

Teaching Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives of  
Teacher Development Online: A Reflective Practitioner Inquiry  
Enseigner en ligne les perspectives interculturelles et  
comparatives du développement des enseignants : une enquête  
de pratique réfléchie

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Article abstract

In this reflective practitioner inquiry, a course instructor and a graduate teaching intern examine the experience of teaching a graduate-level course about cross-cultural perspectives of teacher development. We inquire along three dimensions: assisting doctoral students to become effective and reflective university instructors; responding to course students' questions and concerns about developing a meaningful academic community in an online learning environment; and conceptual issues of teaching comparative, international, and development education (CIDE) in university settings. Our key argument is that in order to succeed in the above three dimensions, professional reflexivity in CIDE higher education courses can be both conceptually and pedagogically multidirectional, by which experienced and novice instructors learn from each other as much as they learn from their students in an engaging and enriching online environment.

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## Teaching Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives of Teacher Development Online: A Reflective Practitioner Inquiry

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**Teaching Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives of Teacher Development Online:  
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**Enseigner en ligne les perspectives interculturelles et comparatives du développement des  
enseignants : une enquête de pratique réfléchie**

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**Abstract**

In this reflective practitioner inquiry, a course instructor and a graduate teaching intern examine the experience of teaching a graduate-level course about cross-cultural perspectives of teacher development. We inquire along three dimensions: assisting doctoral students to become effective and reflective university instructors; responding to course students' questions and concerns about developing a meaningful academic community in an online learning environment; and conceptual issues of teaching comparative, international, and development education (CIDE) in university settings. Our key argument is that in order to succeed in the above three dimensions, professional reflexivity in CIDE higher education courses can be both conceptually and pedagogically multidirectional, by which experienced and novice instructors learn from each other as much as they learn from their students in an engaging and enriching online environment.

**Résumé**

Dans cette enquête de pratique réfléchie, un instructeur de cours et un stagiaire d'enseignement diplômé examinent leur expérience de l'enseignement d'un cours de niveau supérieur sur les perspectives interculturelles du développement de l'enseignant. Nous nous interrogeons sur trois aspects : aider les étudiants de doctorat à devenir des enseignants universitaires efficaces et réfléchis; répondre aux questions et aux préoccupations des étudiants du cours concernant le développement d'une communauté académique significative dans un environnement d'apprentissage en ligne; et les questions conceptuelles de l'enseignement de l'éducation comparée internationale du développement (ECID) dans des contextes universitaires. Notre argument principal est que pour réussir dans les trois dimensions mentionnées ci-dessus, la réflexivité professionnelle dans les cours d'enseignement supérieur d'ECID peut être à la fois conceptuellement et pédagogiquement multidirectionnelle, ce qui veut dire que les instructeurs expérimentés et les plus novices apprennent les uns des autres autant qu'ils apprennent de leurs étudiants dans un environnement en ligne engageant et enrichissant.

**Keywords:** higher education; comparative, international, and development education; cross-cultural perspectives; practitioner inquiry; online learning

**Mots clés :** enseignement supérieur; éducation comparée, internationale et du développement; perspectives interculturelles; enquête auprès des praticiens; apprentissage en ligne

## Introduction: Getting to Class

Notifications pop up on screen as students “enter” the virtual classroom. Their microphones are muted, and as they sign on, they are doing what they would be doing as they entered a physical classroom: settling into their chairs and unpacking notebooks, bringing out highlighted notes, or flipping through their readings. Some have early dinner food, a snack, or a mug of coffee, perhaps visible to the class or perhaps positioned on their desks strategically off-screen. Others may be rushing from work or family activities, to carve out the space and time to be both “in class” and “at home” at once. Yet others attend from the University of Toronto graduate offices or study carrels in the hope of getting good internet connection. The space-time compression and comfort of the synchronous and asynchronous dimensions of this course offering have become a feature of our time together as we learn and discuss each week.

By this point in the week we—Dr. Sarfaroz Niyozov, the instructor, and Ms. Elena Toukan<sup>1</sup>, the course intern—would have had our meetings and coordinated the required activities, also all online. These could include, for example, developing the class agenda, creating PowerPoint presentations about the main readings or guest lectures, responding to students’ queries about the readings, the postings on the summaries and responses and the assignments such as the group presentations, creating the breakout groups, articulating the broad plan for readings for the following weeks, or facilitating a guest speaker. We would have also taken stock of the summaries that students have posted during the week asynchronously and possibly responded to most of them, noting how discussions unfold among students offline with the same enthusiasm that we witness in the conversations during the weekly class time.

