

GLOBALISATION AND THE SHAPING OF THE TERRAIN OF THE CURRICULUM

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Draft of paper to be presented at Third Colloquium of Curriculum Policy and Practice
— III Colóquio Internacional de Políticas e Práticas Curriculares — Federal University
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I start from the view that the impact of globalization on education has been very considerable, but that it seems likely to become even greater in the future, creating quite novel and unpredictable challenges and opportunities for ‘education’—which is placed in quotation marks because the ‘education’ that might be found in twenty, or fifty years time may bear little resemblance to what we have known as education for the past half century. This makes it all the more surprising that our knowledge of the relationships between globalization and the curriculum has been so rarely discussed. In one major exception to this tendency, Noel Gough points out that ‘globalization has so far had very little overt influence on curriculum theory—on the concepts and methods of academic curriculum inquiry’ and he shows how this is the case in the major collections of work on the curriculum field (Gough 1999).

Gough’s article was published eight years ago, but I found very little had changed when I began researching earlier this year for an article on Globalisation and the Curriculum that I was commissioned to write for a new edition of a well known educational encyclopedia (and it is significant that this will be a new entry in the encyclopedia). This paucity of academic interest in the field may be compensated somewhat by more ‘popular’ discussions in the genre of ‘globalisation is changing everything so what will it mean for what our kids are taught?’ These discussions, though often interesting, seem usually to adopt a form of what might be called ‘banal’ globalization, for instance through the McDonaldisation or CocaColanisation of the curriculum. (Incidentally, there is an important distinction to be made between those

two metaphors; while Coca Cola is a standard product, available for sale anywhere, McDonaldisation, strictly interpreted, involves the a management system as well as a standardized product, and hence is much more further reaching in its implications.) I suspect that the main reason for this relative silence is that the educationists who are interested in the curriculum often have an 'internalist' view of it; they are interested in the development of a more or less 'universal' set of principles for the curriculum, even though these may need to be modified in differing circumstances, continuing to centre often around variations of Tylerian approaches.

They are correspondingly less interested in 'external' effects, even, it seems, those involving changes as dramatic and far reaching as globalization. My approach, as a sociologist of education, is the opposite; I am interested in how external factors not only 'affect', but 'construct' curriculum thinking and practice, in the context of education priorities and systems that are themselves being changed by globalization.

My approach will be to start by trying to isolate the key features of globalization, and then to consider how we might assess their relationships with education in an era of neoliberal globalisation. I will then briefly consider the role and nature of the curriculum over the last half century before going on to consider how various accounts of globalization might enable us to grasp key elements of its relationships with curriculum.; this will involve attempting to register those effects through the medium of a set of 'Education Questions'. I will conclude by considering the prospects for the future of 'curriculum' (by that stage I hope it will be clear why the quotation marks are necessary!).

One major problem with the term 'globalisation' is that it has been taken in so many different ways; James Mittelman, for instance, distinguishes between globalization as a discourse, a process, a condition, or state of affairs, and as a political project, while Philip McMichael adds to this list globalization as an outcome, or as an organizing principle (McMichael, 2006, 587). I will develop some of these approaches more fully below, especially that of globalisationas a political project, which has rather direct effects on curriculum, but I want to begin by setting out briefly my understanding of the current conjuncture as it concerns the relationship of globalization and modernity. This is because education may be seen as the iconic

representation of the project of modernity, both in developing and sharing visions of a better future, and promising to be the means through which they might be achieved. However, what characterizes globalization as an ontology is that in its current neoliberal phase, where it carries the project of neoliberal capitalism, the relatively harmonious and mutually supportive relationship between earlier forms of capitalism and modernity is seriously challenged.

