

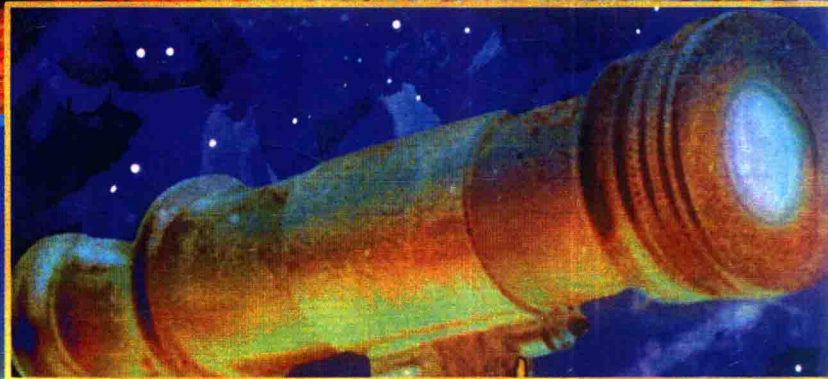
Second Edition

Comparative Education

Exploring Issues
in International
Context

Patricia K. Kubow

Paul R. Fossum



Comparative Education

**Exploring Issues in
International Context**

SECOND EDITION

Patricia K. Kubow

Bowling Green State University

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Upper Saddle River, New Jersey
Columbus, Ohio

*To all educators, worldwide,
who commit themselves to enhancing the lives of students*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kubow, Patricia K.

Comparative education : exploring issues in international context / Patricia K. Kubow, Paul R. Fossum.—
2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-13-171980-7 (pbk.)

1. Comparative education. 2. Education—Cross-cultural studies. I. Fossum, Paul R. II. Title.

LB43.K85 2007

370'.9—dc22

2005021868

Vice President and Executive Publisher: Jeffery W. Johnston

Executive Editor: Debra A. Stollenwerk

Assistant Development Editor: Elisa Rogers

Editorial Assistant: Mary Morrill

Production Editor: Alexandrina Benedicto Wolf

Production Coordination: GGS Book Services

Design Coordinator: Diane C. Lorenzo

Cover Designer: Janna Thompson-Chordas

Cover Image: Getty Images

Production Manager: Pamela D. Bennett

Senior Marketing Manager: Darcy Betts Prybella

Marketing Coordinator: Brian Mounts

This book was set in Times by GGS Book Services. It was printed and bound by R.R. Donnelley & Sons Company. The cover was printed by R.R. Donnelley & Sons Company.

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4

ISBN 0-13-171980-7

Preface

This book aims to widen the influence of comparative education by articulating its relevance to a larger, practitioner-oriented audience. We believe that the comparative study of education is not only useful but also necessary for all people engaged in the educative task. However, few introductory texts are available that acquaint students with comparative education and equip them with the skills to systematically explore the key issues affecting educational policies, practices, and reforms at home and abroad.

Over the past 50 years, the field of comparative education has been moving toward examining education-related issues as opposed to educational systems. This focus encourages researchers to compare issues that affect education worldwide and is also relevant for in-service and preservice educators whose responsibilities are becoming even more challenging due to diverse sociocultural, political, and economic factors shaping the educational landscape.

The educational dilemmas that one society faces are often important issues in other nations as well. Comparative inquiry widens our conceptual lenses so we can see how seemingly similar issues manifest themselves in different settings. Thus, we argue for the development of *comparative perspective taking* as an essential part of teacher professional development. It speaks to the need for teachers to see their world and the education realm from multiple vantage points. It calls to mind different ways of seeing. As educators look outward to learn from other nations and cultures, they are in a better position to view education anew in their own and more localized contexts. The goal, then, is for teachers to use that knowledge—a combination of local and global perspectives—to inform educational decision making.

This book adopts a cross-cultural, issues-oriented approach. Four issues that continue to be at the center of public scrutiny and educational debate within and outside the United States are explored in the text: purposes of schooling; educational access and opportunity; education accountability and authority; and teacher professionalism. These issues are explored in two different countries or regions for purposes of comparison and contrast.

The eight nations and regions studied in this text comprise a diverse and broad set but should not be viewed as a representative sampling of all cultures or countries. Rather, they highlight the complexity and tensions surrounding education and how culture, politics, economics, and social values coalesce to shape the ways that educational issues are interpreted in different settings. The comparative approach helps students identify similarities and differences of the educational issue within unique national contexts, understand the complex interplay of factors that influence it, and exposes them to current comparative literature. These are important as they sharpen analysis of and reflect on their own professional practice.

