

Response Paper:

Empower or Control? Education in Emergencies and Global Governance

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Abstract

Do programs that provide education in emergencies empower those whom they are intended to assist, or do they coerce and control? Is the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) a global body that seeks to bureaucratize, regulate, and “govern from a distance” (Sobe, this issue), or does it represent the emergence of universally accepted human rights and the triumph of world society principles and norms in one of the last bastions of marginalized territory: the international conflict or disaster zone? All of the articles in this issue directly or indirectly engage in this central debate. Beyond the subfield of education in emergencies, these questions address one of the most important issues facing international educators and humanitarian workers today – the melding of the humanitarian and development paradigms and the perceived politicization of aid that has accompanied this change. The four articles published in this issue of Current Issues in Comparative Education present a range of vantage points from which to view this dichotomy. This response paper discusses the issues that they raise that are most closely and urgently related to this debate.

Do programs that provide education in emergencies empower those whom they are intended to assist, or do they coerce and control? Is the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies a global body that seeks to bureaucratize, regulate, and “govern from a distance” (Sobe, this issue), or does it represent the emergence of universally accepted human rights and the triumph of world society norms in one of the last bastions of marginalized territory: the international conflict or disaster zone? All of the articles in this issue of *Current Issues in Comparative Education* directly or indirectly engage in this central debate. Beyond the subfield of education in emergencies, these questions address one of the most pressing issues facing international educators and humanitarian workers today – the melding of the humanitarian and development paradigms and the perceived politicization of aid that has accompanied this change.

According to some scholars, the spread of universalizing norms of mass public education to even the most difficult and hard-to-reach regions represent the dangerous triumph of liberal market democracy and global governance techniques (Duffield, 2005; Fox, 2001). Education reforms, in this context, may be used to re-orient societies toward western notions of security and democracy, and introduce a market-oriented economic model into the education system. They may also be part of a new security paradigm that seeks to regulate communities within weak states in order to minimize risks to the stable, prosperous states that support these humanitarian efforts.

Neoinstitutionalists are more sanguine about universalizing forces in education. As progress and justice became nation-state goals in the twentieth century, they argue, universal (mass) education triumphed as the primary means to achieve these goals because it held value for fledgling states who wanted to gain entry to the international system (Finnemore, 1996; Meyer, Ramirez, & Soysal, 1992). According to this argument, as a global good and a global norm, mass education became one of the features with which modernizing states could distinguish and legitimize themselves,

joining the group of largely western/northern states that set the standards for social acceptance and participation in the increasingly globalized economy.

Adopting international standards for education and other systems integral to the functioning of the nation-state may extend the benefits of world society standards to those who have been marginalized and disadvantaged. Furthermore, it enhances the legitimacy of any state, but particularly that of a fragile state affected by conflict. Yet critics argue that the rationalization, professionalization, and bureaucratization of education as part of humanitarian assistance—a vehicle that may be used to empower and include—also creates a vehicle that may be used to coerce and control. This dichotomy is evident in this issue, and it is important to explore further.

The four articles published in this issue of *Current Issues in Comparative Education* present a range of vantage points from which to view this dichotomy. In this response paper, I discuss the issues the authors raise that are most closely and urgently related to the debate outlined above. First, I situate the rise of education in emergencies within the larger debate on humanitarian action and the context of the expansion of humanitarianism. Second, I explore the universalizing role of the INEE as it relates to the empowerment/control debate presented by these articles. Finally, I argue that while “new humanitarian” aid organizations and institutions, including INEE, work with communities and individuals rather than states to circumvent problems posed by weak or fractured states, INEE and the education in emergencies movement is neither an exclusively controlling nor empowering network. Instead, they may serve both purposes, at different times, under different conditions, and a dichotomy may not exist at all.

Education in Emergencies and Two Kinds of Humanitarians

The tension between empowerment and control, described above, emerges both in the broad discussion of humanitarian action as well as education in emergencies as a subset of the field. “Traditional” humanitarians, on the one hand, typically view humanitarian space as politically neutral, requiring strict separation from the influence of potentially corrupting forces and their activities that could serve a broader purpose. “New” humanitarians, on the other hand, aim to address the root causes of conflicts and see their efforts as linked to progress, justice, and universal access to services that will improve the human condition (Barnett, 2005; Stoddard, 2002). Because these two schools of thought have been critical to the development of the field of education in emergencies, it is worth dwelling on their differences before discussing how they relate to the articles in this issue.

