

A Critique and Response to Multicultural Visions of Globalization

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ABSTRACT: The paper by White in this issue of *Interchange* contains an interesting model for a global educational perspective based on the writings of Aurobindo and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. White proposes a foundation for this new perspective based on the synthesis of Aurobindo's and de Chardin's theories of global, social, and conscious evolution. In our response we critique the author's proposal from the perspective of the current challenges to social justice within the educational community. In particular the writings of Charles Darwin, Paolo Freire, Karl Marx, and Vivekananda (Aurobindo's peer) are examined to present evolutionary and philosophical viewpoints on the origins and causes of inequity. We contend that no global multicultural perspective on education is possible unless we first address the fundamental inequities present within the socio-economic and educational structures that characterize the world today. Thus any attempt to introduce a "global educational agenda" within an educational institutional structure is bound to be problematic.

Introduction

"Multicultural Visions of Globalization" is an ambitious paper, one which attempts to create a new theoretical framework for education in today's age of *globalization*. The author integrates the theories proposed by eminent individuals like Aurobindo and de Chardin to lay the foundations of a new global educational perspective with the goal of promoting ethical and social consciousness in the classroom. However, many of the arguments presented in the article overlook the reality of the current situation in the world and instead engage in a hypothetical exercise of constructing a framework which supposedly will overcome the obstacles existing in the world today, particular social injustice within existing educational systems.

The Need for Common Notions (Definitions)

The use of various terms in this paper without careful definition are problematic. For instance, the terms consciousness and social consciousness need to be carefully defined as they lay the foundation for many of the premises and consequent claims in the paper. White writes “globalization is defined as the compression of the world and the amplification of consciousness on an international social, political, and humanitarian scale.” This assumes that the term consciousness is a uniform construct and that a common collective consciousness is a possibility. The etymology of the word consciousness shows that different definitions abound in the domain of philosophy, psychology, socio-biology, and theology. We think a better approach might be to use known socio-biological models of altruism in order to argue that the social evolution of mankind indeed reveals some universals of moral behaviour (see Conde & Ayala, 2004). However most socio-biological models reveal shortcomings when reduced to the individual level (Wilson & Sober, 1994) and hence the predictive value of these models are tentative.

Some general criticisms we have for White’s article are:

- (1) The lack of evidence presented to make the case that we (humanity) are really moving towards a collective consciousness;
- (2) The absence of clearly outlining and resolving dichotomies in various definitions drawn from the spiritual community versus the scientific community.

The Reality of the Situation

The solution proposed by White is more of a spiritually guided answer as opposed to one that carefully weighs current realities and real educational and institutional obstacles before proposing an answer (hypothetical or otherwise). A natural question is, Why does one need a multicultural perspective to globalization, particularly the need to create a new perspective that integrates Eastern and Western thought? In other words, what is it about society and education today that is broken and needs fixing or needs to be adjusted? There is no denying that a basic fact of life around us, both in the East and West, is that inequities exist: rich versus poor, the educated versus uneducated, those in power versus those without power, wealthy countries versus poor countries, citizens versus guest/transient workers, higher social standing and mobility versus being stuck in abject status quos, affluent neighbourhoods and schools versus ghettos (Sriraman, 2007). Although

the author presents a very well intentioned thesis for education in order to shift our collective evolutionary consciousness to better life for the coming generations, the origins of present day inequity need to be better examined before proposing a solution, hypothetical or otherwise. We rely on the writings of Charles Darwin, Paolo Freire, Karl Marx, and Vivekananda (Aurobindo's peer) to present our position.

Why do inequities exist in the first place? What are their origins? These are important questions to answer before we attempt to propose any solution. Are educational initiatives aimed at equity and multicultural awareness simply attempts at "patching up" things that are in essence atomically broken? Are multicultural educational initiatives, well intentioned attempts to lead students towards a better more evolved understanding of the kaleidoscope which characterizes humanity? That is, to give a deeper meaning to the purpose of education or simply remedy the situation on an ad-hoc basis as opposed to getting to the root of problems. Like White, we are interested in addressing and changing the status quo contributing to the propagation of injustice in the world within the framework of education. However simply proposing a theoretical solution without fully understanding the real issues to begin with is both problematic and wishful thinking. Some positions are now presented about the origins of inequity and injustices within educational and societal mechanisms, which in our opinion need first to be addressed by educators before proposing any global framework for multiculturalism.

