

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION AND SOCIETY | VOLUME 36

COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Survey of an Infinite Field

Edited by
C. C. Wolhuter
Alexander W. Wiseman

COMPARATIVE AND
INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION:
SURVEY OF AN INFINITE FIELD

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION & SOCIETY

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**COMPARATIVE AND
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EDUCATION: SURVEY OF
AN INFINITE FIELD**

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CONTENTS

<i>About the Contributors</i>	vii
<i>Series Editor Biography</i>	xvii
<i>Preface</i>	xix
Chapter 1 Introduction: Comparative and International Education as an Infinite Field <i>Alexander W. Wiseman and C. C. Wolhuter</i>	1
Chapter 2 Comparative and International Education: Development of a Field and its Method and Theory <i>David A. Turner</i>	11
Chapter 3 Global Trends in the Rise and Fall of Comparative Education Societies <i>W. James Jacob, Huiyuan Ye, Miranda L. Hogsett, Annette T. Han, Midori Hasegawa, Lili Jia, Lin Jiang and Shangmou Xu</i>	29
Chapter 4 Comparative Education in Brazil: Understanding the Research Field <i>Luis Enrique Aguilar and Ana Elisa Spaolonzi Queiroz Assis</i>	61
Chapter 5 Comparative Education in Spanish-speaking Latin America: Recent Developments and Future Prospects <i>Jorge M. Gorostiaga and Óscar Espinoza</i>	79
Chapter 6 The History of Comparative and International Education in North America <i>W. James Jacob, Huiyuan Ye, Shuo Wang, Xueshuang Wang, Xiufang Ma, Abdullah Bagci, Quan Gu and Julio Luis Méndez Vergara</i>	101
Chapter 7 Comparative Education in Eastern and Central Europe <i>Nikolay Popov and Teodora Genova</i>	119

Chapter 8 Comparative and International Education in Western Europe <i>Maria-Jesús Martínez-Usarralde and Carmen-María Fernández-García</i>	137
Chapter 9 Comparative Education in the Arab World: Origin, Development, and Research Interests <i>Kwabena Dei Ofori-Attah</i>	157
Chapter 10 Comparative Education in Central Asia <i>Aisi Li</i>	175
Chapter 11 Comparative Education in South Asia: Contribution, Contestation, and Possibilities <i>Poonam Batra</i>	183
Chapter 12 Comparative and International Education in East and South east Asia <i>Lorraine Pe Symaco and Roger Y. Chao, Jr.</i>	213
Chapter 13 Perspectives on Comparative and International Education in Oceania <i>Alexandra McCormick and Seu'ula Johansson-Fua</i>	229
Chapter 14 Comparative Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Young Field on a Promising Continent <i>C. C. Wolhuter</i>	249
<i>Index</i>	269

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PREFACE

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alexander W. Wiseman
Series Editor

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