The Urbanization of Everything
Thoughts on Globalization and Education

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One thing, it’s true hasn’t changed—capitalism still keeps three quarters of humanity in extreme poverty, too poor to have debts and too numerous to be confined: control will have to deal not only with vanishing frontiers, but with mushrooming shantytowns and ghettos.

(Deleuze, Negotiations, p. 181)

There will soon be more people living in the city of Bombay than on the continent of Australia ... With 14 million people, Bombay is the biggest city on the planet of a race of city dwellers. Bombay is the future of urban civilization on the planet. God help us.

(Mehta, Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found, p. 3)

Introduction

This chapter contends that the global forces of the contemporary socio-economic order are serving to redefine such previously dominant terms in educational study as urban, suburban, and rural. In effect, everything is being urbanized. Applying the theoretical lens of a specific subset of theoretical work in the discipline of geography—critical geography—and its insistence on the simultaneous attention to space, place, power, and identity, this chapter offers beginning attempts at taking “the spatial” aspects of these forces seriously in the study of the lived experiences of schools. This process of redefining/restructuring—a distinction between urbanization as process and urban as lived experience—then calls into question notions of equity and social justice (particularly in seeing the urban as a part of broader moves that encompass the whole of the social fabric). In the larger field of geography, questions have arisen in thinking through what a concept of “spatial justice” might mean, and efforts at rethinking citizenship within global sets of forces give rise to considering differing notions of democracy and identity, and even the resurgence of cosmopolitanism as an ethical framework. Indeed, as we explore the amorphous term “globalization,” we are reminded that “the social spaces of contemporary capitalism are being increasingly politicized; space is no longer merely the theatre of political conflict but its principle stake” (Brenner, 1997, p. 152). It is here where the work of social foundations of education and educational theorizing must take these processes seriously. The intensified politicization of the spatial and how that plays out in schools and in the lives of children now becomes the terms of our engagement. The interplay between pedagogy and place serves as a locus of attention requiring spatial analysis and a theorizing informed through the lens of a critical geography.

The Spatial Study of Schooling

Only recently in the history of educational research have scholars concluded that the tendency to think of schools as bounded systems—systems that begin and end with four walls and the sounding of school bells—was simply not enough. Schools, in fact, are very complex social systems that are all bound up in a “tangled web of practices” that include connections to government (local, state, and federal), community as a set of material conditions, historical context, economic structure and shift, and fluid notions of community, culture, and identity (Ellis, 2005; Nespor, 1997; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Attempting to understand practices in educative spaces requires the embrace of multiple levels of analysis and inquiry. This complexity of forces—all working on the actors involved—comes clear with the addition of the lens of critical geography and an insistence on the fluidity of scale as a mode of analysis (see Helfenbein, 2010).

Geographical scale is political precisely because it is the technology according to which events and people are, quite literally, “contained in space.” ... In scale therefore, are distilled the oppressive and emancipatory possibilities of space, its deadness but also its life.

(Smith, 1990, quoted in Brenner, 1997, pp. 159–60)
What then does critical geography and *the scalar*—a term suggesting a spatial analysis across and within multiple scales—offer the study of the social foundations of education? What does the “spatial turn” in social theory, curriculum theorizing, and philosophy promise for those interested in the lived experience of schools? How does one attempt to understand diversity and the multicultural in the globalized moment? What would such explorations in educational research entail? These questions serve as the impetus for this theorizing in hopes of extending the conversation on education and offering one potential mode of analysis, “thinking through scale.”

“Thinking through scale” (see Helfenbein, 2010) then is a beginning attempt to theorize a methodology for the study of urban youth, urban schools, and the changing global context. As mentioned, too often studies of kids and education end at the doors of the school, neglecting the forces that work on all those involved—or, privileging one to the detriment of other factors. This is obviously not to say that analytical work in school based activities or broad social analyses does not have worth in educational research, only that an exploration of the ways in which identity formation occurs within a flux of forces—one that includes the global—changing in form and import at multiple scales, might enrich the conversation on how kids navigate schools. In pursuit of those goals, adopting a critical geography framework enables an interrogation into how students, educators, and community members make place within the intersections of space, power and identity. The lessons learned from the stories speak to broader issues of culture, including the navigation of social networks, the changing nature of urban education and educative spaces, and the construction and reconstructions of identity in the globalized moment.

