

Teaching Global Interconnectivity

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Wilmslow Road runs by the campus of Manchester Metropolitan University in England, representing a border between academia and commerce. It is where students shop, meet their friends and hang out – just as I did as a graduate student in the 1970s. More than 30 years later, I had an opportunity recently to re-visit my old neighborhood. Was this still the same place where I used to hang out? In one sense, it clearly was. Many of the buildings were the same and it was still a centre of vibrant commercial activity. Its geographical location had clearly not changed.

Yet, in another sense, Wilmslow Road has been totally transformed. Its social constitution is now radically re-configured, with shops and their signs tended by people with roots in many different cultural traditions. Saris and Samosas are sold where once there were only fish and chip shops. The ubiquitous McDonalds and Starbucks compete for business with South Asian and Chinese restaurants now imitating the business models of the successful global brands. And even in cooler temperatures, young people sip their Café Late *alfresco*, in a way that would have once been regarded as very un-English. They do this while talking on their cell phones and wireless computers with relatives and friends who perhaps live on the other side of the world.

The young people hanging out in Wilmslow Road are now globally interconnected, in much the same way as they are in Oxford Street in Sydney or Chapel Street in Melbourne. In these cities – aspiring to be global – similar cultural practices can be observed. The young around the world listen to the same songs on their iPods and wear the same brands of jeans, but also take great pride in their engagement, even enthusiasm, for cultural diversity. They are subjected to a range of influences. There is not, for them, the simple socialization into an existing culture defined by a clear set of norms. Theirs is a dynamic culture, constantly and rapidly changing, subject to a wide variety of pressures and open to many creative possibilities.

These transformations are due largely to the revolutionary advances in information and communications technologies, which have led not only to the greater mobility of people but also to the rapid circulation of ideas and information, as well as money and capital. At a personal level, technology has enhanced people's capacity to remain in touch with communities around the world in a way that was not possible in the 1970s. But it has also required them to interpret and negotiate new information and ideas, now abundantly available in considerable diversity. The young people of Pakistani background in Wilmslow Road, for example, have to negotiate on a daily basis not only the local English cultural norms but also the nostalgic views of their parents, as well as the new notions about religion, culture, politics and the like emanating from Pakistan, and potentially also from many other parts of the world, such as the Middle East.

The changing cultural economy of Wilmslow Road is thus illustrative of the ways in which communities around the world are becoming interconnected, as much of the literature on globalization has shown. However this literature focuses largely on such macro issues as the global integration of economic activity, our shared environmental problems, increasing levels of international economic and refugee migration, major health concerns such as AIDS, the so-called 'clash of civilizations' between Western and Islamic worlds, the increasing income gaps between rich and poor nations, and within nations, the drifting apart of socio-economic classes and the like. In this paper, I want to stress instead the importance of looking at global interconnectivity at the micro levels – at the level of how young people negotiate identity issues within the context of the transnational spaces that increasingly characterise most communities.

I say 'most' because it is not only young people in the metropolitan areas who are affected by the global circulation of ideas, people and money. Remote parts of the world are also implicated – though clearly in ways that are markedly different, and in conditions that are deeply asymmetrical. The villagers in India, for example, who rely for their subsistence on remittances from their diaspora in metropolitan New York or London or Dubai, are no less implicated in the global logic of capital and the new patterns of global cultural interconnectivity. The people who are mobile and those that stay at home can now be in touch with each other on a regular basis, and cannot but increasingly re-shape each other's identities.

Indeed, it is difficult to imagine places that still remain unaffected by the global flows of people, money and information – as well as of ideologies, cultural tastes and aspirations. Even if people cannot travel their imagination is nonetheless sparked, to a greater or lesser degree. We can hence no longer assume self-contained communities whose inhabitants live in blissful isolation, unaffected, in ways both direct and indirect, by people and places great distances from where they live and work. We are all affected, for example, by decisions made in far away places like London, Tokyo and Washington, whether we realize it or not. And what occurs in small communities is not also entirely irrelevant to what happens in larger metropolitan cities.

