

SPECIAL ISSUE
The Future of Education Research Journals

education policy analysis
archives

A peer-reviewed, independent,
open access, multilingual journal



Arizona State University

Volume 22 Number 27

May 5th, 2014

ISSN 1068-2341

Significance: U.S. Blind Spots in Judging Research

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Citation: Anderson-Levitt, K. M. (2014). Significance: U. S. Blind Spots in Judging Research. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 22(27). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v22n27.2014>

This article is part of EPAA/AAPE's Special Issue on *The Future of Education Research Journals*, Guest Edited by Dr. David Post.

Abstract: Opening U.S. educational publishing to the rest of the world promises fresh perspectives and new solutions—but not if U.S.-based editors, reviewers and readers fail to recognize the significance of research conducted outside the United States. This essay explores why U.S.-based reviewers easily miss the social importance and the intellectual interest of research conducted elsewhere, and points to several steps they can take to improve their appreciation of the full global range of educational scholarship.

Keywords: Academic Discourse Communities; Educational Research; English for Academic Purposes; Faculty Publishing; Globalization; Intercultural Communication; Peer Evaluation; Writing for Publication

Relevancia: Los puntos ciegos en los EE.UU. para evaluar investigación educativa

Resumen: Abrir las publicaciones académicas de los EE.UU en educación para el resto del mundo promete nuevas perspectivas y nuevas soluciones, pero no si los editores, revisores y lectores con sede en EE.UU., no reconocen la importancia de la investigación llevada a cabo fuera de los Estados Unidos. Este ensayo explora por qué revisores que residen en Estados Unidos pierden fácilmente de vista la importancia social y el interés

Journal website: <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/>
Facebook: /EPAAA
Twitter: @epaa_aape

Manuscript received: 6/11/2013
Revisions received: 10/15/2013
Accepted: 11/10/2013

intelectual de la investigación llevada a cabo en otros lugares, y señala varios pasos que pueden tomar para mejorar su apreciación del rango mundial llena de beca educativa.

Palabras clave: comunidades discursivas académicas; investigación Educativa; Inglés para fines académicos; publicaciones académicas; globalización; comunicación intercultural; evaluación por pares; escritura académica.

Relevância: pontos cegos em os EUA para a avaliação da pesquisa educativa

Resumo: Abrir os periódicos acadêmicos nos EUA em educação para o resto do mundo promete novas perspectivas e novas soluções, mas não se os editores, avaliadores e leitores com sede nos EUA, não reconhecem a importância da pesquisa realizada fora dos Estados EUA. Este ensaio explora porque os avaliadores que residem nos Estados Unidos facilmente perder de vista a importância social e interesse intelectual da investigação levada a cabo fora dos EUA, e aponta várias medidas que podem tomar para melhorar a sua apreciação de toda a gama de prêmio de educação global .

Palavras-chave: comunidades discursivas acadêmicas; pesquisa educacional, Inglês para fins acadêmicos; publicações acadêmicas; globalização; comunicação intercultural; avaliação pelos pares; escrita acadêmica.

Introduction

“It is as if San Diego and Dover are the ends of the world that counts” (Larsson, 2006, p. 190).

The World Educational Research Association (<http://www.weraonline.org/>), established in 2009, holds promise for rich, multilingual, variegated ways of framing educational problems with equally diverse practical solutions and theoretical tools. However, in the current context of unequal access to “international” journals, the effort could, ironically, lead in the opposite direction, that is, to research yet more narrowly filtered by the interests of English speakers and particularly by U.S.-based editors, reviewers and readers. This essay will illustrate how that filtering works. It does so by examining, within the context of much broader debates on power and equity, one of the barriers faced by non-U.S. authors who seek to publish in U.S. journals, namely, judgments about the “significance” of their manuscripts.¹

My analysis draws on the scholarly literature, but also on my own experiences as a U.S.-born editor of U.S.-based journals who has struggled with recognizing the value of unfamiliar work. I was editor of *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* (AEQ) from 1994 to 2000, when about 15 percent of its authors came from outside the United States. Recently, I became one of the seven co-editors of *Comparative Education Review*, where over half the articles are authored by scholars from outside the United States (Post, 2009).

