



Special Symposium Issue on Rethinking Culture, Context, and Comparison in Education and Development

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Editorial Introduction: Rethinking Culture, Context, and Comparison in Education and Development

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In this issue, CICE brings together noted scholars in education who were invited to reflect on the theme Rethinking Culture, Context, and Comparison in Education and Development. This special issue can be seen as a sequel to the most recent one, entitled Comparative and International Education: The Making of a Field and a Vision into the Future. The previous issue addressed meaningful theoretical contributions to the field of comparative and international education since its establishment.

In April 2013, the International and Transcultural Studies Department at Teachers College (TC) held a symposium entitled *Rethinking Culture, Context, And Comparison in Education and Development*. At the symposium, four invited speakers—Karen Mundy (OISE, University of Toronto, Canada), Frank-Olaf Radtke (University of Frankfurt, Germany), Joseph Tobin (University of Georgia, USA), and Antoni Verger (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain)—as well as faculty and students from Teachers College, Columbia University, gathered to discuss “how best to conceptualize context and rethink distinct levels and scales in educational research...”

More specifically, the goals of the symposium were to:

Understand how and why similar phenomena are, for cultural or contextual reasons, translated, interpreted and received differently. Investigations of educational policy are interrogating the system logic and system processes of educational policy. In response to these challenges, researchers have developed new research methods, including multimodal approaches that deserve further scrutiny. Taken together, these questions, conceptual developments, and research techniques pose provocative questions about the shifting nature of comparison in educational research.

In an effort to share this discussion beyond the confines of a two-day symposium, the editors of CICE have chosen to publish a special fall issue that includes two featured papers written by Joseph Tobin from the University of Georgia, and Antoni Verger from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, as well as the response pieces of Teachers College faculty who participated in the symposium, including Lesley Bartlett, Gita Steiner-Khamsi, and Herve Varenne. The end product, as seen in this issue, is a thought provoking set of articles that address contentious aspects within the field which attempt to push the methodological and theoretical boundaries of the field of comparative and international education, provoking us to question our understandings of culture, context and comparison.

In “Comparative, Diachronic, Ethnographic Research on Education” **Joseph Tobin** presents his ground breaking method of inquiry for exploring early childhood education in three different

countries and across two unique time periods. To use his own words, “the trick is to think simultaneously about space and time, in a sort of ethnographic version of physics’ unified field theory” (Tobin, p. 2). Rather than drawing on traditional methodologies to do so, Tobin uses a “video cued multivocal ethnography” to reveal reflections and reactions of educators across different cultural contexts. More importantly, however, his study redefines the type and scale of ethnographies that can be conducted comparatively.

Antoni Verger masterfully applies the example of PPP (Public-Private Partnership) in education as an illustration to demonstrate why a preoccupation with culture, context, and comparison matters for understanding the rapid global expansion of the education industry. In his article “Investigating Global Education Policy: Toward a Research Framework on Policy Adoption and the Multifaceted Role of Ideas in Educational Reform,” he probes deeply into why some specific ideas are deemed more attractive than others and under what circumstances, suggesting that the process of policy change cannot be disentangled from the local context and the politics that come along with it.

In “Vertical Case Studies and the Challenges of Culture, Context and Comparison,” **Lesley Bartlett** reviews the works of both Tobin and Verger and the varied ways in which they emphasize the importance of context. She then advocates for using the vertical case studies approach to address current challenges in comparative and international education (CIE), arguing that society is interconnected and no phenomenon can be studied separate to or outside the context of its greater physical, socio-cultural, political, and temporal environment.

Gita Steiner-Khamsi makes a strong appeal to “bring culture, context, and system back into the study of globalization.” In her article on “Comparison and Context: The Interdisciplinary Approach to the Comparative Study of Education,” she explores the long-standing debate between disciplinary versus interdisciplinary perspectives in CIE, calling on scholars to free themselves of disciplinary boundaries that may inhibit their ability to explore new and relevant methodologies and theoretical approaches to the comparative study of educational systems, beliefs, and practices.

Finally, in “Comments on Tobin’s Contribution to Comparative Research in Anthropology and in Education,” **Hervé Varenne** reiterates the importance of comprehensively exploring the question of culture. He does so through a review of Tobin’s article from an anthropological perspective, in which he studies cultural differences and the extent to which they are time and context-bound. Through his critique of earlier anthropologists, he argues that society cannot be freed of culture and that it is best studied from a comparative perspective, that is, in relation to the “other.”

This special issue seeks to stretch the thinking of researchers who are dedicated to the comparative study of education. Differences in methodological approaches reflect frequently, but not always, differences in interpretive frameworks. Thus, we tend to choose the method that helps us to say what we see conceptually, that is, how we tend to explain differences and similarities in educational systems, beliefs, and practices. By implication, interpretive frameworks are at the same time indispensable and coercive. On the positive side, we need them to succinctly express what we see and how we explain “things.” They enable us to use vocabulary that members of the (same) academic community understand, either because the terminology reflects a particular discipline (sociological, anthropological, economic, etc.) or a theoretical orientation (e.g., world systems theory, functionalist, constructivist, etc.). On the other hand, every “confession” to a particular interpretive framework, such as the choice of a

particular discipline or theoretical orientation, is a decision *against*, or to put it more mildly, a hesitation to embrace alternative frameworks.

The co-editors of this special issue do “believe” in the value of interpretive frameworks. In fact, we find it an issue of concern that so many studies are simply pragmatic. In other words, they are produced without laying bare, and as a corollary putting up for debate, the disciplinary approach or the theoretical foundation from which the author operates and draws conclusions. Having and identifying a clearly defined interpretive framework is better than none. Nevertheless, these interpretive frameworks channel our ways of thinking and seeing in particular ways. This special issue is about how we use the method of comparison depending on where we stand in terms of an interpretive framework.

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Comparative, Diachronic, Ethnographic Research on Education

Joseph Tobin
University of Georgia

Locating Educational Practices in Space and Time

Most qualitative studies in international education take place in a single site in a single nation. When studies are of more than one country, they most often use more quantitative than qualitative approaches. There was a time when studies conducted in multiple cultures were more common in anthropology. Margaret Mead (1935; 1960) and Ruth Benedict (1934) did comparative studies of two or more cultures. Beatrice and John Whiting conducted the most systematic of comparative cross-cultural studies of child rearing in their *Six Cultures* (1975) study. One of the six ethnographies that served as the foundation of that study was conducted by Robert A. LeVine (1966), who was my doctoral mentor. I have attempted to carry this comparative project forward, and to do so in a way that systematically deals with variation within, as well as among cultures, while also taking into account how cultures stay the same and change over time.

In *Time and the Other* (1983), Johannes Fabian criticizes ethnography, as a discipline, for its failure to locate cultures in time. He argues that ethnographers see cultures (other than our own) as existing outside of history, in a timeless ethnographic present (e.g. “the Japanese believe. . .”). The epistemological and methodological challenge is to add a sense of time to our comparative ethnographies. As anthropologists, we tend to be much better at thinking cross-culturally than cross-generationally, better at thinking about differences of place than of time. The trick is to think simultaneously about space and time, in a sort of ethnographic version of physics’ unified field theory.

Over the past twenty years or so comparative education meetings and journals have been sites for intense debate about the merits of world system theories that emphasize the inexorable homogenization of educational practices across the globe versus theories that suggest the potential for local settings (whether defined as nations, regions, communities, schools, or even teachers in individual classrooms) to resist the power of the global. I posit that this should be primarily not a conceptual or ideological battle, but instead an empirical question: clearly global forces are powerful and they unmistakably impact local educational practices. But it is equally clear that globally circulating ideas are sometimes or even often resisted, and even when adapted in local settings, always undergo modification. I view the interplay of the global and local as an ongoing engagement and negotiation, with different outcomes in different settings at different times. I see our job as educational anthropologists and comparative educators as getting smarter at designing studies that, rather than setting out to support one side or the other of the world system/local resistance debate, instead help us understand how and why globally circulating ideas sometimes carry the day, while at other times local concerns and local cultural practices come out on top. To understand the interplay of globally circulating ideas and pressures on local communities, we need careful empirical studies.

A Video-Cued Ethnographic Method to Comparative Education

For the past thirty years in my studies of preschools in Japan, China, the US and other countries, the approach I have employed is a method I call “video cued multivocal ethnography,” but which is better known as the “Preschool in Three Cultures method.” The core idea of this method is that videos function in these studies not as data but as interviewing cues. This

method has several steps. We videotape a day in a preschool in each country. We then edit the eight or more hours of video down to make a 20-minute video, which we then use as an interviewing cue for a widening circle of informants. We begin by showing the video to the teacher in whose classroom we filmed, asking her to comment on the typicality of the events in the video and to explain the thinking behind the practices captured in the video. We then use the video as a cue for interviews with her fellow teachers and director, then with staff at preschools in at least four other sites in the country, and then to educators at preschools in the other countries in the study.

The first *Preschool in Three Cultures* study (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989) emphasized differences in Chinese, Japanese, and US approaches to early childhood education, and argued for the importance of thinking about the role of what we call “implicit cultural beliefs and practices.” But this is not to say that the original study saw the preschools of each country as homogeneous or only reflective of cultural factors. Our video-cued method, in which we showed a video shot in a single preschool in a single city to 300 or more educators at five or more sites across each country allowed us to show which practices are largely shared, which are variable within each country, and the areas of agreement and disagreement within each nation’s educational discourse (Tobin, 1992).

Our method also allowed us to think about the impact of globalization and other social, economic, and political forces on local settings by asking our informants to tell us about the pressures and influences they are experiencing in their daily practice. In the first study, key themes included how in the 1980s, preschool practice in China was being impacted by the single child family policy, in Japan by a falling birth rate, and in the US by political, academic, and ideological battles over whether young children are more helped or harmed by being enrolled in preschools as opposed to being cared for at home. While “implicit cultural beliefs and practices” was the construct that was foregrounded in the study, cultural beliefs and practices were shown to be interacting with forces of globalization, demographic shifts, economic change, and political pressures.

In the second study, conducted twenty years later, we more explicitly explored the power of globalization and other social, economic, and political forces on preschools by adding a diachronic dimension. The central question of the new study was how and why approaches to early childhood education stay the same and change over the course of a generation. The new study compared three countries’ approaches to early childhood education across two points in time: 1983 and 2003. To facilitate a diachronic analysis, we added some new steps to our video-cued interviewing method. We showed directors and teachers in each country the video shot in their preschool twenty years earlier and asked them to reflect on what had changed, what had stayed the same, and why. We also shot new videos in each of these preschools, and repeated the steps of the video-cued interviewing we had done for the first study. We videotaped in a second focal preschool in each country. These second preschools were selected as examples of a new direction in each country’s early childhood education. Asking viewers in sites across each country to comment on the videos shot in these progressive schools worked to introduce more explicit discussion about where educators see their systems of early childhood education going, and how they feel about these changes.

If I had to summarize the key findings of the new book in a single sentence, I would say that between the mid-1980s and the first decade of the new millennia, early childhood education in China changed a lot and Japanese preschools stayed much the same. But this does not mean that China was more interesting than Japan during this period. Our focus on understanding change in systems of early childhood education should not blind us to the importance of also understanding and appreciating the complexity of continuity. Understanding why a day at Komatsudani Day Care Center in Kyoto looks much the same in 2005 as it did twenty years

earlier is as compelling a question as understanding why Dagan Preschool in Kunming China changed. Maintaining continuity in a program of early childhood education from one era to the next requires as much effort and creativity as it does to change. If we think of change as being caused by external forces, like the movement of a small boat in a rushing stream, we can argue that it takes more energy to stay in place than to move with the flow. Absence of change over time in a preschool can reflect the inertia, stubbornness, or even laziness of the staff. But it can also reflect the courage of teachers and directors to stand up to political pressures to distort their practice in reaction to each educational fad and demand from grandstanding politicians. Our job as educational anthropologists and comparative educators is to account as much for continuity as for change, as much for local variations as worldwide similarities. In the sections that follow I provide examples of the kind of change of preschool beliefs and practices we found in China and the kind of continuity we found in Japan, and why.

China

Returning in 2003 to Dagan Kindergarten in Kunming, the preschool we had videotaped in 1983 we found the school housed in a brand new six-story building, with high tech equipment, an indoor gym, dance studio, and music room. We also were told by the directors that they had recently radically revised their curriculum and pedagogy, based on the government's 2001 Guidelines for Kindergartens, which called for more emphasis on children's creativity and self-initiative, and for less teacher-led, didactic instruction. The directors at Kunming told us that while they endorsed the idea of this paradigm shift, it was proving challenging to implement, especially for their older teachers, who had been trained in a very different approach.

