Documenting Picture Our World
CMNS Honours Project

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Documenting Picture Our World - Project Rationale
Picture Our World - A Documentary - Script
Picture Our World - A Documentary Film – 22 minutes

Documenting Picture Our World:

**A Literature Review on Children and Globalization
and the Rationale Behind the Picture Our World Project**

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Introduction:

Picture Our World is a project created by university students giving cameras to children in order to communicate cross-culturally through photography, empowering its participants to be empathetic global citizens. This paper will present the rationale behind the Picture Our World project and suggest why its story should be told through a documentary film. This rationale will be contextualized through a study of globalizations affects on children. I will present a literature review of the work done to date on this subject demonstrating that the Picture Our World project is both unique and important in its processes and aims.

Literature Review:

A framework for Globalization study

Manfred Steger describes globalization as an "unpresidentented compression of time and space reflected in the tremendous intensification of social, political, economic and cultural interconnectedness and interdependencies on a global scale (Steger, 2002, p. ix)." I feel that this definition of globalization is as good as any because it highlights the many facets of globalization that are worthy of analysis. Steger's definition also suggests that a multidisciplinary approach is important when studying the phenomenon of globalization. This kind of approach is used by Irene Rizzini and Natalie Hevener Kauffman who co-edited a book entitled *Globalization and Children* (2002) which is one of few published works that explores the relationship between globalization and children in-depth. The editors' backgrounds are in the sociology of childhood, however they present articles from political science, law, economics, and communication disciplines. My analysis, although grounded in the communication discipline, will similarly interject

other disciplinary insights in order to provide a more holistic understanding of globalization's effects on children.

Globalization and children

Globalization has profound impacts on children both in the global North and South. Irene Rizzini, one of the foremost researchers on the subject, notes that the changes to the economic, political, and social institutions brought on by globalization are "affecting the everyday context in which children grow up and interact with the rest of society (Rizzini, 2002, p. 371)". She goes on to suggest that the impacts of globalization on children are "normative" (Rizzini, 2002). This implies the importance of studying globalization from a child's perspective in the social sciences, something that appears to be grossly lacking (Langer, 2004). There is, however, a small body of work that I will discuss.

Implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Most of the relevant literature starts by making reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) from 1989. Kauffman and Rizzini (2002) note that the consensus around the rights of the child through the CRC:

Has great potential for supporting the work of child advocates, including children and youth themselves. The CRC lays out clear state and local responsibilities for respecting the rights of the child and advancing child well-being. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, especially through its monitoring of state efforts to implement the CRC, can play an important role in stimulating domestic debate and fostering domestic as well as international work on behalf of children and youth (Kauffman and Rizzini, 2002, p. 163).

It may be true that the CRC has brought children's rights into the international discourse but there are many who find fault with the legislation, noting that the CRC has been difficult to impliment for several reasons. One reason is that children's rights legislation has shifted from special protection intrinsic to children to more generally stated recommendations designed to harmonize it within broader international human rights legislation (Burman, 1996). This means not only that children lack the special protections they need but also that the general terms used are harder to interpret and implement. As James puts it, "children's every day lives are, at the same time, at risk of being increasingly controlled and constrained under the banner of 'children's best interests' (James, 2002, p. xiv). She suggests, in a political economy tone, that she is trying to discover "how those interests are being defined, by whom and for whom on a global scale (James, 2002, p. xiv). Finally perhaps the greatest threat to implementing the CRC are international agreements on the economic front which have done a great deal more damage than good on the lives of children.

Economic Challenges

One of the main tenants of globalization is its macro-economic strategies of trade liberalization and neo-liberal budgetary restrictions. This economic system has created changes that affect children in many ways both directly and indirectly. Those who advocate neo-liberalism argue that "a rising tide will lift all boats" and there is evidence that some countries with rising GDPs have improved their health care and education for children (Kauffman, Rizzini, Wilson & Bush, 2002). However, these examples are the exception and not the norm for most of the world's children. One of the main impacts of neo-liberalism has been a widening gap between the rich and poor. This gap exists both

on a national and international level (Penn, 2002). The World Bank gives some examples:

> Life expectancy in Sub-Saharan Africa is 50 years, and in Japan it is almost 80. Mortality among children under five in South Asia exceeds 170 deaths per thousand, while in Sweden it is below 10 per thousand. Over 110 million children in low-wealth nations lack access to primary education, while almost universal enrollment is the norm in industrialized countries (cited in Kauffman et al., 2002, p. 9).

