Abstract

Some of the perspectives presented in this paper are shaped by the experiences of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES). The Japan Comparative Education Society (JCES) was one of the five bodies that came together to form the WCCES in 1970. The JCES has thus played a major role in Comparative Education not only nationally but also globally.

Within the field of comparative education, the nation state has traditionally been a dominant unit of analysis. The nation state remains a meaningful unit for many purposes, but much exciting work can be done with other units. Concerning conceptual frameworks, the field has been dominated by the social sciences and has followed fashions of that sector; but it could usefully branch out and become more pluralistic in many of its approaches. The field of comparative education also needs to be aware of the extent to which it does and does not have a distinct identity. It has particular overlap with the field of international education. In some circumstances such overlap can be beneficial, but it can also be problematic.

A further section of this paper focuses on language issues. Scholarly communities around the world face challenges arising from the extent to which their languages are or are not widely used elsewhere in the world. Japanese scholars perhaps face greater
challenges in this domain than do scholars in English-speaking
countries, for example; but those who do overcome the language
barrier can make important contributions to cross-cultural dialogue.

The era of globalization provides both opportunities and
challenges. Improved communications and cheaper travel provide
access to information on a scale which was previously unimaginable.
Globalization also reduces the extent to which policy-makers and
practitioners can limit their horizons to local matters, and thus
increases the interest in comparative studies. However, globalization
requires adjustment of conceptual frameworks and demands new
approaches to the field.

The JCES has much to be proud of in its four decades of history.
It also has much to look forward to; and counterpart bodies around
the world will greatly appreciate the leadership and collaboration
which the JCES will continue to provide in the global arena.

It is a privilege and honour to participate in this conference. I begin by
congratulating the Japan Comparative Education Society (JCES) on its 40th
anniversary, which is a very significant event; and I sincerely thank our hosts for
their hospitality and leadership. I do this not only on my own behalf but also on
behalf of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES), which I
serve as Secretary General. The JCES has played a major role throughout the history
of the WCCES. For many decades, therefore, Japanese scholarship in the field of
comparative education has been evident not only within the country but also on the
global stage.

This address will focus on some trends in the field of comparative education.
I was asked to focus on new challenges and new paradigms, which I will do. But in
order to identify the new challenges and paradigms, it is necessary to sketch some of
the old and continuing challenges and paradigms. Part of my contribution will be to
take a global perspective, noting both the strengths and weaknesses of the field as a
whole and the different emphases in particular countries and regions.
The WCCES: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Since my presentation is given partly in the capacity as Secretary General of the WCCES, I will begin with some perspectives on the history and operation of that body. This provides a framework for an overview of the global field of comparative education, and of the way that the work of the JCES fits into it.

The WCCES was formed 1970, having evolved from an International Committee of Comparative Education Societies which had been convened by Joseph Katz, of the University of British Columbia in Canada, in 1968 (Epstein 1981, p.261). Five societies came together to form the Council, namely

- the Comparative & International Education Society (CIES) of the USA, which had been founded in 1956,
- the Comparative Education Society in Europe (CESE), which had been founded in 1961,
- the Japan Comparative Education Society (JCES), which had been founded in 1965,
- the Comparative & International Education Society of Canada (CIESC), which had been founded in 1967, and
- the Korean Comparative Education Society (KCES), which had been founded in 1968.

This list shows that the JCES was one of the founding constituent societies of the WCCES. The JCES is the third oldest society worldwide, and the oldest in Asia.

