

GLOBALIZATION AND SCHOOLING: EQUITY AND ACCESS ISSUES

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1. INTRODUCTION: GLOBALIZATION AND EDUCATION

Globalization, marketisation and quality/efficiency driven reforms around the world since the 1980s have resulted in structural and qualitative changes in education. In their quest for excellence, quality and accountability in education, governments increasingly turn to international and comparative education data analysis. All agree that the major goal of education is to enhance the individual's social and economic prospects. This can only be achieved by providing quality education for *all*. With reference to schooling in the USA, Karen Biraimah (2008) evaluates the overall goals of UNESCO's *Education for All* (EFA) and the United States' *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) programs, and concludes by questioning whether there is a "hidden curriculum" within both programs' constructive rhetoric that reflects an agenda far removed from the altruistic goals of EFA and NCLB.

Students' academic achievement is now regularly monitored and measured within the 'internationally agreed framework' of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). This was done in response to the growing demand for international comparisons of educational outcomes (OECD, 2007, *Education Policy Analysis*, p. 8). To measure levels of academic performance in the global culture, the OECD, in co-operation with UNESCO, is using *World Education Indicators* (WEI) programme, covering a broad range of comparative indicators, which report on the resource invested in education and their returns to individuals (OECD, 2007, *Education at a Glance – OECD Indicators*, p. 6).

The OECD international survey presents an encyclopaedic view of the comparative review of education systems in 30 OECD member countries and 19 other countries, covering almost two-thirds of the world. At least half of the indicators relate to the output and outcomes of education, and one-third focus on equity issues (gender differences, special education needs, inequalities in literacy skills and income). For instance, with reference to completion of secondary education, as one of the outcomes of schooling, *in 21 of 24 OECD countries upper secondary graduation rates exceed 70%. However, in Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Japan, Korea and Norway graduation rates equal or exceed 90% (OECD, 2007, p. 44).*

From the macro-social perspective it can be argued that in the domains of language, policy, education and national identity, nation-states are likely to lose their power and capacity to affect their future directions, as the struggle for knowledge domination, production, and dissemination becomes a new form of cultural domination, and a

knowledge-driven social stratification. Furthermore, the evolving and constantly changing notions of national identity, language, border politics and citizenship, which are relevant to education policy, need to be critiqued within the local-regional-national arena, which is also contested by globalization. Current education policy research reflects a rapidly changing world, where citizens and consumers are experiencing a growing sense of uncertainty and alienation.

The above reflects both growing alienation and a Durkheimian sense of anomie in the world “invaded” by forces of globalization, cultural imperialism, and global hegemonies that dictate the new economic, political and social regimes of truth. These newly constructed imperatives in educational policy could well operate as global master narratives, playing a hegemonic role within the framework of economic, political and cultural hybrids of globalization.

2. ACCESS AN EQUITY ISSUES IN SCHOOLING

More equitable education and access to higher education needs to be ‘widened to benefit all social groups’, according to recent OECD findings (OECD, 2006, p. 14). Action is therefore needed thought education systems to ‘tackle’ the problem of more equitable education (OECD, 2006, p. 14).

Our divided educational systems around the world, by means of their hegemonic structures, legitimise social inequality. In the class-conflict analysis, be it Marxist or neo-liberal, the education system is perceived to be a hegemonic knowledge management organisation in the learning society, or ‘the dominant state ideological apparatus’ contributing to cultural reproduction. Global inequalities in income and living standards have reached ‘grotesque proportions’ according to the 1999 annual United Nations Human Development Report (UNHDR). The report noted that economic inequality had been rising in many countries since the early 1980s:

The countries of Eastern Europe and the CIS have registered some of the largest increases ever in the Gini coefficient, a measure of income inequality. OECD countries also registered big increases in inequality after the 1980s—especially Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. Inequality between countries has also increased. The income gap between the fifth of the world’s people living in the richest countries and the fifth in the poorest was 74 to 1 in 1997, up from 60 to 1 in 1990 and 30 to 1 in 1960. By the late 1990s the fifth of the world’s people living in the highest-income countries had 86% of world GDP—the bottom fifth just 1% (UNHDR, 1999, 37).

