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Chapter 5

Entanglement and Transnationalism in the History of American Education

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This chapter discusses a number of ways that transnationalism has been approached in the history of American education and proposes that an "entangled history" approach can be usefully applied to thinking about transnational interactions in the historical development and operations of schools and school systems. It aims to contribute to the conversations within this edited volume by historically discussing education as an international field and proposing that we need to pay greater attention to the interpretive frameworks used in the history of American education. The chapter also elaborates on the claim that interpretive frameworks are not severable from the empirical, documentary "data" dimensions of archival research. Rather, the historian needs to be cognizant of and reflect upon the ways that method, objects of inquiry, narrative, and theoretical frameworks are unavoidably interlinked. The entangled history approach advanced in this chapter considers the assemblages and apparatuses that produce regularity, order, and forms of coordination over human social, political, cultural, and economic ways of living.

Tensions between methods and objects and between researchers and their categories of analysis are endemic to historical scholarship. In the history of education, these issues become particularly acute around the topic of international exchanges. When historians look at "transfers," "borrowings," "circulations," "crossings," and "exchanges" they stake out positions on how entities are discerned, what kinds of external positions are—or are not—available to researchers as well as how the "hybrid" and the "pure" are formed.¹

As an illustration of some of these issues, we can turn to a succinct (and critical) narration of the historiography of American education offered four decades ago by the noted US historian of education

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Lawrence Cremin. According to Cremin, the standard story of the development of educational institutions in the United States has been that

the colonists come from Europe bearing a variety of attitudes toward education; in general, backwardness reigns supreme, except in New England, where schools are early erected to confound that old deluder Satan. And these New England schools are destined to be the foundation upon which the American public education system is later erected. At the end of the eighteenth century, it becomes evident that European ways are not working and that the new nation will need a different kind of schooling to nurture and perpetuate its distinctive way of life. There follow diverse efforts to popularize learning, such as Sunday schools, infant schools, and Lancasterian schools, but none of these proves adequate to the needs of the emerging society. And so Horace Mann, Henry Barnard, John Pierce, and others launch a great crusade for public education, in which the forces of progress vie with the forces of reaction for more than a generation. By 1860, the conflict is won, except in the South, that is, where victory must await the regeneration led by northern philanthropists at the end of the nineteenth century. Thereafter, the story is that of the refinement, improvement, and extension of public schooling in response to the conditions of a democratic-industrial civilization. (Cremin 1970, p. x)

The point of mentioning this is not once more to underscore the truism that historians settle on their objects of inquiry and interpretive frameworks because of the circumstances and preoccupations of the times they live in (however accurate that may be). Rather, Cremin's accurate caricature—which might be said to still characterize certain textbook presentations of US educational history—helps us focus attention on the ways that notions about aboriginality, propriety, and rootedness are linked to ideas of progress and modernity, as well as to a notion of “society” as single domain, coextensive with a national territory and encompassing a population that is discrete and bounded, even if it is diverse and stratified at the same time. While, in the case of American educational history, there has recently been a scholarly interest in bringing global interchanges into the picture in more nuanced ways and in deprovincializing nation-state centered approaches, much of this work still operates from what can be characterized as a “transfer paradigm.” This chapter discusses the characteristics and shortfalls of “transfer” research and proposes that an “entangled history” approach can be usefully applied to thinking about intercultural exchanges in the history of education. It aims to contribute to

the conversations within this edited volume by historically discussing education as an international field and proposing that we need to pay greater attention to the interpretive frameworks used in the history of American education. The chapter also elaborates on the claim that interpretive frameworks are not severable from the empirical, documentary “data” dimensions of archival research. Rather, the historian needs to be cognizant of and reflect upon the ways that method, objects of inquiry, narrative, and theoretical frameworks are unavoidably interlinked. Far from being a limitation of our field of academic knowledge production, this is, in fact, a strength.