**Youth and the Spatial**

Studying educative spaces requires a look at the youth, youth cultures, and the practices through which youth come to inhabit spaces. Typically youth cultures and the academic treatment of them hold something of a marginal place in educational scholarship. Tangled up in notions of delinquency, deviance, violence, and expansive consumer potential, *youth* becomes a liminal position—“ambiguously wedged between childhood and adulthood” (Skelton & Valentine, 1998)—that changes and evolves in response to the social, cultural, and economic shifts taking place all around it. Fine and Weiss (1998) note how young working-class adults are often characterized and employed by political and cultural forces in search of scapegoats.

They are displayed and dissected in the media as the cause of national problems. They are depicted as the reason for the rise in urban crime, as embodying the necessity for welfare reform, and of sitting at the heart of moral decay."

( p. 1, author’s emphasis)

Steinberg and Kincheloe (1998) refer to the increasing importance of the study of youth in the culture of late capitalism and characterize its fluid nature as the “dilemma of the postmodern childhood.” Grossberg (2001, 2005) offers the connection of a conflated political and economic ideology that has no room for the long-term nature of caring for kids in the blurt, “Why neoliberalism hates kids.”

Studies of the geographies of youth culture, while limited, indicate a key materiality for young people in that public space remains defined as adult space. Youth then struggle to create youth places out of adult spaces. Negotiation and resistance are common characteristics of these interactions but, it is important to note, that the ways in which youth strive for a sense of place, identity, and expression are varied and occur with varying levels of success (Breitbart, 1998). Youth places often hold liminal character and only have uneasy effectiveness. They are often neither school nor home, public nor private but rather a conglomeration of both. These hybrid places, in which the students themselves play a role in fashioning their meaning, show the realities of power structures that limit and label youth but can never quite do so completely or in any guaranteed way. It is in this recognition of the hybrid nature of these places and the entry into greater understanding of what they might mean that critical geography and thinking through scale perhaps offer a method.

*Thinking through scale* in educational research follows the three basic themes of the work of critical geographer Edward Soja: “firstly, the capitalist order is being reorganized in ways that profoundly privilege the spatial over the temporal; secondly, that spatiality is fundamentally constitutive of social life; and thirdly, and consequently, that critical social theory needs to take space seriously if it is to make sense of society” (Latham, 2004, p. 270). The ways in which space is privileged and reorganized in the globalized moment profoundly affects the lived experience of schools. For example, the characterization of urban versus suburban schooling takes a presumably spatial distinction and extends it into a whole series of raced and classed assumptions that then do indeed become constitutive. To challenge such a dichotomy and the assumptions underlying it takes to task not only the ideological forces at work in making places, but opens up the possibility for other ways to think of those spaces and those who inhabit them. For example, it may be more useful to think of urbanization as a process, a set of relations at work on spaces—a set of characteristics that moves as development and global
economic shifts impact multiple sites and populations—rather than the stiff markers of urban or rural. Additionally, the danger of overly simplistic dichotomies lies in the tendency to superimpose value judgments in equally simple ways (i.e. urban is bad, suburban is good) or to obscure the ways in which these relations emanate from relationships at all scales.

Scale is what geographers use to determine the extent of their map, the object of their representation. Scale determines borders, features, inclusion, exclusion and the nature of study. Like the aperture of a camera, scale opens up on or focuses on in details, sliding back and forth, with a nod to the postmodern, a lens. Thinking through scale then offers that instead of fixing our lens in the process of analysis, we slide the scale from the particular to the global and back again in hopes of a more enriched conversation about educative spaces. Not comparative but contextual. Thinking through scale embraces the mutually constitutive aspects of Soja’s trialectics (1996; 1989): the social, the historical, and the spatial. While simultaneously attending to these three aspects, it becomes important to delineate two terms of equal import: the spatial and the urban.

The Spatial

Space is a medium—and the changing way in which we understand, practice and live in terms of our space provides clues to how our capitalist world of nation-states is giving way to an unanticipated geopolitics—a new sense of our relation to our bodies, world and planets as a changing space of distance and difference.

(Shields, 1999, p. 147)

Shields’ point here reinforces the newest (30 years or so) directions in geographic theory—the recognition that space is productive, the conduit for, and the product of social relations. This multifaceted characterization serves more than simply pointing out the complexity of any spatial analysis but also points to two important distinctions: (1) the subjectivity of our relationship to spaces; and (2) the lack of guarantee, or determinism, in the nature of both social and spatial production. Many taking up these two distinctions and their subsequent objects of analysis (e.g. power, identity, positionality, the border, and, perhaps most importantly, a rethinking of the global and the local) have come to call their work critical geography.

Those taking up the lines of analysis embraced by critical geography typically begin with an exploration of the synchronic relationships of space, place, power, and identity (Soja, 1989; Massey & Jess, 1995; Soja, 1996; Harvey, 2001; Allen, 2003). While space and place have always been a focus for geographers, the distinction comes in analyzing the relationships between the two and in coming to postmodern analyses of how both operate in identity formation. For geographers, place is the localized community—filled with meaning for those that spend time there. Quite simply, it has significance. Forces of economic, social, and cultural practices work on both the inhabitants of the place and work to form the place itself; place is the articulation of this larger power-geometry. Space constructed through discursive, interpretive, lived, and imagined practices becomes place (de Certeau, 1984; Soja, 1996). Place must be seen as only possible in its interactions.

Critical geography has largely turned to analyzing the multiple forces at work in the changing relationships of space and place in the period known as late capitalism and, sometimes, the globalized condition (Allen, 2003; Breitbart, 1998; Harvey, 2001; Massey & Jess, 1995; Soja, 1996, 1989). How place relates to and/or is constituted by a space impacted by the forces of globalization forms a point of departure for a scalar analysis—thinking through scale—of economical relations, democracy, and identity. Mapping relations of power remains a central axis to the work of critical geographers and holds the affinitive connection between the field and the complementary work of critical theory and cultural studies. Some writers argue that coming to articulate the conditions of power and its effects on lived society are not only academic trajectories but the moral obligation of the geographer (Harvey, 2001; Soja, 1989). Furthermore, Soja (1989; 1996) offers that critical social theory in the globalized condition would benefit from the explicit inclusion of the mutually constitutive spatial, historical, and social—what he terms trialectics.

The turn here for educational research is one in which we begin to take the spatial seriously both in how it might help constitute the conditions for the experiences we study but also in how particular actors and actions help to constitute the spatial itself. Doing this, of course, requires the sliding scale of analysis previously mentioned. The map of educational experience under analysis then must simultaneously reflect the intricacies of place as experienced by those who spend time there and the broader (increasingly) global forces at work in constructing those conditions; this insistence makes this geography a critical one but indeed calls into question the old, unquestioned terms of analysis, most notable “urban.”

The Urban

Urban education is different because it is the emergent American culture, a complex, urban, multidimensional culture ... How we invent the next phases of American urban schooling is how we invent the nation.

(Anderson & Summerfield, 2004)

In the case of urban schools, Kincheloe (2004) lists 12 characteristics that mark an urban experience in education: (1) high population density; (2) big schools, big
school populations; (3) profound economic disparity; (4) high rates of ethnic and racial diversity; (5) factionalized struggles over resources; (6) ineffective business administration; (7) increased student health problems; (8) higher student and educator mobility; (9) higher immigrant populations; (10) linguistic diversity; (11) unique transportation problems; and (12) teacher/community separation (pp. 5–8). This list is familiar to anyone working in the field, but one might ask if these issues are unique to the urban experience or only a matter of degree. Indeed, as demographic changes follow economic and political shifts, schools once easily identifiable as urban, rural, or suburban begin to blur together (or flip roles) on closer inspection. This is not to suggest that schools are becoming monolithic in their characteristics but rather that a process of restructuring is at work in the world of schools as well. Suburban schools are seeing increasing rates of linguistic diversity as certain rural districts see changes in immigrant populations and income disparity. The old models no longer hold.

As we have moved into the post-Cold War, Information Age, “the urban” as a concept has become a popular item for both public and scholarly attention. The city has not only become popular again but, argued here, it has also become the blueprint for processes whose influence reaches out to the larger society as a whole. The reorganization of the urban provides an interesting example of how thinking about globalization might affect education. Downtown gentrification—seen quite visibly in the city where this author resides, Indianapolis—fundamentally changes the realities of urban schools; or rather, it should. The processes at work in this reorganization include a renewed interest in privatizing schools through the stepping stone of charter schools, a continued assault on the public schools as “broken” and not worth the money, and impassioned efforts at “tax reform” aimed at gutting the funding for public education, all as the rhetoric of making urban areas as attractive to the global marketplace continually echoes in media outlets and statements from the statehouse. The urban core, or ghetto as some might call it, has become attractive again, resulting in escalating property taxes and economic incentives to move the people that reside there out. But instead of extending out into the next urban layer to the suburbs as previously noted by more modernist urban geographies, small pockets scattered about the city become the only option. These patterns show how the processes of globalization are at work in the places of our analysis, but also something about globalization itself.

For example, major cities in the United States have been reorganized around the economic principles of neoliberalism. Harvey (2007) lays out how New York City began a major transformation in the 1970s that has resulted in an entirely new urban formation—in particular, that of the cordonning off of Manhattan for a global elite. Important for consideration here in Harvey’s analysis is that the revitalization of Manhattan came at the cost of other parts of the city, and importantly signaled a shift in municipal government priorities from benefitting the population to creating a “good business climate” (pp. 9–10). One of the effects of this partitioning of the city relevant for thinking through how these changes might affect communities revolves around the change in cost of living specifically around areas. Populations at middle- or lower-class levels find themselves priced out of formally or historically occupied neighborhoods. The Latino population of New York has seen significant decline in growth in certain areas (Manhattan most visibly) as the cost of living has increased. The effect here is dispersion both within urban areas and urban-to-urban movement.

To consider globalization and education spatially begins with recognizing the shifting nature of global capital, an economic phenomenon occurring across the spatial that changes not only what we want kids to do in schools but the kids themselves who walk through our classroom doors. One can easily see the economic repercussions of job outsourcing on the communities of our students as the nature of work in the United States changes, or ceases to exist. Immigration, both on an international level and within the urban/exurban relationship, provides challenges for schools and their attempts to provide a consistent service and curriculum for their students, but it is important to understand globalization as an economic transition that impacts all levels of the social, and does so primarily through spatial restructuring.

Gentrification of urban areas as seen throughout the cities of the world embodies a whole new set of processes than in its much more limited past. Urban “revitalization” or “renewal” now integrates residential development with commercial and recreational enterprises, in effect making downtown a destination again. Ultimately (albeit not immediately), schools and youth enter into the equation of defining what these spaces look like and conversely, what they do not look like. In this sense, urban revitalization is as much about moving people out as it is about moving people in—certain things cannot, at least visibly, coexist. Here the contradictions of massive influx of funding to the development of urban core areas and simultaneous de-funding of urban school districts points us yet again to taking the spatial seriously (see Anyon, 2005; 1997) but also redirects our attention to what is being called globalization.

Globalization

Without question, the term “globalization” has entered the public conversation with a multitude of meanings
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and theorizations. A simple definition might be “an umbrella term for a complex series of economic, social, technological, and political changes seen as increasing interdependence and interaction between people and companies in disparate locations” (“Globalization,” 2006). Rather than recount the various debates on definitions, it seems more prudent to move directly to how globalization is understood here and its impact in the study of the social foundations of education. Globalization, for the purposes of this chapter, is the pulsing extension of the contradictory processes of capital throughout the spatial realm. By offering the descriptor “pulsing” the intention is to suggest that these forces extend and retract—what Lefebvre calls the “incessant to-and-fro”—in the hopes of new markets, the reinscription of old ones, and the extraction of markets where there once were none. This is precisely why the urban is “reorganized” rather than “revitalized,” an important point in connection to public education. Lefebvre (2003) argues that fundamentally these processes follow the broadly conceived characteristics of urbanization in the present moment. As these processes extend through the spatial—beyond what was once narrowly considered the urban or the rural—we see the urbanization of everything.

From almost any position there exists an apocalyptic tone in scholarly critiques of globalization. Some argue that globalization has created a “Global Monster of the North” (Sommersan, 2005) exacerbating the gulf between the affluent and the impoverished, while others compellingly argue that deindustrialization combined with the explosion of urban population growth leads the us to a “Planet of Slums” (Davis, 2004). While certainly these critiques offer just caution and help scholars within the critical tradition, the point of this essay remains in turning the analytical attention of scholars of education to how these “economic, social, technological, and political changes” impact the lived experience of schools. Again, in other words, what would it mean to take the spatial seriously? Taking the spatial seriously in its relation to schools and schooling means that instead of holding on to old markers like urban, suburban, and rural, educational scholarship should turn its critical eye to the processes at work, or rather, urbanization.

Urbanization

Since the 1920s, studies of urbanization have followed the model of a group of social scientists in Chicago. They famously laid out an “onion model” for mapping the corresponding factors of rapid industrialization and immigration on cities. Like an onion, their representations laid out a series of concentric zones, beginning with the central business district, to the inner city, to the suburb. Patterns of changing demographics and the processes of power struggles and competition for subsistence resources characterized each ring. Until the advent of globalization as a variable in socio-cultural analysis, this model was applied to urban study around the world without challenge. Recently, some geographers and urban planners have protested and offer that this model, “no longer corresponds to the way global cities, and their increasingly de-territorialized economies, work. City centre functions have been decentered, patterns of urban growth no longer conform to the onion model, let alone the fixed boundaries of metropolitan governance” (LERI, 1999). Some of us, especially those who study education in urban spaces in particular and the impact of race on schools, have also suspected that this model was insufficient.

The city then—or perhaps more accurately, the urban—in its reorganization necessitates a more liquid geography specifically attuned to new mobilities and able to slide from one scale to another. Rejecting the applicability of the onion model and even network theory, these thinkers, influenced by critical geography, suggest that “instead we need to develop a multimodal form of mapping, that can grasp patterns of continuity and change, stasis and flux within a more flexible scalar geography” (LERI, 1999, n.p.). This reorganization is not simply confined to the “the city” but rather is on a level that affects all aspects of society—the urbanization of everything. For those interested in the study of educational spaces it is hoped that the essay begins a conversation about what that type of analysis might need to emerge in future work.

[the urban] is both the site of the development of capitalism and the condition that might inspire a whole-hearted recognition of people's common interests. The city is both the “obstacle to the new society...and its prototype.”

(Lefebvre in Shields, 1999, p. 149)

There are two ways to speak about the urbanization of everything, the material statistics on urban populations and growth and the increasingly appropriateness of “urban” as a descriptor for most people's everyday life. Beginning with the numbers, the rate of global urban growth has surpassed all of the previous predictors (save perhaps science fiction). The population in urban areas in 2004 (3.2 billion) is larger than the total world population of 1960. In terms of the growth of cities, 86 cities had populations over 1 million in 1950, 400 do today, and 550 are predicted to reach that mark by 2015 (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs cited in Davis, 2006). Geographers have been created new terms for the sheer scale of this urban growth; megacities for those in excess of 8 million and hypercities for those exceeding 20 million inhabitants. Exacerbating this trend, the global countryside has reached population capacity and will decrease as early
as 2020; which is to say, all future global population growth will be urban.

As for the appropriateness of the descriptor urban, it is important to note how previous notions of the geography of cities no longer hold. Geographers call this process urban restructuring, referring to the ubiquitous changes in global metropolitan areas over the last 30 years. There is, of course, debate as to the nature, origins, and ends to these changes but no urbanist denies their reality. Key to this shift is the simple spatial boundary of the urban experience and the breaking of previously solid rules such as the development of urban core areas and industrialization. The suburbs—itself a distinct spatial phenomena—have now come to be seen as the exurban marked by pockets of privilege as opposed to their original homogeneity. Difference itself is happening differently in the contemporary spatial relations—what Soja calls postmodern geographies (1989) in general and postmetropolis in the contemporary urban context (2000). The increased speed and capability of the movement of goods, people, and information has pushed geographers to think increasingly of urban zones or corridors as the traditional delineation of core/periphery breaks down. Furthermore, critical geographers suggest that the process of these changes has been inverted as “our cities and all our lived spaces have been shifting from a period of crisis-generated restructuring to the onset of a new era of restructuring-generated crisis, a crisis deeply imbricated in the post-modernization of the contemporary world” (Soja, 1996, p. 23).

Writing The Urban Revolution 30 years ago, Lefebvre offers that urbanization drives global capital, creating the conditions necessary for industrialization (a controversial view argued against vehemently by more traditional Marxists such as David Harvey). While historically the relationship between capital and urbanization is characterized as causative in favor of capital as the prime mover, Lefebvre flips the premise on its head, bringing forth a necessary attention to what we will call the geospatial. While acknowledging how these forces operate simultaneously, it remains significant to think through the processes by which spaces affect the nature of capital. For example, a way in which we see this phenomenon in education might be the marker of “urban” school and the headlong rush to find some other identifier (i.e. magnet or charter) that somehow loses the negative connotation. Or, how often first comments on a suburban or exurban neighborhood tend to be “good schools” without any further substantiation.

As everything becomes urbanized, another question for scholars in educational foundations revolves around a more nuanced notion of citizenship. As citizenship has traditionally involved one’s relationship to the nation-state, the urban condition raises questions related to access what it might mean to be a citizen of a city. Thinking then of urban citizenship brings a somewhat abstract notion to the material. Painter and Philo bring this to light:

if citizenship is to mean anything at all in an everyday sense it should mean the ability of individuals to occupy public spaces in a manner that does not compromise their self-identity, let alone obstruct, threaten or even harm them more materially.

(1995, p. 115)

Urban citizenship, or the right to the city, has everything to do with recognition and access to the services of that city—precisely what the current restructuring is acting upon. For families looking for communities with successful schools, options are increasingly limited and scattered across newly mapped urban spaces. While municipal governments focus on the climate for attracting businesses, funding and support for urban schools continues to decline. Somewhat paradoxically however, as young professionals move into gentrified areas in major cities, the need for “good schools” within a system of representation that has already constructed urban schools as bad creates yet another rush for alternatives (i.e. magnets, charters, and/or vouchers). Again, in terms of a right to the city, economic resources prove to be the only way in and, for educational researchers, contestations over the material, lived experiences of people in urban areas and the representations that act upon both those people and areas remains a constant, fluid area of exploration. An analysis that takes these multiple scales into account—or, a critical geography—proves to be our best hope for taking up this work.

Conclusions

To conclude, then, is to return to the title: the urbanization of everything. In what Lefebvre (2003) calls the “urban problematic,” we see the processes of global capital extending through both the spatial and the temporal, beginning with the prototype of the urban experience. This process, noted here as a restructuring of spaces, of urbanization, ultimately extends throughout the larger social world and impacts central conceptions such as democracy and identity. What is important to educational researchers in the work of critical geography and their attempt to draw our eye to these processes is the recognition of schools as part of the game and ultimately part of what is at stake. Brenner (1997) notes this change in the import of the spatial as, “the social spaces of contemporary capitalism are being increasingly politicized; space is no longer merely the theatre of political conflict but its principle stake” (p. 152). As theorists and researchers fundamentally interested in the lived experiences of schools, attention to the spaces within which and on which these forces act is essential. As global capital
always/already works toward "revalorize[ing] and reconlize[ing] the spaces it has already conquered" (Brenner, 1997, p. 154), one need only look at current attempts at educational reform to easily see how education has become an identifiable space of possibility for restructuring. Also, returning to the beginning, the epigraph of this essay by Mehta (2004) from the text Maximum City points to the notion that urbanization in present day Mumbai is a blueprint for urbanization worldwide, much as we argue here that the distinctions between urban issues in education and the suburban or rural are less and less tangible. But more importantly, Mehta points to the downside of this urban future and offers a cautionary tale of where we all might be headed ("God help us"). For the social foundations of education then, certainly some of the terrain has shifted; how then we proceed—or in other words, how do we take this seriously—remains to be seen, but one potential for this new scholarship lies in the conversation with a critical geography.

Notes

1. A version of this chapter was presented at the 1st International Globalization, Diversity and Education Conference, Pullman, WA, March 3–5, 2005.
2. It should be noted that Soja has been criticized for offering the return to the study of the everyday materiality of all three aspects of the trialectic but in practice falling into the distanced analysis of the academic observer. This researcher has suggested that careful attention to emergent design and qualitative method could ground this framework in the perceptions of those inherently tied to educative spaces.

References