ORGANIZATION OF THE TEXT

Part 1, “*Comparative Education and Underlying Assumptions about Education: The Comparative Approach*,” introduces students to the field of comparative education and its development and usefulness (Chapter 1) and discusses prevailing theoretical bases that comparative educators have used to interpret educational policies and practices (Chapter 2).

Part 2, *“Education in International Context: A Comparative Approach Applied to Contemporary Educational Issues,”* examines four selected issues, each in relation to two different countries to promote comparative perspective taking. Chapter 3 examines how diverse purposes of schooling shape educational curriculum in Hong Kong and Israel. Chapter 4 examines challenges to educational access and opportunity in Brazil and South Africa. Chapter 5 explores the changing relationship between education and the state and how this affects education accountability and authority in England and Germany. Chapter 6 focuses on different orientations to teacher professionalism and the ways these perspectives affect teacher autonomy and professional development in Japan and the United States.

Part 3, *“Interpreting Educational Issues: Local–Global Comparison and the Use of Analytic Frameworks,”* encourages students to use the frameworks drawn from different disciplines to aid in the systematic investigation and analysis of educational issues. In Chapter 7 we suggest how the frameworks, which were applied to educational issues in various countries, are also effective in helping readers consider domestic and local issues. An innate feature of an issue is that a plurality of responses exists. Because multiple responses are possible for any given question or situation, answers to questions undertaken can yield ambiguous responses. Teachers and teacher educators should recognize these ambiguities and become comfortable enough to move ahead in their practice. Chapter 8 explores multiple conceptions of globalization and reveals how global forces influence schooling’s purposes, access and opportunity, educational accountability and authority, and teacher professionalism.

FEATURES OF THE TEXT

To help students and practitioners reflect on these complex educational issues, we provide analytic frameworks and a systematic method for examination. The frameworks emerge from diverse disciplines and fields (e.g., political science and educational policy) and can be applied to other issues of interest. Designed to foster critical thinking, these frameworks help readers suspend their judgment by drawing on multiple perspectives. This leads to a deeper understanding of the factors affecting an educational issue or phenomenon and helps inform educational improvement efforts. The goal, then, is for students to see that education can be better understood when viewed from multiple perspectives and disciplines.

Each chapter includes various pedagogical features. The **Focusing Questions** at the beginning of each chapter identify the particular aspects of the issue to be addressed. The **Sustaining Reflection** at the end of each chapter serves as a launching point for further reflection. The glossary defines **key terms** that appear throughout the text to help students understand the issues presented.

Biographical sketches of historical and contemporary educators present six leading educators in the field who have used cross-cultural perspectives to guide domestic educational efforts. **Side-by-Side Comparison** describes the demographic attributes, geophysical and economic realities, and sociopolitical factors of featured countries.

This text seeks to (1) broaden the scope and context for examining educational issues through an international comparative approach; (2) increase understanding by examining

underlying assumptions of educational policies, practices, and reforms; (3) encourage multiple perspective taking by viewing educational issues in light of diverse cultural and historical contexts and through interdisciplinary lenses; and (4) employ specific analytic frameworks to help the reader see educational issues in new ways. The overall goal of these approaches and features is to develop teachers' skills in comparative perspective taking, which can help inform educational improvement efforts.

We hope that professors, teacher practitioners, teacher educators, curriculum developers, and school administrators find that this book stimulates reflection and aids their own personal and professional decision making.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are indebted to a number of people who contributed to this book. For helping ground our thinking in the field of comparative and international education, we have benefited from the mentorship and guidance of the faculty at the University of Minnesota, especially Drs. John Cogan, Josef Mestenhauser, and R. Michael Paige. Drs. Jane Plihal, Barry Sullivan, and Marion Lundy-Dobbert have also stimulated our thinking about education.

We have also benefited from discussions in graduate and undergraduate classrooms at Bowling Green State University and the University of Michigan–Dearborn—with students too numerous to single out who have informed our thinking and direction as we embarked on this second edition. The following reviewers gave us important advice: Mary Ellen Edwards, University of Toledo; Francis E. Godwyll, Ohio University, Athens; Lawrence E. Hahn, Wilkes University; Mary Jane Hayes, Austin Peay State University; Bernard K. Hayford, Southern Connecticut State University; Geraldine C. Jenny, Clarion University of Pennsylvania; Todd Kenreich, Towson University; Mary F. Leslie, Louisiana State University, Eunice; J. Lynn McBrien, Emory University; Vincent R. McGrath, Mississippi State University; Kwadwo A. Okrah, Indiana University, South Bend; Carol Anne Spreen, University of Maryland, College Park; and Tommy Williford, University of Georgia, Athens.

