



The University of Hong Kong
Faculty of Education



20th Anniversary
Inaugural Professorial Lecture

**Comparative Education:
Traditions, Applications, and the
Role of HKU**

Mark Bray

Dean and Chair of Comparative Education

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*Inaugural
Professorial
Lecture*

Text of the lecture delivered by Professor Mark Bray, Dean and Chair of Comparative Education, at the Rayson Huang Theatre of the University of Hong Kong, Saturday 7 February 2004.

First published 2004 by:

Faculty of Education,
The University of Hong Kong,
Pokfulam Road,
Hong Kong,
China.

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**Comparative Education:
Traditions, Applications, and the Role of HKU**

Mark Bray

Dean and Chair of Comparative Education

Today, we are launching the celebrations for the 20th anniversary of the Faculty of Education. This is a significant milestone for us, and as Dean of the Faculty I sincerely thank you all for joining the occasion.

In some respects the history of the Faculty is much longer than 20 years: our roots go back to 1917, when the Department for the Training of Teachers was created in the Faculty of Arts. The Department evolved into the School of Education in 1976. However, at this season we commemorate the establishment of the Faculty, in 1984, rather than these earlier bodies. It is a particular pleasure to have with us today colleagues who were part of the Faculty right at its beginning. A few of them have remained with us throughout the period. Ten of our current academic staff were with the Faculty during its first year of operation,¹ and two of our support staff were with us at that time.² Other former colleagues have come back for this occasion, and to them I extend an especially warm welcome.

The Faculty's 20th anniversary committee decided at an early stage that highlights for the season of celebration should include lectures from the Faculty's three Chair Professors.³ It happens that I have not yet myself delivered

¹ They are Cheng Kai Ming, Ora Kwo, Flora Kan, Ki Wing Wah, Tammy Kwan, Winnie Lai, Frederick Leung, Philip Stimpson, Gerard Postiglione, and Sam Winter.

² They are Ellie Leung and Kosina Suen.

³ Professor Amy Tsui will deliver an anniversary lecture in conjunction with the World Assembly of the International Council on Education for Teaching (ICET), which the Faculty will host from 13 to 17 July 2004; and Professor Cheng Kai Ming

a formal inaugural lecture, and I am therefore taking the opportunity to deliver an anniversary lecture which is also an inaugural lecture.⁴ It is a further pleasure to do this in conjunction with the annual conference of the Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong (CESHK), which is itself in its 15th anniversary year. The University of Hong Kong (HKU) has played a major role in the work of the CESHK, and we are very pleased to host today's conference. We greatly value the partnerships which the Society has facilitated, and we look forward to playing a continuing role.

From these introductory remarks, I will turn to the main theme of my lecture. Focusing on my own specialism, I will outline some features of the field of comparative education. I will not go into extensive detail, which might not interest today's broad and diverse audience; but I will highlight some of the parameters of the field and the contributions that it can make to the broader domain of educational studies. Following the wording of my title, I will commence with some of the traditions in the field. I will then turn to some applications, before concluding with particular focus on the past, present and future roles of HKU. It will be evident that we have much to celebrate, but also that we have much still to do.

Traditions in the Field of Comparative Education

The editor of *Comparative Education*, which is one of the principal journals in the field, has recently written (Broadfoot 2003, p.411) that:

Perhaps more than other fields, comparative education has been devilled by debates about its purpose, its epistemology and its methodology. Over the years its status has swung between the opposing poles of arcane ephemera and key educational policy tool. At the present time we find ourselves at the latter extreme, with governments around the world anxious to learn about educational practices in other countries, as they scan the latest international league tables of school performance. As a consequence, it has never been more important for comparative education to set its own house in order, to bring the maximum rigour, relevance and creativity to the collective endeavour.

Behind this statement are many debates and much agonising. Although the

will deliver an anniversary lecture at the Regional Conference of the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM), which the Faculty will host from 20 to 22 October 2004.

⁴ Professor Cheng's presentation will also be an inaugural as well as anniversary lecture.

themes to which Broadfoot refers cannot be fully explored here, I can outline some of the contours. This might be especially helpful to members of the audience who are not already familiar with the field.

History and Development

As a distinct domain of study, comparative education is widely said to have originated in Western Europe during the 19th century. Marc-Antoine Jullien, whose 1817 booklet was entitled *Sketch and Preliminary Views of a Work on Comparative Education* (Jullien 1817), has been widely described as the ‘father of comparative education’ (see e.g. Rosselló 1943; Berrio 1997; Leclercq 1999); though an alternative view might be that the field had multiple origins, and that Jullien was only one of them (Halls 1990; Wang 1998; Bray & Gui 2001). During the first half of the 20th century the field gathered momentum. Sadler (1900) presented a seminal address in England; and Nakajima (1916) published a significant book in Japan which was translated into Chinese with some adaptation by Yu (1917). Other important early works include Sandiford (1918) and Kandel (1935).

