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Demanded and Feared: transnational convergencies in national educational systems and their (expectable) effects

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ABSTRACT The article focuses on the impact of social developments related to 'globalisation' on education. In line with the world systems approach as most prominently expounded by Immanuel Wallerstein the author conceptualises globalisation not as a new development, but as the current expression of a long historical process originating in sixteenth century Europe. In order to make use of world systems theory for education, the author makes a strong argument in favour of taking Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and the relative autonomy of the educational system into account. On this basis, the author reviews a secondary analysis based on numerous studies of national education systems with respect to the various degrees of convergence, divergence and variation. It is argued with reference to the neo-institutionalist approach of the Stanford group that convergence and standardisation in education are not questions of affirmation or rejection as much as historical processes that by no means imply a deterministic implementation of an economic rationale.

1. Globalisation

Within the last decades discourses on social developments being 'international', 'multicultural', 'transnational', 'universal' or 'global' conquered the scene of scientific conferences, mass media, publications and public debate. Among them, 'globalisation' in the end became the most widely used term of reference. Even though it may be relevant to distinguish between the various concepts mentioned above, they all point to processes which may no longer be explained by purely local, regional, national or cultural peculiarities, but instead by 'global' developments (cf Die Gruppe von Lissabon, 1997, p. 44). Within the last decade, this discourse on 'globalisation' also entered educational research, policy making and practice. Yet, at a closer look

'globalisation' as well as its application in educational theory and research go back further, the periodisation depending of course on the theoretical assumptions which are applied to globalisation and education.

1.1. *The 'Modern World System' Approach*

This contribution makes use of a concept of 'globalisation' as deployed by theorists of the modern world system like Immanuel Wallerstein and others (see e.g. Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1977; Wallerstein, 1979; Meyer & Hannan, 1979; Bergesen, 1980; Boeckh, 1985; Frank & Gilles, 1993). Even though Wallerstein's approach has been criticised and some critics predicted that the theory would decline after the fall of socialist Eastern Europe, it is still one of the most influential paradigms (Hall, 1996).

The basic idea underlying Wallerstein's concept is that a supranational level called 'the modern world system' emerged from European origins some 500 years ago as a new societal aggregate beyond national and other social structures. In this view, global developments are characterised by the following 'secular trends' (cf Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1977, p. 166):

- (a) the successive, eventually global 'expansion' of an economic model based on capitalist principles,
- (b) 'commodification' as the process by which ever more material and immaterial goods (estates, human labour, natural resources, time, risk, natural beauty) are commercialised into products to be exchanged for profit on a competitive world market,
- (c) 'mechanisation' shaping all technical-scientific revolutions since the industrial revolution. The resulting 'modern world system' is a competitive and hierarchical one consisting of countries belonging to the centre, the semi-periphery or the periphery, yet not in a static and deterministic way.

From this point of view, the recent discourse on 'globalisation' is just a new phase in the historical evolution of 'the modern world system'. This new phase is characterised in particular by a threefold claim for more liberalisation, privatisation and de-regulation, seen as the motor of recent globalisation processes (Die Gruppe von Lissabon, 1997, p. 63). Some factual developments surpass the rhetoric and point to the effects e.g. on national labour markets and also on national educational policies (Brown, 1996) of such neo-liberal policies which tend to delegitimize national policies and civil society. However, these developments are still heavily debated, as protest movements e.g. from non-governmental pressure groups demonstrating at world trade conferences show.

However, theories of the modern world system rarely, if at all, take educational dimensions into consideration. It had to be the educational scientists themselves who had to demonstrate that the world systems approach was relevant to educational research. Some of them followed this

path while others defended their concern with the nation-state as the appropriate level of comparative analysis (cf Adick, 2000c, p. 84). The author of the present article had first dared to explicitly speak of 'Education in the Modern World System' at a conference in 1988 devoted to education in the so-called Third World. In that paper (Adick, 1989) the traditional explanations of 'dependency theory' which tended to see the so-called developing countries, most of them ex-colonial, as mere victims of external pressure exerted by the core countries, which, in turn, were considered as the only actors in a bi-modal and static relationship of oppressors and oppressed, of haves and have-nots, of know-all and know-nothings was left behind. Instead, the approach was adopted to place these phenomena in a broader historical picture of an interrelated but hierarchical world system, a concept which was consequently elaborated on in other publications pertaining to the educational developments in the 'Third World' (Adick, 1992a; 1992b), and then generalised for modern education world-wide (e.g. Adick, 1995; 2000b). Into that context the author continued to integrate the findings of the growing research of the 'Stanford group' initiated by John W. Meyer and others who had started studying empirical data pertaining to 'the world educational revolution' in the 1970s (cf Meyer et al, 1979) and who have since published a host of other studies in the varied authorship of Benavot, Boli, Meyer, Ramirez, Rubinson and others (cf also the article of Ramirez in this issue).

