

The Challenge of Theory in Comparative Policy Research ... and Its Possible Re-Articulation

Seminar with **Bob Lingard**, Professor, University of Queensland, (Australia),
Stephen Carney, Associate Professor & President of CESE, Roskilde University
and **John Benedicto Krejsler**, Professor, DPU-Aarhus University,

This seminar explores the role of theory in expanding how we can think about educational policy research at a time when it is being constrained by a dominant global mode of representation. With a focus on re-articulation, we shall explore the potentials for thinking differently; of explicitly employing theory to reframe narratives about global education. This is done by employing theory that offers radical other language with the purpose of making it possible to think global education policy differently.

This includes the work of *Arjun Appadurai* (notions of scapes, disjunctures of globalizing flows, and diasporic spaces), *Ash Amin* (topological spaces), *Jean Baudrillard* (simulations, simulacra, and the powers of fatal thinking), *Gilles Deleuze* (practices of joy and sadness, control societies and deterritorializations) and the broader turn toward post-foundational perspectives in theory

Since the 1990's education has moved from being a national prerogative to entering what has increasingly become a global space of comparison. Dominant logics urge countries to become comparable through surveys, standards, and imaginaries of best practice. Transnational collaborations strive for a common language for how we can conceptualize, think and act education through so-called consensus-advancing procedures that motivate through peer-pressure and fears of falling behind. Such processes have unfolded as comparison in education has risen on the policy agenda, as education is increasingly connected to the value of a nation's human capital and success among 'competitive global Knowledge Economies'. Comparative surveys like PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS have become agenda-setting mainstay in policy debate. National policy looks for the country with best practices through the lens of comparison. Nonetheless, the use of theory to understanding and challenging this turn of events is still underdeveloped.

The seminar is sponsored by the DPU-AU [Research Programme Policy Futures](#).

Time: Tuesday, September 17, from 10:00-16:00

Place: Room D166

Registration: Participation is free, but registration is required at:

<https://events.au.dk/SeminarWithBobLingard17sep2019>

Program:

10:00 – 10:10: Intro: (J.B. Krejsler)

10:10 – 10:55: *'The Grand Simulation' Provoking Practices of Sadness and Joy: Baudrillard & Deleuze reflections upon comparative policy research* (Professor, John Benedicto Krejsler, DPU, AU)

10:55 – 11:15: *Break*

11:15 – 12:00: *'Full Montessori': reframing globalizing education on the periphery* (Associate Professor, Stephen Carney, Roskilde University)

12:00 – 12:30: Discussion

12:30 – 13:30: LUNCH

13:30 – 14:30: *Researching and theorizing comparative education policy situated in/against the new and changing spatialities of globalization* (Professor, Bob Lingard, University of Queensland)

14:30 – 14:45: BREAK

14:45 – 16:00: *Re-articulation and the Use of Theory in comparative and policy research: Workshop with audience: Participants are invited to join dialogue concerning the use of theory in comparative policy research in education... its current state and possible 'futures'.*

Abstracts to seminar:

The Challenge of Theory in Comparative Policy Research ... and its possible Re-Articulation

Researching and theorizing comparative education policy situated in/against the new and changing spatialities of globalization

Bob Lingard, Professor, University of Queensland, Australia

This paper argues that how we define education policy, encompassing both discourse and practice, text and enactment, words and processes, carries implications for how we theorise and research it. The paper focuses specifically on the implications of the new spatialities of globalization for conducting comparative policy research today in relation to the outlined definition of education policy.

This focus will work across a number of theoretical and methodological approaches, including de Sousa Santos's concept of globalized localisms and localized globalisms, Appadurai's global flows and diasporic spaces, Amin's account of topological spatialities, Brenner's rescaling of the state, and Peck and Theodore's concept of fast policy making. In terms of complementary research methodologies for conducting comparative policy research, a brief account will be provided of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus), global ethnography (Burawoy), transversal vertical case study (Bartlett and Vavrus), following the policy (Peck and Theodore), and network ethnography (Ball). While policy imaginaries have to some extent been 'debordered', their enactment 'remains a stubbornly localized, context-specific process' (Peck and Theodore, 2015, pp. xv-xvi).

The challenges for theory and methodology in doing comparative policy research will be traversed in relation to the foregoing discussions of theory and methodology and how to think about mobility and fixity, place/space, global/national/local relations, state and private actors in policy text production and policy enactment. The potential of big data approaches – numbers as technologies of governing at a distance - to become surreptitious policy and to frame developments globally and nationally will also be considered in that context. The necessity of adding in temporal concerns to doing comparative education policy analysis will also be stressed, given that changing impacts and playing out of globalization and the recent rise of ethnonationalisms and critiques of (neoliberal) globalization from both the left and the right.

'Full Montessori': reframing globalizing education on the periphery

Stephen Carney, Associate Professor and President of Comparative Education Society in Europe (CESE), Roskilde University

The contemporary focus on learner centered or 'child-friendly' schooling has roots in international visions related to the rights of the child and the subsequent EFA movement

that gave it clear form. What started as grand vision now takes form as bland orthodoxy as the child becomes the competent, skillful and productive centerpiece of the global knowledge economy.

This narrative – only one possible reading - takes its own form in the global south, where meaning is created amongst tidal waves of cultural, political and economic change. Proliferating signs meet hectic attempts at sense-making, fostering wild associations and fantastic dream scapes. In Nepal, a country where all of the recent growth in school provision comes from private sector initiatives, we see a legitimate yearning for cosmopolitan belonging, economic opportunity and social distinction, all delivered with enthusiasm by a new breed of educational entrepreneur. If this assemblage within the global *cultural* economy can be named, we might call it ‘full Montessori’, the slogan of many school billboards, recruitment brochures and school improvement manifestos. Rather than only indicating global policy convergence, ‘full Montessori’ can be understood as a loose signifier for competing visions of school and the subject of/ in education as well as a call for a different sensibility when we explore global education phenomena.

The paper will consider the rise of child-focused schooling in Nepal. It will illustrate how new global attachments and an intense market for schooling lead to the resurrection of a distinguished vision of pedagogical reform, turning it into banal and hyperreal statements that tell us much about our global situation as well as the prospects for studying global education reform as policy ‘science’. Building on the fatal research and writing strategies of Jean Baudrillard I outline a different mode of exploring a world in/ of fragments. What can be pieced together? How and Why?

‘The Grand Simulation’ Provoking Practices of Sadness and Joy: Baudrillard & Deleuze reflections upon comparative policy research

John Benedicto Krejsler, Professor, Danish School of Education, Aarhus University

Since the 1990s we have seen a totalizing assessment dream in education governance moving from the US, Australia and UK to Continental Europe, Asia and beyond. It has produced an imaginary that extensive monitoring, evaluation and documentation can become the engine to systematically manage school policy and practice towards more quality and better effects.

Drawing upon Baudrillard's thinking on simulations and simulacra this presentation considers the hypothesis of how far this school policy dream can be understood as a ‘grand simulation’: It produces a crisis or ‘a fear of falling behind’, which motivates competition to succeed at local, national and global levels. The simulation proliferates with the insistent aura of objectivity, systematics, big data, and science that talks in evidence and treats with ‘what works’ packages. Does this dream of optimization suck us all into a virtual world of ‘ingrowing obesity,’ where an uninterrupted supply of statistics and digital platforms provides us with codings that loosen our grip on the real by the alchemical use of numbers, algorithms, graphs, images, and signs?

The presentation further explores how Deleuze's Spinoza-readings and the concepts of practices of joy and sadness can help us express affective aspects of subjectivities produced by 'this grand simulation'.

The presentation argues that by observing school policy as the effects of a larger crisis-producing and competition-motivating simulation, it becomes possible to rearticulate a persistent trend in (trans)national school policies in a language different from this trend's own self-referencing logic—and thus to question the trend itself in a new light.