

## GLOBALISATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: A VIEW FROM THE SOUTH

Noel Gough

Globalisation is one of the key ideas currently informing educational policy, practice and research in many countries. This paper examines the meaning of globalisation and its local expression in countries such as South Africa and Australia, with particular reference to possible implications of globalisation for environmental education. I outline an approach to conceptualising globalisation as a 'transitional imaginary' in curriculum work and draw some distinctions between globalisation, development, and the types of 'thinking globally' that environmental education often promotes. I suggest that there are significant tensions between supporting economic globalisation and promoting global perspectives in school curricula that have particular relevance for environmental education and may require a distinctive local response from southern African environmental educators.

### INTRODUCTION

Globalisation has become one of the key ideas informing educational policy in Australia and many other countries during the 1990's. The term 'globalisation' is often used to describe the integration of national economies into the international marketplace (see, for example, Robertson, 1990; Waters, 1995) and the implications of globalisation for education have for the most part been discussed and debated in relation to broad policy questions concerning the economics, management and organisation of education and training (see, for example, Little, 1996; Pannu, 1996; Samoff, 1996; Stewart, 1996). Globalisation also refers to our apprehension of new and increasingly complex patterns of interconnectedness - cultural processes that destabilise relationships between social organisation and the spaces and places in which technologies, materials, media and meanings are produced, exchanged and consumed. Thus, for Anthony Giddens (1994:4) globalisation is "about the transformation of space and time, its increasing intensification acutely related to the expansion of mass communication and transport systems."

Globalisation involves contradictory trends towards the integration and differentiation of economic and social processes that vary according to each country's particular history, political institutions and cultural traditions. Thus, globalisation does not impinge on all nation-states in the same way. Globalisation can be expressed as economic concentration (and an internationally mobile labour force), cultural homogenisation (Coca-colonisation, the McDonald's phenomenon) and transnational social movements (including the environmental and peace movements). But at the same time, globalisation has facilitated the fragmentation of national and group identities (Balkanisation) and the emergence of new hybrid

identities within nation-states (Greek-Australian, African-American).

I am sure that globalisation is being expressed differently in southern Africa and Australia, and that there are distinctive local encouragements to thinking positively about globalisation in South Africa, given its relatively recent emergence from a long period of economic and cultural isolation (coupled, nevertheless, with intense international scrutiny). I do not presume to give South African colleagues any advice on how they should respond to these encouragements but, as a fellow resident of the southern hemisphere, it might be useful if I share my 'view from the south' of some possible implications of globalisation for environmental education. Although Australia is economically aligned with the nations that international aid and development organisations call the wealthy and industrialised 'north', many of us feel that we stand with nations of the developing 'south' in ways that reflect more than our geographic location. Nevertheless, our geography helps: despite being thousands of kilometres from the world's financial capitals, our relatively high rate of unemployment (not to mention much of our foreign and domestic policy) is a direct result of decisions taken in the boardrooms of London, Tokyo and New York, and we have good reasons for suspecting that aerosol usage in the northern hemisphere has some causal relationship to the carcinogenic hole in the ozone layer over Tasmania.

I am currently involved in research which explores the links between globalisation and school curriculum change. This research is broadly concerned with the ways in which processes and effects of economic and cultural globalisation are becoming evident in curriculum policies and school programmes, and expressed by teachers and students, with particular reference to the ways in which meanings that

that circulate in increasingly globalised media (such as television and the internet) are deployed in the construction of school knowledge (Gough, 1997, in press). My particular interests are in the conceptual and methodological aspects of this research and I will outline below one approach to conceptualising globalisation in curriculum work. I then briefly explore a key contextual issue that seems likely to complicate efforts to inquire into local expressions of globalisation in curriculum work, namely, the global perspectives that are already entrenched in many school subjects. I argue that there may be significant tensions between globalisation and global perspectives in school curricula that are particularly relevant to the work of environmental educators.

