

Globalization and Education – A Case Study of British Columbia Project Summary

This research study concerns educational reforms and change, and more specifically the effects of “globalization” on education – schools, colleges and universities – and on “stakeholders,” that is, on teachers, professors, educators, parents and of course learners in formal settings.

There are many definitions of globalization, or perhaps more accurately, many globalizations. A distinction is made between “economic globalization” which stresses the imperatives of market competition and global capital in promoting a convergence among national education systems and “global rationalization” which is based on the ideas of a converging unitary cultural system and institutional isomorphism. These two concepts will form the methodological lens for the study.

Examples for the impact of globalization upon K – 12, adult and university education is are the way governments restructure their systems of support for education, as a consequence of shifting economic and social priorities and the way academic culture in some countries is shifting from a collectivist and public orientation to norms of individualism and individual (parental) choice that often stand for economic conservatism and religious fundamentalism.

Certain reforms of the last decade and a half might be characterized as “competition-based” . The quest for efficiency and accountability is at the origin of the development of performance indicators to control and monitor institutional 'output'. Furthermore, academic programs and curricula are modified and adapted to fit standards of accreditation and ranking agencies that make for increased homogeneity.

Privatization is a major, or “primary” reform device tied to neoliberal globalization, perhaps the most dominant and visible evidence of globalization in formal schooling and higher education. For education it means two things: (1) transferring responsibility for providers, regulating and financing education from the state to individuals and private organizations and (2) the adoption or adaptation of market mechanisms in public school and higher education systems.

Part of a larger Canadian and international research project, the project is designed as a case study of schools, universities and other formal educational settings in British Columbia. We shall examine:

- (1) which significant changes have taken place in the education system in the province and how they have translated into curricula, working conditions of teacher and other personnel as well as learning conditions for learners in BC's schools, colleges, universities and other formal educational settings;
- (2) what were the driving forces for these changes; and
- (3) whether and how changes introduced in British Columbia by legislation, ministerial fiat, institutional management decision, or by collective agreement, can be explained by these two theoretical constructs.

The results of our research will be compared with those from an Ontario study to be conducted in parallel, with a view to distilling common features of developments in the two provinces in a report on (anglophone) Canada . This synthesis report will then in turn serve as the Canadian input into an international study, conducted in parallel and with a common methodological framework in 15 countries.

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