In developing the fundamental argument, I follow Boaventura de Sousa Santos in suggesting that it is crucial to the understanding of the current global era to distinguish between the trajectories of capitalism (as found currently in the form of neo-liberal globalisation), and modernity, and to examine the relationships between them. As he puts it, 'Western modernity and capitalism are two different and autonomous historical processes.... (that) have converged and interpenetrated each other.It is my contention that we are living in a time of paradigmatic transition, and, consequently, that the sociocultural paradigm of modernity....will eventually disappear before capitalism ceases to be dominant...partly from a process of supersession and partly from a process of obsolescence. It entails supersession to the extent that modernity has fulfilled some of its promises, in some cases even in excess. It results from obsolescence to the extent that modernity is no longer capable of fulfilling some of its other promises' (Santos 2002, 1-2).

Santos also argues that 'Modernity is grounded on a dynamic tension between the pillar of regulation ((which) guarantees order in a society as it exists in a given moment and place) and emancipation ... the aspiration for a good order in a good society in the future' (2). Modern regulation is 'the set of norms, institutions and practices that guarantee the stability of expectations' (ibid); (it) is constituted by the principles of the state, the market and community (typically taken as the three key agents of governance; (see Dale, 1997)). Modern emancipation is the 'set of oppositional aspirations and tendencies that aim to increase the discrepancy between experiences and expectations' (ibid). However, he goes on to argue that 'what most strongly characterises the sociocultural condition at the beginning of the century is the collapse of the pillar .of emancipation into the pillar of regulation, as a result of the reconstructive management of the excesses and deficits of modernity which have been entrusted to modern science and, as a second best, to modern law'

(7). Further, these two pillars have now ceased to be in tension but have become almost fused, as a result of the 'reduction of modern emancipation to the cognitive-instrumental rationality of science and the reduction of modern regulation to the principle of the market' (9)

The crucial point here is, of course, that 'education' has historically been called on, and expected, to contribute to both the regulation and the emancipation pillars. It has effectively been assigned two quite different and contradictory roles in maintaining the relationship between state and society, and, indeed, many battles over curriculum content have not only reflected but been inscribed by precisely this tension. Central to my argument, then, is that education, in the form of schooling, with 'curriculum' at its heart, has been perhaps the most significant 'modern' institution, and that that what we now observe and experience is symptoms of two, relatively abstract but nevertheless potent challenges in the current, neoliberal, phase of capitalism, its increasingly recognised 'obsolescence', and the quantitative and qualitative intensification of one of the tensions that has always been at its heart.

Curriculum and Modernity

We are fortunate that it is possible to elaborate the key points about the relationship between curriculum and modernity, through the work of the most prominent theorists of education as a key element of modernity, the Stanford institutionalists, or world polity theorists, who argue that the curriculum is and has been since the beginning of the last century, essentially global (e.g. Meyer et al). Their basic argument is that what we are witnessing now in the curriculum field is not something that arises from more recent developments of globalisation, but is a continuation of a common world curriculum that has been in place since at least the end of World War II.

They argue that rapid spread of national educational systems and the striking but surprising degree of curricular isomorphism that we observe across the societies of the world, irrespective of their location, level of development, or religious and other traditions, cannot be explained by the functional, national-cultural, or rational-instrumental theories that have dominated the study of educational systems or the

curriculum hitherto. They derive first of all from the very model of modern "stateness" that has spread especially rapidly since 1945. As Suk-Ying Wong puts it, 'With the breakdown of the old colonial empires and the subsequent extension of the nation-state system, a new concept of the construction of society as based on a rational model that emphasized economic, political, and cultural individualism arose. As these states seek internal and external recognition for themselves as "proper nation-states," they tend to sample from, and then incorporate, prevailing conventions in the world order.

Education is central to this modernizing mission, and the structure of school curricula is "closely linked to the rise of standardized models of society and to the increasing dominance of standardized models of education as one component of these general models. 1113 The school curriculum is seen not as the 'instrumental choice of individual societies to meet various local requirements' but 'a ritual enactment of worldwide educational norms and conventions'.... The definition of legitimate knowledge to be taught in schools, and the selection and hierarchical organization of such bodies of knowledge, are thus by and large "externally" prescribed. At the core of the prescription lies "rational" discourse on how the socialization of children in various subject areas is linked to the self-realization of the individual and, ultimately, to the construction of an ideal society.

