Border Crossings: towards a comparative pedagogy

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ABSTRACT This article uses the Comparative Education millennium special issue and the author's recently published five-nation comparative study of primary education to argue the case for a new comparative pedagogy. Pedagogy is defined as both the act of teaching and the discourse in which it is embedded. The comparative analysis of pedagogy requires that we have a viable framework for the empirical study of classroom transactions and that we locate these transactions historically and culturally at the levels of classroom, school and system. The postulated analytical framework maps the key elements in the act of teaching and links them with the processes of curriculum transformation from state to classroom. Comparative pedagogy reveals, alongside each country's unique mix of values, ideas and practices, powerful continuities in these which transcend time and space. In so doing, it helps us to pinpoint those universals in teaching and learning to which, in any context, we need most closely to attend if we are to improve the quality of education.

Territories and Borders

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. From this tendency comparativists—who are sometimes inclined to differentiate themselves from mere comparers—are not immune.

Fortunately, the August 2000 special issue of Comparative Education, the starting point for articles in this issue, was more interested in questioning borders than in maintaining them. Thus, Angela Little explored the hegemonic subtexts of the relationship between education and development (Little, 2000); Robert Cowen pressed further his quest for appropriate units of educational comparison for our time, whether these be nation-state, region, transitology or rim (Cowen, 1999, 2000); Patricia Broadfoot argued that the traditional concepts of the discipline (if discipline it is) should be problematised and that it—and we—should be freed 'from the collective conceptual blinkers which the traditional apparatus of educational assumptions represents' (Broadfoot, 2000, p. 369); Michael Crossley commended the building of bridges between intellectual cultures and traditions (Crossley, 2000); and of course the entire special issue was predicated on the need for a changing world to be serviced by changing tools of comparative analysis. This is as it should be, given that the journal's contributors agreed that globalisation is the catalyst both for this introspection and the apparent revival of interest in comparative education.

However, as Castells shows, in striking at the heart of individual and collective identity, globalisation provokes borders as well as threatens or dissolves them (Castells, 1997). So perhaps we should not be too surprised if some of the old territorial frissons are faintly
detectable in the millennial special issue of *Comparative Education* and the present follow-up issue. Nor should we be surprised, therefore, at the continuing reverence for Michael Sadler, who is quoted several times in the special issue, and rarely with less than unqualified approval. The attraction of Sadler is that he legitimates the territory of the academic comparativist and enables him or her to disdain parvenus such as the cherry-picking policy-makers who import ‘tough new’ policy x, practice y or even slogan z (‘z’ is for zero tolerance) in the belief that it will ‘drive up standards’, promote economic prosperity and advance their political careers.

However, Sadler’s celebrated assertion of the cultural embeddedness of education—‘the things outside the schools matter even more than the things inside ... and govern and interpret the things inside’ (Sadler, 1900, p. 49)—may well be an unproblematic credo, but the same surely cannot be said for his insistence that ‘the fabric of an organisation ... must be taken in all, or left unimitated’ (Sadler, 1902, p. 44). For just as the diversification of disciplinary perspectives and methods in comparative education should challenge traditional assumptions about what makes good comparative research, so, as *Comparative Education* (Crossley & Jarvis, 2000) also argues, our now more extensive knowledge about education elsewhere must question the traditional belief in the inviolability of the nexus of nation-state, culture and educational idea.

In any case, history—a necessary companion to comparative study but these days an all too frequently absent one—teaches us a different lesson. Cultural borrowing happens; it has always happened. Few countries remain hermetically sealed in the development of their educational systems, and for centuries there has been a lively international traffic in educational ideas and practices. So, for example, Pestalozzi mingles with Tagore and the Elmhirsts in both English and Indian progressivism; Dewey turns up briefly in the Soviet Union and Turkey as well more lastingly in England and the USA; both the German Gymnasium and the American high school help shape the development of secondary education in Russia; Kay Shuttleworth imports or exports the *Ecole Normale* from France to England and India; Jan Komensky (Comenius) journeys tirelessly from Moravia to Heidelberg, Amsterdam, Prague, Berlin, Paris, Stockholm, London and points between and beyond, and his principles of common vernacular schooling and carefully graduated whole class teaching, not to mention his textbooks, embed themselves deeply and lastingly in the pedagogy of many countries of central, eastern and northern Europe; and the monitorial systems of Bell and Lancaster seed themselves just about everywhere (Alexander, 2000, pp. 169–172).

In cases like this it is more difficult than one might suppose to distinguish deliberate acts of cultural import–export and colonisation from the more random processes of cultural migration and cross-fertilisation which are the by-products of trade, war, migration, colonialism, religious proselytising, aristocratic grand tours and idle curiosity. So, rather than invoking Sadler to justify boundary maintenance, we might remind ourselves that his example was Germany, a country about which he and his early twentieth century compatriots had decidedly mixed feelings—as David Phillips shows in his contribution to the special issue (Phillips, 2000). We might examine more closely, therefore, the dynamics of this perennial and ubiquitous trade in educational ideas and practices. We might investigate what happens to such ideas and practices as they collide with indigenous traditions within different cultural settings; and we might explore why some of them ‘take’ and are domesticated while others do not. And we might also consider the way that attitudes to the importing and exporting of educational ideas and practices may be coloured by residual xenophobia, cultural imperialism or political correctness; for as Edward Said has uncompromisingly reminded us, academics can no less detach themselves from their history and culture than can the rest of humanity (Said, 1994). This alternative agenda would take us closer to the understanding of cultural
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change and continuity which is a necessary part of the comparativist’s programme; it would place globalisation in its historical context rather than treat it as a novel phenomenon; and it would open up new perspectives on our questions about boundaries and borders.

