

Negotiating Policy in an Age of Globalization: Exploring Educational “Policyscapes” in Denmark, Nepal, and China

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This article aims to explore processes of policy implementation with respect to an ongoing empirical study in three very different sites: Denmark, Nepal, and China. Rather than treat these investigations in the traditional manner of separate and contained national case studies, I attempt to create a “policyscape” around processes of what Roger Dale (2000) has called hyper-liberalism in education, and I do so by working across different levels of the education systems within these three countries. My argument is that nation-state and system studies of education must be informed by understandings of the nature of globalization and especially the new imaginative regimes that it makes possible. Educational phenomena in one country case must thus be understood in *ongoing* relation to other such cases. In this sense, I am attempting to operationalize as a research program a new approach to comparison, one that has been alluded to in the literature but only conceptually (e.g., Cowen 2000; Marginson and Mollis 2001; Welch 2001).

This new approach has its own problems, however. If we accept that educational phenomena are increasingly interconnected to the extent that they can be conceptualized as part of some meaningful single site, how then do we understand the role of states in reform? More broadly, how are we to work with locality and the situated history, politics, and culture of distinct places while acknowledging the ways in which these phenomena are themselves products of international dynamics? Further, and perhaps of greatest interest, if such policyscapes exist, how then are acts of negotiation, resistance, and opposition interconnected in the ways that theorists such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) have hypothesized? Perhaps their notion of an interconnected multitude overestimates the capacity of global reform to bring coherence of any type (Balakrishnan 2003), but what, then, are the connected possibilities for action in contemporary educational reforms, and how can these opportunities be understood?

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Conceptualizing Globalization and Education: Some Starting Points

It is common in analyses of globalization to talk of economic, political, and cultural elements, although there is much debate about its history and its distinctiveness as it currently manifests (Tilly 2006). While a range of frameworks is offered in the education literature, one increasingly dominant set focuses on the role of market capitalism (e.g., Ball 1998a; Dale 1999; Welch 2001). Here, the penetration of economic values and systems is re-ordering relations within and across states in ways that are changing the very understandings that we have of what it means to be educated. Democracy and engagement are often viewed as being under siege with calls that we resist the demise of community relations, mutual respect, and dialogue (Welch 2001). Others, however, suggest that we work with the changed circumstances, resorting to, for example, strategies of “academic capitalism” (Clark 1998). Yet others, not least those inspired by French poststructuralism, lament the “terrors” of the “performance society” and appeal to our instinct for self-preservation, often couching their arguments in terms of securing a place to hide (Ball 2003).

While recognizing the role of economic transformation and the reworking of power/knowledge relations resulting from the spread and deepening of advanced capitalism, a broader analysis of the effects of globalization attends to issues of identity—of both individuals and nation-states (e.g., Marginson and Mollis 2001). In relation to individual subjectivities, Arjun Appadurai (1996, 2000) and others (e.g., Gupta and Ferguson 1997) demand that we acknowledge the consequences of the deterritorialization of phenomena created by globalization. Never have static frameworks of nation-state/society, center/local, developed/underdeveloped, and so forth been more inadequate: “The apparent stabilities that we see are, under close examination, usually our devices for handling objects characterized by motion. The greatest of these apparently stable objects is the nation-state, which is today frequently characterized by floating populations, transnational politics within national borders, and mobile configurations of technology and expertise” (Appadurai 2000, 5).

Contemporary globalization is characterized by “flows” that are not only rapid but “disjunctive,” embodying new possibilities but also inconsistencies and contradictions. Here, globalization manifests as disparate and contradictory forces and as the emergence of “intensely local forms” that “have contexts that are anything but local” (Appadurai 2000, 6). New imaginative regimes are one important mechanism at work here, liberating citizens and the oppressed from repressive states, restrictive institutional forms, and local histories but also disciplining them via new forms of collective life and allegiance. Subjects are both empowered by global flows (not least in terms of global visions that reinforce the right to personal emancipation and well-

being) and dominated, for example, by new forms of exploitation within markets and workplaces and by further distortion of gender relations.

In the same way, states are being both emboldened and marginalized by the forces of globalization. Sangeeta Kamat (2002) builds on the work of Henri Lefebvre (see, e.g., Lefebvre 1991) to consider afresh the ways in which state power is being reconfigured in contemporary times. By analyzing the language of a central World Bank document concerned with decentralization (Burki et al. 1999), Kamat explores the ways in which state/society relations are reengineered via a multitude of new control and steering mechanisms. Rather than advocating a direct role for the state, such prescriptions imply invisible or embedded processes of power via new legislative arrangements, managerialist modes of organization and new administrative systems, and—most important—a new mental landscape for thinking about society and its relation to the state.

This mental space may be influenced by a range of global forces, imaginative regimes, specific agencies, and their vested interests, but it is mediated by the state, and it is the state itself that creates the terms on which new regimes and technologies can be received. This “deliberate production of state space” takes form as “politico-institutional and administrative configurations,” wherein the state obtains agreement about its scope of action in any given sphere: “This consensus is engendered, in part at least, by articulating the policy of decentralization with a discourse of democratization. In everyday political and administrative routines the state may be less present than before, strengthening instead its role in producing consensus for the normative framework that determines much of how decentralized relations will be self-governed and self-regulatory” (Kamat 2002, 116). The state is therefore simultaneously decentered by the multiple voices that claim authority to speak about education and strengthened by its new mandate in “organizing the field of possibilities, and laying the boundaries for local policy” (Kamat 2002, 116).

While recognizing the power of the apparatuses of governmentality currently being deployed by states and their agencies, we must also acknowledge the transnational dimensions of these instruments and techniques. Rather than accept the preeminence of the state and its alleged vertical reach from top to bottom, James Ferguson suggests that globalization has exposed the “intensively managed fiction” of thinking in “levels” (2006, 10). Rather, a focus on transnational relations opens new empirical lenses that uncover a multitude of practices in government at the top and within grassroots organizations at the bottom that are actually deeply connected to and formed by global and cross-national phenomena. The state may very well have new tools at its disposal, but possession does not necessarily mean that it is master of the processes of global governance or in an unassailable position to maintain and enhance its “spatial reach” and “encompassment.” Research on the

role of the state should thus take into account this contest and “treat its verticality and encompassment not as a taken-for-granted fact, but as a precarious achievement—and as an ethnographic problem” (Ferguson 2006, 112).