As Cremin's schema suggests, one way to contrast seventeenth-century Puritan New England schooling with the nineteenth-century Common School reform is to characterize the former as an improper, untenable “demi-indigenization” of European schooling models. In this view, the common school reform movement was more “properly” attuned to actual “new world” needs and circumstances (Tyack 1967, p. 5). To offer this interpretation, one need not treat the American Common School reforms as “endogenously” arising. High-profile reformers such as Calvin Stowe and Horace Mann undertook well-publicized European study tours. However, alternatively using a “transfer lense,” one could argue either that what they “borrowed” was adequately adapted, or that the foreign lesson/example was subsumed into the domestic reform discourse and functioned as a “legitimization” or “scandalization” strategy (to apply language proposed by the comparative education scholar Gita Steiner-Khamsi [2002]). A third alternative, of course, is to see Horace Mann taking inspiration from Prussia as the perverting of American democratic and egalitarian ideals (Gatto 2001). All of these alternatives move the intentions and actions of elite reformers into the foreground and these readings illuminate what Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann (2006) identify as the limitations of historical research on cross-cultural social, political, and cultural interactions that proceeds from a transfer paradigm. In the section below, I discuss those limitations in relation to scholarship on the history of American education. Then, in the subsequent section, I discuss ways that historians of education can (and are) reconceptualizing their work and drawing more on “entangled approaches” to studying transnational dimensions of the history of education.

Limitations of a Transfer Problematic

I will acknowledge that in beginning this chapter with Lawrence Cremin's caricature of US history of education scholarship I am in

part setting up a straw figure. Above I did venture that features of this interpretive paradigm still shade a considerable amount of scholarship produced in the United States. However, rather than engaging in an extensive critical review of that literature to document the enduring presence of the aforementioned transnational transfer narrative, I consider that it will be most productive to lay out the critique of a “transfer problematic” in more general terms. The aim would be that historians might use these points as they construct their own future studies and consider the ways they are articulating connections between their archival methods, conceptualizations, interpretive schema, and overall engagement with questions of representation and the production of historical texts.

One of the commonplace assumptions of transfer studies is that they tend to postulate fixed points of departure and arrival. This might well mean, for example, that the early nineteenth-century Monitorial Methods often associated with Joseph Lancaster and Andrew Bell are analyzed solely as departing from a coherent central point and arriving in different contexts as a pedagogic reform that is variously “received.” While this strategy can provide some profitable insights into how schooling changes over time, it risks obscuring the complexity of the connections and intercrossings that engender certain cultural forms and social patterns and not others. One thinks, for example, of the trend in colonial studies to depart from exclusive reliance on a mythical “centre-periphery dynamic,” and instead to find ways to better account for the multiple networks of relations, as well as the multidirectional nature of those relations (Gruzinski 2002; Steinmetz 2007; Stoler 2006).

First, transfer paradigms have particular difficulty recognizing and analyzing “crisscrossings”: the reciprocal, reversible, and multiple vectors of movement and exchange. While there may be certain instances where interrelationships are strictly bilateral, it is probably more often the case that educational exchanges and borrowings/circulations take place within dense webs of relationships. The multiplicity and complexity of the networks along which people and ideas travel, do not always lend themselves to bilateral analyses.

Second, related to the problem of assuming fixed points of departure and arrival and “bilateralism” is the diachronic lens that frames most transfer research—that is, the analysis of something that is conceptualized as a process that unfolds over time in steps that are concrete and absolutely discernible. In Anglo-American comparative education scholarship, the desire to model the departures and arrivals of educational transfers remains strong (Phillips and Ochs

2004; Rapplee 2006). Leaving aside questions of general theory in the social sciences, the rigid diachronic and fixed arrivals/departure frames of reference necessitated by a strict transfer paradigm do not perfectly serve historians’ general preferences for complex/complifying accounts, overdetermined explanations, and tentative conclusions (Sobe and Ness 2010).

A third major shortcoming of much transfer research is that the analytic categories used to study movement (e.g., “adaptation,” “translation,” “origin”) are frequently considered invariable. The historicity of these very concepts escapes analysis and there can be an ironic reinserution of national perspectives. In history of education scholarship in particular, the conceptual tools used to discern how something is “fit”/“fitted” to a particular setting represent a particularly egregious blind spot. That the notion of “adaptation” has potential social Darwinist implications seems clear enough, but perhaps more worth mentioning are the bodies of botanical, zoological, and medical knowledge that were created across the nineteenth century around questions of acclimatization. As Michael Osborne’s work (1994, 2000) shows, along with ethnography, the sciences of acclimatization were pivotal appendages of colonial and imperial projects, concerned, as they were, with how organisms could be successfully moved from one climate to another. This was all in the interest of optimizing the economic reorganization and social administration initiatives that were part and parcel of the colonial project. “Acclimatization thinking” has become an *idée fixe* in the field of comparative education in large part due to the relentless recycling of early English comparativist Michael Sadler’s 1902 injunction that education reformers not

wander at pleasure among the educational systems of the world, like a child strolling through a garden, and pick off a flower...and then expect that if we stick what we have gathered into the soil at home, we shall have a living plant. (Sadler 1964, p. 310)

Sadler’s is literally a “soil argument” strikingly in sync with the Cremin narrative with which I opened this chapter.

