



## *Special article*

# **Pursuing Ideology or Conforming Reality: Why does Education Shift its Function from Equity to Competitiveness in the Era of Globalization?**

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## **Introduction**

For sociologists, the function of education remains a controversial issue. Unlike structural-functionalists, such as Parsons (1951), who views education as a key path for the working class to achieve upward mobility, radical-critical researchers argue that education acts as a political tool to serve the interests of dominant groups. Some of them believe that education can be classified as one kind of ideological state apparatus, functioning to transmit the dominant ideology (Althusser, 1971). Therefore, the contents of the school curriculum largely appreciate the values of the middle and upper classes and spurn those of the working class (Illich, 1973). Consequently, this curriculum embodies a political intention, producing the phenomenon of class reproduction and corrupting the assumption of equality in education. The correspondence principle also argues that schools are a political site, designed to reproduce the unequal structure of the labor force (Bowles and Gintis, 1976). The concept of cultural reproduction further provides a persuasive account to explain the phenomenon of educational inequity, by discovering a significant gap between school curriculum and class cultures. The academic school curriculum, focusing on abstract concepts and logical relations that link with the life contents of the middle and upper classes and disconnect those of working classes, creates a strong mechanism of selection that allocates the middle/upper class student and the working class student to privileged and unprivileged positions respectively (Bernstein, 1996; Bourdieu, 1993; Willis, 1977). Facing this structural inequity, the state has a responsibility to take active action to achieve the emancipative function of education, enlarging the percentage of working class students who are able to achieve upward mobility (Dale, 2001). However, social justice has gradually lost its voice on the political platform, in an era of globalization that addresses the notion of international competitiveness

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(Rizvi and Lingard, 2006; Lingard, 2000). As a globalized system fuses many countries into an interlocked body, the considerable amount of capitalist profit embedded in this system leaves them no choice but to implement the core philosophy of globalization, neo-liberalism, viewing a free market as the best model for enhancing efficiency and ensuring service quality. In order to guarantee the positive function of this market, the authority of the state is relaxed in order to maintain a free market, and governmental interventions, like providing public services, are seen as impeding the positive mechanism of this market (Blackmore, 2006). Therefore, the state is forced to focus on the issue of international competitiveness rather than that of social justice. A new mission for schools is no longer to counter social inequity for working class students, but to function as the main site for the cultivation of human capital, which is the key element for enhancing the international competitiveness of a given country. It is argued that this political change involves the processes of value construction, turning globalization into a new world value. This new value creates a social discourse, defining failures as an unavoidable outcome of mental deficit and, thus, remitting the collective obligation of the state (Ball, 2006; Olssen, Codd and O'Neill, 2004; Popkewitz, 2000). It is certain that social discourses are able to produce the function of schooling that formulates people into docile bodies (Foucault, 1991). However, this self-governing perspective may ignore the influence of a rational mind born in people. This essay argues that this rational mind allows people to call for a better life. Individual needs may fuse into a collective form, driving the state to maximize economic advantages for its citizens through the channel of globalization. Consequently, this new collectivism suppresses the voice of social justice and is able to reshape the purpose of education.

### **Constructing a New World Value through Schooling**

It has been argued that a key way to enlarge the size of the global market is to turn globalization into a new world value, letting individual countries recognize the importance of globalization and helping it operate stably (Robertson, Bonal and Dale, 2006). Therefore, creating a supportive value system is essential for globalization. Regarding this issue, Giddens (2002) argues that the predominant power of America doesn't let it fully dominate the operation of globalization. However, it is also argued that in creating this value system, America tends to act as an initiator because the USA, an archetypal capitalist country, is eager to dominate this capitalist market (Wallerstein, 2004). Therefore, America should be viewed as a transnational company to export the idea of globalization (Berberoglu, 2003). In doing this exportation, Washington contends that the global economy is able to benefit American exports and to enhance the degree of social civilization for its members. One of its key strategies is to create regional and international institutes (Stiglitz, 2002), whose core mission is to transform the concept of globalization into a world value (Heywood, 2003). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), for example, has become a proactive promulgator for America to deliver the idea of neo-liberalism, which views a free market as the best model for sustaining efficiency and ensuring

service quality. Actually, other bodies like the WTO, WB and IMF, play a similar role, serving the interests of advanced countries, particularly the USA (Robertson, Bonal and Dale, 2006; Stiglitz, 2002).

