CERC Studies in Comparative Education


Earlier titles in the series are listed on the back page of the book.
Actors and Purposes in Comparative Education

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The nature of any particular comparative study of education depends on the purposes for which it was undertaken and on the identity of the person(s) conducting the enquiry. This first chapter begins by noting different categories of people who undertake comparative studies of education. It then focuses on three of these groups: policy makers, international agencies, and academics. Although this book is chiefly concerned with the last of these groups, it is instructive to note similarities and differences between the purposes and approaches of academics and other groups.

Different Actors, Different Purposes
Among the categories of people who undertake comparative studies of education are the following:

- *parents* commonly compare schools and systems of education in search of the institutions which will serve their children’s needs most effectively;
- *practitioners*, including school principals and teachers, make comparisons in order to improve the operation of their institutions;
- *policy makers* in individual countries examine education systems elsewhere in order to identify ways to achieve social, political and other objectives in their own settings;
international agencies compare patterns in different countries in order to improve the advice that they give to national governments and others; and

academics undertake comparisons in order to improve understanding in many domains, including the forces which shape education systems and the roles of education systems in social and economic development.

When parents undertake comparisons, their concern is practical and tied to the evolving needs of their children. If their children are about to reach or have reached kindergarten age, the parents’ main focus is on kindergartens; if the children are about to reach or have reached primary school age, the parents’ main focus is on primary schools; and so on. Parents may undertake systematic comparisons on carefully-identified criteria; but their purposes and approaches are rather different from those of other groups on the list, and they are not the main focus of this book.

Practitioners such as school principals and teachers are in some respects similar. Their interests are less likely to progress to higher levels of the system in a linear way as the years pass (i.e. from kindergarten to primary to junior secondary, etc.); but they also have practical concerns, and their attention to particular problems is likely to diminish once those problems have been solved.

Related remarks might be made about policy makers. They are given more attention in this book because they are more likely to place their findings in the public domain for external scrutiny; and partly because of the likelihood of such scrutiny, policy makers are more likely to pay attention to methodological issues. Valuable insights may be gained from analysing both the types of comparisons that policy makers commonly undertake, and the types of conclusions that policy makers draw from their comparisons. Sometimes the comparisons are undertaken to inform future decisions, but comparisons are also commonly undertaken to justify decisions that have already been made. Around the world, different cultural and political factors become evident in the ways that policy makers make comparisons.

The comparisons made by international agencies are even more squarely within the focus of this book. Some agencies are explicitly concerned with education, and are mandated to undertake comparison as part of their reason for existence. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is an obvious example. Other important international bodies in education include the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

These bodies each have their own emphases, but the similarities in the ways that they undertake comparisons are perhaps more obvious than the differences. Like practitioners and policy makers, international agencies undertake most of their comparisons with practical aims in mind, though international agencies may also contribute to broader conceptualisation.

 Academics may also be concerned with practical aims, especially when undertaking consultancy assignments and applied research. However, perhaps the main part of academic work is concerned with conceptualisation. Many theories abound within the academic arena. Fashions change over time, and different parts of the world have different emphases. Indeed the field of comparative education itself differs in emphasis in China and Bulgaria, for example. Thus, even with its dominant focus on academic study of education, this book has multiple perspectives.

**Policy Makers and Comparative Education**

From a practical perspective, much of the field of comparative education has been concerned with copying of educational models. Policy makers in one setting commonly seek information about models elsewhere, following which they may imitate those models with or without adaptation. In some settings this practice has been described as “educational policy borrowing” (see e.g. Steiner-Khamsi 2004; Phillips & Ochs 2007; Steiner-Khamsi & Waldow 2012). However, borrowing is perhaps a misnomer since it implies that the models will be given back after use, which is very rare.

When policy makers seek ideas worth copying, they first have to decide where to look for the ideas. Review of patterns around the world reveals biases in the types of places that policy makers consider worth investigating. One influence arises from language: policy makers who speak and read English are likely to commence with English-speaking countries, their counterparts who speak and read Arabic are likely to commence with Arabic-speaking countries, etc. Another influence arises from political linkages, for example within the European Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or the Caribbean Community. A third influence arises from perceptions of hierarchy: less developed countries tend to look at more developed countries, and countries that are already economically advanced tend to look at others that are similarly
advanced. Policy makers in industrialised countries do not often look for ideas and models in less developed countries, though it is arguable that sometimes they should do so.

