Comparative education is not, I think, a science seeking general laws; nor is it a science seeking knowledge either in the sense that it provides a structure to support the growth of knowledge, nor in the sense that it has distinctive conventions by which its truths are tested. I think it worse of it for that, because I do not aspire to validate the study against attack from without: I regard 'science' and 'discipline' as terms of approbation rather than descriptive terms. Lauwerys was conceding too much to positivist social science when he wrote of comparative education that its "hope is that it may become possible to provide a body of general principles which would help to guide policy-makers and reformers by predicting, with some assurance, possible outcomes of the measures they propose" [2]. I feel that here he is striving for predictive power that is not comfortable or productive within the structure of comparative education, and that general principles are, within comparative education as within historical study, but rather means towards the illumination of the particular. The figure or centre of attention is the individual: the general is the figure which serves to throw the individual into clear relief.

In its essence, comparative education is less concerned with predictions and the future than with that which is accepted as actuality occurring in time and space. Its habitat is located within the coordinates of living rather than within the coordinates of static analysis. It is descriptive rather than experimental. It deals in insight rather than law as a standard for understanding.

Let me explain this claim. When Lauwerys writes of "general principles which may help to guide policy-makers and reformers by predicting, with some assurance, possible outcomes of the measures they propose", he seems to be aspiring to laws sufficiently well established to allow the actor to accept their predictive power rather than rely on his judgement of what might happen in the light of experience. If such laws exist, then the actor has less 'figuring out' to do: he can exercise his judgement within the areas where the laws do not hold or do not guide, whereas in areas in which general laws or principles do hold, they command his assent rather than opposition to his judgement.

In science, the appeal is to the logic of the process by which the result has been obtained, replicability, to the conventions of the scientific method. If you have conducted your investigation properly, then your result should be more assured than my judgement because science penetrates the world of mere appearances to reveal a more real, or at least more definable, world than that which confounds the eye. 'Scientists tell us that…' the saying goes, and we had better believe them.

However, in human affairs what the scientists tell us does not take us too far. 'Being equal…' they begin, but other things never are. So we have to judge the
need to tutor our judgement, not simply to discipline it. The normative studies of
politics serve to tutor our aspirations; but our grasp of realities—or as I might prefer
it, actualities—is improved by descriptive human studies, of which comparative
seems to me to be one. It is the fruits of these I am describing when I speak of
ner than law as a basis for understanding'.

telligent aim of the comparative study of human conduct in educational settings
development of personal professional insight. Such personal insight is the characteristic
that understanding on which we found our capacity to imagine the feasible yet
and our capacity to grasp rapidly and react intelligently to the unexpected
is we inevitably and frequently encounter. It is in life as in games the basis of the
iative and the creative response. It is such understanding that guides us beyond the
iction. Literature and the arts foster it with a high degree of freedom to invent the
History and comparative education seek the revealing in the authenticated. As
o to speak, a critical refinement of memory by evidence which makes it public, so
education is a rendering of educational travel into public experience.

ice is made public to invite judgement in dialogue, and such judgement rests upon
arity of an appeal to evidence. This evidence, the fundamental data source for
education, must be description; and I am going to argue that, since it became a
us and academic study, comparative education has paid too little attention to
description, preferring to emphasise such abstractions as statistics and
ments on the one hand and school ‘systems’ on the other. It might appear from the
exponents that comparative education is an observational study, but in fact the
parative educationist collects records when abroad and writes his study largely
ents. His observations of the living educational process are generally used to give
alisations which they are insufficient to support, or to provide the student with
ction against misreading his documents. No doubt they also underlie the
he offers us, but they are not presented in such a way as to allow us to criticise
isions.

say: ‘Give me your evidence. Discuss it with me. Appeal to my judgement. Do not
me your conclusions and ask me to trust your wisdom’. In some sense this must be
description.

course, description is itself a complicated business. Let me turn to intelligent
description which is relatively unselfconscious in the nineteenth century educa-
ller whose work I happen to know best: Hartvig Nissen, the Norwegian policy-
mer, educational administrator and teacher who received a travel grant to visit
1852. He wrote:

e one walks into a Scottish school, one almost always notices various large
ographical maps hanging on the walls, and beside them, a lot of cardboard sheets,
ch biblical matter is printed. Generally, one finds also coloured natural history
ns accompanied by a text. These things, one can well say, give the Scottish
its physiognomy ... One finds in places one, or more often, several black-
sometimes on easels, sometimes hanging on the walls; and these ‘wallboards’
ch used in teaching, especially in arithmetic and geography, but also in other
s. There are also globes and different sorts of diagrams. Wall maps are now
en left without names; these are aids for teaching general or physical and
atical geography.

