MULTIDIMENSIONAL ASPECTS OF LITERACY RESEARCH, THEORY, AND PRACTICE

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COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON LITERACY INSTRUCTION, EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH, AND KNOWLEDGE OF TEACHING*

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Having to give a presidential address is a daunting challenge. It has led me to reflect on what I believe and how I know what I think I know. It has led me to consider what has stimulated me to rethink issues and to see events in new ways. It has led me to examine how I maintain my conceptual bearings.

What of these intellectual meanderings is worth sharing? I have chosen to focus on how cross-national comparisons have dramatically challenged positions I had come to accept as given. This choice is not accidental. Those of us who have read some of my work know that I am preoccupied with how human interaction is influenced by organizational conditions. My favorite approach to understanding differences rests on naturally occurring contrastive cases that lay bare the inner workings of a process. With my bent of mind, it should be expected that I find cross-national comparisons to be enormously intriguing.

Interest in cross-national comparisons is not new to the field of reading. I think of William S. Gray's pioneering international survey for UNESCO (1956) which included cross-national evidence on eye movements during reading. John Downing's 1973 volume provides a comprehensive consideration of comparative reading. Annotated bibliographies by Eve Malmquist (1982) and Norman Stahl and his students (Rasnak & others, 1989) provide more recent overviews of this vast literature. During the past several decades, more systematic cross-national comparisons have been undertaken, including the IEA studies (Thorndike, 1973; Purves, 1989) and the work by Stevenson and colleagues (Stevenson & Lee, 1990; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992).

I believe that my own interest in cross-national comparisons began when I studied at the University of Edinburgh. During the previous year when I attended a small American college, I had taken about 10 courses during the year. At Edinburgh, I learned that I would take only 3 courses for the entire year. This struck me as curious, but it was not until about midyear that I realized the significance of the change in the way the curriculum was conceptualized and offered. For the first time in my life, I had the time to read and think from different perspectives on the topics I had decided to pursue in depth. For the first time in my life, I realized the excitement of learning. I am quite sure that if I had not had this experience I would not have gone on to graduate school. So this started me thinking about cross-national differences in schooling,

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and how rather minor changes in the ways the work is structured can have major implications for learning.

I remember as a doctoral student hearing Sheldon White speak about his attempts to understand the changes children make during the ages 5 to 7. In his exploration, he turned to the anthropological records in a variety of cultures. By examining the activities of children, he began to distinguish what was common to all cultures and thus might be maturationally based from what was variable with social and cultural roots. He referred to this activity as "butterfly collecting," the identification of intriguing examples caused him to think anew.

So, in a sense, what I want to do is to share with you some "butterflies"—cross-national examples of literacy-related practices that have had the power to challenge my thinking. In these analyses, I focus on cross-cultural comparisons as a way of coming to terms with forms of practice and knowing here in the United States. To dredge up a familiar phrase, too often we are like the fish who are last to discover water. Knowing about other cultures and their practices lays a basis for better understanding our ways of doing things and the assumptions that underlie them.

I will explore three "butterflies" in some detail. The first pertains to the organization of literacy instruction in Japan and in the United States. The second considers Reading Recovery and its adaptations to other cultural contexts. The final example concerns the tendency of American teachers, as contrasted to teachers in other nations, to adhere closely to textbooks for their curriculum. Then in the final section of this address, I will reflect on the implications from these examples for my thinking about instruction, assessment, and teachers education. Because of the many changes that are occurring in educational systems around the world, some of the generalizations I will make are in the process of being changed; yet, I believe that the main lines of my argument are true.

Instructional Organization: The Case of Japan

I have been particularly interested in how children in different nations are organized during the first stages of reading instruction. The typical American pattern has been to organize young children into groups based on their learning progress during the beginning stages of reading and to pace the instruction of the groups differentially. A common variation on this basic pattern has been to individualize the instruction of all children in a class, but again with the more proficient reading more and more challenging materials.

This tendency to group children on the basis of their reading achievement has also been common in most other Western nations. But a "butterfly" does exist. Japan represents a major exception in this pervasive tendency to group young students on the basis of their ability or to individualize their instruction (Cummings, 1980; Rohlen, 1983). Early literacy instruction, as well as instruction in other subjects in Japan, is designed for the whole class (Rohlen, 1983; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). So my question is: How does literacy instruction in Japan work?