In our second Chinese focal school, Sinan Road Kindergarten in Shanghai, we found the paradigm shift much further along. Educators in Shanghai played a role in developing the 2001 Kindergarten Guidelines and Sinan Road is one of the preschools that is widely recognized as pioneering the implementation of the new child-centered, constructivist approach. The Chinese educators we interviewed consistently provided the same explanation for the logic behind this paradigm shift: The Chinese economy is in the process of radical change. For China to successfully compete in global capitalism schools there is a need for a new generation of creative citizens. To produce these new creative citizens who can lead the new economy, there needs to be a new curriculum, starting with the preschool curriculum, a curriculum that supports the development of creative thinkers and entrepreneurship.

Early on in our study, we intended to tell a linear story about Chinese early childhood education in the new millennia: preschools in Shanghai, Beijing, and Nanjing had already largely completed a shift from teacher-directed to child-initiated activities. In provincial capital cities, such as Kunming, the shift was in process, but implementation was more difficult, due to less access to expert training in the new paradigm. Directors of preschools in rural areas were aware of the new Guidelines and in general supportive of the new direction, but frustrated by a lack of access to training opportunities that would allow them to better understand and implement the new approach.

Over the four years we conducted research for the new study in China, we gradually came to see that we would need to tell a less linear, more complicated story. In our video of a day at Sinan Road Kindergarten we see many examples of the kinds of child-centered, constructivist activities that would be considered progressive and even cutting edge at the best preschools in Europe and North America. But we also see examples of activities that are hybrid, combining recently embraced ideas from the West with traditional Chinese approaches. This is most clear in a segment from our Sinan Road Kindergarten video we call "The Storytelling King."

In the Sinan Road video we see the whole class gathered on the rug and one boy, Ziyu, standing in front of them to tell a story. Ziyu announces that his story is called, "Goodong," an

onomatopoeic sound made by something heavy that drops in the pond. Here's the gist of Ziyu's story: "In a forest lived many animals. One day an owl heard a strange noise in the pond, that scared him. He went to tell others. Those who went to check thought that there was a monster in the pond. In the end, a lion went to the pond to check only to find that a ripe papaya falling from the tree to make the noise. Everyone was relieved.

Ziyu finished his story, said "thank you," and took a seat on the floor with his classmates. Ms. Wang, one of the two teachers, asked the children what they had heard in the story. Some children said that there was an owl and the teacher asked what the owl was doing before it heard the noise. This exchange went on for a few turns before Ms. Wang asked the group whether Ziyu could be named Story King. Some said "Yes" and some said "No." The children then voted. Ziyu was invited to count the votes. He won the honor by a majority, with 18 of 24 children voting "Yes." He then wrote his name on the red Story King poster.

Then Ms. Wang said, "Some children didn't raise their hands. Shall we listen to their arguments? Children commented: "That story was like one we heard before." "He was not loud enough." "He did not say things clearly sometimes." Ms. Wang teacher turned to Ziyu and asked if he agreed. He thanked his classmates for their comments and selected a story-teller for the next day.

Teacher Cheng explained how the Story King activity get started:

In the beginning, children just wanted to listen to a story that the teacher would tell. Later, a couple of children who were interested in telling stories asked if they could come to the front to tell a story. We encouraged them to give it a try. Soon, many children began to prepare their own stories and asked for their turns.

Straightforward criticism has long been a common feature of Chinese daily life, not only in the first thirty years of the People's Republic, when the Cultural Revolution and other social movements required people to be self-critical as well as critical of others, but also in the pre-revolutionary periods, when Confucianism encouraged criticism as a means towards cultivating learning and promoting social values. As a familiar component of Chinese everyday life in families, neighborhoods, schools, business dealings and social life, criticizing others does not carry as harsh a feel in China as it does in the US, Japan, and many other cultures. Constructive feedback from both experts and peers can be found in Chinese education not just in the early childhood classroom, but also in the preparation and ongoing professional development of teachers, in reciprocal critique and discussion sessions called *qiecuo* (learning from each other by exchanging ideas). In both activities we find a belief not just in the value of constructively giving and humbly accepting critical feedback but also in the value of oral performance, "virtuosity," and of learning as a process of "self-perfection." Both the critical feedback and the pursuit of virtuosity seen in this activity are examples of what we are calling culturally implicit practices and of what Jerome Bruner (1990; 1996) calls "folk pedagogy," in that although these practices are not encouraged or even mentioned in the new curriculum guidelines, they are common features of contemporary Chinese early childhood educational practice that survive from one social upheaval and pedagogical paradigm shift to the next and which Chinese teachers feel no need to explain, justify, or reflect on until they are prompted to do by outsiders.

We see in the Storytelling King activity an example of the emergence in China of a hybrid pedagogy that combines Chinese and Western pedagogical notions. The Story Telling King activity combines progressive beliefs in child-initiated curricula, a Deweyian notion of the democratic classroom, self-expression, and an emphasis on creativity with Chinese traditions of verbal performance and virtuosity (Paine, 1990), of learning as a process of "self-perfection" (Li, 2003), and a belief that is both traditional and Chinese socialist in the pedagogical value of constructive criticism.

This notion of cultural hybridity complicates the linear story we told in the previous section of China moving inexorably as a nation down a path from more didactic, teacher-directed, knowledge transmission pedagogy towards constructivist, child-initiated and child-directed pedagogy. A final round of interviews that the Preschool in Three Cultures research team conducted in 2007 with Chinese early childhood educators suggests that the aggressive push toward progressivism and child-centeredness that characterized Chinese early childhood education from about 1990 to 2006 has begun to be counterbalanced by an acknowledgment of the value of traditional Chinese pedagogical practices, including the value of direct instruction and the mastery of skills. The period of intense borrowing is being replaced by a period of consolidation and hybridization of foreign and domestic educational ideas (Schreier, 2000; Steiner-Khamsi, 2000).

Continuity in Japan

Our research suggests that whereas China during the last twenty years has been viewing early childhood education as an agent of change, Japan has been more concerned with how early childhood education can be a source of continuity, that is, with maintaining core cultural values in an era of economic difficulty and perceived social decline. During the 1990s, between the periods of our first and second study, Japan experienced a series of changes: the birth rate, already low, became even lower; the economic bubble burst, and the economy that had been robust in the early 1980s was in decline; young people continued to move from rural areas to urban neighborhoods, where families raised their young children without close contact with relatives, friends, or neighbors. Many social critics lamented the loss of traditional values, as Japan's postmodern condition and consumption-oriented ethos had produced an increasingly anomic, alienated society.

In our interviews with Japanese educators in the early years of the new millennium, we heard a familiar, sad refrain: Japan is in decline, socially and culturally as well as economically. Young parents no longer know how to raise their children. Teachers have lost their way. Neighborhoods are no longer sites of support and resilience. In the face of such challenges, Japanese see the role of preschools as not to change, but instead to more than ever be sites of cultural preservation, where contemporary children can acquire traditional Japanese values and habits. In response to the perception that the rest of society is changing too fast, Japanese preschools are viewed as sites of social and cultural continuity. We found evidence of this continuity in the lack of change we found in preschool practices and in Japanese early childhood educators' beliefs.

The Teddy Bear Fight at Komatsudani

A prime example of this continuity in beliefs and practices can be seen in teachers' approaches to dealing with fighting children in our first and second study. In *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited*, there is a scene in which three girls pull and tug on a teddy bear until they fall into a struggling heap on the floor. During this struggle, the only visible and audible reaction of the classroom teacher, Morita-sensei, is to call out from across the room: "*Kora Kora*," (which in English means something like "Hey there!").

Figure 1. Three girls pull the bear



Source: Tobin et al., 2009

Figure 2. Girls fighting



Source: Tobin et al., 2009

Figure 3. Morita-sensei walks by



Source: Tobin et al., 2009

When asked about this scene, Morita-sensei explained that this is typical of her approach of watching children and letting them know that they are being watched, but avoiding otherwise intervening. Morita-sensei explained that she called out “*kora, kora*” at the moment when she became concerned that the children were fighting too close to the sharp corner of the piano bench. Her intent was to cue the children to be careful without intervening in a stronger way, which would have risked ending their interaction. To describe this strategy of supporting children’s social-emotional development by holding back, and watching without intervening, Morita-sensei used the term *mimamoru*. *Mi* literally means “to watch” and *mamoru* means “to guard.” Together, when used in the context of preschool, the words describe a Japanese pedagogical strategy we translate as “teaching by watching and waiting.”

In the original (1989) *Preschool in Three Cultures* study, Fukui-sensei, gave a similar explanation for a fight videotaped in her classroom:

When there’s a fight among children, I watch and wait and try to decide if they are really attempting to hurt each other, or if it is just rough play. It’s sometimes hard to tell. If it looks like it’s getting to be too rough or that it might get out of control, I tell them to be less rough, but I don’t tell them to stop (p. 133).

The Preschool in Three Cultures method involves showing the videotape made at one preschool to teachers and directors at five more sites around the country and getting their reactions. Most informants said the Morita's approach in the Teddy Bear fights was familiar. Some teachers said they would have intervened more aggressively than did Morita-sensei, but no one found her approach surprising and everyone was able to infer the thinking behind her practice (in contrast to the surprised, bewildered and critical reactions of most Chinese and American educators).

Further evidence that *mimamoru* is a pedagogical practice that is widely culturally shared is that it has been documented not just in both Preschool in Three Cultures studies, but also by other scholars who have studied Japanese preschools in single settings, including Catherine Lewis (1984; 1995); Merry White (1987); Joy Hendry (1989); Eyal Ben-Ari (1996); and Daniel Walsh (2002; 2003). The fact that both the practice and logic of low-intervention has been documented by scholars working in such diverse settings (*hoikuen* as well as *yochien*; private as well as public; in various regions of the country) suggests the workings of a process of meaning making that transcends the local. Finding the practice across such diverse settings would be easy to explain if it were discussed in Japanese teacher education textbooks, found in the national kindergarten guidelines, or was a practice that is circulating globally. In the absence of such explicit pressures, I suggest that a cultural explanation is most logical.

Conclusion

The Story Telling King activity is an example not of the power of the global to homogenize or of the local to resist change, but of both at once. In Chinese early childhood education, a new hybrid form of progressivism is emerging, that combines Dewey, Vygotsky, the Project Approach, and Reggio with Confucianism, Chinese socialist principles, and Chinese educational traditions that give importance to memory, performance, mastery, content knowledge, and critique. Professor Zhu Jiexiong of East China Normal University suggested to us that the globalization of education in China works like a pendulum, swinging back and forth between periods of looking outwards and inwards. But unlike a pendulum, there is no final, fixed, pre-determined resting place. Instead, the pivot point of the pendulum is constantly shifting, as new hybrid forms of education emerge, mixing once external with internal elements, producing a new center.

The Teddy Bear fight at Komatsudani is an example of how Japanese early childhood educators in the face of what they perceive as disturbing forms of social change, see the primary function of preschools as providing young children with opportunities to experience a kind of social complexity they lack in their contemporary lives in one-child families living in alienating urban environments. Parents, teachers, directors, and child development we interviewed expressed a sense of pessimism and even despair about the overall condition of Japanese society, citing problems including the fact that young people are not getting married and having children, that high housing costs are forcing young families to live in distant suburbs, leaving inner city neighborhoods aging and inner city preschools struggling to survive, and that parenting skills have dramatically deteriorated among the young generation of parents who themselves were raised by preoccupied, overly Westernized parents who lost touch with Japanese cultural traditions. In the face of these challenges, preschools are oases of traditional cultural values.

Methodological approaches that combine cross-national with diachronic analyses make it possible to locate educational approaches in time as well as space. Our analyses shows that political, economic, and social change can lead to a paradigm shift in preschool pedagogy, in one country, in one time period (in this case, China, between 1982 and 2002), while during the same time period, in another country (Japan), which was experiencing its own economic and social upheavals, preschool pedagogy changed very little. The implications of this story is that we comparative educators and educational anthropologists need to avoid a one-size-fits all conceptual orientation on the impacts that that external (e.g. globalization) and internal forces

have on educational systems, and instead do careful empirical studies of how political, economic, and other forms of social change contribute to both continuity and change in educational practices.

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Why do Policy-makers Adopt Global Education Policies? Toward a Research Framework on the Varying Role of Ideas in Education Reform

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Introduction

Globalization is profoundly altering the education policy landscape. It introduces new problems in education agendas, compresses time and space in policy processes, and revitalizes the role of a range of supra-national players in educational reform. This deterritorialization of the education policy process has important theoretical and epistemological implications. Among others, it is forcing comparative education scholars to pay more attention to the politics and dynamics involved in the *policy adoption* stage.

Policy adoption is a moment that has acquired a great deal of strategic significance in current education reforms. Indeed, in the contemporary global governance scenario, education policy processes cannot be analyzed by simply looking at the conventional sequence of agenda setting, policy design, implementation, and evaluation stages; nor by looking at these different moments simply from a national *optique*. Due to transnational influences of a very different nature, education reforms are more and more often externally initiated, and multiple scales interact in the dynamics through which these reforms are negotiated, formulated, implemented, and even evaluated.

