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CHAPTER 8

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## Comparative Education, Globalization and Teaching with/against the Nation-State

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The nation-state is an accomplishment whose rise, it can be argued, parallels the emergence of the social or human sciences – comparative education among them – in the nineteenth century. From the nation-centered studies proposed by Marc-Antoine Jullien in the 1810s to the World's Fair exhibits of the turn of the twentieth century, the nation and educational comparison have been inextricably bound. Indeed, through the Cold War and presently with the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and other international educational assessments, it is clear that the nation-state and educational comparison have continued to be strongly linked.

The nation-state as the ultimate horizon of reference for 'society' has long been the ultimate 'unit' of analysis in sociology, something reflected in the field of comparative education in both structural functionalist and many political economy approaches. Whether conceived of as an organic unity of forces and factors or as internally differentiated and conflict-ridden, there is a striking persistence to the idea of the nation-state as a unit container. At the same time, globalization theory and currents of transnationalism invite us to question the nation-state. Ulrich Beck's (2002) notions of a cosmopolitan sociology also ask us to rethink our standard notions of units of analysis and develop conceptual and methodological resources for understanding the world that is undergoing what Beck refers to as a cosmopolitan transformation.

The problem of sorting out the salience of the nation-state thus presents challenges both for comparative education research and for the teaching of comparative and international education. As a contribution to a book dedicated to teaching in the field, the present chapter concerns itself more with the latter; however, some of the arguments advanced bear on the design of comparative and international education research as well.

In an era where concerns about globalization traverse both academic and popular debates, it seems particularly pressing that courses in comparative and international education devote some attention to grappling with the ways in which schools are situated in, and in relation to, global processes and phenomena. Even a cursory review of leading textbooks and syllabi collections shows that this occurs widely. Nonetheless, this essay calls for a more careful rethinking of the ways that both nation-state and globalization concerns are integrated into our field. And even though its primary aim is to offer suggestions for how to teach 'with and against' the nation-state in the setting of today's world, my arguments extend back to diagnose and problematize how things national and things global or world-level have been treated in our field.

### The Foundations of Teaching Comparative Education

Let us begin with an observation from the French science studies scholar Bruno Latour, who has proposed that:

Most of the social sciences were invented, a century ago, to short-cut political processes after many years of insufferable civil wars and revolutionary strife. If we have a society that is *already composed as one single whole* and which can be used to account for the behavior of actors who do not know what they are doing, but whose unknown structure is visible to the keen eyes of a social scientist, it then becomes possible to embark on the huge task of social engineering in order to produce the common good, without having to go through the painstaking labour of composing this commonality through political means. (Latour, 2000, pp. 117-118; emphasis in original)

Latour is speaking of a historical moment when society was seen as coextensive with the territory of the nation-state. And important here for our purposes are his observations on what was 'achieved' through this conceptual legerdemain and what this means for the habitus and training of the social scientist as one who was to enjoy a privileged position in bringing about reform. The project of studying and teaching of comparative education manifested across the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century very much in these same terms. Kaloyannaki and Kazamias (2009) have described a 'meliorist' strand of comparative education study marked by a focus on lesson-learning and an emphasis on leveraging research for purposes of reform and improvement. Their characterization of certain technical strands of comparative and international education research certainly rings true on many levels. However, it is also important not to lose sight of the fundamentally normative nature of social science *ipso facto*. Even in its more phenomenological, humanistic, critical, and *Verstehen*-oriented variants,

social science is a project of social engineering. Teaching comparative education is bound up in the teaching of social engineering.

Latour's (2000) observations on social science and the nineteenth-century imagining of societies as *constituted as a single whole to begin with* are also relevant to the ways that globalization is often discussed in contemporary social science – and in the field of comparative and international education specifically. Quite often the existence of a 'globalized world' is presented as an orienting fact, a *fait accompli*, as the starting point of analysis. And, indeed, one might rework and rewrite Latour's analysis as follows: if we have *a globalized world* that is already *composed as one single whole* and which can be used to account for the behavior of actors who do not know what they are doing, but whose unknown structure is visible to the keen eyes of a social scientist, it then becomes possible to embark on the huge task of social engineering in order to produce the common good.