#### GLOBALISATION AND CURRICULUM INQUIRY

As an issue for curriculum inquiry, I do not assume that globalisation is a subject and/or object to be constrained by definition. Rather, it is a focus for speculation - for generating meanings. To paraphrase Clermont Gauthier's (1992:185) orientation to his critique of action research, I want to know how globalisation works, and what it does, but not what it is. I am interested in what curriculum workers (teachers, administrators, academics, researchers) *do*, and *do not* do, with the meanings that we exchange under the sign of globalisation, and in working towards a defensible position on the meanings we *should* attempt to select, generate and reproduce through our curriculum practices.

Henry & Taylor (1997:47) identify two aspects of globalisation - 'the facts concerning transnational processes and communication' and 'an increasing awareness of this reality' - and I will focus here on the second. There is, of course, no unitary 'reality' of globalisation, and I suggest that whatever 'awareness' may be 'increasing' is a somewhat inchoate apprehension of complex, multiple, proliferating and immanent *realities*, overlaid (and further complicated) by our own reflexive 'awareness' of the need to be - and to be seen to be - aware that globalisation is, indeed, worthy of our attention. My own attention is drawn to those traces of globalisation that Wilson & Dissanayake (1996: 6) describe as a 'transnational imaginary', namely:

the *as-yet-unfigured* horizon of contemporary cultural production by which national spaces/identities of political allegiance and economic regulation are being undone and imagined communities of modernity are being reshaped at the macropolitical (global) and

micropolitical (cultural) levels of everyday existence [emphasis in original].

Like Grumet (1981: 115), I take curriculum to be 'the collective story we tell our children about our past, our present, and our future,' and therefore see curriculum work as one form of 'contemporary cultural production' through which this transnational imaginary may be expressed. As it coheres around the concept of 'globalisation', the appearance of this transnational imaginary in the Australian literature of educational inquiry has, for the most part, been restricted to discussions and debates about the economic management, marketing and organisation of education and training (see, for example, Kenway *et al.*, 1994; Lingard *et al.*, 1993) and broad questions of national schooling policy (see, for example, Henry & Taylor, 1997). For these scholars, economic restructuring - driven by the need for Australia to respond to international economic and technological trends - appears to be the master discourse informing policy decisions at all levels of education. For example, Kenway *et al.* (1994:318) argue that two dominant restructuring tendencies have emerged in Australian educational systems' responses to economic globalisation: A centralising tendency concerned with curriculum and professional development, enabled by corporate federalism and the new nationalism, and guided by the principles of vocationalism and scientific rationality; and a decentralising tendency concerned with money, management and industrial relations, and guided by principles of deregulation, devolution, privatisation, commercialisation and commodification. While I do not dispute these generalisations, we cannot assume that the institutional force of globalisation within a particular nation-state's policy discourses will necessarily carry similar weight elsewhere. Transnational economic exchanges predate the spread of global capital, and imagining that they now constitute some kind of irresistible force transforming all aspects of late-twentieth century life may exaggerate the reach and extent of global economic integration. For example, Barnett & Cavanagh (1994:383) estimate that about 80 per cent of the world's population lives outside global consumer networks.

Economic globalisation clearly has consequences for national and local curriculum policies, but evidence of the ways in which it may be informing and (dis)organising curriculum practices at the school level is chiefly anecdotal. For example, Henry & Taylor (1997: 56) observe that in Australia the pressures of micro-economic reform have already encouraged education systems and some schools "to

wheel and deal where they can in the attempt to become more competitive and cost-effective:"

Schools buy in pre-packaged American software, and there are increasing pressures for schools to seek corporate sponsorship for all manner of things - from school bands through to computer laboratories. Increasing numbers of schools ply the Asian market for fee paying students. This commercial logic is essentially anarchic, with unpredictable effects on curriculum and schooling practices.

