

look at the realities of modern public schools. The one fault of the book is Brown's attempt to limit the applicability of his insights to urban schools. One could make a strong argument that these challenges are of consequence to some degree in all public schools.

Mark Bray (Ed.). *Comparative Education: Continuing Traditions, New Challenges, and New Paradigms*, Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic, 2003, 264 pp., ISBN 1-4020-1143-1 (paperback, \$50.00).

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Since its founding, comparative education has struggled with a problem of identity. Is it a compendium of interests in education, internationally applied? Or is it a discipline in itself with unique traditions of scholarship? If the former, it would include all educational applications of the social sciences (anthropology, economics, political science, sociology, history, psychology, etc.), all educational applications of the professional disciplines (law, school administration, university administration, public policy and management, curriculum and instruction, teaching and learning, and technology), and all the concerns of specific nations and/or regions (Africa, Latin America, postconflict environments, postparty states, and the like). If comparative education consists of all this, what might it leave out? On the other hand, if comparative education is a discipline with a specialized set of interests deserving of an independent and autonomous position among other disciplines, then what are those disciplines and what is their future?

This new book on comparative education consists of a dozen essays chosen by editor Mark Bray from among 390 papers presented at an international meeting of the World Council of Comparative Education. The essays previously appeared in a special issue of *International Review of Education*. Given the plethora of topics that could fit under the comparative education umbrella and the difficulty of finding papers of minimal standards from an international conference, one might be excused for having fairly low expectations of the product. However, this one is worth reading.

Following an introductory essay, the chapters are divided into three sections covering methods, political forces, and cultures. The result does not answer the basic comparative education dilemma. Faculty will not be able to use this book as a basic text. What makes this book compelling, however, is that most of the essays are interesting.

For instance, under the methodology section, there is a discussion that compares achievement, cost, and quality of the 47 international schools in Hong Kong. Are German schools better than French schools? One need not go to France or Germany when their schools may be in America's backyard. There is a chapter that provides a synthesis of international comparisons over the last 200 years, the author arguing that because comparison was so deeply influential in the era of the fountain pen, will it not be more influential with the methods from the Internet and the computerized library information systems?

With respect to political forces, three of the five chapters in this section concentrate on changes following the end of the party/state in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Deeply knowledgeable about the region, one author reflects on the profoundly important common processes—decentralization of management; privatization of financing; structural and curricular reforms; and the rapid introduction of standardized evaluation, testing, and selection. A more in-depth application are those in a second chapter that describes how these changes have affected Siberia and the Russian Far East. A third chapter on lifelong learning in Russia is also a surprise. The author correctly observes that the adult education “push” from within the Soviet system was surprisingly backward (in pedagogy, efficiency, and purpose) when compared to the norms of the West. What happened after this system had to confront the emptiness of its prior claims? Perhaps the most interesting chapter in this group is the one that compares the educational performance of China and India since the 1940s. China has outperformed India on almost every indicator, but is this because the role of the state under central planning was so different or because the underlying cultural attitude toward education was so different?

With respect to culture, there is an essay on differences between Korean and White American children in how they develop effective narrative skills when one culture emphasizes speaker competence and the other emphasizes listener competence. There is a chapter on what children have lost by educational modernization in both Europe and Japan. The author argues that in the Middle Ages, children had a miserable life, but in the 18th century, childhood was discovered by social scientists and social workers who established childhood as a period for protection. The author argues that childhood has returned to its previous level of low expectations and high pressure in both Europe and Japan, illustrated by the examination

hell in which young students study for unconscionable periods of time and universally suffer adverse consequences.

It would not be true to suggest that these chapters are of uniform quality. In one, the author argues that traditional peoples of Africa, Latin America, and Asia should have university programs dedicated to their own particular wisdom because it is totally different from Western disciplinary traditions (so much for anthropology). In another, the social hierarchy and the word for *work* in Chinese is said to have profound implications for vocational education. Neither chapter seems to be worth much attention.

Some of the virtue in this book lies in the diverse background of the scholar authors. For many years, the editor has been responsible for insights on education in China, Europe, and the United States from afar. The analysis of the Soviet Far East is through a Japanese perspective. The tendency in the post-Soviet world is from a German. The comparison of China and India is by a partnership from each country. If the future of comparative education were to depend less on its definition and more on the quality of interest and insight, then these essays would bode very well for the discipline.