Reconstructing the “Field”: A Revitalized Comparative Education

Globalization, if taken to mean convergence and harmonization as well as rupture and disjunction, suggests that comparative work in the field of education policy concerns itself not only with such issues as the new role of the state or the changing nature of subjectivities and subject positions but also with the very question of comparison itself. This proposition is not a call for a refined comparative education but for a substantially different one.

The emergence of policy-focused scholarship, tightened relations between the funding of research and government policy, and the increasing commodification of education have all acted to trap comparative education within a largely functionalist epistemology. Contemporary comparative research (but not that within the U.S.-based Comparative and International Education Society) is dominated by the agenda of international agencies such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the studies of international achievement that it supports within an overall agenda of promoting economic reform. Many educational researchers have become complicit in this project (Ball 1998b). While providing some usefulness, such studies contain a multitude of problems, not least their failure to acknowledge adequately the connections between schooling, culture, and educational practice. In the process, pedagogy is presented as a value-neutral transmission system rather than an expression of culture or locality. Robin Alexander’s (2000) ambitious five-country comparison of (predominantly developed-country) school systems and classroom processes provides one of the few starting points and methodologies for understanding deep-running educational histories and narratives and for making sense of and aligning pedagogical practices in different settings. This work, however, primarily encompassed descriptions of educational systems, daily routines, and classroom interactions as ends in themselves and conceptualized education as state- or nation-bound, in the process ignoring the interconnectivities between sites made unavoidable by the globalization of experiences.

A number of scholars are attuned to these issues and suggest different ways in which the field of comparative education could be revitalized. Simon Marginson and Marcela Mollis (2001) advocate broader analytical frameworks in which global carrying agencies, newly emerging geopolitical relations, hybrid subjectivities, and new forms of identity are traced and elaborated upon. For Anthony Welch (2001) the stakes are much higher: either we continue with a refined process of instrumental understanding and progress, or we work to reenergize comparative education with a political mission that

can elevate the voices of the disposed, maintain democratic relations in teaching, and resist the “bowling alone” (Putnam 2000) future of self-interest, material inequality, and social dislocation. Robert Cowen (2000), however, resists the urge to seek coherence or to offer a new political “project.” Instead, he avers that new starting points are required: new terms with which to name and make sense of educational phenomena; new ways of defining educational spaces beyond the reliance on nation, educational system, and school; and new categories of relations between these new objects. Solutions to these challenges, he suggests, promise a number of approaches to comparative education better fitted to the future.

How might we approach the field while acknowledging that phenomena are increasingly deterritorialized and recognizing the centrality of the state and nation in mediating how globalization is localized? How can we comparatively study policy as global vision and text as well as local negotiation and enactment?

Many scholars working in different fields have attempted to question and move on from the bounded site as a basis for understanding social action. “Multi-site ethnography” (Marcus 1995), “vertical case study” (Vavrus and Bartlett 2006), and the “anthropology of policy” (Shore and Wright 1997) are all attempts to move beyond local sites in order to connect local enactment to national and international policy formulation processes. In these approaches, however, understanding is derived mainly from the local case, with this knowledge taken into other settings located above and/or beyond the case. In this sense, the knowledge created is not comparative, although the ambition is to deal with (inter)national forces and to acknowledge that action, while generated in local settings, is a result of local and external phenomena (especially policies and systems imposed from above). In all cases, the nation-state remains a key unit of analysis.

Appadurai (1996) represents a clear break in this regard by suggesting that we find spaces that cut across and reinvigorate state-bounded units. His notion of “scapes” as both imaginative and material worlds is an attempt to better reflect the interconnectivity of phenomena in late modernity. Especially useful for understanding the power of global policy messages in the field of education is the notion of “ideoscapes,” which are “composed of elements of the Enlightenment worldview, which consists of a chain of ideas, terms, and images, including *freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation,* and the master term *democracy*” (Appadurai 1996, 36). Ideoscapes are fluid, hybrid, and evolving, not least as a consequence of the “growing diasporas (both voluntary and involuntary) of intellectuals who continuously inject new meaning-streams into the discourse of democracy in different parts of the world” (Appadurai 1996, 37). While Appadurai has been criticized for undertheorizing power and the role of the state in his attempts to envisage the production of locality (e.g., Ong 1999), his notion of scapes, when read in

the light of the critique of comparative education above, provides one potentially powerful basis on which to construct an educational ideoscape—what I refer to as a policyscape—that might capture some essential elements of globalization as phenomenon (object and process) and provide a tool with which to explore the spread of policy ideas and pedagogical practices across different national school systems.

One cornerstone of this policyscape is the ideologies of neoliberalism (with its focus on new economic relations) and liberalism (where the individual is centered in relation to the state) currently embedded in international education reforms. Capturing the essence of these ideologies is a monumental task and one to which I can only allude here. Nevertheless, one could highlight the rise of the nation-state with its basis in the protection of individual liberty (Tikly 2003) or its promotion of universal entitlements, professionalism, and bureaucracy (Powell and Dimaggio 1991). Others have considered how this project has transformed into one aimed at shaping (and controlling) individual subjectivities (Rose 1989) and one in which a rampant “technologic” has led to a fixation with efficiency and accountability measures (Welch 1998). In educational terms, approaches to learning have come to prioritize active participation, inquiry, and emancipation. Some scholars, however, create genealogies of learning in order to examine the forms of self-regulation inherent in modern educational ideologies (Popkewitz 2000).

