

USING THE CONCEPT OF CONSEQUENTIAL TRANSITIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE BUDDHIST MONASTERIES OF NEPAL

King Beach
**International Educational Research and
Development Consultancy (IERDConsult)**

Facultad de Psicología, Universidad de Sevilla
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LIMITATIONS OF TRANSFER FOR UNDERSTANDING GENERALIZATION IN EVERYDAY ENVIRONMENTS

- transfer is logically no different than “just plain learning,” or alternatively, it defines a narrow and isolated aspect of learning
- transfer splits agency into mental representations or external environment without adequate means for understanding their relation
- the formation of transfer contexts are not assumed to be an actual part of the transfer process

LIMITATIONS OF TRANSFER FOR UNDERSTANDING GENERALIZATION IN EVERYDAY ENVIRONMENTS

- Logically, transfer from old contexts to new ones must happen for us on a daily and even moment-to-moment basis. Yet when we search for transfer, it is difficult to find, and appears even more difficult to intentionally facilitate.
- Transfer was conceptually developed on a narrow range of tasks and is not capable of understanding generalization across everyday social context, which are far more complex

LIMITATIONS OF TRANSFER FOR UNDERSTANDING GENERALIZATION IN EVERYDAY ENVIRONMENTS

- Limitations of transfer have been acknowledged by others developing alternative conceptions of transfer, e.g. Lobato, Greeno, Schwartz, Engeström and Tuomi-Grohn and others
- With the exception of Engeström and Tuomi-Grohn's work all of these conceptions focus on highly localized tasks rather than larger social organizations

CONSEQUENTIAL TRANSITIONS: A BROADER SOCIOCULTURAL CONCEPTION

Consequential transition is a developmental change in the relation between an individual and one or more social activities. Changes in their relation can occur through a change in the individual, the activity, or both. Transitions propagate knowledge across social space and time. A transition is *consequential* when it is consciously reflected on, struggled with, and shifts the individual's sense of self or social position.

A TYPOLOGY OF TRANSITIONS

- Lateral transitions occur when an individual moves between two historically-related activities in a single direction, e.g. from school to work.
- Collateral transitions involve individuals' relatively simultaneous participation in two or more historically-related activities, e.g. doing homework between home and school.
- Encompassing transitions occur within the boundaries of a single social activity that is itself changing, e.g. teachers responding to a new education reform.

A TYPOLOGY OF TRANSITIONS

- Mediational transitions occur within educational activities that project or simulate involvement in a yet-to-be-fully-experienced activity, e.g. vocational education

3 KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF CONSEQUENTIAL TRANSITIONS

1. Knowledge propagation across social space and time
2. Identity craftwork
3. Leading activity and heterochronicity

KNOWLEDGE PROPAGATION ACROSS SOCIAL SPACE AND TIME

- involves multiple interrelated processes rather than a single general procedure
- involves changes in both individuals and social organizations
- is never separate or decontextualized from social organizations (cf. Davydov)

IDENTITY CRAFTWORK

- Involves a change in sense of self and/or social position, and often a sense of becoming someone or something new
- Drives knowledge propagation as much as it is shaped and perturbed by it
- Not all changes in knowledge have consequences for sense of self and social position, or identity.

LEADING ACTIVITY AND HETEROCHRONICITY

- Human life “...is not built up mechanically...from separate types of activity. Some types of activity are leading ones at a given stage and are of greater significance for the individual's subsequent development, and other types are less important. Some play the main role in development and others a subsidiary one. (Leont'ev, 1981, p. 95)
- Whether an activity is “leading” and therefore dominant or not is determined by the heterochronicity or relative timing of the sequence of activity categories characteristic of a society *and* the period in an individual's development at which they participate in the activity.

CONSEQUENTIAL TRANSITIONS AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Consequential transitions began as a sociocultural alternative to transfer for understanding knowledge generalization among larger social organizations that are themselves changing
- This in turn made it useful as a conceptual tool in doing educational development work.