Focusing on policy adoption implies paying closer attention to, and producing more empirical research on, the processes, reasons and circumstances that explain how and why policy-makers (or other education stakeholders) select, embrace, and/or borrow global education policies, and aim to implement them in their educational realities. Looking at the adoption stage has the potential to introduce new perspectives in the study of global education policy (GEP), as well as to disentangle several aspects of the global policy debate that, in comparative education, have been often captured by the convergence-divergence dilemma.

To contribute to building this research strand, I suggest looking more in depth at the role that ideas play in policy decisions and related policy outcomes in a global governance scenario. It is noteworthy that policy analysis – not only in the education field - tends to neglect an explicit reflection on the role of ideas in processes of policy and/or institutional change. To a great extent, this happens due to the difficulty in defining and categorizing ideas, as well as in distinguishing them from other social phenomena (Kjaer & Pedersen, 2001). Despite these challenges, I argue that a more explicit conceptualization and theorization on the role of ideas will contribute to providing a better account of the nature, processes, and outcomes of GEP.

Finally, I also argue that to understand why external policy ideas are selected and retained in particular places, we need to look more closely at contextual contingencies of a different nature, especially at those of a political and institutional nature. 'Context' is one of those concepts often used - and abused - in comparative education. It carries strong semiotic connotations and its meaning is often taken for granted. To address this frequent absence, in this article, I will explore how a range of key contextual variables can be operationalized in GEP research.

I develop these arguments in three main sections. In the first, I review the different traditions in education and globalization studies, and justify the necessity of looking more explicitly and systematically at the policy adoption stage. In the second section, I review how different theoretical approaches in social sciences can contribute to analyze the role of ideas in GEP change, and in policy adoption in particular. In the third section, I systematize a range of contextual dimensions that are more decisive in processes of education policy adoption. If in the previous section I was reflecting on *what types of ideas are most influential in GEP processes, and how*, in this one I will be reflecting on the *particular institutions and contextual circumstances that favor or inhibit the influence of certain global ideas in particular territories*. To illustrate the different theoretical premises presented in the article, I apply them to a particular area of education reform: the spread of education privatization, since this is one of the most extensively promoted reform approaches in global education agendas in recent decades.

Different Traditions in Global Education Policy: Beyond the Convergence-Divergence Debate

In comparative education, the study of globalization and education policy is strongly influenced by macro theoretical approaches, two of the most noteworthy being the 'World Society' theory and the 'Globally Structured Educational Agenda' (GSEA). The first argues that the 'education institution', as we know it, has spread around the world as part of the diffusion of a culturally embedded model of the modern nation-state. According to this theory, a range of common education policies (but also health, fiscal policies, etc.) have been adopted around the planet as the result of both the international dissemination of the values of western modernity as well as the legitimation pressures that governments receive – especially in postcolonial settings - to demonstrate to the international community that they are building a 'modern state' (Meyer et al., 1997).

For its part, the GSEA sees the world capitalist economy as the driving force of globalisation and as the main causal source of the profound transformations manifested in the education arena today (Dale, 2000). This approach stresses that most significant educational changes we witness today should be understood as being embedded within interdependent local, national and global political economy complexes. International financial organizations are key agents in this multi-scalar scenario due to their agenda setting capacities; among other things, they define what the main problems are that member-states should address if they want to successfully integrate into an increasingly globalized and competitive knowledge-economy. Despite their important differences, both approaches identify worldwide convergence trends in education policy: World Society does so by emphasizing institutional isomorphism (i.e. the common form that education systems are acquiring globally), and the GSEA, by focusing on the constitution of a global education agenda.

However, the comparative education field is also fertile in the production of more micro case studies that rather highlight the divergence that prevails in GEP processes. These accounts admit that similar education reforms are spreading globally, but the way in which they translate into local policy practices is rather conflicting, and even contradictory. Overall, they consider that global policy ideas are constantly and actively reinterpreted and modified by a range of political actors that operate at a range of scales – including the national and the local - according to their own symbolic frames and institutional settings. Here, we find from anthropological studies that focus on the cultural and identity factors involved in global education policy interpretation (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Phillips & Stambach, 2008) to historical and sociological institutionalist studies, which focus on the role of path-dependent institutional traditions,

systems of norms, and national regulatory frameworks in the re-contextualization and adaptation of global education policies. (Dobbins, 2011; Maurer, 2012; Takayama, 2012).

The macro and the micro approaches sketched above reach apparently contrasting conclusions, to a great extent, due to the fact that they focus on different stages of the education policy process: policy diffusion and agenda setting, on the one hand, and policy enactment and concrete educational practices on the other. As I argue next, focusing on the policy adoption stage – which, in a global governance scenario, intermediates and mediates more and more determinantly between agenda setting and concrete policy developments- can contribute to have a more complex view of the convergence-divergence debate and, in general, a more comprehensive understanding of GEP processes.

The Policy Adoption Focus

Scholars that focus on policy adoption are less concerned with how global policies get transformed once they have penetrated the local arena, than with *why they penetrate* the local arena in the first place. To them, understanding policy adoption (i.e. the processes, reasons and circumstances that explain how and why policy-makers select and embrace GEPs) is key to account for the changes of scale and the new political interactions that are emerging in more deterritorialized policy processes. Nevertheless, despite the increasing relevance of policy adoption to understand the nature and outcomes of GEP processes, this is a policy moment still understudied.

In comparative education, the ‘policy borrowing and lending’ literature (see key contributions in Steiner-Khamsi, 2004, 2012b) or the ‘mechanisms of globalization effects’ (see Dale, 1999) are some of the few frameworks that explicitly aim at understanding the variety of forces and rationales involved in processes of education policy adoption in a global setting. These frameworks reflect on the political, and economic drivers involved in the adoption of GEPs, as well as on the governance technologies that explain the so-called policy transfer, including standardization, externalization, or governance by numbers. They also show that international organizations play an increasingly active role in policy adoption processes, not only by influencing their member-countries’ decisions, but also the policies adopted by other international organizations (cf. Grek, 2012; Mundy & Menashy, 2012).

It is well documented that many countries – especially developing countries - adopt global policies and programs because they are externally imposed on them via aid conditionality or binding international agreements. However, more and more often, policy-makers adopt global policies in an apparently voluntary way (Dale, 2005). When this happens, dynamics of persuasion, discursive selectivity, and generation of meaning become more central as factors of policy change. This trend forces us to refine the analytical tools we use in globalization and education studies and, more specifically, pushes us to have a more systematic and theoretical understanding of the role that ideas can play in the study of the nature, dynamics and outcomes of GEPs. As I hope to demonstrate in the following section, taking the role of ideas more seriously in our models of analysis can contribute to shedding light on this particular area of inquiry.

Theorizing the Role of Ideas in Global Education Policy: The Case of Privatization Reforms

Human interpretation and ideas are variables that always frame political outcomes and policy decisions at all levels. Thus, research questions on the role of ideas should not be framed in terms of whether ideas matter or not, as the fact that they matter should be taken for granted. Rather, more relevant questions to be addressed are: *What kinds* of ideas matter more in specific

periods of policy change? *How, when and under what circumstances* do ideas matter more? And, are ideas *autonomous sources of power*?

Different theoretical approaches deal differently with these questions. In this section, I explore how approaches such as institutionalism, rationalism, and constructivism do so, and, in particular, how different scholars in comparative education engage with related premises when analyzing the relationship between globalization and education policy. I specifically reflect on how comparativists have applied these premises to a particular area of education reform: education privatization.

Main approaches

1) Scholars coming from historical and sociological institutionalism, and related traditions, focus on the impact of ideas once they become **institutionalized** at a range of scales. To them, ideas exert influence as elements that are embedded in a broad range of institutions, such as international regimes, systems of values and norms, and policy paradigms (cf. March & Olsen, 2005; Hall, 1993). They look at ideas as embedded in broader and usually stable ideational structures that condition (and even restrict) the capacity of local policy agents in decision-making processes. These types of ideas frame policy-makers behaviors and preferences, and generate shared assumptions among them about how the world works, the nature of problems, and the main policy instruments that are available to them to face these problems (Campbell, 2004).

In comparative education, such a 'structuralist' understanding of the role of ideas influences a very broad range of scholars and theories, starting with world culture theory which, as sketched above, attributes world convergence in education to the successful expansion of western normative frameworks, including values such as human rights, individualism, and democracy. Other scholars use concepts like 'education ideology' (see Schriewer, 2004), 'policy scape' (see Carney, 2009) or 'political imaginaries' (see Robertson, 2005) to refer to transnationally shared ideational frameworks that shape the way policy-makers perceive educational problems and take decisions about educational reform, including the particular policy instruments they are more likely to select and/or reject. Others advocate the necessity to have an even broader understanding of ideational structures, including worldviews, religions, and civilizational projects when it comes to understanding how cultural legacies mediate the effects of globalization in education (Schwinn, 2012; Robertson & Dale, 2013).

How does this perspective apply, in particular, to studies on education privatization? Generally speaking, it leads us to focus on how the emergence of certain 'ideational frameworks' (including policy paradigms, political ideologies, public sentiments and so on) is conducive to the adoption of privatization measures. In developing countries, the prevailing developmental paradigm, the so-called Post-Washington Consensus, is especially conducive to privatization measures, as it encourages governments to explore non-bureaucratic ways of coordinating economic and social activities and to create an environment that favors the private sector acquiring a more dynamic role in economic and societal issues (Van Waeyenberge, 2006). Within this paradigm, managerial proposals that involve the state partnering with the private sector and rethinking the role of the state in the provision of public goods are considered sound.

At the same time, it is remarkable that, in recent decades, the structuration of a range of principled beliefs concerning what is the legitimate role of the state in education has contributed to advance privatization policies both in the North and in the South. In many parts of the world, strong public sentiments against the state operating as a direct provider of services

have been forged, to the point that many consider the welfare state to be facing a crisis of legitimacy, even in Northern European countries (Wiborg, 2012). This shift in public opinion and values is very significant when it comes to understanding the global spread of privatization and related managerial solutions; as Kalimullah et al. (2012) state, “bureaucracy now has few supporters anywhere. Any solution offering a reduction in bureaucracy is likely to be popular” (p.19).

In general, the fact that neoliberalism and related policy discourses have become hegemonic, and form a sort of commonsensical global framework, contributes to the belief in many countries of the world of the inherent superiority of the private sector, or the goodness of performance-based incentives and choice shaping the parameters of education reforms (Carney, 2009; Taylor et al., 2000).

2) For **rationalist** scholars, ideas exert influence as lenses that focus on the ‘best option’ for policy-makers to maximize their interests, or as coalitional glue to facilitate the cohesion of particular groups. From this perspective, ideas appear to have a lower profile as causal factors of policy change. Their main role is to “alleviate coordination problems arising from the absence of unique equilibrium solutions” (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993, p. 17). According to this approach, actors that participate in policy interactions at different scales are goal-oriented and engage in strategic interactions to maximize their utilities on the basis of given preferences (Risse, 2000). In terms of policy adoption, rationalism would expect local policy-makers to select certain global policies because such policies work or have worked well elsewhere. Thus, policy-makers would be construed as well-informed rational actors that choose internationally tested policy solutions to improve the outcomes of their education systems.

In comparative education, rational choice or methodological individualism are far from being dominant approaches. We find an example in an author like George Pscharopoulos (1990), whose starting point is that education policy-makers in developing countries are rational actors who try “to deliver the best with given resources” and are “concerned with the equitable distribution of benefits associated with educational expansion and provision” (p. 371). Similar conceptions are implicit in the logic of intervention of many international organizations and aid agencies when engaging with local constituencies in policy exchanges. These organizations seem to assume that, by systematizing worldwide evidence and/or doing impact evaluations of a range of interventions, they will demonstrate to national policy-makers what policies ‘work’ and, accordingly, the latter will opt for adopting and implementing them (cf. Schuller & Burns, 2007; Bruns et al., 2010). According to rationalism, national policy-makers would embrace privatization policies once it has been demonstrated that these policies can contribute to improving students’ academic performance and/or the efficiency of education systems.

3) **Constructivist** approaches ascribe more of a leading role to ideas as independent factors in policy change. A core assumption in constructivism is that actors’ interests and preferences are social constructions and not objectively given (Haas, 2004; Hay, 2002). These scholars are interested in analyzing ideas functioning as road maps for policy making. In the situations where policy change happens, ideas act more clearly as explanatory variables defining actors’ preferences “by stipulating causal patterns or by providing compelling ethical or moral motivations for action” (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993, p. 16).

