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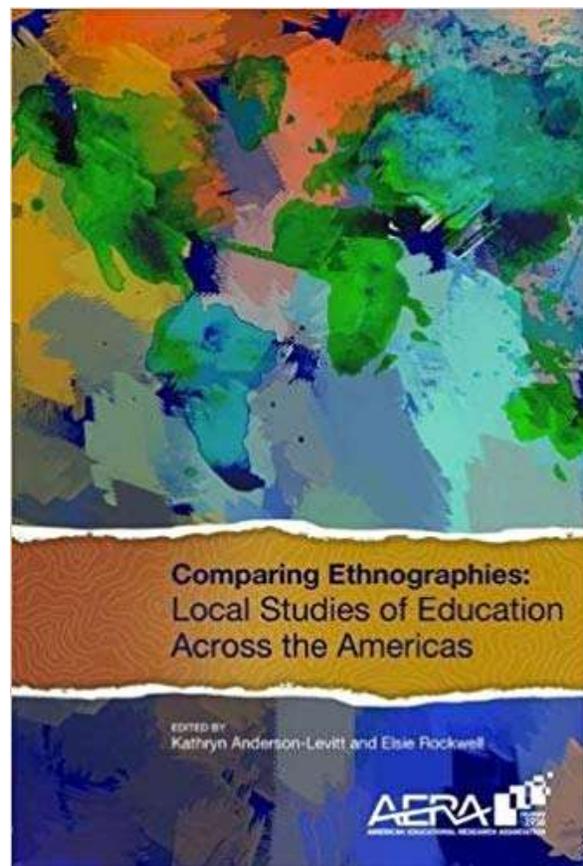
Anderson-Levitt, K., & Rockwell, E. (2017). *Comparing ethnographies: Local studies of education across the Americas*. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

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Reviewed by Sarah A. Robert
University of Buffalo SUNY
United States

I was eager to review Anderson-Levitt and Rockwell's edited compilation, *Comparing Ethnographies: Local Studies of Education Across the Americas*, because they are rock stars in my eyes. Renowned for sustained and thought-provoking ethnography of education in the Americas and beyond, the title suggested that their newest hit just dropped in a hard-copied format. The compilation is based on a multi-year collaboration of ethnographers located in different nations from Argentina to the United States "with the goal of furthering discussions on the need for and value of constructing a comparative perspective based on ethnographic and qualitative studies of education in and beyond the schoolroom" (p. 1). Beginning with an overview of the collaboration, the editors reassured me that indeed this was a worthwhile, engaging read. I am an ethnographer of education policy, based in the United States. My work focuses on the gendered dimensions of policy in relation to textbooks, school food, and teaching work in Argentina, the United States, and on a global level. I did not intend to find content for



doctoral courses I taught or for advising master's and doctoral students learning about qualitative research and embarking on collaborative transnational careers, but I did.

I also learned more about a biennial conference that spawned this collaboration. *Comparing Ethnographies* raises awareness of the 25-year-old Inter-American Symposium on Ethnography and Education and hopefully brings attention to the Symposium, ensuring that it continues to flourish and grow. As I write this review, the U.S. federal government continues to engage with southern neighbors not necessarily in new ways but in ways that reflect a rekindling of U.S. colonial hegemony, militarization, and *othering*. The compilation and the Symposium disseminate timely knowledge for U.S.-based researchers who wish to swim against a rising tide of isolationism, threatened imperial incursions, and national socialism. Now more than ever, U.S.-based scholars should work with colleagues around the world, breaking down walls rather than hiding behind them. Readers are provided an example of how that might be done.

Transnational Collaboration as Structure

Although I dove into the pages eager for comparative knowledge from the hemisphere, particularly of teachers' work (Robert, 2017; Robert, Pitzer, & Muñoz García, 2017), the major contribution of this edited volume is the extensive elaboration of how to engage in collaboration and comparative research. Anderson-Levitt and Rockwell have raised the bar for ethnographers of education and qualitative education researchers, generally, who are concerned with thinking beyond constrained boundaries on any given topic. U.S.-based scholars should walk away with the urgency, at least an itch, to engage with colleagues based outside the United States to learn about and from them the topics on which their expertise rests. Parochialism is challenging to overcome but can and should

be in order to expand what is known about education.

Studying the "other" as well as with her/him/them is undertaken on a historical trajectory rife with power differentials. Decades ago when I arrived in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to begin fieldwork on gender representations in Argentine high school history textbooks (Robert, 2001), Profesora Catalina Wainerman stated, as she is apt to do, without mincing a word: "I hope you are not here to rediscover the Americas. Columbus already did that." Her words were all the starker because our communication up until that moment had been in *Castellano*. She chose to level this warning in her perfect British-accented English for impact. I then set off under her tutelage to construct an archive of official Argentine history textbooks spanning the last 50 years of the 20th century and to make sure my study stood on the shoulders of Argentine giants who had already examined the topic (Romero, 2004; Wainerman & Heredia, 1999). *Comparing Ethnographies* details the predicaments and challenges inherent in cross-border research and collaboration – from time and financial constraints, to language, and to different preparation for and induction into the profession.

