

COMPARATIVE EDUCATION: The Construction of a Field

Despite its long history and widespread institutionalisation into university courses, professional societies, and specialist publications, questions about the nature of comparative education remain. That comparative education is *institutionalised* as a distinct area of inquiry does not necessarily imply, much less justify, its *intellectual* legitimacy as an independent field.

I address the problem of why the intellectual and the institutional trajectories of this field diverge. I contend that comparative education is a field constructed not purely based on cognitive criteria, but also by power relations associated with social structures and human agency, and discourse.

Employing sociological analysis and philosophical argumentation, I examine the literature on the field's intellectual definitions and institutional histories in English, Spanish, Chinese and French, obtained mainly from three international surveys covering 52 countries, and triangulated by interviews with 28 comparative education society leaders and participant observation.

This research demonstrates that the institutional and intellectual forms of comparative education diverge due to the dialectic between factors of structure-agency and epistemology. The field of comparative education is thus constructed through the interaction of sociological and epistemological forces which comparativists codify into the discourses on and institutions of comparative education. When appropriate combinations of intellectual and institutional legitimacy coalesce, a relatively sustainable field emerges.

This study elucidates the power-knowledge relations shaping academic fields, and the positional nature of institutional histories and intellectual definitions. It probably represents the first globally comparative analysis of what comparative education is, offering a holistic framework for understanding its shaping by sociological and epistemological forces.

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Maria Manzon is a Research Associate of CERC, HKU and former Assistant Secretary General of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies. Her publications include two edited books: *Comparative Education at Universities World Wide*, Charl Wolhuter, Nikolay Popov, Maria Manzon & Bruno Leutwyler (Eds.) (2008), 2nd ed., Sofia: Bureau for Educational Services, and *Common Interests, Uncommon Goals: The Histories of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies and its Members*, Vandra Masemann, Mark Bray & Maria Manzon (Eds.) (2007), Hong Kong/ Dordrecht: CERC/Springer. She is Editor of *CIEclopedia*, an online 'who's who' database for comparative and international education founded by Teachers College, Columbia University and currently hosted by CERC at HKU in co-sponsorship with major universities worldwide.

12.45 – 14.00
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G01 Hui Oi Chow Science Building, HKU
All are welcome!

**Please be reminded that the CERC AGM
will be held at 12:15, prior to the seminar!**



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