

The Context for Teacher Standards: A Global Analysis

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Standards, globalization, culture and diversity

The problem with standards is that they standardize. The problem with globalisation is that it also has a tendency towards standardisation. While such standardisation may have positive outcomes in certain areas (agreement on units of measurement or benchmarks for communications technologies for instance), in the social and cultural spheres location, history, ethnicity, language or religion, are, for instance, sources of identity characterised more by heterogeneity and diversity. There are, therefore, inherent conflicts between standardisation and heterogeneity and between globalisation and identity. These conflicts inevitably work themselves out in the processes of standardisation and globalisation currently under way in education and in teacher education, as elsewhere.

For instance, as Jansen (forthcoming) points out

...the most dangerous consequence of globalization is that it has established a broad consensus not only about what kind of economy is desirable, but about what education is for. This consensus holds that education is for economic productivity, for technological advancement, for greater competition and market share, for institutional and learner performance measurement, and for regulation and accountability to ensure that performance-driven economies and pedagogies are not only achieved, but sustained.

This increasing congruence of educational policies and regimes in Western countries has been noted by many observers (e.g. Dale 1999, 2000, Lawn 2000, Marginson 1997, Thomson 2002, Wilding 1997), as has the encroachment of the new managerialism and its technologies of institutional control (Beck 1999, Morley and Rassool 2000). These are argued to be quite pervasive in their imposition of standards, compliance procedures, accountability measures, performance tests and other features of an audit culture (see Angus, forthcoming)

despite the arguments of those such as Berliner (2005) that as far as tests of teacher performance are concerned current tests are inadequate and misleading and 'proper' tests would probably be prohibitively expensive due to the complexity and unpredictability of teaching.

While globalisation brings about degrees of convergence in such matters, it is inappropriate to see it at a totalising process (Angus, forthcoming). However, the documented experience of many minority cultures is that globalised policies and procedures exhibit a new form of neo-colonial behaviour which denies their identity, their culture and their historical experience. Jansen (forthcoming) compares the discourses of two Australian keynote speakers at the opening of a conference on teacher education: one a politician and the other an indigenous community leader.

From the politician, there were words like performance, outcomes and standards. From the indigenous leader, there were words like community, respect and engagement.

From the politician there were words about the necessity for benchmarks, frameworks and measurement; From the indigenous leader there were words about the value of consultation, personal well-being and dignity.

From the politician there were words about testing: from the local leader, about trust.

From one, about heads; from the other about hearts.

From the parliamentarian, about individuals; from the communitarian, about family;

From the local politician, about accountability; from the local leader about reciprocity. (Jansen, forthcoming, Ch2)

Jansen's contrast between globalisation, standardisation and political imposition on the one hand and culture, identity and difference on the other shape in very direct terms our

perception of the conflict with which teachers are continually confronted in their day to day lives, particularly those teachers who work in diverse or disadvantaged communities (Bullough 2001, Nieto 2004a, 2004b, Ryan 2003, Thomson 2002).

Thaman, for example, argues that

In most Pacific communities, school children's relationships with their parents and other elders continue to be negotiated within the terms of reference of local cultures and vernacular or indigenous education systems that have their own ideas about cognitive development, interpersonal and social responsibility, as well as the development of wisdom. But at school, Pacific cultural values and ideals are often de-valued and discouraged because they often conflict with the values the school is trying to promote. For example, while schooling and the educational bureaucracy rely on universalism and impersonality, indigenous education systems rely on specific contexts and interpersonal relationships. (Thaman, forthcoming, Ch 4)

This concern is one shared almost universally by indigenous cultures but one that is increasingly contextualised within a discourse that argues that what is needed is the development of education that allows students to migrate across boundaries. Greenwood and Brown argue strongly within the New Zealand (Aotearoa) context, both decolonization and capacity building around which self-determination can be developed are crucial for both Maori and Non-Maori (Pakeha) in a bicultural context.

Both the concept of de-colonisation and that of capacity building have relevance for Pakeha as well as Maori. A discourse that privileges a single set of values and a blinkered approach to knowledge disempowers the apparent beneficiaries of the system as well as the victims. Within the educational context, Pakeha teachers are disempowered when they do not know how to meet the needs of their Maori pupils, and Pakeha students are disempowered when they are not being equipped to understand and be able to interact with both cultures of their land. (Greenwood and Brown, forthcoming Ch5)

Standards, therefore, need to be developed within bicultural, or more commonly, multi-cultural contexts in ways that build the capacity not only for economy related skills but also social and cultural skills that allow teachers and students alike to both acknowledge and participate in the social and cultural relationships of various communities.