The Evolutionary Viewpoint

The Darwinian explanation suggests that inequity is simply one of the many natural mechanisms that have arisen over the course of our evolution. If we view ourselves as creatures whose sole purpose in life is to survive and to have progeny, then it is evident that the competition for the same natural resources would leave others in the wake. The strictly Darwinian explanation would suggest that certain groups are doomed to perish simply because they are unable to cope with changes occurring in their environment. Unlike other mammals, we tend to hoard natural resources, much more than we can possibly use and at the same time, we also exhibit tendencies towards altruism which are paradoxical and unexplainable in strictly biological terms. In fact, Charles Darwin (1871) in the *Descent of Man*, posed the question whether the phenomenon of moral behaviour in humans could be explained in evolutionary terms, viz., natural selection. The evolution

of social systems (religious, ideological, political) of various kinds are not explainable strictly in Darwinian terms. One of the most interesting but controversial theories proposed to explain social evolution is that of Herbert Spencer. Although Herbert Spencer is better known for his population-pressure theory. Spencer (1857, 1873) also paid attention to the phenomenon of warfare and its role in shaping human progress, namely raising the consciousness of organizations to a higher more evolved plane. Recent history shows examples of this evolution of consciousness after conflicts; for example, Asoka's¹ embracing of the peaceful doctrines of Buddhism after the carnage at Kalinga; the Icelanders conversion to Christianity as a means to end internal strife among warring clans, and to work towards the common good of their isolated society. The Icelandic Parliament is in fact over a 1000 years old. Comte (1972) proposed a stage theory for our social evolution in which humanity moves from a theological stage onto a metaphysical stage onto a positive stage, where we reject absolutism of all kinds. In our opinion, the fundamentalism in religion rampant in the world today indicates that humanity is still very much in the theological stage.

Is Globalization a New Phenomenon?

The present day economic inequity in the world is best illustrated by the fact that many universities in the West have larger budgets than the Gross National Product (GNP) of many nations in Africa, Asia, and South America. Despite the current state of affairs we are also creatures of ideas who over the course of our evolution have moved away from a strictly clannish and genotypic connection to a memetic² connection. We conglomerate over common ideas or ideals as evidenced in the spread of the numerous great world religions, which link people together across a spectrum of class, culture, race, socioeconomic status, and nationality. This journal medium via which we educators communicate is a memetic product. Similarly ideologies such as Marxism connect people from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Even the so-called phenomenon of globalization is nothing new from the point of view of history. There is sufficient historical evidence that even in periods when means of transport and communication had not been developed, oriental civilization penetrated into the West. Iran and Greece were in contact with each other, Asoka's missions to the West, and Alexander's influence on Egypt, Iran, and North West India, produced a cross-fertilization of cultures (Radhakrishnan, 1964).

Another big, intensive, but relatively localized process, which we may, also call globalization, occurred in Europe, in the expansion of Christianity in the middle ages, in the shadow of the Roman Empire. In the late middle ages, states began to take shape as components of a new form of Empire. The scenario resulting from this process of European globalization, prevails until now. In the sort of jig-saw puzzle which characterize the political dynamics present in this process, the idea of a nation became strong. States and nations are different concepts, as well as political dynamics and cultural dynamics. The political dimension of this process prevailed and something vaguely called State/Nation began to take shape as the primary unit of the European scenario. The empire which emerged in the late middle ages and the Renaissance as the assemblage of such state/nations, although fragile, mainly due to power struggle, favored the development of the ideological, intellectual, and material bases for building up the magnificent structure of science and technology, anchored in mathematics, supporting a capitalistic socio-economic structure. The expanding capitalism, supported by religious ideology and a strong science and technology, had, as a consequence, a new form of globalization, now effectively engaging the entire globe. The great navigations and the consequent conquest and colonization, completely disclosed the fragility of a possible European empire. The internal contradictions of state, as a political arrangement, and of nation, as a cultural arrangement, emerged, in many forms (Sriraman & Törner, 2007).

Religious and linguistic conflicts, even genocide, within a State/Nation became not rare facts. Indeed, they are not over. As a result of all these processes, education was, probably, the most affected institution. Educational proposals, even curricula, are noticed in this era. The influence of national characteristics interfered with objectives derived from the new World scenario. The development of Science and Technology, obviously related to the educational systems, was unequal. Interchanges intensified. The Industrial Revolution made Science and Technology a determinant of progress. Hence, the enormous competition among European States, which intensified during the 19th century and early 20th century, raised Science and Technology, which became increasingly dependent on Mathematics, to top priority. One terrible consequence of this competition between European states was the advent of colonization, the consequences of which the world is still very much experiencing.