Readers can and should turn to the volume for guidance on transnational collaborations. The book begins with an introduction to theirs, followed by four content chapters, a commentary on methodology, and an epilogue. All the chapters are transnationally authored. The content chapters compare ethnographic literature on four different topics: indigenous peoples in and out of school, indigenous education policies, education of transnational migrant populations, and teachers' work. Table 1 below is a visual representation of the participants, nations, and topics.

CHAPTER	AUTHOR	NATIONAL LOCATION	RESEARCH TOPIC
1	Elsie Rockwell (Editor)	Mexico	Introduction
	Kathryn Anderson-Levitt (Editor)	United States	
2	Patricia Ames	Peru	Indigenous Peoples In and Out of School
	Ana Maria R. Gomes	Brazil	
3	Aurolyn Luykx	United States	Indigenous Education
	Ana Padawer	Argentina	
4	Gabriela Novaro	Argentina	Transnational Migrants
	Lesley Bartlett	United States	
5	Kathryn Anderson-Levitt	United States	Teachers' Work
	Belmira Oliveira Bueno	Brazil	
6	Marta Sánchez	United States	Meta-ethnography
	George W. Noblit	United States	
7	Inés Dussel	Mexico	Epilogue

The collaborations unearthed diverging foci and conceptual frames even on the same topic. The challenges are great and begin with the question of where “borders between populations, and between regions and nations in an age of transnational flows and dominion are drawn” (p. 14). Juxtaposed terms emerged and required the authors to sort through categories that may be used in Latin America but not in the United States such as diversity versus cultural difference or social justice versus injustice related to human rights violations. “In Latin America, anthropologists rarely write about social justice, but they take the existence of social injustice as evident and problematic, arguing for equal access to democratic, public, free, and good quality schooling for all” (p. 18). As differences emerged and the categories needed to be sorted out, authors were confronted with the

question of whether it is possible to compare across such differences.

The comparisons of ethnographies are not systematic or comprehensive literature reviews. The authors and editors do not make the claim nor encourage such an effort, and this is commendable for the inherent pitfalls of capturing and examining all that exists on the topics, especially across national contexts and languages. Readers should not pick up the volume to be deeply immersed in the literature on the four topics. Instead the reader can rely on learning about teachers’ work in different national contexts, rather than a synthesis of (allegedly) everything written about the topic in those national contexts. Sufficient attention is paid to the contexts in which the studies were produced, the ways that ethnographers are prepared for the field, research constraints, as well as overviews of exemplar studies and themes across them. Context and the

conditions that shape the four issues are vital to understanding the topics.

At times the co-authors allude to tensions and challenges in undertaking the project. Perhaps it is a weakness that the challenges and tensions are alluded to rather than explicitly confronted (beyond a longer-than-necessary discussion of the word subject/*sujeito*). As I embark on a collaborative transnational teaching venture as a State University of New York Teaching Partner with a Venezuelan colleague, I would benefit from more concrete examples of the challenges and tensions. Still there are other reasons why researchers, graduate students, and transnational practitioners of education (e.g., policy makers, think tank and NGO professionals) should pick up this book, which I outline below.

What Is Ethnography?

In most of the chapters the authors conceptualize ethnography as methodology and practice. This begins in the introduction where Rockwell and Anderson-Levitt pose questions and provide responses to simple but not simplistic questions. One question they tackle is: What is ethnography? Ethnography has different meanings and is practiced differently within education research in the Western Hemisphere. It has a history—particularly when applied outside of a researcher’s imagined communities (Anderson, 2016) – that is more often than not a history completely absent from U.S.-based education research programs preparing U.S.-based and U.S.-focused education researchers. Sadly, and quite mistakenly, like so many other trending terms in education research, ethnography is tossed around and written into dissertations and publications with no historical or methodological grounding. Thus, the term lacks depth and rigor, and actually, explanation, when it appears as such in a text. Instead, ethnography serves as ahistorical stand-in for sloppy at best and nonexistent at worst qualitative methodology. This is a

dangerous undertaking as so-called ethnography is increasingly practiced by U.S. researchers examining the education of minoritized and marginalized populations within U.S. borders. Ethnography is more than the pat line in an introduction that is cut and pasted over and over again “ethnographic methods of x, y, z were used to collect data.”

Ethnography as methodology and its practice is not limited to the introduction. The authors of all but one chapter (Chapter 7) articulate guidelines and principles for reading ethnographies within the nation they live and hold research positions. The methodological discussion is a reward for readers regardless of experience and orientation. Furthermore, the methodological knowledge conveyed is a sure contribution to courses on qualitative research within education, anthropology, and qualitative sociology.

Meta-ethnography: A Methodology for Literature Reviews

An aim of the transnational collaboration was to explore methodological approaches to literature reviews of ethnographies. Page after page, the what and the how of such an undertaking (Introduction-Chapter 6) is impressed upon the reader. I was intrigued by the creativity that the contributors breathed into what is too often treated – if treated at all – as a mundane and structure-less process of producing a review of literature when literature reviews can and should be about learning from scholars outside of Northern and Western metropolises (Robert & Yu, 2018).

