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Education and Social Transformation

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In keeping with the overall design and concept of our special 50th anniversary volume, this issue focuses on the theme of *Education and Social Transformation* – a theme which is strongly inter-linked with the big question of *What is Learning for?* (theme of issue 1 in volume 50) and *Learning to Be* (theme of issue 2 in volume 50). It is also a theme that was directly inspired by the *Learning to Live Together* pillar in the famous 1996 UNESCO report on lifelong learning, produced by a commission headed by Jacques Delors, which included among its members our current chair of this journal's editorial board (Roberto Carneiro).

Educational systems contain both transformative and reproductive elements. The balance and tensions between these has varied extensively over time and continues to vary across countries and the world's region. Ideally, education would reproduce the “good” and transform the “bad”, but “good” and “bad” are value based and inherently political in nature. Accordingly, the prevailing form of governance and the nature of power relations, as reflected in the dominant socio-cultural and socio-political institutions in a given context, profoundly condition the balance and tensions between these elements.

To reiterate from my contribution in the last issue (Desjardins, 2015), there is little doubt that education has played a crucial role in transforming societies. In OECD countries, it has played a central role in the modernisation process – where modernisation is defined as moving from ‘traditional values’ to ‘secular-rational values’, and from ‘survival values’ to ‘self-expression values’, as defined by Inglehart and Welzel (2010). Inglehart and Welzel also point out with evidence from the World Values Survey that ‘secular-rational values’ which correlate with ‘self-expression values’ tend to be observed in countries with large portions of the population who have studied ‘emancipative type’ philosophies as well as empirically-based science at universities, but especially when this has been in countries which also experienced ‘emancipative type’ political developments (e.g. social democracy).

It is thus not just education *per se*, but the socio-cultural and socio-political contexts in which education is delivered that matter for the transformation of society in ways that are consistent with notions of social justice. For example, in Western democratic societies, the *emancipation* of individuals as well as of collectives is a key aspect undergirding prevailing notions of *social justice*, both in terms of *conscientization* (Freire, 2005), and the extent of freedom that people are capable of reaching so as to identify and pursue what it is that matters to them (Sen, 2009). It is easy to see that education has the potential to foster this kind of emancipation, but as social science has consistently revealed over the last 50 years, this is in no way a straightforward or a ‘to be taken for granted’ process (e.g. Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970).

As I and many others have argued (see Desjardins, 2015), the emergence of neo-liberal, global and post-structural forces, has meant that the era of exclusive top-down forms of State social control imposing a single identity and value formation system, which were so crucial for constructing modern European nation-states as we know them, is now long gone.

The State indeed maintains a strong hand in education in most nation-states but global and market forces are undoubtedly exerting an increasing influence over educational systems. Many now recognize neo-liberalism as one of the dominant forces exerting influence over identity and value formation, often via or in connection with educational processes. As neo-liberals contend, the market, not the State, should set the rules of the game in exerting control, precisely because market forces are more consistent with choice and freedom. While the market is seen by neo-liberals as consistent with greater choice and freedom, others are realising that greater market control also implies a different set of rules of the game imposed from above, which may severely limit the opportunity structure of the economically disadvantaged in ways that can be perceived as unjust.

Insistence by neoliberals to minimise the ability of the State to exert control in ways that are not consistent with market-based principles and hence negate the State's role as the primary arbiter of the *social contract*, has led to growing income and wealth inequalities (Piketty, 2014). Many argue that this has also led to the growing concentration of power in the hands of the few – the so called *one percent*. There is a growing number of wealthy donors and philanthropists that are seeking to influence and even control the electoral process and politics. This is not to deny the value and importance of philanthropy but to recognize that it is not a substitute for the power and moral authority of the state to balance interests of individuals and social groups. In the US, for example, there is rising concern regarding the torrent of money being funneled by wealthy donors into politics, particularly since the U.S. Supreme Court's 2010 Citizens United decision. Together, this toxic mix is arguably undermining the middle class, consensus and not least democratic principles and notions of social justice as discussed above.

Thus the idea that education can simply be taken at face value to be empowering, or serve an enlightening and even transformative function is perhaps too optimistic. Primarily because it neglects the conditioning effects of power relations and the fact that education has important effects on the position of citizens in any prevailing hierarchy of social relations. It also neglects the reproductive forces associated with education, namely those that seek to preserve or even enhance dominant interests. In other words, it neglects how the structure and distribution of different types of capital structure the social world (Bourdieu, 1986).