The educational system is highly centralized with the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture prescribing the curricula, certifying textbooks to be used nationwide and designating the pace to be followed (Gerbert, 1993). Indeed, unauthorized

materials are strictly forbidden (Gunderson, personal communication, November 22, 1993). That is, all children at a particular grade across Japan experience the same curriculum at approximately the same time. The classes are large, with an average of 30 to 42 students, and instructional periods are long, usually 40 or 45 minutes in elementary schools (Stevenson, 1991; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; White, 1987).

In first grade, the textbooks contain about nine stories and six expositions and in second grade, about seven stories and four expositions (Mason, Anderson, Omura, Uchida, & Imai, 1989). In comparison, American basal readers include two to three times the number of selections, each with two to three times the number of words (Gerbert, 1993). As Elaine Gerbert in her analysis of Japanese readers explains, "In contrast to the current American emphasis on exposing children to the challenging complexities of life, Japanese elementary kokugo textbooks present the world as a safe, predictable place, a secure, protected environment where man and nature interact harmoniously" (Gerbert, 1993, p. 157).

How instruction for all members of a fairly large class is accomplished is intriguing. Instruction proceeds at a very slow pace, with treatment of new concepts in depth so that all children have an opportunity to understand and learn. Jana Mason and her colleagues (1989) describe the Japanese reading lesson "as a kaleidoscope of activities" (p. 399). They found that a set of about 24 activities occurred in the majority of lessons they observed. These include "teacher reads aloud," "class reads aloud in unison," "individual students read aloud," "teacher evaluates quality of oral reading," "class evaluates quality of individual oral reading," "class writes answers to teacher questions," "class responds in unison to teacher questions," "individual students justify answers to questions by presenting reasons or by quoting text," "free small-group discussion," "individual students act out scene from story," and "class sings" (Mason et al., 1989, p. 399). They observed that activities seldom lasted more than a few minutes, and that they tended to recur, often in cycles. The attention of children was maintained fairly well for the 40-minute period. Individual seatwork assignments were rare, and when they were given, they were of short duration with the teacher walking around the room checking the work.

Mason and her colleagues refer to this style of instruction as "deep reading." Historical traditions underpin the rereading of selections as stated in the old Japanese saying: "Read it again and again and you will realize its meaning" (Mason et al., 1989, p. 401). And the preferred route to comprehension is oral reading; rarely does silent reading occur. Japanese teachers describe "deep reading" as "becoming sensitive to the nuances in slightly different forms of expressions, understanding the feelings of characters at a subtle level, appreciating the social or historical context in which stories are placed, learning to read between the lines, capturing the writer's motif, having personal reactions to stories, and connecting stories to one's inner, subjective world" (Mason et al., 1989, p. 403). This is very different from the reading instruction most first and second graders receive in the United States. Moreover, and most striking, there are neither local nor national standardized reading tests given at the elementary or secondary levels (Gunderson, personal communication, November 22, 1993).

Harold Stevenson and his colleagues also note the extended and highly interactive nature of literacy and mathematics instruction in Japan (Stevenson, Lee, Stigler,

Kitumura, Kimura, & Kato, 1988; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; Stigler & Stevenson, 1991). They characterize lessons as coherent units, with beginnings, middles, and endings, that in total focus on single problems or themes. Similarly, Merry White (1987) describes teachers as repeating lessons as often as necessary, always in step-by-step fashion; children are not expected to grasp new principles or methods thoroughly at first. But children were often observed to come up with the point of a lesson before the teacher had verbally stated it (White, 1987). Surprisingly, given this thoughtful, slowly paced instruction, the reading achievement of Japanese children has been found to be similar to that of American children (Stevenson & Lee, 1990; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992).

Yet Japanese education is not perfect, the system changes drastically when children enter middle and high schools. The early whole-class instruction in elementary schools is followed by instruction in secondary schools—schools that are differentiated from each other on the basis of academic performance (Rohlen, 1983). Entrance exams before university become the source of considerable anxiety to adolescents since their performance on these exams has a strong bearing on the type of university students attend, which in turn influences the prestige of subsequent employment. Factual learning seems to be the key to doing well on the entrance exam; thus, preparation for the exam shapes instruction in the middle grades and high schools. Therefore, we see in Japan two different models: one of early schooling emphasizing values of cooperation and searching for understanding, followed by a second model that is geared to learning facts for the university entrance exam.

