"Comparative research begins, in my view, with a destabilization of self--with a felt need for encounters with difference that invite one to imagine alternatives. While we would not want to abandon the efforts to generate theories and concepts that transcend cultures, we also want theories that address real human experiences. Culture nearly always entails encounter with the unexpected….To imagine culture, then, and at the same time to culture the imagination, is the task of comparative education in the next century.”
--Hoffman, 1999

“And if thou appearest to be entirely lost, Compare thyself. Know what thou art.”
--Goethe, Torquato Tasso, v. 5

Course Overview

Comparison is a central part of educational inquiry. This course provides an opportunity to consider the value of comparison for our understanding of education. We will explore a range of comparative perspectives of key aspects of schooling. In so doing, we examine both methodological challenges associated with comparison and conceptual contributions that comparative research offers. In the class we will undertake contrastive analysis of national and local responses to universal questions in education, focusing particularly on globalization, education reform, and teaching and teacher learning.

This course begins with the assumption that our ability to understand curriculum, teaching and teacher education, and learning is too often limited by our familiarity with education. Comparative research lets us make the familiar strange. The result not only enriches our understanding of educational phenomena elsewhere but also sharpens our insights into our own educational experiences. This course is intended to help each of us learn more about education in our own and other countries.

A second starting point of the course is the claim that discourse about education in the U.S. too often ignores context. Comparative work allows us to consider both the significance and meaning of context. Schooling in any setting is shaped in part by certain regularities; one can argue that these make for powerfully shared commonalities across national and local contexts. Our course can help us investigate what these regularities may be and how these can illuminate universal issues in education. In the process of doing that, we also can come to understand how other aspects of education are greatly affected by context in its many forms. Throughout the term we will explore what constitutes context--politics, economics, social forces, historical processes, culture, organization, and so on.

A third premise that guides this course is that discussions of education, as well as education policies and practices, exist within global and local discourses. Throughout this course, we will want to be attentive to and explore the ways in which globally and locally circulating ideas come into play.
We will begin the semester by asking why do comparison and how it might be done. To address these, we analyze recent comparative work and review the development of comparative education as a field. We will explore the possible goals of comparison as well as methodological dilemmas and potential pitfalls inherent in comparative research. We will also consider issues of voice and positionality, particularly as they relate to work that so often constructs the Other for an audience.

After these initial discussions (which in fact we will continue throughout the term), we will begin to focus in on the ways in which comparative perspectives contribute to discourse about education. In particular, we will examine teaching and teacher learning comparatively and explore teaching and teacher learning in the context of globalization. To approach these issues, we will need to attend to debates about globalization in education and the intersection of global and local practices in the construction of schooling, particularly teaching. We then turn to literature that explores teaching and teacher learning. Our goal will be to see how such work enriches our understanding of the practice(s) of teaching and teacher education, as well as to consider how teaching is influenced by contexts that today include the movement of ideas, people and goods that help make up globalization.

Throughout the course we will consider theoretical and conceptual explanations as well as case studies and policy documents that illuminate the experience of education in particular communities. During the term we will also have the opportunity to meet with others who have been engaged in comparative research as well as to work with data to pursue some questions comparatively.

The course readings have been chosen to allow us to explore theoretical debates and concepts in different countries and to consider research that uses a wide range of methodological approaches. We will read about education in a variety of settings. Some of our texts and video materials we will use will give us repeated opportunities to consider education in China, Japan, and the U.S. While they don’t constitute a central focus of the course, they will give us some chance for shared discussion that draws on multiple and sometimes conflicting descriptions and interpretations of education in a particular setting. These countries offer sharp contrasts in ways that can highlight our thinking about the fundamental commonalities in the provision of education and the practice of teaching and at the same time make salient some of the areas in which teaching and learning are affected by context. In addition, throughout the term, I invite you to bring whatever country- or region-specific focus you have in your work to our readings and discussion in ways that inform not only your own studies but our collective learning.