While 1.3 billion people struggled to live on less than \$US1 a day, the world's richest 200 people doubled their net worth between 1994 and 1998 to more than \$1 trillion. The world’s top three billionaires alone possess more assets than the combined Gross National Product of all the least developed countries and their combined population of 600 million people. Dervis (2007) argues that globalisation has created ‘winners’ ‘and losers’ in education and societies globally:

Globalization has fundamentally altered the world economy, creating winners and losers. Reducing inequalities both within and between countries, and building a more inclusive globalization is the most important development challenge of our time...Addressing these

inequalities is our era's most important development challenge, and underscores why inclusive development is central to the mission of the UN and UNDP (Dervis, 2007, UNDP).

3. THE GLOBAL FUTURES AND GLOBAL SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Increasing global inequality is likely to produce conflict in the world. Polarization of societies is likely to increase, due to the unequal distribution of power, wealth, income, status, and education. Some of the new developments and indicators in global socio-economic stratification of income and wealth include:

- Global inequality is greater now than ever before. The richest 1% in the world receive as much as the bottom 57%.
- Top 5% earn more than the bottom 80%.
- In 2001 there were 7.1 million millionaires, whose total wealth was US\$27 trillion.
- The wealth of 7.1 million individuals equals the total combined income of the world.
- The income inequality gap is increasing.
- The first study of global income inequality was done by Branko Milanovic (1999), Senior Economist from the World Bank. He surveyed 91 countries in the global village.
- The ratio between the average income of the top 5% and the bottom 5% increased from 78:1 in 1988 to 114:1 in 1993 (Milanovic 2002).
- Four fifths of the world's population live below the poverty line.
- In 1996 the wealth of the world's 358 billionaires exceeded the annual combined income of half of the world's population.

In general, global social stratification is more visible today than ever before. The gap between rich and poor citizens, within both developed and developing nations, is also growing. The richest two percent of the world's adult population now owns more than half of global household wealth. The bottom half of adults own barely one percent. So the gains from global growth are being highly unequally distributed. What does this imply for those at the bottom? In 2007, over a billion people had almost no income (the equivalent of a dollar a day or less for each). They typically spent more than half of what they did earn on food for their families, leaving even less for shelter, water, education and health care (Dervis, 2007). According to PISA (2006) findings, students' socio-economic differences accounted for a significant part of between school differences in some countries. This factor contributed most to between-school performance variation in the United States, the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Belgium, the Slovak Republic, Germany, Greece and New Zealand (PISA, 2006, p. 5).

3.1 Explaining educational inequality

Educational inequalities can be explained in terms of the following seven dimensions:

- a. Inequalities due to individual differences (meritocracy) or individual capacities reflecting *innate* abilities and efforts
- b. Social factors or SES (socio-economic status), including social class inequalities, social background, family, and family origins. Social background is measured by parents' education (measured in years), the number of books in the home when the respondent was aged 14, wealth of the family etc. (*cultural capital*).
- c. Family differences-parental attitudes to education, parental values, encouragement given to children, material resources available etc.
- d. The school as a *reproductive* source of educational inequality (EI).
- e. Cultural/social reproduction theory: the education system as a mirror of society reproduces the existing class structure and the hierarchy of individuals, including the ruling power elite.
- f. Gender inequality
- g. Ethnicity and inequality (groups from non-English-speaking backgrounds-NESBs).

3.2 Sources of educational inequality

Edith King (2005) believes that *classism* is a manifestation of discrimination and prejudice, which arises from the 'wide inequities in the distribution of wealth in a society' (King, 2005, p. 71). Both Edith King (USA) and John Polesel (Australia) examine the impact of social class, gender and ethnicity on educational inequality, and academic achievement. King (2005) argues that social class is the largest single dimension affecting children's performance in school. Polesel (2005) argues that gender and ethnicity continue to influence academic achievement in schools in Australia.

Access and equity continue to be enduring concerns in education globally. A significant gap in access to early childhood education is documented in about half of the OECD countries. We learn that in some countries, fewer than half of children participate in the pre-school sector, ranging from over 90% in France to less than 5% in Turkey, with Australia (under 30%) in the nineteenth place (p. 46). Those who eventually complete secondary education have very different literacy levels, ranging from 10% to 60%. Finland had the highest literacy scores and the lowest under-achievement rate (10%), where as the United States and Poland had the lowest mean literacy rates (under 30%) and the highest under-achievement rates (60% and 50% respectively). The United States, with one of the highest upper secondary completion rates, has the 'second lowest mean literacy score' (OECD, 2001, *Education Policy Analysis* p. 50). Obviously some countries face serious challenges to 'raise or sustain participation rates' and to improve the 'quality of outcomes' (p. 49). Equally startling is the fact that only a minority of countries have made "lifelong learning for all a reality", and that in most countries, lifelong learning is 'largely an unfinished agenda' (OECD, 2001, *Education Policy Analysis* p. 67).