There is much consensus among scholars that policies and practices—such as European Union (EU) policies aimed at integrating national education systems or at shaping them to the demands of the new economy, OECD policies that highlight competitive advantage, and international donor policies that attempt to combine political concerns for democratization and rights with concerns for efficiency and value for money—are increasingly standardizing the flow of educational ideas internationally and changing fundamentally what education is and can be. These policies and practices can be divided into the following three levels:

1. Visions and values: for example, curriculum documents that conceptualize learning in terms of individualized skills and competences and in which content and standards aim to support national goals related to the global economy and private/personal ones aimed at self-realization
2. Management and organization: for example, policies of decentralization such as local or site-based management, policies of choice in schooling and higher education, and systems of executive (and responsible/accountable) leadership and decision making
3. Learning processes: for example, learner-centered pedagogy, classroom democracy, and active learning through which teachers are restyled as facilitators of learning and students as independent learners

These policies and practices are essentially transnational in character. They are globalized messages projected across educational spaces and translated in ways that resonate in particular contexts. They reflect the loosely defined visions of supranational institutions, states and their perceived competitors, and the ignitable passions of select internal stakeholders. While they aim to achieve different things, they are bound together by a deep ideological commitment to centering the individual in learning processes and removing, at least rhetorically, the central state from a fundamental role in educational delivery. The mantras of self-determination and ownership, choice and value, and efficiency and competition have their root in a general neoliberal view of economics and what Mitchell Dean (1999) calls an “advanced liberal” understanding of the individual in relation to society.

Having created a polycscape around notions of liberalism in education, an immediate concern is the extent to which this approach can be considered coherent, given its basis in not only different types of countries (Denmark, Nepal, and China) but also different levels of the educational system in these countries (higher education, compulsory schooling, and non-university-based teacher training) and different specific reform initiatives (governance and management systems and curriculum reform).

One suggestion is that we focus on what Cowen (2000) has called the “codings” of educational processes and sites and attempt to explain these comparatively “in a way that captures the *intersections* of the forces of history, social structures and the pedagogic identities of individuals” (336, emphasis added). It is through unraveling these codes that we might begin to understand what Cowen calls the “social permeabilities and immunologies” that facilitate or inhibit the spread of a particular type of educational thinking and that would then be crucial variables in the development of theory, in this case, about the terms on which these generic educational messages travel and embed elsewhere.

The unraveling of educational codes is by no means straightforward, however. As embedded cultural practice (Alexander 2000), scientific study, not least in foreign societies, is problematic. Further, if we go beyond the best attempts at culturally attuned, multicountry studies (typified by Alexander’s own *Pedagogy and Culture*) and acknowledge globalization as contributing to significant confusion, complexity, and interconnectivity, how are we to enter and make sense of this newly constructed field?

Cowen offers the notion of “transitologies”: the study of societies at the point of rapid and radical transformation. Here, the political collapse of the Soviet Union is an example, but so too is the political redefinition of state/individual relations that occurred in Margaret Thatcher’s Britain (1979–90). Transitologies need not be limited to wars, revolutions, or social breakdowns. Fundamental economic and ideological reforms bring politics, history, and culture to the surface. When the lightning rod of these reforms strikes globally

(as is the case with neoliberalism), we may get new and meaningful insights into the interconnectivity of politics, history, and culture across localities at a time when these three elements are often dismissed as outmoded (i.e., the “death” of politics, the “end” of history, and the inadequacy of the “culture” concept).

Instead of exploring the implementation of apparently coherent reform on systems that are assumed to be rational and stable, the focus on “major metamorphosis” elevates acts of rupture, conflict, tension, and resistance (Cowen 2000, 339). In this process, comparative analysis is strengthened with a new awareness of the nature of locality in global education reform. Cowen is thus offering glimpses of a methodology that connects comparative research to the macrosociological changes identified by Appadurai, Akhil Gupta, Ferguson, and others.

The Policyscape in Denmark, Nepal, and China

It is through innovative constructions of field, place, and site (such as policyscapes); revitalized analytical units (such as educational codes); and a focus on rupture (via transitologies) that one of many new comparative educations might emerge. For the study reported here, three sites have been chosen with which to construct an educational policyscape to explore the issues raised in this article.

The three countries—Denmark, Nepal, and China—could hardly be more different. Denmark, a highly industrialized urban society of 5 million people, is cited regularly as a model in areas including educational participation, gender parity, and the provision of universal health care.¹ Most notable, perhaps, is its capacity for social and economic innovation, where it has maintained high levels of national income during the transition from an agricultural and industrial base to one focused on knowledge creation and “value-added” enterprise (Danish Globalization Council 2006). By contrast, Nepal suffers from halted economic development, caused in part by a debilitating Maoist insurgency that, in turn, has been fueled by persistent low

¹ The ongoing study of university reform in Denmark is funded by the Danish Research Council for Social Science and explores the implementation of new governance systems. Data were collected between 2004 and 2006. Three universities (a traditional multifaculty institution, a single-faculty technology-oriented institution, and a so-called reform university where project-based learning and group work are favored) were selected for the bulk of the empirical work related to university boards, and access was obtained to observe the regular meetings of these bodies throughout the period. Approximately 25 interviews were conducted with board members, with a focus on the transition to the new management regime, especially in terms of the relationship to former decision-making organs such as the university senate; members’ vision(s) for the university, especially what this implies about the role of the university in society; and the role(s) of the board and of its members as individuals and as members of “blocs” within it. Attention was also directed to the relationship of the board to other internal bodies, especially informal or vaguely articulated senior management bodies and advisory organs.

levels of social, political, and economic development.² With over 90 percent of its population of 26 million living in rural settings and existing on less than US\$300 per annum, the state struggles to generate the levels of resources required to improve its education system in order to achieve its vision of inclusion, democracy, and material progress (Ministry of Education and Sports 2006). China, however, defies easy description.³ An emerging economy of central importance not only to its Asian neighbors but also to its Western counterparts, China's 1.3 billion citizens experience vastly different levels of education, access to resources, and daily lives. So-called knowledge societies such as Denmark and its northern European neighbors are often held up as models for the "new" China (People's Daily Online 2001).

