

Globalization Of Education

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In popular discourse, *globalization* is often synonymous with *internationalization*, referring to the growing interconnectedness and interdependence of people and institutions throughout the world. Although these terms have elements in common, they have taken on technical meanings that distinguish them from each other and from common usage. Internationalization is the less theorized term. Globalization, by contrast, has come to denote the complexities of interconnectedness, and scholars have produced a large body of literature to explain what appear to be ineluctable worldwide influences on local settings and responses to those influences.

Influences of a global scale touch aspects of everyday life. For example, structural adjustment policies and international trading charters, such as the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), reduce barriers to commerce, ostensibly promote jobs, and reduce the price of goods to consumers across nations. Yet they also shift support from "old" industries to newer ones, creating dislocations and forcing some workers out of jobs, and have provoked large and even violent demonstrations in several countries. The spread of democracy, too, is part of globalization, giving more people access to the political processes that affect their lives, but also, in many places, concealing deeply rooted socioeconomic inequities as well as areas of policy over which very few individuals have a voice. Even organized international terrorism bred by Islamic fanaticism may be viewed as an oppositional reaction—an effort at *deglobalization*—to the pervasiveness of Western capitalism and secularism associated with globalization. Influences of globalization are multi-dimensional, having large social, economic, and political implications.

A massive spread of education and of Western-oriented norms of learning at all levels in the twentieth century and the consequences of widely available schooling are a large part of the globalization process. With regard to the role of schools, globalization has become a major topic of study, especially in the field of comparative education, which applies historiographic and social scientific theories and methods to international issues of education.

Globalization Theory

Globalization is both a process and a theory. Roland Robertson, with whom globalization theory is most closely associated, views globalization as an accelerated compression of the contemporary world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a singular entity. Compression makes the world a single place by virtue of the power of a set of globally diffused ideas that render the uniqueness of societal and ethnic identities and traditions irrelevant except within local contexts and in scholarly discourse.

The notion of the world community being transformed into a *global village*, as introduced in 1960 by Marshall McLuhan in an influential book about the newly shared experience of mass media, was likely the first expression of the contemporary concept of globalization. Despite its entry into the common lexicon in the 1960s, globalization was not recognized as a significant concept until the 1980s, when the complexity and multidimensionality of the process began to be examined. Prior to the 1980s, accounts of globalization focused on a professed tendency of societies to converge in becoming modern, described initially by Clark Kerr and colleagues as the emergence of *industrial man*.

Although the theory of globalization is relatively new, the process is not. History is witness to many globalizing tendencies involving grand alliances of nations and dynasties and the unification of previously sequestered territories under such empires as Rome, Austria-Hungary, and Britain, but also such events as the widespread acceptance of germ theory and heliocentrism, the rise of transnational agencies concerned with regulation and communication, and an increasingly unified conceptualization of human rights.

What makes globalization distinct in contemporary life is the broad reach and multidimensionality of interdependence, reflected initially in the monitored set of relations among nation-states that arose in the wake of World War I. It is a process that before the 1980s was akin to *modernization*, until modernization as a concept of linear progression from traditional to developing to developed—or from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft* as expressed by Ferdinand Toennies—forms of society became viewed as too simplistic and unidimensional to explain contemporary changes. Modernization theory emphasized the functional significance of the Protestant ethic in the evolution of modern societies, as affected by such objectively measured attributes as education, occupation, and wealth in stimulating a disciplined orientation to work and political participation.

The main difficulty with modernization theory was its focus on changes within societies or nations and comparisons between them—with Western societies as their main reference points—to the neglect of the interconnectedness among them, and, indeed, their interdependence, and the role played by non-Western countries in the development of the West. Immanuel Wallerstein was among the earliest and most influential scholars to show the weaknesses of modernization theory. He

developed *world system theory* to explain how the world had expanded through an ordered pattern of relationships among societies driven by a capitalistic system of economic exchange. Contrary to the emphasis on linear development in modernization theory, Wallerstein demonstrated how wealthy and poor societies were locked together within a world system, advancing their relative economic advantages and disadvantages that carried over into politics and culture. Although globalization theory is broader, more variegated in its emphasis on the transnational spread of knowledge, and generally less deterministic in regard to the role of economics, world system theory was critical in shaping its development.

The Role of Education

As the major formal agency for conveying knowledge, the school features prominently in the process and theory of globalization. Early examples of educational globalization include the spread of global religions, especially Islam and Christianity, and colonialism, which often disrupted and displaced indigenous forms of schooling throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Postcolonial globalizing influences of education have taken on more subtle shapes.

In globalization, it is not simply the ties of economic exchange and political agreement that bind nations and societies, but also the shared consciousness of being part of a global system. That consciousness is conveyed through ever larger transnational movements of people and an array of different media, but most systematically through formal education. The inexorable transformation of consciousness brought on by globalization alters the content and contours of education, as schools take on an increasingly important role in the process.

Structural adjustment policies. Much of the focus on the role of education in globalization has been in terms of the structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and other international lending organizations in low-income countries. These organizations push cuts in government expenditures, liberalization of trade practices, currency devaluations, reductions of price controls, shifts toward production for export, and user charges for and privatization of public services such as education. Consequently, change is increasingly driven largely by financial forces, government reliance on foreign capital to finance economic growth, and market ideology.

