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Looking Back, Looking Forward: Reflections and Hopes for Inclusive Comparative and International Education CIESC Presidential Address, May 31, 2021

Regard en arrière, regard en avant : réflexions et espoirs pour une éducation comparée et internationale inclusive

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Article abstract

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CIESC Presidential Address, May 31, 2021

Steve Sider, President, CIESC

Abstract

In my 2021 CIESC presidential address, I considered the question “What can inclusive comparative and international education research look like?” I situated my own experience to consider three “Cs” for the future of comparative and international education: complexity, care, and cautions. Complexity refers to the divisive and challenging global issues that exist and in which comparative education research takes place. As comparative and international education researchers, we need to practise an ethic of care in engaging in research in increasingly complex times. I concluded by providing three cautions for the future of research: transparency, positionality, and ethical relationality.

Résumé

Dans mon discours présidentiel de la SCECI de 2021, je me suis penché sur la question « À quoi peut ressembler une recherche inclusive en éducation comparée et internationale? » J’ai situé ma propre expérience pour envisager trois éléments pour l’avenir de l’éducation comparée et internationale : complexité, attention et précautions. La complexité fait référence aux difficiles problèmes mondiaux qui nous divisent et dans lesquels s’inscrit la recherche en éducation comparée. En tant que chercheurs en éducation comparée et internationale, nous devons pratiquer une éthique de la prudence en nous engageant dans la recherche à une époque de plus en plus complexe. J’ai conclu en proposant trois mises en garde pour l’avenir de la recherche : transparence, positionnalité et relationnalité éthique.

Keywords: comparative education, complexity, care, inclusive education, Canada

Mots clés : éducation comparative, complexité, soins, éducation inclusive, Canada

I have recently been asked to contribute to two publications. One is being developed by the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES) and involves contributions from member societies around the world. I am delighted to add to the work that my PhD supervisor and mentor, Dr. Suzanne Majhanovich, did in 2007 when she and Zhang Ling completed a similar chapter on the history of the Comparative and International Education Society of Canada (CIESC) up to that time. This publication has a focus on looking back.

The other publication is being coordinated by colleagues of the Spanish journal *Revista Española de Educación Comparada*. For this publication, I have been asked to think of what the future might hold for comparative education. Parts of this presidential address are taken directly from the work I have been doing on this paper. As a result, my address today is going to look back and to look forward. It will align with the type of work I do, which is conversational, community-based, and participatory. It values reciprocity, transparency, and humility. I will use examples from my research to explore the question which I think is critical for us as we consider the future: What can **inclusive** comparative and international education look like?

In preparing for today's address, I have been thinking of Dwayne Donald's (2013) concept of ethical relationality. Donald stated that

What is required for knowledge to become organic and make a claim on us that will facilitate a necessary shift in our understanding is a storied approach to knowledge that helps us see ourselves implicated in and in relation to what it is that we want to know ... For teaching and learning to be meaningful, we need to see ourselves in ecological relation to that which we want to know. Relations always come first. This is what stories teach us. (Donald, 2013, p. 19)

So, I begin by looking back at my own experiences and privileges; by so doing, I attempt to situate myself within CIESC. I then turn to explore three aspects that I propose can frame some of our thinking about what an inclusive comparative and international education can look like going forward: complexity, care, and cautions.

Looking Back

I begin by providing a personal narrative of how I became involved in comparative education. I will situate my own positionality within this narrative. My childhood was spent in two distinctly different areas of India, separated by 1,500 km of geography and a litany of political, economic, and social divides. I grew up in northern Bihar, widely considered the poorest part of India. My earliest childhood experiences were with the children of the community in which I lived. I rarely interacted with another White person. Once I turned school age, my parents chose to send me with my sister to an international boarding school in the Himalayan foothills. It was a drastically different life in the cool mountain climate surrounded by the privileges of an international education. A number of years later, my family moved to Canada, and I experienced significant school challenges with being in a new country. These included bullying, linguistic tensions, and academic barriers. Fortunately, primarily thanks to a number of kind teachers who served as key signposts along my journey, pointing me to an orientation of the local and the global, I completed my K–12 schooling and pursued university studies. This was a rich time of discovery for me as I engaged in learning *about* international relations and learning *in* international contexts as I travelled through central and South America for two summers while in university. Towards the end of my undergraduate degree, I decided that I could best satisfy my international mindedness by becoming a teacher. Teaching became a career that I engaged with, along with school administration, for 15 years before pursuing my PhD and commencing my career as a faculty member in a faculty of education.

