

*The*  
GLOBAL POLITICS *of*  
EDUCATIONAL  
BORROWING *and*  
LENDING

*Edited by*

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## Foreword

Globalization is the type of phrase that Antonio Nóvoa (2002) calls *planet speak*. It is a ubiquitous word that travels across the media, academic literatures, and the local bars as something that everyone "knows" and that seems to need no author. Yet globalization is an empty signifier whose spaces are filled continually with multiple and differentiated meanings. It is a name to signal the fulfillment of the progress that modernity was to bring, spoken about with a reference once reserved for the worldwide Church's redemption of the soul. But globalization also produces talk about the degeneration of culture, the erosion of national identity, and the end of diversity in an increasingly standardized world. While globalization appears ubiquitous, it often is treated ahistorically. It is made to seem as a condition that encapsulates contemporary life, one that, if I use a recent comparative study of schooling in Europe, is accepted almost fatalistically.

This planet speak raises the question of understanding the things happening in the world that make the talk of globalization possible. That is, while the talk of globalization may function as an empty signifier, there are things happening in the world for which the word acts as a convenient fiction. The intellectual problem is how to interpret these phenomena of the world. Gita Steiner-Khamsi and the scholars she has invited to contribute to this book take up one such phenomenon—educational borrowing—and explore its historical and contextual dimensions in their national and transnational studies. They note that globalization, like policy borrowing, is not a new phenomenon but rather speaks to anxieties, or celebrations, regarding the rationalities and systems of knowledge governing the social and the individual in contemporary reforms.

If globalization is not a new historical phenomenon, the question is how to account for the present. Most of the literature on contemporary globalization takes the economic characteristics as central for investigating the changes occurring. Such discussions often focus on, for example, the movement from Fordist to post-Fordist economies as evidence of greater global differentiation in changing both cultural and social patterns. Some literature focuses more directly on the cultural phenomena of globalization as an area to be studied in its own right. This latter literature considers, for

# Globalization in Education: Real or Imagined?

*Gita Steiner-Khamsi*

When researchers study privatization, decentralization, choice, and standards in education, they often point to the international dimension of these particular school reform movements. For many experts in domestic policy and school reform studies, an international perspective is now considered indispensable. Their particular interest lies in borrowing or "learning from elsewhere" (Phillips, 2000). This book responds to the global trend of transnational borrowing and lending in education. While some of the authors seek to explain why educational policies increasingly are imported or exported, others describe how they are locally adapted once they have been transferred from one context to another.

In comparative education a large rift yawns between those implementing and those studying educational borrowing and lending. A common misconception among practitioners holds that comparative researchers compare educational systems and selectively borrow or lend what "works," transferring it from one system to another. Consistent with this view, policy analysts, for example, believe that the advantage of comparative studies often lies in learning from elsewhere. This normative, ameliorative approach toward comparative studies—extracting models that are perceived as effective from other systems—holds huge appeal. In fact, it has generated a tremendous interest in comparative studies that is uncanny to comparativists.

In contrast to the normative endeavor that seeks to impart an understanding of what can be learned and imported from elsewhere (borrowing),

as well as what can be taught and exported to elsewhere (lending), contributors to this book describe, analyze, and attempt to understand in detail the impact of policy borrowing and lending on local educational reform. In so doing, they examine the politics of educational borrowing and lending ("why"), the process ("how"), and the agents of transfer ("who"). In addressing these issues, this book applies comparative methods to study the phenomena of transnational transfer, globalization, and international convergence in education.

Every now and then epidemics emerge in educational research that feverishly spread into every discipline and professional field. They start out with a few scholars who are the first to become infected with a new theme; the virus then circulates within the scholarly community, eventually burgeoning into an epidemic when each and every author feels compelled to at least briefly comment on the theme. The contagion is under control only when a saturation point is reached. Beyond such a point, authors writing in a frenzy on the topic merely recycle old publications, providing neither new "data" nor a new interpretive framework for a concept that has become increasingly shallow. As an example, with a mass of writers joining the debate on "civil society," the concept became elusive; manifestations of "civil society" were seen wherever more than two individuals gathered in pursuit of a common goal. With the topic having become increasingly broad and nebulous, scholars in the late 1990s scurried to provide a simple, lasting explanation for the differences between the "old" and "new" democracies of the early 1990s that would resonate over time; in the process, however, they left the original context (the transition from planned to market economies) behind. In addition to the previously discussed features of thematic epidemics—that is, their contagious nature as well as the attempt by scholars to provide simple explanations for complex issues—the context in which epidemics emerge, matters a great deal (Gladwell, 2002). When the context is lost to academic exhaustion and oversimplification, the contagion of an epidemic weakens to such a degree that it is almost entirely eradicated.