Ironically many neo-liberal critics point out that it is the World Bank and IMF themselves who are largely to blame for many of these statistics. This is because loans given to the South are loaded with conditions that handcuff state governments from spending in the social sectors of health and education that are so crucial to children (Penn, 2002) (Kauffman et al., 2002) (Lewis, 2005). This atrocity on children is only compounded in places such as Sub-Saharan Africa where the AIDS epidemic is infecting 1 in 4 children (Lewis, 2005) (Penn, 2002). In her scathing rebuke of the World Bank Helen Penn (2002) suggests that the Jubilee 2000 coalition has estimated that globally 7 million children die unnecessarily each year. She ads that many children that survive will have limited and decreasing access to education and health care. Penn goes on to point out how the World Bank justifies their hypocrisy through participating in early childhood development ECD programs along the lines of those suggested by the CRC.

> The World Bank is similarly able to use the configuration of the innocent individual child, whose brain will be fed, nutritionally and cognitively, by ECD programmes modeled on the USA. In this way the World Bank and its satellite

donor agencies avoid confronting the gross harm that is being done to the children of the poor in the South by neoliberal policies, and the failure to address debt relief.

Part in parcel to these economic challenges facing children as a result of globalization there are challenges posed by migration, rapid urbanization and war (Kauffman et al., 2002).

Cultural Challenges

Another profound impact of globalization on the lives of children is in the realm of culture. While phenomenon like migration have obvious effects on children's understanding of culture the proliferation of new communications technologies and media has perhaps the most wide reaching effect. While a majority of the research that has been done on children and communications technologies has focused on the effects of violence in television and movies there has been some research on the effects of media as it pertains to children's understanding of culture. Much of this research has focused on the commodification of children. Sara Grimes and Leslie Regan-Shade (2005) note that market researchers have estimated the value of the Canadian 'tween' market at $1.8 billion CDN annually, including direct purchasing power as well as their influence over family purchases. This has led producers of children's content to ensure that the cultural understanding of children changes to one seen through the lens of the market (Seabrook, 1998). Kapur (cited in Grimes & Regan-Shade, 2005, p. 187) reiterates this point:

> Contemporary notions about children are the result of deliberate efforts by industry forces and the commercial media to 'transform the twentieth-century notion of children as innocents in need of protection to one of children as sovereign, playful, thinking consumers'.

The danger of this modality for children is that as these values which Cook dubs the 'ethos of acquisition for acquisition's sake' (cited in Grimes & Regan-Shade, 2005) will limit children's participation in cultural activities beyond the marketplace. Jeremy Seabrook eloquently summarizes the outcomes of child commodification:

> In this 'kinderland' is forged the patriotism of brand loyalties for life, commitment to consumption patterns that are built into their view of the world, the creation of lifestyles which eclipse and cancel all other options. The 'empowerment' of children in this way is actually an intensified violence against the resources of the earth, against their own future, and against the millions of children in the world who die each year from avoidable sickness, malnutrition-related or water-borne diseases. This extension of consumer freedoms in a world from which all other choices have been excluded will, in due course, collide with the future it has already used up (Seabrook, 1998, p. 44).

One key point from Seabrook's assessment is the interconnectedness of this new consumer culture with global situations including poverty in the South and the environment. Furthermore, while the commodification of children is mainly a phenomenon in the North its values are being transmitted to the South via communications technologies. "The development of global communications gives a competitive cultural advantage to those few countries with highly developed communications industries and hence heavily affects the influence to which children will be exposed (Kauffman et al., 2002, p. 4)."

