Exploring Educational Transfer

Lecturer: Professor Dr. Florian Waldow
Department of Education Studies
Centre for Comparative and International Education
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Main disciplines: Comparative education, Educational science, Sociology

Dates: 31 July – 4 August 2017
Course Credits: 10 pts (ECTS)
Limitation: 25 participants

Objectives
Since the emergence of comparative education as a field, scholars have been fascinated by what happens when educational ideas, methods and organisational structures travel from one context to another. Over the course of the last few decades, research on educational transfer has become one of the largest and most active research areas in the field of comparative and international education. Possibly partly triggered by the increased awareness of global flows induced by the latest wave of globalisation, the study of transfer phenomena is currently a hot topic also in other social science disciplines. Not surprisingly, this has led to a wealth of different approaches and concepts that are being used in the field.

Questions of educational transfer have been approached with different motivations: one strand of research has been primarily interested in facilitating educational transfer, aiming at identifying “best practices” elsewhere in order to transfer them to other education systems. Another, more analytic strand of research has been primarily interested in understanding what happens when educational ideas, structures and discourses travel from one context to another, in many cases demonstrating that transfer nearly always is selective and that processes of adaptation and appropriation often change what is transferred beyond recognition.

The course aims to give a comprehensive introduction to the field of educational transfer. For the purposes of the course, “transfer” is understood to comprise a wide variety of approaches (borrowing and lending, policy learning, diffusion, reception studies, …). Among the questions addressed are the following: What happens to
educational ideas, discourses, methods or organisational principles when they travel? Who are the agents of educational transfer? What happens to the sending and the receiving context? Is it possible to “learn” from other countries? How can transfer phenomena be studied? Which theoretical concepts do we possess that help us understand them? How has globalisation impacted educational transfer?

The course will give participants an overview of current transfer research, including the theoretical approaches used to study transfer. It also aims at equipping the participants with methodological tools useful in studying transfer. Hopefully, this approach will make it possible for participants to incorporate what they have learnt in the course into their own work.

**Specific requirements**
The course will be mostly in lecture form. However, there will be ample time for discussion and for relating course content to the participants’ own work. It is therefore very important that participants read the assigned course literature.

**Recommended reading**
If in addition to the required reading you want to prepare for the course by reading one seminal work in the field, I recommend the following:


You may also want to have a look at some of the contributions in:

LECTURES

Monday

Lecture 1: Introduction
In the introductory session, the participants and the lecturer get to know each other and each other’s work and discuss the programme and expectations for the summer school. Also, some of the basic concepts we will be working with will be clarified and the position of transfer research in the wider landscape of educational studies and the social sciences as a whole will be discussed. Participants should be able to give a (very brief) outline of their own work in the session.

Literature:


Lecture 2: Historical perspectives on transfer
Educational transfer is a phenomenon that has been around for a very long time. Already when national systems of education first emerged, they did this in mutual observation of and exchange with each other, even if this has sometimes become obscured by the “nationalist” perspectives of large parts of educational historiography. In some instances (and on some levels of analysis), these transfer processes have has led to far-reaching standardisations of the educational landscape. The lecture will discuss these phenomena and make clear that educational transfer is far from being a modern “invention”.

Literature:

**Tuesday**

**Lecture 3: Imagining transfer: Different approaches I**
Processes of educational transfer have been studied by researchers with a variety of different theoretical “spectacles”. This lecture will acquaint participants with some of the most widespread theoretical approaches to studying educational transfer. One important focus of this lecture will be the question how different approaches deal with the question to which degree transfer is forced or voluntary. Another is the question of whether transfer leads to an increasing standardisation of education worldwide or not. The lecture will also discuss the question whether the emergence of similar phenomena in different locations is necessarily a sign of transfer or not. Approaches covered in this lecture range from World Culture Theory to postcolonial approaches.

**Literature:**

Lecture 4: Imagining transfer: Different approaches II
This lecture continues the overview of theoretical approaches to educational transfer begun in the last lecture. It will comprise the “borrowing and lending”-approach including Schriewer’s “externalisation thesis” and the “policy attraction”-model of Phillips and Ochs. It will also discuss alternative ways of conceptualising space (and therefore transfer), such as Arjun Appadurai’s notion of “scapes” that transcend national boundaries, and recent problematisations of the concept of “transfer” as such, such as the argument recently put forward by Beech & Artopoulos.