I want to focus on the first model. How shall we understand the highly engaging Japanese instruction that leads to learning comparable to that of American children (Stevenson & Lee, 1990)? I consider four explanations; there are probably more. These are the homogeneity of the population, the early experiences of the children, the nature of the orthography, and the education of teachers.

Homogeneity of the population. First, the relative homogeneity of students in Japan may make it easier for Japanese teachers to provide total class instruction and for children to learn. Japan's population is culturally, racially, ethnically, and linguistically homogeneous; Koreans, the one significant minority, make up less than a half percent of the total population (Rohlen, 1983). The variation among American students in reading achievement is greater than that of Japan when we consider the nation as a whole. Nevertheless, the variation among students in individual American schools is similar to that in Japanese schools (Stigler & Stevenson, 1991). Because of socioeconomic class differences in American neighborhoods, the variation in individual schools is narrower than that of the nation as a whole. Thus, American elementary school teachers teach classes that are similar in variation to those in Japan

But more than this reality is the perception of Japanese teachers of student equality. Even when differences exist, teachers are influenced by the Confucian belief in human malleability and are thus predisposed to consider all children as equal in their potential to learn, with the related assumption that effort rather than innate ability accounts for achievement (Stevenson & Lee, 1990; White, 1987). The latter is illustrated by James Stigler's comparison of Japanese and American fourth graders who were asked to solve a math problem for which there was no solution (Seal, 1993).

Japanese students kept working until they finally had to be told that the problem could not be solved; in contrast, American students when unable to solve the problem immediately gave up. Stigler interprets the difference in persistence as reflecting underlying cultural belief in the efficacy of work versus ability. It is clear that the Japanese as a nation believe that all children have the ability to learn and believe that effort accounts for differences in achievement. In contrast, we in the United States believe in the importance of ability and see it as a major determinant of learning.

Earlier experiences of children. Second, and more important, the preparation that children receive prior to first-grade instruction may underlie the effectiveness of the early reading program. In Japan, education is highly valued. Mothers perceive their role as supporting the education of their children and tend to depart from the workforce during their childbearing years (Brinton, 1988). Because education is highly valued, most Japanese children attend preschool and kindergarten (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989). Lois Peak (1991) documents the difficult transition that children make from the indulgence and loose discipline of the home to become obedient and cooperative students in the preschools; she attributes the success of the transition to the skill of the preschool teachers. The Japanese parents she interviewed identified "cooperation and being a member of the group" as the most important thing for children to learn in preschool; in contrast, US parents selected "self-confidence and self-reliance."

Most Japanese children come into first grade able to read *hiragana* and many can write it. Yet, studies of preschools show that academic learning is not emphasized. Instead, much of this preparation may occur in the home. Mason and her colleagues (1989) report that Japanese parents purchase an average of 10 picture books and 22 magazines each year for their children between the ages of 3 to 5. This material includes an abundance of *hiragana* that relate to children's interests. In sum, the early literacy experiences that mothers provide with commercial materials and the social preparation of preschool and kindergarten may prepare children for the formal reading instruction they receive.

Nature of the orthography. A third explanation concerns the nature of the orthography. As most of us know, Japanese children learn to read three orthographies. Two of these, *hiragana* and *katakana,* are syllabaries based on different orthographies; the third, *kanji,* consists of a nearly unlimited set of Chinese characters. The first reading books in Japanese schools are written in the 71 *hiragana* characters, but 76 *kanji* characters are also introduced during first grade. A fourth consisting of the English alphabet is also learned for scientific notation, titles, and signs.

Some evidence exists showing that it is easier to learn to read syllabic than alphabetic orthographies (Gleitman & Rozin, 1977). At the same time, the sheer number of different orthographies to be leaned by Japanese children represents an enormous undertaking. Thus, it is difficult to conclude that the ease or burden of the orthographies accounts for the nature of early literacy instruction in Japan.

Education of teachers. A final condition that may account for differences in instruction and learning pertains to teacher education. My first hunch was that teachers learned how to structure interactive forms of instruction during their teacher prepara-

tion. I reasoned that because of the nationally determined common curricula, teacher education was geared to the development and refinement of lessons. But to the contrary, the descriptions I read of teacher education reported a more general conceptual emphasis, with relatively little attention to methods and practice teaching.