To many constructivists, ideas are more than simple instruments of human action; they have constitutive power and intrinsic force (Blyth, 2004). To constructivists, ideas are seen as causal factors that influence policy decisions by shaping the perceptions of decision makers, providing

them with rationales for action or filtering interpretations of the external world (Kjaer & Pedersen, 2001). Their research focuses on the role of persuasive arguments, deliberation and communicative action as independent causes of social behavior and political change (Risse, 2004). They do not deny that ideas can work as embedded in institutions, but are more interested in the processes by which ideas that were initially held by a minority become widely adopted and institutionalized (Hasenclever et al., 1996).

In comparative and international education studies, some scholars are focusing on the dynamics of promotion of, and persuasion regarding, global policy ideas (Grek et al., 2009; Ball, 2012; Resnik, 2012; Olmedo, 2013). Many of them focus on how a range of international organizations, knowledge brokers, and policy entrepreneurs try to convince governments of what are the key problems that they need to address and the most effective policy solutions (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012a). Researchers in this specific area observe that global policy ideas do not necessarily become influential because of their inherent quality and rigor, but because of the promotional and framing strategies of the experts backing them (Verger, 2012). In fact, many policy entrepreneurs predispose policy-makers to consider their proposals by making them look like they are scientifically supported, or aligned with 'international good practices' and 'international standards' (Edwards Jr., 2013).

The transnationalization of the education privatization agenda is a good example of how the lack of conclusive evidence regarding the effectiveness of a policy does not prevent it from continuing to be disseminated around the world (Luke, 2003). The promoters of privatization are aware of the criticism and resistance that their ideas may generate in many places. Consequently, to make their preferences more normatively acceptable to a wider audience, they tend to avoid using the 'privatization' label and resort to more appealing concepts such as public-private *partnerships*, *school choice*, *innovative* forms of provision, or *school autonomy* (Robertson et al., 2012). One of the reasons these alternative concepts are more appealing is that they are vague enough so that different policy actors can read almost anything into them. In fact, it has been documented that concepts like public-private partnerships or school autonomy can work as "accommodationist mechanisms" (cf. Linder, 1999) in the sense that a range of different political ideologies may provide them with meaning and feel at ease with the frame in question (Verger, 2012; Verger and Curran, 2014).

Another asset in the hands of privatization entrepreneurs and advocates is that market metaphors are inherently persuasive because most policy-makers have positive experiences with 'the market' as a space for the distribution of goods and services in their daily lives. However, they tend to misinform about the numerous failures that the mechanical transposition of market rules to the delivery of public goods such as education generates. Overall, privatization advocates often resort to the repetition and the misrepresentation of evidence when it comes to selling their preferences (Ball, 2007). As has been argued by Lubiensky (2008) in relation to the US context, one of their most common tactics to create momentum around privatization reform is to produce a sort of 'echochamber effect' around a small, usually low-quality and unrepresentative sample of studies.

Focusing on the role of ideas does not mean neglecting that the influence of policy ideas is contingent on the institutional setting in which they are produced and delivered. To most constructivists, the symbolic and economic capitals of the organizations backing new policy ideas impact significantly on the social perception and credibility of these ideas. It is noteworthy that the most successful policy entrepreneurs are usually based in international organizations, such as the World Bank or the OECD, that are located at the interstices of a range

of influential policy networks. These organizations provide them with sufficient resources to package and disseminate their ideas effectively as well as the channels to directly access key policy-makers in their member-states (Campbell, 2004).

To conclude, constructivists assume, counter to the rationalist assumption, that policy-makers do not have perfect information when making their policy choices and that, in fact, their knowledge on education policy matters is likely to be impressionistic and incomplete (Hay, 2001). In general, according to them, global policies are not widely adopted because they are the best (or even a good) choice, but because they are *perceived* as such by key decision-makers. Even though this is a valid point to understand the selection of certain policy options by policy-makers, in the next section I will argue that other elements and contingencies need to also be addressed to understand policy adoption in its complexity.

Placing Policy Ideas in Context

Despite the constructivist effort to place ideas at the center of analytical models, there is the risk of isolating them from material factors and extra-semiotic forces. According to Jessop (2010), the role of ideas and, more broadly speaking, semiotic analysis should be seen as a heuristic device to reduce complexity in the study of reality, or as an entry point to understand reality, but not as an end in itself. In addition, the constructivist emphasis on conceiving ideas as causal factors runs the risk of modeling ideas as independent variables of policy change in a too linear and positivistic way. Overall, a more dialectical understanding of the relationship between ideas, institutional change, and strategically selective contexts would be more appropriate.

Campbell (2004) has done a remarkable job when it comes to advancing a more relational approach on this terrain. His work theorizes on how different types of ideas, such as policy paradigms, programs, frames, and public sentiments, which interpellate to very different domains of reality (the micro and the macro, the normative and the policy-oriented), interact in processes of institutional change. Paraphrasing him, new policy proposals will be more likely to penetrate education systems if entrepreneurs can present them in a way that appears to translate well into the prevailing national or regional regulatory framework and policy paradigm, and into the normative sentiments of decision-makers and key stakeholders.

As I show in this section, to analyze policy adoption and, specifically, to understand why external policy ideas are selected and retained in particular places, we need to look more closely at contextual variables of a different nature, with a focus on those of a political and institutional nature. As mentioned above, 'context' is one of those concepts often used - and abused - in comparative education. It carries strong semiotic connotations and its meaning is often taken for granted; consequently, in much research it is rarely defined and systematized. The strategic-relational approach (cf. Jessop, 2001; Hay, 2001) is helpful to think about what we specifically mean by context and, more importantly, how we operationalize it in research on GEP.

The strategic-relational approach forces us to think of 'context' as a conjunction of semiotic and non-semiotic *strategically inscribed selectivities* (of a political, institutional, and economic nature) that may privilege or discriminate against certain ideas (and the carriers of these ideas) over others (Hay, 2001). Strategic selectivities need to be differentiated from broader social *structures*, such as the prevailing form of the capitalist system, the accumulation regime, or the related policy paradigm (Dale, 2005). Strategic selectivities are variables that are more contingent and contextually inscribed in nature and that, among other properties, mediate strategically in the reception of new or external policy ideas. In the following lines I present those among them that, according to recent literature, seem to intercede in a more decisive way in processes of

education privatization reform. They are: government ideology, administrative and regulatory viability, political institutions, domestic political contention, and periods of crises.

1) Government ideology. Policy-makers are more inclined to adopt policy solutions that fit within the ideology of the government for which they work or that they represent. According to Taylor et al. (2000), political ideology is one of the main reasons why nations do not deliver equally in the GEP field. These authors show that, for instance, governmental ideologies represent a key filter when it comes to adopting OECD recommendations on educational policy. In the case of the privatization agenda, this would mean that market-liberal, or liberal-democratic governments would be *a priori* more inclined to adopt pro-privatization measures such as promoting school choice, contracting-out, etc., than social-democratic ones. However, in some cases, this premise needs to be more nuanced since, as I develop below, the left vs. right cleavage is losing weight as an *explanans* of privatization reforms.

Despite the modern education privatization agenda, with its emphasis on competitive financing, partnerships with the private sector and choice, being initiated by the so-called 'New Right' in the 1980s, many social democratic governments are advancing privatization measures alike today. Understanding the evolution of social-democratic thinking is key to explaining this apparent ideological dissolution. In recent years, many social-democratic governments, especially in Europe, have moved closer to pro-market ideas because they genuinely believe that, by adopting them, they can contribute to improve public education, public health, or the state pension system (Wiborg, 2012). Social-democratic parties are concerned with the legitimacy crisis of the welfare state and the increasing social dissatisfaction with the bureaucratization of public services – in fact, some of their more prominent international leaders even reproduce publicly the generalized belief that “the public sector is bad at management” (see declarations of Gordon Brown in Ball, 2007, p. 4). For them, market reforms are seen as an opportunity to transform, but also to protect the universal welfare state in the face of its public legitimacy crisis. By doing so, social-democrats expect to keep on using the welfare state as their most valuable political and institutional weapon in electoral disputes (Klitgaard, 2007).

2) Administrative and regulatory viability. Peter Hall (1993) conceived 'administrative viability' as a key aspect in his analysis of the reception of Keynesianism in different country settings. This variable implies that new policy ideas are most likely to be taken up by policy-makers if they perceive these ideas as technically workable and fitting within their budgetary, administrative and time-horizon constraints and capacities (Kingdon, 2002).

Beyond technical capacities, regulatory obstacles, of both a legislative and a normative nature, are also in the calculus of policy-makers when considering borrowing external models. Precisely for this reason, according to Maroy (2012), Belgium and France behave very differently when it comes to incorporating the quasi-market model into their education systems, despite both countries receiving similar pressures to engage in such a transnational model. In Belgium, quasi-markets are advancing much faster due to the fact that freedom of choice is inscribed in the country's constitution and is strongly valued by families. In France, in contrast, there are numerous rules that restrict freedom of choice, and many families value the republican school as a cultural melting pot, even above their right to choose a school.

On occasion, policy-makers will be more receptive to external policies if they are consistent with previous (positive) experiences in their countries. In India, for instance, the PPPs idea – which is being promoted by a very active transnational advocacy coalition – has smoothly penetrated

into the national education debate as the country has twenty years of experience with *partnerships* in non-education sectors such as infrastructure, water and solid waste management. Thus, for Indian educational policy-makers, if PPPs have been technically viable in other sectors, they would have a great potential to work in education (Verger & Vanderkaaij, 2012).

3) Political institutions. The rules of the game and the prevailing political institutions can work in very different – and contradictory ways - when it comes to advancing or resisting the adoption of GEPs. In some countries, like Denmark or The Netherlands, the political party realm is so fragmented that governments usually need to be formed by multiple party coalitions. These coalitions can be so ideologically diverse that it may be difficult for them to agree on drastic measures, as education privatization can be. Thus, these political systems are more conducive to institutional stability than those where governmental politics are led by a two-party system (Kjaer & Pedersen, 2001).

Similarly, some governments in some countries are more effective at advancing ambitious education reforms than others as a consequence of the institutional rules for decision-making and, specifically, the role and presence of veto points in political processes. For instance, from an ideological perspective, the U.S. would seem more inclined to adopt a national voucher system than a welfare-equalitarian country like Sweden. However, the chain of decisions required in American politics has such a length and complexity that, in the U.S., voucher proposals have been several times interrupted at the Federal level in the last decades. In contrast, Sweden's political system, in which the executive and legislative branches of government are mutually dependent and that does not offer many veto opportunities to interest groups, has been able to advance an ambitious voucher reform in a short time (Klitgaard, 2008).

For their part, countries that have witnessed a high level of education decentralization are more conducive to privatization trends. Quite often, local governments, especially in developing countries, lack the capacity to deliver education in an effective way, which leads to middle class families exiting the public sector and enrolling their children in private schools. Furthermore, as shown by Theresa Adriaio et al. (2009) in the case of Brazil, local governments tend to have insufficient technical capacities to manage education systems in all their complexity, and many of them end up buying 'reform packages' and education consulting services from private consultancy firms. They, thus, become more vulnerable to, for instance, the marketing strategies of so-called "school improvement corporations", such as America's Choice, which promise to their potential clients "We have the results you are looking for: improved student achievement, higher test scores, increased graduation rates, fewer discipline problems, and more effective leadership and teaching" (Ball, 2012, p. 96).

4) Contentious politics and legitimation. Governments may engage in GEP processes as a way to attract political capital and neutralize internal opposition to education reform. This is the case of countries that adopt international institutions' recommendations as a way to gain leverage in education reform debates at the domestic level, and to advance certain changes that would otherwise be contested by oppositional groups (Martens et al., 2009). On occasion, governments strategically focus on the adoption of those specific external recommendations that are closest to their particular preferences; to them, the supposed neutrality of global policies can contribute to legitimate their own political agenda (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012b) [1].

It is also quite common that governments recur to external actors as a tiebreaker in moments of great uncertainty or polarization in education debates at the country level. According to Steiner-Khamsi (2012b), when education reform processes get trapped in highly politicized public

debates, domestic actors may invoke an external source of authority to unblock the situation. This external source (whether it is an international organization, and INGO, or a consultancy firm) may achieve this objective by working as a coalition-builder and/or as the provider of a third-best solution.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, for instance, the government adopted a School-Based Management (SBM) reform by invoking international standards, although the main driver of the reform was, in fact, internal legitimation. According to Komatsu (2013), the SBM reform allowed the Bosnia-Herzegovina government to present itself as a reformer in tune with European standards, thereby responding to the citizens' aspirations for European integration, at the same time that it portrayed itself in front of the public as a government that, through SBM ideas, aims to depoliticize education in a post-conflict situation. Nevertheless, it was also the case that the government ended up implementing SBM only very superficially and without losing its direct control over schools (Komatsu, 2013).

