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EDUCO SCHOOLS IN EL SALVADOR: A DEMOCRATIC TREE IN A GLOBALIZED FOREST?

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ABSTRACT

This research on the Educacion con Participacion de Comunidad (EDUCO) rural schools in El Salvador examined the nature of the reform and its impact on parent involvement and engagement for the local community; the underlying economic and political ideologies of EDUCO; and interpreted these findings to uncover the implications of the reform for democratic participation for the local school and community and for the more broadly constructed meaning of democracy, nationally and internationally.

INTRODUCTION

Educational reforms can not compensate for the range of society. Our search for solutions without understanding the problems is tantamount to a random walk through a garden of panaceas.

- David Berliner (2005)

The Educacion con Participacion de Comunidad (EDUCO) rural schools in El Salvador, initiated in 1991 at the end of El Salvador's twelve-year civil war, provide basic education for children in grades 1-8 through a decentralized, community-governed process. Democratically elected community councils manage the schools, hire and fire teachers, and partially contribute to their financial support. Since their inception, they have been supported by the World Bank, a non-transparent, transnational organization that has promoted and facilitated public basic education programs through-

out the world, in particular in developing nations. Research on the EDUCO schools can serve as a fruitful source of comparison for the similar but weaker market-driven educational reforms such as privatization and decentralization in the United States. My research on and the resulting analysis of the EDUCO schools revealed the contradictory nature of educational reforms that are academically competitive, economically cheap, socially equitable, public and democratic and are concurrently designed to advance the agendas and ideologies of global agencies and national governments.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This case study was situated in the conceptual framework of critical theory (Freire, 1970, 1995; Leistnya, 1999; McLaren, 1995); in the ideology of neo-liberal economics; the ecologies in parental engagement research (Calabrese Barton, Drake, & Perez, 2004); and in Dewey's exploration of the conflicting roles of the individual and the public in a democracy in *The Public and Its Problems* (1927).

Interpreting the extensive body of literature based on the work of Paulo Freire (1970, 1995) and the development of critical theory, Leistnya (1999) claimed that the foundation of Freire's work is the "conviction that a critical, multicultural democracy should be the driving force of the struggle for freedom" (p. 45). For Freire, "conscientization" or what Leistnya calls, "presence of mind" is essential to the struggle for freedom and democracy as well as a sense of history, praxis, and dialogue. "Presence of mind is the ability to analyze, problematize, and affect the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural realities that shape our lives" (p. 45). To understand the social and historical forces that surround us, we must critically assess the dominant ideologies that permeate all beliefs and values, and for the critical theorist, transform these ideologies through praxis and dialogue. In his ensuing analysis of dominant groups and discourse, Leistnya emphasized the importance of both participation and dissent for democracy.

The dilemma of the external forms of democracy as explored and developed by Dewey in his book, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927), is relevant to this analysis of local democracy and EDUCO schools. In this work, Dewey analyzed the conflicts of individual interests and of the purposes of the public, and defined democracy

as “the collective name for a multitude of persons each voting as an anonymous unit,” and states that the “best which most men attain to is the domination by the public weal of their other desires” (1927; 76, 77). In his analysis of political democracy and of the “massive and extensive” power of the economic order, Dewey concluded, “The same forces that have brought about the forms of democratic government, general suffrage, and executives and legislators chosen by majority vote, have also brought about conditions that halt the social and humane ideals...of an inclusive and fraternally associated public” (p.109). Here, Dewey explored how the process of majority vote can work against the social ideals of the public. He considered the possibility of circumstances where the majority with a small fraction of winning votes may subsequently dominate the more humane conditions favored by a minority with a nearly equal number of votes, and thereby, undermine the cohesion of the community and the sense of the inclusive whole.

The “massive and extensive” power of economic order, as described by Dewey is particularly relevant to the development of the EDUCO schools. Spring (1998), Carnoy (1999), Torres (2002, 2005), and Desmond (2000, 2002) have claimed that the dominant ideology underlying educational reform policies of the World Bank and the Bush presidential administration including the EDUCO schools in El Salvador and the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) in the United States are rooted in the neo-liberal tenets of Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman, whereby “human capital economics transforms education into an economic commodity” (Spring, p.182). The EDUCO schools may be evidence of local, rural educational reform enacted by community citizens, however, the reforms are politically advanced and economically supported at the national and global levels by the ruling government and by the supranational organization, the World Bank.

