



# Universal principles transform national priorities: Bologna Process and Russian teacher education



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- I analyzed teacher education curriculum and educational policy documents.
- I juxtaposed the dominant themes before and after neoliberal reforms.
- I showed the changes in the approaches and program structures.
- Changes include de-professionalization, fragmentation, and individualism.
- These changes have significant social and cultural consequences.

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## ABSTRACT

In 2003, the Russian Federation joined the Bologna Process, which accompanied the introduction of global neoliberal reforms into the Russian post-socialist space. To examine these transformations, I juxtapose foreign language teacher education program documents before and after the introduction of neoliberal policies. Participation in the Bologna Process re-conceptualized the teacher's role from a public intellectual to a technocrat, contributed to a fragmentation of subject knowledge preparation, and began promoting the individualism of the new capitalism. I present responses to the Bologna Process by Russian academics and teacher educators and argue that neoliberal reforms may have long-lasting negative consequences.

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## 1. Introduction

Relationships between global or international actors and national policy-makers often rest on assumptions of universal principles – that all educational problems can be solved with market-based reforms. It is often assumed that for a nation to become competitive in the global market, it has to accept universal solutions to existing national problems. International organizations suggest that the arrival of knowledge economy is contingent on the adoption of global neoliberal reforms: market-based educational policies that promote an expansion of the private sector, choice, student's individual responsibility, and entrepreneurship (Ball, 2012; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

During policy re-contextualization (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004) or policy convergence (Meyer & Ramirez, 2000), some problem

definitions and solutions for them, as well as the knowledge that they are constructed from, are ascribed greater value and are rendered as universally beneficial. An example of an ongoing higher education policy convergence is the Bologna Process – a process that seeks to harmonize higher education policies in 44 countries of Europe and Central Asia. In the Bologna Process, the Anglo-Saxon model of higher education (as opposed to the Continental or Scandinavian models) with its liberal democratic, capitalist, and individualist values is rendered as a superior model in comparison to other national higher education approaches (Dobbins, 2011; Silova, 2009). As the Process unfolds, it creates spaces for transnational conversations about the quality of teacher preparation and “universal” problems in teacher education (Zgaga, 2008).

However, based on my analysis of the national educational policies of the Russian Federation and its documents on teacher preparation, I argue that despite its surface benefits, the Bologna Process carries potentially harmful effects for national models of teacher education. On the example of Russian preparation of

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foreign language teachers, I show that re-structuring of teacher education according to the Bologna requirements follows neoliberal market-based approaches (Apple, 2001). As a result, it re-defines teacher's work from being a public intellectual to being a technocrat, reduces the quality of teacher preparation by fragmenting and diminishing the significance of the subject matter preparation, and undermines Russian cultural values of collectivity and group solidarity (Nikandronov, 2009) by promoting the individualism of the new capitalism. I draw on Gramsci's (1971) writing on education to analyze the transformations that occurred in Russian teacher education and to trace changes in national conceptualizations of education and teacher education as consequences of participating in international processes.

### 1.1. Globalization and the neoliberal agenda

Even though definitions of globalization proliferate, consensus among various globalization theorists about the nature of the process is rare. When it does occur, it tends to acknowledge how intertwined the process of globalization has become with the spread of neoliberalism around the world (Ritzer, 2007). Harvey defines neoliberalism in the following way:

Neoliberalism is ... a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.

Harvey, 2007, p. 2

Couched in the language of universal freedom, democracy, and liberty, the neoliberal agenda turns the world into a market place in which anything, including education, can be turned into a commodity and traded. Zeichner (2010) argued, for example, that in the US neoliberal policies have led to the commodification of teacher education, decreased funding for public education, heightened hyper-rationality, and increased accountability. Similar trends can be found in many countries around the globe. For example, Robertson (2012) analyzed the spread of neoliberal policies that target teacher preparation facilitated by international agencies, such as OECD and the World Bank. At the core of the international organizations' agendas is a claim that by increasing the quality of students' learning, trained teachers contribute to a nation's ability to compete in the knowledge economy (cf. World Bank, 2013). Furthermore, international organizations' technocratic conceptualizations present teachers as "human resources, or human capital requiring investment" (Klees, 2012, p. xviii) instead of viewing them as human beings, public intellectuals, or ethical actors. According to Giroux (1985), technocrats implement and execute curricula designed by someone else, whereas intellectuals engage in creative shaping of and critical conversations about education.

