



## SEEKING TO TEACH EQUITABLY: AUSTRALIAN TEACHER EDUCATION IN A GLOBALISED WORLD

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine how global developments in education have altered the emphasis given to concerns of social equity. We begin this paper by examining globalisation, the changes that globalisation have imposed on teacher education, and the positioning of education management, education policy and social justice within these contexts. Next, we examine the ways in which globalisation and neo-liberalism, driven by the notion of 'teacher quality' and an increased reliance on standardised tests, have affected teacher education internationally, as well as in Australia, and the influence this has had on equity agendas. Following this, we examine pedagogical strategies such as Inquiry-Based Learning, learning through collaboration, and research literature inquiry models, identifying how these approaches serve diverse student bodies and disadvantaged students. As noted by Reay 'Bernstein asserted that "education cannot compensate for society", but schools that aspire to be "incubators of democracy" have a moral duty to try' (2011, 2).

**Keywords:** globalisation, social justice, epistemological equity, inquiry-based learning

### Introduction

In the past decade, higher education institutions around the globe have found an exponential increase in international students (King and Raghuram, 2013). Reports indicate that Australia is at the forefront of this increase in international student enrolments in tertiary education (OECD 2013). These increases have resulted in a creation of a diverse student bodies with rich traditions, multiple perspectives, and the potential to provide individual, social and institutional benefits (Astin 1993). It has also presented challenges for educators seeking to employ pedagogical approaches that are equitable and accessible to all (Spalding 2013).

This paper explores the ways in which globalisation has effected education generally. Next, the impacts globalisation has had on education internationally, and in Australia, are investigated. The final section of the paper makes some observations about pedagogic strategies that might be used to address these concerns.

Contemporary pedagogical practice needs to be meaningful to students from vastly different multicultural and socioeconomic backgrounds (Gale and Mills 2013; Altbach 2013) while teaching a range of cognitive and interpersonal skills necessary for life in the global marketplace (Leask 2013). Future teachers not only need to learn about issues of equity in education and the politics of knowledge production; pre-service student teachers need to be taught within pedagogical contexts that engage students in socially just education practices (Kincheloe 2008). According to Ghanaian scholar Sefa Dei, "[t]he question of how to create



spaces where multiple knowledges can co-exist in the Western academy is central: especially so, since Eurocentric knowledge subsumes and appropriates other knowledges without crediting sources. At issue is the search for epistemological equity” (2008, 8). The aspiration to create such spaces informs this paper.

## **GLOBALISATION AND EDUCATION**

Globalisation is often considered to be a Western phenomenon that follows the history of European development from the Renaissance, through the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution (Sen 2002). However, if evidence of globalisation is shown by ‘trade, migration, spread of cultural influences, and dissemination of knowledge and understanding’ (Sen 2002, n.d.), then it clearly has a much longer history rooted outside of Western knowledge and processes. The technological advances of the printing press, gunpowder and the magnetic compass, among many others, were present in China around 1000 AD, but unknown elsewhere; the decimal system was developed by mathematicians in India between 100 AD and 500 AD, and, as with the Chinese inventions, spread to Europe and other parts of the world by processes we would now associate with globalisation (Sen 2002). In the late 1980s, the term globalisation ‘became popular with business journalists and management theorists’ (Connell 2007, 51) in the West as well as in research associated with the idea, developed in the literature of economics. Globalisation in this period referred to the integration of capital markets, across national boundaries, in strategies of corporate expansion; the term globalisation emerged in sociological research in the following decade as researchers endeavoured to understand the nature of this “global society”.

