

# Cross-National Comparison of Provision and Outcomes for the Education of the Second Generation

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*This article introduces the special issue, which focuses on the ways in which educational institutions in Europe and North America are responding to the growing number of children of immigrants entering schools and universities. It discusses the ways in which the needs of children of immigrants differ from those of native-born students, and the ways in which variations in the structure of national education systems, and in policy and practice, may shape the pathways that children of immigrants take into the labor market, higher education, and their lives as citizens. The authors review existing research on this topic and highlight some of the difficulties involved in comparative studies. They close with an overview of the articles presented in the special issue.*

Europe, North America, and other economically advanced societies have received millions of international migrants since the 1950s and now face the important task of integrating not only the immigrants themselves but also their children. Of the institutional domains involved in this process, one of the most crucial is the educational system: More than half of the student body in many urban schools and postsecondary educational institutions in Europe and North America were born abroad or are children of immigrants, presenting new challenges to these systems as they seek to prepare young people for employment and citizenship.

This special issue considers the implications of this changing demography and the ways in which educational systems in Europe and North America are responding. It examines both the different approaches that countries are taking toward the integration of children of immigrants, and the more subtle ways in which general educational policies and the structure of education systems affect the trajectories that children of immigrants take into further education or the labor market and into their lives as citizens.

The issue focuses primarily on the children of immigrants, or the second generation, as they are often referred to.<sup>1</sup> This is because most first-generation immigrants arrive as adults and, with the exception of foreign students in higher education (many of whom return), they do not generally attend school in the host country. It is also because it is the experience of their children that gives the first clear indication of how well immigrants are being integrated into the economic, political, and social life of the host country.

A great deal of the research on immigrant integration focuses on the immigrants themselves, on the material resources and social and cultural capital that they bring with them, and their ability to use them to build new lives in the host country. Much less attention has been paid to the institutional arrangements they confront and the opportunity structure framed by these arrangements. But pathways and outcomes for immigrant groups depend crucially on the nature of educational policy and provision, the extent to which educational institutions constrain and maximize choice, and the ease with which they can be navigated. We recognize, of course, that the resources of immigrant groups and the agency of immigrant families are extremely important factors in shaping pathways and outcomes and that structural factors are not determining. Nonetheless, because the role of

institutions has generally been neglected and because research can be helpful in enabling policy makers and practitioners to respond to changing student demographics, we feel that a special issue with a focus on institutional questions is valuable.

Because so little research has been conducted on this topic, the articles in this special issue do not attempt to present a complete picture of what is, in many ways, as yet uncharted territory. Rather, they constitute an initial attempt to demonstrate the ways in which cross-national comparison can improve our knowledge of the role of educational institutions and policies in integrating immigrant youth; to identify important areas for future inquiry; and to raise some key questions with regard to the conceptual and methodological challenges particular to conducting international comparisons in the area of immigrant education.

## POSTWAR MIGRATION TO EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

The articles in this issue refer to five countries in Europe (Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, and the Netherlands) and two in North America (the United States and Canada). Although all are industrialized countries that now have substantial migrant populations, they have different experiences in terms of the timing, volume, and composition of migration flows. The obvious distinction is between the “New World” countries of the United States and Canada, which were built on migration, and the European countries, which have admitted large numbers of migrants from outside the region only in the postwar period. Although they have not been extensively explored, we would expect these differing histories to be reflected in policies toward the incorporation of children of immigrants through education.

In the postwar period, migration flows to Europe and North America have been shaped by the immigration policies adopted by governments in an effort—never entirely successful—to determine the type of people who cross their borders, and how long they stay and in what status. Where migrants to each country have come from has reflected connections dating from the colonial period and patterns of trade and investment, and also geographical proximity and transportation links.

Most important, countries have differed in the degree to which they have encouraged, and permitted, low-, medium-, and high-skilled labor. For example, whereas Canada has consciously sought to recruit the highly skilled, the United States has admitted migrants who include very highly skilled professionals with technological and engineering backgrounds, and many low-skilled workers, who enter both as the relatives of earlier immigrants and, in the case of many Mexicans, without documentation at all. In Europe, Germany and the Netherlands both recruited immigrants from Turkey and Morocco in the 1960s, mostly to work in factories, with the result that most immigrants have little education, whereas in Britain, a shortage of health care workers led to the recruitment of many nurses from the former British colonies in the West Indies and the emergence of a much more diverse immigrant population. The characteristics of immigrants to Europe have further diversified with the influx of refugees, including East Indians fleeing ethnic persecution, and those escaping famine, ethnic persecution, and political upheaval in Africa and, more recently, in the former Yugoslavia (for an overview, see Thomson & Crul, 2007). Yet more recent are the new flows of migration within Europe consequent to the enlargement of the European Union, bringing about significant labor mobility from the new countries of Europe to more prosperous countries such as the United Kingdom to meet certain skill shortages.

