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REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH 2008; 78; 330
DOI: 10.3102/0034654308317846

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Research on Globalization and Education

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Research on globalization and education involves the study of intertwined worldwide discourses, processes, and institutions affecting local educational practices and policies. The four major theoretical perspectives concerning globalization and education are world culture, world systems, postcolonial, and culturalist. The major global educational discourses are about the knowledge economy and technology, lifelong learning, global migration or brain circulation, and neoliberalism. The major institutions contributing to global educational discourses and actions are the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Trade Organization, the United Nations, and UNESCO. International testing, in particular the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and instruction in English as the language of commerce are contributing to global uniformity of national curricula. Critics of current global trends support educational alternatives that will preserve local languages and cultures, ensure progressive educational practices that will protect the poor against the rich, and protect the environment and human rights.

**KEYWORDS:** globalization, international education/studies, multiculturalism, economics of education.

Research on globalization and education involves the study of intertwined worldwide discourses, processes, and institutions affecting local educational practices and policies. Researchers come from a variety of disciplines and often take an interdisciplinary approach to their topics. The field is developing its own language and conceptual frameworks, in particular with regard to “flows” and “networks.” Often, the terms societies or civilizations are used to identify groups of peoples sharing similar characteristics who see themselves as connected across the boundaries of nation-states. In addition, research on globalization and education is currently divided into four overlapping theoretical perspectives about the causes and processes of globalization.

In the first section of this article, I will define the field of globalization and education. The second section discusses the major theoretical frameworks for interpreting the field. Based on my definition of the field of globalization and education, the remainder of the sections will review research on the different aspects of the field.
including the global curriculum, the knowledge economy and technology, lifelong learning, global migration and brain circulation, multiculturalism, methods of instruction, testing, gender equality, and English as a global language. Also, I will discuss research on the intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations contributing to the globalization of education such as the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Trade Organization (WTO), UNESCO, the United Nations, and nongovernmental organizations associated with human rights, environmental, and women’s education.

Defining Globalization and Education

The economist Theodore Levitt is credited with coining the term *globalization* in 1985 to describe changes in global economics affecting production, consumption, and investment (Stromquist, 2002). The term was quickly applied to political and cultural changes that affect in common ways large segments of the world’s peoples. One of these common global phenomena is schooling. As the opening editorial to the new 2003 journal *Globalisation, Societies and Education*—the very founding of this journal indicates the growing importance of globalization and education as a field of study—states (Dale & Robertson, 2003), “Formal education is the most commonly found institution and most commonly shared experience of all in the contemporary world” (p. 7). However, globalization of education does not mean that all schools are the same, as indicated by studies of differences between the local and the global (Anderson-Levitt, 2003).

The language of globalization has quickly entered discourses about schooling. Government and business groups talk about the necessity of schools meeting the needs of the global economy. For example, the U.S. organization Achieve, Inc. (2005), formed in 1996 by the National Governors Association and CEOs of major corporations for the purpose of school reform, declared that “high school is now the front line in America’s battle to remain competitive on the increasingly competitive international economic stage” (p. 1). The organization provided the following definition of the global economy with a publication title that suggested the linkages seen by politicians and business people between education and globalization: “America’s High Schools: The Front Line in the Battle for Our Economic Future”:

The integration of the world economy through low-cost information and communications has an even more important implication than the dramatic expansion of both the volume of trade and what can be traded. Trade and technology are making all the nations of the world more alike. Together they can bring all of the world’s companies the same resources—the same scientific research, the same capital, the same parts and components, the same business services, and the same skills. (p. 4)

In a similar fashion, the European Commission’s (1998) document *Teaching and Learning: On Route to the Learning Society* describes three basic impulses for globalization: “These three impulses are the advent of the information society, of scientific and technical civilisation and the globalisation of the economy. All three contribute to the development of a learning society” (p. 21).

The launching of the *Globalisation, Societies and Education* journal required the editors to define their field of study. In the first issue, the editors stated that globalization and education would be considered as an intertwined set of global
processes affecting education, such as worldwide discourses on human capital, economic development, and multiculturalism; intergovernmental organizations; information and communication technology; nongovernmental organizations; and multinational corporations (Dale & Robertson, 2003).

The following represent some of the features alluded to by the editors as global educational processes. With regard to educational discourses, most of the world’s governments discuss similar educational agendas that include investing in education to develop human capital or better workers and to promote economic growth. As a consequence, educational discourses around the world often refer to human capital, lifelong learning for improving job skills, and economic development. Also, the global economy is sparking a mass migration of workers, resulting in global discussions about multicultural education. Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), such as the United Nations, the OECD, and the World Bank, are promoting global educational agendas that reflect educational discourses about human capital, economic development, and multiculturalism. Information and communication technology is speeding the global flow of information and creating a library of world knowledges. Global nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), in particular those concerned with human rights and environmentalism, are trying to influence school curricula throughout the world. Multinational corporations, in particular those involved in publishing, information, testing, for-profit schooling, and computers, are marketing their products to governments, schools, and parents around the world.

As indicated by the journal’s title *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, these intertwined global educational processes are analyzed in the framework of societies in contrast to nation-states. This framework makes it possible to talk about a global society or societies. The term *societies* is meant to encompass something broader than a nation-state by including economic and political organizations, civil society, and culture. In this definition, the nation-state does not disappear but becomes a subset of societies. In other words, particular societies might be identified as having similar political forms such as democratic and totalitarian, similar economic organizations such as market-driven and planned, or similar religions such as Islamic, Christian, and Hindu societies.

Whereas the founders of the journal chose the word *societies* to identify groups of peoples sharing similar characteristics who see themselves as connected across the boundaries of nation-states, others have chosen the word *civilizations* (Hayhoe & Pan, 2001a; Huntington, 1996). The term *civilizations* can be used for the categories of east and west and north and south. However, these terms are so broad that they defy any clear definition. In comparing the thinking of Asian and Western students, Nesbitt (2003) defined his concept of Asian to be a civilization based on Confucian ethical values, such as China, Korea, and Japan, and Western civilization as based on the early works of Greek thinkers like Plato and Aristotle. Huntington (1996) popularized the idea of clashes of civilizations. His vision is of a world divided by religious, cultural, and economic differences that override the boundaries of the nation-state. His civilizational categories include Western, Latin American, African, Islamic, Sinic (China and Korea), Hindu, Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and Japanese. In the future, civilization clashes, he argues, will be between Western, Islamic, and Sinic civilizations.

How is the study of globalization and education different from the traditional field of comparative education? First, researchers on globalization and education
are not drawn exclusively from comparative education, although many of those studying globalization are identified with the field of comparative education. As a new field of study, researchers into the processes and effect of globalization on educational practices and policies come from a variety of education disciplines, including anthropology, curriculum studies, economics, history, sociology, educational policy, comparative education, psychology, and instructional methodologies. For instance, the book *Globalizing Education: Policies, Pedagogies, & Politics* is edited by Michael Apple, a curriculum researcher, Jane Kenway, a sociology of education researcher, and Michael Singh, an educational policy researcher (Apple, Kenway, & Singh, 2005). As a consequence, at least in its initial stages, research in this new field tends to be interdisciplinary. This does not preclude the possibility that sometime in the future, researchers in the field of globalization and education will be specialists educated in doctoral programs devoted to the topic.

