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# Neither a Borrower, or a Lender be: Educational Reform Through Transnational Borrowing and Lending

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“Neither a borrower, nor a lender be”: Educational Reform  
through Transnational Borrowing and Lending<sup>1</sup>

MARGARET ZOLLER BOOTH

*Educational Policy Borrowing: Historical Perspectives* edited by David Phillips and Kimberly Ochs. Oxford: Symposium Books, 2004. 239 pp. \$42.00 (paper). ISBN 1-873927-94-0.

*The Global Politics of Educational Borrowing and Lending* edited by Gita Steiner-Khamsi. New York: Teachers College Press, 2004. 235 pp. \$32.95 (paper). ISBN 0-8077-4493-X.

When does it become time for a nation to resort to borrowing educational policy from abroad; when that time comes, who should do the lending, and what will the consequences for both parties be? Thomas Friedman argues in *The World Is Flat* that it is high time for the United States to begin borrowing educational policy from others. Furthermore, we might conclude that this borrowing should come from nations in the East, which, according to Friedman, are quickly surpassing the United States in educational outcomes, ingenuity, and technological engineering productivity.<sup>2</sup> While some of Friedman’s readers may view him as an alarmist, those U.S. policy makers taking him more seriously are likely to recognize the immediacy in his world analysis as similar to other critical periods in the history of U.S. education, such as the late-1950s Soviet Sputnik era or the late twentieth-century obsession with Japanese schooling at the wellspring of its postwar economic miracle. However, if U.S. policy makers were to conclude that now is the time to begin borrowing, how would it proceed without making the all too common mistake of attempting to transplant educational policies in their entirety from afar without indigenizing them in the process?

Answers to these and other questions regarding the lending/borrowing process are explored in the two volumes examined in this review essay, *Educational Policy Borrowing: Historical Perspectives*, edited by David Phillips and Kimberly Ochs, and *The Global Politics of Educational Borrowing and Lending*,

<sup>1</sup> *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare; Polonius speaking: “Neither a borrower, nor a lender be; / For loan oft loses both itself and friend” (act 2, scene 3).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2005).

edited by Gita Steiner-Khamsi. Edited by notable authorities in the field, these two volumes effectively examine the process of borrowing and lending from similar yet somewhat divergent approaches. In their study of “globalization” as a product of educational exchange, both volumes are informed by the perspectives that “borrowing is not copying” and that the successful process of internationally influenced educational reform is a complex mélange of borrowers and lenders.<sup>3</sup> Phillips and Ochs present a purely historical analysis, while Steiner-Khamsi’s is more multidisciplinary in its approach, incorporating as well a larger number of contemporary case studies.

### Historical Borrowing

The Phillips and Ochs volume includes some thoroughly researched, significant historical analyses of the borrowing/lending process. While the research methodology and scholarship of this book is often impressive, its organizational structure is not as effective. The volume would have been an even more valuable resource were it organized into thematic sections with editorial introductions and conclusions, for instance, if the editors of *Educational Policy Borrowing* could have created an introductory section entitled “Setting the Stage for a Historical/Theoretical Framework.” The first two chapters, the first of which is written by the editors, fit nicely into this theme. Phillips and Ochs effectively utilize their first chapter as an introduction, creating a conceptual framework on which the remaining chapters can draw for analysis. They take their four-stage framework (cross-national attraction, decision, implementation, and internalization) and apply it to select chapters with the intent of accomplishing what they called for in their somewhat similar chapter in the Steiner-Khamsi volume. That is, they wish to present a series of case studies of educational borrowing in an attempt to analyze the effectiveness and applicability of their framework within these historical contexts. The remaining chapters of the Phillips and Ochs volume, which for the most part are well researched and presented, often do accomplish this.

The second chapter, by Bernd Zymek and Robert Zymek, seeks to explain the general inconsistencies and paradoxes of educational borrowing. The authors break their analysis into three themes. First, they reveal the inconsistency of historical borrowing caused by the lack of true “national systems” from which to borrow or lend. Second, they explore the paradox of looking abroad for educational systems that were both contextually appropriate and locally relevant. Finally, they examine the interwoven and often competing goals of nationalizing, internationalizing, regionalizing, and transregionalizing. While this chapter would have been more effective if it had provided more detailed evidence and extensive references, it does present a nicely

<sup>3</sup> Quotation is from Steiner-Khamsi, *Global Politics*, 5.

coherent analysis of the field, reminding us that we need not reinvent the wheel but can learn a great deal about the process of comparative education by studying the comparative nature of other social sciences.