Precisely how school curricula will change in response to the new restructuring agendas driven by economic globalisation remains a very open question, especially as these are combined with, and complicated by, the increasing (and interconnected) effects of global media culture on what young people learn (in and out of schools). While it is possible to make some informed guesses about how globalisation will manifest itself in changing school curricula (and in whose interests), there are many gaps in our current knowledge of the dynamics of a transnational imaginary in curriculum work and in the theoretical resources which may assist us in identifying problems and opportunities as they emerge. For environmental educators, the sedimented history of global perspectives in school curricula is a key contextual issue that complicates any attempt to locate the transnational imaginary of globalisation in our work.

#### BEFORE GLOBALISATION: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES IN THE CURRICULUM

Global issues and concerns have long functioned as topics or themes in specific traditional learning areas such as history and geography, and efforts to give more emphasis to global perspectives in school curricula are well-documented. For example, in many English-speaking countries during the latter years of the 1980's, global themes became an explicit focus of a number of curriculum development initiatives in such relatively new curriculum areas as development education (*Living in a Global Environment*, Fien, 1989), peace studies (*Educating for Global Responsibility*, Reardon, 1988), world studies (*Global Teacher, Global Learner*, Pike & Selby, 1987 and *Making Global Connections*, Hicks & Steiner, 1989) and the World Wide Fund for Nature's (WWF) Global Environmental Education Programme (Huckle, 1988). The recognition of the global dimensions and significance of issues such as peace, environment, and industrialisation in developing nations, has also led some international institutions - such as the United Nations, UNESCO, and its

satellite and subsidiary organisations, including the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) - to attempt to influence school curricula through a variety of transnational curriculum development and/or teacher professional development projects. For example, the UNESCO-UNEP International Environmental Education Programme, which commenced in 1974 and is still current, has sponsored many such projects which have sought to promote educational action in response to concerns about the quality of the global environment. (However, this program has also been criticised for perpetuating a colonialist discourse in environmental education rather than promoting genuine international collaboration and cooperation; see Greenall-Gough, 1993).

Many of these curriculum development initiatives promoted variations on a now familiar slogan - 'Think global. Act local' - though none, to my knowledge, recognised the irony of recycling a phrase that owes much of its popularity to the economist Theodore Levitt (1983:92), who used it to encapsulate his advice that 'the globalisation of markets is at hand' in an article for the *Harvard Business Review*. Greig, Pike & Selby (1987:20) are typical of the authors of environmental education texts who render this slogan as 'think globally, act locally' without citing or otherwise acknowledging any source. (Of course, the imperative to think globally has an even longer history: For example, in 1967 Marshall McLuhan noted that with the advent of an electronic information environment, "all the territorial aims and objectives of business and politics [tend] to become illusory"; see McLuhan & Fiore, 1967:5). But while global themes in the curriculum are undoubtedly one consequence of the success of transnational social movements, there is very little evidence that they express a transnational imaginary that has contributed to any significant changes in the key meanings that are mobilised in school-based curriculum deliberations and debates (see Annette Gough, 1997; Noel Gough, 1987, 1990, 1991). For example, it is obvious that environmental education has been understood in many schools and school systems as an incremental addition or alternative to conventional curriculum *content*, but I can only speculate on its role (if any) in challenging the 'container' metaphor of curriculum. Yet this is precisely what might be expected if 'think global' had become a powerful imperative in thinking about school curriculum change, since it can be argued that all notions of 'containment' are destabilised and subverted by recognising the complexity and multiplicity of the global environment's inter-connections (thus, for example, we can no longer simply 'throw

rubbish away', because in global environmental terms there is no 'away').

However, the point I wish to develop here is concerned with the ways in which global perspectives in national and local curriculum specifications may function as a kind of 'noise' in any attempts to examine more closely how school curricula might (or should) be changing in response both to economic globalisation and to broader cultural expressions of a transnational imaginary. For example, in 1995 the state of Victoria's Board of Studies published its *Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF)* as a basis for curriculum planning in years P-10 and for reporting on student achievement. The eight-volume CSF (its contents are organised into the eight key learning areas 'agreed to nationally' by the former Australian Education Council) includes in its outcome statements references to many of the same global issues and concerns that have previously functioned as topics or themes in subjects such as history and geography. Moreover, the CSF can itself be understood as a product of a centralising tendency in educational restructuring that has been animated by economic globalisation. However, while the CSF is likely to be very influential in shaping the rhetoric of school curriculum policies and priorities, any references to globalisation that may be expressed in (or implied by) its outcome statements will comprise only a relatively small sample of the possible meanings that actually circulate among teachers and students in schools.