According to Torres (2002), the neo-liberal state emerged within the past three decades to promote the notions of open markets, free trade, the reduction of the public sector, the decrease of state intervention in the economy, and the deregulation of markets (p. 368). Within Latin American countries such as El Salvador and in other nations, neo-liberalism became associated, historically and philosophically, with structural adjustment programs, as advocated by the World Bank and other financial organizations. A central aspect of the economic restructuring policies under structural adjustment

recommended for the neo-liberal state is the reduction of the size of the federal deficit through the reduction of the public sector; including education, health, pensions and retirements, public transportation, and housing; and the promotion of the 'private' through privatization of services and the deregulation of trade, industry, and services. In contrast to the welfare state which represents a social pact between labor and capital, the neo-liberal state is decidedly pro-business (p. 369).

Neo-liberalism rose as the dominant ideology impacting educational reform policies worldwide with the accelerated rise of economic globalization beginning in the 1980s. Economic globalization resulted from a world-wide economic restructuring which involved the globalization of economies, science, technology, culture, and the production of knowledge as well as a profound transformation in the international division of labor (Harvey, 1989).

Carnoy (1999) emphasized that the effects of globalization and its ideological packaging needed to be analyzed beyond subtle influences on the knowledge production in the classroom to determine its impact on the overall delivery of schooling. He claimed that globalization has had five major impacts on education, briefly summarized as 1) a massive reorganization of work to produce a more highly educated and a low-cost workforce; 2) a private-sector bias that shifts spending for education from the public to private sectors; 3) the comparison of national educational systems internationally through a definition of quality based on standards and standardized assessments; 4) the use of information technology to expand the quantity of education at a lower-cost; and 5) the development of globalized information networks, e.g. the world wide web, as a means to transform world culture (pp.15-18).

According to Carnoy (1999), neo-liberal changes in the world economy advocated for three major educational reform strategies:

- Competitiveness-driven reforms aimed primarily at improving economic productivity by improving the quality of labor through decentralization, standards, improved management of educational resources, and improved teacher recruitment and training.
- Finance-driven reforms directed at the reduction of public spending on education while improving the productivity of the workforce through increasing the efficiency of the use of resources. Education reforms recommended by international

agencies such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and regional banks are primarily finance-driven reforms and include the shift of public funding for education from the higher to lower levels of education; the privatization of secondary and higher education in order to expand these levels; and the reduction of costs per pupil in all levels of education, chiefly through increases in class size.

- Equity-driven reforms focused on equality of economic opportunity and social mobility through the expansion of access to education for the lowest-income groups, women, rural populations, “at risk” populations and special needs students.

As referenced by Carnoy above, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are the two major supranational institutions which were created at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944. The World Bank Group is comprised of four agencies that make loans or guarantee credit to its 184 member countries. In addition to financing projects such as roads or schools, the Bank also makes loans to restructure a country’s economic system. The International Monetary Fund monitors national economies and makes cash or credit available to member states experiencing short-term balance-of-payment difficulties. Decisions at both the World Bank and the IMF are made by a vote of the Board of Executive Directors, representing member countries. Many of the same people serve on both boards. Voting power is determined by a nation’s financial contribution with the seven largest industrialized countries (the G-7) holding about 45 per cent of the board membership. In this regard, developed countries such as the United States, Germany, and Great Britain are able to determine much of the economic policies and the financial lending that affect the developing nations. Members of the Boards are appointed by their governments, not elected, severely reducing the amount of transparency surrounding the decisions of these two institutions.

In this investigation of the impact of national and global economic and political power on the local agency of parents and community members as they developed and governed the local EDUCO schools, it is necessary to include literature on the agency of parent involvement and engagement and its meaning for democratic action in schools. Research conducted by Calabrese Barton, Drake and Perez (2004) resulted in a data-driven framework for understanding parent engagement, termed the “ecologies of parent

engagement" (EPE) and provided new insights into the agency of parent involvement and engagement. Supported by evidence collected in high-poverty urban communities, their research focused on parents' beliefs and actions concerning science education reform and the ways in which parental beliefs and actions align with the expectations held by others in the reform process (i.e., children, teachers, and administrators).

