“Man is never short of lofty aims; he merely can never decide on principles of implementation”

*Philip J. Foster, CIES Presidential Address, San Diego, California, 1971*
LOFTY AIMS

Global pivot begins in the 1990s

Quantity
- Roofs and desks

Quality
- Learning
Quality triumphant

• Number of primary-aged children that will not go to school is increasing (GPE 2013)

• Today’s policy imperative: Quality
  – Especially quality of educational outcomes
  – A target of virtually every country, even those not meeting universal primary education.

Global radical advocates of education

• Promote internationally-derived definitions of educational quality.

• Quality-of-outcomes focused policies are purportedly a primary causal factor leading to a successful educational system
Who?

• Large-scale cross-national tests
• Monitors of target-driven international agreements and treaties in education

and

• Global agencies, foundations, companies, etc. that promote them.

Global educational policy regimes

• Setting targets and collecting, comparing, and disseminating indicators to monitor their accomplishment.
  – Often disagree
  – Often share the same promoters

• An architecture of agents formulating, monitoring and/or promoting sets of quality-of-outcomes policy targets on the global scene
• Globally define educational quality
  • organize a set of rules,
  • beliefs about causation,
  • expectations
  • norms
• Encourage their acceptance by groups of nations

Part of a larger international political economy of global regimes

GATT, NAFTA, CAFTA, ...etc..
(see for example, Keohane 2005)

Critics and advocates
• Much work on the success of international tests and agreements (and their monitors).
• Most emphasize the power and authority of the international regimes

But
• Do they fully account for the demand that countries have to participate in international agreements or global tests?
• Can we be fully satisfied with explanations that discount the possible agency of countries and their educational systems, especially poor or low-achieving countries and systems?
New research problems

• Not simply the success of agendas imposed from above and afar.

• These global regimes include networks of
  – Intergovernmental agencies
  – Public and private non-governmental agencies
  – Public-Private partnerships
  – International-domestic partnerships
  – Other domestic and international actors

Complex interplay of agendas

Chile       Argentina

Both competitors in PISA’s cognitive Olympics
Chile

1990s

- Chile
  - Concertación reformers and World Bank negotiate in Middle School Loan agreement
    - TIMSS
    - Access to expertise in testing and standards
- TIMSS
  - US Educate America Act of 1994
  - Developing world not a priority
- UNESCO – LLECE
  - Hostile to encroachment of TIMSS
  - Same technical weaknesses as most regional tests?

2000s

- Chile
  - Latin American standard in technical quality of tests
  - New teacher evaluation
    - Student achievement not included
  - Partnership with Australian Council of Education Research
    - Development of Curriculum Standards
      - Mapas de Progreso
      - Estándares
  - PISA & IEA Studies
    - Low achievement
    - Improving?
    - High political costs for Ministry

Argentina

1990s

- TIMSS
  - Researchers attend feasibility study conference supported by CIDA, OISE and U. of British Columbia
  - Argentine MOE disqualifies academic representative
  - NO intention for participation in international tests
  - Period in which public sector was most open to international agency involvement.

2000s

- PISA
  - Low achievement
  - Ranked lower than Chile!
    - Lower then Uruguay and Costa Rica!
    - ¡Nos volvimos Latinoamérica!
      - We've turned into a Latin American country!
    - High political costs for Ministry
  - A period of repudiation of international agencies and agendas
  - One factor
    - Many civil society groups have no confidence in government data.
New program of inquiry

• Going beyond focus on the power and authority of international agencies or policy regimes
  – Where domestic national interests viewed primarily as passive and derivative.
• Bringing evidence to bear on discussions
  – ideology and empirically weak hunches have been common.
• Avoiding analytical hegemony
  – willful and blinding eagerness to discount the agency of weak, poor or underachieving educational systems

Evidence of agency

• There is demand for global education quality advocacy regimes
  – They reduce the costs related to finding out what other countries are doing.
  – They limit the uncertainties participating nations face in evaluating each other's policies and their outcomes.
  – They offer the promise of taking advantage of the expertise of other nations in achieving educational quality.
Importance

• We should not leave these problems to be simply part of the pro and anti globalization ideological debates
  – Why do countries participate in international tests?
  – Why do countries commit to internationally-sanctioned targets?
  – What do global and domestic actors seek?
  – How does focusing on improvement in ranked indicators promote (or not) good policy?

PRINCIPALS OF IMPLEMENTATION
Evidence?

• There is very little empirical substantiation for the idea that the explicit pursuit of educational quality standards, of any kind, results in increased quality

Data inspired speculation

• Essentially, a bet
  – Global advocates of educational quality do not offer meaningful opportunities to learn from the expertise of other countries in achieving educational quality.
  – They are not delivering on the promise that might be a key explanation of their high-demand even on the part of countries far from achieving even their least challenging targets.
Poor information

• Most successful countries in the quality lottery did not succeed by following globally-sanctioned targets.
  – Whose example should be followed: Finland’s small classes or Singapore’s large classes?
  – How does a country achieve a good rank on the EFA gender specific index (GEI) or EFA’s closely monitored literacy rates?
  – How does a country achieve a higher percentages of students scoring at high PISA proficiency levels?

Pursuing ranked indicators

• Research in other fields, especially culture, suggests that investing in the pursuit of high ranks on league tables or other ranked tables of indicators can be disastrously costly and completely ineffective (Rossman and Schilke 2014).
Expertise in advocacy

• The global advocates of educational quality operationalize quality as:
  – Goals
  – Targets
  – Ranked indicators
  – Proficiency levels and test scores

• They offer parameters to guide nation-state betting on quality:
  – Standards
  – Liberated test items and test frameworks
  – Recommended policy frameworks

Hollow advocacy

• The monitors and testers have not typically conducted empirical tests to confirm or disconfirm the causal hypotheses that underlie their policy advocacy.
  – They typically look at winners and losers (the losers are typically ignored, the winners are what matter) and inspect their
    • policies,
    • educational governance systems,
    • pedagogical habits,
    • Etc.

• Infer that whatever factors are different, are likely causes of their excellence.
Gambling on quality

- **DATA INSPIRED SPECULATION**
  - Tests are carried out, indicators are collected
    - Ranked data are examined
  - Winners are identified
    - “lessons” are inferred
  - The lessons are not tested
    - The lessons are promoted

A comparative education agenda

- How are quality-of-outcomes targets and opportunity related?
- How are quality-of-outcomes targets established, interpreted, adapted and enacted across global regimes and national classrooms?
- We need to develop empirical and theoretical accounts for the fact that educational systems are changing their relationships with civil society, the bureaucracy, and the international system while simultaneously engaging in the pursuit of global or other standards of educational quality.
- Cross-national comparison permits the contrasting and identification of crucial governance variables that the limited variance of single-nation studies makes difficult.
Back to Phil...

• Can human life be improved?
• Should it be improved?
• Can education play a pivotal role in this?
• YES

How?

• The radical advocates are sure that how is clear:
  – educational systems should bet on the quality-of-outcomes goals they identify and monitor.
• I appeal for comparative research that calls that bet:
  – Let’s test that faith with empirical and theoretical rigor.
Thank you

Power Point available: http://www.albany.edu/eaps/