



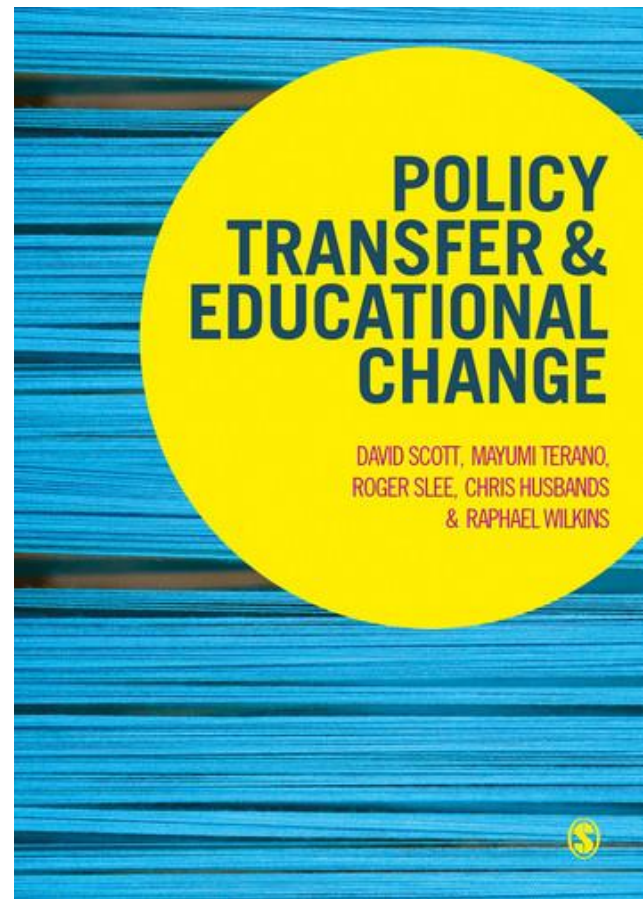
Scott, D., Terano, M., Slee, R., Husbands, C., & Wilkins, R. (2016). *Policy Transfer and Educational Change*. SAGE.

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In their recent book, *Policy Transfer and Educational Change*, authors David Scott, Mayumi Terano, Roger Slee, Chris Husbands, and Raphael Wilkins attempt to explain the spread of ideas regarding educational policy and the ways in which this exchange influences education reform. Stressing the weaknesses of policy borrowing, they suggest a new type of exchange referred to as policy learning, a process of “identifying a set of practices which are considered to be successful in one national setting and then transposing them to another national setting” (p. 11). This definition emphasizes the primacy of cultural context in developing new education policy, in contrast to policy borrowing, the transfer of policy from one location to another with no attention paid to context. The theory of policy learning is attractive because it not only appears to be logical, but it appeals to the humanistic ideal of individualism. Using India as a case study, the authors demonstrate how educational reforms of the past were



ineffective under a policy-borrowing method, and ultimately failed due to a lack of cultural significance and consideration in the implementation process. Although the book effectively discusses educational reform on a macro level, the authors struggle to accomplish their goal of explaining the significance behind their proposed solution of the policy learning method generally, and its application in India specifically.

The authors' assessment of different reforms is integral to understanding why the authors favor policy learning over policy borrowing and other methods. They classified these variations as P<sub>1</sub>, P<sub>2</sub>, and P<sub>3</sub>. The policy-borrowing method, P<sub>1</sub>, is a simplistic model in which the policy that is transferred is not heavily restructured. This method assumes that contextual elements in one country can be substituted with that of another country for productive implementation; however, according to the authors, P<sub>1</sub> is an effective mode of educational reform because policy borrowing fails to consider cultural contexts that enable educational policies to either succeed or fail.

