



# **Strengthening the Comparative Dimension in Comparative Education (Research)**

**Aaron Benavot**

Visiting Professor, Center for the Study of International  
Cooperation in Education (CICE)

and

Professor, Dept. of Educational Administration and Policy Studies, School of  
Education

University at Albany-State University of New York

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# Outline of Presentation

- What is Comparative Education (CE)? Changing definitions of the field
- What is International Education? (will mention in passing)
- Four dimensions to characterize Comparative Education:  
**Institutions/Organizations; Intellectual corpus/Theories;  
Research strategies and Policy Orientation**
- This presentation focuses on the **research dimension** of CE
- Which sources of data/information can we draw upon to examine the research dimension? Advantages and disadvantages of each source
- CE research in North America (CIES): key findings and trends
- Why so few “comparative” studies in Comparative Education?
- To what extent is this pattern true of CE research in other countries and regions? In Japan?
- Strengthening the comparative dimension in Comparative Education Research: Possible steps
- Questions for debate



# Changing Definitions of Comparative Education

Comparative Education is the comparison of various philosophies of education based not only on theories but the actual practices which prevail (Isaac Kandel 1957).

Comparative Education is a field of study dealing with the comparison of current educational theory and practice in different countries for the purpose of broadening and deepening understanding of educational problems beyond the boundaries of one's own country (Carter Good 1962).

If custom and law define what is educationally allowable within a nation, the educational systems beyond one's national boundaries suggest what is educationally possible. The field of comparative education exists to examine these possibilities (Arthur Foshay 1962: 7)

Comparative Education is a systematic examination of other cultures and other systems of education deriving from those cultures in order to discover resemblances and differences, and why variant solutions have been attempted (and with what result) to problems that are often common to all (V. Mallinson 1975)

# What is Comparative Education (2)?

Comparative education has four purposes:

- To describe educational systems, processes, or outcomes.
- To assist in the development of educational institutions and practices.
- To highlight the relationships between education and society.
- To establish generalized statements about education that are valid in more than one country. (Harold Noah 1985)

Comparative education is a “loosely bounded field” and is “held together by a fundamental belief that education can be improved and can serve to bring about change for the better in all nations.” (R. Arnove, Altbach and Kelly 1992)

[Comparative education is] an intersection of the social sciences, education and cross-national study which attempts to use cross-national data to test propositions about the relationship between education and society and between teaching practices and learning outcomes (David Wilson 2003)

# What is Comparative Education (3)?

The following definitions are included in the concept of CE:

- A study of two or more education systems.
- A study of how the philosophy, objectives and aims, policy and practice of education in other countries influence the general development, policy and practice of education in a particular country.
- A study of how the development of education in the past, across the ages and continents, has influenced the development of education in particular countries.
- A study of the school systems of two or more countries, and of the administrative machineries set up to implement or to control the implementation of government policies at various levels of education systems (Adeyinka 1994) [Nigeria]

Comparative Education is a fully established academic field of study that examines education in one country (or group of countries) by using data and insights drawn from the practices and situation in another country, or countries [Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia].

# Tentative Conclusions

Changing definitions of field of CE indicate:

- A move away from comparing educational philosophies, ideologies, and practices for purposes of insight (*verstehen*) and possible policy reform to an adoption of social science approaches, methods and norms to study and compare educational systems, or their elements
- A growing diversification of definitions of the field of CE, and its purposes, with little apparent consensus
- A growing recognition that educational conceptions and practices in one part of the world influence/affect conceptions and practices in other parts of the world: recognition of transnational influences, neo-colonialism, etc.



# What is international education?

## Two main conceptions of IE:

1) Education that transcends national borders through the exchange (geographical mobility) of people--for example, when students travel to study at an international branch campus (cross-border higher education), or as part of a study abroad program (e.g., SUNY programs outside US, Stanford in Florence, U of Chicago in Paris), or in a student exchange program (e.g., Fulbright, Erasmus, DAAD, Monbukagakusho)

2) A comprehensive approach to education that intentionally prepares students to be active and engaged participants in an interconnected, multicultural world and dynamic global economy.

- International primary or secondary schools (different languages of instruction, different curricula, aims, children of foreigners)
- European schools (Savvides 2006)
- International curricula in (national) private and public schools (Doherty et al. 2009)
- International tracks (like IB) in state sponsored (public) schools (Weenink 2008)

# 4 Dimensions that Characterize CIE field

## **Institutional, Intellectual, Research, Policy-oriented**

### **Institutional Dimension**

Indicators of CIE organizational strength (infrastructure) at the national, regional and international levels

- University-based graduate CIE programs, CIE courses in other programs
- Research centers focusing on CIE issues and policies
- CE Professional societies (eg, CIES in USA 1956, CESE in Europe 1961, WCCES in 1970, KCES 1970?, Comparative Education Society of Asia in 1991), almost 40 associations are members of WCCES
- Specialized journals, book series, yearbooks, encyclopedia, edited volumes in CIE
- Annual, or regular conferences
- Graduate students enrolled in MA and PhD programs in CIE

### **Intellectual Dimension**

- What is the intellectual corpus and theoretical substance of the CIE field?
- What are the main theories and concepts used by (or available to) CIE scholars?
- What philosophical and epistemological assumptions are present in CIE work?
- Which theoretical paradigms from the social sciences and humanities have been integrated in CIE?
- What types of discourses are prevalent?





