Positioning Multicultural Education across the Mirror of Globalization

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Introduction

Along with what I suspect many of my colleagues who teach college-level multicultural education classes experience, my initial approach to teaching introductory courses to graduate students has centered on the history of the national educational system in the U.S. and included practices and policies in schools. For those who wish to gain further specialization in the field, I have tried to expand the scope of my classes in several different ways, including: (a) identifying content sub-areas (i.e., immigration and education); (b) proposing a specific theoretical dimension (i.e., critical multicultural education); and (c) enlarging the scope (i.e., from the national to the global).

To date, I have attempted to advance the global framework in two particular ways. One way is through the comparative analysis of different national educational systems. In one of my graduate-level classes, through the guidance of an edited book, we begin by examining issues of diversity and equity in various societies and conclude our conceptual journey around the world with identifying the implications of our analysis as it impacts the U.S. and more specifically our own practice.

An alternative approach, which I will present in this article, aims to augment the scope by focusing on global issues through explicit attention to globalization, culture, and education. Insights about theories and practices in different parts of the world are situated within the framework of globalization and global, national, and local connections are sought at these various levels.

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The goal is for the students to engage in a critical analysis of the issues presented and identify conceptual convergences and divergences. The processes and the aims of this advanced-level course are presented below. The primary aim is to engage in a discussion of one possible approach that could be used to compliment alternative ones (Starks, 2013).

Course Overview

The course description provides an initial point of departure into a global journey with local consequences.

Course Description

This graduate-level course will help students learn about ways in which globalization impacts educational policies and practices around the world. Utilizing culture as an entrance point, we will examine how students' identities and teachers' positions are shaped in the changing global social and educational terrain. Finally, we will work to create critical educational responses to globalization, which are complimentary to multicultural education.

Stemming from the general course description, the relevant course objectives follow:

Course Objectives

◆ *Illustrate knowledge of historical macro-level theories that have been used to understand the multifaceted expressions of globalization.*

◆ *Engage in a critical analysis of current frameworks that attend to the relationship between globalization and education.*

◆ *Familiarize yourself with key pro-cesses in which highly digitalized spaces impact identity construction of youth.*

◆ *Display mini-specialization in one aspect of globalization and education through the completion of a research project.*

◆ *Demonstrate critical and analytical skills in transferring theory into practice in the development of critical educational responses to globalization.*

As it becomes evident to the reader, or for that matter to a student who enrolls in the class, multiple levels of analysis are integrated in the course. While the entrance point is at the macro-level, it is hoped that the transfer of theory into practice will take place at the meso- and micro-levels of teacher practice.

Theoretical Lens: Multidimensional Analysis

The transition from the macro-level of globalization's social forces into the world of schools takes place gradually in the course. In the first thematic unit, the students are introduced to the multiple dimensions of globalization and their relationship to education (Bottery, 2006; Spring, 2009). At the same time, they are provided with literature that interrogates the perceived sweeping one-dimensional global forces and critically analyzes underlying processes (Popkewitz, 2000).

The goal is for the students to begin to identify actors that either promote or resist the global 'agenda,' while sometimes doing both. Attention is devoted to the strong relationship between the global and the local and to foundational work on cultural formations/tranformations in the era of globalization (Appadurai, 1996).

In the second thematic unit, attention

is given to the micro-level processes in which digital social spaces impact student identities. Concepts such as hybrid identities are discussed while theoretical discourses that contrast youth popular culture with school culture are critically analyzed (Deuse, 2006; Freistat & Sadlin, 2010; Kenway & Bullen, 2007; Williams, 2008).

The aim of this unit is for the students to move beyond traditional conceptions, while at the same time critically analyzing the meaning of digital or physical spaces on identity construction. The participants are asked to identify the possibilities and restrains that technology presents to education/educators.

