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ABSTRACT

Ontario's Ministry of Education released a language policy document in 2007 governing practice in the province's elementary and secondary schools with respect to English language learners. This document reflects trends associated with the phenomenon of globalization while at the same time attempting to address a number of local (that is, provincial) priorities. As such, Ontario's language policy illustrates the manner in which the influences of globalization on education are mediated by national or provincial governments.

In 2007, the Ontario Ministry of Education [MOE] released a language policy document entitled English Language Learners/ESL and ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12 [hereafter ELL Policies and Procedures, 1<-12]. This document is intended to govern practice in Ontario's elementary and secondary schools with respect to English language learners (ELLs); as such, it outlines the policies and procedures to be adopted by the province's boards of education, principals, and teachers. However, as Spolsky (2004) noted, "language policy functions in a complex ecological relationship among a wide range of linguistic and non-linguistic elements, variables and factors" (p. 41). This paper focuses on a nonlinguistic aspect of Ontario's language policy document, namely the context in which and for which it was developed. I argue that ELL Policies and Procedures, K-12 reflects trends associated with the phenomenon of globalization while at the same time attempting to address a number of local (that is, provincial) priorities. That this document contains both local and globalized elements, I suggest, is consistent with Carnoy's contention that "there is much more political and even financial space for the national state to condition the way globalization is brought into education than is usually admitted" (p. 58).
THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON EDUCATION

While researchers apply a number of definitions to the term globalization, Stromquist and Monkman (2000) commented that "globalization remains an inexact term for the strong, and perhaps irreversible, changes in the economy, labor force, technologies, communication, cultural patterns, and political alliances that it is imposing on every nation" (p. 3). How can the effects of globalization on education be characterized? Stromquist and Monkman identified four such effects. First, business criteria relating to efficiency and productivity are being applied in the education sector. Second, child-centred curricula are being replaced by an emphasis on vocational training. Third, the autonomy of teachers is being reduced as administrators gain increasing control over school settings. Finally, education is increasingly seen as a commodity rather than a public good.

According to Carnoy (2000), national, state, and provincial systems of education have been subject to globalizing influences in at least three ways. First, there has been pressure to reduce public expenditure on education; "finance-driven" education reform has been, according to Carnoy, one of the most direct impacts of globalization on education (p. 47). Second, in spite of reduced public spending, many jurisdictions have expanded secondary and postsecondary school enrolment in order to produce a skilled labour force. As a result, governments are seeking alternate sources of funding for education. A third effect of globalization has involved international comparisons of school systems, accompanied by standard-setting and the testing of students. Taken together, these effects as identified by Stromquist and Monkman and by Carnoy suggest that globalization can be discerned in national (or, in the case of Canada, provincial) education systems through reduced or altered forms of funding, the commodification of education, the incorporation of accountability measures, and changes in curricula and teachers' roles intended to result in the production of a skilled labour force.

Carnoy commented that the "effects of globalization on education are passed through the policy structures of national states, so it is these states that ultimately decide how globalization affects national education" (p. 58). Thus, while acknowledging that globalization has significantly affected national education systems, Carnoy nonetheless maintained that nations still have an important role to play in mediating the influence of globalization.
Political climates in which businesses operate are established at the level of the nation state; nations articulate and implement particular and, ideally, coherent economic and social policies; capital is invested within national boundaries. Carnoy’s is not the only voice arguing that nation states retain important policy-making and decision-making power even in the face of the strong economic, cultural, and political influences associated with globalization. Currie and Subotzky (2000), for example, noted that "global developments do not manifest uniformly in different contexts; they are mediated by local and national conditions" (p. 127). Writing in the same vein, Olssen, Codd and O’Neill (2004) remarked that, while globalization has produced a number of common responses among nations, "it is important not to assume that globalization is a homogenous or universalizing process. Its various dimensions . . . will have different manifestations in different national contexts" (p. I l). With respect to education policy, then, it would seem reasonable to search for evidence of local issues nested within or, possibly, competing with trends and perspectives associated with globalization. Does Ontario’s ELL Policies and Procedures, 1<-12 (MOE, 2007) document reflect both the global and the local? Before addressing this question, I outline a number of issues related to language policy in the Canadian and, more specifically, Ontario setting.

LANGUAGE POLICY: NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL ISSUES

Cummins (2006) linked language policy with the issues of linguistic diversity and equity, noting that "the absence of coherent policies within schools in relation to the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity of the student body risks compromising principles of equity to which all Canadian schools are committed" (p. 4). Further, Cummins outlined a number of problematic assumptions which have, in his view, become normalized in many Canadian schools: "literacy" generally refers to English literacy; ELLs’ first-language knowledge is seen as having little instructional relevance; and English as a second language (ESL) teachers are seen as having primary responsibility for ELLs’ second language acquisition.

