REFLECTIVE TREATISE

Globalization, the I, and the Other

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Of all the forces touching upon comparative and international education, there is perhaps none more important than globalization. Much is being written about it; much still remains to be said. I am using such an unorthodox title to this paper to highlight how globalization is impacting individuals in special ways. Today, we are seeing a veritable economic and technological and, thus, cultural revolution that is simultaneously affecting values, institutions, practices, and futures. The staggering amount of information, goods, and persons circulating across countries is moving us toward greater homogeneity, despite various singular responses from some states and communities. You and I, as both individuals and comparative educators, need to develop wider and deeper understandings of the meanings and processes of globalization and of the full reach it is attaining through both market and state forces.

Values, Power, and Politics

New values permeate the increasingly globalized contemporary society. We may not agree on whether what we call "globalization" is recent or ancient, but it is undeniable that much of the form, intensity, and widespread nature it evinces, has little in common with previous human experience. Today, individualism and competition are highly dominant values, with little space left for contestatory and liberatory thought. The priority assigned to the satisfaction of personal wants and desires is occurring to the detriment of discussions of a more transcendental or spiritual nature. Likewise, the identification of the power and political issues that underlie many decisions and events is becoming outdated, as emphasis becomes placed on production and the creation of new goods, displacing reflection about current and past events. In the field of education, research based on empirical facts leaves practically no space for more reflective treatises as to where our society is going. Research findings seem to be the only way to present knowledge; essays are avoided or seen as unwarranted or, at best, circumspect expressions of subjectivity.

Yet, issues of power differentials in society and their impact on educational institutions are more important than ever. Why? The nature of decision-making in education has changed substantially. The key players are no longer those most affected by education--the parents--and the professionals in charge of imparting formal education--the teachers--but rather private firms and international financial institutions. Through well-established lobbies in central countries, firms make themselves heard. International lending institutions, through persistent circulation of ideas, provision of advice, and promises to fund reforms that move in desired directions exercise considerable influence on educational policies. Today, in fact, it would be a rare case to find instances of educational reform emanating from the legislature; all now derive directly from the executive branch of government with very little teacher participation, and even despite the opposition of teachers' unions (Grindle, 2002; Ibarrola, 2001). Consequently, the

measures propounded by contemporary reforms are very much alike in terminology and intention across countries, and the new educational consensus is not being shaped by its most legitimate parties.

The politics of education have acquired peculiar forms. First of all, there has been a relentless attack on the quality of public schooling, and even on the possibility of reshaping it. Second, everywhere in the world, "educational reforms" have been enacted. As the market and the unit that impels it--the business corporation--have assumed greater salience in everyday life, there has been a spillover of economic values into all social institutions. Third, values such as productivity, efficiency, quality control, local participation, and choice permeate most educational reforms. Thus, reforms pursue decentralization, privatization, testing of students and teachers, national standards, and accountability, which have been identified--with limited foundation--as the means to reach the new educational values.

At first sight, the host of reforms today promises a welcomed modernization of the administration and pedagogical practices of schools; they also promise to deliver something desired by all of us: higher student achievement. On deeper examination, these reforms tend to be shallow and aimed more at the reduction of costs than at the solid and stable improvement of classrooms. A careful review of teaching practices conducive to learning in the United States (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996) concluded unambiguously that, holding constant the socioeconomic levels of blacks and whites in this country, 50 percent of the variability in their performance could be explained by the competence of teachers, especially their ability to promote higher-order thinking. This key finding led the National Commission to advocate that much more attention be given to the training of teachers and to their more equitable distribution among schools. The Commission recommended also that instead of high-stakes testing, educational systems should use a "system of performance assessment to learn how students learn;" such system would include essays, oral exams, portfolios-certainly all measures in which the teacher's judgment would be crucial (Darling-Hammond, 2001).

But what has happened to this recommendation and others based on educational research? It has been quite common for them to become ignored. Educational decision-makers, or "change champions" as some supportive parties even term them, have proceeded with very little regard for existing research findings. Rather, what guides them is the strength of their convictions that market forces produce better results than governmental action, which the prevailing educational decision-makers see as cumbersome and protracted. Quite often, reforms have sought to minimize costs, which leads educational economists such as Carnoy (2000) and Klees (2002) to conclude that these initiatives are "finance-driven." Moreover, many educational reforms have focused on the structure of schooling rather than the actual classroom dynamics (Stigler, 2002). The latter, the point of contact between student and formal knowledge, brings in the teacher as the crucial actor. Instead, we have moved to many kinds of administrative and governance changes under the assumption that all affect classroom practice. Which, in fact, they do not.

