methods in Comparative Education* (Edwards et al. 1973), both illustrated and contributed to the debates about methodology in comparative education, and can be considered another milestone. For example, Barber (1973, p. 57) attacked Noah and Eckstein's notion of a science of comparative education as being too positivist and controlled; Halls (1973, p. 119) described comparative educators as having an identity crisis with their multiple labels such as "inductive", "problem-solving" and "quantificatory"; and Noonan (1973, p. 199) argued for the alternative paradigm represented by the emerging work of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

Similar diversity was evident in the 1977 special issue of the US journal *Comparative Education Review* on "The State of the Art" (Vol. 21, Nos. 2 and 3, 1977); and the parallel special issue of the UK journal *Comparative Education* on "Comparative Education: Its Present State and Future Prospects" (Vol. 13, No. 2, 1977). The editors of the UK journal would no doubt have agreed with the introductory statement by their US counterparts (Kazamias & Schwartz 1977, p. 151):

Uncertainties about the nature, scope, and value of comparative education were sounded in the mid-1950's when the foundations were laid for its promotion as a respected field of study. Yet at that time it was still possible to identify individuals who were recognized as authoritative spokesmen for this area and writings (texts) which defined its contours and codified its subject matter. Such was the case, for example, with I.L. Kandel and his books *Comparative Education* (1933) and *The New Era in Education* (1955), and Nicholas Hans with his *Comparative Education: A Study of Educational Factors and Traditions* (1949). Today such identifications are no longer possible. There is no internally consistent body of knowledge, no set of principles or canons or research that are generally agreed upon by people who associate themselves with the field. Instead, one finds various strands of thought, theories, trends or concerns, not necessarily related to each other.

A decade later, a follow-up collection of papers that had been published in *Comparative Education Review* since the 1977 State of the Art issue suggested that the field had broadened yet further. The editors (Altbach & Kelly 1986a, p. 1) observed that:

There is no one method of study in the field; rather, the field increasingly is characterized by a number of different research orientations. No longer are there attempts to define a single methodology of comparative education, and none of our contributors argues that one single method be developed as a canon.

For example, within the book Masemann (1986) argued for critical ethnography; Theisen et al. (1986) focused on the underachievement of cross-national studies of educational achievement; and Epstein (1986) discussed ideology in comparative education under the heading “Currents Left and Right”. The final chapter by the editors of the book (Kelly & Altbach 1986, p. 310) asserted that four kinds of challenges to established research traditions had emerged since 1977:

- Challenges to the nation-state or national characteristics as the major parameter in defining comparative study
- Questioning of input–output models and exclusive reliance on quantification in the conduct of comparative research
- Challenges to structural functionalism as the major theoretical premise undergirding scholarship
- New subjects of enquiry, such as knowledge generation and utilisation, student flows, gender and the internal workings of schools

The editors also asserted (Altbach & Kelly 1986a, p. 1) that scholars had begun to address intranational comparisons as well as transnational ones. However, the book did not provide strong evidence to support this statement. Certainly the field has moved to embrace much more intranational work, some of which is remarked upon in the pages of this book; but in general this was a feature of the 1990s and after, rather than the 1980s and before.

Perspectives for the New Century

In 2000 the UK journal *Comparative Education* published another special issue entitled “Comparative Education for the Twenty-First Century”

(Vol. 36, No. 3, 2000). It appraised the development of the field since the 1977 special issue mentioned above, and in that connection the opening paper by Crossley and Jarvis (2000, p. 261) observed that:

The significance of continuity with the past emerges as a core theme in the collective articles and many contributions echo a number of still fundamental issues raised previously in 1977. Most notably these include: the multi-disciplinary and applied strengths of the field; “the complexities of this kind of study”; the dangers of the “misapplication of findings”; the importance of theoretical analysis and methodological rigour; the (often unrealised and misunderstood) policy-oriented potential; and the enduring centrality of the concepts of cultural context and educational transfer for the field as a whole.

At the same time, Crossley and Jarvis noted that the world had changed significantly since 1977. They noted (p. 261) that most contributors to the special issue in 2000 saw the future of the field in a more optimistic but more problematic light than had been the case in 1977. This was attributed to a combination of factors, and in particular to

the exponential growth and widening of interest in international comparative research, the impact of computerised communications and information technologies, increased recognition of the cultural dimension of education, and the influence of the intensification of globalisation upon all dimensions of society and social policy world-wide.

Indeed these factors have become of increased importance, and underpin many of the chapters in this book.

