

The Global Classroom

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Abstract

The nature of pedagogy and the collaboration between international parties in subject design ameliorates some of the more negative characteristics of globalized education. I argue that the nature of globalization is to be found in the small and ongoing practices that constitute collaboration between differing parties. In this way, what globalization means is in fact a constantly negotiated contingent and never settled. My argument is that reductive critiques of internationalization are far too simplistic. The example of EME 150 and the uptake through the Malaysian educational system of some of its components is an example not of 'imposition' or 'imperialism' but rather of a more negotiated and collaborative pedagogy that points to some of the benefits of cooperation, collaboration and by inference of globalization

The Global Classroom: Effective Subject and Pedagogy Design as Positive aspects of Globalization

Jan Aart Scholte argues that globalization is characterized by the 'transcendence of boundaries' (Scholte 1997). The discourse of globalization and internationalization is now a critical driver of global educational reform (Guehenno 1999; Plattner 1999; Sites 2000; Walby 2000). From marketization in Australian Universities through to reform in Malaysian Teaching Institutes, the forces of global competition, as well as the need to become competitive in an increasingly competitive and aggressive international economy are forces for change. On the one hand, educational reform needs to maintain national priorities as argued by Mansell and When (Mansell and Wehn 1998). On the other hand, the process of global competition and competitiveness necessitate a radical restructuring of priorities to entail the continued effectiveness of national goals.

The emergence of knowledge economies based on the structural requirement of the knowledge societies means that the structural role of education in such an environment is shifting. No longer, content with an educational system where elite knowledge was the privilege of a minority and many were consigned to work in a Fordist industrial economy, post-industrial work requires a far broader range of skills and abilities. The ongoing need for life long learning and ability to communicate and adapt to rapid change is putting pressure on curriculum pedagogy and the structure of schooling (Cogburn 1998). Keeping formal educational institutions relevant to the educational needs of citizens in a globalized world is of course a significant driver for educational reform.

Critics such as Bowers from a more conservative position and Giroux from a more radical position argue that globalization in education is in some measure aimed at creating consumers for a global capitalist order. The argument is that essentially the process of globalization is about marketization. The standardization of education to meet the growing and ever expanding needs of a global market is for these thinkers among the major characteristics of globalization. In this way, the relationship of globalization to education is a relationship of commodification and homogenization. Students in a globalized education system are enacted as consumers and the process of inculcating consumer consciousness into students and hence reacculturating them to the needs of a global capitalist order. Giroux argues that the 'learner' is 'simply a consumer of information' within the demands of educational globalization (Giroux 2000).

CA Bowers argues in a similar vein concerning the politics and economics of globalization but from a conservative position. This enables him to go a step further with relation to pedagogy. Bowers also argues that economic and cultural imperialism animate globalization, however he also contends that forms of progressive social constructivist pedagogy rather than being a way to counter and ameliorate aspects of globalization are in fact examples of its worst face. In other words, Bowers argument is that constructivist pedagogy such as the social constructivism of Vygotsky, Dewey and Freire are the Trojan Horse of Western imperialism (Bowers 2003; Bowers 2005; Sher and Flinders 2006).

Bowers' position is that social constructive pedagogy is in fact an extension of western values and in this sense undercuts non-western societies by subjecting them to an English curriculum and mode of instruction that devalues and inhibits students from maintaining and living their local cultures. According to Bowers, students learn in English in a system designed by Westerners and intergenerational local knowledge is lost. In this way, the very fact of teaching in English in constructivist pedagogy is an act of imperialism.

According to Bowers, communities lose their traditions and sense of community in a globalized world and that progressive social constructivist pedagogy is a corollary to this process (Bowers 2001):

Both Bowers from the right and Giroux from the left provide us with interesting critiques of globalization and its relationship to pedagogy (Neiman 1990). From the Left Giroux and those like him decry the spread of capitalist rationality and homogenisation that occurs in schooling because of market forces. The radical left critics however see the solution in radical democratic terms as the overcoming of capitalism. (Giroux 1988; Giroux 1989; Giroux 1991; Giroux 1992; Giroux 1993; Giroux 2003). Bowers and others on the Right also decry the cultural impact of globalization but tend to see the alternative as an uncritical acceptance and celebration of traditional cultures and pedagogical practices. It is my contention that both strains of thought provide practitioners with little room to move beyond either radical overhaul or conservative restoration. Both discourses are limited in their applicability to the Malaysian context.