This discourse is highly standardized and universalistic in character'. 14. Further, curriculum is not seen as a 'rational' process in itself, but as primarily conforming to the values of modernity; as John Meyer puts it, 'the scientific researchers who study [the relation between curriculum and national goals] have no real systematic knowledge showing, for example, that instruction in mathematics and science facilitates economic growth, that instruction in social studies facilitates political integration, or that any particular instructional content actually facilitates the legitimacy of and domination by an economic or political elite ...[Thus] in modern practice, the scientific theory enters into social discourse - and even social research - as a normative matter rather than a technical one. Forms are created ...because they conform to the values defined in the theory more than because of any evidence of their actual effects' (Meyer 19)

In this account, then, the worldwide curricular isomorphism that we observe is not the product of globalisation as currently conceived, but has a much longer history, associated with the spread of the values and assumptions of modernity, such as scientific rationality, individualism, progress. Variations on those assumptions have framed curriculum debates until very recently, with the place and role of curriculum recognised as essentially 'meliorist' and progressive, the means through which nation states achieved their goals through education.

Two problems with this analysis, however, are that it in a sense makes curriculum stand for education more broadly, and that what is meant by curriculum is the appearance of particular subjects on national educational goals. The first of this suggests that curriculum can be seen as a topic independent of the education systems of which it is part, while the second equates it with what is formally listed, not what is actually taught, or, more importantly, what is taught to whom.

The nature of the relationships between globalisation and curriculum.

The first difference between the 'modernisation' and 'globalisation' explanations of curriculum is that for the former education is assumed to be fundamentally national. The nation state itself is a key institution of modernity, and the 'world' is seen as being made up of nation states; 'the nation-state that organizes education (is) embedded in a world society - in other words, a nation-state system'.
113.

The curriculum has become such a crucial component of schooling essentially because it is seen as the means through which nation states are able to adjust their education systems to meet changing demands and preferences. It has been the key means through which national mandates for education are expressed and given substance. However, in an era of neoliberal globalisation, the 'national' is no longer the dominant level of economic production, or the level at which all sovereignty is exercised, or (though it arguably never was) the exclusive 'container' in which societies operated. Similarly, the state can no longer be taken for granted as both the exclusive institution and form of rule in national societies; that is carried out by a combination of actors among which the state is one, and possibly *primus inter pares*,

that includes market and community, and at other levels than the national, including the transnational and the subnational (see Dale 1997; Dale and Robertson 2000).

Globalization, by contrast, implies social and economic forces operating supranationally and transnationally, rather than internationally, to elude, break down, or override national boundaries, while reconstructing the relations between nations. Ontologically, neoliberal globalisation can be seen as a set of political-economic arrangements for the organization of the global economy, driven by the need to maintain the capitalist system rather than by any set of values. Adherence to its principles is brought about by political economic leverage and perception of self-interest. No nation state, not even the United States or China, is now able to control or direct the global economy, and this has two key consequences for our understanding of globalisation and curriculum.

The first is that while it is the case that global models of education are not reducible to the interests of particular powers, the same is true of the global economy, too; it is the interests of the global economy, as represented through the plethora of international organizations created for the purpose (G8, WEF, OECD, World Bank, WTO, regional organizations like EU and NAFTA), to which individual nation-states willingly cede some part of their national power in the interest of collective control of the global economy in their joint interests (which, of course, means that far from there being a tension between globalisation and nation states, certainly the rich ones, those states are themselves the most active agents and promoters of globalisation), that ultimately sets the parameters for education and curriculum.

