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Chapter 1

Learning in new times: Globalisation, learning and the postcolonial condition

Christine Fox

Introduction: Globalisation, culture and education

‘Globalisation and postcoloniality are perhaps two of the most important terms in social and cultural theory today’ (Gikandi 2001, pg 627). Learners in the 21st century are immersed in local, national and international learning settings that are transformed by new global cultures. In earlier times, Western ideas of modernisation and social change were drawn on to explain shifts in learning experience as students learned new technologies, and developed expertise around new workplaces or professions. In our new times, students live in an incoherent transitional state between the excitement of ever broadening access to information and the crisis of disintegration of old certainties. On the one hand, learning is deeply affected by the homogenising influence of a global economy and a certain sameness to education policy around the world. On the other hand, learning is heavily influenced by global socio-cultural heterogeneity, by a popular culture that grabs and disperses everything and everyone through the media outlets, and by an emerging crisis of identity.

Ted Sanders and Vivien Stewart (2004) have outlined what they see as the educators’ need to respond to the new global era at the school level. ‘We are at the brink of a new epoch: just as schools had to adapt from the Agricultural Age to the Industrial Age to the Information Age, so too do schools now need to adapt to what future generations will no doubt refer to as the “Global Age”’ (Sanders & Stewart 2004, pg 200). Teacher educators need to prepare new teachers for the transition, according to Sanders and Stewart, by encouraging trainees to know more and to have a greater grasp of world cultures and languages.

However, there is a greater need than knowledge out-of-context. Learners need to understand that they too are in the global space, they are part of the story, and narrators as well, not just learners of something ‘out there’ that may not impact on them. For example, in the most dramatic way possible, learners throughout the world were for a moment united in the grief and tragedy of the Asian tsunami of 26 December 2004, which affected countries around the Indian Ocean from Asia to Africa, and caused death and destruction for millions of people.

In a different way, North Americans were united by the tragedy of the September 11th attack in 2001 on the Twin Towers in New York. Since then teachers and teacher educators have been urged in the United States to prepare students to achieve greater global literacy, greater knowledge of the world around them, and improved competency for future careers in global markets. Frequently they see such knowledge as a way to protect American interests. Here is one typical view:

Given the terrorist attacks on our nation and its people and the long twilight war on terrorism in which we are now engaged, it is vital that the generation of Americans now in school develop and cultivate a broad understanding of the economic, cultural, religious, political, military, health, and environmental dynamics around the globe. For all of them affect our interests (Engler & Hunt 2004, pg198).

When there are such global upheavals that attract the international media, it is seen to be ‘only human’ to respond in either of two quite contrasting ways. As was seen through the September 11 upheaval, some responses naturally bring people of a specific nation or culture closer together, to identify what is important in their lives, and to identify closely with their nation-state. Alain Touraine contends that differences between peoples are exacerbated as they struggle to maintain their identities against the encroaching forces of globalisation (Touraine, 2000, cited in Law 2004). For such reasons, therefore, people ‘close ranks’. Alternatively, as was seen in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, many people identify outwards, with a sense of global citizenship that encompasses a consciousness of the wider world.

There are as many definitions of globalisation as there are opinions about how globalisation affects our society. A US scholar, Karen Monkman, aptly describes the political divide, although opinion is in reality on a continuum, not a dichotomy. She says that “like beauty, globalisation is in the eye of the beholder... Those on the political Left criticize globalisation as Western hegemony and imperialism and seek alternatives, while those on the Right praise globalisation as the triumph of Western civilization and liberal democracy. The concept is broad, holistic, multidisciplinary, and contested” (Monkman 2002, pg 497).

Parlo Singh, from Queensland Australia, talks about globalisation as relating to concepts of “time-space compression” and “global consciousness” (Singh 2004). People increasingly discuss world events or invoke images of global products or internationally recognised individuals as if they were present, even though they are actually absent from the local place. “This “globe-talk” is symptomatic of the perception that we live in rapidly changing and uncertain times, and that the fate of local communities is connected to distant political, economic, and cultural happenings’ (Singh 2004, pg 103).