Turning to specific examples, clear evidence of importing may be found in the United Kingdom (UK). Beginning with an example from the 1980s and 1990s, some UK reforms were at least partially inspired by experience in the United States of America (USA). They included student loans for higher education, magnet schools, Training & Enterprise Councils, education-business compacts, community colleges, licensed teachers, and Employment Training (Finegold et al. 1992, p.7).

Space constraints preclude detailed analysis of each of these, but some insights may be taken from the first, i.e. student loans. The UK Secretary of Education made three trips to the USA to discuss student aid programmes, and made repeated references in speeches and in print to the benefits of US models (Mcfarland 1993, p.51). The loan schemes subsequently launched in the UK were part of a package related to the overall government vision for radical reform of education, and the momentum of the political motives caused and permitted policy makers to overlook many details first of how loans had actually worked in the USA and second how they might be expected to work in the UK. Nevertheless, the tools of comparative education were considered useful by these policy makers. The USA was considered an appropriate source for educational models because of personal relationships between the top politicians and because it was perceived to be successful in the global marketplace (Whitty 2012).

Many other countries have also looked to the USA as a source for models. Among them is Switzerland, in which the authorities have not only explicitly referred to models in the USA but also hired US consultants to develop a reform package for schools (Steiner-Khamsi 2002, p.76). As in the UK, the moves were strongly shaped by domestic political forces; and as the domestic political scene changed, so did the strategy for importing models. After a period of heated debate and protest by the teachers’ unions, the Ministry of Education publicly distanced itself from US models. Instead, the authorities used references to European reforms, especially in the Netherlands and Denmark. According to Steiner-Khamsi (2002, p.79), this new orientation suited policy makers because the European models were less known in the Swiss education community and were thus less subject to criticism and controversy. In this case, comparative education was being used not only as a source of ideas but also to legitimate the government in actions that it wished to undertake.

During the colonial era, it was standard practice for models of schooling to be imported, albeit usually with some modification, either from the colonising country itself or from other colonies of the same power (Gifford & Weiskel 1971; Altbach & Kelly 1978; Thomas & Postlethwaite 1984). Thus throughout the British empire, for example, many common features in education systems reflected the political frameworks in which the colonies operated, and led to differences from school systems in the French, Portuguese, Spanish and other empires. For instance, whereas secondary schools in UK colonies commonly led to school certificate examinations, in French colonies they lead to the baccalauréat. Other differences ranged from the roles (or lack of roles) for vernacular languages as media of instruction to policies on class size and teachers’ pay.

During postcolonial eras, some of the old ties have remained while new ties have developed. This is evident in Hong Kong, which was a UK colony until it reverted to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. The external sources to which policy makers have turned for inspiration may be illustrated by the following four reports published shortly after Hong Kong’s political change:

- A 1999 consultation document on the aims of education included an annex on developments elsewhere (Hong Kong 1999, Annex 4). The other locations were China, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, the UK and the USA.
- Attached to the reform proposals in a 2000 consultation document was an appendix entitled ‘Reforms in Other Places’ (Hong Kong 2000, Appendix I). The other places were Shanghai, Taipei, Singapore, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Chicago, and the USA.
- A 2002 report on higher education contained an appendix entitled ‘International Examples of Institutional Governance and Management’ (Sutherland 2002, Appendix D). The examples were the University of Pennsylvania (USA), the University of Wisconsin-Madison (USA), the University of Warwick (UK), the University of Melbourne (Australia), and the Imperial College of Science, Technology & Medicine (UK).
- A 2003 document on teacher competencies by the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education & Qualifications (ACTEQ) contained an appendix focusing on Continuing Professional De-
development (CPD) and entitled ‘Teachers’ CPD Policies and Practices in Selected Regions’ (ACTEQ 2003, Appendix C). The selected regions were Scotland, England and mainland China.

These lists contain an interesting mix of locations from which data were collected. The colonial legacies remained evident, with the UK (and two of its component parts – Scotland and England) still very prominent; but the lists also included many other parts of the world. Reflecting the bilingual nature of Hong Kong, in which the two official languages were English and Chinese, the majority of places on the list were either English-speaking or Chinese-speaking societies. The additional societies were advanced industrial countries in Asia – Japan and the Republic of Korea – which were considered to have some cultural affinity and were respected because of their economic successes. Also worth noting is the mix of units for comparison. In some cases comparisons were with countries (Singapore, Japan, Scotland, the USA, etc.); but also on the list were three cities (Shanghai, Taipei and Chicago) which were arguably parallel to Hong Kong in its identity as a city. The report on higher education selected a number of institutions for comparison. In this case, all were from prosperous English-speaking countries – Australia, the UK and the USA.