Nations also differ in their approach toward the integration of immigrants (Castles & Miller, 2003; Favell, 1999; Freeman, 2004), differences that are reflected not only in the criteria for admission—for example, whether chain migration through family reunification is possible—but also in the ease with which immigrants can apply for and receive permanent residence and citizenship status and in the rights and services available to them before they do so. Traditionally, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland have been the most difficult countries in which to get citizenship. France and (to a lesser extent) the Netherlands have fewer barriers for newcomers. The relationship between these differences in integration policy and educational provision for children of immigrants has not been

extensively explored, but an article by Fibbi, Lerch, and Wanner (2007) shows that having citizenship has a positive effect on educational attainment.

## EDUCATION, MOBILITY, AND CITIZENSHIP

Education is by no means the only determinant of intergenerational mobility. Many other factors, such as demographic change and shifts in occupational structure associated with new labor markets, are also involved. Generally, however, these structural aspects are less amenable to public policy manipulation than education; it is the susceptibility of education to influence by policy that gives it its significant role in social mobility. How different societies legislate for education and how their educational policies enshrine issues of equity and distributional justice therefore becomes a matter of profound importance in determining the different life chances of social groups.

The evidence that different education systems produce different outcomes for different groups of students is beginning to accumulate. Within the challenging realm of producing internationally comparable data, the annual education indicators published by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) in *Education at a Glance* provide basic evidence of key differences in educational systems—and key differences in attainment for students progressing through those systems. International surveys such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), and the Progress in International Reading Study (PIRLS) have a growing significance for the governments whose policies they report on, and they are becoming influential as policy drivers. In particular, the PISA survey, reporting on the mathematical and problem-solving attainment of 15-year-olds, has had a major influence on educational policy. In Germany, for example, the relatively “poor” PISA results were taken as an indication of lack of progress in reducing the impact of social background on educational attainment and were subsequently used to justify major educational reforms. Indicators showing variations in participation and retention arising from structural differences between countries can also have a powerful influence; in the United Kingdom, the low rate of postcompulsory participation has undoubtedly fed the unprecedented number of policy initiatives aimed at retaining “nontraditional” students within education and training after age 16 (Nuffield Review, 2005).

There is preliminary evidence that cross-national differences in educational provision also shape immigrants’ economic and civic integration, insofar as they delimit the nature of pathways and progression available to young people of different ethnic backgrounds. The participation and attainment of social groups in education are outcomes ultimately dependent on the structures and processes of particular education systems. In making cross-national comparisons, certain critical system dimensions present themselves. How selective are the systems, and at what point(s) does overt selection occur? How are transitions managed, and what function do they have in selection and retention? How is covert selection managed through the visible and hidden content of the curriculum and the framework of values guiding the practices of educational institutions? How are educational policies framed, and what kinds of incentives or discouragement do they provide to particular groups? Cross-national comparative surveys are powerful means of answering these questions, revealing fixed points and degrees of freedom, so that policy interventions can be better targeted. Of course, such studies also have their limitations, in that they emphasize structural and systemic aspects and focus on outcomes. They therefore reveal little about the processes of schools and colleges and the shared and contested understandings of teachers and learners involved. Nevertheless, they provide a useful starting point for determining the value of making certain comparisons over others.

## HOW ARE THE PROBLEMS OF THE CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS DIFFERENT?

In many ways, the problems faced by children of immigrants are no different from those faced by the children of native-born parents: The education of those from poor families may suffer because of their lack of financial resources or cultural capital, or because they live in underserved areas,

whereas second-generation children from wealthier homes may sometimes be better situated to take advantage of educational opportunities than the majority of native-born youth. However, their presence does present particular challenges for educational institutions. The way that the education system is organized in terms of policies and processes, as well as the specific responses it makes to the challenge of dealing with rapid change in the student population, has enormous consequences for many of the children of immigrant parents, consequences that can be different, or more profound, than for the children of native-born parents.

