Theory of Policy Borrowing and Lending in Comparative Educational Research

Gita Steiner-Khamsi, gs174@columbia.edu
Teachers College, Columbia University, New York

Related Research Areas:
- Globalization in education, “traveling reforms,” “cross-national policy attraction”
- International convergence of educational systems (neo-institutionalism)
- Reception and diffusion studies, diffusion of innovation studies (1920s and 1950s)
- Social network analysis, Small World research, epidemiological models in sociological network analysis (new millennium)

(a) Normative Interest in Policy Borrowing/Lending

Normative interest (the search for best practices in comparable systems) = legitimacy of the practice of comparative education


(b) Research interest in Policy Borrowing/Lending – the debate:

Research interest = understanding “lesson-drawing,” “emulation” or “borrowing/lending,” that is, why, when, how, by whom references are made to best practices in other educational systems

Neo-Institutionalist Theory (Stanford School of Sociology of Education) versus System Theory (Niklas Luhmann, Juergen Schriewer, Gita Steiner-Khamsi and many dissertations at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York)
1. The Neo-Institutionalist Argument of Modern Schooling (John Meyer, Francisco Ramirez)

1.1. The Egg-Cartoon School (Homogenous Classroom with 1 Adult Teacher)

The Bell-Lancaster System of Modern Schooling in Early 19th Century

Figure 1: A Teaching Monitor and His Reading Group

1.2. Education and Nation-Building

Horizontal and vertical integration by means of modern schooling (John Meyer et al. 1972) – progress and social justice as pillars of modern schooling

1.3. World Policy, International NGOs and Transnational Regimes

- John Boli et al. on World Polity
- David Suarez on human rights education (diffusion) in Central and Latin America,
- Collette Chabbot on EFA in 1990

1.4. International Convergence of National Educational Systems, Beliefs, and Practices

2. **System Theory (Niklas Luhmann, sociology of knowledge)**

- Explaining Policy Change: how is change justified/legitimized?
- Education as a sub-system of society
- The Theory of Externalization (Schriewer)
- The Semantics of Globalization (Schriewer): Global pressure is, at closer examination, always nationally/domestically induced (to generate leverage for policy change/reform)
- Reference Societies (who is emulated/which systems are emulated?)
- “Path dependency”: the “socio-logic” of policy borrowing/lesson-drawing

➔ Self-Referentiality (non-change; reference to (i) tradition/values, (ii) organization, (iii) “scientific rationality”) and externalization (change), that is external references to other sub-systems and other systems/countries

Figures 4 are from Schriewer & Caruso (2004) [Blue Book].
FIGURE 4: Reference Societies in International Articles

Revista (Española) de Pedagogía, 1925 & 1926 to 1995 & 1996

Na Putyakh k novoy Shkolye/Narodnoye Prosveshchhnye, 1926 & 1927/
(Sovetskaya) Pedagogika, 1937 & 1938 to 1995 & 1997

Jiaoyu Zazhi, 1924 to 1948/Renmin Jiaoyu, 1955 to 1975/
Jiaoyu Yanjiu, 1985 to 1997

- Socialist Countries
- Western Industrial Countries
- International Organizations
- Other Countries
3. Policy Borrowing and Lending (within System Theory) at TC, Columbia U

Research areas within Comparative and International Education (New York):

Interesting phenomena:
- fake borrowing/discursive borrowing (“flags of convenience” – David Lynch)
- unnecessary borrowing (Achimota example)
- timing: borrowing in times of revolutionary/political/administrative changes
- reference societies (typically countries in the global North)
- the emergence of South-South collaboration [green book: South-South Cooperation in Education and Development, 2009]

Political aspects [blue book: The Global Politics of Borrowing and Lending, 2004]:
- The politics of policy borrowing/lending (policy borrowing as a “certification” strategy)
- The politics of comparison, league tables, and target-setting – policy reception/responses to release of international student achievement results: “scandalization,” “glorification” or “indifference” (reflecting the policy setting; at times to generate reform pressure and at other times to alleviate reform pressure)

Economic aspects [red book: Educational Import. Local Encounter with Global Forces in Mongolia, 2006]:
- Contingency of loans/grants: funding is given IF a particular reform (or “portfolio of best practices”) is borrowedimplementedimported
- Double-talk of Ministries of Education in developing countries (double-talk: literally; the case of Mongolia)

Cultural aspects [also in red book]:
- What happens when a reform has been imported: what happens to existing practices? Do the new reforms replace previous practices, supplement them, or modify them?
- How are imported reforms culturally modified/locally adapted (anthropological focus) and what does this adaptation tell us about the cultural context (which aspects of a reform encounter cultural resistance and which aspects are fully adapted; example of “student-centered learning” in a setting with a clear social order in the class room and clear distinction between adult and child roles)


Example:

Normative Interest in Policy Borrowing/Lending or Comparison

Teacher Quality and Student Outcomes
(2007 McKinsey Report & Own Study in Kyrgyzstan)