

**TE 923: Comparative Perspectives  
on Teaching, Curriculum and Teacher Education  
Fall 2004**

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Class meetings: Tues., 9:10-12:00  
Erickson 113  
Office hours: by appt.

*"And if thou appearest to be entirely lost, Compare thyself. Know what thou art."  
--Goethe, Torquato Tasso, v. 5*

*"Comparative research begins, in my view, with a destabilization of self--with a felt need for encounters with difference that invite one to imagine alternatives. While we would not want to abandon the efforts to generate theories and concepts that transcend cultures, we also want theories that address real human experiences. Culture nearly always entails encounter with the unexpected...To imagine culture, then, and at the same time to culture the imagination, is the task of comparative education in the next century."  
--Hoffman, 1999*

**Course Overview**

Comparison is a central part of educational inquiry. This course provides an opportunity to consider the value of comparison for our understanding of education. We will explore a range of comparative perspectives of key aspects of schooling. In so doing, we examine both methodological challenges associated with comparison and conceptual contributions that comparative research offers. In the class we will undertake contrastive analysis of national and local responses to universal questions in education, including questions about the links between education and the construction of identity, the relationship between the organization of curriculum and instruction and student learning, and the nature of teachers' work and knowledge and the support of teacher learning.

This course begins with the assumption that our ability to understand curriculum, teaching and teacher education, and learning is too often limited by our familiarity with education. Comparative research lets us make the familiar strange. The result not only enriches our understanding of educational phenomena elsewhere but also sharpens our insights into our own educational experiences. This course is intended to help each of us learn more about education in our own and other countries.

A second starting point of the course is the claim that discourse about education in the U.S. too often ignores context. Comparative work allows us to consider both the significance and meaning of context. Schooling in any setting is shaped in part by certain regularities; one can argue that these make for powerfully shared commonalities across national and local contexts. Our course can help us investigate what these regularities may be and how these can illuminate universal issues in education. In the process of doing that, we also can come to understand how other aspects of education are greatly affected by context in its many forms. Throughout the term we will explore what constitutes context--politics, economics, social forces, historical processes, culture, organization, and so on.

We will begin the semester by asking why do comparison and how it might be done. To address these, we analyze recent comparative work and review the development of

comparative education as a field. We will explore the possible goals of comparison as well as methodological dilemmas and potential pitfalls inherent in comparative research. We will also consider issues of voice and positionality, particularly as they relate to work that so often constructs the Other for an audience.

After these initial discussions (which in fact we will continue throughout the term), we will begin to explore the ways in which comparative perspectives contribute to discourse about education. In particular, we will spend some time examining debates about globalization in education and the intersection of global and local practices in the construction of identity. We then turn to literature that explores from an interpretivist perspective the roles and different meanings of context in teaching, learning, and teacher learning. Throughout the course we will consider theoretical and conceptual explanations as well as case studies and policy documents that illuminate the experience of education in particular communities. During the term we will also have the opportunity to meet with others who have been engaged in comparative research as well as to work with data to pursue some questions comparatively.

The course readings have been chosen to allow us to explore theoretical debates and concepts in different countries and to consider research that uses a wide range of methodological approaches. We will read about education in a variety of settings. Some of our texts and video materials we will use will give us repeated opportunities to consider education in China, France, Japan, and the U.S. While they don't constitute a central focus of the course, they will give us some chance for shared discussion that draws on multiple and sometimes conflicting descriptions and interpretations of education in a particular setting. These countries offer sharp in ways that can highlight our thinking about the fundamental commonalities in the provision of education and the practice of teaching and at the same time make salient some of the areas in which teaching and learning are affected by context.

### **Expectations for the Course**

I list below the expectations with which I am starting the term. Over the course of the semester we will want to clarify our individual and collective expectations. Consider the following as starting points:

1. I assume that our class is a seminar. For us to learn together, we each need to contribute, and that will require that each of us has prepared thoughtfully in advance and comes prepared with the readings and whatever writing or experience that we will need for our discussion. I assume each of us brings unique and relevant experience and questions to this course and hence I assume we each come prepared to discuss. I also assume that participation involves discussion that is thoughtful, responsible and constructive. As a group we will want to talk explicitly about what we expect from participation.
2. I assume that we all learn by making an effort to articulate ideas and that writing provides valuable opportunities for that. My goal is to provide a range of opportunities for writing, with enough diversity to allow each of us to feel really engaged with the work. My hope is that the writing we do is connected meaningfully to our learning goals for the term and for our longer term scholarly goals. Since our class will include people with very different goals, different substantive interests, and at different stages of their doctoral program, my assumption is that writing assignments will need some tailoring to individual needs. We need to discuss how we might approach this and how we will evaluate our learning. I also assume that writing should be interactive, that it should be offered as part

of a conversation (even if one in print), and that we will therefore want to talk about who our audience is as we write and how we think about sharing our writing.