# Dimensions for characterizing the CIE field

## Research-related

- What are the main types of research strategies employed by CIE researchers?
- How have these changed over time?
- What data collection methods and forms of analysis do CIE researchers use to study the phenomena, issues and topics of interest to them?
- Geographical focus and units of analysis of CIE research

## Policy-related

- What is the role of CIE scholarship in policy formation?
- What are the relationships between CIE research and policy recommendations?
- How do CIE scholars study educational policies?
- What kinds of policy-oriented or practice-oriented research are prevalent in the field of CIE?
- Who are the consumers of CIE research in the policy world?

This seminar concentrates on the **research** dimension of CE



## Data/Information Sources to characterize CE Research (and other dimensions)

1. Surveys of researchers and practitioners who are members of CIE associations and societies
2. Surveys of courses taught in CIE programs
3. Analysis of literature: articles in CE journals, books, other publications
4. Analysis of citations/ references to work of CIE scholars
5. Content analysis of web sites presenting CIE programs

Advantages and disadvantages of each. Emphasis on (3) and (1)

# Relevant bibliography (select)

John N. Hawkins and Val D. Rust (2001) "Shifting Perspectives on Comparative Research: A View from the USA," *Comparative Education* 37, no. 4 (November): 501–506.

Heidi Ross, Cho-Yee To, William Cave and David E. Bair (1992) "On Shifting Ground: The Postparadigm Identity of U.S. Comparative Education, 1979–88," *Compare* 22, no. 2: 113–131.

David Post, Joseph Farrell, and Heidi Ross (1995) "Prologue to the Investigation of Comparative and International Education Graduate Programs in North America, Part I," *CIES Newsletter*, no. 108 (January): 4, 14, 18; and Heidi Ross, David Post, and Joseph Farrell, "Prologue to the Investigation of Comparative and International Education Graduate Programs, Part II," *CIES Newsletter*, no. 110 (September): 1, 4–5.

Robert L. Koehl (1977) "The Comparative Study of Education," *Comparative Education Review* ("Special Issue: The State of the Art") 21, 2/3 (June/October): 177–194.

Val D. Rust, Aminate Soumare, Octavio Pescador, and Megumi Shibuya (1999) "Research Strategies in Comparative Education," *Comparative Education Review* 43, 1 (February): 86–109.

Angela Little (2000) "Development Studies and Comparative Education: Context, Content, Comparison, and Contributors," *Comparative Education* 36, no. 3 (August): 279–296.

Timothy A. Drake (2011) "U.S. Comparative and International Graduate Programs: An Overview of Programmatic Size, Relevance, Philosophy, and Methodology" *Peabody Journal of Education* Vol. 86, 2: 189-210.

Bradley J. Cook, Steven J. Hite, Erwin H. Epstein (2004) "Discerning Trends, Contours, and Boundaries in Comparative Education: A Survey of Comparativists and Their Literature." *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 48, no. 2 (May): 123-149.

Shoko Yamada and Jung Liu (2011) "Between Epistemology and Research Practices," Chapter 20 in J. Weidman and W.J. Jacob (eds) *Beyond the Comparative: Advancing Theory and Its Application to Practice*. Sense Publishers.




# Findings from Survey of CIES members

Cook et al (2004) conducted a survey of CIES members based on 2000 membership directory in 2001. The written and telephone surveys ended up including 419 usable responses (70% from US; 30% non-US). Different languages used over phone. Closed demographic questions; open ended ones re: the main themes (550), works (537), figures (451), universities (240) and organizations (743) of CE. Sample: Relatively high % of women, younger gen, recent degree recipients, no regional specialization

**Findings: Many themes, influential works and figures noted by respondents. This reflects diversity of CE conceptions, approaches, methods; Many voices, much inclusion, little consensus on borders**

“The field [of CE], as reflected by CIES, is composed of a membership whose disciplinary lenses, research interests, and academic training are **highly disparate**. While broadly situated to study the forces shaping education around the world, the field of comparative education **lends itself naturally to a multidisciplinary approach and is continually recasting itself** as new partners enter the conversation. And, hence, its **boundaries are much more flexible and pliant** because of the larger epistemic contests facing other social sciences disciplines. It is also susceptible to a variety of calls for change because of the **polyvocality inherent in its member composition and scholarly endeavors...**



## A paradox: A field with weak consensus, flexible identity, few boundaries, yet strong growth/vitality

Because of the Society's disciplinary eclecticism and open admission criteria, it appears to be a group with a **relatively flexible [and transient] professional identity**.... Because of its disparate nature CE is also being defined by a degree of **internal antagonism and suspicion of any trend that seeks uniformity and by boundaries that are continually challenged, stretched, and blurred**. It [is] a field...determined by the diversity of its research and interpretive enterprises, rather than one that has any established or consensual agenda....Common points of reference that characteristically unite other fields [are] thematic content, historic tradition, or boundary continuity. **Comparative education exhibits little or no consensual references or orientations...**

Despite its multifarious difficulties, **the field exhibits continued vitality and growth**. University programs and centers dealing with issues relating to comparative and international studies are growing worldwide. Membership activity and interest in professional organizations focused on CIE is multiplying. The field has grown from a small enclave of scholars...in North America and Europe before WWII to a worldwide contingent of scholars, teachers, policy makers, and students. While there have been robust and cumulative increases in theory and knowledge, the strength of the field is that it is woven of threads of many kinds of thinking. As such, the field seems to have **a commitment to inclusion as a conversational and theoretical ideal.**" (Cook, Hite and Epstein 2004)

# A more recent view: similar picture

Foster, Addy and Samoff (2011) in *Int'l. Journal of Educational Development* report an analysis of 605 articles that were published between 2004 and 2008 in 4 journals: *Comparative Education*, *Comparative Education Review*, *Compare* and *IJED*.