The OECD report, *The Knowledge-Based Economy* (1996), put forward an argument that global competitiveness can be achieved through knowledge creation and innovation facilitated by mobility networks. After that publication, the knowledge economy gradually became the dominant narrative of policy-makers around the world. This "imaginary" of knowledge economy has become one of the major drivers for the global spread of neoliberalism (Lauder, Young, Daniels, Balarin, & Lowe, 2012). The notion of "imaginary" – "a constructed landscape of collective aspirations" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 31) – is a useful reminder that knowledge economy is created through circulation of discourses rather than through material practices. It also underscores a lack of evidence that it is real, desirable, or equally beneficial for all (Lauder et al., 2012).

### 1.2. Bologna declaration and European teacher education

Major transformations in European higher education systems were believed to be necessary for Europe to become a knowledge economy by 2010. The tenets of the Bologna Declaration (European Commission, 2010) are set to facilitate greater academic mobility of faculty and students, so that innovation and creation of new knowledge could proceed through these networks. Even though many European academics supported the Bologna process as an opportunity to modernize higher education, to attract talent from around the world, and to strengthen cultural traditions, a growing number of scholars started questioning it as a form of academic capitalism and a process of commodification of higher education.

From the latter perspective, economic priorities that emphasize an entrepreneurial university competing in the global educational market for "the best brains" lead to academic imperialism (Robertson, 2008) and entrench neoliberalism as the new norm. Many see transformations in higher education under neoliberal policies as damaging because market-based approaches to education diminish the conception of education as a public good (Davies, 2005) and decrease the role of universities as sites of intellectual engagement (Paraskeva, 2010). The underlying assumption of the Bologna Process is that there are universal problems that have universal solutions (Kwiek, 2004). This assumption allows the recontextualization of neoliberal principles built into the framework of the Process (Jessop, Fairclough, & Wodak, 2008) into new contexts.

In many participating countries, teacher education has not been spared from the neoliberal changes that are affecting higher education. Even though the Bologna Agreement does not include any intentions of decreasing teacher professional preparation, the unintended consequences of the reforms include narrowing conceptions of teacher training and increased standardization of teacher education programs (Aydarova, 2012). Manifestations of these consequences vary across contexts. In Germany, school-related subjects began to receive greater emphasis, whereas philosophy and history courses lost the prominent position they used to occupy prior to reforms (Blömeke, 2006). In Norway, increased focus on academic disciplines reduced attention to other courses (such as pedagogy) that afforded a critical analysis of social conditions (Garm & Karlsen, 2004); the new regimented degree structure left little room for teachers' character-formation (Munthe, Malmo, & Rogne, 2011). In Bulgaria, on the other hand, the number of hours dedicated to subject knowledge courses has decreased (Bankov, 2007). Similar among different contexts is the tendency to apply market principles to the design and delivery of teacher education, with cost effectiveness and cost-cutting receiving higher priorities than other aspects of educational provision.

The impact of the Bologna Process on European teacher education, as a process that facilitates recontextualization of neoliberal discourses into the sphere of education traditionally dedicated to the public good, remains a largely understudied area. A few studies described above that have examined the transformations in teacher education present a picture of mixed results where transnational solutions did not match national needs but were picked up by national elites to fulfill their agendas. The question remains, however, how the preparation of teachers, which has long been regarded as a national endeavor, is re-interpreted in light of the spread of global neoliberal agendas in the countries that have historically relied on nationally produced knowledge in relative isolation from international trends, such as, for example, Russia (Schriewer & Martinez, 2004). In an attempt to answer this question, I will examine the transformations of Russian teacher education under international influences.

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