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Seeking common boundaries. New ways of looking at globalisation in education and training

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Zusammenfassung: Die üblichen polarisierenden Interpretationen von Globalisierung bringen weltweit Rechte und Linke in eine Allianz des Widerstands. Gefordert sind jedoch Ansätze der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Thema, die weniger Pole zementieren als Gemeinsamkeiten akzentuieren. Der Autor Peter Kell fordert und erprobt vor diesem Hintergrund neue Ansätze in der Analyse von Globalisierung sowie in der Bildungsforschung und -debatte.

Peter Kell

Seeking Common Boundaries

New Ways of Looking at Globalisation in Education and Training

Orthodox theories of globalisation position learning within a narrow economic framework and do not recognise a broader range of interpretations and perspectives of globalisation. Broader definitions are needed to provide a framework so that educators can connect with the complexities and opportunities that arise from globalisation for global interconnectivity and the formation of inclusive transnational communities of practice.

Going Global: A Free Market Bonanza ?

The relationship between education & training and globalisation is more commonly expressed in terms that reflect an orthodox neo-liberal economic paradigm which is characterised by an integration of world market structures. In this context products and services are developed, manufactured and distributed within a worldwide market increasingly represented by transnational corporations. One of the expanding markets is a transnational market in education and training.

More commonly the rationale and the future of the nation state is juxtaposed against an ability to participate in this integrated world-wide market and to remain economically "competitive". The state is exponentially required to provide the economic and social conditions to sustain the entry of global capitalism under the banner of free trade. This incorporates a generic policy cluster of lower trade barriers, deregulated financial markets and labour market conditions as well as generous tax incentives for transnational corporations to locate their operations in selected nation-states.

Part of the policy cluster involves a link with the provision of education & training to the skill formation necessary to be economically competitive. This relationship with education and international competitiveness is also linked with advances in the new technologies of learning such as on-line technology which is proposed as promoting borderless education and training.

These policy settings commonly associated with globalisation have also facilitated the steady privatisation of the state education & training system and the creation of new "hybrid" training enterprises. Integrating private and public organisations, these hybrids include multi-media corporations, finance and banking organisations, publishing companies and telecommunication organisations in partnership with private and public educational providers. Many of them have a global capacity operating across all continents in franchised chains that span national boundaries.

The limiting factor in much of the neo-liberal discourse is

the emphasis on competition, a sentiment which limits and contradicts the potential of collaborative global links and communities of practice.

The Global/Local Dilemma Sparks Cultural and Political Backlashes

Aligned with these developments is a mantra towards lowered government and state intervention that has been enthusiastically presented by conservative "think tanks" of international capitalism such as the Davos grouping and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Their message has a determinist tone highlighting the futility of resistance to the new world economic order and extolling compliance with the generic global policy settings around free trade and a residual governmental role.

In their zeal the WTO neo-liberal free traders have triumphantly predicted the end of politics with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Unfortunately they have created a new form of divisive cultural politics which has contrived to unify the left and right in their resistance to globalisation. Right wing racist groups such as the National Front in France, Neo-Nazis in Germany and the One Nation Party in Australia have argued that globalisation has led to an erosion of national identity and they have blamed this on immigration. On the extreme left activist groups like September 11 (S11) have argued that the post-Fordist forms of "soft" capitalism have undermined the support structures of the nation-state and led to new forms of exploitation. Much of the left's message has racist overtones too in refusing to come to grips with the nature of international transmigration in the recent phases of globalisation by preferring to represent traditional "white" constituencies rather than the new multi-racial "disposable" work force in less developed nations.

The commonality in their messages also concerns a nostalgia that revives myths about the stable economic and social conditions that characterise nation-states which were said to have mono-ethnic, mono-lingual and mono-religious identities. In many respects the backlash against the economic perspectives of globalisation have emerged within the cultural sphere sparking anxieties about the perceived homogenising qualities of world capitalism. This interpretation of globalisation suggests that local economic, social, cultural

and political systems will be swamped by all embracing "global" forms of social, cultural and economic practice.

