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Revisiting comparative pedagogy:
Methodologies, themes, and research communities since 2000

Abstract

This article provides an analysis of contemporary comparative research on pedagogy, as published since 2000. It explores this sub-field of comparative education inquiry over this period, including how it has responded to new global movements, changing balances of power, and methodological advances. While these have shaped the field in recognisable ways, differing responses to these among researchers from contrasting research traditions have resulted in divergence as well as convergence. This divergence has created distinct typologies of studies that reflect particular epistemic communities of researchers, depending on how context and the purpose of research are perceived. The scoping review is based on a survey of 51 articles identified through a systematic search of 10 English-language journals in the field of comparative and international education.

Introduction

In his seminal 2001 work on Culture and Pedagogy, Robin Alexander notes that almost all comparative studies:

> …concentrate their attention on the macro or national level and say little or nothing about the day-to-day workings of schools, still less hazard analysis of pedagogy. Indeed it is perhaps a weakness of comparative education as a discipline…that so many of its proponents have neglected what is arguably the most important part of the educational terrain, the practice of teaching and learning, and what is possibly the most elusive theme of all, how such practice relates to the context of culture, structure and policy in which it is embedded. (Alexander 2001, 3)

Alexander's work has been a major influence on each of us as researchers interested in both teaching methods and what lies behind and shapes them in different contexts. It would be tempting to assume that the sub-field has built upon Alexander's work nearly a decade ago, grown, and moved on. In order to test these hopeful assumptions, we conducted a one-year scoping study[1] to survey systematically the landscape of empirical studies that compare pedagogies across national contexts. The scoping review set out to identify relevant research and to map it descriptively and analytically, identifying prominent geographical loci of interest, themes that guided the studies and emerged from them, and researchers' methodological approaches. We were especially seeking to understand how the field had developed since 2000.

This article sets out the broad framework for the study, and the methodology for the review. It then provides a descriptive overview of the articles identified, followed by analytical findings. We propose a framework which captures two particularly divergent

approaches within this sub-field and, finally, consider the implications of the differences between these 'research communities' and tensions and gaps for future exploration.

Why Pedagogy? Why 2000?

Alexander's (2009) widely-cited and inclusive definition of pedagogy defines it as the 'the act of teaching together with its attendant discourse of educational theories, values, evidence and justifications' (928). This theory of pedagogy embraces therefore not just what is visible, that is, what teachers are doing and which discernible teaching methods they are using, but also what lies behind these. This distinction between teaching methods and pedagogy is particularly significant for comparative studies for several reasons. The theories and values behind what teachers do are profoundly shaped by their own experiences as learners, and by the cultural milieux in which they are socialised into adult-child relationships and epistemological positions on what constitutes knowledge and how it is learned (Rappleye and Komatsu 2017). While observable and labelable teaching methods may be decontextualised, teachers' decision-making in their planning and in the minute-by-minute enactment of classroom life is not. Setting education in its wider socio-cultural, political, economic and historical contexts has been at the heart of comparative education for over 100 years, and therefore separates comparative studies of pedagogy from international studies of pedagogy. As such, a study of pedagogy in three countries that simply compares raw achievement scores, for example, without due attention to how context shapes these would not be comparative by some widely-used definitions within the field (eg Phillips and Schweisfurth 2014).

When pedagogy is addressed in comparative or international studies, it is often reduced to a set of observable teaching strategies, ignoring the importance of what lies behind teachers' choices; when pedagogy is overlooked, it remains a black box between the inputs to education (such as buildings and teaching resources) and the outcomes from it (such as exam results) (Alexander 2015; Schweisfurth 2015). This is due, at least in part, to the complexity of pedagogy as both practice and discourse, and the associated challenges of examining and analysing it. Alexander (2015) has likened pedagogy to a deep well, which is safer to circle than to look into too deeply, and has also drawn attention to the financial, time, and linguistic challenges of doing classroom research intensively and comparative (2001).

Pedagogy is of immense importance in shaping the learning experiences of students, and by extension, their potential life outcomes. Estimates (and rigour) vary, but one meta-analysis suggests that teachers and what they think and do accounts for about 30% of variance in learning outcome success (Hattie 2003); arguably this is even larger in poorer contexts where the teacher is the primary resource for learning in the absence of, for example, extensive teaching materials or internet access. However, evidence on the implementation of pedagogical reforms points unequivocally to the resilience of practice and challenges in changing what teachers do. There are many explanations for this, including the political economy of educational change and understandings of 'best practice', but many of the issues confounding pedagogical transformation have their roots in teachers' beliefs, shaped by their own experiences in the context of wider cultural belief systems. In the context of

this embedded practice, attempts to shift practice through superficial strategies are unlikely to penetrate pedagogy in its full expression.

