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# *BEYOND BINARIES: A WAY FORWARD FOR COMPARATIVE EDUCATION*

## *Más Allá de los Discursos Binarios: Un Camino Abierto para la Educación Comparada*

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**ABSTRACT**

Binary discourses shape and produce the stories we construct about the field of comparative education. In the first part of this article, I review a set of binary discourses that have characterized social science research since the Enlightenment, including: quantitative-qualitative, nomothetic-idiographic, inductive-deductive, and practice-theory. We can think of each of these binaries at opposite ends of a set of spectrums. In the second section of the paper, I show some of the ways in which these binaries have influenced the ways that we write and talk about research within the field of comparative education. I refer to the notion of binary discourses and the productive capacity of these discourses to shape our field. I then outline some critiques of these binaries to demonstrate the inherent limitations of

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binary discourses, and why we need to move beyond binaries in our research, and in the histories about our field. Finally, I present some tentative conclusions on ways to get ourselves out of the trap of binary thinking.

**KEY WORDS**: Comparative Education, Methodology, Binaries, Discourse.

### RESUMEN

Los discursos binarios moldean y producen los argumentos que construimos sobre la disciplina de la Educación Comparada. En la primera parte de este artículo, analizo un conjunto de discursos binarios que han caracterizado la investigación en Ciencias Sociales desde la Ilustración, incluyendo la cuantitativa-cualitativa, nomotética-idiográfica, inductiva-deductiva, y la práctica-teoría. Podemos pensar sobre cada uno de estos discursos binarios como argumentos en los polos de un conjunto de posibilidades. En la segunda sección del artículo, revelo algunos modos en los que estos discursos binarios han influenciado las formas a través de las cuales escribimos y analizamos la investigación en el ámbito de la Educación Comparada. Analizo la noción de discursos binarios y la capacidad productiva de estos discursos de impactar nuestra ciencia. Seguidamente expongo algunas críticas de estos discursos binarios con el objeto de demostrar las limitaciones inherentes a los mismos, y la necesidad de trascenderlos en nuestra investigación y en las historias de nuestra ciencia. Finalmente, avanzo algunas conclusiones tentativas sobre las formas de superar y trascender la trampa del pensamiento binario.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Educación Comparada, Metodología, Categorías Binarias, Discurso.

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## INTRODUCTION

Social science research has been largely characterized by binary thinking, which has its roots in the Western Enlightenment period (Bauman, 1991). Binary discourses, as I argue in this paper, shape and produce the stories we construct about the field of comparative education. In this article, I discuss some of the dichotomous binaries that have characterized the broader discipline of social science research within which we can locate the field of comparative education. Specifically, in the first part of the paper, I review the

following examples of binary thinking: quantitative-qualitative, nomothetic-idiographic, inductive-deductive, and practice-theory. For heuristic purposes, I simplify my discussion about these binaries, fully recognizing (and later elaborating) the risks in doing so. We can think of each of these binaries at opposite ends of a set of spectrums. They do not necessarily align with one another, although there are relationships between them as I demonstrate in my outline. In the second section of the paper, I show some of the ways in which these binaries have influenced the ways that we write and talk about research within the field of comparative education. I refer to the notion of binary discourses and the productive capacity of these discourses to shape our field. In the third section, I outline some critiques of these binaries to demonstrate the inherent limitations of binary discourses, and why we need to move beyond binaries in our research, and in the histories about our field. Finally, I present some tentative conclusions on ways to get ourselves out of the trap of binary thinking.

## 1. BINARY DISCOURSES

The quantitative-qualitative binary discourse has characterized methodological discussions in the social sciences over the past thirty years or so. Many educational research textbooks are still divided into chapters on quantitative and qualitative research, attesting to the ongoing prevalence of this binary (egs. CRESWELL, 2008; PUNCH, 2011; SUTER, 2012). Quantitative methodology is generally depicted as an approach to social science research that applies a positivist approach, drawing on the natural sciences, to social phenomena. Positivist or what are also called empiricist approaches to research are characterized by a commitment to objectivity, causality and replicability. The most preferred methodological tool is the survey, through which objectivity can be maintained, item concepts can be operationalized, replication carried out, and causality determined. In addition to surveys, experimental design and secondary analyses of existing data are also recognized as valid tools of quantitative research. Furthermore, the most preferred data source for quantitative researchers is numerical data (BRYMAN, 1988).