**Expectations for the Course**

I list below the expectations with which I am starting the term. Over the course of the semester we will want to clarify our individual and collective expectations. Consider the following as starting points:

1. I assume that our class is a seminar. For us to learn together, we each need to contribute, and that will require that each of us has prepared thoughtfully in advance and comes prepared with the readings and whatever writing or experience that we will need for our discussion. I assume each of us brings unique and relevant experience and questions to this course and hence I assume we each come prepared to discuss. I also assume that participation involves discussion that is thoughtful, responsible and constructive. As a group we will want to talk explicitly about what we expect from participation.

2. I assume that we all learn by making an effort to articulate ideas and that writing provides valuable opportunities for that. My goal is to provide a range of opportunities for writing, with
enough diversity to allow each of us to feel really engaged with the work. My hope is that the
writing we do is connected meaningfully to our learning goals for the term and for our longer
term scholarly goals. Since our class will include people with very different goals, different
substantive interests, and at different stages of their doctoral program, my assumption is that
writing assignments will need some tailoring to individual needs. We need to discuss how we
might approach this and how we will evaluate our learning. I also assume that writing should be
interactive, that it should be offered as part of a conversation (even if one in print), and that we
will therefore want to talk about who our audience is as we write and how we think about
sharing our writing.

I propose below a generic model of work that might be required for the course. We will
want to discuss this as a class and individuals may want to meet with me to explore ways to
adjust these general possibilities to their particular interests. Consider this only as a starting
proposal. I urge you to find a way to construct learning opportunities in this class that will
connect with other learning you are engaged in and which are rewarding for you.

a) As a seminar, this course relies heavily on the participation of students. The course
format will most often be group discussion. I see my role as one who can give background to and
facilitate discussion. I will occasionally give mini-lectures, but most often we will work as a
group (or in small groups) to analyze readings and the issues they raise, analyze videotapes of
classroom practice or other data, or discuss our research. Only take this course if you are
prepared to (1) prepare for each class by reading carefully, taking notes and thinking about the
material before class and (2) participate actively, thoughtfully and constructively.

You will work with a partner or a small group of classmates to take responsibility for
helping me lead one class during the term. This will entail preparing an outline of the readings
and questions raised by them, possibly making some brief remarks regarding a particular reading
or readings, and then helping to lead a critical discussion of the readings for that week. You will
also be expected to provide feedback to classmates on their written commentaries (see
explanation below) as part of your responsibility for supporting our learning on this topic/set of
readings. You and your partner/group will need to meet together in advance to consider what
approach you would like to take to help us grapple with the week's readings and you should
meet with me by (at the latest) Monday before the Wednesday you are responsible so that we can
talk together about how best to organize that day's class. We can use a range of formats to
stimulate discussion, and I hope this shared responsibility for class increases the many ways we
can come to understand and inquire about the issues in this course. In addition, each of you will
have one other time during the term when you have formal responsibilities to present in class,
this time reporting on a research project you are undertaking as part of this course. The schedule
for presentations will be worked out in class.

b) To help move forward our thinking and discussions, you are asked to write short (1-
3 pages) commentaries on the readings at least 4 times during the term, choosing from weeks
noted as one with commentaries. (There are a couple of "exceptional" weeks when we won't
count on commentaries.) These short pieces will consist of thoughtful responses to the week's
reading assignment. You need not tell me what the articles said, but you will need to raise
questions about the readings, draw comparisons or contrasts, take issue with arguments, vent
about things that annoyed or puzzled you in the material, or otherwise demonstrate a
comprehension of the authors' positions and some thoughtful reaction to these. You can use
these as a great way to help frame our class discussion and, of course, they are helpful ways of
letting me know how you are making sense of the readings and the course. Your weekly
commentaries should be posted on our class ANGEL site by Tuesday night (no later than 8 p.m.)
the evening before class. You will get feedback from me and from classmates taking leadership
responsibility for particular weeks. You must complete 2 such commentaries by Feb. 20 and the
remaining 2 by April 24.
c) To encourage you to have the opportunity to work with a broader body of work and to help you hone skills valuable for the doctoral comprehensives, I would like you to write an essay that provides a critical review of two books we are reading as a class. I will provide fuller discussion of this assignment as the time approaches, but briefly, this task allows you the chance to deal critically with original research, weigh opposing and/or conflicting interpretations of the work, and explore how one makes sense comparatively of educational phenomena. Another major goal of this assignment is to examine issues related to how educational research may have meaning for practice. This essay is due no later than April 10.

