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Please cite this paper as:

Parkes, R. J., & Griffiths, T. G. (2009). *Comparative education, border pedagogy, and teacher education in an age of internationalisation*. Refereed paper presented at 'Teacher education crossing borders: Cultures, contexts, communities and curriculum' the annual conference of the Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA), Albury, 28 June – 1 July.

Published by: Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA)

Stable URL: <http://atea.edu.au/ConfPapers/2009/Refereed/Parkes&Griffiths.pdf>

Review Status: Refereed – *Abstract and Full Paper blind peer reviewed.*
 Non-Refereed – *Abstract Only reviewed.*

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Comparative Education, Border Pedagogy, and Teacher Education in an Age of Internationalisation

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Abstract

Calls to internationalise higher education have intensified in recent years, particularly as educational services have grown to become a significant export industry within the Australian economy. This measure is indicative, however, of the relatively narrow way in which internationalisation has been constructed, and its political utility in compensating for declining public investments in education, particularly under the Howard government. In this paper we explore the possibilities for challenging such conceptions by taking a comparative education approach to teacher education. We position this approach in terms of a ‘border pedagogy’ that requires teacher educators, and their students, to acknowledge the historical, geographical and temporal nature of knowledge and identities, through international comparative work, such that their own identity and professional knowledge is more authentically internationalised.

Introduction

Over the past decade the call to internationalise has intensified in Australian Universities, reflected in a recent report indicating that education services are now Australia’s third-largest export industry (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008). However, this internationalisation effort has been primarily motivated by economic imperatives, constructing internationalisation in “narrow economic terms of buying and selling education products and services across national boundaries” (Vidovich, 2004, p. 443), and structured to compensate for declining investment in higher education that marked the tenure of the Howard government. Within this context, the work of internationalisation in higher education takes on diverse forms, such as attempts to deliver off-shore programs; attract foreign students into domestic degrees; form branch campuses and franchises; build linkages and partnerships with overseas institutions; generate academic mobility for students across national borders; or integrate intercultural and global dimensions into curricula (Knight, 2006). In various constellations, and with a strong emphasis on the more economically motivated of the above approaches, these activities form the internationalisation strategy of universities around the country.

Teacher education occupies an interesting, and somewhat ambivalent, place in the movement towards internationalisation of the curriculum within the Australian Academy. Historically connected to the production of teachers for a specific locale, teacher education programs and professional accreditation authorities such as the NSW Institute of Teachers credential graduates on the basis that they have knowledge of state-based curriculum requirements. At the same time, these authorities require graduates to be prepared for the social, cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity of contemporary student populations, while State systems and their curriculum frameworks refer consistently to the preparation of students for a globalised world and labour force. The hegemony of state based curricula is soon to be tested by the proposed national curriculum in Australia. However, it is within this moment of tension and flux that we find heightened opportunities for ‘crossing borders’ to extend the breadth and depth of teacher education curricula and practice.

In this paper we explore possibilities for challenging the hegemony of the narrow economic discourse that frequently accompanies or underpins internationalisation policies in higher education; and the local/national tunnel vision of some aspects of teacher education. We take the internationalisation imperative as an invitation to advance the study of comparative education as a ‘border pedagogy’ within teacher education. Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) describe border pedagogy as the practice of “people moving in and out of borders constructed around coordinates of difference and power” (p. 199). For Giroux (1992) border pedagogy requires interrogation of how institutions, knowledge, and social relations are thoroughly inscribed through relations of power. A border pedagogy encourages students to rethink the relations between the centre and margins, and “to be sensitive to the multiple, nonsynchronous relations between one’s identity, social position, and other cultural constructions” (Stanley, 1992, p. 167), including the ways in which school curricula instantiate particular sets of social and political interests. We explore the possibilities of comparative education as a border pedagogy for teacher education, as a means by which local curricula may be learnt and simultaneously denaturalised, more deeply understood, disrupted and deconstructed, as we come to understand the geographically and historically situated nature of curriculum policy and prescriptions.

