

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

KATHRYN ANDERSON-LEVITT, ed. *Local Meanings, Global Schooling: Anthropology and World Culture Theory*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. 2003, 263 p. Index.

Anderson-Levitt opens an intriguing dialogue between two different perspectives on schooling around the world. World culture theory, as developed by John Meyer, Francisco Ramirez, John Boli and colleagues, argues that the culture of schooling is converging toward a single global model, based on evidence of broad similarities among schooling systems across nations, including common ideals, institutional forms and practices, organizational features, curricula and instructional methods. This theory of schooling extends to the cultural sphere the universalist deterministic logic of Wallerstein's (1974) world systems theory, a structural argument for global convergence of international economic systems. Accordingly, Meyer and colleagues rely on macro level analysis for their argument, with little description of what actually happens inside the classroom. This is where anthropology and comparative education offer divergent views of contemporary schooling around the world. It is not surprising, then, to find that while contributions to the current volume are consistent with convergence toward a single model of schooling at "a high level of abstraction" (p. 7), the ethnographic case studies demonstrate that substantial gaps exist between such a model and "actual practice on the ground" (p. 16). In other words, despite the appearance of structural similarities, considerable differences in lived experiences exist.

Anderson-Levitt begins the volume with a clear discussion of world culture theory and anthropological perspectives on contemporary trends in schooling around the world. A comprehensive overview of world culture theory by one of its proponents, Francisco Ramirez, concludes the volume, which readers unfamiliar to this topic may also want to read at the outset. In between are ten chapters presenting cases studies from Thailand, South Africa, Guinea, the United States, China, Tanzania, Brazil, France, and Israel. The volume is organized into three sections: part I examines the impact of national education reform at the local level; part II explores the ways in which teachers, students, and parents experience reforms; and part III addresses education reform initiatives that come from outside national boundaries. The majority of chapters focus on elementary education.

The contributions range from classroom implementation of national policies in different South African schools (Napier) and reforms in curricular context and pedagogical practice in Guinea (Anderson-Levitt

and Diallo) and in Israel (Segal-Levit), to the supranational influence of Europe on French educational reforms (Reed-Danahay) and with opposite directionality, student resistance to foreign instructors' attempts to promote the western Communicative Method in English-language instruction in China (Ouyang).

One of the unifying themes that emerge from the diverse settings presented is the extent to which reform pressures are alternately accepted or resisted according to the priorities of the society and the individual. Of course the interests of these two constituencies are not always compatible, and several contributors examine the details of local conflicts and the ways in which particular outcomes are justified by one group over another. Rosen, for example, examines the ways in which one group of American parents subvert teacher autonomy through a neoliberal vocabulary representing themselves as "customers" of schools with entitlement to "consumer choice" in the selection of curricular materials and instructional methods. In another chapter, Hatch and Honing illustrate different approaches taken by four progressive schools to issues of goals, instructional approach, and relationships with parents, demonstrating that truly distinctive schools are extremely difficult to maintain even in a decentralized nation committed to educational alternatives such as the United States.

In a different vein, Stambach probes tensions between American missionaries' attempts to implement an English-language primary school program to enhance career possibilities and Tanzanian parents' resistance to this program, who instead see educational institutions as the locus for child socialization, Kiswahili national language and cultural cohesion. A similar set of tensions between competing approaches to teaching and learning is the subject of Barlett's chapter on Brazil.

In recent years, the structural determinism of world systems theory has come under increasing attack, with several theoretical alternatives offered to explain the empirical macro data. While conceding the pervasiveness of power structures, Samoff (2000) argues against any determination of local responses by global pressures, for a range of institutional pressures provide resistance to globalization forces. Ball (1998) suggests that global pressures are locally (nationally) articulated and, while global pressures may indeed be pervasive, national systems are able to reinterpret ideas. In an argument contesting the exertion of centralized power for observed global similarities, Levin (1998) argues for contextual affordances, as, while globalization processes may sweep the globe like an epidemic, some countries are more receptive to these processes than others.

Similarly, most authors in this volume resist the primary claims of world culture theory. Also, as investigation of the "local" in globalization studies rarely extend beyond the national level, the studies in the current volume make an important contribution by extending the analysis from the national level to the classroom, making it clear that what happens on the ground in particular ministries of education, local communities, and classrooms

cannot be ignored. The breath and depth of this book will attract readers in a variety of fields including sociology, anthropology and education.

References

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