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Guest Editors' Introduction to the FIRE Special Issue on "The Place and Future of Comparative Education in Teacher Education"


Patricia K. Kubow

Indiana University, pkubow@indiana.edu

Allison H. Blosser

High Point University, ablosser@highpoint.edu

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Abstract

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Keywords

comparative education, teacher education

GUEST EDITORS' INTRODUCTION TO THE *FIRE* SPECIAL ISSUE ON “THE PLACE AND FUTURE OF COMPARATIVE EDUCATION IN TEACHER EDUCATION”

Patricia K. Kubow¹
Indiana University, USA

Allison H. Blosser
High Point University, USA

The teaching of comparative education as an avenue for scholarly inquiry remains underdeveloped. The focus of this special issue, “The Place and Future of Comparative Education in Teacher Education,” is to begin to fill this void as scholars consider the place and future of comparative education in the context of teacher education. Paradoxically, despite increased interconnectedness of nations and peoples, the global environment has not necessarily afforded comparative education equal footing with other courses in teacher education at colleges and universities. In some instances, comparative education is not offered as a stand-alone course, but integrated into an existing teacher preparation and/or advanced education course. Thus, the aim of this special issue—a project of the Teaching Comparative Education Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES)—is to examine the place of comparative and international education (CIE) in teacher education programs in the U.S. A concern is that teacher education programs are not adequately preparing American teachers to educate students with global competence in an interconnected, pluralistic society.

In “Comparative and International Education in Teacher Training Programs: The Case of North Park University in Chicago,” Angelyn Balodimas-Bartolomei argues that although some teacher candidates learn a foreign language, participate in study abroad, and engage in international events, relatively few students in teacher education programs take a course in CIE. Her article discusses how and why CIE became a required graduate level course within her university and describes the specific content and pedagogical approaches used in the course. The work offers helpful insights as to how CIE can be integrated into a Master’s degree focused on literacy, language, and culture. Balodimas-Bartolomei particularly stresses the benefits of CIE courses for teachers of English language learners (ELLs) and recent immigrants, which is one of

¹ Correspondence: Patricia K. Kubow, W.W. Wright Education Building Room 4252, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, 47405, USA; Email: pkubow@indiana.edu

the fastest-growing segments of the student population nationally. English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, therefore, constitute an area where comparative and international educators could, and should, push for the inclusion of CIE courses in these programs of study. Because more school districts across the U.S. are encouraging, and in some cases requiring, elementary and secondary school teachers to obtain ESL education, ESL can be a fertile environment for CIE infusion. Balodimas-Bartolomei succeeds in advocating for how and why CIE can, and should, become a required aspect in schools of education at colleges and universities nationwide.

Olena Aydarova and Sheila Marquardt, in their article, "The Global Imperative for Teacher Education: Opportunities for Comparative and International Education," propose the inclusion of conceptually rigorous CIE courses in teacher education curriculum. For the authors, this means abandoning CIE courses that center on national comparisons, and instead focusing on courses that critically examine neoliberal trends in the global economy, the influence of international assessments and transnational organizations in education, and the power dynamics of self and Other. Even for the few teacher licensure candidates who complete a study abroad experience, there is no guarantee that such trips will develop students' cultural understandings or global awareness without coursework that helps them incorporate cultural knowledge and international learning into their future classrooms. Aydarova and Marquardt contend that, due to heavily regimented and regulated teacher education programs, one of the only places where it becomes possible to integrate CIE is in a multicultural education course. The authors assert that CIE courses can help teachers understand educational innovations and become better adept at working with immigrant populations in U.S. schools. An important aspect of such an education is to help pre-service teachers "to distinguish between various deployments of globalization discourses."