Undoubtedly, "globalization" has grown into an epidemic. What simple explanation have scholars generated for globalization that has transformed it from a virus to an epidemic? With the globalization epidemic lasting for quite some time now, there exist a few. Many cultural anthropologists, for example, tend to explore why globalization plays out differently in different cultural contexts (e.g., Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001), whereas historians seem to be interested mostly in identifying the differences between globalization and earlier forms of transnational and transregional dependencies (e.g., Hopkins, 2002). Clearly, researchers do not operate in a vacuum; they build on and respond to existing scholar-

ship in their own field. When their object of study is considered superfluous, they understandably exhibit feelings of loss. Appadurai (2000) identifies globalization as such a "source of anxiety" in the U.S. academic world.

Social scientists (especially economists) worry about whether markets and deregulation produce greater wealth at the price of increased inequality. Political scientists worry that their field might vanish along with their favorite object, the nation-state, if globalization truly creates a "world without borders." . . . And everyone in the academy is anxious to avoid seeming to be a mere publicist of the gigantic corporate machineries that celebrate globalization. Product differentiation is as important for (and within) the academy as it is for the corporations academics love to hate. (p. 1)

What is the pet idea that educational researchers and practitioners fear to lose in the wake of globalization? Judging from publications in educational research, it is the idea that we are abandoning our idiosyncratic conceptions of "good education" or "effective school reform," and are gradually converging toward an "international model of education." One of the most frequently given explanations for such a fear is the following: Once the barriers for global trade are eliminated, we will import and export anything, including education. Such an assumption also holds that only a small number of school reform models are traded, typically those that are high in demand, that is, those considered to be most effective. Such an explanation might appear commonsensical, but it is erroneous. Nevertheless, the idea of *education sans frontières* mystifies many scholars, and the study of the international convergence of national educational systems has drawn considerable attention in journals of comparative education since the late 1990s.<sup>1</sup>

One is tempted to believe that the saturation point for the globalization epidemic is in sight. Before highlighting yet another topic in this field, for example, many authors recently have introduced their interest in globalization studies with an apologetic note for amassing scholarship in this over-studied subject. Clearly, some aspects of globalization are more examined than others. As Carnoy and Rhoten (2002) note in their introduction to the most recent issue on globalization in education, "the notion that economic and social change affect educational structures and content is old hat" (p. 1). Thus, any study dealing with globalization in education needs to move beyond confirming the intimate relationship between the increased transnational flow of goods, finance, communication, people and ideas (globalization), and changes in national educational systems.

Without anxieties or apologies, this book addresses globalization in education, and attempts to introduce both a historical and a contextual dimension that we find lacking in the ongoing debate. Studies on how

and why educational reforms are transplanted from one context to another, whether borrowing is ever wholesale or by design selective, and, finally, the interest in understanding the relation between transnational policy borrowing and international convergence, have a long-standing research tradition in comparative education. It is only in the past few years, however, that this well-established niche in comparative education has drawn academic curiosity and practical interest from other researchers and practitioners.

The authors of this book take the process of globalization for granted, but have serious doubts about whether globalization necessarily leads to a "world culture," "internationality," or "internationalism" in education, that is, to an international model of education. They neither share the enthusiasm for an emerging international model that is supposedly more just and equal than previous models, nor fully embrace the fears that many scholars in the field are experiencing. Some such scholars fear a hybrid international model of education that is composed of borrowed bits and pieces from various high-income educational systems, whereas others fear, more specifically, a complete Americanization of educational reforms in the rest of the world.

Rather than fueling existing anxieties about an emerging international model of education, several authors of this book observe that domestic policy makers, researchers, and practitioners tend to resort to "globalization" and refer to reform experiences only in particular policy contexts. Guided by an interpretive framework that seeks to understand how decision makers justify reforms to an informed and interested public, they find that references to "lessons from elsewhere" often provide a much-needed justification for introducing and accelerating fundamental educational reforms at home. The likelihood for policy borrowing increases when incremental reforms fail, leaving policy makers with a protracted policy conflict that brings any further attempts at reform to an impasse. In such moments of protracted policy conflict, they construct an "absent other" by resorting to an imagined world culture in education *as if* there exists an international agreement on how reforms in education are supposed to unfold. In other words, the authors of this book think that globalization is *for real*, but the international community of experts agreeing on a common (international) model of education is *imagined*.