Instead, the Japanese view graduates of teacher education programs as novices who need the guidance and support of their more experienced colleagues on the job. This continuing form of professional development can occur because teachers in Japan are in charge of classes about 60% of the time each day, even though the student-teacher ratio is about the same in the two nations. The nonteaching time is realized in three ways: children with special needs are instructed within the regular class, Japanese teachers teach classes that are considerably larger, and they are in schools about 2 hours more each day than are American teachers (Stigler & Stevenson, 1991).

Japanese teachers have their desks in a large common room where they correct papers, work on lesson plans together, discuss the success of lessons, and consider how they can be improved. The national curriculum provides a common focus for this dialog among teachers. Because the lessons are typically organized around a single compelling problem, much time is devoted to developing and sharing questions that stimulate thought. Unlike the United States, where continuing professional development is often tied to further graduate school education, in Japan most professional development occurs within schools and there are few graduate school opportunities for advancement.

Summary. This detailed consideration of Japanese first-grade instruction reveals the extent to which instructional practices are embedded in societal beliefs concerning the importance of cooperative behavior and effort, and how they are supported by the family, earlier schooling, and national goals. Based on this understanding, we should become cautious about importing instructional practice from one nation to another.

At the same time, understanding the complexity of another system, another way of thinking about education, provides a platform from which we can view our own schooling practices. From this vantage point, I worry most about our preoccupation with ability as the basis for learning and the haste with which we mark our children as learners and nonlearners. Our first-grade instructional programs are harsh in comparison with those experienced by Japanese children. Our methods of teacher development fail to offer the same degree of support that is realized through the Japanese system.

Reading Recovery in New Zealand and in the United States

I now turn to a different comparative case, one involving the adaptation of a program developed in one country into the social and cultural contexts of other nations. It involves Reading Recovery, an early literacy intervention program developed in New Zealand. Most of us are familiar with the program. A child, usually from the lowest quintile of a grade, participates tutorially in reading and writing activities with a Reading Recovery teacher for a half hour daily. The purpose of the program is to help children develop a balanced and self-sustaining set of reading strategies.

I have recently reread the research literature on Reading Recovery and an intriguing finding appeared to me that I had overlooked before. In New Zealand, selected children participate in about 30 tutorial sessions, on average, before they are discontinued. Clay reported an average of about 28 lessons in her 1978 field trial research (1985, Table 1, p. 88).

In the Columbus Ohio pilot study beginning in 1984 (Huck & Pinnell, 1986), 30 lessons were established as the criterion for counting children as having participated in Reading Recovery. Yet, it turned out that the average number of lessons for children to be brought up to the average of their classmates was 60.7 for the pilot cohort. Indeed, the following year the criterion for having participated in Reading Recovery was set at 60 sessions (Pinnell, Huck, & DeFord, 1986). In years since then, 60 lessons tends to be about the average number received. This occurs in spite of the fact that American children receive Reading Recovery in addition to classroom instruction, whereas New Zealand students receive it instead of classroom instruction.

So here we have a very intriguing butterfly. In one national context children require about half the number of lessons to recover literacy than in another. Beyond the cost considerations implied, we are led to think about national differences in literacy instruction. Several factors may account for the relative ease in "recovering" children in New Zealand in comparison with the United States. I will consider five of these: the homogeneity of the population, cultural support for literacy, literacy instruction prior to Reading Recovery, the match between classroom instruction and Reading Recovery, and the relative difficulty of first-grade instruction in the two nations. The first two seem to be general societal conditions, whereas the latter may take us some distance in understanding the specific mechanisms through which cultural conditions work.

The homogeneity of the population. Similar to Japan, the population of New Zealand is much more homogeneous than that of the United States. Yet, minority groups such as the Maori and the Pacific Islanders do add to the cultural diversity of the population (Cazden, 1990; Clay, 1985). It seems logical that it would be harder to bring a child up to the average of his peers in a highly diverse classroom than in a more homogeneous one. Yet, as I mentioned before, studies of American classrooms show that classrooms in any particular school tend to be much more homogeneous than the population at large. Since the standard for discontinuation from the Reading Recovery program applies within each neighborhood school, it is not clear that the greater heterogeneity of the American population accounts for the greater number of lessons.

Cultural support for literacy. Cultural differences, however, may be at work. New Zealand, similar to Japan, is a society in which literacy is highly valued. Reading achievement and volume have been reported to be higher and more homogeneous in New Zealand than in the United States (Guthrie, 1981; Purves, 1989). Educational policy-making and curricular planning are centralized at the national level, although some efforts toward decentralization are underway. Perhaps a major sign of the commitment of the society to education is the establishment of Reading Recovery as a nationwide program. These values may become manifest in familiar support for literacy. At the same time, schooling factors may be at work.