d) The most extensive writing for the term will be a research project that you develop. The topic will be of your own choosing but it should be directly connected to issues, readings or debates introduced in this course. All of us will have the opportunity to view and work with some data (videotape, surveys, interviews with teachers, student achievement data, etc.). You could choose to develop a project that comes out of this data or you can develop one that draws on work you are engaged in yourself. You can choose to do a library research project, to use some empirical data you have available, to develop a dissertation proposal, or to do some combination of these. You should discuss your topic with me by Feb. 13, turn in a two page prospectus by Feb. 27, a preliminary annotated bibliography by March 15, and be prepared to present work in progress during the final weeks of the term. I encourage you to work in groups as you proceed with your research. The final draft of the paper will be due on May 1. As we begin these projects, we can clarify what each stage requires.

As a way to support your developing knowledge about the topic you are most interested in, and to facilitate ways that can contribute to our larger class discussions of comparative education, you need to identify an area of interest in teaching or teacher development by Jan. 16. On periodic basis throughout the term you will be asked to find and read one article related to that topic. With each reading you seek out, you will come to class prepared to add to our discussion of how comparisons about teaching are made, what they offer, and how they deepen our understandings of teaching and teacher learning. Occasionally you will post brief (1-2 paragraph) synopses on a literature review discussion forum. Over the course of the semester, you will have built a small bibliography of comparative research related to your focal area, and your postings and discussions can add to our class’s efforts to explore how teaching looks, comparatively, and how it is constructed and enacted in a global context.

Weighting the different tasks:

Because I want the work we do in and out of class to be meaningful, it is essential that you be involved in thinking through both the process and substance of assessment of your work. I propose that you think about how you would like to approach each of these tasks (as well as defining each), and then meet with me to discuss how you want to approach assessment. You must schedule a meeting, in which you will talk about your goals for the course and your plan for assessment, to meet me by Feb. 12. (I will set up a google doc on the ANGEL site for you to find a meeting time.) I suggest you think about the following range of weightings for assignments:

- participation: 15-30%
- commentary writing and responses: 20-40%
- book review essay: 20-40%
- research project: 25-40%
Readings

What follows is a proposal for what and when we will read together as a class. I want us to be able to amend this as we proceed in the term, in particular making adjustments that allow our reading to more directly responsive to your individual and our collective interests.

As a class, we will read several books and you will choose at least one book that from a set of recommended ones that you will read with a small group of classmates. The books will be available at Collegeville Bookstore, other area bookstores, or can be purchased online. There will also be a small coursepack of book chapters required (to be purchased through Collegeville Textbooks, 321 E. Grand River). The journal articles, book chapters, and reports we read will be available through ANGEL or are ones you can access through MSU Library’s electronic resources.

The required textbooks we all will read are:

Tentative schedule (Jan. 9 draft)
Note: This plan for a schedule of readings will be adjusted as we develop our work together this term.

Course Outline

I. Making comparisons: Why and how do we compare things in education?

Week 1. January 9: Context matters
   Introduce ourselves and the course
   What is possible with comparison?

Week 2. January 16: How can we make comparison?
   Read:
   One article you find, in English or another language, that is an empirical study of teaching that explicitly compares some aspect of teaching. Post 1-2 paragraph summary of the study on literature review discussion forum.