In the EPE, the relational phenomenon of activity networks and how parents negotiate their own space and capital was explored and investigated in terms of social class, race, and language; revealing how parents activate resources and leverage relationships with teachers, other parents, and community members in order to author a place of their own in schools. In parent engagement, parents are actors in shaping and impacting what actually transpires around their children in schools. As conceptualized by Calabrese et al. (2004), parent engagement differs markedly from traditional descriptions of parents' involvement in which parents conform to the expectations of the school-authored space of school and community by supporting and participating in school-initiated activities and school-directed relationships as a means of reaping the social capital benefits of schooling for their own and others' children. Criticizing the bulk of research on parental involvement for its reliance on a deficit model, especially in high-poverty urban communities, where parents participate in school-sanctioned ways; the authors stated that only a few research studies report on initiatives that have included parents as equal partners and decision makers. Calabrese Barton et al. (2004) argued that as parents are positioned or position themselves in the changing spaces and changing access to the school's resources for their children, they may find themselves supported by teachers if these actions are considered with the traditional relationships of parent and teacher, whereas they may find themselves in a power struggle with teachers, administrators, and the school district if this repositioning challenges school norms for involvement. They also maintained that parents, regardless of class, ethnicity, and language, use social networks outside of the school to negotiate social capital within schools.

EL SALVADOR

The EDUCO school reforms need to be examined within the

economic, political and social conditions of the nation. El Salvador is the smallest country in continental Latin America and with approximately 6.3 million inhabitants, the most densely populated. Between 1980 and 1992, it experienced a devastating civil war that resulted in over 80,000 deaths, half-million people were displaced and another million fled to the United States. Major economic disruptions occurred as the result of natural disasters including earthquakes in 1986 and 2001, and Hurricane Mitch, in 1998. Since 1989, the most conservative party and the leader of the contra military position during the war, the Republican Nationalistic Alliance (ARENA) party, won each presidential election in El Salvador's parliament until the most recent March 2009 election. The Civil War was resolved via dialogue and negotiation, led by the United Nations, with the agreement of both the ARENA government and the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN), the major opposition party and resulted in the Peace Accords that affected all aspects of the life of the nation. The FMLN has continued to grow and has been successfully elected to local and state offices throughout the country. On March 15, 2009, Mauricio Funes was elected as the first FMLN president of El Salvador. During the twenty years in which the ARENA party dominated Salvadoran politics and public life, it followed a neo-liberal economic program of fiscal austerity, stabilization, liberalization and privatization that was heavily influenced by the United States and global lending agencies such as the World Bank. A compelling example of this influence was El Salvador's conversion of its national currency from the colon to the dollar in 2001.

Although reported as the top free market in Latin America and one of the freest in the world, the World Bank noted in its Country Development Profile, that "despite prudent macroeconomic policies and deep economic reforms, growth in El Salvador has remained low and averaged only 3 percent between 1996 and 2000" (p.2). Growth dropped to 1.5 percent in 2001 as a result of the earthquakes and the country's response to the downturn in the US economy for that year. The country's economic growth in 2004, estimated between 1.3 and 1.8 percent, was the lowest in Central America and the second lowest in all of Latin America, higher only than Haiti. Current economic reports have recorded ongoing increases in inflation, with the average cost of basic foods, in particular corn tortillas as a result of worldwide demand for corn to produce etha-

nol fuel, have gone up dramatically. The current rise in the cost of living began its rise in 2001, when the Salvadoran president pushed the dollarization plan through the Legislature, a national initiative advocated by the International Monetary Fund that replaced the historical national currency, the colon, with the dollar.