The Problem of Materialism: Marx and Engels

Although many countries in Asia, Africa, and South America became free from the yoke of colonialism in the last century, this freedom left in its wake uprooted peoples when colonial masters started drawing lines on maps to equitably partition land in various regions of the world. Hopefully the reader realizes the irony in our previous statement. There was considerable loss of subsistence lifestyles, loss of indigenous cultures, and traditional knowledge. The consequences of colonization were not any different in North America and in Australasia. The outcome of the colonial period of our history was education as an institution and a new economic structure being implanted in various regions of the world with the explicit purpose of perpetuating the very structures created to maintain colonialism, namely oppression of the many by a few. Indeed Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' monumental writings³ address issues such as exploitation of workers within a capitalistic economic system and the problem of materialism confronting humanity, which would inevitably lead to class struggles and revolutions. Many of the foundational writings of social justice can be traced back to the ideas proposed by Marx and Engels. Today's study of the ecological footprints left by the industrialized nations reveals the obscene differences in resource consumption⁴ between rich and poor nations, a natural consequence of materialism run amok as predicted by Marx and Engels. White writes:

The emergence of reflective consciousness marks the current stage of evolution. Evolutionary movement has now shifted from the biological realm to the psychosocial realm. This is the formative stage of the Noosphere (Greek prefix "noos" meaning "mind"). The Noosphere is described as a semi-imposed layer of thought forming around the planet, metaphorically clothing the globe with a brain. The future of human evolution is the organizational complexification of this social sphere surrounding the planet creating a collective global consciousness.

White also points that Teilhard makes a magical leap into mystical speculation as opposed to staying grounded within the framework of reality. If indeed we grant "eons" of time for such magical changes to occur to our collective consciousness, then a simple application of the Hegelian dialectic to Marx and Engel's thesis would eventually lead society into a more evolved connected social state culminating in a communal state. This approach does not rely on any notions of spirituality for positive changes to occur.

A Pedagogy of Social Justice: Paolo Freire

Paolo Freire (1921-1997), the Brazilian educator and social reformist, came of humble origins. His books *Pedagogy of Freedom* (1998a) and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1998b) is perhaps the most frequently cited Marxist-influenced⁵ work in educational literature. Freire addressed the power dynamics between the oppressed and the oppressors (including the dynamic between teacher and student), and that the way toward liberation is through political movements and political struggle, of which literacy is but one part. Thus his emphasis on writing the world, is beyond literacy. Clearly, literacy (i.e., reading the world) is also an integral and necessary part of this process. Freire's banking concept holds that students are knowledgeable beings with the intrinsic capacity of creating knowledge with the teacher, as opposed to being empty buckets of ignorance or simply "files" or automatons dependent on the teacher's absolute authority to learn and construct new knowledge. It is also important to note that Freire emphasized critical literacy as opposed to functional literacy. The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2004) defines mathematical literacy as an individual's capacity to identify and understand the role that mathematics plays in the world. Further literacy involves making well-founded judgments and using and engaging with mathematics in ways that meet the needs of each individual's life as a constructive, concerned, and reflective citizen. It should be noted that countries like Brazil, China, and India are not a part of OECD but are key players in globalization with large vulnerable populations. The essential question is: Does the OECD represent only the interests of the citizens of developed and wealthy countries who are its members or does it also take into consideration the need for equitable and sustainable development with non-members, and more importantly create an awareness of this inequity to students in countries which participate in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). In spite of the good intentions of the OECD, is the push for mathematical literacy around the world simply another mechanism at propagating functionality in the masses as opposed to critical thought and liberation? For instance do large scale tests like PISA include problem-solving and problem-posing items which make students quantitatively and qualitatively analyze (a) trends in immigration data within OECD and between OECD and non-OECD countries, the causes and consequences thereof; (b) reported incidences of hate crimes against minorities and immigrants in OECD countries, the causes and

consequences thereof; (c) comparative data on resource consumption between OECD and non-OECD countries, the reasons for huge discrepancies and their consequences; and (d) data revealing trade deficits and surpluses between OECD and non-OECD countries, the causes and consequences thereof.

Freire (1998a) suggested that pedagogical practices should support education for liberation and emphasized problem-posing pedagogies that strive “for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality” (p. 62). Problem-posing pedagogies are necessary if the goal of education is to challenge inequities. Freire’s writing suggests a pedagogy which promotes greater social awareness or a social consciousness appropriate for initiating major shifts in thinking. An outstanding example of this pedagogy in practice is Gutstein’s (2006) work *Reading and Writing the World with Mathematics*. Gutstein’s book also points out the obstacles to such a pedagogy within a school system, particularly institutional resistance from administration and other stake holders within a school district. The question then is: Can emancipatory and social justice pedagogies really free individuals from oppression at a societal level? How can this be possible without it occurring at the individual level first? Freire himself wrote that the central problem was: How can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation? Only as they discover themselves to be “hosts” of the oppressor can they contribute to the midwifery of their liberating pedagogy (1998). Clearly Freire is stating that the oppressed adhere to the oppressor and have to break free. If individuals do not subjectively and intrinsically feel free, how can any educational or social mechanism make this happen no matter how good the intention? Aurobindo does tackle this problem in his writings and White’s article alludes to this issue.

