

Indifference-driven Discontent to Empathy-led Development: Globally Minded Educators in Dialogue with Stiglitz

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GLOBALIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENT is a book worthy of the shelf of every educator in higher education seeking greater understanding for the key role that global economic policy plays in shaping globalization's unfolding, including education. In our 'market classroom' era (Renshaw, 2013), standardized testing has become a currency, much as the dollar drives our market economy. High grades act as limited resources to compete for, more than they serve as indicators of genuine learning. Transnational performance assessments, such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), intend to provide useful comparative data for improving international education systems, yet have created a competitive friction undermining potential collaborative synergies originally sought. Moreover, the results of such assessments are widely publicized to a public uninformed on the assessments' very different functional distinctions (Loveless, 2013). Comparative alarms ring upon viewing performance assessment numbers that quickly place not only individuals, but entire nations, along a global measuring stick that few understand the basis for or the organizational powers-that-be behind its wide-sweeping decrees. Perhaps it is easier to trust blindly an agreed upon "rational" judgment of academic achievement, than it is to examine carefully not only the quantified rationale behind the assessments, but also the emotional subjectivities and sociocultural factors shaping such measuring sticks and participant performances along them. Merging intellect with emotion and context is vital for understanding how *marketized* classrooms both challenge and support learning. This developmental work involves cultivating general public awareness of global market economies.

Candidly and insightfully composed by 2001 Economics Nobel Prize winner Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* is a personalized narrative presenting a brief history of the complex dynamic among a few top global economic institutions and key regions of the world these institutions have impacted, for better or for worse. Stiglitz's former roles as senior vice president and chief economist of the World Bank and member and chairman of the US President's Council of Economic Advisors, provide a strong foundation for the author's analyses of prominent ideals and blunders implemented by global economic giants. The author discusses shared lessons to be learned in his stark portrayal of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) historically strong-armed presence in developing regions, many of which have come to date national history "'before' or 'after' the IMF," akin to marking history 'before' or 'after' a "natural disaster" (Stiglitz, 2003, p. 97). The IMF is a global body that was created with the aim to cultivate global growth and economic stability via "policy, advice and financing" to developing member nations seeking macroeconomic stability, and poverty reduction (International Monetary Fund, 2015, June 3). Thus, one has to wonder how the contrasting outcomes came to be. Initiating this inquiry reveals that a simple answer cannot be found.

Stiglitz attributes his call to examine global economic inequality to his attendance at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 *I Have a Dream* speech, a pivotal moment in time inspiring many to respond to local and global injustices of many kinds. The 20-year old Stiglitz entered a graduate program of economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, yet was surprised to find few fellow economists committed to the cause of inequality. In contrast, he discovered an abundance of classmates who "worshiped at the feet of (a misunderstood) Adam Smith, at the miracle of the efficiency of the market economy" (Stiglitz, 2013, August 27, para. 5). Stiglitz recognized ways this "efficient market economy" enhances socioeconomic disparity, rather than socioeconomic healing. A troubled economy hits hardest those in the lowest socioeconomic sector. The Great Recession of 2007-9 led to a 53% drop in the income of African-Americans, while the "recovery" predominantly led to financial gains in the socioeconomic top 1 percent (Stiglitz, 2013, August 27). As national economic systems become increasingly dependent, reducing socioeconomic disparity is becoming more and more complex. Cultivating a shared global *value* for reducing inequality is vital. Organizing shared *approaches* to addressing inequality presents even greater challenges, as international political systems and their impact on shaping the economies therein, differ enormously. In accessible language, Stiglitz approaches this Rubiks Cube complexity with a perceptive eye for trends.

Stiglitz details a few examples for how "market fundamentalism" has tended to reinforce socioeconomic inequality. Market imperfections, much like human imperfections, are inevitable, yet market fundamentalism operates as if perfection were a reality. The blind eye that results is the one that cannot see those struggling the most socioeconomically, thus perpetuating systematic inequity. A helpful global policy accounting for market imperfections is the forgiveness of debt, whereby a more developed nation forgives debt owed by a developing nation. Such policy does not place all burden on the struggling nation, but recognizes that global systematic imperfections play a role in creating such struggles (Stiglitz, 2003). Nations have the opportunity to get their feet under them and increase their *capital outflows*, or the international sale of local goods. As demonstrated in the East Asia financial Crisis of the 1990's, when developing nation exchange rates did not improve 'after the IMF' intervention, these nations were marked as "failing to take

the necessary reforms seriously,” a criticism that became a self-fulfilling prophecy leading to a departure of capital investments (Stiglitz, 2003).

Akin to global equity, classroom equity entails that educators value their diverse student populations for the cultural assets and knowledge capital. Just as developing regions grow amidst confidence, students respond well to a caring teacher who expresses *confidence in their abilities*. Public criticism can do much harm to both a region’s and a student’s confidence and development. IMF’s public criticisms did not restore a confidence leading to capital inflow, but rather “exacerbated the stampede of capital out” (Stiglitz, 2003, p. 97). In the classroom or the global stage, those in positions of authority and power have the choice to express confidence or criticism amidst another’s developing talents and relative weaknesses. The presence of this choice brings those in power face-to-face with their “invisible privilege” and the difficult reality that another’s “suffering is implicated in [one’s own] comfort” (Wang, 2008, p. 13). Inclusion is always a difficult test of humility in asking the privileged to release and share their privilege. In this lies a hidden confidence in being part of a greater good, a bank account inviting deposit.