1.2. Missing Links Between the Modern World System and Global Developments in Education

However, in order to bridge the gap between the economy-centred 'world systems approach' and the empirical findings of the Stanford group on global educational developments, it was necessary to make use of Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital as a kind of relays between the economy and national education systems (Bourdieu, 1983). Cultural capital transmitted as 'incorporated cultural capital' via instruction in schools, appearing as 'institutionalised cultural capital' by the certificates issued by the educational systems, and being in principle convertible into other forms of 'capital', namely economic and social capital, thus served as the 'missing link' between the capitalist world economy and educational developments. Under the auspices of the 'modern world system', then, 'cultural capital' has to be conceived of as (increasingly) internationally compatible, competitive and convertible.

A second 'missing link' pertaining to the variations within the praxis of education beyond the existence of global patterns could be explained by referring to Bourdieu's and Passeron's definition of the 'relative autonomy' of the educational system as a subsystem of society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1974). It accounts for the somewhat paradoxical situation of dependency within a state of independence: education is dependent on global developments, but at the same time it acts along a rather independent 'pedagogical' logic of its own.

At the time of their publication (in the 1970s and early 1980s) the two theoretical concepts of 'cultural capital' and 'the relative autonomy of education' were not meant to respond to what is now called 'globalisation'. The choice of referring to them as the missing links between theories of the modern world economy and the empirical findings on global educational developments has, however, found new legitimacy in the fact that Bourdieu himself in the last years of his life has widely published on and also actively participated politically in this new discourse on globalisation (e.g. Bourdieu, 2001).

2. Convergence and Standardisation

To speak of convergence (or divergence) necessarily implies comparing trends in two or more societies – otherwise there would be no convergence, but just a certain development within one case, e.g. the expansion of mass education in a given country. Standardisation is seen as the outcome or consequence of a longer process of social change with certain traits of convergence (there are, of course also processes of social change which lead to divergence or parallel developments). If the impact of standardisation is to be estimated and converted into political decisions, those processes of convergence which have led to the standardisations identified have to be primarily focused on. This implies that the problem needs to be discussed in a global perspective, and not in a national one. If standardisation is the outcome of convergence which occurs in several or even in most nation states, explanations have to be sought on the global scale and the respective implications for policy-making need to be taken into account.

In the educational field, global players are active who might be considered as fuelling the process of convergence and standardisation in national educational systems. As such the dominant role of e.g. the World Bank in determining or even imposing educational expansion and the structure of school systems is heavily debated (Schulz & Naumann, 1997). Besides these direct interventions, there are also more subtle forms of achieving consensus in supranational organisations like the UNESCO by holding international conferences and issuing reports and recommendations that might lead to convergent trends, e.g. in slowly, but steadily furthering human rights education in national curricula (UNESCO, 1998). If striving for liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation may be said to comprise the driving force in recent globalisation processes with regards to the economic system, the global players in education are not (yet) unanimously decided on where to go. Whereas the World Bank is associated with ensuring that imperial, i.e. European languages, specifically English, are used for instruction in schools (Brock-Utne, 2001), UNESCO explicitly favours a policy of linguistic and cultural diversity (de Cuéllar, 1995). On other aspects, however, supranational organisations acting in the field of education have come to formulate common objectives pertaining especially to the universal right to

basic education laid down in the 1990 Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All and the following global activities towards implementing that goal. World-wide standardisation effects are thus due to an international consensus achieved by means of international declarations, but also by the multitude of international development organisations in the expanding field of global educational decision-making after World War II (Chabbott, 1998).

2.1. Convergence Patterns in School Systems

According to A. Inkeles and L. Sirowy

Besides national and historical peculiarities which shape the educational developments of a country or an epoch, there seems to exist a long-term trend toward convergence of national school developments. This could be the conclusion if the findings of a re-analysis of numerous existing studies on national educational systems presented by Inkeles & Sirowy (1983) were accepted. The following table on 'convergence', 'divergence' or 'variation patterns' concerning various aspects of schooling derives from their study (Table I). Special attention should be given to the codes in the table (capital or minor 'c', 'd' etc.) indicating the direction and the strength of the trends they found.