The Internationalisation Agenda in Higher Education

The recent Bradley Review of Australian Education (Bradley et al., 2008) sets out a wide-ranging vision for Australian Higher Education, including the headline target of 40% of all 25-34 year olds to have a higher education qualification by 2020. The substantial reform of funding arrangements runs through the report, with calls for increased public funding both for higher education providers and for students, to meet such challenges. A dedicated section of the review is titled “International education and global engagement”, suggesting at least part of the broader agenda put forward is to further advance the internationalisation of Australian higher education offerings for all (domestic and international) students undertaking their programs.

The emphasis in the Bradley Review, however, is firmly fixed on conceptions of how higher education can advance Australia’s national interest, in terms of direct and indirect contributions to the national economy and the skills and composition of its workforce. Following the Howard government’s push to make Universities reliant on fee-paying international students to make up for diminishing public funding, Bradley et al. (2008) acknowledge the limitations and risks of such a strategy (pp. 93-5), but continue to talk about the higher education sector primarily as an “important export industry” (p. 87). Indeed, Bradley’s discussion of a “third-phase of internationalisation” reads much like the last, with an emphasis on how the higher education industry can contribute to our national trade agenda, preparing students for work in a global economy, while generating links with industry development and skilled migration programs, and encouraging international collaborations.

In a similar fashion, calls for more international higher degree research students, and much needed financial support in the way of scholarships, living allowances, fee-waivers, and infrastructure spending, are underpinned by the goal of producing “high-quality graduates and research [which] will be crucial to Australia’s long-term productivity and growth outcomes” (p. 88). Gestures are made toward enhancing all students understanding of international issues, and the exchange of knowledge across national boundaries, but the principles of the international agenda appear to be dominated by national economic objectives: can we sustain and continue to grow our international student numbers, particularly in higher degree research, to consolidate this export industry and produce more skilled graduates who may then work in Australia. Detailed discussion of curricular and pedagogical reforms for the internationalisation of higher education, that might contribute to outcomes other than narrow and easily measured economic outcomes, are perhaps understandably beyond the scope of a major policy review like this. What is evident, however, is that a more critical

agenda of deepening all students' disciplinary knowledge through international and comparative study (see Haigh, 2008 for example), is at best a secondary consideration.

While we understand and must pragmatically accept the economic thrust of efforts to internationalise higher education in Australia, given past and present federal funding regimes, we believe that the real opportunity being missed is one that acknowledges 'critical engagement' with theory and practice as higher education's contribution to the education and training sector. Like Robbins (1992), we believe that a "certain cosmopolitanism" is required on the contemporary scene (p. 176). That is, cosmopolitanism understood not as an obsession with "a preconceived totality, but one . . . in which more than one 'world' may be realized, where 'worlds' may be contested" (Robbins, 1992, p. 176). It is in this context, and with this underpinning philosophy, that we advance comparative and international education as a response to the internationalization imperative within teacher education. In its capacity to compare and contest through comparison of educational worlds, that we believe comparative education offers possibilities for a productive and critical engagement with the internationalization agenda, and should therefore, have a significant place in contemporary teacher education programs.

Comparative Education and the Internationalisation of the Curriculum

A major line of research within the broad field of comparative and international education over the last 40 years has been the move to develop explanatory accounts of national / local educational phenomena at the world / global level. Broadly described as world-systems approaches to comparative education, this research has been characterised by empirical and theoretical work making the claim for a 'world culture' of education, recently articulated by Jones (2007) as the "global architecture of education", whereby educational structures and ideas are diffused, adopted, and transferred to nation-states across a single world-system. Baker and LeTendre (2005) stress that the concept of a world culture is inherently and unavoidably dynamic, bound up in the concept of education as a global institution across multiple contexts, acknowledging that local, regional and national factors will almost inevitably shape its manifestation, but setting these processes within a converging global framework. Arnove and Torres (2003) similarly set out a global-local dialectic to account for the interplay between institutions, actors and other influences at these different sites.