The Neglect of Pedagogy in Comparative Education

This, then, is the cue for pedagogy, perhaps the most prominent of the themes which comparativists have tended to ignore. There is a certain irony in this, given that Sadler would surely have argued that macro and micro are inseparable, not that ‘the things outside the school’ are all that comparativists need to study. In the special issue, Angela Little recorded that just 6.1% of this journal’s articles between 1977 and 1998 dealt with ‘curricular content and the learner’s experience’ as compared with nearly 31% on themes such as educational reform and development (Little, 2000, p. 283). Robert Cowen asserted that ‘we are nowhere near coming fully to grips with the themes of curriculum, pedagogic styles and evaluation as powerful message systems which form identities in specific educational sites’ (Cowen, 2000, p. 340). Patricia Broadfoot argued that future comparative studies of education should place much greater emphasis ‘on the process of learning itself rather than, as at present, on the organisation and provision of education’ (Broadfoot, 2000, p. 368). And the need for this kind of shift was central to the rationale of the programme of Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded seminars on comparative research which she, David Phillips and I organised at Bristol, Oxford and Warwick in 1997–1999 (Alexander et al., 1999, 2000).

If the omission is so obvious, one might reasonably enquire why more comparativists have not acted to remedy it. On the other hand, the fact that comparative studies of pedagogy are not reported in comparative journals does not mean that they are not taking place. Journals such as Teaching and Teacher Education and the British Educational Research Journal have included several such pieces and this fact again prompts the boundary question. What in a comparative study of pedagogy is more important, the illumination of pedagogy or the act of comparing? A researcher who submits his or her comparative study to Teaching and Teacher Education rather than Comparative Education or Compare would seem to know the answer. He or she, presumably, would agree with Broadfoot’s assessment in an earlier Comparative Education special issue that comparative education is not a discipline but a context, a means to an end rather than an end in itself (Broadfoot, 1977, p. 133).

No less significant than the neglect of pedagogy in the comparative education literature is the apparent neglect by many comparativists of comparison itself. For perhaps the most striking finding in Angela Little’s survey of the contents of Comparative Education 1977–1998 is that ‘only a small percentage [of articles] ... have adopted an explicitly comparative approach’ and that ‘the majority [58%] focus on single countries’ (Little, 2000, p. 285). Are comparativists, then, classified by where they publish rather than by what they do? Are disciplinary boundaries defined more by loyalty than logic?

The Editors of another comparative journal, Compare, use the curious phrase ‘comparisons within a single nation’ (Leach & Preston, 2001, p. 149) for single-country studies. Perhaps this stems from a recognition that because comparing is a fundamental human activity, all research, including single-country education studies, entails comparison of some kind, even if it is tacit and unadmitted. Or maybe ‘comparisons within a single nation’ is merely a device for obscuring the slightly uncomfortable fact that in Compare, as in Comparative Education, the larger proportion of published articles have entailed no transnational comparison, a fact confirmed elsewhere by Broadfoot (1999, p. 23).

Little’s (2000) analysis of Comparative Education’s share of the comparative literature has three components: context (the particular country or countries studied), content (using the
journal’s 1978 classification reproduced on the journal’s inside back cover), and *comparison* (the number of countries involved). On this basis she portrays a literature in which north writes about south, but not vice versa, in which educational systems and policies feature much more prominently than educational practice, and in which, as I have noted, single-country studies are more plentiful than transnational comparisons.

If pedagogy features but rarely in the content analysis this may indeed be because comparativists have chosen not to study it (the logistical, methodological and linguistic demands of comparative pedagogical research make comparative policy analysis, especially when it is grounded in documents rather than fieldwork, a much more manageable option, and a cheaper one). But it may also reflect anachronisms in the 1978 classificatory framework, for the small print of Little’s survey lists a further 73 articles (or 18% of those she surveyed) whose themes this framework apparently cannot accommodate. Among them are articles on ‘girls and women’, ‘diversity/cultural pluralism’, ‘minorities’ and ‘philosophical and pedagogical theory’ (Little, 2000, p. 283). However, if these four confirm that the 1978 framework needs updating, they also signal that comparativists themselves are responsive to changing educational and social agendas, although the few articles in the final category do little to elevate comparative pedagogy from its place near the bottom of the thematic league table.

**Comparative Pedagogy: one domain from two**

This persistent neglect prompts a further thought. Perhaps pedagogy is one of those aspects of comparative education which demands kinds and levels of expertise over and above knowledge of the countries compared, their cultures, systems and policies. I rather think it is. In the *Comparative Education* special issue Michael Crossley (2000) argues:

> If the well documented pitfalls of comparative education are not to be re-encountered, it is important that those new to such research engage with the literatures that are central to the field. Similarly, it is important for those who see themselves as comparativists to embrace the opportunities presented by such a widening of research networks and discourses (p. 324).