Despite these early milestones, major development of the field did not occur until the second half of the 20th century. One indicator of that development was the formation of various professional bodies. Thus, the 1950s and 1960s brought:

- the Comparative Education Society (CES), founded in the USA in 1956;
- the Comparative Education Society in Europe (CESE), founded in 1961;
- the Japanese Comparative Education Society (JCES), founded in 1964;
- the Comparative & International Education Society of Canada (CIESC), founded in 1967; and
- the Korean Comparative Education Society (KCES), founded in 1968.

In 1970, these bodies came together to form an umbrella World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES). During subsequent decades the number comparative education societies continued to grow, and today the WCCES has 30 member societies. Most are national education societies, though some are regional and language-based societies. Among the WCCES member societies is the Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong (CESHK), which was founded in 1989.

To disseminate their work, many of the WCCES member societies publish journals. In the USA the *Comparative Education Review* was launched by the Comparative Education Society in 1957, and remains among the principal journals of the field. Other journals are today published by WCCES member societies in Chinese, English, French, German, Greek and Spanish (Bray 2003a; 2003b). Additional journals are produced by independent publishers; and the field now embraces countless books in many languages. Comparative education has become a large and multifaceted field in all regions of the world.

Foci of Enquiry

Despite the existence of the professional comparative education societies, comparative education has suffered from uncertainties in identity. Within the domain of educational studies, the fundamental characteristic of comparative education is of course comparison. However, the methodological approaches may be many and varied, and comparative education cannot claim any distinct or exclusive ownership of tools and perspectives. The uncertainties in identity are exacerbated by overlap with other fields, and particularly with international education. Yet the identity of international education is itself in dispute, and the term has been used to mean different things in different settings. In some contexts, international education describes the process of educating people to see themselves as international citizens in other nations (e.g. through the operation of international schools). In other settings, more closely allied to comparative education, international education describes educational work which practitioners and scholars undertake in countries other than their own. This use of the term often distinguishes such applied work from the more theoretical research traditions which are characteristic of comparative education (Wilson 1994; Rust 2002).

Because the fields of comparative education and international education are related, in the USA the Comparative Education Society (CES) changed its name in 1969 to become the Comparative & International Education Society (CIES). Similarly, in 1979 the British Comparative Education Society (BCES) was renamed the British Comparative & International Education Society (BCIES).⁵ Other societies in which the twin fields are placed together include the Comparative & International Education Society of Canada (CIESC), and the Australia & New Zealand Comparative & International

⁵ Further change came in 1997, when the BCIES was merged with the British Association of Teachers & Researchers in Overseas Education (BATROE), to become the British Association for International & Comparative Education (BAICE).

Education Society (ANZCIES).

However, this alliance of names and fields has not been straight forward. In the USA, the 1969 change from CES to CIES only came after controversy (see e.g. Epstein 1968); and, confusingly, the society's journal retained its title *Comparative Education Review* even though many of its articles would fit more easily under the heading of international education than comparative education. Elsewhere, a proposal in the mid-1990s to merge the Japan Comparative Education Society with the parallel Japan International Education Society was rejected in part on methodological grounds concerning the identity of the respective fields. Yet in contrast to the pattern in the USA is the fact that the Greek Comparative Education Society (GCES) which does not have International in its title – in 2003 launched a journal entitled *Comparative and International Education*. And although the Comparative & International Education Society of Canada (CIESC) has Comparative in its title, its journal is entitled *Canadian and International Education*. Finally, although 25 of the 30 member societies of the WCCES have only Comparative in their titles without International, in practice much of the work in which their members engage would more easily be described as international than comparative. The fields are thus intertwined and indistinct.

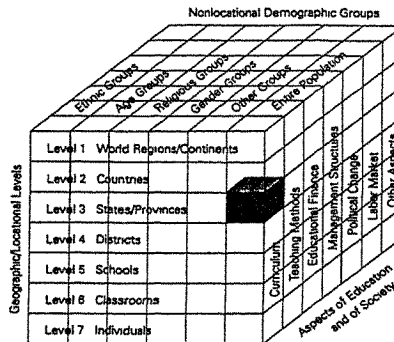
Units of Analysis

To those who wish to emphasise the comparative nature of work, a key question concerns units of analysis. In most early studies, the nation state was the principal unit of analysis. Nakajima (1916) made this explicit in his title *Comparative Study of National Education in Germany, France, Britain and the USA*. In other books, including such classics over the decades as Kand (1935), Cramer & Browne (1956), Moehlman (1963), and King (1973), the dominance of the nation state was immediately evident from a glance at the list of contents. Many books also focused on continents or world regions (such as the Caribbean, Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa). Other classic work such as Hans (1950), Bereday (1964) and Noah & Eckstein (1969), do countenance different units of analysis, but the field clearly stressed cross-national and supra-regional comparison more than intra-national comparison. Indeed the cross-national and supra-national elements have been among the features which have distinguished comparative education from other domains in the broader realm of educational studies.

