

Silent and explicit borrowing of international policy discourses. The case of the Swedish teacher education reforms of 2001 and 2011

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Abstract

The article presents different models of comparative education by discussing the government committee reports (SOU) which prepared the Swedish teacher education reforms of 2001 and 2011. These serve as examples for different kinds of policy borrowing from an international Bologna process discourse in national government document. The article facilitates Waldow (2009) term of “silent borrowing”. The reform of 2001 shows distinct references to international discourses without making this explicit. The reform of 2011 is then an example for explicit borrowing. The related government committee report refers very obvious to the Bologna process. However, this is seen as strategy in order to mark its distinction to its predecessor reform. Our cases are assumed to show how socio-historical and political contexts condition national discourses’ recourses of legitimation.

Keywords: teacher education, comparative education, *policy borrowing and lending*, educational reform

Introduction¹

In international educational politics and research over the last 20 years, teacher quality has been discussed as a significant factor that determines pupil performance (Day and Sachs 2004). Following this somewhat surprising discovery, teacher education has become a prominent reform project in many national contexts. Moreover, frequent international large-scale studies today can reveal evidence of issues from each national education system which ought to be improved, not least in order to achieve good rankings in the educational league tables (Steiner-Khamsi 2004; Hopmann et al. 2007). Finally, the European Union Bologna process, started in 1999 and aimed at the homogenisation and internationalisation of the European higher education sector, also took teacher education into consideration (Buchberger et al. 2000). Consequently, teacher education can be seen as a legitimate way to demonstrate the impact of the ‘international’ on national educational projects.

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However, while there is little doubt that this impact is real, we can question whether there is a linear transfer process that might result in the international convergence of national educational systems (Simola et al. 2013). By discussing the Swedish teacher education reforms of 2001 and 2011, this article aims to exemplify different concepts of comparative education theory in order to demonstrate how the impact of the international on national education can differ and how indeed it can be explained. The concepts in focus explain why educational models and discourses move from one national context into another and thereby point to the phenomenon of *policy borrowing and lending* (Steiner-Khamisi 2010; Waldow 2012). Our focus is not only borrowing and lending *per se*. We find that the reference to a lender of a particular model is equally relevant. In very few cases, a domestic system adopts an idea from elsewhere by way of international trends or best practice stories from other countries. Instead, the process is often concerned with the legitimation or delegitimation of arguments in the national reform processes with reference to the international arena (Waldow 2012). The Swedish reforms of 2001 and 2011, and their relation to the Bologna Process, provide interesting examples of how national reforms may or may not refer to international processes and trends, at least in terms of their role as sources of inspiration. Legitimation, as well as delegitimation, are achieved not only by referring to sources and models, but also by concealing them (Waldow 2009).

Such reference can only be demonstrated here as a discursive practice. We will therefore draw empirically on Swedish government committee reports (*Svenska Offentliga Utredningar, SOU*). Reforms are prepared, in the Swedish context, by expert committees which introduce and motivate changes on scientific and political grounds (Wallin 2001).² We build our argument on the commission reports for both teacher education reforms: SOU 1999: 63 for the reform of 2001, and SOU 2008: 109 for the reform of 2011.

Consequently, the questions discussed here are: (i) How are the Swedish teacher education reforms of 2001 and 2011 influenced by international trends and processes? (ii) How are such influences dealt with on the discursive level in the committee reports that prepared the reforms? The article starts with an extended introduction to our theoretical approach, which addresses explicit and silent borrowing in educational reforms. We will then discuss Swedish teacher education since 1945, before we examine the two most recent reforms in relation to the Bologna Process. Finally, we will contextualise our findings in terms of Swedish culture and history.

