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Beech, Jason. 2011. *Global Panaceas, Local Realities: International Agencies and the Future of Education*. Comparative Studies Series, vol. 22. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. ISBN 978-3-631-59477-3. Hardback. 279 pages. € 41.90 / £ 37.70.

The exchange of educational ideas and its intended and unintended consequences are a core theme in comparative education. Jason Beech's book is a highly welcome contribution to this strand of research. It investigates how proposals for teacher education by UNESCO, World Bank, and OECD were recontextualised in Argentina and Brazil in the 1990s. Both countries are part of a wider global reform landscape with shared characteristics like decentralisation, school autonomy, professionalisation of teachers, a curriculum based on competencies, and centralised evaluation systems. As source material, Beech uses guidelines and policy proposals at both the global (international agencies) and the national level (Argentina and Brazil). Additionally, interviews with teacher educators in both countries serve to show how seemingly universal scripts, as those produced by international agencies, are appropriated and sometimes subverted in local contexts – in other words: how policies translate into social practices.

The book consists of seven chapters. In Chapter Two, Beech traces the different traditions within comparative education that have dealt with educational borrowing and lending. Chapter Three investigates what kind of educational knowledge (in particular about teacher education) was pushed forward by international agencies between 1985 and 1996. Beech carves out both similarities (such as the need for adaptable educational systems, schools, teachers, students) and differences (such as the World Bank's human resource approach vs. UNESCO's humanist perspective).

Chapter Four, as historical flashback, examines how the teacher came into being in Argentina and Brazil, and how these ideal constructs reflect different trajectories in each country, through the examples of the Normal School (end of nineteenth century), the New Education Movement (1930s to 1960s), and Developmental and Technocratic Views (1990s). While in Argentina, teachers were devised as "obedient executors" (p. 103) of state-defined civilisation aims, and the New Education Movement was regarded as dealing only "with the details of daily life in schools" (p. 113), teacher education in Brazil was much more fragmented; the New Education Movement coincided with the revolutionary search for a new Brazilian citizen. Under the influence of developmental and technocratic views mainly imported through international (or US) agencies, both countries experienced an increasing division of labour: while policy goals and curriculum guidelines were defined by experts, teachers were downgraded to mere technicians.

How could these two countries' experiences converge in this last period? Chapter Five provides an answer by illuminating the growing influence of international agencies, who move their global and (purportedly) universally valid programmes into local contexts. Both the Argentinian and Brazilian governments pressed for a thorough transformation of their educational systems due to allegedly external pressures – or to put it more provocatively: they pleaded for reform without having an obvious problem to solve. However, classic reform solutions such as decentralisation did not occur uniformly in Argentina and Brazil, with traditional power structures left intact (Brazil) and

decentralisation translated as provincialisation (Argentina). Also the flexibilisation of the curriculum was interpreted flexibly: Argentina's Common Basic Contents were so many that they virtually substituted the former prescriptive curriculum, and both countries continued to practise an encyclopaedic curriculum culture.

One of the most valuable chapters when it comes to local appropriation is Chapter Six, which analyses interviews with teacher educators in each country. International agencies have clearly framed local discourses on teacher education, but Beech shows that engaging with these global prescriptions can result in diverging, "non-literal" (p. 211), interpretations and implementations. Here, the fruitfulness of having two units of comparison comes to the fore, especially when the Brazilian consciousness of teacher autonomy is contrasted to the Argentinian incorporation of the language of reform: "[Argentinian] teachers are given an autonomy for which they were not prepared" (p. 241).

In his introductory chapter, Beech calls for "new conceptual apparatuses in order to understand the circulation of ideas about education in the current world, and how this circulation affects actual educational practices in different contexts" (p. 13). His theoretical approaches, making use of Foucault's concept of discourse and Bernstein's concept of recontextualisation, serve his purpose well to reveal both the power and transformative capacity of discourse – but they are not exactly new. Beech's conceptualisation of space, identified by himself as crucial for understanding the different loci of transfer, remains underexplored – a drawback that he compensates for in a recent co-authored conference paper.¹ Repeated, identical footnotes (notes 23 and 152) and quotations (p. 43 and 130) as well as longer repetitive passages, typographic errors, and imprecise citations (such as www.worldbank.org) reveal a certain degree of carelessness in the finalisation of the manuscript. Other defects, such as repeated faulty hyphenation, missing bibliography and list of abbreviation, are probably owed to the publisher.

These minor shortcomings aside, Beech's book constitutes a fascinating and empirically rich study of global-local transfer in education, which is equally useful for scholars of educational transfer and for students in comparative education.

¹ Beech, J., and M. Larsen. 2011. Thinking Creatively and Critically about Space in Comparative and International Education. Conference paper presented at the annual conference of *CIES (Comparative & International Education Society)*. Montreal (May 1-6, 2011).

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