Literacy instruction prior to Reading Recovery. The time of school entry may have a bearing. Children in New Zealand enter school on a staggered basis as they turn 5 years of age, and they begin reading and writing upon entry. They participate in the classroom literacy program for a year before being selected for Reading Recovery. In the United States, all children of an age cohort enter school at the same time in the fall; some who just make the cut-off time may be almost a year younger than some of their classmates. Whether children participate in literacy activities depends on the focus of the kindergarten program, and whether children attend. The decision to begin Reading Recovery at the beginning of first grade has the effect of offering some children tutorial support before they have received much classroom instruction. Tutorial instruction without the prior foundation of literacy may result in more tutorial sessions being required in the United States.

The match of the classroom program with Reading Recovery. Another possible explanation involves the degree of consistency between Reading Recovery support and instruction in classrooms. The Reading Recovery program was designed to be compatible with the nature of ordinary instruction in New Zealand (Clay, 1985; Goldenberg, 1991). In contrast, it is often at odds with the philosophy and reading instruction of American teachers. Even in schools where teachers have moved toward a more holistic philosophy of language instruction, the continuing preoccupation with assessment often results in contradictory signals being given to teachers. In sum, there are potential tensions between classroom and tutorial instruction in the United States that are minimized in New Zealand. Marie Clay (1987) identifies differences between the philosophy of Reading Recovery and instructional programs in American schools to be a problem. She writes, "They [American teachers] were teaching by basal reader procedures in their classrooms and by Reading Recovery procedures in the intervention and the two approaches could be expected to be in conflict." But would these differences be sufficient to double the needed tutorial intervention in the United States?

The relative difficulty of first-grade instruction. A final consideration is the difficulty of reading instruction. During the years between 1968 and 1980, basal programs in the United States increased substantially in difficulty, both in the number of stories included, the length of stories, and the number of new words introduced (Barr, 1989). Although most seem to have decreased somewhat in difficulty during the past decade, they are still extremely demanding. Given the goal of bringing children participating in Reading Recovery up to the average of their class, this would be harder if first graders were reading from a more demanding program than from a less demanding one. Thus, another hypothesis we might entertain is that Reading Recovery participants in the United States require more tutorial sessions because the American standard for classroom achievement in first grades is higher.

Summary. Transporting educational practice from one national context into another represents a remarkable achievement. This comparative analysis suggests how conditions of American schooling and literacy instruction have shaped the Reading Recovery program in the United States. Through it we see more clearly how such conditions as the policy on school entrance, the nature and difficulty of literacy programs, and the support for literacy within a culture may influence the shape of an intervention program brought into American society.

Considering this analysis and the description of Japanese instruction, I am struck by how much we in the United States expect of our first graders. In many ways the basal programs and the achievement tests that are compatible with them set a very high standard for what is viewed as "normal."

In the cases of Reading Recovery and Japanese instruction, we have focused mainly on the instruction and learning of children. We turn now to a more focused consideration of the instruction teachers provide and their own education.

The Instruction of Teachers and Their Education

Cross-national comparisons show striking contrasts among the teachers of different nations in their use of textbooks. American teachers have been notable in their degree of adherence to textbooks. Indeed, observational studies in the area of literacy suggest that for many American teachers, the basal readers and guidebooks become the curriculum (Anderson, 1984; Barr & Sadow, 1989; Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 1993; Durkin, 1984, finds use of basal readers, but limited instruction). In most other nations, a curriculum is specified and textbooks are sometimes prescribed, but teachers go beyond the textbook to devise the activities that form the curriculum. This was seen clearly in the case of Japanese instruction. Similarly, teachers in Great Britain (Downing, 1970) and New Zealand (Goldenberg, 1991) have been observed to provide instruction that is more child-centered and less textbook driven than that observed for teachers in the United States.

It may be suggested that this tendency is really a thing of the past. In the past few years, some districts have used the power they have to develop districtwide literacy programs, and some have encouraged individual teachers to develop their own literacy programs—a practice that has been common in private schools, but rarer in public ones. Yet, not all teachers wish to assume the responsibility entailed (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 1993; Goldstein, 1978; Prawat, 1993) and the majority of local districts continue to define their literacy curricula through the basal reading program(s) they select.