The policy of borrowing and lending in education

In terms of the conception of the legitimation and delegitimation of national reform projects, comparative education theory offers several valuable models. David Philips (2004) explains how international educational models have become attractive to potential borrowers, arguing that a *conditio sine qua non* is that there exists a

problem or dissatisfaction in a given national context. This dissatisfaction can be exacerbated by large-scale international studies such as PISA or TIMSS which enable the ranking of national education systems in terms of “better” or “worse” and “better” or “even better”. By ‘scandalising’ a nation’s position in these rankings, the pace of national reform can be accelerated or the perception of the need for change can be generated (Steiner-Khamsi 2004). Referring to the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, Jürgen Schriewer (1990) explains how a so-called *externalisation of world situations* can become a vehicle for political arguments which are supposedly strengthened by international arguments (for a comprehensive and very illuminating overview on externalisation, see: (Waldow 2012)). Two factors are important here: the first is that externalisation does not simply mean copying from other countries, but legitimisation and motivation strategies that deliver arguments for the required change. World situations are only one of several legitimisation strategies. The other factor is that world situations do not necessarily mean other countries themselves, but instead refer to world trends (ibid.) and, while these trends might have been triggered in a particular national context, they may already have detached from that context. One intriguing example is New Public Management ideology in education. Few would refer today to the actual country of its origin (which was in fact New Zealand) (Steiner-Khamsi 2004).

As mentioned above, following Niklas Luhmann there are other legitimisation strategies such as externalisation of the principles and results of science (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*), or of organisation (see Waldow 2012). Different kinds of externalisation can be active at the same time, but in relation to our focus on internationalisation other alternatives may become possible. This means that it is possible that the reference to the international or the deliberate omission thereof in favour of another, for example national argument has a legitimising character. Regarding omitted references, Florian Waldow (2009) proposes a very useful model. He distinguishes *explicit* and *silent borrowing*. Silent borrowing indicates references that are not made visible as such. In the case of a national reform project, this means that there is an obvious borrowing of or reference to an international discursive reservoir, but that an explicit reference is avoided, and other legitimising strategies are used instead. It is not, however, easy to identify such borrowing since it is silent. Waldow (2009) suggests the strategy of searching for *isomorphisms*, which refers to similar arguments and terminologies in different discourses. In order to illustrate this, we present an example of Swedish government committee reports (SOU) from the 1960s and 1970s. These reveal a remarkably strong resemblance to international discourses of the time, but without making any explicit reference to them. Instead, the reforms are legitimated by normative and rational arguments which follow a teleological logic. After finding such isomorphisms, it is necessary to investigate which references are used instead, and then interpret the phenomenon in relation to the

nation-specific particularities of the case that enables one legitimisation strategy, but prevents another (*ibid.*).

Teacher education in Sweden from a historical perspective

After a long reform process, in 1962 the Swedish compulsory school was transformed into a comprehensive school (*grundskola*) for all children from grades one to nine (Hartman 2012). In 1970 the upper secondary school (*gymnasium*) was also reformed and today constitutes part of the Swedish comprehensive school system. Since then, 98 percent of pupils have continued their education at upper secondary school (Richardson 2004). However, one peculiarity of the reform was that, although there was now a school for all pupils, Swedish teacher education retained its diversity. There were several different teacher degrees and programmes, for instance for the elementary, intermediate and secondary levels at comprehensive school, or for teaching younger or older children. In addition, there were preschool teachers, upper secondary teachers and vocational teachers (Richardson 2004). Until 2001, there were frequent trial-based attempts to harmonise teacher education. The main argument, at least up until the 1990s, was that Sweden was a society that emphasised common and shared values as well as equality and equity (Telhaug et al. 2006). During this time, Swedish teacher education was also, compared with other Western European countries, quite closely related to national educational policy (Lindensjö and Lundgren 2000; Linde 2003), and since the 1950s the Swedish state had regarded the education of its teachers as a vehicle for shaping educational policy (Wermke 2013). Moreover, up to the 1980s Swedish teacher education received a great deal of input from state and educational research on pedagogy in the classroom (Carlgren and Klette 2008).

