This paper examines how educational comparisons might be used by the educational practitioners, and how the educator can contribute to the comparativists' work. Currently, it is argued, a gap exists between comparative educational study and the theory and practice of education. This leads to three areas of need. First, professional comparativists need to demonstrate the kinds of comparisons they can make and their relevance to educational theory and practice. Second, researchers and practitioners need to develop a common language for interpretation of the studies of comparativists and to provide knowledge that can apply to real situations in schools. Third, practitioners need to indicate the nature and context of their practical concerns so that the relevance of comparative studies can be determined. The demand in the 1970s for multicultural education in Australia, and the use to which comparative studies were put in furthering this demand, provide a starting point to offer suggestions on improving the dialogue between researchers and practitioners. (CG)
EDUCATIONAL COMPARISONS AND THE EDUCATOR

by

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This paper examines some of the ways in which educational comparisons might be used by the educational practitioner, and how the practitioner can contribute to a dialogue with comparativists.1

The context of this exploration is the widely held opinion that there is a gap between comparative educational study as we know it today and the theory and practice of education. If there are to be productive links between comparative education as a recognized area of research and the practices that characterize our educational institutions, several aspects of the current situation would need to change. Professional comparativists would need to demonstrate the kinds of comparisons they could make and their relevance, if any, to the theory and practice of education. Secondly, researchers and practitioners would need to develop a mutually comprehensible language to explore the potential of available concepts and research methods to provide knowledge that would be translatable into real situations in schools. Thirdly, practitioners would need to indicate the nature and context of their practical concerns in such a way that it could be determined whether, and how, comparative study would be appropriate and relevant.

Both groups would need to be a good deal more frank than they are now about their attitudes to two issues. Should comparative research be relevant to educational theory and practice? Can it be relevant?

EDUCATIONAL PRACTITIONERS AND COMPARATIVE EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

The educational practitioner has a number of strands in institutionalized comparative education to turn to for possible guidance.

At the broadest conceptual levels comparative education, especially in the United States, has been dominated by that syndrome of perpectives we now label as "modernization theories". These have been challenged by an equally heterogenous set of viewpoints given the general title of "dependency theories". Both perspectives are not fundamentally concerned with education but comparativists have employed them to locate educational ideologies and practices in the context of explanations of the unequal distribution of power, wealth and knowledge within and between nations.2
Still at the aggregate level but with theoretical interests more closely focussed on education are those studies that replace the countries or regions of traditional comparative study by quantified "variables". These studies build upon computerized data banks and multivariate analytic techniques to test empirically a range of competing hypothesis about the antecedents and consequences of selected educational phenomena usually concerned with structure rather than process or content. 3

One of the oldest traditions in comparative education is the case study of one or more national systems or sub-units of education. The best of them have aimed at comparisons that generate analytical categories, test hypotheses, focus on similarities as well as differences and lead the reader into the area of theoretical and policy implications.

The newer phenomenological approaches of the 1970's have employed social science concepts in attempts to compare two or more educational situations to derive low or middle level hypotheses. These approaches have tended to avoid the limitations of the nation or sub-national unit as the basis of comparison and "national character" as the explanatory vehicle. They have tended to focus upon the rich variety of human relationships and the central importance of perception and culture in educational situations, in contrast to macro level analyses that focus on structure and measurable inputs and outcomes. 4

At the lower end of conceptual generalizability are those comparisons of the type whereby data from overseas or out of town are referred to in the course of trying to come to grips with a local educational situation. This is the sense in which philosophers, historians or sociologists say, "We are all comparativists", which is true, but simplistic. These comparisons are usually made to take from other situations those that appear to be relevant to ours, rather than being made for the purposes of systematically comparing the various situations to establish an hypothesis about similarities and differences. At a broad level it is called "uncritical cultural borrowing" or "imperialism". At the level with which we are most familiar it is called "surveying the literature".
It is probably true that there are some connections between each one of these strands in comparative education and the type of knowledge that each can make available to the educational practitioner. In the negative sense there is a connection between each approach and the limits it places on the practitioner's ability to obtain relevant information. Many case studies, for example, by adhering to national boundaries and praticalistic explanations, are little more than entertainment value. Many aggregate studies, complete with path analysis diagrams (with unexplained variance at a level of .99) seem designed only for obfuscation.