The tradition of studying pedagogy comparatively goes back to some of the earliest studies in comparative education. Studying pedagogy comparatively speaks to the full range of purposes of comparison, from enhancing intercultural understanding, to improving education systems by learning from others, to enhancing the depth of theory by testing it against a full range of empirical examples. The many ways that context shapes pedagogy combined with the imperative to improve it in order to raise learning outcomes of all kinds makes it a rich seam to mine in separating the universal from the particular.
The particular period of this study puts into sharp relief the importance of pedagogy but also the ways in which various contexts shape it. By the end of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) era (2000-2015) significant progress had been made toward the goal of basic schooling for all, with two-thirds more children in school in 2012 than in 1998, approximately an extra 50 million (UNESCO 2015). However, this attention to access without due regard for quality of what happens in schools led to what has been called a 'learning crisis'. Estimates vary, but according to one influential document (UNESCO 2015), despite massively improved access to schools, 250 million children globally, most of whom are in school, have not learned basic skills of literacy and numeracy. In the quest to improve learning outcomes, pedagogy has been identified as a key area for intervention.

We therefore set the starting point for our study at 2000 for two main reasons. The start of the MDG epoch marked a departure in global attention to education, especially in developing countries. The subsequent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from 2015 drew attention to the importance of quality, inclusive education and therefore brought pedagogy increasingly into the frame in all countries. One might expect the research literature to reflect both of these. Equally significantly, however, this is when Robin Alexander's seminal work *Culture and Pedagogy* (2001) was in press (and when the first author's PhD comparative study on pedagogy – supervised by Alexander – was completed). Alexander's work was extremely comprehensive, embracing historical studies as well as comparison, and combining historical and contemporary policy analyses, teachers' perspectives, and classroom observations. Being comprehensive, it was a 'state of the art' statement for the period up to then, but to our knowledge nothing of that scale has been attempted since. The book represented something of a clarion call for researchers in this area and provided theoretical and analytical frameworks for future research. It is important to capture and understand what has happened since, whether it builds on this foundation, and how the changing global context is reflected in it.

Review Process

The core question guiding the review was, 'How has pedagogy been comparatively researched cross-nationally?' We were interested in methodological, geographical, theoretical, and other orientations of this comparative research on pedagogy. Sub-questions of the research therefore included, for example: How many countries are typically compared? What methods are employed? Where has the research been conducted, and which countries/regions have been neglected, or might benefit from comparative and in-depth explorations of pedagogical processes? Our hope at the outset was that the answers

to these and related questions might provide insights toward informing global learning goals, or might fill the gaps in the SDG framework regarding pedagogical practices. In short, what more do we need to know, and which approaches might offer the most promise in addressing these issues?

Given the possible variation in how comparative pedagogy could be understood, approached, and researched, we conducted a hand-search strategy to identify and select studies that complied with our specific search criteria, which was five-fold. First, the studies must contain some variation of "pedagogy"[2]—including pedagogic, pedagogical, pedagogue—anywhere in the text (i.e., title, abstract and/or full text) and more than once. Second, the studies must be comparative at the level of the nation-state and include two or more countries. While acknowledging the risks of this type of methodological nationalism, this made possible the task of sorting potentially comparative studies from those that focused on a number of schools or teachers from within one national setting without contextualising them as comparative studies should. Moreover, given that Alexander's work in *Culture and Pedagogy* involved an in-depth and nuanced comparison across five national contexts, we felt cross-national comparative was most appropriate for this initial scoping exercise. Third, the studies must focus on education at the primary and/or secondary level. Research in both private and public institutions was included. Fourth, as noted previously, the studies must be published since 2000 (and up to August 2019). Fifth and finally, the research must be empirical in nature, but can draw upon multiple epistemological frameworks and research methodologies.[3] Given the complexity of pedagogy and its combination of the visible and invisible, it would have been ideal to restrict the study to articles which used a mixture of observation and interview or other technique. However, in practice very few articles researched pedagogy in its full expression and so we included those which, for example, relied solely on teacher interviews.