Summarising their findings, convergence patterns have been found especially in the structures of school systems concerning state control, compulsory education, and the right to education, public finance, and administration. Convergence patterns also encompass the articulation of types and levels of schooling, diplomas, professionalised teacher training, an approved syllabus and curriculum, and the respective achievement test for certification purposes. Less convergence, i.e. more variability and even divergence, is found in those variables which pertain to characteristics of teaching style, attitudes, the climate of the school, local participation in decision-making etc.

Defining standardisation as the consequence of convergence signifies that there is a set of characteristic features which gives the school the status of a globally identifiable institution, regardless of national, ethnic, cultural, economic and gender variables, hard facts being, e.g. that every minor has to go to school, that there are laws and rules regulating this institution, there are persons called teachers and persons called students, there are classes, timetables, textbooks, tests and certificates etc. However, the moment a particular school is entered, differences are found – differences in the language spoken, in the instructional style, in the amount of parental participation, in the educational values cherished etc. The fact that school systems produce some sort of convergence should, however, not be generalised as to hold true for education in general, because it stands in marked contrast to research results of other educational agencies, such as the family, which does not (or not yet) show a general tendency at convergence, as Inkeles (1980) had found in another study.

Educational Dimension	Pattern of Change*	Comment
<i>Ideational and Legal</i>		
Public responsibility	C	
Provision for compulsory education	C	
Duration of compulsory Schooling	C	Renewed divergence among more advanced countries?
<i>Structural</i>		
"School" forms	C	
Articulated ladder structure	C	
Preparation & certification of teachers	C	Variability in professional and academic training
Principle of standard curriculum	C	Variability in central control & standardisation
formal tests	C	Universally used; variability in type & function
Organisation of higher education	V	Except for a few structures, distinctive forms persist
<i>Demographic</i>		
Enrolment ratios	C	characteristic mostly at primary & secondary levels
Repetition rates	D	
Students-to-Teacher ratios	M	Europe converges historically; recent data: no convergence
Secondary school comprehensiveness	M	Divergence in vocational shares. Convergence on principle indicated by policy changes
<i>Administrative – Financial</i>		
Ministry of education	C	Variability in role
Inspectorate	C	Variability in level of government responsible
Local governing boards	V	Some do not have any; others vary in type
Teacher power & participation	V	
Participants in decision-making	V	
Administrative responsibility by level of government	c	Slow movement toward a middle ground
Free public schooling	C	
Public expenditure / GNP	c	Strongest convergence among most advanced nations
Mode of fund raising	V	Special taxes vs. general receipts
Financing centralization	c	Slow convergence toward a middle ground
<i>Interpersonal & Institutional Dynamics</i>		
Teacher attitudes	V	
Classroom dynamics	V	
Instructional style	V	
Co-education	C	Strongest at primary & tertiary levels
Female Schooling participation	C	Convergence of gender parity at all levels over extended time period
Social origins & access to higher education	c	Slight convergent movement among more advanced but much variability persists
Parental conceptions of education	V	

Key to entries:

Code	Description
C	A well-documented and marked convergent tendency has been observed in the adoption of a policy or structure, or in the level of a dimension
c	A slower, more moderate convergent tendency has been observed
D	A divergent tendency has been observed
M	Results are mixed. Different patterns of change obtain when different samples are examined or different indicators of the same dimension are observed
V	The dimension has not been examined with longitudinal data, but existing studies suggest considerable variability

Table I. Testing for Convergence in educational systems: summary table (compare Inkeles & Sirowy, 1983, p. 326).

2.2. *Convergence Patterns in School Systems According to J.W. Meyer*

The findings of Inkeles and Sirowy are not the only ones which propose the notion of a standardised form of schooling. Similar to theirs are conclusions by John W. Meyer proposed in an article on 'The global standardisation of national educational systems' (Meyer, 1992), in which he traces such standardisation or convergence patterns in various dimensions of schooling: concerning the basic educational structure he sees school systems shifting towards the 'tacitly-preferred UNESCO model of 6-3-3 years' and towards comprehensive models of secondary education, rejecting more and more any overt differentiation by ethnicity, class, and gender variables (*ibid.*, p. 5).