Moreover, Debra A. Stollenwerk, executive editor at Merrill/Prentice Hall, and Elisa Rogers, assistant development editor, have been supportive of our efforts.

Finally, we thank Shirley Kubow; Jennifer, Samuel, and Leah Fossum; Mary Kubow and David Kubow; and Richard and Rosemary Fossum for their support and encouragement in seeing the second edition to completion.

*Patricia Kubow
Paul Fossum*

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Comparative Education and Underlying Assumptions about Education: The Comparative Approach

Part I (Chapters 1–2) prepares readers to explore the issues raised in the book.

Chapter 1: Comparative Education

This chapter introduces students to the field of comparative education and the field's history, development, and usefulness.

Chapter 2: Theory in Comparative Education

This chapter discusses prevailing theoretical bases that comparative educators have used to interpret educational policies and practices.

Comparative Education

Focusing Questions

- What is comparative education? What are the benefits of comparative study?
- What is the function of a discipline? How is an academic discipline different from a field?
- Curiosity or interest in the unknown is an important step in getting people to engage in comparative educational inquiry. What regarding education interests you?
- What is “reflection”? What inhibits or prevents one from pursuing reflection?

INTRODUCTION

Nations have long viewed education as an important factor in both individual and societal development. With countries' growing concerns about how they will position themselves on the global stage, schools are facing increasing demands to meet a number of often conflicting goals. Diverse stakeholders' views on schooling create tensions over educational content, instruction, structure, and outcomes. The debate encompasses manifold concerns such as:

- Egalitarian concern for educational quality and the opening of opportunity for more and more students
- Economic concern for equipping students with appropriate workplace competencies and skills
- Civic concern for educating citizens who can participate effectively in public life in increasingly pluralistic environments
- General humanistic concern for developing the whole person through a process of lifelong education

Because of these higher stakes within an increasingly globalized world, schools have come under greater national scrutiny regarding the ways they can contribute to or hinder a nation's progress. Calls for greater school accountability and educational reform in the United States and abroad have led to criticism of the education profession itself. In light of new global realities, educators are prompted to reexamine the purposes of schooling, the underlying assumptions about the relationship between education and development, and questions about educator professionalism.

Although each generation has had to deal with social, cultural, political, and economic factors and their impact on education, educational reforms in the first part of the 21st century will be shaped by debate about how nations should educate students for a global world in light of nation-state allegiances. To illustrate, technology and mass communication are challenging the notion of national boundaries, changing economic relationships, fostering greater interdependence, and challenging citizens to reconsider their loyalties and identities. The question of how technology might affect educational access and opportunity locally, nationally, and globally will need to be examined. Ross-Holst (2004) effectively summarizes the opportunities and challenges associated with globalization:

Knowledge today is spreading faster than at any time before in human history. Complex issues are cutting across traditional academic disciplines. Advances in communications let students anywhere in the world access the best teachers and newest ideas. Students have opportunities once unimaginable to collaborate with peers from other countries in order to gain insight and understanding about those cultures. These new opportunities suggest . . . that educators are more relevant to the project of education than ever before: to scaffold new ways of knowing, to help children and youth reach higher and more complex levels of understanding, and to guide students to achieving greater appreciation for cultural complexity and diversity. (p. x)

To aid educators in a critical examination of education, this text offers an issues-oriented approach to explore, in an international context, selected themes of educational importance. This approach emphasizes at least four premises. First, educational issues rather than educational systems become the centerpiece for critical study. As teachers perform their work they often take for granted organizational systems and structures, and therefore do not necessarily deal meaningfully with predicaments and decisions that tend to shape the professional world of teaching. Second, the central issues are seen as educational dilemmas rather than educational problems. This is appropriate because it focuses on the ways teachers need to seek balance and thoughtful responses for which simpler unidimensional solutions are not available. Third, these issues are examined cross-culturally in order to broaden and deepen understanding of the issues and, in turn, to enable personal improvements of educational practice. Fourth, the text uses analytic frameworks. This helps readers to critique the educational issues systematically.

The enduring yet contemporary educational issues that steer the book's organization include purposes of schooling, educational access and opportunity, education accountability and authority, and teacher professionalism. Expressed as questions, the issues undertaken in this book take the following form:

- ❶ What are the purposes of schooling?
- ❷ What is "equitable education," and who decides?

- What is the appropriate balance between education authority and accountability?
- What factors reinforce or hinder teacher professionalism?

Like the answers that emerge from these questions, an innate feature of an issue is that responses or resolutions are multiple and ambiguous in ways that are never fully resolved. Moreover, the issues themselves are not discrete but overlap and connect in particular ways. Because issues connote debate, clearer identification of and focus on issues provides insights into the negotiation that characterizes modern democracy. The issues undertaken in this text have been and remain at the center of public scrutiny and debate within *and* outside the United States.