It is argued that the construction of a new world value is not achieved simply by creating political agencies – it also involves other factors. As Veblen (1994) argues, creating wealth requires ability, so that the upper class possesses a superior social honor, excellence. This social dignity further molds a social phenomenon, in which modeling themselves on the upper class becomes a crucial channel by which people promote their social status. This relationship suggests that modeling the actions of advanced countries could be viewed as a critical path for promoting the status of developing countries. Therefore, acting as a superpower country, the USA would become an ideal model for others to emulate, particularly in the democratic sphere. Modeling facilitates the advocates of globalization, particularly America, in exporting their core philosophy, neo-liberalism (which postulates that a free market is able to promote efficiency), to imported countries (Dale, 2003).

In terms of modeling, Berger (2000) argues that the issue of cultural exportation can be viewed as typical. The crucial factor in making it so successful is whether people worldwide will commit to the pursuit of popular cultures, such as American culture.

*“Anglo-Saxon” culture is now in its “Hellenistic” phase. That is, it is no longer diffused by means of imperial power, British or American; rather, it has become a cultural force in itself, with large numbers of people clamoring to share it... autonomous movement no longer dependent on support from the outside. (Berger, 2000: 426)*

This mental inclination has made the learning of English a worldwide movement or fashion. Drohan and Freeman (2000) believe that the corruption of the Soviet Union has further reinforced the predominant influence of English in the world. English ability has become a symbol of global competence. This social value, acting like a vital channel, facilitates the export of American culture, and consequently permeates our daily life. However, Said (2006) criticizes this phenomenon, conceptualizing it as post-colonialism, and arguing that it results from the subjection of those imported countries. They voluntarily appreciate the cultures of advanced countries. This cultural misrecognition not only strengthens the influence of Western hegemony but also devalues the status of their mother cultures. Furthermore, it has been argued that a superior position creates an uneven power relationship, allowing dominant countries to influence the rest (Torres, 2006). For example, people have come to believe that the best universities are normally in the USA. This belief assists America to export its ideas of university administration (Rhoades and Slaughter, 2006). Those advantages, mentioned above, assist America to ship neo-liberalism to other countries.

It is argued that one of the strategies of value exportation concerns schooling.

Foucault (1991) argues that the implementation of power does not take place through coercive force but schooling, which functions to cultivate the public into a docile body that takes the order of dominant groups as being natural. Therefore, a core ingredient for running globalization is the rebuilding of the souls of social members, as noted by Popkewitz (2000):

*Progress is produced, it is reasoned, not only through institutional change but also through changing the inner capabilities of the individual so that the person acts as a self-responsible and self-motivated citizen, what I will later call the governing of the soul. (Popkewitz, 2000: 158)*

This viewpoint suggests that achieving this schooling generally requires the creation of social discourse. The findings of Säfström (2005) show that a life-long learning project promises to promote the professional ability of its participants to meet the requirements of a modern society. This legendary saying is able to reshape the minds of the public, who come to believe that the participants will be winners, and those who don't will be losers. This phenomenon indicates that discourse is able to eliminate people's reflective minds and, thus, manipulate their actions. For Ball (2006), this new form of hegemony intends to transform society into a form of performativity, referring to the situation in which people need to empower themselves voluntarily in order to win the pride in the game of ranking:

*Performativity works from the outside in and from the inside out. As regards the latter, performances instilling of pride, identification with and 'a love of product or a belief in the quality of the services' provided... On the other hand, ratings and rankings, set within competition between groups within institutions, can engender individual feelings of pride, guilt, shame and envy – they have an emotional (status) dimension, as well as (the appearance of) rationality and objectivity. (Ball, 2006: 694)*