From the 1990s on, the Swedish school system underwent tremendous decentralisation. The responsibility for schooling was transferred from the central government to the municipalities, which are now also the direct employers of the teachers (Forsberg and Lundgren 2009; Forsberg 2011; Englund 2012). Since this time, other guiding values have also come into focus: individualisation and preparation for life-long learning. Again, comprehensive teacher education was seen as a crucial instrument for implementing and promoting such ideals (Ödman 1995). The expectation that a school which promotes equality needs a teacher education with no organisational distinctions gained strength (Askling and Jedeskog 1994; Carlgren and Marton 2002). Teachers were supposed to share a common pedagogical ideology that enabled strong cooperation and a close relation of teachers and syllabi in the different school years (*ibid.*). This shift was assumed to improve the transitions of pupils throughout their schooling career.

In 2001, there was a teacher education reform that implemented corporate, i.e. integrated, teacher education for all forms of teachers who built on a comprehensive and shared pedagogical and didactical education with an integrated school practice. The teacher education programme now drew on 1.5 years of shared general

pedagogical education (Hartman 2012; Linde 2003; Richardson 2004). However, this could be seen as a logical next step in the Swedish development as can be illustrated by the preceding teacher education reform of 1988. Already here, the traditional cycles of elementary and lower secondary grades (*lågstadiet, mellanstadiet, högstadiet*) somehow disappeared and were replaced by two types of teachers responsible for “younger” children (grades one to seven) and “older children” (grades four to nine). This clearly illustrates a move towards integration already before 2001. Further, more exhaustive and subject didactics as well as subject studies were much more emphasised for those teachers, providing evidence of academisation (Richardson 2004; Hartman 2012).

The 2001 reform also aimed to even further strengthen the academisation of teachers’ knowledge base (Hartman 2012). Here, it may be argued that the reform showed a clear commitment to trends that were prevalent in the international arena, identified by the OECD and the EU. Other prominent concepts are also clearly visible such as decentralisation, liberalisation, individualisation and life-long learning. In particular, they were supposed to be coped with in the reform by corporate teacher education for all teachers based on a shared knowledge base focusing on competencies of life-long learning, but also on much individual space for a plethora of specialisations. However, after 1999 Sweden participated in the European higher education process created by the Bologna treaties in 1998, reinforcing the need for such a commitment. This above all required a reform of teacher education, as we will discuss further on.

In short, the reform did not last long. Several studies have shown that the plan of shared academic grounding for all teachers was harder to implement than expected (Hartman 2012; Linde 2003). After 10 years, in 2011 Swedish teacher education was reformed again. However, it can also be argued that another significant reason for this fast transformation can be seen in the political changes in Sweden which had occurred since 2006. The social democratic government which had held office for an extended time with only short interruptions was replaced by a liberal-conservative alliance which defended its majority successfully at the 2010 election. Great effort has gone into reforming teacher education and it is obviously still viewed as a key vehicle for shaping educational policy. With the reform of 2011, the ‘older’ classification of different teacher degrees and programmes has once again been implemented. The relationship to the Bologna Process has, however, remained untouched.

The reforms of Swedish teacher education in 2001 and 2011

In this section, we will analyse the government committee reports (SOU) which prepare and motivate the reforms with respect to their references to international processes such as the Bologna Process (European Ministers of Education 1999). The reform of 2001 was the project of a social democratic government and took shape during the formation of the Bologna treaties in 1998, which Sweden ratified in 1999.

We argue that the reform must be seen as an obvious and necessary reaction to the European integration of the Swedish higher education system since Sweden became a member of the European Union in 1995. In addition, Agneta Bladh, who signed the Bologna treaties on Sweden's behalf, was also politically responsible for the reform of 2001. The second reform, in 2011, is seen as a liberal-conservative project. Its elaboration proceeded from the end of the Bologna Process, which was expected to finish in 2010.