¹ By “U.S. journals” I mean peer-reviewed periodicals whose editors usually come from U.S. universities, whatever the location of the publisher. By “non-U.S. scholars” I mean scholars who work in institutions outside the United States, excluding U.S.-born and educated expatriates. There are actually many degrees of “inside” and “outside” so that, for example, scholars who received doctoral education in the United States but now work outside it have some insider knowledge, while non-native English speakers who were educated elsewhere but now work inside the United States may face linguistic challenges.

Within the Larger Context, One Barrier to Access

Access to U.S. journals is one piece of a much larger set of inequities in academic publishing, where countries with well-funded research establishments dominate, where English has become the main language of social science and its native speakers the gatekeepers (Ammon, 2010), where measures of “impact” increasingly impinge on scholars, and where U.S. and U.K. journals are over-represented in indices measuring “impact” (Gingras & Mosbah-Natanson, 2010). Another piece of the larger issue is book publishing, where the rate of translation from other languages into English is stunningly low, resulting in a huge academic blind spot for monolingual English speakers (Heilbron, 1999, p. 439; Sapiro, 2008). Within this larger framework, I focus here specifically on access by non-U.S. scholars to U.S. journals, and I address not linguistic barriers per se but rather national barriers that can affect even native English speakers.

Non-U.S. scholars seek to publish in U.S. journals for at least two good reasons. First, they simply seek to reach a wider audience with their research. In addition, many are responding to pressure to publish in “high impact” journals, which happen to cluster in the United States (e.g., Larsson, 2006, p. 192; Lillis & Curry, 2010; Uzuner, 2008). Not everyone accepts the measurement mania that feeds the latter pressure (e.g., Willinsky, 2006), but it is real; for example, evaluation guides for tenure and promotion from Spain, Hungary, and Slovakia give extra weight to “journals with impact factor,” referring to Thomson Reuters’ Science Citation Index (Lillis & Curry, 2010, pp. 50-56). As noted, the majority of “journals with impact factor” are published in the United States; thus, of the 113 education journals used by Thomson Reuters’ Social Science Citation Index, 61 originated in the United States, 37 in the United Kingdom, and 15 in other countries as of 2007 (Peters 2009, pp. 243-4).

However, non-U.S. authors who decide to publish in U.S. journals face multiple obstacles. Those from less affluent countries face economic barriers, including very limited access to international books and journals and lack of research funding (Canagarajah, 2006; Mweru, 2010). In addition, non-native speakers of English face the linguistic challenges of writing in an English (or of paying for a translation) that is standard enough and clear enough to be accepted by reviewers (e.g., Uzuner, 1995). Barriers also include the rhetorical structures expected by U.S. readers, which even authors who are relatively fluent in English must struggle to learn (Bazerman, 1988; Flowerdew, 2008; Ollion, 2012, appendix).

The judgments that editors and reviewers make about the “significance” of a piece of research, the focus here, represent yet another obstacle. Questions about language will enter the discussion, but only obliquely. I will show that judgments about “significance” can make access difficult even for scholars from affluent nations and for native English speakers. In journals where many non-U.S. authors do gain access (as in *Comparative Education Review*, as noted above), I will show how judgments about significance may nonetheless shape and filter the content of what gets published.

Why Full Access Matters

A research system dominated by U.S. scholars might seem to have the advantage of easing the flow of communication by operating in a single language spoken by perhaps a billion people. However, as already suggested, such a system is inequitable. With the academic publishing organized into a periphery dependent on a center located “from San Diego to Dover,” as Steffan Larsson notes in the epigraph, decisions made at bibliographic databases like ERIC in Maryland can, again in Larsson’s words, “make my colleague’s research in Sweden invisible, even to other Swedes” (2006, p. 191).

Equity issues aside, U.S. scholars should also worry about barriers and filters for the sake of their (our) own scholarship. If research conducted in the United States were basically equivalent to scholarship done elsewhere, it would not matter to theory and practice who publishes from what parts of the world. However, social science is *not* the same everywhere (Heilbron, 2008). In fact, on a world scale, the United States “is probably one of the more unusual and least ‘representative’ societies in the world—and thus a particularly problematic case from which to build generalizing theory” (Szanton, 2004, p. 22; compare Merckx, Hayhoe et al., 2006). In addition, barriers and filters screen out the least familiar and hence potentially “newest” and most interesting scholarly insights (Lillis & Curry, 2010). Thus, a system shaped by U.S. scholars works against a worldwide interest in building the broadest possible pool of common knowledge and, ironically, works especially against the interests of monolingual U.S. scholars because they (we) suffer from the biggest academic blind spot.