The course under consideration is CTL1037: *Teacher Development: Comparative and Cross-Cultural Perspectives* at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto, offered in the winter term (January to April) of 2019. This course aims to bring together two fields of inquiry: first, teacher development, and second, comparative and cross-cultural perspectives on education. Thus, it examines various perspectives on the professional lives of teachers within particular places (e.g., classroom, schools) and works upward to the broader contexts in which teachers work and live, as seen by these teachers and as analyzed through various scholarly frameworks. This long-standing course on OISE’s syllabus fulfills requirements for multiple programs. It is among the courses that research-stream MA and PhD students in the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning (CTL) department can select as one of their required courses in their home department. It is also among the core courses in the Comparative, International, and Development Education (CIDE) specialization program; in fact, it was first created and taught by some of the CIDE program’s founding faculty. OISE’s unique CIDE specialization program locates itself within the broader field of comparative, international education (CIE), but its founders had included “development” in its title in recognition that comparative and international education often also refers to development work, whether explicitly or implicitly. Having been a student in this course over a decade ago in Winter 2008 as part of her Master of Arts degree, Ms. Toukan participated in the course offering of Winter 2019 as a teaching and research intern. In designing her involvement as a practicum course, the CIDE program leadership encouraged her to think about how this course could help inform doctoral training in university instruction, as well as inform future graduate-level courses in comparative, international, and development education, both at OISE and more broadly. This encouragement crystalized into a guiding question for

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<sup>1</sup> Elena Toukan has since successfully completed her doctorate degree, however at the time of writing she was still a doctoral candidate.

practice and reflective research: In what ways could reflexive practice generate knowledge, insight, and experience that could mutually strengthen doctoral training of “novice” instruction, as well as experienced professors alike? And how could this contribute overall to strengthening existing courses within the CIDE program?

While there are many challenges presented by teaching and learning generally, we think that teaching and learning in comparative, international, and development education offers special challenges in the university setting. In this reflective practitioner inquiry, then, we examine the experience of the CTL1037 Winter 2019 offering, and we inquire into the questions that experience raised along three dimensions: personal teaching experience, students’ questions and responses, and issues of teaching comparative and international education in university settings. This paper begins with a brief literature review of some of the challenges and issues documented about teaching and learning about comparative, international, and development education in higher education. We provide an historical overview of the CTL1037 course, which is followed by a description of our approach to reflective practitioner inquiry. We then share analysis drawn from our reflection journals, discussions among instructors, and student feedback. We conclude by identifying some of the implications that this course presents for current and future instructors of comparative and international education courses in higher education.

Our key argument is that, to succeed in the above three dimensions, the professor-novice professional relationship and the teaching and learning process are both conceptually and pedagogically multidirectional—by which the two instructors learn from each other as much as they learn from their students, alongside emerging theory about online teaching and learning. We further recognize that the ability for instructors—both new and veteran—to learn reflexively about creating empowering and dynamic online and blended course offerings is especially relevant and urgent in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, when higher education courses are being moved online on a larger scale than ever before. The principles of the CIDE field in being multidisciplinary, multidimensional, and embracing pluri-vocality can be leveraged in an adaptive pedagogical response to this and other crises, when undertaken reflexively in a learning mode, and in collaboration with colleagues, novice and experienced alike.

### **Teaching and Learning in Comparative, International, and Development Education**

The nature of comparative education has broadened substantially in recent decades, as education has moved beyond questions of a predominantly national character in an interconnected world. In Canada, student populations are more diverse and globally connected than ever before, increasing the importance of teachers’ capacities to teach cross-culturally and cross-linguistically. Classrooms themselves become transnational spaces, as “internationalization” is among the leading aims and objectives of universities and higher education institutions in many high-income and middle-income countries (Yemeni & Sagie, 2016). Howe (2003) in fact recommends that all teachers benefit from inclusion of CIE in their education and professional development, as it is increasingly important for teachers to foster global citizenship, international cooperation, and cross-cultural understanding. He points out a limitation, however, in that most CIDE courses are reserved for graduate students, contributing to the narrowing of teacher education.

Several challenges with teaching CIE and CIDE-related topics have been documented in academic research and literature. Some of these are reflective of challenges of the CIDE field overall, which Heggi (2016) describes as “the multidisciplinary study of educational phenomena in social and cultural contexts” (p. 91). What, then, is the relationship between the field’s

“multidisciplinary” nature, its “educational phenomena” and its “social and cultural context” that one might navigate as a course instructor in CIDE?

In their systematic literature review, Foster et al. (2012) describe the inherent plurality of the field that makes it difficult to identify consistent common themes in CIDE research, teaching, and practice. They argue that

The community of comparative and international education researchers moves in multiple directions simultaneously, does not feel constrained by the walls that commonly separate, say, economists from anthropologists or survey research from textual analysis, and regularly insists that understanding education requires studying not only what happens within schools’ walls but also where the schools sit and who enters their doors. (p. 712)

This multiplicity of thematic, disciplinary, methodological and geographic roots, alongside consideration of diverse teaching contexts can make for a dynamic field, open to numerous possibilities. These possibilities highlight certain trends in recent years, however, of first, a shift in interest from educational content to social and political contexts, and second, the nature of CIDE to cross thematic, disciplinary, methodological, and geographic borders (Foster et al., 2012). In a content analysis of the *Comparative Education Review*, Nordtveit (2015) noticed the lack of unifying features in the CIDE field in favour of certain “frequent elements”: (1) a focus on the “national” as the primary unit of analysis for understanding education as both “comparative” and “international”; (2) a characteristic of CIDE’s “academic practitioners” as interested in not only studying but improving the educational systems that they study, and (3) a focus on educational development.