Second, comparative education has traditionally focused on comparing the educational systems of nation-states. Referring to the “new world for comparative education,” Dale (2005) wrote that with globalization, the world “can no longer unproblematically be apprehended as made up of autonomous states, an assumption that had been fairly fundamental to much work in comparative education, indeed, the basis of the comparisons it undertook” (p. 123). Or, as Carnoy and Rhoten (2002) asserted, “Before the 1950s, comparative education focused mainly on the philosophical and cultural origins of national education systems” (p. 1). For Dale (2005), globalization studies have given comparative education “a new lease of life” (p. 118). In an editorial in *Comparative Education*, Broadfoot (2003) wrote that the topic of globalization had a positive effect on the historic swings in the perceived value of the field of comparative education: “At the present time we find ourselves at the latter extreme [key educational policy tool], with governments around the world anxious to learn about educational practices in other countries, as they scan the latest international league tables of school performance” (p. 411). Researchers in the field of comparative education have logically turned their attention to the issue of globalization as indicated by the articles appearing in the *Comparative Education* journal such as “Globalisation, Knowledge Economy and Comparative Education” (Dale, 2005) and “Meeting the Global Challenge? Comparing Recent Initiatives in School Science and Technology” (Jordan & Yeomans, 2003).

The study of the effect of globalization on educational processes is developing its own academic language, originating in the work of Appadurai (1996) and Castells (2000). Appadurai (1996) introduced the language of global flows of ideas, practices, institutions, and people, such as *ethnoscapes*, the movement of the world’s peoples; *financescapes*, the movement of trade, money, and capital; *technoscapes*, the movement of technology; *mediascapes*, the movement of images and ideas in popular culture; and *ideoscapes*, the movement of ideas and practices concerning government and other institutional policies. Flow provides a general conceptual framework for the process of globalization. Castells (2000) translates the concept of global flows into networks; the various flows (financescapes, etc.) move through networks that are capable of limitless expansion. Because of the Internet, networks can compress time and space with communication becoming instantaneous. Also, networks will continue to expand and attract members because being in a network increases possibilities of success in most endeavors. In studying the global transformation of political economy, Held, McGrew,
Goldblatt, and Perraton (1999) used the concepts of flows and networks to categorize seven areas of globalization: military, governance, trade and finance, environment, migration, popular media, and communications and transportation. Also, there are grassroots networks promoting democracy and social justice (Bandy, 2004; Smith, 2007). In their conceptualization of globalization, these areas stretch across the boundaries of nation-states and continents with the local and the global becoming enmeshed. Although these three approaches to globalization have provided conceptual frameworks and language to the study of globalization, they have been criticized for not considering the role of human choice or agency in the globalization process (Marginson & Sawir, 2005).

The following sections will review research related to the intertwined worldwide discourses, processes, and institutions affecting educational practices and policies, including in the next section the differing theoretical perspectives concerning globalization and education. The review of worldwide discourses will include the knowledge economy, lifelong learning, global migration and brain circulation, and neoliberalism. Two sections will be devoted to research on the major global institutions affecting worldwide educational practices and policies including the World Bank, OECD, WTO/General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), United Nations, UNESCO, and other intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as human rights, environmental, and women’s organizations. The last section will discuss the growing uniformity of educational practices related to methods of instruction, testing, and use of English.

World Culture, World Systems, Postcolonialist, and Culturalist

Currently, there are four major interpretations of the process of educational globalization. The first is an interpretation that posits the existence of a world culture that contains Western ideals of mass schooling, which serves as a model for national school systems. One premise of world culture scholars is that all cultures are slowly integrating into a single global culture. Often called “neo-institutionalist,” this school of thought believes that nation-states draw on this world culture in planning their school systems (Baker & LeTendre, 2005; Boli & Thomas, 1999a; Lechner & Boli, 2005; Meyer, Kamens, & Benavot, 1992; Ramirez, 2003; Ramirez & Boli, 1987).

The other three interpretive models are sometimes overlapping, in particular with regard to analysis of world knowledges and power. The world systems approach sees the globe as integrated but with two major unequal zones. The core zone is the United States, the European Union, and Japan, which dominates periphery nations. The goal of the core is to legitimize its power by inculcating its values into periphery nations (Arnove, 1980; Clayton, 1998; Wallerstein, 1984, 2004). What I will call postcolonial analysis sees globalization as an effort to impose particular economic and political agendas on the global society that benefit wealthy and rich nations at the expense of the world’s poor (Apple, 2005; Brown & Lauder, 2006; Gabbard, 2000; Olson, 2006; Weiler, 2001). The third interpretation emphasizes cultural variations and the borrowing and lending of educational ideas within a global context (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Benhabib, 2002; Hayhoe & Pan, 2001b; Schriewer & Martinez, 2004; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). This interpretive framework draws on anthropological research and a culturalist theorist perspective.

World cultural theorists argue that schooling based on a Western model is now a global cultural ideal that has resulted in the development of common educational
structures and a common curriculum model (Meyer & Kamens, 1992; Ramirez, 2003; Ramirez & Boli, 1987). As an ideal, this model of schooling is based on a belief in educability of all people, the right to education, and the importance of education in maintaining economic and democratic rights. As a participant in the evolution of world culture theory by a group of sociologists at Stanford University in the 1970s and 1980s, Francisco Ramirez (2003) wrote, “The [world] culture at work, we later asserted, was articulated and transmitted through nation-states, organizations, and experts who themselves embodied the triumph of a schooled world ‘credential society’” (p. 242). In their pioneer survey of the world’s curricula, world cultural theorists John Meyer and David Kamens (1992) concluded “that through this century [20th] one may speak of a relatively clear ‘world primary curriculum’ operating, at least an official standard, in almost all countries” (p. 166). Why is there a common global primary school curriculum? Meyer and Kamens claim that “as national elites define and develop curricular policy, they tend to draw from the best developed models they and their consultants can find” (p. 168). These ideal education models exist in a world educational culture.

In sharp contrast to world cultural theorists who believe that a Western school model globalized because it was the best, world systems analysts believe that the core countries are trying to legitimize their power by using aid agencies, in particular through support of education, to teach capitalist modes of thought and analysis (Arnove, 1980; Tabulawa, 2003; Wallerstein, 1984, 2004). In a similar manner, postcolonialist analysis argues that Western schooling dominates the world scene as the result of the imposition by European imperialism and their Christian missionary allies. Simply stated, Western-style schools spread around the globe as a result of European cultural imperialism (Carnoy, 1974; Spring, 1998, 2006; Willinsky, 1998). With the breakup of colonial empires after World War II, new forms of colonialism or postcolonialism appeared through the work of IGOs, multinational corporations, and trade agreements. In its current manifestation, postcolonialist power promotes market economies, human capital education, and neoliberal school reforms all designed to promote the interests of rich nations and powerful multinational corporations. In the framework of postcolonialism, these critics argue, education is viewed as an economic investment designed to produce better workers to serve multinational corporations (Becker, 2006; Crossley & Tikly, 2004; R. Rhoads & Torres, 2006; Spring, 1998; Stromquist, 2002; Stromquist & Monkman, 2000). In describing what they consider to be the negative effects of global IGOs and trade agreements on Latin American education, Schugurensky and Davidson-Harden (2003) wrote, “We take a postcolonial perspective in considering the historical inequalities . . . mark the region’s relations with the world’s richer countries. . . . [The WTO/GATS] has the potential to continue the cycles of imperialism which have subdued Latin American countries’ development since the time of colonisation” (p. 333).