In many globalization-analysis frameworks, the requirement of 'keen eyes' and the illumination of structures purportedly 'unknown' to those enmeshed in them enshrines the contemporary social scientist as a mandarin every bit as privileged as the nineteenth- and twentieth-century sociologists who studied their own and others' societies with an eye seeing what others could not and making improvements where others could not. Stäheli (2003) describes attribution to 'the global' of an overarching explanatory power as 'a pervasive totalizing gesture which tries to make the outside of the global unthinkable' (p. 2). Stäheli also observes that even those who exalt the subversive power of the 'local' tend to reify the global as a pre-existing whole. The prevalence (and perhaps obduracy) of this tendency to take globalization as a set-piece is partly evidenced by many recent challenges to it. These include many calls to shift analytic focus onto the construction of the global. Collier and Ong (2005) and Sobe (2014) have called for the study of the making of 'global assemblages'. In like manner, Dale and Robertson (2009) have called for an emphasis on the constitution of social and political processes and phenomena, analysis of how different sets of relations are formed, and a rejection of reliance on ossified and static categories of analysis.

The challenge for teaching comparative and international education is to avoid taking 'the nation-state' and 'a globalized world' as two already-constituted facts whose purported reality and potential conflict with one another demarcate the terrain of analysis.

### Imagining Locals and Globals

One avenue of addressing this challenge is suggested by the work of the late Benedict Anderson, whose scholarship on 'imagined communities' has had a paradigm-shifting impact on the ways that scholars across the social sciences and the humanities study nationalism; ethnic, social and cultural belonging; and social identities broadly considered. From Anderson's work, both in

terms of how he does *and doesn't* discuss education, we can draw some important guidelines and insights for teaching comparative and international education.

To begin, permit me to note that when reading Anderson's *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (1983, 1991, 2006), I sometimes imagine him to be addressing comparative education's inappropriately overquoted 'Sadlerian dictum'. With Jamie Kowalczyk (Sobe & Kowalczyk, 2012), I have argued that turn-of-the-twentieth-century British comparative education advocate Michael Sadler's (1900/1964) recommendation that education reformers not 'wander at pleasure among the educational systems of the world, like a child strolling through a garden, and pick off a flower' (p.310) is a dangerous and colonialist way of conceptualizing educational 'context'. Sadler's recommendation echoes the colonialist science of 'acclimatization' (Osborne, 1994, 2000) that investigated which agricultural crops and animals could and couldn't be transported to what parts of the world in the interest of resource exploitation. And it also egregiously inscribes principles of difference that enable different curricula, pedagogical methods and forms of schooling to be applied to particular 'kinds' of people based on outsiders' perceptions of worth, aptitude and potential. Moreover, Sadler's organicist argument about so-called native soil is also an example of the dubious assumption that a unique 'national spirit' is inscribed in the philosophy and institutions of particular national education systems. The error is not just Sadler's. For most of its history, the field of comparative and international education has been entirely incorrect when analyzing the relation between schools and nations – the critical error being to treat the nation-state as an explanatory independent variable from which most of the salient aspects of schools and school systems flow. Instead, the nation needs to be taken as something that needs to be explained, more than it explains (Sobe, 2014).

Robert Cowen (2014) has argued that the nation-state appears in many contemporary political and academic conversations about international educational comparisons as the 'reverse translation of a political category into a research-technical category', with the result being a black-boxing of the 'nation' into a set of so-called variables. In like manner, Lynn Fendler has recently discussed the ways that 'ghosts of the nation-state haunt educational histories when nations are treated as independent variables, frozen in time and exempt from critical investigation' (2013, p. 227). In comparative education too, this has ironically led to the contents of national education traditions being left unexamined and more unchallenged (Welch, 2009) than the tradition (and critique) of methodological nationalism would actually seem to predict. When the nation is black-boxed and treated as if it were an independent variable, there is an unfortunate side effect of short-changing educational research by not exploring the ways that schools fabricate national identities, national imaginaries and national practices.

Given that Anderson approaches the nation as a created, enacted imagined community, it is surprising how little mention there is of schooling in his work. In one of his chapters that is most often cited (and taught), Anderson (1991, 2006) discusses the 'Census, Map and Museum' as three 'institutions of power' (p. 163) that bring to light key elements of the 'grammar' of imagined communities. He recounts that in the first edition of the book (1986), he wrote that one can see the 'instilling of nationalist ideology through the mass media, the educational system, administrative regulations, and so forth' (p. 114) but that in the 1991 revised edition he then saw things differently. It is thus interesting to ponder why in both the second and the later editions schooling drops out of his formulation for how nationalist sentiments are imparted and national communities imagined.[1]

