International Co-operation through Education

Proceedings of the 35th Annual Conference

The University of Auckland
Auckland, New Zealand
29 Nov - 2 Dec 2007

Edited by Brian D Denman, Centre for Higher Education Management and Policy, University of New England

Published and produced in 2007 by the University of New England, Armidale, NSW 2351, Australia and by the Australian and New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society.

© The Australian New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society

These papers are copyright protected. Individual authors retain the right to use or re-use their respective papers for teaching and research purposes, but no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Enquiries should be made to individual authors. The views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the editor or publishers.

Produced in Armidale, Australia

ISBN: 0-909347-10-7
Educational Transfer: Analytical frameworks, conceptualisations and motives

Laura B. Perry and Geok-hwa Tor
Murdoch University
l.perry@murdoch.edu.au
g.tor@murdoch.edu.au

Abstract

Educational transfer is an important and growing body of literature in the field of comparative education. Work from the last decade has focused on the stages of the borrowing cycle, and the context, cause and rationale for education borrowing. This recent work has contributed to earlier research on the role of multilateral organizations such as UNESCO, the OECD or the World Bank in education development and transfer. This paper provides an overview of current work on educational transfer, focusing on analytical framework, conceptualisations and motives. In doing so, we deliberately link related literature from different disciplines and perspectives to account for education policy changes. Rather than describing the substance, agents or mechanisms of educational transfer, the paper takes an analytical approach at a higher level of abstraction by asking questions such as: What are the domain’s major dimensions or sub-domains in terms of methodology and theoretical perspective? What are the strengths or weaknesses of each dimension? What topics have yet to receive attention? What conceptual models are likely to be useful in guiding next steps in the study of educational transfer? Based on the systemisation, we then try to chart the way forward in the domain of educational transfer research.

Keywords: Educational Transfer, Analytical Framework, Research Synthesis
Introduction

Social institutions in open societies do not exist or operate in isolation, but rather mutually interact with similar institutions or the larger society. A nation’s educational system is influenced by not only domestic and internal but also foreign and external forces. As information communication technology develops, policy makers, researchers and educators have increasing access and exposure to ideas and practices from a variety of local, national and international sources. They may also experience increasing pressure to adopt or adapt practices and structures from elsewhere.

This rise in educational interaction and globalization is heightening interest in educational transfer. Building on scholarly works since the early decades of the 19th century (Phillips, 2006), educational transfer or specifically educational policy borrowing and lending has been a well established niche in comparative education (Steiner Khamsi, 2004). Studies about educational transfer can illuminate the processes of policy change and the nature of policy development in the field of education. As a conceptual framework, it can also enable the integration of diverse literature from multiple disciplines to account for educational policy making and educational change.

This paper provides an overview of the main theories and methods used to study educational transfer. In addition to theories that are well-established in comparative education literature, we include theories from public and social policy that may be fruitful for understanding educational transfer. One of our aims is to create a more coherent framework for further work. In doing so, some of the guiding questions for us are: What are the domain’s major dimensions or sub-domains in terms of methodology and theoretical perspective? What are the strengths or weaknesses of each dimension? What topics have yet to receive attention? What conceptual models are likely to be useful in guiding next steps in the study of educational transfer?

Educational Transfer: An Overarching Label

An overarching notion or conceptual heading that encompasses all the salient dimensions of a particular social phenomena is crucial for furthering understanding and knowledge of the issue at hand. This overarching notion defines the boundaries and essential characteristics in the building of a knowledge base about that phenomenon. Our review of the literature shows that researchers use a variety of terms to describe the forces, processes and agents that impact educational change. These terms refer to particular types of educational transfer; the most common terms employed, especially in the field of comparative education, are educational borrowing and lending.

Educational borrowing or lending denotes a relatively narrow range of partners involved. It also implies a unidirectional process. While borrowing and lending are important processes, they are not broad enough to serve as an overarching label. Rather, they are specific processes that fall under a larger, more general
heading. Such a broader heading should be able to capture the complexities of the dynamics involved in educational policy change, especially those due to external forces.

