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Introductory Essay

Globalization and Education: Exploring Pedagogical and Curricular Issues and Implications

A recent article about globalization notes that in the most simple terms, globalization means "an increase in international trade and investment" (Weisbrot, 2000, p. 15). As a simple definition it does not of course tell us whether the phenomenon is good or bad. Yet we also know that the effort to liberalize trade and investment is not only hotly contested, as recent events in Seattle and Washington around meetings of the WTO and IMF demonstrated, but the effects can be seen everywhere.

While the proponents of global trade and investment laud the fantastic increases in the national wealth of countries like the United States and other developed countries in the West, critics point to relative impoverishment not only in so-called "third world" countries, but also to dramatic shifts in the economies of the "rich" countries. Such changes include significant increases in income disparity, loss of higher-paying and permanent employment despite low unemployment rates, and decreased levels of publicly funded social security (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2000; Sennett, 1998; Weisbrot, 2000).

We can find examples of globalization in these terms right in our own back yards so to speak. In Calgary, where I live and work, the skyline is dominated by new glass towers boasting the wealth of the oil patch while homeless people lack shelter. Talisman, a Calgary based oil exploration company, boasts of a "5,000 per cent increase in quarterly profits" in the past year based on its oil exploration ventures in Sudan, while people there endure unbearable miseries and tragedy (Chase & Sallot, 2000). And even more locally, in a sense, the bodies of the youth we teach are inscribed with the symbols of global capitalism and their identities and desires channeled by the whims of the marketplace (Giroux, 1998).

McLaren and Farahmandur (2000) see the current effects of globalization historically as the continued reach and growth of capitalism. They describe in more vivid terms the implications of what I started by noting as a simple definition of globalism: "The presence of capitalism floats in the air like the avuncular aroma of pipe tobacco wafting through your bedroom window from a neighbor's veranda," and

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Mesmerized by the scent of money, we wilfully ignore the ramifications of capitalism's current capital flight; its elimination of multiple layers of management, administration and production; and processes such as de-industrialization, the ascendancy of financial and speculative capital, the expansion of transnational circuits of migrant workers, and the casualization of the labor force. (p. 31)

In focusing on globalization and education in this special issue of the *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, it is not my purpose in this introduction to attempt to offer a full accounting of the current phenomenon of globalization, but I wished to frame the issue for the discussion of education. Certainly here we can identify the effects of neoliberal policies, which seem to go hand-in-hand with economic globalization as having placed public education in a more precarious position, with significant cuts in public funding, the application of market principles to accountability, and the opening up of schools and other public institutions to private interests (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2000).

In the call for papers for this issue, we invited submissions from researchers whose interests are in exploring the question of globalization and its deeper implications for education, not just in terms of the economics of education, but also in terms of practices in schools. As we wrote,

Whether one regards globalization as despairing of tradition and ultimately nihilistic, or hopeful and constructive, offering possibilities for re-thinking theory and practice, the implications for education requires thoughtful inquiry and exploration. Thus we invite submissions that relate in a broad way to the issue of globalization and its effects, but address more specifically questions related to pedagogy, the lives of children, teacher's work, the nature of public education, and curriculum issues.

One of the difficulties with exploring the relation between globalization and education is the sheer breadth of the question. There is also the tendency, however, to overuse the term *globalization* in our everyday talk, which tends to blunt its specificity. Moreover, the term is often used in nonspecific ways to describe broad cultural changes, often in rather ahistorical terms as part of the "postmodern condition." In the opening essay, David Smith reminds us that globalization is not new, and that at least for the last 500 years, the West has been engaged in an aggressive conquest of parts of the world. In a recent radio interview Edward Said challenged the notion of *postcolonial* and the idea that we are living in a new era of globalization. What has changed, he maintains, is that the form of colonialism has shifted to American cultural and economic hegemony (CBC Radio, *Ideas*, May 4, 2000).