On the other hand, qualitative data usually consists of «words rather than numbers» (MILES and HUBERMAN, 1994: 1). The most important

aspect of qualitative research is a phenomenological commitment to seeing the social world through the eyes of the subject. This preference leads qualitative researchers to understand broader social contexts in order to make sense of behavior. Qualitative research is seen as being more fluid, flexible and unstructured than quantitative research, and less scientific given the emphases in quantitative research on precision, fixed measurements and hypotheses testing (BRYMAN, 1988; HAMMERSLEY, 2002).

One of the philosophical foundations of qualitative methodology is attributed to *Versteten* or understanding. *Versteten* is central to idiographic approaches to social science research and generally speaking these are qualitative. The other half of the idiographic binary is the nomothetic approach, which is generally quantitative. The terms nomothetic and idiographic are terms first used by the 19th century, Kantian philosopher Wilhelm Windelband to describe two distinct approaches to knowledge, each corresponding to a different intellectual tradition and corresponding branch of study. Nomothetic is based on what Kant described as a tendency to generalize by deriving law-like statements or principles that explain objective phenomena in general. Nomothetic research emulates the logic and methodology of the natural sciences.

Idiographic research is based on what Kant described as a tendency to specify, and is typical for the humanities. It describes the effort to understand the meaning of contingent, unique, and often subjective phenomena. Idiographic refers to research methods that emphasize the unique elements of the individual phenomenon —the historically particular— as in much of history and biography. In this respect, this approach generally focuses on a complete, in-depth understanding of a single case, rather than generalizations across cases (THOMAE, 1999).

The quantitative-qualitative binary discourse is closely related to the inductive-deductive binary discourse. Deductive reasoning, also known as deduction, flows from a general theory to specific hypotheses. The researcher generally begins with a well-established theory, which is then tested through a carefully designed research study. On the other hand, inductive reasoning, also known as induction, is a kind of reasoning that constructs or evaluates propositions that are abstractions of observations of individual instances. Inductive reasoning contrasts with deductive reasoning in that a general

conclusion is arrived at by specific examples. The difference between the two models is that one is theory based and the other is theory producing. Inductively generated hypotheses tend to be investigated using qualitative research methods and deductively generated hypotheses tend to be investigated using quantitative research methods (SUTER, 2012).

Finally, I include a few thoughts about the practice-theory binary discourses. There is a widely held view that theory is anything but practice and that each exists at the opposite end of a continuum. Theory has various meanings including theory as a generalizing/explanatory model; theory as developing bodies of explanation; and scientific theory in the form of ideas formally expressed in a series of statements as a part of the process of normal science. Theory is viewed as thinking, reflecting, and in its «purest form...as elegant description of knowledge» (THOMAS, 2007, p. 28). Theory is celebrated by many scholars as the goal of academic pursuit. As Ball writes, with respect to his school effectiveness research, «I wish to argue that the absence of theory leaves the researcher prey to unexamined, unreflexive, preconceptions and dangerously naive ontological and epistemological *a prioris*. I shall wail and curse at the absence of theory and argue for theory as a way of saving educational studies from itself» (BALL, 1998: 78-79).

Above all, theory is viewed as being not only of much higher value of practice, but actually the obverse of embodied and practical knowledge. While practice involves 'doing', theory involves 'thinking'. Sch n, in his work on reflective practice and learning, contrasted the «high ground of theory» to the «swampy lowlands of practice» (SCHÖN, 1991: 42). His use of the «swampy lowlands» of practice refers to the messy, confusing problems of professional practice; everyday problems that could not be solved through the use of research-based theory and technique.