We argue the term ‘educational transfer’ is an appropriate umbrella heading and overarchig label because it encompasses different claims about the impact of forces on the development of educational policy and change. We use it to refer to the movements of ideas, structures and practices in education policy, from one time and place to another. In comparative education, the "place" that is analysed is often a nation state, although researchers of educational policy, change or reform often examine local contexts. Educational transfer occurs through a variety of paths or mechanisms, such as diffusion, imposition or lesson drawing (Rose, 1991; Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). Most importantly, educational transfer captures a complex range of processes and interactions, such as the ideational, covert, or implicit mechanism referred to as soft transfer, as well as overt and explicit policy borrowing and lending referred to as hard transfer (Evans & Davies, 1999). The term 'educational transfer’ acknowledges the simultaneity of contrary currents, namely the diffusion of a generic global agenda that can lead to global convergence and standardisation, and the intricate dialectics of adoption, transformation or hybridisation and rejection that can result in an unexpected complexity of outcomes such as ‘missed universalisation’ and ‘creative deviation’ (Schriewer, 2003).

Educational transfer, therefore, is an area of study in the subfields of comparative and international education as well as educational policy studies. The study of educational transfer can be an end by itself (i.e., as a "dependent variable"), wherein analysis aims to explain the precedents, context, processes and consequences. Studies about educational transfer can also serve as an analytical tool (i.e., as an “independent variable”) to account for educational policy changes and decision making.

**Forms of Educational Transfer**

As an umbrella term, educational transfer includes a range of types or forms, which also denotes the stages and degrees of transfer. In this section, we provide a brief overview of the three main forms of educational transfer: diffusion, imposition and lesson-drawing. Figure 1 charts these different forms and sub-forms of educational transfer.
The transfer of educational ideas, ideology, values, policies and practices occur along a continuum of power in terms of the interaction between local and external forces.

**Diffusion** is a common term used loosely in the literature as the spread of policies and ideas between countries (Stone, 2001). In this paper we posit a more specific conceptualization of diffusion as one form of educational transfer that is unintentional and contagious, especially on the receiving end. Diffusion involves the transfer of educational discourse ideas, norms and culture (soft transfer). It is also the first step in most cases of educational transfer, which entails varying trajectories of outcomes.

**Imposition** is externally induced educational transfer by military occupiers, colonizers, international organisations and/or donor agencies. With the case of development and/or multilateral organizations, individuals or authorities on the receiving may not desire the content of this form of educational transfer, but may feel compelled to accept it to receive other benefits. At its most extreme level, for example under military occupation or colonization, the imposers of educational transfer do not seek the symbolic approval of the recipient.

**Lesson drawing** is a deliberate effort by the receiver and which may involve both soft and hard transfer. To a certain extent it is preceded and facilitated by the diffusion of external ideas, norms and culture. As indicated in Figure 1, lesson drawing can lead to multiple outcomes including uninformed transfer to
various forms of informed transfer. These will be further elaborated under the section on process of transfer.

The intensification of globalisation has brought about qualitative changes to national and supra-national relations, with the result that educational transfer at the two extreme ends of absolute conscious and voluntary decision and absolute coercive imposition are becoming less common. Instead, educational transfer happens in different contexts and periods of time with varying combinations of conscious decision and coerciveness. The models proposed by Phillips & Ochs (2004) and Dale (1999) capture this variability and complexity of educational transfer. The model by Phillips & Ochs places educational borrowing along a continuum from imposed, required under constraints, negotiated under constraint, to purposeful borrowing. Dale’s model conceptualizes educational transfer as borrowing, learning, harmonisation, dissemination, standardisation, installing interdependence and imposition.

Levels of Analysis

Multiple theories and research methods from a variety of disciplines, including sociology, political science and international relations, have been used to investigate educational transfer. In this section, we chart the main levels (micro, meso or macro) of analysis that have been used.

Educational transfer can occur at different geopolitical levels, including transnational, international, regional, national or local contexts. In the field of comparative education, studies on educational transfer typically take the nation-state as the lowest or most basic unit of analysis. In the field of education policy, lower units of analysis, such as states or provinces, regional districts, local authorities or even individual schools, are common as well.

Studies on educational transfer commonly use either a macro or a micro level of analysis. Macro level analyses focus on either transnational, international, or regional (e.g. Australasia) aspects or forces on educational policy change and development. It is an outside-in/top-down approach, or ‘looking from the wood to the trees’. A macro level analysis may examine how the decisions of individual actors are transformed or aggregated into macro-level effects by institutionalised rules or social mechanisms. Macro level analyses may also examine global or international forces, actors and structures that influence educational transfer.