Yet while this tradition has a long and respected ancestry, it also has problematic dimensions. Both countries and world regions are artificial creations of widely varying sizes, and commonly have considerable internal diversity.

sity which is glossed over when they are taken as units of analysis. In the mid-1990s, I presented arguments along these lines in an article co-authored with Murray Thomas (Bray & Thomas 1995). The core of our article was a cube which, we suggested, could be used to classify many comparative studies of education (Figure 1). Along one side were aspects of education and of society, and along another side were nonlocational demographic groups. The front of the cube then presented seven geographical/locational levels. At the top were world regions/continents, which were followed in turn by countries, states/provinces, districts, schools, classrooms and individuals. We observed that comparisons could be made at each of these levels, and that the insights gained from such comparisons would differ at each level. We noted that in some respects patterns at each level were influenced by patterns at other levels. We made a case for multilevel analysis of educational phenomena; and where resources did not permit such multilevel analysis, we suggested that researchers should at least be aware of the level at which they were operating, and of the limitations imposed by focusing only on that level.

Figure 1: A Framework for Comparative Education Analyses



Source: Bray & Thomas (1995), p.475.

When seeking a venue for our article, Murray Thomas and I chose a generalist journal, the *Harvard Educational Review*, rather than one which focused specifically on the field of comparative education. This was because we wished to reach a broad audience and to promote synergies between different fields. As we explained in the opening paragraph (p.472):

Comparison is the basis of almost all forms of inquiry. However, the field of educational studies known as comparative education has his-

torically been defined in a somewhat limited way. As active contributors to this field for some time ... we have felt disquiet about some of its basic premises, especially concerning the dominant units of comparison in the mainstream literature. We have noted that the chief focus in comparative education literature has been on countries and world regions, and that this has tended to lead to unbalanced and incomplete perspectives. On the other side of the coin, we have noted that much research in other fields of education has been undesirably localized in focus. In many of these studies, unbalanced and incomplete perspectives have resulted from the lack of an international dimension.

We then observed (p.473) in relation to the levels on our cube that:

research at particular levels is more common in some fields of educational studies than in others. For example, much of the work on effective schools has focused on institutions and what goes on inside them, and has made inadequate use of insights obtainable from cross-national comparison. The corollary is that most people working in the field commonly labelled comparative education tend to have a good understanding of macro-level phenomena but are much less comfortable with the tools and perspectives of researchers who work at the micro-level. We believe that both sides could learn from each other.

We were gratified by the way in which the article did indeed reach an audience of researchers who would not normally have read the comparative education literature. In 1996 the article was designated the Outstanding International Study of the Year by the American Educational Research Association (AERA), which, with 20,000 members, is the largest and arguably most prestigious generalist body in the domain of educational research. Partly because of that visibility, the article has been widely cited in a range of locations not normally linked to comparative education (e.g. Frank 1998, p.172; Ballantine 2001, p.326), and has helped researchers in fields which might not have an international dimension to see the importance of international contextual forces. The article has also been widely cited in publications more specifically in the field of comparative education (e.g. Paulston 1997, p.126; Watson 1998, p.24; Arnove 2003, pp.4, 13). For these researchers and their readers, the article has helped to spread awareness that comparisons can be undertaken at many levels, within countries as well as across countries. The article has also shown how the qualitative insights gained from comparisons may differ at different levels, and that, for example, perspectives gained from comparing patterns across classrooms may be rather different from those gained from

comparing patterns across countries. These insights may complement each other to form a more complete picture of the whole array of forces which shape educational and other patterns and processes.

The Impact of Globalisation

The choice of theme for today's CESHK conference, 'Comparative Education in an Increasingly Globalized World', reflects the wide recognition of the impact of globalisation on many spheres of life. Globalisation has been seen as both a threatening and an invigorating force (see e.g. Held et al. 1999; Held & McGrew 2000). In the field of comparative education, its impact has in general been more invigorating than threatening, and certainly it has stimulated a substantial literature (e.g. Sweeting 1996; Stromquist & Monkman 2000; Jarvis 2000; Rao 2003). On a broad level, Crossley (2000, p.324) has pointed out that:

It is now increasingly difficult to understand education in any context without reference to the global forces that influence policy and practice.... This set of factors helps to explain why many formerly mainstream educational researchers are now engaging in comparative and international research in education. In seeking to understand their own systems, they have discovered the significance of global factors and begun to recognise the value of comparative studies.

This remark is allied to Broadfoot's observation, quoted above (2003, p.411), that governments around the world are "anxious to learn about educational practices in other countries, as they scan the latest international league tables of school performance". Policy makers and practitioners cannot afford to be parochial in their points of reference. The huge impact of the Third International Mathematics & Science Study (TIMSS) (see e.g. Robitaille & Beaton 2002; Hiebert et al. 2003), in which researchers from our own Faculty have played a significant role (see e.g. Leung 2002; Law 2002), illustrates the increased attention paid to international comparative studies in educational circles. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a parallel project of considerable significance (see e.g. OECD 2001, 2003) in which colleagues at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) are actively involved (see www.fed.cuhk.edu.hk/~hkpisa).

Globalisation has also changed the nature of comparative education by increasing the interaction between scholars in different communities around the world. The internet has assisted scholars in comparative education as much as other fields; cheaper air travel has permitted scholars from different

countries to meet each other more easily; and interchange of ideas has increased the commonality in the topics which scholars choose to investigate and in their methodological approaches (Bray 2003c; Wilson 2003).