   Recommended: selections from either Teaching Mathematics in Seven Countries: Results from the TIMSS 1999 Video Study (download from nces.ed.gov), 2003 or Teaching Science in Five Countries: Results from the TIMSS 1999 Video Study (download from nces.ed.gov), 2006.

   In class: view TIMSS videotapes
   Write commentary

Week 3: January 23: Epistemological and methodological issues in comparison: What constitutes comparison? Why and how do we do it?

   One article you find, in English or another language, that is an empirical study of teaching that explicitly compares the aspect of teaching you have chosen as your focus this term. Post 1-2 paragraph summary of the study on literature review
discussion forum. Focus on methodological and epistemological decisions the author(s) made.

Recommended:
Selections from E. Said. Orientalism.

Write commentary

Week 4. Jan. 30: Comparisons to improve education: The case of teachers and teaching

One article you find, in English or another language, that is an empirical study of teaching that explicitly compares the aspect of teaching you have chosen as your focus this term. Post 1-2 paragraph summary of the study on literature review discussion forum.

Write commentary

II. Understanding teaching in an era of globalization

Week 5. Feb. 6: Globalization and world systems: Competing descriptions and interpretations


Recommended:

Write commentary

Week 6. Feb. 13: Teaching as global and/or local: policy and practice


One article you find, in English or another language, that is an empirical study of teaching that explicitly compares the aspect of teaching you have chosen as your focus this term. Post 1-2 paragraph summary of the study on literature review discussion forum. Focus on global, regional, national, or local influences and contexts.

Week 7. Feb. 20: Circulating conceptions of the good teacher


One article you find, in English or another language, that is an empirical study of teaching that explicitly compares the aspect of teaching you have chosen as your focus this term. Post 1-2 paragraph summary of the study on literature review discussion forum. Focus on conceptions of good teacher as discussed in the article.
Recommended:


Write commentary

Week 8. Feb. 27: Viewing Teaching Cross-culturally: Across Place and Time


March 6—no class--spring break

Week 9. March 13: Peripheral vision and other lenses to bring to viewing teaching comparatively


Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments: First Results from TALIS. (2009). OECD.

Explore TALIS website.


One article you find, in English or another language, that is an empirical study of teaching that explicitly compares the aspect of teaching you have chosen as your focus this term. Choose an article that uses a large data set. Post 1-2 paragraph summary of the study on literature review discussion forum.

Write commentary

Week 10. March 20: Comparing and making sense of pedagogies and their reform


One article you find, in English or another language, that is an empirical study of teaching that explicitly compares the aspect of teaching you have chosen as your focus this term. Choose an article that uses a large data set. Post 1-2 paragraph summary of the study on literature review discussion forum.

Week 11. March 27: Looking comparatively at reform ideas in teaching: “student-centered teaching” and cooperative learning


One article you find, in English or another language, that is an empirical study of teaching that explicitly compares the aspect of teaching you have chosen as your focus this term. Choose an article that uses a large data set. Post 1-2 paragraph summary of the study on literature review discussion forum.

Write commentary

Week 12. April 3: Revisiting the global and local in teaching

Selected articles from special issue (November 2012) of *Comparative Education*.

One article you find, in English or another language, that is an empirical study of teaching that explicitly compares the aspect of teaching you have chosen as your focus this term. Post 1-2 paragraph summary of the study on literature review discussion forum

Write commentary

III. Understanding teacher learning in an era of globalization

Week 13. April 10: Learning to teach understood comparatively

Explore TEDS-M other resources on TEDS-M website.

Recommended:

No commentary this week

**Week 14. April 17: Teaching learning as global and local discourse**


Write commentary

**Week 15. April 27 : Continuing the conversation: Synthesis and reflection on our own journeys**


Exam week: meeting day/time to be determined, tentatively scheduled for May 1, 5:45-7:45.