According to Blackmore, ‘globalisation should be treated as a problematic rather than as a descriptor ... but there are differential, uneven and unpredictable effects between and within nation states, between and within university systems and universities and for different populations’ (Blackmore 2002, 420). These effects occur through the movement of ‘objects, persons, images and discourses’ creating disjuncture in relationship to ‘institutional structures in different regions, nations or societies’ (Appadurai 2001, 5). Discourses about globalisation in the research literature provide an account of modernity in metropolitan societies with a focus on either: risk and uncertainty of existing arrangements, the complexities involved in negotiating differences in culture, or the dynamic of capital accumulation (Connell 2007). Discussions around the notion of globalisation have been dominated by academics in Europe and North America concerned with the impact on their metropolitan areas, largely excluding other voices (2007). This has significance for education systems, particularly those in developed nations who are frequently the destination of migrants and refugees and has had ‘tremendous impacts on what counts as official knowledge, what counts as a responsive and effective education’ (Apple 2011, 223). This has placed education policies and knowledge values onto shifting sands, tethered to international economic interests (2011). Within this paradigm, the voices, perspectives and experiences of legions of individuals, communities and nations, not dominated by first world markets, are notably absent from contributing to these discourses, yet they are profoundly affected by them (Appadurai 2001).

In addition to the thinking being driven by economics, globalisation is also recognized as operating in conjunction with neoliberalism; both, in concert, are viewed as being responsible for hijacking education and morphing the objectives of learning into business outcomes (Waite, Turan and Niño 2014). Neoliberalism is a term that refers to a libertarian free market approach to government policy (Pusey 2003), but is also currently understood by many, as the dominant political discourse (Habibis and Walter 2009). The ideology that underpins neoliberalism is that



government influence should be minimised as, ‘the market is the most efficient mechanism for allocating social and political resources’ (Habibis and Walter 2009, 93). Ong argues that neoliberalism has allowed a new mode of political optimization, ‘as a new relationship between government and knowledge through which governing activities are recast as non-political and non-ideological problems that need technical solutions’ (2006, 3). Or to put it as Lingard does, ‘the concept of globalisation works in a performative sense politically to mean neo-liberal economics, drowning out other meanings’ (2005, 168).

Under neoliberal policies education has become increasingly commodified, obliging teachers to focus on testing standards rather than learning (Waite et al 2014). The evidence for this is shown by the widespread use of standardised testing in both the developed and the developing worlds. In the USA standardised testing has manifested in the form of the No Child Left Behind legislation, introduced in 2002; in Australia standardised testing appears as the National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). These testing regimes are the sort of ‘technical solutions’ alluded to by Ong (2006) designed to address the ‘problems’ of slipping behind in the global competition of educational rankings (2006). Standardised testing is used to compare not only different areas within a nation, but also to compare the performance of different countries with each other. This has proved to be a slippery slope for several reasons. Comparing numbers out of context is deceptive at best (Paine 2013), ‘measures’ of educational progress in developing countries have been found to be patently misleading (Van Steenwyk 2014), and the ethnocentric nature of standardized tests has essentially resulted in legitimizing bias (White & Cooper 2014).

Within this landscape, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has assumed an increasingly prominent role in the coordination of activities and in the adoption of particular philosophies of government around the world, not just among its 34 member countries. Savage, Sellar and Gorur assert the OECD ‘play an increasingly powerful role in setting the terms of educational debates broadly and specifically in relation to equity’ (2013, 163). They also indicate that the OECD promotes the use of the economic term ‘equity’, instead of equality, and prefer quantitative performance indicators over description. Louden observes that:

In social policy more generally, the dominant neo-liberal discourse has tended to reduce or reify all issues to economic issues, to be suspicious about producer capture, to emphasise the role of consumer choice in allocation of resources, to focus on standards and accountability and to give priority to particular kinds of research evidence (2008, 359).

In assessing the effectiveness of education, the international focus has not merely shifted to quantitative outcomes; the notion of ‘teacher quality’ has emerged around the globe (Paine 2014).

### **Globalisation and ‘teacher quality’**

One of the more pernicious aspects of globalisation is that phrases pertaining to education have been clung onto by media outlets, used in political and economic contexts, circulated around the world at lightning speed, and emerged as policy (Paine 2013). Internationally, within this global landscape, the notion of ‘teacher quality’ has taken centre stage (2013). In Australia there have been persistent calls, through the media, for investigations into the quality of



teaching and teacher education as well, mostly from those concerned with matters of economics and productivity. An Australian government inquiry into teacher education (Australia Parliament House of Representatives 2007) listed the titles of 103 reviews of teacher education that have been conducted in Australia between 1979 and 2006. The positioning of these reports seems to reveal a blithe confidence that the crisis, if there is one, surrounding teacher quality is unproblematic and relatively easy to fix. In Australia “think tanks”, vested interests and non-government agencies (see Business Council of Australia; Centre for Independent Studies; Institute for Public Affairs; Grattan Institute) also contribute to these debates, and discussions of teacher quality have appeared in almost every facet of school education. The matter is made all the more confusing with the terms teacher quality, school effectiveness and school improvement often being used interchangeably.