Globalization, with the creation of increasing economic power and employment opportunities in the North, has generated unprecedented physical mobility toward this area. Emigration from Sub-Saharan countries and Central European countries to Europe, and emigration from Latin America to the United States and Canada have undeniable impacts on educational systems in Northern countries. The impact is twofold, given the bipolar nature of the immigration to these countries. On the one hand are the English-speaking children of sophisticated professionals who come here to work in cutting-edge firms as those in the electronics and bio-technical industries. On other hand are the large masses of non-English speaking children of semi-literate and even illiterate parents. The first make demands for better and more offerings by the public schools in the suburbs. The latter are caught in a bewildering world of increasingly destitute, ethnically segregated, and violence-prone public schools in the inner cities. This scenario, in a minor scale, is repeated in developing countries, with the cities playing the magnet role over the rural areas. Is it any wonder that public schools are under constant attack? Privatization and parental choice in the form of charter schools and voucher programs enables the wealthier classes to exert more control over the kinds of schools in their communities. It also enables them to use more state resources for their direct benefit.

The technological revolution in information and communication has brought the Internet, satellite TV, and the wireless telephone. These technologies per se can be used for both positive and negative ends. On the welcome side, there is now immediate and direct contact among people, institutions, and governments. On the unwelcome side, cultural models of consumerism, competition, individualism, and violence circulate easily and constantly. The media are a powerful external influence that far exceeds the pedagogical experience of children and adolescents in schools. From cartoons in Japan to MTV in Senegal, visual and oral narratives bring new identities and irretrievably shape traditional cultural norms--some for the better, others for the worse. Through the creation of consumerism, the media have also augmented intergenerational differences. In many countries, "adolescents" are a segment in many ways difficult to reach by older age groups. Nonetheless, schools are important sites for the socialization of new generations. By fostering the formation of close and relatively long-lasting (at least covering the three years of junior high or the three years of senior high school) peer groups, schools have a powerful impact on future adults, who are moving in greater numbers toward self-satisfaction rather than trying to understand of other cultures or the development of solidarity values. Because of the intense proximity schools create for young students, schools continue to have a greater influence than the media in the final analysis--although increasingly peer groups and the media act in unison.

The importance of social markers, such as social class, gender, and ethnicity, is not declining with the increased complexity of our contemporary world. Both in their own right and in their intersection with each other, each of these markers merits deep analysis. Women certainly have a greater presence in politics and economic arenas than they may have had a decade ago, but improvements are not uniform or even sustainable. News of women attaining deanships and presidential offices in major universities is offset by depictions of grotesque pornography in which women are the primary referent. Gains of women in occupations and public office emerge in sharp contrast with enduring sexual divisions of labor and the expectation that women must continue their domestic responsibilities (Arnot, 2000; Kenway and Kelly, 2000; and Blackmore, 2000). The participation of minorities in modern conscripted armies is

accepted without much contestation of how disadvantaged groups are the new "cannon fodder". Women, for all their legitimate claims, remain curiously silent about wars and military conflicts that are still basically masculine and which tend not to affect women as much as they affect men.

A New Research Agenda for Immediate Action

What I have discussed above is by no means exhaustive of the changes that are taking place in our globalized world. (For a parallel discussion of globalization challenges to comparative education research, see Marginson and Mollis, 2001.) Yet, they alone create a new agenda for comparative and international educators. Let me elaborate on some of items in this research agenda:

The growing integration between economics and schooling is shaping both the knowledge that is considered legitimate and the forms schooling will take. Universities are rapidly modifying their disciplines to meet the new industrial pressures as well as creating new indicators of scholarly "contribution" to the university. It matters now much less to research a social issue than to study a productive problem. Concomitantly, it is much more important to conduct large-scale "funded" research than to examine problems under small grants. Because of these developments, an important agenda for comparative educators will be to engage in more research studies focusing on the intersectionality between university to K-12 schooling to understand with greater precision the new knowledge being produced and circulated from the university to K-12, and thus shaping primary and secondary education, and the demands (met and unmet) emerging from K-12 to higher levels of education.