I propose below a generic model of work that might be required for the course. We will want to discuss this as a class and individuals may want to meet with me to explore ways to adjust these general possibilities to their particular interests. Consider this only as a starting proposal. I urge you to find a way to construct learning opportunities in this class that will connect with other learning you are engaged in and which are rewarding for you.

a) As a seminar, this course relies heavily on the participation of students. The course format will most often be group discussion. I see my role as one who can give background to and facilitate discussion. I will occasionally give mini-lectures, but most often we will work as a group (or in small groups) to analyze readings and the issues they raise, analyze videotapes of classroom practice or other data, or discuss our research. Only take this course if you are prepared to (1) prepare for each class by reading carefully, taking notes and thinking about the material before class and (2) participate actively, thoughtfully and constructively.

You will work with a partner or a small group of classmates to take responsibility for helping me lead one class during the term. This will entail preparing an outline of the readings and questions raised by them, possibly making some brief remarks regarding a particular reading or readings, and then helping to lead a critical discussion of the readings for that week. You will also be expected to provide feedback to classmates on their written commentaries (see explanation below) as part of your responsibility for supporting our learning on this topic/set of readings. You and your partner/group will need to meet together in advance to consider what approach you would like to take to help us grapple with the week's readings and you should meet with me by (at the latest) Friday morning before the Wednesday you are responsible so that we can talk together about how best to organize that day's class. We can use a range of formats to stimulate discussion, and I hope this shared responsibility for class increases the many ways we can come to understand and inquire about the issues in this course. In addition, each of you will have one other time during the term when you have formal responsibilities to present in class, this time reporting on a research project you are undertaking as part of this course. The schedule for presentations will be worked out in class.

b) To help move forward our thinking and discussions, you are asked to write short (1-3 pages) commentaries on the readings most weeks. (There are a couple of "exceptional" weeks when we won't count on commentaries.) These short pieces will consist of thoughtful responses to the week's reading assignment. You need not tell me what the articles said, but you will need to raise questions about the readings, draw comparisons or contrasts, take issue with arguments, vent about things that annoyed or puzzled you in the material, or otherwise demonstrate a comprehension of the authors' positions and some thoughtful reaction to these. You can use these as a great way to help frame our class discussion and, of course, they are helpful ways of letting me know how you are making sense of the readings and the course. Your weekly commentaries should be posted on our class ANGEL site by Monday night (no later than 9 p.m.) the evening before class. You will get feedback from me and from classmates taking leadership responsibility for particular weeks.

c) To encourage you to have the opportunity to work with a broader body of work and to help you hone skills valuable for the doctoral comprehensives, I would like you to write an essay that provides a critical review of two books we are reading as a class. I will provide fuller discussion of this assignment as the time approaches, but briefly, this task

allows you the chance to deal critically with original research, weigh opposing and/or conflicting interpretations of the work, and explore how one makes sense comparatively of educational phenomena. Another major goal of this assignment is to examine issues related to how educational research may have meaning for practice. This essay is due October 21.

d) The most extensive writing for the term will be a research project that you develop. The topic will be of your own choosing but it should be directly connected to issues, readings or debates introduced in this course. All of us will have the opportunity to view and work with some data (videotape, teacher logs, interviews with teachers, student achievement data, etc.). You could choose to develop a project that comes out of this data or you can develop one that draws on work you are engaged in yourself. You can choose to do a library research project, to use some empirical data you have available, to develop a dissertation proposal, or to do some combination of these. You should discuss your topic with me by October 12, turn in a two page prospectus by November 5, a preliminary annotated bibliography by November 23, and be prepared to present work in progress during the final weeks of the term. I encourage you to work in groups as you proceed with your research. The final draft of the paper will be due on December 14. As we begin these projects, we can clarify what each stage requires.

Because I want the work we do in and out of class to be meaningful, it is essential that you be involved in thinking through both the process and substance of assessment of your work. I would propose that you think about how you would like to approach each of these tasks (as well as defining each), and then meet with me to discuss how you want to approach assessment. I suggest you think about the following range of weightings for assignments:

participation	15-30%
commentary	20-40%
book review essay	20-40%
research project	20-40%

### Readings

As a class, we will all read six books and you will choose from options that include three recommended books. In addition you will need to purchase a CD and/or course packet of selected readings. The books are available at Student Bookstore (SBS), 417 E. Grand River (351-4210). One or more copy of each will also be available to borrow from my office. The course packet will be available for purchase from the College of Education Copy Center on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of Erickson Hall.

