

Comparative Education at Vanderbilt

Executive Summary

Because there are many competing concepts of comparative education, no comparative education program can be successful unless choices are made in content emphasis and organizing principle. This note describes the choices made at Vanderbilt and the reasons for their success.

Background

Unlike economics, sociology or psychology, comparative education is not simply a discipline applied to schools and universities. Comparative education utilizes methods from each of the social sciences and with one *ex ante* preference --that of comparison. But comparison means different things. To some it means that samples are required from two nations. Others insist that it means samples from different cultures. And to some, it may mean samples from two points in time. The complexity of these issues may help explain why university-based programs in comparative education are often characterized by a lack of consensus and lengthy debate over identity.

Comparative education is frequently associated with international education. The two are not the same. While comparative education advances our understanding of education through comparative research, international education as an endeavor, is normative; it helps develop attitudes of tolerance and understanding of different cultures (Epstein, 1994). Much of the effort to infuse human rights and principles of equality into a national curriculum and to influence the training of teachers on issues of world peace can be characterized as part of international education.

Comparative education is also associated with Education in Developing Countries (also known as Development Education). This specialization emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the growth of independent countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Many university-based programs concentrated on education in these countries which were characterized by poverty, the need for nation- building and a predominance of development assistance agencies as conduits for education policy dialogue. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, for instance, The University of London maintained two separate academic departments, one for the Study of Education in Developing Countries and another for Comparative Education. The former might cover education in Ghana; the latter might cover education in Germany, Europe or the Soviet Union. The feeling was that these regions constituted ‘fields’ so divergent that it necessitated autonomous academic structures.

In the 1960s the field of comparative education benefited from critical assistance from the Ford Foundation. Purposes were mixed. One objective was ‘to mature’ the application of social science principles to new phenomena. It was also intended to build capacity in understanding education in critical regions such as sub-Saharan Africa where prior experience was thin. The Ford Foundation was responsible for the Comparative Education Center at the University of Chicago. This center was a leader in the field of comparative education for several decades and today represents an important precedent.

Two of the four faculty at the Center held joint appointments, one with sociology, the other with economics. Comparative education courses were cross listed with economics and sociology. Each scholar in comparative education was a leader in the social sciences. Mary Jean Bowman was among the leading human capital economists. C. Arnold Anderson served as the chair of the University of Chicago Department of Sociology as well as editor of the *American Journal of Sociology*. Philip Foster and Robert

Myers were also well known in the social sciences and published in leading social science journals. The model of the Comparative Education Center implies a respect for the work of Comparative Education as an arena for the social sciences analogous perhaps to social science applications in epidemiology, demography or migration.

Multiple definitions of an academic field make diversity in program delivery inevitable. Comparative education programs emerged at UCLA, USC, Stanford, UC Santa Barbara, Washington, BYU, Michigan, Michigan State, Indiana, Harvard, Teachers College, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania State University, Florida State and many other universities, each different from the others. Programs situated at Harvard, Florida State and Indiana were dominated by the program evaluation contracts which had been won from USAID and other development assistance agencies. The characteristics of comparative education at Stanford included a 'critical perspective' on governmental institutions in conjunction with faculty who saw themselves as Marxian social critics. Most programs encouraged students to take comparative education courses in an atmosphere of exclusion from the normal concerns of graduate students interested in problems within the US. Comparative education programs were often 'compartmentalized', with minimal student contact with the main functions of the school of education. Finally some Comparative Education programs tend to see themselves as representing under-appreciated social science paradigms. In a recent speech to the members of the Comparative and International Education Society for instance, the president provided a list of the perspectives which are needed in Comparative Education today at the University of Maryland. They include:

participatory, action, feminist, indigenous, critical, critical ethnography, and critical race' which study 'dependency, world systems, critical, neomarixt, progressive economic, economic reproduction, cultural reproduction, resistance, feminist standpoint, gender and development, socialist feminist, critical race, queer, intersection, critical postmodern, post structural, postcolonial, and critical pedagogy (Heyneman, 2008).

In two ways, comparative education at Vanderbilt has defined itself differently than other comparative education programs. Its organizing principle is derived not from the demands of university faculty but rather by the priorities determined by the fields of policy and practice. Course content is determined by questions arising from ministers of education, from school teachers, from policy analysts. If they consider it a problem it is relevant to our course of study.

Second, at Vanderbilt comparative education is integrated with US higher education management and with US school administration. Theories and problems emanating from the US are considered to be important foci for anyone studying comparative education.

