**Comparing Ethnographies: Local Studies of Education across the Americas**

This book edited by Elsie Rockwell and Kathryn Anderson-Levitt has many positive things to offer. It consists of five chapters, one commentary and one epilogue. *Comparing Ethnographies* is both stimulating and ambitious. In the introduction the editors explain that the principal aims of the book are: a) to challenge the parochial visions that seep into generalisations and policy imperatives in the field of education; b) to advance discussions of the need of constructing comparative perspectives and, c) to show what can be learned by comparing research across national and linguistic boundaries. All three objectives are entirely fulfilled.

Overall, *Comparing Ethnographies* focuses on the experiences of indigenous peoples, migrants and teachers both in-and-out of school. The book is a constant reminder that knowledge is always contextual and the editors emphasise the need to look for similarities and contrasts within and across contexts.

From the outset, the book challenges two well-established general assumptions. First is the understanding of the term ‘the Americas’. Rockwell and Anderson-Levitt explain that English-speaking countries split the continent in North and South America. However, in Latin America, it is known as America, a single continent rather than two. They have carefully chosen the term ‘the Americas’ to capture the complex historical and cultural diversity as well as the interconnectivity among nations. The second general assumption challenged by *Comparing Ethnographies* is the practice of research in isolation. The book shows that collaboration of scholars as equals can and should take place across borders.

Another valuable aspect is the reminder that comparison itself is a necessary learning tool. We learn through comparisons and the book shows the value of comparing and offers different reasons to compare. According to the editors, comparing makes the familiar forms of schooling strange and not taken-for-granted. They explain that by comparing researchers can understand better the particular situations they are studying. However, I would add that by comparing, educational practitioners can also understand better the particular situations of their own everyday practice, an aspect that is very well evidenced in the book. Rockwell and Anderson-Levitt also show that across the north and the south there are contrasting purposes for comparing. Ethnographers from the north tend to focus on minority groups whereas Latin American ethnographers tend to focus on the lack of equity across the region. However, as the book shows, despite prevailing structural inequalities, valuable experiences in teachers’ work often surface in Latin American ethnographies.

The book is also novel about its own construction, with scholars from different countries co-authoring together in order to address a common theme, taking into account differences in relation to the contexts and they ways educational research is practiced across them. However, how exactly the idea of co-authoring was conceived and how the process of pairing co-authors was undertaken and by whom are aspects that Rockwell and Anderson-Levitt could have explained with more detail.

Rather than a compilation of single and unlinked chapters, the book is a rich mosaic that provides historical understandings about the challenges that education in its broad sense has had in the Americas, from past and recent struggles of inclusion to the current conditions of teachers’ work under neoliberalism. In so doing, socio-economic, political and historical factors are well looked-after throughout. Depending on each reader’s needs and interests, each chapter will offer different rhythms and insights.

In Chapter Two, Patricia Ames and Ana Maria Gomes take up the task of examining, problematising, historicising and contextualising the often taken-for-granted categories of majorities, minorities, inclusion and exclusion in Peru and Brazil. They see these categories as social constructions and as unfixed attributes. They show the utility of these categories in each context and the problems of exporting them without examining and contextualizing them properly. They problematise the terms ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ by highlighting the changing status of indigenous populations and the subordination attached to them throughout time.Context and history are crucial elements of this chapter. The authors acknowledge that it is necessary to take into account the history of each country and the positionality of each researcher. They offer a brief historical overview of how both countries have dealt with education for indigenous people and how ethnographies of indigenous education are currently undertaken in both countries. Although there are many similarities between Brazil and Peru such as the approach towards assimilation, violence and people’s demand for high-quality education, the authors highlight the challenge of comparing across Latin American nations because of the rich diversity and heterogeneity of conditions within the region.

In Chapter Three, Aurlyn Luykx and Ana Padawer focus on the ways in which global processes and discourses on educational reform impact upon the school experience of indigenous children in the US and Argentina. The authors start by looking at the similarities between both countries in terms of their postcolonial histories and their recent public policies. They also provide an interesting distinction between the adoption of intercultural and multicultural education in each country as well as a rich analysis of the political and economic interplay between the macro structure and the collective responses of marginalised groups. As with Ames and Gomes, they recognise the importance of the sense of place and the significance of the presence of Native teachers amongst indigenous communities.

Gabriela Novaro and Lesley Bartlett in Chapter Four, expand the discussion on assimilation and inclusion. Their focus is on the relation between migration and education in the United States and Argentina from the experiences of Mexican and Bolivian migrants respectively. They offer a rich historical account of the development of the ideas of assimilation and inclusion within the academic and teaching discourses, and in so doing, reveal new modes of assimilation.

In Chapter Five, Kathryn Anderson-Levitt and Belmira Oliveira Bueno, focus on the notion of teachers’ work. The authors explore who takes up the work of teaching and the reasons for choosing their profession in four countries: Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and the United States. As with Luykx and Padawer in Chapter Three, the authors also link their analysis to the ways in which the macrostructure (e.g. accountability; poverty) affects teachers’ work across the region. Another valuable aspect is the discussion of the contextual challenges associated with researching teachers’ work, from linguistic differences between Spanish and English to methodological choices. Anderson-Levitt and Bueno show that both linguistic and contextual differences are important because they reveal different ways of thinking, practicing and researching about teaching.

Overall, the book widely celebrates the contributions that ethnography has made as a research discipline, particularly in the field of education. It shows the long evolution of ethnography as a discipline from ethnology to meta-ethnography. It discusses whether ethnography has managed to overcome pitfalls associated to colonialism and Western supremacy. Ames and Gomes show that ethnography makes possible the consideration of multiple practices and identities arising in schools and communities, which allow us to see continuities instead of binaries. For Luykx and Padawer ethnography represents one of the few channels by which knowledge about indigenous societies is transmitted to the larger populations, whereas for Gabriela Novaro and Lesley Bartlett, ethnography documents the successes that quantitative studies would dismiss as outliers. In the Commentary, Marta Sánchez and George Noblit, show that ethnographic studies allow the upholding of difference in the current global era where a single reality – in education and elsewhere – is imposed by international organisations such as the OECD and the World Bank.

In the Epilogue Inés Dussel explains that for her, the book questions the use of categories, which are often considered equally relevant across contexts. For Dussel, the book encourages horizontal dialogue with others and manages to overcome linguistic, cultural and academic limitations across borders. Dussel concurs with Sánchez and Noblit on the fact that the current monolingualism of global learning metrics has silenced alternative perspectives. I agree with Dussel on the need of expanding the project of this book to ‘other’ Americas. Following her travel metaphor, I hope that the journey that has started with this book will continue.

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