We narrowed the empirical studies to peer-reviewed articles published in English-language journals that publish comparative research and research on pedagogy (for example as opposed to focusing explicitly or exclusively on policy). We also targeted journals that are considered international in scope (i.e., not exclusively regional) and perceived as shaping the field of comparative and international education (CIE).[4] Based on these general criteria, the following journals were targeted:
- *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*
- *Comparative Education*
- *Comparative Education Review*
- *Forum for International Research in Education*
- *Globalisation, Education and Societies*

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[2] We used "pedagog* as a search term in order to include all associated terms.

[3] Any studies that conduct current/historical analysis of national and/or international reform measures, national curriculum, policy documents, existing cross-national data (e.g., TIMMS, PISA), textbooks, or instruction manuals in schools were excluded.

[4] The broader hierarchies of knowledge production certainly shape the field of CIE (see, for example, Takayama, Sriprakash, & Connell, 2017), and we acknowledge the limitations of conducting a review primarily in top-tier international journals housed largely in the West/Global North. Moreover, we also acknowledge the inerrant value of reading, reviewing, and disseminating knowledges within journals considered to be at the periphery.

- *International Educational Journal: Comparative Perspectives*
- *International Journal of Educational Development*
- *Prospects*
- *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*
- *Research in Comparative and International Education*

Any other publications of grey literature (including agency-based research), books, PhD theses and other academic journals that are not listed above were excluded. While acknowledging that this might exclude a wide range of interesting work, including books such as the one that inspired the study, it made the online search feasible, and given the relative speed of journal article publication, allowed us to hold more effectively the time-bound nature of the study. All of the studies were screened by the authors to clarify and refine inclusion criteria accordingly and discuss any problems that arose on some of the studies that did not fit clearly within the initial inclusion criteria.

We acknowledge that the exclusion of articles published in non-English language journals limits the study and unfortunately reflects the wider hegemony of English language in publication. The reality of academic publishing globally is that in most countries the pressure is on researchers to publish their best work in international English-language journals[5] and so the contents of these constitute a realistic if constrictively-framed snapshot. We also faced the practical limitation of not speaking all potentially relevant languages on our small team – while we each have some competence in other languages and familiarity with a range of research contexts, we are all English language speakers who work and research in English. However, checking abstracts (in English) from one prominent Spanish and Portuguese language journal - *Educaçao e sociedade* – uncovered three articles from this time period on South American contexts that would have been relevant to this study. We therefore recognise the limitations of this approach and hope that future studies might build on our study and broaden the scope to the rich body of literature published in other languages.

Comparison: By the numbers

A descriptive overview of the publication patterns across the 51 articles raises a number of important observations. All of the journals could potentially include comparative studies of pedagogy. Apart from the *International Journal for Educational Development*, which might be interpreted as not inviting articles on pedagogy[6], and *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, which for obvious reasons, invites them, none of the journals' mission statements singles out pedagogy.

Two-country comparisons were by far the most common (n=29), although some studies did compare pedagogy across three or four countries (n=14) and a handful examined it in five or more countries (n=8). In terms of geography, most of the articles compared broadly similar contexts, for example exclusively European (n=16) or within Sub-Saharan Africa (n=6). Figure 1 highlights the connections across national contexts as evident in the articles.

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[5] See, for instance, Thomas (2018) on academic publishing in Tanzania.

[6] 'The IJED **does not encourage** articles which may be more appropriate for journals of pedagogy….unless the relevance to feasible public policy is clearly demonstrated.' See
https://www.journals.elsevier.com/international-journal-of-educational-development

[Figure 1]

We also used the OECD's Development Assistance Committee's list[7] as a means to classify the countries into broad categories of lower-income (not on the list) or higher-income (on the list). As evident in Table 1, about a quarter of the studies spanned donor and recipient contexts.

[Table 1]

The patterns also point to some political economy issues that underpin knowledge production in this and related fields. South America is notably absent, but as noted above Spanish language journals are likely to tell a different story. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (n=4) and Caribbean (n=1) are also underrepresented. In the meantime, English speaking contexts are over-represented—particularly England (n=15)—and in the least developed region globally, Sub-Saharan Africa, the most developed country, South Africa (n=9), is most studied and compared.

Comparison: Methods

A variety of research methods were utilised to comparatively research pedagogy. Approximately one third of the studies (n=16) employed only one research method; another third employed two (n=16), and the remainder (n=19) utilised three or more.[8] Interviews, usually conducted with teachers or educational leaders, appear most often, followed by observations of classrooms, schools, and communities.