It should be noticed that not only governments engage in global policy talk to legitimate their particular interests. Domestic private interests can also be very effective when it comes to the mobilization of external ideas to generate education reform pressure. For instance, a country like Thailand - with strong societal support for public education - ended up importing a voucher system in early-childhood education as a consequence of the collective action of private kindergarten owners. Kindergarten owners in this country invested a significant amount of resources in sponsoring the vouchers idea as a business survival strategy. Nonetheless, they convinced local political elites of the convenience of adopting this education-financing model by framing it as an "internationally fashionable policy" with potential positive equity implications (Ho, 2006, p. 67).

Of course, the pressure of non-state actors can go in the opposite direction and lobby against new international privatization trends. In Argentina, although for reasons of a very different nature, both the teachers unions and the main association of private universities campaigned against the liberalization of education in the context of the World Trade Organization's services negotiations. As a consequence of this, the minister of education vetoed the possibility of Argentina opening their education sector to international commercial providers in the framework of these trade negotiations (Verger, 2009).

5) Crisis. Crises are moments of policy variation in many domains. It has been acknowledged that there are more possibilities for new ideas to act as roadmaps in periods of crisis and uncertainty (Richardson, 2005). Policy-makers perceive importing new policies from elsewhere as more necessary when the problems in the education system are critical, or perceived as critical. Warning signs in this realm include a high level of internal dissatisfaction with the education system on the part of families, teachers, etc.; the collapse or inadequacy of educational provision; negative results in international evaluations such as PISA; and so on (Phillips & Ochs, 2003).

International and domestic policy entrepreneurs tend to use crises – or critical situations more broadly speaking - as political opportunities for education policy change. Several scholars have recently paid attention to how the confusion generated by 'natural disasters' in both Haiti and New Orleans have leveled the terrain for neoliberal education reformers to advance privatization and school choice reforms (Atasay & Delavan, 2012; Buras, 2013). To give another example, in developing contexts, the fact that many countries are still far from reaching the 'Education For All' (EFA) goals due to the insufficient resources available is used by

privatization advocates to introduce a sort of urgency reform pressure to convince governments and donors that they need to bring the private sector into education delivery, and see it as a key ally to achieve EFA (Srivastava, 2010).

From the point of view of policy adoption, it may look like “context” restricts the range of possible options available to policy-makers operating at a range of scales (regional, national and local) over a particular time horizon (Hay, 2001). However, what many of the contextual dimensions identified here have in common is that they reveal policy-makers to be active producers of meaning and key active agents in the GEP sequence. To some extent, their policy choices are related to the complementary (symbolic, political and material) gains and clout that certain global policies come with, and to the way these policies fit within their technical capacities, policy preferences and political interests.

To Conclude: Taking Ideas (More) Seriously

The conceptual and theoretical framework sketched in this article invites us to look at the constitutive and causal role of ideas in processes of education policy change and policy adoption in a more systematic way. It provides us with the necessary elements to explore what types of ideas, in what way and under what circumstances, can contribute to initiate processes of education policy reform in a global governance scenario. Among other potentialities, paying closer attention to the multiple roles of ideas in GEP processes and, specifically, to their application in dynamics of policy adoption can contribute to unraveling the macro vs. the micro, convergence vs. divergence, local vs. global and related dichotomies that so often stretch the globalization debate in comparative education (cf. Chisholm, 2012; Robertson, 2012).

I have also argued that focusing on ideas does not necessarily mean embracing an ‘idealist’ ontology or a naïf version of constructivism, which would understand that specific types of ideas – such as arguments and deliberation - can be isolated as causal factors in processes of policy and institutional change. In this respect, I have argued that ideas are not only agency-sensitive or micro-level factors in essence; they also need to be understood as constitutive of broader structures and institutions (in the form of, for instance, policy paradigms) with causal powers over actors’ preferences and decisions. In other words, ideas can operate as both structure and agency, action and condition. Furthermore, I have suggested using ideas as an entry point to the analysis of reality, but not as something that is commensurable with reality. Ideas, rather, need to be conceived as part of ‘causal configurations’ (cf. Pawson & Tilley, 1997) that interact in an analytically distinguishable – although ontologically embedded - way with strategic actions, social events and contextual selectivities in bringing about policy change.

I have illustrated the application of this framework by looking at the global spread of education privatization policies. I have shown that, globally speaking, the currently prevailing policy and development paradigm is conducive to the adoption of privatization measures of a different nature. This trend is reinforced by the rhetoric and framing strategies that a range of influential private education entrepreneurs and advocates display to make their policy options more acceptable to a broader audience. Furthermore, I have given examples of the contextually inscribed selectivities that contribute to select and retain, but also to reject, different elements of the transnational privatization agenda in particular places.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the global privatization agenda is not only about promoting the adoption of specific policies and practices; it is broader in scope and, in fact, politically more ambitious than that. Its main aim is to promote a drastic and paradigmatic

change both in the goals of education systems (putting global competitiveness, and economic efficiency at the center of state priorities in education) and in the expected role of the state in education (from a provider state to an evaluative state). Inevitably, once such a paradigmatic change becomes more broadly institutionalized, more policy-makers worldwide will be more receptive to the adoption of particular privatization measures, especially to those that fit better within the new goals and globally accepted forms of education provision.

Despite the theoretical and epistemological focus of the framework presented in this article, its application has important methodological implications. Taking ideas more seriously implies having to pay more attention to the carriers of these ideas, and tracking the policy networks they constitute (cf. Ball, 2012; Vavrus & Bartlett, 2009). It also implies having a better understanding of how policy entrepreneurs introduce new policy ideas in global education agendas, and frame and disseminate them across different fields, organizations, and regions (cf. Grek et al., 2009; Verger, 2012). It also requires us to have in-depth knowledge of the particular contexts in which these ideas are being adopted, as a way to capture how multiple contextual contingencies operate in a strategically selective way by favoring certain actors, ideas, and discourses over others (cf. Hay, 2002). Finally, methodologically speaking, it is worth mentioning that comparative education is potentially well-suited to analyzing the impact of global education policy ideas, as comparative analysis is one of the most appropriate strategies for understanding why, to what degree, and under which particular circumstances the same transnational idea is more influential in some particular settings than in others.

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Notes

[1] See how this premise applies in the way several European governments have approached the Bologna process in Huisman et al. (2004), and Amaral and Magalhaes (2004).

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Vertical Case Studies and the Challenges of Culture, Context and Comparison

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The Teachers College Symposium invited scholars to rethink culture, context, and comparison in educational research. In his response to these questions (this volume), Joe Tobin promoted comparative ethnographies to understand how social, cultural, and political processes play out across multiple locations and time periods. He urged careful empirical studies of how and why globally circulating ideas are made manifest in local practices. Specifically, Tobin recommended diachronic, video-cued multivocal ethnographic methods. In such an approach, video excerpts function as interviewing cues, prompting educators to reflect on what is shared and what is variable in educational practices that differ by time or location, as well as how cultural beliefs and practices were shaped by economic and political forces. Thus, Tobin and his colleagues invite participants themselves to explain the impact of culture on their own practices, and they fruitfully mine the basic human impulse for comparison in order to elicit contrasts in practices.

Antoni Verger's response (this volume) focused more on policy making. He considered the epistemological and methodological implications of the deterritorialization of education policy processes, particularly how multiple scales interact during the policy adoption stage. He suggested that scholars should examine more carefully the role that ideas play in policy decisions and policy outcomes, and he asked "what types of ideas might be most influential in these types of processes, how and in what contextual circumstances."

In this brief intervention, I offer a distinct but compatible reaction to the challenges of considering culture, context and comparison in educational research. I draw upon work I have done over more than a decade with Frances Vavrus, developing what we have called the "vertical case study" approach. In this piece, I first describe the "axes" of the vertical case study. I then explain how the approach addresses the dilemmas of culture, context, scale, and comparison in ways that complement the approaches recommended by Tobin and Verger.

The Axes of the Vertical Case Study

The VCS approach unfolds along three "axes"—the vertical, the horizontal, and the transversal. First, this approach insists on simultaneous attention to and across micro-, meso-, and macro- levels, or spatial scales, which constitute the verticality of comparison. Too often qualitative work reifies social, political, and economic processes as "forces" or "systems" with explanatory power. There has been a tendency to take the macro for granted and focus exclusively on a single-site locality rather than carefully exploring how changes in national and international institutions, discourses, and policies are influencing social practice at the school level. In contrast, I aver that attention to the ways global processes are shaped by and in turn influence social action in various locales is essential. "The local" cannot be divorced from national and transnational forces but neither can it be conceptualized as determined by these forces.

In addition, the VCS approach recognizes that space itself is socially produced (Massey, 2005), and every "level" is an instance of the "local." In other words, the World Bank or one country's ministry of education are also "local" contexts, with their own complex social, cultural, and material relations. However, as shown in work by de Sousa Santos and colleagues (2007; see also Vavrus & Bartlett, 2012), the World Bank's "local" often becomes globalized and loses any

sense of the cultural or historical specificity of norms and values. As Kathryn Anderson-Levitt (2012) explains,

Most anthropologists define culture as the making of meaning, with an emphasis on the process itself as contested. It follows that world culture is locally produced in social interaction, and that meanings are then reconstructed in the global/local nexus. Power matters, particularly the hidden power to make resources for meaning making widely available, and to make them attractive and scientifically persuasive. How actors succeed in claiming particular ideas as global and how the locals strategically respond are questions where anthropologists can contribute to understanding the global/local nexus and the exercise of power within the world polity (p. 441).

Discussions of “world culture” too often fail to consider the role of social interactions and power in the processes of establishing and maintaining such norms across locations. Relations of power elevate certain local views of the world to the level of the global. An analysis that compares these multiple “locals” and problematizes the uptake of certain discourses, processes, and policies and the enrollment in networks is critical to the VCS approach. For example, as described in *Teaching in Tension* (2013), I had the privilege of working with a group of talented scholars from Tanzania and the United States to examine how learner-centered pedagogy is promoted by influential organizations, how it was adopted unevenly by the Tanzanian government, and then how it was implemented in six Tanzanian secondary schools. In Chapter 1, Vavrus, Bartlett, and Salema map the promotion and expansion of learner-centered pedagogical approaches across Africa in the wake of the 1990 Educational for All conference and the 2000 adoption of the Dakar Framework for Action. The chapter documents the historical succession of educational policies and discusses how structural adjustment, political shifts, and significant levels of World Bank funding for primary and secondary-level educational reforms paved the way for the adoption of LCP. In Chapter 6, Bartlett and Vavrus detail how the national assessment system contradicts learner-centered approaches, thus stymying pedagogical changes at the local level. Further, in Chapter 9, Webb describes how the national Tanzanian language policy poses specific challenges to student engagement and LCP.

Second, the horizontal dimension of the VCS approach emphasizes the importance of comparing how similar policies unfold in distinct locations that are socially produced and “simultaneously and complexly connected” (Tsing, 2005, p. 6). The horizontal element takes two primary forms. First, scholars might trace people, policies, or practices across sites. For example, in chapter 3 of *Teaching in Tension*, Bermeo, Kaunda, and Ngarina consider how teachers’ previous experiences in pre-service teacher education, continuous professional development, and informal teacher learning affect whether and how teachers implemented learner-centered education. Alternately, the “horizontal” element may prompt a series of comparative case studies of how a similar phenomenon manifests across different locations. This type of horizontal comparison juxtaposes cases that follow the same logic to address topics of common concern. For example, in *Teaching in Tension*, the researchers decided to compare the implementation of learner-centered pedagogy across six secondary schools in the Arusha and Moshi regions. In Chapter 4, Bartlett and Mogusu consider how the Tanzanian teachers who participated in a pedagogy workshop understood learner-centered pedagogy, what they identified as its benefits, and how they implemented it when they returned to their schools. In Chapter 5, Vavrus and Salema consider the material constraints on implementing LCP. In Chapters 7 and 8, Thomas and Rugambwa examine how teachers understood and addressed, pedagogically, concerns regarding inclusion and gender, and how the specific school environments supported or constrained pedagogical moves.

Third, the VCS emphasizes the importance of transversal comparison, that is, of historically situating the processes or sets of relations under consideration and tracing the creative appropriation of educational policies and practices across time and space. The transversal

element reminds us to study across and through levels to explore how globalizing processes intersect and interconnect people and policies that come into focus at different scales. The VCS approach expands the locations of research while showing how actors are related through specific historical contingencies that connect disparate social sites and social actors. In this way, transversal analysis enables one to show how “places are traversed by unequal relations of power and struggles to contest these relations” (Mahon & Keil, 2009, p. 4). In *Teaching in Tension*, the transversal axis involves tracking policies, like Education for All, and pedagogies, such as LCP, as they become enrolled in different networks and come to act on and through others, such as national or regional education officials, teachers, students, and parents. This transversal analysis bears in mind that levels or scales are social fields that are historically produced rather than static planes to which ‘the local’ or ‘the global’ are consigned.