“...Our mapping effort [of CIE] shows clearly the permeability of field, disciplinary, and methodological boundaries. **The community of CIE researchers moves in multiple directions simultaneously, does not feel constrained by the walls that commonly separate**, say, economists from anthropologists or survey research from textual analysis, and regularly **insists that understanding education requires studying not only what happens within schools’ walls but also where the schools sit and who enters their doors.**”

# Findings from analysis of CE literature (I)

Robert Koehl (1977) analyzed all articles published in the *Comparative Education Review* (1957-1976). Defined “**comparative education**” as “**the systematic study of two or more systems of childhood socialization, particularly formal schooling, and usually across cultures.**”

Of the 386 CER articles he analyzed, he found (among other things):

	Number	Percentage	Adjusted %
One country only	162	42.0	53.3
2 countries	59	15.3	19.4
3-4 countries	20	5.2	6.6
5 countries	14	3.6	4.6
6-11 countries	34	8.8	11.2
12 or more	15	3.9	4.9
Indeterminate/ Irrelevant	82	21.2	-
Total	386	100	100

“Only about a third of the CER articles are cross-national comparisons”

# Analysis of CE literature (2)

**Research strategies found in articles published in 3 comparative education journals (CER, CE and IJED), in 1964-66 and then from 1985 to 1995 (every 2 years).** Source Rust et al., (1999) *Comparative Education Review* 43 (1): 86-109.

Ten Research Strategies	1964-1966	1985-1995
Theory	8	7
Experiment	0	0
Existing Data Analysis	8	11
Literature Review	48	26
Historical Analysis	15	5
Comparative Project	15	16
Project evaluation/ Review	1	6
Content Analysis	0	6
Participation/ Observation	2	8
Interview	1	8
Questionnaire	1	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Number of Strategies</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>834</b>
<b>Number of Articles</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>427</b>
<b>Strategies per article</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>1.95</b>



# Analysis of CE literature (3)

Foster, Addy and Samoff (2011) in *Int'l. Journal of Educational Development* report an analysis of 605 articles that were published between 2004 and 2008 in 4 journals: *Comparative Education*, *Comparative Education Review*, *Compare* and *IJED*.

Research design/ main method of the article	Supply: Published Articles Reviewed	Demand: Cited Articles
Employed Document Review or Historical Analysis	26	29
Case studies	22	23
Survey/Quantitative Analysis	17	16
Comparative studies (explicitly noted by author)	14	14
Employed Interviews or Focus groups	14	14
Observations	6	4
Experimental/Quasi-experimental	<1	0
Tracer/Longitudinal	<1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Number of Articles Reviewed</b>	<b>605</b>	<b>?</b>

# Why so few “comparative” studies in CE?

Most studies estimate the percentage of cross-national, cross-country or direct comparison studies at between 15-35% of CE articles published. (If you consider papers submitted and not published, then percentages are likely to be lower). Why then is a comparative dimension explicitly missing from the research carried out by so many CIE researchers?

In a deeper sense, why is a comparative dimension also absent or weak in other aspects of this research literature-eg, in the justification of cases to be analyzed; in the literature reviewed; in the explanations, interpretations and discussion of the issues studied; and in the policy debates entered into?

Possible reasons:

1. Region/area studies were established and expanded in elite US universities (due cold war conflict and development aid policies) with funding from gov't, Ford Foundation etc.. They tend to be interdisciplinary programs with a focus on case studies, and a relatively weak comparative dimension;
2. Dominant orientations of leading scholars at traditional centers of CE graduate study and research: U of Chicago, Teacher's College, SUNY-Buffalo, OISE
3. Dependence of researchers on funding/ grants from govt. agencies (USAID, etc.) that are interested in knowledge about single cases.
4. Differences in disciplinary orientations: economics, demography vs. anthropology or educational policy (sociology split)
5. Other reasons?



# To what extent does this pattern obtain in other countries?

**Anecdotal evidence: (need to conduct a more systematic examination)**

Based on my coeditor experience at CER, which annually receives about (or over) 200 manuscripts from all over the world, and increasingly from Asia, I find a very large percentage of single case studies among the submitted manuscripts and little attempt by the author(s) to engage in an explicit comparative analysis.

In addition, most case studies examine one country's educational policies in relation to a selected issue or topic(s). Few case studies attempt to justify the case selection, to characterize the position of the case in relation to others, to explain the relevance of the case analysis for other cases (eg, in a region, in a development category, among language groups).

Often, due to the paper's weak comparative dimension, it is either not sent out for review (50%), or sent for review and eventually rejected (25%).

(This is not the only reason for rejection, but an important one, given the criteria according to which reviewers are asked to evaluate manuscripts)

Obviously this evidence says little about CE research submitted to other CE journals, esp in the non-English speaking world