Without considering, then, the historical, cultural, and economic contexts what may therefore be lost is a more critical understanding required to build effective responses and resistance to the negative effects experienced in everyday life in schools and other educational sites (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2000). The challenge this presents is to explore the effects on practices especially, and how practices are both shaped by and can confront the negative impact of globalization, because it is in the "practice of everyday life" that one can begin to discern the broader social, cultural, and economic chan-

ges in their concreteness (de Certeau, 1984). Stating it more evocatively, David Smith, in the lead article in this issue argues for a “spirit of *re-localization*, and a pedagogy of the Now” to address the dispiriting reductionism of economicist approaches and the narrow and sterile instrumentalism fostered by free-market thinking and approaches.

Following the lead of Smith’s opening essay, each of the articles takes up that challenge to explore the everyday effects of globalization on education. They raise critical issues about educational practices that are framed in the context of globalization. Most of the authors included do not attempt to explain globalization in broad theoretical or empirical terms, but rather take up issues as Foucault (1984) would probably have counseled us to do:

Actually, for a domain of action, a behavior, to enter a field of thought, it is necessary for a certain number of factors to have made it uncertain, to have made it lose its familiarity, or to have provoked a certain number of difficulties around it. These elements result from social, economic, or political processes. But here their only role is that of instigation. (p. 388)

David Smith’s essay provides a thoughtful historical and philosophical context for the issues and concerns raised by the subsequent authors. In exploring the meaning of globalization he reminds us of the complexities of globalization: that the effects of globalization are felt not only in the economic, cultural, and social realms, but also in how knowledge and human identities are constructed. In terms of educational issues, Smith maintains we are experiencing an “epistemological crisis” in education, where the narrow focus on economics and free-market thinking reinforces modernist rationality and individualism and discounts how deeply all human and planetary life is interconnected and intertwined.

Certainly there is legitimate fear that the emphasis on information technologies serves ultimately only to deepen rather than ameliorate Smith’s notion of the epistemological crisis in education. It is this concern that is taken up eloquently by Borgmann (1999) in his recent reflection on the challenges posed by the proliferation of information technologies on a global scale. Borgmann writes that we must struggle to maintain and nurture the distinction between information—of which there is more and more: more “noise” he terms it—and meaning and understanding, which can only be sustained in relation to something real. Borgmann reinforces Smith’s notions of the importance of relations and interconnectedness—among humans and in relation to our environments. Acknowledging the abundance—or in David Jardine’s, Pat Clifford’s, and Sharon Friesen’s term, the excess—that information technology offers, Borgmann nonetheless offers a cautionary lament:

But while information technology is alleviating overt misery, it is aggravating a hidden sort of suffering that follows from the slow obliteration of human substance. It is the misery of persons who lose their well-being not to violence or oblivion, but to the dilation and attenuation they suffer when the moral gravity and material density of things is overlaid by the lightness of information. People are losing their character and definition in the levity of cyberspace. (p. 232)

Such concerns are echoed even in the work of some people at the forefront of technological innovation. In a recent article, Joy (2000), the co-founder and

chief scientist of Sun Microsystems, raises alarms about the new technologies of information and how they are already outstripping our capacities to use them ethically. He asks, "can we doubt that knowledge has become a weapon we wield against ourselves?" (p. 14).

Technological innovation as one of the signposts of the new globalization confronts educators directly, and we need to question seriously whether it is the technology itself and the overabundance of information that it offers that creates meaning and happiness. But it also creates openings for certain choices. As Joy (2000) suggests, "we must now choose between the pursuit of unrestricted growth through science and technology and the clear accompanying dangers" (p. 14).

It is this kind of living in the Now and the in-betweenness of the choices offered that characterizes David Jardine's, Pat Clifford's, and Sharon Friesen's notion of the "gift" that technology brings, but as in the notion of gift, not necessarily expected and not carrying the burdens of obligation. Their discussion of the gift is provocative. As they suggest, the promise and excess of information technologies is sometimes offered as a gift, but a gift that is ambiguous in its origin, meaning, and connection to reality, as Borgmann would argue. In global terms, computer technologies can flood classrooms, but with what, and for what ends? But what if in all that noise and stuff something arrives that really is a gift: something that addresses children and opens up worlds for them? How can we imagine possibilities for children in the ambiguous space of commodified information and the excess to which children are subjected? This is the pedagogic challenge that Jardine, Clifford, and Friesen offer for thought.