One obvious challenge for schools is that the children of immigrants have a different cultural background, which frequently involves their speaking a language other than that of the host society at home in their early years. As a result, schools find that they are dealing with children who enter with a wide range of different language skills and communicative capacities but often a limited knowledge of the host language. This same limited knowledge frequently makes it difficult for their parents to help with homework or to interact easily with teachers and other school staff. As the children become more comfortable with the host language, other problems may arise: They may lose their parents' native tongue and find it hard to communicate with them, creating tension or distance among family members. In some cases in which parents have limited skills in the host language, children also take on adult roles in the household, such as interpreting for their parents and dealing with bills and official documents; some children find this stressful, and it may draw time and attention away from their schoolwork.

Another issue, which has, of course, become particularly contentious in recent years in certain countries, is how different education systems provide for students with different religious backgrounds. Although this is a question that affects some native-born youth (the degree to which schools should allow demonstrations of Christian faith in the United States is a matter of great debate at the present), it more often affects students of immigrant backgrounds and has been particularly controversial for Muslims in many countries. As Thijl Sunier's (2009) article in this special issue shows, the questions involved go beyond the commonly reported issue of restrictions on religious dress to more complex questions of the role of religion in the curriculum.

Beyond these high-profile issues of language and religion, children of immigrants may differ from others in more subtle ways that nonetheless have important implications for the way they respond to the school environment. Immigrant parents and their children may have quite different assumptions and expectations with regard to the relationship between school and society: for example, in terms of how large a role parents should play in assisting with homework, the ways in which it is appropriate to discipline a child, parental participation in the life of the school, and who should make key decisions regarding a child's education.

Immigrant parents also have different, though of course not common, relationships to the host society. When it comes to employment, children of certain immigrant groups may find that they are discriminated against in primary labor markets or lack the social networks that could lead to employment. At the same time, some immigrant communities may be able to offer connections to jobs that can provide a channel to upward mobility, or at least a safety net that may not be available to others. The nature of an immigrant community's relationship to the labor market is therefore an important factor when considering school-to-work transitions and how education systems can facilitate them.

A similar logic operates in the public sphere. For many children of immigrants whose families may be isolated by lack of language skills and contact with those outside their community, the school may be the primary location in which they learn about the culture, society, and civic life of the host country and come into contact with native-born peers. The ways in which this kind of knowledge is taught and learned, both formally through civics and social studies courses and informally through peer interactions and participation in school government or extracurricular activities, is therefore perhaps more significant for them than for the children of native-born parents, who will generally have more opportunities to absorb it at home.

For all these reasons, as the number of second-generation immigrants in educational institutions grows, it is important that we understand the ways in which not only conscious integration policies but also general educational policies and enduring features of education systems that we tend to take for granted can affect them in different ways from native-born students.

### CROSS-NATIONAL RESEARCH ON THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS

Yet research on the ways in which national institutional arrangements and practices, as well as specific policies, shape immigrant educational attainment and prepare newcomers and their children for employment and citizenship is still in an early stage. Only a small number of internationally comparative research projects on issues of immigrant education have been conducted within the past decade, and most of this work has focused on educational attainment and labor market outcomes.

On the broadest level, the 2003 PISA data have been specifically analyzed to show the attainment of different immigrant groups (both first and second generation) in 17 countries, including the 7 countries featured in this issue (PISA, 2006). Educational outcomes at age 15 and attitudinal data for immigrant students are compared with native students, defined as those born in the country or with at least one native-born parent. Some generalizations are possible. First, there is no significant association between the size of the immigrant student population and the size of the performance differences between immigrant and native students. Second, immigrant students consistently report similar or higher levels of interest and motivation in learning than native students. Third, second-generation immigrant students perform better than first-generation immigrant students. Fourth, there is an association between a country's language support programs and the size of the performance difference between immigrants and native students.

Behind these general trends lies significant variation between countries, which is revealing in terms of the success of national policies aimed at integration through education. Some of this variation is particularly marked across the seven countries covered in the studies in this issue. For example, the size of performance differences between native and immigrant students varies widely across countries, with differences being most pronounced in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, and the Netherlands; in Canada, on the other hand, immigrant and native students perform at similar levels. Uniquely among these countries, Canada also shows a significant rate of decrease across immigrant generations in the performance gap between native and immigrant students. Findings relating to baseline mathematical competence reveal that although most native students attain this level, more than 40% of first-generation students in Belgium and France and more than 25% in Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States perform below this level. In Germany, uniquely among the OECD countries, the 40% statistic applies to second-generation students too, and the proportion is reduced only to 30% in Belgium and the United States.