You might ask, of course, has this not always been the case. People have always moved; and cultures have always been shaped and reshaped by various forms of exchange. Under colonialism, for example, the people of the British Empire were interconnected in a highly structured manner that was planned and executed from London, affecting people in far-flung places like Sydney, Bombay and Nairobi. Under colonial regimes, markets and financial systems were also globally integrated, once it became possible to transport goods across vast distances, and for people to remain in touch with each other using new communication technologies, such as the telegraph. International brand names like Campbell Soup, Coca Cola and Heinz Foods all emerged in the 1880s, and, in less than 20 years, became household names in many parts of the world.

Global thinking was not restricted to the economic sphere, however. It also developed in the popular consciousness, as people wished to find out more about the countries with whom they traded and the cultures with which they shared colonial links. Indeed, the discipline of anthropology itself was created to fulfill people's desire to know others, even if it also represented a system of knowledge with which power was exercised over colonized people. Education played a major role in the dissemination of colonial ideas, designed not only to buttress the exercise of power but also to make it seem natural and legitimate to the colonized and colonizing populations alike.

In the colonial context, one of the main aims of education was therefore to develop a consciousness that assumed that the economic and political interests of the colonial powers were identical with those of the colonized. Curriculum was designed to produce colonial subjectivities. Both Britain and France therefore invested heavily in creating educational infrastructure in the communities they colonized. Schools were established to educate the masses, while universities were created to develop a local administrative elite beholden to the colonial powers. From the colonial point of view, then, the world was indeed globally interconnected, with the destinies of the people interdependent.

The contemporary forms of global interconnectivity differ markedly from these earlier colonial constructions, however. To begin with, they do not assume a political center from which economic and political activity across the world is coordinated. They suggest rather that it is the

advances in information and communication technologies that have converted the world into a single world system which does not need a central point of coordination. In the new context, there is an assumption that a sense of global interconnectivity is forged and sustained by the people themselves; that globality is as much about popular consciousness as it is about the structural changes witnessed since the Second World War. In this sense, global interconnectivity is not systemic as such, but produced *organically* through the shifting subjectivities of people.

The current rhetoric of globalization suggests that the nations of the world are incorporated into a single 'society', operating within a globalizing economy. As a result of time-space compression, cultures and societies are being squeezed together and driven towards mutual interaction. Communities are becoming more culturally diverse, and have to negotiate a politics of difference that is not only locally evident but potentially spans the globe. This suggests that while, under colonialism, interconnectivity represented a political project designed to legitimize territorial conquests, in the contemporary era it describes an empirical reality resulting from the ease with which goods, finance, people, ideas and media are now able to move across the world, giving people the impression that they have more choices, and that they are 'citizens of the world'. It is about their social imagination.

The idea of global interconnectivity, then, is not new. But nor is it self-evident or politically neutral. Many of the links that define our lives occur in the shadows, the nature of which is masked from people who often take them for granted. One of the problems I have therefore with much of the recent social theory is that it represents globalization in ahistorical and apolitical terms – without reference to the actual actors shaping it, struggling over its forms, contesting its various formations. It also fails to realize that each global process – each experience of interconnectivity – has a specific history from which it has emerged. In this way, global processes do not mark a clear departure from colonialism, but are embedded within its historical trajectory.

Global interconnectivity is also a dynamic phenomenon, politically and historically changing. It follows then that it is not only experienced differently, it is also interpreted differently in different contexts. It involves a hermeneutical politics. It has different consequences for different communities, and even individuals, some of whom are able to profit from its possibilities, while others have their lives shattered as a result of its excesses. Not surprisingly, therefore, its implications for public policies are highly contested because they represent particular configurations of power that serve some interests, and not others.

Let me now turn to the implications of this brief analysis for thinking about curriculum. If greater global interconnectivity is indeed re-shaping our identities and communities in some of the ways I have described – and if our students encounter both its opportunities and its challenges – then we, as educators, need to ask how we should teach about global interconnectivity so that our students can interpret its various forms – the politics of its representation – and critically assess how it might shape both their imagination and their life options, and how they might intervene politically to articulate new forms of global relations.