In the field of comparative education, micro level analyses, on the other hand, typically focus on the nation-state as the unit of analysis. Here the analytical gaze is cast on a particular nation-state (the tree), focusing on the observable micropolitics of educational policy change or development. This is the level of analysis commonly and widely adopted by existing work on educational borrowing and lending (e.g., Ochs & Philips, 2002; Shibata, 2004; Steiner-Khamsi & Quist, 2000).

While macro-level analyses can reveal general trends, mechanisms and forces that influence educational transfer, they are unable to provide details about the
extent of transfer at the local context. Micro level studies that use the nation-state as the unit of analysis, however, have identified variations in the form of transfer across a continuum. These range from policy transfer that is imposed (under totalitarian rule), required under constraint (in defeated/occupied countries), negotiated under constraint (required by bilateral/multilateral agreements), or borrowed purposefully (international copying of policy/practice observed elsewhere), or voluntarily (Ochs & Phillips, 2004). Nevertheless, a micro level of analytical gaze is prone to methodological nationalism (Stone, 2001), a myopic perspective that fails to see the wood from the tree.

Since education policy transfer is a complex mechanism involving the interplay between social structures and agency, studies adopting different levels of analysis are complimentary and useful for illuminating the processes of educational transfer. A macro perspective is appropriate for revealing the general trends and tendencies of discursive patterns, ideologies, and structural changes, while a micro perspective is needed to elucidate the processes of implementation and adaptation. Macro perspectives are especially useful for shedding light on the larger forces that impact educational transfer, while micro perspectives can illuminate the reception of educational transfer from external sources.

However, such a dualism is rejected by post-structuralist scholars such as Bordieu (1989) and Luhmann (1997). They advocate a holistic analytical gaze that transcends the dualism of micro and macro perspectives in explaining the phenomena of social reality. However, this has yet to be explicitly and widely applied in the study of educational transfer. As each analytical approach has its inherent blind spots and deficits, researchers of educational transfer may wish to include Bordieu’s (1989) notion of constructivist structuralism and Wendt’s (1987) structuration theory to achieve a synchronic rather than a diachronic (wherein researchers tends to talk past one another) approach.

In his theory of constructivist structuralism, Bordieu (1989) argues social scientists should adopt ‘relational thinking’ rather than focus exclusively on ‘substantialist thinking’. He cautions researchers of adopting a “microsociopolitical” vision that fails to see ‘the wood from the tree’ His solution is to construct ‘the space of positions’ (the broader context or macro analysis), so that we will be able to understand the point from which we stand. In a similar vein, Wendt’s ‘structuration theory’ emphasizes that structures and agents are mutually constitutive yet ontologically distinct entities (1987, quoted in Evans & Davies, 1999). ‘Structure’ is defined as a set of internally related elements which occupy a position within a social organization. Agents and structures are reconciled in a ‘dialectical synthesis’, in which the subordination of one over another is eliminated.

Linking a micro analysis of a particular policy change with a macro analysis on the national and global forces that impacted it can offer a more realistic and accurate portrayal of educational transfer. In-depth analyses of either a macro or micro perspective are still necessary, but they can be made fuller and more
comprehensive by including insights or examples from the other perspective. In this regard, it is encouraging that comparativists are using social theories based on a dialectic analytical framework to not only account for individual actions at the level of the nation-state, but also explain that behaviour more holistically by integrating both the endogenous and exogenous structural forces that have impacted the micro-politics of educational transfer (Luhmann, 1982; Schriewer, 1992; 2000; 2003; Dale, 2000).

**Theoretical Perspectives**

In explaining the extent and nature of educational transfer, scholars have used three types of theoretical lenses: structural-functionalist, realist/conflict, and phenomenological/culturalist perspectives. Each of these theoretical perspectives is grounded in a particular set of assumptions and world-views, and offers a different way of understanding, explaining and predicting educational transfer. These three groups roughly correspond with the main theoretical categories used in the discipline of sociology, namely interactionist, functionalist, and conflict paradigms (Babbie, 2002). Figure 2 charts these three major groups of theories.

