

Claude A. Eggertsen (1909–1995) and Comparative Education

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Family, colleagues, and former students saddened by the death of Claude Eggertsen on February 9, 1995, have been buoyed by tributes offered at several gatherings since then to memorialize his life. Recalling details from his academic career, which grew from seeds sown in small towns in Utah and flourished in Ann Arbor at the University of Michigan, have enlivened Claude's contributions to studies of the dilemmas democratic ideals hold for education and the projects he created at home and abroad to explore and resolve them. Before the Eggertsen Lecture at the 1995 Boston Comparative and International Society (CIES) Meeting, Victor Kobayashi highlighted some of the connections Claude had with the CIES and the values that characterized Claude's scholarship. In the remarks that follow, I would like to extend the discussion of Claude's contributions to foundational studies in education and the challenges his efforts still present to scholars in the field of comparative education and the CIES that he helped to found and nurture.

Who were Claude's teachers? "I was railroad family," he once wrote in an autobiographical letter to his children and grandchildren after a winter's trip to Thistle Canyon, Utah, where he was born. Helping his father run the depot at Mantai, and working with "section gangs" to maintain roadbeds along rail tracks crossing Utah, exposed him to workers from different ethnic backgrounds and to the economic hardships their families faced as they struggled to improve living conditions. The oldest of six children, Claude worked and supported his own family during the onset of the Depression, which riveted his attention on the large-scale economic interests that were ruining personal dreams and family fortunes. He graduated with honors from Mantai High School in 1926, but well-worn volumes of the *Book of Knowledge* (still on shelves in the basement of his Ann Arbor home), and stories about the hours spent in Mantai's Carnegie Library, attest to a reading habit and pattern of self-education that fueled his curiosities about world affairs and the history of social change. His youthful inclination to debate about the social and economic inequities surrounding him was strengthened by habits of labor conditioned by tending trains passing through Utah's countryside.

Claude graduated from Brigham Young University (BYU) in 1930 and taught social studies in the Carbon County Schools (1930–33) near

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Price, a coal-mining town hit severely by the Depression even before 1929. It was the school and not the Mormon Church that Claude saw as the center for discussions and debates about local issues. His view of the school, at the center of the community, pushed him to the forefront in wage disputes between fellow teachers and his local school board in the early 1930s, and leadership in organizing local chapters of the Utah Education Association. Already enrolled in a master's program through extension work at BYU, Claude traveled further West in the summer of 1931 to study education at Stanford University. While Claude was drawn to Stanford by the more famous Elwood P. Cubberly and Lewis M. Terman, it was the young Harold Benjamin's teaching that galvanized his educational thinking and reinforced his inclination to act. Benjamin's interdisciplinary text for Stanford's freshman orientation course outlined the character of the "problem solver," who, throughout time, had confronted problems of survival and sought different means to resolve them.¹ In Benjamin, Claude identified his model of a problem solver, one who favored the method of education over force in attempts to expose the social underpinnings of existing educational arrangements, and efforts to change them. Claude returned to Utah at the end of the summer, intending to settle and start his family, but Benjamin, who had left Stanford for the University of Minnesota, insisted that Claude leave Utah and come to Minnesota. Reassured by the personal pledge of any needed financial support, Claude, his wife, Nita Wakefield, and their new baby finally left Utah by train in 1933 for graduate studies at the University of Minnesota.

At Minnesota (1933–39), Claude's close relationship with Benjamin, and new advisor Edgar B. Wesley, forged the professional perspectives and skills he would later apply throughout his own career at the University of Michigan. Following the footsteps of his engaging and nationally recognized mentors, Claude deepened his commitment to education as the central institution in the life of large and small communities, and his conviction that schools and higher education were obligated to reinforce democratic ideals and practices, especially in their own operations. At Minnesota, he projected his early experiences in the rail and mining towns of Utah onto the larger map of educational history in the United States and the role historical understandings should play in preparing educators. Wesley's "Lo, the Poor History of Education," published in *School and Society* in 1933, and Merle Curti's volume in the American Historical Association's survey of social studies in the schools, *The Social Ideas of American Educators*, 1935, were but two immediate sources that set the standard and pointed the direction for Claude's scholarship.² From a

¹ Harold Benjamin, *An Introduction to Human Problems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930).

