Comparative Policy Studies
Theories, Methods, and Emerging Issues

Professor Gita Steiner-Khamsi, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, USA & Graduate Institute of International Development Studies, Geneva, Switzerland

Course dates: 30 July - 3 August 2018

Main disciplines: Educational Science, Sociology, Political Science, Research Methodology

Course Credits: 10 pts (ECTS)

Course objectives / learning outcome
The seminar guides doctoral students in their endeavor to review, apply, and critically reflect on relevant theories and methods that lend themselves for understanding the policy process from an international comparative perspective. A special focus will be placed on the comparative study of global education policies, in particular, on the reception and translation of such “traveling reforms,” the role of international comparison for global norm setting, and the growing influence of multinational businesses and philanthropies in shaping educational reform. Even though the examples deal mostly with education policies, most of the theories, methods and emerging issues, discussed in the seminar, may be useful for public policy studies in general. developed economies. Finally, though policy evaluation is also part of the policy process, we look at policy-making rather than evaluation.
The seminar is divided into three parts:

**Part 1** presents core concepts of three influential strands of social theory and shows how the same phenomenon may be interpreted differently, depending on which theoretical framework one has chosen. Several social theories (Foucauldian analysis and critical social theory, neo-institutionalism, system theory) and several interpretive frameworks for analyzing the policy process (advocacy coalition framework, multiple streams framework, policy transfer/borrowing) are presented in depth in order to explore the five most common frames used in policy studies: rational, economic, political, social, and globalization frame.

**Part 2** consists of one session that focuses on methods of comparative inquiry that are especially suited for comparative policy studies. The first part of the methodology session focuses on cross-national comparison and case study methodology. The second part of the session deals with social network analysis which draws on relational data to identify types of policy actors (e.g., policy brokers, policy entrepreneurs, policy translators) and policy networks.

**Part 3** highlights four emerging issues that are currently being heatedly debated in the policy research community: (i) public-private partnership in education, (ii) transnational accreditation (iii) businesses and philanthropy in education, and (iv) alternative financing in aid and international cooperation.

Students are expected to read 2-3 texts in details for each lecture/session, and the rest only cursorily. The syllabus includes a few texts produced by scholars based in Scandinavian countries.

In addition to the discussion of the reading, there will be time set aside during the seminar to discuss the research projects of the students, regardless of the stage in which they currently are. Starting on the second day, the participating doctoral students are encouraged to present their ongoing dissertation research and get feedback from the lecturer and the peers. Handouts on how to structure and present dissertation research will be provided in the first session. Depending on what is most useful for the doctoral student, the feedback may be on issues related to the interpretive framework, research design and methodology, data analysis and interpretation of findings, or the write-up of the dissertation research.
Upon completion of the summer school course, students are encouraged to choose a topic for their seminar paper that relates to their own research.

The course is structured in interactive lectures/power point presentations followed by discussions on how the reading relates to current debates as well as to students’ own dissertation research.

**COURSE OUTLINE**

**Lecture 1: The Policy Process: Rational, Political, Social, Economic, and Global Frames**

The first session consists of an overview of several perspectives/frames that are applied for the study of the policy process: the rational, political, social, economic, and global frames. In addition, the first session introduces two widely referenced theories in public policy studies: the Advocacy Coalition Framework and the Multiple Streams Framework. In an attempt to explore under-studied aspects of the policy process, the lecturer presents her own classification of theoretical concepts taking into account transnational networks and global actors.

Readings:

Lecture 2: Theories I: Governmentality, Managerialism and the Role of the State

The session starts out with a reflection on the changing role of the state in agenda setting, policy formulation, and policy evaluation drawing on Foucault’s concepts of governmentality. The shift from government to governmentality, first described by Foucault, has been applied to educational studies by scholars such as Jenny Ozga (“governance by numbers”), Stephen J. Ball (“network governance”), or Christian Maroy (“theory of the post-bureaucratic state”).