A slight imbalance in the force of these two imperatives is detectable here: non-comparativists must engage with the literature, but comparativists need only to embrace opportunities. If the camps are indeed this discrete, the implications of this are that the same obligations—to embrace opportunities and study other literatures—should apply to each of them. There may well be evidence of ill-judged comparison among the ‘new’ educational comparers, but we can also find examples of superficial or even ill-conceived analysis of particular educational phenomena in the mainstream comparative literature. Unless one is content to confine oneself to that superficial juxtaposing of national educational systems which used to be the staple diet of university comparative education courses but, mercifully, is now much less common, then meaningful educational comparison is never less than a magnificent challenge, for it requires engagement with several distinct literatures and modes of analysis simultaneously. The term ‘comparative education’ connotes not a discipline but a broad field of enquiry in which two endeavours or domains come together: comparing and educating. One can hardly study comparative law or literature without knowing at least as much about law or literature as about the countries and cultures involved and the business of making comparisons; the same goes for comparative education.
This is why this article’s title refers to ‘comparative pedagogy’. Pedagogy is a large and complex field of practice, theory and research in its own right. Yet of its two central acts—teaching and learning—only the latter is mentioned in the notes for contributors’ in *Comparative Education* and in Little’s framework. The challenge of comparative pedagogy is to marry the study of education elsewhere and the study of teaching and learning in a way which respects both fields of enquiry yet also creates something which is more than the sum of their parts.

**New Territories, Old Maps**

The *Comparative Education* special issue appeared a few months before the publication of *Culture and Pedagogy* (Alexander, 2000). This study had at its core data from the project *Primary Education in Five Cultures*, which were gathered at the levels of system, school and classroom between 1994 and 1998. Trying to classify this study in accordance with the *Comparative Education* framework underlines pedagogy’s marginal status in mainstream comparative discourse. The study’s ‘context’ was England, France, India, Russia and the USA: so far so good, even though five-country studies are relatively unusual. (Edmund King’s seven-nation study remains the outstanding example of this genre (King, 1979)). Its ‘content’ straddled at least six of the journal’s 13 themes without sitting comfortably within any of them, and the educational phase with which it dealt—primary education—does not appear at all in that framework. Its ‘comparison’ was across five countries (a rarity) and both north and south (a rarity overall, and a novelty in the five-country category; Little, 2000, p. 284).

There are two reasons why the content of the *Five Cultures* research mapped so imperfectly on to Little’s framework. One was that pedagogy, as already noted, is a neglected field in comparative education. The other is that this framework, and the attendant use of it, do not readily accommodate studies which cross one important border hitherto unmentioned, that between the macro and the micro. *Culture and Pedagogy*—as the title suggests—illustrates the Sadler maxim about the inseparability of the worlds inside and outside the school, yet Little’s framework seems to imply that comparative studies are either national or local, about policy or practice, the system or the classroom, rather than that the desired illumination may be achieved by combining these.

So, if in *Culture and Pedagogy* classrooms, teachers, pupils and teaching–learning processes feature prominently, so too do the five national systems and their policies. For pedagogy does not begin and end in the classroom. It can be comprehended only once one locates practice within the concentric circles of local and national, and of classroom, school, system and state, and only if one steers constantly back and forth between these, exploring the way that what teachers and students do in classrooms both reflects and enacts the values of the wider society. That, at least was one of the challenges which the *Five Cultures* research sought to address.

Another challenge for a comparative pedagogy is to engage with the interface between present and past, to enact the principle that if one is to understand anything about education elsewhere one’s perspective should be powerfully informed by history. So while the comparative journey in *Culture and Pedagogy* culminates (pp. 427–528) in a detailed examination of teacher–pupil discourse—for language is at once the most powerful tool of human learning and the quintessential expression of culture and identity—it starts (pp. 49–172) with accounts of the historical roots and developments of primary education in each of the five countries, paying particular attention to the emergence of those core and abiding values, traditions and habits which shape, enable and constrain pedagogical development.
Defining Pedagogy

So far a definition of pedagogy has been inferred. It is time to be more explicit. One of the values of comparativism is that it alerts one to the way that the apparently bedrock terms in a particular discourse are nothing of the sort. That is certainly the case in education, although the differences can be quite subtle. Thus, it may well matter, in the context of the strong investment in citizenship which is part of French public education, that éduquer means to bring up as well as formally to educate and that bien éduqué means well brought up or well mannered rather than well schooled (‘educate’ in English has both senses too, but the latter now predominates); or that the root of the Russian word for education, obrazovanie, means ‘form’ or ‘image’ rather than, as in our Latinate version, a ‘leading out’; or that obrazovanie is inseparable from vospitanie, an idea which has no equivalent in English because it combines personal development, private and public morality, and civic commitment, while in England these tend to be treated as separate and even conflicting domains. It is almost certainly significant that in English (and American) education ‘development’ is viewed as a physiological and psychological process which takes place independently of formal schooling, whereas Russian teachers define ‘development’ transitively, as a task which requires their active intervention: in the one context development is ‘natural’ while in the other it is more akin to acculturation. Similarly, in the Anglo-American tradition the most able child is defined as the one with the greatest potential, while in Russia’s Soviet pedagogical legacy it is the least able, because he/she has furthest to travel towards goals which are held to be common for all children (Muckle, 1988; Alexander, 2000, pp. 368-370).