I met my PhD supervisor as a result of what I thought was a failure. I was a school administrator who was encouraged to apply to a PhD program by one of my Master of Education professors. I applied to the PhD program that the instructor had recommended but was not accepted. Shortly after, Suzanne Majhanovich from Western University reached out to me to see if I would consider studying at Western. I drove to Western to meet with Suzanne, and in that meeting, I discovered the scholarship of comparative and international education. After spending an hour with Suzanne, I knew that I wanted to study under her mentorship and that I had found my "people." A year or so later after commencing my PhD part-time while still working as a school administrator, Suzanne invited me to submit a proposal to an academic conference. Again, this was a completely new experience for me since I had been used to the kinds of professional learning conferences that educators participate in but not scholarly ones. I presented at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) conference that year, specifically the CIESC conference. This was my first connection with CIESC.

Under Suzanne’s guidance, I continued to engage with CIESC annual conferences. In 2007, I became part of the CIESC executive. Over the next 15 years, I served multiple terms as secretary-treasurer, member at large, vice president, and president (2019–2021). This involvement has led to other board involvement including the CSSE and WCCES boards, both as a result of my term as president of CIESC. During this 15-year period, my research has been geographically broad but always focused on supporting the inclusion of students with disabilities in Canada, Haiti, Ghana, Egypt, and beyond. My publications tend to focus on the intersection of inclusive education, school leadership, and comparative education. It is important to note this as I describe the importance of being inclusive in comparative and international education later in my address.

I share this short version of my history as a way to position and deconstruct the many aspects of privilege that I have experienced and benefited from. My lived experience has been framed by my experience as a White child growing up in a seemingly poor area of India; my experience of speaking Hindi as my first language as a child and soon recognizing the power of the English language; a boarding school experience that connected me with children from around the world but separated me from the community that I considered home; my experience of having school teachers who helped me transition to Canada while recognizing that not every child has this benefit; and my experience of travelling throughout Latin America as university student, easily leaving areas of conflict such as Guatemala and Nicaragua while seeing those who hosted me remained in the dangers zones of their communities. My more recent history is also a story of privilege as I had a supervisor who helped me find my way in comparative and international education while I was a school administrator with all of the means to pursue such a scholarly task. I will be frank and say that I recognize that much of my work in comparative and international education—as a student, a teacher, and a faculty member—has been motivated by both guilt and a deep longing to connect with others. Guilt from the recognition that I do have many privileges that others might not share; a sense of connectivity birthed out of my global experiences. I say all this to recognize that our lives are full of complexities and tensions; my life is no different.

Finally, in this initial part of my presidential address, I want to also acknowledge the complexities of our organization and of the world in which we live in June 2021. In this CIESC conference, we have engaged a number of our elders and knowledge keepers—Ali Abdi, Kumari Beck, and Shibao Guo, all former CIESC presidents—along with Jackie Ottman from University of Saskatchewan and current CSSE president—in leading an open forum on racism. A focus on anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, and anti-Asian racism has been a hallmark of this year’s conference, largely because we are trying to wrestle with the complexities of the world in which we live. Recent events such as the attack on a racialized scholar at the 2019 CSSE conference at the University of British Columbia, the death of George Floyd, the recent discovery of the bodies of the 215 Indigenous children in an unmarked grave in Kamloops, incidents of anti-Asian racism, and many others have intersected with our individual lives and that of CIESC as a scholarly association. These are more than complexities; they are critical moments in our individual and collective journeys to determine who we are—and who we will be—as humans and as a global community. They also shine light on the future of what inclusive comparative and international education can look like going forward.