This situation suggests that in educating its conformists, the dominator normally employs the tactic of fabrication rather than coercive force. When people internalize the imposed value, they become self-governing agents who are willing to practice the goals that the dominant group has set up (Ball, 2006), as witnessed by the case of American universities that are willing to commercialize themselves and get away from the academic kingdom (Rhoades and Slaughter, 2006). Although the federal government introduced a relevant policy, allowing them to sell copyright materials in the market, its practice not only involves outside imposition but is also in the minds of insiders:

*In sum, public policy at the federal and state levels and institutional policies of public and private universities have ushered in an academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime. The logic of the private marketplace has come to be inscribed in the formal legal parameters of higher education. The redefinition of the boundaries between public and private sectors has not simply been imposed by political and economic actors outside higher education; it also expresses the initiative*

*and commitments of many actors within the academy. Not surprisingly, the, the emergent regime is being codified not only in formal public policy but also in academic practices. (Rhoades and Slaughter, 2006: 113)*

Therefore, schooling functions as a political technology. As Foucault (1991) argues, the ruling technology has shifted from a model of statutory imposition to schooling that instills concepts and values to cultivate people into a docile body.

*Such a process occurs, he (M. Foucault) says, through disciplinary practices of power as they operate in and through modern social institutions such as education. Such disciplinary practices constitute a technology of the political in terms of which individuals recognize themselves as members of the society and as social beings. (Olssen, Codd and O'Neill, 2004: 24)*

Ball (2006) argues that this governing technology is able to transform the nature of economic principle from reality to an un-concrete imagination that installs performativity as a new canon to steer people's behavior. They are now concerned with competence and productivity rather than trust. This change discards professional judgments and takes a measurable indicator of performances as orthodoxy. In such a situation, individuals become an appendix of enterprise rather than reflexive agents. Eventually, the contradiction between the oppressed structure and spiritual hope engenders schizophrenia that assists the state to initiate new targets in national development and make social members devote themselves to such targets. When they assimilate the relevant concepts of neo-liberalism, like efficiency and competence, the state is able to change its role, shifting from supplier to initiator and auditor. This change releases it from its obligation to provide social justice and public services. Therefore, personal accounts become a powerful discourse for justifying the phenomenon of social inequality.

### **Globalization and the New Role of the State**

As the size of a global market expands significantly, its influence becomes predominant and, thus, renovates the power relationships among countries. The state is no longer concerned with creating national boundaries that isolate it from others, or using them as a gateway to maintain their sovereignty (Giddens, 1990), and now takes cooperation as a fashionable idea for political actions in order to gain a considerable amount of profit, embedded in the global market. Therefore, cooperation now becomes a new economic/political movement, as witnessed by the development of regional unions, like the European Union created in 1986 and the Southern Common Market in around 1994 (Frieden, 2006). Furthermore, as advanced information technology benefits economic activities, many countries introduce deregulated policies in order to buttress their national power. This approach helps fuse countries into an interlocked body, blurring the boundary between states (Ceglowski, 2000). Furthermore, this boundary can be corrupted by the rapid flow of people, ideas, values, information and technology, which generates a relationship of 'disjunction'

among people, discomposing the existing cultural root/solidarity (Appadurai, 2006; Currie, 2004).

This global market is also able to reshape the sovereignty of nation-states. In order to pursue the capitalist profit of a global market, they reduce their control over tax policy for importing goods (Dale, 2003). It is also argued that individual countries are unable to effectively deal with some international problems, like environmental and health issues, caused by globalization, so that the idea of the transnational organization emerges (Currie, 2004; Olssen, 2006). This development might diminish the authority of the state. However, it would be more appropriate to view sovereignty as a historical concept that changes itself in order to fit into a new context (Olssen, 2006).

*If globalization shapes and alters the form of sovereignty, sovereignty must be seen as a historically dynamic concept whose boundaries 'move' between the global order and nation-state. In the process of globalization, some of the governance roles of the state become uncoupled from the state and taken up by international institutions. (Olssen, 2006: 264)*

Responding to this new era, the state introduces new laws and regulations in order to survive in a global market. This adaptation shows that the role of the states is moving from the political regime to the economic domain.