Consequently, P<sub>1</sub> can be amended to P<sub>2</sub>. According to this method, two countries are considered, one that requires reform and one that utilizes a mechanism that is deemed to be effective. Then, the similarities and differences between the two countries are weighed and the ways in which the mechanism of reform needs to be altered for accurate implementation are made. Finally, the mechanism is implemented in the recipient country and the mechanism is subsequently changed given the specific cultural context. Lastly, P<sub>3</sub>, the policy learning model builds on the learning process and includes elements such as "pedagogic relations," (the relationship between the learner and the "catalyst"), a "change process," (the learner experiences an internal change or the community of the learner undergoes an external change), and "temporal and spatial arrangements" (the

learning is internal in the learner or it is externally located in time and space; see pp. 12, 112). The policy learning model emphasizes learning as a process and how this is beneficial when implementing reform policy. Assuming the process of education policy reform in a country would follow one of these three models, the authors accentuate how P<sub>3</sub> represents the most comprehensive model of policy transfer, as it forces the country to learn from another country's policy as opposed to accepting it at face value and expecting it to work.

Several aspects of the book support this argument, specifically, the emphasis on cultural context and the assertion that one cannot assume that policies imposed upon a country will work in the same manner as in another location. In the greater discourse of educational policy, this position takes form in the concept of locality, or the idea that a region's culture, history, norms, and political structure influence how a policy can be successfully implemented (Carney, 2008, p. 63). In such an increasingly globalized world, considering locality in policy making is necessary. Education is geared more toward the market now more than ever due to education's increasingly neoliberal and market-based character. This focus often disregards a country's ability to succeed because the needs and expectations of developing nations are typically overlooked by those of developed nations.

The author's macro analysis of education reform and education from the perspective of developing effective curricula is beneficial, and their theory of policy learning appears theoretically sound enough to work in the real world if implemented well. Yet, the book lacks a level of specificity regarding India that would demonstrate how policy learning is superior to other policy transfer methods in enacting educational change. In addition, this case study did not do the theory justice. Not only was the case study based on policy

borrowing, not policy learning, but the study was unsuccessful. While the authors can be commended for their attention to cultural context and explanations of policy learning and key steps for successful implementation, the selection of a case study that failed to use policy learning to make lasting improvements in India is contradictory. Examples about how policy learning would look in India would have strengthened the authors' argument and given evidence as opposed to assumptions. Put simply, the authors do not reveal the true potential of policy learning in India.

The authors admit that main developments of "political interest in market forces" were prominent in Anglo-Saxon countries and the differences in the "environmental contexts and in values and expectations" between more Western cultures and developed nations must be considered when conducting this research (p. 60). The authors focus on this necessity for cultural perspective, yet sometimes this focal point of their argument falls short when they discuss countries such as England and Australia with more frequency than the case study country, India. The book does not put India in a positive light; its educational policies are not successful and the authors do not fully explore how a policy learning method of policy implementation would provide a more culturally compatible set of policies and solutions in that country. In fact, with just a few examples in a couple of pages at the end of the book, the authors provide too little discussion of the proposed solution of policy learning. Additionally, the authors do not offer any counter-arguments for why the policy learning model would not work in India. Much of the argument then rests exclusively on the belief that because policy transfer in the form of the policy-borrowing models of  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  do not effectively ensure proper implementation, policy learning will. Policy borrowing is supposedly proven to be

"conceptually flawed" and a "fail[ure] in practice" (p. vi). Instead of critically assessing how the policy-learning model could be enacted in India, the reader is left feeling unfulfilled with the assertion of policy learning as the ultimate solution of educational policy reform.

Moreover, another contradiction in the book is the lack of autonomy given to India. Throughout the book the words "community" and "communication" are used to describe the foundations of successful policy learning. However, the smallest region of India the authors researched is Bihar, a region with over 99 million inhabitants. It is not wise to base a study on a locality containing almost one billion people when the cultural context and history has not been taken into account. The book speaks of shaping policy around a community by identifying the individual needs, but it is problematic to consider 99 million people as one community.

In essence, *Policy Transfer and Educational Change* gives the reader a good understanding of policy learning, one way to successfully integrate and implement policies in education systems. This theory offers a hopeful solution to global educational policy problems, and postgraduates and policymakers should not overlook the possibilities imagined by the authors in this book. However, by proving that India's policy borrowing process was ineffective without specifically proposing a solution for India using the policy learning method, the authors leave a little too much up to imagination. With a lack of practical examples of the policy learning model in India, the book uses a failed case study to support this promising theory of policy learning and its implementation. Perhaps with a different case study that successfully described the implementation of policy learning in a smaller region, the book would make a stronger case for policy learning.

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