Looking Forward: New Cs for Comparative Education

Marianne Larsen, a former president of CIESC, challenged us a few years ago to consider “a new and fresh thought in relation to what we study; the interpretative concepts, frames and theories that we develop in our work, the influences and contexts which mould the work we undertake as

comparativists” (Larsen, 2013). This is a bold challenge and one that I alone am not equipped to address. However, in this section, I provide some of my personal insights into how we may be able to engage in what the study of comparative and international education might look like in the future. My thesis is that a key part of our focus should be ensuring that we are **inclusive** of the broad spectrum of those who engage in what we might consider comparative and international scholarship, even though they (and we) might not traditionally see their work as under this umbrella. By reaching out to a broad spectrum of scholars, we have an opportunity to engage with the complexities of the world. I follow this section on complexities by considering the importance of an ethic of care in our work. I conclude by providing some cautions for our work. As noted earlier, the following sections of my presidential address are taken from the paper I have written for *Revista Española de Educación Comparada* (Sider, 2021).

Over the past 20 years, scholarly and popular writers have challenged educators to foster the so-called 21st century skills in students (see, for example, Fullan et al., 2017). These skills are sometimes referred to as global competencies (OECD, 2018) and often are referenced in the English language to “the Cs” since they begin with the letter “C.” These include, for example, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. The idea of 21st century skills or global competencies can be a problematic, neoliberal concept as the identified skills and knowledge may be closely associated with corporate interests in the Global North (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016; Olssen & Peters, 2005, Rizvi & Lingard, 2011). The espoused global competencies may not represent or even benefit those who live in complex, fragile contexts. So, in this article, I provide a counter-narrative, the “new Cs,” that is, words that begin with “C” that I would propose to help us consider new ways forward in comparative and international education research. These words are complexity, care, and caution.

Complexity

We often talk about commonalities in the human experience, but the global COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the contrasts in our lived experiences and massive socio-economic-political divides. For example, anti-Black and anti-Asian racism has been highlighted through violent acts in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and beyond. In Canada, we have also seen anti-Indigenous racism and disturbing discoveries such as the unmarked graves of Indigenous children who were part of residential schools. In other contexts of the world, there have been glaring disparities demonstrated in the experiences of farmers in India, the introduction of cholera to Haiti via United Nations troops, and the tragic experiences of refugees in many parts of the world in their effort to escape conflict. In many contexts, we are learning about “intercultural competencies” while others are experiencing seemingly ever-increasing conflict. The irony of this should not be lost on us.

The COVID-19 pandemic seems to have exacerbated the divides that exist as even vaccine distributions have seen a clear demarcation between the Global North and the Global South. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that we are living closer than ever before in global community due to technology while, at the same time, being greatly divided. Information about COVID-19 is broadcast via traditional and social media. We are almost immediately aware of the lack of vaccines in countries like India despite the fact that it is the world’s largest producer of vaccines (Frayser, 2021). Further illustrative of the divides that are growing is a deeply personal one: I can have a research team meeting with university faculty colleagues in Haiti via Zoom, but I am not living the reality of many of those same colleagues who are not being paid for months on end. Perhaps the divides that exist in the world could be best illustrated through the responses to

two questions: Who has access to vaccines? Who has access to technology? The issues of vaccines and technology are but two ways in which global divides can be illustrated.

These issues raise questions related to the relevance of comparative and international education in this complex era. It also challenges us to consider what comparative and international education “means” in this new age of remote learning and connectivity, of uneven and inequitable access to basic health care. What does “international” mean in an era of transnationalism (Vertovec, 2009)? An illustration of this that I experienced recently was through the Third Annual WCCES Symposium that was held in November 2020. There were many presentations involving scholars from the Global South which was wonderful. If you had access to technology, you had access to the conference. However, it was clear that some scholars from the Global South were not able to participate because they did not have access to the basic technology that would allow them to participate. The symposium illustrated that scholars could engage in research and presentations beyond national borders. Yet, it also illustrated that many still did not have access to an international audience. For them, transnationalism is a concept not reflected through their experience. How will we as comparativists include all scholars, not just those with access to technology or funding in the future?