In view of content and instruction he notes a tendency towards world-standardised curricula and a similar set of subjects taught and the time devoted to them (*ibid.*). This criterion was also studied in other publications of the Stanford group with the result of revealing tendencies towards standardised curricula, more so for the elementary, and (still) to a lesser extent for the upper secondary level (Benavot et al, 1991; Meyer et al, 1992; Lenhardt, 1993; Kamens et al, 1996).

Furthermore, Meyer (1992, p. 6) assumes that educational organisation is not yet administered in a world-wide standardised way, due to different forms of political control and administration in the various countries; yet he does see a long-term trend towards more nation-level control over education. To this I would add a 'caveat': here Meyer seems to be analysing administration from a de-centralised experience as is typical for the USA and anglophone countries with rather generous local and regional autonomy. In my opinion, there is a trend of convergence to a medium range of national government control: whereas centralised bureaucracies (e.g. France) give way to more regional and local involvement in decision-making, de-centralised bureaucracies tend to gain more influence (e.g. the implementation of a national curriculum and central testing at key stages in England).

Concerning the organisation inside school and classroom, Meyer detects strong evidence for homogenisation with respect to classroom teaching by professionalised and somewhat autonomous teachers (*ibid.*, p. 6). This could be a slight deviation from what Inkeles and Sirowy found. But it could be also due to the fact that the whole system evolves and leads to more convergence over time which also applies to the hitherto diverse sectors of schooling. If teachers all around the world are confronted with roughly the same theories in their teacher training (e.g. every future teacher seems to learn about the theories of Piaget or Bourdieu), and if schools enter the information age (access to the internet), then it is plausible to suppose that teaching patterns in schools classrooms will also converge over time.

In addition, Meyer finds an increasing number of links between national educational systems and the direction of their developments, and he sees reform projects inspired by international influences which might eventually lead to 'the rise of an international educational system' (p. 7) instead of a nation-based model of compulsory schooling. So one could say that there is

already a good deal of international discourse and mutual influence taking place concerning the organisation and essence of education.

The trends towards convergence and standardisation are heavily criticised. One may therefore ask: what is wrong with convergence and standardisation? Why is it under attack by educationists, scientists, politicians and civil society? Why is it considered as a threat to education? (as supposed by the title of this issue 'Globalisation: autonomy of education under siege?')

3. Pro- and Counter-arguments on Standardisation

When identifying the frequently voiced arguments in scientific publications as well as in political debate around the topic of standardisation and convergence, one should keep in mind that many of the central arguments may be found in contributions dealing with other topics such as privatisation, de-regulation, parental choice, state control, curriculum development and similar questions. As examples of the range of topics which include questions pertaining to convergence and standardisation cf Radtke & Weiss; Scheunpflug & Hirsch; Stromquist & Monkman (all published in 2000).

3.1. Arguments on the Virtues of Standardisation

Standardisation prevents arbitrary situations and decisions. If, for instance, nine years of compulsory schooling are the standard, a state cannot just deny some children access to schooling for less than nine years. Another example: if teaching is done by qualified teachers, the headmaster cannot ad-lib let anyone teach in his school without a certificate.

Greater mobility. A standard set of subjects and curricula enables parents and their children to move from one place to another. A standard set of acknowledged certificates enables students to apply for further training, university access or entrance into the labour market anywhere, domestically and even internationally.

Equal rights and opportunities. Children of every social background can move up the educational ladder according to their performance and not according to their social origin. Of course, gender and social class play a role in educational achievement, but if performance meets the requirements, access to higher levels of education cannot legitimately be denied.

Enhanced quality by setting standards. If there is a core curriculum or if there are state approved textbooks which set the standard of what has to be taught and learned at school, instruction in schools has to meet these requirements. If teachers have to study in institutions of higher education instead of having some sort of on-the-job-training, this will supposedly enhance their academic and later their teaching performance.

Democratising effects. Standardisation enables mass participation (education for all), since standardised solutions like 'mass schooling' are 'cheaper' than a variety of mutually not interchangeable types of schooling; the effects are compatible to those known of 'mass production' in the industrial society.

Standardisation facilitates rational (logical) decisions. Decisions cannot go beyond standard requirements, e.g. one can rationally (logically) argue that the quality of education will decline if teacher training is abolished, or that a country's economic competition will suffer if compulsory education is suspended.