On my reading, Anderson offers an extremely persuasive analysis of how census-taking, mapping and museum practices generate a structural grammar through which national sentiments can come to operate as social facts (Appadurai, 1990). Anderson explains that he turned to census, map and museum as part of revising his earlier assumption that official nationalisms in Asia and Africa emulated the nationalisms of Europe. Instead of this 'superficial' (Anderson's word) reading, he sees the operations of the colonial state as setting the stage for national imaginaries through the three aforementioned institutions of power. Regarding schooling, it is notable that Anderson's earlier view on the inculcation of nationalist ideologies includes educational systems as part of an 'and so forth' list of various communication/dissemination technologies. This is emblematic of an unfortunate tendency within academic scholarship to assume that schools are merely one of many sites of social reproduction and to not treat them as sites of cultural production that are contingent, contested and consequential in their own right (Sobe, 2009). In fact, I would propose that students of comparative and international education need to be made well aware of the drawbacks and limitations to assuming that schools and what happens at schools are *derivative* of tensions and social compacts that have been worked out in other social arenas. Schools are the sites of major political, cultural and social flashpoints, and one of the major contributions of our field has been to show schools as less stable and less authoritative sites for disseminating social and political ideals than they are sometimes taken to be.

Anderson's *Imagined Communities* appropriately remarks on the European/North American cultural specificity of the age-graded classroom model as part of a proposal that the very provision of classrooms as part of a sequenced progression helped to foster colonial nationalisms. He describes the regimented and standardized features of schools as creating 'a self-contained, coherent universe of experience' (1991, 2006, p. 121), though he does not extensively elaborate on the consequences of this. He notes that the tiered, hierarchical features of school systems brought a series of pilgrimages into being in many settings. Middle schools and secondary schools brought students out of smaller villages and towns and into regional centers, and then

those who advanced on to higher education necessarily traveled to colonial capitals, or – in rare circumstances – to the colonial metropolises themselves. Anderson writes:

the tender pilgrims made their inward, upward way, meeting fellow-pilgrims from different, perhaps once hostile, villages in primary school; from different ethnolinguistic groups in middle-school; and from every part of the realm in the tertiary institutions of the capital. And they knew that from wherever they had come they still had read the same books and done the same sums. They also knew ... that all these journeyings derived their 'sense' from the capital, in effect explaining why 'we' are 'here' together. (1991, 2006, pp. 121-122)

The pyramid-like structure of an education system, by virtue of the very mechanics of its operation, thus might assist greatly in developing the horizontal comradeship that is so fundamental to the imagined community of a nation. In other words, even leaving the potential 'national'-specific content of curricula and textbooks out of the picture, one can contend that the institution of modern schooling lends to the creation of the imaginaries of nation-states. A clear and obvious extension of this insight would be to analyze the ways that the materiality and repetition of international student mobility helps to construct global sensibilities and imaginaries.[2]

In sum, there seems to be a pressing need to orient the teaching of comparative and international education towards a study of educational assemblages (Webb, 2009; Ball, 2012; Sobe, 2015). When we study educational borrowing and lending, it becomes imperative to think about the formation, coordination and extension of networks and discursive formations through which heterogeneous, disparate objects are brought into relation. Collier and Ong's argument that rather than examining 'the changes associated with globalization in terms of broad structural transformations or new configurations of society or culture', attention should be paid to 'the specific range of phenomena that articulate such shifts' (2005, p. 3) is useful advice for teaching in our field. Learning to analyze the materialities (Lawn & Grosvenor, 2005; Coole & Frost, 2010), embodiments (Epstein, 2007) and apparatuses (Agamben, 2009) of schooling is a worthy endeavor for the keen eyes and keen minds of our students.

### Teaching with the Nation-State

How best to articulate the salience of a single-case study is a recurrent question in the field of comparative and international education. Editors of journals in our field sometimes express concern at the surprisingly small number of studies that are actually *comparative*. I see this reflection as a useful exercise, if only because it helps to articulate numerous and varied arguments for embracing the heterogeneity of scholarship that falls under the

broad umbrella that is the field of comparative and international education. How, why and when to identify a 'national case' remains a question worth asking in our teaching. Ample are the introductory (and advanced) courses that spend considerable time having students grapple with transnational actors, institutions, processes and phenomena – and yet then require a single nation-centered final paper, with little comment on the juxtaposition. (And indeed, at times my own courses certainly fit this model.) The convincing critiques of 'methodological nationalism' (Dale, 2005) notwithstanding, it is still important not to abandon the nation-state in our teaching. Building off my previous arguments, this section aims to raise additional considerations for what it can mean to teach 'with' the nation-state, particularly in an era of heightened sensitivity to globe-spanning relations, processes and phenomena.