# Is this also the case in Japan?

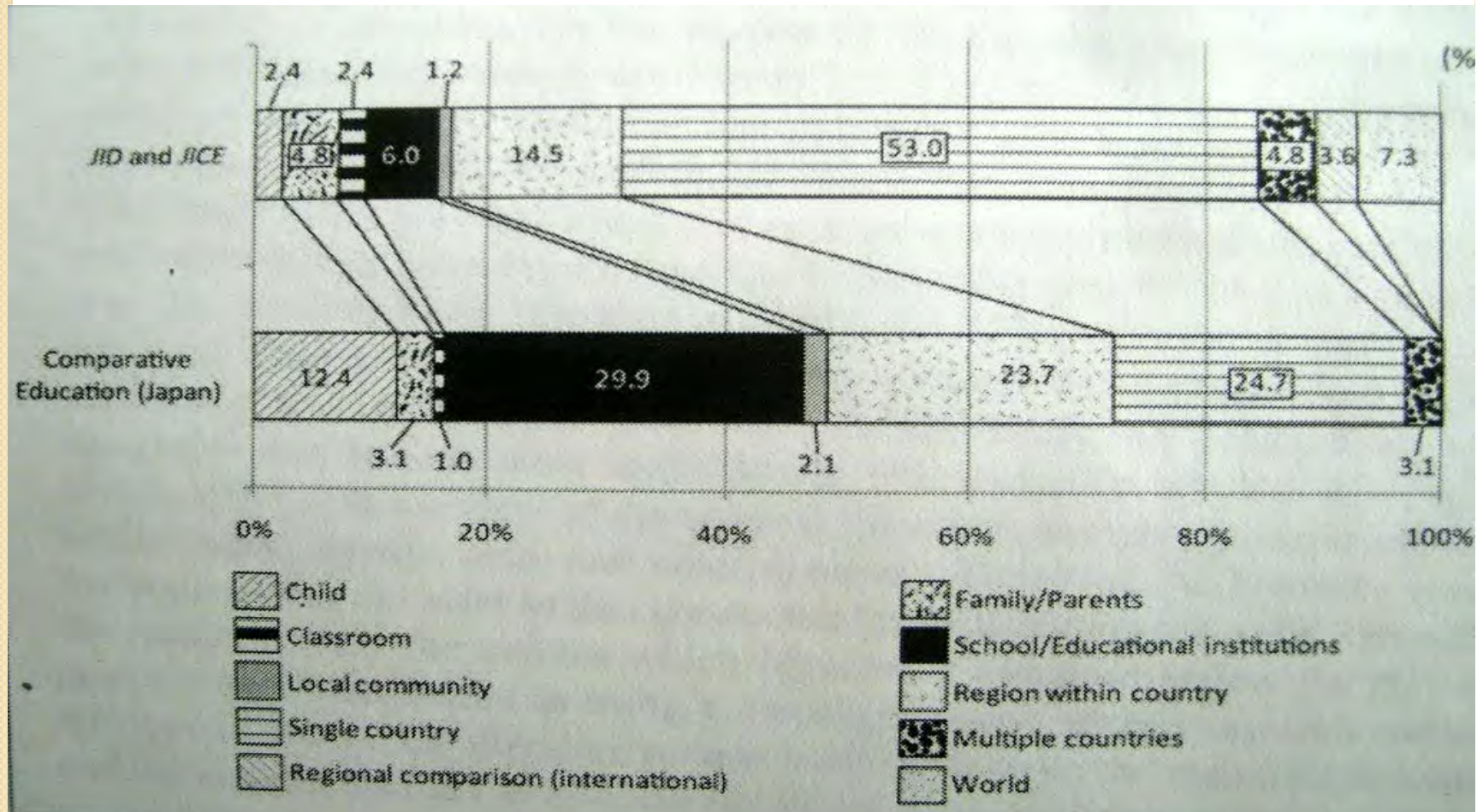
Source: S. Yamada and J. Liu (2011). Authors analyse the 'general' articles in the Japanese journal *Comparative Education* (1990-2009), published by the Japan Comparative Education Society. They find:

(Japan) CE articles tend to be “...**descriptive of the educational practices of a particular society** and foster an attitude of close **observation** among the authors....The journal appreciates articles which capture **education in the web of culture, religion, history**, and other aspects of the social life of people in particular contexts, instead of evaluating the effectiveness or the function of education (especially schooling) seen from the side of the service provider or outsiders.”

“...The **mainstream** of Japanese CE is **country studies**, with a clear effort not to link it to any agenda or theory, but **to be precise in description**. While there has been heated discussion about theories such as modernization, world-systems, structuralism, and postmodernism in English literature throughout the post-World War II period (Arnove 1980; Eckstein and Noah 1985; Welch 1985), Japanese comparative educationists seem not to have needed the theoretical framework to demonstrate their sophistication or draw boundaries from other academic fields.

## Is this also the case in Japan? (2)

“...12% of articles in *CEJ* [n=261] take the individual (learner or parent) as the unit of analysis. Among *CEJ* articles, the first six units which are smaller than a single country constitute 72% of all articles. Only 3% of all *CEJ* articles focused on a unit larger than a single country. By contrast in *JID* and *JICE*, only 31% [of 130 articles] focused on units smaller than a single country. 53% took a single country as their unit, with most writing about national education systems...”





# Additional thoughts about the pattern in Japan (3)

Possible additional reasons why the case study approach dominates the work conducted and published by Japanese CE scholars:

- Japanese education system is seen by Japanese researchers as unique, deeply embedded in Japanese culture, and not well understood by foreigners, especially if they haven't done extensive 'field work';
- Japanese scholars tend to emphasize holistic accounts of education and society (how all the different aspects are interrelated: culture, religion, politics, etc.), rather than cross-cutting analytical accounts of education and schooling;
- They view an education system as embedded in, and reflected of, the surrounding society and relatively immune from external, sometimes pernicious, influences;
- Japanese scholars are often interested in policy implications for a particular country and not for a broader set of cases;
- Based on the above, it can be argued that many Japanese scholars project these assumptions on foreign education systems. The kind of comparative education research they value is a reflection of their own perceptions and assumptions about Japanese education. "A thorough study of a foreign education system requires a deep understanding of the society in question..." (Yamada & Liu 2011)
- Other reasons?



