

Editorial Introduction: Birthday “Bumps”

Emily S. Bishop
Teachers College, Columbia University

With this issue, Comparative and International Education: The Making of a Field and a Vision for the Future, the CICE team is delighted to join in the yearlong celebration of a milestone for our institution and the field of education beyond, the 125th Anniversary of Teachers College. Appropriately, we are the proud home of the Happy Birthday song - but when I was a little girl in London, birthday parties came with a less harmonious tradition: the Birthday “Bumps”. These “bumps” are a (more or less gentle) shaking up and down of the lucky celebrant, once for each of their years. In that spirit, our birthday gift to Teachers College is a (more or less gentle) shaking up of our discipline of Comparative and International Education and its traditions, by a diverse range of voices in a new kind of harmony.

“The field of Comparative Education is a mature and important area of academic inquiry with a promising future”. This concluding passage of our opening article, **Noah Sobe** and **Jamie Kowalczyk’s** *Exploding The Cube*, reflects our editorial team’s thinking when they first crafted the call for papers for this issue, at the beginning of this anniversary year:

For over a century, the field of Comparative and International Education (CIE) has made valuable theoretical and practical contributions that address the pressing challenges that the education sector has faced globally. These theories have provided both practitioners and policymakers with a framework of reference not only for developing strategies and action plans, but also for implementing new programs and solutions for further advancement.

As we pursue a new development agenda, in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the Education For All (EFA) movement, a collective vision for a post-2015 framework in education is needed. There is a growing understanding that globalization presents demands on education, whereby educational initiatives are increasingly expected to foster global competence and develop 21st century skills. In this changing environment, large-scale assessments provide additional mechanisms to track academic competences and, consequently, place further pressures to adapt existing educational models to the increasingly globalized achievement race.

In celebration of our community’s landmark milestone, we invited scholars of both Comparative and International Education and the broader field of related, relevant disciplines to submit articles that reflected on theories of CIE and discussed their applications in education, in the context of the current changing environment. Specifically, we posed the question:

How have CIE theories/theorists influenced institutions, policies, educational models, trends, and/or research agendas in local, regional, and international contexts?

We were delighted by the response, and excited by the critical, innovative thinking that inspired the “bumps” shaking up CIE traditions, from the principles of Education For All to the methods

that shape our research. In keeping with our tradition of accessibility to scholars and practitioners from beyond the field of CIE, our authors focus their attention on fundamental theories and concepts familiar to many outside our discipline, such as the capability approach, neoliberal frameworks or the pervasive influence of Foucault. However, as you will soon see for yourself, they put those fundamentals to good use in crafting arguments and analyses that thoroughly rattle concepts central to our discipline.

Global C(c)ontext(s)

In “Exploding the Cube: Revisioning “Context” in the Field of Comparative Education”, **Noah Sobe** and **Jamie Kowalczyk** challenge our understanding of what context is, and suggest a delineation between ‘big C’ Context and ‘little c’ contexts to more effectively and accurately identify power dynamics. The cube they are proposing to explode is Bray and Thomas’ (1995) familiar formulation: the first mainstay of CIE to take a “bump” in this issue.

In “Theorizing Privatization in Education: Comparing Conceptual Frameworks and the Value of the Capability Approach”, **Francine Menashy** tackles three more well-trodden conceptual frameworks – the neoclassical, social primary goods and rights-based approaches – with an argument for the application of the capability approach to an area it is seldom considered: the private sector.

In “Breaking Tradition: Taking Stock of Research on Global School Choice”, **Beth Wright** considers the concept school choice through the lens of prevalent research practices on the issue, and challenges CIE scholars to move beyond neoliberal conceptualisations and use new modes of analysis to tackle questions of choice and reform.

Local Contexts

In “Neoliberalism in Two Hong Kong School Categories”, **David Woo** stays with the issue of school choice but moves us into the country-level context section of the issue. He applies a neoliberal lens to discern the impact of a changing Hong Kong and the shifting demands of a growing and diversifying population on two schools with distinct features.

In “Canadian Youth Volunteering Abroad: Rethinking Issues of Power and Privilege”, **Mai Ngo** invites us to rethink our perspective on an aspect of development that resonates personally for many of us: youth volunteering. Using Institutional Ethnography (IE), she maps out power and privilege dynamics to advance the debate on the ethics of the practice.

In “Particularizing Universal Education in Postcolonial Sierra Leone”, **Grace Pai** uses a vertical case study to challenge the universality of universal education, by illustrating the fact and necessity of local incarnations of global ideals in pre-civil war Sierra Leone and demonstrating the relationship between the rural Bunumbu Project and the broader process of nation-building.

Our concluding guest article, “The International Efficiency of American Education: The Bad and the Not-So-Bad News” by **Stephen Heyneman** (with kind permission from the original publishers), ends with a positive challenge to a CIE trend, looking beyond PISA scores to rethink the habitual criticisms of US education.

Join us in exploring the highs, lows and “bumps” of applying Comparative and International Education theory to a variety of (C)ontexts. We hope you will, on the evidence of these new and established voices in our midst, agree with Sobe and Kowalczyk (and us) that our field has a promising future ahead.

Notes

My thanks to Adriana Lovera and Amlata Persaud for their help in revising an earlier draft of this article, and to Sandra Sirota for her feedback.

Emily S. Bishop is a doctoral fellow in Comparative and International Education and Political Science at Teachers College, Columbia University, and the managing editor of *Current Issues in Comparative Education*. Email: emily.bishop@tc.columbia.edu; for CICE business please contact cice@tc.columbia.edu.

References

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