[Table 2]

The research methods in the 'Other' category included student assessment data (n=6), reflection journals (n=5), household surveys (n=1), photo-voice activities (n=1), and more.

In terms of the research participants, teachers were most often the primary unit of analysis and focus of attention, with all but two of the studies involving teachers in some fashion. This is perhaps not surprising given the search criteria focused on pedagogy, which is often assumed to reside within the teacher.

What is perhaps more surprising, however, is the lack of student voice. While nearly half of the studies (n=25) focused on students in some way, much of this attention did not actively involve or focus on learners. For example, several researchers conducted classroom observations but maintained attentiveness to the words and actions of the teacher, with less concern for how students were responding to various pedagogies. Given the recent attention to educational quality, beyond mere access, it is somewhat disappointing that students and, importantly, their first-hand perspectives, do not feature centrally in most of these studies, and this reflects wider patterns in the international literature on pedagogy (eg Schweisfurth 2011).

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[7] Any attempt at classification of countries (e.g., North/South, East/West, Developed/Developing) is problematic, so herein we rely on the OECD's (2016) designation to highlight cross-ODA comparisons.
[8] As many studies utilised two or more research methods, the numbers in Table 2 necessarily total more than 51.

A small handful of articles did involve students to a greater extent, however. Murphy-Graham and Lample (2014) conducted interviews with focal students as well as 40 hours of classroom observations in Honduras and Uganda. Elsewhere Welply (2014) employed group interviews with primary school students in France and England that "were in great part children-led", complementing this method with "participant observations in the classrooms and playgrounds and informal discussions with participants" (349). Comparing similar contexts but with a wider range of methods, McNess (2006) examined "pupils' perceptions of the pedagogic process" in England, France, and Denmark by drawing on large-scale surveys of 600 pupils each, interviews with pupils, observations, focus group discussions, interviews with teachers, document analysis, and performance data (517). These types of studies were exceptions in the literature, however.

Comparison: Methodologies

The ways in which the articles invoked comparison and context across countries varied considerably. In reviewing the 51 articles we noticed that, on one hand, some articles contained contextually-rich comparison that explained the sociocultural and geopolitical positionings of the locations under study, and then centred these positionings within the analysis. These studies attended to the nuances that comparisons can offer by examining the ways in which pedagogical moves were enacted, translated, and received similarly or differently across contexts, including at the local, peri-local, and state/provincial levels, as well as the national. An example is the article by Breton-Carbonneau and colleagues (2012) who included the specific cities where the research was conducted in the title and abstract of their piece, then compared and discussed at length the historical, political, and educational contexts of these unique research sites. The authors of these studies also tended to 'hedge' their claims more often and to refrain from broader assumptions based on data sets that were not representative or generalisable.

In some of the other pieces, by contrast, it was not always possible to discern where within the countries the research was conducted, which in some cases might matter significantly, particularly in contexts with decentralised education systems or with urban/rural or other spatial inequalities. Some studies used a case study or convenience sampling approach where, for example, one or two schools or lessons in each country (eg Busher et al 2011; Stich 2015) were then used as examples of national phenomena. As this potentially extends the reach of the comparative findings beyond their immediate context, we term this 'generalised comparison.' Rather than focusing on more localised understandings for how pedagogy was understood and implemented in specific contexts, the comparisons narrate how a group of pedagogical actors in X country were different from those in Y country, without considering the potential variations within X (i.e., sub-national) or the theories for differences between X and Y. In some studies, the local context is described within the discussion of the sample, but this is not then followed through in the analysis of how context shapes practice.

While acknowledging the importance of the national context, after Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) we would argue that this vertical axis – ie from the local case study upwards through sub-national and national units to the global level – should include attention to the more

specific locale as well as other relevant scalar units, rather than assuming that national policy and culture are the only or main contextual factors which shape teachers' beliefs and pedagogical work. Stemming from the basic argument in comparative education that 'context matters', we would argue that research aiming to compare pedagogy is perhaps at its best when the specific contexts in which the research is conducted are adequately described *and* the researchers use these descriptions—however structured—as core elements of their comparative analysis.