As the migration of people accelerates, the South is coming to the North. This makes it necessary to understand the dynamics of both regions. Educators in the North, including those who are not comparativists, need to learn the background of students, their cultural norms, their cognitive patterns, and the nature of the school systems of origin, and to determine how the North must adjust to new pressing conditions rather than demand full assimilation. These immigrants range from the Moroccans and Libyans in Italy to the Guatemalans and Argentines in the United States. Since considerable legal and illegal migration is occurring, comparative educators face the challenge of helping develop anti-racist curricula. Comparative educators in the South need to become familiar with educational reforms going on in core countries in the North (and that will reach developing countries in the very near future) to demystify their content and promise. Another aspect of the ample flows of people across countries is the increased rate in the diffusion of HIV/AIDS. To the catastrophe in Africa, we will soon have to add the explosion in India. Consequences of this for comparative education is the necessary connection to be established between health and education, both for children and adolescents in school and for adolescents and adults out of the formal education system.

The whole notion of "national" development must be brought into complete and detailed revision as interdependencies between countries grow and as asymmetrical relations between many of them characterize the new ties. Modernity and postmodernity are concepts and paradigms that barely scratch the surface of ongoing changes in our contemporary worlds. The new forms of economic activity and economic "growth", the

new manifestations of cultural and ethnic identity, the emerging forms of citizenship and civic attitudes, the growing gaps across generations in values, experiences, and preferred futures must be systematically reviewed and assessed in the context of realities strongly shaped by massive information, communication, and production technologies. Schools must respond to these new realities, in part through teacher reformation and modifications in subjects and curricular content. In part, schools must face the new realities by accepting that other forms of knowledge transmission, particularly through the mass media, are major rivals to the classroom.

The presence and involvement of private firms in education continues to be in a crescendo mode. The implications of a tight association between the business world and schools are not fully known. On the positive side, the linkage suggests more financial resources and more expertise along the lines of administration and planning for the schools. On the downside, this connection promises a narrow focus on education as means for economic production. A case in point is a recent while house initiative, announced in April 2001 and now moving to implementation, to create Centers of excellence for teacher training (Creative Associates, 2002). Three such centers are being established in Latin America and the Caribbean with the purpose of improving primary education teaching through teacher training and material dissemination. At the same time, these centers are meant to be "a pioneering model of how public-sector/private-sector partnerships work to benefit all parties involved" (Creative Associates, 2002, p. 1). Selected corporations are being invited to become founding partners and make tax-deductible contributions of $1 million per firm over four years. Will firms simply donate resources or will they exert influence on issues to be addressed through primary schooling? While philanthropy is mostly a virtue, what consequences do the increased participation of business firms in public schools portend? Comparative studies of these emerging roles and processes would illuminate our understanding of changes in the provision and definition of "public education."

The expansion of messages in media forms, from cinema to TV programs to specialized magazines, many targeted to precise age groups and socioeconomic levels, and the pervasiveness of the entertainment industry, makes it imperative to understand to develop a stronger interdisciplinary tie between education and social communications. The preponderance of visual and oral narratives is affecting how learning occurs, including how children now prefer to learn in schools, as well as the content of learning. From a gender perspective, forms of masculinity and femininity are being shaped and recomposed through the mass media represent an enormous field of research to explore. The influence of the media is also salient in policy making. Many political leaders--authors and proponents of national educational reforms--proceed by imitation of ideas and hearsay of successful programs. They have been found to lack the habit of reflection and systematic inquiry that is essential for sound policy design (Darling-Hammond, 2001).

The enormous material consumption unleashed in the North and the consequent demands that it has made on the environment, particularly in the developing countries, has made the environment a global issue. And environmental destruction merges in perverse ways with the invasion of rights and territories of indigenous populations. From the jungles of Colombia to the deserts of Central Asia, the protection of rivers,

oceans, forests, air, and indigenous seeds and plants becomes an issue to be addressed both through political and educational means. In this context, environmental education as well as indigenous knowledge becomes a field for comparative education to engage in. This environmental education, however, should not be limited to such topics as "Heal the Bay," but should also include issues of environmental justice (questioning the uneven disposal among communities of environmental hazards), and the role of transnational corporations in the creation of consumer demands and their satisfaction through often rude exploitation of environmental resources in weaker geopolitical regions.