The ever-advancing spread of technology has greatly improved access to materials and, despite concerns about the “digital divide”, has reduced the disadvantages faced by scholars in locations remote from libraries and other sources of data. As observed by Wilson (2003, p. 30):

The advent of web pages at international organisations and national statistical services has revolutionised how basic research is undertaken in our field. The development of Internet search engines a decade ago and meta-search engines five years ago has also transformed our research capabilities.

At the same time, technology has spread the influence of the field, making the findings and insights from comparative educators available to a much larger audience than was previously the case through electronic journals, web sites and other media. The internet does, however, bring its own baggage, including an emphasis on English that contributes to the dominance of that language (Mouhoubi 2005, p. 62).

Also of particular significance are shifts in the global centres of gravity. The main roots of the field are commonly considered to lie in Western Europe, from which they branched to the USA. Subsequently, comparative education became a significant field of enquiry in other parts of the world. In contemporary times, patterns in Asia are particularly exciting. Japan and Korea have had national comparative education societies since the 1960s, but younger bodies have emerged in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Philippines; and since 1995 Asia as a whole has been served by a regional society (Mochida 2004). The growth of activity in China, including Hong Kong, has been particularly notable (Bray & Gui 2001; Bray 2002). These developments are bringing new perspectives based on different scholarly traditions and social priorities.

In the millennial special issue of *Comparative Education*, Crossley and Jarvis (2000, p. 263) noted that new directions for the field included “new substantive issues, and the potential of more varied and multi-level units of analysis, including global, intranational and micro-level comparisons”. Elaborating in his sole-authored paper in the special issue of the journal, Crossley (2000, p. 328) observed that:

While it is already possible to identify concerted efforts to promote, for example, micro-level qualitative fieldwork ... and regional studies ..., the nation state remains the dominant framework in published work, and few have explicitly considered the various levels.

Crossley then highlighted a paper by Bray and Thomas (1995) which stressed the value of multilevel analysis and which, Crossley suggested, deserved further attention. At the heart of the Bray and Thomas paper was a cube which presented a set of dimensions and levels for comparison. Several chapters in this book refer explicitly to the Bray and Thomas paper, and indeed in many respects it provides a core theme within the volume. The concluding chapter reassesses the cube in the light of the contributions by the various authors in the book.

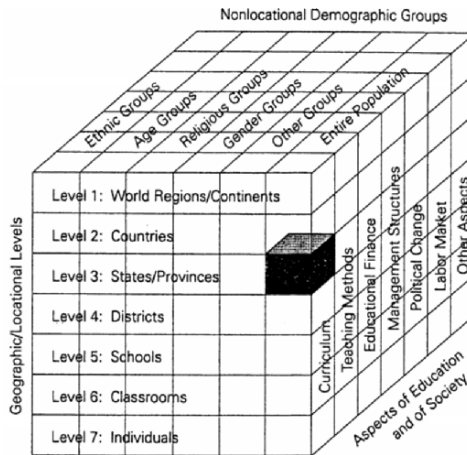
The Bray and Thomas Cube

Figure 0.1 reproduces the cube presented by Bray and Thomas (1995, p. 475). It was part of a paper entitled “Levels of Comparison in Educational Studies: Different Insights from Different Literatures and the Value of Multilevel Analyses”. The paper commenced by noting that different fields within the wider domain of educational studies have different methodological and conceptual emphases, and that the extent of cross-fertilisation was somewhat limited. The field of comparative education, for example, was dominated by cross-national comparisons and made little use of intranational comparisons. In contrast, many other fields were dominated by local foci and failed to benefit from the perspectives that could be gained from international studies. The paper then pointed out that although the field of comparative education had been dominated by cross-national foci, many other domains lacked such perspectives. The authors argued that stronger relationships between different fields would be to the benefit of all.

On the front face of the cube are seven *geographic/locational* levels for comparison: world regions/continents, countries, states/provinces, districts, schools, classrooms, and individuals. The second dimension contains *nonlocational demographic* groups, including ethnic, age, religious, gender and other groups, and entire populations. The third dimension comprises *aspects of education and of society*, such as curriculum, teaching methods, finance, management structures, political change and labour markets. Many studies that are explicitly comparative engage all three dimensions, and thus can be mapped in the corresponding cells of the diagram. For example, the shaded cell in Figure 0.1 represents a comparative study of curricula for the entire population in two or more provinces.