One final and related methodological point is worth mentioning: the infrequent acknowledgment of researcher positionality throughout the articles. Harking back to Alexander's definition of pedagogy at the outset of this article, teachers' theories and values are at least in some part related to the (sub)cultures of which the teacher is a member. As such, in researching pedagogy, and especially in making normative claims about 'good' or 'bad' pedagogies, it is important to attend to the cultural nature of the pedagogic process. In qualitative research traditions where researcher positionality is acknowledged to be important, we might have expected to see an unpacking of this as part of being transparent about the authors' own pedagogical assumptions. Murphy-Graham and Lample (2014), for example, helpfully noted that the research was conducted by "four research teams, each consisting of one North American doctoral student and one Honduran researcher from the National Pedagogical University" who "conducted in-depth interviews in Spanish with these students that lasted approximately 1 h (quotations that appear in this article were translated by Murphy-Graham)" (55). In this instance knowing that the teams were bi-national is a useful and relevant piece of information. In research on pedagogy, critical reflexivity might lead to uncomfortable conclusions (Thomas and Vavrus 2019). Whatever the risks, despite being an essential aspect of interpretive research, it did not receive much attention, even in the articles based on qualitative research. To be fair to authors, the demands of writing for an article format often involves difficult decisions about whether to include lengthy reflections of this kind, unlike, for example, a monograph or PhD thesis.

At this point, then, it might be appropriate to specifically address our own positionalities. Researcher judgement is always evident through all aspects of the research process: which research questions to ask and pursue; what to ask, measure, or explore; which analytical approaches and/or statistical tests to perform; which results or findings to report; and more. This exercise was no exception. We noted above that Alexander's research has influenced each of our perspectives. Beyond this, our own formative pedagogical experiences as learners were in Canada, the US and England respectively, and so rooted in Western traditions. However, together our research and professional practice spans research and consultancy in and on Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. Our research approaches have generally leaned toward qualitative methodologies with some notable exceptions; so, while we gravitate towards interpretivist research this is not exclusive. We are at various stages of our careers (senior scholar, mid-career researcher, PhD student); at various stages we have all focused on how global understandings of best practice, especially learner-centredness, are manifested in different contexts. Benefiting from multiple constructive conversations about individual articles, the scoping methodology, and our (latent) biases, this paper reflects our collective conceptual convergence in aiming to systematically answer the core questions of the exercise.

Thematic findings: Constructing pedagogy, actors, purposes, and contexts

Our analysis revealed that pedagogy is explicitly or implicitly constructed in a range of ways in the articles: through particular normative positions about what constitutes good pedagogy and what it is for; through the lenses of postcolonialism or performativity; and/or based on differing perspectives on the relative influence of global or local shapers of beliefs, discourses, and practices. We also see pedagogical actors portrayed in ways that reflect these foundations. How these studies conceptualise context is equally important, given the comparative nature of the research and the ways in which context shapes pedagogy. We discuss each of these issues in turn below.

The articles offer an assortment of normative positions in relation to pedagogy. One which continues to dominate is learner-centredness (broadly defined) as best practice, with 11 articles referencing it or techniques associated with it, such as collaborative group work or dialogue. Most of them use learner-centred forms of pedagogy as a benchmark against which to compare teachers' practice, in a context of reforms or interventions which encourage it. Interventions include, for example, an attempt to raise pupil achievement through group work in Trinidad and Barbados (Layne et al 2008) and the use of student voice in the contextualisation of knowledge and the creation of agency in sexuality education in Ghana, Switzerland, and Kenya (McLaughlin et al 2015). At the same time, a variety of purposes for pedagogy is set out, from 'the basics' through to social agendas and soft skills, including the imperatives to improve: measurable literacy and numeracy outcomes (eg Chudgar 2015); vocational preparation (eg Kutnick et al 2018); inclusion of learners with special education needs or from minority/migrant groups (eg Rose and O'Neill 2009; Welply 2010); conflict resolution and reconciliation in divided, conflict, and post-conflict societies (eg Zembylas et al 2009); democratic citizenship and political literacy (eg Hahn 2015); and sexuality and HIV/AIDS understanding (McLaughlin and Swartz 2011). There were outlier studies focusing on particular subject pedagogies (eg Music in Stich 2015) or institutions (eg Islamic schools in Boyle 2006), with a substantial cluster of papers focusing on mathematics pedagogy. While we cannot know the precise reason for this cluster on mathematics pedagogy, the fact that numeracy is considered a basic skill and is often perceived as relatively 'context-free' and therefore more straightforward to compare may be at least part of the reason. Within this cluster there was a tendency to use video analysis, focused on the finer grains of practice.