Other ways in which globalisation has changed the nature of comparative education include the themes on which researchers are focusing (Marginson & Mollis 2001, pp.611-614). One such theme is cross-border international education, which raises questions about the identities of mobile students and about the attributes required for educators, institutions and systems. Sub-themes include tensions between pedagogical practices and national cultures, and the mushrooming of on-line communities. Other themes include forms of identity in the global era, and the impact of international agencies and other globalising forces at the national level.

Turning this round, it has been suggested that comparative education can itself make a strong contribution to other fields in the era of globalisation. Crossley and Watson (2003, p.66) particularly comment on the multi-disciplinary and applied foundations of the field, its engagement with a diversity of theoretical frameworks, its traditional concern with the processes and agencies of international transfer, and its sensitivity to contextual and cultural differences.

Applications of Comparative Education

The above remarks have already alluded to several applications of comparative education. These dimensions deserve some elaboration. The nature of the applications in particular settings of course depends on who is doing the applying and for what purpose. Thus the goals of academics, policy makers, teachers, parents and students, for example, will all be somewhat different. Within the limits of this lecture, I will focus only on two of these groups, namely academics and policy makers; and I will refer to some tendencies of *misapplication* as well as application.

Comparative Education in the Academic Domain

In the academic domain, the tools and perspectives of comparative education can either be concentrated in specialist courses, journals and books, or they can be used as part of an approach which underpins other fields of study. This pair of possibilities is evident in our Faculty of Education as well as in the wider arena. On the one hand are colleagues who explicitly use the label Comparative Education to describe their work; and on the other hand are colleagues who undertake studies which are comparative but who would not label themselves Comparative Educationists and would not join a body like the

CESHK.

Moreover, a range of identities may be found within the CESHK and similar organisations. Many members choose to join these bodies because they find that the conferences are congenial and that the publications shed light on domains in which they are interested rather than because the members are concerned about the methodological debates and about the history and future of the field. Thus, even within the CESHK and similar organisations, many members would hesitate to describe themselves as Comparative Educationists. This reflects the fluidity of boundaries which resembles the pattern in some other academic domains (Becher & Trowler 2001).

The response from many of those who do identify themselves as Comparative Educationists has been accommodating. The field does not have sufficient strength to countenance rigid barriers and tight circles which can only be entered through accreditation. Most Comparative Educationists are glad to have their own specialised conferences and publications, but are also glad for the field to contribute to the endeavours of scholars who adopt different labels for their own specialisations. As indicated, one strength of comparative education is that it welcomes contributors from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds. Further, partly because of the overlap with international education noted above, comparative education conferences commonly welcome presenters who focus only on single countries. Thus, many Hong Kong academics have joined comparative education conferences in distant countries even when their papers have focused only on Hong Kong. The comparative education community has tolerated or even encouraged this pattern because the conferences are gathering grounds for scholars from many countries, and the comparison can take place during the discussions at the conferences themselves.

Nevertheless, the ability to call almost anything comparative when the topic is transported out of its original context is problematic. Similarly, while the comparative education community applauds the fact that a wide range of scholars undertake explicitly comparative studies, it commonly laments the fact that many of those scholars are inadequately systematic in their comparison. Broadfoot (2003, p.403) was quoted above as asserting the need for the comparative education community to “set its own house in order”, and to “bring the maximum rigour” to its collective endeavour. The house is not in order when gates are left too widely open; and when studies are not prepared with adequate rigour, the field falls into disrepute. A considerable amount of material published under the heading of comparative education lacks methodological and conceptual rigour, with the result that its contribution to aca-

democratic discourse is weak. Among the tasks for the field is to strengthen its rigour so that comparative education can be more effective and useful, both as a field in its own right and as a tool and approach to support other fields of enquiry.

Comparative Education for Policy Makers

Ambivalence about applications may be more evident in the domain of policy making. On the one hand, the fact that policy makers increasingly analyse patterns beyond their immediate localities may be viewed very positively. As observed by such authors as Crossley (1999, 2000) and Steiner-Khamsi (2002), policy makers, far more than ever before, are expected to draw on external examples and experiences to justify their proposals for actions at home. It is good to see comparative analysis in our own Hong Kong documents as much as in those in other parts of the world. To take a few recent examples:

- The Education Commission's consultation document on the aims of education included an annex on developments in other parts of the world (Education Commission 1999, Annex 4). The other parts of the world were China, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, the UK and the USA.
- Attached to the reform proposals in the Education Commission's 2000 consultation document was an appendix entitled 'Reforms in Other Places' (Education Commission 2000, Appendix I). The other places were Shanghai, Taipei, Singapore, Japan, Korea, Chicago, and the USA.
- The 2002 Sutherland Report on higher education contained an appendix entitled 'International Examples of Institutional Governance and Management' (Sutherland 2002, Appendix D). The examples were the University of Pennsylvania (USA), the University of Wisconsin-Madison (USA), the University of Warwick (UK), the University of Melbourne (Australia), and the Imperial College of Science, Technology & Medicine (UK).
- The 2003 document from the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education & Qualifications (ACTEQ) on the teacher competencies framework contained an appendix entitled 'Teachers' CPD [Continuing Professional Development] Policies and Practices in Selected Regions' (ACTEQ 2003, Appendix C). The selected regions were Scotland, England and mainland China.