## 2. BINARY DISCOURSES IN COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

Discourses based on the binaries outlined above have been taken up in many historical and methodological accounts of the field of comparative education. After explicating the meaning of discourse I am deploying in this paper, I review a few ways that binary thinking has characterized

accounts of methodological trends within our field. Discourses comprise statements whose organization is regular and systematic, consisting of all that can be said and thought about a particular topic. As Weedon explains, discourses are «ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them.» (WEEDON, 1997: 108) Discourses offer us frames, definitions and structures through which to view, experience and make sense of the social world. This is their enabling capacity. They also constrain how we experience and understand the world, limiting our understanding to legitimate, official ways. Moreover, discourses produce or construct what we come to think of as commonsense 'truths'. The focus here is upon analyzing the productive capacity of discourses to construct or constitute 'reality' or 'truth' (FOUCAULT, 1972).

This process of truth production is related to the idea that identities are produced through discourse, leading us to reflect upon how particular discourses construct the identity of the field of comparative education. In this process of constructing identities and the 'truth', discourses conceal themselves and make it appear as though things we consider real and true exist external and prior to the discourses within which they are described. The normalization of the discourse operates in such a way to protect or shield the discourse, or at least to make appear as something so inevitable, normal and natural that it cannot be questioned or critiqued. In other words, the assumptions and beliefs related to the field of comparative education that are described here seem so natural and certain that they do not require justification or explanation. When they are sanctioned by our 'forefathers' and other contemporary key scholars in the field the normalization function of discourses becomes even more invisible and powerful.

Nearly all early accounts of the history of our field have presented accounts of comparative education research that have drawn either explicitly or implicitly upon the binaries outlined above (e.g. BEREDAY, 1964; BRICKMAN, 1966; NOAH and ECKSTEIN, 1969; TRETHEWAY, 1976). This tendency has continued with more recent accounts of the development of our field, including Altbach and Kelly (1986), Crossley & Broadfoot (1992), Epstein (1994), Kubow and Fossum (2007), Mundy et al (2008), and Phillips and Schweisfurth (2007). These accounts of the field review various phases in the development of comparative education, primarily (with the

exception of Brickman) since the nineteenth century. These phases tend to align with binaries such as nomothetic-idiographic, inductive-deductive, and qualitative-quantitative. For example, in 'Comparative and International Education: Overview and Historical Development' Erwin Epstein wrote that «ideographic and nomothetic approaches have delineated the contours of comparative education right up to the present» (EPSTEIN, 1994: 918). In this encyclopedia entry, he traces the origins of comparative education as a distinct field from the early nineteenth century. He outlines the work of key figures in the field including Marc-Antoine Jullien and Sir Michael Sadler. Epstein reviews their work, noting that Jullien's approach was basically nomothetic in his attempts to «isolate a few social factors to identify underlying trends and patterns and apply these to schooling to arrive at a general explanation of a class of educational actions or events» (Ibid.: 919). Jullien's use of the scientific method was instrumental, according to Epstein, in opening the way for nomothetic studies. Indeed, Jullien wrote that the aim of comparative education should be to «deduce true principles and determined rules so that education would be transformed into an almost positive science» (Quoted in PHILLIPS and SCHWEISFURTH, 2007).

Many accounts of our field review other examples of the history and support for nomothetic approaches within comparative education (e.g. EPSTEIN, 1994; PHILLIPS and SCHWEISFURTH, 2007). Noah and Eckstein are generally presented as two of the main proponents of the nomothetic approach to comparative education. Others before Noah and Eckstein were said to have advocated a nomothetic approach to comparative education. One of the earliest comparativists George Bereday laid out a systematic and scientific approach to comparative education. His ideas have been viewed as being similar to Jullien's in that he proposed collecting facts about different educational systems, juxtaposing them in tables or charts, and then identifying principles or laws of education and societal development through inductive logic.