Of course, issues of interconnectivity are at once empirical and normative. Empirically, we need greater clarity over how global transformations are re-shaping our lives. Normatively, we need to ask how we *should* work with these transformations, creatively and in ways that are potentially progressive. And if indeed these transformations affect everyone, albeit in ways that are highly differentiated and unequal, then the question arises as to how educators should respond to these shifts so that globalization does not further reproduce social inequalities. In other words,

how should curriculum be framed so that it provides students with both an empirical understanding of global transformations and an ethical orientation towards them?

Of course, the imperative to re-think curriculum has been widely recognized in recent years. Both scholars and organizations have insisted that internationalization of curriculum must now be viewed as a basic goal of education. Indeed so ubiquitous has this sentiment become that it can perhaps be regarded as part of a new global slogan system. Almost every educational system now maintains that curriculum must become more responsive to the compelling requirements of globalization, because it uniquely spans the cultural, economic, political and interpersonal dimensions of international relations. It must assist 'intercultural understanding' and encourage 'an international outlook' among students, as a way of responding to the diverse and increasingly complex nature of the global environment.

According to the American philosopher, Nel Noddings (2005), the promotion of global citizenship has never been more urgent. She argues that global citizenship involves a set of cultural attitudes towards the requirements of economic and social justice, of social and cultural diversity, treating the earth as a single unified place that needs protecting and educating for peace. Her framework for educating for global citizenship includes building community and mutual respect, creating social responsibility, instilling appreciation for diversity, promoting emotional literacy and managing and resolving conflict.

In contrast to this values-based approach, another influential American scholar, Howard Gardiner, has argued for a skills-based paradigm that highlights the need for students to develop skills they will need to analyse issues and mobilize others to solve problems from multiple perspectives. The global age, he maintains, requires individuals who are cognitively flexible, culturally sophisticated and are able to work collaboratively in groups made up of people of diverse backgrounds and intelligences.

My own position is somewhat different from both Noddings' and Gardiner's, because while I broadly agree with their sentiments, I believe they state their educational aspirations at a highly generalized and abstract level, making it difficult to infer their implications for specific reforms of curriculum and pedagogy. Nor do they consider the issues of the nation-centric assumptions that still dominate educational thinking.

At a practical level, any attempt to internationalize the curriculum faces the highly entrenched traditions of educational policies and practices that remain largely locally defined, even if they are influenced by many external sources. Almost by definition, much of our pedagogic practice is local, where our priorities are informed by the immediate exigencies of our day-to-day lives. The immediate issues we have to deal with are invariably local.

If this is so then I believe that our approach to teaching global interconnectivity should begin with the local, but must move quickly to address issues of how our local communities are becoming socially transformed through their links with communities around the world. I want to stress the relationalities that lie at the heart of any thinking about the dynamics of change. I believe that our focus ought to be on understanding the nature, scope and consequences of global transformations, rather than on some generalized principles of global citizenship or the skills required in the global economy. In this way, I want to argue that learning about interconnectivity itself needs to become cosmopolitan.

Of course, the idea of cosmopolitanism is not new. It dates back to the ancient Greeks but its variants can also be found in other major civilizations, like the Chinese and Sufi Islam. Not

only can the idea of cosmopolitanism be found in many different traditions, it has also been a highly contested idea, between those who view it as expressing a moral concern for the entire humanity, those who wish to privilege the pragmatic immediacy of our social and moral concerns, and those who view it as a notion that celebrates the lifestyles and interests of the global elite. Not surprisingly therefore cosmopolitanism has been theorized from a variety of different perspectives: as a world-view, a social attitude, a political philosophy and a moral disposition that implies the need to view the world as a single place.

I want to suggest an alternative to these conceptions, which seeks to overcome the dichotomy between the global and the local presupposed by many of these conceptions. I want to propose instead a view of cosmopolitanism that defines it as a particular way of learning about our own social identities and cultural trajectories that underscores their interconnectivity with the rest of the world. In this way, I want to emphasize the dynamic nature of our identities and cultures, now changing more rapidly and more intensely than ever before, mostly as a result of their interactions with identities and cultures that potentially span the world. Unlike multiculturalism that highlighted learning about other cultures *within* the nation-state, I want to argue that the sources of cosmopolitan learning are more diverse and extensive, and can no longer be contained within the borders of the nation-state.

