Introductions

Reinventing Our Comparisons

De-colonializing, De-alienating Comparative Education for Peace, Justice, and Planetary Sustainability

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Abstract

This introduction explores the trends, challenges, and possibilities of comparative and international education (CIE) as identified by six comparativist scholars and incorporates some of my own work on this topic. The scholars' work had diverse foci; however, the overall theme was CIE needing to (re-)center goals of ending socio-historical oppressions. This is with reflectivity that CIE forms a contested terrain of histories, and too-often current trends, of being political tools for sustaining/intensifying oppressions and dominance over Nature. The authors' calls of CIE for peace, justice, and sustainability were discussed through the following themes with many intersectionalities between the articles: decoloniality, citizenship education that counters citizen/non-citizen othering, globally holistic and planetarily sustainable development and education, and humanizing education that grounds collectivity and de-alienation.

Keywords

Comparative and International Education (CIE) – decoloniality – citizenship education – education for sustainable development – critical pedagogy – Paulo Friere – ecopedagogy

I tell my students at the beginning of every semester that understanding, studying, and researching education is inherently comparative, as we understand anything new to us by comparing “it” through our held knowledges. Comparisons allow us to (mis)understand anything new, including in/non-/formal pedagogies. Paulo Freire (1998a) argued that learning and research emerges from ingenuous curiosities¹ that may become “more methodologically rigorous, progress[ing] from ingenuity to epistemological curiosity” (pp. 35–36); however, the curiosity’s essence remains constant. Thus, it can be understood that the way in which the articles in this special issue (SI) critically compare, analyze, and problematize the trends and tensions of the field is rooted in ingenuous curiosities that have become more “methodological.” Although comparative disciplines are more methodological in their approaches, emergent “understandings” are always subjective no matter how frequently some scholars define their work as “absolutely objective.” The following Durkheim and Lukes (1982) quote is projected on a PowerPoint slide during our class discussions:

When the phenomena can be artificially produced at will by the observer, the method is that of experimentation proper. When, on the other hand, the production of facts is something beyond our power to command, and we can only bring them together as they have been spontaneously produced, the method used is one of indirect experimentation, or the comparative method. (p. 147)

Students cannot (and should not) be born into vacuums to separate them from outside societies for “experimentation proper” educational research.² Unlike an experiment such as measuring gravity in an airless vacuum, comparative approaches form contested terrains on spectrums from being contextually positive or negative, empowering or oppressive, and socio-environmentally just or unjust in their analysis and outcomes of education. This special issue’s articles critically problematize current comparative and international education (CIE) trends that form these contested terrains and their intersectionalities of alignments and conflicts.

As Paulo Freire (1998b, 2000) argued that education cannot be apolitical, research is always political, including CIE work (Assié-Lumumba, 2017; Dale,

1 Ingenuous curiosity is “what characterizes ‘common sense’ knowing... [i]t is knowledge extracted from pure experience” (Freire, 1998a, p. 35).

2 It must be noted that such dehumanizing research described could also not lead to be “artificially produced at will by the observer” (p. 147).

2005; Torres, 2017). Countering research that touts itself as objectively absolute is essential in CIE. Deconstructing the politics and subjectivity to determine the limitations of what CIE research can and cannot say includes problematizing the following: what units of measure and benchmarking are utilized or not, whose voices are heard and not, what epistemological framing are used and not, what previous research is legitimized and not, and numerous other methodological aspects (Assié-Lumumba, 2017; Takayama, Sriprakash, & Connell, 2017). Many CIE scholars, such as Phillips and Schweisfurth (2007), have argued that a “best” education system, which none exists, cannot be blindly replicated worldwide; however this too-often continues to occur. If this was possible, CIE would be simplified to cookie-cutting all the world’s education to such a “perfect” system. As I often remind my students, the world is infinitely complex and messy, making comparative education an endless utopian task of bettering education.³