On the one hand, in “soil arguments” we are encountering the tradition in academic knowledge production of jointly coding physical and social spaces as deeply and fundamentally interlinked. Yet also important is that these physical and social spaces of human habitation are constructed as fundamentally different from other physical and social spaces of human habitation. On the other hand, physical space joined to a notion of historical process,² has historically

enabled Europeans from at least the seventeenth century onward to view themselves as “time travelers” whose voyages around the world enable them to observe different stages of civilizational progress. In connection with this, we can point to the nineteenth and early twentieth-century Euro-American tradition of theorizing “adaptations” in relation to the temporal category “primitive” as a descriptor of certain groups and their manners and mores. The self-privileging, tautological, and linear evolutionary trajectory that this inscribed is so familiar that it hardly bears mention, except that the pattern of positioning minority and marginalized groups in spaces that could be characterized by an absence of norms of civility and a need for “development” continues up through the present day (Popkewitz 1998).

As just noted, the concept of “adaptation” constructs both temporalities and spatialities. Once objects become thought of as discrete spaces (whether that be a “national economy,” a “school,” or “Cambodia”) administration and systems of coordination and control become possible. In recent years, there has been extensive scholarship on the ways that power relations are inscribed through visual apparatuses like maps, surveys, charts, and tables. This captures the importance of spatial thinking to government for rendering visible the acts, dispositions, and “being” of those who are its subjects and objects. Yet also of vital importance is what Nikolas Rose (1999) refers to as the ways that the “texture” of space has been understood or “modeled” in relation to government. Conceptualized as isotropic (everywhere the same), space lends itself to repetitive action, reproducible products, standardization, and uniformity (Poovey 1995). However, in modernity space has also been thought of as possessing thickness and depth. A notable example of this is the division that is sometimes supposed to separate human experiences from “underlying” laws and principles (Rose 1999; Foucault 1971). When space is conceptualized not as a smooth plane but as nonregular, with varying, uneven depths, principles of differentiation ensue. Some areas emerge as sites suited for liberal, democratic participatory politics; others emerge as more appropriately governed through force, authority and the inculturation of habit (Sobe and Fischer 2009).

If we fail to interrogate the historical categories that are used to study movement and locate them within particular genealogies, we run the risk of overlooking the ways that these very concepts serve as strategies of government. Robert Young’s work (1995) on the history of the concept of “hybridization” is a useful case in point. Counseling caution at the exuberant multicultural celebrations of hybridity found in the conceptualization of a multicultural, multiethnic United Kingdom in the

1990s, Young carefully explores the way hybridity served as a disarmingly similar master organizing concept within British colonial projects. He argues that the supposed nineteenth-century fixation on cultural “essentialism” has been overdrawn. Instead, sexualities and race were drawn into the complex systems of colonial governance and administration through cultural work around notions of hybridity. None of this means that “hybridity” is without any value as a conceptual tool to be employed in academic scholarship—the point instead is to emphasize that this analytic concept itself has a history and to counsel caution/critical awareness at the liberational valence with it is often skewed.

No doubt, concepts like “indigenization” and “localization” merit equal genealogical investigation. Ironically, then, despite their express sensitivity to and interest in the unique characteristics of different “contexts,” transfer studies are often weakened by a reluctance to historicize and destabilize their analytic categories.

