

Transnational Education in Historical Perspective. The *Deutsche Kolonialschule* (1898-1944)

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Abstract

Transnational education (TNE) is widely viewed as focussing on a new form of educational practice specific to the globalised world of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. This article explores the potential that a historical perspective can offer. Particular attention is due the political and societal context of colonialism. It focusses on the Deutsche Kolonialschule (German Colonial School) where young German men trained for a life overseas between 1898 and 1944. First, it gives a brief overview of the Kolonialschule's founding and development. The second part explores the various forms of cross-border networks and interconnections that it was part of. The third part analyses the intended types of education and training as well as the educational goals of the Kolonialschule. Fourth, a conclusion takes up the initial question looking at the potentials of a historical perspective on transnational education.

Keywords: transnational education, colonial education

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Zusammenfassung

Transnational education (TNE) gilt als neue, spezifische Erscheinungsform im Bildungswesen des globalisierten späten 20. und frühen 21. Jahrhunderts. Dieser Beitrag lotet das Potential einer historischen Betrachtungsweise unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Rahmenbedingungen des Kolonialismus aus. Als Untersuchungsgegenstand dient die Deutsche Kolonialschule, die zwischen 1898 und 1944 junge Männer für ein Leben in Übersee ausbildete. Der erste Teil schildert die Gründung und Entwicklung der Lehranstalt. Zweitens geht es um Formen und Ausprägungen grenzüberschreitender Verflechtungen und Netzwerke, in welche sie eingebunden war. Der dritte Abschnitt fragt danach, welche Lehrinhalte vermittelt und welche Erziehungsziele angestrebt wurden. Viertens schließt ein Ausblick auf die Entwicklung der Schule nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg die Ausführungen ab.

Schlagwörter: transnational education, koloniale Erziehung

1 Introduction

The term transnational education (TNE) refers to a field of research that has been emerging since the early 2000s (*Kosmützky/Putty* 2016). It is widely viewed as focussing on a new form of educational practice specific to the globalised world of the late 20th and early 21st centuries (e.g. *Adick* 2005, p. 247). Following a definition put forward by UNESCO, it mainly comprises forms of instruction, mostly in tertiary education, in which learners are located in other countries than the institutions teaching them, or more broadly “...the mobility of education programs and providers between countries“ (*Knight* 2016). With most of the research focussing on contemporary issues, the concept is rarely viewed or contextualised historically. History of Education, on the other hand, has not yet systematically adopted the concept of transnational education in its analyses. Although the field has increasingly been addressing transnational questions since the mid-2000s (*Roldán/Fuchs* 2019), this research deployed theoretical and methodological approaches taken from historical research in pursuit of a transnational history of education rather than a history of transnational education. Its broad approach is aimed at understanding “...the circulation of ideas, people, institutions and technologies across state or national boundaries and thus the entanglement and mutual influence of states, societies and cultures.” (*Vidal* 2017, p. 229).

The present contribution seeks to combine these disparate strands of research by exploring the potential that a historical perspective on transnational education offers. *Marianne Larsen* (2018, p. 101, 112f.) recently made an urgent appeal “...to bring historical research back into comparative education“ in the form of transnational historiography, which she regards as the only form “...appropriate for our globalized age“, for “our world of complex connections, flows, and entanglements.“ A shared basis and point of departure for these perspectives is offered by the definition of transnational education that *Christel Adick* (2018, p. 3) proposes: “TNE takes place in educational spaces organized [...] across national borders in which people meet and act for the purpose of gaining or transmitting education”. This is less strongly oriented towards the specific conditions of the early 21st century and, like transnational historiography, places emphasis on the crossing of national boundaries, on non-state actors and institutions, and on the educational intentions pursued by these actors.

The question as to what a historical perspective may contribute to our current understanding of transnational education can, in this contribution, only be answered by means of a case study. Its object will be the *Deutsche Kolonialschule* (German Colonial School) in Witzenhausen near Kassel in the north of Hesse. From 1898 to 1944, about 2,300 young men in their early 20s trained for a life overseas, especially in the German colonies. The school is particularly suited for study in the context of this special issue since it was founded specifically to provide an educational response to the challenges of rapidly accelerating globalisation around 1900. This is what the geographer *Friedrich Ratzel* referred to in 1884 when he wrote: “It is no longer possible today to define the term 'education' (*Bildung*) with the concept that prevailed not many years ago. *Anyone who wants to be vigorously active [in this world] needs an education that may truly be called global (Weltbildung).* This may be achieved inland as well, provided a people of the interior is aware of the sum of its overseas and global interests and exerts its powers accordingly” (*Ratzel* 1884, p. 13f., emphasis in the original)¹. Moreover, as a college-like institution for