For example, we have little knowledge of how teachers in the Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) key learning area in Australia deploy concepts of globalisation or other expressions of a transnational imaginary to "explain economic decisions made by governments" (this is a Level 5 learning outcome in the 'Natural and Social Systems' strand of the SOSE KLA; see Victoria, 1995:18), although a content analysis of syllabus documents and textbooks would undoubtedly provide us with some clues as to which explanations they are likely to privilege. Fien & Williamson-Fien (1996:125) provide a recent overview of 'best practice' in teaching global perspectives in SOSE in which they assert that "few Australian syllabuses provide students with [a] comprehensive view of the world as an interconnected and interdependent system". However, a consideration of what these authors *omit* from their discussion and recommendations sheds useful light on the new complexities that globalisation introduces to the SOSE curriculum in Australia and, indeed, to environmental education in any setting. Fien &

Williamson-Fien (1996:129) consider that the role of global education in a country such as Australia is to create public awareness and understanding of the nexus between development and lifestyle issues, and to promote values and lifestyle choices consistent with the core principles of life in a democracy.

These authors unabashedly write from a socially critical standpoint on the role of the industrial development paradigm in building nation-states, but they do not seem to recognise that the terms of the political debates in which they engage are rapidly changing. One set of changes is usefully summarised in McMichael's (1996:26) list of five premises that underlie his argument that globalisation has displaced the institutional and ideological relations constructed by the development project:

First, development is perhaps the 'master' concept of the social sciences, and has been understood as an evolutionary movement bringing rising standards of living - a logical outcome of human rationality as revealed in the European experience; second, the development project was a political strategy to institute nationally managed economic growth as a replicable pattern across the expanding system of states in the post-World War II world order; third, the paradigm of developmentalism offered a broadly acceptable interpretation of how to organise states and international institutions around the goal of maximising national welfare via technological advances in industry and agriculture; fourth, this paradigm has collapsed with the puncturing of the illusion of development in the 1980s debt crisis, the management of which dismantled development institutions; and fifth, debt management instituted a new organising principle of 'globalisation' as an alternative institutional framework, with the underlying message that nation-states no longer 'develop;' rather, they position themselves in the global economy.

Fien & Williamson-Fien (1996:129) argue that "global education is based upon the assumption that the social and structural changes needed to make this a more peaceful, just and ecologically sustainable world" will not occur without 'a fundamental re-education of the Western public'. But, as McMichael's analysis suggests, the 'social and structural changes' that might constitute socially just and ecologically sustainable responses to *post*-developmentalist capitalism are not necessarily those that have been seen

to be desirable in forms of global education that take a socially critical position on development. What is particularly noticeable in Fien & Williamson-Fien's (1996:129) elaboration of their position is how easily a language of opposition to the development paradigm can be accommodated by the new rhetoric of globalisation; they write: "... if it is true that the rich must live more simply so that the poor may simply live then, in the words of Trainer (1988)":

the key... must be the education of public's in overdeveloped countries regarding these critical themes, so that eventually they will support the necessary restructuring of the global economy and the economies of their own countries.

I suspect that many readers of Trainer's words could easily assimilate them to the dominant discourses of economic 'restructuring' with which Australia and many other countries have been pre-occupied since the mid-1980's; some may recognise that Trainer is likely to be anticipating a very different type of 'restructuring' from that which might be indicated by the industrialised nation's economic agenda. My concern here is that the *language* of 'global education,' as promulgated by even its most critical practitioners, may be little too hospitable to an uncritical embrace of economic globalisation. Environmental educators cannot assume that their call to 'think globally' necessarily requires them to support any and every local expression of globalisation.