From its origin in 1970 with five constituent societies, the WCCES has grown and developed: today it has 32 constituent societies in all parts of the world. Twenty four of these societies are primarily national bodies such as the JCES and the KCES, or sub-national bodies such as the Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong (CESHK); six are regional bodies such as CESE and the Comparative Education Society of Asia (CESA); and two are language-based bodies—the Association Francophone d'Éducation Comparée (AFEC) which serves French-speaking scholars, and the Nederlandstalig Genootschap voor Vergelijkende Studie van Opvoeding en Onderwijs (NGVO) which serves Dutch-speaking scholars.
The most visible activity of the World Council is the organisation of World Congresses approximately every three years. The first World Congress was held in Canada in 1970. It was followed by Congresses in Switzerland (1974), United Kingdom (1977), Japan (1980), France (1984), Brazil (1987), Canada (1989), Czechoslovakia (1992), Australia (1996), South Africa (1998), South Korea (2001) and Cuba (2004). In this list, it is again important to note the role of the JCES, which hosted the fourth Congress. At that time, Masunori Hiratsuka was the WCCES President; and both before and since, many distinguished Japanese scholars have contributed to the WCCES in a range of ways.

The WCCES is registered as a non-governmental organisation in operational relations with UNESCO. The WCCES has had close links to UNESCO from the outset, and for some years its secretariat resided in UNESCO's International Bureau of Education in Geneva, Switzerland. Continuing links with UNESCO give WCCES members a voice in this important international body.

**Methods and Foci in Comparative Education**

*Units of Analysis*

A key question for all scholars in comparative education concerns units of analysis. In most early studies, the nation state was the principal unit of analysis. Nakajima (1916) made this explicit in his title: *Comparative Study of National Education in Germany, France, Britain and the USA*. In other books, including such classics over the decades as Kandel (1935), Cramer & Browne (1956), Moehlman (1963), and King (1973), the dominance of the nation state was immediately evident from a glance at the list of contents. Many books also focused on continents or world regions (such as the Caribbean, Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa). Other classic works, such as Hans (1950), Bereday (1964) and Noah & Eckstein (1969), did countenance different units of analysis, but the field clearly stressed cross-national and supra-regional comparison more than intra-national comparison. Indeed the cross-national and supra-national elements have been among the features which have distinguished comparative education from other domains in the broader realm.
of educational studies.

Yet while this tradition has a long and respected ancestry, it also has problems. Both countries and world regions are artificial creations of widely varying sizes, and commonly have considerable internal diversity which is glossed over when they are taken as units of analysis. Elsewhere (Bray & Thomas 1995), I have argued for multilevel analysis in descending (or ascending, if preferred) order of size: world regions/continents, countries, states/provinces, districts, schools, classrooms, and individuals. Comparisons can be made at each of these levels, and the insights gained from such comparisons differ at each level. When these insights are collated in a multilevel analysis, the overall perspective gained is multifaceted and much more complete than it would otherwise be.

Many other units of analysis can also be taken for comparison. This matter was among the themes addressed in the 2001 World Congress of Comparative Education Societies in South Korea, and the book which brought together papers from that Congress (Bray 2003a) included focus on cultures as a unit of analysis (e.g. Kim 2003; Numata 2003). Other scholars have compared the forms of education operated by different religious groups (e.g. Walford 2000; Orteza 2003), and have compared clusters of school systems within individual countries or territories (e.g. Phillips 2000; Bray & Yamato 2003). Alternatively, following Sweeting (1999) and others, scholars may make comparisons over time. Many possibilities for instructive work utilising different units of analysis have yet to be fully explored.

**Conceptual Frameworks**

The field of comparative education has drawn strongly on the theoretical bases of the social sciences. To some extent, therefore, shifts in dominant paradigms within the social sciences have been reflected in shifts in comparative education. In Western societies, this includes the rise of positivism in the 1960s and 1970s, and the popularity of post-modernism in the 1980s and 1990s (Psacharopoulos 1990; Epstein 1994; Paulston 2000; Crossley & Watson 2003). However, comparative
education scholars have tended to use a fairly limited set of tools from the social sciences. Books and journal articles display many commentaries based on literature reviews, but relatively few studies based on survey research, and almost no studies based on experimental methods. During the period of the Cold War, scholars in Communist countries tended to take rather different approaches from their counterparts in Capitalist countries, and rich societies have much greater access to resources than do poor ones. Nevertheless, across the global field of comparative education are many fundamental commonalities. These commonalities have perhaps increased with the collapse of Communism, the rise of the internet, and the intensification of academic exchanges and internationalisation of higher education.