Notwithstanding these fundamental differences, the three countries are bound tightly together by intense efforts to orient their education systems to the challenges of the global knowledge economy and via a recognition that successful development is based on elevating the individual in processes of learning, and limiting the role of the state in the delivery of education. Successful development and this new state role are understood very differently across the three cases, however. Nevertheless, in each example, the state references its reform efforts to "best practices" and "accepted knowledge" gained from exposure to the standard as perceived to be practiced in the

² The ongoing research in Nepal, funded by the Danish Council for Development Research, consists of two components: a policy study of government initiatives to support the transfer of public schools to communities and an ethnographic study of the implementation process. For the former, a wide range of governmental instructions and guidelines and donor policy documents were consulted, with the aim of exploring ideologies of the role of the state in education, the potential of communities, and the function of the educational bureaucracy. For the latter, five primary schools were chosen for in-depth study. Three of these schools were in urban Kathmandu, with the two others being located in rural settings: one in the Terai and one in the Hills. The schools were chosen for a range of reasons of relevance to the study. In some cases, the schools were held up as models for the transfer process, not least because they serviced the poor. Others took the initiative in opting out. All claimed an ambition for improving educational quality. The schools were visited on multiple occasions between 2004 and 2005, with the Kathmandu schools continuing more intensive involvement in the research until at least 2008. Data collection consisted of semistructured interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. Head teachers, teachers, students, and community members were interviewed, as were nongovernmental organization (NGO) workers involved in supporting these and other opted-out schools. Documents related to schools' transfer process and ongoing internal management were also consulted. In addition, interviews were conducted with government officials from the central bureaucracy, district managers, and staff responsible for supporting school and teacher development.

³ The ongoing study in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) of China is of a different type and is made possible by development work undertaken for the Danish Agency for Development Assistance, which supports the development of teacher education in state teacher-training colleges, and NGOs' efforts to implement child-friendly education in rural schools. The research reported here was made possible by my (unique) access to the diplomatic field, regional government policy makers, and leaders in teacher education institutions as well as relatively free access to a range of urban and rural schools in the TAR. This access enabled an analysis of the relationships between official policy statements and positions, the views of the bureaucratic and professional elite responsible for implementing the reforms, and actual pedagogical processes in teacher-training institutions and local classrooms. Data related to educational practices in Tibet were collected during seven trips to the region between 2001 and 2007. These trips involved project planning and negotiation tasks, educational activities with teacher-educators, numerous field trips to urban and rural schools within a 100 kilometer radius of Lhasa, and a close ongoing relation with a Danish Save the Children project both in Tibet and in Copenhagen.

West and uses these justifications to impose a range of new educational arrangements. Before examining how states manipulate these policy messages and how actors make further sense of them so they resonate with their particular worldviews, I will elaborate some elements of the reform agenda across each country.

Global Visions

In Denmark, reform efforts span kindergarten (in terms of preparing 3–6-year-olds with an individualized learning portfolio), compulsory schooling (more testing and a focus on core skills for employment), and higher education (institutional mergers, new funding models, new governance and managerial systems, and charging of tuition). The current Minister of Science, Technology, and Development has invoked the signifiers “quality,” “elite,” and “world class” to legitimize the overhaul of what had been previously regarded by the general public as a well-functioning higher education system.⁴ At the same time, the prime minister has insisted that the “black hole” of university funding be subject to market discipline, moving “from idea to invoice” (see Carney 2006). Rather than a vulgar and local initiative aimed at undermining the traditional role of higher education in social democratic Denmark, however, this sound-bite glimpse of the future must be seen in light of the EU’s Lisbon Declaration, not least its overall goal to make the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010 (European Council 2000). The Danish Law on University Reform from 2003 (Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation 2003) is one important element in aligning Denmark to this future.

This overall vision resonates surprisingly closely to the policy agenda being implemented in war-ravaged Nepal. The focus on the quality of basic education reflects the discourse of Jomtien (World Declaration on Education for All 1990) but is now presented less in terms of national development and democracy and more in terms of “keep[ing] abreast of emerging, new knowledge and skills needed in the contemporary context of a global society” (Ministry of Education and Sports 2006, 18–19). Here, reform of secondary education is proceeding even though basic education has so clearly failed in its goals to realize universal participation, gender equality, relevance, and breadth.

Rather than view these shortcomings through the lens of inadequate state financing and management, the state itself has been identified as the problem. As a remedy and with money borrowed from the World Bank, the government of Nepal has embarked on a concerted program of community

⁴ Helge Sander was appointed Minister of Science, Technology, and Innovation (later changed to “Science, Technology, and Development”) in 2001, when a new Liberal/Conservative coalition government ended the 9-year rein of the previous Social Democratic administration. He is one of only two ministers to have held his post throughout the three parliamentary terms of the current government.

schooling aimed at giving back these (mainly primary school) institutions to their rightful owners, namely those individuals with the most direct stake in their futures. In this regard, local communities—envisioned as consisting of people with limited experience of formal education—are being “empowered” to organize themselves locally, manage teacher and pupil learning, and, of course, “share” the costs of schooling (World Bank 2003, 6). At the other end of a failing system, secondary schools will now provide “competency-based learning,” engage all “stakeholders,” and improve management efficiency to transform themselves into “knowledge centers” able to give young people the “technical know-how” to be “competitive in national and international contexts” (Ministry of Education and Sports 2006, 4).

In China, educational reform initiatives—driven by former Premier Zhu Rongji’s “go global” ambition—focus on lifelong learning, advanced technologies, institutional mergers, and concerted attempts to internationalize courses and students. Since 2001, the central government has been implementing curriculum reforms aimed at preparing China’s young people for a world shaped by an OECD/World Trade Organization discourse of competition, innovation, initiative, teamwork, and independence, with learner-centered pedagogy as its magic bullet. Across the country—and with little regard for the teaching traditions of millennia—counties, schools, and teachers have begun to orient themselves toward the theoretical ideal of the student as dialogue partner, colearner, and active participant in schooling (Carney 2008). Not to be intimidated by the scope of the task ahead, the central authorities set a 5-year time frame for nationwide implementation.