Why do many American teachers tend to adhere closely to textbooks? I will explore two explanations. The first concerns the influence of the textbook industry and the second the organization of teacher education. Other explanations, such as the value that a society places on education and the respect it gives to teachers, are also undoubtedly at work. My reason for focusing on these two is because they directly involve our lives as literacy researchers and teachers.

Reading textbook series. Reading researchers are intimately involved in the development and marketing of literacy programs. Because of this, textbook series acquire an authority they might not otherwise have. The quality of the materials is probably improved through their advice. In comparative terms, this degree of cooperation between the research community and the publishing industry is unique. Moreover, the amount of guidance provided to teachers through the manuals accompanying the textbooks is unparalleled. That is, many textbooks selected for classrooms in

other nations tend to be anthologies with few suggested activities, less guidance for teachers, and fewer ancillary materials.

Patrick Shannon (1989) in his book, *Broken Promises*, examines the dominating influence of basal readers in American reading instruction. District administrators and teachers, particularly those who have reservations about their own expertise, are reassured by the authorship of the basal series. In addition, basal series, coupled with assessments, promise administrators a way to assure instructional quality and monitor the work of teachers. The commercial interests of publishers and the needs of district administrators combine, then, to insure the continuation of textbook-based reading instruction.

Shannon (1989) argues that reading instruction based on such programs is inadequate and that teachers are "deskilled" through the process. Because many curricular and instructional decisions have been made in the guidebook, teachers miss opportunities to reflect on their practice and to build their knowledge about teaching. In a cyclical way, current practice tends to limit the knowledge of teachers, which in turn perpetuates the perceived need for basal prescriptions to compensate for the limited knowledge.

Teacher education. Limited teacher knowledge and confidence may well be part of the problem. If they are, they also reflect back on the quality and brevity of teacher preparation programs. I suggest that the historical evolution of teacher education in the United States has resulted in two developments that erode the knowledge, confidence, and authority of teachers. The first is the development of a two-class system in the universities that is mirrored by the arrangements in schools where administrators control the work of teachers. The second is an educational research community that is more familiar, until very recently, with issues of concern to administrators and specialists than to teachers, and their development of research knowledge that reflects this bias.

The story of teacher education in the United States is an interesting one. Jurgen Herbst (1989), in his book, *And Sadly Teach*, traces the education and professionalization of teachers in American culture. The first normal schools, founded in Massachusetts in the 1830s were modelled after Prussian seminaries. Differences between the two nations help to explain the unique character of the American system. In Europe, school teaching was valued as a desirable lifetime career; in the United States, teaching careers were short: for young men, they were seen as educational paths toward professional or occupational advancement; for young women, as interim employment prior to marriage. In Europe male teachers predominated; the opposite was true in the United States: between 1840 to 1860 the proportion of female teachers in Massachusetts rose from 62% to 78%, with a reciprocal decline in male teachers.

Although some normal schools, such as that in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, continued to train both primary and secondary teachers and administrators, several conditions led to a second model. Given the short careers of most teachers and the degree to which many were underprepared, a two-tiered solution developed: elementary school teachers, mainly women, were assigned to short-term city training schools, whereas secondary school teachers, administrators, and specialists attended the normal schools. These two models and other variations spread across the nation state by state. The two-tiered solution of earlier days foreshadowed later solutions in teacher education,

namely the education of teachers in normal schools and undergraduate programs and the training of administrators and specialists in graduate programs. As normal schools were incorporated into the state university systems, preservice teachers were usually taught by a group of faculty members different from the graduate faculty who teach specialists and the administrators.

The status distinctions developed through the university system have carried over to the schools where it is assumed that administrators and specialists, including those in reading, are prepared to guide and monitor the work of teachers. The recent preoccupation with assessment is simply an upward extension of administrative forms of control to state and national levels.

But our own educational research community has also been marked by the company most of us keep. Few of us who are graduate faculty members have been directly involved until recently in the education of preservice teachers and in the ongoing professional development of practicing teachers. Our research and our knowledge revolves around issues that arise mainly from our work with reading specialists. We used this knowledge in our teaching, our authoring of basal series and college text books, and our inservice activities. We may have evolved a specialized system of educational knowledge that is cut off from the roots of contextualized, classroom knowledge.

