

Changing Educational Contexts, Issues and Identities

40 years of Comparative Education

Edited by

**Michael Crossley, Patricia Broadfoot
and Michele Schweisfurth**

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**This book is dedicated to all members of the
Editorial Board for *Comparative Education*,
past and present**

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Introduction: changing educational contexts, issues and identities

40 years of Comparative Education

Michael Crossley, Patricia Broadfoot & Michele Schweisfurth

Introduction

For more than 40 years, the journal *Comparative Education* has served the multi-disciplinary field of comparative education in ways that have contributed to mutual growth and development. *Comparative Education* was first published in 1964, with the inaugural volume being edited by A.D.C. Peterson. The founding Editorial Board included Edmund J. King and W.D. Halls, and the early cover pages positioned *Comparative Education* as 'a British and Commonwealth journal which is published three times a year, in November, March and June' (inside front cover, 1967). The first publication offices were at Pergamon Press, Headington Hill Hall, Oxford, UK and subscription rates 'for libraries, research establishments and all other multiple-reader institutions' were £3.10p per volume. Individual subscribers 'who certify that the journal is for their personal use' (ibid) paid £1.00.

Volume 1, number 1 (October 1964) was a modest issue, consisting of an editorial, three papers, a selection of book reviews and a total of 44 pages. We have chosen to include this editorial as the first entry in the present compilation not only because of its historical significance, but also given the enduring pertinence of the intellectual and professional foundations that it established for the journal in its opening paragraphs. In this seminal statement, the new journal *Comparative Education* acknowledged the fundamental importance of theoretical and methodological issues, recognised the challenges to positivistic approaches to research in the social sciences and declared its deep respect for scholarship sensitive to contextual and cultural differences. Within the formal 'aims and scope' and associated publication policy, care was taken to demonstrate how *Comparative Education* would also prioritise the application of research and scholarship to the worlds of educational policy and practice. To cite Peterson's editorial (1964, p. 3), 'We hope to serve the cause and attract the interest not only of comparative education and comparativists, but of education as a whole and its administrators or practitioners.'

Setting a tone that has underpinned the character and spirit of the journal through to the present day, the first editorial went on to note that, while the role of education in economic development was increasingly highlighted, and research should do more to address emergent issues:

It may not be possible to establish general theories or even individual principles which have a universal validity, but it is clearly possible for educators in one country to make valid inferences from experience in a number of others. It is as a contribution to this field of practical discussion that we have founded *Comparative Education*.

(Peterson 1964, p. 3)

From the outset, the journal has thus paid close attention to matters of theory and methodology, while simultaneously dealing with the applications of research to contemporary concerns in policy and practice. It is a journal that has engaged with epistemological and paradigmatic differences, championed the cause of comparative and international research and long challenged the uncritical international transfer of educational policies and practices. In doing so, it also began with a commitment 'to present up-to-date information on significant educational trends throughout the world...but expressed in a straightforward way for the general reader as well as for educationalists and students' (back inside cover, 1967). As the first three articles published in 1964 also indicate, *Comparative Education* welcomed contributions dealing with Western and non-Western contexts – systems in the more prosperous nation-states and those in the less economically developed parts of the globe. The first of the three papers, published in 1964, written by T. Balogh, thus focussed on the economics of educational planning in what was then labelled the developing world, while the second piece by W.D. Halls explored similar themes with specific reference to the French experience. For details of the third paper, we invite you to join us in searching the archives!

Comparative education: the journal and the field

In this introductory chapter, we reflect upon the historical development of *Comparative Education*, the journal, in the light of significant changes in the development of the field itself. We explore how the journal and the field have influenced each other over time; how changing times have seen shifts in the contexts, issues and priorities attended to by comparativists; and how the different approaches to comparative education pursued have influenced the intellectual and professional identities and positionings of those involved. The articles that we have chosen for inclusion in the volume reflect changes in a complex, multi-disciplinary history – in a way that demonstrates both the contemporary resurgence of interest in comparative studies and the future potential of this field of enquiry. With over 40 years of continuous publication, selecting a limited number of papers from such

a large back catalogue proved a difficult task in its own right. Had space limitations not played a part in this process, we would certainly have liked to have included more selections. However, if those entries that we have chosen encourage the reader to search further into earlier volumes – possibly using the new online systems – we will have achieved our purpose. Factors that influenced our selection include the distinctive nature and quality of each piece, its relevance to the historical story being told, the diversity of contexts considered, and the range of issues, authors, approaches and time-frames covered. In this introductory narrative, we refer to the issues raised by the papers as a whole, and draw upon some in more depth in considering emergent trends and developments. However, we have chosen not to review each entry as a separate entity, preferring to establish a broader intellectual framework within which the reader can then locate and read each contribution in detail.

We have adopted a partly chronological and partly thematic four section structure to help document the changing intellectual trends and patterns that mirror the evolution of the journal itself. Having said this, it is also clear that while some core themes can be seen to dominate certain decades, others have had a more constant and ongoing influence on the content and spirit of the journal throughout its lifetime. Readers may also be sensitive to the fact that the terminology used in comparative education, and in the social sciences more generally, has changed in both subtle and more marked ways over the time-frame in question. While we acknowledge the significance of such changes for contemporary work, in keeping with our historical perspective, in this introductory piece we remain largely consistent with the wordings used by the various authors in the times in which their work was first published.