In our analyses, we want to illustrate two phenomena: 1) the report of the 2001 reform (SOU 1999: 63) contains many references to international discourses such as the one related to the Bologna Process. But these are not made explicit; other legitimating strategies are used instead. 2) The report preparing the reform of 2011 (SOU 2008: 109) contains several explicit references to the process in focus but, read thoroughly, the reform appears in many sections to be little more than a revision of the 2001 report. It hardly offers a radically new perspective, aside from the re-implementation of the different teacher degrees and programmes. We argue that, through the explicit reference to the international, the most recent liberal-conservative reform aims to mark a stark distinction from its social democratic predecessor, even if in many sections it appears only to repackage the old reforms. For increased readability of the text, the quotes are translated directly from Swedish into English. The reforms are used alongside the government committee reports that prepared the reforms.

The reform of 2001: the silent Bologna discourse

In 1999, the government committee report for the reform of 2001 (SOU 1999:63) was published. Its title, "To learn and to lead" (*Att lära och leda*), reveals the competencies teachers are expected to develop in their teacher education:

From different directions we hear that education and competences are crucial for a democratic society and economic development. [...] *much* points to the fact that the first and most important educational task is the development of individuals who are enabled and empowered to both cope with information, and search for knowledge as well as to solve problems (SOU 1999, 49, our italics).

The societal conditions for working as a teacher are described as ever-changing and, for this reason, teachers must during their education gain opportunities to work within the Swedish school system in different local contexts and from different perspectives. The capability to reflect and think critically beyond subject borders and to develop their own point of view becomes the central factor that is supposed to empower teachers for life-long learning.

In various contexts it is self-evident that knowledge is the most relevant production commodity in a new society. [...] The information society [...] requires a particular literacy in order to process complex information, which undergoes constant change and renewal.

That is why people are needed that over and over again refresh their learning. Education comprising of self-reliant work and individual professional development – life long learning – becomes a condition for the future society (264, our italics).

A focal point, finally, is the academisation that follows, as is also required by the Bologna declaration, from undergraduate to master's level.

During the undergraduate education, teaching students are expected to acquire competences that enable them to continue after their graduation with a Masters of education (268).

“Various contexts”, “much” and “various directions” remain the only vague references to the required changes. These can indeed mean anything. However, first of all, changes in and of society are given as the main reasons for the reform. Social development is the core argument and is mirrored in the proposed changes, such as decentralisation.

Changes in the society result in a situation that emphasizes many more competences for learning, even in areas beyond the traditional teacher education (261f., our italics).

The isomorphisms with the Bologna Declaration (1999) are highly visible. In the main section, Sweden must be a lender, as a quick glance at its content reveals, presented here in paraphrase: The Declaration requires that examinations and programmes in European higher education be comparable. Related to this, it requires a progression of the programmes from undergraduate to master's level. Bologna emphasises the European aim of strengthening the intellectual, cultural, social, scientific and technological dimension of the Union. Priorities are the promotion and increase of local flexibility and employability, and the opportunity and preparedness for life-long learning. Europe as a knowledge society becomes a factor in the individual, social and human growth of its citizens. Their European awareness will be sustainably strengthened by the knowledge society. Moreover, Europe as a knowledge society will and must transmit to its citizens the necessary competencies for the challenges of the new century. Knowledge and gaining the new knowledge are transmitted as special values and a shared social and cultural identity.

This Declaration accentuates the importance of national reforms aligned with the formulated European goals. It can be stated that Sweden was very early to implement its reforms here. Other prerequisites named in the declaration include the autonomy and independence of higher education institutions in order to enable higher education and research to adapt to frequent changes in society. Higher education must be strengthened by further academisation, aimed at securing European competitiveness. Key words in the Bologna Declaration such as flexibility, life-long learning, knowledge society, technology, knowledge exchange, and academisation also appear in other international discourses such as those of the OECD, UNESCO, WTO or the World Bank.