The required textbooks are:

Robin Alexander, Culture and Pedagogy: International Comparisons in Primary Education. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001.

Kathryn Anderson-Levitt, Local Meanings, Global Schooling: Anthropology and World Culture Theory. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Kathryn Anderson-Levitt, Teaching Cultures: Knowledge for Teaching First Grade in France and the United States. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2002.

Mary Catherine Bateson, Peripheral Visions. NY: Harper Collins, 1994.

James W. Stigler and James Hiebert, The Teaching Gap: Best Ideas from the World's Teachers for Improving Education in the Classroom. NY: Free Press, 1999.

Margery Wolf, A Thrice-Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism and Ethnographic Responsibility. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992.

You will need to choose one of the two textbooks as required reading:

Donald Hones and Cher Shou Cha, Educating New Americans: Immigrant Lives and Learning. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates, 1999.

Bradley Levinson. We Are All Equal: Student Culture and Identity at a Mexican Secondary School, 1988-1998. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.

In addition, you may choose as an option to read the following recommended text:

Clea Fernandez and Makoto Yoshida, Lesson Study: A Japanese Approach to Improving Mathematics Teaching and Learning. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates, 2004.

## **Course Outline**

### **I. Making comparisons: Why and how do we compare things in education?**

#### Week 1. August 31: Context matters

introduce ourselves and the course  
consider the role of context  
what is possible with comparison?

#### Week 2. September 7: How can we make comparison?

Read: Stigler and Hiebert, The Teaching Gap. NY: Free Press, 1999.

In class: view TIMSS videotapes

Write commentary

#### Week 3. September 14: Epistemological and methodological issues in comparison: What constitutes comparison? Why and how do we do it?

Read: Harold J. Noah, "The Use and Abuse of Comparative Education," pp. 153-166 in New Approaches to Comparative Education, ed. by Philip G. Altbach and Gail P. Kelly. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Catherine Lewis, "Japanese First-Grade Classrooms: Implications for U.S. Theory and Research," Comparative Education Review (May 1988): pp. 159-172.

Gerald LeTendre, "The Problem of Japan: Qualitative Studies and International Educational Comparisons," Educational Researcher, 28 (2), 38-48.

Gaily Kelly, "Debates and Trends in Comparative Education," pp. 13-22 and 295-298 in Emergent Issues in Education: Comparative Perspectives, ed. by Arno, Altbach, and Kelly. Albany: SUNY Press, 1992.

Robert Arnove, "Reframing Comparative Education: The Dialectic of the Global and the Local," pp. 1-24, in Arnove and C. Torres, eds., Comparative Education. Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999.

Simon Marginson and Marcela Mollis, 'The Door Opens and the Tiger Leaps': Theories and Reflexivities of Comparative Education for a Global Millenium," Comparative Education Review, vol. 45, no. 4 (November 2001): 581-615.

Write commentary

Week 4 . September 21: Positioning ourselves and the Other

Read: Margery Wolf, A Thrice-Told Tale. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992.

Write commentary

## **II. "Reading the Global": Competing perspectives for considering education, globalization and identity**

Week 5. Sept. 28: Policy and practice as global and/or local

Kathryn Anderson-Levitt, Local Meanings, Global Schooling: Anthropology and World Culture Theory. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Week 6. October 5: Globalization and World systems: Global patterns and the relevance of the nation-state

Read: Carlos Torres, "Globalization, Education, and Citizenship: Solidarity Versus Markets?" American Educational Research Journal, vol. 39, no. 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 363-378.

Francisco O. Ramirez and John Boli, "Global Patterns on Educational Institutionalization," in Institutional Structure: Constituting State, Society, and the Individual, ed. by George M. Thomas et al. Newbury Park: Sage, 1987.

John Boli and Francisco O. Ramirez, "Compulsory Schooling in the Western Cultural Context, pp. 25-38. In Arnove, Altbach and Kelly (eds.), Emergent Issues in Education. Albany: SUNY, 1992.

Mark B. Ginsburg, Susan Cooper, Rajeshwari Raghu, and Hugo Zegarra, "National and World-System Explanations of Educational Reform," Comparative Education Review (November 1990): 474-499.

Thomas Clayton, "Beyond Mystification: Reconnecting World-System Theory for Comparative Education," Comparative Education Review (November 1998): 479-496.

Write commentary

Week 7. October 12: Education, schooling and identities

Read: Loukia Sarroub, "The Sojourner Experience of Yemeni American High School

Students: An Ethnographic Portrait," Harvard Educational Review (Fall 2001): 390-415.

AND choose one of the following to read:

Donald Hones and Cher Shou Cha. Educating New Americans: Immigrant Lives and Learning. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates, 1999.