Vertical Case Studies: Culture, Context, Scale, and Comparison

The vertical case study model is consistent with and complementary to the approaches recommended by Tobin and Verger for addressing dilemmas of culture, context, scale, and comparison. The comparative ethnography promoted by Tobin is exemplified by the horizontal axis, whereby scholars consider how social, cultural, and political processes play out across multiple locations. The recommendation for diachronic comparison is inherent in the transversal axis, which traces the evolution and appropriation of educational policies and practices across time. Tobin’s diachronic, video-cued multivocal ethnographic methods offer ideal techniques to meet these two goals; they might be complemented by other elements in the VCS toolkit, including surveys and participant observation. To Tobin’s comparative ethnographic approach, the VCS adds a reminder of the importance of studying ‘vertically,’ across levels, to consider how decisions in international organizations, diverse national bodies (such as curriculum, assessment, and language policy bureaus of the ministry of education), regional education authorities, and local schools mutually constitute and influence one another.

This vertical axis, therefore, heeds Verger’s call to consider how multiple scales interact during the policy adoption stage, and how ideas (such as learner-centered pedagogy) become influential. In doing so, the approach endeavors to escape the “global/local” dualism that has marked so much work in the field, even as it seeks to raise new questions about how policies and pedagogies developed locally in globally influential institutions get appropriated and remade across sites. Further, by insisting on a horizontal axis, the VCS approach reminds scholars to consider, empirically, how ideas may be differentially influential, depending upon cultural, social, political, and material conditions. Finally, by drawing on the anthropology of policy, which examines the on-going processes of policy *appropriation* (e.g. Hamann & Rosen, 2011), the VCS approach questions the stage-wise approach to policy and instead considers policy as practice. It considers how global policy studies could be supplemented and strengthened by even greater attention to the ways that policy is *appropriated and practiced* as it ‘flows’ transnationally and travels transversally.

In sum, the vertical, horizontal, and transversal axes represent one methodological approach that rejects older notions of culture as geographically-bound and responds to processual, practice-based notions of culture. The approach recasts considerations of context to engage multiple scales simultaneously, while foregrounding the empirical benefits of systematic comparison in educational research. In this way, Vertical Case Studies offer a fruitful avenue for reconceptualizing the dilemmas of culture, context and comparison in the field of International and Comparative Education.

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Comparison and Context: The Interdisciplinary Approach to the Comparative Study of Education

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The symposium on *Rethinking Culture, Context, and Comparison in Education and Development* brought together several groups of noted scholars. Of those, I would like to focus on two: those that utilize a disciplinary lens versus those that apply an interdisciplinary, or rather multidisciplinary approach to the comparative inquiry of education [1].

A very brief sketch of institutional history may be in order here, given that the Department of International and Transcultural Studies sponsored the symposium in spring 2013. For several decades and until 1997, the program in International and Comparative Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, was situated in a department titled "Philosophy and the Social Sciences" alongside all foundation studies or disciplines of education: anthropology and education, economics and education, history and education, philosophy and education, politics and education, religion and education, and sociology and education. Students were able to study comparative education in combination with one of the seven disciplines in the department. An eighth program was in that department labeled "International Educational Development" (nowadays subsumed under the name International and Comparative Education) that drew from methods and theories of inquiry from *several* disciplines. By definition, the program in International Educational Development (IED) is, to this day, interdisciplinary. At some universities, the international and comparative programs were associated with area studies and offered a concentration in a geographic region. Similarly to developments at other universities in the United States, starting in the 1960s the program in International Educational Development attracted a much larger number of students than the discipline-based programs. The number of graduate programs, the size of professional associations, the reach of academic journals but also jobs associated with the field of International and Comparative Education expanded rapidly over the last twenty years. Due to a series of reorganizations at the college level, the Department of International and Transcultural Studies now hosts two reputable programs: the large interdisciplinary program of International Educational Development and a smaller program in Anthropology and Education. As such, the IED program closely collaborates with faculty and students that are spread out throughout the college and the wider campus at Columbia University.

Said this, the stark contrast between anthropology and comparative education, which anthropologist Herve Varenne suggested during the closing panel of the symposium, rests in my opinion on a false dichotomy. The debate should be, in my opinion, between disciplinary versus interdisciplinary approaches to the comparative study of education. I argue that the method of comparison relies on an interdisciplinary approach in order to understand and generalize findings on similarities and differences between educational practices, beliefs, and systems. As I will argue throughout this essay, sample size (N) matters a great deal in this debate.

From N=1 to N=3: Joseph Tobin's Contribution to the Comparative Project

It used to be common in anthropology to carry out studies in multiple cultures. Joseph Tobin refers in his contribution to the work of Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, as well as his own mentor Robert A. LeVine who advanced the "comparative project" in anthropology. What a comparative inquiry requires is indeed thinking "simultaneously about space and time" (Tobin,

in this issue) as opposed to the more common ethnographic method of examining a culture across sites, levels, and time. Over the course of my academic career, the work of Clifford Geertz has been influential to the extent that his conception of ethnography as local history has led to the merging of several departments of history and anthropology. Thus rather than using a sample size of one (N=1), Tobin expands his sample to three (N=3) in order to carry out a comparison.

His video-cued ethnographies of three cultures (or, as I will explain later, of three nations) represent a landmark anthropological study in which he examined preschool education across not only across time (1983 and 2003) but also across space (USA, Japan, China) and groups of actors/informants within the various spaces (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009). Unsurprisingly, his study won great acclaim in the comparative education research community as it represented contextual comparison at its best (see special issue of *Comparative Education Review*).

There are two distinct methodological features that make his work ingenious and different from other ethnographies of schooling. Tobin and his colleagues engaged in cross-cultural comparison without anthropological shame and at the same time masterfully tackled the problem of spatial determinism that is endemic to ethnographies. First, in all the three countries the same issues or critical incidents—previously identified as key issues in preschools—were video-recorded to ensure comparability: classroom routines, separation, fighting, misbehavior, mixed-aged play, and intimacy between teachers and children. By presenting them as cues to stimulate a response, the informants were “forced” to take a stance on these key issues.

Arguably, comparative studies tend to rely to a great extent on forced-response data. Very much to everyone’s dismay, this creates a validity problem: the universe of possible responses is drastically reduced for the sake of comparability. This is not the case in Tobin’s methodological masterpiece because the material is used to open up rather than to narrow down interpretation. The forced-response feature of the study enables a contextual comparison and, combined with the self-reported accounts of the informants (“what would you do in this situation?”), considerably increases the validity of this comparative study. Thereby researcher bias is minimized, yet made transparent and thoroughly reflected throughout the ethnography. Second, a compelling feature of the sequel is the selection of an additional preschool in each country that teachers in that country identified as being innovative. Thus, the second ethnography of 2009 comprised not only video-cues from the same three preschools that were filmed twenty years earlier but also from three new ones that teachers consider, to use Jürgen Schriewer’s terminology, as “reference” preschools: preschools that practitioners in a given context regard as exemplars of “best practices” and worth emulating. Even though the answer to this question heavily depends on who is asking—an American researcher, a trained practitioner, a Buddhist monk, a concerned mother, an international donor, etc.—the question of what practitioners consider a good school is very important in order to understand pedagogical belief systems.

Nevertheless, as pointed out by Isabell Diehm during the discussion at the symposium, Joseph Tobin does not resolve, but in fact exacerbates, the “*attribution problem*” that anthropologists so forcefully and rightfully criticize: they first dismiss the nation as the unit of analysis because every nation is literally “multi-cultural” but then need to resort to “nation” as a social category to describe the differences between the three contexts observed in preschools of China, Japan, and the United States. This is problematic because, due to the disciplinary bias, a context or a case is interpreted as culture, and culture is equated with nation. Thus, the practice of *mimamoru* (translated as “teaching by watching and waiting”), a low-intervention approach that Tobin and his associates observe in preschools in Japan, becomes in his interpretation a *Japanese* educational practice. Similarly, *qiecuo* (translated as “learning from each other by exchanging ideas”) is a practice that Tobin observes not among students but also among teachers in the

three observed preschools in China. In an attempt to show that culture trumps official curriculum, Tobin interprets *qiecuo* as an expression of the broader value of “self-perfection,” a value that vanished from the official grammar of (pre-) schooling in China and yet endured into the present. With reference to Jerome Bruner’s concept of “folk pedagogy,” he identifies this practice as a contemporary “*Chinese early childhood educational practice*” [italics inserted by author] that is taken for granted in China and was preserved despite generations of pedagogical paradigm shifts (see Tobin, in this issue). Despite the sophisticated methodological approach of the video-cued ethnography, it is the ethnographer Joseph Tobin and his associates, who interpret what they observe in a narrow disciplinary manner. Because of their disciplinary affiliation with cultural anthropology, they interpret what they observe in terms of cultural differences. Phrased differently, if they were sociologists, they would possibly interpret the same findings in terms of social stratification and structure. Naturally, each discipline imposes a specific lens on the object of study in an attempt to refine and advance disciplinary ways of knowing (see Kuhn, 1962).

The blind spot of cultural anthropology is the attribution fallacy. It is pronounced when ethnographers engage in cross-national comparison of two or more cases that are situated in different countries. They tend to interpret the differences in terms of national differences and inadvertently end up using a political category (nation-state) to explain cultural differences between their cases. From a comparative methodology perspective, they tend to *contrast* rather than *compare* their cases, and favor the design of *most different systems with different outcomes* over alternative designs of comparisons. The attribution problem becomes visible when adjectives such as “typical Japanese,” “typical Chinese,” “typical American,” or other stereotypes are tried. This attribution trap possibly accounts for the reason why cross-national studies in cultural anthropology have become sparse.

For more than twenty years, multicultural education studies have experienced a fascinating debate over the attribution fallacy. The debate is better known in Europe than in North America. Frank-Olaf Radtke, one of the keynote speakers of the symposium, has convincingly shown how the “studies on countries of immigration” were used as a “scientific stamp of approval” for stereotyping German minorities that had immigrated from Turkey or other emigration countries. The celebration of cultural diversity in schools went hand in hand with studying the “culture” of the other and led more often than not to an “orientalization” (Edward Said) of ethnic minorities. Ethnic Germans, Swiss, or Austrians, for that matter, were turned into cultural objects of study distracting from larger structural inequalities, institutional discrimination and racism that the *system* of education had been reproducing [2].

From N=155 to N=1: Antoni Verger’s Contribution to Understanding the Local Reception of Global Education Policy

Antoni Verger’s study of global education policy is a stellar exemplar of studies in comparative education that examine why some traveling concepts or reforms (e.g., concept of public-private partnership in education, managerialism and teacher accountability reform, etc.) resonate in a given context or in a given case. Figuratively speaking, he reduces the sample size of 155 to one. According to the UN classification, there exist 155 countries that, based on their GDP per capita, are considered “least-developed countries” or developing countries.

Thus, he is leaving the global level (N=155) to study the local (N=1), in particular, the reception and translation of global education policy in the local context. This methodological approach is not uncommon for those among us who study traveling reforms. Precisely because every transfer and implementation process is selective, the question becomes: why are only some aspects of a global education policy borrowed and how are they locally implemented or reframed?

In the early days of globalization research, there used to be a large group of social and educational researchers who were mesmerized by the question of whether educational systems in different parts of the world would eventually converge to one international model of education. What the question captured at the time was a phenomenon that later became known as policy borrowing/lending, global education policy, or traveling reforms, that is, reform packages that policy makers *for a variety of reasons* and only *selectively* adopt. Needless to state, the camp remains divided between those that believe in the salutary effects of globalization and others who highlight the rising inequality between countries, as well as within countries, as a result of the unidirectional flow of finance, ideas, technology, power and standards.

The investigation of “best practices” or “international standards” and the scrutiny of international agencies that bring them to life, administer them, finance them, and use them coercively as programmatic conditionality have become fascinating topics of comparative inquiry. As with all emerging research areas, scholars very soon position themselves with regard to the phenomenon that they study. For those among us who keep issues of power, inequity and world-systems in mind when studying new phenomena,, “standards” benefit the big and powerful, that is, those that have the technology and capacity to implement them. In recent years, a group of us in international and comparative education, showed how the global education industry benefitted from international standards in education. Like public health, education was, until recently, regarded as an activity geared towards enabling the growth of the individual, and for this reason unsuited to standardization or any other kind of cookie cutter approach. As a result, commercial interest in education was limited to areas like “hardware” (i.e., textbooks, computers, infrastructure, etc.) where there was the possibility of making a profit. Clearly, this has radically changed over the past decade: the fundamental shift from inputs to measurable outcomes and standards has been good (for) business. This shift has benefitted the education industry. Similar to textbook publishing, one of the most lucrative branches of the education industry tends to focus on selling tests which generates, year by year, a constant flow of customers who must pass them to succeed. As a result, international standards, 21st century skills, and other supranational notions of curricular content have become the pillars of big business. Given the corporate logic of capital growth, we will most likely see a rapid expansion of tests, not only at critical entry, transition, and exit stages of the education system, but eventually for each subject, and possibly for each grade, in school.