Despite the variety of theories, content and methodological techniques made available by each of these strands of comparative educational study, the practitioner in the long run can really only use comparisons in three basic or underlying ways. I am basing this argument heavily on the article by Doug White, in *Compare*, 1978, entitled "Comparisons and Cognitive Process, and the Conceptual Framework of the Comparativist".5

As summarised by White, these three uses are:

... first, to note possible regularities for further comparison; second, to test out ideas, as in a version of the controlled experiment of the natural sciences; or third, to stimulate the imagination and broaden the experience of the researcher and his readers.6

The first of these uses of comparison is the one so strongly advocated in the traditional texts on the theory of comparative education, and exemplified in the better of the historically or phenomenologically oriented case or problem studies. Generalizations can be derived from comparisons, but the most sensitive use of comparative educational study is the refinement of analytic categories and general statements to the point where educationally relevant knowledge is obtained.

The second use of comparison is that popularized by positivists such as Przeworski and Teune, and Holt and Turner.7 In the long run the practitioner usually derives from this kind of comparative study the knowledge that either certain hypothesized relationships between input, structural and output variables do not occur in reality; or that they do, but not in such a manner that they contribute to the formulation of policy or practice in immediate situations.
The third use of comparison is the sensitization of the researcher and the reader to the problematic nature of those aspects of his culture that would otherwise be taken for granted. Partly this is accomplished through the development of empathy (and sympathy?) by exposure to alternative solutions adopted in different countries to common human problems. Partly, according to many theorists, it is accomplished through the search for patterns of relationships between educational and other phenomena that can only be perceived when one stands back from one's own culture and views it as objectively as possible in relation to others. Comparativists in the United States who disagree on issues of theory and methodology seem to be able to agree on the centrality of this use of comparison.8

As one of the few comparativists in Australasia who has expressed an opinion on this question in print, Doug White came to this conclusion:

The first of these [uses] is possible, if one accepts that patterns and regularities are seen by the observer, or by interaction between him and his subject matter, in which case the first use becomes rather like the third. The second is of doubtful validity ... the best that can be hoped for is that the usefulness or range of the categories can be considered. The third of these possible uses includes elements of the first and second uses ... It can ... give insight and understanding to the researcher and to the reader. In this sense, comparison develops or enhances the culture of those who take part in comparative Education.9

If one accepts White's argument (which I do) it follows that the major use that the practitioner can make of comparative educational research, whatever strand he chooses, is as a source of sensitization to the characteristics of his own situation and to the potential types of the solutions available. He can also use the content and the methodologies of comparative educational research to familiarize himself with how these potential solutions can be evaluated in theoretical and practical senses.

In order to accomplish these tasks the practitioner needs to have access to a language of concepts and methodology that makes sense both to him and to professional comparativists. There are several major problems here; comparativists too often don't ask the questions that
practitioners want answers to. Comparativists often ask questions that practitioners have never dreamed of thinking about. Even when comparative research is relevant to practitioners it is often presented in such a way that it is not easily interpretable, either because of jargon, or statistical oversophistication or excessive particularity or generality. The level of generalization at which comparativists work is often commented upon as a major problem for practitioners, but it is difficult to arrive at a reasoned judgment as to whether or not the gap between academic researcher and educational practice is greater in comparative approaches to education than in other intellectually organized approaches.

These problems in communication are not intrinsically or necessarily involved in the relationship between institutionalized comparative research and educational practice. They could be minimized quite simply by the adoption of a different set of assumptions about the relationship between the two areas of educational endeavour. Consider for example, this statement by Cole Brembeck, in an article in the Comparative Education Review in 1975, entitled "The Future of Comparative and International Education".

