

**Abstract:**

**Singapore's "global assemblage":  
Digging into the culture of education policy making**

As a meta-concept, "globalization" has the tendency to create master categories such as an emergent global/izing education policy. This paper critiques the thinking and assumptions that underpins a global education policy. The paper proposes that "global assemblage" is a more helpful conceptual thinking about the way education policy works in globalizing circumstances. Conceptually, the notion of an assemblage helps us to re-conceive global forms not as a totalizing external force but as an element that works in combination with other heterogeneous elements in local situations and contexts. Aspects of Singapore's education policy landscape are analyzed as part of Singapore's "global assemblage" to reveal a culture of education policy making that is constituted by heterogeneous elements such as global techniques, situated politics and ethics.

## *Introduction*

In a recent interview with CNN to mark its 30th anniversary, Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong reflected on what he would have done to prepare Singaporeans for globalization. He said that had he knew the accelerated pace and impact globalization has on Singapore, he would have started preparing Singaporeans five or ten years earlier for the challenges of globalization. He also said that he would have pumped in more resources, in education and training, "to help workers upgrade and train for an era in which knowledge is "absolutely critical""(Li & Chew, 2010).

This national/local response to globalization speaks of a new social imaginary that treats globalization as a "problem space" (Collier & Ong, 2005; Koh, 2010) where the state does not wither out but urgently takes on as its prerogatives to assemble a range of multifold tactics to deal with the problems, challenges, fears and anxieties that globalization brings. Indeed from this excerpt, the official/state narrative on globalization is that the unpredictability (read: "problem space") of globalization can be combated with "preparation" in the form of more "education and training" as the "solutions". Of course, it is also a narrative about the capability of the Peoples' Action Party (hereafter PAP) government – the dominant one party hegemon, who has been in power since 1959 and whose legendary performance of leading Singapore to triumph over several rounds of economic and financial downturns has earned the confidence from the Singaporean populace for its legitimacy to rule.

My purpose in narrating this seemingly success story of how one small city-state manages globalization is not to partake in some celebratory proclamations of the globalization story of Singapore or to suggest Singapore as *a* "model" for globalization. Rather, it is to signal to a larger argument that this article takes, and that is to return to the "national/local" to understand globalization, as Jane Kenway and Johannah Fahey (2009) have also argued, "globalization cannot be fully understood without taking the complex architecture of the nation state, the nation state apparatus, and the sub-national into consideration" (p.115). While I am consciously aware that to evoke the "national"/"local" seems a spurious re-route to the conceptual "global"/"local" binary that has dominated much discussion in the globalization literature, I clarify here that my argument of a return to the "national/local" is a nuanced uptake of Stephen Collier and Aihwa Ong's (2005) notion of "global assemblage" where the state is instrumental in orchestrating an assemblage of heterogeneous elements such as global techniques, situated politics and ethics (Ong, 2009) to engage with the global (in all its manifestations).

There are sufficient accounts of “local”/“national” education systems that indigenize their national education agenda despite the transnational pressures created by a globalizing policy field (see for example, Ozga & Lingard, 2007; Arnott & Ozga, 2010). Yet these accounts are largely coming out of Anglo Saxon contexts; they have little to say about the place of Asia in the debate on an emergent global/izing education policy although “Asia” itself is not a homogeneous geographical entity. This paper therefore situates a contextual analysis of Singapore’s education policy terrain within the broader debate around an emergent global policy field in education with a view to shed light on the *culture* of education policy making in globalizing circumstances.

This analysis is, however, of interest beyond the specific case of Singapore for two reasons. Firstly, the Singapore case suggests that a close-up analysis of (any) national education systems for their policies and practices cannot sidestep the embedded culture, histories and place-based politics even if it appears that the national education system analyzed contain semblances of a “global format”. Secondly, the use of “global assemblage” as a conceptual tool shifts attention away from a deadlock discussion of globalizing education policy in terms of the global/local binary that has dominated much of the scholarship on global education policy studies. This theoretical insight further offers an analysis that is reflexive, always mindful of *situated* mediations, decisions and practices (Ong, 2009).