From a business perspective, standards-based education is lucrative because it generates an economy of scale. More specifically, it kills two birds with one stone: first, it enables companies to sell a product (student tests) in large quantity. Second, tests are a “smart business product” because they make it necessary to revise the software of education, that is, all the other items—curriculum, teacher education, textbooks—which precede the act of taking the test. Each of these elements must be reformed so as to prepare the students to pass. As with other value chains, once one link is changed, all the others must be replaced as well. This is the phenomenon we observe in outcomes-oriented reform and the move towards international standards, broadly defined. What we may see in ten, twenty, or thirty years from now are education systems that have adopted, side by side, global reforms from Pearson, IB, Bridge, Cambridge Education, and other business packages in one and the same country.

In the twentieth century, minorities challenged the nation-state for political reasons. In the twenty-first century, global business is the greatest contender. Scholars of critical theory rightfully pointed out that in education, horizontal integration meant in effect assimilation and vertical integration was used to justify the gate-keeping function of education along class, race, ethnicity, and gender lines. Over the past ten years or so, PISA in particular became a global monitoring tool for enforcing the implementation of international standards as defined by a small and exclusive group of OECD experts. As a result, national governments are nowadays

held accountable for the learning outcomes of students in their country. Precisely at a moment in history when neoliberals declared the ultimate defeat of government and the inevitable rise of markets as regulators of educational quality, PISA appeared. Strikingly, PISA has helped governments to reassert themselves as drivers of reforms and guarantors of quality. Among other measures, providing equitable education to all segments of the student population is considered an important feature of effective school systems.

Some global education policies are transferred to developing countries as part of a programmatic conditionality attached to a loan or a grant provided by an international donor (World Bank, USAID, etc.) or an international organization (Soros Foundation Network, Save the Children, etc.). Other global education policies are sold to national or local governments more often than not at a very high price with the argument of spill-over to other non-participating schools. Regardless from where global education policies emanate, the attention of our group of comparative education researchers is on the local policy actors: why do policy makers buy into, or in the case of public-private partnership in education and the global education industry, literally buy global education policy (Verger, 2011; Verger, Novelli, & Kosar Altinyelken, 2012)?

An answer to these kinds of questions may only be given after a detailed analysis of the context. Thus, this group of researchers starts out with observing global trends in education in many countries (large N) but then moves from a huge N (for example, N=155) to a one-country study (N=1). In other words, cultural anthropology is not the only discipline that believes in the importance of understanding culture, context, or systems nor is ethnography the only method of inquiry to understanding a community, a causal web of relations, or a bounded system.

World Culture versus Local Culture Theories

Several scholars in comparative education have astutely described the various paradigms within globalization studies in education. Oren Pizmony-Levy (2012), for example, distinguishes between social researchers that direct their attention to “world culture” and others that explore “local culture” in order to understand globalization in education:

One body of research, which I refer to as *world culture*, argues that education systems are becoming similar due to a top-down process whereby new ideas and models regarding the responsibilities of the nation-state are developed in world society and later adopted by individual nation-states (Meyer et al. 1997). A second body of research, *local culture*, focuses on local conditions that translate and appropriate global ideas into local realities (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Schriewer & Martinez, 2004; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). This latter line of inquiry criticizes the former for being narrowly focused on globalization as an outcome rather than a multifaceted and complex process” (p. 602).

Pizmony-Levy’s noteworthy intellectual project is to demonstrate the complementarities of these two bodies of globalization studies using the example of environmental education curricula. He asserts that global convergence and local divergence of one and the same reform (in this case, environmental education) are processes that are not mutually exclusive.

I agree with Pizmony-Levy and would like to add that the differences between the two camps are primarily a reflection of different units of analysis; with one group focusing on global trends, macro-analysis, or world culture and the other on contextual differences or local culture. As repeatedly shown, the neo-institutionalist focus on global trends is endemic to the type of sociological inquiry pursued by John Meyer, Francisco Ramirez, David Baker and their associates. In effect, it is a disciplinary artifact rather than a fundamental difference in how the process of globalization is explained. For neo-institutional sociologists local variations do indeed exist but are considered irrelevant (expression of “loose coupling”) and simply not

worthy of further exploration. Ultimately, for neo-institutionalist theory loose coupling is the explanation (Latin: *explanans*) rather than the issue that begs for an explanation (*explanandum*). In contrast, cultural anthropologists but also system theorists are keen and able to further our understanding of how globalization plays out, or rather is framed, understood, and used at the local level. In comparative education, for us, an analysis of the global/local nexus requires that loose coupling is not only acknowledged but also analyzed in great detail and interpreted. How a global education policy is translated at system or local level, tells us a great deal about the culture of the system and the local policy context.

Clearly, one may very well be committed to understanding “local culture” from an interdisciplinary perspective, that is, without having to subscribe to the methods and paradigms of cultural anthropology. In fact, it is important to acknowledge that educational systems are also bounded systems. They are meaning-producing organisms that reproduce themselves with a particular organizational logic, mode of regulation, and cultural practices that are constantly challenged by other (sub-) systems within a society as well as by the generalized other in the form of “world society.” Local policy actors tend to resort to world society and globalization at times of heightened or protracted policy conflict. In other words, from a system’s perspective, global governance is a quasi-external force that is locally induced to generate “additional meaning” (German: *Zusatzsinn*) in situations when there is a need for a quasi-external source of authority that could help forge new coalitions. The strong belief in local agency and the commitment to uncovering the power dynamic in a given policy context is diametrically opposed to interpretive frameworks that view global governance as an external force that reigns (or rather “rains”) over helpless national and local governments.

The same sense of active local agency is involved in Katja Brögger’s analysis of higher education reform in Denmark. She brilliantly applies Derrida’s term “hauntology” (2014) to explain why practices and beliefs from the past endure into the present and have shaped the reception of the Bologna process in Danish higher education. In her intellectual endeavor to understand globalization at an organizational level, she demands that we critically challenge “globalisation’s status as a hegemonic macro-narrative, which often leads to atemporal and ahistorical analyses” and immerse ourselves into alternatives to macro-analysis (Brögger, 2014, p. 3).

In line with these two comparative education researchers, Pizmony-Levy and Brögger, and many others, I have made an appeal to bring culture, context, and system back into the study of globalization. By definition, globalization transcends space and time, and from a philosophy of science perspective, we should refrain from using an interpretive framework that merely replicates the very same processes—deterritorialization and dehistoricization—it intends to explain. The macro-analyses of world culture theory tend to focus on many countries and on long time periods. As Brögger has convincingly argued, macro analyses tend to deterritorialize and dehistoricize the process of globalization. In an attempt to avoid circular reasoning, it is therefore important to explore and understand the context and timing of global policy borrowing in as much detail as possible. The case study lends itself for doing so.

Contextual Comparison from an Interdisciplinary Perspective

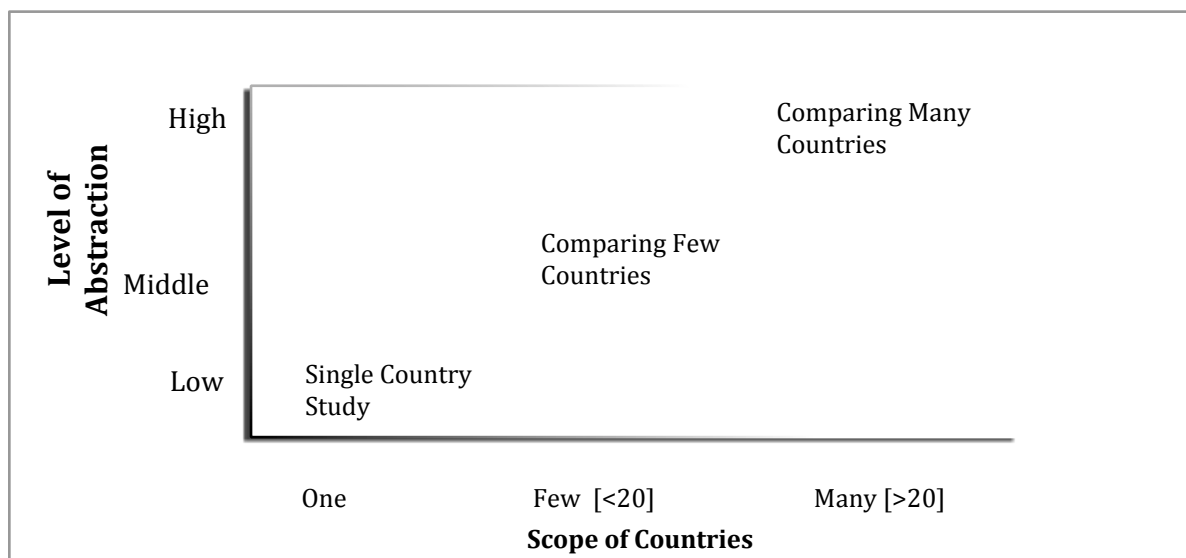
Different from ethnography that is closely associated with the discipline of cultural anthropology, a case study is oblivious to disciplinary boundaries. Comparative social researchers, from Charles Tilly to Todd Landman, refer to the case study as a method of inquiry that operates with many variables and a small sample size, or in the single case study, a sample size of one. The objective of the case study is to understand the causal web and power relations within a bounded system. Needless to reiterate, it is essential to examine the varied actors, sites, and levels of interaction precisely because power is distributed unequally within a system.

The academic question of whether single case studies qualify as comparative becomes moot when considered against the backdrop of studies that pursue contextual comparison (see Little, 2000). Case studies are a *sine qua non* of contextual comparison. It is indispensable to carry out case studies to explain similarities and differences between various units of analysis, whether they are cases, countries, contexts, or systems. Furthermore, a case study must produce a “thick” description” (Clifford Geertz) and is, by definition, both horizontal and vertical. As mentioned above, it draws on many variables and rests on a sample size of one. Therefore, I find the term “vertical case study” to some extent misleading because it suggests that it is possible to produce a case study that is flat or non-vertical (see Vavrus and Bartlett, 2009). Nevertheless, it may be useful as a reminder that the most important feature of case studies is their depth, and ability to explain the causal web of actors that interact in a bounded system.

Whereas the greatest strength of the case study methodology is its explanatory power for a given context, its greatest weakness is its inability to generalize across contexts. For this reason, case study methodology is considered only one of many forms of comparative inquiry. The advantages and disadvantages of case-oriented versus variable-oriented comparative research, as well as between large-N (many countries) versus small-N (few countries) comparison, are accurately presented in Todd Landman’s textbook on comparative methodology (Landman, 2003). Landman systematically discusses the key characteristics of comparative studies that draw on single cases, comparison of a few countries, and comparison of many countries.

Landman presents a figure that illustrates the depth versus breadth dilemma. Figure 1 shows how every increase in sample size results in a greater level of abstraction.

Figure 1. Methods of Comparison



Source: Landman (2003, p. 25)

In my own writing, I used the example of teacher shortage to demonstrate the complementary nature of these three methods of comparison (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). The example of teacher shortage demonstrates that the level of abstraction, reflected in global indicators, creates not only a validity problem, but also an interpretation challenge. For example, the global indicator of teacher shortage that draws on a comparison of *many countries* may suggest a virtually non-existing shortage rate of 0.2 percent in a given country. However, the low rate conceals the fact

that schools in that country must rely on teachers who work double shifts, take on additional hours, or engage in other local practices that help the system to cope with massive teacher shortage. The high level of abstraction found in large-N studies leads to generalizations, as well as speculations or false interpretations.

In a second step, I therefore compared *a few countries or a few systems* and found a divide in teacher salary systems: in some parts of the world, including in the post-Soviet region, teachers are paid by the number of hours they are teaching (Russian: *stavka* system) whereas in other parts of the world, including in North America and Europe, they are paid based on their weekly workload of 35 to 40 hours per week. These two world-systems of teacher salary structure have their own idiosyncrasies or “logic” that explain in great part other policies and practices in the education system including the hiring, promotion, management, and education of teachers. In a third step, finally, we produced case studies using the same comparative framework but allowed for the individual case “to talk back,” that is, were keen on identifying aspects that only applied to particular cases, but not others [3].

As remarked earlier in the context of Tobin’s outstanding contribution, ethnographies but also single case studies suffer from the inverse problem: the attribution problem. Should the findings be attributed to this particular context under study or do they also apply to other contexts? As a result, practices may be falsely attributed to “culture” (or, as mentioned above, to nation) rather than to general processes, beliefs and practices that also exist elsewhere.