# The Challenge: How to strengthen the ‘comparative’ dimension in CE research?

- Begin by revising the training of young CE researchers/scholars in graduate programs. Alter the messages (explicit/implicit) conveyed by faculty. Reconsider the examples of “ideal” or “highly valued” CE research in required readings and class discussions. Help students reframe research questions and course assignments with a stronger comparative dimension. Can one do good CE research based on secondary sources, and not traditional ‘field research’?
- In comments to colleagues during talks or on draft papers, indicate the limitations of research with a weak comparative dimension.
- Develop and organize conference sessions or book chapters that have a clear comparative dimension.
- Change the evaluation criteria used by the editors of CE journals.
- Other ways...



# Questions for Debate

To what extent do the arguments and evidence appear clear, consistent and valid?

In what ways could the arguments, evidence and recommendations be improved?

What, in your opinion, are the reasons for the prevalence and dominance of 'qualitative' studies of single cases (countries/systems) in North America, in Japan, elsewhere?

Are there implications for the Japan Comparative Education Society, and the (Japanese journal) *Comparative Education* in this regard?

Other questions?





# Thank you!

For more information:  
Contact Aaron BENAVIDOT

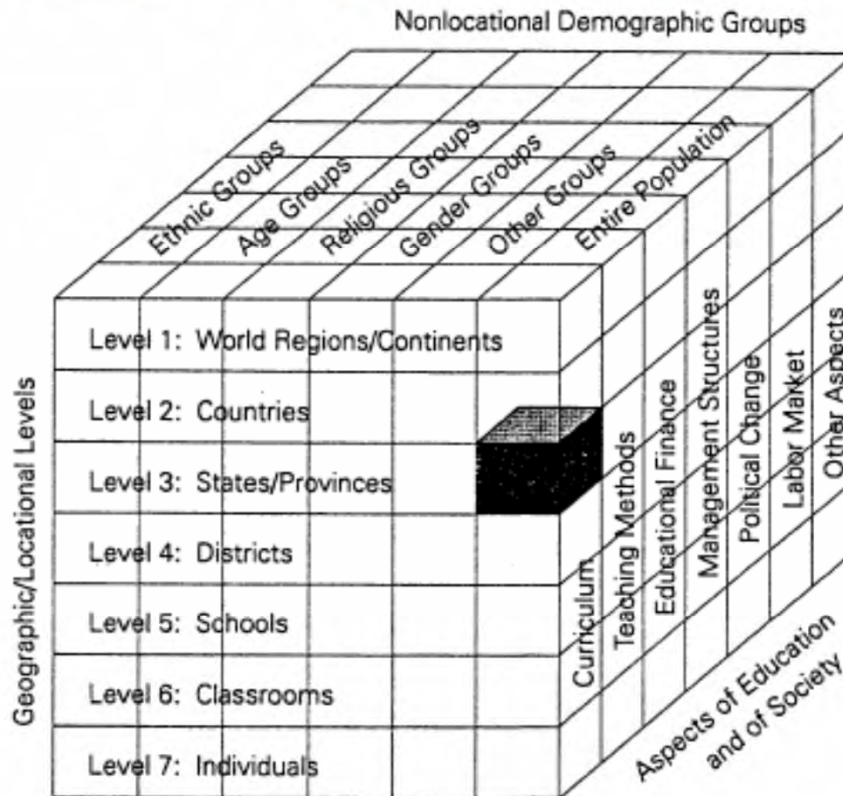
[abenavot@hiroshima-u.ac.jp](mailto:abenavot@hiroshima-u.ac.jp)

or

[abenavot@albany.edu](mailto:abenavot@albany.edu)

# What is the Mark Bray and Murray Thomas “Cube”

Figure 14.1: A Framework for Comparative Education Analyses



Source: Bray & Thomas (1995), p.475.

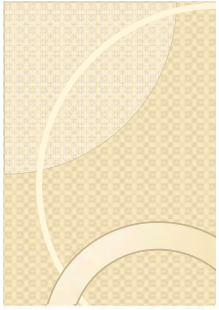
What is missing from the cube?