I believe that a discipline which is seriously concerned with knowledge-building honours the practitioner. It develops fine mechanisms for learning from him. Similarly, the scholar seeks out the practitioner, listens to him, and finds ways to study what he knows and to distill from it new increments of fundamental knowledge. That opinion is, I believe, a sound one. Quite obviously, however, it is not shared by many professional comparativists, since published research in the professional journals indicates that the problems of practitioners are not an over-riding influence on the selection or orientation of research in comparative education.

It has been argued so far that the practitioner must know what purposes can be served by educational comparisons and where in comparative research this material is available. But equally, as Brembeck reminds us, the comparativist ought to be able and willing to listen to the questions being asked by the practitioner. To facilitate this communication the practitioner ought to be able to analyze his situation in such a way that would clarify the type of comparison that could be
relevant and fruitful.

How can the practitioner contribute to the clarification of issues relevant to educational theory and practice in such a way as to attract the attention of the comparativist?

It is obviously impossible to attempt general answers to these questions, since the needs and concerns of practitioners at different levels and in different areas of education will vary greatly. For illustrative purposes, however, I will use the example of the situation of the practitioner in relation to the area of multicultural education, an area of importance and controversy not only on both sides of the Tasman but in many areas of the world.

COMPARISONS AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

The 1970's saw an enormous growth in the demand for multicultural education. In the Australian case, a great deal of the pressure for multicultural education was based upon several different uses of comparisons.

Internal comparisons highlighted the differences between the educational attainments of children from different ethnic backgrounds. The systematic documentation of these differences by independent researchers and by government agencies such as the Commonwealth Schools Commission came at about the same time as the recognition by State and Federal governments of the need to devise policies that addressed (or appeared to) the problems associated with minority ethnic status.

Minority groups themselves were able to make their voices heard about their unequal treatment in the areas of education, health care, legal rights, working conditions and political under-representation in a predominantly Anglo-Celtic society. Their comparisons were based not only upon their relative oppression but also with reference to absolute ideals based upon natural justice and United Nations declarations of human rights, in particular the right of citizens to have access to their own cultural heritage. These comparisons led inexorably to demands for compulsory multicultural education programs encompassing teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), community languages, bilingual instruction, intercultural perspectives across the curriculum.
and public support for ethnic schools.

External comparisons with policies being adopted in countries such as the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Israel and the United Kingdom led to numerous suggestions about the development of similar or modified programs in Australia. These types of comparisons were largely oriented to selective cultural borrowing, although a few attempts were made to develop holistic paradigms and theoretical constructs that could place the Australian situation in a comparative perspective. 12

In this emotionally charged and politically treacherous area of social policy it is not surprising that many of the comparisons employed have been used to support this or that strongly felt viewpoint. In consequence, the rhetoric that came to surround the concept of multiculturalism and the political aerobatics displayed in the rush to control strong ethnic group pressures have obscured some basic problems faced by educational practitioners who are being asked to provide programs suitable for a multicultural society.

For example, many of the special interest group pressures are contradictory and in themselves are not necessarily oriented to the achievement of social harmony and tolerance implicit in the broad rubric of multicultural policy. Emphasis on any one of TESL, a specific community language, bilingual education or intercultural studies in a school might benefit only one (or a few of many) cultural group(s) at the expense of others. To make all areas available or compulsory without reducing the time spent in other curriculum areas is extremely difficult, if not impossible, and leads directly into the politics of what kind of educational priorities should be adopted in a period of economic depression and high youth unemployment.

Comparisons, either internal or external, that have as their ideological foundation the absolute necessity for compulsory multicultural education, can often be counterproductive. In teacher education, for example, the advocates of compulsion would have all trainee teachers study TESL, a community language, issues in bilingual education, the processes of language acquisition and intercultural studies, and gain practical experience in ethnically diverse schools. In contrast,
many trainee teachers would feel antagonistic at the thought of embarking upon such a program, particularly if these activities were to be pursued at the expense of employment related skill acquisition. Many teacher educators would feel that such a program violated some important pedagogical principles and ignored the reality of how trainee teachers became socialized into their profession.