In Parlo Singh’s (2004) review of a number of recent monographs addressing the issues of globalisation and education (reviews of Allman 2001; Levin 2001; Luke 2001; Spring 2001), she introduces the work

of a key globalisation theorist, Arjun Appadurai (Appadurai 1996). Appadurai uses an insightful visual language to describe globalisation in terms of five dimensions, or landscapes, that cross borders and boundaries, namely “ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes”. As Singh points out, Appadurai uses these to show that globalisation is by no means a singular concept, and that, ideas, images, and fashions do not necessarily follow the logic of economic markets or political regulations.

Education is influenced by all five dimensions, where culture and the media, technology and curriculum, the economy and educational ideology all impact on education and are impacted by, or formed by, the flows of globalisation. There are many contradictions as Appadurai describes: ‘the complexity of the current global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics’ (Appadurai 1996, pg33; see also Bhabha 1994). And Tony Welch talks in similar fashion about the complex and contested, phenomenon of globalisation, in particular ‘the unfettered global competition of industries and institutions, including the knowledge and culture industries’ (Welch 2002, pg 433).

It is these contradictions that make for an adventurous project for educators. In the following sections, some questions are posed as to how educators and learners engage with these new times. Are they excited by the prospect of new horizons? Are they afraid of the consequences of going ‘outside the square’? How do we work with learners from a variety of cultures, histories, languages, experiences, subjectivities, and learn from them in these postcolonial times?

New times: the postcolonial lens

In a ‘nation of immigrants’ such as Australia, and most of the so-called new world, it is appropriate to talk about education in postcolonial terms. Postcolonialism is a useful way to describe the effect on societies of movements of people to and from former colonies, and to analyse the consequences in a global context of power and domination, economic privilege, political resistance and the emergence of the subaltern voice (Spivak 1990; Hickling-Hudson et al. 2004; Fox 2004). In terms of education, the impact of these movements is seen in both the content and pedagogy of curriculum. It is seen in the assumptions made by educators about what knowledge is worthwhile and accepted and who is heard. It is seen also in the competing interests of local and global knowledge. It is debated in relation to learning preferences and styles, and to the production of learning resources.

The diaspora of peoples from Europe, Asia, the Americas and Africa throughout the history of the world is more obvious in countries with recent histories of immigration than in countries where immigration took place many centuries ago. Nevertheless, in countries such as South Africa, or in the Caribbean, such a generalisation would not apply. Over the last two generations in Australia, educational practice

has been carried out in the context of multicultural classrooms, second language learning, workplace literacy, education for special populations, indigenous education and, particularly in higher education, international education.

In an interesting summary of key concerns related to globalisation and postcolonialism, Cameron McCarthy and colleagues argued that educators need to ‘pay special attention to developments associated with human immigration, cultural globalization, and the rapid migration of cultural and economic capital and electronically mediated images’ (McCarthy et al. 2003, pg 449; see also Giroux 1991). They aptly cite the poet Césaire’s wry statement (1983 in McCarthy et al. 2003, pg449) that ‘no race has a monopoly on beauty, on intelligence, on strength’. The 21st century curriculum must as a matter of necessity and urgency take into account the ‘transforming context’ of culture and identity for our students. The authors describe a ‘new world of cultural fluidity’ (pg 450); they call upon educators to seek out the multiple meanings and influences of popular culture. Their essay is a significant contribution to a collection of essays written for a special issue on popular culture, postcolonialism and education for the *Harvard Education Review* (2003).

Postcolonialism refers to the ways in which numerous expressions of ‘culture’ increasingly move across territorial borders, as well as to the complex influences of global connections through media and new technologies. It refers to those whom Singh (2004) calls global travellers—people whose international work crosses nation-states (community workers, consultants, teachers, engineers, disaster relief workers etc), migrants, refugees, tourists. Theorists of postcolonial education talk of the postcolonial imagination, where learners choose from a vast array of cultural sources, so that binary opposites of coloniser/colonised no longer have meaning. As McCarthy et al. explain (2003, pg 456):

The work of the postcolonial imagination points toward a larger inventory of associations in the conceptualization of culture and identity than one finds in the educational thought of the cultural monologists. Postcolonial cultural workers are often engaged in the radical practice of double-coding, in which they mobilize two or more plains or fields of idiomatic reference in any given work, ... Postcolonial artists may therefore quote or combine the vernacular and the classical, the traditional and the modern, the cultural reservoir of images of the East and the West, the First World and the Third, the colonial master and the slave.