In order to gain deeper understanding of methodological shifts in English-language literature, Rust et al. (1999) analysed articles in three major journals, namely Comparative Education Review published in the USA, Comparative Education published in the UK, and the International Journal of Educational Development published in the UK. Reviewing articles from the 1960s, Rust et al. found (p.100) that 48.5 per cent were mainly based on literature review and 15.2 per cent were historical studies. For the 1980s and 1990s, they found a marked drop in the two categories to 25.7 per cent mainly based on literature review, and 5.0 per cent historical studies. Reviews of projects had increased, as had participant observation and research based on interviews and questionnaires. In this respect, the field had increased its use of some standard social science instruments.

Rust et al. also scrutinized the qualitative/quantitative biases of the articles. Their survey of 427 articles published in 1985, 1987, 1989, 1991, 1993 and 1995 found that 71.2 per cent were based on qualitative methods, 17.3 per cent were based on quantitative methods, 10.8 per cent were based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative, and 0.3 per cent were based on other strategies. Commenting on this, Rust et al. stated (1999, p.106) that scholars in the field of comparative education tended to rely on similar philosophical assumptions. Concerning the nature of reality, they suggested, comparative educators tended to see reality as somewhat subjective and multiple, rather than objective and singular.
Also, epistemologically comparative educators tended to interact with that being researched rather than acting independently and in a detached manner from the content.

A third aspect of the study by Rust et al. concerned the geographic foci of the articles. During the 1960s, the dominant focus was on high-human-development countries (using the classification of the United Nations Development Programme). By the 1980s/1990s, however, the balance had shifted significantly. It still showed bias towards these countries, but included much greater focus on low-human-development countries. Thus, whereas in the 1960s 73.1 per cent of the articles in Comparative Education Review and Comparative Education focused on high-human-development countries, and 15.0 per cent focused on the low-human-development countries, in the 1980s/1990s these proportions were 43.1 and 23.3 per cent.

If these findings were set alongside comparable analyses of articles in other languages, such as Chinese, Japanese, and Russian, differences in emphasis would probably be found. Nevertheless, the overall patterns are likely to show some similarities. Among the welcome trends is the increased focus by Asian scholars on education in less developed countries alongside the focus on industrialized countries (Lee 1999; Cheng 2003). However, much scope exists to extend this pattern.

Further, the topics chosen for comparative analysis, and the methodological approaches, have continued to vary considerably in different parts of the world. Gender, for example, has been a much stronger topic for focus in Western countries than in Asian societies; and analyses of the World Bank and other international agencies have been much more common in the English-language journals than in journals in Asian languages. Similarly, not all societies have been equally interested in themes of post colonialism, multiculturalism and civil strife. Thus, while it is increasingly possible to talk of about a global field of comparative education, it is necessary to recognise continued variations.
The Nexus with International Education

Despite the existence of the professional comparative education societies, comparative education has suffered from uncertainties in identity. These uncertainties are exacerbated by overlap with other fields, and particularly with international education. Yet the identity of international education is itself in dispute, and the term has been used to mean different things in different settings. In some contexts, international education describes the process of educating people to see themselves as international citizens in other nations (e.g. through the operation of international schools). In other settings, more closely allied to comparative education, international education describes educational work which practitioners and scholars undertake in countries other than their own. This use of the term often distinguishes such applied work from the more theoretical research traditions which are characteristic of comparative education (Wilson 1994; Rust 2002).

Because the fields of comparative education and international education are related, in the USA the Comparative Education Society (CES) changed its name in 1969 to become the Comparative & International Education Society (CIES). Other societies in which the twin fields are placed together include the Australian & New Zealand Comparative & International Education Society (ANZCIES), the British Association for International & Comparative Education (BAICE), the Comparative & International Education Society of Canada (CIESC), and the Nordic Comparative & International Education Society (NOCIES).