Such terms hint at more than the comparativist’s need to be acutely sensitive to the problems of language and translation. They also subtly align the educational agenda along culturally distinctive lines even before one starts investigating the details of policies and practices. In the cases exemplified above, both l’Éducation and vospitanie inject suggestions of public morality and the common good into the discourse in ways which subliminally influence the recurring discussions about school goals and curricula in France and Russia; while the Russian notions of ‘potential’ and ‘development’ each imply—and indeed impose—strong teacher agency and responsibility in a way which their more passive and individualistic English and American connotations do not.

The consciousness intimated here also implies a model of pedagogy, and a course for comparative pedagogical analysis, which are as far removed as they can be from the crude and normative polarising of ‘teacher-centred’ (or ‘subject-centred’) and ‘child-centred’ teaching which too often remains the stock-in-trade of such accounts of pedagogy as are available in the comparative literature. Mainstream pedagogical research abandoned this dichotomy years ago; mainstream comparative research should now do likewise. Perhaps the most damaging residue of this sort of thinking can still be found in the reports of some development education consultants, who happily commend Western ‘child-centred’ pedagogy to non-Western governments without regard for local cultural and educational circumstances, or for recent advances in the psychology of learning and teaching, or for the findings of pedagogical research on the decidedly questionable record of child-centred teaching in Western classrooms, of all of which they seem to be unaware. It would seem that the Sadlerian embargo governs the import of educational ideas, but not their export, and that in the development context pedagogical expertise may be less about knowledge than gross national product.

‘Pedagogy’ itself also, as a concept, lies linguistically and culturally on shifting sands. In the Anglo-American tradition, pedagogy is subsidiary to curriculum, sometimes inferring little more than ‘teaching method’. ‘Curriculum’ itself has both a broad sense (everything that
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a school does) and a narrow one (what is formally required to be taught) which comes closer to continental European ‘didactics’ without capturing the sense in la didactique or die Didaktik of a quasi-science comprising subject knowledge and the principles by which it is imparted. Curriculum is more prominent in educational discourse where it is contested, less where it is imposed or accepted as a given. In the central European tradition, it is the other way round: pedagogy moves centre stage and frames everything else, including curriculum—in so far as that word is used—and didactics (Moon, 1998; Alexander, 2000, pp. 540–556).

Because the range of meanings attaching to pedagogy varies so much in English—quite apart from differences between English and other languages—we have to be stipulative, and to be stipulative in a way which allows us to use the term for comparative analysis. My own preference is to eschew the greater ambiguities of ‘curriculum’ and the resulting tendency to downgrade pedagogy, and use the latter term to encompass the larger field. I distinguish pedagogy as discourse from teaching as act, yet I make them inseparable. Pedagogy, then, encompasses both the act of teaching and its contingent theories and debates—about, for example, the character of culture and society, the purposes of education, the nature of childhood and learning and the structure of knowledge. Pedagogy is the domain of discourse with which one needs to engage if one is to make sense of the act of teaching—for discourse and act are interdependent, and there can be no teaching without pedagogy or pedagogy without teaching. It is the aspect of education which most tellingly brings together macro and micro.

A comparative pedagogy takes this discourse not one stage but several stages further. Pedagogy relates the act of teaching to the ideas which inform and explain it. Comparative pedagogy identifies, explores and explains similarities and differences in pedagogy, as concept, discourse and practice, across designated units of comparison such as nation-states. It thereby exploits opportunities which only proper comparison can provide: teasing out what is universal in pedagogy from what is unique or site/culture specific; informing the development of pedagogic theory; and extending the vocabulary and repertoire of pedagogic practice.

Three Conditions for a Comparative Pedagogy

We can now propose three basic principles or conditions for such a comparative pedagogy.

First, and in common with all comparative studies, it should incorporate a defensible rationale and methodology for comparing across sites, cultures, nations and/or regions.

Second, bearing in mind my distinction between teaching as act and pedagogy as both act and contingent discourse, it should combine procedures for studying teaching empirically with ways of accessing the values, ideas and debates which inform, shape and explain it.

Third, because these values, ideas and debates are part of a much wider educational discourse and—typically—are located in the context of public national education systems as well as schools and classrooms, a comparative pedagogy should access these different levels, contexts and constituencies—local and national, within schools and outside them, involving teachers, parents, policy-makers, administrators and so on—and examine how they relate to each other and inform the discourse of pedagogy and the act of teaching.

The first of these conditions applies to all comparative studies so I need say no more about it. If there are gaps in the comparative literature, comparative theory and methodology is not one of them, and comparativists write at least as much about the purposes and processes of comparing as about the outcomes. Indeed, in another context, Jerome Bruner coined Allport’s term ‘methodolatry’ to warn against the tendency for the debate about methods to squeeze out the actual doing of research (Bruner, 1990, p. xi). The two, of course, should proceed hand in hand.
About the second and third conditions, however—the need to access both the teaching act and the pedagogical discourse, and the importance of pursuing the latter at macro and micro levels and appropriate points in between—I need to say rather more.

A Framework for the Comparative Empirical Study of Teaching

If learning and teaching are shaped by national culture and history, and by the trading and migration of ideas and practices across national borders, as well as by more immediate practical exigencies and constraints such as policy and resources, is it possible to postulate a model of teaching, and a framework for studying it, which both accommodates its many forms and variations and rises above the constraints of value and circumstance? Can we devise a universal analytical model of teaching which will serve the needs of the empirical researcher in any context? This was the challenge we were forced to take up in the *Five Cultures* project, for we needed a framework which would allow us to make sense of disparate data in a way which showed no obvious bias towards particular, culturally specific accounts of learning and teaching.

Many years ago the anthropologist Edmund Leach (1964) argued that the more complex the model, the less likely it is to serve a useful descriptive or explanatory function. With Leach in mind, then, let us start by reducing teaching to its barest essentials:

*Teaching, in any setting, is the act of using method *x* to enable pupils to learn *y*.*

In so skeletal a form the proposition is difficult to contest, and if this is so we extract from it two no less basic questions to steer empirical enquiry:

- What are pupils expected to learn?
- What method does the teacher use to ensure that they do so?

‘Method’ needs to be unpacked if it is to be useful as an analytical category which is able to cross the boundaries of space and time. Any teaching method combines *tasks*, *activities*, *interactions* and *judgements*. Their function is represented by four further questions:

- In a given teaching session or unit what *learning tasks* do pupils encounter?
- What *activities* do they undertake in order to address these learning tasks?
- Through what *interactions* does the teacher present, organise and sustain the learning tasks and activities?
- By what means, and on the basis of what criteria, does the teacher reach *judgements* about the nature and level of the tasks which each pupil shall undertake (*differentiation*), and the kinds of learning which pupils achieve (*assessment*)?

Task, activity, interaction and judgement are the building blocks of teaching. However, as they stand they lack the wherewithal for coherence and meaning. To our first proposition, therefore, we must add a second, and this unpacks ‘in any setting’, the other question-begging phrase in our definition:

*Teaching has structure and form; it is situated in, and governed by, space, time and patterns of pupil organisation; and it is undertaken for a purpose.*

*Structure and form* in teaching are most clearly and distinctively manifested in the *lesson*. Lessons and their constituent teaching acts are framed and governed by *time*, by *space* (the way the classroom is disposed, organised and resourced) and by the chosen forms of *pupil organisation* (whole class, small group or individual).

But teaching is framed conceptually and ethically, as well as temporally and spatially. A lesson is part of a larger *curriculum* which may include both established subjects and domains of understanding which are not subject specific. Curriculum embodies purposes and values,
and reflects assumptions about what knowledge and understanding are of most worth to the individual and to society. This is part of the force of ‘teaching ... is undertaken for a purpose’.

There is one more element to put in place. Teaching in classrooms is not a series of one-off encounters. Teachers spend a great deal of time with the same class, and indeed the primary teachers on which my own research has focused spend a whole year and sometimes several years with the same children. Together with their pupils, teachers create and become incorporated within a micro-culture. This allows teachers to make many aspects of teaching and learning habitual in order to achieve economy of effort and efficiency in the use of space, time and resources. The evolution of the classroom micro-culture also allows—indeed requires—that teachers develop procedures for regulating the complex dynamics of pupil–pupil relationships, the equivalent of law, custom, convention and public morality in civil society. Further, teachers and teaching convey messages and values which may reach well beyond those of the particular learning tasks which give a lesson its formal focus. This element we can define as routine, rule and ritual.

The complete framework (discussed in greater detail in Alexander, 2000, pp. 320–325) is shown in Table I. The elements are grouped under the headings of frame, form and act. The core acts of teaching (task, activity, interaction and judgement) are framed by classroom organisation (‘space’), pupil organisation, time and curriculum, and by classroom routines, rules and rituals. They are given form in the lesson or teaching session.

This provides the broad framework. Choices then have to be made about how one analyses each of the elements. These dictate further questions about analytical categories, research methods and technologies which for reasons of space cannot be addressed here. Suffice it to say that in the Five Cultures research each element above was broken down into several analytical sub-units, the main research tools were observation, video and interview, and the core data comprised field notes, interview transcripts, lesson transcripts, photographs, teaching documents and some 130 hours of videotape. However, this information is relevant here only in so far as it demonstrates that the framework actually works. The analysis of teaching from five countries contained in Culture and Pedagogy starts with the basic disposition of the framing and regulatory elements of curriculum, space, pupil organisation, time and routine/rule/ritual, and works through each of the others before finishing with a sustained analysis of patterns of classroom interaction and the dynamics and content of teacher–pupil discourse. However, the same framework could be used to inform a rather different research methodology to the one I myself used. The point at issue here is conceptual rather than technical: it concerns not the relative advantages of, say, systematic observation using pre-coded interaction categories to produce quantifiable data and the use of transcripts to sustain close-grained qualitative analysis of discourse, but the viability of this as a framework for researching teaching in any context and by any means.
Macro and Micro

The element in the framework in Table I which most explicitly links macro with micro, or school and state, is the curriculum. In most systems curriculum is centrally prescribed, either at the national level or, as in a federal and decentralised system like the USA, at the levels of state and school district. In few public education systems is control of the curriculum vested solely in the school.

In fact, the curriculum is probably best viewed as a series of translations, transpositions and transformations from its initial status as a set of formal requirements. At the beginning of this process of metamorphosis is the national or state curriculum. At its end is the array of understandings in respect of each specified curriculum goal and domain which the pupil acquires as a result of his or her classroom activities and encounters. In between is a succession of shifts, sometimes bold, sometimes slight, as curriculum moves from specification to transaction, and as teachers and pupils interpret, modify and add to the meanings which it embodies. Sometimes the change may be slight, as when a school takes a required syllabus or programme of study and maps it on to the timetable. This we might call a translation. Then a school or teacher may adjust the nomenclature and move parts of one curriculum domain into another to effect a transposition, which then leads to a sequence of lesson plans. But the real change, the transformation, comes when the curriculum passes from document into action and is broken down into learning tasks and activities and expressed and negotiated as teacher–child interactions and transactions.

However faithful to government, state or school requirements a teacher remains, teaching is always an act of curriculum transformation. In this sense, therefore, curriculum is a ‘framing’ component of the act of teaching, as suggested by Table I, only before it is transformed into task, activity, interaction, discourse and outcome. From that point on it becomes inseparable from each of these. In the classroom, curriculum is task, activity, interaction and discourse, and they are curriculum.

Table II schematises this process, and ties it into the families of ‘frame’, ‘form’ and ‘act’ from the model of teaching in Table I. Together, these two frameworks provide a basis for constructing a reasonably comprehensive empirical account of pedagogy at the level of action, and for engaging with the attendant discourses.

Of course, the macro–micro relationship is about much more than state–school curriculum transmission or transformation. For a start, the process is complicated by the existence of more levels than bipolar formulations like ‘macro–micro’ or ‘centralisation–decentralisation’ allow. Regional and local tiers of government have their own designated powers, or strive to compensate for their lack of these by exploiting their closeness to the

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Adapted from Alexander (2000, p. 552).
action, and local agency manifests itself in many other guises, both formal and informal, beyond the governmental and administrative. In the *Five Cultures* data, the importance of these intermediate levels and agencies provided a corrective to Margaret Archer's classic account of the development of state education systems (Archer, 1979). A proper explanatory account of pedagogical discourse needs to engage with this more complex arena of control and action if it is to move out of the straitjacket of linear models of teaching as policy enactment and education as unmodified cultural transmission. Here the work of Giroux (1983) and Apple (1995) provide the necessary moderation to the stricter reproductionist line taken by Bowles & Gintis (1976) or Bordieu & Passeron (1990).

Such an account also needs to treat the somewhat mechanistic concept of 'levels' itself with a certain caution, for once we view pedagogic practice through the profoundly important lens of values, we find—as Archer shows in her later work (Archer, 1989)—that the relationship between structure, culture and (pedagogic) agency is more complex still.

**Values**

Values, then, spill out untidily at every point in the analysis of pedagogy, and it is one of the abiding weaknesses of much mainstream research on teaching, including the rare accounts that appear in the comparative education literature, that it tends to play down their significance in shaping and explaining observable practice. Latterly, the idea of 'value-free' teaching has been given a powerful boost by the UK government's endorsement of school effectiveness research (which reduces teaching to technique, and culture to one not particularly important 'factor' among many) and by its adoption, across the full spectrum of public policy, of the crudely utilitarian criterion 'what works'. Teaching is an intentional and moral activity: it is undertaken for a purpose and is validated by reference to educational goals and social principles as well as to operational efficacy. In any culture it requires attention to a range of considerations and imperatives: pragmatic, certainly, but also empirical, ethical and conceptual (for an extended discussion of the idea of 'good practice' as the reconciliation of competing imperatives, see Alexander, 1997, pp. 267–287).

Clearly, a value-sanitised pedagogy is not possible. Indeed it makes as much sense as a culture-free comparative education. Yet values can all too easily be neglected, and the problem may reflect the accident of technique rather than conscious design. Thus, a recent account of classroom interaction in Kenyan primary schools (Ackers & Hardman, 2001) uses Sinclair & Coulthard's (1992) discourse analysis system, which reduces spoken discourse to a hierarchy of ranks, transactions, moves and acts with little regard to its meaning and none to its socio-linguistic context. The Kenyan study is illuminating, yet if the chosen procedure is problematic in linguistic terms, it may be doubly so in a comparative study of teachers in one country undertaken by researchers from another (for a culturally grounded alternative, see Alexander, 2000, pp. 427–528).

In the rather different setting of a comparative education seminar on the American East Coast, a seminar participant viewed one of my Five Cultures lesson videotapes and condemned the featured American teacher for 'wasting time' when she negotiated with her students rather than directed them. The teacher concerned was highly experienced, and perfectly capable of delivering a tightly structured traditional lesson and imposing her will upon the children. But she chose not to, because her educational goals included the development of personal autonomy and choice and she believed it necessary for children to learn, the hard way if necessary, to master time rather than have it master them. (For time, as we found in this research, is a value in education as well as a measure of it, and it was...
viewed and used in very different ways in the five countries.) This teacher was expressing in her practice not only her private values, but also those embodied in the policies of her school, school district and state. These values should have been the seminar participant’s first port of call. The issue here was not one of simple school effectiveness or professional competence, but of how, in a culture which stands so overtly for individual freedom of action, the diverging individualities of 25 students in one classroom can be reconciled with ostensibly common learning goals. For this example was but the tip of a values iceberg, a continuum in which the observed American pedagogy stood at the opposite extreme to what we observed in Russia and India. On the one hand confusion, contradiction and inconsistency in values; on the other, clarity, coherence and consistency. It is this, as much as simple executive competence, which explains many of the startling contrasts in the practice, and in the apparent efficiency of the practice, with which such values were associated.

This example, too, may help us with our earlier reflections on Sadler and cultural borrowing and lending. For perhaps it is the degree of compatibility at the level of values which sets the limits to what can be successfully transferred at the level of practice. A pedagogy predicated on teacher authority, induction into subject disciplines, general culture and citizenship will sit uneasily, at best, with one which celebrates classroom democracy, personal knowledge, cultural pluralism, and antipathy to the apparatus of the state. And vice versa. This simple proposition, which can readily be tested in practice, eludes the policy borrowers, who presume that ‘what works’ in one country will work in another. Thus, Russian children continue to outperform those of the USA in mathematics and science (Ruddock, 2000), despite the massive disparity in resourcing between the two countries’ education systems (World Bank, 2000). Yet the World Bank and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) dismiss Russian teaching as ‘authoritarian’ and ‘old-fashioned’ and press for a more ‘democratic’ and ‘student-centred’ pedagogy (World Bank, 1996; OECD, 1998). ‘Only connect …’

**Temporal and Spatial Continuities**

So the explication of values is a *sine qua non* for a comparative pedagogy. In the *Five Cultures* research it yielded, alongside the familiar differences in the goals and orientations of the five education systems, differences no less marked in how schools are perceived and perceive themselves as well as in classrooms and teaching.

The analysis also revealed powerful continuities in time and space. Thus, although an offspring of revolution, French public education retains features which recall its pre-revolutionary and ecclesiastical origins (Sharpe, 1997), and the conjunction of institutional secularism and individual liberty is not without its tensions. The more obvious Soviet trappings of Russian education have been shed, but the abiding commitment to *vospitanie*, and the emphasis in schools and classrooms on collective action and responsibility allied to unambiguous teacher authority, not to mention the methods of teaching, show the more clearly that the continuities here are Tsarist as well as Soviet. The continuities in India reach back even further, and we found at least four traditions—two of them indigenous (Brahmanic and post-Independence) and two imposed (colonialist and missionary)—combining to shape contemporary primary practice in that vast and complex country (Kumar, 1991). In England, the twin legacies of elementary school minimalism and progressive idealism offset government attempts at root-and-branch modernisation. The one still shapes school structures and curriculum priorities (and government is as much in its thrall as are teachers), while the other continues to influence professional consciousness and classroom practice.
Jerome Bruner reminds us, too, that in our pedagogical theorising we are still drawing rich sustenance from our more distant, pre-positivist past. Chomsky acknowledges his debt to Descartes, Piaget is inconceivable without Kant, Vygotsky without Hegel and Marx, and 'learning theory' was constructed on foundations laid by John Locke (Bruner, 1990, pp. x-xi).

This kind of intellectual genealogy was most strongly visible in Russian pedagogy, partly because of the overall consistency of practice and partly because those whom we interviewed were themselves fully aware of the roots of their thinking, for this is a pedagogy in which—unlike in England—education theory is held to be important. Thus, if Russian pedagogy owes much, via Vygotsky and his disciples, to Hegel and Marx, it owes no less to a tradition of pedagogic rationality which reaches back to Comenius and Francis Bacon. And it is a familiar truth that Lenin and Stalin built directly on the Tsarist legacy of political autocracy, nationalism and religious orthodoxy, thus securing fundamental continuities amidst the chaos (Hobsbawm, 1995; Lloyd, 1998).

Temporal continuities such as these—and they are but a fraction of those uncovered in this research—shape current national practice and set limits to the character and speed of its further development. The spatial continuities, casually crossing national borders without so much as a nod to Sadler, are detectable in a study involving several countries to an extent that is not possible, or plausible, in a study involving just two. These continuities place within our reach an important prize, that of differentiating the universal in pedagogy from the culturally specific.

Again, it is not possible to list all the cross-cultural resonances we encountered in the Five Cultures research. However, overarching these were six versions of teaching and three primordial values which emerged and interacted time and again. The six versions of teaching were:

1. Teaching as transmission (the passing on of information and skill).
2. Teaching as disciplinary induction (providing access to a culture's established ways of enquiry and making sense).
3. Teaching as democracy in action (in which knowledge is reflexive rather than received, and teachers and students are joint enquirers).
4. Teaching as facilitation (respecting individual differences and responding to developmental readiness and need).
5. Teaching as acceleration (outpacing 'natural' development rather than following it).
6. Teaching as technique (emphasising structure, graduation, economy, conciseness and rapidity).

The first is ubiquitous, but in the Five Cultures data it was most prominent in the rote learning and recitation teaching of mainstream Indian pedagogy. Classrooms in France provided the archetype of the second, but it also surfaced in Russia and India, and—although often under professional protest—in England and the USA. Teachers in the USA frequently argued and sought to enact both the third and the fourth, often with explicit obeisance to John Dewey and Jean Piaget. Those in England, subject to the pressures of the government's literacy and numeracy strategies, still made much of developmental readiness and facilitation though rather less of democracy. Drawing directly on Vygotsky's maxim that 'the only good teaching is that which outpaces development', our Russian teachers illustrated a pedagogy (5) which was diametrically opposed to developmental readiness (4). At the same time, they, like teachers across a wide swathe of continental Europe, drew on the older Comenian tradition (6) of highly structured lessons, whole class teaching, the breaking down of learning tasks into
small graduated steps, and the maintenance of economy in organisation, action and the use of time and space.

