Chapter 3
Frontiers in Comparative and International Sociology of Education: American Distinctiveness and Global Diversity

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Many of the questions examined in US sociology of education today are quite grounded, practical, or policy oriented. Sociologists of education ask questions about the specifics of the US educational system, about the details of how students move through the system, and about the implications of these features for inequalities in achievement, attainment, and other outcomes. Much research in the field seeks to describe empirical relationships regarding social problems related to schooling, most often in the USA. This focus contributes detailed knowledge of the society in which many researchers and their audiences are based. It is rooted in the goal of understanding real issues and problems in education and speaking to the formation of national and state level policies pertaining to education.

But in its quest for understanding US-specific schooling, the American sociology of education has lost sight of another primary goal of social research: improving and expanding theories of education to refine their explanatory power. Critics of this current state of affairs have bemoaned the narrowness of the field (Meyer quoted in Bromley 2010) and its apparent lack of “concern for theory testing or the accumulation of propositional knowledge about schooling and society” (Brint 2009:13). Because many recent analyses in the sociology of education have been “conceptually shallow and empirically incremental...few have made a major contribution to our understanding of the role of today’s schools in a rapidly changing global society” (Hallinan 2011:1).

One reason for the theoretical shallowness of the field is its disproportionate focus on education in the USA. Overt concern with a single nation limits progress in advancing general theories of education, because “important elements of the societal context are held constant and therefore may not be subject to even implicit consideration”

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(Broad 1997:36; see also Meyer 1987). In fact, extensive detailed knowledge of a single case may be counterproductive to the goal of advancing general theory, if scholars erroneously generalize knowledge from an atypical case (Ragin 1994).

In the quest to advance general knowledge and theories about education and educational processes in a global society, comparative and international approaches offer leverage over US-centric approaches on two fronts. First, comparative and international research can provide fresh insights to longstanding questions in the sociology of education, which serve to refine and expand existing theories. When comparative research addresses similar questions but reveals different answers from those provided by US-based research, the theoretical leverage gained is most readily apparent. Second, comparative and international research can pose new questions rarely considered in US-focused research that are crucial to developing a general sociology of education and new theoretical perspectives. In these ways, comparative research holds the promise to lead the American sociology of education in bold new directions to make contributions to the study of schooling and educational systems in the global era.

This chapter assesses the degree to which the American sociology of education is comparative and international in scope and briefly considers why the attention devoted to comparative and international research has remained relatively stable over time. It then explains the distinctive role of comparative and international research for advancing insights on longstanding substantive questions and provides examples of prior studies that have done so. Beyond calling for more international and comparative research, it advocates for greater dialogue and integration between the US-focused and comparative and international streams of research in sociology of education. The chapter then discusses some pressing questions rarely considered by US-based research that constitute frontiers for a more globally oriented and theoretically expansive sociology of education.

How Comparative?

There is no doubt that the American sociology of education has been largely a US-centric enterprise. But in light of globalization of the past 20 years or so, to what degree has the field become more internationally comparative? One way to capture the extent to which the American sociology of education is comparative in scope is to examine the proportion of all articles in the discipline's leading journal, Sociology of Education, that are internationally or comparatively oriented. Between 1990 and 1999, 35 of the 169 research articles (20.7%) published in the journal were comparative or internationally oriented. In the next decade, 2000–2009, 27 of the 159 research articles (16.9%) were comparative or international in their orientation. Thus, on average, since 1990 roughly 19% of the research articles published in the leading journal in the American sociology of education were comparative and international in scope.

When these results are compared with those from an analysis for an earlier period (Ramirez and Meyer 1981), it is clear that the quantity of content devoted to international research in the Sociology of Education has increased, albeit slightly. Ramirez and Meyer (1981) found that between 1964 and 1981, 15% of the articles published in the journal were comparative or international in their scope.

From this evaluation we can conclude that the quantity of comparative and international content has remained relatively stable over the past four decades and that it has never comprised more than 20% of the content in the Sociology of Education. A content analysis of a single journal offers only one lens on the field's degree of internationality, but other approaches, such as examining books or papers presented at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association, likely would reveal a similar picture of a field that focuses about one fifth of its efforts on comparative and international research.