Given the plurality, breadth, and ambiguity of the field, then, how do university course instructors of CIDE-related topics approach teaching and learning? Researchers approach this question from several perspectives. Parreira do Amaral and Hornberg (2016), for example, delve into the importance of addressing sociopolitical and cultural contexts of educational inquiry and instruction, in which historical and social dimensions of experience shape the distinctness of educational policy and practice in the field. Other scholars take as their starting point a theoretical framework through which students can be assisted to understand the particularities of comparative educational experience. In practice, Kubow and Blosser (2016) draw connections to multicultural education, noting both the strengths of examining various cultural perspectives, while at the same time warning against the objectification of “culture” as a static and commoditized entity.

Regarding key constructs that preoccupy teaching within comparative and international education, Sobe (2016) and others have critiqued the centrality of the nation-state in the ways that research is often framed and presented. Sobe argues that nation-states are imagined communities (invoking Anderson [1983]) that convey a sense of hierarchy that is central to colonialism, which in turn objectifies cultures, communities and groups as “others.” This indicates the need for instructors to critically analyze different constructs of the global and the national in CIDE, not in the least of which requires a deconstruction of “us” and “them” hierarchies along national lines (Howe, 2003; Sobe, 2016). A lack of critical attention to underlying power dynamics can lead to inappropriate or harmful conclusions about education across contexts with diverse histories and relationships to the nation-state. For example, Crossley (2016) emphasizes the importance of questioning the uncritical use of comparative data, whether in rankings or in qualitative assessments of “progress” or “development.” Critiques such as these, therefore, suggest the need for CIDE course instructors to not only familiarize students with the ideas, concepts, and constructs

in the field, but also to help equip them with the critical skills to question and analyze the implications and assumptions mobilized by such core constructs and ideas.

Some scholars raise concerns that the CIDE field tends to focus more on issues of sociopolitical, economic, or cultural issues, with less focus on educational issues of curriculum, pedagogy, and teachers' work. Manzon (2016) draws on educational philosopher Gert Biesta's (2009) framework of educational purpose as comprising processes of qualification, socialization, and subjectification through teaching and learning. Qualification, Biesta proposes, refers to providing students with the knowledge, skills, understanding and judgment that allow them to do things, ranging from the specific to the more general; socialization introduces individuals into the ways of doing and being that inculcate them into the culture or membership of a group (in this case, the academic traditions and practices of the CIDE field); and subjectification refers to those processes that allow individuals to become more autonomous in their thinking and acting, again in this case, as scholars or practitioners in the CIDE field. Through Biesta's framework, Manzon (2016) indicates some of the ways that CIDE course instructors might help students navigate both the pragmatic and theoretical dimensions of teaching and teacher development. Incorporating insights from the CIDE field informed the reflections we would take as instructors of this course.

### **Describing the Course**

The course *Teacher Development: Comparative and Cross-Cultural Perspectives* is a 12-week course offered once a year. Dr. Niyozov was himself a student in the course while it was being taught by its first instructors—Dr. Joseph Farrell and Dr. Mick Connelly—and later started teaching this course in 2005 when he was hired at OISE as an assistant professor. Over the years, Dr. Niyozov has made several alterations to his instruction of the course in response to growing experience, including diversifying reading lists, involving greater student participation, adding thematic as well as geographic diversity, restructuring assignments and assessments, and accounting for developments in the field. At the same time, he has retained the central premise of the course to situate teaching and teacher development—spanning the journey from teacher recruitment, pre- and in-service education, and extending through to retirement—to situate these different issues across the spectrum within different contexts. Themes can include how particular subjects such as science or mathematics are taught and assessed similarly and differently, as well as broader social justice issues such as how race, gender, religion, class, and urban or ruralness affect teaching and learning. They could also include broader political economic factors such as privatization, standardization, accountability, decentralization, and application of global reform policies in local education contexts. The diversity of contexts explored include political, international, historical, and comparative cross-cultural contexts. In 2014, the course went through another significant iteration when it began to be offered in a “blended” format, comprising a mix of in-person and online sessions.