Instructively, while Hong Kong and its East Asian neighbours looked to such countries as the UK and USA for models, sometimes the UK and USA looked to East Asia for models. An example from England is a report commissioned by the government’s Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) which made a strong case for cross-national study of education, and was taken seriously by a wide audience (Crosley & Watson 2003, pp.2, 6; Alexander 2008, p.9). Particular emphasis in the report was placed on the high achievement scores of pupils in Japan, Hong Kong, Korea and Singapore. In part, the report noted, these scores reflected cultural factors which could not be replicated in the UK; but the report also noted dimensions of systems, schools and classrooms which could be shaped by policy decisions.

Policy makers in the USA have also at times sought to learn from East Asia. In 2009, for example, US President Barack Obama praised the education system of South Korea, telling US educators that “our children spend over a month less in school than children in South Korea every year” (Korea Times 2009). He called for Americans “not only to expand effective after-school programs but to rethink the school day to incorporate more time”. His remarks surprised Koreans who felt that their school system was too pressurised and would have preferred a more relaxed system along the lines US patterns (e.g. Park 2012). Nevertheless, US educators have also looked carefully at international studies of educational achievement, particularly to see why scores have been higher in parts of Asia and what can be learned (e.g. OECD 2011; Tucker 2011).

While the above paragraphs stress cross-national comparisons, policy makers also learn much from intranational comparisons. This may be especially obvious in federal systems in which major differences exist between states or provinces in the structure and content of education. In India, for example, an Annual Status of Education Report has regularly shown data on enrolments, facilities and children’s learning in the majority of the country’s 35 states and union territories (e.g. Pratham 2013). It has noted wide variations in available resources for education, and has recommended measures to improve equity and quality. In a rather different economic and social context, Canadian statistics have shown enrolments, expenditures and curriculum variations among the 13 provinces and territories (e.g. Statistics Canada 2013).

In contrast to comparisons across space are comparisons across time. The Canadian report mentioned above (Statistics Canada 2013) made explicit comparisons across time; and this report has many counterparts elsewhere. Policy makers are particularly inclined to make comparisons with the work of their predecessors, usually with the goal of showing how much society has benefited or will benefit from the policies that the contemporary policy makers have devised; but sometimes policy makers also learn from history about obstacles to avoid and the dangers of over-ambition.

Academics are sometimes dismissive of much of the comparative work of policy makers. They may argue that the work of policy makers is excessively governed by ideology, and that it is sometimes weak in design and interpretation. Policy makers may be equally dissatisfied with the work of academics, especially when it fails to lead to clear recommendations that are delivered in a timely manner. However, both groups can learn from each other; and international agencies may be a third group with approaches that are again different and also instructive.

International Agencies and Comparative Education

Because of space constraints, it is necessary to select just a few examples from the huge number of international agencies concerned with education. The three bodies that have been selected are UNESCO, the World
Bank, and the OECD. Each of these bodies has internal variations, and patterns have evolved over time. The variations and evolutions cannot be examined in detail here, but are addressed by such authors as Jones (2006), Rizvi & Lingard (2009), and Singh (2011).

UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization was founded in 1945 in the context of reconstruction following World War II. The authors of its constitution referred to the need to advance mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples, and commenced with the declaration that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed” (UNESCO 1945). The constitution added that the purpose of the body was:

> To contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law, and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations.

Conflict around the world has remained a major problem, and UNESCO has remained strongly committed to this goal.

UNESCO’s headquarters are in Paris, France, in addition to which the organisation has a global network of National Offices, Cluster Offices, Regional Bureaus and Liaison Offices. It also has a number of specialist Institutes, among which those having functions specifically concerned with education are the:

- International Institute for Capacity-Building in Africa (IICBA), in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia;
- UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), in Hamburg, Germany;
- International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), in Paris, France and Buenos Aires, Argentina;
- International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC), in Caracas, Venezuela;
- International Bureau of Education (IBE), in Geneva, Switzerland;
- Institute for Information Technologies in Education (IITE), in Moscow, Russia;
- Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) in New Delhi, India; and
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), in Montreal, Canada.