THE COMMUNITY *GÖNBA* (MONASTERY) EDUCATION PROJECT IN NEPAL



BUDDHIST MONASTERIES IN NEPAL

- The birthplace of the Buddha has been home to Vajrayana Buddhist monasteries since the 7th or 8th century
- Today it is estimated there are more than 4000 Buddhist monasteries (*gönbas*) in Nepal
- An even rougher estimate suggests between 60,000 and 80,000 young novice monks and nuns study, work, and practice in Nepal's monasteries

BUDDHIST MONASTERIES IN NEPAL

- **Virtually no data exist on the actual numbers of monasteries, or on the monks and nuns who reside there.**
- **All data here are from semi-structured interviews with the leadership of 16 urban and rural community-based monasteries and 2-3 monks and nuns from each institution.**

NOVICE MONKS AND NUNS

- **A majority of novice monks and nuns enter the monastery at 8-12 years of age.**
- **Most are from Nepali or Tibetan ethnically Buddhist families**
- **Most Nepali novices are from economically highly impoverished families today**
- **Most participate in education only within the monastery**

EXISTING CONSEQUENTIAL TRANSITIONS

- **From novice to fully ordained monastic monk or nun at 22-25 years of age within the monastery (Encompassing Transition)**
- **From novice to returning into the community to work at 16-18 years of age (Lateral Transition)**

A TWO-PART PROBLEM

1. **Today few novices (1-2%) remain with the monastery through full ordination as monks or nuns. This threatens the future of community monasteries and Buddhism in Nepal.**
2. **Novices who leave the monasteries generally return to lives of economic poverty after having received little or no academic education and some religious education.**

These problems did not exist 50 years ago, so what has changed?

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

- **Non-impooverished families do not send their children to monasteries today.**
- **Novices have fewer close-in-age role models in the monasteries**
- **Novices have increasing contact with world beyond the monastery.**
- **Increasing importance of academic education for economic survival in Nepal**
- **Political climate in Nepal**

WHAT CAN BE CHANGED?

- **None of the larger-scale cultural and historical causes are directly and easily subject to change through intervention.**
- **Working with monastery leaders, conceptual tools from the consequential transitions framework help us see areas where change intervention may be possible.**

KNOWLEDGE PROPAGATION ACROSS SOCIAL SPACE AND TIME

- The direction of knowledge propagation should not be only toward full monastic ordination, but also toward returning to the community.
- Basic academic education partially integrated with religious training can propagate knowledge through both the encompassing transition (novice becoming an ordained monk or nun) and the lateral transition (novice returning to the community)

KNOWLEDGE PROPAGATION ACROSS SOCIAL SPACE AND TIME

- For novices participating in the encompassing transition, academic knowledge propagated into the monastery activity should not radically alter the nature of the activity.
- For novices returning to the community in a lateral transition between two activities, academic knowledge should change what it means to return to the community as well as the nature of work engaged in.

IDENTITY CRAFTWORK

- Acknowledgement of both transitions as equally legitimate by the monastery leadership is critical to constructing positive identities as a monk or nun in the monastery and as a lay practitioner in the community.
- Without that acknowledgement knowledge propagation in transition back to the community will be greatly restricted by a sense of self as failed.
- It will also limit future contact with and support of the monastery

LEADING ACTIVITY AND HETEROCHRONICITY

- There is no leading activity for a majority of novices *within* the monastery.
- Though the monastery is organized to promote becoming an ordained monk or nun as a leading activity, the relative timing of that organizational expectation is in contradiction to the novices actual readiness to decide to be a monk or nun. This means there is no leading activity to motivate the encompassing transition for most novices.

LEADING ACTIVITY AND HETEROCHRONICITY

- Though there is no preparation by the monastery for novices choosing to return to the community, many leave to assist their families struggle to survive economically. Assisting their family is the leading activity in novices lateral transition back to the community.
- Both the encompassing and the lateral transitions must have leading activities from which the novice can choose when s/he is at an appropriate age to decide.

MOVING FORWARD

1. Offering integrated primary academic and religious education in the monasteries will afford knowledge propagation for both potential transitions.
2. Identity craftwork is involved in both potential transitions and should be supported and seen as equally positive in value.
3. Both potential transitions must involve a leading activity to provide direction and motivation for the transition.

MOVING FORWARD

- 4. This will provide two legitimate transition options for the novice monk or nun when they are of an age capable of making a reasoned decision.**
- 5. Most importantly, it should better prepare novices to reenter their community and break the cycle of poverty many are born into, and increase somewhat the number of novices remaining in the monasteries as ordained monks and nuns**

MANY CHALLENGES

- Few identifying records exist for the smaller monasteries**
- Little habit of communication between the monasteries**
- Education not a major topic of discussion or debate within the monasteries**
- Economies of scale affect what is educationally feasible and sustainable in the small monasteries**
- Political climate of Nepal**

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

Questions and comments please

