

**Towards a New Public Education:  
making globalisation work for us all**

Peter Moss

Thomas Coram Research Unit

Institute of Education University of London

27-28 Woburn Square

London WC1H 0AA

Tel. (+44) 207 612 6954

[Peter.moss@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:Peter.moss@ioe.ac.uk)

## ABSTRACT

Globalisation is a long-term and multi-dimensional process. If it is to benefit mankind, and not ruin the planet, a number of threats must be urgently addressed and global processes better managed. Managing globalisation for the common good requires, *inter alia*, an enhanced role for democracy, supported by a new public education inscribed with six key values - democracy, critical thinking, relational ethics, creativity, social justice and solidarity - and based on a particular image of the child and the school. The article concludes by asking how might this new public education gain ground in the face of strong obstacles, proposing democratic experimentalism and glocal networks as important elements of change that is radical in direction but piecemeal in form.

Globalization has the potential to bring enormous benefits to those in both the developing and developed world. But the evidence is overwhelming it has failed to live up to this potential (Stiglitz, 2006, p.4).

Globalisation is a multi-dimensional and long-term process. It encompasses internationalization (increasing cross-border relations, international exchange and interdependence), liberalization (of restrictions on movements), universalization (disseminating objects and experiences across the world), modernization (spreading the social structures of modernity) and deterritorialisation (the increasing separation of social spaces from territorial places, distances and borders) (Scholte, 2005). Some of these dimensions have a long history. Maritime commerce linking China, Japan, India, the Persian Gulf and East Africa flourished in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Darwin, 2007). Technological advances revolutionised transport and communication in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, linking the globe in new ways (*ibid.*). What is perhaps most distinctive of current conditions is globalisation as deterritorialisation, exemplified by phenomena such as electronic communications and finance.

Globalisation offers both potentially enormous benefits and potentially lethal threats. In this paper, I shall consider these threats and how they might be mitigated, as well as how the potential benefits might be realised more equitably, in particular through an enhanced role for democracy supported by a new public education. I shall end with a question. How might this new public education gain ground in the face of strong obstacles?

### THREE GLOBAL THREATS

Nothing better illustrates the threats posed by globalisation, in particular the deterritorialised dimension of this process, than the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the acceleration of global warming. Both threaten the whole planet - or rather our species, since the planet has the potential to recover; nowhere is safe, no country can protect itself by unilateral action. Both can be reduced only by global action. Both are advancing at an increasing pace: in January 2007, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved the minute hand of the Doomsday Clock two minutes closer to midnight - to 23.55 - to reflect global failures to solve the problems posed by nuclear weapons and the climate crisis (<http://www.thebulletin.org/minutes-to-midnight/>).

The second threat is reduced diversity. This threat again knows no borders. The impact of human activity is reducing bio-diversity, many species facing extinction (United Nations Environment Programme, 2007). Ideas (or rather their proponents) strive for global dominance, riding roughshod over other perspectives in a process of "hegemonic globalisation", which involves "the successful globalisation of a particular local and culturally-specific discourse to the point that it makes universal truth claims and 'localises' all rival discourses" (Santos, 2004, p. 149).

A current example is the resurgence, since the 1970s, of certain forms of liberal thought: political advanced liberalism and economic neo-liberalism (Rose, 1996). These hegemonic discourses shape how we think of the world and ourselves, with their insistence on extreme individualism and hyper-flexibility, "the inculcation of calculating mentalities" (Rose,

1999, p.214), and the collapse of the social into the economic, wherein “all aspects of social behaviour are now reconceptualised along economic lines – as calculative actions through the universal human faculty of choice” (Rose, 1999, pp.141, 142).

The third threat arises from growing inequality, both within and between countries. In the United States, between 1979 and 2005, the top five percent of families saw their real incomes increase 81 percent, whilst the bottom 20 percent experienced a 1 percent decline (<http://www.demos.org/inequality/numbers.cfm>). Globally, today, the income of the 225 richest people equals that of the poorest 40 percent, 2.7 billion people (World Federation of UN Associations, 2007). Increasing inequality creates enormous human immiseration and growing global instability.

All three threats are extremely dangerous. They are, however, neither inevitable nor irreversible. Globalization, Stiglitz argues, “does not have to be bad for the environment, increase inequality, weaken cultural diversity and advance corporate interests at the expense of the well-being of ordinary citizens” (Stiglitz, 2006, p.xv). The problem, he contends, is not with globalization itself but in the way globalization has been managed, “with economic globalization outpacing political globalization. Reforming globalization is a matter of politics” (Stiglitz, 2006, p.269).