# Which Subject Areas are Taught Worldwide? 1980s and 2000s

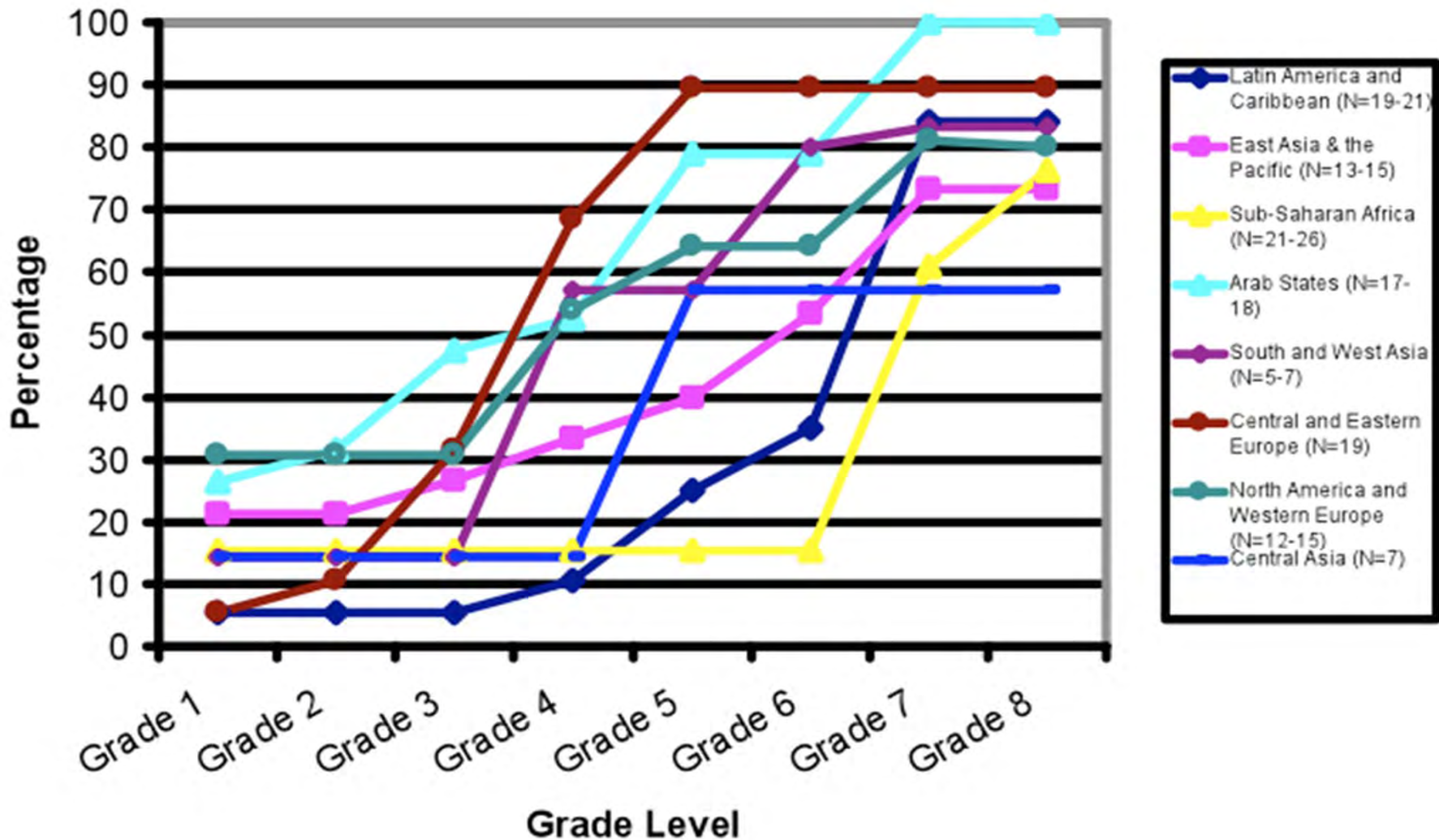
Proportion of all countries requiring instruction in curricular subject areas (n in parentheses)

	Grades 1-3		Grades 4-6		Grade 7-8	
	1980s	2000s	1980s	2000s	1980s	2000s
<b>Subject Categories</b>	(83-84)	(122-23)	(72-77)	(120-24)	(77-84)	(116-123)
All Languages	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Mathematics	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>98</b>
Sciences	<b>74</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>97</b>
Comp. & Technology	<b>6</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>41</b>
Social Sciences*	<b>78</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100</b>
Religion & Moral Education	<b>60</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>56</b>
Aesthetic Education	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>83</b>
Sport/ Physical Ed.	<b>92</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>94</b>
Skills & Competencies	<b>72</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>67</b>
Electives & Other Subjects	<b>40</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>58</b>

\* Social Sciences includes social studies, history, geography, civics, citizenship education and environmental studies