## CONCLUSION

I have suggested that the history of global perspectives in curriculum can be understood as a kind of 'noise' disrupting and complicating attempts to locate a transnational imaginary in curriculum work, but in identifying it as such I am not suggesting that this noise should be 'controlled' or suppressed. Such noise is just as much an expression of a transnational imaginary as the national education policy instruments that are intended to better position the education systems of countries like Australia and South Africa in the global marketplace. But we need to know more about how these complicating and competing discourses - whether they be history or hype - interact, shape one another, and shape school curricula.

To take just one example of the different ways in which globalisation might be expressed in Australia and South Africa, consider the circumstances of the 51% of South Africans who live in rural settlements many of whom live from the land, and who may be joining the global economy now that the economic

sanctions that once kept them separate have been lifted. Under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), as formulated in early 1990's, agricultural efficiency is not achieved through national development plans (in which the farm sector of nation's economy articulates with its industrial sector) but by world market 'breadbaskets' achieved through farm concentration and specialisation - a streamlining of agriculture that accelerates deruralisation. Australia has already reached the stage of having an almost residual rural sector: Less than 15% of the population live in rural areas and the fraction employed in agriculture work on 'efficient' farms that produce the maximum amount of food for the minimum cost using the least number of people. Goldsmith (1994:39) provides a worst case scenario for the application of GATT in countries that retain a high percentage of rural settlement:

It is estimated that there are still 3.1 billion people in the world who live from the land. If GATT manages to impose worldwide the sort of productivity achieved by the intensive agriculture of nations such as Australia, then it becomes easy to calculate that about two billion of these people will become redundant. Some of these GATT refugees will move to urban slums. But a large number of them will be forced into mass migration ... We will have profoundly and tragically destabilised the world's population.

Schools are inevitably implicated in promoting (or resisting), mediating and ameliorating the deleterious effects of such social transformations. For example, Howley (1997) argues that nation-building in the USA, which has been achieved partly through systems of schooling that privilege cosmopolitan interests, has served to debase rather than improve the quality of life in rural communities:

In fact, during the past century and a half, improving rural schools also meant reshaping and redirecting them into a national system - a system of schooling, manufacture, trade, politics, and culture - that has insured, if not required, the depopulation of the countryside.

My hunch is that the roles that environmental educators may be expected to play in building the new South Africa will require them to think very carefully about what they are prepared to support and not support in the name of 'globalisation' (and of 'development' too, since this is far from being an extinct concept). Howley's speculations and suggestions about the types of research and educational policies that might honour rural interests in the USA are

worthy of consideration in this regard, but the precise ways in which globalisation is being expressed and strategically deployed in South Africa will require the formulation of a distinctive local response.

There are few obvious or easy resolutions of the complex issues that globalisation raises for environmental educators, and I can do little more in this brief essay than to raise questions about these complexities for the reader's consideration. By way of closure, it might suffice for me to say that environmental education advances by being challenged to respond to new problems and research questions and that I would be pleased to act as a 'critical friend' to any South African colleagues who may be interested in pursuing such problems and questions in more detail.