The primary rationale, then, for examining educational issues in a comparative manner is to broaden one's perspective and sharpen one's focus. Moreover, educators in different countries view these issues from a different perspective so it is necessary for one to understand them in light of differing cultural, social, and political contexts in each country. We do not advocate, therefore, the wholesale adoption of one country's strategy by another country. Rather, we take the view that awareness and understanding of the *theoretical and philosophical assumptions* underlying educational issues and educational reform in various nations are necessary for thoughtful, informed *educational practice* in each nation.

The countries examined in this text (Brazil, England, Germany, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Israel, Japan, South Africa, and the United States) were chosen as a way to provide diversity and breadth in the exploration of some enduring, important issues in education. The countries selected are not meant to be a representative sampling of all cultures but rather a way for the reader to consider tensions or dilemmas that surround education and how culture shapes the ways in which the educational issue is perceived, understood, and addressed in a particular country. By viewing each educational issue from the perspective of two different nations, readers can identify factors that might be missed when considered within the context of their own countries alone.

Specifically, readers will learn how diverse purposes of schooling shape education in Hong Kong and Israel, how challenges to educational access and opportunity influence schooling in Brazil and South Africa, how the changing relationship between educators and the state shapes education accountability and authority in England and Germany, and how different orientations to teacher professionalism in Japan and the United States affect teacher autonomy and professional development. By examining issues in an international perspective, readers will realize that the issues span national boundaries and that people of every nation wrestle with disjunctures between their societal ideals and their educational realities.

We hope that this text helps readers explore educational challenges in an in-depth, critical way. Through its use of perspective taking in multiple cultural contexts (i.e. issues across several nations) and of analytic frameworks from a variety of disciplines (e.g., political science, sociology, and psychology), the text provides an international context as well as tools for readers to enhance their ways of "seeing" education. Each analytic framework also serves as a freestanding device that readers can apply to other educational issues. Exposure to numerous frameworks can help readers analyze educational issues, and the provision of specific examples demonstrate how the frameworks can be used to systematically critique issues important in education.

IDENTIFYING THE FIELD: A HISTORICAL LOOK AT COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

What Is Comparative Education?

In general, “comparative education has developed as a field devoted broadly to the study of education in other countries” (Kelly, Altbach, & Armove, 1982, p. 505). **Comparative education** draws on multiple disciplines (e.g., sociology, political science, psychology, and anthropology) to examine education in developed and developing countries. Comparative inquiry often leads to an examination of the role that education plays in individual and national development. It also encourages us to question our educational systems and to examine how societal values influence our attitudes toward how we educate. The following questions can help citizens see the disparities between beliefs about the purposes of education and the consequences—intended and unintended—of the education these societies provide:

- Is education a benevolent agent of change?
- Is education a mirror of the larger society, manifesting through its structure, curriculum, and pedagogy inherent inequalities?
- Do educational practices maintain societal status quo?

Comparative education and the critical perspective taking that comparative inquiry affords can prompt deeper examination of the tensions among society, development, and education and the role that citizens, either directly or indirectly, play in the educative process.

Comparative education centers on the study of education from cross-cultural, cross-national perspectives. Trethewey (1976) has stated that comparative education “may take the form of a study of responses in other societies to problems that appear very [much] like the ones you recognise in your own educational system” (p. 2). Although comparative education provides an opportunity to explore foreign cultures and their educational systems, it can also provide a refreshed capacity to appraise a person’s own culture and educational values. The forces affecting education—forces that education, in turn, affects—can be divided into the political, economic, sociocultural, and technological dimensions. By focusing on the tenuous relationships between education and these dimensions, comparative study brings greater clarity and insight to educational policies and practices.

Because of increasing concern over the difficulties nations face internally and externally, education plays an important role in national progress and globalization. Epstein (1983) suggests that comparative education is not just an academic exercise but has practical utility in the reform of schooling. Thus, not only can comparative education deepen understanding through critical questioning, but a practical benefit can be derived from comparative study as well.

Comparison—a process of studying two or more things to see how they are alike or different—gives attention to certain aspects through the copresence of the other (Eckstein, 1983). Comparative thinking and international perspective taking are essential for citizens in a diverse, global society. Comparison challenges students to suspend judgments of those foreign systems that they might derive from their own localized and limited perspectives. Through the development of comparative thinking skills, students should be able to undertake analyses of their home cultures and systems with a more nuanced understanding of the various cultural factors at play.