Identifying this global culture is difficult but is most often articulated in a resistance to the colonising aspects of new capitalism and popular culture. This global culture finds expression in the popular consumerism of McDonald's and Coca Cola as world products. The resistance to colonising influences of this new globalisation has an ambiguous and racist quality. It leads to a situation where there is a resistance to the "Americanisation" of culture in countries like Japan and the "Japanesification" of American life in North America. This resistance engages in a racist discourse which has been falsely used to explain such tragic events such as Bosnia.

This reading of globalisation attributes the civil turmoil in nations such as the former Yugoslavia and present day Indonesia as simply racial and ethnic tensions emerging from the homogenising qualities of globalisation. It is a position that states that an alternative response to globalisation is a retreat to an exaggerated and regressive localism, suggesting that globalisation has facilitated a reverse tendency towards seeking secure and predictable boundaries around issues of identity, race and ethnicity.

Such as an interpretation of globalisation and nationalism fails to account for the complexities of class, economy and identity and collapses issues into simple and uncomplicated views about race and identity. It ignores the complexities associated with the political economies of these nations and the historic legacies of colonialism that shaped and fuelled hostility across communal groups. This rendering of the "local" offers a polarised either/or perspective of globalisation that excludes an exploration of the commonalities, hybridities and interconnectedness that emerges from alternative ways at analysing globalisation.

New Frameworks for Working with Globalisation

As educators and trainers are confronted by, and contribute to, the transnational education markets that typify globalisation they need to develop new frameworks for practice. These frameworks need to be based on different principles from the impoverished theoretical analysis offered by neo-liberal perspective and the polarities offered by the advocates of the global/localism homogeneity model.

In seeking tools and models to work in the context of globalisation educational managers and teachers need to critically examine the traditional and unproblematic models of "internationalisation" based around countries and national identities. New theoretical tools are needed to explore complexities around social and cultural identity.

Internationalisation tends to view globalisation as a phenomena associated with nations and ignores another level of complexity in analysing global interactions. How might this influence education and training? For instance, much of the transnational education market in South East Asia is not country specific but is shaped by complex interplays between factors such as region, political economy, transmigration, class, historic legacies of colonialism and ethnicity.

When these factors are applied to analyse the SE Asian education market, participation from ethnic Chinese from many different countries and regions becomes a salient feature

that might be obscured when using more orthodox methodologies. This participation is related to the interplay of a complex set of factors beyond a simple national analysis.

Traditional models of international study operates on a comparative paradigm that identifies difference and highlights contrasts. The new intellectual tools for globalisation need to look for commonalities. These tools move away from a comparative analysis towards a relational methodology where similarities are explored. The benefit of this is to ensure that teachers, managers and researcher do not approach issues from a "us" and "them" orientation. In the context of exploring and establishing relationships across the globe, a methodology which seeks to explore commonalities rather than differences, also has the potential to avoid paternalistic and racist overtones.

How might this work and what might be the benefits of a relational strategy? One example is a joint project on the English Language Training Business in Asia that I am involved in with colleagues Michael Singh from RMIT and Ambigapathy Pandian at the University of Sains Malaysia. The research involves the development of case studies in Australia and Malaysia to examine at the implications of global English on English Language Teachers' work. The project has adopted a relational methodology and not traditional methodologies that differentiate between the case study sites on the basis of nation.

A relational strategy is able to explore more fully historical, social, political and economic linkages seeking common themes and experiences. It will stress the importance of social and political contexts in post-colonial times, the nature of multiculturalism, the role of indigenous languages and the cultural impact of globalisation. There is the opportunity to explore how groups interpret globalisation and how that influences their response to other communities across the globe.

It also helps to establish some common ground from which to engage in a dialogue on issues and problems for educators. It is much easier to establish a rigorous and continuous dialogue from a position of commonality than it is from a perception of difference. It also helps establish a discourse based on reciprocity and a mutual long term interest. It is a productive and meaningful foundation to establish and sustain global partnerships. Other perspectives on globalisation lack this capacity and they have the potential to become pre-occupied with difference. Neo-liberal theoretical views of globalisation positions professionals as competitors and the global/local analysis can facilitate exaggerated nationalism and localism. They are inadequate tools to establish equitable global communities of practice and partnerships that need a methodology that seeks to explore common experience, common destiny and breakthrough arbitrary boundaries.

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