However, the ways that policy makers around the world undertake

comparative analysis are sometimes flawed. Their choice of locations for drawing the comparisons may be biased; and their methodological approaches to the comparison may be problematic. It is important to recall Sadler's observation from the very early years of the field (1900, p.310):

We cannot wander at pleasure among the educational systems of the world, like a child strolling through a garden, and pick off a flower from one bush and some leaves from another, and then expect that if we stick what we have gathered into the soil at home, we shall have a living plant.

This statement was made by an individual who had led what McLean (1992, p.3) described as "the most extensive study of foreign education ever undertaken in Britain", and deserves continued attention in all countries at all times. As McLean added, however (1992, pp.16-24), the lesson had not been well learned in the United Kingdom. Morris (1998) has also pointed out that during the 1980s and 1990s policy makers there inappropriately presented certain patterns of education in our part of the world as a model for their own education system to emulate. During the 1990s, Morris observed, the East Asian economies were performing well, and positive references to the superior achievements of 'Pacific Rim' or the 'Tiger' economies were common in educational policy statements of various kinds. The logic of such comparisons was essentially:

- Country A is an economic basket case (high levels of unemployment and low levels of economic growth) – this is portrayed as largely the result of the educational system which is not producing workers with appropriate skills.
- Country B is economically successful (low levels of unemployment and high levels of economic growth) – this is to a large degree the result of its possessing a well-educated workforce.
- Therefore, if Country A adopts some of the features of the educational system of Country B it will improve the state of Country A's economy.

However, such comparisons can be both superficial and simplistic. As Morris remarked (1998, p.4):

The extent to which cross-country comparisons of aspects of schooling can provide direct guidelines to policy making requires a high degree of caution – especially where this involves the selective 'raiding' of the features of educational systems. The need for caution comes primarily

from the difficulties which arise from comparison across cultures, ahistorical comparisons, a tendency to reify patterns of economic growth, and selective focusing.

This is not to say that policy makers should not undertake cross-country comparisons. Indeed quite the contrary, such actions are to be applauded and encouraged. Through comparison, policy makers can understand their own systems better; and, as noted by K.M. Cheng (1999a, p.9), comparative education can alert policy makers to the obstacles and failures in other systems as well as to the successes. However, policy makers need to think carefully about the places chosen for comparison and about the implications of those places. Hong Kong policy makers in particular seem to have a strong predilection to look at such countries as Australia, the United Kingdom and the USA, and also on occasions Japan, mainland China, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan. They are much less likely to look even at such close neighbours as Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam; within Europe they gloss over such countries as France, Italy and Spain; and Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, West Asia and South America are practically ignored altogether. This is only partly a result of language barriers: it is also a result of mindsets about which types of society are worth emulating and likely to deliver worthwhile ideas.

This tendency to focus on a restricted range of locations limits the scope for ideas and restrict the understanding that could come from analysis of education in a broader set of contexts. Mason (2002) has shown that instructive lessons can be learned from comparing Hong Kong's target-oriented curriculum with South Africa's outcomes-based education. Similarly, policy makers who are concerned about the dominance of private supplementary tutoring in Hong Kong would probably learn more from looking at such countries as Egypt, Mauritius and Sri Lanka, where tutoring has long been widespread, than at such countries as Australia, the UK and the USA where tutoring is still uncommon (Bray 1999b; Kwok 2001); and to understand the nature and impact of colonial transition, it is more useful to look at countries in Asia and Africa than at ones in Western Europe and North America (Bray 1997a, 1997b).

The Role of HKU

From these remarks I turn to the third part of my lecture, which concerns the role of HKU. Looking back, we may gain some satisfaction from our leadership in the field of comparative education; but much remains to be done, and I will sketch a proposed agenda for some of this work.

Sweeting (1999a) has presented what he called the “early history” of comparative education at HKU. He traced writing about fields at least contiguous with comparative education back to 1926, when the first issue of the *Journal of Education* sponsored by the university’s Education Society was released with articles on the new educational policy of the Chinese Republic and other matters. The earliest courses that may be regarded as a form of comparative education were part of a postgraduate diploma programme launched in 1939; and further courses were taught in the 1950s. However, HKU only entered what Sweeting calls the modern era in comparative education during the 1980s; and since that also coincides with the creation and development of the Faculty of Education, it is on that period that I shall focus.

IEA Studies

The Faculty of Education has played a major role in the cross-national studies of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), and indeed the Faculty is formally designated the Hong Kong IEA Centre. Researchers from the Faculty have participated in many IEA projects, providing data collected according to common templates which can then be compared with data from other parts of the world.

The IEA work was initially taken up in Hong Kong by Alan Brimer, who was Head of the School of Education and then, following the creation of a Departmental structure within the newly-formed Faculty of Education, was Head of the Department of Education from 1984 to 1987. The first IEA project in which Alan Brimer played a major role was the Second International Mathematics Study, of which the Hong Kong report was published in 1985 (Brimer & Griffin 1985). Subsequently, colleagues became involved in IEA projects which focused on a wide range of subjects (see www.hku.hk/cerc/IEA/hk-iea_centre.htm). They include:

- science and mathematics education (Holbrook 1990; Leung & Law 1997; Leung 2002; Law 2002);
- pre-primary education (Opper 1992, 1996);
- reading literacy (Johnson & Cheung 1995; Tse 2002; Tse et al. 2003);
- information technology education (Law et al. 2000); and
- civic education (Lee & Leung 2001; Lee 2002a).