Significance

As an editor, I told authors that the most important criterion for accepting a manuscript, assuming sound scholarship, was the significance of the work. I was not alone. For example, *Educational Researcher* seeks feature articles and reviews/essays “of broad significance” (“Manuscript submission,” <http://edr.sagepub.com/>), while the *American Educational Research Journal* publishes studies and analyses “that constitute significant contributions to the understanding and/or improvement of educational processes and outcomes” (“Manuscript submission,” <http://aer.sagepub.com/>). Recent *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* Reviewer Guidelines include among the criteria “significance of the topic for advancing the field of educational anthropology,” (*Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 2009) while the *Reading Research Quarterly* advises authors that it seeks “manuscripts that make significant contributions to advancing knowledge and understanding of reading and of literacy, broadly defined” (*Reading Research Quarterly*, no date). Similarly, a groundbreaking study of the peer review process for allocating grants in the social sciences and humanities found that significance was not only a formal criterion established by the granting agencies but also the criterion mentioned most often by the scholars doing the reviews (Lamont, 2009).

When we peer reviewers and editors assess the significance of a scholarly work, we make two kinds of judgments, one about “social/political” significance and one about “scholarly” significance (Lamont, 2009, p. 160). In the first case, we ask whether a work is what I will gloss as “important,” that is, whether it addresses the most pressing problems we need to face as members of society. In the second case, we ask whether a work is what I will call “interesting,” that is, whether the ideas it presents are stimulating or provocative, whether they “advance the field.” These are, of course, overlapping categories; a topic may be both important and interesting, or may be considered interesting precisely because it is important. However, because the context of judgments about what is important differs from the context shaping discussions of what is interesting, I distinguish these two dimensions here.

What Counts as Important

Reviewers favor studies addressing real and immediate social problems not only in applied fields like education but throughout the social sciences and humanities (Lamont, 2009, p. 172). However, norms for judging what counts as important problems often depend on nation- and region-specific social and political contexts, as illustrated by cross-national variation in the most popular research topics. For example, within anthropology of education, U.S. scholars focus on success and failure among racialized/ethnic and linguistic “minorities” (Delamont & Atkinson, 1995;

Jacquín, 2006). There are good reasons for the U.S. focus, including a history marked by conquest of indigenous peoples, enslavement of Africans, waves of immigration and persisting inequalities. However, seen from Mexico, the U.S. word “minority” does not make sense, because anthropologists there are concerned with equity for the *majority* of the school-aged population (Rockwell, 2002). Elsewhere, ethnographers are more likely to focus on social class, as in France, where legislation restricts attention to ethnicity (Raveaud & Draelants, 2011); in developing countries, external actors may drive the equity concerns, as when interests of the World Bank and USAID give gender equity more prominence as a topic in West Africa than it receives in the United States (Diallo, 2011). Moreover, not all ethnographers of education focus on inequity as the most pressing problem. In Nordic countries, in the context of the long history of welfare policies, many educational researchers organize their work around the notion of “proper childhoods” within public institutions (Anderson et al., 2011), while in Japan ethnographers have been concerned with school nonattendance and with teacher burnout (Minoura, 2011, p. 229).

Not only topic per se but the location of the study also affects judgments about its importance. Thus, a study of journal articles in the field of economics showed that the top five journals, two of which are U.K.-based and three U.S.-based, overwhelmingly favored studies focused on the United States (Das et al., 2009). The chance of acceptance for papers about India, China, and African nations or even about the United Kingdom was so much lower than the chance for a paper about the United States that deciding where to conduct one’s research might actually affect a researcher’s likelihood of gaining tenure, according to the analysts (Das et al., 2009). Lillis and Curry (2010) suggest an explanation for these findings, noting reviewers’ unstated assumption that the United States stands for the whole world, representing the “unmarked” or generic case, whereas other locations are “marked” or particular. In their study of the publishing experiences of European psychologists and educational researchers, they found that reviewers wrote comments like, “Why did the authors choose to study Hungarian students?” or “Please could they outline why Madrid was chosen as the place of study...” (Lillis & Curry, 2010, p. 142), the kinds of comments unlikely to come up about studies set in California or New York City.