After IMF interventions in the 1990s, unemployment in Korea and South Korean poverty both tripled. Unemployment in Thailand increased by ten, while poverty in Indonesia doubled. Stiglitz (2003) largely attributes the East Asia economic crisis to a similar factor influencing nearly one hundred economic crises in the past 25 years: “capital market liberalization” (p. 99). All too often, more powerful global institutions, such as the IMF, have ‘required’ market liberalization policies in developing nations. Such nations often are unprepared for capital market liberalization and find themselves “subject to both the rational and irrational whims of the investor community” (Stiglitz, 2003, p. 100). Sudden investor inflow can change to sudden investor outflow, while the developing nation is left bitterly critiqued by a global playing field blind to the nation’s strengths. Parallel to classroom contexts, undervalued students who may need more time to complete a project, paper, or test, can leave the marketized classroom disheartened and tempted to believe a low assessment of their abilities as a learner, causing them to feel a low perceived worth as a person. *Is this development?* Capital markets, like public school classrooms, are built upon a foundation of competitive comparison. While the human species is unlikely to evolve completely away from competition and comparison, there is a vital ingredient needed for the development of humans and nations alike.

The key ingredient is *empathy*.

Without empathy, parent-child and student-teacher bonds cannot be formed. Without such bonds, significant aspects of the learning process are lost. Students might ingest three chapters of biology facts and spit them back out again for a test, but the knowledge may never enter the student’s systematic way of thinking. An empathetic bond between a teacher and a student has the capacity to transform knowledge regurgitation into authentic transfer of learning. Rather than simply winning or losing a test as a performance, students grow to become *societal participants* who care about the knowledge gleaned and understand how the knowledge resonates with larger bodies of knowledge and applicative purposes. Relational bonds help students to personalize their learning and cultivate uniquely meaningful applications. Such an approach to student and national development more closely resembles the human body than it does a fundamentalist market economy. Neurologists, Goleman and Siegel, both highlight the biological, personal, and social

benefits of empathy. Goleman (2006) describes empathy as involving (1) *social awareness* and (2) *social facility*. *Social awareness* includes *primal empathy* (feeling with others), *attunement* (full receptivity), *empathic accuracy* (understanding another), and *social cognition* (understanding how the social world works). *Social facility* includes *synchrony* (smooth nonverbal interaction), *self-presentation* (effective presentation of self), *influence* (shaping social outcomes), and *concern* (care for and action on others' needs). The brain's "give-and-take signals" in "contingent" relational communication (Siegel & Hartzell, p. 81) demonstrate the neurological significance of empathy in learning as a social process. Empathy enables a *co-construction* of identity in a learning process activated by a parent or teacher who listens "with an open mind" and responds to what is *actually* communicated, not "a predetermined, rigid model of what is expected" (Siegel & Hartzell, 2014, p. 82). Sociologist Brown (2012) documents the vital role empathy plays in both protecting and healing from shaming experiences. Connecting the personal and the global, a good dose of empathy may benefit our global societal development, as much as the persons therein.

Movement toward socioeconomic equity, locally and globally, involves not only surveillance and adjustment of national economic policies and global exchange rates, as the IMF covers. Equity on a macro-scale involves addressing the micro-level, including one-on-one interactions between students and teachers. Preparing teachers who support students as human beings worthy of attention in becoming engaged and fulfilled global citizens (Pang, 2005), may parallel the development of macroeconomic policies that regard cultures, regions, and nations with greater dignity and understanding. For teachers and policy makers, empathy is a glue connecting the haves and the have-nots with classroom knowledge and global capital. Those in positions of 'having' can empathize with challenges faced by those who may 'have less,' while also recognizing the rich knowledge, culture, and resources that the 'less powerful' *do have*. Empathy can be powerful in demystifying the myth that some *have* and others *do not*. Moll (1992) and multicultural education as a field is committed to the belief that all *have something of value*, but this *something* may not be recognized yet in public spaces. In this light, Stiglitz's (2003) analysis of macroeconomic policy resonates with a micro imperative for empathy and an ethic of care (Noddings, 2003), not only in the classroom, but also in global policy. What might empathy look like, when infused in global economic policy?

Pang (2005) connects Noddings's (2003) *ethic of care* to Banks' (1998) *theory of multicultural education* to conclude that the caring educator will take time to understand and draw upon students' wealth of diverse abilities, cultures, and knowledge. Perhaps policy makers can take this view as well. In this light, a valuable lesson to be learned from the IMF's overbearing presence in developing regions, particularly in the 1990's, is a lesson expressed by Moll's (1992) *funds of knowledge*. Moll describes the cultural background knowledge that a student brings to the classroom as a resource for the teacher and other learners. Just as student development thrives in a learning environment that recognizes and welcomes diverse student strengths, cultural and national development thrive in a global environment that recognizes and welcomes diverse regional strengths. As educational systems view struggling students as humans with learning resources and strengths, classroom pedagogy that values and develops student abilities becomes a greater focus than standardized assessments that compare and compartmentalize student learning. This pedagogical feat involves "red eyes" at times, in learning to see and engage the *whole* learner who enters the classroom not only with intellect, but also an emotional realm and a cultural background that significantly shape one's learning experience (Wang, 2008). Similarly, global economies can

learn to see developing regions in light of their unique resources and knowledge, and allow such nations to enter global markets on their own accord and pace. Just as a student's multicultural development and participation involves "intellectual lines" and "emotional curves" (Wang, 2008), a nation's global economic development and participation is shaped by curvatures of cultural context. It is these cultural and emotional curves that bring rich texture to human and global development.

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