*States are not however surrendering their sovereign capacities. Rather they are implementing control mechanisms to adapt to the changing architecture of global power. (Olssen, 2006: 264)*

Therefore, the state is not subject to the dominant force of globalization but adopts an active tactic to empower itself to maximize its interests in this new context. As Luhmann (1995) argues, in order to maintain an independent operation, a system has to engage in a process of functional evolution that makes its functions unique; otherwise, this system will be subsumed by other systems. This evolution involves the strategy of 'reference', allowing this system to develop the best action plan/project that is able to meet the requirements of a new social context. This referential argument indicates that globalization may be unable to manipulate states entirely. In contrast, states are able to reserve their own power by adopting a transformative strategy that generates better outcomes.

A core referential action in the context of globalization could be international competitiveness. Because globalization addresses the application of knowledge, this orientation accelerates the movement of globalization and speeds up the flow of capital, human resources, technology and information. This situation not only surpasses the control of the state but also pushes many countries into a contest arena that requires competence. Therefore, international competitiveness becomes a key ingredient for them to survive in a global market. This component helps them to improve their national force and, thus, benefits their citizens. Joining globalization,

then, becomes not simply a capitalist game but also a synthesis of economic and political action. The purpose of this approach is to obtain more capitalist profit by creating a much freer and more open market that calls for shrinking governmental authority. Eventually, neo-liberalism, the core philosophy of globalization, takes over the position of social justice (Rizvi and Lingard, 2006). Neo-liberalism is also able to push away the legitimate obligation of the state to protect its citizens, so that the idea of welfare and equity is no longer on the political agenda, or at least declines in priority (Lingard, 2000).

*This call for international competitiveness has weakened the capacity of nation-states to provide social protection for their citizens. (Lingard, 2000: 84)*

Social welfare is now redefined as a privilege rather than a basic right for citizens. The obligation of the state is no longer to engage in redistributing wealth, or creating more jobs or committing to social equity. Its new mission is to bestow employability or individual self-sufficiency upon its citizens through education (Lingard, 2000). This phenomenon reveals a new political ideology, with market logic or individualism as an iron canon in public services, including education.

*...because globalization is generally associated with the reduction of nation-state power and political intervention; the supplantation of politics by the market; an emphasis on the competitive individual rather than community. (Blackmore, 2006: 214)*

This description indicates that market ideology appreciates individual choices and discards a collective philosophy, like social welfare (Blackmore, 2006).

*The state is thus increasingly withdrawn from its traditional welfare obligations, defining them as merely a domestic problem. (Blackmore, 2006: 217)*

Individualism further generates a powerful discourse: that personal effort is the crucial factor leading people to achieve successful outcomes. McCarthy and Dimitriadis (2006) point out that the state, as a social apparatus, is able to employ media to construct social discourses, functioning as daily philosophy to regulate our behavior:

*The link between the state as legitimized administrative apparatuses and the state as one of the crucial sites of the production of identities in the body politic leads us to the wide-open spaces of the public sphere, in which civic order is built from discourses that manage the needs, interests and desires generated by them within the socially combatant populations that make up society. (McCarthy and Dimitriadis, 2006: 201)*

Functioning as a productive apparatus, the state is able to convert the individualism and volunteerism of enterprise into a public discourse, transforming social issues into the domain of personal matters. This shift further creates a new belief that self-help is the best path to improve the ability of those people who are

behind society. Such self-revolution helps them fit into the needs of future society. The philosophy behind this relationship is that the core problem is not about society but the will and practice of citizens.

*Psychologistic explanations for social phenomena reign supreme, and are supported by a burgeoning literature of self-improvement texts, texts which posit poor self-esteem as the pre-eminent societal ill today. (McCarthy and Dimitriadis, 2006: 208)*

The expansion of the size of the middle class further justifies this discourse. Different rewards in the labor market, like salary and reputation, are viewed as the natural outcomes of different abilities of workers (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2006). This discourse redefines the meaning of social inequality:

*...inequalities by no means disappear. They merely become redefined in terms of an individualization of social risks. The result is that social problems are increasingly perceived in terms of psychological dispositions: as personal inadequacies... Social crises appear as individual crises, which are no longer perceived in terms of their rootedness in the social realm. (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2006: 150)*

This redefinition remits the public obligation of the state and allows it to push social problems into the domain of personal matters (McCarthy and Dimitriadis, 2006). Mental conditions become the best means to rationalize failure, poverty, crime and inequity. Therefore, public services are no longer associated with the aspect of collective interests but the regime of personal experiences. The idea of governmental interventions in public services is rejected because it violates personal preferences and unavoidably produces a negative impact (Olssen, Codd and O'Neill, 2004).