In general, postcolonial analysis (Crossley & Tikly, 2004) includes issues of slavery, migration and diaspora formation; the effects of race, culture, class and gender in postcolonial settings; histories of resistance and struggle against colonial and neo-colonial domination; the complexities of identity formation and hybridity; language and language rights; the ongoing struggles of indigenous peoples for recognition of their rights. (p. 148)
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Postcolonial analysis considers a prevailing form of knowledge to be the result of political and economic power. In contrast to world cultural theorists, those using postcolonialist analysis believe that the global influence of Western thought is not a result of it being right but of political and economic power. German political scientist Weiler (2001) identifies the relationship between global knowledge and power as involving a hierarchy of knowledge where one form of knowledge is privileged over another; where a particular knowledge is legitimated by power because it legitimizes that power; and where a transnational system of power working through global organizations, such as publishing corporations, research organizations, higher education institutions, professional organizations, and testing services, legitimates one form of knowledge.

A common thread between postcolonial analysis and “culturalists” is the belief in the existence of world knowledges and the subjugation of some knowledges by others. Culturalists reject what they consider to be a simplistic view of world cultural theorists that national elites select the best model of schooling from a world culture of education. They also question the idea that models of schooling are simply imposed on local cultures. This group of theorists believes that local actors borrow from multiple models in the global flow of educational ideas. In contrast to the concept of the existence of a world culture reflecting a single form of knowledge, culturalists stress the existence of different knowledges and different ways of seeing and knowing the world (Hayhoe & Pan, 2001b; Little, 2003; Rahmema, 2001; Zeera, 2001). In addition, culturalists argue that in the global flow, there are other educational ideas besides human capital, such as religious, Freirian, human rights, and environmental education, and multiple forms of progressive education (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Benhabib, 2002; Schriewer & Martinez, 2004; Spring, 2004, 2006; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). For instance, Beverly Lindsay (2005) argues that universities in Zimbabwe and elsewhere should adopt “dynamic paradigms to support peace and progressive development through university enterprises” (p. 194). Choosing from these multiple educational models, local actors adapt them to local circumstances sometimes against the desires of local elites. Summarizing the case studies in her edited book, Steiner-Khamsi (2004) wrote,

Educational transfer from one context to another not only occurs for different reasons, but also plays out differently. For example, despite all the political and economic pressure on low-income countries to comply with “international standards” in education, imported policies do not have homogenizing effects, that is, they do not lead to a convergence of educational systems. (pp. 202–203)

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that postcolonial analysis and culturalists often overlap in their research because they share similar perspectives concerning the existence of multiple knowledges and the subjugation of some knowledges by others. However, the four major interpretive divisions in the field of globalization and education do reflect differing approaches to the future of globalization. The first two interpretive frameworks advocate a particular political agenda. World culturalists support and want to improve the current dominant human capital model of schooling. World systems theorists see this as a process to legitimize the actions of rich nations. Believing in the value of a world culture, Baker and LeTendre (2005) stress the existence of “a world culture of education shaping similar values,
norms, and even operating procedures in schools across all kinds of quite contrasting nations. . . . Education change right now is a result of deepening of existing institutional qualities more than the effect of outside forces” (p. 169). In other words, the dominant model of schooling is okay and any educational change should be focused on its improvement. In contrast, postcolonial analysis posits that the dominant global school model is exploitive of the majority of humanity and destructive to the planet. They would like to replace the dominant model of human capital education with other more progressive forms designed to empower the masses. For example, Franzway (2005) asks,

What can education policy actors and practitioners of new pedagogies do in a world where the pressures of political and economic forces have reached a global scale? What are the possibilities for progressive action when capital and the state grasp at the flows of globalization, while communities, individuals, and social institutions flounder in pessimism and passivity? (p. 265)

A general political agenda among culturalists is recognition of multiple knowledges, alternative cultural frameworks for schooling, and the importance of studying the interaction between the local and the global. As Hayhoe and Pan (2001b) stated with regard to the study of world cultures and knowledges: “Of greatest importance is the readiness to listen to the narrative of the other, and to learn the lessons which can be discovered in distinctive threads of human cultural thought and experience” (p. 20).

**Global Discourses: The Knowledge Economy and Technology**

Global educational discourses play an important role in creating common educational practices and policies. It is certain that a central global discussion is about the knowledge economy. Contained within discourses about the knowledge economy are discussions of technology, human capital, lifelong learning, and the global migration of workers. Brown and Lauder (2006) described the conceptual evolution of the knowledge economy from the original work on human capital economics by Gary Becker (1964, 2006), who argued that industrial development in the 20th century relied on the knowledge and skills of an elite few but that, now, economies depend on the skills and knowledge of all people. Coining the term *postindustrial*, Daniel Bell (1973) predicted that there would be a shift from blue-collar to white-collar labor, requiring a major increase in educated workers. In the 1990s, Peter Drucker (1993) argued that in the new stage of economic development, knowledge rather than ownership of capital generates new wealth and that power was shifting from owners and managers of capital to knowledge workers. Growing income inequality between individuals and nations, according to Robert Reich (1991), was a result of differences in knowledge and skills. In summary, changes in human capital and postindustrialism, according to these theorists, created a knowledge economy where wealth was tied to knowledge workers and ultimately to educational systems.

Discourses about the knowledge economy focus on the necessity of educating students with skills for the global workplace. In this regard, technology plays a double role. First, students are to be educated so that they can continually adapt to a work world where technological innovations are occurring almost daily (Monahan, 2005; World Bank, 2003). The World Bank (2003) has phrased it this way: “A knowledge-based economy relies primarily on the use of ideas rather than
physical abilities and on the application of technology. . . . Equipping people to deal with these demands requires a new model of education and training” (p. xvii). In turn, information technology and communications has made it easier for students to access the world’s knowledges (Stromquist, 2002). Also, technological innovations affect the process of education, as Stoer and Magalhaes (2004) wrote, this makes the “knowledge inherent to the teaching–learning process . . . an extension of the demands of economic globalization, on the one hand, and functional to the new emerging needs of scientific and technological reconfiguration of the processes of production and distribution” (p. 325). An important aspect of rapid technological innovations is a demand for lifelong learning, which will be discussed in detail in the next section.

The knowledge economy plays a role in discussions about economic development and competition between nation-states and supranational government organizations such as the European Union. “The conventional wisdom,” David Guile (2006) wrote, “is that knowledge now constitutes the most important factor of production in the economies of advanced industrial societies; and as a corollary, the populations of these countries require greater access to knowledge as represented by qualifications” (p. 355). For developing countries, discourses on the knowledge economy hold out the promise that expanded educational opportunities will result in economic growth and modernization. “Like a gospel,” Grubb and Lazerson (2006) claimed, “it [the rhetoric of the knowledge economy] has been accepted by an extraordinary range of policymakers, reformers, many [but not all] educators, the business community, most students wanting to get ahead, and much of the public” (p. 295).

Examples of the penetration of the knowledge economy discourse in educational planning can be found throughout the globe (Spring, 2006). The following two examples are of an advanced economy, the European Union, and a developing economy, China. For example, the 2000 European Council’s Lisbon declaration (Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2002) urged member nations “to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (p. 7). The title of a European Commission report on higher education exemplifies the penetration of knowledge economy discourses into policy statements: “Mobilizing the Brainpower of Europe: Enabling Universities to Make Their Full Contribution to the Lisbon Strategy” (Commission of the European Communities, 2005).