Arguably, two of the biggest movements in CIE since Alexander's work in 2000 are, on the one hand, the postcolonial 'turn' and on the other hand, the performativity movement within education more broadly. The latter is presented, for example, as the Global Education Reform Movement (Sahlberg 2011) and policy by numbers (through PISA and other international large-scale assessments; Grek 2009). These two contrasting movements occupy considerable space in education research and CIE in general, and they are reflected, too, across these comparative studies of pedagogy, as are the contrasts between them.

Postcolonial perspectives are likely to be found in articles based on research situated in the Global South, and so this excludes many of the articles from our search. However, there were six articles which could be put in this category, on the basis that they paid particular attention to context and local needs in lower-income national and local settings, and the

ways in which core education policy and curriculum ignores these at the expense of more cosmopolitan concerns. While a couple use the language of postcolonialism, the one which embraces postcolonial perspectives most explicitly (Tom et al 2017) is part of the *Comparative Education Review* special issue on *Contesting Coloniality*. It explores pedagogies from native American, Afro-Portuguese, and Romani experiences, through pedagogical media including ICT and hip-hop culture.

More conspicuous were articles which linked performativity-related reforms to the work of teachers in the classroom. We identified nine articles that fit into this category. In most cases the articles were written from outside this perspective – that is, the articles were critical of how such reforms attempted to control teachers' pedagogical work through new forms of accountability or assessment, or how they framed teacher identity in a way that paid scant respect to teachers' own views of their work. A particularly critical and theoretical perspective is offered by Ball and Maroy (2008) who analyse and conceptualise the ways in which urban schools mediate market-oriented liberal reform in six European countries, and the role of key professionals in setting an agenda, whether it be an instrumental response that buys into the reforms, or one which celebrates heterogeneity and equity.

How teachers are constructed as actors maps onto these movements, including the degrees of freedom they are perceived to have, or should be allowed to have, in the classroom. Their perceived roles are also, inevitably, reflected in the purposes set out for pedagogy in each study. While many articles conceptually and methodologically draw a clear line between the actors and what they do, for example by interviewing teachers and observing them, in a couple of articles we find an occasional conflation of *teacher* quality and *teaching* quality (eg Aslam et al 2019; Sapire and Sorto 2012). This tends to essentialise pedagogy as a characteristic of the teacher, rather than as an interactive process which may change in response to different groups of learners or which the teacher might improve over time.

As noted above, context is not just about the nation state, although for most of the articles, this is the case. In addition to consideration of local and national levels, the influence of global or at least supranational understandings of best practice underpins many of the articles, sometimes in an analytical or critical way (eg Pantiç et al 2011) and at other times through an unself-conscious benchmarking of practice against global norms or a conscious benchmarking against agreed international targets such as the MDGs or SDGs (eg Sapire and Sorto 2012; Aslam et al 2019). In contrast, some of the articles take an explicitly local or culturalist perspective on pedagogy, focusing on how the setting shapes pedagogical practices and possibilities through such vectors as teacher beliefs (eg Kelly et al 2014) and community expectations (eg Taylor and Mulhall 2001).

Anderson-Levitt (2004) delicately explores the tensions between, on the one hand, convergence driven by a limited international repertoire, and, on the other, local manifestations of this:

> I would argue both that classroom practice is 'remarkably homogenous' around the world, and that teachers in different contexts teach in significantly different ways, at least in the case of first- and second-grade reading lessons in the United States, France, and the Republic of Guinea. However, the problem then becomes how we

should conceive of national culture and global processes and acting within classroom practice. I will show that in the case of reading lessons, teachers use a simple repertoire of lesson elements to build different lesson structures. Although shallow and almost meaningless until given meaning by local teachers, the common repertoire, the transnational model, nonetheless had a real impact on and a real presence in local practice. (239)

Anderson-Levitt's approach to context not only holds in tension global and local forces; it also relies in part on ethnographic immersion and a holistic understanding of context. Not all of the articles see context through these lenses, with some taking a more variables-oriented approach, perceiving context as a set of conditions, as we will elaborate further in the following section.

Toward a typology of comparative studies of pedagogy

The analysis above points to considerable methodological and thematic diversity among the approaches taken by authors of these articles. It also highlights differing understandings of, and approaches to, context. On the one hand this diversity is symptomatic of social sciences in general and comparative studies in particular, and it reflects well-trodden and well-rehearsed epistemological pathways along qualitative/interpretive and quantitative/positivist lines. On the other hand, a closer look at the diversity reveals particular clusters which suggest a typology of studies, and from that typology, we might posit the existence of two distinct research communities with different methodological approaches reflecting different perspectives on context, different understandings of pedagogy's main purposes, different sources of inspiration and funding, and therefore potentially different impact. While these 'epistemic communities' (Haas 1992) may be intuitively familiar to scholars inside the CIE field, our analysis allows us to provide a framework for mapping them and a typology of some of their characteristics.