The third and final thematic unit attends more closely to the meso-level world of schools. The students are asked to locate sources of teacher agency within the confines of existing policy mandates (Margolis, 2006; Vongalis-Macrow, 2007). They are then encouraged to envision curricular and pedagogical practices that are globally responsive and locally relevant, while maintaining a critical lens throughout (Camicia & Franklin, 2010; Horsley & Bauer, 2010; Karseth & Sivesind, 2010).

In all these levels, critical analysis remains the goal. The students are encouraged to make connections and analyze the material in light of their application to their personal and professional lives. At the same time, they are asked to compliment the macro-level analysis with the development of a mini-expertise through a research project. A more detailed look on the specifics of the three thematic units follows.

Thematic Unit 1:
Setting the Stage

The introductory module in this class is shaped around the dimensions of globalization. In that, the influence of intersecting economic, geopolitical, technological, environmental, linguistic, and cultural forces on education is explored (Bottery, 2006). The pressure for standards, management, accountability, performance, students as consumers, and global competition are often identified as indications of the transfer of economic globalization in education. In order to make the connections more transparent, the students are encouraged to critically screen national, state, or district-level policy documents and to identify evidence of such transfer. Identifying hidden messages is key in this process.

At the same time, attention is devoted

to sources of resistance that exist in multiple levels. For instance, Sassen (2008) writes that "territory, authority, and rights are complex institutionalizations arising from specific processes, struggles, and competing interests" (p. 74). The presentation of competing educational discourses through the World Bank, OECD, and UNESCO, as presented by Spring (2009), frames the discussion that is complemented by additional insights, such as the pro/counter-globalization discussion by Burbules & Torress (2000) or the distinction between 'globalization from above' and 'globalization from below' by Kellner (2000).

The goal is not to promote one agenda, but to critically analyze pros and cons in all. After the initial review, the direction diverts to the level of culture specifically. Using Appadurai's (1996) seminal work and Spring's (2009) typologies for cultural frameworks, the students are encouraged to identify connections and disconnections of cultural frameworks around the world. Maintaining a critical lens throughout, they are asked to comparatively analyze the information. Sometimes, they are to compare and contrast antithetical views on similar topics and identify similarities and differences.

For instance, they are asked to compare and contrast Spring's (2009) "Examples of educational borrowing and lending: The case of South America" (pp. 23-27) with Popkewitz's (2000) section on "The Indigenous Foreigner" (pp. 174-177). Other times, they are asked to 'localize' information that is presented in the readings. For example, one question is:

> Spring (2009) writes that "…local school officials and teachers do not simply dance to the tune of global flows and networks" (p. 7). Using insights from the readings for today identify three examples that demonstrate resistance to the global flows from teachers/school officials.

Thematic Unit 2:
Understanding the Audience

The transition to the second thematic unit for the class is facilitated by the attention to culture, which was introduced as the concluding element of unit one. Building upon the concepts discussed in the previous unit, the students are asked to explore the unique ways in which students' identities are shaped in digital spaces. Attention is provided to characteristics, opportunities, and restrictions that digital culture affords people (Deuse,

2006), the fusing borders between the physical and the digital world (Beavis, 2007), and the implicit messages that are sent through various social media (Freishtat & Sandlin, 2010).

Recognizing that not all youth have access to the digital culture, the students are encouraged to critically examine the above phenomena. At a later stage, the discussion transitions to explicit exploration about identities in relation to school.

The role of the students as active producers in the digital space is juxtaposed with their passive roles as students in traditional schools (Kenway & Bullen, 2007; Williams, 2008). At the same time, the students begin to examine youth cultural reproduction beyond the digital space. Hybrid, transnational, and cosmopolitan identities are discussed within the intersecting web of societal boundaries (Singh & Doherty, 2008).

Sometimes, the students' responses are elicited through general reactions to the readings. For instance, they are prompted to engage in an open conversation about readings that are most likely going to trigger in-depth discussions. One question is:

> What are your reactions to Freishtat and Sandlin's (2010) analysis of Facebook? Explain.