Traditional humanitarians argue that aid must rest on the principles of neutrality, impartiality, independence, and universality. Neutrality requires that aid not be used to promote the interests of one side in a conflict over another. Impartiality requires that aid be given based on need, without discrimination according to race, religion, ethnicity or other markers. Independence requires that aid be free of religious, political, or other associations. Universality requires that aid should reach victims of crises regardless of where they are (Terry, 2002). These principles are closely linked to the missions of organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) that serve particular roles in combat, tending to victims and promoting adherence to the rules of war. Organizations that espouse these traditional principles are concerned with delivering aid, but they are also concerned with gaining and maintaining access to victims of conflict. Violating any one of these principles could be perceived by warring parties as an attempt to benefit the other party to the conflict and therefore result in denied access to affected populations.

In today's world of expansive humanitarian missions, the traditionalists' fundamental concern is to avoid the politicization of humanitarian aid. To this end, they hew closely to the principles outlined above, eschew state partners, and accept little to no funding from state sources to avoid becoming an instrument for achieving a particular political strategy. Because they believe that development and relief activities must be segregated they guard against expanding their mandates beyond traditional needs (Barnett, 2005). Thus, the traditional view of humanitarian relief work limits the goal of this work to activities that address urgent (physical) needs and encompass immediate relief.

New humanitarians like Save the Children, International Rescue Committee (IRC), and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), on the other hand, believe in the power of aid to transform underlying social inequalities. An expanded humanitarian mandate allows these organizations to address inequalities through a transformational agenda by reforming economic and social systems. Their goals and missions tend to be compatible with Woodrow Wilson's internationalism, which states that foreign policy could and should be used as a progressive force to attack the root causes of poverty and promote democracy, peace, and liberalism throughout the world (Barnett, 2005; Stoddard, 2002). The fact that government bilateral aid agencies often support this expanded mandate is not generally problematic for these NGOs; many of them encourage it by calling for increased coherence between relief and development efforts. As a result, in many crises, new humanitarians often experience a coincidence of interest with government funders. Yet new humanitarians perceive their positions as apolitical to the extent that they "act according to universal values and avoid partisan politics" (Barnett, 2005, p. 728).

As the expansion of humanitarian aid brought many new organizations into the field, it exposed the tensions between traditional humanitarians and new humanitarians. According to traditional humanitarians, a broader mandate could erode the goals of humanitarianism and be more easily manipulated for other (political) purposes. Any activities beyond the traditional purview of aid were suspect, and many international actors resisted the idea of including education in the humanitarian paradigm. Both because of the additional programs categorized as relief activities and the closer relationship to government bilateral agencies, traditionalists saw these interventions as a politicization of aid. They criticized new humanitarianism as the strategic linking of humanitarian and development goals to security issues to form a coherent political, social, and economic international system. They argued that this new humanitarianism advanced the interests of core countries over those affected by conflict, assuming a governance role in the borderlands—those traditionally marginalized areas of the global South—and filling the post-Cold War vacuum that was created by the departing superpowers (Duffield, 2002).

Although some humanitarian agencies and donors have not yet incorporated education into their activities, the expansion of the humanitarian aid paradigm is now widely accepted. For example, Hodgkin (this issue) notes that most of the large international relief organizations and their donors that do not focus exclusively on health issues in their mission statements now include education as a key component of humanitarian action and have signed on to INEE's universalizing principles. The other articles in this issue take the integration of education in emergencies into the humanitarian paradigm as a point of departure.

The success of education in emergencies programs symbolizes the triumph of the new humanitarians. Despite this shift, however, the warning from traditionalists must be heeded. The altruistic motivations that lie behind the goal of expanding the reach of education also encourage

the bureaucratization, professionalization, standardization, and institutionalization of the techniques used to achieve them. A movement's success is marked by its institutionalization and internalization (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Keck & Sikkink, 1998). When the effort to empower others becomes bureaucratized, however, it creates two critical results: it consolidates western norms as universal values, and it concentrates power in the hands of humanitarians.

The four articles published in this issue of CICE raise questions regarding the governance, politicization, and universalization of education that are central to this debate. Some of these authors laud the inclusion of education in humanitarian action as a critical component of the aid paradigm, while others voice concern about the extension of western-centered notions of aid and education to areas that may be unsuspecting recipients of the liberal market structures that accompany these interventions. Education in emergencies embodies this struggle between traditional and new humanitarians – specifically, the debate over whether expanded humanitarian action is driven by the humanitarian impulse or instrumentalized as a political tool. The next section looks more closely at the reasons for optimism and for caution in the remarkable success of INEE.

Empower or Control?