An overarching point of the Bray and Thomas article was their call for multilevel analyses in comparative studies to achieve multifaceted and holistic analyses of educational phenomena. The authors observed that much research remained at a single level, thereby neglecting recognition of the ways in which patterns at the lower levels in education systems are shaped by patterns at higher levels and vice versa. While researchers can often undertake only single-level studies because of constraints dictated by purpose and availability of resources, Bray and Thomas suggested that researchers should at least recognise the limits of their foci and the mutual influences of other levels on the educational phenomena of interest.

Figure 0.1: A Framework for Comparative Education Analyses



Source: Bray & Thomas (1995), p. 475.

The Bray and Thomas framework has been extensively cited, both in literature that is explicitly associated with the field of comparative education (e.g. Ginsburg 1997; Broadfoot 1999c; Arnove 2001; Ferrer 2002) and in broader literature (e.g. Frank 1998; Ballantine 2001). It has generally been seen as useful, and some authors have endeavoured to take it further by making explicit what was already implicit in the framework. For example, Watson (1998, p. 23) highlighted an alternative grouping of countries and societies according to religion and colonial history. Such alternative categories are in fact already represented in the “nonlocational demographic” dimension of the framework, though rather than being “nonlocational” they might perhaps be more aptly termed “pluri-locational” or “multi-territorial”. The final chapter of this book draws on the other chapters to comment on ways in which the cube could be refined and supplemented to extend conceptualisation in the field.

The Features of this Book

Some features of this book have already been mentioned. They deserve elaboration so that readers can see the context within which the book was prepared and the contributions which it makes.

Beginning with the earlier point about shifting centres of gravity, this book is part of the increased strength of the field in East Asia. All contributors to the book are associated in some way with the Comparative Education Research Centre (CERC) at the University of Hong Kong. Its three editors have been Directors of that Centre; most of the contributors are or have been academic staff or research students associated with the Centre; and the other contributors have been visitors for various lengths of time. Because of this, the book to some extent has an East Asian orientation. However, all authors also select examples and employ materials from other parts of the world, and the book is global in its messages and relevance.

A second feature is a mix of dispassionate and of personalised chapters. Thus, some authors have sought to portray their perspectives in an objective way, while others have been subjective and even autobiographical. Both genres, it may be suggested, contribute usefully. Perhaps especially in a field such as comparative education, the backgrounds and perspectives of the analysts are of major significance. The chapters by Potts and by Watkins, for example, fit into a growing tradition in which scholars have recounted their own career histories and the ways in which personal circumstances have shaped their current thinking about the field (see e.g. Postlethwaite 1999, pp. 67–75; Jones 2002; Hayhoe 2004). The approach shows how scholarship can evolve within the careers of specific individuals, and indicates that methodological choices adopted by researchers reflect personal circumstances as well as more academic criteria. As remarked by Eisner (1996, p. ix), “We seldom reveal how we, as researchers, feel about what we are up to, or how those feelings shape our perceptions, alter our values, and enable us to construct meaning out of experience.” Such commentary can be as valuable in the field of comparative education as in other domains.

In structure, the book has three main sections. First comes a group of chapters which comment on the nature of the field. Within this group, the first identifies major purposes for undertaking research in comparative education, and remarks on the different perspectives that may be held by different actors. The second chapter in the section compares quantitative and qualitative approaches, showing the strengths and limitations of each and taking studies of literacy as a theme. The third chapter addresses the place of experience in comparative education research, and includes discussions of objectivity and subjectivity.

The second section turns to specific units for analysis. This section is the longest in the book, and forms its core. Within the field, examples may readily be found of comparative study of each of these units for analysis; but it is less common for academics firmly to consider the strengths and limitations of their approaches. The various chapters, taken separately, show multiple facets for viewing their subjects; and together they form a mosaic which represents a significant proportion of the total field. Eleven chapters focus on a wide range of units for comparison, commencing with places and ending with pedagogical innovations.

The concluding section returns to the wider picture. One chapter focuses on ways in which the field of comparative education relates to other domains of enquiry, both within the broad arena of educational studies and in other disciplinary areas. The companion chapter charts some of the continued diversity in the field and the trends and issues that have become apparent. It highlights some of the lessons to be learned from comparison of approaches and methods in comparative education research.

Preparation of this volume has been a major exercise of teamwork and coordination. Most chapters have been presented in conferences and/or CERC seminars at the University of Hong Kong. The editors and contributors hope that readers will find the book as stimulating as were the processes of preparation. At the same time, the editors and contributors view this book as just a stage in the ongoing development of the field, which indeed has many more dimensions to be explored and developed.