Schools and teacher education institutions in Australia have been strongly criticized for their inadequate responses to the needs of ethnic minorities, and have been urged to adopt pluralistic programs based, in many cases, on overseas models. Most of the criticisms are valid. However, State and Federal governments that have accepted and tabled official reports critical of past and current educational responses to ethnic diversity have simultaneously been pursuing policies that have led to savage cuts in financial and personnel resources available to schools and teacher training institutions. Comparisons that lay the blame on schools concentrate on only one link in a long chain and have the effect of helping to keep ethnic minorities in their oppressed position as long as the criticisms are deflected from their proper targets. They also tend to put educational practitioners on the defensive and inhibit their likelihood of using the comparative data to stand back a little and try to make policy judgments in a more objective manner.

To summarise, the Australian experience seems to have been one in which several different types of comparisons have been made in the area of multicultural education, for purposes and reasons that are highly understandable, but which have not contributed much towards their professed aims. An argument could be made for the use of comparisons that would enable some sort of "distancing" to occur, so that an assessment could be made of the relative merits and viability of different types of policies and programs.

In pursuit of this aim, what kinds of questions could practitioners, amongst others, ask that could provide guidelines for fruitful comparative studies in the multicultural area? What bases could be developed for a mutually comprehensible language of analysis and discussion among practitioners and comparativists (and possibly even politicians and minority ethnic group spokespeople)?
Obvious questions to start with would be: what is the range of acceptable multicultural policies in Australia, and how could they best be translated into viable programs at the school level? This focus would involve directing the comparisons towards classification and categorization with the aim of selecting the most relevant politically and socially viable policies from overseas and local experience.

A number of people, such as Holenbergh Young, Mills and Bullivant, have already asked these questions and have provided us with different sorts of guidelines as to how educational policies and programs could be located within typologies of social and political philosophies that are amenable to international comparisons. Another area of rapprochement is the simple but neglected task of monitoring the fate of multicultural programs at local levels and comparing their history with relevant interstate or overseas examples. This involves to some extent an ability to work within the neo-positivist framework of people like Przeworski and Teune, since structural elements of each situation must be abstracted and translated into categories amenable to "culture free" (at least temporarily, for analytic purposes) international or intersystemic comparisons. In most cases, however, productive comparisons could be achieved within the ambit of the case study method, especially since the fate of particular programs seems to be bound up more with the interpersonal relations of the people involved than with abstract structural properties.

The ideal core for a dialogue between practitioners and comparativists would seem to be the comparative study of multicultural pressure groups and their interplay with host society institutions, ranging down from governments to schools and parent associations. Practitioners are in a position to indicate the dimensions of these power plays quite clearly from experience, and comparativists now have at their command an array of concepts and methodological approaches that have already proven fruitful in the analysis of the politics of multiculturalism. It is not surprising that educational practitioners have not been able to identify key questions or receive clear guidelines about multicultural educators from governments, education departments, academic...
researchers or ethnic pressure groups. Multicultural education is first a question of politics and social morality, and only secondly a question of pedagogy. The reality in which most practitioners probably operate is one characterized by too little guidance, too few resources and too little freedom to make and implement effective policies. It is difficult for the practitioner to achieve much of lasting value in this circumscribed situation, especially if subjected to strong pressure to adopt this or that policy because it is politically advisable.

Given the reality of the practitioner's situation does it matter very much whether or not comparativists address themselves to the sort of policy-relevant issues outlined above or whether they continue to publish their esoteric articles in the professional journals, neglecting the needs of the practitioner seeking some more objective knowledge base on which to base decisions?

It does matter to the practitioner whether or not he continues to base his policies and programs on locally oriented, special interest and emotionally loaded comparisons, or whether he can articulate his concerns in such a way that academic research can be used to devise constructive solutions to his problems. Despite the very real constraints on the practitioner it is possible to bridge the gap between the classroom and institutionalized comparative educational research. I will try to illustrate how this can be done by reference to a specific school situation in the area of multicultural education.