In this context, well-meaning reviewers and editors may steer the literature to focus on problems that we, not the authors, see as important. Thus Lillis and Curry (2010) found that editors occasionally encouraged the authors of studies set elsewhere to develop an explicit comparison to U.S. literature so that the non-U.S. location, with its “difference” from the United States explicitly highlighted, could be used to confirm the presumably generic U.S. findings (pp. 145-7). I did this myself in advising non-U.S. authors submitting to the *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* how to get the attentions of U.S. reviewers and readers. Not surprisingly, anticipating that pressure, some non-U.S. scholars filter themselves, as illustrated by a seminar in Spain on how to publish in “journals with impact” in which the speaker advised colleagues to “change the topic” and “approach the topic from an international perspective” or else editors will make you revise to “present the study as dealing with a general issue” (Robinson-García, 2012: slides 25 and 48). Yet what counts as a “general issue” seen from an “international perspective” can turn out to mean issues as they are defined locally within the United States.

What Counts as Interesting

Even in an applied field, reviewers and editors consider not only the practical importance but also the scholarly interest of a work. Journals sometimes discuss this criterion as “contribution to the advancement of knowledge” (e.g., *Comparative Education Review*, “Instructions for authors,” <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/journals/journal/cer.html>), a notion closely aligned with judgments about a work’s “originality” (Lamont, 2009) and “novelty” (Lillis, Magyar, & Robinson-Pant, 2010).

Judgments about what is interesting or original develop in on-going “disciplinary conversations” (Bazerman, 1988, p.145), conversations in which we scholars engage when we present at conferences and comment on colleagues’ presentations, when we meet to evaluate applications for promotion or for grants, and when we chat about academic issues in university corridors. The conversations extend to written discourse when published in articles, chapters, books, or blogs. Within these conversations, certain terms come to take prominent roles; for example, terms like “pedagogical,” “readiness” and “outcomes” appear often in *Educational Researcher*, in contrast to terms like “metaphor,” “bricolage,” and “imbrication,” heard frequently at recent anthropology meetings. At the same time, scholars cite certain authors so frequently in disciplinary conversations that the authors come to form a canon. Over time, key terms and canonical authors come to serve as shorthand references to entire points of view so that, within the relevant discipline, one term like “Goffmanesque” or one reference to a name like Bourdieu evokes a broad theoretical scenario.

This is where linguistic barriers play a role, since linguistic competence constrains who participates in which conversations within what is ostensibly the same discipline. Scholars in many countries are multilingual, and within their local disciplinary discourse/speech community it may be the norm to communicate in two, three or more languages. In contrast, the social science disciplines in the United States operate as virtually monolingual, as can be demonstrated by our citation patterns (Gingras & Mosbah-Natanson, 2010; Hewings et al., 2012; Yitzhaki, 1998). This monolingualism, compounded by the low rate of book translation noted above, isolates U.S. readers from the conversations going on in other languages.

At the same time, linguistic competence is not the only constraint on disciplinary conversations. Citation patterns also reveal national and regional boundaries independent of linguistic borders (Yitzhaki, 1998). For example, U.S. ethnographers of education cite relatively little British ethnography of education (Delamont & Atkinson, 1995), while neither British nor U.S. scholars cite much from the large body of Scandinavian work published in English (Larsson, 2006), not to mention English-language research from India.

National boundaries develop in part because disciplines are organized differently from one country to another. Thus, Schriever and Keiner (1993) attribute the lack of mutual citation between leading German and French education journals not to linguistic barriers but rather to the fact that educational research is historical and hermeneutic in Germany but positivist in France. Even the names of disciplines and their scope vary significantly across nations; for example, the school-focused study of *éducation* in France does not correspond with the Danish interest in all things *pædagogik*, that is, the “moral, social and cultural formation” of persons across the lifespan (Anderson et al., 2011, p. 195), nor does an interest in “didactics” in continental Europe translate easily to the United States (Alexander, 2001).

Whether constrained by linguistic barriers or shaped by national differences, where distinct conversations take place within the same discipline or family of disciplines, distinct canons and concepts emerge. As a result, even in a country like France, which imports and translates much more foreign social science than does the United States (Sapiro, 2008), practitioners of a discipline like sociology remain relatively ignorant of the outline of sociology as practiced in the United States (Ollion, 2011). Meanwhile, a mere reference to Bernard Lahire in France speaks volumes to sociologists of education there, while drawing blanks from their U.S. counterparts, just as the canonical significance of a scholar like Florestan Fernandes in Brazil or of Ebuchi Kazuhiro in Japan escapes U.S. readers (Anderson-Levitt, 2011). Imagine, then, how easily the significance of a particular citation or of a particular term in a manuscript could escape a reviewer or editor from

outside that particular academic community. It is difficult to recognize how an argument “advances the field” when the field in question is not really the same as the reviewer’s field.