² Edgar B. Wesley, "Lo, the Poor History of Education," *School and Society* 37 (1933): 619–21; Merle Curti, *The Social Ideas of American Educators* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935).

paper written for one of Wesley's seminars in the history of American education Claude developed his dissertation, "The Monitorial System of Instruction in the United States." Based on primary source materials drawn from archives throughout the United States, his thorough study of Joseph Lancaster's schools in America pivoted on the thesis that the evolution of public schooling in the United States was deeply rooted in the rejection of charity principles and the assertion of workers' demands for equal educational opportunities. His analysis of the social and economic interests served by the rise and fall of monitorialism in the United States helped Claude develop what would become an underlying theme in his orientation to the history of American education: "Periods of notable achievement in American public education had been closely related to an absorbing interest in the educational theory and practices of other people."³ Collaboration with Benjamin, Wesley, and others at Minnesota occurred in the midst of dramatic economic dislocations and diverse plans for reappraising and reconstructing American education. Just before Claude took up his new position at the University of Michigan in 1939, perhaps as a reminder of the intelligence and courage it took to be a "problem solver" through the force of education, Benjamin dedicated his satiric critique of progressive education, *The Sabertooth Curriculum*, to Claude and another graduate student with whom he had once shared an office.⁴ On more than one occasion, in conducting the educational foundations program at Michigan, Claude would use the lessons in Benjamin's popular work to question the merits of enthusiastically presented but misconceived proposals for educational change.

Claude arrived in Ann Arbor for summer school in 1939 and immediately began organizing new courses in the philosophy and sociology of education and revising those already established in the history of American and European education. From the beginning, he taught students by putting them at the center of projects designed to help them develop historical insights related to their different areas of educational expertise. In advanced seminars he taught students how to use the rich primary sources in the Michigan Historical Collection and other archives to interpret critically education at the university and in the state. He published their findings in several critically acclaimed volumes.⁵ Students who did produce dissertations in the history of American education were tested

³ Claude A. Eggertsen, "The History of Education and Postwar Educational Policy," *University of Michigan School of Education Bulletin* 13 (January 1942): 50–51.

⁴ Harold Benjamin, *The Sabertooth Curriculum* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939).

⁵ Claude A. Eggertsen, ed., *Studies in the History of American Education* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, School of Education, 1948), *Studies in the History of Higher Education in Michigan* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1950), and *Studies in the History of Higher Education in Michigan* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1955).

by their understanding of the "Curti thesis" on the social ideas of American educators, and the problem of objectivity in stating central questions in historical research.

Claude's early Michigan years were interrupted by World War II in which he served as lieutenant commander in the U.S. Naval Reserves, 1944–46, with responsibility for organizing and managing the Navy Pacific University at Pearl Harbor. The experience, for which he was awarded a Bronze Star, widened his vision of the educational needs of veterans in the postwar world and the inadequacies of the scope of his own teaching about the origins and problems of education in the United States. After returning to Ann Arbor, he traded a large wall map of the United States that hung beside his glass-topped seminar table for an even larger map of the world. With the recruitment of new faculty and the attraction of National Defense Education Act (NDEA) fellowships in the late 1950s, comparative education replaced the history of education as the centerpiece in the Social Foundations Department in the School of Education at Michigan.

Claude's orientation to international and comparative education shaped his broad view that world security and freedom of learning went hand in hand. Echoing Benjamin's optimistic outline for education-based social change,⁶ Claude articulated his own view that a people's security was "only temporarily to be found in stockpiles of atomic bombs and pacts" and that the desired security could be "brought about only through a reserve of understanding, of factual information and of the ability to interpret it relevantly, and of the acceptance of all persons as rightful co-residents upon a planet."⁷ While he recognized other means for learning about the world, Claude unflinchingly held that the school and well-trained educators were the principal resources in the postwar world and that the social foundations of education bore primary responsibility for opening the world to students at all levels of professional preparation.

For nearly 3 decades Claude and his colleagues initiated an array of projects to demonstrate how such a broad aim could be realized through a program committed to cultivating education as a university discipline. Combined archival and field studies were undertaken in virtually every region of the world. Recorded in *Notes and Abstracts in the Social Foundations of Education*, published by the School of Education from 1961 to 1979, are accounts of research projects, exchange programs, workshops, visiting lectureships, study tours, conference proceedings, consortia arrange-

⁶ Harold Benjamin, *Under Their Own Command: Observations on the Nature of a People's Education for War and Peace* (New York: Macmillan, 1947).