This means, *inter alia*, strengthening democratic politics. The problem here is twofold. First, the established institutions and practices of national and local representative democracy are ailing. Fewer people vote, elected representatives are held in low esteem, many feel estranged from

mainstream politics (Hay, 2007). Second, there is a democratic deficit at the global level:

we have failed to develop the democratic political institutions that are required if we are to make globalization work – to ensure that the power of the global market economy leads to the improvement of the lives of most of the people of the world, not just the richest in the richest countries” (Stiglitz, 2006, p.276)

To which we might add, to ensure too the reduction of global warming and nuclear weapons and the flourishing of bio- and cultural diversity.

#### A NEW PUBLIC EDUCATION

Faced by these daunting threats, it is easy to despair. Yet there are signs of resistance, giving hope that another world is possible in which globalisation works for the common good. There is growing awareness of global warming; there are movements confronting hegemonic globalisation; and some countries, especially in East Asia, have managed to benefit more from globalisation, including substantial reductions in poverty. There is also growing interest and engagement in alternative forms of democratic politics, including social movements active on particular issues, such as the environment or globalisation.

Education is widely proposed as a necessary response to globalisation. But such advocacy often treats education in a narrow and strongly instrumental way: as a means of adapting populations to the demands of an increasingly competitive global economy, through the “measurable technical production of human capital” (Luke, 2005, p.12) and the creation of a new flexible *homo economicus*. For flexibility, as

Fendler (2001) observes, is “vaunted as the cutting-edge solution to the challenges of productivity in a fast-moving global economy, and the goals and objectives of education reinscribe the values of flexibility through curricular and pedagogical practices” (p.119).

But education can play another role. It can foster resistance to the threats posed by globalisation, contributing to what Freire (2004) called “the language of the possible”, not just “the neoliberal ‘pragmatic’ discourse, according to which we must ‘accommodate’ to the facts as given” (p.76).

If education is to have this role of resistance and possibility, I contend that we need a new public education, inscribed with six key values – democracy, critical thinking, relational ethics, creativity, social justice and solidarity - and based on a particular image of the child and the school.

## IMAGES

What is our image of the child? This question was the starting point for the extraordinary educational project in the northern Italian city of Reggio Emilia. Adopting an explicitly social constructionist approach, the community recognised that understandings of childhood – our images - are productive of policy, provision and practice. The image adopted by Reggio Emilia was the ‘rich’ child, a child of infinite capabilities, born with a hundred languages, an active co-constructor of knowledge, identities and values, and a citizen and subject of rights (for further discussion of the pedagogical theories and practices of Reggio Emilia see Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Rinaldi, 2005).

The image of the school is similarly important for a new public education. An image widespread today is the school-as-factory, an enclosure where human technologies are applied to children to produce predetermined and strongly normative outcomes. An alternative image, more suited to a role of possibility and resistance and to the image of the rich child, is the school-as-public-forum in civil society. This is a place of encounter between citizens, young and old, serving many purposes and capable of many outcomes, some expected, others not, and most productive when relationships are governed by democratic practice (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, et al., 2007).

This image is richly expressed in *For a New Public Education System*, a declaration published at the 40<sup>th</sup> Rosa Sensat Summer School in Barcelona:

In the new public education system, the school must be a place for everyone, a meeting place in the physical and also social, cultural and political sense of the word...where children and adults meet and commit to something, where they can dialogue, listen and discuss, in order to share meanings: it is a place of infinite cultural, linguistic, social, aesthetic, ethical, political and economic possibilities. A place of ethical and political praxis, a space for democratic learning. (Associació de Mestres Rosa Sensat, 2005, p.10).



## VALUES

Such images of child and school provide a context that welcomes and nurtures the six key values. For Freire “the democratization of the school...is part of the democratization of society” (Freire, 2004, p.97). *Democracy* is not just a value to be taught; it is a way of thinking and relating to be practiced in everyday life (Dewey, 1939). Moss (2007) has explored how democracy can be practiced in early childhood services (but the argument applies to other forms of education):

First, *decision-making* about the purposes, the practices and the environment of the nursery. Second, *evaluation* of pedagogical work through participatory methods...Third, *contesting dominant discourses*, what Foucault terms regimes of truth, which seek to shape our subjectivities and practices through their universal truth claims and their relationship with power....[Fourth] opening up for *change*, through envisioning utopias and turning them into utopian action. (pp.13, 15)

Stimulated by the emphasis on children’s participation in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a growing body of research and practice has demonstrated how the voices and perspectives of even the youngest children can form part of democratic practice in early childhood services and schools (see, for example, Clark, Kj rholt and Moss, 2005).