**Figure 2: Theoretical perspectives used to examine educational transfer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Theory</th>
<th>Perspectives/Approach</th>
<th>Assumptions/Major Tenets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural-functionalist</td>
<td>Consensus, Rational, Normative/Idealistic, Narrative, Objective, Diffusion, World Culture /World Model</td>
<td>Macro-determinism of micro-relations &amp; processes, Social evolutionism, Positivism, Collectivism (common world educational culture as a common heritage), Regulation/stability/equilibrium/homeostasis, Negative feedback loops, Dysfunction is the catalyst for transfer and/or change, Functions serve to maintain structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical System theory (Durkheim, Talcott Parson)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-Institutionalism’s World Society Theory (John Meyer and associates)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict/Critical</td>
<td>Radical Marxism, Realist, Power relations, Domination/coercion</td>
<td>Macro or Micro determinism, Determinism based on Economy/materialism (Marxism), Determinism based on power-relationship (neo-Marxism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World System Theory (Wellerstein)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependency Theory (Andre Gunder Frank)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendental /Phenomenological</td>
<td>Holistic Eclectic Constructionism Situationalism (context) Transcends micro/macro divide</td>
<td>Subjective meaning of events, social processes and pragmatism, Micro-constructivism, Structures &amp; agents are mutually constitutive yet ontologically distinct entities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social System Theory (Luhmann, 1997); Structuration Theory (Wendt, 1987)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many macro-level studies have used the semantics of globalization as a metanarrative and overarching explanation for the phenomena of educational transfer, wherein education policy change is treated as a manifestation of globalization in education. As a result, theoretical perspectives focusing on 'systems' seek to account for the increasing complexity of the 'global policy community' and the rise of generic agendas in education and social welfare, using the semantics of globalisation and theory from the sociology of knowledge (Schriewer, 2003).

On one end, focusing on the global dissemination and diffusion of principles, models and institutionalised ideology, are the neo-institutionalists and their world society theory. This is an example of a structural-functionalist perspective. This perspective is based on the assumption of some consensual and collectively derived grand theories that serve as a common heritage for all national education systems. These grand theories/best practice models are highly rationalized, articulated and consensual, and therefore serve as a defining and legitimating framework for local actions. Studies from this perspective point to a worldwide convergence of education systems as an outcome of a world educational culture constructed and propagated through global cultural and associational forces (Meyer et al., 1997; Dale, 2000). Policy change stimulated by external forces is seen as a natural developmental stage in education, wherein dysfunctional policies are replaced with best practice models from elsewhere to maintain the equilibrium and well being of the system as a whole.

By contrast, world system theory and dependency theory, based on a conflict and neo-Marxist perspective respectively, conceive the role of education as an instrument of human capital building and the reproduction of social inequality, which is additionally reinforced by globalisation (Dale, 1999). Globalisation, therefore, is seen as forced penetration and subjugation by the 'haves' on the 'haves not', the northern hemisphere on the southern hemisphere, or the 'core' on the 'periphery.'

Dale (1999, 2000) approaches educational transfer and globalisation from a more phenomenological and realist perspective. While world society theory seeks to demonstrate the prevalence and significance of a common world educational culture (a cosmological heritage) which determines educational policy at national level, Dale (2000) advocates looking at globalisation in education as a globally structured agenda for education, which is less deterministic and rationalistic. Dale (1999, 2000) acknowledges the structural forces of world
society, but suggests that states and organisations can mediate these dynamics to varying degrees. The questions of who gets taught, what, how, by whom, and under what circumstances can illuminate the contingencies of unintentional and spontaneous educational transfer in the form of diffusion caused by globalisation. Dale (1999) shows how a new form of supranational influence affects national educational systems by elucidating the mechanisms involved in terms of the scope of the mechanisms (whether they include policy goals as well as policy processes), the locus of viability, the mode of power employed through the mechanism, the initiating source of the policy change and the nature of the parties to the exchange.

Neo-Institutionalism (world society theory) and neo-Marxism (world system theory) are different ways of understanding with human and social experiences, including educational transfer. Contradictions between their underlying styles of reasoning stem from their frame of reference. Both of these macro perspectives have been widely applied in the international relations literature to describe policy transfer in general, which touches on educational transfer. These studies, however, do not use educational transfer, borrowing or lending as defining titles or headings.

Looking specifically at a particular national education system (a micro level of analysis), conflict and phenomenological perspectives reject the macro-determinism of micro relations and processes. For example, neo-Marxist (a very common perspective in the literature on international relations & political science) perspectives focus on the implicit or explicit power relations involved in the process of educational transfer. How each individual nation-state interprets and responds to the “globally structured common agenda” (Dale, 1999) about national educational systems is examined.