Heroes and Agents

Contemporary education reform elevates new actors to center stage. The Danish University Law is founded less on new structures and mandates and more on new subjective relations: in effect, a radically different type of leader and follower. With overtones of the classic “heroic” model of leader first articulated by Max Weber (1947) and popularized by James MacGregor Burns (1978), Danish universities are now vested with governing bodies with a majority of members appointed from outside the university (usually public sector and business executives), appointed vice-chancellors/rectors who report directly to these boards, and appointed institute leaders who in turn work for the rector and not their colleagues (as was the practice under the previous system of elected representation). With the expressed desire to smooth decision-making processes and inject accountability into the mind-set of universities, democratic participation has been relegated to the status of an optional extra. In part, the legitimacy of the new regimes comes from a perverse alliance between neoliberal heroic managers brought in from beyond to save “their” institutions, students who are redefined as customers

with individual interests and rights, and the community (read: employers) in whose name the reforms were mandated (Carney 2007).

In the same way, schools in Nepal have been given new masters and a new organizing logic. School management committees made up of a majority of parents and local stakeholders—now termed service seekers—are empowered to make decisions about school organization, finance, and outreach as well as to manage the work of teachers, who are called service providers. Like developments in Denmark, many parents and children rejoice at the changed fortunes being played out at their local primary schools. People previously marginalized or excluded find themselves sitting at the table with the district education officer, school leader, and local elites. Children remark on the change in having punctual, polite, and engaged teachers (Carney et al. 2007).

In this regard, China reflects a more complex picture. While school decentralization has a long recent history, the state has maintained a strong grip on education. Parents may be empowered to participate in (and partially fund) public education, but ultimate power lies with local authorities and the apparatus of the central state. Nevertheless, the call of “the global” places teachers and pupils in a new and dynamic, albeit uncertain, relationship. Always servants of the state, teachers continue to abide by the interests of China’s ongoing project of “glorious modernization,” although this effort is now augmented by global indicators and success criteria. Pupils, now central to the rhetoric of policy documents and programs, have a similarly augmented project: to be true to the values of the motherland but also to grasp the possibilities opened up by the global knowledge economy in order to obtain personal wealth, success, and fame. Although research on China’s educational traditions prioritizes the category of the group over the individual, the new curriculum drives a wedge into this ideology, which is readily buttressed by the nation’s aggressive approach to market capitalism. At one time, the student served the school and society. Now the tables are turning.

Technologies of Administration

A number of devices are being deployed to liberate subjects so that they might take control of their destinies, to act independently, and to shape their institutions in ways that connect to the passions expressed in the global educational discourse of individualism and self-determination and its related terms: ownership, empowerment, and choice as well as value, efficiency, and competition. What binds the three cases even more closely together, however, is the potential power of new managing and organizing devices or technologies, which Michel Foucault (1978) describes as deeply political and which work not only on subjects, but through them, moving forward by “taking what is essentially a political problem, removing it from the realm of political discourse, and recasting it in the neutral language of science” (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, 196).

For instance, Danish university leaders have signed personal performance contracts with their board chairpersons. In turn, these vice-chancellors have extracted similar contracts from institute heads. Staff members, increasingly organized in research groups, are asked to set quantifiable goals and list, well in advance, the intellectual outputs likely to emerge from their research. Universities themselves are under the thumb of their ministry. Each of Denmark's higher education institutions has signed a detailed development contract, promising in effect to deliver intellectual goods and services within the 3-year contract period. These documents include specific statements of what will be achieved in the coming period, right down to details of the proposed growth in student numbers, volume of new courses, amount of external research funding, and so forth.

Similarly, the decentralization of schooling in Nepal via community management hinges on an active, influential role for parents and local stakeholders, yet this process is being dramatically curtailed. First, the ministry has secured a management structure that ensures its control of decentralized provision. While the committees comprise significant numbers of local community members, the district education officer and a district-appointed "focal person" ensure that the decisions made by the committees are in line with the government's broad policy agenda. At all stages, the district education officer reserves the right to intervene on school management committees, to appoint members where needed, and to overturn the decisions made by these elected bodies. In all community schools, new subcommittees are being established—for example, project monitoring committees and a social audit committee—with the district education officer driving the agenda.

In China, in addition to new curriculum documents that reinforce the preeminence of the individual, textbooks attempt to speak to each pupil in ways not previously encountered. Teachers are being trained to take each student seriously, to consider individuals' learning styles and interests, and to manage their progression through the system. While the curriculum focuses on classroom learning processes, the techniques of elevating the learner and his subjective view require not only new forms of action but a different way of conceiving of one's classroom role and, thus, one's place in the order of things. The call for quality education issued in 1999 (State Council 1999) shifted dramatically the mission of teachers from one concerned with socializing China's youth into the major traditions and values of the country to, instead, conceptualizing them as learners engaged in an ongoing and incomplete process of lifelong education to prepare them for an uncertain global labor market. To this end, teachers must encourage "active and unique ways of learning," "autonomous learning," and children's "inquisitive spirit" (Ministry of Education 2001), all of which require the recalibration of social relations, a new contract between teacher and learner, and an accommodation with uncertainty and contingency.

In each of the three cases, the impact of the newly deployed political technologies on power relations and subjectivities is far from clear. Thus, the next section provides some insights into how each country is dealing with certain policy shifts, how the political technologies deployed to affect these shifts are operating, and how the actors who negotiate and embody them attempt to counter their most pervasive effects. For each country, I will give attention to one dominant aspect of reform and the political technology most associated with it.

Contesting Policyscapes

While the new emphasis on executive leadership in Danish higher education has led to accusations of an undemocratic structure being pushed down onto institutions, this criticism is only part of a pervasive change in the nature of accountability. New development contracts between the university and the ministry mean that universities (manifest as the board's members who have signed this document) look up to the government and not down to the members who compose it. The consequences have been a fundamental loss of legitimacy and moral authority in the eyes of academics and students but also new powers with which to push through reforms that will serve the government interest in fewer world-class institutions.