Through these projects, Hong Kong researchers have contributed to international as well as local data bases, and have given Hong Kong significant visibility in the wider arena. Their findings have had important implications for

curriculum, administration and other dimensions of education. Hong Kong has been able to benchmark itself against other systems in ways that have sometimes shocked policy makers out of complacency. For example, while Hong Kong ranked well on the TIMSS data in science and mathematics, it ranked much less satisfactorily in the PIRLS data on reading literacy. The data showed that motivation is important: parents and other householders in Hong Kong did not strongly motivate children to read, with the result that Hong Kong's scores were lower than those in several countries which had fewer economic resources.

The Comparative Education Research Centre

The Comparative Education Research Centre (CERC) was established in 1994, in part to build on the strengths in IEA work. CERC's operations underwent formal review as part of the Faculty's management processes in 1998 and 2003, and each time CERC was praised by both internal and external assessors. CERC has also gained strong recognition in the broader field. For example Joseph Farrell (1999, p.545) of the University of Toronto, reviewing the book by Noah & Eckstein (1998) that CERC had published the previous year, described his perception of CERC as "one of the newest and strongest intellectual centers of the world". He added:

The Centre seems a place where many of the tensions and intellectual conflicts between what we have traditionally labeled as east and west, developed and underdeveloped, left and right are coming together in a ferment that may produce some very new and different ways of understanding and carrying on our professional business. That a book such as this is published by and in a place such as Hong Kong strikes me as a remarkable accomplishment and perhaps indicates that we can, finally, cross our various cultural, ideological, and epistemological divides to better understand each other. This is what the comparative understanding of societies and how they facilitate learning is ultimately all about.

The following year, Edmund King (2000, p.496), Emeritus Professor of the University of London, similarly described CERC as "productive and authoritative", despite the fact that it had at that time only existed for six years; and John Morgan (2000, p.362), of the University of Nottingham, highlighted the particular contribution that CERC's publications had made to "the analysis and understanding of education and social and political change in East Asia". From these and similar remarks in a wide range of settings, both formal and

informal, it is clear that CERC's reputation has grown in a very desirable way.

During its decade of existence, CERC has had four Directors, beginning with Lee Wing On. I took over as Director in 1996, and played that role until 2002. Bob Adamson took over from me when I had to devote more of my administrative time to the newly-formed Department of Curriculum & Educational Studies; and Mark Mason took over from Bob Adamson when the latter moved to Queensland for a period of leave in mid-2002. Together with their supporting committees, each Director has carried forward the mission of CERC in a way that has emphasised continuity and growth rather than sharp change of direction.

CERC's most visible products during the decade have been in published form. In addition to supporting CERC members to publish work in journals and other outlets published by other bodies, CERC has to date published 28 books under its own imprint. The series CERC Studies in Comparative Education, which is now co-published with Kluwer Academic Publishers, is attracting a growing queue of authors. Another series, which has also attracted very positive attention, has been co-published with the Asian Development Bank; and a pair of seminal books on *The Chinese Learner* (Watkins & Biggs 1996, 2001) has been co-published with the Australian Council for Educational Research. Though CERC publications have proven well able to stand on their own, partnerships with external bodies have been valuable ways to extend outreach.

Other activities of CERC are reported in its newsletter, *CERCular*, which since 1996 has appeared twice a year in English and from which excerpts have been reprinted in Chinese through the *Comparative Education Review* published by Beijing Normal University. Among the activities reported in these newsletters are seminars from both visitors and HKU colleagues, workshops and training courses of various kinds. The newsletters have also contained short articles.

Contributions to Professional Bodies

Academics and students at HKU have also made major contributions to professional bodies in comparative education. In the context of today's conference, the CESHK is perhaps a good place to begin. The CESHK has to date had seven Presidents, among whom HKU is proud to have contributed four. The founding President (1989-91) was Bernard Luk, then of the CUHK and now of the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd). He was followed by Leslie Lo of the CUHK, and then by three academic staff from HKU: Gerard

Postiglione (1994-96), Lee Wing On⁶ (1996-98) and myself (1998-2000). Clive Dimmock of the CUHK then took over for a short period in 2000, and was succeeded by HKU's Bob Adamson (2000-02). The President who has completed his term (2002-04) at this conference is Ip Kin Yuen from the HKIEd, who plays a leading role in the HKU Faculty of Education Alumni Association. HKU has also of course contributed through membership of CESHK Executive Committee and in various other ways including host of the website (www.hku.hk/cerc/ceshk).

As mentioned above, the CESHK is one of the 30 members of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES). Another member society in which HKU has played an active role is the regional Comparative Education Society of Asia (CESA). This body was formed in 1995 during CERC's inaugural symposium at HKU. CESA works as a forum to bring together scholars from across the region, and is especially important for scholars in countries which do not have national societies of comparative education.