COMPARISONS AND THE MULTICULTURAL SCHOOL

A nice example of the practitioner reflecting on the constraints of everyday school situations and the application of comparative analysis to them is provided in a recent chapter written by an Australian teacher, Bill Hannan, in a book with the title Teacher Learning. Hannan's chapter is titled "The multicultural school - or schools in search of their own culture". His main argument is that multiculturalism should be treated as:

... an issue for the whole school and the whole curriculum. Clearly the concept implies some special approaches to language and some deliberate provision for teaching of minority cultures, but
the main drive should come from a view of culture that permeates the entire curriculum and touches every child. ... A Multicultural curriculum, in brief, rests on the foundation of a sound definition of general culture ...

A less ambitious way to express the point is to say that the general curriculum needs to be revised so that it is democratic, pluralistic and free from bias.17

In the chapter Hannan illustrates how this approach can be translated into curricula for schools, particularly in working class inner suburban areas of high migrant density. In doing so he provides an example of an practitioner using comparative educational data to inform his classroom procedures, and doing so in a way that provides a basis for a dialogue with comparativists to try to answer the questions he raises.

Some of Hannan's comparisons are of a type familiar enough to the student of orthodox comparative education. His use of these comparisons is, however, refreshing. For example he compares the multiculturalism demanded in Wales, the Basque countries and Quebec to establish the most important constraints on policy that need to be considered in the Australian situation.18 In his analysis of some curriculum material from Italy, he does advocate selective cultural borrowing, but for the purpose of seeing things from an Italian viewpoint. In doing so he opens up the possibility of children from different cultures studying the same topic from their cultural perspective, not via the host culture's interpretation of these viewpoints. In one sweep he has overturned conventional approaches to the use of comparative material in the multicultural area.19

Other types of comparisons made by Hannan are not so frequently encountered in institutionalized comparative education.

Early in the chapter Hannan advances a general proposition in order to focus his inquiry into the proper nature of multiculturalism in the school.

In English-speaking countries the classic way up for immigrant minority groups has been to assimilate. Only those who have learnt to merge their identity with the majority culture have been accepted.20
Hannan doesn't provide evidence for this proposition. He is more concerned with the dilemma presented to the educational practitioner if it is true that minority ethnic identity and social mobility are parts of a zero-sum equation.

Hannan's analysis of comparative research on the relationships between language, identity and social class leads him to question what he describes as "a primary tenet of multiculturalism, namely that everyone should have a good command of the common language of the dominant culture". He questions the myth that a command of standard English is accompanied by social mobility or is a prerequisite for it. He suggests that building constructively on students' home dialects (English and non-English varieties) and using them as the vehicle to make the translation to standard English if and when necessary, is pedagogically sounder and socially more equitable than a rigid instance of standard English from the infant grades. Attempts to stamp out dialects are based on a policy of assimilation. In any case they are futile.

This type of comparison is aimed at peeling back the layers of taken-for-granted assumptions in an attempt to show their relationship to broad social policies and to clarify the social and political implications of various educational options. It is the verbal analogue of the type of paradigm developed by Holenbergh Young to map out the political contexts of various multicultural policies in education and society.

A related technique is employed in his analysis of the arguments for and against different types of bilingual education. These arguments are rather heated, and range over areas such as natural rights, the maintenance of ethnic cultures, cognitive development and the relevance of comparisons with overseas bilingual programs. Hannan concludes quite frankly that cultural borrowing in this area would be inadvisable at present. "Bilingual schooling on any scale scarcely exists in the conditions we are concerned with, and where it does the number of variables makes tight research impossible". He goes on, however, to analyze language policies in several countries to show that the politics of bilingual education is often more important than the educational evidence about the relationship of bilingual instruction to children's
cognitive and linguistic development.

The fact that much of our thinking about using ethnic languages in school is dogged by worries about how the kids will get on in English tells us a lot about the status of English- and non-English speakers and next to nothing about human learning. The English-speaking world suffers from glossophobia - a state of believing that a second language, like alcohol, can be tolerated by the upper classes but does more harm than good to the lower orders.25

Hannan's argument is in favour of several strategies of bilingual education ties up the strands of personal and group identity and the possibility of enhancing both without prejudicing the opportunities for social mobility of working class immigrant adolescents. He concludes that "politically bilingual schooling is eminently justifiable, and educationally it still looks a reasonable bet".26 This is a nice example of the use of comparison to distance oneself from one's own culture to try to look at the policy options as dispassionately as is possible.