The other approach that Epstein claims characterizes our field is the idiographic approach.[1] According to this line of thinking, comparative education should aim for *Versteten*. Educational research that is idiographic

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[1] Epstein uses the spelling 'ideographic', while I have chosen the alternative spelling 'idiographic' for this paper.

should involve the intensive study of education systems within broader socio-cultural, political and economic contexts in order to gain a full understanding of it. Idiographic research does not aim to deduce principles or laws. It involves interpretive social, historical and cultural studies of education. Early comparative education scholars in this tradition include Sadler, Lauwreys, Kandel, Hans and Holmes. For example, in response to the question, 'What can we learn from the study of foreign education system?' Sir Michael Sadler (1900) noted that: «The practical value of studying...the working of foreign systems of education is that it will result in our being better fitted to study and to understand our own.» And Lauwrey's claimed that «Comparative education is not normative: it does not prescribe rules for the good conduct of schools and teaching...It tries instead to understand what is done and why.» (Quoted in PHILLIPS and SCHWEISFURTH, 2007: 14).

So we have the establishment of a binary that implies comparative education research has been either nomothetic or ideographic. Following Epstein (1994), a number of texts and papers on the history and methodology of comparative education, have made reference to the idea that comparative education consists of research that is *either* nomothetic *or* idiographic (PHILLIPS and SCHWEISFURTH, 2007; VAL et al., 1999). However, in his discussion about macro-historical perspectives in comparative education research, Schriewer writes that comparative education, «should be prepared to *in method* relativize the contrasts between historical and social scientific —or between idiographic and nomothetic— types of comparative analysis» (SCHRIEWER, 2003: 32).

Before outlining the problems with this binary, I will make a few remarks about the inductive-deductive binary in comparative education research, which aligns broadly with the nomothetic-idiographic discussion above. Rust et al (2009) in their history of the development of comparative education review the background debates in our field on whether research should be inductive or deductive. They note that the early scholars such as Hans, Kandel, Schneider took for granted that comparative education research was inductive. Bereday continued this tradition with his comparative methodology that was also inductive in that it began with descriptions of two or more countries, then juxtaposed the data for the countries and then compared the data. Rust et al (2009) in outlining the methodological debates

of the 1960s and 1970s explain how others, beginning with Brian Holmes, challenged this inductive tradition, and drew upon deductive approach in their research. Holmes claimed that scientific laws are general statements from which future events could be inferred deductively. Noah and Eckstein, according to this and other accounts, looked at the methods of comparison from other social sciences and they noted that these methods were characterized by the systematic, controlled, empirical and, where possible, quantitative study of explicitly stated hypotheses. For them, the future of comparative education lay with the development of a scientific, deductive methodology, with the aim of educational improvement.

Other accounts of our field, including my own (LARSEN, 2010), have reviewed dependency theory research that characterized comparative education research in the 1970s-1980s. Comparative research from a neo-Marxist, dependency theory perspective focused on the destructive effects of colonization on the colonized. Scholars in this tradition focused their attention on the sweeping insensitivity of the colonizers and their treatment of indigenous populations. The assumption behind this research was that all colonizers homogeneously and uniformly oppressed the colonized, across time and place. The point here is not to review all of the research that is either inductive or deductive in the field of comparative education, but to note that histories of the field tend to group comparative studies as being either inductive or deductive, relying on the binaries to construct a particular discourse about research within the field according to binary, methodological logic.

Likewise, in other methodological accounts of our field, writers refer to work that is either quantitative or qualitative, or policy research that is either an intellectual 'policy of' exercise or pragmatic 'policy for' research. For example, in her editorial introduction to an issue of *Comparative Education*, Broadfoot wrote that over the year, the status of the field of comparative education, «has swung between opposing poles of arcane ephemera and key educational policy tool» (BROADFOOT, 2003: 411). Bray (2004) in discussing methodology and focus in comparative education notes that most research has been qualitative and relatively few studies based on survey research, and almost none on experimental methods. Rust et al (1999) in their review of 427 articles in three major English-language comparative education journals categorize articles as being quantitative or qualitative. They found

that about 70% were based on qualitative methods, just over 17% on quantitative methods, and only 10.8% on mixed methods. Again, the point here is that authors within the field have turned to binary discourses, such as quantitative-qualitative, in order to construct accounts of the nature and development of the field of comparative education.