*Critical thinking* is “a matter of introducing a critical attitude towards those things that are given to our present experience as if they were timeless, natural, unquestionable: ...of interrupting the fluency of the narratives that encode that experience and making them stutter” (Rose,

1999, p.20). Critical thinking is central to Freire's 'pedagogy of hope' (Freire, 2004), an education that enhances "the critical capacity to make choices and transform reality" (Freire, 2005, p.4) rather than an education focused on accommodation to 'the facts as given'. This, too, has been an educational goal in Reggio Emilia, where the fascist experience "taught them that people who conformed and obeyed were dangerous, and that in building a new society it was imperative... [to] nurture and maintain a vision of children who can think and act for themselves." (Dahlberg, 1995, p.177)

*Relational ethics* are expressed in various ethical approaches, for example, 'postmodern ethics' (Bauman, 1993), 'the ethics of care' (Tronto, 1993) and Emmanuel Levinas's 'ethics of an encounter'. These approaches share common themes: responsibility for other humans, other species, and the environment; rejection of calculative thinking; making contextualised judgements, rather than conforming to universal codes; and a respect for otherness (for a fuller discussion, see Dahlberg and Moss, 2005).

*Creativity* opens education to the amazement and unexpectedness of new thought, expressed in many ways, and offers escape from the cul-de-sac of predetermined outcomes. Important here is Malaguzzi's theory of the 'hundred languages of children' and making connections: "When we are born we are a whole, and the whole of our senses strains to relate with the world around us in order to understand it. Very quickly, however, we find ourselves 'cut into slices', a phrase used by Loris Malaguzzi to define the state of separation in our culture which forces us to pursue knowledge on separate paths" (Vecchi, 2004, p.18).

Deleuze also foregrounds the importance of making connections. This multiplies the potential for precipitating events through creating life-giving confrontations and provocations. It undermines techniques of normalisation and totalising systems of classification and representation: “if you believe in the world you precipitate events, however inconspicuous, that elude control, you engender new space-times, however small their surface or volume” (Deleuze 1990, p.176).

Resisting the threats of globalisation and distributing the benefits more equitably calls for renewed commitment to *social solidarity*, based on recognition of inter-connectedness and inter-dependence, and to *social justice*. The new public education is an expression of this commitment: it must be understood as a collective responsibility and a common good, in which all participate and from which all benefit. Reasserting solidarity does not, however, mean ditching individuality. Rather it means re-acquainting ourselves with some once familiar understandings: that the individual is not preformed, but the product of social relations, and learns in relationship with others; that the autonomous human being is only free if in balanced relation with the community; and that choice has individualistic and collective meanings, to be carefully distinguished: “‘choice’ does not simply refer to the right of individuals to pursue narrow self-interests in a competitive marketplace... In a democracy, individuals do not only express personal preferences; they also make public and collective choices related to the common good” (Carr and Hartnett, 1996, p.192).

Images and values are necessary but not sufficient conditions for a new public education. It must also have content. Space precludes detailed

consideration. But just as the main issues facing us today are cross-disciplinary, so too should content be organised: around border-crossing themes, not individual subjects. The declaration *For a New Public Education System*, for example, argues that such a system “organises its contents on the basis of that which is absolutely necessary in order for a person to exercise their citizenship”. This means organising education around six major aims or themes: communication; culture; science and technology; health, environment and sustainable development; citizenship and democracy; creativity, imagination and curiosity.

#### GAINING GROUND

There are formidable barriers to a new public education of resistance – to the threats of globalisation – and of possibility – to make globalisation work for all. Neoliberalism is a powerful contrary movement, attaching pre-eminent value to markets, competition and individual choice (there is, of course, a place for these values; the question is, what place?).