Perhaps it is not surprising that the majority of pages of the leading American journal devoted to the sociology of education should be focused on the education in the USA (Baker 1994). On the other hand, in this era of globalization and the rapid expansion of international data sources in recent decades, a parallel expansion in international and comparative research might have been expected. This is true especially in light of the "ritual deference" to the need for more comparative international research in the field (Ramirez and Meyer 1981). Editors of Sociology of Education often explicitly appeal to more international research in the pages of the journal when they begin their editorship (see e.g., Alexander 2003; Schneider 2006; Bills 2009). Schneider stated it this way: "One area that the sociology of education has devoted limited attention to is globalization, both as it relates to mass education and with respect to how education is serving minority groups within the USA and other countries. We encourage submissions from scholars in the USA and abroad on these issues." (2006:1).

Why have such appeals for more globally focused education research gone largely unheeded? Perhaps it is because calls for more comparative and international research in the field have seldom explained why such research is needed or described the broad intellectual returns it could bring to the field generally. Comparative and international research and the theoretical leverage it offers are seldom emphasized in graduate training in sociology of education. Instead, in this era of ever-increasing expectations for publications, many graduate programs "encourage students to make their careers by exploring under-investigated empirical relationships rather than working on testing or developing theory" (Brint 2009:14). Moreover, comparative and international research is difficult and time consuming. Scholars interested in comparative research

1Sociology of Education is one of the highest ranking education journals in the USA and nearly exclusively publishes research by sociologists of education. Thus, it can be said to reflect the "forefront of current sociological thinking about education in the USA" (Brin 2009:9). Articles (excluding special features, comments, and replies) were coded as international and comparative if they focused on one or more societies other than the USA. Core studies of a single society other than the USA, research comparing at least two societies (one of which could be the USA), and transnational research comparing many nations were all coded as international and comparative.
have to work harder to find and compile data, to gain the substantial knowledge necessary to conduct research on societies about which they initially may know little, and to convince a disproportionately US-centric audience of the broad relevance of their research. These challenges of comparative and international research clearly will not appeal to all scholars, but those scholars who rise to these challenges also have great opportunities to reap the rewards.

The Value of a Comparative Lens for Extending Theory

Across a significant number of characteristics, the American educational system is distinctive from most other educational systems in the world today. The American educational system is marked by decentralized, local control of the main components of schooling and the propensity for multiple grassroots reforms. In contrast to highly standardized educational systems found in much of the world, the US educational system is marked by a lack of standardization. Teacher training, school budgets, examinations, and a host of other factors are determined at the local and state levels, not at the national level (Kerckhoff 2001). This low level of standardization in the American educational system has implications for a wide array of educational processes and outcomes. For example, Park (2008) finds that in less standardized educational systems, like that of the USA, parents of low socioeconomic status face more barriers to necessary knowledge about schooling, due to the lack of accountability and transparency in such educational systems. In contrast, the greater accountability and transparency of standardized education systems enables parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds to assess and monitor the child’s performance in comparison to established standards.

American secondary education also is distinctive in that virtually all high schools award the same credential, the high school diploma (Müller and Shavit 1998; Kerckhoff 2001). In many other countries, different types of secondary schools provide different credentials to their students. As a result, American schooling tends to be less vocationally oriented relative to schooling in other industrialized countries and has a weaker capacity to structure the flow of students out of educational institutions and into the labor market (Kerckhoff 1996, 2000; see also Mortimer and Kroeger 2000). The American system is rife with second chances for students who do not complete a particular level of schooling by a certain age (Turner 1960; Clark 1983; Britt and Karabel 1989; Levin and Levin 1991), such as the possibility of graduating from high school by means of a GED for students who drop out of high school (Niles 2010). For all these reasons, “it is best to think of the American institutional structure as an outlier in comparison to other systems” (Baker 1994:59).

3 Fortunately, data constraints have eased in the past decade with the development of several high-quality comparative international data sets related to education. These include the Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the International Adult Literacy Study (IALS) and, perhaps most notably, the Program for Student Assessment (PISA) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).
outcomes came to be viewed as "one of the most consistent findings in the status attainment literature" (Downey 1995:746). A prominent explanatory mechanism for this relationship is resource dilution, that is, with each additional child in the household, there are fewer material resources and less parental attention available to each individual child. Finite resources must be distributed across more children. Fewer resources per child, in turn, lead to lower academic performance and attainment.

