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The German Example: English Interest in Educational Provision in Germany since 1800
by David Phillips. London and New York: Continuum, 2011. 230 pp. \$130.00.
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Few countries in the world are at once as admired and so feared as Germany, with the former mainly the result of economic prowess and the latter due to the past excesses of military might. In education, the positive and negative dovetail in ways as complex as today's highly stratified and segregated education system that still reflects its pioneering, differentiated educational provision, from kindergarten to dual apprenticeship to the research university and many organizational forms in between. *The German Example* contributes in myriad ways to that key debate of comparative education, namely transfer and translation between cultural contexts. Building upon decades-long curiosity about German education and its influence in his home country, David Phillips, emeritus professor of comparative education at Oxford, enjoys a unique position to chart and evaluate two centuries of English interest in educational provision in Germany, the country most often chosen as a model in policy making in England. He does so here in a volume that synthesizes numerous contributions of his own published work over the years, provides a rich source of verbatim citations on this wide-ranging topic (by key figures such as Matthew Arnold and Michael Sadler, among others), and offers an extensive bibliography, plus relevant appendixes of original source documents (from 1886 to 1927), for readers to follow up their own inquiry. While mainly focused on England and Wales from the vantage point of those scholars, policy makers, and educators who suggested or indeed took German educational provision as an exemplar, references to other influential countries in Europe as well as the United States broaden the scope—as do selected explicit comparisons and helpful contrasts of educational principles, structures, and conditions.

Instead of attempting to provide a comprehensive history, Phillips identifies germane periods of educational reform over 2 centuries. This magnifies the phenomenon under study even as it marks opportunities for other scholars interested in educational borrowing to follow up and delve deeper into particular phases, perhaps especially regarding politics that were not central to this study. Clearly, educational borrowing as a feature of reform processes in European education is nothing new. Rather, the book underscores that this is in fact the standard operating procedure, from the earliest attempts to institutionalize compulsory schooling to the contemporary Bologna process standardizing higher education, which already counts 47 participating countries engaged in intergovernmental negotiation and supranational coordination.

The first chapter briefly discusses educational policy borrowing and various aspects of German education that were once—or continue to be—enormously attractive around the world. Chapter 2 discusses the beginnings of English interest in Germany (primarily looking to Prussia, but throughout the author emphasizes regional differences in a Germany whose borders have shifted much more dramatically than have those of the British Isles). The following chapter discusses how state involvement in education evolved (1833–70) and the influence of Germany's example especially in regard to compulsory schooling. Next, Phillips discusses the half-century development of a national education system in England (1870–1918). Chapter 5, "Excursus: Aspects of the German University," taking a somewhat different tack in its extensive historical process tracing, integrates the significant story of influence of the German university

(an eminent model, despite the contemporary undoing of its apotheosis). Paired with the abiding interest globally in vocational education and training “Made in Germany” that has helped Germany avert or weather many an economic crisis (165ff.), this discussion of the German example beyond schooling manifests the continuity of cross-national awareness and attraction in systems that have been understood as worthy of emulation, whether based on criteria of equity, efficiency, or excellence. The next two chapters, discussing periods in the twentieth century (the interwar period 1918–39 and post-WWII), are less comprehensive, but also likely better known to readers. The vivid concluding chapter is brief and here the reader wishes for further summary and outlook.

Not essentially a study of the reception of scholarship, the book instead specifies classic mechanisms and arenas of transfer, from influential individuals and elite exchanges to international exhibitions and travel reports, as well as policy learning (via reports, commissions, and the like) that have long been influential. Yet in terms of theory (set out in chap. 1), Phillips’s own “spectrum of educational transfer” and the terms of educational borrowing (philosophies, ambitions, strategies, enabling structures, processes) are not always explicitly applied to the case at hand. This could have been more comprehensively done to enhance the relevance of the range of phases discussed, especially for nonhistorians. For instance, the significant West to East imposition of policy and practice following German unification that Phillips analyzes, after which the education system logic, structures, and curricula were wholly replaced, is perhaps the perfect contemporary example of “imposition.” Discussing the most recent developments in Germany, the author explicates how the country’s self-understanding as an exemplary educational nation (*Bildungsnation*) was shattered by middling performance in the OECD’s PISA studies of 15-year-olds’ school performance since 2001 and the dramatic underfunding of its renowned universities and their transformation responding to globalization and Europeanization pressures.

Thus, this volume provides both historical and contemporary examples of considerable interest to those who wish to understand the shape and reform of education systems in England and Germany even as it demonstrates how challenging such multicultural, multilingual scholarship is to craft. Indeed, readers will profit most if they have additional contextual background information to optimally make sense of the arguments assembled here about what is being borrowed by whom, when, and where. The collection of citations and statements as well as the extensive bibliography provide a considerable resource even for readers without substantial knowledge of both the lending and borrowing countries. As David Phillips fittingly concludes: “The German example in education is of particular interest to comparativists because it has been over the past two hundred years and more a model to be taken into account when evidence has been needed of what might be possible in terms of educational change” (177). There is every reason to believe that Germany’s education system, whether glorified or vilified, will continue to be a force used to inspire, implement, or legitimate reforms in England and other countries around the world.

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