## 3. PROBLEMS WITH BINARY DISCOURSES

Binary thinking is seductive because it simplifies the complexities of the social world. It is easy to get stuck in the thinking that our field is characterized by binaries and that we need to choose between one part of a binary or the other. Either we do quantitative *or* qualitative research, we value theory *or* practice, or we think we need to start with theory *or* develop theory. I outline in this section some of the limitations of these binary discourses before presenting some ways out of binary thinking.

Generally speaking, deduction is defined as reasoning from the general to specific and induction as reasoning from the specific to the general. However, in current philosophical and research methodological texts, this usage is viewed as outdated. For example, according to the more contemporary accounts, a deductive argument is an argument in which it is thought that the premises provide a guarantee of the truth of the conclusion. In a deductive argument, the premises are intended to provide support for the conclusion that is so strong that, if the premises are true, it would be impossible for the conclusion to be false. An inductive argument is an argument in which it is thought that the premises provide reasons supporting the probable truth of the conclusion. In an inductive argument, the premises are intended only to be so strong that, if they are true, then it is unlikely that the conclusion is false (FIESER and DOWDEN, 2003). I present two educational examples to illustrate this point. The first is an argument that even though it reasons from the specific to general, is deductive, because the truth of the premises *guarantees* the truth of the conclusion:

— Effective schools are comprised of quality students, quality teachers, and quality administrators.

— Quality students are committed to success.

— Quality teachers are committed to success.

— Quality administrators are committed to success.

— Therefore, *all* members of effectives schools are committed to success.

Moreover, the following argument, even though it reasons from the general to specific, is inductive:

— Schools in Finland have always done exceedingly well on PISA tests.

— Therefore, schools in Finland will continue to do well on PISA tests.

Therefore, it is worth noting, that the proof technique used in mathematics called mathematical induction, is, according to contemporary definitions given above, actually a form of *deduction* (FIESER and DOWDEN, 2003), thus demonstrating the blurring of the inductive-deductive binary, much in the same way that the lines between nomothetic and idiographic approaches are ambiguous.

Next I discuss at greater length some of the limitations of the qualitative-quantitative binary drawing primarily upon the work of Martyn Hammersley (1992, 2002). Hammersley identifies the various component meanings of the qualitative/quantitative binary and argues that these issues are not as simple or closely related as sometimes believed. He reviews literature to show how the idea of 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' have come to refer to internally coherent and comprehensive research paradigms that are «founded on incommensurable philosophical and/or political presuppositions» (HAMMERSLEY, 2002: 2).

First, Hammersley (1992) critiques the notion that quantitative data refers to numbers and qualitative data refers to words. He writes that a large proportion of research, including much that is called qualitative, combines the two approaches to varying degrees.[2] Ethnographers regularly make quantitative claims in verbal forms, using phrases such as regularly, frequently, often, and typically. He points out the variation in the nature of data that is not

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[2] I have done this myself in policy research on the impact of performance appraisals on teachers, Larsen 2009a.

unrelated to the word/number binary, noting that when quantitative researchers criticize ethnographers' use of words rather than numbers what they are referring to is precision and that for them prevision means numbers. However, as Hammersley points out, adequate precision does not necessarily require the use of numbers. Accuracy is generally more important.

Next Hammersley (1992, 2002) questions the distinction that qualitative, ethnographic research takes place in 'natural' settings and quantitative research, which is experimental, in 'artificial' settings. The implication, primarily for qualitative researchers, is that research in 'natural' settings is better than research in 'artificial' settings. The charge of artificiality is also directed towards survey researchers who conduct formal, structured interviews in contrast to researchers who use more unstructured and informal interviews in 'natural' settings. Hammersley rejects this distinction between natural and artificial settings as spurious, asserting that to «what happens in a school classroom or courtroom, for example, is not more natural than what goes on in a psychological laboratory» (HAMMERSLEY, 2002: 5). Moreover, he notes that research in 'natural' settings does not guarantee ecological validity, and research in 'artificial' settings cannot debar us from it.