More recently, comparative research has examined this longstanding relationship to find that the negative relationship between sibling size and educational outcomes tends not to hold in some societies. Instead, in many developing countries, the number of children a child has is either neutral or beneficial for his or her educational performance and attainment. In Vietnam, the negative relationship between sibling size and enrollment disappeared when controls for socioeconomic status were added (Anh et al. 1998). In Kenya, Buchmann (2000) found no effect of sibling size on children's probability of enrollment. In Botswana, the number of 7- to 14-year-old children in the household was positively related to educational enrollment and attainment (Chernichovsky 1985). In China, Lu and Treiman (2008) found that effects of sibling size on educational attainment varied over time in response to changing state educational policies. When schooling opportunities were limited and expensive, children in large families obtained less schooling. When schooling expanded and became less expensive, the negative relationship between many siblings and educational attainment disappeared.

The extended family systems common in developing countries can provide resources, economic or otherwise, that facilitate children's schooling. In some societies, older children also are expected to contribute their earnings and other resources to finance the education of younger children. Thus, the relationship consistently found in the USA is not generalizable to all countries. Taken together, evidence from developing and developed nations suggests that there is no axiomatic relationship between family size and schooling (Buchmann and Hanum 2001). Rather, the relationship varies according to a society's level of development; the USA represents only one context in a continuum of societies. Moreover, the diversity of patterns in the relationship between family size and school outcomes across different societies improves our understanding of the mechanisms underlying the family size-educational attainment relationship. Family resources do indeed play a key role in individual children's educational success, but societal variations in the structure of families (e.g., nuclear or extended) can give rise to different family strategies to procure those resources.

Another example of the value of international research for refining general theory comes from research on how interpersonal influences shape students' educational expectations. After more than 30 years of US-based research on this relationship, the consensus became that peers and parents "shape ambitions more directly and with greater impact than any other source" (Spenner and Featherman 1978:392). When highly comparable international survey data became available in the mid-1990s, Buchmann and Dalton (2002) examined the reach of this well-known relationship and found that in some countries, peers and parents had little or no impact on students' educational expectations. They reasoned that whether or not these significant others are influential for students' educational expectations depends, in large part, on the structural features of the educational systems in which they operate. In the US system of relatively open, undifferentiated secondary schooling, peer and parental attitudes about academic performance significantly influence adolescents' own attitudes and aspirations, net of other factors. The diffuse charter of US secondary schools (Meyer 1977) means that schools have little influence on the expectations and self-conceptions of their students. But in educational systems where students are sorted into different educational pathways at an early age, their expectations are determined in large part by the type of secondary school they attend; there is far less room for significant others' attitudes to influence students' educational expectations (2002).

Like the example of the relationship between sibling size and children's educational outcomes, this second example demonstrates how a social process of central interest, the role of significant others in this case, is not fixed or finite; rather, its effects depend on the context in which it operates. Awareness of such variations in the relationship between significant others and adolescent educational expectations can give rise to a more nuanced understanding of the process of attitude formation among adolescents which, in turn, can lead to more elaborate theories.

A final example comes from the study of curricular differentiation within academic subjects (tracking) and its relationship to inequality of opportunity and achievement. Much US-based research has shown that tracking tends to magnify inequality of achievement because minority and low-income students often are assigned disproportionately to lower tracks (Gamoran and Mare 1989; Hallinan 1991, 1992; Lucas 1999) and students enrolled in lower tracks have lower achievement than students enrolled in higher tracks (Oakes et al. 1992; Gamoran 1987). These results have led many scholars to be critical of tracking, viewing the practice as "a regressive mechanism that... builds inequalities into schools that both devalue and materially disadvantage those groups who are least able to defend themselves" (Oakes 1994).

Comparative and international research on curricular differentiation demonstrates that tracking does not lead necessarily to inequalities in learning or achievement outcomes; rather, the effect of tracking depends on other features of the educational system in which tracking is implemented. In a comparative study of Israel and the USA, Ayalon and Gamoran (2000) found that in Israel tracking is associated with higher average achievement and lower achievement inequality, while in the USA, in line with prior research, they found that differentiation in academic programs reinforces inequalities. They attribute these differences to structures of the secondary education systems in the two countries. Israel's standardized curriculum and national examination system offer clear incentives for achievement among teachers and students in all levels of academic courses, whereas the absence of a standardized curriculum and national examination system in the USA leads tracking to reinforce inequality without raising average scores.