Deconstructing CIE is essential as the field influences the (mis)guiding of pedagogies, structures, and policies of education. As editors, we asked authors to not only describe current CIE trends, but to make explicit which ones need to be disrupted. Socio-historical residue of oppressive CIE trends that construct and legitimize education to justify socio-environmental violence need to be ended. Early travelers’ who initiated CIE were most often from the West and normalized Western ways of knowing and teaching, mirroring Orientalism framed by Edward Said (1979).⁴ Although such comparisons for meaning-making are largely expected by these travelers’ ingenuous curiosities, comparative work must challenge dominant epistemological notions of education and self-perceived “common sense” that sustains and intensifies hegemony. Numerous CIE scholars (Arnove, 2013; Dale, 2005; Torres, 2009) have problematized what globalizations (*from above* and *from below*) influence ideological teaching that Westernization as the sole endpoint as opposed to globalizations helping to decenter blind Westernization and epistemologies of the North. De/reconstructing CIE is increasingly necessary as globalizations intensify, with global peace and planetary sustainability hanging by, metaphorically, a thinning thread.

Aligning with my arguments given, the articles broadly fall within the following three thematic arguments: decoloniality of education and the CIE field;

3 “Utopian” here indicates goal to reach for but never attained, as Torres and Teodoro (2007) gives the metaphor as the unreachable horizon.

4 CIE began with travelers’ diaries with comparative descriptions of unknown teaching ways and systems to them. These travelers “knew” what they were observing through their own epistemological lenses to determine what was “good” and “bad” education.

widening citizenship education to include critical global citizenship (GC), and reimagining CIE's analysis on solidarity and alienation through micro-to-macro comparative perspectives. Although the following designates specific article to each trend, all the articles incorporate each of these trends directly or indirectly.

1 Decoloniality

In describing the decoloniality of CIE, I return to “common sense” as ‘normal native intelligence’ (Torres, 2011, p. 181) affected by (de)coloniality and globalizations sustaining/countering neocoloniality, and comparative reflectivity. Self-reflection that does not challenge and diversify one's own ways of knowing, especially the epistemologies of the population(s) being studied, merely reproduces, rather than counters, oppressions grounded in one's own epistemologies (Connell, 2007; Santos, 2018; Tierney, 2018). If education is grounded in coloniality, patriarchy, and neoliberalism (i.e., epistemologies of the North), then the education will reproduce these oppressions (Santos, 2018). For example, disrupting Orientalist CIE is essential to cease comparisons viewed solely through Western theoretical lenses and disciplines, benchmarks Western education as “best”, and views Global North to Global South knowledge transfers as a single direction. Continuing to adapt education to hegemonic “common sense” will never end racism, patriarchy, xenophobia, coloniality, epistemicide, and other socio-historical oppressions, but rather the opposite. Michael Apple (2004) utilized Gramsci to eloquently state hegemony's role in ‘saturat[ing]’ our very consciousness, so that the educational, economic and social world we see and interact with, and the common sense interpretations we put on it, becomes the world tout court, the only world.”

CIE that counters neocoloniality and neoliberalism is the subject of Ali Abdi's (Decolonizing Knowledge, education and social development: Africanist perspectives) and Rebecca Spratt & Eve Coxon's (Decolonising ‘Context’ in Comparative Education: the potential of Oceanian theories of relationality) articles. Abdi problematizes how colonial monocentric reconstructions of education and knowledges continue to de-develop many in Africa through schooling, including CIE studies, by instilling Western development as global common sense when speaking of “development”. Education that normalizes top-down, non-locally contextualized “international development” continues coloniality and, if taught as such in CIE curricula, the field becomes a tool for (neo)coloniality. CIE influence on teaching for such “development” (or uppercased “Development” to indicate goals of

hegemony) leads to socio-environmental injustices and violence, and planetary unsustainability (G. W. Misiaszek, 2020a, 2020b). Spratt and Coxon argue for Oceanic theories of relationality in CIE work to disrupt global North coloniality within education. They do not “attempt to reinterpret what the theorists say or to draw explicit comparisons with ‘Western’ theorizing” to not “re-present them from a non-Indigenous perspective”. They emphasize that comparative contextualizing, (un)consciously, are acts of power and politics with comparativists needing to deconstruct their attempts through, what de Sousa Santos (2018) termed as “ecologies of knowledges”. The authors argue how Oceanian theories of relationality, and corresponding “doing Southern Theory,” can counter comparative coloniality in representing a “generative and potentially rich ‘trend’ within CIE”.