The language policy vacuum which Cummins (2006) highlighted has been offset in Ontario by a number of recent initiatives focusing on ELLs. In 2005, the Ontario MOE published a support document entitled Many Roots/Many Voices:
Supporting English Language Learners in Every Classroom; in 2007 revised curricula for high school ESL courses were released, and ELL Policies and Procedures, K-12 was also published. Such activity suggests that ELLs are on the MOE's agenda, raising the question of why this is the case. Several elements relating to the Ontario context may have prompted these initiatives. First, and perhaps most simply, there are increasing numbers of ELLs in Ontario elementary and secondary school classrooms. Nationally, "in 2006, . one in five Canadian residents was born outside the country — the highest level in 75 years. That proportion grew substantially from 18.4 per cent of the population, just five years earlier" (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC], 2007, December 4). At the same time as these demographic changes have been occurring at the national and provincial level, published results of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test suggest that ELLs are struggling in disproportionate numbers to pass this test which is a requirement for an Ontario secondary school graduation diploma. Just 52% of ELLs passed the literacy test in 2007 while English-speaking students in academic and applied level English classes had pass rates of 95% and 62% respectively (Education Quality and Accountability Office [EQAO], 2007). The Ontario MOE has responded to these test results and to increased numbers of ELLs in the province's schools by providing additional funding to support the learning needs of ELLs throughout the province; recent media reports, however, have suggested that some boards of education have directed funding intended for ELLs elsewhere (CBC, 2007, April 18). A further impetus for the generation of formal ELL-related policy may be the increased presence in Ontario secondary schools of fee-paying international students, many of whom have been recruited by boards of education seeking additional sources of revenue. The ELL Policies and Procedures, K-12 document may have been developed, in part, to serve the needs of these international students.

ONTARIO'S ELL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES, K-12 DOCUMENT

When designing top-down language policy initiatives, national, state, and provincial officials may choose from a number of models of English as a second language (ESL) programming. Possibilities range from intensive, daylong English language programs to bilingual education models to team-teaching by ESL-specialist and subject-specialist teachers. In Ontario, the decision has been made to place ELLs "in a grade-level or subject-specific
classroom for at least part of each day" (MOE 2007, p. 21). In addition, content (i.e. subject-specific) teaching and language instruction are to be integrated for ELLS, and all teachers are to be "responsible for supporting academic success for all students — including English language learners" (p. 31). The document alludes to the need to provide opportunities for teachers and administrators "to develop the skills they need to support English language learners effectively" (p. 10), suggesting that capacity-building is a significant component of the MOE's language policy as teachers' roles now explicitly include responsibility for fostering ELLs' language growth. The MOE notes that it will "collect student data for example, . . . EQAO results, data on credit accumulation and course types taken, graduation rates, and other indicators of student success — in order to track student progress and monitor the academic achievement of English language learners" (p. I I). Further, the MOE states that it will use assessment information "to set benchmarks for English language learners in Ontario" (p. I I).

In many respects, this policy document addresses several of the equity-related concerns raised by Cummins (2006). ELL Policies and Procedures, K-12 (MOE, 2007) recognizes that ELLs come from diverse backgrounds and fall into a number of different categories: specific reference is made to students who are Canadian-born as well as to "newcomers from other countries" (p. 9). The document notes that these newcomers may be immigrants, refugees, or fee-paying international students, and that ELLs therefore have varying experiences, strengths, and needs which schools must address. Teachers and guidance counsellors are expected to monitor ELLs' social adjustment as well as their academic progress. The MOE states explicitly that teachers of all subjects share responsibility for fostering ELLs' language acquisition; further, the MOE acknowledges the value of ELLs' first language backgrounds through mandating the introduction of procedures to award credits to ELLs with sufficient proficiency in an international language. In a broader context, however, ELL Policies and Procedures, K-12 reflects the complex ecological relationships mentioned by Spolsky (2004): this language policy document is both a response to local (that is, Ontario) concerns and a reflection of globalizing trends in education. It is to this issue that I now turn.
RESPONDING TO BOTH LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONCERNS

Apart from the statement that "the diversity that exists in Ontario's classrooms has helped to shape the policy outlined in this document, which is intended to promote good outcomes for English language learners" (p. 7), there is little indication in ELL Policies and Procedures, 1<-12 (MOE, 2007) itself of the context in which it has been formulated. Policy goals, however, are stated explicitly, and it is in several of these goals that both local concerns and globalizing influences can be discerned. Indeed, the very diversity to which the document refers can be related to immigration trends which have seen increased numbers of ELLs appear in Ontario elementary and secondary schools. The globalization-related commodification of education to which Stromquist and Monkman (2000) alluded is seen in the document's acknowledgement that fee-paying international students are among the ELLs present in Ontario classrooms.