Hammersley outlines the qualitative-quantitative distinction between focusing on meanings versus focusing on behaviour in research. Qualitative research is said to be interpretive, focusing on documenting the social world from the perspectives of those studies. Quantitative research is said to be focused on behaviours. Yet, as Hammersley explains, it is rare for qualitative researchers to restrict themselves to documenting their subject's point of view without explaining perspectives and behaviours; and much quantitative research is concerned with attributing meaning and perspectives to behaviours. Hammersley (1992, 2002) then reviews three ways that the quantitative and qualitative paradigms as taken to be philosophically opposed: in terms of realism versus idealism, naturalism versus anti-naturalism, and deductivism versus inductivism. He challenges the notion that quantitative research is committed to a realist epistemology and that the qualitative method is idealist in its rejection of representations of reality, pointing out examples of qualitative research that has adopted realist positions, and quantitative research that has adopted idealist positions.

The issue of whether natural science is an appropriate model for research in the human sciences is his next topic, one as we have seen above that has been debated at length within the field of comparative education. Hammersley points out the complications in trying to determine whether or not the natural sciences provide a suitable model for social science research. Again he points to examples of qualitative researchers who have justified their work in naturalistic terms. He notes various complications in trying to determine whether or not the natural sciences are a good model for the human sciences, such as the fact that there are significant differences in methods between various natural sciences, and concludes that «in terms of naturalism also, then, we do not find a contrast between just two incommensurable philosophical positions. And neither quantitative nor qualitative research is wedded exclusively to one position» (HAMMERSLEY, 2002: 9)

Finally, Hammersley addresses the issue of deductivism versus inductivism, noting that qualitative researchers generally characterize their research as inductive and quantitative research as deductive. This, according to Hammersley and others (e.g. SUTER, 2012), is an over-simplification. While it is generally accepted that more deductively generated research draws upon quantitative research methods, and most inductive research draws upon qualitative research methods, no one method of research is associated exclusively with a single form of logic. Not all quantitative research is concerned with hypothesis testing, and not all qualitative researchers reject the deductive method.

In fact, all research is (or at least dcould be, to some degree, both inductive and deductive, moving from ideas to data as well as from data to ideas. Glaser and Strauss's (1967) work in developing the grounded theory method demonstrates this well. Grounded theory method is a systematic generation of theory from data that contains both inductive and deductive logic, as well as verification of findings. Grounded theory method does not aim for the 'truth' but attempts to conceptualize what's going on by using empirical research. In a way grounded theory method resembles what many researchers do when retrospectively formulating new hypotheses to fit data. However, applying the grounded theory method the researcher does not formulate the hypotheses in advance since preconceived hypotheses result in a theory that is ungrounded from the data.

Glaser originated the basic process of grounded theory method described as the constant comparative method where the analyst begins analysis with the first data collected and constantly compares indicators, concepts and categories as the theory emerges. It is somewhat surprising given what would appear to be a methodological alignment between grounded theory method and comparative education case studies, that grounded theory method has not been more widely embraced by comparativists. This is despite calls from scholars within the field to engage in grounded theory method and other similar case study methodological frameworks that break down inductive-deductive binaries (e.g. CROSSLEY and VULLIAMY, 1984; KLEES, 2008, VAVRUS and BARLETT, 2006).