*State support for egalitarian policy initiatives as thought to be an attack on 'enterprise and endeavour', 'self-reliance', 'responsible self-management' and personal sacrifice' (Olssen, Codd and O'Neill, 2004: 138)*

McCarthy and Dimitriadis (2006) further point out that such social discourse functions as a key means of governing technology because its schooling function is able to convince people that achievements belong to personal matters. Furthermore, self-improvement is nothing to do with the state but personal efforts, and mental deficit is a crucial factor leading to failure.

Responding to this variety in intelligence, the obligation of the state is to provide multiple forms of education, which presumably is able to unlock people's potentials (McCarthy and Dimitriadis, 2006). Therefore, a vital assignment for education is to enhance the competence of individual persons rather than to improve the structured inequality of educational results. This market logic, thus, reshapes the aim of education from its former focus on the issue of emancipation from structural oppression to enabling its subjects to become:

*...new cultural values and workers who are "enterprising", or self motivating, or*



*as Rose has put it, “self steering”’. (Blackmore, 2006: 213)*

### **Collective Expectation and the Reconstruction of Educational Function**

The above analysis shows that the state is subject to the dominant force of the global economy. However, this perspective tends to neglect the agency of people. As Storey (2003) argues, although most people are unable to produce texts, they are not always subject to domination. Preferences and experiences create the mechanism of agency, allowing individuals to select specific texts and interpret their meanings. This selection and interpretation highlights the fact that people employ their rational minds to tackle the imposition of texts. Such rational ability is able to support the subjectivity of human beings, functioning to govern the material world. This relation suggests that material desires may be interwoven with rational judgment, a combination that may fuse into a collective force to steer the state.

It has been argued that the material desire of human beings is so strong that material development becomes an important criterion for them in evaluating the degree of civilization of their societies. Lukács (1971), for example, argues that because scientific technology is a key component in enhancing productivity, and thus meeting the material needs of human beings, it gains power. For Marcuse (1964), this inclination is able to fuse individual needs into a collective intention that commands the state to commit resources to scientific development in order to move itself forwards to a higher stage of material civilization. This communal soul, conceptualized as “one dimensional man,” thus suppresses the free and critical minds of people. Nevertheless, this phenomenon indicates that material conditions are able to produce a profound influence on our daily life. Although material needs drag us into the kingdom of hedonism, as witnessed by the fact that many persons build up their identities by purchasing precious commodities (Bell, 1976), the functions of objects cannot be reduced to a narrow division between ‘use-value’ and ‘exchange-value’ in the terminology of Marx (1961). Rather, without adequate and good materials, it is very hard for people to sustain an elegant manner. This interactive relationship shows that material conditions can produce physical and psychological functions (Veblen, 1994) that further provide a significant space for people to actualize their being. Therefore, chasing profit can be viewed an innate motive in people, functioning to move progression. The global economy with a considerable amount of profit corresponds to this motive. This correspondence engenders a social will, commanding the state to join the game of globalization in order to create better life conditions for its citizens. This situation indicates that states are not totally subject to the domination of globalization, but rather conduct a transformative strategy (Lingard, 2000; Rizvi, 2000; Robertson, Bonal and Dale, 2006).