As to equity and socio-economic background, students from high-income families continue to have much better access to tertiary education than students from low-income families. In France, 62% of the 15-year-olds coming from the poorest 20% of the families repeat at least one year in school, and in Germany only eight out of a hundred young

people from a low socioeconomic background had access to higher education. In the UK, children from less affluent social classes represent 50% of the school population, yet only 13% of entrants to top universities (pp. 76-7). The International Adult Literacy Survey showed that in 14 out of the 20 countries that took part in the survey, at least 15% of all adults aged 16-65 performed at literacy level 1 – a level of competency too low to cope with the most basic tasks required in a knowledge-based society.

3.3 The digital divide pedagogical issue

The OECD volume also shows that those without access to ICTs and without ICT skills are less and less capable in participating in the knowledge-based society may experience a new inequality of the *digital divide* kind. The highest percentage of households possessing a PC was in Denmark (63%), USA and Australia were almost equal with 50%, and Italy was 20%. The access to Internet was 46% for White and 23% for African-American households in August 2000, and as few as 3% of poorer households were on line, compared with 48% of the more affluent households (OECD, 2001, *Education Policy Analysis* p. 86). One of the conclusions drawn is that education policies are not sufficient to address the equity issue, and that “social inequalities existing outside the education system contribute to educational inequalities in terms of access, opportunity, process and outcomes” (p. 92). Despite the impressive expansion of participation in education, a relatively large part of the population, especially people from low-income families, remain excluded from access to education. Education policies to promote equal learning opportunities for all “can therefore hardly be seen as successful” (OECD, 2001, *Education Policy Analysis* p. 92).

4. GENDER INEQUALITY

Gender inequality is another dimension of social stratification and division of power. Gender inequality reflects the existing patriarchy. Using population adjusted cross-national data, and by employing social indicators covering economic, political, educational and health domains, current research conducted in the USA documents persistent trends in global gender inequality. Dorius (2006) when evaluating global trends in gender inequality from 1970 to 2000, and using indicators covering economic, political, educational and health domains. argues that absolute gender inequality *increased* among paid adult workers, surviving adults, literate adults, as well as total years of school attainment and life expectancy.

Gender inequality is also tied to issues of ethnicity, race, power, status, and class. Women are encouraged to develop skills that are useful in low-paying jobs, such as clerical work, which leads to lower income and status. The inability of many women to work fulltime and overtime due to heavy family responsibilities keeps them from keeping and advancing in their jobs (as most cannot find affordable childcare). In contrast, the 2006 PISA findings indicate that in OECD countries, females outperformed males in reading literacy:

In twelve countries, the gap was at least 50 score points. In Greece and Finland, females were 57 and 51 points ahead respectively, and the gap was 50 to 66 points in the partner countries Qatar,

Bulgaria, Jordan, Thailand, Argentina, Slovenia, Lithuania, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia and Croatia... The smallest gender gaps among OECD countries were in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (24 and 29 points, respectively)... In Korea, males increased their performance by 20 score points between 2000 and 2006, but females at twice that rate. In Finland and Korea, over 60% of females were at high levels of reading proficiency, Level 4 or 5, compared to just over one-third (36%) of boys in Finland and below one-half (47%) of boys in Korea (PISA, 2006, p. 51).

Why do gender inequalities exist? Some argue that differences in human biology (specifically, that women have children and can spend many years of their lives pregnant) cause *gender stratification* differences. Sociologists argue that environment itself, as well as cross-cultural and historical evidence show that gender inequalities are variable rather than constant. For instance, the functionalist perspective defines society as a system of interlinked parts and *roles* to be fulfilled in a particular social hierarchy. Talcott Parsons believed that stable, supportive families are the key to successful socialisation. In Parson's view, the family operates most efficiently with a clear-cut sexual division of labor in which females act in *expressive* roles and men act in *instrumental* roles. This perspective is still applicable to traditional and patriarchal societies that characterize much of developing economies. However, continuing social change, and the impact of development, science and technology (and knowledge in general) are likely to alter gender differences—creating a more balanced gender patterns in the future.