Notwithstanding the narrowing room for maneuvering for the Danish university, ethnographic research (see note 1) suggests a rocky road for attempts at turning these institutions into private-sector knowledge-creating firms. On the board of one of the country's leading universities, a number of private-sector members have actually been the most articulate in attempting to preserve internal democracy and autonomy. Leaders from pharmaceutical, biotechnology, and industrial concerns, brought in to strengthen the relevance and transferability of university research, are increasingly the strongest advocates for basic research and for what one respondent called "disinterested creativity."⁵

Academic staff, embattled by the attack on their autonomy, have refused to submit fully to the new regime. With limited options internally, lobby groups have emerged, calling upon leading scientists—including Danish Nobel Prize winners—to articulate the government's agenda but with the twist that world-class research be funded and allowed to develop with the high degrees of freedom and uncertainty that characterize research at the acknowledged centers of world-class excellence. Indeed, the government vision of judging Danish universities by international standards is under attack by the new frame of reference that such rhetoric brings into focus: benchmarking research and teaching outputs against the world's leading institutions have exposed the shabby state of Danish higher education funding.

⁵ This comment was made by a board member of a Danish university.

Similarly, by looking (principally to the United Kingdom) to develop a system of research assessment and evaluation, the Danish government has been forced to deal with the many acknowledged shortcomings of that system. As one academic respondent in the study suggested, “When the Minister uses global examples and arguments to force change, we can use global examples and arguments to question it.”⁶

In Nepal, primary and secondary schooling is being reformed with a similar vigor, although with a very different locus of control. While Danish university reform comes as a national response to the general policy vision of the EU, the relentless round of research papers generated by the OECD, and domestic fears about maintaining relevance and position in a global world, policy making in Nepal is shot through with the explicit fingerprints of external actors. In relation to community participation in schooling, the World Bank is in the driving seat. Its project document, outlining the case for school transfer, eliminates any notion one might have had of a well-functioning education ministry grappling with complexity, diversity, and extreme poverty. “Inadequate” central administration, poor “service” delivery, and “low levels of accountability” (especially from the ministry and its salaried teachers) are identified as deep problems that are only resolvable by “handing back” schools to the “rightful owners” (World Bank 2003).

The new school management committees have indeed led to changes. Start-up grants from the government (with funds borrowed from the World Bank) have enabled infrastructure purchases, physical improvements, and budget support. Parents serve on committees and perceive that teachers are changing their practices, not least in terms of regular attendance and improved engagement.

A number of factors have mediated, however, against the types of changes envisaged by the World Bank. Domination from above is complemented by subversion from within, as the category of guardian member (i.e., those who sponsor orphans or other needy children) has been manipulated by local politicians who, in effect, notionally support children in the school catchment area in order to qualify for membership on the school management committee and thus continue their broader political work. In many instances, newly transferred schools are implementing changes that mirror the much-admired private sector rather than reach out to the needs of excluded groups: school uniforms, English-language instruction, and a focus on examination performance are just some examples of the new, inclusive reforms being reworked locally in ways that resonate with earlier experiences of schooling that enabled elitism and social distinction to flourish (Carney and Bista 2007). Indeed, the collapse of public education in the 1990s gave rise to heightened interest in private provision, and this trend is now driving the decision of

⁶ This comment was made by a faculty member of a Danish university.

many community-managed schools not only to opt out of direct government control but also to charge fees and go private themselves.

The shift to a new curriculum in China represents the determination of national legislators to prepare their country for the perceived challenges of the global knowledge economy. While some have argued that the spread of this pedagogical form is part of an international aid project designed to “facilitate the penetration of capitalist ideology” in the developing world (Tabulawa 2003, 10), the reforms here have a characteristically Chinese flavor: driven from Beijing by a policy elite from Shanghai that had experimented with child-oriented curriculum innovations in that city (Sun 1998), based on weak processes of local and school-level consultation (Huang 2004), and underfunded. For Fuquan Huang (2004), the fixation with content rather than the transference of this content into learning experiences has led to poor implementation and active resistance (105). Many teachers explain that preparation for the new curriculum has taken the form of short courses and seminars conducted away from the classroom, which, ironically, are presented in a lecture format and where attendance is treated as evidence of certification and compliance (Carney 2008).

Although Tibet represents a hyperpolitical context (Barnett 2001), the experience of curriculum reform in that region of China is thus far from atypical, not least when compared to other areas of rural and remote China where minority groups are absorbing state-directed modernization efforts (Hansen 1999; Postiglione 1999). Empirical work in teacher-training institutions/colleges, public schools in the urban centers, and their remote counterparts in rural areas highlights a range of responses to the reform of teaching methods (Carney 2008). In particular, it appears that the educational elite (bureaucrats, teacher-educators, and urban teachers) show a high degree of ambivalence to the reforms, gauging them mainly in terms of their ability to promote improved individual exam performances. The traditional focus on rote learning, recitation, and scripted classroom action has not disappeared in such classrooms. Rather, teachers now deploy a new, internationally legitimated pedagogy to intensify historical patterns of control and domination.

The compulsion to view education in terms of quantifiable performance outcomes is part of a historic legacy in China of using an exam-focused education as a tool for social mobility. The intensification of the process promoted by the reform now appears, however, to be supplemented by another tendency: for these groups, the reform of education resonates with the discourse of the global knowledge economy and China’s economic strategy to compete internationally. Children in such schools hear the reform message not only as a call for improved performance but also as an invitation to join the world of high capitalism.

The situation in rural schools is somewhat different. Here, children from

families with no history of formal education and with an antagonistic relationship with the Chinese state see the reforms as a chance to obtain basic skills that can better prepare young people for a world dominated by the cash economies of the region. An intensified focus on the learner has resulted in historically excluded groups being dragged into deeper forms of classroom engagement. Paradoxically, success in the new school means continued participation and progression in schooling and a further immersion in the language and ideology of the Chinese state.

We are then confronted with a policy that, while having the same message, is heard differently and with very different consequences. Urban and predominately Han Chinese children understand the reforms as a pathway to the greater economic future waiting in China's provincial capitals, where they will be even more deeply integrated into a global space of self-determination and material well-being. In rural areas, Tibetan minorities understand the reforms as a chance to migrate to local centers, adopt the Chinese language of power, and become modern subjects in an emerging regional world where Tibetan cultural identity is under threat. In this context, the state may succeed in binding young people to a national project. In the urban centers, however, experiences of progressive pedagogy may further distance youth from the national state project and locate them instead in a localized version of a global initiative.