The first part of this paper reviews literatures that make mention of an emergent globalizing education policy with a view to critique it. I argue that the notion of an emergent globalizing education policy is an example of a master category that is often associated with “globalization”. As a master category, it has the tendency to limit us to think of global/izing education policy in uncritical and familiar ways. The second part proposes that “global assemblage” is a more helpful conceptual thinking about the way education policy works in globalizing circumstances. The third part analyses aspects of Singapore’s education policy landscape to reveal a culture of education policy making that is constituted by a heterogeneous element of global techniques, situated politics and ethics.

### *The shadows of an emergent global/izing education policy*

In an interview on the topic “Globalizing the Research Imagination” (see Kenway and Fahey, 2009) Saskia Sassen (2009) remarked that as a meta concept, “globalization” has the tendency to produce master categories that produce shadows and penumbra around themselves that occlude clarity and the power to illuminate. An emergent global/izing education policy is an example of a master category that is produced in the recent literature on globalization of education policy.

That education policy takes after a “global” format is a reminder of earlier accounts of the thesis of homogenization/Americanization of culture when globalization became a popular phenomenon that caught the imagination of many in academic debate. This was of course heavily critiqued by sociologists and anthropologists (see Robertson, 1992; 1995; Turner & Khondker, 2010). James Watson’s (1997) seminal work on the ethnographic study of McDonalds in East Asia, for instance, critically interrogated the production and consumption of McDonalds that was thought to be “uniform”. This homogenization thesis is itself an example of a master category of “globalization” which limits people to see the familiar rather than the complex shadows and messy terrain of local uptake of a cultural form. This argument, though not new now, can similarly be extended to the formation of a global/izing education policy.

A familiar thinking around the conception of a global/izing education policy, and a rather simplistic one I would argue, is that national education systems are re-formatting their education systems according to an emerging “global” format. The idea is that the dislocating processes of globalization has shaken out nationally organized education systems as they come to grips with a global economy that demands a set of skills different from the old industrial model of schooling. Jenny Ozga and Bob Lingard (2007, p.70) explain it in this way:

globalization foregrounds education in specific ways that attempt to harness education systems to the rapid and competitive growth and transmission of technologies and knowledge linked to the national competitiveness of nations within the global economy

The World Bank (2002), for instance, identified essential skills and dispositions such as creativity, flexibility, innovation and entrepreneurship as the new human capital requirements for the new globalized economies. Schools and educational systems have therefore urgently jumped onto the bandwagon of education reform to re-align their missions and curricular to cultivate in students these core skills and dispositions for a globalized economy. In terms of curricular and offerings, we see common trends and patterns of a renewed emphasis on the teaching of creative/critical thinking skills, experiential learning that promotes applied knowledge, and cooperative learning that fosters team-work, *inter-alia*.

Andy Green’s (1999) contextual analysis of the impact of globalization on education in Europe and East Asia, for example, revealed that policy convergence has indeed become increasingly similar over time especially in educational contents and the rhetoric that shaped policy discourse, objectives and educational outcomes. Yet this study also pointed out

variations in uptake of policy structures and processes in different countries where he observed that “the structures of national systems are fundamentally determined by national differences in industrial structures and labour markets arrangements, in political traditions and institutions, and in cultures of citizenship and knowledge” (p.61). Although Green’s study was conducted in the late 1990s, I find his account of the policy convergence/divergence trend in the countries studied applicable to the current debate on global/izing education policy. Of significance in Green’s study, though not explicitly stated is that there are *culture specific* ways of national education policy making in globalizing circumstances – this is an argument that I will later take up again in my analysis of Singapore’s education policy making.