New South Wales is the most populous State in Australia and in a review of teacher education conducted in NSW, *Quality matters* (Ramsey 2000), the author proposed that an Institute for Teachers be established ‘to provide a way for teachers themselves to take responsibility for the development and application of professional teaching standards’ (McMorrow, 2001), and hence quality. This emphasis on teacher quality continued when, in 2001, a national Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership Taskforce (TQELT) was established. This taskforce was set up to provide advice on teacher preparation and professional standards. The rationale for establishing the taskforce given in the initial Australian ‘national framework for professional standards for teaching’ asserts that:

It is clear that teachers have to be more and more successful with a wide range of learners in order to prepare future citizens with the sophisticated skills needed to participate in a knowledge-based society. The sort of pedagogy needed to help students develop the ability to think critically, create, solve complex problems and master complex subject matter, is much more demanding than that needed to impart and develop routine skills. Thus teachers have to be both knowledgeable in their content areas and extremely skilful in a wide range of teaching approaches to cater for the diverse learning needs of every student (TQELT 2003, 3).

Teacher quality was thus positioned to be the explanation for the majority of problems to be found in school education. The idea of adopting strategies for improving teacher quality as a global educational panacea has since been adopted by the OECD (2005). Regardless of the many documents that have circulated around the globe to address teacher quality, it has been noted that, within these documents, there “is a relative lack of discussion of the content of initial teacher education, and no substantial interrogation of what rigorous teacher preparation entails” (Paine 2013, 123).

To address the concerns about teacher quality governments in some OECD countries have sought to “standardize” teaching. As a consequence of these global trends Australia has adopted a standards and regulation approach to achieving and maintaining teacher quality. Here under the professional standards arrangements, teacher quality is gained by accrediting programs of pre-service teacher education, requiring graduates to meet agreed standards of Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement (AITSL 2012). However, while these developments can be seen as a response to concerns about ‘global competition, centralization, teacher quality and student equity’ (O’Meara 2011, 428), this focus on “standards” prioritizes concerns of administration and management over pedagogy, student learning and fairness.



## **SOCIAL JUSTICE: EQUITY IN EDUCATION**

For students considered disadvantaged, factors other than teacher quality have been found to influence education outcomes. Following the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the USA, a commission was established to survey and report on the equality of educational opportunities (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld, and York 1966). In general terms it had been assumed that disparities in achievement could be attributed to funding, but the researchers found that, 'the variation in performance in different children within the same school is far larger than, in fact several times as great, as the variation in performance between schools' (Coleman 1968, 20). It was not the case that children from poor backgrounds would always fail to achieve, in fact they often achieved more strongly than their advantaged counterparts. Coleman concluded that improvements could be made if schools provided an 'integrated environment' and employed an 'equality strategy' (Coleman 1968). Lingard noted the findings of the Coleman report and observed, 'that the quality of pedagogies is an important social justice issue in education' (2005, 166). Thus while teachers influence outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged students, the bigger picture of the social environment cannot be ignored. Angus notes that if teachers are to make a difference to their students' learning they,

must take into account the family and social circumstances of the young people to whom they are obliged to provide an education. Indeed, as I have been arguing, we need to think about how education, as a social institution, systematically acts to disadvantage certain types of people in certain types of communities and how such processes of disadvantaging can be turned around. The point is that education, if it is to be socially responsible and equitable, must be sufficiently inclusive of the lives and cultures of 'others', those outside the circle of privilege, including the most disadvantaged students and their communities, in order to make a positive difference in their lives (2012, 243).