However, this alliance of names and fields has not been straightforward. In the USA, the 1969 change from CES to CIES only came after controversy (see e.g. Epstein 1968); and, confusingly, the society's journal retained its title Comparative Education Review even though many of its articles would fit more easily under the heading of international education than comparative education. And concerning the JCES, I am aware that during the 1990s a proposal to merge with a parallel Japan International Education Society was rejected in part on methodological grounds concerned with the identity of the respective fields. Yet in contrast to the pattern in the USA is the fact that the Greek Comparative Education Society (GCES) – which
does not have International in its title—in 2003 launched a journal entitled *Comparative and International Education Review*. And although the Comparative & International Education Society of Canada (CIESC) has Comparative in its title, its journal is entitled *Canadian and International Education*. Finally, although 27 of the 32 member societies of the WCCES have only Comparative in their titles without International, in practice much of the work in which their members engage would more easily be described as international than comparative.

These remarks show that the fields of comparative education and international education are intertwined and indistinct. Overlap also exists with other fields. This is quite acceptable, and need not be a cause either for alarm or for ‘policing’ the field. However, many papers at comparative education conferences display a lack of rigor in methodology. Indeed some such papers cannot easily be described as comparative, since they do not make their units of analysis explicit and do not undertake clearly-stated comparisons. This is not a new problem, and it partly arises from a laudable desire to welcome to the field young scholars and others who have not yet developed rigorous analytical approaches. However, it is arguably a matter which deserves ongoing attention and improvement.

*The Significance of Language*

Language is of course a key to all forms of academic enquiry. Languages are especially important in the field of comparative education, which involves so much cross-national analysis. Over a decade ago, Halls (1990, p.63) declared that “for comparative studies to thrive, the linguistic barrier remains the greatest to be overcome”. His observation still has considerable relevance today.

Language barriers create biases both in the choice of subjects for comparisons and in the literature used to support analytical frameworks. In Africa, for example, the boundaries drawn by colonial politics remain very strong and form barriers between English-speaking, French-speaking and Arabic-speaking countries. These boundaries remain evident not only for African scholars themselves but also for outsiders. Thus among academics in the United Kingdom and United States who
focus on Africa, much more work concerns English-speaking than French-speaking countries. By contrast, academics in France and Belgium who focus on Africa are more likely to address issues in French-speaking than English-speaking countries. In another part of the world, scholars with fluency in Russian are much better placed to undertake comparisons of countries in the former Soviet bloc; and scholars with fluency in Spanish are well placed to compare education in Latin American countries.

Issues of language are felt especially keenly in Japan because rather few individuals outside the country are fluent in Japanese. A great deal of foreign material has been translated into Japanese, but for comparative education it can never form more than a fraction of the amount that most scholars would need for in-depth study of their chosen themes. As a result, Japanese scholars who wish to study foreign education systems are under much greater pressure to learn foreign languages than scholars whose mother tongue is English, French, Russian or Spanish. Challenges similar to that in Japan are faced by Korean, Chinese and Indonesian scholars, for example.

The question then is which foreign languages scholars of comparative education are best advised to learn. The answer must of course depend on their areas of geographic and cultural interest. As an international language, English has become the tool which can open the largest number of doors on a global scale, though of course individual scholars may find it more useful to learn either other international languages or the national or local languages of the countries in which they are working.

The issue of language is not only a matter of access to factual information: it also shapes paradigms in scholarly work. Different paradigms dominate literatures to different extents in different languages. Scholars working in, say, German as opposed to Chinese are likely to be influenced by rather different conceptual frameworks and to be influenced by different traditions even in the ways in which they report their analyses. Scholars working in languages used by smaller communities, such as Bulgarian or Thai, are more restricted in the materials and
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perspectives on which they can draw than scholars working in languages such as French or Spanish.

Within the WCCES, as in many other international bodies, the dominant language is English. This does create biases, but seems the most useful compromise at the present time. In the early years, particularly when the Secretariat was in Switzerland, the WCCES also stressed the use of French; but more recently the balance of languages in official affairs has shifted markedly towards English. At World Congresses, the convention has been to use the language of the host country supplemented by English and by other languages as far as demand and resources permit.