Such an approach can, of course, be utilised to identify and elaborate the internationalisation of higher education as a global phenomenon, diffused through international governmental and non-governmental organisations, but in ways that translate or adapt this phenomenon to local conditions (see for example Bradley et al's, 2008, use of OECD comparative data to support an increase in the proportion of international students undertaking higher degree research, p. 100). We may then usefully draw on an international or world-systems framework to make sense of the internationalisation agenda, as for example Vidovich (2004) does in her comparison of a secondary school in Singapore and Australia, and their respective efforts to develop an internationalisation agenda in their schools.

This type of work is underpinned by foundational understandings of the value of comparative and international education, and some of its key purposes of improving our understanding of our own and other countries, our capacity to generalise, predict, make recommendations, and our capacity to generate and develop theory about education through comparative study (see Fairbrother, 2005). Bray's (2007) work reviewing different purposes of comparative work for different actors (academics, policy makers, international agencies, practitioners and parents) also highlights the potentially significant learning about one's own culture and society that inevitably results from international comparative study. He goes on to cite Isaac Kandel's (1933) assertion that: "The chief value of a comparative approach to such problems lies in an analysis of the causes which have

produced them, in a comparison of the differences between the various systems and the reasons underlying them, and, finally, in a study of the solutions attempted” (p. 38).

In a recent Presidential Address to the United States based *Comparative and International Education Society*, Klees (2008) extolled the virtues of the potential depth and breadth of such border crossing:

The principal comparative advantage of comparative education is that the field is literally constituted by border crossings, and comparative educators, by necessity, roam far beyond education. In my view, no other disciplinary or professional field has such a broad, interconnected vantage point from which to view the dilemmas of our time. Education is the anchor that focuses us, but we know—and have to know—significantly more in some ways, for example, than economists or other social scientists, even about their own fields, about the research methodologies used, about policy and practice. (p. 302).

Although it is important to heed Alexander’s (2001) concern that “the business of comparing education across cultures, nations, regions and indeed academic disciplines commands attention to borders, and it is a short step from marking borders to defending them” (p. 507), we believe that Klees makes a crucially important point in his assessment of the potential of comparative education as a border-crossing invitation, and it is in this sense that we argue that comparative education holds real promise as a ‘border pedagogy’ for teacher education in contemporary times.

If we agree with Alexander (2001) that pedagogy has often been a neglected category in comparative education, then it is arguably novel to advance comparative education itself as a pedagogy for contemporary teacher education. However, the pedagogical capacity of a comparative study of education to promote students’ understanding of their profession, and such major “dilemmas of our time” as globalization and its impact on the trends in, and trajectories of educational ideas both locally and around the globe, is arguably significant. As a pedagogy for crossing borders, comparative education holds promise for critical pedagogues interested in challenging the narrow economic agenda of many internationalization efforts that neglect the curriculum of teacher education.

The Promise of Border Pedagogy

In the early 1990s, on the eve of a series of critiques of ‘critical pedagogy’ by feminist poststructuralist educators (Ellsworth, 1989; Gore, 1991, 1993; Yates, 1992), Henry Giroux set about redefining radical education as ‘border pedagogy’. Recognising the pedagogue’s inevitable location within relations of power, formed out of institutional and disciplinary authority, the concept of the ‘border’ was invoked as a metaphor to signal the way in which “power is inscribed differently on the body, culture, history, space, land, and psyche” (Giroux, 1991a, p. 51). Acknowledging “the shifting borders that both undermine and reterritorialise different configurations of culture, power and knowledge” (Giroux, 1991b, p. 510), border pedagogy discourse was mobilised by Giroux to re-assert a radical public philosophy of education. According to Giroux (1991a), ‘border pedagogy’ signals firstly, “forms of transgression in which existing borders forged in domination can be challenged and refined” (p. 51); secondly, the development of pedagogical conditions in which “students become border crossers in order to understand otherness within its own terms, and to further create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power” (p. 52); and finally, “to make visible the historically and socially constructed strengths and limitations of those places and borders we inherit and which frame our discourses and social relations” (p. 52). Consistent with the

above, Giroux (1991a) notes that as an effect of border pedagogy “the terrain of learning becomes inextricably linked to the shifting parameters of place, identity, history, and power” (p. 53).