Ideally, contextual comparison draws on all three types of comparison. To reiterate the example of the teacher policy studies mentioned above, the insufficiencies of the teacher shortage indicator are found in other global indicators that, by virtue of having to focus on the smallest common denominator across a wide spectrum of countries, gloss over contextual differences. It should be taken for granted that the level of abstraction and, by implication, the magnitude of imprecision and extent of de-contextualization, increases with every additional case, context, country or system added onto a comparative study. In fact, the level of abstraction may increase to the extent that the global indicator becomes devoid of any context-specific or country-specific meaning. It becomes literally *meaningless*.

Field versus Discipline

I began this essay by dismissing the dichotomy between anthropology and comparative education as a false juxtaposition and by proposing instead a reflection on the disciplinary versus the multidisciplinary approach to the comparative study of education. I find it essential that comparative education researchers draw on theories and methods that best explain a phenomenon regardless of disciplinary boundaries. By definition, theoretical paradigms and methods are associated with specific disciplines such as, for example, anthropology, economics, sociology, or political science. Academic fields, such as international and comparative education, borrow methods and theories from such disciplines.

As researchers in international and comparative education we rely on interpretive frameworks and methods of inquiry that, in their original context, were associated with specific disciplines. A multidisciplinary approach is not to be confounded with an approach that suspends or transcends disciplines. A transdisciplinary approach would result in a conceptual vacuum, a theory-free endeavor, or normative research with little explanatory power. It is therefore in the best interest of analytical researchers in fields of education, such as in international and comparative education, to have strong foundation studies or disciplines in education that shape our ways of knowing but also seeing things.

Notes

[1] I use the terms multidisciplinary (involves several disciplines) or interdisciplinary (entails exchange between several disciplines) on purpose synonymously in this essay. I see them as opposites to the term “transdisciplinary” (without or beyond a discipline).

[2] In the 1990s, I was part of a group of scholars, along with Frank-Olaf Radtke, Isabell Diehm and others who advocated for a rights-based approach in multicultural education (Diehm & Radtke, 1999). It was an approach that at the time was called anti-racist education and was at opposite ends to intercultural education that we found to be too apolitical, culturalist and insensitive to social injustices and inequalities (Steiner-Khamsi, 1990).

[3] The UNICEF studies on teacher shortage and recruitment into teaching (ten until now) reflect this triple usage of comparative inquiry. The UNICEF six-country study, *Teachers: A regional study on recruitment, development and salaries of teachers in the CEECIS region*, is especially recommended for a review because the studies were produced in mixed research teams, half of them consisting of local experts and the other graduate students at Teachers College, Columbia University (UNICEF CEECIS, 2011).

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Comments on Tobin's Contribution to Comparative Research in Anthropology and in Education

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Tobin's work has been groundbreaking. Famously, he and his team put together a sophisticated comparative study of three ways of doing pre-school—in Japan, China, and the United States (1989). As such, this study has precedents in anthropology. What is unique in Tobin's work is that he got people from one place to comment on what they saw people from "other" places do, including what these Others said about Them. This is not only a study about cultural difference but, more significantly, a study about what might be called "meta-culture" or "meta-ideology," culture *about* culture, ideology *about* ideology.

Anthropologists have wondered about this but have rarely, if ever, published research that is powerful evidence for the reality that people, even non-anthropologists, can produce culture about culture. Tobin shows that human beings can confront, systematically and deliberately, the grounding of what they do, apparently mindlessly. Much has been written about people acting as if their way was the "natural" way, as if it were a matter of fact that things ought to be done this way rather than another way. There may be many who say such things to interviewers. But Tobin tells us again about something that many anthropologists and other comparativists keep forgetting. "Culture," this most powerful of concept, is not about people becoming blind to the source of their imagination or practices, it is also about the deliberate production of something that responds to an uncertainty ("how are we to teach our young children?"). But all answers are soon challenged. Whether through internal struggles or through its interaction with other people (because of travel, migration, war, etc.) conditions change and new questions keep arising ("should we amend how we teach our young children given what we see elsewhere?"). New productive work is needed, including the work of attempting to maintain what one has been doing. And so history gets made.

I have talked about this process as one of "difficult collective deliberations" (2007), but, in that paper, I was focusing on the uncertainties faced by one set of people, under political controls that make them significant to each others, as they attempt to figure out, often antagonistically, what these controls are and what to do next about them (Varenne & Koyama, 2011). What Tobin has done is show us what can happen when people from different polities, who must work in their daily lives under different kinds of constraints, find themselves having to deliberate about the responses other polities give to similar issues. If a child hits another child in a pre-school, what should their teacher do? If the teacher has not intervened, is this a problem that those in authority (principals, etc.) should be concerned with? Tobin kept asking such questions, and the people kept answering.

Now, this concern with meta-ideology is not exactly new in cultural anthropology, though it has rarely been phrased in this manner. Ruth Benedict (1932) expanded the still developing Boasian paradigm by wondering how it could be that neighboring peoples could have quite different rites of passage even when they knew very well what their neighbors did: "When a loved one dies, how should one display one's grief?" "Should we do anything different if we find out that our neighbors grieve differently?" In principle, this is a version of the questions that concern many in the fields of Comparative Education, for example in Gita Steiner-Khamsi's

work on the processes of policy borrowing (2000, 2012). This is also a version of what Claude Lévi-Strauss meant when he wrote about *bricolage* and refused to analyze myths solely in terms of their local contexts (1966 [1962]). It is a version of the concern with hybridity that is itself a recasting of the earlier Boasian concerns with diffusion and its limits. It is related to what inspires Jill Koyama to write, building on Clifford Geertz and Bruno Latour, about “educational policy as (deep) play” (Koyama & Varenne, 2012).

Tobin, to the extent that he works in this tradition, is not really concerned with “Japan,” “China,” or “America,” as distinct cultures with properties that can then be projected unto individuals making some human beings “Japanese,” others “Chinese,” and still others “Americans.” He is concerned in the processes that lead people to produce what they can be seen actually to produce, in their day to day practices, even when they are fully aware that they could be doing something else. Tobin does write of “Japanese,” “Chinese,” “American” teachers. But his attention is on *pre-schools* and the differences between the “Japanese,” “Chinese,” “American” version of these schools. He keeps warning us that Kamatsudani, Dong-Feng, St. Timothy’s, are not “typical” but that they are “in Japan,” “in China,” “in the United States,” as they appear *at the turn of the 21st century*.

Comparative research continues to reveal enduring differences, including differences in the manners of the changes that can also be noticed, here or there, now or then. But the best versions raise fundamental questions about the production of these differences. Tobin’s work, I believe, is another attempt to reconstitute classical cultural anthropology that this is deeply aware of the dangers in earlier phrasings. It makes a difference whether one writes about “the Japanese,” “Japanese pre-schools,” “pre-schools and teachers in Japan in 2000.” The differences in phrasing are subtle but essential for an understanding of the evolution and impact of the ongoing production of any cultural arbitrary. They are essential in the proper interpretation of the evidence that comparative work in anthropology and related fields has accumulated. As Boas (1887, 1938 [1911]) first began arguing systematically “like causes” (for example the need to take care of young children in ways that go beyond the incidental education they may receive in families or with peers) do not lead to “like consequences” (schools with specific pedagogies and curricula). Even when one takes into account other major matters, like the size of the population, its internal differentiation into classes or occupational groups, its access to various kinds of technology (from irrigation canals to high speed internet), functional needs can be met in any number of ways with further consequences on the historical evolution of institutions and practices. The Boasians pursued this, culminating with Benedict’s epoch-making *Patterns of culture* (1934) that Tobin’s *Preschool in three cultures* (1989) directly echoes—as well as it also echoes another epoch-making study: Shirley Brice Heath’s *Ways with words* (1983). All are towering examples of the power of the comparative method in anthropology.

So, given all the evidence that in “advanced” “industrialized” “capitalistic” or “neo-liberal” polities, pre-school education can be practiced in significantly different ways, what conclusions should we draw? That is, what are the implications that similar practices might be ignored here and sanctioned there? If we say that some practices are “Japanese,” while others are “American,” what, exactly, are we implying? Are we still saying that the practices are different “because some teachers are “Japanese” while others are “Americans”? Or are we now saying something else?

In summary are the observed differences a matter of:

- different enculturation whether through early experiences or through later learning in teacher education programs?
- different historical processes within a nation-state and its policies that have produced now inescapable prescribed routines?
- ongoing bricolage with both the probably differentiated personalities of the people in the school, as well as with administrative or other political imperatives?

In other words, are we to talk about:

- individuals and their culturally shaped identities or *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977 [1972])? Should we search for ways to write about “Japanese teachers” and the impact of their internalized ways on their practices?
- panoptic and hegemonic institutions shaped by a long historical evolution (Foucault 1978 [1975])? Should we search for ways to write about “Japanese schools” and the impact of their organization on the lives of all involved?
- moments of intense work by people struggling with everything that is put at their disposal or stand in their way (Garfinkel, 2002)? Should we search for ways to write about teachers or schools “in Japan” “in the late 20th century”?

As Tobin writes here, the trick for anthropologists is to write about their observations without conjuring an image of “a” culture as a timeless object. The Boasians, of course, were well aware of that what they were observing was a product of long histories. Boas insisted that archaeology be one of the “four fields” that made of anthropology one of the first “multi-disciplinary” social sciences. Some of the critics of Boasian anthropology accused it of “historicism.” In a similar vein, the French traditions associated with Saussure and Lévi-Strauss spring out of historical studies of the ongoing transformation of all languages and other forms of symbolic imagination. But anthropologists, mostly, were not very careful in their formulations. As I argue elsewhere (1984), even the post-Geertzian anthropologists who started the critique of the tendency of anthropology to forget history, wrote about *the* so-and-so as if “they” (the Balinese, Sherpas, American poor people in their sub-cultures) had essentially stable properties through some epoch.

Tobin, to his credit, went back to the sites of his initial ethnographies (Tobin, 2011). He reports, comparatively, on what happened to two sites and can now write, as few if any anthropologists have ever done, on the differences in the *historical* evolution of *both* sites. At Kamatsudani fighting children are still left alone to sort things out for themselves under the detached eye of young teachers. In China, what is striking are the changes. Thus we can now compare and contrast two histories and are led to wonder about the deliberations (controversies, negotiations, shifting of resources) that produce an appearance of stability in one place and an appearance of change in another. Japan might comfort those who imagine culture as the reproductive effect of deeply embedded early enculturation. China stands against this, particularly if we added to Tobin’s evidence all the other evidence, from other sources (Tsang 2000), that shows that China may have had more school policy changes in the 20th century than any other major polity. But China also stands as a challenge to an interpretation of Japan as “conservative,” or “traditional.” It is not only that Japan changed much over the past 150 years, but that even periods of stability must be approached as periods of a particular type of ongoing work to produce and preserve one form of cultural arbitrary in a context of both internal and external challenges to the status quo.

In his inimitable way, Bourdieu once wrote:

1.1.1. Insofar as it is a symbolic power which, by definition, is never reducible to the imposition of force, Pedagogical Authority can produce its own specifically symbolic effect only to the extent that it is exerted within a relation of pedagogic communication.

1.1.2 Insofar as it is symbolic violence, Pedagogical Authority can produce its own specifically symbolic effect only when provided with the social conditions for imposition and inculcation, i.e. the power relations that are not implied in a formal definition of communication. (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977 [1970], p. 7)

What I think Bourdieu is saying is that a teacher, whether or not she intervenes when two children fight, always relies on a specific, rather than general, form of symbolic representation that shapes her ways of relating to the people who may be concerned about the children fighting (the children themselves, the administration, the parents). In other ways she does it within a cultural arbitrary because she cannot rely on a simple "imposition of force" (or rational functionalism for that matter).

So, we are back where Boas and others first took us systematically: We cannot understand human action apart from a robust theory of culture as a matter of arbitrary associations between objects and tasks, as well as the manner of the sanctioning of particular practices in terms of these arbitrary associations. Cultures, in their peculiarities, arise and evolve in history. At any joint they may be modeled but, in the practices of all involved, either in a classroom, a principal's office, or a ministry, the sanctions that attempt to maintain a set of associations require ongoing, deliberate and deliberative work that, at times, will involve metalinguistic, meta-pragmatic, and meta-ideological matters. And so will other attempts to imagine alternatives to their institutionalization and shifts in what is to be sanctioned.

The evidence for all this is overwhelming and we can only get blind to it if we drop comparative perspectives whether within any version of the present and across history. The comparative perspective, in anthropology and the fields concerned with the comparison of education, schooling, and other formal practices, must be the foundation of all theories of human action, including pedagogical and political action. What "must be done" here or there cannot be determined through calls to universalistic rationalism and functionalism. It can always be done different, and, soon, it will.

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