It is also crucial to note that globalization has a double impact on education policy. It affects not only the goals and purposes of education, but the means by which education policy is made. The former may be seen as producing a globally structured agenda for education (see Dale 2000), while the latter is associated with the shift from government to governance, as states cease to be seen only as obstacles to the liberalizing of trade that is at the core of neoliberal project, and what distinguishes from older forms of liberalism that saw states a necessarily obstacles to free trade. This shift has been referred to as the constitutionalisation of the

neoliberal, as rules limiting the role and influence of states are enacted by states themselves. The outcome of this has been a major restructuring of the governance of education, with the state losing its assumed exclusive powers in the area and being reduced to coordinating the new activities, actors and scales through which educational governance is to be achieved.

So, we are at a juncture where the old assumptions about the curriculum and how it is influenced and formed are themselves under critical challenge from social forces associated with globalisation as a process and as a project. This has clear implications for questions around the 'control' of curriculum. They can no longer be assumed to be concerned exclusively with national issues, or addressed at a national level only. What we may be seeing is the emergence of a functional and scalar division of labour of educational governance, with activities, including curriculum, related to the KBE addressed at supranational level, and schools' other activities regarded as 'local', and in a sense outside globalization.

One major consequence of these changes for the relationship between globalisation and curriculum is that the issue is becoming not so much one of 'updating' the contents of the curriculum as container, but one where the very *shape* of the container, and its *place* in the processes of education, are undergoing significant change.

This is because the *shape* of the curriculum container was determined in modernity by what we will call a common grammar of schooling, and specified national needs, while the *place* of the curriculum was to embed the aims and objectives of education through determining the *content* of what was to be *taught*, and how, in schools. Now both of those things are under strain from the changes just mentioned, as the position of the 'national' in both the mandate and the governance of education changes, and the demand of schools in what is represented as a Global Knowledge Economy shifts from content knowledge to competences.

Globalisation as Discourse

The discursive shift that has taken place has been to see globalisation as entailing a new Global Knowledge Economy (GKE) of which all nation states are part, and to which education is to contribute in a major way. The GKE is seen to require is not so much a modification of the curriculum, as its transformation, through the changes in its shape and place already discussed. In particular, competences are to take priority over content knowledge, and universalism is to give way to tailored offerings, right up to the point of 'personalised learning'. 'Just in case' educational provision, the traditional basis of curriculum, is to give way to 'just in time' provision, and ultimately to 'just for me' provision, which is to be achieved through 'any place, any time, any provider' Lifelong Learning (see OECD ;EU). The shift to a GKE representation of globalisation requires a transformation of thinking from curriculum as a body of knowledge to be taught in a planned, sequenced way, to competences to be learned ad hoc, as and when necessary.

While I have been concentrating on discourses of western modernity—because it is those discourses that are being diffused across the world—it is important to recognize that 'Education for development' itself is a thoroughly modern discourse. It assumes the possibility of, and takes for granted the benignity of, progress, and the key role of the state in bringing it about. 'Modernisation theory' indeed assumed that all countries went through the same stages of development, and that education could play a key role in making modern states and modern societies. That, of course, is no longer believed, and it has been replaced by discourses of deficit, dependency and risk (originally fiscal risk, which underlay the Washington Consensus and development policies constructed around conditionalities—first fiscal, later 'good governance, but since 11/9/2001 including threats to security). These representations framing and defining the relationship between globalisation and curriculum in developing countries are themselves deeply embedded in Western modernity, and it is this that continues to set the basis for understanding, that determines what is to be explained and how (itself, of course, the traditional role of the curriculum in modernity).

Globalisation as a Condition, or State of Affairs

The main curricular responses to the altered condition, or state of affairs in which we live as a result of globalisation have centred around a 're-emergence' (Marshall, 2003, 398) of the field of 'global education'. It could be argued that 'global education' originated essentially with the UN Declaration of Human Rights, addressing the need for a place in the curriculum for world studies, human rights, peace education and so on. Here, it may be clearly seen as tightly related to the discourses of Modernity. What Kirkwood sees as the fundamental philosophical assumptions of global education---'human beings are created equal...;human behavior is culturally, not racially determined; all members of the human family possess basic human rights; and global education has a moral purpose' (10) may be seen to underlie more recent approaches, in response to the changes brought about by an increasing level of, and increasingly directly experienced condition of globalisation.