Specifically in the field of comparative education, comprehensive conceptual models delineating the politics behind national education policy changes due to external influence have been developed (Phillips & Ochs, 2003 & 2004; Schriewer, 2003; Steiner-Khamsi, 2002; Steiner-Khamsi & Quist, 2000). A word of caution, though, is that studies using a conflict perspective to highlight the agency of local actors can fall into the trap of ‘methodological nationalism’ (Stone, 2001) by providing a narrow and polarized view that fails to see the wood from the tree.

In the midst of the competing but complementary theoretical frameworks of the structuralist and conflict perspectives is the phenomenological or culturalist perspective. This perspective originated at Humboldt University and is represented by Luhmann’s theories of self-referential social systems (1982) and Schriewer’s externalization theory (1992, 2000). Luhmann’s theory has great potential that has yet be fully utilized as an overarching theoretical framework to explain the phenomena of educational transfer.

From a phenomenology perspective, the Humboldt tradition emphasises the persistence of multiple worlds and the idiosyncrasy of meaning within local social
contexts. It acknowledges the liberty and autonomy of local actors in selecting and evaluating international models, and adapting them to internal needs for 'supplementary meaning' before institutionalizing them in the local context. This proposition is in tandem with Bourdieu’s (1989) argument that the autonomy of a space of action (in this case the national education system) depends on the extent to which it can 'refract' external pressures into its own logic.

With a higher level of abstraction involving second-order sociocybernetics, or observation on observations about the steering of societies, Luhmann’s social system theory is comprehensive because it transcends the prevailing epistemological, methodological and ontological dichotomies in neo-institutionalism and neo-Marxism. It does not seek to establish relationships between observable facts to derive scientific theory and universal truth, as in neo-Institutionalism. Nor does it emphasise power relations embedded in social interactions, as in neo-Marxism.

Instead, Luhmann’s world system theory conceives social systems such as national/world education systems as self-organising or autopoietic. The theory acknowledges the influence of structural forces, but at the same time argues that a social system is able to reflect on its own operations, environment and even on itself. This self-reference mechanism is recursive and involves continuous “construction and reduction of complexity” (Luhmann, 1994). Luhmann’s world system theory is based on the assumption that social structures fulfil functions, and that functions solve problems. Under this conceptualisation, social structures are contingent because a problem can be resolved by different functions and a given function can be discharged by different structures and practices.

As mentioned earlier, Luhmann’s theory remains less widely discussed in the literature on educational transfer so far despite its encompassing and transcendental characteristic which holds much promise for future developments.

As a conclusion for this section on the theoretical perspectives underlying the study of educational transfer, we would like to reiterate Schriewer’s (2000) call for critical analyses that transcend ideological, theoretical, epistemological and ontological contradictions, to present a holistic view that vitiates orthodoxy and strengthens heterodoxy via multidimensional comparisons (Paulston, 1990). In so doing, multiple realities can be seen as compatible with objectivity and rationality.

**Processes in Education Transfer**

The reality that policy making processes are complex and often chaotic is widely acknowledged (Kingdon, 1995; Stone, 2001; Sutton, 1999). In terms of the actors involved in the transfer of educational ideas, ideology, policies, practices or institutions, a simple binary categorization of ‘lender’ and ‘borrower’ is perhaps simplistic. Actors involved in educational transfer include not only official policy
makers, bureaucrats and politicians, but also individuals, organisations and networks serving as agents for educational transfer, specifically as carriers, exporters and inducers. Many of them, such as international organisations, international think tanks or international consultants, are neither ‘lender’ nor ‘borrower’, but merely facilitate the exchange processes between actors.

A unilinear conception of educational transfer as either an instantaneous one-sided transfer of ideas between individuals, institutions and systems, or the imposition of educational policy on others, is rarely appropriate (Sutton, 1999). On the other hand, drawing from public policy literature, policy transfer (which includes educational transfer) occurs in stages, with no guarantee of succession for each stage into the next one. The extent of educational transfer falls on a continuum from mere ideational transfer at the discourse level, to minor adjustments in the precise settings of policy instruments, to limited experimentation and introduction of new policy techniques, to a radical shift in the hierarchy of goals and instruments employed to guide policy (Hall, 1993; Stone, 2001).