Another subject of increasing importance is that of human rights. With the almost unstoppable economic and political power of Northern countries, there is the assertion by governments and citizens in those states that they are entitled to many unilateral positions and definitions regarding what is "right" and "wrong". We live in a much more complex world than it was even 15 years ago. Technologies amenable to violent use are now much more easily accessible than in the past, and it is true that some that groups are making improper use of them. But, at the same time, the little peace and civility we have are the product of hundred of years of efforts in trying to respect and understand the "Other". International law and diplomacy, conventions on basic rights such as political, economic, and political freedoms, agreements on the rights of women and minority groups cannot be thrown overboard to pursue immediate self-gratifying responses. School systems face enormous challenges today making young generations understand that human rights and peace go together; that you cannot trample on someone else's right to claim yours without incurring retribution at some later point. Appeals for the development among people (particularly students) of a stronger ethic of caring and empathy will not be sufficient; work has to take place both to illuminate the inequalities that exist in society as well as to redress the undesirable conditions, even when it means that advantaged groups will see their power reduced in the process. Work among educators of different nationalities, experiences, and political objectives is essential. The treatment of civic education and history in new, appealing, accessible, and balanced ways is needed. This will have to be done on a comparative basis and, further, following an interdisciplinary approach that recognizes the contributions of history, politics, and economics.

As forces of civil society in the form of educational organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and community and grassroots groups are activated in response to the array of changes brought by globalization, comparative educators need to engage in a greater understanding of the non-formal education and informal education through courses more focused on adult learning and popular education offered by these elements of civil society. The work of numerous NGOs, operating in many countries and within multiple contexts, must be given greater attention by governments. At present, we have a very narrow view of what education is, all too often conflating education with formal schooling. This, unfortunately, leaves out the creative and very promising work of many NGOs that have identified effective modes of popular education with adults that, in some instances, may be applied to younger populations (Stromquist, 2000). We educators have come to understand NGOs mostly through the eyes of political scientists and public administrators. This is an arena where pedagogical lenses are sorely needed. Understanding the educational work to be done through non-official forms approaches

and through informal ways of teaching and learning presents a promising frontier in the context of our globalized world. And, in this respect--particularly, the educational work of NGOs in the South--much remains to be learned by educators in the North.

Concluding Thoughts

Education, at its deeper level, is about helping people to deal with their environment and, as necessary, to transform it. Globalization is introducing multiple changes to our environments and imposing more commonality than divergence. It is also introducing an avalanche of concepts, values, and practices that wraps us through physical rather than intellectual energy. Globalization forces are bringing together multiple issues and exposing the powerful intersections of economics, politics, culture, and technology. Although at first there might be the tendency to see all these forces as essentially macro, the "I" is being challenged in crucial ways. Before we can recognize the "Other", we have to know ourselves well. This requires a position of ethics, not just being bystanders of external developments. A key dictum of Dewey's philosophy, applicable today more than ever, was that "ethics is prior to epistemology". The "I" of those reading this essay will be mostly middle and upper-middle class individuals. How do we force ourselves to recognize our situated lives and the benefit we draw from current circumstances? One possibility, among many others, is recognizing our location of privilege and how it shapes our research agendas, particularly the issues we do not consider worth examining--from race to gender to geographic location.

Globalization is highlighting how education cannot be considered an isolated field but must attain centrality as part of a comprehensive intellectual domain, noting the many nodes created by macro and micro forces. Educators must respond to the complexity of globalization by creating interdisciplinary teams, not just within the social sciences but also across such fields as law, health, business, and technology. Educators must also respond to globalization by getting to know the "Other" much better: The experience from developing countries has important lessons to tell, and as some of the South increasingly becomes part of the North through migration, making sense of multiple human meanings and experiences is an unavoidable task. The challenges posed by globalization are immense and, while they will take years to be satisfactorily addressed, we must start now.

Notes

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