Solutions

Thus far I have shown that the literature paints a bleak picture of childhood in the era of globalization, however, one reoccurrence in almost all of the texts provides hopes

and is of especial relevance to my project. This reoccurrence is the admonition that children be given a voice in every aspect of globalization that affects their lives. Limber and Kauffman (2002) point out that the CRC itself provides for participation by children in Articles 12,13,14 and 15. The authors go on to state: "Encouraging children to express their opinions and feelings about their own lives and events in their world and to participate actively in the world around them signals a respect for children as human beings (Limber & Kauffman, 2002, p. 85)." This kind of participation then must differ greatly from the model of children as consumers. One example of this kind of participation is given by Sara Cameron (2000) she describes a UNICEF backed program in war torn Columbia where children initiated and worked on peacemaking through playing with children from rival groups. Another example is found in research done by Howard and Gill (2001) in which they asked children "what it means to be Australian" in light of increased immigration and outside global influences. In another example the government of New Zealand actually organized a consultation asking children and young people to give their views on their conditions (Rizzini, 2002). The striking thing about these examples is their simplicity, yet the impact of letting children's voices be heard can be life changing. For example Limber and Kauffman (2002) point to study results that suggest: Open and parliamentary classroom climates promote civic knowledge and engagement; participation in group civic activities give valuable experience in decision making, working effectively towards common goals, problem solving and solidarity; political participation may lead a child to develop more sensitivity to the problems and needs of others; and participation as children may lead to lifelong patterns of engagement in political and civic activity. Weithorn (cited in Limber & Kauffman, 2002, p. 85-86)

adds:

> "To enable children to stand up for themselves, for others, and to those who
> will try to influence them, we must help them develop their dignity and self
> worth…in general, age appropriate participation in decisions that affect
> children is likely to help them feel that they can positively influence their own
> lives and those of their families and communities".

Picture Our World

Against the backdrop of the literature review I have just presented I will now present the story of Picture Our World (POW) demonstrating how POW fits into the literature on children's role in globalization.

POW is a grassroots organization created by communication students at Simon Fraser University which aims to bring children of different cultures into dialogue through the visual communication of photography. Thus far POW has conducted one pilot project which included two classrooms of students from elementary school students - one in Vancouver, Canada and one in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The project involved teaching children how to use photography as a medium of communication in order to express their lives across cultural and economic barriers. Thus the POW project fits into the aforementioned notions of children participating in a dialogue about what their life is like in a globalized world. The project included photography and cultural workshops for one week. The children then took photos that expressed "what it's like to be me". Next the photos were exchanged between the two classrooms and were also shown in a photo exhibition open to the public. Finally in the last stage of this pilot project I will be telling

the story of the project through a documentary film with footage that was taken in the classrooms and at the photo exhibition

The classrooms for the pilot project were selected because of their socio economic proximity. One school was located in a low income East Vancouver neighborhood and another in a "slum" area in Buenos Aires. Admittedly the level of economic disparity between a low income area in Vancouver and one in Buenos Aires is great but the goal was to give voice to children who may have difficulty getting their voices heard both internationally and within their own states due to socio economic reasons. The cameras were purchased for the children through outside fundraising mostly through the university community. This is counter to the global norms of children with the economic means ie. internet access, telephones, cameras, being the ones able to participate (even if it is in meager ways) in the international dialogue.

Within the classroom the children's activities included learning about the opposite countries, however, they were encouraged to imagine what life was like in the opposite country based upon their own imaginations. This way the children were able to use their own intuition and interpretive skills to try to relate to the opposite child's culture. These understandings were often changed drastically once the pictures had been exchanged. Thus the children were able to create their own dialogue about what childhood was like for themselves as well as what it is like in another country. One memorable quote on the I will use in the documentary is from a girl in the Vancouver classroom who says "it [POW] will teach us a lot about Argentina and a lot about ourselves too." This coincides with the previously mentioned suggestion that participation by children in civic/political

activities may instill a better sense of self and lead them to be more empathetic towards others (Limber and Kauffman, 2002).

In conclusion, as a completion of the pilot project of POW I will be producing and editing a 22-minute (television length) documentary. This documentary will allow supporters of the project to see the process in action. The documentary will also be used to enable continuation of the POW project. Screenings of the documentary will be held with the aim of having it broadcast on television. This will spread awareness of Picture Our World and will encourage others to enact similar projects through the organizations facilitation. Film footage will also be made available on the Picture Our World website as a further means of promotion. In order to coalesce the film within the efforts of the project the film will be seen from the children's perspectives using interviews and classroom footage of the participants. Ultimately the documentary should be read as a tool to create awareness of the necessity of including and listening to children's voices in the discourse and decisions of globalization.

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