One central difference between the studies is the extent to which they take an instrumentalist view of pedagogy with a focus on learning outcomes of different kinds. Some studies appear to be driven primarily by curiosity or a quest for knowledge about pedagogy which treats it as a valuable object of study for its own sake. Such studies might, for example, be concerned with the connection between policy and pedagogy, or culture and pedagogy, or, somewhat more instrumentally, teacher professional development and pedagogy. Understanding teacher identity as a factor shaping reactions to policy, a factor shaped (or not) by culture or professional development are central concerns here, but what the outcomes of pedagogy might be is not the primary issue. Pedagogical processes themselves are the focus. On the other hand, a roughly equal number of articles focused on how pedagogy led to or at least aimed to foster particular outcomes, defined as the skills and knowledge expected of learners. As noted above, a wide range of potential outcomes is explored, both academic and social, but a particularly prevalent cluster is concerned with measurable outcomes in 'the basics' – that is, literacy and numeracy, often assessed through tests. This could be expressed as a continuum (Figure 3), with each study somewhere along it, depending on how process or outcomes focused it is.

[Figure 2]

A second key difference between the articles concerns their treatment of context. One way of thinking about context is to see it holistically as a kind of ecosystem (Author 1 and Colleague 2019). This has been called a pedagogical nexus (Hufton and Elliott 2000) to reflect the interconnectedness and mutually reinforcing nature of different parts of the system; it has also been termed the 'onto-cultural context' (Rappleye and Komatsu 2017) to reflect the ways in which learning and culture are interdependent. A contrasting way of thinking about context is as a set of discrete variables, which might include, for example, national policy on pedagogy and/or supervision of teachers, class size, learning resources, parental attitudes to schooling, and so on. These variables are normally pre-determined and so the framework within which context is understood is *a priori*. This, too, could be expressed as a continuum:

[Figure 3]

If we combine these two continua, we have the following matrix, and each study would fit into one of the four quadrants.

[Figure 4]

Quadrant A represents studies that combine a process orientation with an atomised view of context; Quadrant B contains studies which combine variable-based analytical frameworks for context with a concern for learning outcomes; in Quadrant C we find studies which combine a focus on pedagogical processes with an ecosystemic perspective on context; and D contains studies which are outcomes-oriented with a holistic view of context.

Using this typology, we converted the two continua into a set of scales in order to distinguish between the more or less extreme versions of each type. Through further full-text reading, we defined scoring criteria, ranging from +3 to -3[9], for evaluating and mapping the studies onto the matrix. Two scores were assigned to each article as follows. Articles that scored two +3s matched the criteria of complete variable orientation and strong focus on learning outcomes. These included Chen et al (2018), Sapire and Sorto (2012) and Aslam et al (2019). Articles that scored two -3s matched the criteria of holistic treatment of the socio-cultural context and attention to pedagogical processes as objects of study in themselves- such as Anderson-Levitt (2004), Hufton et al (2003) and Breton-Carbonneau et al (2012). By identifying these articles as the 'extreme' versions, it was then possible to score the other articles relative to them. Each article was read fully three times to refine our judgement for scoring, resulting in the final matrix.

An overall diagram of the 51 articles plotted onto the matrix, with the size of circle at each node reflecting the number of articles (ranging from 1-5 articles) situated there, looks like this:

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[9] The minus or plus do not refer to positive or negative judgments of the researchers' approaches but rather our understandings of the articles' positionings. A seven point scale (-3 to +3) was selected by the team due to its affordances in creating notable distinctions whilst minimising issues related to reliability (-5 to +5 would be too fine-grained to have confidence in the distinctions).

[Figure 5]

The eleven articles in Quadrant B, as well as sharing a concern for outcomes with an *a priori* list of ingredients of context, have a number of things in common. They variously:
- Reference the 'standards' agenda
- Reference the SDGs and/or the 'learning crisis'
- Seek to intervene to improve outcomes (and so need to have variables to manipulate to make changes)
- Use quantitative methodology
- Are often funded by aid agencies or national governments

The 22 articles in Quadrant C, on the other hand, are more likely to be:
- Qualitative and interpretive
- Culturalist in perspective
- Self-funded or funded by research councils
- Less oriented toward making recommendations than contributing to knowledge

These were the most strikingly different and populated quadrants, with the most extreme examples. In Quadrant D, where we find articles with an ecosystemic view of context but an orientation to outcomes, the outcomes under study are primarily social, as in Nasser et al's (2014) study of teaching for forgiveness in Arab countries. While this is a significant cluster, it is less pronounced in its difference, without extreme examples, and somewhat fewer articles are found there (eight in the quadrant overall).