UNESCO’s overarching objectives, and the specific priorities for the education sector, have been set out in its Medium-Term Strategy 2014-2021 (UNESCO 2013). The overarching objectives are “Contributing to lasting peace”, and “Contributing to sustainable development and the eradication of poverty”. These objectives were set with awareness of the gap between rich and poor and the need for sustained focus on equity and inclusion. The three strategic objectives for the education sector are:

- Developing education systems to foster quality lifelong learning opportunities for all;
- Empowering learners to be creative and responsible citizens; and
- Shaping the future education agenda.

The Medium-Term Strategy stated (UNESCO 2013: 21) that education:

> is both a basic human right and a vector to realize other human rights and achieve international development objectives. Education has a direct impact on poverty reduction, health promotion, gender equality and environmental sustainability. It is at the heart of social inclusion and social transformation and it is widely acknowledged that no country can improve the living conditions of its people without important investments in education.

In order to achieve its goals, UNESCO undertakes comparative study of education to identify practical ways to extend the quantity, improve the quality, and appropriately orient the direction of education around the world. Thus, to some extent the comparative work of UNESCO resembled that of policy makers, commented on above. Indeed UNESCO has a strong policy advisory role, particularly for national governments. The emphasis on the national level reflected the fact that UNESCO is a member of the United Nations in which the nation (country) is by definition the basic building block. UNESCO’s membership includes both industrialised and less developed countries, but its main work is focused on the latter.

UNESCO’s emphasis on countries as the unit of analysis may be seen in its statistical yearbooks. Table 1.1 illustrates this observation with statistics on lower secondary education. Each country was allocated one line, and in this sense appeared to be equal in status even though the
countries displayed vast differences in population and other indicators. Thus China, which had a population of 1,300,000,000 and 3,658,000 lower secondary teachers, was allocated the same amount of space as Maldives, which had a population of 200,000 and 3,000 lower secondary teachers. Countries are also commonly treated as equal units in official meetings convened by UNESCO, with each member state having a single vote.

Table 1.1: Statistics on Lower Secondary Education, Selected Asian Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Gross graduation ratio</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Pupil/Teacher ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Number ('000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongolia</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Korea</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: (1) The gross graduation ratio is defined as the total number of graduates, regardless of age, from a given level of education (in this case lower secondary) expressed as a percentage of the population at the theoretical graduation age for that level of education. (2) Most data are for 2010, but some are for other years. (3) ... = no data available


However, UNESCO is of course aware of other units for analysis. Thus, although the report from which Table 1.1 was extracted contained no analyses at sub-national level, it did present some supra-national analyses. Figure 1.1 is an example, showing by world region the estimated number of children of primary school age who were out of school. It identifies proportions of children in this age group who had already left school, who were likely to enter school in the future, and who were un-

likely to ever enter school. The regions were defined on a combination of geographic and political criteria. Thus, the countries of North America were included with the Arab States rather than being grouped with Sub-Saharan Africa; Western Europe was grouped with North Africa rather than Central and Eastern Europe; and Mexico was grouped with Latin America rather than North America.

Figure 1.1: Children of Primary School Age who were Out of School, by World Region

Note: Data are for 2010.

While much of UNESCO’s work is practical, aiming to expand the quantity and improve the quality of education in its member states, the organisation also plays a conceptual role. This is evident in the analytical publications produced not only by the headquarters and regional bureaus (e.g. Ho 2012; UNESCO 2012) but also by its Institutes (e.g. Schieffelin & McGinn 2009; Bray & Varghese 2011; Nafukho et al. 2011).

In addition, UNESCO contributes to the field of comparative education through two important journals. One is the International Review of Education (IRE), edited at the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.
This journal has International rather than Comparative in its title, but describes itself (IRE 2013) as “the longest-running international periodical on the comparative theory and practice of formal and non-formal education”. It was established in 1931, but went through various periods of turbulence before being “reborn” in 1955 under the aegis of what was then called the UNESCO Institute of Education (Roche 2013, p.153). Most articles are in English; but the journal also publishes articles in French, and until a 2013 editorial change (Roche 2013, p.154) was willing to publish articles in German.