Standardisation shows rationalising (economical, reasonable) effects. Teaching 30 students in a classroom along standardised lines is economically more 'rational' than teaching just one youth by a private tutor along individually developed curricula. Of course, in this case, the economic rationality is seen from the perspective of social returns to public funds invested in education.

Standardisation across countries makes schooling internationally compatible. Certificates become internationally accredited, because they are based roughly on the same conception and contents of schooling. Thus, educational standardisation opens up access to labour markets and education abroad.

3.2. Arguments on the Vices of Standardisation

Cultural imperialism and hegemony. The standard world model of education is a 'Western' model which implies alienation and domination of 'non-Western' countries. It also implies hegemony of the cultural concepts of the ruling classes, and of the majority culture over minorities in multicultural societies.

Cultural homogenisation. Standard curricula underestimate or do not care for religious, cultural and ethnic diversity; comparable to 'monocultures' in cash crop production this makes them more susceptible to 'disease'. Traditions and variations get lost or are amalgamated in such a way that they lose their identity.

Danger of enforcing one-sided solutions and 'sterile' stereotypes. Plurality, creativity and non-conformism are precious resources rather than obstacles, especially in view of the challenges of the future. Standardisation might lead to reduce the range of human knowledge and life styles transmitted in schools.

Reduces the autonomy of education. If teachers have to teach along pre-fabricated lines, schools have to follow regulated programs, and parents and students have to obey laws concerning compulsory education, then all of these requirements limit their choice.

Brain drain (especially from so-called Third World countries). Mutually interchangeable certificates and curricula enhance the recruitment and emigration especially of highly skilled personnel to core countries without core countries having invested in the education of such personnel.

Enhances social disparity structures. Since standardisation is defined within the hegemonial world order, it meets the interests of the ruling classes rather than the poor. It urges poorer countries to invest in models of education from which elites rather than the mass of the population benefit.

Education is turned into a commodity. Pressure for rationalisation and international competition favour standard solutions which are cost-effective and efficient – to the detriment of the educational demands of parents and students.

3.3. Questions Arising from These Pro- and Counter-arguments

The list of pro- and counter-arguments is somewhat puzzling. Is there a way to decide who is right, and who is wrong? Which of the arguments are true and which are not? Some of the arguments are outright contradictory: whereas some stress issues such as the expected positive effects of standardisation for cross-country mobility like studying and working abroad, others refer to the same trend in negative terms stressing the allegedly negative results like brain drain and cultural imperialism. At a closer look, then, every argument has its share of empirical, factual elements as well as at least implicitly containing values, i.e. normative elements. For instance, when arguing that standardisation furthers possibilities for studying abroad, this refers to empirical evidence that in fact students do study abroad, while at the same time welcoming this by implicitly supposing that standardisation enhances this. For others, the converse is true: the same empirical evidence of studying abroad arouses fears of alienation and cultural domination.

Furthermore, effects accredited to standardisation (convergence, homogenisation) might in fact be due to other factors like economic power or political decisions. For example: if a given country does not offer suitable positions and financial means for highly qualified researchers these will tend to seek their fortune abroad. In this case, then, the resulting 'brain drain' is not due to convergence or standardisation (even though these factors are the prerequisites for cross-country mobility), but is rather due to the missing political will to offer adequate career prospects in their home countries. In order to be able to decide scientifically on which factors account for what kind of development, a sophisticated and multi-faceted inquiry would be necessary.

4. The Pitfalls of Convergence and Standardisation Arguments

However, the problem can also be approached differently. Besides amalgamating factual and normative elements and often lacking in empirical research, both sets of arguments may be said to be based on a false theory of modern schooling. This critique largely also applies to most of the theoretical approaches to globalisation and education which go under the headings of systems theory, (neo)institutional world polity theory, critical theory or other names. There are two main reasons for this false, or rather, curtailed, theory of modern schooling. One is an underestimation of the relative autonomy of the school, the other an underestimation of the relative autonomy of the learner. Taking this as a basis, and conceiving societal developments in analogy to how Piaget conceives human development, a better understanding of how educational systems handle globalisation influences and convergence can be arrived at by looking at the adaptative and outbalancing processes between uniformity and plurality, standardisation and variation, global model and national educational reality.