The background characteristics of immigrant students and their school characteristics only partially explain these differences in mathematics performance. For example, after accounting for the education and socioeconomic backgrounds of immigrant students, there are still significant performance differences between native and second-generation students in four (of our seven) countries: Belgium, France, Germany, and the Netherlands. Similarly, the fact that some immigrant students do not speak the language of instruction at home again only partially explains performance differences in mathematics, although the association is strong in Belgium, Canada, Germany, and the United States, thus pointing to the desirability of strengthening language support policies in these countries.

Other studies have attempted to relate educational outcomes more specifically to national policies. An investigation of the relationship between national integration policies and outcomes for the children of immigrants in eight European countries found a wide variety of outcomes.<sup>2</sup> For example,

the German system, which tracks students at the age of 10 into academic or vocational schools, seems to be quite effective in enabling second-generation youth to enter employment through vocational training and apprenticeships but less successful at preparing them for university. In contrast, the more open English and French systems allow more young people to attend university but are less effective in preparing them for employment. However, because the research targeted different ethnic groups in different countries, systematic comparisons revealing causal relations could only be made with great difficulty. The research was also limited to the children of immigrants, leaving unexamined the significance of vocational and academic training for immigrants who arrive as young adults.

A second international project, which compared second-generation Turkish and Moroccan immigrants in six European countries, found that different institutional arrangements have a startling impact on the educational careers of Turks across Europe.<sup>3</sup> The study concluded that differences in the starting age for compulsory schooling, the number of school contact hours in primary school, early or late selection in secondary education, and labor apprenticeship programs significantly affect students' future trajectories into higher education and employment. Learning the second language in an educational setting in a period in which children start to speak seems to provide a better starting position. The later selection in France and Belgium compared with the German-speaking countries makes it possible for many children of immigrants to make up for their initial disadvantaged position. The selection at age 10 in Germany has a devastating effect on the further school careers of pupils of Turkish descent. The apprenticeship track in the German-speaking countries, however, smoothes the transition to the labor market (see also the article by Crul and Schneider, 2009, in this special issue).

Similarly, another comparative study found that differences in the educational systems of Canada, the United States, and Australia affect rates of subsequent labor market integration for immigrants. In Canada and Australia, the expansion of higher education took place at a later stage than in the United States, which meant that the native population in these countries was relatively less educated. The educational gap between immigrants and the native population was therefore smaller and worked in favor of the immigrants (Reitz, 1998).

A recent special issue of the journal *Ethnicities* titled "Explaining Ethnic Inequalities in Educational Attainment" (Heath & Brinbaum, 2007) discusses seven European countries and the United States. The editors found that the educational disadvantage of children of immigrants from Europe is consistently explained by the educational position of the parents but that some non-European immigrant groups continue to be disadvantaged even after controlling for parental background. However, the articles do not explore the link to educational policy or structural factors in a systematic way.

Even less comparative research has been conducted to examine the ways in which educational systems shape immigrants' social and civic inclusion. Yet, schools and colleges are usually the site of immigrants' earliest and most intensive contact with the receiving society, and they have been found to play an important role in shaping immigrants' cultural and political identities and relations with other social groups, both as the result of conscious policies and through the unintended consequences of institutional arrangements. One study has shown that the civic cultures of the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France, and Germany are transmitted to immigrant youth in both explicit and implicit ways through school curricula, shaping their collective identities and orientation toward the receiving country (Schiffhauer, Baumann, Kastoryano, & Vertovec, 2004).

#### MAPPING THE TERRAIN

These projects point to a number of factors that require further systematic study to identify the causal relationships and the policy implications that grow out of them, including the role of specific educational policies or programs designed to promote the integration of immigrant students; the

effects that general institutional arrangements, such as the timing of key decision points and procedures for tracking students into academic or vocational programs or schools, have on immigrant students; and broader questions of the articulation between educational institutions and the labor market, and the intersection of education with other policy domains.

Although it is impossible to give a comprehensive overview, we can map some of the features of the landscape and indicate some of the factors that seem to be of central importance, many of which are addressed in the articles in this issue.

The complex process of educational tracking begins very early. The age at which students enter school and the availability of preschool education varies widely across countries with important implications for the children of immigrants. In Germany, for example, where mandatory schooling begins at age 6, many children obtain familiarity with school routines by attending kindergarten. However, relatively few children of immigrants attend kindergarten despite the obvious benefits for their competence in German. By contrast, in France, the *maternelle* system, which cares for children from the age of 3, has a more universal attendance. Children of immigrants in Germany therefore generally achieve competence in the dominant language later than their counterparts in France.