The second journal is entitled Prospects: Quarterly Review of Comparative Education, and is edited at UNESCO’s International Bureau of Education in Switzerland. When the journal was established in 1969, it was edited at the UNESCO headquarters in France, and entitled Prospects in Education: A Quarterly Bulletin. In 1972 it was renamed Prospects: Quarterly Review of Education, and the word Comparative was added to the title in 1995. In contrast to the International Review of Education, which can have articles in two languages within a single issue of the journal, Prospects may be translated into several languages in its entirety. When the journal was launched, it appeared in English and French; and then in due course other languages were added. The editorial office moved to the International Bureau of Education in 1993, and at that time the journal was appearing in six languages: English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese and Russian. For financial and logistic reasons full publication in all six languages could not be maintained, but the journal always appears in English and sometimes also appears in other languages.

The World Bank

During World War II, financial experts recognised that the post-war world would greatly need international cooperative arrangements to address monetary and financial problems. After several preliminary meetings, representatives of the 44 Allied Nations met in Bretton Woods in the USA in 1944. and established the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). Today, the IBRD is better known as the World Bank. The longer name reflected the institution’s original purpose: to lend money to help reconstruct the war-torn countries of Europe. After this reconstruction had been achieved, the Bank turned to the less developed countries of the world. This change of emphasis explains why the full name is no longer so commonly used. The year after the Bretton Woods meeting, 1945, world leaders formed the United Nations (UN). In 1947 the Bank joined the UN family, and thus is strictly speaking a UN body. However, it operates under a different structure of governance from UNESCO and most other UN bodies.

The World Bank is multisectoral in focus, with projects ranging from agriculture to water supply. The initial decades did not include projects on education, but after the early 1960s the sector gained increasing prominence (Jones 2006, pp.101-131). In 2013, the World Bank described itself as one of the largest external financiers for education in developing countries, adding that it managed a portfolio of US$9 billion and had operations in 71 countries (World Bank 2013). In the decade to 2012, 64 per cent of new projects were devoted to basic education, 17 per cent to upper secondary or vocational education, and 19 per cent to tertiary education (World Bank 2012, p.3). Like UNESCO, particular focus was placed on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) objectives.

The World Bank headquarters are in Washington DC, USA, and English is the dominant working language. However, multiple languages are used for specific projects, and in 2013 the website (www.worldbank.org) offered some information in 17 languages: Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, Bulgarian, Chinese, English, French, Khmer, Japanese, Mongolian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Thai, Turkish, Ukrainian and Vietnamese. The World Bank has multiple country offices, and employs over 10,000 people worldwide.

Like UNESCO, the World Bank is primarily concerned with the practical application of comparative education, and again much of its analysis has a country focus. Nevertheless, the World Bank presents many analytical studies of education, both in its policy documents (e.g. World Bank 2011) and in research on particular themes (e.g. Patrinos et al. 2009; Maigaard & Mingat 2012; Sondergaard et al. 2012). In line with its mandate, the majority of these studies focus on less developed countries. Eastern and Central Europe has also gained increasing prominence since becoming a focus of World Bank work in the 1990s.

The World Bank does not operate any specialist journals in education, but it does publish articles on education in The World Bank Research Observer and The World Bank Economic Review (e.g. Dang & Rogers 2008; Cigno 2012; Van de Sijpe 2013). Since the World Bank is a bank, the emphasis in much of its comparative education research is on matters related to economics and financing rather than to such themes as pedagogy and curriculum (Collins & Wiseman 2012; Klee et al. 2012). Again, the country is the
dominant unit of analysis.

One membership survey of the US-based Comparative and International Education Society (CIES), which is the largest society of its type in the field, asked respondents to list what they considered to be the most influential governmental and non-governmental organisations impacting on the field of comparative education (Cook et al. 2004, pp.140-141). Among the 188 different organisations listed by the sample, the World Bank was identified as having the most influence and received 19.7 per cent of responses. The other organisations in the top six were UNESCO (15.8%), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (7.8%), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (5.0%), the United Nations (3.7%), and the OECD (3.5%). The fact that the 69.3% of the 419 respondents were resident in the USA must be taken account, since it implied a bias towards institutions that were prominent in that country and which produced a lot of material in English. Nevertheless, nearly one third of the respondents were resident elsewhere in the world, so the sample was not restricted to US perceptions.