Alex Modotti stated, "After sixteen years of ARENA led governments loyally implementing the IMF-model of privatizations and opening of markets, El Salvador's economy shows many signs of being on the brink of collapse" (ZNET, 3/29/2005). Foreign loans, one major factor in keeping the economy afloat, increased El Salvador's total public debt to a figure representing 46.5 percent, which passed the 40 percent limit recommended by such lending agencies as the IMF, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank. The greatest factor supporting the Salvadoran economy are the massive remittances send to families from Salvadorans living and working abroad. Estimates state that 2.5 to 3 million Salvadorans live abroad, primarily in the U.S. In 2004, expatriate Salvadorans sent 2.5 billion dollars to El Salvador. International estimates place 41.3 percent of Salvadoran households in poverty, while 16.7 percent are in extreme poverty. In rural areas, these figures are much higher: Over twenty-seven percent of the rural population is in extreme poverty within an overall rural poverty rate of over fifty-five percent. Although poverty figures decreased substantially during the 1990s, economic decisions after 2001 and the earthquakes of 2001 increased poverty rates which have been resistant to change. Forty percent of all public schools in the country reported moderate to severe damage from the 2001 earthquakes.

RESEARCH METHODS

The author's investigation of the Salvadoran educational reforms, in particular the EDUCO program, began in 1997 through analyses of international documents and through a series of four extended periods in the country in 1997, 1998, 1999, and in 2005. In addition to analysis of document studies conducted by the World Bank, the El Salvador's Ministry of Education (MINED), and the nongovernmental entity, Asociacion Intersectorial para el Desarrollo Economico y el Progreso Social (CIDEP), I conducted interviews with the National Director of the Education at MINED, the current

and most recent past Secretary Generals of the national teachers' association, EDUCO and official school directors (principals), EDUCO and official teachers, EDUCO parents from the Planta Nueva farming cooperative south of Nahuilzalco, and University of El Salvador education department faculty.

EDUCO

El Salvador's EDUCO program began in 1991 from state and local communities' efforts to create pre-school and basic education services in rural areas. El Salvador's twelve year long civil war, 1980-1992, generated violence, political polarization, severe infrastructure damage, and tremendous population migration within and outside the country. During the war, several rural communities had taken the initiative and organized basic education for their children, locally termed "popular education." Building on the existing popular education structure, MINED with financial support from the World Bank, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) developed the educational reform, EDUCO. By 1992, the World Bank had become the primary financial lender for the expanding EDUCO programs with the national government gradually assuming portions of the costs.

EDUCO is based on the creation, legalization and provision of support to local organizations involving parents (Asociaciones Comunales para la Educacion -ACE) which help develop new education services in their communities. The MINED situated the legal framework for the creation of the ACE's within existing laws to avoid legislative decision making. In EDUCO schools, the MINED transferred financing to the ACEs to hire teachers and purchase goods and services for their schools through regular accounts in a private bank, an innovative process that supported neo-liberal policies (Meza, Guzman, & De Varela, 2204, p.3).

In 1991, 263 ACEs participated; each hired a teacher, and 8,426 students benefited. In 2003, the program included over 2,000 ACEs and rural schools, 7,000 teachers and 362,000 students with the ACEs administering approximately 12 percent of the national education budget. Communities used existing local infrastructure (schools, community houses, or properties belonging to a community member) although in some cases, funds were channeled to the

community from the national ministry to build new classrooms with community participation. The EDUCO teachers are hired for one year periods are not permitted by ACEs and the MINED to become members of the national teachers' professional organization, *Asociación Nacional de Educadores de El Salvador (ANDES)*, as compared to teachers in public schools in the more urbanized areas of the nation. Prohibition of union membership for EDUCO teachers is an effort by MINED to limit the overall national percentage of teachers with union membership and to prevent union interference in the governance of the EDUCO schools. The MINED developed a financial administration program to ensure that legal requirements for the use of the public funds were met. The MINED program also included activities to promote, organize, legalize, train and monitor the ACE's and to train and support the local teachers. EDUCO's primary pedagogical strategies incorporated innovative practices such as multi grade classrooms and accelerated education for grades two to six. This flexibility of educational practices is in contrast to the official graded school structure found in urban areas. Adding or combining grades in response to demand, according to MINED, contributed to increased enrollment and retention and made more efficient use of teachers. (Interviews with Vice Minister, MINED and Secretary General, ANDES, 2/18/2005).