As mentioned above, CTL1037 plays an important role in the CIDE program as one of its core courses. The course also engages a large number of students each year that span a range of OISE's graduate programs—from its master's and doctoral streams, from research- and course-based programs, from all OISE departments, and occasionally from other University of Toronto faculties and institutions. One of the unique dimensions of the course is that it engages directly with teacher development, as well as with teachers' lives, work, cultural backgrounds, and classroom practices. As an interdisciplinary program, CIDE has a wide range of course foci, from the policy-based to the methodological, to political and socioeconomic considerations. That this course grappled predominantly with teachers, pedagogy, and classroom experience brings an

important crossover between studies of curriculum, teaching, and learning, and studies of international and cultural issues, reflecting the impacts and effects of educational policies and frameworks in practice. Notably, the course introduces two other types of frameworks around teacher development themes: (1) the perspectival-ideological (e.g., personal practical/narrative, life and work, holistic, behaviorist/coaching, critical, Eurocentric, anticolonial) frameworks on teacher development and (2) the geographic-contextual, which in this course starts from the far East, South, Central and Western parts of Asia to North and Sub-Saharan Africa, to Eastern and Western parts of Europe, and concludes with South and North American education systems. Such a broad and pluralist approach aims to show the structural and conceptual complexities of teacher development, which in turn responds to the diverse interests of the enrolled students. As such the course has also appealed to students in OISE's teaching stream programs—such as the Master of Teaching (MT) and Master of Education (MEd) programs—given that it helps to provide different lenses into their own teaching work. Students are encouraged to engage in educational research from different geographic and cultural settings, and thus to put themselves in a mode of becoming more aware of the assumptions that they bring to their teaching.

The “blended” format of the 2019 offering moved all meetings, aside from the first introductory meeting, online. We could not have foreseen then—or at the time of initially writing this article later that year—that online learning would soon become a system-wide shift for university instruction due to the health restrictions required by the global COVID-19 pandemic, forcing many instructors and students to take on virtual learning modes. The fact that Dr. Niyozov had the opportunity for a more deliberate move towards online course design makes it an interesting case to consider in exploring both the ways that the instructors consciously strove to build a meaningful learning community in an online space, and simultaneously reflected on their actions and experience through practitioner inquiry.

### **A Three-Dimensional Approach to Reflective Practitioner Inquiry**

The roots of reflective practitioner inquiry trace to various paradigms of teacher development, including narrative (Trahar, 2013), holistic-emotional (Leitch & Day, 2000), and evaluative (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). For our purposes, we draw additionally from action-research traditions, in which theory can play an important role in determining the anticipated framework of an ongoing, reflective scholarly inquiry. This builds on holistic and narrative approaches that emphasize reflective inquiry's personal transformative effects, as the practitioner delves into one's own psychic and embodied sense of self in the world to generate knowledge about identity and practice. In the context of this research, the presence of the novice instructor opened the space of reflexivity to be not only the enterprise of the veteran instructor, but rather a collaborative and dialogical space to exchange perspectives, examine data together, and collaboratively build shared visions and planning next steps (Mann & Walsh, 2013). As we identify our primary objective in this research with an understanding of teaching CTL1037 as a microcosm for exploring certain questions about teaching CIDE-related courses on teacher development in the university setting, a collaborative, action-research paradigm seemed most appropriate. This paradigm further enabled us to see our role as practitioners as not separate from students and other members of the class, but rather as participants in a collaborative pedagogical experience.

Reason and Bradbury (2001) employ a framework for action-research in participatory inquiry and practice that classifies research and practice skills according to first-person (fostering an inquiring posture to one's own life, to act “choicefully” and with awareness); second-person (the ability to inquire with others about issues of mutual concern); and third-person (to extend



projects to create a wider impact) research and practice skills. While these categories can be treated independently, Hartog (2018) suggests that all three forms have a place in a human inquiry project in a scholarly setting. Thus, we consider these facets as comprising a three-dimensional approach to inquiry as practitioners teaching this course.

### **Teaching and Learning in Comparative and International Education**

In the sections that follow, we reflect on practice over the past semester along the three dimensions described above. We used first, second, and third-person questions to focus on how reflexive practices generate insight and experience to strengthen novice instruction, as well as teaching and learning more broadly within the CIDE program, in the following ways. First-person questions allowed us to examine our own teaching preparation, pedagogy, practice, and evaluation, and to take a critical assessment of our approach and skills as a university educator and a teaching intern. Second-person questions reflected on interactions with students online, in person, and institutionally. Third-person questions considered broader issues about higher education teaching and learning in the CIDE field. The data for this inquiry come from Ms. Toukan's biweekly reflection journal entries, from course documentation, and from exchanges between the instructors, including a reflective discussion between the authors conducted midway through the course. The questions above were used to organize reflection and analysis on these data sources.

#### ***First-Person Questions: Questioning Our Own Practice and Pedagogy***

In setting up our practicum involvement as a teaching and research intern, we described the first purpose of the practicum as follows:

To gain practical experience in teaching comparative international education, by supporting and shadowing the instructor of *CTL1037, Teacher Development: Comparative and Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, Dr. Niyozov (Practicum Mentor), over the 2019 Winter term. The student will participate in weekly online lectures (including occasional presentation of content), will help to facilitate breakout discussion groups, and will participate in weekly planning and running the Blackboard Collaborate and Quercus platforms.

Ms. Toukan approached this aspect of the practicum by first trying to familiarize herself with the students in the course. From the introductions provided in our first lecture meeting, Ms. Toukan observed that students seemed to come from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds and experience with the topic of teacher development, some with firsthand experience in the teaching field, others with other vantage points in educational research and practice. She asked herself how, then, as instructors, are we sensitive to the diverse needs, frameworks, and contexts that students are bringing to their interaction with the content? And how do we ensure that we are meeting (or at least striving to meet) the wide range of expectations that different students bring to the same course?