The OECD

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is younger than UNESCO and the World Bank, having been created in 1961, but owes its origins to the same period of history. It is the successor to the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), which was set up in 1947 with support from the USA and Canada to help rebuild European economies after World War II. The OECD has been described as a “rich man’s club” of wealthy nations (Woodward 2009, p.1). The OECD to some extent accepts such a description, though in an official publication (OECD 2008, p.8) has added that:

The OECD is a group of like-minded countries. Essentially membership is limited only by a country’s commitment to a market economy and a pluralistic democracy. It is rich, in that its 30 members [which expanded to 34 in 2010] produce almost 60% of the world’s goods and services, but it is by no means exclusive. Non-members are invited to subscribe to OECD agreements and treaties, and the Organisation shares expertise and exchanges views on topics of mutual concern with more than 100 other countries and economies.

The OECD headquarters are in Paris, and its principal working languages are English and French.

Like the World Bank, the OECD has a multisectoral focus. The Economic Department addresses the core business, and is the largest part of the organisation; but other sections focus on the environment, technology, food, communications and employment. The OECD’s semi-autonomous bodies include the Nuclear Energy Agency, the International Energy Agency, and the European Conference of Ministers of Transport.

Education also features on this list, and has gained increased prominence. The Directorate for Education (later named the Directorate for Education and Skills) was created in 2002 as a successor to a previous sub-division within the organisation. According to an official statement (OECD 2008, pp.19-20), it “helps member countries achieve high-quality learning for all that contributes to personal development, sustainable economic growth and social cohesion”. Specific foci include ways to evaluate and improve outcomes from education, promote quality teaching, and build social cohesion through education.

Particularly well-known among the OECD education publications is the annual Education at a Glance. The first edition was published in 1992, and subsequent editions both extended the scope and improved the reliability and comparability of data. This task has not been easy. As observed by Henry et al. (2001, p.94):

National data can often be incomplete, unreliable and out of phase in terms of timing and methods of data collection …. [Federal states like the US, Australia, Canada and Germany provide data in terms of weighted means, a process that cannot be assumed to have been carried out in any uniform fashion. Even aggregations are not always reliable because of changes in definitions and methodology. This is particularly so in collecting data on participation in tertiary education, where reforms in the post-secondary sector often change the ways students are classified for the purposes of allocating grants and benefits.

The OECD has nevertheless persisted with methodological refinements. It has devised techniques of aggregation and approximation to moderate the data supplied, and it has used powers of persuasion to encourage its members to collect data in a common format. The OECD Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics (OECD 2004) charted some of the improvements.

Most parts of Education at a Glance take the country as the unit of analysis, with the exception that some tables and charts show Belgium’s
Flemish education system separately from its French education system. Figure 1.2 reproduces a chart in which this separation is made. The chart also shows England separately from Scotland, though shows the United States as single entity despite the diversity among its 50 states. Other tables and charts in the same publication (OECD 2013a) showed both the United Kingdom and Belgium as single units, despite their internal diversity.

Figure 1.2: Teachers’ Salaries in Lower Secondary Education, in equivalent US$ Converted using Purchasing Power Parities

The chart shows annual statutory salaries in 2011 for teachers in public institutions with 15 years of experience and minimum training.


From a methodological perspective, it is instructive to note that Figure 1.2, needing a common currency, uses US dollars – not in raw form according to prevailing official exchange rates, but according to purchasing powers (i.e. recognising that US$1 may purchase more in some settings than in others). This calculation relies on the accuracy of purchasing-power estimations, and still glosses over variations between different cities and regions within countries; but it is clearly preferable to unmodified exchange rates.

Also worth noting is the way that Figure 1.2 ordered the countries and systems. As noted by Henry et al. (2001, pp.95-96):

Inevitably, the establishment of a single playing field sets the stage for constructing league tables, whatever the somewhat disingenuous claims to the contrary. Visually, tables or figures of comparative performance against an OECD or country mean carry normative overtones.... To be above, below or at par with the OECD average invites simplistic or politically motivated comment, despite the pages of methodological and interpretative cautions which abound in the annexes.

Further, the OECD has in some publications expanded its focus considerably beyond its own member states. For example, the 2013 edition of Education at a Glance stated (p.21) that coverage included "two non-OECD countries that participate in the OECD Indicators of Education Systems programme (INES), namely Brazil and the Russian Federation, and the other G20 countries that do not participate in INES (Argentina, China, India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and South Africa)". Again, such data were mostly presented on a country-by-country basis, despite the internal diversity which might have been especially notable in such countries as China, Indonesia and Russia.