The relative responsibility of schools and families for children's education, especially in the early grades when children are establishing their school careers, is another way that educational systems differ. This dimension is reflected in variations in the school day and also in the balance between work in school and at home. In Germany, for example, the primary school day is short, and mothers are expected to supervise their children's extensive homework in the hours at home. This is hard for immigrant mothers, who often do not have enough competence in German to help their children. This feature of the German system offers a fruitful basis for comparison with the French and U.S. systems, where more work is done at school and less at home.

The most prominent dimension of difference across systems concerns the complexities of assessment and tracking that largely determine whether students are headed for college, early employment or, in the worst case, neither. There is enormous variation in the timing and the procedures through which students are tracked onto vocational or college-oriented pathways and in the rigidity of these assignments. Many European systems feature formal tracks that are reflected in separate schools that prepare students for the university or for different tiers in the labor market (manual vs. white-collar labor). For example, in Germany, children are sorted at the age of 10 into three tracks with very different destinations. Once this separation takes place, it is difficult to move from a lower track to a higher one, though it is always possible to fall within the system. Tracking into separate schools appears to sort students to a very substantial degree on the basis of social characteristics, including immigrant origins; the children of immigrants tend to be concentrated in the lowest regular track and in special schools for "problem" students (Alba, Handl, & Muller, 1994; see also Crul & Schneider, 2009). In the United States, by contrast, the great majority of students attend schools from which it is theoretically possible for them to continue to college. In fact, of course, there is a great deal of internal differentiation within the U.S. system. This occurs both within schools, which often track students into advanced placement or special education classes (Oakes, 1985), and also across schools, which vary enormously in terms of the quality of teaching and the rigor of the curriculum. In effect, students who attend poorly funded urban schools are unlikely to be qualified to attend university and, if they do, they are ill-prepared for college level work (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 1991).

As the U.S. case makes especially clear, in considering tracking systems, the apparent point of decision making is not always in fact the crucial moment. Although an examination at age 10 may be the final verdict in terms of closing doors to certain opportunities, the important factor may actually be whether rigorous courses are available in the earlier years of education to prepare students for the decisive test.

There is also the related question of the extent to which immigrants are affected by differences in school funding and curriculum. Research in the United States has found quality of school, which

depends not only on family resources but also on residential patterns and funding, to be an important determinant of educational outcomes among second-generation youth (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holdaway, 2008). Despite the recent high-stakes testing movement, there is still enormous variation in the curriculum in the United States, so equivalent students who are nominally on a college-bound track may receive very different educations depending on whether they attend a suburban high school or an inner-city one. The children of some immigrant groups, chiefly Latin American and Caribbean, tend to be disadvantaged in these terms and to receive high school diplomas that reflect less preparation for college work (Kasinitz et al.; Waters, 1999). At the other end of the spectrum, France has a unified national curriculum in its *lycées*. In general, curriculum diversity probably affects the children of immigrants by opening the door to differences of quality as well as content, although the ability to tailor the curriculum to specific student populations may offer advantages for immigrant students.

Differences in systems of funding also bear on immigrant education. In the United States, school funding depends to a considerable extent on local property taxes. The consequence is that schools within the publicly funded system can vary substantially in terms of their resources: Generally speaking, schools located in more affluent suburbs have higher funding levels than those found in cities. In many other countries, such as France and the Netherlands, school funding is determined at a higher level than the local community, with the consequence that there is less inequality between schools where the native group predominates and those where the children of immigrants are mostly found. In addition, in some systems, schools with high percentages of immigrant students receive additional funds. This is true in the Netherlands, for instance. In France, there is a social-class-based policy defining Zones of Educational Priority, which channels extra funds to schools located in poor areas; because the children of immigrants reside disproportionately in such zones, they benefit from the policy. But not all European countries have such policies. In Portugal, for example, the state so far has refrained from providing extra funding or implementing extra programs aimed at children of immigrant background. Margues and Martins (2007) related this nonintervention in Portugal to the generally weaker welfare state in Southern European countries.

The schools that students attend and the exposure they offer to the native or majority group are affected by the degree of ethnic segregation, which varies widely cross-nationally. In the United States, residential segregation remains at rather high absolute levels, though it is typically lower for immigrant groups than for African Americans; it also varies substantially across different immigrant origins and across metropolitan regions (Logan, 2002; Massey & Denton, 1993; Orfield & Lee, 2006). Some observers claim that it is lower in European societies, where, in any event, the majority group has not abandoned the cities to the degree that has taken place in the United States. For France, for instance, researchers argue that the areas of immigrant concentration mix different immigrant groups and include native French (Body-Gendrot, 1999; Wacquant, 1996). If true, this lower segregation should imply greater contact in schools among students with different origins.