Both traditionalists and new humanitarians would agree that their overarching goal and guiding principle is to alleviate the current suffering of (distant) strangers (Barnett, forthcoming; Boltanski, 1999). Altruism and the desire to empower vulnerable groups to take charge of their lives lie behind efforts to promote and extend access to quality education. Aid workers and advocates who promote education in emergencies programs are highly motivated and well-intentioned. Indeed, humanitarianism is designed to be an “emancipatory project, intending to liberate individuals from the causes of suffering and increase their capacity to determine their fates” (Barnett, forthcoming, p. 2). As Sobe notes in this issue, extending the reach of quality education efficiently and effectively, however, may have its own unintended consequences. Below, I discuss three of these consequences: (1) the debates surrounding global standards, (2) the emergence of community participation in the context of global governance, and (3) the increased power held by humanitarians.

Global Standards: Good for All and Universal?

Andina (this issue) documents and analyzes the spread of western norms as global standards. She outlines the move toward progress and justice, which are highlighted in the INEE references to human rights and human capital and respectively defined as material success and equality (Finnemore, 1996). Using a neoinstitutionalist framework, she analyzes the INEE Minimum Standards to assess “how global level forces influence and shape processes and discourse” (p. 16) and searches for references to “global standards” and “global principles” in the INEE documents from the regional and global consultations organized to create the Minimum Standards.

As Andina points out, the INEE Minimum Standards are structured and supported by references to education as a human right. Neoinstitutionalists view these processes as part of the global expansion of world cultural norms. They view global norms and standards as key elements in creating shared understandings about “who is a person, what constitutes an organization, and what...a nation-state look[s] like” (Ramirez, 2006). They argue that mass schooling gained worldwide acceptance because it was a key feature of the modern nation-state. Nation-states adhered to “world models of the organization of sovereignty (the modern state), and the organization of society as composed of individuals (the modern nation)” (Meyer, Ramirez, & Soysal, 1992, p. 129). Mass schooling was an inherent ingredient in this model of organization. Nation-states, or

those bodies desiring to strengthen their image as nation-states, were increasingly legitimized by the degree to which they were able to adopt global (western) standards for mass education and other forms of social organization.

The neoinstitutionalist paradigm, however, carries two controversial elements: (1) How “good” are these global standards? (2) How “universal” are they? The first question challenges whether internationalized standards lead to broader social goods. As Sobe does in this issue, many scholars and traditional humanitarians argue that describing standards as “international” and “universal,” is, in fact, code for western/northern, and that poorer states in the globalized south may not perceive these norms as benevolent (Duffield, 2002; Kennedy, 2004). And, as a result, they may be coerced into these standards rather than choosing to adopt them.

Second, although these international standards certainly have taken hold in many parts of the world, it is not clear that they have been as triumphant as the neoinstitutionalists/world society theorists would argue. [1] Interestingly, this seems to be supported by the evidence in Andina’s analysis of the language used in the minimum standards documents. She points out that there are more references to international standards and norms (global culture) in the final Minimum Standards document, created by authors in the global center, than in the documents created during the regional consultations, in the global periphery. She concludes that the authors of the final document were “more influenced by the need to place the MSEE within the existing global culture than were those at the regional level” (p. 13). If this is the case, how far then, really, does the global culture extend its influence?

Global Governance and Community Participation

The neoinstitutionalists are right to point out that most of the world has accepted the nation-state model as the legitimate form of political organization and way to organize society and deliver social services. In this structure, “schooling the masses” became the mechanism for establishing symbolic links between governments and citizens (Meyer, Ramirez, & Soysal, 1992, p. 131). Yet governance systems within nation-states continue to vary dramatically, despite the efforts of international institutions to promote a particular type of governance (e.g., liberal market democracy). Liberal market democracy has not necessarily achieved dominance. Furthermore, the degree to which the liberal democratic model of social, political, and economic governance is accepted among nation-states remains contested.

Aid organizations promote different types of governance models depending on their missions and funding agencies. In education programs, these differences are often characterized by the relative emphasis placed on centralization versus decentralization, and on community or private structures versus state or public structures. Sobe points out that INEE documents emphasize “community” partnership and inclusion. He notes that “national community membership and the furtherance of the national social body are no longer the ultimate goals of reconstruction” (p. 49). Instead, community and participation have become units of self-governance and a set of mechanisms, respectively, used to regulate behavior in an increasingly standardized way around the world.

The community is used as a unit of governance for multiple reasons. First, according to some (Freire, 1970), it gives a voice to the dispossessed. Many humanitarians promote engaging community to rebuild social cohesion, address social malaise, and deliver social services. According to this reasoning, local actors can work collectively to accomplish community projects because of their social networks and mutual trust. Community “provides the relationships of trust and the habits

of cooperation essential for members of society to work together to solve common problems” (Warren, 1998, p. 81). The local community referred to in humanitarian program implementation, however, may be scattered, divided, traumatized, or uprooted.