Dale (2005) suggests, at least in the case of the European Union, that the discourse of the knowledge economy includes a limitation of the power of the nation-state over education. “Previously, education had been assumed to be, under the European treaty, an exclusively national responsibility,” Dale (2005) wrote, “but the Lisbon statement included the promulgation of sets of Concrete Future Objectives for Education Systems, and stated that these could only be met at the level of the Community and not by individual Member States” (p. 136). Under the Lisbon declaration, European Union schools are to educate their students to be high skilled workers who would ensure success in global economic competition.

The global discourse about the knowledge economy has set the agenda for many national educational policies (Spring, 1998, 2006). One example is the Chinese government’s integration of economic and educational planning. In a World Bank report about the knowledge economies in Hong Kong and Shanghai, Cheng and
Yip (2006) explained, “Both Hong Kong and Shanghai are facing challenges from what is, conveniently, called a ‘knowledge society.’ As such, the education systems in both cities also face major challenges” (p. 4). The authors go on to describe how discussions of the knowledge society are changing educational policies in both cities, in particular with regard to lifelong learners: “The curriculum reforms in both cities seem to point in the same direction—that of a general shift in orientation from concrete knowledge and skills to generic abilities” (p. 34).

In contrast to the focus on increasing educational opportunities to prepare needed workers for the knowledge economy, there is some research evidence that suggests that there is an oversupply of higher education graduates. After analyzing data on college graduates and their income, Brown and Lauder (2006) concluded that, globally, the number of college graduates is larger than labor market demand. The result is educational inflation with reduced wages for college graduates and people occupying jobs for which they are overtrained. They argue that employers are primarily concerned with work attitudes and that good work attitudes are associated with higher levels of education. In other words, their research concludes that in some cases, a higher education degree merely serves the function of identifying workers who have good work attitudes.

Global Discourse: Lifelong Education

Lifelong education is part of the discourse about the knowledge economy. In this context, primary and secondary education becomes preparation for the lifelong learning required by the rapidly changing technology of the knowledge economy. As a consequence, concerns about lifelong learning have a direct effect on primary and secondary curricula. What skills should students learn so that they can become lifelong learners?

Lifelong learning became a worldwide topic of discussion in the 1970s with the publication of a report by UNESCO (Borg & Mayo, 2005). Reflecting a humanist background, this report called for lifelong education as part of individual cultural growth (Faure et al., 1972). This humanist vision of lifelong learning is in sharp contrast to discussions in the late 1980s and 1990s. The OECD reconceptualized lifelong learning by making it part of human capital theory (Field, 2001), and the European Union gave it central prominence as part of the human capital requirements of the knowledge economy (Commission of the European Communities, 2000). Now, lifelong learning is considered essential for individuals to keep pace with the constantly changing global job market and technology (Borg & Mayo, 2005; Spring, 1998). The European Union’s statement on lifelong learning defined it as “all purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence” (Commission of the European Communities, 2000, p. 3).

In discussions of the knowledge economy, preparation for lifelong learning requires an emphasis in primary and secondary schools on learning basic skills, in particular communication and math skills, interpersonal skills, and skills needed to learn other subjects. In discussing the knowledge economy in Hong Kong and Shanghai, Cheng and Yip (2006) explain the meaning of lifelong learning among Chinese school officials wanting to prepare students for the knowledge economy: “ability to learn new things, to work in teams, to communicate effectively, to manage oneself, to question and to innovate, to assume personal responsibility, etc.” (p. 34).

In one document issued by the European Union (Cedefop & Eurydice, 2001), the
skills needed for lifelong learning, skills that are to be taught in primary and secondary schools, are described as “the general elementary and/or cognitive competencies required for a whole series of jobs, indeed all jobs: mathematics, writing, problem-solving, social communication and interpersonal competencies” (p. 31). In the United States, several business surveys found corporate leaders believing that the knowledge economy required primary and secondary students to learn computation, communication, problem-solving skills, and proper work attitudes (Olson, 2006). The report on the 2005 summit on U.S. high schools limited the recommended core curriculum to 4 years of English (communication skills) and 4 years of math, including data analysis and statistics. These were considered the only essential subjects needed for preparation of students for lifelong learning in the knowledge economy (Achieve, Inc., & National Governors Association, 2005).

In summary, discussions about lifelong learning for the knowledge economy resulted in an emphasis in primary and secondary education on teaching communication and math skills as well as interpersonal skills (proper work attitudes). In addition, discussions of lifelong learning, similar to the effect of globalization on comparative education, gave new life to the field of adult education (Armstrong, Miller, & Zukas, 1997; Foley, 2004). The result is a flood of research on lifelong learning and adult education. A review of this research is beyond the scope of this review on globalization and education. However, it is important to note that global discourses on education and knowledge economy changed the earlier humanist vision of lifelong learning to one focused on the ability of workers to adapt to a changing world of work along with increasing the importance of the field of adult education.

Global Migration, Brain Circulation, and Multiculturalism

One of the much studied aspects of the knowledge economy is the global migration of workers. The largest migration is from poorer to wealthier nations. As a consequence, wealthier nations, which have 16% of the world’s workers, have more than 60% of global migrants (Martin, 2005; Parker, 2005). The Report of the Global Commission on International Migration (2005) declared,

International migration has risen to the top of the global policy agenda. . . . In every part of the world, there is now an understanding that the economic, social and cultural benefits of international migration must be more effectively realized, and that the negative consequences of cross-border movement could be better addressed. (p. vii)

Martin (2005) provided the current official description of global migrants for the Global Commission on International Migration:

Migrants are defined by the United Nations as people outside their country of birth or citizenship for 12 months or more. In a world of 190+ sovereign nation states, each of which issues passports and regulates who can cross its borders and stay in its sovereign territory, the UN’s Population Division estimated there were 175 million migrants in 2000, including 65 million or 37 percent in “less developed” nations, which are those outside Europe and North America, Australia/New Zealand, Japan, and the ex-USSR “where it is presented as a separate area.” The number of migrants in less-developed countries was stable in the 1990s, but the developing countries’ share of the world’s migrant stock fell with their rising population. (p. 7)
Originally, the focus was on “brain drain,” a term, according to Vinokur (2006), first used in the United Kingdom to describe the influx of Indian scientists and engineers. Now, the focus is on the developing phenomenon of “brain circulation,” where skilled and professional workers move between wealthy nations or return to their homelands after migrating to another country. The Report of the Global Commission on International Migration (2005) provided this justification for dropping brain drain in favor of brain circulation:

Given the changing pattern of international migration, the notion of “brain drain” is a somewhat outmoded one, implying as it does that a migrant who leaves her or his own country will never go back there. In the current era, there is a need to capitalize upon the growth of human mobility by promoting the notion of “brain circulation,” in which migrants return to their own country on a regular or occasional basis, sharing the benefits of the skills and resources they have acquired while living and working abroad. (p. 31)

Brain circulation has been aided by national efforts to bring back educated workers lost in the brain drain. In China, returning knowledge workers are called “turtles,” as explained by Jiaojiao (2007): “Enticed by more opportunities in a blossoming economy, many overseas Chinese—or ‘turtles’—are swimming home” (p. 20). The Chinese government is offering special benefits to encourage turtles. Malaysia has developed a national strategy to bring scientists home (Robertson, 2006).

Two important areas of educational research developed as a result of brain circulation. One deals with the effect of the migration of skilled and unskilled workers on the countries of origin and host countries. And the other related research area is the accommodation in national school systems of migrant populations.