In addition to the differentiation within the public system, one must consider the role of schools that are not part of this system. In the United States, these are private and parochial schools. Many Hispanic families take advantage of the Catholic school system that was originally established by earlier waves of Irish and Italian immigrants. Historically, this system has facilitated access to university and professional education for the children of Catholic immigrants. In recent years, charter schools have also become another feature of the educational landscape. In some other systems, notably the Netherlands and France, religiously affiliated schools are publicly funded and thus cannot easily offer ethnically privileged routes of educational mobility to the children of immigrants.

Mastery of the dominant language is one of the greatest challenges for the children of immigrants, many of whom speak their parents' language at home. Yet approaches to the questions of second language teaching and bilingualism vary widely across countries in terms of the duration of language training, the integration or segregation of second language learners, and whether subject content is also taught in the native language. Sweden, for example, has a long tradition of mother-tongue



language teaching, whereas Great Britain provides minimal assistance to students with less than native English language competence. In the United States, a wide variety of so-called bilingual instruction programs exist, which have generally been conceived as transitional, aiming at the ultimate integration of the children of immigrants in English language classrooms.

Just as time of entry into education is important, so is the time and manner of exit and the way in which educational institutions are or are not articulated with the labor market. The way in which the transition from school to work is managed varies in different national contexts. German students, for example, have a highly structured transition facilitated by apprenticeship programs and connections between schools and employers (Faist, 1995). In the United States, the picture is much more mixed, with some vocational high schools offering apprenticeship and cooperative work programs while the majority provides much more minimal assistance with the school-to-work transition (Rosenbaum, 1994). The range of possible credentials or qualifications that can be earned and the ways in which they connect to employment opportunities and further education are also important (Kerckhoff, 2001).

The U.S. education system is characterized both by a lack of formal and definitive tracking through high school graduation and by the range of opportunities for continuing education beyond high school and the possibility to enter and complete college at an older age. Although they will not be able to reenter the system at a very high level, students who drop out of high school can earn the equivalent credential by passing the General Education Development (GED) exam. “Second chances” at college are available not only through community colleges but also through other channels, such as the U.S. military. Other countries generally offer fewer second chances. In Britain, for example, most students still complete college during the traditional 18–22 age period, with few opportunities to return, and there is no system of community colleges that offer transfer credits. At the same time, a large number of career-specific “further education” courses offer what some scholars have referred to as an “alternative track.” That may provide a better route into the labor market than the generalized U.S. high school diploma (Kerckhoff, 2001).

Another area in which educational systems differ considerably is their approach toward religion, including not only the content of religious education but also students’ religious activity in schools and the wearing of religious clothing and symbols. Until recently, France stood out as the only country to strictly enforce secularism in schools by prohibiting the wearing of headscarves and other symbols (Bowen, 2006), whereas Britain, for example, took a more *laissez-faire* approach and regarded religious dress a permissible manifestation of students’ culture. A related question is how schools prepare students for civic participation, overtly through the teaching of government, history, and international affairs, and in less direct ways through the structuring of interactions among students and between communities and schools (Schiffauer et al., 2004).

## THE MULTILAYERED NATURE OF EDUCATION POLICY

As we consider the questions outlined previously, we must bear in mind the complex and multilayered mixture of policies and practices that determine what actually happens in the classroom. For example, national policy on a particular issue may be subject to substantial variation in its implementation at the level of the local education authority and again at the level of the individual school. Often the ability to mobilize resources and to motivate local stakeholders and teachers will be as important as the formal content of the policy. In the classroom, “implicit policies” embodied in the attitudes and expectations of teachers and counselors can be extremely important in fostering students’ success (Stepick & Stepick, 2005).

For this reason, in considering the factors that need to be included in the process of comparing systems cross-nationally, we need to have a sense of the way in which education or other relevant policy is generated, formulated, and implemented from the central to the local levels. This will include an understanding of the structure of representation and interests—for example, the ways in which immigrant groups are represented on local school boards or in national or local legislative or

other bodies responsible for educational policy (Fraga & Elis, 2009)—and of the degree of centralization or room for local variation in implementation.

As we mentioned, a full consideration of the factors shaping student outcomes would, of course, need to take into account the role of agency more broadly, not only as it plays out in the formulation of policy and its adaptation at the local level but also in terms of the ways in which families and ethnic communities respond to the opportunity structure presented by the institutional and policy environment. Clearly, access to material and cultural resources outside the school are often crucial in determining whether children of the same ethnic background will be able to thrive even in unpromising educational environments. There is a rich literature on the role of social capital, for example, within certain national contexts (see for example, Bankston & Zhou, 2002a, 2002b), and many of the contributors to this special issue are working on the interaction between institutional factors and agency in other contexts. Although very mindful of these issues and aware that future research needs to consider the dynamic relationship between institutions and agency, for the purposes of this special issue, we have decided to hold this to one side to allow for a sharp focus on the role of institutional and policy differences.