4.1. *The Relative Autonomy of the School*

Picturing globalisation, convergence or standardisation as the agents of school developments underrates the autonomy of the school, – globalisation (or convergence, or standardisation) being the independent, and schooling the dependent variable. This is the common and typical sociological view of schooling and education, and even many educational scientists follow this basic idea. But it is not true.

Historical analysis reveals that a potential for relatively autonomous pedagogical reasoning and action arose alongside with the school developing into a sub-system of every modern society. This relative autonomy stemmed – in Bourdieu's view – from the professionalisation of school teaching (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1974). Teachers developed their logic of instruction, their ideas of what is good for children and youths, their routine of managing classroom activities with diverse abilities, their conception of didactics and teaching methods. And pedagogical logic is not necessarily identical (and will never be) with the logic of other sub-systems of society like administration, economy, politics, mass media, etc.

It has to be stressed that the feature of the relative autonomy of the school is not something which could ad-lib be removed from schooling. On the contrary: it is essential and guarantees that schooling functions as a partly self-regulating and independent sub-system of modern societies, even though it is not always easy to decide on where to put the stress: on the relativity and the limitations attributed to this 'relative autonomy' of the school, or on the autonomous pedagogical possibilities this model offers (cf Roeder et al, 1977, p. 37, 42). However, the existing relative autonomy of the school can clearly be taken as a historical achievement, and it is as essential and characteristic for

modern schooling as the convergence and standardisation patterns described before.

4.2. The Relative Autonomy of Learning

Picturing globalisation, convergence or standardisation as the agents of school developments also underrates the autonomous learning processes of students in the school, – globalisation (or convergence, or standardisation) being again the independent, and the learning student the dependent variable. But learning theories, especially cognitivist and constructivist ones, stress the fact that it is the individual, who is actively seeking, filtering, structuring and re-structuring knowledge, and who is not just a passive recipient of information flows. Learning in school may be intentionally imposed by state controlled curricula and may be filtered by teaching strategies, but acquiring knowledge is an active, self-regulated process (cf Schunk & Zimmermann, 1994).

Even socialisation theories which by definition focus on the impact of societal influences on the individual, have come to give more space to the active individual in the last decades. Here again, the individual is no longer conceived of as a passive recipient of societal influences, but rather as someone productively assimilating them (cf Hurrelmann, 1998).

Taking these two dimensions into account: the relative autonomy of the school and that of the learner, we can no longer cling to the simplistic notion of convergence or standardisation as being only imposed on schooling and learning. This is an over-deterministic view. Instead the relationship between them should be conceived of as containing interrelations between international influences and national school developments, including relative autonomy and feed-back processes.

4.3. Balancing Standardisation and Variation

In analogy to how Jean Piaget analyses human development we could, then, distinguish between ‘assimilation’ and ‘accommodation’ processes depending on the cognitive structures which an individual already possesses or which he or she has to develop anew in order to cope with new situations. Piaget defines the cognitive adaptation process in the interface between the individual and his or her environment as a balance between assimilation and accommodation (cf Piaget, 1972, p. 10). In analogy to this, developments of national educational systems in response to globalisation could be seen as at times assimilative and at other times accommodative, depending on the prefabricated structures which they already have at their disposal to handle globalisation.

In a similar Piagetian sense, then, we could also refer to the distinction between ‘competence’ and ‘performance’: cognitive development leads to certain universal competencies, like the concept of the invariance of volume or formal logical reasoning, but the actual performance, i.e. the acquisition and

handling of these competencies depends on the cultural circumstances and the social situation in which they take place (cf the discussion in Schöffthaler, 1984). In analogy to this, 'universal competencies' offered by national educational systems and their 'situative performance' might be distinguished. To give an example: compulsory education in a state-controlled institutional setting could be interpreted as a rational answer to the demands of social cohesion in a world which is characterised by an extremely high and by now even international division of labour, social segregation and cultural plurality. This is, to speak in Piagetian language, one of the 'universal competencies' of modern school systems: to promote social cohesion. The reality of schooling in different settings, its variations and constant modifications are what could then be called their 'situative performance', i.e. the way they actually realise for social cohesion in a particular cultural and societal situation.

4.4. Transferring 'Globalisation' into 'Schooling'

Following these basic ideas, the mechanisms by which convergence patterns are translated into pedagogical actions would be the following (cf Adick, 1995, p. 56):

1st level. Increasing international division of labour, competition, interdependence and standardisation lead to new political and economic arrangements, for example, the recent processes to promote a European identity, the re-structuring of world society after the fall of socialist Eastern Europe, or the world trade conferences aiming at open national markets for the unrestricted flow of international capital. Of course, these processes are disputed and criticised nationally and internationally, but these disputes are political and not educational ones, even though educationists may participate in this discourse.