t the elementary schools I visited, the 10 Heriots schools were certainly those
vided with a comprehensive selection of such teaching aids. Boards were fixed
1st board with religious knowledge:
1. Introductory
2. Christology
3. Basic knowledge which all must know.
Each of the three divisions of this board contained the most important material and Bible references.
2nd: Chronology (Biblical and British)
3rd: Chronology (General)
4th: Large scale representations of pillars. (The Ionic, Doric and Corinthian, and other architectural features.)
5th: Instead of the board, various weights, balances and other mechanical contrivances and small machines.
6th: Rules.
7th: Large scale representations of pillars. (The Ionic, Doric and Corinthian, and other architectural features.)
8th: A whole lot of mathematical figures and also drawings illustrative of vegetable physiology.
In addition to these inscribed blackboards, there were two others set on the wall. There were also a simple barometer and thermometer, and good maps on some blackboards together with natural history diagrams.

Nissen is, in a relatively unselfconscious way, attempting the task of providing through description, and although I do not think this is the place for elaborate methodological analysis, it seems to me worthwhile to reflect a little on what he is doing.

At one point he is offering a description of the contents of the blackboards in a way that does not actually give us a reproduction of the contents, but a list of topics. He does not tell us whether the topics were headings on the boards or are his own characterisations of the content. He does tell us about what contemporary field-workers might call ‘data gathering and recording’: “In one of the schools I wrote down the following about their contents, which roughly locates within a distribution the case which he describes by telling us that it was one of those Heriot’s schools “best provided with ... teaching aids”. His description then is general and particular, its evidential base in record-keeping is adequately described, and some effort is made to locate his case within a population of cases.

In the previous paragraph he offers us a generalised impression of the physical characteristics which give the Scottish school what he calls its ‘physiognomy’. This is abstracted to a kind of observational visit recorded more particularly in the case of the Heriots school survey based upon a sample. From the context of his book we can obtain information about the sample of schools he visited although we have no way of establishing that the sample was representative of the total population of Scottish schools. The generalisations are, so I know, not based upon statistical techniques but on personal impression. The use of the indefinite pronoun, ‘one’ (man in Norwegian), suggests an implicit claim that the impression would be gathered from the same range of visits by most of the readers being addressed.

Nissen describes not only the appearance of the school, but the educational process. He is writing of the model school attached to the Normal School in Edinburgh:

In English some pieces were read from the reading book. All, without exception, well, some remarkably finely. Thus, there was a lively thirteen-year-old boy, who was to read a short rhetorical piece, whose opening was: ‘Liberty is commensurate and inseparable from British soil; British law proclaims even to the stranger a sojourner, the moment he sets his foot upon British earth, that the ground on which he treads is holy, and consecrated by the genius of Universal Emancipation!’
peple who were present to such an extent that an involuntary burst of applause out. The reader may feel reserve perhaps because this does not tally with our of view; but when one is oneself present, it seems quite natural. One is oneself d by the same feeling and one is not offended that the feeling is allowed sion.

even looked at in the light of reflection such a scene has its deep meaning. he common school shows its power to implant a feeling for freedom and ality in its pupils’ breasts; the love of fatherland is strengthened and nourished power of sympathy, and when thus the simplest working man’s son in the on school and through the use of the materials of instruction prescribed for him position to strike the finest heartstrings of his superiors and carry them with the stream of emotion, then one gets not only the understanding but the feeling ut the people are one and that the training even if different in grade yet is similar ommon for all parts of the people. [4]

oot of this there is also observation. There is the careful transcription of a passage under [5]. There is the statement that this passage was read by a 13-year-old boy as oral examination in English, the latter information given in the paragraph preceding ed, and there is the statement that a burst of applause broke out. But there is also comment as, for example, in the description of the lad as ‘lively’ and in the n of the quality of his reading. And there is interpretation of the responses to and of its motivation. The audience were ‘carried away’. Their applause was ary. Finally, we are offered by Nissen an interpretation of the situation as a such a scene has its deep meaning”—which is reflective and deliberate or, to express more familiarly, is theoretical.

is clear that any description, even if it is far more controlled than that of Nissen, rests judgement of him who observes and describes, both in respect of what he selects as notice and in respect of interpretative perception. There may also be evaluative and reflective interpretation, and indeed it may be argued that these make the n more accessible to criticism because they provide evidence regarding the position server. All description derives its form from falling into place within a perspective actural principle is inseparable from the point of view of an observer.

want to make two claims. First, if one takes comparative education to denote the studying outside one’s own cultural boundaries, then there is a perspective provided which cannot be provided by any other principle of study. Crudely, ‘ae see oursel’s as us’. More elaborately, to contribute patterns of descriptive selection and interpreta- question those within the culture in which the observation is made. If, like me, you at there are grave problems in making social sciences self-critical through falsifiable theory—problems which we can assume have been solved when it becomes to bar social scientists from filling up football pools because of their power to predict then a comparative base for critical interpretation is of very great importance.

