



Crucial Topics in Foundations of Education: International Perspectives

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Recent Developments in Comparative Education: Myths, Muddles and Marvels

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There are a couple of myths about comparative education which are worth inspecting briefly, before we get on to its contemporary marvels. One myth is that comparative education compares. (It used to.) The second is that it is useful for advising governments about educational policy. (It was; briefly.)

The muddles are more impressive than the myths. Three will be discussed: (i) that PISA and university world-rankings are a form of comparative education; (ii) that comparative education is more precisely described (in English anyway) by the newer nomenclature: 'comparative and international education'; and (iii) that comparative education is 'interdisciplinary'. Of course it is – the banality of the proposition is very impressive. However, that banality magnifies a muddle.

And so? Two myths, then three muddles – that must mean there will be four marvels? Unfortunately, not even academic life is that simple. There is only one marvel: that the field of study is being re-thought. It can be suggested that it is being re-defined in four main ways:

- (i) Sociologically, we are seeing the invention of an applied comparative education, in (several) university systems;
- (ii) Politically, we are seeing a new interface between politicians, the mass media and 'comparative' research;
- (iii) Epistemically, we are seeing new theorisations some of which are on the edge of becoming 'schools' of thought and some of which are merely new; and
- (iv) Epistemologically, it is becoming possible to see why 'comparative education' keeps morphing but also why its core intellectual puzzles are unlikely to disappear (until universities disappear).