2nd level. These new situations lead to societal problems, which are partly transformed into 'objectives of the school', i.e. they are delegated to be tackled and solved by the relatively autonomous national educational systems. For instance, states react by creating new educational programs and certificates to adapt to world standards. The difference to step 1 is, that it is not, e.g. the World Trade Organisation defining new programs, but the educational system as a relatively autonomous subsystem with its own logic and routines.

3rd level. The educational system, then, deals with these external challenges in a pedagogical manner, and this may be said to be its specific contribution, which other subsystems of society, like the economic or the political systems, do not achieve. This means that the educational system does not simply conform or subordinate to external pressures, but instead it translates them – by using specific educational devices such as curricula, or teacher training – into its educational horizon in order to make sense in a pedagogical way (and

not in an economic or political way). To take the example of the new information technologies: computers are not simply put into the classrooms in order to conform to international standards, and students are not simply instructed in using them, but the moment computers enter the educational system they provoke a debate on educational objectives, on the relevance of teaching computer techniques and new technologies for the purpose of general education and enlightenment.

4th level. As part of international developments the school does not only execute world pressure, but it is actively concerned with the project of how to master and how to deal with globalisation in a productive way. Human knowledge of the world is selected and transformed in a pedagogical manner to be actively appropriated by teachers and students. And this acquisition of knowledge in the school by the undeniable fact that it is done by relative autonomous self-regulated learners necessarily includes a certain amount of choice, critique and new possibilities to interpret the world. Thus the process of education in school is not just a transmission of pre-fabricated knowledge, but leads to a transformation of human knowledge and to a re-interpretation of the world situation, and may eventually offer new possibilities for mankind to survive, evoking responsibility and insight into the complex economic, social, and cultural world situation. Schools may not always be effective in achieving productive and critical ways of learning, but they certainly function according to a different logic than economy and politics.

5. Possible Responses to Convergence

By throwing some light on the mechanisms of external global pressure and how it is transformed into pedagogical action, the specific public responsibility of education becomes obvious. Convergence and standardisation do not exempt us from the task of interpreting the world in a pedagogically sound way to the next generation. And they do not relieve us from administering the school system dedicated to such an educational objective in a sensible way. But this set of reflections concerns normative pedagogical reasoning and as such is not situated at the same level of observation and analysis as factual convergence and standardisation patterns.

5.1. The Need for a Normative Discourse on Globalisation and Education

Thinking about how politics and pedagogy should respond to international convergence necessarily implies normative reflections on education and globalisation, since answers to questions like: which line of reasoning should be followed, which should be avoided, and for what reasons? cannot be derived at from empirical evidence, but recurs to a normative discourse, a discourse, however, that exceeds national boundaries.

As educationists, or educational policy makers we should not fear international convergence: learning from and following the experiences of others, accepting certain standardisations, etc. does not necessarily counter our national and cultural interests. But neither should we see it as a salvation for our national problems. We should instead understand the mechanisms by which world influences enter our schools (as described above), and, which is even more important, we should ensure that they make sense in a pedagogical way.

It is true that the essence of the modern world system is largely its economic rationality, which transcends and even tends to delegitimise the level of the single state. Thus national options are under heavy pressure, especially from an economic perspective. It is also true that international studies comparing achievements in schools like TIMSS (Third International Mathematics and Science Study) exert pressure on national educational systems to comply to international standards. But this does not preclude room for manoeuvre in acting and reacting in the educational subsystem, as has been exemplified for global challenges in the dimensions of vocational training, human rights education, peace education and intercultural education (Lenhart, 2000), as well as for the realms of basic education, mother-tongue and foreign language learning in school, and the curricular contents of education (Adick, 2000b).

Most of us surely do not agree that compulsory education should function along the lines of an economic market model, describing parents and children as clients or consumers, perhaps even paying for education as a commodity, and schools only offering immediately useful and applicable skills and qualifications. Admittedly, this perspective may apply to continuing education outside or after school, for which learners or parents pay. But it cannot be the logic behind compulsory education which is legitimised, however inadequate its practical manifestations, as education for all and thus meant to be integrative, regulated by norms and values of a democratic system, following the principles of equality, justice and inclusion.