Research on Taiwan provides further evidence that the effects of tracking depend on features of the educational system in which it is implemented. Like Israel, Taiwan's educational system includes a highly standardized curriculum and national
examinations (Broaded 1997). These features create high incentives for teachers and students to work hard and perform to the best of their ability, regardless of their track placement (1997:39). They also ensure that schools place students with the greatest aptitude for taking standardized tests into high ability tracks, with little or no regard to their social class backgrounds.

Knowledge of cases where tracking appears to have achieved the desired effects of both low inequality and high overall achievement is relevant for theory as well as US educational policy. It underscores how the effects of tracking can be better understood when aspects of both the school environment and the societal context are considered. These findings are also provocative for policymakers. In debates about how to achieve the desired goals of tracking without its detrimental effects in the USA, evidence about the effects of tracking from Israel and Taiwan could give rise to deeper reflection about other distinctive features of the US educational system that might be manipulated toward this goal. This is just one example of the benefits of greater integration between the US-focused and comparative and international streams of research in sociology of education.

These examples all demonstrate the power of comparative and international research to extend the theoretical and empirical scope of the questions sociologists of education ask and examine. In each case, new evidence from non-US contexts generates new ideas about a longstanding relationship of interest and extends and refines prior theories of these relationships.

The Value of a Comparative Lens for Developing New Global Theories of Education

In the USA, ours has been a nationalistic sociology of schooling, not a sociology of all forms of education in global society (Brint 2009:15).

Beyond extending the reach of general theories and highlighting the distinctive nature of the US educational system, comparative and international research is uniquely suited to pose new questions about education on a global scale that will be of great consequence in the next decade. With globalization, as economic, social, and cultural linkages and exchanges throughout the world have intensified they have stimulated powerful socioeconomic and demographic changes. These changes are challenging educational systems and schools everywhere in the world (Suarez-Orozco and Sattin 2007). As globalization promotes greater universalism and homogenization across national boundaries and regions, there are clear trends toward convergence in educational institutions and processes on a global level. The increasing standardization of curricula and core teaching practices (Baker and LeTendre 2005; Ramirez 2006; Meyer et al. 2010), the global spread of school choice principles (Forsey et al. 2008), and the rapid rise of shadow education throughout the world are just three examples of educational phenomena becoming more common in the course of globalization.

Within these and other trends of global convergence, there remain important differences across societies and their educational systems that significantly impact educational inequalities and outcomes for individuals and groups within those societies (Kerehoff 2001). Institutional variations in educational systems lead to different processes whereby youth are sorted into educational trajectories and subsequent occupational destinations (Kerehoff 1995, 2000, 2001; Shavit and Blossfeld 1993; Mühler and Karle 1993; Shavit and Müller 1998). These institutional variations also impact various educational outcomes such as academic achievement (see Van de Werfhorst and Mips 2010, for a review) and students' educational and occupational expectations (Buchmann and Park 2009). Two trends constitute particularly promising frontiers for future research: the global spread of shadow education and stability and change in educational stratification.

The Global Spread of Shadow Education

Shadow education, or out-of-school educational activities that supplement formal schooling, has grown rapidly throughout the world. These activities include tutoring and extra classes, offered either online or in learning centers, that are intended to increase students' chances of navigating the allocation process (Stevenson and Baker 1992:1640). A recent study of more than 40 nations found that more than a third of all seventh and eighth graders participate in tutoring, cram schools or other forms of shadow education in these nations (Baker et al. 2001; see also Bray 1999).

The prevalence of shadow education and its goals vary across nations. Shadow education can be remedial, when it is used to help struggling students improve their performance in school, or enriching, when it provides supplementary learning and skills beyond what is taught in school (Baker and LeTendre 2005). Shadow education of the enrichment variety often flourishes in educational systems where high-stakes testing serves as a gatekeeper to future educational opportunities (Stevenson and Baker 1992; Buchmann 2002; Yamamoto and Brinton 2010; Buchmann et al. 2010; Park et al. 2011). One form of shadow education in need of further research is the rapid growth of private learning center franchises. Private learning centers provide a host of remedial and enrichment supplemental educational services. The Sylvan Learning Company, with more than 2,000 franchises in North America and Europe, is the largest private learning company in the world (Sylvan Learning 2007). Aurini and Davies (2004) predict that this form of market-based shadow education is the wave of the future (see also Davies 2004; Aurini 2006).