Second, community is deliberately included and privileged in INEE’s plans precisely to avoid the overbearing, regulative approach that Sobe cites, that traditional humanitarians worry about, and that is often attributed to the hegemonic efforts of outsiders. Community, in the vision of the INEE advocates, is not meant to constrain and control, but to liberate and empower. The INEE exhortation to create committees that are representative of community members is intended to stimulate civil society structures that are as broadly representative as possible. Yet, as most aid workers will be the first to acknowledge, the best intentions do not necessarily produce the most emancipatory results. Sobe identifies correctly some of the flaws in this effort.

Third, community emerges as the unit of governance in the INEE structure for another reason, in addition to the empowerment (or control) rationale described here. The Minimum Standards are intended for people affected by conflict and crisis. In many of these circumstances, national government is weak, divided, or hostile. The local government may be corrupt, absent, or unrepresentative of the local community. Within a fragile or chaotic state, a local community necessarily emerges as the carrier of social services. Despite its weaknesses, the (local) community is, in fact, considered the most critical player in the INEE Minimum Standards. Community may be the closest, feasible available option to provide services not necessarily on a permanent basis, but until a broader, perhaps more representative body can assume responsibility for providing social services.

However, in this context as well, relying on community members to the degree that they figure into the INEE Minimum Standards raises a set of questions regarding the nature of community and the role of community in promoting mass education. Given that mass schooling is used to enhance the legitimacy of the nation-state, and that the fate of this schooling is inextricably connected to sovereignty and national boundaries, how might mass education function in the absence of the state? [2] In the event that the nation-state has broken down or fragmented, what role do international standards for mass schooling play? If creating functioning public institutions signals a legitimate nation-state, strengthening local community associations as a key aspect of governance may work at cross-purposes, undermining the nation-state rather than strengthening it. This involves a shift away from a centralized state and incorporates community structures to manage social services.

Concentrating Power in the Hands of the Humanitarians

Another aspect of the “empower or control” debate addresses the power of those who intend to empower. By establishing that education is a right, even under the most difficult circumstances, international organizations intend to draw on universal norms and standards to enforce its access for all, thereby empowering those who have been excluded from the right to participate in their own liberation. Yet as traditionalists note, aid agencies are powerful actors in selecting, granting, changing, promoting, standardizing, or withdrawing services to populations affected by conflict and crisis. The act of accumulating power has its own consequences, and these agencies are granted authority to intervene in many facets of human lives. Although the resulting institutionalized ethics can “enhance a project of emancipation, it can also lead to new forms of domination” (Barnett, forthcoming, p. 3). As Sobe points out using insightful references to earlier efforts at promoting post-conflict reconstruction, “contemporary reconstruction projects in post-conflict

and chronic crisis situations are efficiently promoting a certain type of state and certain kinds of political rationalities" (p. 50-51).

Hodgkin (this issue) calls for overtly acknowledging the political rationalities Sobe and many others highlight while separating decisions that are negotiable from those that are nonnegotiable. She outlines the troubling issue of curriculum reform after conflict, noting that deferring curricular decisions until political sensitivities have subsided risks turning a temporary and expedient solution into one that may last for years (p. 36). Using a negotiated approach to curriculum decision-making, she believes, will allow more opportunities for "genuine participation by all stakeholders," particularly youth, thereby increasing the likelihood that quality education will be provided to all (p. 35).

Increasing the ability to "positively influence" the potential for change (Hodgkin, this issue, p. 34) is one of the key ideas underpinning Hodgkin's discussion of the curriculum process. Yet within this effort, humanitarians return to the conflict in their aims: who decides what is positive, and who is involved in influencing the potential for change? As Hodgkin notes, humanitarian organizations may consider their mandates politically neutral, yet power structures invariably surround their activities and decisions. This fact is evident in the author's discussion of competing local versus global norms. How should organizations address local norms that mandate exclusions? Hodgkin presents the very real possibility that an international agency promoting girls' education may be doing so in violation of local norms and customs. She addresses this problem with candor: certain international rights and standards are nonnegotiable. The problem, she argues, is when these nonnegotiable aspects are not presented to those beneficiaries participating in the curriculum development process transparently alongside full knowledge of an international NGO's operating environment and its external constraints. The implication may be that if the powerful at least acknowledge their power, they take one step closer to power-sharing.