If the model of compulsory education turns away from this basic legitimation which it has acquired over the last 200 years, societies will have to pay a high price, e.g. for re-integrative measures after youths have fallen out of the school system, for heavy security measures as a result of widening gaps between rich and poor, etc. A national educational system offering compulsory, free and equal access to schooling thus far is the only legitimated and unanimously accepted pedagogical device and symbol of social integration. If this is abolished, what would be the alternative? Which mechanisms or social institutions could replace it in order to achieve social cohesion, which is essential for the functioning of societies? It is not even economically sound to abolish it, because the social costs which would necessarily follow (prisons, security systems, re-education institutions, social welfare programs, even wars etc.) would be much higher. So a curtailed

version of the model of education for all, which has been achieved in compulsory education systems, will not pay off.

5.2. Convergence as the Result of a Historical Process and of Human Experience

Convergence should then, this is my conclusion, be interpreted as the result of a historical process, in which nations became more interlinked in a competitive hierarchical world system. A certain amount of standardisation is the result of such a process of convergence. But standardisation also implies achievements, and not only restrictions. So, when universal and free access to schooling is under attack, the normative discourse may hint at those historical achievements, not in order to prove the argument, but to foster it politically. Because factual historical achievements as such are no proof that to follow them is better than to alter or to abolish them. But normative discourse can point to the probably foreseeable consequences which follow the delegitimation of central aspects of modern schooling systems.

Another way to find non- or less arbitrary criteria for a normative discourse on education may be to interpret convergence and standardisation as manifestations of human experience. Following Jürgen Habermas, the social evolution of humankind results from what he calls an 'endogenous learning mechanism', i.e. the fact that human beings are bound to learn in two basic dimensions: a 'technical' dimension resulting from their interaction with nature outside and a 'moral-practical' dimension representing the interaction of human beings with their own inner nature, both of which, of course, work together in determining the reality of a respective societal praxis (Habermas, 1976). Each technical device, then, like the tool of an artisan reflects this active appropriation of how to handle the interface between the material to be treated (wood, iron, cement) and the cognitive map of the artisan, the intentions of what he or she has in mind to do with it in a certain social environment. In a long evolution since the discovery of the hammer and the wheel, these tools have become ever more improved and refined by human experience and social communication.

The same process of human experience, holds true for other non-material 'devices' which mankind developed, such as, for instance, the pedagogical institution called the school (cf Adick, 1992a, p. 178). Could we, then, not see standardisations in modern schooling also as a result of long and varied experiences of how to handle the interface between education and society, between knowledge production and knowledge acquisition bridging the generation gap between teachers and learners? So that, e.g. societies which started the process of establishing education for all without much state interference in a longer process of experience and of communication (with other countries) adopted more state control, whereas other societies, which started to implement schooling by state regulations had to learn they need to allow a certain local autonomy in order to be more effective?

Here is another example. The principle of inclusion could be seen as the result of a long historical process which contains a lot of human experience with different ways of including or excluding children from school, be it for religious, gender or ethnic reasons. But exclusion did not pay off, it led to rebellion, to expensive segregated parallel school systems, to disparities within societies. Thus, the standard solution became inclusion (at least as a proclaimed principle). But, of course, inclusion also is based on domination and homogenisation, e.g. concerning the language of instruction or in the conception of the world represented in school subjects and textbooks. In order to make homogenisation acceptable, some niches are left for particularistic interests on the condition that they do not undermine inclusion as the underlying principle: e.g. private schools, reform programs and single-sex instruction may be operating, but they have to follow some sort of common curriculum and testing in order to become accredited for the fulfilment of compulsory education. Particular cultural values may be taught, but only alongside the dominant official curriculum and on the basis of the same educational logic. In other words: even cultural peculiarities are transformed into teachable school knowledge (with textbooks, didactics, etc.). Here again we would see the universalistic competence which compulsory education has gained, which is 'inclusion', and the situational performance which includes variations to a certain degree.

Against this background one might predict, then (cf Tillmann, 1997; Adick, 2000a), that a curtailed form of compulsory education, guided only by principles of immediate usefulness and applicability for economic purposes, measured short-sightedly by its alleged cost-effectiveness, suspending principles of inclusion and equal opportunities, will not become a reality. Or, if it becomes a reality, then humanity must invent a new pedagogical device to replace the school and its functions for society.

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