For the first several weeks of the course, Ms. Toukan observed and participated in the course, building relationships with students, and helping to ensuring that the logistics of group work and assignment completion was running smoothly through technical assistance and breakout group support, for example. Ms. Toukan then had the opportunity to prepare and deliver the core lecture in week 7. In her journal, she reflected on some of the questions that she was grappling with as she strove approach the topic from a lens that engage thoroughly with questions of teaching and pedagogy, as encouraged by Manzon (2016), but would simultaneously address preexisting suppositions about its context, as highlighted by Crossley (2016). In preparing this lecture to focus

on the Finnish case, Ms. Toukan reflected on the significance of the “comparative” aspect of learning in this program that the instructors employed in this course, and kept two questions central to her preparation process, as well as her post-class reflections: “On what basis were we comparing? What role were we giving to context?” With these questions in mind, Ms. Toukan did her best to not only describe the Finnish education system, but to also put it in context of its geographical and historical background, as Parreira do Amaral and Hornberg (2016) argue for.

In a larger discussion of Europe’s historical and contemporary experience in education and teacher development, we gave attention to the ongoing role of education as a tool of the state for forging national identity and the “imagined community” of nationalism (Anderson, 1983). Universal public education served to force a common national identity and the building of strong nation-states in Europe against the encroachment of neighbouring countries (Carnoy, 1974; Hayhoe, Manion & Mundy, 2017). We also emphasized both the diversity of educational experience across Europe, as well as the ongoing participation of many regions of Europe in colonial processes related to education. These are topics that are well-described in some of the other core courses in the CIDE collaborative program. Were they ways, we reflected, to help reinforce common themes across CIDE’s core courses, even while discussing more specialized topics such as teacher development?

In addition to content, Ms. Toukan continued to reflect on her own pedagogy as an instructor over the weeks she was teaching. Recognizing the importance of using multimedia to enhance learning and engagement with information, she supplemented the core chapter reading with an audio interview of the author. The interview also provided an update on how key ideas in the core reading had been taken up internationally in the years since its publication. She left time at the end of the lecture for discussion, but also strove to weave student participation throughout the lecture at earlier points, for example, by polling students on their preexisting knowledge of the topic prior to the course reading. While a poll could typically be seen as a passive form of student participation, she used the question and the instant results as a launching point for students to initiate discussion. Ms. Toukan then participated organically to co-construct a deeper understanding based on that week’s readings and content in which students and instructors mutually drew from each other’s perspectives and vantage points. She and Dr. Niyozov also took time through the week to review the students’ reading summaries and responses on the learning management system (LMS) and seeded some of the students’ examples into her presentation, inviting them to say more if they wished. This also helped to draw specific points of comparison to contexts that some students already had experience with, such as in Iran, Colombia, and China.

In week 10, Ms. Toukan strove to put the readings in conversation with one another to grapple with issues related to teacher development in Africa. This occurred mainly through her choice of core readings: one being a deeper epistemological analysis of education in Africa from N'Dri Thérèse Assié-Lumumba (2016), a scholar from Côte d’Ivoire, and the other being a more technical report of teacher development in parts of the African continent from local educators. She also brought insights from her dissertation field work in the continent, sharing experiences and questions she had encountered on the ground. Student feedback reflections on the teaching intern’s two lectures, submitted through the LMS for the benefit of her learning and reflection, affirmed they were well-received, particularly for stimulating lively discussions that focused on the points of the themes and readings that resonated with students the most. Students also appreciated seeing a novice instructor—still in her PhD program, like several of them—experimenting with approaches to course instruction.

### ***Second-Person Questions: Interacting with Students Online, in Person, and Institutionally***

At the outset of the course, we both wished to orient ourselves towards the students by understanding their goals, hopes and expectations for the course. In consultation with Dr. Niyozov, Ms. Toukan drafted an introductory survey questionnaire asking the following questions: What goals, if any, do students express in taking this course? How do they expect to engage with the content of the course? What do they expect of their colleagues and instructors in the course? What do students think that the instructors can do to strengthen the learning experience? We invited them to share any personal information that they wanted us to know and that they felt would be relevant to the course.

The start-of-course questionnaire highlighted several different expectations that students are bringing to our classroom. Approximately two thirds of students were in the Master of Education (MEd) course-based program, almost a third were in a PhD research-based program, and only one student was in a Master of Teaching (MT) practitioner-based program. Some students were early on in their coursework at OISE and were eager to become fluent in the concepts and theoretical frameworks to analyze their own experiences as teachers or practitioners. Others were more versed in educational theory and research, and they were seeking ways in which they could draw from thinkers to inform their own research approach to teacher development. Only two departments were represented in the course, with the majority of students in CTL and less than a fifth of students from Leadership, Administration and Higher Education and (LAHE), while one student also joined us from another Canadian institution. Students came from different national backgrounds, identifying themselves in their surveys as coming from China, Colombia, Iran, Pakistan, Hong Kong, and Canada; many other countries were represented in the places where students had travelled or had teaching experience.