Readings:


Lecture 3: Theories II: Neo-Institutionalism and the Role of Transnational Regimes

Arguably, neo-institutionalist theories lend themselves for a reflection on why national systems adopt international knowledge, beliefs and standards and what role international organizations play in propelling such international scripts. Both the Stanford University variant of neo-institutionalist theory is discussed (notably, Meyer, Ramirez, Bromley, Chabott) as well as modifications associated with the Scandinavian schools or historical institutionalism. Examples from education, health and managements studies are supposed to illustrate the neo-institutionalist interpretive framework. The reading for this session also includes two texts (Dale 2005, Steiner-Khamsi 2012) that critically reflect on neo-institutionalist theory.

Readings:


See also critiques:


There is an interesting debate in comparative education between authors writing within the interpretive framework of neo-institutionalism and those with an affinity to system theory. The main tenets of the controversy will be discussed. Key concepts of system theory, such as functional differentiation, exclusion/inclusion, and self-referentiality will be explored and subsequently applied to shed light on two issues: (i) public-private partnerships in education and (ii) the use of “scientific rationality” (Luhmann), and (iii) the definition of "evidence" in the policy process.

Readings:


Lecture 5: **Theories IV: Policy Transfer, Local Adaptation and Domestication (including texts on Scandinavian debates)**

The study of global education policy, international standards, "best practices" or policies that "travel" from one country to the next and get translated/adapted differently has traditionally been a core research area of comparative education. This research area has been revitalized over the past twenty years or so by scholars in sociological systems theory with a keen interest in understanding the phenomenon of "externalization" (see session/lecture 4) but also more broadly by researchers in globalization studies. In session/lecture 5, we read several Scandinavian authors who analyzed policy transfer.

**Readings:**

Lecture 6: **Methods of Comparative Inquiry and Social Network Analysis**
The first part of the methods session provides an overview of comparative methods of inquiry drawing on Todd Landman’s textbook. The second part deals with relational data and presents applications of social network analysis in policy studies.

Readings:


Lecture 7: **Issues I: Public-Private Partnership in Education** The third part of the seminar (sessions 7 – 10) addresses current issues in policy studies from an international comparative perspective. In addition to the reading, students are encouraged to review blog discussions, podcasts and livestreams on the following four emerging issues discussed in class:

- Lecture 7: public-private partnership in education
- Lecture 8: transnational accreditation
- Lecture 9: businesses and philanthropy in education
- Lecture 10: alternative financing in aid and international cooperation.

Readings:


**Lecture 8: Issues II: Transnational Accreditation**

**Readings:**


**Lecture 9: Issues III: Businesses and Philanthropy in Education**

**Readings:**

Lecture 10: **Issues IV: Alternative Financing in Aid and International Cooperation**

Readings:


Please also review the documents listed on the following sites:

- [http://www.educationcannotwait.org](http://www.educationcannotwait.org)
- [https://www.globalpartnership.org/about-us/foundations](https://www.globalpartnership.org/about-us/foundations)

**The lecturer**

Gita Steiner-Khamsi is Professor of Comparative and International Education at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York, and Director of NORRAG. Over the next few years, she holds a dual academic appointment at Columbia University in New York (always in the fall semester) and at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva (always in the spring semester).

Prior to her appointment at Columbia University (1995), she worked for close to ten years as policy analyst in the Ministry of Education, Canton of Zurich, Switzerland. She published eight books, numerous journal articles and book chapters on areas related to comparative policy studies, globalization, comparative methods, and international educational development. She has analyzed school reforms and teacher policies in North America, Europe as well as in Mongolia and in Central Asia. She is series editor of three book series in comparative education: *World Yearbook of Education* (Routledge), *International Perspectives on Educational Reform* (Teachers College Press), and *NORRAG Series on International Education and Development* (E. Elgar Publisher). Her most recent book is entitled *The Global Education Industry*, co-edited with Antoni Verger and Christopher Lubienski, published by Routledge in 2016.

She is a part-time R2 Visiting Research Professor at the University of Oslo, funded from an UTNAM grant and secured/coordinated by Kirsten Sivesind.