Chapters 3–7 of the Phillips and Ochs volume could be grouped under the title “Nineteenth-Century European Borrowing.” First, Almut Sprigade’s chapter provides a thorough investigation into England’s efforts to conduct educational comparison and to borrow during the first half of the nineteenth century. After examining England’s use of the available sources for comparison at the time (statistical reports, travel literature, and periodical and journal articles), Sprigade concludes that both the academic community and the general public had ample access to information regarding education abroad, which contributed to a lively debate regarding educational borrowing at home.

Borrowing from England is the focus of a chapter by Marcelo Caruso, who investigated Spain’s and Germany’s ability and desire to borrow the popular British Bell-Lancaster monitorial educational system during the nineteenth century. Caruso found that a strong “tension between two social and cultural tendencies” (76) influenced Spanish and German views regarding this system of education, which they interpreted as giving children more individual power and teachers less of a role in instruction. This well-developed case study reveals how “elements of culture, meaning attribution and assignment should play a significant role in the analysis of the borrowing of educational knowledge and models” (78).

The theme of cultural context continues through the two chapters that follow. Christina de Bellaigue investigates the cross-channel English and French perspectives on secondary (mainly boys’) education in the mid-nineteenth century. The chapter focuses on British reports by Matthew Arnold describing the French system and French reports by Jacques Demogeout and Henry Montucci regarding British secondary schools. De Bellaigue reveals how these reports were shaped by the educational debates of the day in their respective countries, which, in turn, influenced their interpretations of what was to be found across the channel. The divergent guiding philosophies of English autonomy and French centralization and state control influenced each country’s perspective of the other’s system, which, in turn, influenced their choice of what to borrow. Likewise, James C. Albisetti explores the influence of foreign models on French female education, as well as the impact of the French state-supported lycées (secondary schools) for girls. In this case, both the social arguments regarding the purpose of female education and the influence of religion (Catholic or Protestant) affected the nature of each nation’s initiatives on female schooling.

In the last of the chapters fitting into the nineteenth-century theme, Philipp Gonon explores how the dramatic expansion of overseas travel during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries increased the volume of

educational reports, which, in turn, hastened the international exchange of educational concepts. Gonon emphasizes the importance of three types of travel: pilgrimages, such as those involving visits to meet with known educators; cultural travel as the prototype of educational tourism; and investigative travel involving the first professional educators who purposefully set out to examine reform. Gonon is one of the few authors in either of these volumes who succeeds in applying historical analysis to contemporary practice by reminding us of the continued importance of educational travel, arguing that “travel educates, and this is especially true for teachers and [other] education professionals” (140). However, even this conclusion might have gone further. Some forms of nineteenth-century travel were purposeful investigations that disseminated useful knowledge to professional educators, he observes, while other forms of travel were little more than glorified vacation junkets. Consequently, applying this lesson to today, we should develop even more educational travel designed around specific investigation protocols, carried out using sound methodology, and focused on achieving productive or useful outcomes.

The following three chapters of the Phillips and Ochs volume could fall under the category of “Post–World War II Borrowing,” as they explore the successes and failures of post–World War II educational reconstruction and reform in Japan, Germany, and Austria. The Japanese example by Masako Shibata argues that two landmark Japanese educational reforms were guided by the same two principles. First, transnational attraction had historically been viewed by national governments as important to national progress (e.g., the drive for modernization during the Meiji Restoration, which became the historical context for the push toward democratization during the post–World War II occupation). Second, it was recognized that educational reform would bring international acceptance, which, in turn, would enhance national security. Concentrating on these two reform periods, Shibata argues compellingly that the roots of Japan’s adoption of a pattern of cross-national attraction are to be found in these two examples of educational transfer from the West.

Providing a contrast to the Japanese example of successful borrowing, Craig Pepin and Mark Clark analyze the failure of U.S. reformers to significantly alter the precepts of higher education in occupied Germany. This lack of success is attributed to the American pursuit of the self-defeating goal of infusing democratization into the school system utilizing exclusively authoritarian means. In the end, the toxic combination of imprecise American reform objectives and the refusal of German academics to critically examine their educational system may have led to the result of “denazification without reform” (178).