Transnational issues often trigger the transfer or exchange of ideas, policy or practice. Transfer or exchange of ideas, however, does not necessarily bring about policy changes. Similarly, the diffusion or transfer of foreign models to policy does not automatically entail a significant change and modification at the level of practice since ideas, discourses and arguments are slippery and can be enacted in many different ways (Stone, 2001). This realisation should serve to explain the paradox that process and content of agenda-setting is apparent at the global level and at the same time the randomness of change in each national and local context is also undisputable. Hence it is important for researchers to consider why some decisions get made and why others do not.

To capture this complexity, we advocate the conceptualisation of educational transfer as involving an underlying learning process for the actors involved, especially on the part of the receivers. This conceptualisation of educational transfer as social learning corroborates Luhmann’s notion of autopoietic mechanism wherein global educational discourse (irritants from the environment) is studied as a self-description and copied into internal communication patterns of educational system and its related organizations We would also demonstrate in this section how this conceptualisation of educational transfer as a result of policy-related learning helps to explain the varying degree and outcomes of educational transfer as well as some seemingly paradoxical events with regard to changes in educational policy.

From the discipline of public policy, Meseguer (2005) postulates learning as mechanism of policy diffusion, and has distinguished between rational learning and bounded learning. Specifically for the conceptualisation of educational transfer, we posits learning as the underlying and definitive process that explains its different forms and outcomes. Our conceptualisation of educational policy learning encompasses not only rational learning (as in lesson drawing) and
bounded learning (as in imposition), but also the unintentional and nondeliberate learning which is involved in the diffusion mode of educational transfer.

The role of social networks

At the macro level of analysis, networks serve as increasingly powerful sites for policy learning and educational transfer. The process of educational transfer begins with the emergence of trans-national educational issues that subsequently fuels the sharing of information, debate, disagreement, persuasion and search for solutions and appropriate policy responses. The exchange of ideas happens across a multiplicity of social networks such as knowledge communities (e.g., universities, think tanks, centers, foundations), advocacy coalitions, international governing organisations, and multinational non-governmental organisations. Social networks include actors from diverse backgrounds such as researchers, academics, politicians, bureaucrats and policy entrepreneurs. Overlap often exists among the social networks and their constituent actors. For example, academics and researchers who are members of particular knowledge communities might also collaborate with multilateral organizations.

Communication and policy-related learning occurs through channels created within social networks such as face-to-face meetings via academic or practitioner conferences, or publications such as journals, working papers, and newsletters. At this initial stage, ideas and values are exchanged, with educational transfer occurring at the discourse level (Schriewer, 2003). Consensual knowledge achieved among knowledge actors at the discourse level may reach national educational policy and practice via different conduits.

Local actors are also involved in educational transfer through social networks. They select, interpret, filter, and modify these global discourses, taking into consideration the local cultural, historical, economic and political context. Hence, the impact of global discourse on national educational policy and practice varies enormously across different countries. Many theorists acknowledge that external and internal forces are at play, but how and why alternatives to existing policy regimes are adopted by policy-makers could receive more attention in the research literature. In this regard, there appears to be a general consensus in the literature that, unless external pressures force dominant interests to change policy, the status quo will prevail (Halpin & Troyna, 1995; Linquist, 2003).

Stages and degrees of educational transfer

Few will dispute the contention that educational policy making is fluid and evolutionary (Ball, 1998; Kingdon, 1995). National education systems typically operate in different modes of policy-related learning and decision making. Kingdon (1995) categorizes policy decision making process into routine, incremental and fundamental level. In a similar vein, Stone (2001) classifies policy-related learning into first, second and third order.
First order level of policy decision making involves routine matching, satisfying and adjusting of existing policies to emerging internal and external conditions. Normally this is achieved by adopting technical procedures from other contexts, without much debate on their logic or design. Educational transfer at this level is implicit and unconscious, and happens by diffusion.

The emergence of anomalies and policy shortcomings create uncertainty, prompting decision makers to reassess the situation at home by first looking internally for answers and solutions. If self-referencing fails to provide clues, they may look to external sources for ideas or models (Schriewer, 2003). To deal with selective issues as they emerge, incremental decision making needs to be made based on second order policy-related learning. This may involve retooling and some selective experimentation, and possibly the introduction of new policy from elsewhere. With second order learning and incremental decision making, the possibility of overt or institutionalised educational transfer is greater.