Other times, they are asked to respond to the concepts that are discussed in class by providing their own perspectives, as the following question demonstrates:

> What does the term "cosmopolitan" or "citizen of the world" mean to you? Would we want all students to be cosmopolitans? Justify.

Thematic Unit 3:
Crafting a Response—Teachers as Agents

The explicit focus on youth identities in unit two paves the pathway for a direct transfer to schools and teachers. The focus of this final unit is for the students to continue to connect the global and the local through a close analysis of how their practice is situated in the web of global/national/local policies.

The first goal is to situate teachers as active agents in the globalization of education. This provides a necessary foundation for the identification of globally relevant educational responses. At the beginning of the transition to this unit, the students are encouraged to reflect upon their roles as teachers (current or perceived future) and the structural forces that impact their

professional lives and the sources of agency and creativity that they possess.

Questions that guide the reflections include:

What are the underlying values that guide your work as a teacher?

Which are aspects of your professional life that you think are non-negotiable to 'mandated' change?

In order to provide an example of what the goal is in the activity, the students are provided with drafts of teacher evaluation documents emerging in various states and are asked to critically locate both mandates and flexibility.

The next goal of the unit concerns students crafting the theoretical philosophies of practices so that they can begin to make explicit connections between theory and practice. The students are asked to envision and propose both curricular transformations and pedagogical innovations that are carefully and purposefully incorporating technology when appropriate. There is guidance through the the the readings as well as flexibility.

Sample Prompts

Identify and list the essential responsibilities of a teacher at your grade level.

Using Vongalis-Macrow's (2007) framework, categorize the areas of teachers' obligations, autonomy, and authority that you consider important.

Categorize/reinvent the areas of agency that teachers at your level of schooling have in curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.

Discussion and Implications

This class aims to cultivate both a strong theoretical foundation and sound practical approaches. One of the main premises of the course is to resituate multicultural education from the periphery to the center of global educational discourses. While multiple graduate-level classes may attempt to make connections between the global and the local, a seminar on multicultural education can compliment such approaches by a clear and explicit analysis at the level of culture.

Often times, the discussion about distant processes of globalization appears just that: distant and disconnected from policies and practices in schools. The

aim of the class is to counteract this by identifying nuances of new global trends and locating/creating spaces of resistance. By reinventing the activist foundation of multicultural education, the goal is to move from individual responsive practice (classroom) to a collective/systemic one (school and beyond).

Situated within the broader framework of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000), this class aims to cultivate the students' critical analysis skills and attend to curriculum, pedagogy, and relationship building that is both globally aware and locally relevant. One of the assessments includes students' constructs on critical globally responsive teaching.

Prior to reaching this level the students' critical thinking skills are cultivated through examinations of "globalization from above" and "globalization from below" practices and policies in schools and classrooms, investigations of 'hidden' messages in curricular material and information shared by the media, and explorations of students' philosophies of globalization, culture, and education.

Through the individual projects that they complete, which are shared with a group of peers, the students focus the content in an area of educational practice that is relevant to them. Their projects enlarge and enrich the theoretical and practical lenses of the class. One of the central pillars, ongoing critical analysis, is particularly relevant in envisioning and creating connections. The role of teachers as travelers is thus cultivated.

Conclusion

The class described here provides one possible pathway to making the connection between the global and the local. The proposal is that among many other things, the journey to the development of critical approaches is a conceptual endeavor. It is not meant to replace an introductory course in multicultural education but rather to compliment it.

However, some of the dangers that exist when teaching multicultural education within a national framework are reproduced at this level as well (Smith, 2009). For instance, the analysis could be too simplistic and the approaches identified too superficial. There may be resistance to an in-depth examination of complex social structures.

What are alternative approaches to connecting the local and global in multicultural education? How do we avoid

"superficial"/tourist methods (Endacott & Bowles, 2013)? What may be some issues with the proposed approach? How could it be improved?

All of these are items for ongoing discussion.

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