#### A NOTE ON METHODS

One reason that comparative studies of education and migration are rare is that they present not one but two sets of thorny methodological problems. First, educational outcomes are hard to compare because both the qualifications that students can receive and the timing of important transitions vary significantly across countries, as does the relationship between those credentials and the labor market. As we see in the Rothon, Heath, and Lessard-Phillips (2009) article in this special issue, for example, simple measures of years in school are rarely helpful, and qualifications are almost never exactly comparable. To make meaningful comparisons, the researcher must have a detailed knowledge of the systems to be compared and make hard decisions about how to structure the analysis. This presents a daunting barrier for researchers who are generally trained within the context of one country.

Studying the children of immigrants presents its own difficulties. Although the term might sound self explanatory, researchers have to decide whether to include only those children born in the country or, given that it seems unreasonable to exclude those who arrived at a very young age, where to make the cutoff point (usually at the age that schooling begins, although this obviously creates problems when that differs across countries to be compared). Even more problematic is the choice of which immigrant groups to compare and how.

Within migration studies, one sees three types of comparative work—the linear, the convergent, and the divergent (Green, 1997)—each of which has its own advantages and disadvantages. The first two are the most common, probably because research can be done within one country and therefore requires less training and funding. The linear approach considers the same group before and after migration and, when considering education, generally compares attainment across generations, comparing the performance of second- or even third-generation students to that of their parents and grandparents. One problem with this is that the passage of time introduces new complications: Young people need more education now than they did in the past, so merely doing better than their parents is often not enough. In addition, as Rothon et al. (2009) noted, many groups will appear to make large gains only because their parents' starting point was so low.

The convergent comparison compares immigrant groups within the context of a single country and, by holding educational context constant, seeks to highlight the relative performance of one immigrant group compared with others or with the native born. Although this avoids the problems associated with comparisons across generations, there are other difficulties. Often, the “context” is not as constant as one would like, with students from different backgrounds receiving a very different quality of education even within the same national or even local context. Furthermore, differences in performance are often attributable to differences in the resources of the groups rather

than institutional factors.

The comparative model with the most potential for highlighting the role of institutions and policy is the divergent comparison. Studying the educational trajectories and outcomes of immigrants from the same country of origin in different regional or national contexts potentially allows the researcher to assess the impact of the receiving context while holding constant the characteristics of the group. But it is no accident that this approach is the least commonly taken. First, it is often difficult to find immigrant groups that are truly comparable in terms of their class, religious, language, and other characteristics, as well as in the timing of their migration. And, because it requires comparing across nations, this approach presents all the problems of comparing national education systems discussed earlier: comparability of data; familiarity with nationally specific ideologies, debates, and conceptual frameworks; and detailed knowledge of education systems and labor markets. The researcher who neglects any of these may face the unpleasant accusation of being an outsider writing about a country she does not know well enough.

## OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUE

The articles in this issue address the role of a number of key institutional and policy factors in shaping the educational trajectories of children of immigrants. In the process, they compare a number of different countries—four are trans-Atlantic comparisons and two within Europe—and make use of a number of different methodologies.

The first article, by Catherine Rethon, Anthony Heath, and Laurence Lessard-Phillips (2009) offers a comparison of the educational outcomes of children of immigrants in Britain, Canada, and the United States, countries that differ both in the degree to which migration is limited by selective policies and in the existence of programs to reduce ethnic inequalities in educational opportunity. The authors compare outcomes for the children of African, Caribbean, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Irish, and Pakistani immigrants in all three countries and add second-generation Mexicans in the United States. They find that children of immigrants of all groups are outperforming the native born in Canada, whereas in Britain, second-generation Black Caribbeans and Pakistani women have lower educational attainment than native-born Whites, as do Black Caribbean men and Mexican men and women in the United States. Although it seems initially that the second generation in Britain is faring less well than its counterparts in North America, when the class background of the parents is taken into account, children of immigrants in all countries are generally achieving higher levels of education than would have been expected on the basis of their parents' backgrounds.