Overall, the 22 chapters that are included here span five decades and document comparative and international research carried out by a genuinely international range of writers – many of whom are, or have been, highly distinguished figures in their respective fields. We are also pleased to include selections from two members of the founding Editorial Board – Alec Peterson and Edmund King. In looking across the decades, it is clear that much of the vision that inspired the launch of *Comparative Education* in 1964 remains strongly embedded in the editorial policy and content of the new volumes of the journal that are being published today. Changing patterns can, however, be discerned as we look back over the contents of past volumes, and it is to these intellectual and professional shifts, in both the field and the journal, that we now turn.

Paradigms and positioning

Not surprisingly, the origins of the journal lie in the mid-1960s when creativity, innovation and challenge captured the spirit of the age.

The atmosphere in higher education world-wide was optimistic and buoyant, and growth in the sector was generating increased interest in innovative research and scholarship. The rapid advancement of the decolonisation process led to the creation of new nation states, and many of these saw higher education as a key driver for the processes of national development. Comparative and international research in education prospered as new audiences of policy-makers and planners, and new student bodies (in the North and the South) sought insights from foreign systems of education. The parallel growth of teacher education programmes, designed to support the expansion of primary and secondary provision, created yet more space for the teaching of comparative education. Moreover, the post-Second World War climate was inspired by the potential of scientific and technological advances, and their implications for new approaches to social science research.

The launch of the journal thus benefited from the spirit of the times; it played a part in the post-war revitalisation of the field, and it found a voice in articulating a distinctively socio-cultural approach to comparative and international research in education. In many ways, this built upon context-sensitive scholarship promoted by earlier comparativist historians and philosophers in the tradition of Sadler (1900), Kandel (1933) and Hans (1949). In the 1960s, however, such socio-cultural perspectives were themselves a challenge to the emergent 'scientism' of the day. The latter favoured quantifiable data that offered the prospect of law-like generalisations in the social sciences, and the possibility of the benefits of controllable social engineering. Noah and Eckstein's influential and aptly titled book *Toward a Science of Comparative Education* (1969) captures this perspective well.

The core issues that characterised the journal in these early years thus highlighted the processes of educational planning, higher and secondary education – in the north and the south – and, to a lesser extent, studies of teacher training and the pertinence of selected school subjects. Many of these themes indicate how deeply the founding Editorial Board members favoured the applications of comparative scholarship, and valued a readership that included policy-makers and practising teachers.

Another reflection of the broader intellectual climate at that time, that is clearly visible in the first group of papers that we have selected by King, Parkyn and Stenhouse, is related to methodological approaches to comparative research. These concerns also highlighted the potential of, and challenges to, positivism in the social sciences, and to the purposes of comparative education as a distinctive field of study. For King these were crucial debates at that point in time – being concerned, as the journal was, to maintain and develop the links between academic scholarship, the work of practitioners and applied social science. His own words on this retain much pertinence for the future of the field

today, especially given its current resurgence and growth. He wrote,

If we do not pay proper attention to this latter aspect of comparative education as a social science, other people will. They may not then call their work comparative education, but will nevertheless work over our proper concerns without benefit of our insights.

(King 1965, p. 147)

Comparative Education thus dealt with many of the contemporary issues of the times in which it was founded. But, from the outset, it also challenged the dominant epistemological stances of the day. It positioned itself in a way that anticipated later paradigmatic diversification and the emergence of new forms of context sensitivity that prepared the way for critical theory and the application of post-modern and post-colonial thinking in the field of education. The paradigm wars were, indeed, fiercely fought within the field of comparative education and our early selections provide at least a flavour of that era for present readers.

Other changes and developments in the 1970s played a part in consolidating the position of *Comparative Education* in the intellectual and professional landscape of the broader field. On a practical level, for example, 1972 saw Carfax Publishing Company take over responsibility as publisher with the invaluable personal support and commitment of Peter Kisby and Roger Osborn-King. *Comparative Education* was, indeed, the first journal – the flagship – for Carfax and one that would embody a most productive and creative partnership in the years to come. The journal itself had rapidly moved from presenting three articles in the first issue to a larger scale with approximately six articles, regular ‘Notes and Comments’ and between 70 and 100 pages per issue throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Under the Carfax imprint, a renewed consistency and quality of technical production was clearly evident – and in the mid-1970s, the journal cover transformed from its original green to a distinctive orange that remains visible within the current – and globally familiar – gold design.

The intellectual positioning and profile of the journal was further enhanced by the introduction of regular special issues, each focussing attention on a pertinent theme or context. The first of these, titled *Comparative Education – its present state and future prospects* (volume 13, number 2, 1977), was edited by a then new member of the Editorial Board, Nigel Grant. This special issue facilitated a more sustained examination of the philosophical and methodological debates that, as we have already noted, featured prominently in the early years of publication. Indeed, one of the papers that we have republished here (Parkyn) is drawn from the first ‘Special Number’. This special issue was produced to mark the thirteenth birthday (or ‘adolescence’) of the journal (and the Third World Congress of Comparative Education Societies). It was an issue that would prove to be