This lack of will in implementation was a factor not only for Germany but also in the case of post–World War II Austria, which Karl Heinz Gruber examines in his chapter. His description of the failure of one Austrian com-

parative education project with the goal of indigenization reveals the importance of consistent policy among administrators sharing the common desire to reform.

The final two chapters of the Phillips and Ochs volume differ from the rest of the book in their focus both on geography and contemporary history, both examining the borrowing of outcomes-based education (OBE) in South Africa. Jonathan Jansen's chapter tackles the borrowing problems associated with OBE in South Africa as he strives to look at the historical context of education in South Africa, the methods of educational borrowing (including the localization policy), and the effects of those new policies in classrooms. While the chapter's four goals are a bit ambitious for a chapter of this size and deserve more extensive grounding in the literature than they receive here, the author presents a valuable, comprehensive description of the process of borrowing OBE. Using Ochs and Phillips's cross-national borrowing framework, Jansen is able to analyze the South African case. Likewise, the final chapter by Carol Anne Spreen examines the development of OBE in South Africa as an example of political change that initiated the borrowing of educational ideas. In this case, Spreen analyzes how new postapartheid South African policy makers looked to recognized foreign sources for educational innovations in order to legitimize both themselves and their proposed reforms. Local interpretations of OBE differed according to the policies' origins, and thus in the end a true hybrid system was created. Spreen uses Margaret Archer's theoretical framework to analyze the South African process, which ultimately needed to disengage itself from foreign influence and localize reform in order to make it acceptable.

*Educational Policy Borrowing: Historical Perspectives* presents several first-rate case studies of educational borrowing to facilitate our understanding of the place of cross-national educational attraction from a historical perspective. However, as a historical volume, Phillips and Ochs would have done well to have analyzed two significant historical events in "borrowing": the effects of colonization and of missionary-dominated educational reform. The absence of these themes skews our understanding of the history of lending/borrowing. While the editors may have desired to interpret "lending and borrowing" from a more voluntary perspective, the line between voluntary and imposed borrowing is often quite thin, as is alluded to in their case studies of post-World War II borrowing under military occupation.

Phillips and Ochs present a strong framework for analyzing the borrowing process in their first chapter. However, while some authors deliberately apply this framework to their particular case studies, others do not. Moreover, Phillips and Ochs do not discuss all of the cases in relation to their framework. Thus, the book misses an opportunity to demonstrate the value of this very significant framework for analyzing educational borrowing and lending.

### The Politics of Lending and Borrowing

Gita Steiner-Khamsi, in *The Global Politics of Educational Borrowing and Lending*, also provides a framework that assists readers in analyzing the process of lending and borrowing from various perspectives and in diverse contexts. Her introduction and conclusion effectively frame the volume's argument that globalization need not lead to a "world culture" or a "hybrid international model of education" (4). On the contrary, the chapters in her book make the collective case for what Phillips and Ochs refer to as internalization or indigenization, the process of borrowing and adapting policies tailored specifically to satisfy the needs of a particular national context. Steiner-Khamsi also effectively assists the development of this theme by dividing her book into three parts, including a useful introduction to each section that contextualizes the authors and their work within that section. While there tends to be an imbalance in favor of the politics of borrowing rather than lending and some question regarding the choice of a few of the representative chapters, Steiner-Khamsi's framework serves to integrate the book as a whole.

The first part of the Steiner-Khamsi volume, "Globalization, Internationality, and Cross-National Policy Attraction," includes three chapters designed to provide an interpretive and methodological framework for the remaining chapters of the book, which are mainly case studies. The first chapter by Charles Tilly presents a concise comparative analysis of historical patterns, social influences, and contemporary political-economic results of globalization. Tilly contends that globalization has always occurred throughout history, resulting in both positive flows of ideas as well as negative political-economic ramifications for much of the world's population. This first chapter is very useful and could be assigned to beginning students of comparative education as it contextualizes past and present trends in educational globalization with statistical trends and broad comparative examples.