Literature:
Wednesday

Lecture 5: Agents and levels of transfer
Extending the overview of the different approaches presented in the last two lectures, this lecture will focus on the agents of educational transfer: who promotes transfer with which agendas? Who is involved in transfer? Which characteristics make transfer between certain agents likely? Topics covered will range from the impact of “travellers’ tales” in the 19th century to the role and policies of international organisations in educational transfer today. A second topic covered by the lecture will be the different levels involved in transfer: global, supra-national, national, regional, local. The lecture will aim to show how these are involved and interact in transfer processes.

Literature:

Lecture 6: Transfer and reference
In education policy-making, other countries are frequently portrayed as positive “reference societies”, i.e. as models to follow (such as Finland after PISA). However, these references do not always lead to anything actually being transferred from these countries. Conversely, not all transfer that is happening is made explicit (“silent borrowing”). Also, “reference societies” are not always positive, but can also serve as “anti-models” that are used to warn against transfer. The lecture will discuss the complex relationship of reference and transfer, placing particular attention on the pivotal role of reference for the legitimation and de-legitimation of policy agendas.

Literature:

Thursday

Lecture 7: Educational transfer in an age of globalisation

A minimalist definition of globalisation states that it consists of intensified political, economic and military interdependence combined with increased global flows of people, goods and information. This intensified interdependence and increased flows have a massive impact on the conditions under which processes of educational transfer occur and which impacts they have. The lecture will try to explore the changes and also ask how these conditions came about. In this context, it will also discuss the relation of transfer and governance in a globalised world.

Literature:

Lecture 8: ILSAs and educational transfer
The topic of this lecture is closely connected to the previous one. The rise of international large-scale assessments (ILSAs) in education has reconfigured the way in which processes of educational transfer operate. E.g., some scholars have argued the countries or regions scoring highest in these assessments have become the new global models in education policy-making. While ILSAs have undoubtedly changed the way in which “reference societies” are constructed, arguably the story is a bit more complex: local conditions still play an important role for how the success of ILSA-top scorers is viewed. The lecture will explore the changes brought about by ILSAs for reference and transfer in education policy-making. It will also situate these changes in the wider picture of the emergence of global comparisons, which predate the first ILSAs by more than 100 years.

Literature:

Friday

Lecture 9: Cross-sectoral transfer
Transfer does not only occur in a spatial sense (e.g. between different countries or regions), but also between different social domains, a phenomenon for which Gita Steiner-Khamsi has suggested the term “cross-sectoral transfer”. Examples abound; e.g., educational thinking and theorising has a legacy of being heavily influenced by theology. Today, economics is providing a prolific source of transfer for many social fields, not just education. But education has not just been at the receiving end of transfer processes, it has also acted as “lender” for other social domains, not least through the “educationalization” of many social problems. The lecture will study some of these processes of “cross-sectoral transfer”, including the obstacles they face.

Literature:


Lecture 10: Final discussion: Educational transfer in your own work
The course will be mostly in lecture form. However, there will be ample time for discussion and for relating course content to the participants’ own work. It is therefore very important that participants read the assigned course literature.
Complete reading list


The lecturer

**Florian Waldow** is professor of comparative and international education at Humboldt University, Berlin. Before assuming this post in 2013, he taught and researched at the University of Münster, Germany, and the Universities of Uppsala and Stockholm, Sweden. He took his doctorate at Humboldt University in 2005.

One of Florian’s main research interests is policy borrowing and lending in education, particularly the ways in which reference societies are used in policy-making. He has
looked at processes of “silent borrowing” (i.e. non-explicit borrowing) and the ways in which PISA-top scorers have been used as reference societies. He has also dabbled in the study of cross-sectoral transfer, looking at how the concept of “standards” migrated from industry to education. Together with Gita Steiner-Khamsi (Teachers College, New York), he has edited the World Yearbook of Education 2012, *Policy borrowing and lending in education*.

Florian is also interested in the processes of meaning-making around and the cultural context of assessment in a comparative perspective. He currently leads the project “Different worlds of meritocracy? Educational assessment and conceptions of justice in Germany, Sweden and England in the age of ‘standards-based reform’”, which is financed by the German Research Foundation’s Emmy-Noether-Programme.

Selected publications of Florian Waldow:


