

“...Education finance is at a crossroads...Can it maintain a ‘winner-take-all’ political economy?”

We Can Do Better: An Essay on Education Finance and Generational Continuity in a Globalizing Economy

Maureen W. McClure

For the last two decades, education finance research has been framed almost solely within a traditional policy framework of neoclassical economics. This Hobbesian (North, 1981) framework provided analysts with well-constructed theories and methods of measuring transactions. These allow our field to move beyond the problems created by relying primarily on the contending opinions of powerful politicians and the junkyard politics of competitive self-interest.¹ This framework will remain necessary to the field of education finance, but it is no longer sufficient for today’s reform policies. Other frameworks are successfully contending for political and economic legitimacy. Some of them do not share our understandings of the truth.²

Education finance is at a crossroads. Can its transactional, domestic orientations adequately meet the growing challenges of reform policy in a globalizing economy? Can it maintain a “winner-take-all” political economy (Frank & Cook, 1995)? During the twentieth century, educational finance policy assumed that political, economic and cultural boundaries were roughly contingent. This may no longer be true, if it ever was. Today’s school districts are sometimes rent by religious ideology and economic wealth.

Globalization is ripping apart local communities, realigning them into translocal political, economic and cultural networks.³ Globalizing economies are rapidly both generating and concentrating transnational wealth (Arnove and Torres, 1999). Education finance policy remains over focused on domestic distributional (access and equity), institutional (class size, teacher quality, etc.) and sectoral (public v. private) policy issues, and underfocused on revenue generation, cultural expectations and their consequences in a globalizing economy. This must change.

As globally mobile wealth grows comparatively faster in the private sector, it is reasonable to predict that market pressures for tax relief and deregulation will weaken governments. At the very time that education finance policy most needs to be seen as a tax investment strategy for regional and generational development, reformers quibble over local means, not transgenerational and transnational ends. Alas, others who may share our same general goals may not agree with our means for creating fair policies. Education finance analysts need to learn how to speak convincingly to others who may share some but not all of the assumptions, attributions and expectations of our policy frameworks.

Maureen W. McClure is Associate Professor of Administrative and Policy Studies and Director of Global Information Networks in Education at the University of Pittsburgh.

There are many ways of consistently framing policy. Some of them tap into deeply held beliefs that are rarely examined for their historical and cultural roots, or the filters they create to include or screen out meaning. Only three are briefly discussed here. Also included is an example of schooling in Bosnia and Herzegovina that is not easily contained by transactional market frameworks.

The acknowledgement of multiple frameworks as a method of addressing complex policies requires a different approach to reform. Salaries comprise the largest part of our budgets, so we need to better understand how different policy frameworks tacitly treat teachers. Instead of stating our positions as self-evident, we increasingly need to acknowledge different frameworks/schema that belong to key stakeholders. We are not bound to treat all other frameworks equally. We do need to make sure our frameworks are clear, compelling, and well-situated within the contests for legitimate financial value. Indeed, we can offer others a great service by working with others to map, compare, and share complex interpretations of what will be often contradictory views, especially when the contradictions are within.

Neoclassical Policy Frameworks: One Best System of Natural Laws

Neoclassical economics rests on powerful historical beliefs that natural law can best explain social order. In the closing decades of the twentieth century it ran headlong into cultural and historical traditions that did not accept the basic assumptions needed for its framework or scripts to function. Most people don’t think much about what it means to be cognitively committed to the traditions of meritocracies, theocracies and democracies. Most of us think even less about the contradictions we create for ourselves by our unreflective, simultaneous commitments to more than one framework. Ancient traditions may script conflicted expectations.

Schemas are scripts of assumptions, attributions and expectations held together by an internal logic consistent with personal experience. They help us learn to create patterns of cultural responses that can be considered automatic. They can be very useful for everyday activities. For example, according to Azar (1997), a script for a living room for a middle-class child in US suburbs may contain assumptions the living room contains a couch, rug, television, books, etc. There will be attributions that living rooms are for certain purposes and not others, such as bathing. If this child walked into a living room and saw a large purple cow sitting in the middle of it, while the experience may be delightful or scary, it would not be expected. It was not part of the living room schema, which scripts expectations to exclude purple cows.

What do purple cows have to do with education finance policy? Schemas help us to map, compare and share our varied interpretations of experience. They help us understand what meaning we include and what we filter out. For example, Herbert Spencer used neoclassical natural laws to justify Social Darwinism. He saw education as the mechanism for sorting and promoting the natural superiority of those who were destined to lead by birth or effort. Spencer may have unacknowledged descendents in the teaching profession—unity under one voice for one best way.

For example, a math teacher may say she teaches math, not children, and if some children can’t keep up, this is natural and not her problem. Her academic goals may be to identify the best students, have them attain the highest scores on achievement tests, and see that they get into the best schools. She may have strong support from some parents if she fights inclusion mandates, and may be among the most easily recruited for charter or voucher schools. Her meritocratic frameworks tend to filter out the problems of divisive social meaning. If neoclassical education reformers, for example, focus on the accountability produced by winner-take-all achievement scores, then what are the implications for inclusion

policies based on civil rights? Will our math teacher believe inclusion taints the purity of meritocratic ideals?

Our neoclassical traditions are rooted in late medieval Deism. The claims to education as a social science are based on this association. Deism asserts that God is the great Clockmaker of existence. Deism is a system of existence or ontology that claims "...solely on the evidence of reason, in the existence of God as the creator of the universe who after setting it in motion abandoned it, assumed no control over life, exerted no influence on natural phenomena, and gave no supernatural revelation.." (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 1981, p. 348). If one assumes that God is the universe's collective Subject or Mind, then Deism schema neatly eliminates the mind-body distinction; all knowable phenomena is material—a mechanism subject to the endless causal forces. Intelligence is necessarily assumed to be external to the mechanism. Descendants of this rich tradition include logical positivists, behavioralists and market evangelists. In education, those with deist ancestors focus their research efforts on the material world, from discovering how brain functions cause learning to how to economically engineer efficient markets.⁴

Within this framework, teachers function as factors of a production process designed to efficiently engineer achievement. Thus teachers are essential, but not necessarily significant, participants in ordered, externally controlled systems. Reform policy may contain tacit assumptions that classroom teachers, like factory and fast food workers, function as conduits for the external intelligence of managers. From this schema teachers are assumed to be in need of external control and managerial guidance so they don't 'shirk.'

External market control for education usually frames taxpayers as managers and parents as consumers. Governors are increasingly adopting a market identity of transactional consumption. Governors have greater incentives to act as consumer protectors than teacher empowerers, setting curriculum standards to regulate the education profession, and offering education consumers more convenient choices through charters and vouchers.

From a production framework, teachers are meant to be institutionally contained and controlled. Like doctors in HMOs,⁵ they are viewed primarily as input costs to be reduced relative to outputs. Teachers may be seen as assets that need to be developed. Market efficiency from this view suggests, but does not demand diminished roles for teachers. For example, cost efficiencies suggested by Blaug (1987) might be achieved by schools that: a) hire teachers to serve 'at will;' b) reduce professional rents (union membership); c) introduce substitute technology for labor; and d) increase the use of standardized curriculum 'packages' and testing mechanisms. A 'deskilled' teacher is a cheaper teacher. A professional, independent teacher designing safe places for children to learn could be a purple cow.

Fundamentalist Policy Frameworks: One Best Way Through God's Voice

Deism is a direct counter to another important system of existence held by millions of people: Theism. Theism claims "belief in a personal God as creator and ruler of the world" (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 1981, p. 1334). Many teachers, administrators and elected officials in US schools live by the cognitive frameworks created by these beliefs. Some theists also believe that God reveals His mind through chosen special agents. These special agents or visionaries are destined by God to explain the world; therefore, the state needs to be a theocracy, unified by a common understanding and acceptance of God's voice.

There have been at least two thematic responses to Theism over the centuries: Divine Right and Chosen Ones. Divine rights advocates claim the right to rule because they are descended from God or gods directly or from one of God's most important agents.⁶ The chosen ones claim to be

God's representatives on earth because God speaks personally through them. He has called on them to bear witness to error and to lead their communities back onto the path of righteousness. They are above the laws of men and nature because God speaks to them directly.

Educational reform policy from this framework focuses on the moral order of social identity. Theists know who they are because they exist in relationship with God. Teaching children to think critically and independently may put them at odds with the need for the loyalty of faith. How many good-hearted public school teachers took what they thought were well-researched educational reform models into classrooms, only to run into buzz saws of parents, preachers and committed others who appeared to be unable to translate the school's perfectly reasonable explanations? Few school districts know how to take pulse of their communities so they can adequately predict budgetary and governance responses to reform efforts.

Theocracy is quite clear about its opposition to democracy (Lugg, 1998). The necessarily reflective, self-questioning, democratic self-governance of a generationally informed people is by definition inferior to the rock-solid certainty of God's absolute laws as told through His chosen agents. Many theists who fought for political control of public schools in the closing years of the twentieth century are now looking for tax exits and alternative forms of subsidies for schooling in which they can control their children's socialization.

Vox Populi Vox Dei: Learning As Linguistic Engagement

Not all reformers view education as consumption composed of an aggregation of choices of schooling preferences and marketable packages: (textbooks and curriculum materials, training modules, information systems and standardized testing). What happens when learning occurs within the imaginations of individual children, is unique to each person, and is not easily observed?

Cognitive frameworks for learning, central to teacher education reform for many years, addresses the problems of multiple validity created by many voices, many developmental, cultural and historical experiences and no external authority to control them. Research on cognition 'situates' learning within the context of social experience (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This adds a new dimension to educational policy reform by creating a critical shift in the portrayal of teachers not as passive responders to external stimuli, but active, engaged professionals creating meaning in their lives (Reed and Ross, 1998a, 1998b).

Far from assuming a neoclassical framework that tries to discover natural laws for social order, this framework focuses on how children in communities create meaning for themselves.⁷ Cognition is more than literacy; it is the responsibility that children assume for the construction of their own schema or voice. It resonates with the concepts of self-governance through civil discourse needed both for democracies and market economies. Some cognitive frameworks are descended from traditions that hear the irresistible voice of God (Vox Dei) in the voice of the people (Vox Populi), not just in His chosen agents.

Linguistically engaged teaching recognizes the importance of acknowledging parental and community traditions.⁸ Engaged teachers daily need to be able to rapidly, often 'intuitively' assess each student's content mastery, cognitive development, and general well being. No small feat. It is this need for mindful, continuous assessment of individual learning within a generational conversation that places the teaching and learning relationship at the center of education.⁹ From this framework, professional authority in the classroom is at least as important as institutional control.¹⁰ Teachers, students and their communities create and sustain these local networks through generational responsibilities for each other. Some aspects of it are 'in loco parentis' and thus outside of market authority.¹¹ Teachers may also act as daily guardians of children's security, creating 'safe havens' for learning, protected from the violence around

them. Teachers need institutional authority to protect children. They also need professional and community networks to maintain their autonomy.

Constructivists generally reject the objectivity of deists, claiming that the material is not a perfect substitute for mind, and that truth can be as much about personal and social portrayals of self and others as it is about the discovered truths of collective observation.¹² Constructivists revive the mind rejected by deists. By focusing on the mental constructions of thinking, language and meaning making, they reject the high priority given the management of certainty through laws in neoclassical frameworks. Instead, they give high priorities to the acknowledgement of ambiguities created by many different voices, and personal rights and responsibilities for the affirmation of 'others'. If the policy hallmarks for neoclassical frameworks are consistency and prediction, then the policy hallmarks for constructivists are portrayal and consequence.¹³

Education finance needs to begin to expand its reform policy repertoire to better account for research in classroom teaching and learning. What will be the consequences for revenue generation as states mandate more and more control of classroom time through exclusive academic standards AND inclusive civil rights?

Teachers Design Safe Places For Learning Generational Conversations

Education is a generational conversation, fragile and easily lost. Teachers are often lone sentinels on the generational frontiers of civilization. During crises, institutions can collapse as teachers and students are abandoned. A generation can be lost. During the war, teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina responded to more than market forces (Vargas-Baron and McClure, 1998; McClure, Dizdar, Fullerton & Lin, 1997). Daily they made heroic efforts to ensure generational continuity. When soldiers deliberately shelled schools for sport, teachers could not turn to the institutions and the external authority charged with protecting them.

They turned instead to each other, to parents and to neighbors. When the power was cut, they taught in the dark. When buildings were destroyed they taught in basements, in homes, wherever they could. Meliha Alic, the director of the Druga Gymnazija in Sarajevo kept her school open six days a week during the siege. Students and teachers from all over the city daily risked their lives to go to school. Their stories of courage and inventiveness in the face of inhuman violence are remarkable. Their school was an idea, a form of resistance, an assertion of humanity and dignity while their worlds collapsed around them. Education itself became a national symbol: the preservation of a fragile generational legacy. Children learned math and science, they sang and created stories, they created beauty and comfort for each other. These bold, reckless and artful performances demonstrated an engagement with and affirmation of life that ran far deeper than the reporting ink of standard test scores.

Teachers and students were 'there' for each other, through the daily drama of cultural insanity. They often cared for and protected each other from "giving up" on life. This mutual responsibility was not limited to teachers. When there weren't enough teachers, parents taught. When parents couldn't teach, neighbors risked their lives to teach the children of others. Not all the stories are noble, but together they tell a story of education as a humanitarian response, an affirmation of beauty and civility that confronted bullies.

Without the security of stable institutions, education was transformed into a communications network among teachers and committed community members who moved heaven and earth to help their children learn in hell. This commitment to a generational legacy re-asserts the importance of responsible communities creating 'safe places' for children to learn. How can children learn to inherit a complex society if they are too scared or too focused on achievement scores to learn, play and

invent? It should not take a war to remind us that teaching and learning is more than a market transaction, but a generational duty and the hallmark of a civilized society.

Multiple Frameworks for Complex Policy: Now What?

Multiple frameworks can be quite useful to map complex stakeholder perspectives in culturally complex conditions. They can help us better understand the inclusionary, participatory, policymaking practices of a voiced democracy. Democracies differ from neoclassical meritocratic and theocratic traditions because they rest on the need to negotiate the ambiguity of many voices, rather than discovering the single, certain voice of God or Nature, as heard through the chosen ones.

Policy dialogue between people speaking from different frameworks can create misunderstandings because they cannot, by definition, share the same assumptions, attributions and expectations. Educational policy analysts increasingly need to be able to speak the 'languages' of these different frameworks, especially if they constitute the 'languages' of major policy stakeholders. In a democracy, theists can win elections and become school board members and legislators. In theory, theists could vote public funding for both democratic public schools and meritocratic vouchered schools out of existence. Education finance policy analysts are increasingly called on to become 'multi-lingual' so they can help ensure adequate public and private investment in education.

Education finance policy analysts need to learn how to comparatively map ambiguity (Paulston, 1999). They need to better understand the voices of those stakeholders who pay taxes, and those who avoid them. This mapping requires a scholarly acknowledgement of, if not an acceptance of, purple cows. Policy analysis requires a regular commitment to include the voices of legitimate, civil counter positions.

Our field rests on the willingness of one generation to invest in the next. It rests on cultural assumptions that other people's children are not mistakes to be contained and controlled or silenced. We can no longer afford to assume that our values are self-evident truths. We need to explain and defend them, convincing others that each of us has generational rights and responsibilities that cannot be traded away in the marketplace or delegated in the voting booth.

Teaching and learning reach far beyond our traditional understanding of education as achievement scores. They serve as the core of a child's generational identity and understanding of the world. Educational reformers tend to ignore the issues that parents and many, if not most, teachers cannot—that they are charged with a generational responsibility that goes beyond the transactional identities of economic hierarchies.

Education is a critical investment in generational development because so much can be accomplished for so little. After so many years of sovereignty contests, where winners take all and others have no voice, is our field ready for allies?

Bibliography

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. 1981. New College Edition. William Morris, ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, p. 348.

Arnove, R.F. & Torres, C.A. (Eds.) (1999). *Comparative education: The dialectic of the global and the local*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Azar, S. T. (1997). Parents and children: Representations of family: Understanding parents and teachers internal working models of their roles in children's lives. *Journal of Education Policy* 20 (1-10).

Barber, B. R. (1996). *Jihad vs. McWorld: How globalism and tribalism are reshaping the world*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Bhaskar, R. (1991). *Philosophy and the idea of freedom*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.

Blaug, M. (1987). *The economics of education and the education of an economist*. New York: New York University Press.

Frank, R. H. & P. J. Cook (1995). *The winner-take-all society*. New York: The Free Press.

Friedman, T. L. (1999). *The Lexus and the olive tree: Understanding globalization*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux.

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation. Learning in doing: Social, cognitive and computational perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lugg, C. (1998). *Reading, writing & reconstructionism: The Christian right and the politics of public education*. On-line monograph. <<http://www.pitt.edu/~mmclure/NEA/nea.html>>.

McClure, M. W. (1998a). The GINIE project: Responsible neighbors: Many generations. In *Technology and the Educational Workplace: Understanding Fiscal Impacts*, K.C. Westbrook (Ed.). Eighteenth Annual Yearbook of the American Education Finance Association. (pp. 3-17). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

McClure, M. W. (Ed.). (1998b). *Teachers as school board members: Democratic communities, professional associations and the generational trust*. On-line monograph. <<http://www.pitt.edu/~mmclure/NEA/nea.html>>.

McClure, M.W., Dizdar, S., Fullerton, K., & Lin, M. K. (1997). *Strategy for decentralized professional networks for education in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Sarajevo: UNICEF.

North, D. (1981). *Structure and change in economic history*. (New York: W. W. Norton).

Paulston, R. (1999). Mapping comparative education after postmodernity. *Comparative Education Review* 43 438-463.

Reed, C. and Ross, M. (1998a). Protecting teacher's judgment in the classroom. In M.W. McClure (Ed.) *Teachers as school board members: Democratic communities, professional associations and the generational trust*. On-line monograph. <<http://www.pitt.edu/~mmclure/NEA/nea.html>>.

Reed, C. and Ross, M. (1998b). Teacher empowerment policy: The view from the ground. In M.W. McClure (Ed.) *Teachers as school board members: Democratic communities, professional associations and the generational trust*. On-line monograph. <<http://www.pitt.edu/~mmclure/NEA/nea.html>>.

Said, E. (1993). *Culture and imperialism*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Samarajiva, R. & Shields, P. (1993). Competing frameworks for research on information communication technologies and society: Toward a synthesis. In S. Deetz (Ed.). *Communication Yearbook* 16 (pp. 349-380). New Brunswick, NJ: Communication Association.

Vargas-Baron, E. & McClure, M.W. (1998). The new heroics of generational commitment: Education in nations with chronic crises. In G. Retamal and R. Aedo-Richmond (Eds.), *Education as a Humanitarian Response* (pp.271-288) London: IBE/UNSECO and Cassel.

Endnotes

1. These policy frameworks' greatest strengths derive from their capacities to differentiate independent external (exogenous) forces on rational (or passive mechanisms) in comparable ways. Generic rationality is a particularly useful method for understanding the responses of traditionally rational actors (e.g. to laws of supply and demand). The strengths of generic causality and statistical methods efficiently engineer generic

knowledge both sequentially and comparatively into a predictable 'one best way' that minimizes error terms.

2. Education finance analysts can no longer assume that stakeholders in the education reform process necessarily share the same 'ontology' or system to explain existence. Some claim neoclassical frameworks contain a deep structural flaw called an 'ontic fallacy.' This is committed by "understanding knowledge as a reflection, a dependent effect of an independent cause ("real objects").. [This]...naturalization of knowledge to, or its determination by, being...This necessarily involves the dehumanization of discursive, justifying subjects.." (Bhaskar 1991:32). Unfortunately, many people throughout the world associate neoclassical traditions with colonialism and the intentional, systematic and pervasive silencing of voices through the use of generic research language (Said, 1993).

3. A University of Pittsburgh professor's local talk about Outcomes Based Education (OBE) was printed in a church bulletin in Texas. The world price of oil may drive local revenue generation as much as local trade (Barber, 1996; Friedman, 1999). Local retail chain stores may be closed, even if they are profitable, if the demand for global return can generate higher profits elsewhere. Immigrant communities that remain bilingual find economic reward in diaspora networks.

4. Indeed, the scientific legacy of Deism-objectivity- requires a "god's eye" vision that is generically outside of the influences of history and culture. Understanding 'reality' means seeing the world as a visible and knowable causal mechanism to be measured and manipulated externally. Those who are the most objective earn the right to govern in a meritocracy based on natural law.

5. It is this engineering model that has seized thinking about educational finance policy reform, treating schools as production processes. Alas, as strategists teach us, great strength in the context of an 'engineered economy' could become great weakness in the context of an 'innovation economy.' Engineering thinking is structured to efficiently produce and distribute goods such as computers and toothpaste. Alas, these frameworks may prove clumsy in the face of new economy issues such as innovation through civil discourse (Freidman, 1999; Arnove & Torres, 1999).

6. In Tibet, head monks are seen as living gods who have reincarnated over many centuries. In Japan, the imperial throne is linked to the Sun God. In China, the emperor was the Son of Heaven. In Egypt, early pharaohs were considered gods in their own right. Usurper pharaohs would claim that a god visited their mothers and that they were the product of that union. After suffering military defeats, pharaohs increasingly portrayed themselves as God's agents. After the pharaohs lost Egypt to the Greeks and Romans, the priest class retained claim to privileged access to the voice of god. In Rome, a ruler could be made a god. In Europe, much of the ruling aristocracy believed it had a Divine Right to its governing claims.

7. Here education is not a series of concrete packages of materials applied in an organized sequence of steps that result in learning for a 'generic' student. Learning instead results from the highly complex linguistic interactions of individual teachers and students. The quality of this interaction or engagement is very important because it requires a construction of self and other through interactive discourse.

8. The construction and responsible ownership for the ways in which individuals and communities learn to portray themselves and others is at least as important as the demonstration of behavior acceptable to others, which is the center of achievement production. Teachers need to understand children not only as unique individuals with quirky and hopefully joyous imaginations, but also as children who are deeply connected to their families' and communities' cultural and historical experiences. These connections may not define a child's classroom experiences, but they can rarely be ignored.

9. Students are linguistically connected to teachers in ways not possible on the shop or sales floor. Teachers model logic, imagination and civility through their interactions with children. What is learned is more than literacy or vocational skills. What emerges is the test of a self-governing society—the quality of judgment that demonstrates competence, civility and inventiveness. Each student needs to develop his or own reflective and inventive voice, situating it within histories and cultures of many generations. Neither commercial packages or ideological scripts can substitute for the single, real voice of an excellent teacher.

10. Students inherit not only language skills from teachers, but social skills and aesthetic views as well. Teachers are not the sole proprietors of these generational conversations. They share this privileged relationship with parents and a civil community.

11. Markets are poor parents because they accept violence. Businesses are allowed to fail and die. Children cannot be eliminated because consumers construct them as market inefficiencies.

12. Some constructivists believe much is lost in the quest for the certainty of materiality at the expense of social identity within a community. Scholars, such as Kuhn and Feyerabend argue, knowledge production is an irreducible social process frequently open to revision and transformation..social systems are open and historical in character... Hence...theory is necessarily incomplete.” (Bhaskar, 1991).

13. Take two children, both the same age. One child has just moved to a different country. A classroom teacher discusses soccer. One child has never seen or held a soccer ball, has never seen a game and knows no one who has. The other child's father is an international soccer star. The teacher who has both children in the same class should not expect both children to learn the lesson's objective in the same way.