#### REFERENCES

- Barnet, J. & Cavanagh, J. 1994. *Global Dreams: Imperial corporations and the New World Order*. Touchstone, New York.
- Fien, J. & Williamson-Fien, J. 1996. Global perspectives in Studies of Society and Environment. In R. Gilbert (Ed.) *Studying Society and Environment: A Handbook for Teachers*. Macmillan, South Melbourne.
- Fien, J. (Ed.). 1989. *Living in a Global Environment: Classroom Activities in Development Education*. Australian Geography Teachers Association, Brisbane.
- Gauthier, C. 1992. Between crystal and smoke: Or, how to miss the point in the debate about action research. In W. Pinar & W. Reynolds (Eds). *Understanding Curriculum as Phenomenological and Deconstructed Text*. Teachers College, New York.
- Giddens, A. 1994. *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics*. Polity, Cambridge.
- Goldsmith, J. 1994. *The Trap*. Carroll & Graf, New York.
- Gough, A. 1997. *Education and the Environment: Policy, Trends and the Problems of Marginalisation*. Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne.
- Gough, N. 1987. Learning with environments: Towards an ecological paradigm for education. In I. Robottom (Ed.) *Environmental Education: Practice and Possibility*. Deakin University, Geelong.
- Gough, N. 1990. Healing the earth within us: Environmental education as cultural criticism. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 13(3), 12-17.
- Gough, N. 1991. Narrative and nature: Unsustainable fictions in environmental education. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 7, 31-42.
- Gough, N. 1997. Weather™ Incorporated: Environmental education, postmodern identities, and technocultural constructions of nature. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 2, 145-162.
- Gough, N. (in press). Globalisation and school curriculum change: Locating a transnational imaginary. *Journal of Education Policy*.
- Greenall-Gough, A. 1993. Globalising environmental education: What's language got to do with it? *Journal of Experiential Education*, 16(3), 32-39.
- Greig, S.; Pike, G. & Selby, D. 1987. *Earthrights: Education as if the Planet Really Mattered*. World Wildlife Fund & Kogan Page, London.
- Grumet, M. 1981. Restitution and reconstruction of educational experience: An autobiographical method for curriculum theory. In M. Lawn & L. Barton (Eds). *Rethinking Curriculum Studies: A Radical Approach*. Croom Helm, London.
- Henry, M. & Taylor, S. 1997. Globalisation and national schooling policy in Australia. In B. Lingard & P. Porter (Eds). *A National Approach to Schooling in Australia? Essays on the Development of National Policies in Schools Education*. Australian College of Education, Canberra.
- Hicks, D. & Steiner, M. (Eds). 1989. *Making Global Connections: A World Studies Workbook*. Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh.
- Howley, C. 1997. Studying the rural in education: Nation-building, 'globalisation,' and school improvement. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 5(12). <http://olam.ed.asu.edu/epaa/v5n12.html>
- Huckle, J. 1988. *What We Consume: The Teachers' Handbook*. Richmond Publishing Company, Surrey.
- Kenway, J., Bigum, C., Fitzclarence, L., Collier, J. & Tregenza, K. 1994. New education in new times. *Journal of Education Policy*, 9(4), 317-333.
- Levitt, T. 1983. The globalisation of markets. *Harvard Business Review*, 83(3), 92-102.
- Lingard, B., Knight, J. & Porter, P. (Eds). 1993. *Schooling Reform in Hard Times*. Falmer, London & Washington DC.
- Little, A. 1996. Globalisation and educational research: Whose context counts? *International Journal of Educational Development*, 16(4), 427-438.

McLuhan, M. & Fiore, Q. 1967. *War and Peace in the Global Village*. Bantam Books, New York.

McMichael, P. 1996. Globalisation: Myths and realities. *Rural Sociology*. 61(1), 25-55.

Pannu, R. 1996. Neoliberal project of globalisation: Prospects for democratisation of education. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 42(2), 87-101.

Pike, G. & Selby, D. 1987. *Global Teacher, Global Learner*. Hodder & Stoughton, London.

Reardon, B. (Ed.) 1988. *Educating for Global Responsibility: Teacher-designed Curricula for Peace Education, K-12*. Teachers College, New York & London.

Robertson, R. 1990. Mapping the global condition: Globalisation as the central concept. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 7(2/3), 15-30.

Samoff, J. 1996. Which priorities and strategies for education? *International Journal of Education Development*, 16(3), 249-271.

Stewart, F. 1996. Globalisation and education. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 16(4), 327-333.

Trainer, F. 1988. *Development Re-think*. Mimeo. School of Education, University of New South Wales, Sydney.

Victoria. 1995. *Curriculum and Standards Framework*. Board of Studies, Victoria.

Waters, M. 1995. *Globalisation*. Routledge, London & New York.

Wilson, R. & Dissanayake, W. (Eds). 1996. *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*. Duke University, Durham & London.