Fourth, even though, in principle, transfer studies are designed to disrupt the insularity of nation-centric research by showing interconnections, interdependencies, and the permeability of borders, the result can actually be to reify and reinsert national references. The transfer paradigm, as we saw above in Cremin’s pithy account, can tautologically insert a national framing as if the demands of progress and advancement somehow require (in mythology, if not in practice) that a given educational system necessarily possess a unique and “national” character. Even if one considers ways that Lancastrianism was “imported” into the United States and gives credence to the importance it may have had in the general shift away from individual to group-instruction teaching strategies, the analytic gesture of “internationalizing” the historical narrative is considerably undermined when an educational practice or theory in circulation is viewed—as they often are—as encountering a “distinctive way of life” or the given “needs” of a particular “emerging society.”

Much of what has just been mentioned could fall under the general heading of what Wernier and Zimmermann term the “reflexivity deficit” that characterizes much transfer research (2006, p. 36). How widely contemporary history of education scholarship could also be accused of a “reflexivity deficit” will here remain an open question. However, I raise the above points because I understand that one objective of the present volume is to introduce more deliberate, considered attention to issues like those mentioned above. In the interest of trying to address the shortcomings of a transfer paradigm, I now move onto elaborating an “entangled histories” approach that seeks to put phenomena of interaction at the center of analysis.

Approaching Entangled Histories

Though the preceding section focused on critique and limitations of what I am referring to as the “transfer paradigm,” it is important to recognize that these approaches do expand in significant ways on narrowly conceived comparative strategies. As Werner and Zimmermann argue, comparison is a “synchronic logic” that must deal with historically constituted objects (2006, p. 35). Comparison requires the deployment of a whole series of mechanisms to fix and pause the flow of time so that a cross-sectional object can be stabilized and discerned—all to be balanced with the recognition that this analytic work takes place within this ongoing flow of time, a flow that is marked by transformations, continuities and discontinuities between possible pasts, presents, and futures. Transfer usefully focuses on temporally unfolding processes. Above I pointed to some limitations of the diachronic lens used in much transfer research, though the critique was directed at the notion that transfer processes unfold in sequential steps that are concrete and absolutely discernible. The challenge that we face as historians of education is to recognize the interaction between the historically constituted temporalities we study and the temporalities produced/imposed by the tools and methods we use to conduct these studies. This is a challenge equally faced by an entangled approach as much as it is faced by transfer and comparative approaches.

The title of this chapter invokes the concept of “transnationalism,” which I am using in a simple sense here as a descriptor of a scholarly interest in examining links or relations between various entities whether they be national, nonnational, or in some fundamental respect supranational.³ Transfer, comparison, and entanglement all seek to highlight these questions around linkages and relations (and, concomitantly, interpenetration and interpellation). Cremin’s pithy account places the US history of education within a transnational frame, though a problematic one as I have pointed out. An entangled history approach accommodates a transnational approach as it shares an interest in discussing the assemblage of multiple, heterogeneous, contingent elements.

Entangled history can refer to analyses of the tangling together of disparate actors, devices, discourses, and practices, with the recognition that this tangling is partly accomplished by said actors, devices, discourses, and practices and partly accomplished by the historian her/himself. The critical leverage of such an approach inheres in the attempt to develop situationally specific understandings of

why-this-and-not-that. Put in terms of subjectivity, this is to foreground the question of what makes people who they are and who they aren’t. In terms of sociocultural forms and dynamics, this foregrounds the contingency of the worlds we inhabit, constitute, and change through our actions.

An entangled history approach accesses concept of the “assemblage,” which is an as if antistructural structural concept that permits the researcher to speak of emergence, heterogeneity, the decentered, and the ephemeral in social life and social interactions that are nonetheless ordered and coordinated. As George Marcus and Erkan Saka have proposed,

Assemblage is thus a resource with which to address in analysis and writing the modernist problem of the heterogeneous within the ephemeral, while preserving some concept of the structural so embedded in the enterprise of social science research. Indeed, the term itself in its material referent invests easily in the image of structure, but is nonetheless elusive. The time-space in which assemblage is imagined is inherently unstable and infused with movement and change. Assemblage thus seems structural, an object with the materiality and stability of the classic metaphors of structure, but the intent in its aesthetic uses is precisely to undermine such ideas of structure. (2006, p. 102)

The contingency and constant shape-shifting of an assemblage does not, however, deemphasize the work that is involved in bringing and fusing together disparate elements to create something that informs, shapes, and is itself reshaped by human actions and forms of social organization. One thinks, for example, of Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory arguments, which emphasize the massive efforts it takes for connections to be made and networks to take shape.

