

# Globalization and Educational Change

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*There is no greater context for educational change than that of globalization, nor no grander way of conceptualizing what educational change is about. Wells and her colleagues analyze how economic and political globalization are affecting the identity and independence of nation states, and the ways in which public education (like public health and welfare) are undergoing change within the states. They acknowledge that there is no agreement about how political and economic globalization have affected public education precisely, and they review and evaluate different theoretical claims about the globalization effect: from neo-liberals, liberal-progressives (or modernizers), realists and critical theorists. The paradoxical juxtaposition of educational markets, privatization and decentralization with standardization of assessment and growing emphases on nationhood in the agendas of school reform is analyzed through these different approaches to globalization theory.*

*This chapter also looks at the social and cultural effects of globalization on education again from different theoretical standpoints in terms of the growth of communism and the spread of visual and electronic imagery. Wells and her colleagues examine the consequences of these influences for teaching and learning, the curriculum, and the ability to deal with difference. Globalization is reshaping students' lives through market influences and symbolic concerns with identity and nationhood. Wells and her colleagues demonstrate how the immensely broad phenomenon of globalization is having very concrete effects on contemporary agendas of educational reform.*

In the last two decades, a growing number of economists, political scientists and cultural theorists have turned their attention to the study of "globalization." Although globalization has been called "the central political phenomenon of our day," only recently have scholars in the field of education begun to explore the relationship between this global transformation and the conditions of schooling ("Incorporating . . .," 1996, p. 3; Green, in press). In fact, much of the literature

on educational change focuses on the school as the unit of analysis and does not consider macro-level forces that shape the conditions for school change. We argue, however, that the global shifts discussed in this chapter could shape the very meaning of schooling in the 21st century.

In this chapter, we first briefly note the conditions that comprise the phenomenon of globalization. We then focus on two of the most powerful themes that are emerging from, and contested within, the globalization literature. The first of these overlapping and intertwined themes – the economic and political implications of globalization – is prevalent in the writing of economists and political scientists. It focuses on the effect of globalization on economic inequality and the role of nation-states in providing public services. Public educational systems, state-run institutions that reflect social conditions, stand to be strongly affected by the political and economic dimensions of globalization.

The second theme – the social and cultural implications of globalization – is primarily addressed by cultural theorists. This theme considers the effects of globalization on culture, arguing that globalization both homogenizes and fragments cultural identities across the world. The phenomenon of simultaneous cultural homogenization and fragmentation raises important questions regarding the culture of schools and the direction school change might take.

In the chapter's final section, we suggest avenues for future research into the relationship between globalization and educational change.

## GLOBALIZATION AT A GLANCE

The term “globalization” is generally used to refer to a complicated set of economic, political, and cultural factors. At an economic and political level, the term signifies the diminishing of economic borders and the simultaneous increase in international exchange and transnational interaction (Dolon, 1993, p. 259). As a result of expanding world trade, nations and individuals experience greater economic and political interdependence. New technologies, particularly communications technology that facilitates expanded world trade as well as cultural interaction, are considered essential to the emergence of globalization. Economic exchange across borders leads, ultimately, to “global enmeshment”, as “money, people, images, values, and ideas flow ever more swiftly and smoothly across national boundaries” (Hurrell & Woods, 1995, p. 447). As economic forces reach across borders and cultures are reshaped by new and expanded communications, the role of the nation-state as arbiter of exchange shifts. The magnitude and effects of each of these phenomenon – economic exchange, the role of the nation-state, and cultural shifts – are all contested within the globalization literature. But all theorists of globalization might agree with the statement of Kumar (1995): “Political, economic and cultural life is now strongly influenced by developments at the global level” (p. 121).

In the sections that follow, we consider the debates within the literature on globalization. Before we continue, we must make clarify one element: We do not mean