There is a great deal of debate about the effect of the movement of highly educated populations on the knowledge economies of nations. For instance, what is the long-term effect of the fact that “many Central American and island nations in the Caribbean had more that 50 percent of their university-educated citizens living abroad in 2000” (Ozden & Schiff, 2006, p. 11). Nearly 40% of tertiary-educated adults have left Turkey and Morocco, whereas Africa has lost 30% of its skilled professions (Robertson, 2006). Early research literature emphasized the negative effect of brain drain on countries losing highly educated workers. This literature stressed that countries experiencing brain drain showed a decline in productivity, a loss of health and education services because of a decline in professional workers, and a decline in the tax base through loss of high paid workers (W. Adams, 1968; Grubel & Scott, 1966; Johnson, 1967, 1968; Kapur & McHale, 2005; Kwok & Leland, 1982). Vinokur (2006) reported that training a worker in India to be a data processing specialist in 2001 cost the Indian government from $15,000 to $20,000. If that worker migrates to another country, then India loses the cost of the training plus the worker’s potential contribution to the Indian economy, estimated at $2 billion. Vinokur (2006) argued that the debate over “who wins, who loses and how much” in brain circulation is “irresolvable—analytically and empirically” (p. 20).

Some researchers claim positive effects for countries experiencing brain drain. One positive effect for nations losing educated people to wealthier nations are the remittances sent home, with some of these remittances being used for education and health care (R. Adams, 2006; Cox-Edwards & Ureta, 2003; McKenzie, 2006; Mora & Taylor, 2006). Also, some researchers are suggesting that the migration
results in demands for greater government spending on education (brain gain) by populations in less-developed countries wanting to migrate (Mountford, 1997; Stark, 2004). These researchers, according to Schiff (2006), believe that this can result in a “net brain gain [for countries losing educated workers], that is, a brain gain that is larger than the brain drain; and a net brain gain raises welfare and growth” (p. 202). In the most recent study for the World Bank, Schiff (2006) concluded that previous studies had been overly optimistic about the positive effects of brain drain on countries experiencing the loss of educated workers. His conclusions for the World Bank study were the following: “The [effect of] brain drain on welfare and growth is likely to be significantly greater than reported” (p. 203).

The brain gain for developing nations has resulted, according to some researchers, in a movement of high skilled jobs from developed to developing countries. For instance, Brown and Lauder (2006) found software companies relocating from the United States and the European Union to India. In the United States, according to Brown and Lauder, software developers earned in 1997 from $49,000 to 67,500 as compared with $15,700 to 19,200 in India. The implication of these findings is that rather than India experiencing a brain drain, they could be experiencing a gain in brain-related jobs. Or, in other words, the United States could experience a loss of jobs requiring highly skilled workers to countries with lower wages and an increasing number of college graduates.

What are the effects of educated and skilled migrants and foreign students on the destination country? Researchers find contradictory effects. In the most recent research for the World Bank, Chellaraj, Maskus, and Mattoo (2006) concluded that reducing the flow of students and skilled workers to the United States would have a strong negative effect on innovation in contrast to raising the number of foreign graduate students by 10%, which would increase the number of patent applications by 4.7%. On the other hand, researchers have found no significant increases in wages for college graduates in developed countries, such as the United States and Great Britain, except for those few entering at the top of the wage scale (Mishel & Bernstein, 2003). Two possible implications of these findings is that developed countries are experiencing an oversupply of college graduates, which would reduce wages, and that the brain gain from migration might be depressing wages for college graduates (Brown & Lauder, 2006).

However, the most dramatic effect on developed nations experiencing brain gain through migration has been an increase in multicultural populations and resulting concerns about cultural and religious conflicts and multicultural education. Can societies remain socially cohesive with increased global migration? In 2007, the British government faced the problem of an attempted suicide bombing at the Glasgow airport by an Islamic militant who migrated to the United Kingdom as part of the country’s brain gain of medical workers (Thomas & Hosenball, 2007; Timmons, 2007).

The problem of maintaining social cohesion with global migration is a main concern of the Global Commission on International Migration, which listed it as one of its six “Principles of Action.” Under the heading “Strengthening Social Cohesion Through Integration,” the Commission declared (Report of the Global Commission on International Migration, 2005),
Migrants and citizens of destination countries should respect their legal obligations and benefit from a mutual process of adaptation and integration that accommodates cultural diversity and fosters social cohesion. The integration process should be actively supported by local and national authorities, employers and members of civil society, and should be based on a commitment to non-discrimination and gender equity. It should also be informed by an objective public, political and media discourse on international migration.

(p. 4)

The problem of social cohesion resulting from global migration has stimulated multicultural education research. It is not possible in the limited space of this review to cover all of this research. Therefore, I will limit my review of research to multicultural education issues in a global context in contrast to reviewing the multicultural education research of a particular nation-state such as the United States or Great Britain. For instance, there is research comparing multicultural education programs in differing countries (Banks, 2007; Grant & Lei, 2001; Rotberg, 2004; Stoer & Cortesao, 2000). There are also discussions of global citizenship. Some of these are theoretical works dealing with the ability of nation-states, in particular those having representative or democratic governments, to function with multicultural populations (Appadurai, 1996; Appiah, 2005, 2006; Benhabib, 2002; Kymlicka & Baogang, 2005; Taylor et al., 1994). There are also works on educating global citizens for a multicultural world (R. Adams, 2006; Bryan & Vavrus, 2005; Dower, 2003; Gaudelli, 2003; Hufford & Pedrajias, 2007; Matthews & Sidhu, 2005; McDonough & Feinberg, 2006; Noddings, 2005; Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004).

Global Discourse: Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is an important part of educational discourses in IGOs, such as the World Bank, OECD, and WTO, and within national governments; I will discuss the work of the World Bank, OECD, and WTO in the next section. Neoliberalism is often traced to the work of Friedrich Hayek, an Austrian economist and Nobel Prize winner, who moved to the United States to teach at the University of Chicago from 1950 to 1962 where he founded what is now called the Chicago School of Economics. First published in 1944, Hayek’s (2007) *The Road to Serfdom* led to criticisms of government bureaucracies, including educational bureaucracies. He argued that free markets, rather than government control and bureaucracy, were the best means of determining production and pricing of goods along with the control of other social institutions including schools. Ideally, traditional government services, such as schooling, should be privatized and control turned over to the forces of the marketplace. Milton Friedman, a colleague of Hayek’s at the University of Chicago and 1976 Nobel Prize winner, became the first American to advocate the use of vouchers as a means of providing school choice (Friedman, 1962).

Hayek and some of his followers such as Murray Rothbard wanted to completely privatize education and remove all government control (Rothbard, 1970). However, neoconservatives did not want government to relinquish control over the standards and curriculum of schools and, as a consequence, urged privatization of education with government control through curriculum standards and testing (Apple, 2000; Spring, 2005). In general, the plea of neoliberals is for a combination of free markets and privatization with government regulation or, as it is
known, the “reinvention of government” (Osborne & Gaebler, 1993). Government-provided services, such as schools, are to be privatized but kept under government regulation. Competition is to be the driving force of social institutions along with global and national economies (Apple, 2000; Lauder, Brown, Dillabough, & Halsey, 2006; Stromquist, 2002; Torres & Rhoads, 2006). The ideal of neoliberalism is to create global free markets (Gray, 2004).