In her article, "Reflection on Building 'Glocal' Competence among Pre-service and In-Service Teachers," Wangari Gichiru states that her intent is to expose students to "critical educational democratic struggles" through the integration of local and global dynamics in her international and comparative education courses at a university in the eastern U.S. Drawing upon the Freirian tradition, Gichiru acquaints students with contexts of educational struggle rather than educational success to emphasize how social inequalities (based on race, gender, class, nationality, and religion) "are not easily interrupted" by powerful global forces. The goal of such inquiry is to help students see themselves as global citizens who possess power to act on social issues and interrupt forms of social inequality. She asserts that a concerted effort is needed on the part of instructors, including comparative and international educators, to look beyond their own viewpoints and assumptions while simultaneously recognizing that instructors' own backgrounds and experiences can be thoughtfully drawn upon to enrich and underscore CIE concepts and perspectives. Curriculum choices and democratic pedagogy can help pre- and in-service teachers to compare their own educational and cultural understandings with the ways education is addressed in other countries. Such comparative perspective taking can develop in teachers—and those they teach—a global-local or 'glocal consciousness' to inform education and stimulate social change.

Payal P. Shah and Kara D. Brown draw upon the concept of 'grafting' derived from agricultural and medical sciences to explicate their pedagogical strategies to internationalize teacher education at a southern U.S. university. In their article, "Grafting: Making Space for International and Comparative Education in a Pre-service Teacher Social Foundations Class," the authors' method was one in which students could utilize international examples as they deemed necessary and appropriate to gain a better understanding of educational policies and issues. An

encouraging finding, according to the authors, is that “students will voluntarily ‘take up’ the comparative and international if curricular and assessment space is provided.” Their method of grafting CIE concepts onto an education course seems to be an approach that could be replicated and the payoff substantial. Applying the grafting strategy in a required, undergraduate social foundations of education course may help to ensure that CIE perspectives are integrated into pre-service teacher education.

All of the authors in this special issue agree that now is the time to push for the inclusion of CIE in undergraduate and graduate teacher education programs of study. Aydarova and Marquardt assert that the time is ripe because the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation is now requiring that licensure programs prepare educators who can engage students with global issues. Similarly, two contributors, namely Balodimas-Bartolomei and Gichiru, see that the increasing percentage of immigrants to the U.S. could help provide a rationale for offering CIE courses in teacher preparation programs. All of the contributors also described the numerous benefits that exposure to CIE concepts affords teachers, including (but not limited to): the ability to practice critical reflexivity; the recognition that context matters for schooling and educational equity; the importance of cultivating an understanding of global citizenship and human rights; and the need for enhanced awareness of the power differentials that exist between self and Other.

But perhaps what will resonate most with policy makers is that CIE concepts learned in both specialized and integrated or grafted courses can find their way into school classrooms and make teachers better at their craft. That is, dare we say it, that there are pragmatic benefits of exposing teachers to CIE. Balodimas-Bartolomei, for example, found that the introductory CIE class helped the teachers to better meet the needs of their immigrant students. One teacher she surveyed specifically mentioned that the course encouraged her to research the education system of Pakistan, the home country of one of her immigrant students. After realizing that her colorful and boisterous classroom might be over-stimulating to this student, the teacher allowed the student and his parents to explore the classroom without other students present so as to ease his transition to school. We, as Co-chairs of the CIES Teaching Comparative SIG, believe it is necessary to emphasize such benefits for the purposes of securing a place for CIE in teacher education. That does not mean, however, that we encourage reorienting CIE courses away from the field’s philosophical and ethical orientation, a point we develop in “Multicultural Education is Not Enough: The Case for Comparative Education in Preservice Teacher Education” in our edited book, *Teaching Comparative Education: Trends and Issues Informing Practice* (Kubow & Blosser, 2016).

Similarly, all of the contributors to this FIRE special issue maintain that CIE courses can help develop teachers into change agents. Specifically, the authors believe that CIE concepts and courses can prepare teachers to resist, and offer alternatives to, neoliberal policies and practices. There is an abiding sense among these authors that neoliberal education regimes are not inevitable, especially if we can motivate educators to take action against them. As Aydarova and Marquardt contend, CIE courses must “prepare teacher candidates to reconsider their position in the world in such a way that they would be able to contest and challenge the discourses of education for global competition that have become the new ‘common sense’ (Kumashiro, 2009) of educational reforms.” Likewise, in the introduction to our book, *Teaching Comparative Education: Trends and Issues Informing Practice* (Kubow & Blosser, 2016), we argue that “there is need for agentic practice on the part of comparative educators to mirror CIE’s agentic theoretical perspectives, positions, and aspirations” (p. 17).