Third order learning involves fundamental decision making characterised by a radical paradigm shift in the goals and content of policy (Hall, 1993). It is the ultimate level of educational transfer. It only happens with concerted efforts from local policy networks or communities, as well as wider social networks or communities such as think tanks and other governmental and nongovernmental organisations within the country or abroad. Timing and chance are critical junctures or policy windows for overt educational transfer to happen, and for the global consensual knowledge to have an impact on national educational policy (Kingdon, 1995; Lindquist, 2003).

The actions of local official actors or bureaucrats are often instrumental in the response to external pressures. Oftentimes, especially in the case of state actors in developing countries, a global best practice is adopted, not due to policy-related learning on their part, but instead as a lesson imposed, probably as part of structural adjustment packages or loan conditions (Jones, 2004). This may help explain the high failure rate of transferred educational policy (Hulme, 2005). However, the coercive character of educational transfer, especially those promoted by international organisations, is sometimes masked by the adoption of apolitical, technical and neutral terms such as 'diffusion', 'knowledge sharing', 'best practice' and 'bench-marking'.

**Motivations**

Understanding the motivation behind a particular transfer may help explain why some transferred policies are successful while others fail. Generally, the strategic motivations for the actors involved in educational transfer can be financial, ideological or pragmatic. In the following section we discuss actors' motivations from the perspective of borrowers as well as lenders.
Borrower motives

For state actors, the transfer of policy is rational and can aid the realization of ideological goals. Social policy, including education policy, comprises packages of cause-effect proscriptions founded on rationalized 'scientific knowledge' (Haas, 1992). Major systemic disruptions or crises may be self-diagnosed, or induced by external regulatory competition or the politics of league tables. Under such circumstances, change is inevitable for survival (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Local actors often browse programmes or ideas from elsewhere and evaluate their suitability as a cheap means of solving the problem. These are policy windows, catalytic times and opportunities for various competing advocacy networks or knowledge communities to ‘promote their ideology and scientific & consensual knowledge to the national policy stage.

Phillips & Ochs (2003, 2004) and Steiner-Khamsi (2002) have modelled comprehensively the lesson-drawing and borrowing side of the educational transfer process, including an elaboration on the motives of borrowing. Studies about educational policy transfer have focused mainly on political motives. The common conclusion is that policy change or actual policy transfer happens only when there is penetration of political objectives and programmes by new knowledge (Haas, 1992).

For the official or state actors responsible for decision making in each national context, policy related learning involves the use of knowledge to define their political interests and refine the strategic direction of policy proposals. By implication, this means that educational policy transfer is likely to happen only when there is some synchrony between the characteristics of the different education systems involved and the dominant political ideologies promoting reform within them (Phillips, 1989, 1992; Halpin & Troyna, 1995). Halpin & Troyna (1995) further argue that state actors often have pragmatic or instrumental reasons for policy borrowing or lesson-drawing. In particular, actors may participate in educational borrowing to legitimate politically controversial education policies. Contrary to received wisdom, therefore, the main attraction of an educational policy idea or model may lie more in its political symbolism than content.

Lender motives

The motivations of exporters or lenders in educational transfer are relatively less well documented, in policy research generally and educational transfer research specifically. We have therefore reviewed literature on policy research from diverse fields to shed light on the possible motivations of lenders of educational ideas, models and ideology.

For international networks, namely knowledge communities, advocacy coalitions and international governmental and non-governmental organisations, actively promoting the transfer of educational ideas or knowledge is essential for maintaining a global market for their policy knowledge base. At the same time,
educational transfer ensures that intellectual and political discourse on education continues to be generated. Case studies on the role and motives behind the active involvement of international organisations such as the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have been emerging in comparative education literature (e.g. Burde, 2004; Jones, 2004). Steiner-Khamsi (2004) calls for more work to address the phenomenon of social network in educational transfer explicitly.

Organizations and individuals operating as educational lenders likely receive significant benefits. In addition to ensuring their survival, educational transfer can serve as the main mechanism for social networks to mark their presence. If two or more rival networks promote contrasting models or ideologies, exporting or transferring legitimates their version of the truth. Similarly, for the individual knowledge worker or researcher, educational lending can promote their research findings or arguments about educational issues and thus enhance their professional status. In her study of foreign aid to Eastern Europe after the fall of communism, Wedel (1998) found that academics involved in lending knowledge and “know-how” gained significant career benefits, especially by consolidating their role as an internationally sought-after expert. Similarly, successful attempts to insert their recommendations or research findings into the rhetoric and discourse of a social network may enhance an individual’s career and professional status, often leading to real financial benefits such as promotion. With their professional status enhanced, they will have improved credibility with policy makers, and increased opportunities to receive internal and external funding. Contributing to actual educational transfer of policy or practice is even more likely to be considered a career milestone, especially as organizations and universities increasingly privilege research that results in a measurable social “impact.”