Related observations are applicable to another activity in the education sector, namely the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Under this programme, assessments of the achievements of 15-year-olds in mathematics, science and reading have been undertaken every three years. In the first assessment, the survey was implemented in 43 countries and education systems. The number dropped to 41 in 2003, but grew to 58 in 2006, 65 in 2009, and 67 in 2012.

As explained by the OECD (2013b, p.13):

The PISA assessment takes a broad approach to measuring knowledge, skills and attitudes that reflect current changes in school priorities... PISA focuses on competencies that 15-year-old students will need in the future and seeks to assess what they can do with what they have learnt – reflecting the ability of students to continue learning throughout their lives by applying what they learn in school to non-school environments, evaluating their choices and making decisions.

The document added (OECD 2013b, p.14) that PISA results “allow national policy makers to compare the performance of their education systems with those of other countries”. The results have commonly been presented, especially in newspapers and other media which seek to distil essential messages, in country rankings. The OECD has frequently stressed that interpretations of the data should go beyond simplistic messages of country rankings, but some of its own reports have priori-
In addition to country-level rankings, the PISA studies permit analysis of students’ motivation to learn, beliefs about themselves, and their learning strategies. The analyses also permit comparisons by gender, socio-economic group and many other units of analysis. PISA has become highly influential among policy-makers (Andere 2008; Pereyra et al. 2011; Breakspear 2012; Meyer & Benavot 2013). In some cases, PISA reports have led to major upheaval, and in other cases they have led to much self-congratulation. Examples of the former include the “PISA shock” in Germany, where policy makers had been complacent about their education systems and were confronted by rankings that were much lower than expected (Waldow 2009). By contrast, Finland has attracted a steady stream of visitors seeking to understand how and why its PISA scores have been consistently at or near the top (Simola & Rinne 2011; Varjo et al. 2013); and since the release of PISA 2009 results, Shanghai has attracted similar attention (Sellar & Lingard 2013).

While PISA is a powerful tool, it also has limitations. Meyer and Benavot (2013, p.21) have pointed out that:

The fact that this apparatus relies on numbers and statistics does not mean that it is anchored in transparent, objective, uncontestable truth. In fact the ‘cloud of data’ produced by PISA may easily permit anyone [to] find support for any preconceived idea. It creates the opposite of transparency because key assumptions and key decisions about categorization and the construction of measures are black-boxed by a complex array of behind-the-scenes judgments and decisions.

Defenders of PISA might rightly retort that it provides a great advance on previous tools. Nevertheless, the comparisons in PISA have sometimes lacked the methodological insights that could have been brought by the tools and traditions of the field of comparative education. These include qualitative judgements that emphasise context and history (Pereyra et al. 2011).

Academics and Comparative Education

Less space will be devoted here to the nature of the work of academics in the field of comparative education since Chapter 2 elaborates on this theme – and indeed the whole book is principally devoted to the academic domain. Nevertheless, while again noting that academics com-

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<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
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[Statistically significant above the OECD average]
[Not statistically different from the OECD average]
[Statistically significant below the OECD average]

Notes: The data refer to the PISA 2009 assessment. The countries with names in bold were OECD members at the time of the publication of the report.

monly undertake consultancies and other practical assignments in which their purposes for comparative study of education may be similar to those of practitioners and policy makers, in general academics are concerned with conceptual and theoretical work. Sometimes they collaborate with policy makers and international agencies in the analysis of data, but an alternative role – evident in some of the critiques of international agencies noted above (Singh 2011; Collins & Wiseman 2012; Klees et al. 2012; Meyer & Benavot 2013) – is to highlight ideological and methodological biases.

Most people see comparative education as an interdisciplinary field which welcomes scholars who are equipped with tools and perspectives from other areas but who choose to focus on educational issues in a comparative context (Manzon 2011). The questions then are how the field would be defined, where its boundaries lie, and how it is changing over time.

One simple way to define the field is by the membership and work of professional societies. The US-based Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) was mentioned above. With 2,300 individual and institutional members and a history dating from 1956, it is the oldest as well as the largest in the field. Comparable societies exist in other parts of the world, some being regional in focus (e.g. serving China, Czech Republic and India), some being sub-national (e.g. serving Hong Kong), some being national (e.g. serving Europe and Asia), and two being language-based (serving speakers of French and Dutch). Most of these societies are members of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES), which was created in 1970 as an umbrella body and which in 2013 had 39 constituent societies (Masemann et al. 2007; WCCES 2013).

