

Introduction

The world in which education is situated is changing. Globalisation, according to Ross-Holst (2004: ix), has “become the central issue of our time” and “will define the world our children inherit.” Teacher professionals, therefore, not only need to know what globalisation is, but also the ways in which the global elite has reconstructed notions of the modern “citizen.” Because teachers are those formally assigned the task of developing “global citizens”, this article seeks to problematize “global” and “citizen” to reveal the ways in which education for global citizenship may help or hinder the masses within democratic Western societies. To begin, we address the dual character of globalisation, whereby a global elite has emerged as separate from but responsible for shaping cultural values for the masses. The disjuncture in constructions of globalisation for the masses and the global elite is explored. We argue that the construction of globalisation for the masses is aligned philosophically with the notion of a global commons (that which holds us together—our common humanity) and practically with a collaborative work ethic (we must come together to solve problems that transcend national borders). Globalisation for the elite, however, is associated with the acquisition of particular attitudes and skills (cultural capital) that enables their participation in trans-local interactions that cater to the self-interests of this global elite. Finally, consideration is given to how the teacher professional is implicated by this duality of the “global” and constructions of the modern “citizen” and the role that comparative and international education (Bouzakis & Koustourakis, 2002) might play in helping teachers engage critically with the “education for global citizenship” discourse.

Globalisation

Among its various meanings, globalisation can be defined as “a set of processes that tend to de-territorialize important economic, social, and cultural practices from their traditional boundaries in nation-states” (Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004: 14). Two simultaneous forces, namely convergence and divergence, are products of an increasingly globalised environment. On the one hand, convergence, as demonstrated in economic interdependence across societies, has resulted in opportunities for some and exploitation of others in a global marketplace. Divergence, on the other hand, is apparent as individuals within and across nations organize themselves into smaller units of perceived distinctiveness and difference (Barber, 1992; Kubow & Fossum, 2007).

Among the downsides of increased capital flows and worldwide communications are its unequal distributive effects (Petras, 1999) within and between societies, as well as its influences on the production and transmission of knowledge that benefit the global elite. As Jenson and Santos (2000) aptly clarify, globalization is “a process by which a given local condition or entity succeeds in traversing borders and extending its reach over the global, and in doing so, develops the capacity to designate a rival social condition or entity as local” (Stromquist, 2002: 3). The “global” therefore is a complex construction that can embrace circumstances that reflect human universals, an extended national or regional interest, and/or the condition of the global commons (Williams, 2003: 302).

While quite a bit of attention has been given to conceptualizations of globalisation in terms of economics (understood as worldwide marketisation and economic growth) and globalisation in terms of information and communications technologies (understood as the rate and reach of knowledge