At first glance, some of the policy goals as stated would seem simply to provide administrative tools to school boards, principals, and teachers: by giving a definition of the term "English language learners," for example, the Ministry of Education makes it easier for school board officials and principals to classify students and then, presumably, to provide the programming supports ELLs require. Programming, however, is inextricably linked with funding. The definition of ELLs as outlined by the MOE is a comprehensive one, as I have noted above. Rather than providing a narrow definition — and thereby excluding students from programming support — the MOE appears to be committed to funding programs and services for ELLs. This is a local priority which runs counter to the general tightening of education expenditure often associated with globalization. At the same time, however, another MOE goal refers to establishing procedures which will contribute to the acceleration of ELLs' acquisition of English for Academic Purposes: increased expenditure, then, is expected to yield specific and measurable results. That this is the case is made clear by the statement that data relating to ELLs will be collected, and that ELLs' progress will be monitored and tracked in order "to support public accountability" (MOE, 2007, p. 10). The use of language relating to reporting and accountability is consistent with globalization as characterized by Stromquist and Monkman (2000). Later in the document, the MOE states that funding for
ELLs is to be directed towards programs and services targeting this cohort of students: boards of education will have to report annually on how such funding has been used. This reporting requirement combines both globalization-related pressures for accountability as well as a local (Ontario) concern with addressing recent negative media stories about the misuse by some boards of education of ELL-related funding.

Another explicit goal of ELL Policies and Procedures, K-12 (MOE, 2007) involves creating procedures for the assessment of ELLs and for the regular reporting of ELLs' progress to their parents. School boards are instructed to "establish procedures for ensuring ongoing assessment of the development of proficiency in English and the academic progress of each English language learner" (p. 27). While assessment and reporting are undeniably integral to good educational practice and planning, a case could be made that there is a subtext to this requirement: the emphasis on frequent assessment and reporting may also be interpreted as underscoring the extent to which parents and students are consumers of a particular commodity, namely education. Although such an interpretation may initially seem far-fetched, the ELL Policies and Procedures, K-12 document incorporates instructions about graduation requirements for ELLs and allowable substitutions for compulsory courses. These instructions may be seen as simply providing information for school board officials and for principals; however, in terms of the marketplace, these instructions also serve to ensure the integrity of the credential (that is, a secondary school graduation diploma) ELLs ultimately obtain. Here again, then, it can be argued that a local Ontario focus on consistent procedures runs parallel with a globalization-related trend emphasizing education as a commodity.

An additional goal articulated in this document relates to large-scale testing, an issue which also has elements reflecting both local and globalization-related concerns. ELL Policies and Procedures, K-12 states that the document seeks to clarify "procedures for the identification of English language learners who are to participate in large-scale assessments" (MOE, 2007, p. 10). These procedures, as outlined later in the document, instruct school boards and principals to make decisions about exemptions and deferrals for ELLs in provincial tests in accordance with the administration guide published by Ontario's
Such procedures, it can be argued, merely relate to local issues surrounding test administration. However, a further instruction which is given is that ELLs should be included in large-scale testing (including national and international tests) "when they have acquired the level of proficiency in English required for success" (p. 28-29). No further elaboration or guidance is given to school administrators on the subject of ELLs and large-scale testing, but this concern with "success" is arguably related to the international comparisons of school systems which Carnoy (2000) identified as one feature of educational globalization.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have commented on ways in which the ELL Policies and Procedures, 1<12 (MOE, 2007) document reflects both Ontario concerns and the influence of globalization. Consistent with Carnoy's (2000) contention that globalizing influences are mediated through national (or, with respect to education in Canada, provincial) policies and priorities, I have suggested several local concerns relating to equity, consistent ESL programming, and the explicit allocation of responsibility for ELLs' language acquisition have been nested within a framework reflecting a number of features accompanying globalization, such as testing, accountability, and the commodification of education. Indeed, it is arguable that in at least one respect there is tension between globalization and local influences in the ELL Policies and Procedures, K-12 document: increased spending on ELLs in Ontario runs counter to the funding cuts which are typically associated with globalization.

Canagarajah (2006) noted that language policy is inherently ideological in nature; I have commented on the ways in which Ontario's policy document reflects the influence of concepts linked to the phenomenon of globalization. However, another perspective with respect to ideology in this policy document is one raised by Olssen, Codd, and O'Neill (2004), who argued that "it is imposed policies of neoliberal governmentality, rather than globalization as such, that is the key force affecting (and undermining) nation states today" (p. 13). According to this view, then, a discussion of global versus local influences may be an oversimplification of more complex phenomena. What I have characterized as local concerns nested within globalized influences might, according to Olssen et al., perhaps better be
described as outright competition between neoliberal and welfare liberal ideology. Neoliberal aspects of the MOE language policy include an emphasis on accountability, credentialing, data collection, and benchmarks; welfare liberal ideology, on the other hand, is arguably reflected in concern in the document for ELLs' social adjustment as well as in references to developing ELLs' individual talents and goals.

However ideology in ELL Policies and Procedures, K12 (MOE, 2007) may be characterized, I suggest that it is indeed discernable. While it is evident that ELL Policies and Procedures, K-12 responds to concerns which reflect local issues and priorities, Ontario's language policy document is also an initiative in which planning, programming, and services for ELLs are situated firmly in a globalized context of reporting, measurable outcomes, testing, benchmarks, and accountability.

References