My own research with colleagues in different parts of the world has illustrated this divide (e.g., Sider, 2014; Sider et al., 2019; Sider et al., 2021b). Even if access to technology is available, research meetings have demonstrated the incredible divides that exist. For example, in a recent research team meeting, colleagues in Nepal, India, Ghana, and Haiti talked about friends and family members who had not been able to access basic health care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, technology brought us together but demonstrated how divided we were, exemplifying that “although the world may be increasingly interconnected, global systems of inequality, power, privilege, and difference are always present” (Zemach-Bersin, 2008, A34). If power and privilege are always present, how can scholars of comparative and international education be inclusive of all?

The complexity of this time reminds us that there are certainly multidimensional, intersecting aspects of comparative education research. It is difficult to identify and examine isolated issues. Simple solutions are not possible. Instead, we need to recognize that complexity is what enriches comparative and international education. Paul Tarc stated that international education is full of “ambiguities, contradictions, and tensions” (Tarc, 2013, p. 5). As we look to the future of comparative and international education research, we need to acknowledge that complexity is at the core of what we do. It is what makes the study of comparative and international education both incredibly challenging and incredibly rewarding. It is in the complexity of individual lived experiences and massive systemic challenges that research in comparative and international education can and must “pull back the curtain” of human experience. We know that “experiences alone do not make a person a multicultural or global educator. It is the interrelationships across identity, power, and experience that lead to a consciousness of other perspectives and a recognition of multiple realities” (Merryfield, 2000, p. 440). I will return to this idea of relationships as a foundation of inclusive research in comparative and international education.

Complexity can cause us to be exasperated and exhausted; it can be overwhelming. One of the challenges that comparative and international education faces is how to “work” IN this terrain while also addressing how to work THE terrain. In other words, how do we examine and critique the structural and systemic issues that pervade our institutions, our local communities, and our global ones, too, while also striving for some level of hope and action? How do we not over-

simplify complex local and global challenges? How do we ensure that we do not conclude the chapter or manuscript too quickly without acknowledging the complexities of contexts and of the research we engage in? I have been recently thinking that perhaps we need to replace the term “conclusions” in our manuscripts with “continuances” and “ongoing complexities”? One of my “continuances” in this complex time is a recognition that I need to consistently examine not only the structural but the deeply personal aspects of comparative and international education. While recognizing that the structural must be critiqued, I must also answer the questions: What am I doing to address the divides that exist in these complex times? How am I being inclusive in my own research? To respond to these questions, I turn to the concept of care, another “C” that I posit as fundamentally important as we consider the complexity of comparative and international education going forward.

Care

Mel Ainscow stated that “The issue of how to build more inclusive forms of education is arguably the biggest challenge facing school systems throughout the world” (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010, p. 401). Inclusive education is at the centre of my research, and I believe it provides an important consideration for the future of comparative and international education. Inclusive education is premised on the belief that every child, no matter their strengths or needs, belongs in their neighbourhood school (Sider, 2020; Sider et al., 2021b). It is holistic and considers the child as a full member of the community, be that the school community or the local neighbourhood. Including students with disabilities and special education needs in their local school should reflect what we hope for from society. Inclusive education is communal; every person in a community is a full participating member of that community and is responsible to ensure that others are welcomed as full participating members. It recognizes strengths in every child and sees the needs that children have as gifts or assets. In many ways, inclusive education is a reflection of Indigenous perspectives on community where everyone is welcomed and honoured and where everyone has something to contribute (Absolon, 2016). Relational space is the heartbeat of inclusive education. It emphasizes the importance of every voice being heard, of every child feeling included. It is premised on an ethic of care.

I have been exploring the intersection of disability and school leadership in Canada and beyond for nearly 20 years. My work particularly focuses on students with significant and complex needs and how school leaders—whether in Canada, Haiti, Ghana, Egypt, or St. Lucia—can foster inclusive skills and attitudes and support teachers to authentically include all students in their classrooms. Comparative and international education provides a space for this type of research and these types of conversations. Comparative and international education research frameworks on inclusive education provide opportunities to better understand inclusive education from a contextualized, localized, and relational perspective (Schuelka & Lapham, 2019). As a result, I have taken an explicitly comparative perspective in my research on inclusive education in Canada, Haiti, Ghana, and beyond (e.g., Sider, 2019).