The main pattern seems to be one of nationally based responses, as nation-states perceive a need to respond to the changed condition of globalisation and to shape their responses to the way it may impact on them. In education, this has been largely based on what might be called global education for, and as part of, national citizenship. This involves 'bringing the world into the classroom, where teachers teach from a world-centric rather than an ethno-specific or nation-state perspective' (Kirkwood, *ibid*), or what Marshall (2005, 83, 84) calls a 'global gaze', a particular mode of recognising the global reality, 'that appears to be required of both the student and the teacher during the teaching learning process'. Lynn Davies takes this point further, suggesting that 'What seems to happen with global citizenship education is a confirmation of the direct concern with social justice and not just the more minimalist interpretations of global education which are about 'international awareness' or being a more rounded person.(Davies' 2006, 6). Davies also very usefully sets out the range of possible combinations of 'global citizenship and education', as follows:

'(a) global citizenship+education (definitions of the 'global citizen', and the implied educational framework to provide or promote this)

(b) global+citizenship education (making citizenship education more globally or internationally relevant; think global, act local)

(c) global education+citizenship (international awareness plus rights and responsibilities)

(d) education+citizenship+global (introducing 'dimensions' of citizenship and of international understanding into the school curriculum, but not necessarily connected)' (13-14)

Processes of globalisation and curriculum.

It is very important to focus on the mechanisms through which globalisation influences curriculum because 'globalisation' itself does nothing and affects nothing. It is never a process without agents (see Dale and Robertson 2000). Those agents put in place, actively or passively, particular mechanisms that either directly, or much more commonly, indirectly, particularly in the current phase, affect what is taught or learned in schools around the globe. One aspect of the reducing national control and discretion over education is that the national economies, which were both the funders and direct beneficiaries of their education systems no longer exist in ways that enable them to continue with those roles. This means that curriculum change at national level cannot be confined to 'changing the contents of the curriculum container', for instance by removing excesses of ethnocentrism, but has to take account of the change in status of national education systems from the way they were configured pre-globalisation, to a point where it is now not uncommon to see them represented as obstacles to, rather than supports of, the current economic framework. (see OECD, eg scenarios). And this is where the point about the shape and place of the curriculum container comes in; the purposes curricula are to serve are no longer exclusively national, and the means of achieving those purposes are no longer so heavily focused around the curriculum.

Put very briefly, then, the argument is that a world where problems and policies are no longer wholly generated at a national level, opens up an 'opportunity space' for the development and provision of education policy advice addressed to

transnational rather than national level problems, and this has been filled by international organizations, especially World Bank and OECD.

Common to these and other IOs is a world-view based on the recognition of the key elements of neoliberal globalisation, including the cognitive assumptions of the dominant strands of the economics profession, the existence of a global market and the need to expand it to create further opportunities for the preferred market-based solutions, the need to minimise and focus the role of the state and the central importance of education in contributing to economic development. They all assume the importance of education as a part of productive social policy. This set of assumptions, powerfully reinforced in many cases by the statistical categories that they created and through which they were given substance and purchase, tells us the nature of the world we are living in, and how it needs to be changed. It tells us what kinds of knowledge are of most worth in that world, and how that knowledge should be developed and distributed. The outstanding example here, is, of course, the OECD's PISA project, which extends beyond the OECD itself. Three things are important about PISA in this context. The first is that it is seen as potentially applying universally, and offering a common metric for the measurement of education. The second is this enables a common basis of evaluation, leading to clear possibilities of 'naming and shaming' as disciplinary mechanisms. Third, and perhaps most important in this context, PISA effectively promotes competence above content, which helps seal the new role and nature of curriculum.