Humankind has great difficulty encompassing the many developments confronting us today and recognising their inter-connectedness: one minute we are concerned with global warming and achieving collaborative solutions, the next with global economy and achieving competitive advantage. Increasing technology and intensification of employment reduces time for thought and for participation in civic society. Nor is there any programme for a new public education that can be universally and uniformly delivered; the complexity, the diversity and the political and democratic nature of education (at least as conceptualised in this article) preclude this technical fix. Indeed, we should heed Allan Luke’s warning of

the “powerful attraction to simple answers, fundamentalist doctrine, and one dimensional politics” (Luke, 2005, p.22) that has been a common reaction to globalisation.

What is needed is a theory of change that does not assume some grand design for global education, but offers the prospect of gradually gaining ground through participatory change. The Brazilian social thinker, Roberto Unger, provides one such theory in his discussion of ‘democratic experimentalism’. He seeks an alternative to proposals for change that are either so radical as to seem incredible or so incremental that they are achievable but trivial. He calls for change that is radical in direction, but piecemeal in form.

This means having a clear idea of direction - ‘where to?’ Hence the need for democratic dialogue about critical questions such as: What is important for our society? What do we want for our children? What is our image of the child and the school? What is the meaning of education? Once direction is agreed, there follows a path of cumulative reforms, “insisting on the possibility and the value of cumulative institutional divergence in the service of empowerment” (Unger, 2002, p.li). He links the need to “develop another way of thinking and talking about society” with the need to “renovate, in the setting of this reoriented understanding, our programmatic imagination: our ways of thinking and talking about alternatives and the future” (Unger, 2002, p.lxxv).

Central to his concept of change is the role of experimentation and its facilitation by democratic practice: “the provision of public services must be an innovative collective practice... It can only happen through the organisation of a collective experimental practice from below... Democracy

is not just one more terrain for the institutional innovation that I advocate. It is the most important terrain" (Unger, 2005, p.179)

There are numerous examples of experimentation, past and present. If I focus on just one example, it is for reasons of personal knowledge and limited space, not shortage of possibilities. I have already introduced the educational project in the city of Reggio Emilia, which has developed over more than 40 years a network of centres for children from birth to 6 years (and Reggio is just one of a number of Italian cities that have undertaken similar local experimental projects). Starting from asking the critical question – what is our image of the child? – and with an understanding of its early childhood centres as places of encounter between citizens, Reggio has undertaken a collective experiment in pedagogical thought and practice, constantly evolving in response to new conditions and perspectives.

Democracy is a fundamental value: "everyone – children, teachers and parents – is involved in sharing ideas, in discussion, in a sense of common purpose and with communication... [Participation] is a value, an identifying feature of the entire experience" (Cagliari, Barozzi & Giudici, 2004, pp.28-29). Pedagogical documentation, whereby practice is made visible and subject to collective interpretation, dialogue, argumentation and understanding, provides "an extraordinary tool for dialogue, for exchange, for sharing" (Hoyuelos, 2004, p.7), a tool for rigorous participatory evaluation, research and learning (Rinaldi, 2005). Their 'pedagogy of listening' has been described as an example of relational ethics applied to education (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). Creativity is central to their idea of learning, supported by ateliers (studios) and atelieristas

(an educator with an artistic background) in most centres. The early childhood centres – ‘municipal schools’ in their terms – are expressions of solidarity, a community taking responsibility for the education of its children. Here are the images and values of a new public education system, the product of a community that has chosen democratically to experiment to find an education that reflects its values.

Does it work? Here we confront a key question. How do we evaluate the new public education? From a positivistic and managerial perspective, the answer lies in finding methods of normative assessment, enabling standardised and objective measurement of attainment against predefined criteria. But this is just one approach, one language, of evaluation. Reggio Emilia adopts another language, one that is participatory and deliberative. Working with pedagogical documentation, citizens take responsibility for understanding and judging the value of the education that they have assumed a public duty to provide. Behind this practice “is the ideological and ethical concept of a transparent school and transparent education... [I]t means the possibility to discuss and dialogue ‘everything with everyone’” (Hoyuelos, 2004, p.7). This civic judgement has, in turn, been complemented and confirmed by that of many thousands of visitors who have come to see the pedagogical work in Reggio. Many have found inspiration for developing their own educational work, co-constructing knowledge, values and identities in relationship with Reggio Emilia (for a fuller discussion of different ‘languages of evaluation’, see Dahlberg et al., 2007).

Today Reggio Emilia has become part of a global network of individuals and services. One way of interpreting this would be to say that the 'Reggio programme' has become a successful international brand that many have wanted to buy into. But another and, in my view, better way of reading this experience is that people and services, finding they share many values and understandings with Reggio, have chosen to enter a learning relationship and, by so doing, to co-construct knowledge, identities and values.