Even more prominently, HKU plays a major role in the umbrella comparative body. CERC is the WCCES secretariat, and hosts its website (www.hku.hk/cerc/wcces). The linkage with the world body in large measure arises from my appointment as WCCES Assistant Secretary General in 1994, and then Secretary General in 2000, and from Bob Adamson's appointment as Assistant Secretary General in 2002. The most prominent WCCES activities are the World Congresses of Comparative Education held approximately every three years and with, at least during the 1990s and the present century, always a strong attendance by Hong Kong scholars.

Academic Programmes, Research Students and Postdoctoral Fellows

HKU has also, of course, played a major role in nurturing of new generations of scholars through its degree programmes. Comparative education has been taught as a component of degree programmes at all levels, and has been a specialist programme at the MEd level. It is a particular pleasure today to welcome students from the cohorts of Comparative Education MEd students who graduated in 1998, 2001 and 2003. Many of our PhD students have undertaken explicitly comparative research studies, and some are currently teaching courses in comparative education in such institutions as the University of London and Shanghai Normal University.

⁶ Lee Wing On is now at the HKIEd, but he was at HKU when elected to the CESHK Presidency in 1996.

To these may be added the careers of CERC postdoctoral fellows. To date, CERC has had two postdoctoral fellows, and looks forward to welcoming a third later this year. Zhang Weiyuan was with us from 1996 to 1998, during which his projects included completion of a study of school careers guidance (Zhang 1998). He subsequently took a major leadership role in the Centre for Research in Distance & Adult Learning (CRIDAL) at the Open University of Hong Kong. Gui Qin was the second postdoctoral fellow (1997-99) and used her time to develop publications on human capital as well as on the broad field of comparative education (e.g. Gui 1998; Bray & Gui 1998, 2001). She then proceeded to Capital Normal University, Beijing, where she is now a professor in comparative education.

An Agenda for the Future

The above remarks show that the worldwide field of comparative education has a long history. Whatever the debates about the origins of the field, at least in the initial part of that history it was dominated by scholarship in Western Europe and North America. More recent times have brought a shift in the centre of gravity towards East Asia. Scholars in Hong Kong, and in HKU in particular, have played a major role in that shift, and can justifiably feel some pride in having done so.

The question then concerns the future roles for these scholars. I will highlight two main themes: the foci of research, and the dissemination and utilisation of research.

Foci of Research

In this lecture, I have remarked on the shift in the favoured units of analysis in comparative education. In the past, the field was dominated by the nation state. That remains a popular unit of analysis, with some justification because national governments do still play a major role both in education systems and in the contextual environments within which those education systems operate. Nevertheless, the field of comparative education has seen some innovative work with different units of analysis. Some of this is evident in the work of CERC. For example:

- Watkins and Biggs (1996, 2001) compared the learning styles of students;
- Zhang (1998) compared school careers guidance in three cities;
- Bray and Koo (1999) compared education in two Special Administrative Regions;
- Hayhoe and Pan (2001) focused on comparison of different cultures;

- Yamato (2003) compared international schools, and the systems of which they are part, within Hong Kong; and
- with a different orientation, Sweeting (1999b) developed methodological insights from comparison over time rather than over space.

Such innovative work is to be applauded and extended. A substantial agenda awaits scholars who are willing to explore other units of analysis, thereby adding to the vitality of the field and to the insights that it can offer.

In term of geographic and cultural emphasis, CERC's work has been dominated by Asia and particularly East Asia. That is not necessarily problematic, but a case can be made for expanding this focus. At the same time, CERC is drawing on the strengths arising from the international background of its members, with publications on countries as diverse as India (Rao & Sharma 2002; Rao et al. 2003), South Africa (Mason 1999; 2002), and Romania (Zdrengeha & Hoye 2003). Several colleagues have also made good use of consultancy assignments in different countries to produce research that contributes to the field. Some of the work by Cheng Kai Ming in mainland China fits into this category (e.g. K.M. Cheng 1999b, 2003), as does some of my own work in such countries as Cambodia, Solomon Islands and Maldives (Bray 1999a; Coyne & Bray 1999a; Bray & Adam 2001). The scope for further synergy between academic and professional work is considerable.

Turning the themes of research, some of the work published by CERC and its members extends understanding on topics which have long featured in the literature. Mok's (2003) book on centralisation and decentralisation would fit into this category, as would the book on higher education by Postiglione and Mak (1997), and the book on equity and access to education by Lee (2002b). Other work is developing frontiers in new topics of comparative research. The work by Watkins and Biggs (1996, 2001) and their collaborators on the Chinese Learner is in this category, and several colleagues have plans to take the research beyond its present boundaries. Further work is needed on technologies in the classroom and beyond, lifelong and lifewide learning, homework, operation of "one country, two systems", and much else. For this, researchers can make use of the distinctive features of Hong Kong's culture, economy and political framework. They can also make stronger use of Hong Kong's location to do more comparative work around the region, for example in Philippines, Vietnam and Laos. This can be facilitated by stronger efforts to recruit students from a wider range of places.