We met with students in person for the first week of the course, meeting around the long tables of one of the faculty's "smart rooms" where we could circulate among the students navigating the LMS<sup>2</sup> from their own devices. We also used this first week to introduce the students to the course aims, syllabus, and assignments. This initial in-person meeting to start the term began the important work of relationship building as a community of learners, which would continue online in the following weeks. Despite several technical difficulties in week 1, instructors and students were comfortable enough with the LMS by week 2 to begin engaging actively with the more conceptual aspects of the course content. We reflected that beyond the advantages and pitfalls of any LMS, it was the students' resiliency and interest, supported by the instructors' communication and support, that contributed to successful interactions in the online learning environment. We also acknowledge that this is not only the case when technological platforms are involved, but a principle of effective online instruction generally.

Not all students were immediately enthusiastic about the online mode of teaching and learning adopted for this course. Two or three students in the first week also expressed their disappointment that the course would be meeting online rather than in person, while at the same time agreeing that it was more convenient not to have to come into the institute's building, especially in the winter. Their dominant concern was less about absorption of content, and more around whether they would have the chance to interact with all aspects for the classroom experience "as they would in person." The strong focus on group work through presentations and weekly breakout group discussions—preassigned by the instructors to promote interactions with

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<sup>2</sup> In this course offering, Quercus and Blackboard Collaborate were the adopted learning management systems (LMS).

all classmates over the course of the term—helped transform hesitance into enthusiasm for the online format and group dynamics of the course. What we took away from these conversations was that many of these graduate students were seeking community with peers and meaningful interactions with faculty and mentors, and sought ways in which such relationship building could occur through the online setting. By the end of the course, no students raised any negative feedback about the course being online. Rather, many said that they appreciated the flexibility it provided, a comment especially highlighted by those with personal circumstances such as childcare or health issues, which could have precluded their participation in the course entirely.

Of course, as with any learning experience, online instruction requires reflexivity in order to learn from experience and improve learning outcomes over time. Given the limitations of online communications, however, Macfadyden (2009) questions whether or not online learning environments can ever offer sufficient interactions and community environments for learning to take place:

In principle, online learning should offer learners a wider mix of interpersonal and cross-cultural encounters, over a shorter time span than can be offered by traditional face-to-face learning environments. But can a virtual classroom offer learners the kinds of community, collectivity and encounter with others, necessary for cognitive and intellectual development? (p. 94)

We reflected on these and other pedagogical questions on an ongoing basis. A few weeks before the end of the course, Dr. Niyozov responded to a reflection question posed by Ms. Toukan: “What pedagogical changes do you make whether teaching in person or online?” He replied:

You know, each has its own dynamics. I’m usually a people person, I love being in the classroom, walking around, having these affective, emotional connections with the students. But this course, because of being online, doesn’t give me much chance to do that—although, I’m getting used to it in a way that is becoming similar to the in-person sessions.

At the same time, Dr. Niyozov also felt that his and Ms. Toukan’s increasing mastery of the online tools increasingly fostered a sense of community, saved time, energy, increased participation during the harsh and prohibitive winter conditions, and allowed other opportunities for deep and critical engagement individually and collectively. This online course made use of online tools such as discussion forums and group work by extending the synchronous and asynchronous time of thinking, learning, and engaging throughout the week at their own pace and rhythms to complement the synchronous sessions. As an example, he shared that with online tools:

I give a chance for students to talk and others have to listen. Not everybody talks at the same time. And in addition to the webinar, we have the non-synchronous, where the students are writing, the students are engaging, and it gives additional engagement which is unique to online courses. And I think it really goes deep and really students are learning a lot from this. So that’s another good thing about online.

Seeing as our students came into this course from different programs and with wide variation in prior experience with the topic, it was useful to have the multiple avenues to connect with content and each other across these different vantage points. Gonzalez (2013) likewise suggests that online tools have created new opportunities to share ideas, develop skills, and facilitate discussions over distances in flexible formats for a variety of purposes “since they represent opportunities for connections between individuals, both experts and novices.” Alongside this promise, however, the virtual nature of online learning brings a number of limitations in comparison to in-person encounters.

Technological decisions are themselves embedded in cultural values and assumptions, and it is important to consider the implications of learning technology on the international and cross-cultural dimensions of any classroom. As Liu et al. (2010) state:

Although modern communication technologies have afforded increasing flexibility that can be used to conduct transnational course design and delivery, concerns exist regarding the social and cultural dimensions of task design, the cultural adaptability of the learning materials and the re-engineering of transformation of courses. (p. 177)

It is true that the online environment does afford certain structures and enable some self-regulation and student ownership over the classroom, but to achieve this can require proactive consideration from instructors to work around the structural limitations of a technology's embedded assumptions. For example, by default only instructors had power over the controls of the LMS's virtual space, determining who could speak, share documents, or present at a given time. Creative workarounds sometimes had to be invented, such as by pre-submitting student work to instructors for upload or creating special "presenter" accounts distinct from students' assigned profiles. Ensuring that we were not simply following the assumptions of the medium sometimes meant subverting technological presets, and making sure we did as much as possible to retain the most important elements of an in-person classroom, such as turning over class direction to student presenters when possible.