That said, it is necessary to emphasize that "invented communities," even though they are imagined, are still real in their impact. They have proved to be very effective policy manipulation tools both in the past (Anderson, 1983) and in the present. In recent years, the proliferation of references to "globalization," made by both lenders and borrowers, is strik-

ing. The "semantics of globalization" (Schriewer, 2000, p. 330) has generated tremendous political and economic pressure to compare educational systems and to mutually "learn" or borrow from them. Implicitly, the semantics of globalization promotes de-territorialization and de-contextualization of reform, and challenges the past conception of education as a culturally bounded system. The semantics of globalization has been so effective that policy analysts and practitioners often defer to a new sort of patriotism, one that claims that the nation-state must transcend national boundaries in order to survive, economically and politically, in today's "global village" (Jones, 1998). As Schriewer (2000) and Mundy and Murphy (2000) have demonstrated, "global civil society" and other international agents acting on behalf of globalization have contributed considerably to constructing an international model of education at a discursive level. In low-income countries, the external pressure to reform in certain ways, and the reference to an international community that exerts such a pressure, are not self-induced as in economically developed countries. On the contrary, the pressure from the international community on low-income countries in the form of international agreements (e.g., Education for All, Millennium Development Goals, Fast Track Initiative, etc.) is real, and will be addressed in the last part of this book. Whether and how these externally induced reforms are locally implemented is an issue of great importance. Borrowing is not copying. It draws our attention to processes of local adaptation, modification, and resistance to global forces in education.

From a historical perspective, the current semantics of globalization is reminiscent of earlier expansionist, transnational agendas. Earlier discursive educational campaigns such as the semantics of progress, democratization, modernization, and development each had an impact similar to that of globalization. From a critical perspective, the semantics of globalization may be regarded as yet another "education for" campaign (Steiner-Khamsi, 2000, p. 180). As was the case with its predecessors, it places external political pressure on local educational reform. Hence, there may be greater convergence among the voices of policy analysts and researchers justifying their models, than among the educational reforms themselves.

The remainder of this book is divided into three parts. Part I includes three chapters that provide an interpretive and methodological framework for the study of transnational policy borrowing and lending. The remaining two parts offer numerous examples and applications. The seven chapters in Part II focus on the politics of policy borrowing. In Part III two chapters offer examples of policy lending. In the Conclusion, I reflect on how research on policy borrowing and lending contributes to policy studies in education.

## NOTE

1. I am referring here specifically to the following journals: *Compare*, *Comparative Education*, *Comparative Education Review*, *Prospects*, and *International Journal of Educational Development*.

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## PART I

## Globalization, Internationality, and Cross-National Policy Attraction

The chapters in Part I are written by scholars in comparative studies who have visibly informed research on policy borrowing and lending in education. Their interpretive frameworks frequently are used as a foundation to anchor this particular research field of comparative policy studies in the larger arena of social research. Chapters 1 and 2 are designed to complement each other by reflecting on the distinction between *real globalization* (also referred to as “internationalization”) and *imagined globalization* (“internationality”). Charles Tilly in Chapter 1 focuses on real globalization, whereas Jürgen Schriewer and Carlos Martinez in Chapter 2 examine internationality in educational knowledge. In Chapter 3 David Phillips concludes this part of the book by presenting a comprehensive methodological framework in which to analyze borrowing and lending in education.

Charles Tilly, internationally known as a scholar in comparative sociology and history, has deeply influenced research on transnational interactions, including comparative education research on transnational policy borrowing and lending. For example, his comparison of several European “revolutionary situations” in the early 1990s, and his corresponding discussion of the different political “outcomes” in these central and Eastern European countries, is only one of his myriad methodological masterpieces that combine cross-national comparison with contextual analysis (Tilly, 1993). For many researchers of policy borrowing and lending, Tilly’s focus on transnational interaction has helped in understanding why, in a given context, one policy solution is selected over another, and how external factors influence and are integrated into local politics.

Tilly’s contribution to this book sets the stage for our reflections on globalization. He contends that globalization *per se* is not a new