y, the aspiration towards positivist and predictive social science models in the return to Lauwerys—“that it may become possible to provide a body of general which would help to guide policy-makers and reformers by predicting, with some the possible outcomes of the measures they propose”, has led to an undervaluing of n and description, an overvaluing of the written source, of the statistical, of the educational systems offer of themselves. Such studies aspire towards objectivity and nd to lose the critical perspective which is inseparably linked to the cultural location server.
teaching—has been moving towards the reinstatement of field observation, since cast in the paradigm of psychometric experiment seems to have only tenuous con-
the recognisable world of the school. Hence an aspiration to check carefully the ch:
of the school, an aspiration already carried far enough to throw doubt on as-
assumptions about educational reality which underly research conducted without t
intimacy of fieldwork.

I feel sure that comparative education will miss making an important contrib-
understanding of schooling if it does not participate in the current development of
approaches to educational process and educational institutions. Indeed, I should li
Comparative Education Society and the British Educational Research Associa-
together to discuss the potential and problems of case study based on fieldwor
jointly sponsoring a conference or by making the two annual conferences coincide
place so that some sessions can be shared.

Towards such a meeting let me contribute a line of thinking.

A readiness to return from analysis based upon the statistical manipulation of
to descriptive or holistic approaches is detectable at the moment in applied social sc
statistical assessment of probabilities is the basis of a decision-making strategy v
rather well in industrial or agricultural settings and in discriminating between
derived from theory. But many feel that the attempt to deploy it to evaluate educ-
social programmes, thereby guiding decision-makers by law-like predictions, has
serious weaknesses in the paradigm.

Reactions to this have been diverse, as one might expect. The distinction which it
is often posed (as it is in a recent issue of Anthropology and Education Quarterly)
between qualitative and quantitative. I do not myself believe this to be the crucial
but rather one created by the distribution of skills among research persons
therefore, reach after an alternative way of characterising the dilemma.

All events or existences may be regarded as unique or as recurrent. All study is
cases. All study of cases implies classes, because to name a case is to make it an in
class. That is to say: to speak of a particular school is to designate a case of the c

Now, in respect of any question or group of questions we care to pose, a c
regarded as representative of a class or as exemplary, but not representative, of a

In the case of my stopping writing to apply heat to the water in my kettle in the
doing so I participate in a case of applying heat to water which is representative
other things being equal, and the protective reservation is not in practice an onerous
scientists working outside controlled laboratory conditions soon discovered that
not be related to classes in this regular representative way, for their classes
relevant multivariate factors in which the individual components varied independ-
other or entered into complex interactions. So they moved to the strategy of usi
of cases because this enabled them to devise statistical techniques capable of a
probability that the sample of cases would be representative of the class.

However, this leads in applied social science to the relation of probabilistic pr
action. For example, such a prediction as that a new Nuffield Science Course w
greater mastery of science. Now the trouble about issues posed in this form is that
instance as unimportant. If it were necessary for the action taken in all socia:
uniform and consistent (that is, for social policy to be absolutely uniform thr
policy area) then the strategy might be acceptable. But it is not. If our curricul
improvement in 50% of cases, no change in 10% and deterioration in 40% (a situ
yield significance at 0-05 level of experimentals over controls), there is no need
ts schools to adopt it. So we must get down to cases; and, as soon as we do, we are c
p. Criticism of the experimental sample paradigm in educational research has led to a renewed interest in case study. I am mounting a like criticism of the tradition in educational research of studying and writing about the systems of other countries, and we develop in our field a better grounded representation of day-to-day educational practice on the careful study of particular cases. The accumulation of cases may yield generalisations in due course; but these will never supplant the need for shrewd practical wisdom which can only feed on the descriptive representation of practice.

If you want to make a contribution to comparative education, I urge you to study very closely biology teaching or staff meetings or the role of the principal or headmaster in several countries. Principal lines of method are open to you. One is the ethnographic tradition of observation. One, which I call the historical tradition, is that of gathering oral interview. There are variations within each tradition and compromises between them, as I myself planning work on the comprehensive school in Europe based upon case studies in an historical tradition.

For individual workers, they must be meticulous about their records and, as they have completed their study, such records of first-hand observation and analysis need to be lodged in national archives which could be replicated internationally as a resource.

Comprehensive studies made a gigantic leap forward in the nineteenth century when the national archives of most European countries were opened to historians. I believe that a revolution in comparative education could occur if detailed fieldwork data became available in the form I have proposed, and if comparative studies which have not taken such data became unacceptable to scholars in this field.

NOTES

Presented by Professor Stenhouse as The Presidential Address at the 1977 annual meeting of the United Kingdom branch of The Comparative Education Society in Europe.


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