Neoliberal school reforms are designed to privatize traditional government school services and return them to the marketplace in the form of school choice and for-profit schooling (Apple, 2000; Apple et al., 2005; Brown & Lauder, 2006; Burbules & Torres, 2000; Crossley & Tikly, 2004; Dale, 2005; Gabbard, 2000; Olssen, 2004; Peters, Marshall, & Fitzsimons, 2000; Stromquist, 2002). Illustrating this argument, Apple (2005) wrote, “Neoliberals are the most powerful element within the alliance supporting conservative modernization. . . . Underpinning this position is a vision of students as human capital . . . as future workers” (p. 214).

Many of the critics of neoliberalism are associated with the antiglobalization movement (Lechner & Boli, 2005). Many critics use postcolonial analysis, which leads them to conclude that neoliberalism is an ideology designed to ensure that privileged nations and people retain their wealth and power in a globalized economy (Becker, 2006; Crossley & Tikly, 2004; R. Rhoads & Torres, 2006; Spring, 1998; Stromquist, 2002; Stromquist & Monkman, 2000). Carney (2003) concluded that neoliberal school policies are out of touch with demands of local cultures. With regard to Latin American education, Schugurensky and Davidson-Harden (2003) concluded that the application of neoliberal policies resulted in “social polarisation in access to education” (p. 339).

World cultural theorists Lechner and Boli (2005) see the limitations of neoliberalism: “Models such as neoliberalism . . . would seem irrelevant in West African states on the verge of collapse. We agree that the relevance of world culture can vary in this way, but this does not diminish its significance as a feature of world society” (p. 28). For world cultural theorists, neoliberalism and its critics are variations on the basic values of world culture and the debate contributes to the evolution of world culture. Lechner and Boli stated, “Appeals to human rights and affirmations of equality, characteristic of much of the movement [antiglobalization and anti-neoliberalism], also adapt world-cultural content for new purposes” (p. 168).

Critics concerned with neoliberal policies with regard to global education policies often, as I will describe in the next section, target the World Bank, OECD, and WTO (Lingard, 2000; Olssen, 2004; Rizvi & Lingard, 2006; Rose, 2003; Spring, 1998). It is these organizations, according to critics, that have spread neoliberal education ideas around the globe.

The World Bank, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and World Trade Organization/General Agreement on Trade in Services

The World Bank, OECD, and WTO/GATS are often linked because of their similar approaches to education and world trade (Henry, Lingard, Rizvi, & Taylor, 2001; Peet, 2003; Rizvi & Lingard, 2006; Spring, 1998). World culture theorists consider these organizations as contributing to the development of a world culture (Chabott, 1999; Sklair, 2004), whereas, as discussed in the previous section, critics of neoliberalism consider them part of postcolonial institutions. Founded in
1946, the World Bank has provided educational loans to developing nations based on human capital economics (Chabott, 1999; Spring, 1998; World Bank, 2003, 2007a). The five largest shareholders of the World Bank are the United States, Japan, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom (World Bank, 2007b).

Educational development became a goal of the World Bank in 1968 when the then-president of the bank Robert McNamara announced, “Our aim here will be to provide assistance where it will contribute most to economic development. This will mean emphasis on educational planning, the starting point for the whole process of educational improvement” (Goldman, 2005, p. 69). McNamara went on to explain that it would mean an expansion of its educational activities.

The World Bank continues to present its educational goals in the framework of economic development: “Education is central to development. . . . It is one of the most powerful instruments for reducing poverty and inequality and lays a foundation for sustained economic growth” (World Bank, 2007b).

Nothing better expresses the World Bank’s commitment to the idea of a knowledge economy and the role of education in developing human capital than its publication *Lifelong Learning in the Global Knowledge Economy* (World Bank, 2003). The book provides a road map for developing countries on how to prepare their populations for the knowledge economy to bring about economic growth. A key to this is instituting, according to the book, lifelong learning from early childhood to retirement and to adapt populations in developing countries to the changing needs of the global economy and technology. In addition to loaning money to promote human capital education, the World Bank has been emphasizing privatization and the restructuring of school systems (Rideout, 2000). The World Bank supports private education in developing countries when governments cannot afford to support public schools for all:

However, in many countries there are other providers of education. Private education encompasses a wide range of providers including for-profit schools (that operate as enterprises), religious schools, non-profit schools run by NGOs, publicly funded schools operated by private boards, and community-owned schools. In other words, there is a market for education. In low-income countries, excess demand for schooling results in private supply when the state cannot afford schooling for all (World Bank, 2007d).

In addition, the World Bank encourages private investment in education through EdInvest, operated by the bank’s International Finance Corporation (2007).

Founded in 1961 as an outgrowth of the Marshall plan in Europe, the OECD is currently made up of 30 of the world’s most economically developed countries including the countries of the European Union, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Turkey, Canada, and the United States, along with partner countries (OECD, 2007a). The OECD is hailed by world cultural theorists as an important contributor to creating global free markets (Gray, 2004). Similar to the World Bank, the OECD takes a human capital approach to education with a concern about social cohesion as related to global migration: “Both individuals and countries benefit from education. For individuals, the potential benefits lie in general quality of life and in the economic returns of sustained, satisfying employment. For countries, the potential benefits lie in economic growth and the development of shared values that underpin social cohesion” (OECD, 2007c).
The OECD operates four important education programs: Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), the Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE), the Programme on Educational Building (PEB), and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2006, 2007d). In recent years, these programs adopted a neoliberal agenda. Rizvi and Lingard (2006) state, “OECD . . . has largely constituted globalization in a performative way as neo-liberal ideology applied to the whole globe . . . [including for education] marketization and privatization on the one hand and strong systems of accountability on the other” (p. 259). A defender of the OECD, Malcolm Skilbeck (2003), the deputy director for education for the OECD, claimed that the OECD’s acceptance of neoliberal policies was “because these tendencies prevail in the world of which it is an extricable part. Yes, it is a think tank but, as with all our thoughts, those of the OECD are embedded in the lifeworlds and cultural settings of its members” (p. 114).

Besides, as stated above, supporting policies similar to the World Bank, the OECD has played a major role in the global standardization of education through its assessment program PISA (Rizvi & Lingard, 2006). Sixty OECD countries and partners participate, which the OECD (2007e) claims represents “90 percent of the world economy” (p. 6). PISA is designed to test skills needed by the knowledge economy:

Developed jointly by OECD member countries through the OECD’s Directorate for Education, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) aims to measure how far students approaching the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills essential for full participation in the knowledge society. (p. 4)

By becoming an international standard, PISA has the direct potential for determining the curriculum content in the areas tested, which are mathematics, reading, and science.

The OECD’s CERI offers the researcher a large collection of publications and statistics including case studies, country surveys, research publications, and reports (OECD, 2007b). The OECD’s neoliberal agenda of privatization and markets is promoted by its higher education department IMHE: “Higher education is undergoing far-reaching change. . . . Among the changes are shifts in the balance between state and market, global and local, public and private, mass education and individualisation, and competition and cooperation” (OECD, 2007g). Similar to CERI, IMHE offers the researcher a wealth of studies and reports on global higher education.

The OECD is contributing to a world culture of schooling through its testing, research, and higher education programs. In fact, one of its programs promotes the international sharing of educational ideas (OECD, 2007f):

The OECD Programme on Educational Building (PEB) promotes the exchange and analysis of policy, research and experience in all matters related to educational building. The planning and design of educational facilities—schools, colleges and universities—has an impact on educational outcomes which is significant but hard to quantify.