In addition, much academic work in the field of comparative education is undertaken by individuals and groups who are not members of these professional societies. Many academics identify more strongly with their parent disciplines, such as psychology, mathematics and sociology, and present their work in the conferences and journals of those disciplines rather than in the conferences and journals of comparative education. Thus, the scale of comparative study of education is much broader than that encompassed by the professional societies which explicitly label themselves as being concerned with the field.

Nevertheless, much can be learned from analysis of the characteristics and inclinations of academics who do choose to identify themselves with the field of comparative education. The survey of CIES members mentioned above (Cook et al. 2004) revealed a diverse and highly eclectic field which was "relatively centerless" (p.136). However, the authors did perceive "a constituency unified around the objectives of understanding better the traditions of understanding one's own system of education by studying those of others' and assessing educational issues from a global perspective" (p.130). Among the themes on which scholars indicated that their work focused, the most frequently-named were globalisation (7.9% of all responses), gender in education (7.6%), education and development (4.6%), equality in education (4.0%), and multiculturalism, race and ethnicity (3.7%); but a huge number of additional themes were named. Diversity was also apparent in methodological approaches and in geographic foci for study.

If patterns in the CIES were to be set aside patterns in other comparative education societies, the picture would show even greater diversity. This observation is elaborated upon in Chapter 2.

Conclusions
This chapter has sketched some of the diversity in actors and purposes in comparative study of education. Parents have very different purposes and therefore approaches from policy makers, and international agencies have very different purposes and approaches from academics. In addition, changes are evident over time.

This book is primarily concerned with the work of academics, and thus with matters of conceptualisation and understanding. Nevertheless, a general point is applicable to all categories, and links to the quotation above from Cook et al. (2004, p.13), namely that people who undertake comparative study of education commonly find not only that they that learn more about other cultures and societies but also that they learn more about their own. This was eloquently expressed by one of the great-grandfathers of the field, Sir Michael Sadler, who wrote in 1900 (reprinted 1964, p.310), that:

The practical value of studying, in a right spirit and with scholarly accuracy, the working of foreign systems of education is that it will result in our being better fitted to study and understand our own.

The emphasis in this quotation is of an individual looking outwards, identifying another society and then comparing patterns with those in that individual's own society. Sadler suggested (p.312) that the compari-
son might encourage appreciation of domestic education systems as well as heightening awareness of shortcomings:

If we study foreign systems of education thoroughly and sympathetically - and sympathy and thoroughness are both necessary for the task - I believe that the result on our minds will be to make us prize, as we have never prized before, the good things which we have at home, and also to make us realise how many things there are in our [own education systems] which need prompt and searching change.

Once the analyst has identified problems, the next logical step is to solutions. Isaac Kandel was a key figure in the generation which followed Sadler's. Kandel's 1933 book (p.xix) listed a set of problems which, he suggested, raised universal questions. Kandel then pointed out that:

The chief value of a comparative approach to such problems lies in an analysis of the causes which have produced them, in a comparison of the differences between the various systems and the reasons underlying them, and, finally, in a study of the solutions attempted.

The tone of such a statement is more closely allied to theoretical goals; and Kandel's book to some extent established a tradition into which the present book fits. However, the field of comparative education has evolved in very significant ways since Kandel wrote those words. Some ways in which it has evolved, and some valuable ways to promote understanding through the use of different units for comparison, will become evident in the chapters which follow.

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2

Scholarly Enquiry and the Field of Comparative Education

Mark Bray

The previous chapter noted that the field of comparative education is by nature interdisciplinary. This chapter elaborates on this theme, and examines ways in which the field relates to other domains of academic study.

A useful starting point is a 1989 book written by Tony Becher. It was published in second edition in 2001 under the co-authorship of Tony Becher and Paul Trowler, with the title Academic Tribes and Territories: Intellectual Enquiry and the Culture of Disciplines. Both editions lucidly analysed dimensions of the academic arena, with the second edition extending analysis and updating it to take account of several powerful influences on the size and shape of higher education. Although both editions were primarily concerned with the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA), they also had considerable relevance to other countries. The domain of educational studies was given only passing attention in the books, but patterns and trends in educational studies can be mapped against those in other domains fairly easily. This chapter is chiefly based on the second edition of the book, together with a sequel edited by Trowler et al. (2012a). The chapter also draws on the works of many other scholars, and particularly the conceptual schema presented by Olivera (1988).