In emphasizing the ways disparate elements are “caught up” with one another, entangled approaches shed light on what can be referred to in a Foucaultian idiom as concrete strategic situations. Foucault sought to investigate formations where it is possible to see relations, mechanisms, and “plays” of power (Agamben 2009, p. 6). One of the key concepts that Foucault began to use quite a bit in the late 1970s as he focused attention on the problem of governmentality was the idea of the apparatus (*dispositif*), which he referred to as the formations that play strategic functions at various historical moments. For Foucault (1980, pp. 194–196), the elements of an apparatus are “a thoroughly heterogeneous set consisting of discourses, institutions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical,

moral, and philanthropic propositions" and "the apparatus itself is the network that can be established between these elements." The apparatus for Foucault is akin to a device that produces something and he noted, "We are speaking about a certain manipulation of relations of forces, or a rational and concrete intervention in the relations of forces, either so as to develop them in a particular direction, or to block them, to stabilize them, and to utilize them." Important about the confluence and combinations of these various elements are the outcomes they produce in terms of governance, meaning what is made possible and what courses of action become thought of as "reasonable" to select among and what it considered outside the reasonable.

An entangled history approach considers the assemblages and apparatuses that produce regularity, order, and forms of coordination over human social, political, cultural, and economic ways of living. For historians of education, the question becomes what is assembled and enacted through schooling. Some of the contributors to this volume participated in an earlier project of Thomas Popkewitz which was to consider John Dewey in terms of his transnational travels (both literal and figurative) and I would propose that much of this work operated more from an entangled history than a transfer paradigm.

As an example to help think through how to operationalize some of the above points, I will briefly discuss a piece I wrote entitled "Balkanizing John Dewey" (Sobe 2005b) that sought to ascertain the multiple entanglements that brought John Dewey into contact with Yugoslavia in the interwar period. This involved an examination of other figures that crossed and "exchanged" ideas with Dewey as he circulated through interwar Yugoslavia as a conceptual persona. The project also involved extensive analyses of the Serbo-Croatian texts that introduced Dewey into the Yugoslav pedagogic literature. So, in place of a diachronic transfer paradigm that centers on the transit of some practice or theory from one context to another, my work attempted to show how multiple layers of analysis and an analytic eye deeply invested in the complexity of cultural formations help us understand the ways that Dewey and Yugoslavia became entangled in the 1920s and 1930s. And, rather than focus just on the precise point of intersection or moment of contact, I looked more broadly at the processes and interests at play as well as the other ideas and activities that were intertwined into these instances of crossing and exchange. My research began with the assumption that the Yugoslav Dewey would not be a simulacra of an American "original" but would be formed out of multiple sets of intercultural

exchange. This led me to ask questions about the "routes" by which Dewey "traveled" to Yugoslavia, whom he was allied with, and how "he" and "his" ideas were transformed by the objects and people he became entangled with.

Though Dewey never lectured in Yugoslavia, he entered into Yugoslav pedagogic discussions in some fascinating and surprising ways. Popkewitz suggests that we treat Dewey's writing as embodying "a particular set of concepts and ways of reasoning about the world and the self that is not merely that of Dewey." While there is considerable valence in how Dewey is "viewed" across the globe, it is also evident that Dewey did not function as an empty signifier to whom any meaning whatsoever could be attached. Popkewitz (2005) suggests that we view Dewey's work as embodying three principal cultural theses: (1) the notion that the individual is an agent of change with "responsibility for personal and collective progress"; (2) the practice of ordering and calculating time—chiefly writing the future into the present—for the purpose of enacting that agency; and (3) the recasting of science as a method of daily living, less for ascertaining truth than as a tool for enacting "plans of operation." Agency, the taming of change and science are not, in Popkewitz's schema, "variations of a single theme." Rather, they enter into different configurations—cultural configurations that both relate collective identities with individuality and draw in other knowledges and cultural practices to shape modernity and the "modern" self.