Our research has demonstrated that local contexts can inform broader knowledge and vice versa. For example, the inclusive education policy framework in Ghana is fairly robust, although there is a significant gap between policy and practice. By contrast, Haiti does not have a policy framework on inclusive education, thus there is potential of our research in Ghana to inform policy development in Haiti. When sharing some of our research in international and comparative contexts with an administrator in Haiti, the latter told us the following: “If I want to see large-scale change occur, I have to work not only with the Ministry of National Education but, even more

importantly, I have to build bridges with people in this region and beyond.” Recognizing the value of comparative and international research in informing localized practices is an important way in which our research can have impact.

In Ghana, we are exploring a major gap between inclusive education practices in private and public schools. Haiti has a high portion of children attending low-fee private schools, thus, once again, the research in Ghana is critical to inform inclusive education policy and accountability frameworks in both private and public schools beyond Ghana. Another way in which this research is informing practice is regarding how to effectively support students with complex developmental needs. In Haiti, we have documented examples of how teachers have been able to support complex student needs in large classes with few resources. Research has demonstrated that including all students in the regular class rather than in separate, segregated classes benefits all learners (Specht et al., 2016). Given the fiscal realities of Haiti, we anticipate that inclusive education there is more likely to be implemented in regular classes rather than separate, specialized classes. This makes the research in Haiti—and resulting mobilization of knowledge—a critical and distinctive comparative and international feature that impacts other parts of the world. For Canadian scholars, comparative research on inclusive education is critical in advancing knowledge on how effective inclusive education can be implemented in Canadian schools particularly with increasingly diverse student populations (Porter & Towell, 2017). As educators globally continue to struggle with the practice of inclusive education, particularly for those students with complex needs, the experiences of teachers in low-resource contexts such as Haiti can provide case examples of what can be done elsewhere.

Finally, our research has demonstrated that no matter the context, school leaders play a significant role in shaping the beliefs and practices of educators, students, and parents with regard to inclusive education (Sider et al., 2021a). Let me share some quotes from interviews which illustrate the importance of school leaders in fostering inclusive school contexts. A principal in Ghana stated that “Teachers need to know about disabilities and limitations but also what children can do.” A principal in Canada commented in an interview as follows: “I say to staff right at the beginning, if you feel like running away, that’s when you need to run into my office. When you find that you are withdrawing and you’re feeling overwhelmed, that’s when you need to run in, not out.” Another Canadian principal shared an illustration of how a parent gave him a hug at the end of the meeting because, in the parent’s words, “I have never had someone want to include my kid in the school before.” Another school administrator, in discussing the importance of care, stated, “Relationships are the foundation of everything I do as a school administrator.” These illustrative quotes demonstrate how a leader’s strengths-based perspective and advocacy can influence teachers in the school.

I have used the research I am involved with to illustrate the importance of care, particularly regarding inclusive education, as we consider the future of comparative education research. Inclusive education certainly provides a logical example of the ethic of care since it is foundational to the very concept of inclusive education. However, it is also important to consider care in the ways in which we do comparative and international research. This is certainly not a new idea, but I believe it is one that needs to be even further heightened as we look to the future. Let me illustrate what I mean with an example from Haiti. Haitian culture values oral traditions, collective-based knowledge, and a strong sense of community (Sider et al., 2019). As a result, community-based participatory research methodologies that prioritize local knowledge in identifying inclusive education practices that are contextually and culturally relevant are critical (Schuelka & Johnstone, 2012). These approaches take into consideration the diverse lived experiences of the participants

in every aspect of this research (Tikly & Bond, 2013). This approach is particularly important in contexts such as Haiti which have experienced historical oppression (Neufeldt & Janzen, 2021). Community-based participatory approaches prioritize research of importance to the community so that knowledge and action for social change are congruent in addressing community needs (Tikly & Bond, 2013). Through the engagement of key stakeholders at multiple levels, a community-based, participatory approach ensures that the voices and needs of diverse community members are honoured throughout the research process (Neufeldt & Janzen, 2021). Care for the topics of our research and the methods we use is critical for our work in complex times.

