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COMPARATIVE EDUCATION RESEARCH: Approaches and Methods. Edited by Mark Bray, Bob Adamson and Mark Mason. Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, University of Hong Kong: Springer, 2007. xv, 444 pp. (Tables, figures.) US\$38.00, paper. ISBN 962-8093-53-3.

Comparative educationists have long been occupied with the task of how to define their field and set it apart from – or link it with – other fields of study. This volume can be seen as yet another attempt to assess the potential of a field that is marked by the overlap of disciplines. As can be expected, the result is less a systematic presentation of a discipline than a colourful potpourri of various approaches, methods, and, one may add, world views – with frequent references to the Chinese context. On the one hand, this may disappoint those who were hoping for another milestone among the classics that represent the field of comparative education and that are briefly discussed in the introduction. On the other hand, this mirrors faithfully the diversity and also tensions within the field.

The different chapters cover a wide range of topics: actors and purposes, quantitative and qualitative approaches, and various units of comparison (such as places, systems, times, cultures, etc.). The contributions vary in character and purpose: while some present overviews of how research in comparative education can be and is actually done – like Bray's chapter on actors or Postlethwaite's and Leung's chapter on 'comparing educational achievements' – others reflect critically upon taken-for-granted concepts within educational research. For example, Yang Rui investigates the concept of 'policy', emphasising the 'conflict perspective' which 'sees policy making [...] as often unempirical and illogical, although policy makers almost always claim otherwise.' (251) Mark Mason, in his chapter on 'comparing cultures', cautions against a homogenous and monolithic concept of culture, and calls 'for a more appropriate construction of culture in all its complexity in a world characterised by increasing degrees of plurality, multiculturalism, interdependence, hybridity and complexity' (169).

How does the focus on China contribute to this general assessment of the field? China is not just a simple reference here, but it is used to illustrate how the very practice of doing research is grounded in culture – and, I would like to add, politics. For example, Mark Bray and Jiang Kai point out that the Chinese language offers four different terms to capture various aspects of the notion of 'system' (125f.). However, how exactly these different conceptualisations of a social reality can lead to, e.g., different research interests or designs is seldom explored in greater detail. This might be due to the number of topics covered, which practically precludes in-depth studies. Fairbrother's analysis of what constitutes literacy and how different cultures make sense of this concept shows how fruitful such an approach can be when concentrating on concrete research questions.

Two important dimensions are touched upon only sporadically in this volume and deserve more attention. Firstly, many chapters ignore the political-ideological dimension of issues termed 'cultural'. When, for example, Potts speaks of the lacking idea of an 'autonomous self' (75) in Chinese culture, can we not equally consider this a successful (and often politically motivated) reactivation of a particular strand of the Chinese tradition? Secondly, despite the self-proclaimed sensitivity towards global issues, transnational space remains under-theorised, apart from occasional references to 'educational borrowing'. What about the various deterritorialized, hybrid social forms, termed 'scapes' by Arjun Appadurai, that are shaped by circulating objects, ideas, technologies, and people and that have become the object of extensive research in ethnology? It would be worth exploring how, both in theory and in practice, comparative education can deal with these phenomena that are taking place 'in between' cultures, people, and ideas. To use the editors' own words, it would add an important 'tool' to the 'toolbox' (379) of comparative education, whose multifaceted potential has been convincingly demonstrated by this volume.

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