In recent years, while there has been an increased interest in obtaining and retaining rural students, Indigenous students and students from low SES backgrounds in higher education in Australia, the focus has been fixated on issues of access to universities and equal representation (Gale and Tranter, 2011). Terms such as 'inclusion', 'diversity', and 'multicultural' have replaced the term equity in policies and procedures, serving as linguistic loopholes that allow authentic concerns for inequality to be dismissed, while still "ticking the boxes" (Spalding 2013). Equity within curriculum, issues of agency and power dynamics has been 'generally ignored' (Gale and Tranter 2011, 42).

Worldwide, educators have registered similar concerns about the increasing inequalities in education (Bogotch and Shields, 2014). Bogotch and Shields assert that 'social justice cannot fall outside an educator's research agenda or even reside on the margins; rather, social justice is a necessary and fundamental assumption for all educators...' (2014, 1). These sentiments are corroborated by educators around the globe, from the United States, to Canada, to Honduras and Turkey (see Bogotch and Shields 2014; Lopez 2014; Van Steenwyk 2014; Waite et al. 2014). One facet of social justice refers to teachers as having agency in relation to issues of social justice as teachers, and another refers to students seeing themselves as agents of change (Spalding, 2013).

There is no consensus regarding the definition of social justice (Lopez, 2014); varying definitions of social justice are inexorably linked to the social contexts in which they are



embedded (Harris, 2014). Freire (1985) contends that social justice is not a fixed condition; it is an on-going process of identifying and redistributing power and resources for the benefit of those who are 'oppressed'. Fraser (2008) asserts that students are participants in education paradigms developed and perpetuated by ethnocentric social and political agendas; the nature and quality of students' social interaction in these frameworks correlates to their agency which, in turn, influences the opportunities they will receive and the degree to which they will experience justice. This also challenges the status of knowledge, and whose knowledge is privileged.

Fostering learning processes which continually identify, examine, and redistribute agency to students who are disadvantaged in education while challenging the legitimacy of declared knowledge governed by elites whose interests do not extend to the welfare of those less privileged are the aims of critical pedagogy (Freire 1970; Kincheloe 2008). Freire identified that minorities and those who experience discrimination aren't "marginal", individuals living "outside" ... and the solution is not to "integrate" them into the structure ... but to transform that structure' (1970, 74). In the community of the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji Nation of far north Queensland, Martin identified how moving from being regarded as a stranger 'with a temporary state of relatedness' to "coming amongst" and "coming alongside" in "relatedness" is achieved by 'fulfilling conditions of honesty, cooperation, and respect at the same time, maintaining their own identity and autonomy so that relatedness is expanded and not diminished or replaced' (2008, viii). We position ourselves within this landscape, seeking to engage in equitable pedagogical practice that cultivates "culturally responsive" teachers committed to seeking ways to remediate educational experiences for disadvantaged students (Dukes and Ming 2014).

Emphasising social responsibility, equality and inclusion in classrooms extends beyond rhetoric or even instilling these qualities in students; it entails applying these values to higher education programs. Just as views on globalisation, social justice and teacher quality require careful examination and revision to bring them into line with contemporary situations, so too do strategies for teaching and promoting learning. Lingard (2005) has argued the need to move away from modernist approaches (for example authentic pedagogy) to productive pedagogy. Doing so requires pedagogic practices attend to four dimensions: 'being intellectually challenging, connected to the world beyond the classroom, and conducted within a socially supportive environment while working with and valuing difference' (Hayes, Mills, Christie and Lingard 2006, 41); we have found inquiry based learning, collaborative learning and evaluating research literature meets these objectives.

### **Equitable Approaches to Learning**

Growing numbers of educators in a variety of disciplines have reported on the benefits of using inquiry based learning (IBL) approaches (Aditomo, Anindito, Goodyear, Bliuc, & Ellis 2013). In New Zealand, inquiry-based learning (IBL) has been part of the tertiary undergraduate agenda since 2002 (Spronken-Smith, Angelo, Matthews, O'Steen & Robertson, 2007). Spronken-Smith et al identify the central goal of IBL as being 'for students to develop valuable research skills and be prepared for life-long learning' (2007, 3). Campbell and Groundwater-Smith (2013) report on the numerous advantages of using inquiry-learning models for initial teacher education based on the outcomes of an international colloquium and studies from the UK, the United States, Canada and Europe.