So, the basis of the argument here is that, acting relatively independently, even sometimes competitively, but within a fairly closely defined framework of assumptions, rather than *responding to* a defined need, the IOs *constructed* that need in particular ways. They effectively defined the problems faced by education systems through the provision of generic solutions, and the statistical naming of the world, based on the notion that what was required was knowledge and expertise, the very attributes that they claimed to hold. Further, there was no single agreed interpretation of the dominant paradigm among the IOs; rather, they competed with each other on the knowledge/expertise terrain they consensually agreed.

A negative example that illustrates this argument is that of UNESCO. UNESCO could be seen as the organization supporting the spread of 'modern' education systems world wide, championing education as a human right before human capital, and favouring the conception of a Knowledge Society over a Knowledge Economy. However, over the decade of the 1990s and beyond UNESCO's influence waned and it was effectively forced to accept the terrain marked out by its rivals; this is most graphically illustrated in the case of the reorientation of its statistical service (see Cusso and D'Amico 2005).

So, at its simplest, the argument is that the IOs might be better seen as constructing and diffusing generic solutions, which enabled and shaped common problem identification—or, at the very least, 'constrain the cognitive and normative range of solutions that policy makers are likely to consider, and constitute symbols and concepts that enable actors to construct frames with which to legitimize their policy proposals.' (Campbell, 1998, 398).

The 'Education Questions'

In an attempt to clarify the issue of what is meant by education, including the place of curriculum in it, because it is used in such different, and often incommensurable ways as to make discussion of it almost impossible, I developed a list of 'Education Questions', designed to make those discussions commensurable by stipulating questions to which discussions of education must have answers, irrespective of their point of departure:

They are introduced here to offer a means of registering more clearly the consequences of globalisation for curriculum.

As well as being a tool to enable commensurability of different education discourse, etc, the questions also provide a kind of critical realist ontology of the curriculum, which is why the first three sets of questions are arranged in a form of hierarchical relationship to each other, in a way reflecting critical realism's stratified conception of reality. Simplifying the jargon, what this means in essence is that we

cannot understand what goes on at the level of practice without having an idea of what goes on at the level of policy, and we cannot understand what goes on at the level of policy without understanding what goes on at the level of political economy. It is important, however, not to take this in a deterministic, top down, way. Influence flows upwards as well as 'downwards', and the level of practice sets limits to what is possible at the level of policy, as well as vice versa.

The Education Questions

Level 1: Educational Practice

Who is taught, (or learns through processes explicitly designed to foster learning), what, how and why, when, where, by/from whom, under what immediate circumstances and broader conditions, and with what results?

How, by whom and for what purposes is this evaluated?

Level 2: Education politics

How, in pursuit of what manifest and latent social, economic, political and educational purposes; under what pattern of coordination (funding, provision, ownership, regulation) of education governance; by whom; and following what (sectoral and cultural) path dependencies, are these things problematised decided, administered, managed?

Level 3: Politics of Education

What functional, scalar and sectoral divisions of labour of educational governance are in place?

In what ways are the core problems of capitalism (accumulation, social order and legitimation) reflected in the mandate, capacity and governance of education? How and at what scales are contradictions between the solutions addressed?

How are the boundaries of the education sector defined and how do they overlap with and relate to other sectors? What 'educational' activities are undertaken within other sectors?

How is the education sector related to the citizenship and gender regimes?

How, at what scale and in what sectoral configurations does education contribute to the extra-economic embedding/stabilisation of accumulation?

What is the nature of intra- and inter-scalar and intra- and inter-sectoral relations (contradiction, cooperation, mutual indifference?)

Level 4: Outcomes

What are the individual, private, public, collective and community outcomes of 'Education', at each scalar level?

Conclusions

In place of the conclusions I may discuss in the final version of the paper, I will point to three areas for discussion that I think may enable discussion around the themes of the paper:

Is globalization leading to convergence?

What relevant and fruitful consequences might flow from the fact that modernity has always been an imposition in the South?

Is it possible to detect opportunities for developing education's role in emancipation in the circumstances discussed in the paper?

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