Reggio Emilia, in this reading, is an example of 'glocalisation', the global linking of local experiences. This can contribute to elaborating Unger's theory of change: 'democratic experimentalism' + glocal networks offer one way in which a new public education may gain ground. Experiences of experimentation flow through networks, distributing new knowledge and providing support and hope to widely dispersed local projects, otherwise easily isolated and demoralised.

The potential of glocalisation does not mean that intermediate levels – between the local and the global – have no role to play. On the contrary, national governments can play a key role in creating a new public education system (they can also, of course, act as a powerful obstacle to its creation). They can provide a framework for all education services, expressing in broad terms democratically-debated and agreed values and aims. Within this shared frame, local governments and individual services should be encouraged to interpret and augment the framework, deepen democratic practice and develop networks of experimental services.



Globalisation is a juggernaut. The peoples of the world must decide whether they wish collectively to try and tame it; or if they hope to be part of the minority who can cling on as it careers towards the future. Education is part of that decision: an education for survival of the fittest that pursues flexibility, accommodation and competitive advantage; or a new public education that desires to be, democratic, solidaristic and emancipatory.

3494 words excluding title, abstract and references

## REFERENCES

- Associació de Mestres Rosa Sensat (2005). *For a new public education system (English translation)*. Barcelona: Associació de Mestres Rosa Sensat.
- Bauman, Z. (1993). *Postmodern ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cagliari, P., Barozzi, A. & Giudici, C. (2004). Thoughts, theories and experiences for an educational project with participation. *Children in Europe 6 (March 2004)*, 28-30
- Carr, W. & Hartnett, A. (1996). *Education and the struggle for democracy: The politics of educational ideas*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Clark, A., Kjørholt, A.T. & Moss, P. (eds.) (2005). *Beyond listening: Children's perspectives on early childhood services*. Bristol: Policy Press
- Dahlberg, G. (1995). Everything is a beginning and everything is dangerous: some reflections on the Reggio Emilia experience. In H.Penn (Ed.) *Early childhood services: theory, policy and practice* (pp. 175-183). Buckingham: Open University Press.

- Dahlberg, G. & Moss, P. (2005). *Ethics and politics in early childhood education*. London: Routledge.
- Dahlberg, G., Moss, P. & Pence, A. (2007: 2<sup>nd</sup> edition). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: languages of evaluation*. London: Routledge
- Deleuze, G. (1992). Postscript on the societies of control. *October*, 59, 3-7.
- Dewey, J. (1939). 'Creative Democracy – the Task before us', an address given at a dinner in honour of John Dewey, New York, October 20 1939. Available at: <http://www.beloit.edu/pbk/dewey.html> (accessed August 2007).
- Fendler, L. (2001). Educating flexible soul. In K. Hultqvist & G. Dahlberg (eds.) *Governing the child in the new millennium* (pp. 119-142). London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Freire, P. (2004 English edition). *Pedagogy of hope*. London: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (2005 English edition). *Education for critical consciousness*. London: Continuum.
- Hay, C. (2007). *Why we hate politics*. Cambridge: Polity.

- Hoyuelos, A. (2004). A pedagogy of transgression. *Children in Europe* 6 (March 2004), 6-7
- Luke, A. (2005). Curriculum, ethics, metanarrative: teaching and learning beyond the nation. In Y.Nozaki, R.Openshaw & A. Luke (Eds.) *Struggles over difference: Curriculum, texts and pedagogy on the Asia-Pacific*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press
- Moss, P. (2007). Bringing Politics into the Nursery: Early Childhood Education as a democratic practice. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 15 (1), 5-20.
- Rinaldi, C. (2005). *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia: listening, researching and learning*. London: Routledge.
- Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of freedom: reframing political thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Santos, B. de S. (2004). Interview with Boaventura de Sousa Santos. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 2: 2, 147-160.
- Scholte, J.A. (2005). *Globalisation: a Critical Introduction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Stiglitz, J. (2006) *Making globalisation work: the next steps to global justice*. London: Allen Lane.

Tronto, J. (1993). *Moral boundaries: a political argument for the ethics of care*. London: Routledge.

United Nations Environment Programme (2007). *Global environment outlook: environment for development*.

Vecchi, V. (2004). The multiple fonts of knowledge. *Children in Europe*, 6 (March 2004), 18-21.