

Editorial Introduction: Innovative Methods in the Field

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“Therefore, if we propose to study foreign systems of education, we must not keep our eyes on the brick and mortar institutions, nor on the teachers and pupils only, but we must also go outside into the streets and into the homes of the people, and try to find out what is the intangible, impalpable, spiritual force which, in the case of any successful system of Education, is in reality upholding the school system and accounting for its practical efficiency.”

-Sir Michael Sadler, 1900.

In the first year of the twentieth century, over 115 years ago, Sir Michael Sadler, an early father of comparative education studies, proposed this radical idea for the study of foreign education systems (Bereday, 1964). He wanted to look beyond the institution of schooling and into a holistic approach to understanding what society as a whole produced. Of course, today, for the field of Comparative and International Education (CIE) the examination of education beyond schooling is not necessarily a new innovation and has been fully embraced. Yet, over a century ago, when our field was in its infancy, this kind of examination was new and innovated, as innovative as any advanced statistical modeling method gaining popularity today. Even back in 1964, George Bereday shared this piece from Sadler, recognizing how influential and innovated this suggested approach had become for the entire field. Bereday, like Sadler, too moved the field through new methods of understanding our subject of education.

This issue of *Current Issues in Comparative Education (CICE)* has attempted to build upon the indomitable spirit of past titans of comparative and international education (CIE) through this theme of innovated methods in the field. Since the founding and through its maturation, scholars in the field of CIE have embraced multiple methodologies, deriving from the field’s rich connection to other academic disciplines. This diverse range of methodologies—encompassing techniques from qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods—has strengthened the relevance and richness of CIE scholarship. There are numerous examples of innovative methods that have pushed the field to new heights. For instance, the vertical case study method has given scholars in the field a holistic approach through a multidimensional lens. Advanced statistical techniques, such as Hierarchical Linear Models (HLM) and Item Response Theory (IRT), have improved analysis of International Large-Scale Assessments. Most recently, we have seen the usage of social network analysis to map the interaction between actors in education.

From Sadler, to Bereday, to the current innovators of the field, this issue recognizes these new methods in CIE. The CICE team hopes that the pieces and scholars in this issue will build upon our rich history of innovation by adding to our promising future as educational comparativists. Each of these entries does this in their own way, but with

two clear distinct themes: three of the articles show these new methods through explorations of datasets and data sources, while the three others provide new innovation through connections to other disciplines that have been adapted to CIE.

Researchers in CIE have for years now utilized large-scale datasets to gain a greater understanding of systems around the world. **Ali Ünlü and Michael Schurig** continue that tradition with cutting edge analysis of TIMSS and PIRLS data in “Computational typologies of multidimensional end-of-primary-school performance profiles from an educational perspective of large-scale TIMSS and PIRLS surveys”. Yet, scholars have also continued to expanded important data sources for educational research. In “Analyzing Public Discourse: Using Media Content Analysis to Understand the Policy Process”, **Nancy Green Saraisky** utilizes a content analysis of American media outlets to illustrate the importance of media in understanding national and international trends for educational policy research, importantly adding a public communication angle to the CIE foundation. Further, in thinking about data sources and the public voice, **Erik Jon Byker and Aditi Banerjee** provide a detailed exploration of India’s Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), which is a massive community-led educational assessment project, in “Evidence for Action: Translating Field Research into a Large Scale Assessment”. The conceptual framework for ASER illustrates how everyday citizens can be equipped with data-driven evidence that CIE is so commonly citing and looking for in research and practice.

As witnessed throughout our history, comparativists have shown how other disciplines or fields can have a great impact onto our research. In “Identifying research priorities for school improvement in the developing world”, **Robyn Read, Magdalena Fernandez-Hermosilla, Stephen Anderson, and Karen Mundy** illustrate how the Child Health and Nutrition Research Initiative (CHRNI) methodology can be used to identify areas for future educational research. The CHRNI method originated in the health research field, but the scholars show how its adaptation can provide CIE researchers and practitioners alike a new tool in priority setting for the field. In another piece, **David J. Woo** builds upon past educational technology studies that have utilized ecological modeling and brings this perspective to CIE in “Advancing Ecological Models to Compare Scale in Multi-level Educational Change”. Specifically, Woo uses multi-level and multi-scale analyses of technology integration efforts of two private international schools’ information and communications technology (ICT) campaigns. The visualizations of metaphorical school ecologies produced in this research are especially crucial for expanding the field through use of these kinds of graphical representations. Finally, the issue closes with a kind of introspection of the researcher as an actor of research. In “Investigator Bias and Theory-Ladenness in Cross-Cultural Research: Insights from Wittgenstein”, **Charlene Tan** uses the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein’s exposition of belief systems to explore investigator bias in cross-cultural research. While the philosophy discipline is not often used in CIE, Tan’s piece offers comparativists a connection to this literature through challenges in conceptual theory-ladenness of observations in our own field.

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Through this issue, we hope to push the field forward by presenting innovative studies in comparative and international education. Comparativists, by nature, have and always will be discovering new methods of inquiry. The diverse research collection found here will add a slight addition to the already strong foundation within CIE. We know that our scholars and peers will continue pushing, exploring, and innovating.

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Reference:

Bereday, G. Z. (1964). Sir Michael Sadler's " Study of Foreign Systems of Education".
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