I read the book during the summer of 2018 and outlined my review during the fall 2018. (Apologies to *Education Review* editors and the volume’s editors!) However instead of finishing the review, prior to spring 2019, I returned to the book to select chapters to create a lesson for a doctoral seminar titled, *Critical Interpretations of Research*. The seminar’s dual purpose is to facilitate learning both “how to” conduct a literature review and to learn about the politics of knowledge,

knowledge production, and epistemology. Together, doctoral students and I will critically read (Ridley, 2010) several chapters to deepen our knowledge of methodology of and for literature reviews of transnational literature, of ethnographies (a specific methodology), and of teachers' work (a specific topic). The vast majority of my students will conduct research in the United States on topics tightly focused on a teaching-learning nexus and will not design or engage in an ethnography. *Comparing Ethnographies* provides an opportunity to read beyond comfort zones and to make the familiar (e.g., literature reviews and ethnography) strange. More importantly, it makes a link between methodology for literature reviews and the methodologies of the research documented in the literature review, a unique contribution to publications about the art of the literature review.

Methodological rigor should not be set aside, even in the development of the methodology itself. The authors apply this mantra to their task and further complicate it by collaborating across transnational spaces. Take for example dialogue about Bourdieu's theories, which are so often foundational to anthropologists' research design. Some of the authors in the volume read the original in French, while others read the English or Spanish versions. The translations relied upon may be rigorous interpretations. However, the discussions that ensued and produced chapters are then the product of the translations and their interpretations. These translations and interpretations are applied to understanding lived experience in the Americas. There is a need to be cautious and thoughtful about the movement of theories and methodologies, and this is carefully attended to in the volume.

Challenges and the Overall Take Away

With so much content covered, the reader is obliged to slow down to absorb, to read deeply, not because of the overall quality of writing but rather the density of the knowledge. (I suspect this to be true even if

the reader is not reading to prepare a book review.) There are many rewards to reading *Comparing Ethnographies*. Overall, the volume offers a lot to and for different configurations of readers. This could be misconstrued as a weakness of the volume – so much is attempted in one volume and preparing the review took extra effort because the review task is to convey a reasoned and thorough evaluation of the book. I recommend the reader focus their reading on one of four learning goals: transnational collaborations; ethnography as methodology and practice; methodological approaches to literature reviews; or one of the four topics: knowledge of indigenous peoples in and out of school, indigenous education policies, education of transnational migrant populations, and teachers' work. Then return to the volume three other times with a different goal.

Conclusion

Edited volumes are a dime a dozen, with many produced each year. However, Anderson-Levitt and Rockwell went beyond flipping a conference panel to publication or binding friends' essays together that so often seems to be the underlying rationale for an edited compilation. *Comparing Ethnographies* is evidence of how the authors practice what they implore of readers, to "break the bounds of thinkable thoughts" in education research. No book produced in at least the last five years could approach the level of contributions made in this volume.

Each chapter holds the readers hand as they cross boundaries to learn about the historically significant and trending topics of education of indigenous populations; indigenous education policies, migrant education, and teachers' work. Transnationalism as both intra- and international border crossing is delineated as chapters are co-authored by Argentine, Brazilian, Mexican, Peruvian, and United States researchers. I, like Dussel, welcomed this as uncharted territory.

There are multiple reasons to read from cover to cover: to learn about one of the four topics examined; to learn how to critically interpret ethnographic literature; to contemplate how to build on any of the components of the project. As Dussel states in her epilogue, “There is a need for guides that do not simplify these worlds as touristic highlights but inform more complex and sensitive approaches” (p. 192) and build space for conversation about research and about the Americas.

As a scholar who has zigzagged back and forth across the Americas during her educational and professional journey, I was eager to read what promised to be a deep analysis of ethnography from the region. Reading the results of the project offered much-needed historical, legal-political,

educational, and national perspectives. Far too infrequently, educational researchers do not feel what it is like when the familiar becomes strange. That may seem nonsensical: we are, after all, experts because we develop a deep and wide familiarity with a topic or education phenomenon. However, it is in that strangeness and discomfort that our intellectual inquiry can expand and perhaps grow; it is from this discomfort that we might break the bounds of thinkable thoughts as Anderson-Levitt and Rockwell guide us toward doing. It is from this beginning that we might participate more conscientiously in the bumpy and difficult “intellectual and concrete journey” (p. 188) that is required to not remake or rediscover the Americas or reproduce a coloniality of knowledge but rather to share struggles as co-learners concerned about public education.

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About the Reviewer

Sarah A. Robert is an associate professor of learning and instruction and the director of the Social Studies Education Program at the University of Buffalo (SUNY). Her research topics include education policy, international education, ethnography, and gender, culture, and equity in education. She recently edited (with H. L. Pitzer and A. L. Muñoz García) *Neoliberalism, Gender, and Education Work* (Routledge, 2018).



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