The article by Maurice Crul and Jens Schneider (2009) looks at the same ethnic group (Turks) with the same starting position (second generation) in Germany and the Netherlands, a classical example of a divergent comparison. Because the migration history of Turks in Germany and the Netherlands is very similar, the group is held more or less constant, making it possible to look at the importance of the institutional educational context in the two countries. The authors seek to explain the fact that higher numbers of second-generation Turks enter postsecondary education in the Netherlands compared with Germany, yet Turkish students in the Netherlands have higher rates of dropout during high school. They show that institutional arrangements in the two countries play an important role in producing these contradictory outcomes. In particular, the duration of schooling, contact hours between teachers and pupils, and the availability of apprenticeship opportunities emerge as important variables. The authors also show how gender shapes the educational attainment of second-generation Turks differently in the two countries.

The next pair of articles, by Richard Alba and Roxane Silberman (2009) and by Maurice Crul and Jennifer Holdaway (2009), use a particular variant of the divergent comparison, considering groups whose ethnic background is different but whose social location as the children of low-skilled labor migrants is quite similar. Together, the articles indicate the challenges involved in trying to level the playing field for children of immigrants in the education system.

Maurice Crul and Jennifer Holdaway (2009) compare second-generation Dominicans in New York with second-generation Moroccans in Amsterdam. The educational systems that these students must navigate in the two cities appear to be quite different. In particular, additional funding is provided for schools with high concentrations of immigrant students in Amsterdam but not in New York. Yet the two systems end up producing rather similar results, with children of both immigrant groups having considerably lower high school completion and college attendance rates than native Dutch and European American students. The authors attribute this partly to residential segregation that leads to high concentrations of immigrant students in certain primary schools. Weak preparation in the early years leads to a process of cumulative disadvantage, and through formal testing in Amsterdam and more informal tracking mechanisms in the United States, they are tracked into the lower levels of the education system. On the positive side, the comparison shows that the additional resources invested in Amsterdam have led to improved outcomes for children of immigrants, but it is clear that much more needs to be done if the attainment gap is to be closed

Richard Alba and Roxane Silberman (2009) compare the children of Mexicans in the United States with the children of North African immigrants in France. Again, differences in the educational structure—this time between the more uniform French system and the more locally varied U.S. one—suggest that immigrant students might be expected to fare better in France, but the authors find that, through different mechanisms, similar outcomes emerge, with children of immigrants in both countries showing significantly lower levels of attainment than the native born. It appears that even in the French system, where efforts have been made to equalize educational opportunities, middle-class native-born parents can still find ways to preserve their children's privileged access to a high-quality education through residential choice, private schools, and supplementary schooling, as well as the greater social and cultural capital of the family.

The article by Thijl Sunier (2009) turns to questions of the role of public education in the development of national citizens and to the ways in which schools approach citizenship and religion in the context of immigration. Through a comparison of two schools in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, Sunier shows how the arrangements they adopted to deal with ethnic and religious diversity reflect aspects of the dominant political culture, the role of state education in the making of citizens, and national approaches to the integration of immigrants. Although Sunier acknowledges that there is substantial variation between schools in United Kingdom and the Netherlands, he argues convincingly that individual schools are informed by the national ideology that prevails in the two countries.

The final article considers the question of language education, specifically the different ways in which countries have tried to help children of immigrants master the host language and the different ways in which they have regarded the role of children's heritage languages. Marie Mc Andrew (2009) compares the approaches taken in four locations—the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec, and the United States, Belgium, and Britain—which vary in terms of the emphasis placed on immersion or limited special services and in the extent to which they encourage the maintenance of heritage languages. She concludes that attempts to identify one policy that is appropriate for all students are misguided in light of the diversity of immigrant students and their needs and that language education should be more carefully tailored to students' age and previous educational experience.

### *Notes*

1. We use the two terms interchangeably throughout. For a fuller discussion of the distinctions that can be drawn among immigrant generations, see the introduction to the parallel special issue by Jennifer Holdaway and Richard Alba. In fact, because children who arrive before the age of school entry have little exposure to the culture of their parents' home country beyond the family, most studies of the "second generation" include children who arrived up to the age at which they start school.
2. Findings of the EFFNATIS project, which was conducted from 1998 to 2000, were drawn from

field surveys undertaken in Germany, France, and Britain using a common questionnaire and from country reports based on secondary analysis of existing data in Sweden, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Finland, and Spain (Heckmann, Lederer, & Worbs, 2001; Heckmann & Schnapper, 2003).

3. This study, launched in 2001 by Maurice Crul and Hans Vermeulen, was based on the results of the EFFNATIS project and on the secondary analysis of additional national data sources in Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, and Sweden. Their findings are reported in Crul and Vermeulen, 2003.

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