Giroux was careful to announce that ‘border pedagogy’ was intended to manifest both political and ethical dimensions. The political was to be addressed by “examining how institutions, knowledge, and social relations are inscribed in power differently” (Giroux, 1991a, p. 52). The ethical dimension was to be highlighted by “examining how the shifting relations of knowing, acting, and subjectivity are constructed in spaces and social relationships based on judgements which demand and frame” our responses to the Other (Giroux, 1991a, p. 52). According to Giroux (1991a), critical to the border pedagogy project should be the process of educating students to read the different cultural codes that both institutions and individuals (including themselves) use to construct narratives, discourses, histories, and identities. Becoming ‘border crossers’, students develop the capacity to challenge the “cultural borders [that are] historically constructed and socially organised within rules and regulations that limit and enable particular identities, individual capacities, and social forms” (Giroux, 1991a, p. 52).

As Freema Elbaz-Luwisch (2001) has asserted, “Giroux has laid out an agenda for border pedagogy that is comprehensive and ambitious” (p. 85). For Giroux, writing on the back of the Regan and Thatcher eras, and neo-liberal triumphalism (see Fukuyama, 1989, on the collapse of all viable alternatives to free market politics), border pedagogy provides a counter-offensive to the hegemonic neo-conservative consensus that has emerged in Western societies like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, and which has recently experienced an intensified second coming after September 11 (Rizvi, 2003, 2004). In his own words, Giroux (1991b) argues that border pedagogy “links the notions of schooling and education to a more substantive political struggle for a radical democratic society” (p. 510). By encouraging students to recognise the historically, socially, and spatially situated nature of knowledge and identity, border pedagogy is a politics of possibilities.

While border pedagogy has been taken up frequently, and convincingly, by scholars and educators living on the geopolitical border between the United States and Mexico (Cline & Necochea, 2006; Romo & Chavez, 2006), as a pedagogical practice that has resonances with their lived experience in borderland communities, we see a more far reaching ambit for the notion of border pedagogy. In its mobilisation of a spatial metaphor that encourage students and teachers to consider “issues of space, place, position, borders, and boundaries . . . [in] the framing of pedagogical questions” (Edwards & Usher, 1997), border pedagogy is of particular appeal in education environments increasingly ruptured by globalising forces, trends, and interests. Like Nado Aveling (2002) we believe border pedagogy has an important role to play in contemporary teacher education. Sitting at the nexus of state-based accreditation regimes, and University internationalisation policies and programs, teacher education is itself in a borderland, constituted by a particular concern for developing graduates with the capacity to teach the locally mandated curriculum, and the pressure to construct teacher education programs with international economic attractiveness. We believe that the requirement for state-based accreditation and the simultaneous provocation to internationalise the curriculum, produces a tension between antagonistic goals that can best be answered by the adoption of comparative education as a border pedagogy in teacher education programs.

Critically Engaging Internationalisation: Comparative Education as Border Pedagogy

According to Alexander (2001), in his construction of a pedagogical agenda for comparative education, there are a number of conditions that must be met by a comparative pedagogy. Two are of particular interest to our construction of comparative education as a border pedagogy. Firstly, Alexander (2001) argues that a “defensible rationale and methodology for comparing across sites, cultures, nations and/or regions” must be incorporated into any attempt to practice a comparative