However, it can be pointed out that such international processes and their related concepts might have been self-evident at this time and that the committee members were highly conscious of the international context of their work. We nevertheless argue that it is remarkable that there is no reference to an international discourse, which must at the very least have been one source of inspiration. The reform must have been an obvious and necessary answer to European integration, but Europe and its related integration processes are never explicitly mentioned. In the following reform, the international references are, by contrast, highly explicit. We will discuss this in the next section.

The reform of 2011: the explicit Bologna discourse

The similarity of many parts of this reform with its predecessor points to the fact that 2011 does not represent a dramatic shift in Swedish teacher education, but appears to be a revision of 2001. There are no changes in the construction of the undergraduate and master's education that constitute the foundations of European flexibility, but the obvious relation to Bologna still remains. The proximity to the process becomes clear from the title of the commission report preparing the reform, "A sustainable teacher education" (*en hållbar lärarutbildning*), which relates to the goals of higher education in Europe, that is to sustainable development (Zgaga 2006). This idea draws on the critical value of continuing work with the principles of academic cooperation beyond national borders (*ibid.*). The only factor that characterises the reform of 2011 as distinctly different from that of 2001 is the return of the different teacher degrees and programmes, i.e. of individual programmes for comprehensive school teachers for different ages, upper secondary teachers, preschool teachers and vocational teachers. The reform is thus somewhat less radical than it appears. Of further interest, therefore, is the legitimisation and communication of liberal-conservative reforms in terms of their social democratic predecessors.

By a process of scandalisation (Steiner-Khamsi 2004) of the relatively unsatisfactory and increasingly poor results of Swedish pupils in international large-scale studies such as PISA or TIMSS, it is argued by the government among others that teacher education in its present form is obviously unable to produce teachers who can teach Swedish pupils in an appropriate way. However, this is not due to the inability of student teachers themselves since, as has been pointed out, even they express disappointment about their education. This is described as a situation that has apparently evolved as a result of the mistakes of the social democratic government which was responsible for the previous teacher education reform.

A critical introspection about education policy is the position of Sweden in relation to its international competitors. If the results do not match expectations, the question emerges,

which are the most important factors which impact on good results of instruction and how are they achieved. Here, teacher education plays a crucial role (SOU 2008: 109, 181).

As mentioned earlier, the reform of 2011 presents little new, and the changes it does present advocate the re-implementation of different types of teacher education for different types of teachers, which actually leads us back to the teacher education of the 1960s which, in turn and somewhat ironically, was the product of a social democratic government. This, we argue, is why the liberal-conservative government appears to be trying to conceal its antecedents as much as possible. This takes place through a strong emphasis on international processes such as Bologna in the government committee report (SOU 2008: 109). Through the reference of “old” content to a “new” arena (the international), the content is represented as if it were new.

It was the aim of the committee to adapt the programs to the examination structures that are – due to the Bologna model – common today. This is also valid in other fields of higher education (ibid. 55).

The 2001 reform is blamed for having too little international focus. This is indeed not entirely unjustified since it refrained from all explicit references to international sources.

Educational science appears [in the commission reports of 2001, authors] as a nationally restricted field of research. [...] The discussion of the commission focused only on the phenomenon of knowledge production. Research from a perspective that is instrumentalized in this way becomes a national question alone (ibid. 102).

In order to emphasise its differences from its predecessor, the 2011 reform refers, however, to the international only in terms of the Bologna Process. The report (SOU 2008:109) has also, as we found, a somewhat curious historical perspective. It starts its historical background descriptions from the medieval age. Such an extended frame of Swedish teacher education relegates the actual predecessor, and in many ways also the lender of the liberal-conservative educational policy, which in fact was 40 years of social democratic policy, to a historical footnote.

The political debates surrounding the school can be seen as discussions about cultural reproduction and schools as expressions of social cohesion. Gustav Vasa’s aspirations for a unified nation become even more apparent in our times (ibid. 102).