In regard to education, structural adjustment policies ostensibly reduce public bureaucracies that impede the delivery of more and better education. By reducing wasteful expenditures and increasing responsiveness to demand, these policies promote schooling more efficiently. However, as Joel Samoff noted in 1994, observers have reported that structural adjustment policies often encourage an emphasis on inappropriate skills and reproduce existing social and economic inequalities, leading actually to lowered enrollment rates, an erosion in the quality of education, and a misalignment between educational need and provision. As part

of the impetus toward efficiency in the expenditure of resources, structural adjustment policies also encourage objective measures of school performance and have advanced the use of cross-national school effectiveness studies. Some have argued that these studies represent a new form of racism by apportioning blame for school failure on local cultures and contexts.

Democratization. As part of the globalization process, the spread of education is widely viewed as contributing to democratization throughout the world. Schools prepare people for participation in the economy and polity, giving them the knowledge to make responsible judgments, the motivation to make appropriate contributions to the well being of society, and a consciousness about the consequences of their behavior. National and international assistance organizations, such as the U. S. Agency for International Development and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), embrace these objectives. Along with mass provision of schools, technological advances have permitted distance education to convey Western concepts to the extreme margins of society, exposing new regions and populations to knowledge generated by culturally dominant groups and helping to absorb them into the consumer society.

A policy of using schools as part of the democratization process often accompanies structural adjustment measures. However, encouraging user fees to help finance schooling has meant a reduced ability of people in some impoverished areas of the world to buy books and school materials and even attend school, thus enlarging the gap between rich and poor and impeding democracy. Even in areas displaying a rise in educational participation, observers have reported a reduction in civic participation. Increased emphasis on formalism in schooling could plausibly contribute to this result. An expansion of school civics programs could, for example, draw energy and resources away from active engagement in political affairs by youths, whether within or outside of schools. Increased privatization of education in the name of capitalist democratization could invite greater participation of corporate entities, with the prospect of commercializing schools and reducing their service in behalf of the public interest.

Penetration of the periphery. Perhaps the most important question in understanding how education contributes to globalization is, what is the power of schools to penetrate the cultural periphery? Why do non-Western people surrender to the acculturative pressure of Western forms of education?

By mid-twentieth century, missionaries and colonialism had brought core Western ideas and practices to many parts of the world. With contemporary globalization, penetration of the world periphery by means of education has been accomplished mainly in other ways, especially as contingent on structural adjustment and democratization projects. Some scholars, including Howard R. Woodhouse, have claimed that people on the periphery are "mystified" by dominant ideologies, and willingly, even enthusiastically and without conscious awareness of implications,

accept core Western learning and thereby subordinate themselves to the world system. By contrast, there is considerable research, including that of Thomas Clayton in 1998 and Douglas E. Foley in 1991, to suggest that people at the periphery develop a variety of strategies, from foot dragging to outright student rebellion, to resist the dominant ideology as conveyed in schools.

Evidence on the accommodation of people at the periphery to the dominant ideology embodied in Westernized schooling is thus not consistent. Erwin H. Epstein, based on data he collected in three societies, proposes a *filter-effect theory* that could explain the contradictory results reported by others. He found that children in impoverished areas attending schools more distant from the cultural mainstream had more favorable views of, and expressed stronger attachment to, national core symbols than children in schools closer to the mainstream. In all three societies he studied, globalization influences were abrupt and pervasive, but they were resisted most palpably not at the remote margins, but in the towns and places closer to the center, where the institutions representative of the mainstream—including law enforcement, employment and welfare agencies, medical facilities, and businesses—were newly prevalent and most powerfully challenged traditional community values.

Epstein explained these findings by reasoning that it is easier for children living in more remote areas to accept myths taught by schools regarding the cultural mainstream. By contrast, children living closer to the mainstream cultural center—the more acculturated pupils—are more exposed to the realities of the mainstream way of life and, being more worldly, are more inclined to resist such myths. Schools in different areas do not teach different content; in all three societies, schools, whether located at the mainstream center or periphery, taught an equivalent set of myths, allegiances to national symbols, and dominant core values. Rather, schools at the margin are more effective in inculcating intended political cultural values and attitudes because they operate in an environment with fewer competing contrary stimuli. Children living in more traditional, culturally homogeneous and isolated areas tend to be more naive about the outside world and lack the tools and experience to assess objectively the political content that schools convey. Children nearer the center, by contrast, having more actual exposure to the dominant culture, are better able to observe the disabilities of the dominant culture—its level of crime and corruption, its reduced family cohesion, and its heightened rates of drug and alcohol abuse, for example. That greater exposure counteracts the favorable images all schools convey about the cultural mainstream, and instead imbues realism—and cynicism—about the myths taught by schools.

In other words, schools perform as a filter to sanitize reality, but their effectiveness is differential; their capacity to filter is larger the farther they move out into the periphery. As extra-school knowledge progressively competes with school-produced myths, the ability and inclination to oppose the dominant ideology

promoted by schools as part of the globalization process should become stronger. This filter-effect theory could clarify the impact of schools as an instrument of globalization and invites corroboration.

See also: International Education Agreements; International Education Statistics; Rural Education, *subentry on* International Context.

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