Dissemination and Utilisation of Research

Hong Kong prides itself, with some justification, on its ease of communica-

tions and its information technology. These have greatly assisted not only the conduct of research but also its dissemination. Hong Kong also has advantages in more traditional forms of communication, since it can offer high-quality printing of books, journals and newsletters at reasonable cost.

Among the Hong Kong's further strengths is its facility in both English and Chinese. For HKU, as an English-medium institution keen to assert itself in the international arena, English has played a stronger role than Chinese in dissemination of research findings. This is likely to continue, and it will be especially important within the context of the Research Assessment Exercises (RAEs) conducted periodically by the University Grants Council, since many of the assessors in these exercises are based in Australasia, North America and Western Europe rather than in Chinese-speaking societies. However, comparative education scholars in Hong Kong can play an additional role by publishing in Chinese. In mainland China, the field of comparative education has grown significantly during the last two decades and is set for further exciting developments. A similar remark may be made of Taiwan, albeit from a different starting point. However, both mainland China and Taiwan are arguably weak in methodological approaches to comparative education, and restricted in the scope of studies conducted. Scholars in Hong Kong can play a leading role to upgrade the rigour and extend the scope, and publications through Chinese will reach audiences that cannot be reached through English.

At the same time, Hong Kong scholars can help the English-speaking world to understand more about the Chinese-speaking world. Hong Kong scholars can read materials in Chinese but then interpret them in English and present them to the international arena. In addition to the writings of seasoned scholars, it is worth calling attention to the work of some MEd students in this domain (e.g. Yung 1998; M.W. Cheng 2003). In addition, among CERC's milestone publications is the book by Gu Mingyuan (2001). Gu is probably the best known scholar of comparative education in mainland China, but until recently was relatively unknown in other parts of the world because little of his work was available in other languages. CERC translated a collection of his writings into English, thereby making them accessible internationally. In doing this, CERC was scoring another 'first': many comparative education books have been translated from English to Chinese, but this was the first such book to be translated from Chinese to English.

The comparative education community must also, of course, disseminate its work to policy makers and other audiences. Much of this is achieved through websites, meetings and consultancies rather than through academic publications. I remarked above on the methodological shortcomings and bi-

ases of many policy documents; but the responsibility for improving this situation lies not only in the hands of the policy makers but also in the hands of the academics, who must reach out and make their work easily comprehended. Meanwhile, we should again applaud the willingness of the policy makers to look beyond our borders for inspiration. This makes comparative education a practical tool as well as an academic domain of study.

Conclusion

In this lecture I have charted aspects of the history and contours of comparative education. It is an exciting field which has renewed vigour in this era of globalisation. It is also an accommodating field, which welcomes contributors from all disciplines. In some respects, this breadth is problematic because it dilutes the rigour of approaches. In this respect, to quote Broadfoot (2003, p.411) again, the field needs to “set its ... house in order” and maximise its “rigour, relevance and creativity”. Through doing this, however, the field can serve not only the interests of those who identify themselves as Comparative Educationists but also scholars in a wide range of other fields. Comparison can be undertaken at many levels, and the insights of researchers who focus on different levels can complement each other in instructive ways. Insights from the field of comparative education can be useful to specialists in other fields, just as the insights from those other fields can be useful to specialists in comparative education.

Comparative education also has an important applied role. Today I have particularly highlighted its usefulness to policy makers. The fact that many policy reports, in Hong Kong and elsewhere, highlight experiences in other parts of the world is to be applauded and encouraged. However, in many cases more attention needs to be given to the models of comparison. The selection of cases is not always easy to justify, and the attempts to identify lessons sometimes pay inadequate attention to contexts and other factors. The responsibility for improving this situation perhaps chiefly lies in the hands of the policy makers themselves, but specialists in comparative education can play a role by making their work readily accessible in appropriate formats.

With these remarks, I thank you for joining today’s event and attending this lecture. I applaud the contributions that many of you have made to the field of comparative education in HKU, in Hong Kong more broadly, and further afield. We have much to be proud of. It is also clear that we can all work together to achieve yet further advances so that when both the Faculty and the CESHK look back from future anniversaries, we will see the present era as a period from which we have made significant further advances.

Finally, as Dean I invite you to join the cocktail reception in the foyer. Greet old friends, meet new ones, and help us to launch the Faculty's 20th anniversary celebrations!

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Biographical Note

Professor Mark Bray is Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Hong Kong (HKU), where he holds a personal Chair of Comparative Education. He joined HKU in 1986, working first as a research associate in the Centre of Asian Studies and then moving to the Faculty of Education in 1987. Prior to joining HKU he taught in secondary schools in Kenya and Nigeria, and at the Universities of Edinburgh, Papua New Guinea and London. His service to the Faculty of Education includes periods as Head of the Department of Education (1991-1995) and Director of the Comparative Education Research Centre (1996-2002).

Professor Bray is author/editor of over 25 books and over 170 chapters and articles, one of which was designated Outstanding International Study of the year (1996). In 2000 he was given an Outstanding Researcher award by HKU. From 1998 to 2000 Professor Bray was President of the Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong (CESHK). He has also been a member of the Board of Directors of the Comparative Education Society of Asia (CESA) and of the US-based Comparative & International Education Society (CIES), and he is now Secretary General of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES).

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