Chapter 2, by Jurgen Schriewer and Carlos Martinez, investigates "both the degree and the dimensions of the 'internationalization' of educational knowledge" (33) through a content analysis of educational literature of three nations (Spain, Russia/USSR, and China) from the 1920s to the 1990s. While the chapter's detailed presentation of the findings does not make for easy reading, the authors do provide solid empirical evidence demonstrating that the educational discourse of these three nations has been greatly influenced by their respective, unique, and politically changing pre- and post-World War II contexts. The authors' conclusion, that there is a lack of evidence of a "growing institutionalization of a 'world cultural environment'" (50) seems reasonable, even if it is based on preliminary evidence from a small sample of nations.

Part I ends with a chapter by David Phillip, who synthesizes much of his previous work in developing a theory of cross-national educational policy attraction. He presents his conceptual framework similarly to his chapter in

his own coedited volume (discussed above) and applies the framework to the study of British repeated borrowing from Germany during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The second part of the Steiner-Khamsi volume is a collection of seven case studies examining the politics of educational borrowing. While the chapters represent various geographic regions, educational topics, and theoretical applications, they vary in their scholarly rigor and depth of analysis. In the first case study, Iveta Silova examines the process of educational borrowing in order to reform Latvian minority education during the 1990s. She discusses the cultural and political contexts of Latvian education, including past Soviet policies that are used to reframe and legitimize old practices (including separate schools for Latvian- and Russian-speaking students) for new purposes. In so doing, she discovers that what is most important in borrowing is not necessarily the actual new policy implementation (or nonimplementation) but rather the power of the discourse, which is often more lasting than actual implementation.

Chapters 5 and 6 each discuss examples of purposeful educational borrowing from powerful foreign sources so as to legitimize reform politically. First, Tali Yariv-Mashal examines the use of the 1970s grass-roots activist organization, the Israeli Black Panthers, who borrowed terminology and ideas from the U.S. Black Panthers movement, including educational references to “integration” and “multiculturalism.” This was done to politicize the process of school integration. In chapter 6, Carol Anne Spreen mirrors her chapter in the Phillips and Ochs volume as she incorporates Margaret Archer’s three-phase theoretical framework to analyze the localization of policy borrowing (in this case OBE) from a global trend. While both of these chapters present appropriate examples to illustrate the political nature of borrowing, each requires a more thorough and searching presentation of evidence to validate Spreen’s argument.

The political ramifications of internally imposed borrowing of educational ideas is the subject of chapters 7 and 8. The first case by Bernhard T. Streitwiser is a well-researched analysis of East Berlin (German Democratic Republic, GDR) whose secondary school teachers were forced to change their curriculum from one that included some social training (*erziehung*) to purely academic education (*bildung*) following the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. However, while the change was mandated by the new government, Streitwiser found that some former GDR teachers continued to include social training, both purposefully and subconsciously, as a part of their lessons. Likewise, in chapter 8, William deJong-Lambert analyzes how Soviet politics influenced scientific theory and research in Poland by enforcing a curriculum that incorporated unsound scientific theory as a product of political ideology. Hence, Darwinian theory was discredited because of its promoted social inequality. In its place, the political establishment fostered Ivan Michurin’s



theory that all species could be taught to survive in any environment. This well-written analysis of the scientific debates involved illustrates the degree to which politically inspired imposition (in the name of educational reform) can corrupt scientific knowledge.

The impact of “borrowed” concepts by external global institutions such as the World Bank is explored in the following two chapters. First, Frances Vavrus examines the case of Tanzania, where educational policies, written in “global language” and “normative claims,” are taken and implemented without concern for the contextual realities of the local situation. Tanzania represents an ideal case study that leaves the reader wishing for a deeper analysis, contrasting *ujamaa* policies and other local traditions more fully with World Bank “global-speak.” Then, Thomas F. Luschei discusses the political incentives and timing involved in Brazil’s adoption of the *Escola Nova* (New School) program, which originated in Colombia. Luschei cites both World Bank and Brazilian political self-interests as the reasons for the borrowing of a program that was already beginning to be perceived as problematic and that was being reevaluated by Colombian authorities. Nonetheless, Luschei argues that governments borrow other nations’ programs primarily for the purpose of bolstering their own legitimacy, in effect borrowing bigger when feeling weaker.