Does it matter that there are two quite different research communities working in this space? Arguably, this pluralism could be constructive. However, there could be lost opportunities. A fusion of these two might help, for example, to resolve the longstanding challenge of positive changes to pedagogy. Pedagogy has proven to be remarkably resilient over long periods and interventions that intervene in specific variables often do not achieve their goals or have unintended consequences. The literature on learner-centred education is testament to this (eg Schweisfurth 2011). Policy change alone, for example, has time and again led to little change at the classroom level, or worse, even changes that are counterproductive.

Even the most extreme C quadrant research team would be unlikely to argue that it is not important to raise learning outcomes (of all kinds), and so connecting the process orientation to the outcomes orientation could facilitate this. Equally, those researchers who adopt a variables-oriented approach might benefit from understanding context more holistically, and be better able to anticipate the connections between interventions and their consequences (or lack of them). As Author 1 (2013) has argued, it is more fruitful to work with the pedagogical nexus, mapping interventions onto it, than to ignore it.

Conclusion

We began this article by asking how cross-national comparative research on pedagogy has changed since Alexander's (2001) *Culture and Pedagogy* study. In the last (almost) twenty years, some new areas of investigation have emerged or been strengthened such as postcolonial studies and studies of global education reform movements, and diverse

research methods have been employed. Yet the stalwart analytical lenses have remained largely static, with teachers' perceptions and practices as the core foci, investigated primarily through interviews and observations in mostly European, or North-North and South-South contexts, at least within the literature surveyed here.

Alexander's work is distinguished by its breadth and depth. He triangulated observation, interviews, and policy analysis, set within in-depth policy analysis and historical perspectives both on the nation and on pedagogical traditions. His works thus spanned the horizontal, vertical and transversal axes (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017) and mapped very carefully the relationship between the particulars of a given class and the national level. It also ensured coherence between the theoretical underpinnings—including the enhanced understanding of pedagogy as both act and discourse—and the empirical process of researching it. The tendency to overgeneralise comparison found in some of these articles, and the preponderance of interviews as sole methods, are in contrast to this, leaving us to wonder how far this sub-field has moved on. However, in fairness, Alexander's book weighs in at 642 pages, and several years were devoted to the study. It is not realistic to expect a single article to approach this scale, although we might have hoped to see greater acknowledgment of the richness of context and the challenges of situating pedagogy within it.

The researching of pedagogy as inherently tied to ways of knowing, acting, and being is evident through locating the reviewed articles on the framework above. The epistemic communities identified reflect connections between epistemological understandings, research designs, and the funding mechanisms or organizational supports that enable or constrain comparative research on pedagogy. This raises critical questions about the extent to which the research status quo is 'fixed'. Are researchers (and their projects) compelled by factors that enable or constrain—such as time, funding, and accessibility—to operate exclusively or primarily within a single quadrant? Or do researchers self-select into these communities and are their perspectives framed inevitably within them? Where and how have hybridised approaches, particularly across quadrants A and D, emerged in the last twenty years, is there more room for these approaches, and what could be learned from them?

The answers to these and concomitant questions are outstanding, but we invite researchers (and practitioners) to consider how, where, and why researching pedagogy comparatively matters. Our scoping of the research outlined and mapped above has highlighted many areas for future investigation that could advance our understandings of pedagogy through comparison. Going beyond the nation state to both larger and smaller units would address the issue of methodological nationalism while acknowledging the power of global discourses and avoiding the trap of simplistic generalisations to the country level. There is also the need to map the field in similar ways beyond English-language journals. Whether the same patterns would prevail in this body of literature is an open and fascinating question. We would also encourage other researchers to engage in similar macro-level studies of sub-fields within CIE, even if not focused explicitly on pedagogy. With the rapid advance of globalisation, intensified interconnectedness of educational systems, and an increasingly pressing focus on quality and learning by communities of educational researchers across different academic and policy fields, Alexander's (2009) plea still resonates: 'there is a no

less urgent need for comparativists to come to grips with the very core of the educational enterprise, pedagogy' (13).

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