What do we conclude, then, in our assessment of the benefits and pitfalls of engaging with CTL1037 primarily in an online versus an in-person environment? Despite the many advantages of accessibility, convenience, and use of synchronous and asynchronous learning tools, some students still struggled with the online format, especially those who already felt isolated in their program, or who grappled with basic understanding of course concepts and contents. Students' struggles—whether with course content, program requirements, academic culture, and wider life issues—are nothing new for instructors to navigate. We realized, then, that we should perhaps not look to the online environment alone either to blame for the cause of these challenges, nor as a solution to resolve larger questions of access and interpersonal issues that students face. Regardless of environment, instructors play important roles in fostering relationships and collegial cultures that promote the meaningful exchange of ideas, leveraging where possible whatever means we have at our disposal to do so. This is the case now, online, as much as ever. That Dr. Niyozov elected for a blended course environment—even by only planning to have one or two of our class meetings in person—opened space for in-person relationships as a foundation for online interactions to strengthen from there.

### ***Third-Person Questions: Questioning Teaching and Learning in The Cide Field***

As mentioned earlier, the notion of comparison is a contested one despite its deep foothold in the field of international education. Comparison can be an especially troublesome mode when it comes to considering culture, especially in a conventional evaluative sense that risks misunderstanding, prejudice, and oversimplification (Mason, 2007). Before considering a new cultural context, both we and the students found it helpful to reflect on our own assumptions and associations with teaching early on in the course, of which many turned out to be culturally based. An activity in the second week was thus helpful in asking students to individually reflect on their own understandings of concepts such as teacher training, teacher development, and teacher education (among others), and then sharing these understandings with each other. This then led into lively discussions on the readings and content of that week, enabling students to quickly move beyond

surface terminology towards deeper conceptual distinctions. These activities also helped illustrate to each of us—students and instructors alike—how we are informed, often in unconscious ways, by a range of assumptions, premises, and tacit knowledge about who and what we think teachers, teaching, and teacher development to be, opening generative tensions between these assumptions. A course such as this can help raise consciousness about these taken-for-granted understandings and bring awareness into their wider studies in CIDE.

Another conceptual tension implicit to teaching in CIDE was how instructors and students conceptualize “culture” itself and what it means to be “cross-cultural.” Traces of the “clash of civilizations” model are detectable at times, which can lead to a reductive Western/non-Western binary that Edward Said (2001) warns against, and that we have not found very productive pedagogically. Mark Mason (2007) suggests taking an approach to culture of *symbolic interactionism*

which embraces constructivism, ethnography and autobiography. The focus of research is the detail of interpersonal relationships, from whose interpretation theoretical understandings develop ... Meanings are communicable because they are based on “key definitions”, which provide a common structure for individual points of view (p. 17).

From a pedagogical perspective, symbolic interactions both between students in “conversation” with the CIDE authors of the texts and articles they studied, became forums to experiment with ideas and understanding. Students were often encouraged to reflect autobiographically on their own experiences which were themselves symbolic of cultural values and understandings.

Interplays between language and concepts of teachers and teaching was also an important point of interest. A student shared that in Albanian, for example, the concept of *learning* is associated with the word for *teacher* but not for *student*. Some groups also discussed, for example, how colonialism has informed the ways in which students grapple with and unpack their conceptions of teachers and teaching—a point also raised in one of the readings on Maori perspectives of knowledge and research by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2014). Texts and discussions also examined how cultures of education and teaching could also vary widely within the same society, in India, for example, seen along the lines of colonialism, monarchy, caste, and religious groups. Teachers were understood not just on their own, but in terms of their relationships—depending on the context, those relationships that they have with students, with parents, with their local leaders and communities, and with the nation-state.

To us, it was important to undertake pedagogical approaches to cross-cultural teaching that took student discussions beyond Western-versus-non-Western “clash of civilizations” (Rizvi, 2011; Said, 2001) binary, accessing a much broader cultural ecosystem to bring insight to teaching and learning in a global or transnational context. Relationships between cross-cultural concepts and teachers and teaching transverse the historical and geographical boundaries to trace the contours of where cultural frameworks diverge and where they agree. Courses such as this can go further in the analysis of examples across cultural spectrums however, and Dr. Niyozov expressed hopes to include increasingly wider ranges of examples from outside “the West” in future offerings of the course.