Cho and Lewis (2005) recently re-emphasized the aforementioned essence of Freire’s pedagogy from the point of view of psychology and the problems with the attempts by Marxist theorists to transform Freire’s “pedagogy of the oppressed” into a “pedagogy of revolution.” They write that “oppression has an existence in the unconscious such that those that are oppressed form passionate attachments to the forms of power that oppress them” (p. 313), and it is necessary for social justice researchers and Marxist theorizers to recognize and address this important issue. Cho and Lewis formulate several challenges⁶ to Marxist theorizers as follows:

Part of the discomfort with “revolutionary pedagogy,” is that the project of liberation often appears to be presupposing universal

notions of what it means to be oppressed, liberated, and how this movement is to be made – often the problem lies in Freire’s emphasis on material relations and not on the issue of patriarchy or colonization with no clear resolution to the issue of authority, liberatory pedagogies can portray particularist notions of oppression and liberation in universal ways and to impose these visions of oppression and liberation upon others through a kind of vanguardism, which can ironically replicate relations of oppression other than overcome them thus returning us to the problem with which Freire begins his analysis in the first place. (2005, p. 314)

Spring (2006) summarizes the relationship between pedagogies and the economic needs of nation/states. His thesis is that the present need for nation/states to prepare workers for the global economy has resulted in the creation of an “educational security state” where an elaborate accountability-based system of testing is used to control teachers and students. Spring correctly points out that:

Both teachers and students become subservient to an industrial-consumer paradigm that integrates education and economic planning. This educational model has prevailed over classical forms of education such as Confucianism, Islam, and Christianity and their concerns with creating a just and ethical society through the analysis and discussion of sacred and classical texts. It has also prevailed over progressive pedagogy designed to prepare students to reconstruct society. In the 21st century, national school systems have similar grades and promotion plans, instructional methods, curriculum organization, and linkages between secondary and higher education. Most national school systems are organized to serve an industrial-consumer state. As later explained, the industrial-consumer state is premised on the idea that a good society involves economic growth resulting from increased production and consumption of goods. In the industrial-consumer state, education is organized to serve the goal of economic growth. (p. 105)

Therefore, in order to counter this organized push for eliminating progressive education, it is important that educators be open to alternative models of pedagogies as proposed by White, which attempt to move beyond the current dominant “industrial consumer state” model of education.

Collective Liberation: Vivekananda’s Perspective

In India, the problem of individual liberation has been addressed within Hindu philosophy by numerous scholars, especially social reformers in

the 19th and 20th centuries. Vivekananda (1863-1902) belonged to a branch of Hindu philosophy called Vedanta (see Sriraman & Benesch, 2005), in particular to a special strand of Vedanta, which holds that no individual can be completely free unless every one else is also free (from oppression). In other words, we as individuals are obliged to act to better society. Vivekananda was able to move beyond the prevalent dogmatic caste system which characterized Indian society and propose a theory of action which necessitated that each of us consciously act towards bettering the lot of our fellow humans, if our goal is to ultimately liberate ourselves and become enlightened. In fact, many of Aurobindo's ideas which White outlines in his article can be traced back to Vivekananda's writings. Again, Vivekananda also does venture into the realm of the mystical within the Hindu framework of the four yogas (Gnana yoga, Raja yoga, Bakthi yoga, and Hatha yoga) as a means of becoming enlightened beings with an evolved consciousness.

Concluding Thought

From a Freirean perspective it is not possible to “empower people” – the best we can do is to create conditions to facilitate, support people empowering themselves, and to work alongside in common struggle. White attempts to create a common vision for educators, and the need for education to be meaningful for the future stake holders of the world. He also manages to synthesize eastern and western perspectives for readers unaware of the writings of Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin. We applaud his intention although the solution proposed is idealized.

NOTES

1. Asoka (c. 299 – 237 BCE) is credited with the establishment of the so-called “first” Indian empire, accomplished through decades of bloody conquests. His deep remorse over the carnage at Kalinga led him to embrace the peaceful doctrines of Buddhism. Under his protection, Buddhism flourished and numerous Buddhist texts were written. Asoka also sent numerous emissaries of Buddhism to places like South East Asia, Egypt, Libya, and Macedonia, which resulted in the “golden” age for Buddhism.
2. See Richard Dawkins (1976) *The Selfish Gene*.
3. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Gesamtausgabe*, edited by the Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus.
4. World Resources 2000-2001: *People and ecosystems: The fraying web of life*. United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, World Bank, World Resources Institute.

5. It is unclear whether Freire was Marxist, or the book was a Marxist work. Freire was clearly influenced by Marx and Che Guevara. In the introductory section of the book Freire wrote: "I am certain that Christians and Marxists, though they may disagree with me in part or in whole, will continue reading to the end" (Introduction, 1998).

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