Comparative Education at the Doctoral Level

These two factors help explain why LPO has identified comparative education as one of four core required courses for all doctoral candidates. The other courses include Economics, Sociology and Political Science. No other American graduate

school requires graduate students of domestic education policy and programs to study comparative education. Because it is not 'ghettoized' but designed to fit the needs of all graduate students, the content of the comparative education courses adhere to specific criteria. Among them:

- The information must provide a wider laboratory on which to observe the consequences of different domestic policies and practices. Examples include important debates over school choice, performance pay, and national testing
- That by studying the challenges and successes of other parts of the world the information helps define what is realistic in terms of domestic education policy. For instance, access standards to higher education in Europe is approaching that of the US and students with higher education opportunity have changed, the question arises as to how European universities now handle low performing students and whether their programs have domestic application.
- That comparative education introduce concepts which may have been overlooked domestically. For instance, by studying the federal role in education in Germany, Australia and Canada students at Vanderbilt are better able to assess the kinds of education policies appropriate not just to central governments but to central governments in a federal structure.
- That the information raise important questions or challenge long-held assumptions which may not have been challenged using domestic sources of information alone. For instance, classes at Vanderbilt take time to analyze school achievement by children of wealthy and poor families in different parts of the world and to better understand the degree to which findings from the U.S. are universal.

- That comparative education may elicit results which were not anticipated but nevertheless have high value. For instance, by studying curricula from other nations, Americans are able to better understand that curricula in math and the sciences often lacked depth and sufficient reinforcing mechanisms.

Comparative education courses are organized differently for different students. The EdD course is application-oriented and geared toward those who will be senior managers. The PhD course is theory oriented and geared for those who will be new academic leaders. All doctoral courses follow the characteristics mentioned above. Current courses cover seven topics, each believed to be essential for future education scholars and policy managers:

- *Education and its purposes* The origins of public education are reviewed including the history of why nation states sponsor public schools. It includes a discussion of the mechanisms by which a common experience and philosophy manifest themselves, and current challenges to their success.
- *Education and human capital* This includes a review of the economic principles for making investments in human capital and the evidence of the effectiveness of those investments. Unlike courses in economics, the comparative education discussion includes the politics of economic policy implementation (see below).
- *Choice, efficiency and professionalism* This covers issues of school effects and whether findings from the United States and other OECD countries can be generalized. It includes issues of what makes a difference in terms of school effects and debates over demand versus supply side policy

interventions. Because comparative education information includes school effects from developing as well as OECD countries the variation in effect is considerably greater than within the US alone, hence the discussions over ‘what works’ is more fruitful.

- *The nature of international education statistics* This is a review of the political history of international education statistics over the last thirty years.
- *The role of international comparisons in education policy.* This discussion covers the use of international tests of academic achievement and the debates surrounding their use.
- *The politics of education policy analysis.* This discussion covers the use of scientific (usually economic) models and the implications of their application to public policy. It concentrates on the debate over basic and higher education in international development as an illustration of how evidence-based policy can backfire politically.
- *The role of education in international trade and education philanthropy.* This discussion includes questions of foreign aid, international targets for achieving Education-For-All, the global growth in the for-profit education industry and the issues of how education should be treated by the U.S. and other countries through the World Trade Organization.

Comparative Education at the Masters Degree Level

Comparative education is offered through the masters degree program called International Education Policy and Management (IEPM). The IEPM program combines K – 12 and higher education issues and prepares students to work on education policy and strategic planning in a wide variety of domestic and international organizations. Students emerge with an understanding of how different organizations – bilateral, multilateral, NGO – operate; how they are financed; how their mandates and governance structures determine their approaches. The IEPM program also helps enhance an understanding of the education system within the U.S. by means of systematic comparison with other countries. Because of faculty expertise and interests, heavy emphasis is placed in the role of the school or the university in influencing community social cohesion.

The two year IEPM program prepares students for a range of career paths where their academic training can be applied within a broad international context. This may include working with global non-governmental organizations, international programs within higher education institutions and a variety of bilateral and multilateral development assistance agencies. The IEPM program is five years old. Demand is rising rapidly. The 15 incoming IEPM students in 2008 are evenly split between American and citizens of other countries. All graduates have done well. Some have returned to their universities of origin in other countries and have quickly been drafted into managerial positions. Some have returned to their country of origin and have entered their Ministry of Education at a senior level. Several have become staff members of the World Bank. Nine or ten have continued their graduate studies either in law school or in PhD programs. Several have joined international development organizations such as Save the Children, UNICEF

and USAID. Several have taken up managerial positions in U.S. universities in charge of Study Abroad.