The rapid growth of shadow education across the globe raises several important questions for further research. First, what factors have given rise to this global trend? Mori and Baker (2010) argue that the growth of shadow education is one consequence of the global spread of the school education systems (Baker 2011:11) and that "the use of shadow education is motivated by the dominant logic of educational expansion in all its forms" (2010:40). Scholars from human capital and conflict orientations may well have other interpretations about the mechanisms underlying the spread of shadow
education throughout the world. A second set of questions involves the consequences of shadow education for educational inequalities and national educational systems. Does the emergence and expansion of shadow education magnify inequalities? Does it confound a nation’s ability to provide equitable and high-quality education to the general population? The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has expressed concern that the rapid expansion of privatized shadow education could influence formal educational systems negatively in terms of both equity and quality (Bray 2009). It also is possible that national governments will seek to incorporate shadow education into formal schooling, such that “in the near future in most places mass shadow education will be a legitimate part of education itself” (Mon and Baker 2010:46). Whether and how these processes occur and their consequences for educational systems, stratification and student performance remain to be seen.

Stability and Change in Educational Inequalities on a Global Scale

The dramatic expansion of education that has occurred since the mid-twentieth century generates new questions about educational inequalities within societies, across societies, and on a global scale. A concern for the American sociology of education has been to understand how individuals come to be stratified in educational experiences and outcomes on the basis of class, gender, race, and immigrant status. A comparative lens illuminates how over the course of educational expansion, some stratification trends have been marked by substantial change and fluidity, while others have remained remarkably constant. An ongoing challenge for sociologists of education and stratification is to make sense of these patterns and trends and explain why some forms of educational inequality are resistant to change while others are changing rapidly.

Socioeconomic Status

The effect of social background on educational attainment has remained stable in almost all industrialized countries over the course of the past 20 years, despite educational expansion and various national policy interventions to reduce inequality (Marc 1981; Shavit and Blossfeld 1993; Torche 2005; Pfeffer 2008). This finding of persistent inequality underscores that educational expansion alone does not change the relative position of social groups in the education queue; already privileged groups manage to maintain their status by getting more education than the masses (Walters 2000). The persistent inequality phenomenon further highlights the need to consider separately the effects on educational inequality of an overall increase in the size of the educational system (school expansion) and changes in the rules by which educational opportunities are allocated (school reform) (Walters 2000:254).

An enduring puzzle, then, is to explain why socioeconomic inequalities often prove resistant to educational expansion and policy change.

Gender

In contrast to the stability found in socioeconomic inequalities in education, trends in gender inequalities in education have seen remarkable fluidity in recent decades. A particularly dramatic shift has been the rapid rise of women in higher education throughout much of the world. Prior to the 1980s, women lagged behind men in the number of tertiary degrees completed in most nations. In the 1980s, women began to reach parity with men and in many cases surpassed men in the amount of education they received (Bradley and Ramirez 1996; Buchmann and DiPrete 2006). By 2000, more college-age women than men were enrolled in higher education in both the USA and the European Union (Eurostat 2002). Moreover, in most industrialized societies, females have made substantial gains in all realms of education and now generally outperform males on several educational benchmarks (for a review, see Buchmann et al. 2008). Even in developing countries, gender gaps in education increasingly favor, rather than discriminate against, females. Boys are still slightly more likely than girls to enroll in school, but girls now progress through school on pace with or at faster rates than boys and have equal or greater educational attainment than boys in most developing regions (Grant and Bahrman 2010).

Projections suggest that the trend of growing female educational advantages throughout the world will continue well into the future. Old paradigms of comprehending gender differences in education as solely due to widespread obstacles to girls and women no longer help guide research. Sociologists of education are beginning to examine the forces that have led women to surpass men in educational attainment in many industrialized countries, including the USA and similar trends in many developing countries, but much work remains. Fruitful explanations include different trends in the returns to education for men and women (DiPrete and Buchmann 2006), changes in the educational aspirations of postfeminist women (McDaniel 2010), and changes in the way parents invest resources in their sons and daughters (Buchmann and DiPrete 2006). Understanding why the educational attainment and performance of males has stagnated in some realms relative to females also is crucial. Clearly, the nature, causes, and consequences of the changing gender gaps in education throughout the world constitute an important research frontier for sociologists of education.

