

**Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Within the Context of Comparative,  
International and Development Education**

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### **Abstract**

Curriculum, teaching and learning should include a component of Comparative, International and Development Education. It is increasingly important for teachers to foster global citizenship, international cooperation and cross-cultural understanding, within the dialectic of the global and the local. By reaching beyond the four walls of classrooms, teachers can gain broader, international perspectives and a deeper sociocultural understanding of curriculum, teaching and learning. Thus, enriching student experience and substantially improving teacher professional development. While there are many potentially significant cross-cultural lessons in teaching pedagogy, teachers have few opportunities. However, through educational exchanges and shared experience, teachers can become introduced to alternative forms of schooling and can learn to think more critically about traditional approaches to education. In this paper, I propose using Comparative, International and Development Education to enhance teacher education and situate my own cross-cultural experiences in curriculum, teaching and learning in Canada and Japan within this context.

### **Key words**

Canada; Japan; comparative education; teacher education; cross-cultural

**Biographical details for the “Notes on Contributors page”**

Edward R. Howe obtained his M.A. from UBC (2000) and his Ph.D. from OISE/UT (2005).

Edward’s dissertation is a comparative ethnographic narrative of Japan’s teacher acculturation.

His main research interests are teacher education and comparative international education.

Comparative, International and Development Education (CIDE) has an important role in curriculum, teaching and learning (CTL). However, despite calls for global and multicultural perspectives, CIDE remains at the periphery of teacher education and classroom teaching (Bennett, 1992). Nevertheless, teacher education programs with a cross-cultural practicum experience have been shown to successfully incorporate CIDE, while broadening preservice teachers' understanding of CTL (Shaw et al., 2003). Through shared experience teachers can gain a better understanding of the significance of CTL within the context of CIDE. Teachers' personal and professional experiences provide a rich database of pedagogical knowledge. There is a wealth of cross-cultural CTL information that remains untapped.

Through collaboration with colleagues from around the globe, tacit understandings and wisdom in the practice of teaching can be uncovered and better understood. Moreover, global citizenship, international cooperation and mutual understanding can be fostered among teachers and students. Shared knowledge of CTL within the dialectic of the global and the local can provide a framework to meet the educational challenges faced by all nations (Arnone, 1999). Enhanced teacher education with a CIDE component would go a long way to achieving these goals (Wilson, 1994). However, CIDE courses are usually offered within graduate programs at Canadian universities and thus don't reach the majority of the teaching population. This is an issue that needs to be addressed.

In this paper, I argue that CIDE courses should be offered to undergraduates within teacher education programs. Teachers need to look beyond the confines of their classrooms to gain a broader international perspective, in order to achieve a deeper cross-cultural understanding of our niche within the global village. If teachers are provided

with more cross-cultural learning opportunities, they can substantially enrich the experience of their students by incorporating their CTL and CIDE experiences into their pedagogy. Furthermore, I illustrate the profound personal and professional growth teachers experience through both formal teacher exchange programs and personal ventures abroad. Perhaps some of the most significant lessons have yet to be discovered and shared as these are often learned serendipitously—as is the case here.

### **Developing a CIDE Conceptual Framework for CTL**

Internationalization of higher education continues to be a focus for many teacher educators. “[It] is the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teacher, researcher and service functions of the institution” (Knight, 2000, p. 14). A recent national survey on the state of affairs of internationalization at Canadian universities showed *progress and promise* (Ibid.). But CIDE is not yet a significant part of CTL in Canadian classrooms, because curriculum has traditionally been monoethnic and change is slow in education, as teachers tend to teach the way they were taught. Moreover, teachers are increasingly under pressure to cover ‘core’ content material at the expense of CIDE and social issues. Teaching to the test is becoming more common at all grade levels. Finally, teachers tend to teach what they know—supplementing the prescribed curriculum with their own experiences. Teachers need more international/intercultural experiences to draw on.