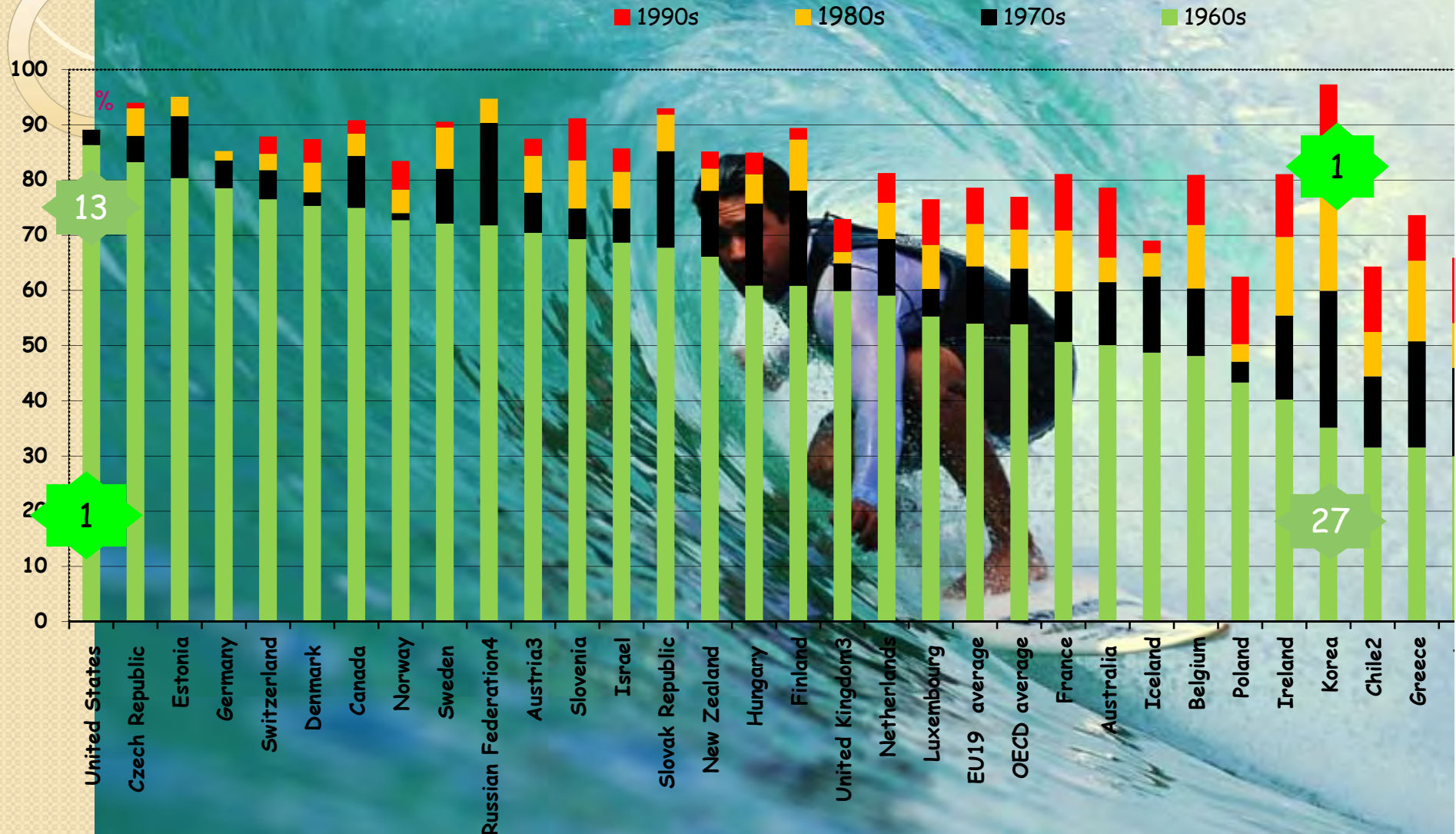


# Worldwide Prevalence of Foreign Language Instruction in Grades 1-8, Circa 2000, by Region



# A world of change in baseline qualifications

Approximated by percentage of persons with high school or equivalent qualifications in the age groups 55-64, 45-55, 45-44 und 25-34 years



1. Excluding ISCED 3C short programmes  
3. Including some ISCED 3C short programmes

2. Year of reference 2004  
3. Year of reference 2003.

High science performance

Finland

High average performance

High average performance

Large socio-economic disparities

High social equity

545  
Hong Kong-China

Chinese Taipei  
Estonia  
Canada  
Japan  
New Zealand  
Australia  
Netherlands  
Liechtenstein  
Korea  
Slovenia  
United Kingdom  
Germany  
Czech Republic  
Switzerland  
Macao-China  
Austria  
Ireland  
Belgium

Strong socio-economic impact on student performance

Socially equitable distribution of learning opportunities

505  
Hungary  
Sweden

Poland  
Denmark  
France  
Croatia  
Iceland  
United States  
Latvia  
Norway  
Slovak Republic, Spain, Lithuania  
Luxembourg

485  
Russian Federation

Portugal  
Italy  
Greece

465

Low average performance

Low average performance

Large socio-economic disparities

High social equity

445  
Israel

Low science performance

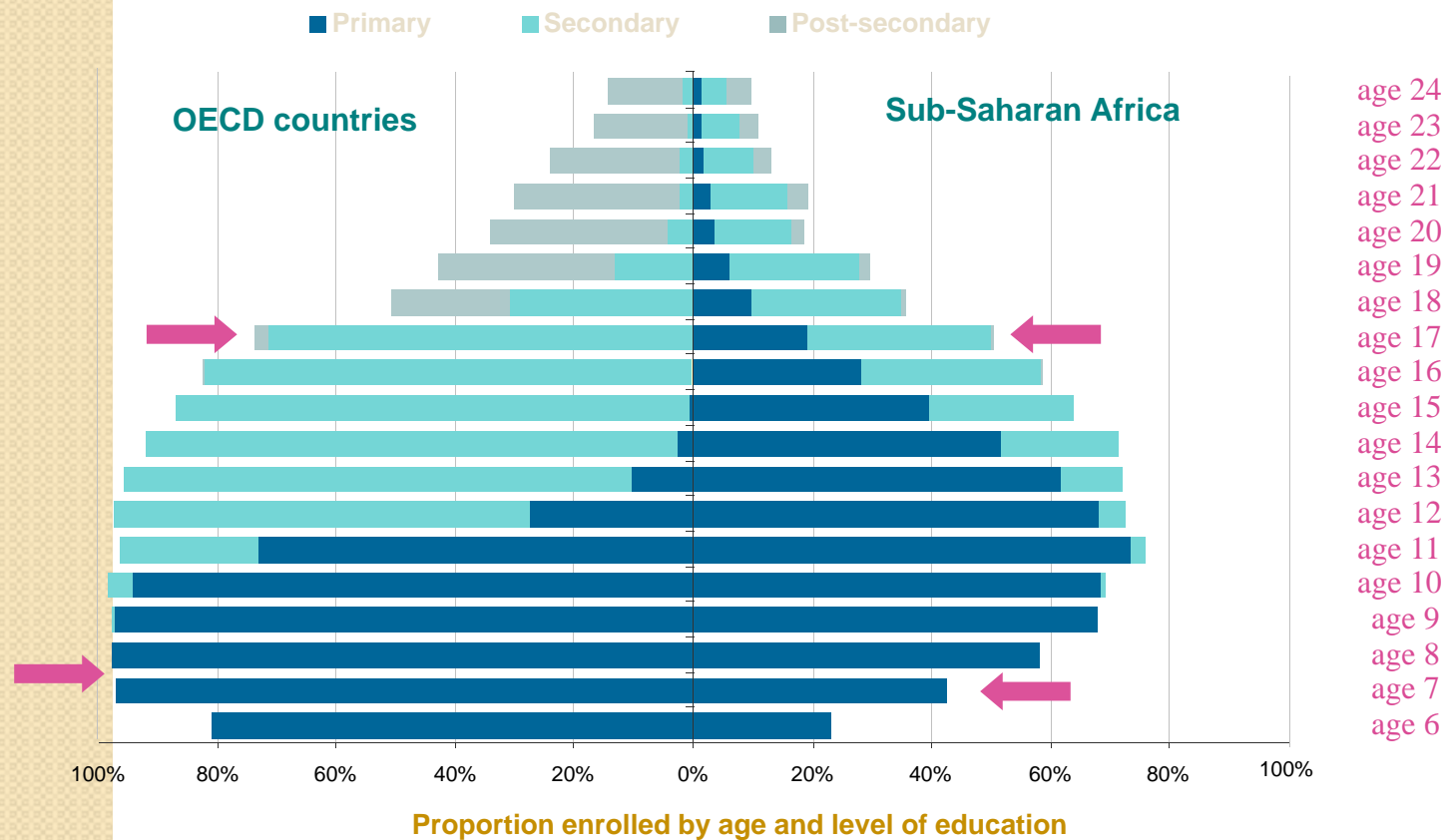
# The global divide: Age-specific enrolment ratios by age in the world's richest and poorest nations