The Impact of Globalisation

Globalisation has become a dominant force which affects many spheres of life, including academic domains, and which may be seen as both threatening and invigorating (see e.g. Held et al. 1999; Field & McGrew 2000). In the field of comparative education, the impact of globalisation has in general been invigorating, and certainly it has stimulated a substantial literature (e.g. Sweeting 1996; Stromquist & Monkman 2000; Jarvis 2000; Rao 2003). On a broad level, Crossley (2000, p.324) has pointed out that:

It is now increasingly difficult to understand education in any context without reference to the global forces that influence policy and practice.... This set of factors helps to explain why many formerly mainstream educational researchers are now engaging in comparative and international research in education. In seeking to understand their own systems, they have discovered the significance of global factors and begun to recognise the value of comparative studies.

This remark is allied to Broadfoot's observation (2003, p.411) that governments around the world are "anxious to learn about educational practices in other countries, as they scan the latest international league tables of school performance". Policy makers and practitioners cannot afford to be parochial in their points of
reference. The huge impact of the Third International Mathematics & Science Study (TIMSS) (see e.g. Robitaille & Beaton 2002; Hiebert et al. 2003) illustrates the increased attention paid to international comparative studies in educational circles. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a parallel project of considerable significance (see e.g. OECD 2001, 2003).

Globalization has also changed the nature of comparative education by increasing the interaction between scholars in different communities around the world. The internet has assisted scholars in comparative education as much as other fields; cheaper air travel has permitted scholars from different countries to meet each other more easily; and interchange of ideas has increased the commonality in the topics which scholars choose to investigate and in their methodological approaches (Bray 2003b; Wilson 2003).

Other ways in which globalisation has changed the nature of comparative education include the themes on which researchers are focusing (Marginson & Mollis 2001, pp.611-614). One such theme is cross-border international education, which raises questions about the identities of mobile students and about the attributes required for educators, institutions and systems. Sub-themes include tensions between pedagogical practices and national cultures, and the mushrooming of on-line communities. Other themes include forms of identity in the global era, and the impact of international agencies and other globalising forces at the national level.

Turning this round, it has been suggested that comparative education can itself make a strong contribution to other fields in the era of globalisation. Crossley and Watson (2003, p.66) particularly comment on the multi-disciplinary and applied foundations of the field, its engagement with a diversity of theoretical frameworks, its traditional concern with the processes and agencies of international transfer, and its sensitivity to contextual and cultural differences.

Conclusions

The field of comparative education has evolved in significant ways over the
decades. In this paper I have highlighted some shifts in the preferred units of analysis, overarching frameworks, and methodological approaches. I have also noted the significance of language, and the impact of globalisation.

The JCES is an important body in the field, and is to be applauded for the vigor which it has displayed throughout its four decades of history. The society has made a major contribution on the world stage as well as within the country. Japanese perspectives and approaches to comparative education have enriched the field as a whole, and have promoted dialogue between academic cultures.

The era that lies ahead has many opportunities. Technological advances provide access to information on a scale which was unimaginable only a few years ago, and inexpensive travel permits interpersonal dialogue and direct experience of different countries and cultures. Globalization has also provided stimulus to the field, since policy-makers and practitioners realize that they must look outwards in their thinking. Exploration of different units of analysis can uncover patterns which had previously been perceived only dimly.

At the same time, various challenges remain. One which I have highlighted concerns language barriers. Japanese scholars perhaps face greater barriers in this respect compared with scholars whose native languages are also international languages. However, Japanese scholars can also make a major contribution, presenting to counterparts insights from Japanese culture and practices which would otherwise remain a closed door to people who do not speak Japanese. They can also help reduce the complacency of academic communities in English-speaking countries and elsewhere who operate as if their language is all that anyone needs to know and that anything which is not communicated through that language is unimportant.

As the JCES looks forward to its next 40 years, the rest of the world looks forward to continued collaboration and learning through partnership. The JCES has much to be proud of, and other constituent societies in the WCCES and elsewhere have much to learn. I thank you again for inviting me to join this very significant conference.
References


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