Globalization and pedagogy provide a terrain for flexibility and adaptability within a context where cultural dignity remains viable and alive. The case I am discussing belies a simple characterization of Australian and Malaysian educational interactions as acts of imperialism. In other words the argument that globalization is simply imperialism under another guise fails to take into account the complex and ongoing changes that occur in society and in some ways sets up an over simplified dichotomy between capitalism and traditional culture. In the Malaysian example, beginning at the top, the commitment of the Malaysian government to globalisation and international competitiveness is not simply submissiveness or resignation. Rather it is an aggressive and empowering commitment to ensuring national dignity in a competitive and tough world. This aggressive commitment is articulated in the Ninth Malaysian Plan. According to the Plan, 'there is a need to strengthen the overall mindset, culture, values and social institutions to be more in step with the country's economic development' (2006).

The nature of the relationship between globalization and pedagogy is in other words constantly open to negotiation and dialectical change. To understand the dialectics of globalization in the local Malaysian context requires much more sophisticated theory than either Right wing or hard Left wing critic's offer. The trajectory of engagement with globalisation is a complex and nuanced one. Yet this complexity belies any easy characterization of it as simply imperialism or exploitation. What's more we must also understand the Malaysian push to internationalise and globalize in education within the context of ethnic and religious diversity and the specific historical milieu Malaysia finds

it self within. The issue of the respective development of diverse ethnicities in the Malaysian context is also critical to the success or otherwise of globalization in education (Ghee 1995).

The Project

How then does this translate to pedagogical practice? An excellent example of this application of dialectical change to pedagogy lies in the work done by Deakin University with three Malaysian Teachers Institutes (University 2006). The following discussion shall now describe one example of collaborative engagement. One project that is part of this reform is the work between Deakin University and the Malaysian Ministry of Education. In collaboration with Deakin University, three Malaysian Teaching institutes have been involved in a program to establish and run a degree for Malaysian trainee teachers that would help advance the standards of Malaysian teacher training. Deakin alongside another Australian University and two UK Universities were selected for this important program. This is an example of global partners in education delivering a primary education degree in Malaysia. It is in short a practical example of the application of the principles of the Ninth Malaysian Plan where 'greater emphasis will be given to developing a strong foundation in Mathematics, Science and the English language as well as to instil good ethics and discipline among school children' (2006). This is also within a framework that instils and develops 'creativity as well as analytical and problem-solving skills' in students. The Ninth Plan specifically outlines the necessity and objective of 'the teaching and learning of Science and Mathematics in English' (2006). The subject EME 150 was designed around a vigorous commitment to scaffolded instruction and deep learning which in large measure was drawn from constructivist theory. We drew on the significant research conducted in Malaysian schools and Universities with regards to the application of constructivist pedagogy (Abdul Razak Hussain 2001; Campbell 2006; Chan 2004; Ismail 2005; Kaur 2001; Lee and Tan 2004; Neo 2002; Wong 2003; Yap 2004; Yen, Bakar, Roslan, Luan, and Rahman 2005). EME 150 was introduced to the PISMP (Program Ijazah Sarjana Muda Perguruan) group in the second semester of their first year Bachelor of Education programme. It was one of six education units offered as part of the thirty-two-unit course in collaboration with Deakin University of Australia (Campbell and Chin 2007).