5. SCHOOLING, GLOBALISATION AND POLICY SHIFTS

There is a trend in educational systems around the world to shift the emphasis from the progressive child-centred curriculum to 'economy-centred' vocational training (Walters, 1997, p. 18), as well as forms of governance, requiring 'intense production', and the use of performance indicators (Daun, 2005, pp. 102-04). This was discovered in comparative studies of education in China, Japan, the USA, Great Britain, Germany, Russia, the Scandinavian countries, and elsewhere. Although these nations are vastly different in terms of politics, history and culture, and *dominant ideologies*, they are united in their pursuit for international competition in the global market. Hence, curriculum reforms and school policies increasingly address the totalising imperatives of the global economy discourse—competition, productivity, and quality.

Schools are only too keen to promote international links and globalisation. The International Baccalaureate, as an alternative to local secondary education certificates, is offered by some elite private schools. In Australia, for example, an article in *The Weekend Australian* newspaper titled 'Baccalaureate: a School Test for Global Villages', linked 'parental concerns about curriculum with the push for Australia to think globally' (August 1 & 2, 1992). The head teachers quoted in the article referred to the *transferability* and the international recognition potentially offered by the certificate and its value for students who wish to be geographically mobile (Zajda, 2007, p. 106). This global mobility is increasingly relevant in the global culture. The issue of *globalisation*, or as Giddens defines the term 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away' (Giddens, 1990, p. 64; see also Giddens, 2000) has been taken up in school promotion. A vivid example of this is a photo of a former girl student leaning on a

large mounted globe. Her words 'My school put the world within my reach', signify the 'value of taking the world view' and suggests a 'world of career options open to her' (Zajda, 2007, p. 107). She, like other products of the global culture, will presumably become part of a new class of cosmopolitans, or individuals with credentials which consist of 'de-contextualised cultural capital', which allows them to participate in many cultures, particularly 'transnational cultures' related to the international job market.

5. CONCLUSION

The concepts of cultural and social capital have become significant for critical sociological research in the last two decades (see Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Burbules & Torres, 2000; Zajda, Biraimah, & Gaudelli, 2008, Zajda, 2009). The globalization processes taking place today are likely to legitimise the unequal distribution of cultural and social capital available. Given that cultural capital is one of the most valuable social commodities, it plays a significant role in social mobility, inequality and social stratification. It is argued that one of the best ways to prevent educational policy and practice from being a tool of totalitarianism or cultural imperialism is to broaden the discourse of democracy, by including critical literacy, access, choice, and equal opportunity. Understanding that education for democracy is more than "education for human rights," "education for tolerance," or "education for diversity" enables us to see that many national systems of education that are frequently assumed to be democratic actually contain some highly undemocratic aspects.

Equality of educational opportunity is difficult to achieve in highly stratified societies and economic systems. Coleman (1975), Levin (1978) and others have argued that education alone was not sufficient to overcome significant SES differences in the society divided along dimensions of class, power, income, wealth, and privilege. Furthermore, the prospect of widening inequalities in education, due to market-oriented schooling, and substantial tolerance of inequalities and exclusion, are more than real. Access and equity continue to be "enduring concerns" in education (OECD, 2001, *Education Policy Analysis*, p. 26). The policy shift away from the progressive and egalitarian vision of education that characterised the 1960s and the 1970s has serious implications for human rights, social justice and democracy.

The difficulty of attaining social justice in the global economy is explained by Rikowski (2000), who argues that sustainable social justice is impossible on the basis of capitalist social forms. Globalisation, in most developing countries (the majority of humanity) is articulated in the form of finance-driven policy reforms concerning efficiency and effectiveness. Their effect on education systems is likely to 'increase' educational inequalities and access (Carnoy, 1999). Furthermore, a lack of emphasis on the relationship between policy, poverty and schooling, and the 'withdrawal of the state as a major provider in the field of education in many parts of the world' raise serious human rights and ethical questions (Soudien, 1999, Zajda, 2005, Zajda, 2009). The growth of global education policy hegemony defining accountability, standards, quality assurance, and assessment fails to respond to the changing relationships between the state, education and social justice in the global economy

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