While some progress has been made to combat racism, prejudice and discrimination, there is much more that needs to be done to foster an appreciation of cultural diversity, universal human rights, responsibility to the world community and reverence for the earth.

Bennett's (1992) model provides a useful theoretical framework to build on these core values, while attempting to unify global and multicultural approaches to curriculum. Bennett effectively delineates six curriculum goals: (1) to develop multiple historical perspectives; (2) to strengthen cultural consciousness; (3) to strengthen intercultural competence; (4) to combat racism, prejudice and discrimination; (5) to increase awareness of the "state of the planet" and global dynamics; and (6) to build social action skills. While I acknowledge the important work done previously by Bennett, Knight and others in the field of International Education, I draw mostly from over 15 years of cross-cultural CTL experiences for my conceptual framework.

From my experiences in the Canadian and Japanese school systems, I have learned many important things that have influenced me as a teacher. Various cross-cultural incidents have each contributed to my own educational philosophy and my principles of teaching, which can be summed up with the ancient Chinese proverb:

*I hear and I forget  
I see and I remember  
I do and I understand.*

Hoffman (1999) suggests that the sociocultural dynamics of CTL must be at the front and centre of any conceptual framework in CIDE. Furthermore, other comparative educators have come to appreciate what Masemann (1990) calls "different ways of knowing." I share Hayhoe's (2001) view for a synthesis of Eastern and Western approaches to CTL for teacher educators. In particular, I have found narrative inquiry an effective means to uncover the intricacies of learning to teach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thus, these

and other scholars who embrace experiential and cross-cultural learning have nurtured my own notion of CTL within the context of CIDE.

My conceptual framework is also reflected in the teachings of John Dewey. My definition of curriculum includes informal and non-formal learning as well as formal schooling, within a vast array of cultural contexts. This idea of curriculum is very different from the “curriculum” typically understood as what a student ‘gets’ from school. Dewey’s (1938) notion of education is essentially based on the following paradigm: experience = education = life. Dewey has been hailed as one of the most important educational philosophers, yet few classroom teachers know of his significant contributions to comparative education. In 1919–21 Dewey visited China (Kobayashi, 1990). The school systems in China and Japan adopted Dewey’s constructivism and in many ways exemplify his educational philosophies far more than North American schools (Gardner, 1989; Hayhoe, 2001; Mingyuan, 2001). Dewey saw the potential of CIDE to enhance CTL and teacher education within different cultural contexts.

### **Learning in Different Cultures: The Making of a Comparative Educator**

I was born and raised in Victoria, British Columbia. Throughout my three decades in Canada and four years in Japan, I have learned a great deal through formal, informal and non-formal education experiences. These experiences have shaped my comparative education research, teaching philosophy and pedagogy in profound ways. In order to situate my CIDE conceptual framework within the broader landscape of CTL, I have included an exceptional cross-cultural story of education and experience that mirrors English as a Second Language (ESL) students’ experiences in Canadian classrooms. In

addition, this example helps to illustrate the close connection between experience and education that has become an essential component of my teaching.

It is a crisp spring day. The cherry blossoms are about to bloom and the noonday sun is streaming through the crowded spaces, reflecting off the glass and concrete office towers of Shinjuku. As the train comes to a halt I check the station sign—*Sendagaya*, yes that's right. I grab my knapsack and get off. As I head down the stairs, across the street to the large ominous building with the intimidating "Sendagaya Foreign Language Institute" sign, I am struck by the fact that I'm nervous and anxious. Why? Well, I deliberately over-estimated my Japanese language ability in order to get into this pilot study language class ... but how fluent is an 'Intermediate' student anyway? Now I am about to find out. I enter the building, take the elevator up to the sixth floor where I am directed to a small, sparsely decorated classroom, dominated by a chalkboard and desk at the front. It is typical except for one feature—there are about 12 chairs arranged in a semi-circle facing the front. Many of the students are already present. "*Konnichi-wa. Dôzo haitte kudasai,*" says a middle-aged woman I presume to be our *sensei*. I respond with a cautious, "*Hai*" and with a bow of my head I enter the room. It is quite a multicultural group as we discover in the introductions ... entirely in Japanese. I am overwhelmed! Now I know what is meant by 'immersion.' The entire class is in Japanese. No English is used. Suddenly, I am no longer the 'super-keener.' The tables have been turned. I shrink into my seat when a question is asked. I am afraid of making a mistake. I feel way out of my league. Everyone seems so confident! I now fully relate to ESL students in Canada.