Moreover, even when a journal accepts a manuscript for publication, missing or misunderstanding the article’s significance has real effects on what is published. For example, reviewers, hoping to enhance a manuscript’s perceived significance, press authors to restrict their citations to English-language literature, thus rendering relevant literature published in other languages nearly invisible (Hewings et al., 2012; compare Canagarajah, 1996).

Now, one might argue that globalization of academic publishing will have the salutary effect of forcing us all to participate in a single, common disciplinary conversation within our particular subfield, developing consistent and clear norms for what counts as interesting research. Yet as long as scholars operate within different speech communities, map the larger disciplines in different ways within their national university systems, and encounter one another face-to-face more often in local and national meetings than in international meetings, then distinct canons and concepts will continue to develop in different locales. Under those circumstances, any sense of uniformity would be an illusion created by the filtering of manuscripts through the U.S.-dominated system.

Struggling to Translate both Importance and Interest: An Illustration

The case of an article by Yves Duterqc and Claudette Lafaye (2007) of France, which was published in the *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* (AEQ) some years after my editorship, illustrates how difficult it is to translate both social importance and disciplinary interest. I report on this case from the perspective of a formerly anonymous reviewer of their manuscript. In the piece, the authors described what happened when homeless families moved into an empty building in a Paris neighborhood, focusing on ensuing debates about whether the squatters’ children should be permitted to attend the public school located next door. Not surprisingly, the reviewers and editors coaxed the French authors to elaborate considerably on the social and political context to help U.S. readers grasp the importance of this case study. For example, reviewers drew out the information that the squatters were African immigrants, “race” being ever salient to U.S. readers while downplayed by French scholars.

Even as the importance became a bit clearer to U.S. readers, the intellectual interest of the manuscript remained hazy to them. Arguing that this case represented “the crisis of the French model of political representation,” the authors relied for their theoretical framework primarily on Luc Boltanski, especially Boltanski and Thévenot (1991). Although Boltanski and Thévenot’s volume had been translated recently into English, I assumed that it would be unfamiliar to most *AEQ* readers because it was unfamiliar to me, even though as a scholar who had worked in France I had read a modicum of French sociology of education. If I were struggling to grasp Boltanski’s notions and why they might matter to my own research questions, surely other *AEQ* readers would likewise have difficulty recognizing the study’s significance. Yet the study *must* be significant, I knew, since French sociologists had published a related article by Duterqc and Lafayette in the top journal *Revue Française de Sociologie*.

Wisely, the *AEQ* editors published the manuscript. It does indeed appear that few U.S. readers grasped its importance or interest, for a search on Google Scholar six years later reveals not a single citation of this piece by U.S. scholars, whereas the four other articles appearing in the same issue of *AEQ* have each been cited 11 to 25 times. Nonetheless, the editors’ decision to publish the manuscript has at least created the opportunity for some U.S. reader somewhere to discover how the French context for immigrants and racialized minorities differs from the U.S. context and to discover Boltanski and Thévenot’s theory of multiple “economies of worth.”

Changing the Current Practice

As the case of this article illustrates, we U.S. editors, reviewers, and readers can easily miss the significance of research conducted in other parts of the world for two reasons—because we are unfamiliar with the social and historical context that makes the problems studied important, and because we do not participate in the linguistically and nationally bounded conversations that define the author’s questions as interesting. As a result, unless we change our practice, we will continue to publish supposedly “international” journals that actually conform to the sensibilities of a parochial U.S.-based social science. How ironic it would be, given our desire for interesting, “new” and “original” ideas, to keep screening out the arguments that least fit within our current paradigms and therefore ought to be seen as the most novel (Lillis & Curry, 2010, p. 167). And how limiting, when addressing the most important problems, to continue to let our vision be hemmed in by our local assumptions about the way schooling has to work or about how students learn. What new solutions to our pressing problems would we find if we reconceived inequity as a problem for the majority of the world’s children, as in Mexico, or paid more attention to the creation of “good childhoods” in classroom communities, as in Denmark?

