Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of

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“Decolonizing Educational Transfer in Postcolonial Countries: Exploring Problems and Solutions for Cross-cultural Educators and Development Practitioners”

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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Remote Defence

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Jason Price, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Jean-Paul Restoule, Department of Indigenous Education, UVic (Co-Supervisor)
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Dr. Lauri Johnson, Lynch School of Education and Human Development, Boston College

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Dr. Debby Ianson, School of Earth and Ocean Sciences, UVic

Dr. Stephen Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Globalization has brought increased opportunities for educators to collaborate across borders, sharing everything from curricula, teaching practices and educational standards to learning technologies, institutional structures and organizational policies. In the literature, this is often referred to as educational transfer, or the borrowing and lending between educational systems from different countries or cultures. Today, institutions that share between educational systems—whether schools, community groups, development organizations, corporations or governments—are so ubiquitous that some may think of it as a natural, inevitable and benign process. Yet as perspectives shared in this study illustrate, for many in-field practitioners, transfer can be challenging, have processes and outcomes that are not always clear or beneficial, and be fraught with many problems. This study examines the perspectives and problems of hosts when Western educators and development practitioners work within their postcolonial communities. Drawing on concepts, methods and strategies from postcolonial and critical education theory, this study examines how transfer can perpetuate historically inherited patterns of Western imperialism to answer the question, as educational borrowers and lenders, how do we know we are or aren’t neocolonial actors when transferring Western education into postcolonial countries, and what can we do to help ensure that we aren’t?

Using a mix of grounded theory, narrative inquiry and action research, this study draws on data from interviews, narratives and group discussions that were collected between 2014 and 2019 from over 33 participants representing visiting and hosting volunteers and staff at three universities in Ghana and Vietnam. The results demonstrate that although their specific problems are individual and varied, hosting professionals can struggle with similar themes like Eurocentrism, developmentalism, inequality, harm and racism, requiring practitioners to use additional evaluation methods besides traditional needs assessments and outcomes-based program evaluations to decolonize their work. In addition to theorizing how practitioners might improve transfer evaluation, the study also examines how hosts and visitors might develop more critical awareness of neocolonial patterns and better support decolonial goals like participant consent, self-determination and empowerment. To this end, the study shares postcolonial perspectives, theoretical models and piloted problem reduction strategies to help future transfer practitioners develop deeper and more critical understandings of educational transfer.

Keywords: educational transfer, critical pedagogy, decolonial education, problem-posing education, international development