In coming to understand this particular entanglement, I found it helpful to spend a considerable amount of time "outside" of Yugoslavia. As I have argued in other publications (Sobe 2005a, 2005b 2006, 2008) in the interwar period, Czechoslovakia appeared as a critically important reference point in Yugoslav thinking about schooling and modernity. In this instance, it became extremely clear that the Yugoslav Dewey did not have a definite starting point in the United States. Rather, Yugoslavs drew him into their discussions and texts from a host of existing conversations—some in experimental pedagogy circles (e.g. the Geneva-based Édouard Claparède) and others centered around an ethnic nationalism that viewed German cultural influence as a dire threat. I attempted to situate my analysis in the circuits and networks of interaction by which Dewey crossed into Yugoslav thinking about the teacher, the student, and the social role of the school. This had me looking at "shelfmates," and it had me looking at "translations," less for the publishing history of Serbo-Croatian versions of works by John Dewey and with more of an interest in the prefatory material and schematics through which he was

brought to a Yugoslav readership. As noted, this meant that Dewey “came” to Yugoslavia through both Geneva and Czechoslovakia.

When I pay attention to what Yugoslavs were saying about Dewey, it is clear that they were very mindful of his “foreign” and “American” status but that they saw that the ideas and perspectives Dewey presented could be “spiritualized” by Slavs. Trying to grapple seriously with this notion of spiritualization and ascertain what was going on by way of enchantment and disenchantment was an attempt to avoid imposing an “acclimatization” model of indigenization and instead take seriously the concepts used at the time. A process of “spiritualization” was the concept that a number of Yugoslavs seem to have used to make sense of how Dewey could/would be changed in the “Slavic world.” In their own conceptualizations, the Slavic was a world of acting and thinking in which things “Yugoslav” had a certain but not an exclusively unique meaning and Dewey became entangled with this world around the issues of how individuality could be best related to collective identity, and what knowledges and practices could be drawn on to give distinct shape and reality to modernity and the fashioning of properly “modern” selves.

This example of an attempt to understand how, why, and to what effects Dewey circulated in interwar Yugoslavia is meant to illustrate some of the analytical strategies that can be drawn upon in an entangled history approach. The entangled history approach, I would submit, shows particular promise when it comes to grappling with the complexities of transnational elements and phenomena, particularly as the researcher seeks to articulate the linkages, connections, interactions, and, indeed, entanglements between different scalar levels.

To conclude, I would submit that the research challenge for historians of education seeking to bring an entangled approach to their scholarship is to ascertain what is in play in a given instance. In other words, it is to ask what assemblages of apparatuses constitute the mechanisms of control and the systems of coordination under which humans live and operate at particular moments. In doing this, we should recognize that there is no naturally pre-given definition of “the instant” or the particularity of what constitutes a “moment.” Instead, these are developed as the researcher interacts with his or her archival materials. All of this requires the active participation of an observer and a “to-and-fro movement between researcher and object” (Werner and Zimmerman 2006, p. 39). This also means that it is incumbent on us (1) to see transnational connections and relationships both where historical actors were aware of forming and/or being affected by them, such as might emerge from amid the dust and

papers of archival work, and (2) to probe transnational connections and relations where these are less “intentional” and less explicitly evident—where the historian’s recourse to broader theoretical and conceptualization issues necessarily comes into play. In the tangle idiom I am using here, this is to require historians to be cognizant that in tracing and describing entanglements they are also constructing their own entanglements.

Notes

1. This chapter draws on material published originally published in Portuguese in Noah W. Sobe, 2009. *Entrelaçamentos e troca cultural na História da Educação: mobilizando John Dewey no período entre guerras* [Entanglements and Intercultural Exchange in the History of Education: Mobilizing John Dewey in the Interwar Era]. *Revista Brasileira de História da Educação* 21: 12–37.
2. Sadler also furnishes an archetypal example of the linking of soil arguments with a conceptualization of historical change. Part of what buttresses his argument that educators cannot clip a practice from one place and “plant” it in another locale is his argument that “a national system of education is a living thing, the outcome of forgotten struggles and difficulties, and ‘of battles long ago’” (Sadler 1964, p. 310).
3. I am purposefully excluding from this chapter a discussion of how historians might conceptualize and deal with “transnational *entitizes*” whether we want to conceptualize those as “global grammars,” “global models,” or even “world-level patterns and forces.” For some thinking in these directions, see Sobe (2012, 2013).

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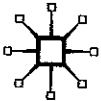
**Rethinking the History of
Education**

**Transnational Perspectives on Its
Questions, Methods, and Knowledge**

Edited by

Thomas S. Popkewitz

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