Such an illustration of the need to contextualise 'standards' leads quickly to the realisation that standards as they are currently being pursued are, in fact, largely devoid of any consideration of context. Even the five fundamental propositions developed by the Australian National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) – arguably the most developed and comprehensive set of standards so far available – define abstract qualities that, while laudable as general propositions, largely ignore the effects of context.

Global challenges, contexts and standards

The previous argument suggests that standards that are contextualised solely within the global 'economic' model will be seriously inadequate for education which is inevitably caught up in wider questions of cultural identity and social justice. What is required as a context for the development of standards is a recognition that certain challenges face us all in an increasingly interconnected world and that the activities of schools must address these in ways which allow understanding of these challenges and the ways in which they might be worked out in both global and local contexts. What follows is a

brief sketch of some of those urgent challenges and changes that might provide a general context for a more purposeful and effective consideration of the issue of standards in education and teacher education alike.

Major challenges for the 21st century

There are three issues facing us. The first issue is how we deal with the reconstitution of our natural environment so as to avoid imminent disaster (Singer 2002). The second issue is how we overcome our xenophobia, learn to live with difference and construct institutions capable of accommodating difference (Gray 2000, Touraine 2000). The third is how we mitigate gross disadvantages within and between societies (Bates 2005, Chossudovsky 1996, Singer 2000).

Technical, social and political changes

Three major changes will affect our approach to these challenges. Firstly, changes in technology will increase our connectedness (information and communications technologies); our control over ourselves as a species (neurosciences and biotechnologies); and our control over production (genetic and nano technologies). Secondly such changes will foster existing trends towards individualisation and connectivity producing (paradoxically) segmentation and differentiation on the one hand and connectedness and solidarity on the other. Thirdly, globalisation of economic, military, legislative and governmental activities, and (hopefully) civil society (Keane 2003) will accelerate.

Changes in governance

The role of government is undergoing significant changes in most countries. Firstly, concerns with security and the 'war on terror' have brought about significant restrictions on civil and democratic liberties including the effective setting aside of habeas corpus for certain 'suspect' cultural groups. Secondly, appeals to the 'efficiency' of markets have led us into some of the 'evils of untrammelled commerce' about which Adam Smith (as well as Marx) so vividly warned us (Bates 2003). In each of these areas of 'policing' and 'laissez faire' I suspect there will be a correction in the next decade, as there was historically at the end of the nineteenth century (Gray 2000, Polanyi 1944). Neither 'the controlling state' nor "Let the market rip" is a useful prescription for desirable social change. It is more likely that governments will increasingly focus on three issues. Firstly, there will be legislated requirements for basic performance and accountability across both private and public sectors, combined with regulatory bodies having powers of intervention. Secondly, over and above these requirements, government will respond to increasing social, cultural, economic and geographic difference by accepting the process of differentiation currently under way in nearly all societies, but also by assuming the responsibility for seeing that such differentiation does not produce or exacerbate significant disadvantage or exclusion. Thirdly, and especially in relation to the previous point, government will increasingly seek to 'manage place'. Here the previously separate responsibilities of government bureaucracies will be brought together with community, business and non-government agencies in ways that empower local communities to take charge of their futures and link them more effectively with the futures of other communities.

Schools

As a major institutional presence in most communities schools will inevitably be a central part of such a process. Schools, however, have internal structures of their own which will change in response to the changes outlined above. Schools, as Basil Bernstein (1975) reminded us, operate through three

message systems: curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation. By 2020 we will need to have resolved some of the long-standing issues embedded in these message systems. Currently, there is a tendency for governments to prescribe in detail the content of curriculum, the standards for evaluation and, increasingly, the pedagogy by which their objectives are to be met. This produces an essentially 'closed' system. The virtues of such a system might well be to produce standardisation which allows guarantees of (minimum) performance and communication and comparison across institutions to be effected. The penalties of such a system is to 'close' it against all innovation and adaptation except that which is centrally prescribed. If 'managing place' is taken seriously as an objective of government then a much more 'open' approach to curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation is required (Bates 2005).

By 2020 the current problem of the *curriculum* (what is to count as valid knowledge?) will be exacerbated by accelerating accumulation of and access to information, much of which will bypass attempts to restrict and coerce teachers and students into pre-determined curricula. The role of schools in helping students *select* information, *contextualise* that information so that it makes sense within knowledge frameworks of various kinds, and *translate* that knowledge into a wise application to an issue of some importance will remain. But it will become much more complex (Bates 2005).