One peculiarity, in Hannan's chapter is that the author freely admits to asking more questions than he can answer. These questions would make a good basis for a provocative research course in the comparative study of educational policy and practice. The examples given here are at the macro level, but are, as Hannan's own analysis demonstrates, readily applicable to the individual school.

Hannan's starting point is: how can schools in working class migrant areas reduce the gap between the attainments of their students in other schools? He proposes three hypotheses. One way would be to increase resources and improve efficiency. Another would be to change the school system. A third would be to orient the whole school around a democratic, pluralistic and unbiased multicultural curriculum. The fact that Hannan argues in favour of the third hypothesis is not important in this context. What is instructive is the way he conceptualized the issue in such a way as provide a basis for a comparative research program oriented to policy analysis.
A second set of concerns lies in the acceptability of bilingualism in some countries and situations, but not in others. What are the political and cultural contexts of these situations, and what constraints do they place upon the permissible functions and programs of schools? Hannan asks these questions in a cross-national context, but in the Australian situation the research could be conducted within any larger city.

Another set of concerns reaches into areas hardly ever mentioned in Australian analyses of multicultural education. For example, writing about Soula, an imaginary Greek girl who arrives at primary school with no English whatsoever:

To respect Soula's home language by providing bilingual programmes is a major rapprochement of the school to Soula's community. Who knows where it could lead? Not, I suspect, to Soula's immediate translation to the great wide world of educational opportunity? More likely to a greater solidarity and understanding between school and community. The question then becomes, solidarity for what? For the right of the whole community to education in English and Greek? To the civil right to use Greek without being molested or subtly discriminated against? For employment rights in Greek? 27

Hannan takes off from a basis of conventional uses of comparative research into critiques of taken for granted categories in his own culture. In doing so he generates questions, hypotheses and generalisations that are stimulating, provocative and potentially amenable to comparative research. Indeed it is hard to imagine how his questions could be answered without comparative research. His work seems to me to be an example of how a mutually intelligible dialogue could be constructed on the basis of a practitioner's indication of the nature of his concerns.

One of the keys to Hannan's refreshing approach to comparative educational analysis is his development of a philosophy of the uses of comparison.

Relevance comes from comparison and contrast. Some subjects are probably too close to home and too sensitive to approach directly. Youth culture...
comes to mind. So does the family. And sex-roles. Their very centrality makes them hard to approach directly in a critical way. The same may well be true of some ethnic themes. The hot ones, and there are plenty of them, have to be handled from a cool distance. The aim, after all, is not to resolve old conflicts with simplistic analyses but to equip people first of all to look at culture and society critically.28

That last sentence is, in my opinion, the kind of reminder that is appropriate both to practitioners and to comparativists.
FOOTNOTES

1. The term "practitioner" is used in its widest sense, from the classroom teacher to the school principal or senior administrator, to refer to people whose main concern is with the operation of educational systems and institutions.


4. See the special issue of the Comparative Education Review, vol.21, nos. 2-3, 1977 for an overview of these approaches.


8. See, for example, the series of articles devoted to the importance of comparative educational studies for teachers in the Comparative Educational Review, v-1.19, no.3, October i975, pp.354-368.

9. White, loc.cit., pp.104-6. For the complete context of the quotation the complete article should be read, since White addresses an argument in favour of the third use of comparison that is closely tied to an argument about cognitive processes in learning.


15. Holenbergh Young, loc.cit.; Mills, op.cit.; Bullivant, op.cit.


17. Ibid., p. 85.
18. Ibid., p. 81.
19. Ibid., p. 90.
20. Ibid., p. 84.
22. Loc.cit.
23. For a summary, see Mills, op.cit., Ch. 1-3.
25. Ibid., p. 103.
26. Ibid., p. 103.
27. Ibid., pp. 104-5.
28. Ibid., p. 91.