

# Book Review

***Globalization and International Education***, by Robin Shields, London, Bloomsbury Academic (2013), 160 pages, ISBN: 978-1-44113-576-6.

Why do contemporary global and international debates on education matter? Whether you are a parent in the UK getting to grips with academies and free schools, a child sitting a standardized test in the USA, or a parent in Nigeria having to pay school fees, there are a range of deep, fundamental issues and debates that connect children and parents across the world. Moving beyond the rhetoric to understand the nature of these debates, and locating education within wider social, political, and economic processes, is therefore of great relevance to anyone wanting to understand education at anything beyond a superficial level.

The aim, therefore, of Robin Shields's book, *Globalization and International Education*, to 'provide a discussion and analysis of contemporary issues in education that are global or international in scope' (p. 7) is of prime importance, not just for students of education studies, but for others, including those with an interest in education generally, and practitioners like myself wishing to take a step back to either engage or refresh themselves with the wider landscape. And the approach Shields takes, to 'provide a critical analysis of assumptions, values and beliefs that underlie education policy and practice' (p. 8) is the right one, allowing the reader to begin unpicking the threads of contemporary trends and discourse and consider what lies at their heart.

Shields opens with the metaphor of a cup, taken from a Buddhist *koan*, or short story, illustrating that we all come 'filled' with our own preconceptions and ideas, and introduces discourse analysis as the tool with which to examine these preconceptions, locate their origins, and understand their implications. From that point on we are taken through two broad areas of contemporary relevance: the link between education and development, and between education and globalization. By mapping out the terrain, and providing conceptual frameworks, case studies, and reflective exercises, we are given the tools to gain not just an overview but an insight into the history, developments, and concepts at the heart of each, and consider these in relation to our own world-views.

We find a well-constructed outline of international development and its relationship to education, charting the shift from colonial to modernization and human capital

approaches, the rise of aid agencies, and the growth of the Education for All (EFA) movement. Capturing the important trends and with useful case studies, we consider the shift in underlying values and motivations, then move on to consider Marxist, post-structural, and post-colonial critiques of the development project with a helpful analytical framework to unpick the fundamentally important questions. One could hope for more emphasis on the role of the state, and reference to more recent discussions on measuring 'quality' in the EFA discourse, which would be useful to link to the subsequent globalization debate. And at times one is left in little doubt as to the author's own view as to which arguments are most 'compelling' (for example, the slightly one-sided examples used in the development critique). However, that might be a personal preference and shouldn't detract from what is a highly impressive and concise overview, which provides an excellent grounding for both new and experienced readers in this area.

Following a thoughtful and balanced analysis of the education and conflict dialectic, we then move on to look at globalization and its relationship to education. This is considered through three lenses: neo-liberalism, world systems, and world culture theories - with a useful case study on decentralization (with implicit links to development) and a discussion contrasting these perspectives to illustrate the complexity and crossover between them. This takes us into chapters that skilfully explore the global knowledge economy, ICT, and higher education, which link particularly to discourses of globalization in the case of the knowledge economy and higher education, and development with regard to ICT.

By analysing the underlying values propagated through these discourses, the pernicious and (some might say) unsubstantiated ideological rhetoric used to justify a host of readily apparent 'convergence' trends is revealed, including standardized testing, international ranking, and the globally 'competitive' university market - all built on the assumption of knowledge as economic commodity rather than public good. A particularly good analysis of the 'one laptop per child' movement illustrates similarly how certain values and world-views may overcome the evidence regarding ICT education and development. This leaves us with a range of fundamental questions to consider - equipped with the tools and the motivation to critically engage, and recognizing connections between trends spanning the entire globe.

One main issue is that themes are not linked as well as they might be. For instance, the theme of development and globalization could be more explicitly intertwined, especially given the deep shift wrought to the development project by the same neo-liberal discourses as have shaped globalization. And the tensions between the very different justifications for education outlined by human capital theory and EFA are not picked up again, as they could be - for example, when discussing the knowledge economy or ICT *for* development. The other concern: a slight feeling of dissatisfaction

with the conclusions, which appear less to draw together those themes considered throughout the book than to instead introduce and discuss Wallerstein's 'terminal crisis,' at a point where the reader perhaps needs consolidation rather than new ideas.

Therefore, through its thematic analysis of global and international issues in education, this book achieves what it sets out to do by revealing critically what lies at the heart of some key contemporary issues, prompting the reader to ask questions and providing a platform for further investigation. As a broad guide to such issues, it cannot be exhaustive; students new to the area should be aware that there may be other dimensions to explore (some highlighted above), and readers with 'baggage' will recognize areas that could be developed. However, the sharpness and analytical lenses are to be admired. More connections could be drawn and perhaps with a more coherent conclusion, making the parts potentially worth more than the sum. However, as a companion guide for those wanting to engage with current global and international education debates, I found it enjoyable and concise and would highly recommend it.

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