⁷ Claude A. Eggertsen, "World Security and Freedom of Learning," *University of Michigan School of Education Bulletin* 20 (May 1949): 119.

ments for teacher exchanges, bibliographic and information retrieval tools, dissertation abstracts and reviews, and news of the professional activities of faculty and social foundations “Associates” affiliated with the rapidly developing Michigan program. A proposal for a multinational study of the allocation of educational resources based on extensive fieldwork in Montreal, details of the University of Sheffield–University of Michigan student and teacher exchange program, and the Michigan exchange project with the Universities of Bombay and Baroda were but three activities highlighted for over a decade in the comparative education program. Planning, implementing, and evaluating each of the program activities provided the bases for studying comparative education at Michigan. Perhaps the most extensive project undertaken was the India exchange, which resulted in the establishment of the Department of Education at the University of Bombay, the creation of a center for research and training in secondary education in rural areas through the University of Baroda, the completion of nine India dissertations and numerous field studies by Michigan doctoral students and faculty, and the teaching and research of six Indian scholars at the University of Michigan. Wesley summarized the academic accomplishments of his former student by observing in his update on the status of the history of education that “Claude Eggertsen is carrying on a program world-wide in inclusiveness and world-wide in its appeal to the goodly number of students who flock to his headquarters.”⁸

Claude’s direct involvement in the CIES and the *Comparative Education Review* (CER) also reflects the social foundations and professional education bias he brought to comparative education. He attended several of the pre-Society conferences directed by William Brickman at New York University where he expressed his reservations about the need for a new society for comparative educators. In introductory comparative education seminars, Claude recounted for students the concerns he had held about creating a separate society and journal, initiatives which he thought would weaken integrated approaches to foundational study like the one he was nurturing at Michigan. As secretary-treasurer of the National Society of College Teachers of Education (NSCTE), 1948–60, and editor of the *History of Education Journal* (HEJ) from 1949 to 1960, he initially encouraged comparative educators to recognize their home within the organization established in 1902 to improve professional education “in collegiate and university departments of education.”⁹ On receipt of the first issue of the CER in 1957, he wrote to George Bereday to point out that the

⁸ Edgar B. Wesley, “Lo, the Poor History of Education,” *History of Education Quarterly* 9 (Fall 1969): 335.

⁹ *A History of the National Society of College Teachers of Education (1902–1950)* (N.p., 1950), p. 4.

HEJ was devoted to publishing both historical and comparative studies of education and that the competition for subscribers might make it difficult for either journal to survive.¹⁰ Claude suggested the possibility of consolidating the two journals to make one journal that would become larger and more influential. By 1963, when Claude was elected president of the CIES, the NSCTE had virtually ceased to exist as an umbrella organization for scholars in different foundations fields. In 1964, during his presidency, Claude organized one of the last sectional meetings of the Comparative Education Society to be held in conjunction with the NSCTE in Chicago. At the same time, the Michigan social foundations program, with its comparative focus, continued to expand with further support from NDEA and Ford Foundation grants and the availability of new resources to sponsor faculty exchanges and field research in India.

Claude chaired over 75 dissertations during his career at Michigan, about half of which focused on comparative education. The studies reflected the "variegated mosaic" of topics and approaches to the field described in the twentieth anniversary edition of the *CER* and Claude's preference for studies that probed the cultural basis of educational problems in different societies rather than simplistic comparisons focused on improvements in American education. They also demonstrated how social foundations questions cast across cultures and nations necessitated teaching students how to "survey, map, interview, and sample as well as document."¹¹ The dissertations written by Claude's students who became leaders in the CIES and the comparative field marked the diversity of interests and methodologies that characterized the Michigan program. Suzanne Shafer and Robert Lawson tested hypotheses related to the denazification of German schools and the introduction of democratic curricula and practices. Val Rust explored German interests in foreign education after World War I. Victor Kobayashi interpreted the impact of John Dewey on Japanese educational thought. Tetsuya Kobayashi contrasted the place of general education in the professional training of scientists and engineers in Japan and the United States. George Urch examined the Africanization of Kenya's postindependence school curricula. Peter Hackett considered the relevance of India's wartime national discipline scheme for Indian school youth. Francis McKenna (whose dissertation advisor was Kenneth Medlin, Michigan's Russian specialist) examined education for developing elites in Uzbekistan. George Male, who became a European specialist in the U.S. Office of Education and professor of education

¹⁰ Claude A. Eggertsen, letter to George Z. F. Bereday, July 26, 1957, Comparative and International Education Society Papers, Department of Special Collections and Archives, Kent State University Library and Media Services, Kent, Ohio.

¹¹ Claude A. Eggertsen, "International Education and Teacher Training," *University of Michigan School of Education Bulletin* 31 (May 1960): 115.

at the University of Maryland, wrote his dissertation on the Michigan Education Association as an interest group in the lobby for public education, 1852–1950. Michael Chiappetta, a specialist on Latin American education in the U.S. Office of Education and professor of education at Indiana University, studied the relationship between college objectives and the training of arts college teachers in the United States.