## OECD countries:

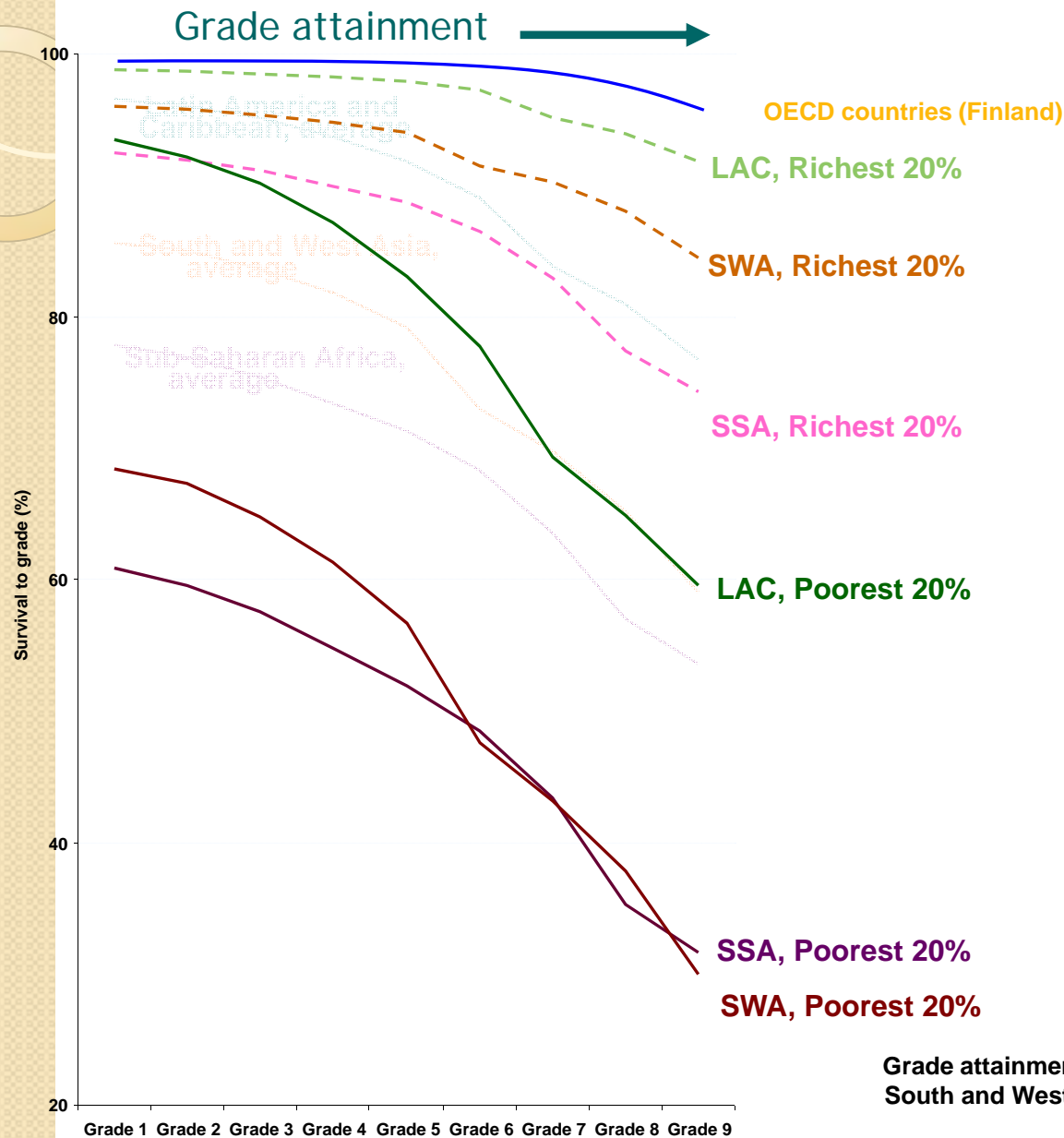
- By age 7, almost all children are in school
- At 17 yrs, 70% in secondary school

## Sub-Saharan Africa:

- At age 7, only about 40% are in school
- At 17 yrs, 30% are in secondary...but 20% still in primary



# Wealth disparities: Grade attainment by wealth quintile in sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia and Latin America



Children in the poorest 20% of households more likely to drop out than those in the richest 20%

Grade attainment by wealth quintile in sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean