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## *Editorial: Comparative Education and (De)Colonial Entanglements: Towards More Sustainable and Equitable Learning Futures*

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## Abstract

The last several decades have seen a global resurgence of academic engagement with decolonial, postcolonial, anti-colonial, and southern scholarship as a way to confront the persisting modern/colonial legacies in education. This special issue brings together a collection of nine articles to critically interrogate (de)colonial entanglements in comparative education by addressing three questions. Who benefits from and who is punished by the colonial legacies of knowledge production in comparative education? How can the professionals and scholars in the field generate more sustainable and just (trans)local and multilingual research practices that act as epistemic disobedience against coloniality? How might we learn from this uncertain time to construct new comparative genres that extend beyond the Western modern/colonial logic? The articles in this special issue challenge the current preoccupation of many researchers, educators, and policy-makers with global education trends – student achievement tests, competitive education league tables, global ranking exercises, and “best practices” – inviting comparative education researchers to articulate decolonial, antisexist, antiracist, and regenerative alternatives that recognize the interdependence of people, place, and planet, as well as the importance of cultural change. Collectively, this special issue aims at creating a space for welcoming critical and creative scholarship to radically reimagine – and ultimately transform – education for more sustainable and equitable global futures.

*Keywords:* decolonial; future learning; sustainability; equity

# **1. Introduction to Comparative Education and (De)Colonial Entanglements: Towards More Sustainable and Equitable Learning Futures**

This special issue aims to contribute to the ongoing debates and intellectual movements that demand a continuous and collective reevaluation, reimagination, and re-articulation of education's role in the planetary crisis. Despite claims of noble intentions and positive actions, formal systems of modern education have contributed – in many cases intentionally and in others inadvertently – to perpetuating colonial structures and oppressive systems that exacerbate the numerous intersecting crises we confront today: entrenched inequality and injustice, institutionalized racism and patriarchy, the threatening reality of the ecological crisis, among many others.

Driven by the logic of modernity/coloniality, formal systems of modern education find themselves deeply entangled in these crises. Our field of comparative and international education research, for instance, has often served to validate Western notions of progress and development through education mechanisms such as universal “best practices,” competitive league tables, and global rankings. In doing so, it has marginalized and even deliberately erased alternative perspectives and worldviews. Today, schools and universities remain deeply entrenched in the ideals of Western Enlightenment. They continue to propagate the belief in human exceptionalism and (neo)liberal individualism while rationalizing a hierarchical social order that places white individuals of European descent above people of color, men above women, and privileging non-disabled individuals over those with disabilities, among countless other examples (Martusewicz, 2018). Ultimately, this same logic of human exceptionalism reinforces the idea that humans are superior to all other living and non-living entities, justifying the exploitation of nature by humans and endangering the lives of all inhabitants of our planet (Common Worlds Research Collective, 2020; Silova, 2021).

In this context, our special issue aims to critically reexamine and challenge the prevailing paradigms of modern education while simultaneously exploring alternative perspectives and transformative pathways toward a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable educational landscape that respects and nurtures all forms of life on Earth. In particular, we invited scholars and practitioners to explore the following questions: How should comparative education respond to a world of shifting planetary boundaries, collapsing ecosystems, and deepening inequalities? How might we learn from this uncertain time to construct new comparative genres that extend beyond mere reruns of Western Enlightenment logic? What education policies, practices, and pedagogies can challenge the colonial entanglements of knowledge production and create space for more equitable and sustainable relationships in the relational flow of life? How can we enact more ethical modes of learning and being in the world?

Before introducing the articles and their authors, it is important to disclose two important considerations. First, this introduction does not define the current (de) colonial entanglements in comparative education. This choice is intentional, and not emerging from a fear to confront a complex operation. We do not believe in adopting

a generalizing and universalizing perspective that could contribute to erasing distinct conceptual, historical, and cultural understandings.

The risk of homogenization is especially high when considering that colonialism in our field is a set of contemporary and evolving ontological, epistemic, and land relations that are sustained and promoted by seemingly universal values and accompanying economic and political systems that are wasteful, exploitative, and devastating for the future of the planet and people, even if these values and systems are often maintained “by good intentions and even good deeds” (Liborion, 2021, p. 7).

Second, as guest editors of this special issue, we had a secondary role in selecting the articles. We developed an open call for proposals and contacted potential authors, suggested possible reviewers to the managing editor of the journal, as well as distributed the call for papers among our network. Unlike our previous experience of guest-editing special issues, we did not participate in reviewing, revising, or selecting articles, which was done by the journal’s in-house editorial team. This unique model for producing a special issue combines submissions from authors known and unknown to the editors and highlights the rigorous model of peer-review of the *Revista Española de Educación Comparada*. Given the relative “distance” between the articles selected for this special issue and the guest editors, we are very pleased with the quality and diversity of perspectives presented by the authors, as well as grateful to all of the contributors for engaging in a collective effort of both challenging and changing the established modern/colonial patterns of knowledge production and ways of being in academia.

The articles in this special issue could be assembled and read in many different ways. As co-editors, we would like to highlight several themes that have caught our attention as particularly interesting or provocative. In particular, we would like to focus on (1) redefining the role of comparison in decolonial research, (2) decolonizing education policies, practices, and pedagogies, (3) reclaiming Indigenous lands and identities, and (4) reconfiguring the nature of academic publishing. We invite you to explore these and other ideas that may resonate with your particular theoretical interests, methodological perspectives, or geopolitical contexts.

## 2. Rethinking comparison

First (and perhaps not surprisingly in retrospect), our invitation to place comparative education at the center of decolonial analysis did not result in any comparative research in a traditional sense, that is, the examination of education phenomena or systems across different national contexts. Only two out of nine articles engaged in comparative analysis, demonstrating and critiquing the modern/colonial foundations of comparative education as a field. For example, Mariana Casellato’s study “Global South Perspectives: A Curriculum Analysis of a Global North Comparative International Education Graduate Program” (in English) examines whether and to what extent global South perspectives are being incorporated in one of the oldest and undoubtedly best-known programs in the field of comparative education. Her study confirms what the decolonial scholars in the field have been systematically denouncing for years – comparative education courses tend to be framed primarily within “Western science, created within the colonial context, valuing the European, white, male-centered knowledge,” while deeming non-Western knowledges less important, valuable, or credible.

Felicitas Acosta notes similar dynamics in her article “The Production and Uses of Comparative Education in Latin America: A Review in Dialogue With Decolonial Readings” (in Spanish). Reflecting on comparative education in the region, she argues that the forms of knowledge production in and about the region directly contribute to its spatial displacement: Latin America receiving legacies and producing its own forms of circulation of knowledge about education. Acosta concludes by presenting two complementary reflections. First, it is critical to reexamine the colonial matrix underlying the structure of the field of comparative education, incorporating the decolonial frame that centers on the critical examination of schooling in the region. Second, it is essential to deepen and allow the study of the forms of knowledge circulation in comparative education in Latin America to enable the plural construction of categories to go beyond the established (Eurocolonial) ways of thinking and acting. In short, both articles suggest that comparative education as a field – and comparison as a knowledge production technique – are deeply implicated in the reproduction of colonial relations and must be fundamentally reconfigured.

Given the modern/colonial legacy of comparative education, most articles in this special issue chose to avoid direct comparison as an analytical lens. This could be interpreted as a refusal to participate in and further legitimize the type of comparison historically used to differentiate, hierarchize, and rank education phenomena and people based on Western standards as a single yardstick of comparison. By avoiding the locking dualisms of mainstream comparative approaches that divide the world into the West/East (or developed/developing), some of the authors move beyond western-centric interpretations of education phenomena to bring into focus alternative horizons, perspectives, and methods for posing a different set of questions about education future. For example, Keita Takayama’s article “Decolonial Interventions in the Postwar Politics of Japanese Education” (in English) draws inspiration from Chen’s *Asia as Method* to decenter the West by disengaging from the prevailing legacies of the Cold War in order to “reopen the past for reflection” and create a momentum of possible liberation in the future (p. x). He skillfully illustrates how moving beyond Cold War legacies (e.g., collective memories of imperialism, war defeat, the Allied Occupation, and postwar reconstruction under American influence) opens an opportunity to reexamine the pedagogical potentials of Shinto-informed worldviews and concepts in the context of ecologically just and sustainable futures not just for Japan but beyond.

Another powerful way of redefining the practice of comparison is offered by Amanda Tachine & Meseret Hailu, who engage in an intimate letter exchange as a form of non-hierarchical dialogue and reflection about decolonial perspectives in higher education. In their article “There is no Future without Native and Black Faculty in Higher Education” (in English), Tachine and Hailu weave together their educational biographies, academic scholarship, teaching experiences, scholarly and poetic literature to bring into co-presence Black and Native knowledge systems that are attentive to differences and passionate about shared understandings. By dialoguing through letter writing about their experience in academia, they offer a powerful alternative to the mainstream practice of comparison and its historical function “to dismember, eradicate, or appropriate” by imposing irrelevant criteria on others (Stengers, 2011, p. 58). Their work effectively (and affectively) demonstrates that it is possible to engage in “comparison” as mutual learning based on respect and trust, creating a space to agree but also to disagree, negotiate, and contest. In this context, comparison becomes a “connective tissue” across different



theoretical perspectives, practices, and pedagogies that promote more equitable and sustainable relationships within the interconnected web of life.

### **3. Decolonizing education policies, practices, and pedagogies**

Unsurprisingly, the articles in this special issue present compelling criticisms of the existing educational systems and express the urgent demand for decolonial perspectives rooted in alternative (non-Western) epistemological regimes. In “Narratives of resistance of Saharawi women from feminist and decolonial pedagogies,” (in Spanish) Irene Martínez Martín, María Teresa Bejarano, and Virtudes Téllez Delgado turn to the practice of feminist care against the impositions of neoliberal logic that generates violence through schooling. Drawing on the biographical memory stories of exiled and displaced women leaders who survived in the Saharawi camps, the authors discuss how Saharawi women promoted, through their activities, common places of situational resistance to the structural and environmental violence resulting from an ongoing political conflict. The authors discuss how Saharawi women create their own spaces, enabling them to transcend boundaries between public and private, share intergenerational feminine knowledge of care through traditional and community spaces, and construct shared power and leadership that empower and emancipate Saharawi girls and women, while extending the circle to more sisters, more feminists, and more decolonial activists. Notably, the authors reflect on the implications of these experiences for decolonizing education through an action framework for a more critical and committed initial teacher training grounded in feminist, decolonial, and intersectional pedagogies.

In “The Colonization of Teacher Training: To the Conquest of Teaching Soul” (in Spanish), José Ignacio Rivas Flores continues the discussion of care and solidarity in the context of decolonizing teacher training processes and education, in general, in Spanish higher education. He argues that technical rationality, neoliberal school morality, and the construction of a national state model form the axes of pedagogical colonization in teacher training programs. Aiming to explore how to dismantle the hegemonic model of teacher training, José Ignacio Rivas Flores invites several teacher-training students to share their perspectives on possible ways to break with the neoliberal and technocratic colonial logic and develop counter-hegemonic proposals. Similar to the conclusions of many other authors in this special issue, Flores and the student participants highlight the urgent need for learning the practice of care and collective responsibility while transforming the currently dominant relations of individualism and competitiveness (which form the foundations of the prevailing rationalist, patriarchal, and liberal education model) into those of solidarity and cooperation.

In “Anti-colonial Epistemic Disobedience in the Education System: Michoacán and Oaxaca as Experiences of Post-Colonial Educational Construction in Mexico” (in Spanish), Mauro-Rafael Jarquín-Ramírez and Enrique-Javier Díez-Gutiérrez present the result of two participatory action-research experiences in the states of Michoacán and Oaxaca in Mexico in collaboration with the sections of the National Coordination of Education Workers (*Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación* better known as CNTE in Spanish). This project explicitly aims to promote forms of epistemic disobedience against the educational and social colonialism that is advancing

in Ibero-America. This team of Mexican scholars takes promising steps to promote a decolonial pedagogy and organize a broad network of anti- and post-colonial epistemic disobedience in Mexico, demonstrating that it is possible to guarantee a genuine dialogue across knowledge traditions – both horizontal and reciprocal – that recognizes and engages with the different experiences, worldviews, and cultures on equal terms.

Through multiple examples, the authors show the opening cracks in the colonial world-system of Mexico that opens possibilities to promote decolonial insurgencies, question the logic and traditional academic rationality, and propose other imaginaries while building educational processes from social and political action from dialogue with the communities, and with previously silenced voices. Nonetheless, the authors also point to varying levels of commitment and involvement with forms of decolonial pedagogy that are effectively resisting neoliberal pedagogies.

## 4. Reclaiming Indigenous lands and identities toward planetary sustainability

While discussing decolonial approaches to education policies and practices, several authors have brought attention to the vital work of repairing – and redefining – the relations between people and place, which the culture of modern/colonial schooling has severed. For example, Elizabeth Sumida Huaman’s article “Earth Worlds and *Indigenous Dream-Making*: A Reflection on Teaching for Beauty, Repair, and Balance”(in English) reminds us that much of our mainstream modern daily existence, particularly in formal schooling, is governed by distractive instruments of coloniality/modernity that are based on extraction from Indigenous lands and benefit from colonial usurpations. As an alternative, she brings attention to Indigenous learning spaces – from small community-based schools to tribal tertiary education – illustrating their capacity to counter the damages inflicted by mainstream schooling through centering Indigenous knowledges toward relationships of interdependence for good human and planetary living. In particular, the article advances the notion of *Indigenous dream-making*, which is based on “the daily work of honoring the beauty of Native earth worlds, repairing harms to the earth and her beings, and balancing difficult realities with good living.” By centering indigenous place-based and nature-mediated learning, we can begin to supplant the course of relentless destructive development and envision the realm of possibilities of what education can do to rebuild more compassionate interconnection between people and the planet’s diverse earth worlds.

In the article “The Amazon on the Path of Global Coloniality: The Araguaia-Tocantins Waterway, Conflicts of Projects, Plurality of Voices/Narratives and Educational Perspectives” (in Portuguese) Salomão Hage, Edir Pereira, Oscar Barros, and Tristan McCowan present a case of the struggle against the implementation of the Araguaia-Tocantins Waterway, which threatens the livelihoods of original peoples and workers, the environment and non-human life in the region. This project is also an attempt to decolonize university-community relationships by questioning the distinctions between teaching, research, and extension, showing the possibility of new configurations and synergies in research processes. This study presents the actions of Indigenous populations, Quilombola peoples, environmental activists, and university-based researchers that collectively engaged in Participatory Action Research in response to the threats in

the Hidrovia Araguaia-Tocantins in the Brazilian Amazon. It is one promising example of decolonial environmental education, which illustrates that instead of teaching *about* climate change or developing skills for climate action, we can learn by doing, i.e., by directly engaging in climate action. In the broader context of planetary sustainability, this project serves as an inspiration and source of social and educational learning for many activist and academic communities of the world.

## 5. More sustainable and equitable learning futures also requires decolonizing academic publishing

Finally, this special issue was conceived to challenge the logic of modernity/coloniality inherent in academic publishing in a more specific and systematic manner. Given that even some of the most critical scholarship runs the risk of reproducing colonial patterns and relationships (e.g., privileging contributions from English-speaking and/or Western-based academics rather than engaging with the plurality of knowledges beyond dominant languages and academic traditions), this special issue attempts to challenge knowledge colonialism by making the space for articles written in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. A commitment to multilingual publishing not only decenter English as the lingua franca in academic research but also subverts norms that govern dominant Anglophone academic publishing by bringing into dialogue colleagues writing across multiple languages and cultures. Furthermore, the journal's open access policy is in itself an important statement and a productive mechanism for making knowledge accessible to researchers, education practitioners, and the broader public, thus disrupting dominant value hierarchies and redefining relations in academia.

As noted before, this collective effort is not meant to offer a single decolonial understanding or a universal strategy for researchers in the field of comparative education to follow. Instead, we invite the readers to engage in a decolonial analysis and practice to disrupt – both collectively and individually – some of the key underlying assumptions and foundational structures of modernity/coloniality in our field. We seek to promote decolonial epistemological and ontological standpoints, recognizing the relevance of people, place, and the planet, as well as the importance of cultural change, while welcoming critical and creative scholarship in multiple languages (Fischman *et al.*, 2022). With this special issue and beyond, we recognize both the efforts of pointing to the shortcomings of traditional colonial perspectives in comparative education and also (and more importantly) articulating decolonial, antisexist, antiracist, and regenerative alternatives. We believe this is the right time to demand and support scholarly strategies that show the potential of *working within* and *outside* the existing education structures to radically reimagine – and ultimately transform – education for more sustainable and equitable global futures.

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