Educational lenders may also be motivated by altruistic motives. Such motives often have a deep ideological component as they embody notions of the good society. Individuals as well as knowledge communities, policy networks, and especially advocacy coalitions often aim to promote certain policy ideas based on ‘deep-core beliefs’ about normative and ontological axioms (Stone, 2001 quoting Bennet & Howlett, 1992). These beliefs form the basis for their views about problems and favoured interventions. As these beliefs are very deeply rooted, stable and not easily shaken, educational transfer promoted by this sort of ideological motivation can neglect, even though they normally do not deny, borrowers’ interests and context.

In a less benign form of altruism, educational lenders are motivated to share their ideas, norms and models with others out of a feeling of duty to introduce ‘public goods’ to other contexts. During colonialism, this form of the ‘white man’s burden’ was seen in the imposition of educational policies by Western governments on their colonies. Beliefs about the civilizing benefits of Western education justified colonialism and imperialism (Willinsky, 1998). In the post-colonial era, educational lending can still serve as an imperialistic tool for
reinforcing that some countries are educationally developed while others are backwards (Tikly, 2004).

From a rational-functionalist orientation, countries which have developed innovative policy concepts may be willing to export them to be tested in other contexts. Educational transfer to a different context can lead to refinements in their innovations or projects. On the other hand, by establishing their approach as an international solution to be promoted worldwide, lenders can minimize the cost of institutional and economic adjustment that they need to make to other potentially diverging internationally promoted policy models.

**Conclusion**

This paper has provided a general overview of the major levels of analysis, theories, forms, processes and actor motivations relevant in the study of educational transfer. Researchers of educational transfer use a variety of perspectives and theories; they have also analysed different geographic locations and substances or content of educational transfer. Our aim has been to provide an overarching umbrella under which these various studies and approaches can be interrelated.

As educational transfer is a complex social phenomenon involving layers of structures, forces and actors, analyses should be similarly complex and multi-layered. Ideally, analyses of educational transfer should include the inter-relationship between social structures, forces and agency. Diversity within the research literature on educational transfer is also beneficial. A knowledge base that includes a variety of research methods and theoretical lenses can best provide rich and realistic explanations. Similarly, comparative and single-case studies of a diverse range of locations and substance can enhance our understanding of the forces, actors and dynamics of educational transfer more generally.

This paper is not an exhaustive review of the state of the art of educational transfer. Rather, our intention has been to provide an overview to help integrate disparate foci and approaches under a general umbrella. We hope that this attempt will help develop cohesion within the research literature, and will provide a firm foundation upon which future studies can build knowledge and theory about educational transfer. In-depth syntheses of the research literature on educational transfer would also be helpful. We conclude our paper with a brief list of studies that we think would be especially productive.

One potential study could strive for analytic cross-fertilization by incorporating divergent theoretical approaches and perspectives to examine a particular dimension of educational transfer. Such a study could illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of particular approaches, as well as the ways in which they complement each other when incorporated into a single analysis. It could also be interesting to compare the explanatory power of such an approach with one that
uses a transcendental and holistic paradigm, such as Luhmann’s social system theory.

While theoretical pluralism should be celebrated as a helpful tool for developing knowledge and theory, it may to lead to fragmentation and confusion especially for the audience as well as novice researcher. To combat this tendency, another study could synthesize research approaches by probing into the overlaps as well as the disjunctions between existing analytical frameworks that differ in level of analytical gaze, disciplinary focus and theoretical perspective. Such a study could make easier later attempts at analytic cross-fertilization between divergent approaches and perspectives.

Reviewing and synthesising studies that use various analytical and theoretical perspectives will likely open up conceptual issues. Comparative analysis and evaluation can show how much a particular theoretical perspective has achieved and how it has to be changed and corrected from the point of view of competing and complementary theoretical lenses. Such a synthesis will normally tie up some loose ends while at the same time reveal more loose ends to be tied up by future work. In this way, research syntheses are useful guides for devising further case studies to build upon existing ones knowledge and theory.
References