If learning about global interconnectivity is to become cosmopolitan, then it must have the potential to help students come to terms with their *situatedness* in the world – the situatedness of their knowledge and of their cultural practices, as well as their positionality in relation to social networks, political institutions and social relations that are no longer confined to particular communities and nations, but potentially connect up with the rest of the world.

Much of the traditional learning about other cultures and cultural interactions has been nationally defined. Cosmopolitan learning, in contrast, represents an aspiration that seeks to develop a different perspective on knowing and interacting with others, within the changing context of the cultural exchanges produced by global flows and networks. It is based on a different view of culture as dynamic and creative, always in the state of becoming as a result of interactions of various kinds, rather than something that is entirely inherited within clearly definable boundaries and norms.

Such learning is of course best done collectively, in transcultural collaborations, in which local problems can be examined comparatively, and linked to the global processes. While such collective learning might not always be possible, it is nonetheless possible to help students to interrogate how things might be done differently in different places. Such interrogation is clearly necessary if we are to help students develop a different imaginary about their lives and life options in the materiality of their collective and interlinked circumstances – in helping them consider how things could be otherwise.

With greater access to the new media, it is now possible to do this kind of pedagogic work through networks, both formal and informal, bringing together students from different backgrounds, with the objective of encouraging them to think outside their own parochial boundaries and cultural assumptions, consider how global processes affect communities differentially, and examine the sources of these differentiations and inequalities, and what could be done about them.

Instead of learning about cultures in an abstract manner, cosmopolitan learning thus involves pedagogic tasks that help students explore the criss-crossing of transnational circuits of communication, the flows of global capital and the cross-cutting of local, translocal and

transnational social practices. Such learning encourages students to consider the contested politics of place making, the social constructions of power differentials and the dynamic processes relating to the formation of individual, group, national and transnational identities, and their corresponding fields of difference.

It should be noted however that this kind of learning is impossible within an emphasis on criticality. This is so because cosmopolitan learning necessarily challenges the prevailing orthodoxies about education and about cultural formations. It contests, moreover, the dominant hegemonic social imaginaries of globalization; and is implicitly directed towards the goal of global relations that are more just, democratic and humane. The current attempts at the internationalization of curriculum highlight the importance of intercultural experiences through such programs as study abroad, but they do not seriously address how such experiences might produce a critical understanding of the new global configurations of economic and cultural exchange.

Cosmopolitan learning of the kind I have in mind, in contrast, encourages students to examine the political meaning of intercultural experiences, seeking to locate them within the transnational networks that have become so much part of the contemporary era of globalization. It is not enough to state that globalization drives cultures towards mutual interaction; it is perhaps more important to examine how cultures are transformed by these interactions, and how our social imagination plays a central role in these transformational processes. As Appadurai (1996) has argued, 'globalization is not simply the name of a new epoch in the history of capital or in the biography of the nation-state. It marks a new role for imagination of social life'.

If this is so, then one of the major goals of cosmopolitan learning should be the development of a critical global imagination based on a recognition that we all have 'elaborate interests and capabilities in constructing world pictures whose very interaction affects global processes' (Appadurai 1996: 11). Such an approach clearly demands the deparochialization of the processes of learning and teaching, highlighting the importance of 'grassroots' global networks capable of interrogating dominant social imaginaries that are no longer adequate for negotiating the complex global realities we now confront.

In this sense, cosmopolitan learning is not concerned with imparting knowledge and developing attitudes and skills for understanding other cultures *per se* but with helping students examine the ways in which global processes are creating conditions of economic and cultural exchange that are transforming our identities and communities; and that, *reflexively*, we may be contributing to the production and reproduction of those conditions, through our uncritical acceptance of the dominant ways of thinking about global interconnectivity.

It should indeed be in our collective power to develop an alternative imaginary of global interconnectivity, one which is informed not by the universalizing logic of the market or by the romanticized notions of global citizenship, but by our determination to develop a different conception of global relations which views all of the world's diverse people and communities as part of each of our moral universes. Such an imaginary requires the development of a sense of moral responsibility among students directed not only towards their families and nations, but also towards the humanity as a whole.