Postcolonial theory is a lens for understanding contemporary education, a way of describing contemporary learning contexts. Students who enter an educational system from outside their comfort zone rely on the institution to provide stability, knowledge, a way in to social acceptance. Many who enter these institutions fail to find any comfort, and remain outside the mainstream; they may become ‘othered’ by their fellow students or teachers, and respond in a variety of ways including withdrawing, rebelling, finding an alternative identity, or initiating action for positive change, As Marcelo Suarez-Orozco (2001) notes, formal and non formal educational instruction are the primary points of contact

with the society they will be living and working in. For those students who are born locally, they are not only in contact with students who come from beyond their horizons, but they are also deeply involved with the products and concepts of globalisation. For learners (from any culture) who do not accept the bureaucratic interpretation of how best to learn and to live, there are many avenues to 'disrupt preconceptions' of what is the norm. For learners with special needs, and learners who are labelled as minority, or disadvantaged socially, economically, or geographically, the lessons learned from postcolonial experience can embrace new ways of structuring education in new times.

It is with these thoughts and ideas in mind that the next section inquires just what are the products and concepts that impact on learners in new times? To what extent is the new knowledge packaged, sanitised, re-constituted for specific purposes? To what extent does access to information exacerbate the divide between the haves and the have-nots? And in the last section, what are the implications for learning in new times for different learners in different contexts?

The interplay of power and knowledge in new times

In many respects, globalisation has been seen as an economic and technical flow of power and knowledge (Crossley and Watson 2003; Law 2004; Ninnes and Hellstén 2005). Learning is increasingly shaped by the learners' interaction with information technology. A continuum of interaction can be discerned, from the tentative exploration of information through a major search engine such as Google, to the sophisticated engagement with e-learning in higher education. Students of all ages are adept at engaging with games and amusements through the worldwide web if they have access to computers, to a telephone line, and to the means of payment for being online. In such times, the scope of e-learning and information technology is exciting and challenging. Education systems have embraced the computer and its treasures throughout the world, not only in the wealthier countries but also in less industrialised countries.

When considering the uses of information and communication technologies (ICTs), learners and educators have also to consider critically the issues that arise and the potential for some learners to miss out. As Sue Clegg et al. point out (2003), the power of globalisation and the determining effect of technology combine to produce a revolutionary change in the way learning occurs. They believe it is salutary to remember that 'no technologies are neutral. They are always the products of real historical social relations as well as the emergent technical capacities they provide' (Clegg et al. 2003, pg39).

Learners have on the whole little critical understanding of what knowledge is worthwhile, or what knowledge is reliable. They are being taught to rely on the pre-packaged programs without having the experience or wisdom to discern errors, or to challenge widespread 'truths'. Many language programs,

games, interactive e-learning are devised as consumer-driven packages, where marketing is the key motivation. The field of instant knowledge is replete with copied or borrowed products; the difficult question of intellectual property rights and copyright law in the global information arena will be one of the most dynamic debates of our times.

In a provocative lecture in Sydney in 1998, Professor Stewart Clegg discussed the interrelated aspects of power, knowledge and learning within his field of management and organisation theory, a particularly significant part of adult learning (Clegg 1999). He outlined his ideas of exploratory learning as opposed to exploitative learning. Exploratory learning is innovative, usually related to authentic tasks, interested in the knowledge and reasoning behind ideas and decisions. Exploitative learning is more about the use of technology and power to bring about an efficient response, often at the expense of people. In organizations, the highly technological environments of many places tend to value processes and products more than people. In many learning environments, the stimuli are through the computer, in many respects they are abstract events, in Clegg's terms. Experts and managers work through a system of codes and images (take for example nuclear imaging in medicine), and seek answers through intelligent interpretation of these codes. In many respects, learning in new times is about understanding new codes, new technological languages. In such a space, there is always a downside, where those who are not introduced to the new codes are marginalised.

