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Review: *Comparative and International Education: An Introduction to Theory, Method, and Practice* by David Phillips and Michele Schweisfurth

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Comparative and International Education: An Introduction to Theory, Method, and Practice by David Phillips and Michele Schweisfurth. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008. 181 pp. ISBN 978-1-84706-059-4.

As the field of comparative and international education evolves and continues to be defined and refined through the multidisciplinary contributions of its scholars, introductory textbooks providing students with a solid foundation for exploring future scholarship in the field become a necessity. David Phillips and Michele Schweisfurth have proved successful in meeting this challenge by offering a clearly written, well organized, and accessible overview of the field in their book, *Comparative and International Education: An Introduction to Theory, Method, and Practice*.

Meant as an introduction to comparative and international education, the text reflects an experiential understanding of the foundation necessary for introductory students to begin academic exploration of scholarly topics in the field. Phillips and Schweisfurth engage in three areas of introduction: the theory and history of comparative and international education, research methods and inquiry, and the impact of education on development. They are also often able to intertwine their topics. For example, two chapters are devoted to development and methods: one offering an introduction to the “key ideas and questions” in education and national development, and the other explaining research perspectives used for conducting research on education and development. The authors move beyond a cursory discussion of methodological controversies by including multiple social science research perspectives such as anthropological perspectives, economic rationalism, Marxism, gender, and human rights. They also examine issues through a global security framework. What emerges is material that proves both instructive and of interest to introductory-level students.

Important to a foundational textbook for any discipline, the authors incorporate theories, concepts, and ideas throughout the text from leading scholars in the field of comparative and international education including Marc-Antoin Jullien, Harold Noah, and Max Eckstein. It is worth pointing out that this well researched tome contains source-related endnotes following each chapter and 18 pages of references to scholarly articles and books, providing a wealth of potential reading for students to further or better understand material from the book.

The book is comprised of eight chapters; includes a foreword, introduction, and conclusion; and offers both a bibliography of sources and an easy-to-reference index. Although a textbook by content, its small design and mere 181 pages suggest a more casual read. Upon leafing through the book, readers notice subheadings reminiscent of strictly instructive material, while enjoying a conversational writing style foreign to most formal textbooks. Another strength of the book comes from the authors' straightforward explanations of theory and methodological concepts, coupled with detailed and easy-to-understand graphic representations. Most chapters contain at least one figure meant to clarify a concept; demonstrate a structure, pattern, or process; or help visualize categorizations. These diagrams also offer an additional means of learning new and oftentimes complex processes such as the structure for comparative inquiry or analyzing issues of education in transitional countries. Appropriate for graduate or undergraduate students, the book is equally useful through a continuous, chapter-to-chapter reading of the text, or with each chapter assigned as an individual reading.

Each chapter appears carefully designed to stand alone as an individual reading. Read together, the chapters subtly build on one another, ultimately culminating with a discussion of selected themes that incorporates the understanding built from previous chapters. Phillips and Schweisfurth provide readers with basic, straightforward conceptual explanations aimed at building the academic foundation necessary to appreciate scholarship, controversies, and challenges present in the field. For instance, the authors devote a chapter to comparative education research which includes a comparison of large-scale student achievement studies to studies in less developed areas. They also include a brief discussion about the roles of UNESCO and the EFA Global Monitoring Team in conducting research.

Although the combination of clear writing and helpful graphic representations leaves readers with few conceptual questions, the absence of situational examples or case studies creates a void in application. The authors reason that incorporating such examples may "date" the book; however, this may prove frustrating to students who rely on such examples to further their conceptual or theoretical understanding. The use of supplemental readings will ensure this text remains "up to date," while also offering professors and students the chance to customize their learning experience through readings on specific

global topics or issues that are not discussed in the book (e.g., girls' education, informal education, or inclusive education). For individuals reading the text without formal instruction, the lack of situational content may be problematic; therefore, the authors may find it beneficial to incorporate end-of-chapter resources such as additional readings, online resources, and discussion questions in future editions. Additionally, author-suggested supplemental readings and online resources may alert readers to additional controversial issues within comparative and international education, as well as provide acknowledgment of marginalized groups in education. Although this is an introductory text to the field, many students may have an increased connection with the material knowing the book includes resources for learning more about these issues.

Overall, Phillips and Schwesifurth's text is a refreshing take on the modern textbook. Throughout the book, the authors remain true to their first words in the introduction: "The study of education in increasingly globalized contexts inevitably draws us towards comparisons" (p. 1). The content of each chapter, and the book as a whole, subtly support the idea of globalized contexts driving comparisons in the field. Although I agree that globalized contexts do assist in driving curiosities, comparisons, and research, the authors' decision to focus primarily on formalized education reduces the comprehensiveness of this text by excluding topics relevant to globalization such as indigenous education or adult education. The authors do note their focus on formal education and suggest that readers seek supplemental readings if interested in informal or non-formal education; however, a chapter containing a brief introduction to these areas of study would prove beneficial, especially by authors who have proven their ability to provide succinct conceptual explanations throughout this engaging introductory text.

Reviewer

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