Cosmopolitan learning thus demands a new way of learning about other cultures and intercultural exchange. It requires the development of intellectual skills to examine the ways in which we create knowledge about others and use it to engage with them. In this way, it highlights both the cognitive and ethical dimensions of intercultural learning. It suggests that learning about

others requires learning about *ourselves*. It implies a dialectical mode of thinking, which conceives cultural differences as neither absolute nor necessarily antagonistic, but deeply interconnected and relationally defined. It underscores the importance of understanding others both in *their* terms as well as *ours*, as a way of comprehending how both our representations are socially constituted.

This suggests the importance of understanding intercultural exchange *historically*, in ways that shows how no cultural tradition – no set of cultural values and practices – can be understood without reference to the historical interactions that produced it. This is always been the case, but in a world in which social networks of money, technologies, people and ideas increasingly shape life options and chances, thinking historically about global interconnectivity is indispensable.

This is so because networks too have histories, without an understanding of which we cannot fully comprehend how people's sense of their collectivity – as solidarity in its positive manifestations and as marginalization in its negative – is forged in power configurations that are often asymmetrical. The past is thus linked to the present, and plays an important role in imagining the future. As Edward Said (1994) pointed out, it is only through this realization that we recognize that our identities are forged in histories of contact between groups of people, where knowledge and resources are traded, borrowed, improved upon, fought over and passed on to others.

The notion of a pure culture, located within its own territory, has always been a myth because all cultures result from their encounters with others. If this is so, then *relationality* must be regarded as key to any attempt to internationalize curriculum through cosmopolitan learning. If we cannot learn about cultures in their pristine and authentic form, then our focus must shift to the ways in which cultural practices are separated from their 'homes' and converted into new forms in their new contexts, and on how this transforms both the places people leave and the places they come to inhabit.

In a world in which flows of information, media symbols and images and political and cultural ideas are constant and relentless, new cultural formations are inevitable, and can only be relationally comprehended. This focus on relationality must therefore replace approaches that treat 'other' cultures as entirely separable from our own. Culture formations can only be understood in relation to each other – politically forged, historically constituted and globally interconnected through processes of mobility, exchange and hybridization.

A relational understanding of global interconnectivity also points to the importance of another element of cosmopolitan learning: *reflexivity*. Reflexivity requires people to become self-conscious and knowledgeable about their own perspective and how it too is subject to transformation as a result of engagement with other cultural trajectories. Reflexive individuals are able to challenge their own assumptions that are often linked to official and popular discourses of cultural difference. They are able to reflect upon the politics of their own representations of others, and point to the ways in which this politics is historically constituted.

Such reflexivity cannot then be achieved without a critical recognition of our own cultural and political presuppositions, and the epistemic position from we speak and negotiate difference. This must involve a realization that knowledge about cultures is never neutral and that our efforts to learn about and engage with others take place within asymmetrical configurations of power. But these need not prevent us from continuing to explore, engage and learn from other cultural trajectories in an effort to transform our own.

In the contemporary era, the volume and speed of intercultural exchange has increased at an unprecedented rate, creating greater possibilities of trade, transfers of technology, cultural cooperation and skirmishes, and even war, than ever before. Never before has there been a greater need for intercultural understanding and communication. But if this understanding is predicated on essentialist conceptions of culture, rather than within a pedagogically open framework that explores the dynamics of cultural interactions in any ongoing fashion, then no amount of intercultural education is likely to be helpful.

Clearly necessary are new ways of thinking about economic and cultural exchange in which conceptions of others and ourselves are defined relationally, as complex and inherently dynamic products of a range of historical processes and the contemporary cultural economies of global interconnectivity. Epistemologically, all cultural understanding is comparative because no understanding of others is possible without self-understanding. If this is so then it is important to emphasize not only historicity, criticality and relationality but also reflexivity in all our attempts to imagine and work towards better futures.

Cosmopolitan learning thus involves both a view of global interconnectivity different from the dominant imaginary of globalization, but also an ethic recommending a certain attitude towards intercultural relations. It conceives of the relation between self and others dialectically, and denies that our cultures are fixed and essentially distinct. It is based on a somewhat optimistic conviction about the creative possibilities of continuous self-examination and transformation. In teaching global interconnectivity, it underscores an ethic that urges us to engage with difference differently and to explore and work towards the possibility of futures that are more democratic and just.

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