To address the larger problem of U.S. and English-language dominance and the distortions created by the obsession with indexes measuring “impact,” scholars and policy makers around the world are taking a number of actions. Many are developing open access repositories and journals, such as the *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, which can dramatically expand access to and citation of scholarly work (Willinsky, 2006, pp. 29-30). Universities and national resource centers have developed alternative indices like Latindex (www.latindex.org), the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO, www.scielo.org), and the Red de Revistas Científicas de América Latina y el Caribe, España y Portugal (RedALyC, www.redalyc.org), while some scholars are contesting or reworking the concept of “impact” (Fischman, Alperin & Willinsky 2010). As part of the larger efforts, U.S. scholars can make use of indexes beyond Web of Knowledge and Scopus when called on to review colleagues, and can take advantage of open source peer-reviewed research, while giving it its due.

Steps for U.S. Editors

However, as those larger efforts work to change academic publishing over the long run, what can and should U.S.-based scholars do right now to ease access of non-U.S. authors into U.S. journals? Editors can take several steps, and some have done so already. Some have increased the presence of non-U.S. scholars on review boards with the idea that such scholars can function as cultural brokers, interpreting to editors the importance and interest of manuscripts submitted from their discourse communities. The success of such efforts will depend on how actively the cultural brokers intervene and how willing the editor is to take their advice.

Much more pro-actively, editors can choose to educate authors about the expectations of “international” journals, as do editors of the British educational journal *Compare*. In *Compare*’s program, “inside experts” mentor experienced scholars from the global South on “the specific disciplinary conversations that the journal wants to encourage” (Lillis, Magyar, & Robinson-Pant, 2010, p. 785). At the same time, facilitators of the program recognize the paradox in trying to “challenge dominant practices” even while helping writers “meet the expectations of the *Compare* reviewers” (p. 79). The editors of the *Croatian Medical Journal* have taken on a similar task of educating authors pre-review (Mišak, Marušić, & Marušić, 2005), but these editors also address the larger inequities by committing to publish research from developing countries on topics that “would

have been deemed too specific to the country to be of interest and importance to the mainstream journal audience” (2005, p. 124).

Editors of U.S. journals could take a more radical step away from the filtering built into U.S.-based reviews by occasionally accepting (and translating, if necessary) manuscripts that have already been reviewed and highly rated in the author’s home country.² Ideally, editors or other cultural brokers would frame externally reviewed articles with introductions providing a broader context to help U.S. readers appreciate their significance.

Steps for U.S. Readers and Reviewers

As reviewers, instead of asking how a manuscript is relevant to the United States, we can and should ask how it frames the larger issues and shows how those issues play out in the locality of the study. Instead of asking for citations in English, we can seek to understand what is argued in the literature cited in other languages.

However, to reasonably interpret larger issues and citations in other languages, as reviewers and as readers we need to seek broader contextual knowledge. To contextualize, we must become wider readers. Journal editors can help with the task of broadening readers’ horizons, as *Comparative Education Review* does by publishing an annual bibliography of (English-language) articles in the field, and as the French journal *Education Comparée* does by publishing the tables of contents of other relevant journals, French- and English-language, in every issue. However, U.S. readers can also take action on our own. Readers can sign up for free table of content alerts from many parts of the world—for example, from French-language journals like *Education et Sociétés* at portals like Cairn (<http://www.cairn.info/>) and like the Centre for Open Electronic publishing (<http://www.revues.org/>), or from Spanish journals at the government-sponsored Repositorio Español de Ciencia y Tecnología (<http://recyt.fecyt.es/index.php/index/login>). To follow books on education, we can subscribe to the long-standing Spanish and Portuguese version of the open access electronic journal *Education Review/ Reseñas Educativas* (<http://www.edrev.info/>).

Readers restricted to English can glean real insights from these approaches, since abstracts in English are often available. However, to push beyond the literatures of the United Kingdom, anglo Canada, Australia, and India, U.S. readers should make the effort to read in languages other than English (and then to cite what they read in the original language as well as in English) (Hamel, 2007). By the same token, we should be rewarding multilingual colleagues and doctoral students for citing and for publishing in languages other than English. A next, albeit daunting, step would be to consider reinstating a foreign language-reading requirement in research-focused education doctorates.