The field of comparative and international education has advanced well beyond thinking about the nation-state and the global in an either/or binary manner. Some have moved to recast this as a 'dialectic' (Arnove et al, 2012) or as a 'nexus' (Schriewer, 2003). Yet, thinking in transactional terms along these lines seems to needlessly pre-judge any particular scenario and may be more a diversion and distraction than generative of productive new analytic insights. The assemblage approach that I have urged above focuses instead on 'the formation, coordination and extension of networks and discursive formations through which heterogeneous, disparate objects are brought into relation' (Sobe, 2014, p. 2). When studying schools in national and/or global terms, students in comparative and international education need to grapple with the contingent bundling together of heterogeneous elements and not struggle to match these contingent assemblages to any prefigured 'cultural models' or reified ideological platforms.

Teaching with the nation-state thus means taking context seriously and actually giving it its due. Too much comparative education research approaches contextualization as a preliminary front-end research activity when the problem of context is more usefully seen as a 'matter of concern' across a research project (Sobe & Kowalczyk, 2014). An analytic focus on contexts as sets or bundles of relations also helps us think about the research challenge presented by globalization, particularly as it heightens our ability to capture localizations and the strategic moves that comparative and international education scholars analyze so well. As an example, consider Dickhaus' (2010) work on 'accountability regimes' in a comparative study of quality assurance initiatives in the South African and Argentinean higher education sectors. She points to the historical accretion of modes of higher education governance in each setting as helping to explain how new accreditation initiatives played out. Nonetheless, Dickhaus argues that transnationally circulating quality assurance policies have become a hegemonic tool for reorganizing the higher education sector, in part *because of* the variety of meanings that can be attached to them and the selectivity that goes into the contested process of appropriation and meaning creation. The challenge of teaching with the nation-state is the challenge of equipping our

students with tools and strategies for understanding mobility, mutability and heterogeneity at ephemeral moments.

Teaching with the nation-state also means devoting serious attention to discursive constructions of nations and the ways that national imaginaries come to operate as social facts. Drawing off Ferguson and Gupta's (2002) work on state practices of spatiality, comparative and international education would do well to give significant thought to the ways that 'verticality' and 'encompassment' are at play in education policies and practice. The performative nature of accountability policies (Webb, 2006) is often remarked upon and is a useful reminder that scholars need to pay heed to 'what else' is occurring via education policy enactments in addition to the putative or aspirational regulation of schools, teachers, children and families. Looking at the ways that nation-states construct a sense of being 'above' society and of 'enveloping' their localities is useful for teaching with the nation-state in comparative and international education. This means not taking nations as pre-given a priori 'containers', but instead, foregrounding strategies of 'containment' as ongoing social, cultural and political projects.

### Teaching against the Nation-State

Unsettling the pre-given and deconstructing the taken-for-granted brings the nation-state form itself into question. In this final section of the chapter, I argue that teaching 'against' the nation-state flows naturally and concurrently from teaching 'with' it. Hence, the backlash of with/against in my chapter's title should be taken not as an expression of binary opposition (one either teaches for or against), but rather should be taken as more of an ambivalent gesture that simultaneously inclines in two directions.

Alongside examinations of encompassment and verticality technologies as well as discursive fabrications of nation-ness, it is clearly essential to recognize the heterogeneity located within nations (Lingard & Rawolle, 2011; Robertson, 2012). This may mean that intra-national comparisons need more attention in the field of comparative and international education than they tend to receive, particularly, perhaps, in our teaching. Different groups may exhibit dramatically and subtly different ways of understanding the 'educated person' (Levinson et al, 1996), something that necessitates intra-national comparative scholarship accompanying any transnational analyses of the purposes and aims of schooling.

Teaching against the nation-state also means bringing into question the sincerity with which the 'national' component of education policies is enunciated. While political elites in many locales have often shared cosmopolitan convictions and commitments, it is only recently that we find such a density of operations that, as Saskia Sassen (2007) writes, 'take place within national institutional settings but are geared to non-national or transnational agendas' (p. 298). Sassen makes a strong case for recovering the significance of place in the global economy; however, a key feature of her

argument about 'global cities' is that urban space often becomes de-nationalized. And, indeed, research examining education reform in cities like Chicago (Lipman, 2004) shows how a national collective frame can easily vanish from the picture. International organizations, both non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and inter-governmental organizations, also come into the picture by providing non-national sites for legitimate claim-making, all of which is arguably linked to a possible transformation of nation-based citizenship into rights-based citizenship.