No less than King Gustav Vasa is provided as a symbol of the sovereign and unified nation. He was responsible for liberating Sweden from Danish rule and for unifying the country, and is seen as a founding father of Swedish nationhood. With this reference, the government committee report, and thus the reform, ultimately retreats from an extended look at the international. The message is that teacher

education is obviously also embedded in a genuine national context which is positively connoted throughout the country.

Conclusion and discussion

The aim of the article was to illustrate how educational reforms such as the reform of Swedish teacher education are influenced by international trends and processes. Further, we investigated how such impacts are dealt with on a discursive level in governmental documents. Our main argument, following comparative education theories, was that both reference and deliberate omission can be observed in national reform projects in relation to the international. The Bologna Process and the manner in which it has been mirrored in the two recent Swedish teacher education reforms is an interesting example of this phenomenon. We were able to identify how a reference to the international has significantly changed from the reforms of 2001 to 2011. This is indeed also related to a governmental shift in Sweden in 2006. The reform of 2001 is a project of a social democratic government. It commenced as the Bologna Declaration started the process of homogenising the European higher education space in 1998, an effort joined by Sweden in 1999. In the committee report accompanying the reform, also published in 1999, there is no reference to international trends in general and the Bologna Process in particular, although the reform of 2001 is an obvious and necessary reaction to the integration of the Swedish education system into Europe. One main argument of this article has been that this absence of references is somewhat awkward. In the case of Bologna, Sweden was early and quite radical in its implementation. Following our historical review, it might be argued that Bologna was compatible with national developments prior to this process. It walked into a ready-made position because, in particular, the issue of integration in teacher education had been discussed intensively before. Continental European countries were much slower with implementing Bologna, but even there the process in question connected in different ways to national issues in teacher education as Blömecke (2007) was able to show for the German case. Further, during the time in question Swedish teacher educators were very strongly represented in arenas discussing European teacher education, such as the Association of Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE). Swedish teacher education was very European at this time.

However, the committee report in focus is a policy document, and here we must argue in terms of legitimation if we want to understand the absence of references to Europe. Applying Waldow's (2009) considerations on borrowing and lending in education policy, we argued that we can observe an example of silent borrowing in this case. The key terms of Bologna and other internationally prominent cases are used, but their sources are not explicitly identified. References to the international and to Europe obviously cannot add to the legitimation of the reform. Several reasons can be put forward for this, the first being mistrust in Europe in the context of the turn of the

last century. Sweden has long emphasised its neutrality and non-alignment policy, and indeed the referendum on the Swedish accession to European Union in 1995 was passed with a very slim majority (52.3 percent) (Kaiser et al. 1995).³ In addition, there are also other reasons for the somewhat unpopular references to apparent international borrowings since, following the logic of borrowing and lending, Sweden preferred to see itself as a lender. This self-understanding was related to a peculiar educational nationalism (Waldow 2009), which drew on the experiences of the comprehensive school reform of 1962 which made the country a forerunner of progressive school policy for many years (ibid.) (at least in the non-socialist world). During the Cold War, Sweden represented the so-called third way in relation to the socialist and capitalist hemispheres (Henningesen 1986). All of this may have contributed to the lack of popularity of the international argument, at least as far as borrowing is concerned.

Finally, such legitimation strategies may have been deemed unnecessary so long as other arguments were strong enough. The Swedish faith in its role as a model of modernity was related to their faith in dedication to scientific rationality in politics. This, in turn, was related to the strong social engineering traditions found in the country (Etzemüller 2010). Education and educational reform was always seen as an answer to evolving problems in the society that had to be solved (Waldow 2007). Educational reforms thereby became a kind of “Whig history” (Waldow 2009), which indicates an organic development towards the best possible society. Such a reasoning can be contrasted to the ideas of modern sociology which emphasise the influential power of the international arena, in the sense of Zygmunt Bauman’s (1995) “system of solutions in search of problems” (p. 263). This also relates to the persistent need for educational policy in democratic societies to undertake reform projects that legitimate their existence (Luhmann 2002).