This is a delicate argument. While acknowledging the asymmetrical power dynamics between international aid agencies and the populations they work to support and discussing which elements are negotiable and which are not may alleviate tensions, it does not eliminate the power imbalance. Thus, the international aid worker is left with a conundrum: how to promote change without "judging universal values to be superior to local values" (Barnett, forthcoming). It may be that this conundrum is irreconcilable.

Focus on Agency: Voices from the Margins

The conundrum—how to promote change without privileging one way forward over another—may be irreconcilable for the moment, but additional points deserve mention here. First, local agency plays a significant role; and second, constant critique may keep the darker side of altruism in check.

Neoinstitutionalists are criticized for their over-deterministic emphasis on international structures and their lack of attention to "agency," a term they often use as a catchall to refer to any action of or among individuals. Although I will avoid elaborating this critique here, it is useful to reflect on it in relation to Qahir and Kirk's (this issue) article on a refugee education program in Pakistan. The authors present a case study describing the way in which an Afghan refugee education program sponsored by the IRC in Pakistan works toward the goals sought by education in emergencies programs. They present an insiders' account of the process a group of educators underwent to assess the degree to which they were meeting the Minimum Standards. The educators discussed

systematically several key indicators that pertain to each category promoted by the Minimum Standards. IRC's Female Education Program (FEP) staff engaged themselves as well as IRC's program resource people and trainers and the program's teachers and administrators in the review process in each school. It is worth noting that the FEP staff excluded the categories and standards that were considered irrelevant to the "FEP school-level setting," in this case, the "emergency phase" indicators and the "sector coordination" indicators; they also included some indicators that were "relevant as written," and "adapted others slightly" (Qahir & Kirk, this issue, p. 21).

The approach to education for Afghan refugees in Pakistan described here highlights the degree to which local populations acquire, revise, and apply international norms. These efforts at acquisition involve struggles and tensions. The Afghan educators described in this piece, and other educators who work for international agencies promoting girls' education among populations with historically low female literacy rates, use the language of international human rights to promote the kind of educational program they believe will satisfy the goals of their own community. Women and men who believe that girls should be educated use global references to strengthen their local arguments with international donors and government representatives. For example, Afghan refugees living in Balochistan employ universal rights language to advocate for education services among international agencies (Burde, 2005).

Yet local populations often associate international norms and standards, such as human rights, with the west. These local educators also know that their communities, some of whom may harbor suspicions toward outsiders' interest in their communities, value education for reasons that predate western involvement in the region. Current western involvement may be associated with many other (negative) activities apart from education. While receiving western support, these educators must often guard against a backlash to western intervention from within their own communities. To do so, many educators working with illiterate societies in rural Afghanistan and Pakistan use local norms to support education for girls and boys. Education or knowledge is invoked in the Qur'an more than any other topic, falling third after "Allah" and "Lord" (Boyle, 2006). Thus, local educators often cite passages from the Qur'an to stress the importance of education for all children and to downplay links to western support.

Local community members' agency plays a more prominent role in determining whether western motivated programs empower or control local populations than many observers grant it (Duffield, 2002; Sobe, this issue). A critique such as the one found in this journal increases the likelihood that power will not inhere in a single set of institutions, but rather will shift and emerge in new forms and new locations.

Conclusion: Empower and Control?

The dichotomy between empowering or controlling communities that I have presented above may not be a dichotomy after all—it may be a "both/and" discussion rather than "either/or." A Foucauldian approach (Duffield, 2002; 2005; Sobe, this issue) to the discussion would likely focus on the power of hegemonic ideas to bend and co-opt the education in emergencies program "beneficiaries," and, indeed, the program administrators, to the will of a force that modifies and regulates their lives through the structures, activities, and words that surround them and in which they participate. I will take this argument in a slightly different direction. It is clear that INEE and the Minimum Standards are able to empower and control simultaneously, yet the empowering aspects of the Minimum Standards do not necessarily serve as a subset of the dominant controlling paradigm. Just as efforts to empower may be used to control, they are also used to break free of control.

It seems clear that neither the Foucauldian nor the neoinstitutionalist view captures the full picture. Both leave out the voices from the margins. Education is a blunt tool for social change, and its recipients everywhere use it in unpredictable and uncontrollable ways. Organizations, institutions, and journals that encourage debate and critique will continue to provide openings for empowerment against a backdrop of hegemony.

Notes

[1]. See for example Steiner-Khamsi (2002, 2004) and Schriewer (2000).

[2]. See Waters and LeBlanc (2005) for an interesting discussion of mass public schooling in refugee camps in the absence of a nation-state and the tensions this entails over determining the type of citizen promoted.

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