At the core of IBL activities are problems posed to encourage active learning, positioning teachers as facilitators (Spronken-Smith et al. 2007). This idea of facilitators supports the Freirean ideal that students are not mere vessels waiting to be educated (Kincheloe 2008). Simultaneously, IBL provides students with opportunities to critically think, solve problems, and develop communication skills while fostering creativity (Aditomo et al 2013). Further, IBL approaches favour collaboration over individualistic and competitive learning models (Järvelä, Vonet, and Järvenoja 2010)

Collaborative learning refers to a pedagogical approach that engages students to work in small groups with the objective of enhancing the learning process. Collaborative learning is also an equitable and inclusive strategy for teaching diverse student bodies; research has shown it to be effective in various contexts, from the focus on engagement and connection to community and social relationships (Yazzie-Mintz and McCormick 2012) to the development and use of 'Knowledge Building Communities' (So, Seah and Toh-Heng 2010). Engaging students in collaborative learning opportunities increases positive outcomes for students (Roessingh and Chambers 2011) and has been found to be beneficial to students whose first language is not English and for minority students being educated in multicultural classrooms (So, Seah and Toh-Heng 2010). Further, 'collaboration leverages the benefits of a heterogeneous class and addresses its challenges' (Garcia and Sylvan 2011, 395). Engaging students in collaborative processes which identifies self-knowledge and self-evaluation as community building activities, also increases agency (Appadurai 2012) while sidestepping issues of bias that often stifle students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds (Skattebol, Saunders, Redmond, Bedford and Cass 2012). Collaborative models of learning do not, however, specifically increase students understanding of research literature or academic research processes.

Engaging undergraduate students from low SES and disadvantaged backgrounds enables students to develop an early understanding of academic processes (Kinkead, 2003). As learning to teach is 'a process that occurs across a professional lifespan' (Cochran-Smith and Demers 2010, 40), exposing undergraduates to research processes at the beginning of their pre-service teacher education potentially gives students greater understanding of the various elements that drive knowledge production as well as an expanded understanding of the political processes and power influences that inform research outcomes (2010). Teaching students that research literature should be examined for its ideological orientations, and not merely being accepted on the basis of a quantitative discovery, is not only important from an equity perspective; it also provides students with the opportunity to articulate their personal beliefs and examine how, as future teachers, this will inform their pedagogical practice (Cochran-Smith and Demers 2010).

In *Why Enumeration Counts* Appadurai (2012) identifies that "self-enumeration, self-mapping and self-documentation" can be used by individuals in urban poor communities to defend against "exploitation and surveillance in favour of advancing their own rights, resources and claims" (2012, 639). We extend this notion to include individual voices in higher education. Providing students with a deliberate space where students can engage critically with existing research literature not only accommodates student voices and perspectives; it enables educators to assess what they value as knowledge, critically compare this to what they believe they are being taught to value as knowledge, and develop a practice of inquiry. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) identified an urgent need to employ deliberate acts of intervention in order to interrupt hegemonic traditions in western education; we align with their aim of connecting inquiry to social discourse with the goal of building community as well as facilitating social transformation.



## CONCLUSION

Globalisation and positioning education as a commodity has undermined equity aims within teacher education and the goal of achieving “teacher quality” has lead policy makers to prioritize standardized test performance. However, educators need to be aware of the changing landscape that inform issues of education and influence equity in the classroom. There is a pressing need for educators to examine issues of social responsibility within pedagogical contexts that not only address academic competencies, but also provides all students with agency, the opportunities to collaborate and develop critical thinking skills.

Using IBL models assists future teachers in identifying individual, cultural and philosophical differences while fostering collaboration. From a social equity perspective, providing students with collaborative classroom environments and engaging them in active inquiry regarding the role of educators and the dynamics of knowledge production are useful strategies in preparing future teachers for equitably teaching diverse student bodies. Engaging students in analysis of current research literature assists students in understanding academic processes while cultivating critical thinking skills. These approaches also position teachers to be active participants in pedagogical practices that seek to maximize opportunities for students whose first language is not English and provides them with pedagogical alternatives to standardized assessments. While these approaches cannot resolve the inequities in current systems, they can help to minimize disadvantage.

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