Ethnic and Immigrant Status

Globalization, coupled with changes in immigration policies, has spurred a recent wave of immigration to industrialized world regions. The magnitude of this wave of immigration is unprecedented and it raises important questions about the impact on receiving nations and on the lives of both immigrants and nonimmigrants within these nations. For the large portion of the immigrant population that is young, prospects for social mobility largely stem from their experiences in the educational system.

While much research examines the determinants of academic achievement for children of immigrants in the USA (Kao and Tienda 1995; Zhou and Bankston 1998; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Suarez-Orozco and Todoraova 2007), very few
studies have examined educational attainment and achievement gaps between immigrant and native-born students in a comparative and international context. Research that illuminates how and why immigrants differ from nonimmigrants in terms of their educational performance and attainment across societies constitutes an important frontier for sociologists of education. Prior predominantly US-based research focuses on individual-level explanations, such as differences in family background, sociocultural adaptation, and language ability, to explain the educationally disadvantaged position of immigrant students. But at the contextual level, features of the country of destination as well as features of the country of origin may impact immigrants’ adaptation processes and subsequent educational achievements, and above and beyond variations in individual and family level characteristics.

Nations differ in their historical experiences with immigration, the degree to which they promote immigration, and public acceptance of immigrants within the host society (Portes 1997). By attending to national-level variations in the receptivity toward immigrants, scholars can determine the degree to which national policies are exclusionary toward immigrants and then predict how these institutional variations relate to aspects of immigrants’ experiences, including their educational achievement and attainment. Using this strategy, Buchmann and Parrado (2006:347) find that immigrant-native student achievement gaps are largest in nations with exclusionary immigration regimes and smallest in nations with inclusionary immigration regimes. Levels et al. (2008) improve on this approach and use an innovative double comparative research design to examine the extent to which macrolevel characteristics of immigrants’ destination countries as well as their origin countries explain differences in immigrant children’s educational achievement. They find that attributes of both host countries and origin countries explain achievement differences among immigrant children. For example, selective immigration laws in the host country explain immigrant children’s better educational performance in traditional immigrant-receiving countries, while political instability in the country of origin is related to the weaker educational performance of immigrant children.

Countries differ not only in their immigration policies but also in the structural features of their educational systems, including level of differentiation across schools and their retention policies. Park and Sandefur (2010) demonstrate the importance of national educational systems for determining cross-national variations in the degree of educational integration of immigrant students. Like other studies mentioned, such research illuminates how the institutional arrangements of educational systems impact educational outcomes of different groups, in this case for immigrants. More research should examine how other institutional arrangements or features of educational systems shape how immigrant students fare relative to nonimmigrant groups. Both of these studies (Levels et al. 2008; Park and Sandefur 2010) serve as valuable models for future research on immigrant education and demonstrate how intersectoral analysis can generate new theories of immigrant educational adaptation. Through a comparative lens that considers a range of diverse contexts beyond the USA, such scholarship places the social and educational processes in the USA into a much larger spectrum.

Conclusion

In its goal to understand US-specific schooling, the American sociology of education increasingly has lost sight of the goal of improving and expanding general theories of education. More comparative and international research on education can remedy the current narrowness of the field by providing fresh insights to longstanding questions in the sociology of education. Because comparative, intersocietal research lays bare the effects of context and structure, it is one particularly promising strategy in the search for mechanism-based explanations of social and educational processes. By examining relationships between events or variables in diverse societies, scholars get closer to understanding the mechanisms behind those relationships. In some cases, research will demonstrate that a relationship appears to be consistent in a wide variety of settings. But in other instances, where the relationship found in some contexts does not hold in others and the outcomes are quite different, the theoretical leverage to be gained from comparative and international research is greatest.

The field’s overt concern with a single nation also has limited progress in advancing general theories of education. Comparative and international research can pose new questions rarely considered in US-focused research that are crucial to developing a general sociology of education and new theoretical perspectives. For these reasons comparative research holds the promise to lead the American sociology of education in bold new directions to make contributions to the study of schooling and educational systems in the global era. To realize these goals, more American sociologists of education must rise to the challenge of conducting comparative and international research. US-focused scholars of education must read and reflect upon the findings of research conducted in diverse contexts and integrate those findings into their work. Only through greater dialogue and integration between the US-focused and comparative and international streams of research in sociology of education can the great value of a comparative lens be realized.

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References