Comparative and international education is critical in this process of understanding inclusive education:

comparative education offers a starting point for improving our education systems and our classroom practices. It also challenges us to think broadly about the link between local practices and global issues, and to explore the overlapping values and social systems that underpin the educational enterprise itself. For teachers, an understanding of the comparative education literature helps for reflection on issues of concern in their own classrooms such as diversity, conflict/peace, teaching approaches, curriculum, and classroom organization in a wider global context, and for learning from the innovations, experiences, and practices of other teachers, schools, countries, and regions. (Bickmore et al., 2017, p. 2)

My research on inclusive education for students with disabilities is not just research. It is an opportunity, a starting point, as Bickmore et al. (2017) stated, to engage in my own commitment to reflect and actively participate in the world, particularly with those with complex needs. It is part of the ethic of care and relationality that I believe we are called to engage with in complex times and spaces. In many ways, it reflects Fazal Rizvi's (2008) epistemic virtues: Thinking interculturally, relationally, historically, critically, and reflexively. It is also an honouring of Kwame Appiah's call that "At the heart of modern cosmopolitanism is respect for diversity of culture, not because cultures matter in themselves, but because people matter, and culture matters to people" (Appiah, 2008, p. 88). This ethic of care is not just about the focus of our research or the way in which we engage in our research. It is an ethic which should permeate our very being as we engage in conversations, in listening to, and in walking with those who share this human existence.

Let me finish this section with a challenge for the future and how we as comparative and international education scholars demonstrate care. This reflects the question that I posited at the beginning of this presidential address: What can **inclusive** comparative and international education research look like? I am not referring to inclusive education but how we can be inclusive of a wide range of scholars who may not see themselves as involved with comparative and international education. In a complex time, we need to demonstrate care for all research because all educational research is now comparative and international. We need to provide opportunities to encourage comparative and international research and learning that go beyond the "traditional" aspects of comparative and international education research. This raises two further questions that I believe we need to address: How might comparative and international education societies, such as CIESC, serve as an inclusive umbrella under which many different individuals and organizations can participate? How can we be deliberately inclusive? By inviting others to share in this space, we can extend our work in critiquing systems where we see privilege and injustice, shining a light and working to dismantle systems and structures. We need to be beacons of care where scholars—and people generally—can see that we care for them, and we care deeply for the human condition.

Cautions

Finally, I turn to some cautions, the final “C”, that I would raise as we consider complexity and care as key aspects for comparative and inclusive education going forward. Understanding the complexity of the work we do from an ethos of care is critical from my perspective. I offer these cautions not to serve as roadblocks or barriers but so we can be aware of potential challenges and pitfalls. Moving forward we need to seriously consider these cautions to ensure that our work is relevant and has integrity.

First, we need to be honest and transparent about our failures in comparative and international education research. Comparative and international education has been guilty at times of following a Westernized, neocolonial model. In this research, we have observed and documented education in other jurisdictions, particularly in the Global South, applying judgement and criticism of educational experiences and systems that may differ from what is normative or traditional. We have presented our findings at comparative and international education conferences to audiences that are primarily from the Global North. Thankfully, we have come some distance from this more traditional, anthropological approach. We need to recognize that these approaches, even when community-based, participatory research was the goal, often included control of the research processes—and funding—from the Global North. Failure can serve as a way forward, a signpost that points us in a new and better direction. This also points us to the key question I have raised in this article, “How can comparative and international education research be inclusive?” A key aspect of inclusion and care is reciprocity. In complex times, it is particularly important that we see research as reciprocal and keep questions such as “How does everyone benefit from this research?” and “Who is driving and controlling the research?” at the front of our research.

Second, as part of the research process in complex times and with care as a foundational ethical value, we need to ensure that we continue to interrogate our privileges and subjectivities. Sustainable change is often best pursued through locally and regionally driven efforts that identify relevant issues and leveraging the assets on the ground to make that innovative change happen (Brissett, 2018). Thus, a caution for those of who live in the Global North is to be particularly and fully aware of engaging in research in the Global South or with Indigenous communities in our contexts. When we are invited to engage in research in these contexts, we need to be mindful of ensuring the locus of control remains deeply held by local colleagues and participants.