The ongoing exploration of cross-cultural perspectives—alongside critical reflection of what we understand “cross-cultural” to signify in this context—is, in part, what we think makes this course so important to the CIDE program. It is a course that not only teaches students *about* cross-cultural frameworks of teacher development, but also encourages personal exchanges and interactions in which students make these connections with each other and within their own

conceptions. The field of comparative and international education often draws from different social sciences that are grounded in “Western logic” (Takayama et al., 2017), but university instructors can decide how they will frame the discipline’s contributions, whether as meriting rejection, canonization, or curiosity and critique.

### **Discussions and Recommendations: Mutual Learning About Teaching in CIDE**

Having shared some of our reflections along the lines of personal development, student interactions, and perspectives on the field, we now look to identify some of the implications that this course holds for current and future instructors of comparative and international education courses in higher education. The model that we undertook in this course had elements of apprenticeship, in which Ms. Toukan as a novice instructor could develop skills while also being socialized into the norms and expectations of university instruction in the field. At the same time, we incorporated a strong reflexivity and research component for both instructors. This allowed us to be conscientious of the antecedents of what we were teaching and how it had been done in the past, and rather than taking them for granted, to reflect on what we wished to carry forward. The exchange of reflections and experience, then, has the potential to strengthen teaching and learning practice across the spectrum of instructors’ experiences in CIDE, from novice instructors to experienced professors. An approach such as this requires humility on the part of the experienced professor, however, to be both the proponent and the subject of one’s own pedagogical approach. This article, thus, provides an argument and case study for greater participation of advanced doctoral students in teaching and instruction in graduate courses in institutions that have prominent CIDE-related programs. It also suggests that the success of the professor as a mentor relates to their openness to learning from the intern as well as from the course students.

There are other implications of this reflective inquiry into the course practice, but we wish to highlight three in particular. First, given the simultaneous “multiple directions” of the field (Foster et al., 2012), instructors of courses about CIDE topics can benefit from developing curricular and pedagogical strategies that allow many entry points into research and practice. In this course, students were given regular opportunities to reflect on personal and professional experiences, interact with others, present, lead discussions, and consider a breadth of empirical and theoretical insights from diverse research contexts in teaching and education. They were asked to identify and explore how commonly accepted terms, concepts, and practices in teacher development are expressed differently in various contexts. While no syllabus could encompass every possible cultural perspective, students were invited to continue building a much broader reading list and a set of summaries with their peers that could provide avenues to follow up with additional readings in the future and in their own research.

Second, the blended and online nature of a growing number of graduate-level courses places new demands both on instructors and students. Being able to interact over distances and time zones may offer special advantages to CIDE-related courses, in which international questions can be further brought to life through mechanisms such as international guest lecturers and both synchronous and asynchronous interactions. However, the demands on instructors to reach out and build effective teaching relationships with students are not lessened by the online medium, quite the opposite. In this course we found it necessary to take extra measures such as an in-person first lecture, special appointments, and a wider range of interactions than would be required otherwise, in order to build a dynamic interchange through virtual means.

Finally, while being aware of the trends in the field that emphasize national, sociopolitical, or economic context over the content and practice of education, teacher identity, and teachers’

work (Foster et al., 2012), course instructors should not underestimate the value of exposing students to questions of classroom experience, content, and practice across international and cross-cultural settings. While sociological, geographic, and policy-based studies can lend great insight into questions of educational import, matters of teaching, learning, and curricula are unique to educational inquiry. If such matters do not have a clearly delineated home within educational programs and in the CIDE field, it is a missed opportunity for scholars and practitioners alike.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we have made a case for the importance of reflective practice in pedagogical approaches to teaching in CIDE in a spirit of mutual learning. We see this as a mode for strengthening pedagogical inquiry for novice and experienced instructors alike within the comparative and international education field. And at the time of teaching this course in early 2019, and while writing this article in the months that followed, we could not have imagined how soon our experience with online learning would become a necessary pivot for all instructors at our institution just a year later due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Both authors have since moved on to teach further iterations of this course and related courses in CIDE, primarily online. We continue to draw on insights from this reflective practitioner research in numerous ways. For example, we have integrated a weekly mechanism for post-session reflections to increase the frequency by which students can share feedback and in real time. The in-session and post-session reflections invite students to mention what they are learning and suggest pedagogical improvements or adjustments. Unlike the semi-structured summaries and responses, the student reflections are spaces for expressive free writing. This allows us as instructors to co-construct the course more iteratively, enabling student leadership where they wish to take the lead in certain discussion, breakout groups, reading reflections, or multimedia additions. In the COVID-19 pandemic circumstances, when so many students were grappling with feelings of uncertainty and lack of control, this ability to have a direct and real-time impact within the online teaching and learning relationship was crucial to students' well-being and success.

However, we also recognize that our pedagogical dynamics have not emerged overnight and have been built on the reflective experiences of past course instruction that has been reflexive and collaborative. It is in such uncertain environments that a mode of reflection and reflexivity—both as individual practitioners and among a collegial community of different experience levels—is proving especially valuable, as each semester presents new challenges internal and external to the classroom. The future uncertainties of higher education and the CIDE field will no doubt require such pedagogical capabilities more than ever before.



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