Meanwhile, post-structural forces continue to reject the State in its attempt to impose from above a single value and identity system embedded in modernization and normalization logic (Desjardins, 2015). Instead, post-structural forces promote diversity, democracy, bottom-up governance, local value systems, emancipation and not least, social justice. Interestingly, these inclinations to reject State power in projecting social control coincide well with neo-liberal interests to atomise the State and promote growing freedom for people to choose how they live. This may help to explain the success of the neo-liberal paradigm (Davies & Bansel, 2007). However, these alignments do not necessarily coincide with the disproportionate accumulation of power and resources in the hands of those who benefit from the neo-liberal project as evidenced

by growing inequalities. While post-structural inclinations can be linked to the rejection of social control by the State, they can also be linked to the rejection of social control by the dominant forces underlying the market (i.e. capital, competition).

As such, living in a global, neo-liberal and post-structural world implies ever evolving complexity, diversity and growing forces beyond the control of any individual or even nation. These forces pose serious challenges to the maintenance of prosperity and cohesion all the while doing justice to democratic principles. For example, it should not be surprising that living in a global, neo-liberal and post-structural world has brought inward-looking and protectionist ideologies based on nationalism and ethnocentrism (e.g. rising support for far right political parties in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, France, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, etc...). Moving forward in a positive direction will no doubt require the continued development of advanced forms of communication and governance involving the daily renewal of political, social and cultural negotiations. Not least, it will require that these processes are well informed by a continuous documentation of the economic and social conditions of people, as well as critical inquiry and reflection. We hope that educational systems and educational research can continue to contribute to the latter in positive ways.

An important point is that education is only part of the picture and interacts with other institutions and social policies such as those that affect the family, employment, the environment and so on. Education and education research nonetheless have an important role to play in revealing these linkages and improving governance more generally. In other words, an exclusive focus on factors within educational systems such as teaching and learning interactions and how these are organized is too narrow. We need to also account for the role of wider institutional and public policy frameworks in conditioning learning and other concomitant outcomes associated with well being.

Consistent with these considerations we have invited contributions for this issue that reflect on the role and effectiveness of education in responding to or propagating major societal, cultural and political developments in recent history. Of particular interest are the successes and failures of education in transforming existing and perceived injustices, and how education and education research should/could proceed to promote further economic and social progress. The focus is on Europe but developments across the globe and in other regions are also important since these too are often relevant to Europe.

In this issue

As in Issues 1 and 2 for this special 50th anniversary volume, we have included in addition to longer, more academic articles (*original articles*), four shorter, more personal reflection pieces (*thought pieces*), which are written in a freer style and take whatever angle the author chooses, in addressing an important but simple question. For this particular issue, the question was:

What role, if any, is there for education systems to play in fostering social transformation for social justice?

We think this set of four reflections gathered at the beginning add substantially to the edition by offering the reader different perspectives related to the topic of *education and social transformation*.

The first thought piece is by **Alan Tuckett** who reflects on the potential role of adult education in transforming societies. Recognising that adult education sits, overwhelmingly, at the margins of public educational systems with limited budgets and public policy attention, adult educators nevertheless see their role as being facilitators of social transformation. He discusses several examples of the successful role that adult education has played in fostering social change in recent history.

Mannie Sher and **Sadie King** reflect on the ‘carrot and stick’ approach to educational policy and practice as a barrier to the potential role of education in fostering social transformation. Current prescriptive pedagogies that rely on the child's, teacher's and school's need to succeed, combined with fear of failure to motivate performance, construct individuals as instrumental learners, rather than emancipated learners consistent with the notion of social justice.

In the next thought piece, **Rodolfo Stavenhagen** addresses a topic that is all too often neglected, namely Indigenous peoples' rights to education and self determination. He reflects on the role of education in fostering social transformation and social justice in the context of issues concerning intercultural learning within the framework of multicultural societies.

In the last thought piece, **Stephen Ball** reflects on how the current dynamics of market forces has transformed the life of the university and is hindering what should be one of the core missions of higher education institutions.

The first longer article is by **Carlos Alberto Torres** who explores the complex and multi-faceted concept of globalisation, which is now recognized as a plural phenomenon. He discusses several forms of globalisation, ranging from transnational top-down forces to bottom-up forces. These multiple faces of globalisation are playing a major role in shaping and re-shaping the role and purposes of education. Several agendas regarding the limits and possibilities of globalisation forces and their impact on our lives are highlighted, including the agendas of *hyper-globalisers*, *skeptics (or anti-globalisers)* and *transformationists*. *Hyper-globalisers* are those who push for models of neo-liberalism and who believe that the quicker we moved to make our world flatter, the better. At the other end of the spectrum is the agenda of the *skeptics*, who see an unprecedented wave of inequality worldwide as a consequence of globalization from above. In the middle are the multiple agendas of so called *transformationists* who are struggling to make sense of the limits and possibilities of the new realities. Some *transformationists* recognise that sovereignty and State power can no longer be conceived in the same way and that this has implications for models of citizenship education and the role of universities. The new context brings into question the sufficiency of national citizenship and other localist tendencies. In particular, it introduces a need to promote a broader view of one's sense of rights and responsibilities within a more expansive spatial vision and understanding of the world. *Global citizenship* is thus seen to include an understanding of global ties and as a consequence the need for a commitment to the collective good beyond one's own borders or local interests. It is meant to complement not substitute traditional notions of national citizenship. According to the author, the competing agendas and tensions between *cosmopolitan* and *localist* varieties of *transformationists* are interacting both in consistent and inconsistent ways with the