Claude remained active in comparative education and in the affairs of the CIES at the end of his Michigan career. To help commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the chair in education at the University of Michigan, the CIES held its annual meeting in Ann Arbor in 1979. In introducing the keynote speaker, James Perkins, former president of Cornell University and then chairperson of President Carter's Commission of Foreign Language and International Studies, Claude underscored the service role he felt comparative educators should play to improve the international orientation of teachers. Two subsequent activities in which he held major responsibilities provided Claude with final opportunities to reassert his view that outreach efforts in resolving major educational questions should become more central in the CIES's mission. While holding the Gerald H. Read Chair in Comparative and International Education at Kent State University (1980–81), he advised his Kent colleagues to organize a conference that would provide an opportunity for CIES founders and younger leaders in the field to rethink the Society's history and consider once again the uses that could be made of comparative research. The conference report, *The Application of Knowledge in Comparative and International Education*, briefly addresses questions about the separation of basic and applied research in the field and presents 23 examples of outreach activities that might be undertaken by comparative educators to respond to the need for a more internationally informed public.¹² Partially in response to issues raised at the Kent Conference, Erwin Epstein, as CIES president at that time, created the Society's Committee on International Education "to advise the Society on ways to tap the national interest in international education to make that area a major force in American schools and the Society a prominent instrument in the achievement of that goal."¹³ Claude was chair of the committee (1981–85), and reported at the Society's business meeting in Stanford in 1985 that the most feasible way for the Society to influence schools to become more internationally oriented was to publish yearbooks on topics of vital international concern. To illustrate how the Society might proceed, he distrib-

¹² *The Application of Knowledge in Comparative and International Education (Report of the First Kent Conference on Comparative and International Education)* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University, College of Education, 1981).

¹³ Claude A. Eggertsen, "In Support of a Recommendation for Outreach," *Notes and Abstracts in American and International Education* 64 (1985): 3.

uted at the conclusion of his report a special issue of *Notes and Abstracts* devoted to education and human rights.¹⁴

While he did not attend annual meetings of the Society after 1987, he stayed in close touch with its activities through communications with colleagues and former students who were involved with the annual Eggertsen Lecture sponsored by former students and the Society since 1980. He and Arnold Anderson were the first to be elected Honorary Fellows of the Society in 1986. During the same period, Claude watched with dismay as the University of Michigan "downsized" its School of Education, and with it, most of the social foundations program and comparative education activities through which it had been internationally recognized for over 2 decades. To perpetuate the educational activity that had once been prominent at Michigan, Claude and Nita, and other members of the Eggertsen family, established in 1981 a substantial endowment through the Rackham School of Graduate Studies to award annually the Eggertsen Prize for "that doctoral dissertation in the history of education which best provides a credible explanation of the development of thought, events, and institutions in education for any part of the world and for any time period." During the last 5 years of his life, Claude's active engagement with educational issues focused less on comparative education and more on his long-standing effort to have a commission oversee the writing of a critical history of the University of Michigan. As representative of Michigan's emeriti faculty, he also attended meetings of the Faculty Senate Assembly, a body which he had led Michigan faculty and administrators to establish in the 1970s in response to demands for more democratic participation in the university's governance. Claude continued to serve as external examiner of a few dissertations from India during the early 1990s, and shortly before his death he helped make arrangements for sending his large collection of historic books on philosophy and the history of education to Beijing University in China.

Following Harold Benjamin's death in 1969, Claude stood and delivered his reflections on his mentor at one of the Chicago meetings for scholars in the foundations of education. Some time later he reported how deeply he missed his former teacher and how "Ben's" perspective and engaging way of framing complex and controversial educational ideas had nurtured his own efforts to imagine and carry out so many different projects. The documents and recollections now being shared by Claude's former students and colleagues, and the recent deposit of the Eggertsen papers in the Hanna archives at Stanford University, should make it

¹⁴ Claude A. Eggertsen, ed., "A Special Issue Published on Behalf of the Committee on International Education of the Comparative and International Education Society," *Notes and Abstracts in American and International Education* 64 (1985): 1-40.

possible to provide thorough accounts of Claude's contributions to comparative and international education, and the many other scholarly endeavors undertaken by the School of Education during his 40-year career. The Hanna's rich collection of educational foundations materials, including the papers of Claude's close friends and colleagues, R. Freeman Butts and William Brickman, and NSCTE records, along with other comparative and international archives, should now make it possible for contemporary scholars to see more clearly than before what their predecessors attempted to achieve in the field of comparative education after 1945. During the next decade, when the mission of the CIES will no doubt be reworked in response to technological innovations and new social and environmental conditions, the records of the founders of the Society should provide an invaluable resource for reflection and the creation of new directions. As with other distinguished founders and leaders in the field, interpreting Claude Eggertsen's experiences and insights should yield very helpful leads for creating new educational thinking and practice.