Interconnectivities: Learning Comparatively from Global Reform

I have argued that we are seeing a new type of coherent object—policy-scapes—which are transnational in character and have at their core a particular constellation of visions, values, and ideology. The rise of advanced liberal ideologies in education is writ large and is being negotiated across educational sites, albeit differently in various locations. In this article, I have tried to illuminate the forces driving contemporary education reform and the factors that enable and inhibit the spread of global ideas. Following Cowen (2000), I selected three educational cases bound together by their status as transitologies. By focusing on societies (and systems) in transition, I have outlined more clearly the role of politics, history, and culture in the production of deeply local versions of a global educational script. In this section, I focus on three issues that emerge from the study of the educational polycscape in Denmark, Nepal, and China.

Different States, Different Fates?

The state is an object and concept in flux. In all three cases, we encounter particular states maneuvering in and around global discourses that demand educational improvement as a prerequisite for future economic advancement and in which certain disciplinary techniques are used to enforce or reclaim

what Ferguson (2006) calls spatial control and encompassment. These highly political technologies are, in large part, strategies employed by state-level actors to reassert control and influence at a time when these are under threat by global norms, values, and demands. Rather than three independent states arriving at new governing technologies in isolation, however, the strategies being deployed here are best understood as part of a new shared power/knowledge regime that gains its legitimacy from a global discussion about how best to do education reform.

In Denmark—a strong state deeply connected to the view of education being pushed by the EU, OECD, and development agencies—the workings of this power/knowledge regime are complex. On one hand, Denmark finds itself bound to the international agreements that it has been fundamental in leading. As a successful knowledge economy, it has few other ways to conceive of education; one must only witness the replacement of the “folk enlightenment” and democratic ideal of “learning for life” by the current lust for (economically driven) lifelong learning. While these discourses frame and constrain education policy-making processes in Denmark, the state, as a deeply modern entity, uses its technical/rationalist and bureaucratic tools to shape these processes with interventionist policies and control systems. While I have highlighted the room for maneuvering and resistance within institutions, the totality of the reform packages and their instruments of control threaten substantially what Danish education is and how it can be conducted. We have the prospect, therefore, of a supposedly strong state appearing to act unreflectively, if not weakly; Danish higher education is being deeply transformed by a policyscape grounded in global neoliberalism precisely because it appears to embody it so completely.

In Nepal, however, we have a policy script dictated from outside to politically astute central actors who are not persuaded by the message of donors to divest themselves from the direct operation of education. With a history of control from Kathmandu, the state appears to be manipulating the rhetoric of local ownership to impose new forms of control. In essence, a society with a long centralist tradition has found a way for this discredited ideology to live again through processes of deconcentration (McGinn and Welsh 1999).⁷ Unlike the situation in Denmark, however, the lack of bureaucratic control and reach leads to a range of local displays and outcomes that are off-message. In the Nepalese case, this result appears to facilitate the reassertion of historic processes of domination and exclusion. We have, nevertheless, the interesting possibility of a “weak” state appearing to act strongly by manipulating the rhetoric of global education reform to reassert its reach at a time when heavy-handed government is being discredited.

⁷ Deconcentration refers to one of the forms of decentralization, in which the authority for implementation of procedures is moved to the local level even though the power to make rules and regulations remains centralized (e.g., McGinn and Welsh 1999).

In China, a different picture emerges. Here, we have an emerging state negotiating individualism and self-determination in education by accepting the primacy of learner-centered pedagogy as the only way to organize teaching in the global knowledge economy. At the same time, the state is manipulating pedagogy to suit its interest in deepening processes of economic transformation. In certain cases, the enactment of the national reform script emerges as rhetoric—what Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe (2006) call “discursive borrowing”—for the repackaging of deep-rooted, culturally legitimate understandings of schooling, namely, as intensified acts of teacher-dominated exam preparation. In other examples, and especially in rural schools, new classroom practices may be leading to progressive educational outcomes such as continued access and participation in school, but, as a consequence, peripheral (minority) subjects are being captured into the Han Chinese nationalist project. In this case, a different type of strength is being mustered—one reflecting a high degree of reflexivity about the nature of the global messages being transmitted and manifesting a strong hand in encouraging culture and history to (a) dilute its impact in some cases, (b) let it intensify processes of state encompassment in others, and (c) remain aware (at all times) of its deeper potential to transform society in ways that might not suit its interests. Whether the intensification of modernity in China, coupled with new technologies such as the focus on individuality in education, can be tempered by the state to the benefit of market-oriented communism remains to be seen.

Making and Remaking Selves

While the technologies deployed in this polycscape have enormous potential to affect subjectivities, the three cases discussed here make it clear that educational policy makers, leaders, and managers are much more than empty vessels. The spatial sites of university boardrooms, school management committees, and classrooms are all venues in which situated actors make history and politics with recourse to earlier memories and narratives about the “educated person,” the state, nation, society, and community, as well as transnational values and ideals about engagement, autonomy, participation, and empowerment (Levinson et al. 1996).

Identities have always been on the move, but perhaps the current conditions create different types of antagonisms, alliances, and alienations. In Denmark, not only are narratives about the academic worker being reformed, but academic places appear to be changing in front of our eyes. In Nepal, changes to school organization appear to invite actors to play new roles and take new subject positions, but innovation is not imposed. For the majority of that country’s poor, school is a modern institution that continues to send multiple and contradictory signals of exclusion. This exclusion continues to spare many of the dispossessed from the burden of acting as customers wielding the power of choice over discredited goods. In the Chinese case, the

curriculum reforms suggest new subjective relations between teachers and pupils and, downstream, within families and between citizen and state. The potential “symbolic violence” of the new pedagogy appears, however, to be countered, not least by strategies of opposition coming from within the state’s own education apparatus (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

How is this resistance to be understood? For Foucault (1978), it is necessary to think in terms of a “complex strategical situation” (93) related to the prevailing strategies of power at that moment and place in time. In Denmark, the spread and reach of the new law create enormous potential for reorganizing social relations and professional identities. Strategies of resistance seek out ruptures in the emerging discourse of the knowledge economy by appealing to other (transnational) narratives about autonomy and engagement in education and by forming alliances with powerful groups such as Danish employers who have never ceased wanting well-rounded graduates and a steady stream of abstract, basic research. The privileged position of neoliberal “heroes” in the reform, however, makes these efforts difficult, as voices of dissent are muffled by the application of a new performance culture.