While this incident occurred over ten years ago, the memories remain deeply embedded in my psyche. The pictures are visual but the emotions and feelings are far stronger and more vivid. I can barely recall the classroom details, yet I remember the significant affect this had on my teaching. For the first time in my life, I felt the fear of making a mistake or of raising my hand to volunteer information. At times I was totally confused—I had difficulty doing what the teacher asked of me. However, as an adult with a wider range of cross-cultural experiences, I was better able to cope than most ESL students in Canadian classrooms. I have a great deal more empathy for ESL students, now that I have experienced their helplessness in a foreign classroom, as I was the Japanese foreign



language equivalent of an ESL student in Canada. Thus, I have a more comprehensive understanding of both ESL and at-risk students because of my experience in Japan.

My travel abroad included powerful lessons in CTL and CIDE that affected me both personally and professionally on several different levels. The most immediate lesson was the feeling of empathy for foreign language learners and immigrants that I gained through this experience. Consequently, when I returned to Canada, in my teaching I made a conscious effort to include key visuals with plenty of support materials for second language learners as well as weaker students. Furthermore, through my visits to other nations in East Asia such as Vietnam and Thailand, I learned valuable lessons regarding all the things Canadians take for granted. I came to appreciate that Canada is an energy rich nation with vast resources and an excellent standard of living (for international comparisons, see Fagerlind & Saha, 1989, pp. 96–122; Hallak, 1990, pp. 7–24).

With a new propensity to compare and contrast, my lessons reflected my experiences abroad, including telling stories about meeting individuals facing profound hardship. For example, while visiting Vietnam in 1990, I met a 26-year-old pedi-cab driver whose appearance led me to believe he was more than twice his age. In broken English, he told me his riveting story of being wounded by automatic rifle fire as he fled from American soldiers. At first, I was skeptical, until he showed me the bullet wound in his right leg, with no exit mark! Apparently, the bullet was still lodged in his calf. I was surprised to learn that he had to support his family of four on less than a dollar a day. To put this into perspective, in Ho Chi Minh City, one dollar could buy a haircut and manicure at the fanciest salon, while ten dollars could buy a gourmet meal for two. When I shared this story with my students, they gained a profound appreciation for the value of CIDE.

Whether teaching about world population growth and energy resources to Science 8 students or the pros and cons of nuclear energy to Physics 11 students, I drew heavily on my personal experiences. CTL within my classroom went far beyond the “curriculum” as mandated by the official ministry curriculum guides. For instance, my students received a humanitarian lesson on the effects of radiation, including graphic video footage of the horrific results of the bombing of Hiroshima. Furthermore, I supplemented materials obtained from the Hiroshima Peace Museum with a tragic story from a Hiroshima survivor, whom I had worked with during my stay in Japan. It is worth repeating here in much the same way I told the story to my students.

On that fateful day of August 6, 1945, Sekimachi-kun was with his kindergarten class on a fieldtrip. When he returned, his Hiroshima home was decimated and his entire family lost. Many more friends eventually succumbed to radiation poisoning. Sekimachi-kun was orphaned at the tender age of five but was fortunate to be raised by an American missionary in Japan. Sekimachi-sensei recalled how this kind American had helped him financially to go to university. As a result, it became Sekimachi-sensei’s mission to help all foreigners he encountered in the same benevolent way. Before his retirement and fight with cancer, Sekimachi-sensei helped me find a job, an apartment and provided much guidance to me during my initial two-year stay in Tokyo.