That globalization is not just a recent phenomenon, as David Smith reminds us, is illustrated poignantly by Verna St. Denis' account of her encounter with the Ju/'hoansi people of the Kalahari Desert in Botswana. The encounter and research project in which she was involved are framed by the context of her own experiences as a woman of First Nations origin in Canada. What she discovered were deep historical and spiritual connections as peoples who have experienced at first hand the ravages of colonialism, and that indeed such experiences transcend time and place. The importance for education, St. Denis argues, is the possibilities that arise from what she terms "globalization from below." Not only does this open up relations around common experiences that transcend narrow national boundaries, but as she maintains, it also deepens and radicalizes the idea of multiculturalism to include how regimes of oppression and power have been and are implicated in Aboriginal peoples' struggles for identity.

Two of the articles, those by Richard Hesch and by Liying Cheng and Jean-Claude Couture, deal with the issue of what Hesch terms "mass testing" and Cheng and Couture call "high stakes testing." Educators might ask what this has to do with globalization. What both essays do is to identify the narrow emphasis on test score accountability and reductionist forms of performativity as growing from principles derived from neoliberal economic policies. Although such policies—which emphasize production, cost-effectiveness, measurement, and something that naturalizes competition and individual

merit—seem harmless on the surface, the accounts offered by Hesch and by Cheng and Couture show the deep impact and indeed harm that can be visited on children and teachers. In his careful analyses, Hesch shows how mass testing serves to maintain structures of disadvantage for inner-city children, and as well denies the legitimate expressions of identity, as many of the children of which he writes are of Aboriginal origin. Cheng and Couture are concerned to show the effects of testing programs on the work of teachers, arguing that “high stakes testing” bends teacher performance in ways that may be healthy neither for teachers, nor for the pedagogic and curricular well-being of children and schools.

Terry Carson and Ingrid Johnston close the Articles section with a discussion of another way that globalization is experienced in the everyday: in issues of cultural differences in the school and classroom. They write of the difficulties of encountering resistance among white teacher education students in the university classroom and how teacher educators may begin to address issues of racism and acceptance of others, as this has become a major challenge to teachers entering our schools today, particularly in urban areas. Asking what might be the “pedagogical entry point” for dealing with the difficulties of racism and intercultural understanding, Carson and Johnston suggest the need for a “pedagogy of compassion.” Such a pedagogy would recognize that our identities are shaped within certain cultural and historical parameters, in a sense, paralleling St. Denis’ notion of “globalization from below.”

It might seem that the articles presented in this issue offer a rather pessimistic view of the effects of globalization, but this would be a one-sided reading. Starting with David Smith’s “spirit of re-localization and a pedagogy of the Now,” Jardine’s, Clifford’s, and Friesen’s notion of the “gift,” St. Denis’ hopes for a “globalization from below,” Hesch’s deep concern for the well-being of inner-city children, Cheng’s and Couture’s hopes for re-spiriting the work of teaching beyond test-standards performance, and Carson’s and Johnston’s “pedagogy of compassion” what we see is hope. Each of the essays offers glimpses and further possibilities for research in the spaces that the forces of globalization colonize. And in the interstices where thoughtful action is possible, we can see the ethical struggle to build meaningful educational practices that challenge the facile demands of globalization. Perhaps, as McLaren and Farahmandpur (2000) conclude, “It all comes down to the question of how we choose to live our lives” and such questions have “special urgency” for educators (p. 32).

Thus the challenges posed by globalization for education and educators is ultimately an ethical one. Taking up what he calls the current “crisis in education,” the theologian Küng argues that this is especially a crisis of values, and moreover is not just a crisis of youth as some in society would characterize the problem as we deal with the bewildering and tragic incidences of school violence, for example. Küng (1996) emphasizes that

having ethical values is never merely a question that is directed at “youth,” but concerns present-day society as a whole—a society which in an age of a democratically legitimated pluralism of life-styles and concepts of living must

constantly pose anew the question of what, ethically speaking, is holding it together. (p. 145)

And as Küng emphasizes, this is at once a global issue and a local one.

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