In the Canadian context, there is an increasing recognition of the generational trauma and harm that have been experienced by Indigenous peoples. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission investigated the harms done through such tools of colonialism as residential schools. In 2015, it released Calls to Action to frame a new way forward for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada (TRC, 2015). However, as some Indigenous leaders have said, “We rush to reconciliation while truth still needs to be found out” (Donald, 2021) and “We need to think more about righting our relationships instead of reconciliation” (Ottman, 2021). These cautions to consider who we are in relationship to others, those who came before, those who are here now, and those who will come after, will help ensure that our research is not just a “snapshot” of a current situation but a recognition of historical factors—and future possibilities—as aspects to consider in our research. Being aware of our research biases and blind spots can help us in ensuring that we are not just doing research “on” participants but “with” them.

Finally, let us put relationships at the heart of our research. This may seem a bit too naïve and simplistic, even “non-scientific.” However, over my research career, I have come to increasingly recognize that research is a relational act. Whenever we are asked to work as part of a research team, there is a relational invitation. When we interview participants, even if we have

scripted questions, there is an element of trust, a core aspect of relationships. In this aspect of relational space, I turn again to what I can learn from Indigenous scholars, one of whom has described ethical relationality as

an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to more deeply understand how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other. This form of relationality is ethical because it does not overlook or invisibilise the particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a standpoint arises. It puts these considerations at the forefront of engagements across frontiers of difference. (Donald, 2013, p. 19).

Patton (2016) explained this as “understanding interrelationships, engaging with multiple perspectives, and reflecting deeply on the practical and ethical consequences of boundary choices” (p. 8).

These are powerful reminders that it is through relationships that we seek to truly understand the human experience which is at the heart of why we engage in comparative and international education research. You can engage in difficult conversations when you have a relationship with another. You can learn, unlearn, and relearn across differences. Of course, relationships and trust take time and effort to foster. We need to recognize that we need to build “relationships over a longer period of time to create trust ... [which] requires patience and careful interactions, and specific capabilities on the part of the organizations and individuals involved” (Kolk & Lenfant, 2015, p. 21). Fransman and Newman (2019) articulated that in research: “trust is key as well as creating spaces for listening, reflecting and imagining” (p. 535). It seems to me that ethical relationality, that is, relationships that are not transactional, but which authentically seek to know the other, are particularly important in the complex, divisive times in which we live and in what is sure to be more challenging times in the future.

Complexities and Continuances

I am left in this tension of living between and within complexity and care. I live in a world that has ugliness and beauty, I am filled with despair and yet I have hope, I see systemic injustices and I see acts of kindness, of compassion, and of love, I see structural barriers and I am invited daily to decide what I’m going to do about those. As I consider the future of comparative and international education research, it seems that these personal tensions are also collective tensions. We experience the world individually but also in community; it is a shared experience. Many years ago, a wise Haitian colleague taught me a Haitian Creole proverb, “*Piti piti ti pay pay zwazo fe niche*” which translates into “Little by little, straw by straw, a bird builds its nest.” This has served as a powerful analogy for me about the comparative and international education research work that I have been involved with: small acts of unpacking the human condition and of collectively addressing challenges can lead to solidarity in fostering a more inclusive and equitable world.

So, what can inclusive comparative and international education research look like going forward? As we live in the complexities, may we live and work with care, to ensure we leave the world a better place than what we inherited. The goal of inclusive education is to welcome every child into their local school where they—and their peers—can experience learning in community. It is not always easy and there are lots of challenges that may arise. Conflict and differences of opinions can emerge. Restoration and relationship-building are often outcomes of the formal learning. In a similar way, comparative education research has the opportunity to be inclusive. Complexities exist in our world which should not dissuade us from engaging in research but should entice us to further explore ways in which we can address these complexities. Framing our research

with a deep desire to care for each other and our world, through an ethic of relationality, provides an inclusive and compelling way forward for the work of comparative and international education.

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