EDUCO also served as a catalyst for institutional changes in the MINED, beginning in 1999. With World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank funding, MINED reviewed its legal framework, reduced administrative staff, transformed three regional offices into 14 Departmental Offices, and created School Administration Boards (*Consejos Directivos Escolares – CDE*) in all public schools in the country. The CDEs integrate school directors, teachers, parents and students. Since 1997, the CDEs have managed financial resources that are transferred from the central level to the local board to purchase educational materials and equipment, and for maintenance and teacher training (Meza, Guzman, & De Varela, pp. 1-4).

Program evaluations indicated that community participation and parent engagement increased in EDUCO schools as compared to official schools. MINED (2001) reported that ACE members dedicate 1044 hours annually to their schools: "management training (200 hours), account management (16 hours), payment of teacher salaries and Social Security (96 hours), purchase of school consum-

able materials (72 hours), advisory consultations with school supervisors and district and regional coordinators (120 hours, community and ACE meeting and assemblies (180 hours), school visits and supervision (360 hours). Meza, Guzman, and De Varela (2004, 2) state that rural EDUCO communities have given and received value in various areas of local development:

- Transparent management of funds at the community level; improved teacher and students attendance (Sawada and Jimenez, 1998; Sawada, 1999);
- Supportive relations between teachers and parents;
- Parental presence in classrooms;
- Time after school and homework support for children;
- Community activities to improve school environments;
- Increased motivation of community members to benefit from literacy programs, parent education, and other adult education activities;
- New alliances with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and municipalities;
- Collaboration with existing development programs in health, water supply and other sectors.

As noted above, teachers in EDUCO schools have one year contracts and are not permitted by ACEs and MINED to become members of the national teachers' professional organization, ANDES. In 1992, ANDES led a broad teachers' strike throughout El Salvador. The national association pressed for increases in salaries and health benefits and opposed the educational reform, EDUCO, stating that EDUCO schools provided no job stability for teachers and undermined the national teachers' association. As part of the overall concessions to ANDES in 1992, EDUCO teachers do not receive the same salary increments that an official teacher receives for years of service. The MINED continues to press for this demand since they claim it is a main reason for the significant turnover of teachers in EDUCO schools.

In my interview with the Secretary General of ANDES, he stated additional reasons for ANDES opposition to the EDUCO schools. He described instances where the local politics of EDUCO ACE committees and their members created divisions in some local communities as one group accrued the additional power of hiring teachers and determining student placements. Since the local community is obligated to provide materials such as cleaning supplies

and building materials, EDUCO schools are generally of an inferior quality as compared to those built and inspected by the central government. Teachers are hired on a one year contract and can be let go at the end of school year, often to make way for a relative or friend of a committee member. In addition to the lack of job security, teachers are often paid irregularly and are not able to advocate for themselves lest they lose their jobs. (Interview, Secretary General, ANDES, 2/18/05). EDUCO programs have also resulted in sexist practices. Given their economic situations, ACE committees have had to choose not to hire women teachers who may become or are pregnant, because they did not have the resources to pay for substitute teachers.

World Bank documents and interviews with the National Director of Education at MINED reported substantial successes for the EDUCO programs in the provision of educational services to high-poverty rural communities, the decrease of teacher absenteeism, increased student attendance without compromising academic achievement, and significant increases in community participation (Meza, Guzman, & De Varela). Jimenez and Sawada (World Bank, 1998) presented analytical evidence that, after holding constant for EDUCO students' backgrounds and taking into account possible selection biases, the average performance of EDUCO and traditional students in official schools in achievement tests, was, in fact, the same. The success of the EDUCO program led to El Salvador's MINED receiving the World Bank Achievement Award for Excellence in 1997. Information on EDUCO and its outcomes have been disseminated to nations throughout Latin America and Africa. Guatemala and Honduras began programs based on El Salvador's EDUCO experiences in 1995 and 1997 respectively.