Steps for Scholarly Organizations and Conferences

There are also steps that U.S.-based scholarly organizations can take. One is to support more translations of books, chapters, or articles from other languages into English. What U.S. readers may need even more than translations, though, are periodic state-of-the-art reports synthesizing research

² This is a solution suggested by journal editors from outside the United States in an open forum at the 2009 American Anthropological Association meeting. The International Political Science Association runs an entire journal, *World Political Science Review*, by publishing “translations of prize-winning articles nominated by prominent national political science associations and journals around the world” (<http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/wpsr>), but its system requires readers who deliberately seek out and pay for this transnational journal.

from other countries or regions on particular topics, to help reviewers contextualize individual manuscripts.

Paradoxical as it seems when open access on the web and electronic alerts are part of the solution, we also need to continue to encourage face-to-face meetings across national boundaries, and to make more room in such meetings for communication across languages. After all, scholars in rhetoric point out that making convincing arguments in the social sciences requires a great deal of “personal credibility” (Hyland, 2011, p. 203), and face-to-face interaction still offers the best opportunity to build trust in one another’s scholarship and interest in one another’s work.

Sometimes the solution can be as simple as inviting scholars to speak in their own languages, which we all do with more meaning-rich intonation and gestures than when haltingly reading a text in another language. This was a suggestion I first heard from Gustavo Fischman in a conversation at the 2009 meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society.³ Later, at the 2011 American Anthropological Association meeting, Patrick Boumard described small European conferences in which speakers managed to make themselves understood when addressing one another in French, Portuguese, Spanish and Italian. In September 2013, Elsie Rockwell of DIE-CINVESTAV, Mexico, and I had the chance to experiment with such a multilingual meeting format ourselves when we coordinated the 13th Inter-American Ethnography and Education Symposium (<http://conferences.gseis.ucla.edu/simposio>). Building on prior efforts of the Symposium organizers to encourage multilingual communication, we asked the 100 participants to speak in their native Spanish, Portuguese or English. Although participants hesitated to interrupt presenters to request brief interpretations from colleagues, as we had encouraged them to do, they did bring translated hand-outs or slides as we had requested. The illustrated bilingual slides in particular greatly facilitated mutual understanding.

Toward Multiple, Multilingual Conversations

The experience of the Inter-American Symposium also revealed that a large majority of the 50 participants who came from the United States and Canada felt competent to follow talks in Spanish. Granted, the focus of the conference on “majorities, minorities and migrations” in the Americas had attracted scholars more likely than average to be comfortable with Spanish as well as English. Nonetheless, this experience gives a glimmer of hope that the monolingualism of U.S. academia just might begin to give way to English-Spanish bilingualism in certain social science fields. And if more bilingual scholars in the United States mean there will be greater comfort with multilingual conferences and multilingual citations, there is a chance that U.S. readers, reviewers and editors will stop using such narrow lenses to judge the significance of other scholars’ writing. There is even a chance that we might actually bring to fruition the promise of the World Educational Research Association for rich, multilingual, and diverse ways of framing educational problems.

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³ I had not met Fischman before, but knew he had taken leadership on cross-linguistic communication in education by editing the Spanish and Portuguese version of *Education Reviews*; I learned later that he edits this journal, *EPAA*, in three languages and that he has published on open access publishing.

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Acknowledgements

Several anonymous reviewers have contributed to the shaping of this argument, greatly expanding my reading. Unfortunately, I have not managed to respond to all their suggestions, such as incorporating Spanish-language literature. Parts of the analysis developed here also appear in a manuscript submitted later to the *Asia Pacific Education Review*.

About the Guest Editor

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David Post is Senior Policy Analyst with the Global Monitoring Report of Education For All, and is currently based at UNESCO in Paris. He also is Professor of Comparative and International Education who is currently on leave from Penn State University in the USA. He has researched and published about educational stratification, about child labor issues, as well as the politics of educational mobilization. He also investigates the impact of concurrent employment on student academic achievement. He has been a visiting professor at the Colegio de México, at the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, and at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Finally, David served for ten years as editor of *Comparative Education Review*, where he became concerned about the commodification of scholarship and the possible responses to it by intellectuals, for example through peer-reviewed, open access publication of studies like those in this special issue. Last year, the EEPA printed the Spanish version of his commentary, "Los Rankings Académicos." <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/1347>

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Volume 22 Number 27 May 5th, 2014 ISSN 1068-2341



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