pedagogy (p. 153). We believe internationalization furnishes teacher education with its rationale for such comparisons. It is certainly the case that many international students enrol in Australian teacher education programs with the view of returning to their home countries upon graduation as qualified teachers. Viewed from the point of view of an international student, the curriculum of contemporary teacher education has a number of problem points, not the least of which is the curriculum method course. In these courses students are inducted into teaching methodologies for the various key learning areas of the school based curriculum (in the case of pre-service Primary teacher education), or their particular areas of subject specialization (in the case of pre-service Secondary teacher education). They are also frequently drilled in the syllabus prescriptions of the state (or in some parts of the world, national) curriculum authority. While understanding the local curriculum of the jurisdiction in which the teacher education program operates is undoubtedly important, this appears as a potential weak point within any internationalization strategy. Such a problem point can be addressed easily by taking a comparative approach to curriculum, that not only inducts the student into the state-based curriculum practices, but simultaneously invites them to draw comparisons (and contrast syllabi) with curriculum prescriptions from their home country. We would argue that this is useful, but perhaps the most superficial level at which a comparative approach might operate in teacher education.

The second point of interest that Alexander (2001) raises is the idea that a comparative pedagogy must address the fact that:

values, ideas and debates are part of a much wider educational discourse and – typically – are located in the context of public national systems as well as schools and classrooms, [consequently] a comparative pedagogy should access these different levels, contexts and constituencies – local and national, within schools and outside them . . . and examine how they relate to each other and inform the discourse of pedagogy and the act of teaching. (p. 513)

We agree, and it is in these specific sets of comparisons, particularly the local and national of various contexts and constituencies, that we understand comparative education as a border-crossing pedagogy that will assist students not only in understanding their own local curricula more fully, but that acknowledges the global flows and transnational movement of pedagogical discourse and curricula ideas.

A comparative pedagogy invites students to view their local educational institutions, policies, curricula, and pedagogical practices through temporal/historical and spatial/geographical dimensions of comparison. These dimensions are somewhat like the vertical and horizontal axes of curriculum inquiry proposed by William Pinar (2007), that encourage knowledge and appreciation of the past and present of the curriculum being studied. Once engaged in the process of vertical and horizontal, temporal and spatial comparison, curriculum, policy and practice are inevitably rendered historical entities that are clearly subject to change over time, and geographically distributed and situated, not the rigid structures they sometimes appear when first encountered.

Comparative education functions as a border pedagogy, inviting students to critically evaluate education policy and practice, by making visible the social, cultural, and historical conditions that have shaped their emergence at a specific place in the global network of trends and flows. As a border pedagogy, comparative education challenges local educational master narratives that masquerade as universals. It encourages a breadth and depth to study that appears so often to be lacking in curriculum and pedagogic instruction. Through comparative education pre-service teachers have the opportunity of becoming ‘border crossers’, who challenge the “cultural borders [that are] historically constructed and socially organised within rules and regulations that limit and enable particular identities, individual capacities, and social forms” (Giroux, 1991a, p. 52), as they recognize the socio-historical construction of their local policies, prescriptions and practices.

Conclusion

There continues to be a need for an internationalisation agenda for education that gets beyond notions of improving our national economy and its competitiveness, enhancing our comparative advantage in the global economy, increasing our national skills base, and further developing education as an export industry. We acknowledge the pragmatic realities of such concepts in contemporary conditions, but also maintain that these do not and should not preclude the possibility of advancing complementary and alternative models of the internationalisation of higher education. With respect to teacher education in particular, we have suggested that there are significant advantages for the sector in the adoption of a comparative education approach and associated methodologies, which constructs this approach as a border pedagogy. Such an approach, we argue, stands to enhance students understanding of their disciplinary knowledge and its articulation in their own national and state settings, as well as their understanding of the global nature of the knowledge and its representation in curricular and syllabus documents, and the inherent global-local flows of knowledge that constitute the process of policy formulation and enactment.

Understood as a border pedagogy, comparative education and its application in teacher education provides an excellent vehicle for developing an alternative internationalisation of education agenda, and one which stands to make a substantive contribution to the quality of teacher education. This in turn stands as a potentially radical political project fit for contemporary times, challenging national boundaries as a foundational component of teacher education, and the accompanying constraints that these boundaries apply to our understandings of our discipline and educational knowledge. Comparative education as a border pedagogy in teacher education is, therefore, a nice contemporary response to the neoliberal legacy of the Howard government, running in potentially multiple counter directions.

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