



Comparative Education: The Dialectic of the Global and the Local. Robert F. Arnove and Carlos Alberto Torres, eds. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999. 434 pp.

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Globalization has been for some time now a theme of interest to educators, particularly in the field of comparative education. This book suggests that the notion of globalization provides a central focus for reframing comparative education research and theory. The major point is that while globalization poses similar problems and is leading to increasing convergence across educational systems around the world, local responses can and do vary, and understanding this so-called dialectic between global forces and local responses is critical to an adequate understanding of education in an international context.

The book's 16 chapters, many of which are written by well-known scholars in the field, offer a good balance of theory pieces, interpretive analyses, and regional case studies. The authors address a wide range of topics including postcolonialism, the role of the state, equality, identity, culture, women's education, centralization/decentralization, reform, adult education, higher education, and the role of international influences and agencies in educational development and research. Regional case studies consider recent educational developments in Eastern Europe and Russia, Latin America, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Anglo-American sphere. Taken together, the chapters offer a panoramic and timely view of current research and thinking in comparative education.

A central theme that emerges from a reading of the book is the by-now classic tension between education as a reproductive process and education for social transformation (the latter frequently interpreted by the book's authors to mean "education for democracy"). Clearly, trends toward reform around the world highlight the international acceptance/appeal of such ideas as "decentralization," while, at the same time, as many authors suggest, the realities of educational and social inequity remain the same or worsen even when such ideologically appealing reforms are put into place. Convergence is also seen in the ways in which educational quality is being defined, as well as in trends toward marketization and privatization.

Yet a major question remains: If the situation for many of the world's poorer populations is not getting any better, and if education continues to be ineffective in



achieving greater social good (most but not all authors are pessimistic on this point), what role has the "dialectic" between global and local to play in the eminent failure of education for positive (i.e., more equitable) social transformation? The hegemony of the global/globalizing idea and its relationship to local forms of belief and practice is frequently targeted, while the indigenous is assumed to challenge and "respond" to the external metanarrative (with varying degrees of effectiveness), itself retaining a fundamental innocence with respect to that narrative. Rather, it may be more productive to explore how, why, and under what circumstances the hegemony of the global devolves into its own localized forms, and how the local ("indigenous") remains not a separate category apart from external/global meaning systems but, rather, an agent/participant in them, transforming them and re-creating new versions of localized—but equally problematic—versions of (hegemonic) reality. It may also be helpful to consider the extent to which cultures, nations, and societies utilize the "global" theme to further reinforce and/or create new categories of the exotic and the other—even within their own borders—to support internally generated and maintained inequities.

The book demonstrates an admirable thematic unity, with nearly every chapter contributing another facet to our understanding of globalization and education—not an easy task to achieve given its scope. The book is a valuable addition to the comparative education literature and would be especially appropriate as a text in comparative education courses. I have used it in teaching my own comparative education class, although the students complained somewhat about the "slant" of many of the chapters (from their point of view, the World Bank and the IMF were just too consistently the "bad guys"). Despite this potential drawback, the book is comprehensive and well researched, and I found many of the essays to be conceptually sophisticated. Although most of the chapters (with a few important exceptions) are not written from an anthropological perspective, anthropologists of education will find much of value here in the extent to which the problematics of culture in an era of globalization are treated as central to the analysis of educational problems around the world.

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