### **Cross-Cultural Teacher Exchanges**

Increasingly, Japanese educators are coming to Canada and Canadians are participating in educational exchange programs with Japan. They are doing so because of the internationalization of education, globalization of the economy, and increased trade and tourism. And by their presence, great forward strides have been made in international education and the exchange of ideas (McConnell, 2000). For instance, the Japanese School Teaching Assistant Program has sponsored over 8000 interns and continues to expand (International Internship Programs, 2002). One intern, who now teaches English

in Gunma prefecture, expressed to me how her one-year experience in a Canadian classroom radically affected her language teaching.

My cross-cultural teaching experience was the most significant event in my personal and professional life as a beginning teacher. While I originally decided to go to Canada for the chance to get out of Gunma and to improve my English, I later realized how dramatically my teaching has changed. In contrast to my own junior high school experience, I encourage active student participation and my classes are far more student-centred.

Since much of what teachers do is culturally embedded, these sorts of cross-cultural teacher exchanges provide a great professional development opportunity.

About 5000 of Japan's teachers are sent abroad every year in order to broaden their international perspective and to gain an increased consciousness of their chosen profession (Japanese Ministry of Education, 1993, p. 92). Likewise, in what has been described as one of the largest national programs of internationalization, thousands of foreigners participate each year in the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program (McConnell, 2000). Since its inception in 1987 over 10,000 Canadians have taken part in the JET Program (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2002). What's more, many Assistant Language Teachers (ALT's like myself) were hired by regional authorities outside the JET program. In 2001–2002 they accounted for 2,784 of the 8,400 ALT's in Japan. The target for 2005 is 11,500 ALT's—including 1000 foreign instructors to be hired as regular teachers in junior and senior high schools (Japanese Ministry of Education, 2002a). JET participants indicated significant growth as a result of their cross-cultural experience (McConnell, 2000). I have personally met a number of Japanese and Canadian teachers who have taken part in exchanges and without exception they have all grown

personally and professionally as a result. More than a few JET colleagues have become active members of comparative education societies.<sup>1</sup>

Several Japanese teachers I have met, each remarked at how their teaching strategies have evolved considerably since returning to their classrooms from cross-cultural teaching experiences abroad. One Japanese teacher modified American lesson plans from the Internet in her English teaching while still adhering to the standardized textbook and mandated curriculum. Similarly, the Canadian teachers I've met who have ventured across the Pacific have found a wealth of ideas from the Japanese teaching culture. For example, organizing the classroom structure and routines to facilitate tasks to be performed by small groups, enables students to take more responsibility for their own learning and frees teachers to interact more with students. Administrative duties that would normally be conducted by teachers such as attendance, homework collection and clean-up can be successfully managed by students who can take on much of the responsibility for managing their own behaviour and learning. In my experience, Canadian teachers who have tried to incorporate some of these strategies have done so successfully.

In British Columbia, due to increasing budget cuts, the foreign exchange program for teachers has all but ceased. While it is possible to take a leave of absence to teach abroad, there is not much support for teachers to do this. I had to resign my teaching position in order to extend my stay in Japan beyond one year. In my ten years of teaching experience in British Columbia, cross-cultural opportunities for sharing professional knowledge were usually made available only sporadically and often only to senior administrators.

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<sup>1</sup> Besides myself, former JETS active in comparative education societies include Robert Aspinall and Adam Komisarof in Japan; Chris Björk and Gerald LeTendre in the USA.