With greater collaboration between educational researchers and teachers, we are learning more about the teaching of reading and writing in classrooms. We are seeing the development of teachers through peer support groups, in writing and whole language. These communities support the reflective activities of teachers and their development of knowledge about teaching practice. There are, then, many recent changes that support the development of teacher knowledge, confidence, and authority.

Yet, at the same time, I suggest that organizational forces may work against such developments. I have explored two here: the seductive quality of basal programs and the differences between teachers, on the one hand, and supervisors and administrators, on the other, in their knowledge and authority—developed in the universities and are carried over to the schools. The forces at work that I have described are structural and they are, I believe, entrenched. They constitute conditions that may well be at odds with the goal of teachers and teacher educators to develop knowledge about teaching collaboratively.

These structural characteristics differ from nation to nation. As we have seen, the teacher education system in Japan is quite different from that of the United States. Some detailed case studies exist for a few nations. In most existing comparative analyses, however, descriptions tend to be impressionistic and differences between countries are not delineated (Schwille, 1991). I look forward to the next decade or two when more detailed descriptions are developed that address such issues as the education of teachers versus administrators, the treatment of curriculum and instruction, and the nature of programs in which teachers participate. Comparative perspectives enable us to discern the institutionalized biases of our own systems and to envision alternatives. Yet, as we have found through the International Educational Assessment (IEA) studies, cross-national comparisons are complex with many potential problems to overcome (Spalding, 1989; Westbury, 1989).

Summary and Implications

One can see from this discussion that I am intrigued by comparative analyses and their possibilities. I am well aware of their butterfly-like quality—beautiful, complex, and illusive. But the comparisons help us see how the values and institutions of a society shape educational processes. Japanese first-grade instruction depends on the prior home and schooling experiences of its students and reflects societal valuing of cooperation, equity, and effort. The slow pace of total-class instruction , the support of highly interactive instruction, and the content of the nationally sanctioned curriculum are the mechanisms through which cultural values work. Teachers learn to teach in this way through the support and guidance they receive from more experienced teachers in schools.

From a detailed analysis of the workings of Reading Recovery in the United States, we can see how the organization of our educational system and its curriculum shape innovative programs brought from other countries. We see how limited preparation of students and the demand of first-grade programs may lead to the need for an increased number of Reading Recovery lessons in the United States. Finally, from the third case, we see how teacher knowledge and authority are shaped by societal institutions, such as the publishing industry and the organization of higher education.

Because of the complexity inherent in making such comparisons, the practical implications do not follow in any direct fashion. The value of comparative analyses lies in their ability to make us more aware of some of the forces operating in our society to shape the character of American education. It is nearly impossible to understand how the nature of interactional events are shaped by values and institutions if we look at these events only within a single nation. Cross-national comparisons bring into sharper relief some characteristics of American society—for example, its assumptions about ability, its valuing of individual achievement, its status distinctions between teachers and administrators, and its trust in textbooks.

Still, I will suggest some implications in three areas. The first has to do with instruction. It seems to me, that we in the United States use instruction to maximize individual differences. We do not use early education to homogenize the experiences of our children. Unlike Japan and France, where early education is subsidized and where almost all children attend, fewer of our children participate. Moreover, when formal instruction begins, we expect children to progress rapidly. This results in our able children learning more and our less prepared children learning less than their counterparts in nations such as Japan. Our system is effective in developing the talents of individuals as indicated by our large number of Nobel prize winners. But we also need to consider the costs.

A second area in which we might draw implications pertains to assessment. The educational system of Japan offers a striking contrast. The early education of children, established on the basis of desired goals, supports the development of cooperation and reflective problem solving. Later, however, preparation for university entrance exams changes the character of instruction to that of transmitting information that may be tested.

In the United States our instruction is already driven by assessment concerns. The easiest way to increase the average is to accelerate the progress of children who learn most easily. Teachers who are currently trying to change the quality of their

students' literacy experiences find themselves conflicted between the demands of increased test scores and quality literacy experiences. Higher scores are not necessarily better, and we need to have a firmer basis on which to establish our instructional goals.

Finally, with respect to teacher education, I am envious of the time that Japanese teachers have to reflect and dialog about their teaching. The development of teaching expertise comes from having time to reflect on practice and to share experiences. We in the United States have to set aside the myth that good teachers are born and begin, within schools, to provide the opportunities for rich collegial experiences that permit growth. I worry about the structural characteristics of our schools—limited time, required textbook coverage, and frequent assessment—that divert our attention away from the refinement of teaching craft.

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