Bradley Levinson. We Are All Equal: Student Culture and Identity at a Mexican Secondary School, 1988-1998. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.

### **III. Conceptualizing context: Teaching and learning as situated practice**

Week 8. October 19: Comparison as a method for recognizing context

Read: Mary Catherine Bateson, Peripheral Vision. NY: Harper Collins, 1994.

Write commentary

October 21: Book review essay due

Week 9. October 26: Teaching as Contextualized Practice: The Question of Teaching Cultures

Read: Kathryn M. Anderson-Levitt, Teaching Cultures: Knowledge for Teaching First Grade in France and the United States. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2002.

Patricia Broadfoot and Marilyn Osborn, "French Lessons: Comparative Perspectives on What it Means to be a Teacher," pp. 69-88 in Oxford Studies in Comparative Education, vol 1 (1991).

Suggested reading (to be made available) :

Gerald LeTendre, David Baker, Motoko Akiba, Brian Goesling, and Alex Wiseman, "Teachers' Work: Institutional Isomorphism and Cultural Variation in the U.S., Germany, and Japan," Educational Researcher, vol. 30, no. 6 (Aug/Sept 2001), pp. 3-16.

Kathryn Anderson-Levitt, "Teaching Culture as National and Transnational: A Response to Teachers' Work," Educational Researcher, vol. 31, no. 3 (Apr 2002), pp. 19-21.

Gerald LeTendre, David Baker and Motoko Akiba, "Response to K. Anderson-Levitt's Rejoinder." Educational Researcher, vol. 31, no. 3 (Apr 2002), pp. 22-23.

Write commentary

Week 10. November 2: Viewing Teaching Cross-culturally: Settings and Systems

Read: Robin Alexander, Culture and Pedagogy: International Comparisons in Primary Education. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001, Parts I-II (pp. 1-172).

No commentary this week.

November 5: final paper prospectus due

Week 11. November 9: Comparing schools as contexts for pedagogy.

Read: Robin Alexander, Parts III (pp. 173-262).

Write commentary

Week 12. November 16: Comparing Pedagogy

Read: Robin Alexander, Parts IV-V (pp. 265-570). reading with varied intensity, keeping focus on your (minimal) two case countries

Write commentary

#### **IV. Teacher Learning as Situated Practice**

Week 13. November 23: Learning to teach understood comparatively

Readings: Choose one of the two sets.

(on preservice teacher education policy and practice)

Paul Stephens, Finn Engil Tonnessen, and Chris Kyriacou, "Teacher training and teacher education in England and Norway: A comparative study of policy goals," Comparative education, vol 40, no. 1 (Feb 2004), pp. 109-130.

Zellynne Jennings, "Teacher Education in Selected Countries in the Commonwealth Caribbean: The ideal of policy versus the reality of practice," Comparative education, vol 37, no. 1 (2001), pp. 107-134.

OR

(on teacher induction)

Selections from E. Britton, L. Paine, D. Pimm and S. Raizen, Comprehensive Teacher Induction: Systems for early career learning. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Press, 2003.

No commentary this week.  
Annotated bibliography due.

Week 14. November 30: Professional Development: Multiple Perspectives

Read: N. Ken Shimahara, "The Japanese Model of Professional Development: Teaching as Craft," Teaching and Teacher Education 14, 5 (1998): 451-462.

Catherine Lewis and I. Tsuchida, "A Lesson Is Like a Swiftly Flowing River: Research Lessons and the Improvement of Japanese Education," American Educator. (Winter 1998): 14-17, 50-52.

Clea Fernandez, "Learning from Japanese Approaches to Professional Development: The Case of Lesson Study," Journal of Teacher Education, vol. 53, nno. (Nov/Dec 2002): 393-405.



Lynn Paine and Liping Ma, "Teachers Working Together: A Dialogue on Organizational and Cultural Perspectives on Chinese Teachers," International Journal of Educational Research (1993): 675-697.

Recommended reading:

Clea Fernandez and Makoto Yoshida, Lesson Study: A Japanese Approach to Improving Mathematics Teaching and Learning. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004.

Write commentary

Week 15: December 7: Continuing the conversation: Synthesis and reflection on our own journeys

Read: Irving Epstein, "Comparative Education in North America: The Search for Other through the Escape from Self?" Compare (Feb. 1995).

Julie Kaomea, "Reading Erasures and Making the Familiar Strange: Defamiliarizing Methods for Research in Formerly Colonized and Historically Oppressed Communities," Educational Researcher, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 14-25.

Final research presentations in class

Week 16 (Exam week): We may want to meet during exam week to continue presentations and synthesis. We will need to decide on this and identify a time.