The final part of Steiner-Khamsi’s volume analyzes the politics of educational lending with two chapters that explore the effectiveness of large global institutions such as nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and the World Bank. Dana Burde’s chapter investigates the role of international NGOs (INGOs) in transferring or lending educational models internationally, especially when those programs are heavily influenced by U.S. policy. Her case study of an INGO-backed project promoting parent-teacher organizations (PTOs) in Bosnia-Herzegovina reveals the limitations of such programs’ sustainability. Burde’s analysis of this case, where indigenous participatory advocates were necessary for the success of the project, concludes that INGOs are more successful at meeting immediate local needs than in achieving long-term development goals with a global focus. Likewise, Phillip W. Jones’s chapter focuses on the conflicting and ambiguous role of the World Bank since 1962. Jones outlines the historical shifts in World Bank policy as it has varied its emphasis from its bank-like obligations of lending money to its role in development, involving human capital theory, structural adjustment, and the development of knowledge. His chapter reveals how these two World Bank goals are frequently in conflict as the bank attempts both to loan and to influence lending projects.

Gita Steiner-Khamsi’s well-written conclusion summarizes the range of questions explored in her edited volume. While she speculates that there may be unresolved “mysteries and contradictions” (202) of lending and borrowing, she is certain that a precondition for borrowing by governments is “the exist-

tence of a legitimacy crisis in an educational system” (204). Moreover, lending agencies acquire obvious benefits from these international relationships.

While Steiner-Khamsi’s conclusion analyzes the contributing chapters more than does Phillips and Ochs’s conclusion, Steiner-Khamsi too misses the opportunity to directly apply what can be learned from the historical case studies that is relevant and helpful to contemporary educational reform efforts. For example, the case study of Latvian school segregation and the resulting power of discourse could be applied to contemporary cases throughout the world where divisions in society have created long-lasting divisions within the school system. South African “Bantu Education” and other colonially imposed systems on the African continent come to mind. Moreover, deJong-Lambert’s piece on the debate regarding scientific knowledge in Poland is an example of a government meddling into the scientific curriculum in order to produce political rather than scientific outcomes. This case study appropriately mirrors contemporary controversies surrounding the teaching of intelligent design within school science curricula. President George W. Bush ex officio ensured that this philosophical topic would be included in the discussion of scientific curricula when he declared “both sides [evolution and intelligent design] ought to be properly taught” alongside each other.<sup>4</sup> While the political debate affecting this purely scientific issue has only recently been widely inserted into the popular press, gradually it has grown on the fringes of the academic community since the founding of the Discovery Institute in 1990, a Seattle-based conservative think tank that, in addition to promoting the idea of intelligent design, has also sponsored projects in national defense.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, a weakness shared by both volumes is their conveyance of the impression that the United States has played the singular role of lender and not borrower in cross-national educational attraction. Yet education in the United States was originally designed through the borrowing process and has continued in that manner through its various phases of development from the nineteenth-century reform of higher education to its more recent infatuation with Japan.<sup>6</sup> Omitting any reference to this type of participation paints an incomplete picture of the phenomenon of transfer and poses the danger of presenting government policy makers with the impression that the only role that the United States plays in international educational policy sharing is that of a lender.

According to Harold Noah, one of the most important uses of compar-

<sup>4</sup> Jodi Wilgoren, “Politicized Scholars Put Evolution on the Defensive,” *New York Times*, August 21, 2005, 1.

<sup>5</sup> See Daniel C. Dennett, “Show Me the Science,” *New York Times*, August 28, 2005. See also H. Allen Orr, “Devolution: Why Intelligent Design Isn’t,” *New Yorker*, May 30, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Robert F. Arnove, “Introduction: Reframing Comparative Education, The Dialectic of the Global and the Local,” in *Comparative Education: The Dialectic of the Global and the Local*, ed. Robert Arnove and Carlos Alberto Torres, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

ative education is “its potential for establishing the generalizability of what we think we know about education.”<sup>7</sup> If policy implementers concerned with Friedman’s “flattening world” were to use these two volumes as a source of generalizations about lending and borrowing, they would find them useful in guiding conceptualization patterns of successes and failures. However, if their perception of the United States is solely one of lender and not borrower, this contributes to a hegemonic attitude, which leads to complacency, lack of reform at home, and an absence of motivation to learn from or borrow from others. As a result, Friedman’s scenario of the world becoming “flatter” and the worldwide playing field approaching equality may not be as far in the future as many of us think.

<sup>7</sup> Harold J. Noah, “The Use and Abuse of Comparative Education,” in *New Approaches to Comparative Education*, ed. Philip G. Altbach and Gail P. Kelly (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 159.

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