

2003 Annual Conference--A Conversation on Educational Achievements Globally. Comparative and International Education Society,

Reviewed by Amy Kemp

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What can history contribute to the study and practice of education? This was the question that seemed to drive the panelists who participated in, "Writing Histories of Comparative Education Research." Moving beyond this theme, participants also explored the question of what an historical perspective can contribute to education. The panel was held at the Comparative and International Education Society meeting. This was a field of scholarship not known for historical analysis, in a Society that is not populated with historians. Perhaps for this reason, the historians' motivation to argue for the importance of their material--even if to a small but stalwart audience--came through in the context of their presentation. <p> Three presentations made up the panel. The chair and organizer of the panel was Noah W. Sobe, from University of Wisconsin-Madison. Sobe also presented the second paper, "Historicizing the Comparative Gesture: 1817 and 1921." The first presenter was Andreas Kazamias, also of the University of Madison-Wisconsin and past president of the Comparative and International Education Society in 1971; his title was, "Nicolas Hans and the Necessity of History in Comparative Education." The final paper entitled, "Myths, Muddles and Poor Memories: The Everyday Story of Comparative Education," was written by Robert Cowen of the University of London (who was unable to attend the conference), and read by Michal Abelson. <p> The three papers were ostensibly aimed at writ-

ing the history of the field of Comparative Education itself, an endeavor important to many in the field of Comparative Education, who would like to see it more firmly established as a social science field. But each papers also went further, to suggest that historical analysis could offer much as a research tool in Comparative Education, offering a perspective enabling important links to be made between historical knowledge and social science theory. <p> While the second half of Andreas Kazamias' paper focused on an historical case study of Comparative Education, because of time constraints, he focused on his history of the discipline of Comparative Education. Kazamias seeks to revive the historical approach to comparative education, which he suggested had been the predominant mode of analysis before the "scientification" of comparative education in the 1960s. He periodized the history of Comparative Education beginning with the Greek tradition, moving to the Enlightenment and on to the nineteenth century to highlight the work of those who he suggests sought to find and understand the national character, or "soul," of educational systems. Kazamias ended in the 1960s, noting that education researchers (he included himself in this group) of this period had begun struggling to make education more like a Chicago School social science. The most interesting contribution of this talk was not the textbook periodization or wide characterization of the periods of comparative education his-

tory, but Kazamias' assertion that the 1960s marked the "scientificization" of comparative education, and a turning point for educational research, away from historical analysis. Also interesting was Kazamias' personal assertion that he had been among the group who believed that social science methods would change educational research for the better, but that he had since changed his mind, and returned to an earlier mode of thinking. <p> Noah W. Sobe then presented a learned and well-researched paper linking comparative education research to social science theory and recommending the use of historical methods in comparative research. Sobe's theoretical framework linked his work to state-building and identity theory by asserting that educational changes are more than policy changes; they are linked to processes and ideas of governance and intra-school relations. He presented two case studies, one from 1817 and the other from 1921, which illustrated different constructions of the idea "self" and of the "national". The first case, in 1817, was a study organized by Marc Antoine Jullien to compare national educational systems. Sobe analyzed the explanations that Jullien left as well as the questions that he formulated for interviewers who were to gather the data from the individual schools. Sobe argued convincingly, with the aid of long quotations from the documents, that Jullien's survey was formulated in such a way as to demonstrate the author's belief in the possibility of people being changed by their education and ability to control themselves. Sobe also argued that, in 1817, Jullien appreciated the importance of both the "global" and the "local" perspectives (global/local was a "hot topic" at the conference as a whole). Sobe then continued with his 1921 case, which was a Teacher's College, Columbia dissertation by Worth James Osburn dealing with foreign criticisms of US education. Sobe suggested that this dissertation is important as it draws attention to what the "outsider" can see in a national educational system that is not his/her own. Again showing the historical roots of ideas

which are sometimes considered novel today, he also suggested that Jullien's work assumed that a clearer vision of a national education system could be gained by comparing as many different visions and perspectives as possible and that the local or individual could not be understood without reference to something else. <p> The final paper was written by Robert Cowen and read by Michal Abelson. Like the first presentation, this paper tackled directly the task of writing a history of Comparative Education as a discipline and indirectly endeavored to bring some coherence to the field. While there were other similarities in the two papers (for instance, highlighting the importance of the Chicago School and the "turning point" of the 1960s in the drive to make Comparative Education more scientific) the analyses were profoundly different in tone. Cowen's paper began with the statement that all histories of comparative education are teleological and hegemonic and that he would examine four paradigms (the Chicago School, the technicist discourse, the Development and World Systems analyses, and the emancipatory/feminist/ liberation discourse). This presentation, though very interesting and erudite, suffered in the way that all papers read by someone other than the author do, i.e. the language and ideas were hard to follow in a lecture setting and the author was not available for further exploration of his ideas. This paper went the farthest of all of those presented (though it was in line with the ideas presented by Sobe in his introduction) in suggesting that a historical or a particular historical paradigm of research could aid Comparative Education in establishing its relevance to current issues and help it to further examine its untested assumptions. <p> In line with the large issues at play in this panel, including the importance and meaning of historical analysis, the boundaries of the field of Comparative Education, no clear consensus was reached or neared. Further, there was little time for discussion, and what questions and comments there were, centered on the question of whether historical analy-

sis could "make a difference" in educational policy or gain a young professor tenure. More through their historical analyses than through their argumentation were the panelists able to demonstrate how historical incidents and characters could shed light on education. <p>

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