Returning to self-reflectivity through reading these two articles, transformative CIE must identify and counter “self-contained intellectual exercise[s] that, in order to be conducted efficiently, must reinforce the separation of the scientist vis-à-vis his or her object of research, including his or her own past sociological knowledge” (Santos, 2018, p. 28). As we reflect upon the oft-touted CIE terminology of (hopefully contextual) “lending and borrowing,” our rational must be problematized endlessly through diverse theories and epistemologies with self-questioning of what is known and unknown, as well as our ways of knowing (Misiaszek, 2019). How we determine what “should” be borrowed must include problematizing the epistemologies and constructs of discipline(s) we make our determinations. de Sousa Santos (2018) argued that “legitimized” disciplinary theories through epistemologies of the North form absences in understanding the world (i.e., “sociology of absences”) which calls for a “sociology of emergences” from epistemologies of the South. What are the absences and needed emergences in our lending and borrowing – *CIE of absences* and *CIE of emergences*? These are key questions for educational comparativists.

2 Citizenship and Development

Many have argued that public schooling is for “development” and “citizenship”. Two articles in this special issue focusing specifically on the later but, as the two articles indicate, both are inseparable from one another. (Neo) coloniality is also inseparable in determining who are our “fellow citizens” and, more importantly within models of social justice, who are “non-citizens” (Fanon, 1963; Memmi, 1967). The authors Yuqing Hou (*Comparative Global Citizenship Education: A Critical Literature Analysis*) and Ratna Ghosh & Xiaoli

Jing (*Fostering global citizenship through student mobility: COVID-19 and the 4th wave in internationalization of education*) focus on global citizenship and its education (GC/E) with, and emergent from, CIE work. Similar to globalizations, GC/E models form contested terrains of the same opposing dualities (Shultz, 2007).

GC/E models grounded in socio-environmental justice posit that no human is a non-citizen because everyone is a global citizen. Hou's article compares and contrast these contested terrains in various contexts across the globe to critically discuss the commonalities and differences of GC/E's socio-historical plurality. The tensions between critical GCE's heterogenous aspects frequently conflicts with homogenous goals inherent to traditional (sub-)national citizenships are discussed through Hou's research as CIE needing to "soften" "hard spaces," (à la Lauren Misiaszek (2020)) for GCE grounded in goals of globally holistic peace, justice, and planetary sustainability.

There are endless ways in which development and citizenship can be problematized within CIE work. COVID-19 is an important one in which Ghosh and Jing discussed, among some other authors. They argue that education mobilities within internationalization allow for numerous possibilities of critical GC, but the politics and associated privileges of mobility also limits/impedes on critical GCE, as well as the complications of COVID-19 initiating the 4th wave of internationalizing education. An overall question is if the world's constructions of education helped or hindered in limiting the pandemic's awful toll, and what roles of CIE influenced education *with/through* globalizations. Ghosh and Jing compare and contrast how the pandemic has affected mobilities linked to GCE successes and failures.

3 Solidarity and Alienation

The last two articles discuss the dualities of solidarity and alienation, and humanizing and dehumanizing internationalization of education. The article *From alienation to solidarity: educational perspectives and possibilities in Brazil and the UK* by José Ernandi Mendes, Elenice Rabelo Costa, Spyros Themelis, and Sandra M. Gadelha de Carvalho compares how alienation emerges from oppressive, neoliberal-rooted education policies in Brazil and the UK. The authors discuss the possibilities of how democratic, Freirean dialogue of oppressive systems within teaching can counter alienation for solidarity. Their comparative analysis of neoliberalism in Brazil and the UK offers insight and possible solutions within these contexts, but also worldwide as neoliberal globalization intensifies.

Laura Servage and Lorin Yochim's article *Internationalization as a moral project: An exploration of the emotions, deliberations, and concerns of teaching faculty* explores the cultural, linguistic, and epistemological diversity of internationalized undergraduate learning spaces from the perspective of teachers. Rather than technocratically analyzing internationalization, Servage and Yochim compare through lenses of moralities. Similar to Peter Kahn and Lauren Misiaszek's (2019) analysis on mobilities and higher education internationalization, in part, through Adrian Holliday's (1999) notions of "small cultures", the authors pose the need for CIE to focus similarly. Servage and Yochim express this as CIE needing "more insightful to reframe internationalization as an emergent project of moral discernment that occurs within individuals, and simultaneously at meso-and macro-levels as these individuals negotiate their concerns toward collective goals and strategies."

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