

Neo-liberal Restructurings of Higher Education: A Global Perspective

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“restructuring of educational systems around the world shows an unmistakable trend toward convergence. Educational systems everywhere are increasingly governed by similar pressures, procedures and organizational patterns”
(Altbach 1991)

“what is most striking about the current higher education restructuring is the unprecedented scope and depth of changes taking place as well as the similarity of changes occurring in a wide variety of nations having different social, historical and economic characteristics”
(Schugurensky 2001)

A sense of crisis in Higher Education created by pressures to change -- from government authorities, students, employers, professional associations and other external stakeholders:

- to meet the needs of the fast changing global economy
- to satisfy the new requirements of the labor market
- to meet the rapid growth in demand for higher education
- to cater for the broadening of its class, gender and ethnic base, creating conditions for a new politics of difference
- to align higher education to developments in technology and distributed processes of knowledge production and dissemination

As universities become larger and more complex, new requirements of policy and governance emerge

Responses to these requirements include:

- ...casting the role of higher education in market terms ('marketization')
 - ...linking outcomes of higher education in vocational terms ('vocalionalization')
 - ...devolving system governance and organizational management ('corporatization')
 - ...introducing of new forms of performance management and accountability ('steering from a distance')
 - ...removing restrictions that impede the optimal allocation and utilization of public revenues ('privatization')
 - ...introducing new more flexible forms of conditions of employment of faculty and staff ('casualization')
- > a culture of performativity**

Not only in Western countries but around the world

Examples:

Singapore

Malaysia

Vietnam

Unmistakable signs of:

global convergence towards neo-liberal market ideologies, driving higher education reform

Some Critical Questions:

how should we understand the nature of this convergence?

how is this convergence possible?

how extensive is its scope?

is it inevitable?

how can this trend toward policy convergence be resisted?

Widely held explanation:

... a **function** of the broader contemporary processes of globalization?

policy makers in most English-speaking countries ----the United States, Britain, Canada and Australia-- interpret the real or imagined implications of globalization for the restructuring of higher education in remarkably similar ways. (Slaughter and Leslie 1999)

global convergence of policies is a **function** of the structural conditions under which they are developed; and that these conditions are anchored in a global economy that shapes most of the educational policy options nation-states have. (Currie and Newsom 1998)

This implied functionalism, not restricted to educational writers

... highly influential among globalization theorists like David Harvey, Saskia Sassen and Manuel Castells, who tend to view globalization in terms of structural, macro-economic and geopolitical transformations.

...they seek to describe the changing structural conditions that affect social and cultural life, under which public policy is formulated.

... the relationship between globalization and public policies is thus conceived in functional terms, assuming global processes to be somehow outside social and cultural terrain.

Some Problems with Functionalism

...draws our attention `disproportionally upon the global economy, reified as `a pre-given "thing", existing outside of thought' whose developmental logic somehow explains policy shifts

...gives scant attention to the discursive and material practices by which people create the regularized patterns that enable and constrain them; that is, it lacks an effective theory of political **agency**.

...radically separates economic from cultural practices; and subordinates cultural dynamics to economic generalizations.

..fails to take into account specific ways in which global processes intersect with local histories and situations.

...Rejection of the universalistic logic of globalization

...globalization is not merely an ideology but is better viewed as involving a set of processes that need to be understood historically ... and relationally connecting the macro-economic global processes to the actual networks of social action that people create, move in, and act upon in their daily lives in specific sites.

...if this is so then global convergence of higher educational policies is always tentative and partial, with forms that are specific to specific sites ... always subject to at least some resistance

...the idea of convergence itself needs to be understood in terms of a set of historically specific social processes articulated through various power configurations.

If this is so, then we need to examine some of the processes through which convergence is achieved

A framework for understanding these processes:

- **circulation of ideologies**
- **conventions and consensus**
- **cooperation and competition**
- **contracts and coercion**

Circulation of Ideas and Ideologies

examples:

- conferences and seminars
- new media
- work of organizations like OECD
- comparative data collection

Consensus and Conventions

Examples:

- Washington Consensus
- Bologna Declaration
- APEC Educational Agreement

Competition and Cooperation

Examples:

- Global Educational Markets
- GATS/WTO
- Higher education Consortia
- Networks across knowledge industries

Contracts and Coercion

Examples:

- Bilateral Agreements
- Dictates of transnational corporations
- Loans and Aid Regimes
- Structural Adjustment Programs

Discussion