My interviews with parents who were members of the ACE which managed the EDUCO school, grades 1-6, on the farm cooperative in Planta Nueva supported the positive outcomes of EDUCO reported in official documents. Parents emphasized the benefits of the training they had received from national consultants on school finance and management and how this training had helped them operate their school efficiently and collaboratively. They stated that all council members had taken the parent training, had continual contact with the school, its teacher and the students in their farming community beyond the monthly ACE meetings, and participated in school classrooms and functions as they were able. They

reported, however, that the financial burden for procuring land for the school and the construction of the building fell totally on the cooperative and that they had to seek outside assistance to accomplish their goals, e.g., a non-governmental organization, the Institute for Co-operation Amongst Peoples purchased the land where the school building was erected. They concurred that financial assistance from MINED was too limited and were concerned that parents had to continue to pay school fees for individual school supplies for their children as well as the ongoing maintenance costs in spite of assurances by MINED that such individual schools fees would stop. With deteriorating economic conditions, some families were not able to pay the fees for all of their children to attend the school and had to decide which child would attend. The ACE and community supplied the daily needs of the school and provided school maintenance at their own cost since MINED monies covered primarily the salaries of the two teachers employed on yearly contracts by ACE. They also reported that it was difficult for them to obtain teachers since the school is in a remote area and the teachers had to rely on bus transportation.

I conducted separate interviews with EDUCO teachers, an EDUCO teacher-principal, teachers in what is termed, "official" or non-EDUCO schools, and a vice principal of an official school. Much of what I learned from these teachers corroborated the information the ANDES Secretary Generals provided to me. In one group interview with three EDUCO teachers and one EDUCO teacher-principal, one of the teachers commented that if "it were known that we were meeting here in a group to discuss critically this program, we would be called terrorists" (Interview, 2/20/05), a chilling indication of their fear of the consequences of dissent in El Salvador. In each interview, the importance of education for rural children and communities was emphasized. However, teachers consistently reported that materials and supplies in EDUCO schools were in short supply; the classes were overcrowded and often held in poorly constructed, poorly ventilated buildings; and that in many cases, teachers had to wait several months to be paid for their work. The cause of the late payments for salary was often due to delays in the receipt of monies from MINED, but the teachers also reported that a few of ACE committees had paid teachers late to assert their power over the school finances. The teacher-principal reported on the extra duties that she had acquired as an administrator, a job

done without any additional pay. All reported that the lack of job security that came with one year contracts made it difficult for them to refuse duties or to complain about school situations. They stated that such complaints could lead to firings or non renewals of their contracts. One teacher reported that the politics of the ACE for her community influenced the hiring of teachers and had led to the release of a very good teacher so the council could hire the relative of a member. All teachers agreed that working in an official school provided job stability and increased salary increments and thus, EDUCO teachers left EDUCO for official positions if and when the opportunity arose.

ANDES, the national teachers union, has maintained consistent opposition to the EDUCO programs since their inception. The organization held three national strikes against the government's efforts to expand the ECUCO programs and to privatize middle level schools. A serious 1990 hunger strike by teachers effectively halted the privatization of public middle level schools in El Salvador, but none of the teacher organization strikes or political actions were able to halt the expansion of EDUCO programs, which the national government has projected to 50 percent of the nation's basic education schools. The Minister of Education, Darlyn Mesa, worked for the MINED since 1990 on the EDUCO programs and also worked as a consultant with the World Bank. ANDES has continued to maintain that EDUCO teachers should be covered by the national laws for teachers including the same job security rights and rights of transfer as official teachers. As previously reported, EDUCO teachers are not permitted to become members of ANDES and as stated by the ANDES Secretary General, they are not allowed to become members of the FMLN party. The Secretary General of ANDES also reported that in a majority of cases, the ACEs are composed of parents and community members who can not read or write. He also stated that the ACEs hire teachers who are newly graduated from the private higher education schools and who lack pedagogical preparation. He also claimed that in some communities, teaching positions in EDUCO schools were bought by individuals, either through one initial payment or through the payment of three or four increments to the school (Interview, 2/18/05).

CONCLUSIONS

The EDUCO educational reform initiated by a series of national policies must be understood within the context of a globalizing world that is as much shaped by the electronic transfer of money from corporate centers and supranational banks as it is by the electronic interchanges via internet in local cybercafés or via cell phone text messaging. As Carnoy noted, "globalization means that a nation's investment, production, and innovation are not limited by national borders. Everything, including relations among family and friends, is rapidly becoming organized around a more compressed view of space and time" (1999, p. 13). In a globalized world, knowledge is a basic, fundamental element. Therefore, globalization has a profound impact on the transmission of knowledge via formal or informal education and on the organization of work worldwide. Human capital enhanced through knowledge and skill acquisition becomes a vital commodity in the economic production and competitiveness of a nation. In the globalized world that commenced in the 1980s, a nation's investment in education became dominated by economic purposes, conditions, and production (Castells, 1997; Carnoy, 2000; Spring, 1998).