Professor Clegg tells the story of the relationship between technology, power, exploitation, exploratory innovation and the economy. In the 1990s an innovative workplace at Lithgow, west of Sydney, developed world class methods of operating their Berlei Bra factory, He notes:

The work practices of the employees were video-taped and benchmarked and used to configure and train a new factory and employees overseas. And the Australian plant closed down-it was no longer 'competitive': under Australian award conditions it would not have been possible for it to be so. The skills and intelligence of its employees were expropriated and incorporated into routines of the overseas plant, at a fraction of the previous wage costs. ... the chief factors in this story were cost considerations: the rates of exploitation or of wage-payment (from certain perspectives, opposite sides of the same thing) allowed as a minimum in Australia are way above the maximum of any third world economy (Clegg 1999, pg 272).

Clegg's story can be a parable for many learning stories in new times. On the one hand his story is an example of an 'intelligent organisation' using exploratory learning in an environment of high technology. On the other hand, it is an example of exploitative learning, where the employees, or learners, ended up without employment. Stories such as these abound in the 21st Century. Innovations in photography provide an obvious second example, where the use of digital cameras and translation of images to the computer screen are inevitably impacting on the work and expertise of film developers and many others in the photography business. Clegg calls for academics and organisational leaders to

exercise intelligent imagination to understand the interrelatedness of power, knowledge and learning in this new era.

Information technology is a key focus in the move towards a global culture, taking into account the interesting and complex relationships between the local, national, and global. The role of English, and of mass communications is also central to the understanding of the dynamics of learning (Welch 2002; Clegg et al. 2003). Moreover, with learning environments leaning towards internationalisation at the tertiary end of the education system, learners are now working with global knowledge, side by side with students from across the globe, taught by an increasingly international teaching force.

Implications for diverse learners in different contexts

The implications of 21st century changes for learning can be seen from cultural, communication, technological, economic, and values/power-based perspectives, borrowing to some extent from Appadurai's five dimensions of ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financescaples, and ideoscape (Appadurai 1996). In this section, a few of the challenges to be faced and celebrated are summarised.

From a cultural point of view, learning in new times has a richness, a diversity, a tapestry of colour from across the globe. Children and adults with access to global culture have little difficulty in learning beyond the space and time of their physical locality. The operative word here is 'access' — from a global perspective, access has been a privilege of the dominant classes, and particularly a privilege of those whose first language is English (see, for example, the work of Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1994) on the perils of English as a 'killer language'). On the other hand, it could be argued that calling English a killer language suggests an impotence of speakers of language other than English and an inability of the 2nd language colonial speakers to influence the language. Appadurai has suggested that one aspect of globalisation is the extent to which the formerly "colonial" can influence the events and shape aspects of globalisation as active agents. The development of hybridised and localised Englishes (see Graddol, Crystal, Singh, Kell & Pandian) suggest that English is no longer the property of the English elite, and the US, but capable of modification in the interests of those who use it across the globe. There is a suggestion of reconciliation between the old colonial arrogance of English speakers and the new postcolonial users of different forms of English.

Culturally, the new times herald promise of not only reconciliation but conflict—interpersonally, internationally, and between people and their natural environments. Moreover, popular culture, distributed globally through a variety of media, will compete with traditional, classical and 'high' culture for most learners. Researchers refer to the global flows of cultural capital, and how the commodification of electronic media shapes culture, for example working-class cultures in highly

multicultural countries such as the United Kingdom (McCarthy et al. 2003). McCarthy et al. comment that education is strongly influenced by new critical discourses and interdisciplinary frameworks to examine this cultural aspect of globalisation through the fields of cultural studies, postmodernism, multiculturalism, and postcolonialism.

Communicatively, the voice of new times is increasingly the postcolonial voice, the voice of the formerly described 'other' in the West (Fox 2003a, 2003b). With the rapidity and urgency with which messages are sent through electronic channels, information and ideas are spread at lightning speed to communities of people who will never set eyes on the place (or indeed the person), from whence the message originates. Today, the teacher and the intellectual have greater opportunities (and possibly obligations) to become 'public intellectuals' and writers, people with a responsibility to look beyond the claims of those in power. One of the most famous postcolonial theorists, the late Edward Said, emphasised the enormous potential of intelligent communication in an influential article published in New York (Said 2001, pg 27):

...at the dawn of the twenty-first century the writer has taken on more and more of the intellectual's adversarial attributes in such activities as speaking the truth to power, being a witness to persecution and suffering, and supplying a dissenting voice in conflicts with authority.