This increase in complexity links to the second significant issue. If selection and contextualisation are going to become the major issues for curriculum, the significant problem for *pedagogy* will be that, not of technique, but of motivation. Here, the increasing differentiation of communities and schools will mean that motivation becomes less of a psychological technique for teachers and more of a cultural issue: one which relates directly to the usefulness of schooling to both individuals and their communities. Here the issue is the need for teaching, which focuses not on 'empathy' or 'tolerance' for children who are 'different' but, rather, as Touraine (2000) suggests, is directly and deeply engaged in understanding and negotiating difference and facilitating cultural choice and change.

The third issue is that of *evaluation*. Conventionally evaluation is focussed on pupil performance (and, by derivation and comparison, school and teacher performance). But the bigger question in the information age is that of tests for truth. How, in the welter of available information is the reliability and dependability, the 'truthful-ness' of information, to be determined? Only by placing it within the context of various 'knowledges' and by subjecting it to continuous scrutiny, not only in a scientific sense but also in a social sense by asking *whose* interests such information and knowledge serves and how the exercise of those interests is justified (Bates 2005).

Teachers

What is needed, (rather desperately given the last decade's drive towards a closed system of curriculum, marketised criteria of comparison, and a constricted pedagogy increasingly at odds with the lived experience of so many students), is a teaching profession and a teacher education experience which is open and responsive to the challenges I have outlined above. Above all, teachers need to be informed and involved in these changes through access to both preparatory and continuing education which is professional in the sense that it is informed and actively engaged, rather than passively 'professional' through a timid but prescriptive and coercive technology of teaching and teacher *training*.

Teacher education

So what do we do about the professional preparation and continuing education of teachers for 2020? The first thing we

need is an opportunity for teachers to understand the broad (global) context of their work through an understanding of the issues outlined above. It is notable that such issues have been largely eliminated from the English teacher training process despite that fact that much of day-to-day work of teachers forces them to address issues of cultural difference, change and conflict in their classrooms. Making sense of that conflict (understanding and mediating more than simply controlling or empathising) is a necessity for their effectiveness as teachers. The work of teachers is, therefore, above all *cultural* work and teaching needs to be understood as a cultural process of negotiation. As MacCarthy (1996) argues, *knowledge is culture* in the sense that various systems of knowledge help communities as well as individuals make sense of their world and act within it. Teacher education is as much an initiation into the various competing knowledges and cultures that constitute our contemporary world and into the mechanisms of cultural negotiation and change, as it is about mastering information and communication techniques. For in the end the role of the teacher is to encourage learning that allows people to 'travel with a different view' (Peters) or, perhaps more boldly, to join the conversation of humanity (Oakeshott).

Education services

In terms of the education service that we will need, it will be far more about the 'management of place' and the linking of the local to the global; it will be far more about difference, cultural negotiation and cultural change; it will be more focussed on the 'clustering' of currently separate educational and cultural agencies; it will be far more involved in ensuring that technological as well as capital and financial resources are distributed on the basis of need in the pursuit of social justice; it will also be more focussed on the development of what Gray (2000) calls a 'modus vivendi' (the construction of common institutions in which many forms of life can co-exist); it will be concerned to avoid the pitfalls that Touraine (2000) points out of succumbing either to the strategic requirements of markets or the narrow concerns of restrictive communities. A tall order? Yes. But as Touraine points out 'A school that is no more than an administrative service is unacceptable.'

Conclusion

These issues provide the broader context for the consideration of standards in education. They need to be seen within the framework offered, for instance, by Sachs (2005) where she argues that what is needed is not simply *performance* standards (which is what most sets of standards are currently focussed on) but rather *developmental* standards around which continuing professional development might occur in ways that allow teachers themselves to become professional learners as exemplars of what they encourage among their pupils. This will require time and support way beyond what is currently available in most systems. Moreover, as Cochrane Smith (2003) and Imig and Imig (forthcoming) suggest, such professional development needs to be centered around not only global issues, but also on the way in which they impact and are worked through locally 'Going local is where the greatest impact can be made' (Imig and Imig, forthcoming).

The globalisation of standards in education can, therefore, not be confined to a consensus over the economic competitive model of education, but must be tempered with considerations of wider issues to do with identity, culture, environment, civil society and social justice and, if they are to be appropriate to these issues, they also need to take into account the diversity of local contexts and identities.

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