Education is among the services covered by the GATS. Legal scholar Christopher Arup (2000) wrote about the potential global effect of the GATS: “Services, particularly those with intellectual content, carry far deeper messages
than goods” (p. 97). The global market in educational services is estimated by Merrill Lynch to be worth outside of the United States $111 billion a year with a “potential consumer base of 32 million students” (Schugurensky & Davidson-Harden, 2003, p. 322). Educational Testing Services (ETS, 2007) described its global marketing:

ETS’s Global Division and its subsidiaries fulfill ETS’s mission in markets around the world. We assist businesses, educational institutions, governments, ministries of education, professional organizations, and test takers by designing, developing and delivering ETS’s standard and customized measurement products and services which include assessments, preparation materials and technical assistance.

Other examples are Laureate Education, Inc., and the Apollo Group, Inc. Laureate Education has a presence in 15 countries serving 240,000 students with ownership in the United States of Walden University and 23 other universities in Asia, Europe, and the Americas (Laureate Education, Inc., 2007a). In 2007, the company announced (Laureate Education, Inc., 2007c), Laureate International Universities, one of the world’s largest networks of private higher education institutions, and the University of Liverpool today announced the expansion of a unique partnership to leverage programs and expertise to create the next generation of international programs for students worldwide.

In 2007, Laureate Education divested itself of the K–12 education business, the Sylvan Learning Centers, to create Sylvan Learning Systems, which, according to Douglas Becker, chairman and CEO of Sylvan Learning Systems, will serve a “global demand for university-level education [that] has been growing at an explosive rate” (Laureate Education, Inc., 2007b). Educate, Inc., owns Sylvan Learning Centers, Hooked on Phonics, and Catapult Learning with its products marketed in Europe under the Schülerhilfe brand (Educate, Inc., 2007). Apollo Group, Inc., owns the University of Phoenix (including University of Phoenix Online and Western International University; Apollo Group, Inc., 2007).

Many of these global information and publishing corporations target developing countries such as Springer Science+Business Media (2007), which stated in its Developing Countries Initiatives,

As a global scientific, technical and medical publisher, we are aware of the role we play in the distribution of scientific information and access to knowledge and research. We make a concerted effort to ensure that the knowledge we manage is also accessible in those parts of the world that are still developing.

The OECD and GATS have promoted a global market in higher education by turning some university administrations into business centers concerned about profitability through expansion into foreign markets (G. Rhoads & Slaughter, 2006; Schugurensky, 2006; Sidhu, 2006). Also, educational products are to be traded within a global free market as explained by Raduntz (2005):

Universities as idea-generating powerhouses are prime targets for investment, by those knowledge-based industries involved in telecommunications, computers, electronics, and biotechnology. As lucrative sites of investment, their potential has been enhanced by the protection of ideas, as intellectual property generated by research, under copyright and patent laws and global trade agreements. (pp. 242–243)

The Laureate Education corporation claims to potential investors that the global market for for-profit higher education is increasing because of a global expansion of the middle class, expanding youth populations in Latin America and Asia, the need for educated human capital, and most important, the difficulties faced by governments in financing public higher education (Laureate Education, Inc., 2007b). On its Web site, the Apollo Group (2007) reports that its founder “John Sperling, believed—and events proved him right—that lifelong employment with a single employer would be replaced by lifelong learning and employment with a variety of employers. Lifelong learning requires an institution dedicated solely to the education of working adults.”

Intergovernmental and Nongovernmental Organizations: Human Rights, Environmentalism, and Women’s Education

Along with the World Bank, OECD, and GATS, other IGOs and NGOs are playing a role in globalizing education. World cultural theorists believe that IGOs and NGOs are the key to creating a world culture (Boli, Loya, & Loftin, 1999; Boli & Thomas, 1999b; Iriye, 2002). From the standpoint of education, IGOs and NGOs have contributed both to the globalization of educational practices and to dissent from neoliberal education policies (Bandy, 2004; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Spring, 2004; Stromquist, 2002).

Some of the IGOs and NGOs work together. For instance, in 1990, the United Nations launched the campaign Education for All at a conference with representatives from 155 nations and 150 NGOs (Spring, 1998). Today, the major partners in Education for All include four branches of the United Nations and the World Bank (UNESCO, 2007a).

Human rights education represents another area of cooperation. Human rights organizations represent the largest number of global NGOs (Keck & Sikkink,

Second in number to human rights organizations, environmental NGOs have been the major critics of human capital education and neoliberal reforms (Caldwell, 1996; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Palmer, 1998; Spring, 2004; Stromquist, 2002). World cultural theorists believe that human rights and environmental activism are part of the process of building a global culture (Lechner & Boli, 2005). The major emphasis in the global environmental education movement is the teaching of sustainability (Sterling, 2001; UNESCO, 1997). It is currently the United Nations decade (2005-2014) for education for sustainable development, with publications and curriculum guides available on the UNESCO Web site (UNESCO, 2007b). The more radical environmental groups advocate ecotage or violent acts to stop environmental destruction (Foreman & Haywood, 1993; Spring, 2004).

IGOs and NGOs are actively involved in the global spread of concern with women’s rights and education. World cultural theorists argue that the international push for women’s rights and equal education is part of the Western ideology embedded in world culture (Berkovitch, 1999). Women’s international activism for equal rights has a long history (Boulding, 1977). The equal education of women and protection of their rights is a significant factor in changing global labor markets (Kenway & Kelly, 2000; Lakes & Carter, 2004). In 1995, representatives from world governments, IGOs, and NGOs met in Beijing for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, where they adopted a Platform for Action that, among many objectives, included the goal of equal access of women to education and the eradication of female illiteracy (Division for the Advancement of Women: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2007b). The conference’s education platform reflects the global discourse on the knowledge economy and human capital education. For instance, another educational objective of the platform was improving women’s access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education for “young women and women re-entering the labour market, to provide skills to meet the needs of a changing socio-economic context for improving their employment opportunities” (Division for the Advancement of Women: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2007c). The same concern with human capital and the knowledge economy was contained in the objective of promoting lifelong learning for girls and women (Division for the Advancement of Women: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2007d).

UNESCO’s Education for All and the World Bank are the two major global campaigns supporting equal education for women (Abu-Ghaida & Klasen, 2004; UNESCO, 2007a; World Bank, 2000, 2007c). The original goal of Education for All was to achieve gender equity by 2005, a goal that wasn’t met (UNESCO, 2007a). Research material on the globalization of women’s rights and education is available through the United Nations (Division for the Advancement of Women: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2007a), the World Bank (2007c), and the campaign for Education for All (UNESCO, 2007a).
Global Uniformity: Instruction, Testing, and English

As discussed previously, the GATS stimulated an existing global trade in education services, contributing to a global uniformity of educational practices. In addition, aid agencies, such as the World Bank and OECD, have championed particular instructional methods and research on those methods (Carney, 2003; Tabulawa, 2003). This is creating, according to world culture theorists, a global culture of schooling (Baker & LeTendre, 2005; Meyer et al., 1992). World system and postcolonial theorists see this process as part of the domination of the core over the periphery (Spring, 2006; Tabulawa, 2003). On the other hand, culturalists see this process as resulting in possible failure or a detrimental loss of local cultural values (Carney, 2003; Jungck & Kajornsin, 2003; May & Aikman, 2003; Warschauer, 2004).