Edward Said compares the influence of the pamphleteer Jonathan Swift in the early 18th Century compared with writers of the 21st Century. Swift had considerable intellectual clout. One of his most famous pamphlets was distributed to about 11,000 people and changed a part of history. Today, when writing for a publication in any single country on one day, the article can reach literally millions and millions of people globally through the electronic media. The question now is whether the mass availability of information in some ways weakens its influence. This has difficult, and sometimes amusing, ramifications for learners and their mentors. Teachers, trainers and researchers are often challenged both by their students' over-willingness to retrieve information from the web, and their students' reluctance to be discriminatory over the relative quality and reliability of what they find.

Technology encompasses not only ICTs but also every sphere of invention and material commodity. The functioning of technology increasingly involves 'abstract' events according to Steward Clegg (1999) as described earlier. Both in industrial organizations and formal learning organizations such as schools and colleges, technological improvements in efficiency also tend to create a higher workload for those still employed. For example, the management of information tends to fall on the teacher or manager instead of clerical officers. Welch pursues the argument as well that technology increasingly drives pedagogy (Welch 2002). Carnoy and Rhotan (2002) believe that linking economic and social change to changes in how societies transmit knowledge is a fairly new endeavour, and yet it is that transmission process that has the greatest implications for education in the 21st Century. They believe

that the very means of increased communication of values and culture creates the site for resistance and ideological struggle:

Globalized information networks mean transformation of world culture. But globalization also means that many groups feel marginalized by the market values of this new culture. Such groups struggle against the globalized economy by asserting cultural values that may themselves be global (e.g., traditional fundamentalist religion, on the one hand, and postmodern environmentalism and feminism, on the other) but are, at the same time, profoundly antimarket. This constitutes a new kind of struggle over the meaning and value of knowledge (Carney & Rhotan 2002, pg4).

These kinds of contradictions and competing interests are clearly visible in educational endeavours where one educational system 'borrows' from others. In many countries engaged in education reform projects, from Australia to Sri Lanka, from the UK to Indonesia, the marketisation of education competes with values of cultural integrity and local construction of knowledge. The move towards implementing more marketable courses and streamlined corporate governance is viewed by many with suspicion (Fox 2003c). Competing cultural values and the threat of exclusion for marginalised groups are often the driving forces behind resistance.

Probably the most obvious influence on education in these times is economic – world trade, global markets, and the competitive structure of national economies are the driving forces in education and therefore in learning. Sites for learning are largely determined by economics (and the ideologies of governments holding the purse strings), whether they are primary schools, private colleges, public institutions, distance education virtual sites, or tiny village outlets for non formal adult literacy learning. The curriculum is also driven by economic forces. Even the choice of foreign language learned in Australia is an economic event, as more and more students choose languages that have potential for future careers rather than for cultural reasons. Whether a school is integrated for children with disabilities, whether there are special schools or selective schools, or comprehensive schools, are as much about economics as they are about the quality of education.

Conclusion

The question of economics leads this chapter to its conclusion with some thoughts about the quality and values base of education for learners in new times. In all education, and especially in light of the interconnectedness of a globalised world, it is the value placed upon learning that counts. And these values are increasingly becoming globalised and commodified, sometimes to the detriment of creativity and thoughtfulness.

The quality of an educational program, and the value of learning for the learners, can be assessed through the curriculum, the learners' engagement with the program, and the learning environment in

which the curriculum is implemented. Most importantly, the educator or trainer contributes through their own values and presence to that learning environment, those values that are often not publicly recognised.

As a metaphor for the visible and invisible values in education, the role of art education is used here to show the intrinsic importance of learning globally. An article by Tavin and Hausman (2004) about the future of art education provides meaning to the metaphor:

On the one hand, globalisation allows art educators [*Note: read educators in new times*] to be aware of more things in our visual environment. The subjects and themes for classroom study should be expanded to encompass the scope and scale of our students' experiences. This can include deeply felt and personal experiences, political and social issues, environmental decision-making, and images in mass media, as well as works of art, architecture, and design. On the other hand, art teachers can begin to unpack the social and cultural roots and consequences of globalization and, with their students, imagine new opportunities (Tavin & Hausman 2004 pg 49).

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