*...globalization is the outcome of processes that involve real actors --- economic and political --- with real interests... globalization does not undermine the state but includes the transformation of the state forms. (Robertson, Bonal and Dale, 2006: 228)*

As Offe (1985, 1996) argues, internal rationality ensures the state implements its legitimate obligation, enlarging the scope of economic activities to create more jobs for its citizens. Joining a global market becomes a vital way for the implementation of this obligation. Olssen (2006) further points that this action does not result from economic pressure but a public expectation. This is because globalization creates new visions that address competitiveness and free markets as new elements in the maintenance of national prosperity. This new demand requires the state to adopt a new thought to implement public policies. When joining globalization becomes a crucial path for achieving this implementation, the public expects the state to develop its human capital in order to maintain national development. Therefore, schools are bestowed this collective mission to develop human capital, so that the purpose of education is shifting from social justice to personal competence. This collective expectation also provides the state a powerful justification to legitimize its declination to capitalists without substantial challenge from the public. This declination creates a legitimate platform for capitalists to swell their own profit, and, thus, exaggerate the phenomenon of social inequality. However, the synthesis of such collective will and a capitalist intention may produce a predominant ideology: that the implementation of collective interests, mainly through the channel of globalization, can benefit both individuals and groups. This social belief oppresses the voice of social justice, so that the state has a good excuse to address the importance of the competence of individual persons rather than to improve the inequity of educational results. As international competitiveness functions as a key ingredient for a country's survival in a global market, human capital becomes a crucial assignment for education. Therefore, the purpose of education shifts from improving structural inequity to giving students individual competence, which can be conceptualized as employability in the market.

## **Conclusions**

A global market, which contains a considerable amount of capital profit, indeed, has become a central issue on the American political agenda. Acting as a typical capitalist country, the USA has been eager to obtain this profit and, thus, devoted itself to the enlargement of this market size by constructing globalization as a new world value. In performing this assignment, one of its tactics has been to establish regional and international institutes for exporting the concept of neo-liberalism to other countries. It has been argued that this value exportation is able to produce a powerful mechanism, a social discourse because when the receivers internalize the assumption of neo-liberalism, they tend to view a free market as the best model for enhancing efficiency and securing service quality. This internalization further reshapes their soul and, consequently, transforms them into self-governing agents who take international competitiveness as a core assignment to empower themselves in order to survive in a new context – globalization. As the concept of competitiveness emphasizes the aspect of individual effort, the factors that influence achievement are reduced into the domain of personal matters or experiences. This reduction separates failure from the field of structural inequity and attributes it to being an unavoidable consequence of mental

deficit, so that governmental interventions are unnecessary and ineffective. Therefore, this market logic enables the state to reshape its obligations, shifting from public services to international competitiveness. This change further creates the mechanism of collectivism, which postulates that in order to achieve international competitiveness, all citizens have to enhance their competence, or otherwise jeopardize the future of their country. This discourse, created by neo-liberalism, shows that the best way to implement power is not the use of imposition but through schooling, which is able to make people become autonomous bodies.

However, this self-governing perspective may underestimate people's rational minds, which engender the mechanism of agency, emancipating them from structural constraints. Although their behaviors are widely confined within the scope of reification, as witnessed by the fact that many people tend to build up their identity by purchasing precious commodities, their preferences determine the existence of objects and their meanings. They employ their rational minds to select the texts that they face, and to interpret their meaning. This phenomenon reveals that a rational mind is an innate ability, allowing people to initiate actions and to be free from the control of social discourses.

Furthermore, the self-governing approach also neglects the interactive relation between materials and human spirit. As objects are able to create mental perceptions, such as joy, satisfaction and excellence, which penetrate our spirit at a deep level, materials bridge the gap between physical and psychical aspects. Therefore, materials function as a crucial medium for the achievement of spiritual sublimation, which is an essential ingredient for people to actualize their being. This relationship indicates that commodities possess dual meanings, covering physical and psychological dimensions. Such individual needs are able to fuse into a collective form, a social expectation that drives the state to create a better life for its citizens through the channel of joining globalization. Therefore, in terms of joining globalization, the state adopts political actions to maximize economic advantages for its citizens rather than subjecting them to the domination of globalization. Achieving this action can benefit both individual citizens and their country. Such combined intentions leave the state no choice but to devote itself to improving its international competitiveness through education. Otherwise, the national force will decrease – a situation that will endanger its members both individually and collectively. Consequently, inequality gradually loses its voice, as witnessed by the fact that instead of social justice, individual competence has become the central concern in educational reforms.

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