The final dimension of teaching against the nation-state that I will review here deals with unsettling the politics of scale that so often frames inquiry in the field of comparative and international education. On what grounds ought we to maintain that something *global* is 'larger' and something *local* is 'smaller', and that the *nation* is most likely somewhere in between? Having brought encompassment practices into question in the previous section, we seem required also to question any vision of pre-arrayed concentric circles showing one layer of social reality necessarily enveloping and surrounding another. In place of taking the local as necessarily contained within the global – and also rejecting the idea that the two can be usefully distinguished by their valence or concrete potential for action (as in the chess analogy of the *global* moving like a queen and the *local* moving like a king) – Guy (2009) suggests that they are two opposite sides of the same distinction and more important as varieties of self-description than anything else. We can investigate the nation-state also as self-description, and while we should clearly attend to scalar relations, we should work off the assumption that spatialities and the politics of scale have unique situational contours. And these are the very things that the field of comparative and international education needs to make central as subjects of inquiry.

Throughout this piece I have frequently discussed the intellectual activity of questioning or putting-into-question. To question is not to repudiate. It is simply to say that these are questions that we as teachers and our students as learners should seek to answer. In this chapter I have proposed that learning how to teach with/against the nation-state holds promise for making known structures better known. It requires a certain kind of alacrity of vision for the social scientist, and it might allow us to contribute to producing common good through solidly political means.

### Notes

- [1] The discussion in this and the subsequent two paragraphs is drawn from Sobe (2014).
- [2] This is a charge that applies both to our present moment and to historical analyses (Sobe, 2008; Goodman, 2015).

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Teaching Comparative Education

CHAPTER 9

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## Teaching Comparative Education: the dialectics of the global and the local

CARLOS ALBERTO TORRES

### Introduction

In quoting others, we cite ourselves. (Cortázar, 1986)

This chapter discusses teaching comparative education in the context of global citizenship education as an emerging focal point of the field. First I shall explain my philosophy of teaching, already presented in a previous publication (Torres, 2015a). This teaching philosophy will serve as an introduction and will perhaps even problematize teaching, for some comparativists may disagree with a teaching philosophy based on Paulo Freire's work and the contributions of critical theory and feminism (Malsbary & Way, 2014).

My second claim is that our readers will be well served in that, in addition to pointing out the political philosophical and methodological principles of my teaching, I focus on the theoretical constructs undergirding one of the most successful textbooks in comparative and international education. So, as one of the editors of *Comparative Education: the dialectic of the global and the local*, a textbook which is in its fourth edition and published in several languages, let me speak about this book and how it may help in teaching comparative and international education. As said in many places, a fundamental premise of my work and that of true critical theorists is that we teach and conduct research to change the world, not simply to observe as detached alchemists experimenting with different products in social engineering or scientific voyeurs enjoying at a distance the intricacies of social behavior and the agonies of everyday life (Torres, 2009).

A central thesis of my work calls into question whether it is possible to fully dissociate the normative from the analytical in the construction of scientific thought. This issue raises the importance of the notion of a good

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**Teaching Comparative Education:  
trends and issues informing practice**

Edited by  
**Patricia K. Kubow & Allison H. Blosser**

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INTRODUCTION

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**Framing the Teaching  
Comparative Education Terrain:  
the need for critical agency  
in teacher education**

**PATRICIA K. KUBOW & ALLISON H. BLOSSER**

This book, *Teaching Comparative Education: trends and issues informing practice*, has emerged from our concern to give greater attention to how comparative education is being taught, or advocated for, in teacher education within higher education institutions. We are pleased that it was of immediate interest to Symposium Books for the Oxford Studies in Comparative Education series. In this volume, we, along with a host of seminal scholars in the field of comparative and international education (CIE), explore the conceptual, normative and practical ways in which the field is being taught. The goal of the book is to consider the ideological and conceptual landscape – both the social and the political spaces in which CIE is situated – and what these changes mean for the teaching of CIE. The intellectual and social aims and purposes of CIE are also examined, as are the sociopolitical issues and trends influencing its practice. The contributing authors explore the philosophical, sociological, political and cultural aspects of teaching CIE, drawing upon their own particular epistemological leanings and professional convictions.

A unifying conviction on the part of most of the book's contributors is that comparative education enables comparativists and practitioners alike to question totalizing narratives, including that influencing teacher education. Across the chapters, there is an anxiety about the position of CIE in the academy and the desire for CIE to play a more central role in both undergraduate and graduate education. A particular concern raised by many of the authors – in locations as diverse as Germany, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States – is with the technicist or utilitarian impulse in teacher education. The societal turn toward utilitarian educational