EDUCO is one manifestation of the Salvadoran national government's efforts to implement legislation, policies, and program that align with an overarching neo-liberal, economic agenda that champions a free market economy, free trade, privatization, deregulation, and the reduction of public expenditures for social services. In El Salvador, the neoliberal policies of the government are openly called by officials and citizens, "The Iron Fist," and are justified as needed to modernize the economy and improve the quality of life for the people of El Salvador. The United States government, international corporations, and the World Bank have supported these efforts financially and politically. These supranational and national economic forces impact education reforms such as the EDUCO programs through policies and acts that encode within the overall system of education the standardization of knowledge and international assessment of educational outcomes; the decentralization of decision making to increase local control over the finance and management of schools, the reduction or elimination of the power of the educational bureaucracy and teacher organizations over curriculum, delivery, and school finance; the maximization of public expenditures on education or in common parlance "getting the

most bang for the public's buck" by using public monies to boost achievement at the basic levels of education and by encouraging or supporting privatization at the secondary or high levels of education.

As the top free market economy in Latin American, El Salvador was governed since 1989 nationally by the ultra right conservative ARENA party. As a developing country, it has had access to the loans of the World Bank for educational reform since 1990, and accompanying these loans was the market economy, neo-liberal ideology of such supranational lending agencies like the World Bank and the IMF, agencies which have no national requirements for budget transparency (Desmond, 2000). The destruction of the educational infrastructure; particularly, in rural, high poverty areas, as a result of the 12 year civil war, and the rise of a structure of population education in the rural areas during the war enhanced the opportunity for the national government and education system under the auspices of the World Bank to introduce and implement neo-liberal educational reforms such as the major decentralization of educational decision making for finances and management as found in the EDUCO programs. The national teacher organization, ANDES, vehemently opposed the EDUCO reforms, but the organization had suffered significant human losses in the civil war due to their alliance with the FMLN, and was overpowered by the political and military clout of the ARENA government after the war. In El Salvador, the conditions for decentralization of educational decision making to the local community were optimal. In addition, the rural communities were demanding national support for new or existing schools. In addition, the increasing number of teachers prepared through private institutions of higher education which were incorporated through the 1990s also created a supply of teachers who were willing to accept EDUCO positions in spite of their lack of job security because they were unable to find employment in the diminished number of positions in the official, suburban or urban schools.

Interviews with parents and community members support the government's claims that the decentralization of decision making in the EDUCO schools granted more democratic power for decision making to local communities and to parents. The EDUCO programs have legislated and implemented a strong structure for parent and community engagement and agency as defined by Calabrese et al

(2004). As documented in the observations and interviews of parents and community members at the farm cooperative in Planta Nueva, parents and community are engaged decision makers in the management, operation and finances of their local schools. The ACEs determine the hiring and firing of teachers and supply the resources for the school with varying amounts of financial support from MINED. The decision making of these schools is reminiscent of the school committees that were extant in the rural education and district schools of nineteenth century United States public education. Local decision making is limited to the management and some of the financing of the EDUCO schools, since MINED controls the curriculum via national standards, textbook selections, and national assessments and provides teacher training for pedagogical methods used by teachers. In EDUCO schools, teachers have limited decision making power over instructional delivery and are dependent on the ACEs for hiring and job security.

The provisions for parent involvement and/or engagement within the educational reform have produced the semblance of local democracy. EDUCO's structure for local community-school decision making places authority for the decisions regarding the local school in the locally-elected ACE committee and at a level closest to the community population utilizing the school. If democracy is defined simply as "the opportunity for participation and dissent" (Leistnya, 1999, p. 45), then the conditions for "participation" exist within the ACE structure as documented by the author in the responses of ACE committee members interviewed, but the opportunity for dissent is limited to the governing council of parents within the governmental structure of the EDUCO plan, and non-existent for teachers in EDUCO schools. Adult participation in this community-based democratic process models democratic practices for the cooperative's children and may influence their own future participation in community governance. However, if the ACE process is similar to the conclusions of the extensive literature on U.S. school board democratic representation (McCarty, 1971; Lutz), actual democratic participation and dissent in the ACEs may be constrained.