### **Cross-Cultural CTL Lessons for Teachers**

A salient “lesson to be learned” from Japanese schooling includes both the organization and structure of schools (Benjamin, 1997; Britton, Paine, Pimm, & Raizen, 2003; Rohlen & LeTendre, 1996; Schlechty, 1997; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). For instance, our school system does not easily accommodate field trips as there are forms to be filled in, buses to be ordered, money to be collected, signatures to be gathered and so on. The rigid timetables we adhere to also make extended school excursions and spontaneous trips out of the question. This is not the case in Japan where teachers meet daily to discuss upcoming events and the need to change the timetable to accommodate learning opportunities, including field trips and excursions to experience local and national historical or cultural sites. While we have to take into account the sociocultural context of CTL there are valuable lessons to be learned. Perhaps Thomas Rohlen (Dateline Productions, 1985) best expressed this notion when he stated comparisons with Japan “offer us a mirror rather than a model.”

The rigid structure and organization of schooling in Canada not only limits student learning but also limits teachers’ professional development. Canadian teachers must make special arrangements in order to be absent from school for professional development (usually without pay) so most sharing sessions take place outside regular school hours. Other than the practicum experience of observing other teachers, it is a rare event for another teacher to spend time observing a colleague’s lesson. What’s more, the Western teaching culture—highly independent and autonomous in nature, works against these sorts of peer consultations. There are few formal mechanisms in place to encourage

teachers to work collaboratively. On the contrary, in Japan, the timetable and physical layout of the school facilitates teacher talk. While Canadian teachers work largely in the isolation of their own classrooms, planning lessons and marking at their desks or at home, Japan's teachers spend hours with colleagues each week working side-by-side in the teachers' room. Some Canadian schools have this physical structure but the timetable does not usually permit much in the way of teacher interactions as teachers are teaching alone in their classrooms for most of the school day.

### **Teacher Education and CIDE**

Recent comprehensive multinational studies on teacher education (Britton et al., 2003; Cobb, 1999; Cobb, Darling-Hammond, & Murangi, 1995; Moskowitz & Stephens, 1997) underscore the importance of providing effective teacher induction to national agendas. The benefits of superior teacher induction include attracting better candidates; reduced attrition; improved job satisfaction; enhanced professional development and ultimately improved teaching and learning. Further comparative and international research focused on teacher education would help facilitate improvements to teacher education, incorporating cross-cultural and international understanding of CTL.

Educators cannot continue to function as national practitioners. Few can stick to the old style of thinking and behaving as they once did. ... As it is irrelevant for any society to import a ready-made model of modernization, so it is for any to import or to export an education system. Innovation in teacher education can be most difficult. Globalism as a paradigm is still vague in shape and characteristic. However, the recent discussion about system theories shows that the world is moving very slowly but steadily toward a new system. In a global age, the teaching profession should be reformed, and the ways of educating and training teachers also need to be transformed. Comparative globalism may work as a strategy for innovation in teacher education. (Ochoa & Suzuki, 1993, p. 74)

In the last century, many nations have implemented significant education reforms (for recent examples see British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2002; Japanese Ministry of Education, 2002b). Deeply contextualized comparative analysis is required to fully understand and explain the failures of most of these educational reform initiatives. “Such deep comparative analysis is not an intellectual luxury ... [but on the contrary] it is a core intellectual duty and responsibility” (Farrell, 2000, p. 100). This is the task of a broad community of scholars and practitioners, not just comparative educators

committed to the ways in which we provide our young citizens, in all parts of the world the opportunities to learn what they need to live good, productive and satisfying lives. It requires at bottom a fundamental change in intellectual culture, away from a parochial point of view, toward a broad comparative understanding of the world. (Farrell, 2000, pp. 101)

Teacher education should include a comparative and international education component. Like other prospective teachers, I learned about Dewey’s philosophy, but not his cross-cultural insights. I received no CIDE in my preservice teacher education. My personal journey of education and experience beyond the Bachelor of Education filled this void. I hope that more cross-cultural learning opportunities will be afforded to future generations of teachers for personal and professional growth. Furthermore, if teachers can incorporate CIDE into their lessons, they can foster global citizenship, international cooperation and cross-cultural understanding in their students. Teacher education with a CIDE component is critical, for any effort to nurture international cross-cultural perspectives, ultimately depends on the effectiveness of the teacher.

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