transformation of the different roles and functions of different kinds of national and global universities.

Global citizenship education is also addressed by **Greg Misiaszek**, but in combination with the concept of *ecopedagogy*. As a form of environmental education, *ecopedagogy* encompasses a critical approach to the teaching and learning of connections between environmental and social problems. It is grounded in the critical and popular education methods of the Brazilian educational scholar Paulo Freire. Tensions exist in the aims of different environment education programmes, as within all forms of education, namely between reproducing or transforming behaviours and structures that sustain socio-environmental oppressions. In recognizing this, an explicit goal of *ecopedagogy* is to promote transformative action by helping to reveal socio-environmental connections that oppress individuals and societies. The analysis suggests some of the policy and practice changes needed for environmental education efforts to be more effective and socially just, and also how local vs global models of citizenship education are both relevant for effective transformative action in this regard.

Mathias Urban approaches the theme of education and social transformation by critically analyzing European and international policy approaches and strategies towards young children, their families and communities in a rapidly changing global context. The early childhood research and practice community has welcomed and even contributed to the idea that early childhood education is a good economic investment, primarily because it has raised the visibility and support of early childhood education. But in reality, policies and practices grounded in this logic may not be appropriate or make a difference, especially for those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. This is predicated on the author's astute observation that policies and practices which aim at 'closing the gap' are grounded in a logic of transformation into a normality that no longer exists. Instead, the new realities of modern societies involve diversity, inequality and fragmentation. Accordingly, new thinking and approaches are needed to early childhood education, firmly grounded in a logic based on democratic practices, recognition and affirmation.

Nelly Stromquist approaches the theme of education and social transformation by examining the concept of women's empowerment as a foundational element in a theory of social change in which the oppressed must be key actors in the change process. Four dimensions to empowerment are discussed, namely the economic, political, knowledge, and psychological, which are not necessarily well fostered via schooling or formal education. The author contends that schools do not always provide friendly or even safe spaces for girls. Instead, she suggests that the successful cases of empowerment through education have occurred in non-formal education programmes which focus on fostering critical reflection on gendered social norms and encourage corrective responses. A key point brought out in the analysis is the distinction between private and public spaces and how this is related to the empowerment process. This is because private space seriously constrains women's availability and possibilities for transformative action. As such, the promotion of agency in the public sphere plays a major role in the development of women's empowerment.

Maurice Crul approaches the theme of education and social transformation by focusing on the extent to which education can be the most important mobility channel for children of immigrants. The empirical and comparative analysis helps to reveal that this depends on the

different educational and institutional arrangements in different countries, such as the different ways the transition to the labour market is organized.

In the next article, **Lauren Resnick** and **Faith Schantz** build a case for transforming learning systems. In particular they emphasize and develop a view that we can grow our intelligence through learning. Schooling systems in Western societies have largely been built on the idea that intelligence is a fixed trait that some people “have,” and others do not, which continues to persist not only as an idea among educators and the population, but as a foundational premise deeply embedded in current educational practices. The authors support their claim that intelligence grows through learning with evidence from population trends and powerful examples of school interventions. They then consider how schools might deliberately *create* intelligence on the basis of these examples, and discuss the implications not only for how schools are organized, but what their very purpose should be.

In the final article, **Gábor Halász** tackles the broad topic of education and social transformation in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), particularly the 11 countries of this region which became members of the EU in 2004 or following this date. In the period before the collapse of Communism and the transition period after its collapse, the purpose of education was strongly connected to the broader goals of transformation, as it also was during the EU accession period. The major difference was the orientation of the transformation and toward what end. The latter period has emphasized a strengthening of the linkages between education and the labour market and in particular the responsiveness of education and training systems to market developments. The article considers the impact of some European mechanisms that have contributed to the strengthening of such linkages, and also the reforms, processes and programmes they have initiated. The author contends that the adoption of the lifelong learning approach of the EU has been a major engine to strengthening the role of education in social and economic development in the CEE region, but more efforts are needed to translate this approach into effective policies and practices.

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