Of particular importance for creating global uniformity of educational practices is global comparison of international test scores. These global comparative test scores might cause national education policy leaders to organize their national curriculum to meet the standards set by these global tests. In the section on Global Education Policies, I have already discussed the importance of the OECD’s PISA and the Educational Testing Service’s Global Division. In addition, the International Association for the Evaluation of Education Achievement (IEA) administers the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies (PIRLS) assessments along with providing the TIMSS–R Video Study of Classroom Practices (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2007). All three of these global testing efforts (OECD, ETS, and IEA) provide valuable data to researchers on assessment and global trends in learning (ETS, 2007; International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2007; OECD, 2007b, 2007e).

World cultural theorists argue that a combination of international tests and the sharing of international research is resulting in a global uniformity of instructional practices. In their analysis of the TIMSS, Baker and LeTendre (2005) found that “if current trends continue, we should expect to see continued standardization of core teaching practices within academic subjects around the world. The curriculum is already highly standardized, and measures of assessment are following close at hand” (p. 115).

Not all researchers agree with Baker and LeTendre. Carney (2003) argued that school effectiveness research using test results as promoted by international donor nations has resulted in a global emphasis on cognitive achievement without a consideration of what local values might define as a good education. Carney proposes that rather than attempting to shape stakeholders to the needs of some internationally defined conception of progress . . . [research might] explore ways in which schooling might take account of the aspirations of stakeholders in order that it might be meaningful to their lives and to their own development needs. (p. 97)

Warschauer (2004) argued that in his study of the introduction of educational technology to improve instruction and learning in Egypt, the inculcation of Western values was made paramount by the aid agency in charge of sending Egyptian educators to the United States and showcasing U.S. hardware and software. “This underlying emphasis on Westernization,” Warshauer concluded, “weakened the project’s potential contribution to educational improvement” (p. 377). Tabulawa
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(2003) argued that aid agencies were implementing student-centered instruction as part of the effort to spread the doctrines of neoliberalism.

Many indigenous cultures openly resist the Western instructional methods and seek to implement traditional methods (Benham & Cooper, 2000; May & Aikman, 2003). In fact, indigenous peoples may be the most vocal in their denunciation of the globalization of educational practices. As one group of defenders of indigenous knowledge and learning stated (Dei, Hall, & Rosenberg, 2000), “Increasingly within [indigenous] communities, refreshing critical voices are emerging to question the processes of knowing and validating knowledge and disseminating it across national and global spaces” (p. 3).

The study of English is a common feature of what Meyer et al. (1992) consider to be a standardized global curriculum. According to Tsui and Tollefson (2007), “Globalization is effected by two inseparable mediational tools, technology and English; proficiencies in these tools have been referred to as global literacy skills” (p. 1). Although the percentage may have increased by now, when they did their study in the early 1990s, they found that 72% of the world’s secondary schools taught English as a modern foreign language (Meyer et al., 1992). Their data demonstrate the 20th-century growth of English as a global language. From 1900 to 1919, only 26.5% of the world’s secondary schools taught English whereas 54.3% taught French and 27.8% taught German. By 1970 to 1986, the percentages changed dramatically, with 72% teaching English, whereas 17.6% taught French and 0.8% taught German (Meyer et al., 1992). Also, some non-English-speaking countries have, after much debate, adopted English as the medium of instruction in higher education (Tollefson & Tsui, 2004).

Despite the growth of English as a global literacy skill, it is important to note that Huntington (1996) found that the actual percentage of the world’s population speaking English actually declined from 9.8% in 1958 to 7.6% in 1992, whereas Hindi language speakers as a percentage of the world’s population increased from 5.2% in 1958 to 6.4% in 1992, and Mandarin speakers as a percentage of the world’s population were 15.2% in 1992. Although these figures indicate that English is still a minority language among the world’s population, the study of English as a foreign language, as noted above, is offered by most national school systems. Also, Huntington argues that his data should not overshadow the importance of English as a form of intercultural communication between diplomats, airline pilots, scientists, business people, and tourists.

How has English become a global literacy skill and a form of intercultural communication? First, it should be noted that a conscious attempt has been made since the 19th century to make Esperanto the global language. Developed by Lazar Ludwik Zamenhof in the 1880s with the belief that a common global language would promote world peace, Esperanto was designed to be easily learned by all people including the poor and not to be associated with any particular nation-state (Janton, 1993). Although Esperanto failed to become the global language, Phillipson (1992) argued that English became the global language as the result of imperialist language policies, in particular by Great Britain. Although British imperialist policies might be responsible for English as a global language, the actual spoken grammar and pronunciation of English varies around the world, resulting in what is called world Englishes (Kachru, 1990).
Some researchers worry that the growth of English as a global language threatens local cultures and identities and could result in the loss of other languages (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). As a result, Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) proposes an international language rights agreement that would guarantee the preservation of minority languages. Maiga (2005) argues that, in Africa, the continued use in the classroom of languages imposed by European colonial powers is undermining educational achievement. This is a result of imposed languages undermining local indigenous cultures and the ability of students to understand their cultural identity. He concludes, “As empirical inquiries . . . demonstrate, beneficial effects are produced when the language of education is the language of culture, that is, when the content and pedagogy permit students to see themselves and to experience their cultural heritage in the curriculum” (p. 180).

Despite concerns about English usage destroying local cultures, Huntington (1996) argued that English today has become de-ethnicized and is no longer associated with any particular culture. Karmani and Pennycook (2005) reach a similar conclusion and point out that the 9/11 Islamic terrorists all spoke fluent English while denouncing American culture. Vaish (2005) concluded from her research in India that despite earlier British use of English instruction for purposes of cultural imperialism, English is studied today in India for mainly economic purposes. She agrees with Huntington that English is no longer associated with a particular national culture but is a tool for participating in the global economy. Spring (2006) argued that English is now the language of a global industrial-consumer culture.

Conclusion

Uniformity of global curriculum, instruction, and testing might be the result of worldwide trends discussed in this article. Global educational discourses on the knowledge economy, lifelong learning, and human capital education are influencing the decisions of national policy makers. Research shows that most IGOs and NGOs, in particular the World Bank and OECD, are also supporting educational plans tied to the knowledge economy and human capital development. Gender equality in education is a priority of most global organizations. Uniformity of global curricula is being supported by international comparisons of scores resulting from the TIMSS and PISA. Neoliberal discourses and the GATS have stimulated a push for global privatization of educational services, in particular in higher education and the sale of information services and books by multinational corporations. Brain circulation might also contribute to a growing uniformity of global educational practices because of local pressures to ensure an education that will help graduates participate in the global economy. The growth of English as the language of global commerce is making the teaching of English a fixture in most national curricula.

There is considerable criticism of the growing global uniformity in education. World systems theorists argue that it is part of a process for legitimizing the actions of rich over poor nations. Those using postcolonial analysis criticize the trend by arguing that it will ensure the hegemony of global elites. Along with many culturalists, postcolonial analysis supports alternative forms of education to those geared for the knowledge economy and human capital, such as progressive and Freirian educational methods. Research done by culturalists concludes that local populations adapt educational practices to local needs and culture, and therefore, rather
than uniformity, there is developing hybrid educational practices combining the local and the global. NGOs, in particular human rights and environmental organizations, are supporting an agenda of progressive human rights and environmental education. And, in sharp contrast to dominant global trends, indigenous groups are demanding the right to use traditional educational practices. Also, some groups are concerned about the loss of local cultures and identity with the trend to making English the global language. These disputes are reinforcing the importance of global educational practices while, at the same time, ensuring possible changes in their current development.

References


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