However, an externalisation of world situations, as was presented earlier with reference to Schriewer (1990), was unsuccessful in Sweden around the turn of the millennium. It was replaced by an externalisation of the principles and results of science (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) (Luhmann 1990; Waldow 2012), which means that the problems and reforms in Swedish teacher education had to be motivated and legitimated by reference to research instead of international practice. The perceived non-existence, or at least non-relevance, of an international arena at the turn of century can be identified among Swedish teachers. In a German-Swedish comparison, Forsberg and Wermke (2012) investigated teachers’ continuing professional development (CPD) in terms of international large-scale studies such as PISA or TIMSS. In 2008, the time of the empirical study, almost none of the approximately 200 Swedish teachers in their sample had, in their entire career, attended a CPD activity with this focus. For their approximately 200 German colleagues, this was an important part of their CPD in terms of assessment issues.

After 10 years of existence, the social democratic teacher education was replaced by a liberal-conservative one. The latter identifies itself through its distinction from

its predecessor. The changes were introduced by a ‘scandalisation’ of the deteriorating results of Swedish pupils in international large-scale studies (Carlgren 2009). And indeed, the deterioration of results cannot be denied. However, we argue that the extent of scandalisation is obviously also a strategy to vilify the work done by the liberal-conservative coalition’s political opponents, the social democrats. The aspect of scandalisation indeed needs more focus than can be provided here. However, what has to be mentioned though is the relation of politics and the mass media in such processes. Both relate to each other. The first needs channels to transfer the scandals to the people, the latter scandals to report about, which relates to the reality of the mass media as described by Luhmann (2000).⁴ In the latter then there are discourses on education and schools emerging – with crises, heroes and villains as crucial parts, as exemplarily shown for the case of Swedish teachers by Wiklund’s work (2006).

The 2011 reform very clearly refers in its committee report to the Bologna Process. A deeper look reveals that it still is very similar to the reform of 2001, with the greatest change being the re-introduction of different teacher degrees and programmes for different types of teachers after the reform of 2001 had implemented a single degree and similar education for all types of teachers. However, as the term “re-introduction” already indicates, this cannot be seen as an innovation, but it is instead related to the Swedish teacher education of the 1960s, which was a time of Swedish educational leadership. Sweden was, with its comprehensive school reform, considered a state of the art of the progressive schooling system within Europe, and it must be mentioned that this coincided with the heyday of the social democratic party. However, the 2011 reform report does not remark on this association, instead referring to medieval times and the first Swedish king, Gustav Vasa, who unified Sweden and liberated it from Danish domination. Gustav Vasa becomes the godfather of the reform and 40 years of social democratic policy are relegated to a historical footnote.

In conclusion, this article has presented considerations on the legitimization of educational reforms. It focused on the phenomena of explicit and silent references in reform discourses to different arguments. The reforms of Swedish teacher education of 2001 and 2011, both implemented by opposing political groups during their respective terms of government, serves as an intriguing example for such practices. The case shows that, in international educational politics, borrowing does not always mean borrowing, and that the lender is sometimes someone other than the party given explicit credit.

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Notes

- 1 In restricted form and in German the argument of this article was published in: (Höstfält & Wermke 2011).
- 2 “The committee system occupies a central position at the intersection of politics, public administration, research and public articulation of interests and provides an arena for policy preparation, formulation and evaluation. Also, it has an important function as a space where political consensus can be negotiated [...] It only happens very rarely that an important policy initiative is not prepared by a government committee” (Waldow 2009, 479).
- 3 In 2003 the Swedish people (56.5 percent of them) rejected a proposal to adopt the euro.
- 4 As a footnote, the mass media is also capable of scandalising its own role in such processes through *critical* analyses of how media and politics have accelerated reforms in education [for an illuminating example, see (Zaremba 2011)].

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