In Nepal, the reform of school management creates similar possibilities for new power formations, as district officials wield less visible but more pervasive instruments of control. To counter this arrangement, however, other actors are encouraged to the table of reform: local politicians, for example, join school management committees and appear to perpetuate wider political battles. Groups previously excluded now use the power of representation and the international terminology of reform (e.g., quality, relevance, value for money) to flex new muscles. What results here is hardly local, as competing versions of democracy, state obligation, and responsibility frame the work of school management committees.

In China, the reform of teaching methods encounters resistance from tradition as well as from an ambitious emerging state with a limited development budget for education. Teacher-centered schooling represents a powerful cultural transmission system that is not easily broken by global or even national edicts and a symbolic showering of resources. The potential of reform pedagogy is great, but it appears to be deeply undermined by another more established discourse of schooling as socialization for respect and conformity. Across China, teachers must interpret policy signals in light of the state’s enthusiasm for slogans and rituals and its fixation on statistics and performance data, as well as with the knowledge of its marked inability to reach in and shape classroom life.

The Creation of Locality

This active battle between global forces and the state, on one hand, and individuals and their educational identities, on the other, creates a multitude

of possibilities for the creation of locality within the global polycscape. Like identity, locality is constituted by a “wider set of social and spatial relations” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 7). Rather than a static and preexisting thing, locality is the embodiment of practices that then makes possible certain identity displays and responses.

Denmark, like other Western countries dealing with intense neoliberal reform, faces the prospect not only of being dominated by the visions and strategies of others but also of contributing directly to this discourse. Western modernity appears to have insisted upon what Weber (1992) called the “sacrifice of mankind to science” (192). Having produced “specialists without spirit” and “sensualists without heart,” the world of instrumental rationality appears to offer only further rationalization and disenchantment (192). Countries on the periphery of this modernity, or in a position to negotiate some of the terms of this engagement, may be securing for themselves other possible futures (see Rofel 1997). For Denmark, however, locality appears as an intense battle to maintain some degree of control over policies that threaten to eliminate from educational practices notions of democracy and engagement. University reform is highlighting processes of radical change that, while mediated by the state, represent a much broader coalition of interests and a power/knowledge regime perceived by many critical actors as threatening not only the nation’s autonomy but the extent to which one can talk meaningfully about a particularly Danish approach to education.

In Nepal, schooling is one key element in a modernization discourse that, by working on and through subjects, has systematically stripped of their legitimacy indigenous education and earlier forms of social organization. When school management committee meetings come to order, it is the district education officer—as agent of the ministry and its external partners—who reproduces elements of a simplified Western school development literature in order to frame what can be thought and said. In this sense, the new school management committees reflect intensified processes of domination by the values of others. Here, locality can often be seen in critiques of teachers and school standards and unhappiness with the persistent interventions of a politicized district office, but it must always be understood as part of a wider frustration with the failures of the state and the democratic project since 1991 and Nepal’s continuing international marginalization. In effect, locality becomes the distillation of national and international battles and dramas into the constrained space of underresourced and undervalued schools standing precariously on the periphery of modern Nepal and the educational vision it has appropriated.

Locality in China takes the form of seemingly committed actors taking seriously (international agency promoted) central government messages for educational change but placing them in the context of a steady stream of ambiguous, confusing, and contradictory signals that frame life in a society

that is intensely market based and authoritarian and that is deeply provincial and increasingly hyperglobal. Here, classrooms are passing on deep and reassuring historically grounded norms and attempting to predict and prepare young people for contingent futures in a world that just does not add up. Current approaches to teaching and learning in classrooms are local manifestations of this complexity. One wonders whether the reluctance and/or incapacity to change teaching styles is, as much, part of a subtle political questioning of the Chinese state by teachers who can no longer ascertain the extent to which current rhetoric about “going global” is meaningful, relevant to the majority of their lives, or enforceable.

Conclusion

This article makes the case that a new approach to comparative education is needed if we are to work with and understand concepts such as global interconnectivity, transnationalism, and deterritorialization and their impact on education. I have outlined one way forward and provided glimpses from ongoing studies of education reform in Denmark, Nepal, and China as a contribution to redefining a comparative education fit for a world shaped by the increasingly shared imaginative landscapes of globalization.

I have illustrated ways in which global visions and policies take form in particular contexts, how these contexts are in themselves increasingly interconnected by the discourse of the knowledge economy, and how actors negotiate these messages and programs “on the ground.” I have documented ways in which the state acts to control the terms of global policy in order to maintain and extend its reach. I have also provided some insights into how actors resist and reshape these efforts. In the process, I have provided a glimpse into the construction of “locality” in an age of global interconnectivity. But much work remains.

One major shortcoming of the “old” comparative education is its tendency to work with parallel studies, only engaging with comparison across the cases in conclusion. The data presented here betray a similar process and not, perhaps, a particularly ambitious response to those insisting that we develop new comparative methods. A challenge, therefore, will be to consider how and on what basis the policyscape presented here reflects a genuinely integrated space or just a convenient and pragmatic way to work across country contexts with more sensitivity for the obvious ways in which they intersect.

If policyscape has deep meaning, then the new space being opened up needs to be mapped. What can travel within this space? How can actors negotiate it? I am thinking less in terms of a one-way hindering or reshaping of processes of educational convergence and more in terms of actors using the newly constructed (and changing) pathways to shape the terms of debate about education. Making operational methodologies that might enable us to work concurrently and dialectically with the imaginative regimes, political

technologies, and the disciplinary and subversive dramas of reflective and connected actors is the next challenge for this approach to comparison (see Hardt and Negri 2000).

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