This FIRE special issue speaks to some of the pedagogical approaches and materials that instructors have found useful in the teaching of international perspectives on education to pre- and in-service teachers, as three of the four articles include specific syllabi, methods, or assignments for teaching CIE. Scholarship and reflection on comparative teaching practice is modeled by the contributing authors who view a central purpose of their courses to be the development of critical thinking and the questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions about school and society in the U.S. and abroad. We are encouraged that CIE concepts are finding their way into U.S. university classrooms as noted in the teacher education programs in the Midwestern, Southern, and Eastern part of the U.S. that compose this issue. The authors are also forthcoming with some of the challenges to integrating CIE into teacher preparation and advanced levels of teacher education. The goal is that teacher education programs help to prepare teachers to see the connections between global processes and local change.

Two of the issue's four articles (i.e., Shah & Brown and Aydarova & Marquardt) advocate for the inclusion of CIE at the undergraduate level. Aydarova and Marquardt make the case for including CIE courses in teacher preparation programs. Shah and Brown, conversely, recognize that teacher licensure programs are already "oversubscribed" with courses and competencies and describe how they worked within the existing program of study at their institution to "graft" CIE concepts onto a required, undergraduate social foundations course for pre-service teachers. The other two authors (i.e., Gichiru and Balodimas-Bartolomei) describe their approaches to and the benefits of graduate level introductory CIE courses. The introductory CIE course that Gichiru teaches is one of several electives graduate students in education programs can take, while Balodimas-Bartolomei's course is required for students seeking ESL/bilingual endorsements as part of the Master of Literacy, Language, and Culture Degree Program at North Park University. From our own experiences at our respective universities and the experiences of these authors herein, it is clearly easier to make room for a CIE course at the graduate level. But contributions to this special issue, coupled with discussions at the Teaching Comparative Education SIG's highlighted sessions at CIES 2016, offer evidence that there is an increasing need for dialogue around the inclusion of CIE courses at the undergraduate level.

Finally, we would be remiss not to mention that all of the contributors to this special issue are female. The inclusion of female voices in CIE research and discourse is of particular importance to us. We are encouraged that these women are willing, by virtue of contributing to this issue, to publically advocate for CIE in teacher education. The issue, therefore, demonstrates a clear interest in sharing strategies for teaching comparative education and endeavors to address such interests.

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About the Authors

Patricia K. Kubow is Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Indiana University-Bloomington, where she is Director of the Center for International Education, Development and Research. Kubow's co-authored textbook, *Comparative Education: Exploring Issues in International Context*, is used in schools of education worldwide. Her recent co-edited book, *Teaching Comparative Education: Trends and Issues Informing Practice*, is part of the Oxford Studies in Comparative Education series published by Symposium Books. Kubow was also a founding member and Co-chair of the Teaching Comparative Education Special Interest Group for the Comparative and International Education Society. Her research interests focus on democratic identities of marginalized populations in schools in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. Kubow's research interests also include indigenous knowledge and cross-cultural pedagogies, teacher education and policy, and the teaching of comparative and international education. Her international work has received national recognition by The White House/the President of the U.S. and the U.S. Agency for International Development. She has also received scholarly research awards from the American Educational Research Association and the Association of Teacher Educators.

Allison H. Blosser is Assistant Professor of Education in the Department of Leadership Studies at High Point University in North Carolina. She co-edited the book, *Teaching Comparative Education: Trends and Issues Informing Practice*, part of the Oxford Studies in Comparative Education series published by Symposium Books. She was also a founding member and Co-chair of the Teaching Comparative Education Special Interest Group for the Comparative and International Education Society. Her research interests include the teaching of comparative education, multicultural education, private schools, and the global proliferation of school choice and market-based educational policies.