Collaboration

The real proof about the nature of the educational reform the actual process of engagement between teachers from Deakin University and the Malaysian teaching staff belies any easy characterization of the process as imperialistic. From the outset, the approach of the staff engaged with EME 150 involved collaborative cooperation. Not knowing exactly what to expect we at Deakin entered our first discussions with the Malaysian colleagues with a sense that what was important was not to act as if we were the recipients of wisdom and our colleagues somehow empty vessels waiting to be filled. In other words, we were well aware of the Freirian requirement that we not treat our colleagues as simply empty containers (Freire 1972a; Freire 1972b; Freire 1974). We needed to fully engage with the practice of critical pedagogy and socially constructivist pedagogy by evidencing these values in our initial collaboration and course negotiation. The problem we faced was how to design a subject that took seriously the need to counter the negative and pejorative impact that globalization and internationalization can have on local cultures.

How do we ameliorate or contend with the way that internationalisation and globalisation can construct and frame relationships in oppressive ways and make border crossing a pedagogy of empowerment rather than one of imposition? In pedagogical terms, how do we design pedagogy that is empowering and inclusive and not simply a Trojan horse for imposed values? The feedback from staff involved in the collaborative work was positive and points to the genuinely positive way in which this example of globalization was framed. In evaluating our work in EME 150, we focused on several areas. We asked our Malaysian colleagues about their experience and how they saw the collaboration between the Deakin staff and the Malaysian staff. In feedback on this issue, we found that the Malaysian staff felt that because of participating in EME 150 they:

- 'Learnt more about educators system as compared Malaysian system which is more exam orientated'.
- 'Sharpen my skills in education and helped me to understand my students better'.
- 'Knowledge and more confidence'.
- 'Improve understanding and knowledge of the topic'.
- 'Opportunity to lecture in English, in preparing for the lectures I have also gained much knowledge from my own reading.'

- 'Gained more knowledge in conducting my class, more readings have a chance to teach in English, instruction and share ideas with Deakin lecturers' (Campbell 2006).

We also asked our Malaysian colleagues to describe their experience in working in a cross-cultural project globalized project. Their responses:

- 'Interesting and totally new experience it improved my style and performance'.
- 'Good in the sense we could exchange ideas see the different work style and take the good points into our examination system'.
- 'Exchange ideas and opinions thoughts from different perspectives'.
- 'Great opportunity to share knowledge and ideas and opinions' (Campbell 2006).

On the surface, the feedback above appears to contradict the arguments of critics such as Bowers on the Right or others such as Carnoy from the Left who seem to frame globalization as a unilinear discourse of imposition and exploitation (Bowers 2005; Carnoy 1977). The collaborative and engaged work done among Deakin staff and the staff of the Malaysian Institutes point to a need for a much deeper analysis of the relationship between globalization pedagogical practice and the specifics of the Malaysian cultural situation. Demonstration of some of the characteristics of the Deakin work with Malaysian teaching Institutes challenges the assumption that all globalization is simply inequality, imposition and coercion. Such reductive theory fails to account for teacher agency and the relative autonomy of practices by respective parties, which can embody quite democratic and respectful approaches to working together. In short, while not underestimating the power of the Western imaginary, to use Castoriadis' provocative term I think the power of teachers and academics to interrogate and engage with relationships in a positive and empowering way is often overlooked in theory that simply sees all globalization as by definition imperialistic and iniquitous. The actual praxis that occurs in collaboration between the West and non-western entities is much more nuanced and fluid than many may think.

English and socially constructivist pedagogy

The practices of traditional pedagogy and so-called rote learning characterize Malaysian schooling and teaching. Yen et. al. argue that 'a great number of Malaysian students are actually passive learners and spoon-fed learners, who rely heavily on rote learning' (Yen

et al. 2005). This perception is widespread and popularly held. Jonathan Kent for the BBC World service writes, 'Malaysian schools and universities are long on rote learning and short on original thinking. They do not turn out the problem solvers and innovators' that a dynamic economy needs' (Kent 2006). Following on from the analysis of the likes of Zairon Mustapha (Mustapha 1998), Hussain Hassan (Hussin 2006) and Zakaria and Iksan (Zakaria and Iksan 2007), there is a common recognition that Malaysian traditional pedagogics have also been teacher centred (Mustapha 2001). A critical component of the course we designed was that it was taught in English. We needed to address the pedagogics and language issue as a whole to avoid falling into the trap of top down pedagogy as well as being caught in the difficult problem of English language proficiency inhibiting learning. In other words, we sought to avoid what Brooks and Brooks outlined as the characteristic problems of traditional pedagogy such as the problem of top down instruction (Brooks and Brooks 1993). We decided to ground the English in experiential learning. Feedback from the Malaysian teaching teams saw this as a major aspect of the course. According to feedback:

- 'Students were able to work in groups challenge certain students because they have to present in English so in a way they have to practice their English.'
- 'Students did put in effort to present and indirectly they need to read up and prepare for the task.' (Campbell 2006).

The lecturers gave positive feedback (despite the difficulties) of teaching in English. They claimed:

- 'Opportunity to lecture in English, in preparing for the lectures I have also gained much knowledge from my own reading.'
- 'Gained more knowledge in conducting my class, more readings have a chance to teach in English, instruction and share ideas with Deakin lecturers' (Campbell 2006).

One of the perceived strengths of the subject was that it required many students to engage the subject matter in English for the first time. This was a challenge for many of the staff. From an educational point of view we decided to also embed and enact English as a communicative language (CLT) (Deller 1990; Mayo 2000; Wesche 2002). This approach has precedent for example in Malaysian environmental education (Thang and Kumarasamy 2006). Thus, the issues of English language facility, pedagogical theory and depth of learning in principle cohered in one strategy. The idea was that the actual

tutorials would demonstrate the theories and different approaches to learning in creative ways, which would shift focus away from reading towards doing (Tozer, Anderson, and Armbruster 1990). The driving idea was to engage the students in authentic learning of the subject matter. The general approach was to organise teaching activities, which would help demonstrate the theory taught.

In other words, we decided to use a combination of scaffolded instruction (English using learning tools such as PMI and Brainstorming), within a CLT English framework. The emphasis of the pedagogy was on scaffolds in the form of processing tools to aid their understanding and completion of the coursework tasks required of them. From the perspective we were working from this seemed to be the best way to pedagogically address the issue of teaching using English in a non-English speaking environment. Malaysian research into cooperative learning supports this approach (Salleh and Wan 2000). Malaysian research into the effectiveness of social and cooperative strategies in language learning also tends to support the approach we have taken (Embi, Long, and Hamzah 2001; Zakaria and Iksan 2007). Feedback stated that the combination of social constructivist pedagogy and English as a communicative language approach:

- 'Reinforced theories and content, build confidence in communication skills there was fun they enjoyed themselves'.
- [The students were] 'able to master the topic and perform activities which related to learning classroom experience'.
- 'Students need to work in groups, having their discussions and prepare the material together will enhance their co-operation and collaboration'.
- 'Students put in a lot of effort and participated well into co-operative learning as well as contextual and experimental learning'.
- 'Students were able to work in groups challenge certain students because they have to present in English so in a way they have to practice their English' (Campbell 2006).

Conclusion

Pedagogy and creativity, in the context of globalization, require social constructivist pedagogy and English proficiency. In such a case, the relationships between western and local collaborators are important. It is necessary that proper and respectful

collaborative values characterize how we work together. Equally important is getting the balance right between English proficiency and the pedagogies we use in the classroom. Situating English within the practical and collaborative activities that students engage in learning helps to give students real confidence and generated deep learning of learning theory in ways that rote and top down drilling of English content simply wont. This type of pedagogical approach when combined with a collaborative and engaged work relationship between Malaysian and Australian lecturers helped us to avoid the worst aspects of globalized education. We sought to avoid at the level of classroom pedagogy what we sought to avoid in collaboration between staff. We did not want what the students were learning to appear as a top down imposition where their abilities and experiences would be a deficit. The example of EME 150 and the uptake through the Malaysian educational system of some of its components is an example not of 'imposition' or 'imperialism' but rather of a more negotiated and collaborative pedagogy that points to some of the benefits of cooperation, collaboration and by inference of globalization (Mustapha 2001).

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