Comparative education at the undergraduate level

The second most popular undergraduate major at Vanderbilt is Human and Organizational Development (HOD). Each HOD student is associated with a specialized track. The fastest growing is the 'international track'. Sixty five undergraduates are currently studying education in an international context. The students are taught many of the same theories of comparative education as available on the graduate level. In addition these are incorporated into a broader set of issues beyond schools and universities. These include community welfare and health organizations, the nature of effective leadership in NGOs, and the characteristics of effective organizations. The undergraduates are also offered the opportunity to study abroad in a range of unique sites designed to reinforce their academic preparation.

Summary

By the nature of the discipline, no comparative education program can exist unless choices are made in content emphasis and organizing principle. At Vanderbilt we have chosen to design comparative education at the doctoral level as a mechanism to assist the American school principal and the American university administrator in the same way as we have designed courses in political science, economics and sociology. We have structured the comparative education courses and philosophy to assist scholars who compete in the domestic education market. We have designed comparative education so that what is taught will be useful for our graduate students whether they enter the academic world, school administration or university management.

At the master's degree level we have designed comparative education as a preparation for mid-level analysis and program implementation whether within an individual university, an NGO or a government agency. And at the undergraduate level we have designed comparative education to launch students into the program and operation world of education and development.

At the same time, we have structured our courses and philosophy to assist international students to return to their countries armed with state of the art techniques and policy experience so that they may play useful roles in the World Bank, government, academia, foundations and individual educational institutions.

References

Heyneman, S. P. 2008 “A Luta Continua: the Presidential Address of Steven Klees” *CIES Newsletter* (May), 2008.

Epstein, E. 1994 International Education in Husen, T. and Postlethwaite, N. (eds.) *International Encyclopedia of Education* Oxford: Pergamum Press, New York Elsevier Science. Pp. 918 - 919

Vanderbilt International Education Courses 2008 – 2009

Course Title	Course Code (s)
UNDERGRADUATE:	
◆ Global Dimensions of Community Development	HOD 2400
◆ Leadership and Change in International Organizations	HOD 2410
◆ International Organizations and Economic Development	HOD 2420
◆ Education and Economic Development	HOD 2430
◆ International Innovations in K-12 Policy Reform	HOD 2440
◆ International Feildschool in International Education	HOD 2460
◆ International Leadership and Development Seminar	HOD 2480
◆ Special Topics in International Leadership and Development	HOD 2490
◆ VISAGE: Education, Social Cohesion and Economic Development in South Africa (Special Topics Code at present)	HOD 2490
GRADUATE:	
◆ International Organizations and Economic Development	LPO 3385
◆ International Issues in K-12 Education	LPO 3512
◆ Education and Economic Development	LPO 3640
◆ International Issues in K-12 & Higher Education (Ed.D only)	LPO 3680
◆ International Issues in Higher Education	LPO 3740
◆ Global Dimensions in Community Development	HOD 3640
◆ Ethnographic Research Methods in Communities (Varying international emphasis)	HOD 3450
◆ Field school in Intercultural Education 3460	HOD

(Varying international emphasis)

UNDERGRADUATE & GRADUATE:

- ◆ Organizations and Social Cohesion (Special Topics) HOD 2880
- ◆ Education and Change in Sub-Saharan Africa (Special Topics) HOD 2880
- ◆ International Business Leadership (Special Topics) HOD 2880

International Education Policy Management

The International Education Policy Management concentration is designed for those who intend to build an academic career dedicated to the study of education and its effect on social and economic development. It prepares you for a career in university scholarship or to take an analytic leadership role in a development assistance agency or international education foundation.

In addition to acquiring expertise in the analysis of education problems in other countries, students are trained to use international analysis as a tool for responding to educational and social problems emanating from within the United States. Building on LPO's considerable intellectual capital in school administration and higher education leadership, IEPM incorporates course requirements in both K-12 and Higher Education programs but benefits from independent work on human capital, international organizations, and trends in education policy reform often utilizing international data bases. The IEPM program emphasizes a rigorous training in social scientific methods, both quantitative and qualitative, including economics, sociology and political science. Students have the choice of applying this training to the study of [OECD](#) or developing countries.