The trajectory of recent pedagogical reform shows interesting permutations on these. Thus, under the Government of India District Primary Education Programme, Indian teachers are being urged to become more democratic (3) and developmental (4) (Government of India, 1998). The language of developmentalism and facilitation is also finding its way into policy documents in France and Russia (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 1998; Ministry of General and Professional Education of the Russian Federation, 2000). At the same time, English teachers are being urged to emulate the continental tradition represented by (6), notably in the government’s numeracy strategy, the espousal of ‘interactive whole class teaching’ and the literacy and numeracy experiments in Barking and Dagenham local education authority (Department for Education and Employment, 1999; Luxton, 2000). These are deliberate acts of pedagogical importation. How far the alien can accommodate to the indigenous remains to be seen.

A distinctly continental European tradition has already been inferred. The Five Cultures data enables the idea of broad pedagogical traditions which cut across national boundaries to be consolidated. In this research, the great cultural divide was the English Channel, not the Atlantic. There was a discernible Anglo-American nexus of pedagogical values and practices, just as there was a discernible continental European one, with Russia at one highly formalised extreme and France—more eclectic and less ritualised, although still firmly grounded in structure and les disciplines—at the other. India’s pedagogy was both Asian and European, as its history would suggest.

Beyond these specifically pedagogical positions were three primordial values—individualism, community and collectivism—which are concerned with that most fundamental human question, the relationship of the individual to others and to society. These are familiar enough in social and political theory, although less so in accounts of pedagogy. In the latter context they glossed as follows:

1. Individualism: choice, freedom of expression, self-actualisation, rights over responsibilities, personal knowledge, differentiated learning, divergent outcomes, the individual.
2. Community: respect for others, sharing, caring, the balance of responsibilities and rights, collaborative learning, the group.
3. Collectivism: social cohesion, common ownership, shared values and norms, responsibilities before rights, joint learning, convergent outcomes, the class.

These values were highly pervasive at both school and classroom levels, and could be traced right through to patterns of teaching and classroom organisation, in which context it seems to me not at all accidental that so much discussion of teaching methods should have centred on the relative merits of whole class teaching, group and individual work.

Individualism, community and collectivism are—as child, group and class—the organisational nodes of pedagogy because they are the social nodes of human relations. Compare this, for example, with Shweder’s contrast of ‘holistic, sociocentric’ cultures like India, and Western cultures with their concept of ‘the autonomous distinctive individual living in society’ (Shweder, 1991, pp. 149–150). Or even consider the cultural conditions which make it possible for a British head of government to assert that ‘there’s no such thing as society: there are only individual men and women, and there are families’ (Young, 1989, p. 490). However, divorcing teaching as technique from the discourse of pedagogy as we so often do, we may have failed to understand that such core values and value conflicts pervade social relations inside the classroom no less than outside it; and hence we may have failed to understand why it is that undifferentiated learning, whole class teaching and the principle of
bringing the whole class along together 'fit' more successfully in many other cultures than
they do in England or the USA, and why teachers in these two countries regard this
pedagogical formula with such suspicion. For individualism and collectivism arise inside the
classroom not as a clinical choice between alternative teaching strategies so much as a value
dilemma which may be fundamental to a society’s history and culture.

But the scenario is not one of singularity: human consciousness and human relations
involve the interplay of all three values and though one may be dominant, they may all in
reality be present and exist in uneasy tension. Nowhere was this tension more evident than
in the USA, where we found teachers seeking to reconcile—and indeed to foster as equivalent
values—individual self-fulfilment with commitment to the greater collective good; self-
effacing sharing and caring with fierce competitiveness; and environmentalism with con-
sumerism. Meanwhile, in the world outside the school rampant individualism competed with
the traditional American commitment to communal consciousness and local decision-
making; and patriotism grappled with anti-statism. Such tensions were manifested at every
level from formal educational goals to the everyday discourse of teachers and children.

Conclusion

If globalisation dictates a stronger comparative and international presence in educational
research generally, there is a no less urgent need for comparativists to come to grips with the
very core of the educational enterprise, pedagogy. Such an enterprise, however, demands as
much rigour in the framing and analysis of pedagogy as in the act of comparing. In this article
I have drawn on a five-nation comparative study of primary education to postulate principles
and frameworks for a new comparative pedagogy. Pedagogy is defined stipulatively as the
discourse in which the act of teaching is embedded. The analysis of this discourse requires
both that we engage with culture, values and ideas at the levels of classroom, school and
system, and that we have a viable and comprehensive framework for the empirical study of
teaching and learning. The interlocking models of teaching and curriculum which I devel-
oped to frame the Five Cultures data analysis link classroom action with the processes of
curriculum transformation from state to classroom.

The focus here is not on the detailed findings of the Five Cultures research (for which see
Alexander, 2000), but on the potential of its analytical framework to support the much
overdue development of a comparative pedagogy. But in arguing the centrality of culture,
history and values to a proper analysis of pedagogy, and in applying the chosen frameworks,
tools and perspectives to five countries rather than just one or two, we can open up other
important domains: that of the balance of change and continuity in educational thinking and
practice over time, and of pedagogical diversity and commonality across geographical
boundaries. In so doing, we are not only forced to re-assess the Sadlerian resistance to
educational import-export; we also come closer to identifying the true universals in teaching
and learning. A properly conceived comparative pedagogy can both enhance our understand-
ing of the interplay of education and culture and help us to improve the quality of educational
provision.

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