As Dewey argued, democratic forms such as local school council elections have also brought about conditions that halt the social and humane ideals of the "public" since the tremendous economic power of the international organizations and corporations that

have created such programs as EDUCO and the undemocratic lack of transparency in the governance of these entities heavily overshadow the thin layer of democracy that comes with the publicly elected councils. EDUCO is a neo-liberal finance driven reform that reduces the cost of basic schooling at the national level and imposes some of the costs of maintaining the school and payment for supplies on the local community whereas historically this financial responsibility was borne by the Ministry of Education. EDUCO has brought basic public education to many very low income rural areas, but increasingly, the costs of schooling are pushed into the private sector to parents and communities who can ill afford the costs of schooling. These nascent forms of local democratic participation have also created opportunities for council members to favor one group of parents over another in the community or in the case of Planta Nueva, in a farming cooperative that owns the community's land jointly. The rule of the majority in the operation of the schools has, at times, developed factions that have undermined the sense of the whole community.

Similar to the conclusions of Carvalho and Jeria (1999) in their study of parent councils in Brazil and Chile, the paradigm of democratic school management implemented through EDUCO is "only tacit and promising" and has been more "a conquest of teachers than of parents" (p.7). As Weiner (2005) has maintained, neo-liberal educational policies have an agenda that includes a major assault of teacher power and teacher unions. In El Salvador, the national teachers union, ANDES, recognizing this effect from the inception of the EDUCO reform, has strongly opposed it and the Ministry's efforts to expand EDUCO schools into urban areas. However, the toll of the Salvadoran Civil War on its membership and the dominance of the ARENA party in national elections since the 1992 Peace Accords have drained resources and power from the union. EDUCO teachers interviewed in this study are clearly aware of the policies and practices of the EDUCO program and when and if possible, become teachers in the "official" education system where job security and salaries are guaranteed. EDUCO's assault on teacher power in the name of local democracy is a national effort to reduce the economic and political status of teachers in El Salvador and to diminish the power of ANDES. Teachers and the union have been a strong source of political resistance to the puppet government of El Salvador through the 1970s and a challenge to the ultra right ARE-

NA government supported by the United States during the Civil War. While EDUCO's policies serve the larger international effort of neo-liberal organizations to reduce the overall power of unions worldwide, in El Salvador the conquest of the union has also meant less political resistance to the ARENA government. With the newly elected FMLN national government in 2009, conditions of the EDUCO programs may change. The new Vice President, Sanchez Ceren, is a FMLN leader and former teacher and is the new Minister of Education for El Salvador. He has stated that EDUCO will be studied and evaluated.

In his presidential address to the Comparative and International Society, "Education, Democratization, and Globalization: A Challenge for Comparative Education, McGinn (1996) raised serious questions about the effects of globalization on democracy and the role of education in the development of democracy. He contended that the definition of democracy has been tainted by globalization and that "democracy, [as touted by powerful nations] is the free market plus capitalism and that democracy's growth is to be measured by the increase of private wealth" (p.341). He maintained that globalization weakened the effectiveness of institutions for democratic government in at least three ways: 1) the rise and growth of transnational corporations and banks as well as supranational organizations has reduced the sovereignty of the most powerful nation-states, 2) roving capital's demand for a skilled workforce regardless of national borders has placed the primary purpose of public education as economic production, and 3) community-based sources of learning have diminished and are replaced by sources outside the community such as television, the Internet, and internationally standardized curriculum (pp. 349-351).

In conclusion, the EDUCO reforms created and have sustained local democratic participation in schools through increased parental engagement and local decision making but have contributed to a reduction of citizens' democratic participation in the larger national and global arena where political parties and supranational lending agencies determine policies. As small, democratic trees, the EDUCO schools are operating in a large forest managed by anti-democratic, globalized forces whose harvest has been cheap basic education and compliant local teachers.

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