## 4. CONCLUSION: BEYOND BINARIES

What we need to find is a way out of binary thinking, to challenge dichotomies that have characterized much social science research since the Western Enlightenment and develop ways of understanding educational phenomena that go beyond the polarization of binary divides. In other words, we need to move beyond either-or or 'one at a time' to both, some and part of, and bricolages of tools, approaches and ways of knowing and thinking about the comparative work that we do. As Lenz-Taquchi writes:

> «In order to really make *another* use of the 'master's tools' possible and transgress the binary divides that we create, we need strategies that are able to be involved in *simultaneously* becoming more complex, multiple, embodies and material, *and* finding ways to reduce complexity and aim for comprehension, receptiveness and some sort of validation.» (LENZ-TAQUCHI, 2010: 120)

The discourses about our field shape how we see ourselves and construct us as comparative education researchers. There are a number of possible ways out of these binary discourses though. First, there is a need to engage in research that breaks down these binaries. Some scholars have suggested possibilities for ways forward. Bray and Thomas developed a framework for comparative education analysis, which is presented as a cube to classify many comparative studies of education. In relation to the various levels of analysis presented in their cube, they contend that most people working in comparative education

«tend to have a good understanding of macro-level phenomena but are much less comfortable with the tools and perspectives of researchers who work at the micro-level. We believe that both sides could learn from each other.» (BRAY and THOMAS, 1995: 473)

Arnove in his introduction to the book *Comparative Education: The Dialectic of the Global and the Local*, writes that: «We believe that the vitality of our field depends on strengthening dialogue with one another and welcoming diverse approaches to gathering and analyzing data on education-society relations. These approaches are qualitative and quantitative, case oriented and variable oriented.» (ARNOVE, 2003: 13) Some interesting work in this area has focused on education in 'developing' countries, including Preston's (1997) «Integrating Paradigms in Educational Research: Issues of Quantity and Quality in Poor Countries», and Tikly's (2011) «Towards a framework for researching the quality of education in low-income countries».

In addition to engaging with new methodological approaches that go beyond binaries, I would like to suggest that we simultaneously re-tell the stories about the background of our field by bracketing out our binaries. Some may call this revisionist history, but all histories are products of particular times, visions, values and assumptions. It is surprising how prone we are to binary thinking and how these binaries often come to represent for us what is good or bad about the research that we do. Even when judgmental overtones are implicit, the distinction between the binaries is present. In my own work, I have criticized histories of history within our field as being linear and developmental (Larsen, 2009b), although I did not, at that time, explicitly note the binary discourses that have characterized much of this writing.

A few other contemporary comparative education authors have alluded to limitations in binary thinking, especially the ways that accounts of our field have been linear and developmental (e.g. CROSSLEY and WATSON, 2003; EPSTEIN, 2008). Crossley and Watson (2003) assert that the demarcation of phases in reviews of the historical development of our field tend to oversimplify the process and that these phases are not necessarily linear or consistent over time or place. Yet, even they review the history primarily in terms of linear development. The same can be said about Epstein's (2008)

account of our field, in which he criticizes the work of past historians of comparative education who have viewed the development of the field as having progressed in Darwinian-style stages of development. He proposes an alternative framework for analyzing the field by focusing on three epistemological streams: positivist, relativist and historical functionalist; and then reviews research that is reflective of each of these streams. While this, in my opinion, is an improvement over past linear accounts, it is still based initially on a binary lens through which research in our field is viewed initially as either nomothetic or idiographic/positivist or relativist. It is from this initial premise that Epstein goes onto demonstrate that there is some research that straddles the divide between these two epistemological frameworks, but it is still a binary discourse that provides the foundation for his argument.

What I think we need to do is get ourselves out of the binaries, by moving beyond «stuck place after stuck place» (ELLSWORTH 1997: xi). Two final ideas come to my mind. I am thinking that a possible way out of these dichotomous binary divides may be found in the work of Rolland Paulston who is known for his mapping of the field. Paulston (2000) produced a number of maps illustrating paradigms and theories in comparative and international education. His maps portray overlaps between various paradigms and focuses on the notion of relations and connections between paradigms. His is an eclectic approach, and I think it is his eclecticism that has always appealed to me. Perhaps a move away from binaries entails then an embracing of eclecticism in which we keep foremost in our minds the many different methodological and theoretical options open to us as comparative education researchers. Rather than embrace binaries, might we not disregard dichotomous thinking and open ourselves to the spectrum of our methodological and theoretical choices that are mapped out in multi-dimensional space.

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