An emergent global/izing education policy terrain needs to be understood in *unfamiliar* ways through new theoretical lens. Bob Lingard and et al. (2005) provide an illuminating take on the conception of what they call “an emergent world or global field of education policy” (p.759). Drawing on Bourdieu’s work, they theorize education policy as a “social space, a field of forces”, where it is shaped at multiple levels and agencies beyond the “national”. In other words, the “national” is no longer the only reference point in matters of education policy formation; “the context of education policy production involves a complex rescaling across the local, regional, national and the global” (Rivzi and Lingard, 2010, p.15). Supra-national agencies such as the World Bank, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and UNESCO are also the “global” players that are exerting influence on the emergent global/izing education policy formation (Lingard, 2000; see also Henry et al., 2001). By reconceptualizing the emergent global/izing education policy as a “field”, Lingard and et al. make us see in unfamiliar ways the way in which education policy as a “field” is a fluid terrain shaped by competing forces, where various actors also struggle to transform the field.

As a master category, it is easy to overlook the underside (read: shadows) of a global/izing education policy. By “underside” I am referring to the way in which the emergent global/izing education policy field has been turned into a “global space of measurement” (Lingard, 2010, p.132) where international comparisons in the form of performance league tables in subject areas such as Literacy, Maths and Science are instituted. This “global” comparison of performance sucks a nation into a global competition of some sort as it compares itself against others to see where it sits within a global field of comparison and also to give it a measure of its potential global economic competitiveness (Rivzi and Lingard, 2010). Of course, the active role of “globalising agency” such as the OECD has been influential in steering such international comparisons (Henry et al., 2001, p.3). Therefore it would be naïve to think of a global/izing education policy field as a study of

education trends, where convergences in education patterns are mapped out. This is a familiar thinking that masks a global “policyscape” as an ideological formation where powerful players (such as the OECD, World Bank and UNESCO) are competing to have its influence to privilege a neoliberal education agenda in education reform (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010).

We also need to look beyond the shadows cast by a global/izing education policy terrain and bring to *light* (pun intended) some of its conceptual limitations. Firstly, the global/local trope is still very much invoked in the discussion and debate about the global/izing education policy field, sometimes with the narrative of the global privileging over the narrative of the local. The example of the narrative of a homogenizing “global format” that comes through a global/izing education field is one. Furthermore such a binary thinking narrowly views “globalization” as the only cause to educational change when in reality there can be an array of complex factors that motivate education reform and policy practices.

Secondly, one criticism directed at the conception of a global/izing policy field is that the national is sometimes left out of the picture. Bob Lingard (2000), and Jenny Ozga and Lingard (2007), for example, borrowed Appaduria’s (1996) concept of “vernacular globalization” as an analytical insight to argue that a nuanced understanding of a global education policy must sit alongside an understanding of the shaping of education policy as “(a) mix of (local) history, politics, global pressures and local aspirations” (Ozga and Lingard, 2007, p.75). This argument while valid is nevertheless an argument that still revolves around the global/local binary. As such, I do not think we have moved much out of the “glocalization” debate a term first coined by sociologist, Roland Robertson (1992, 1995) when he began to talk about the complex intermingling of the global and the local. Conceptually while the vernacularization of education policy suggests the engagement of the local in global education policy, what it does not say however is that “the global” sometimes have to work against a culture specific local/national ideology – the kind of place-based politics and knowledge that interacts with the flows of global policy practices. This is why I argue that we need to dig inside the national, inside the local (Sassen, 2009) in order to understand how the Singapore state mobilizes education policy to prepare for globalization.

In the next section, I explain the conceptual usefulness of Collier and Ong’s (2005) term “global assemblage” as a point of departure from the debate about an emerging global/izing education policy which I argued is unproductively locked in the global/local binary. Conceptually, the notion of an assemblage helps us to re-conceive global forms not as a totalizing external force but as an element that works in combination with other heterogeneous elements in local situations and contexts. I will then unpack the constituting heterogeneous elements of Singapore’s “global assemblage”.

### *Singapore's "global assemblage"*

As anthropologists, Collier and Ong (2005) did not name "education policy" as an example of "global assemblages", but they identified "bioscience", "accounting" and "finance" as examples of global forms that become "anthropological problems" when they are formulated and reformulated in specific situations. These global forms become "territorialized in assemblages" and "they define new material, collective, and discursive relationship" (p.4). They do not exist in decontextualised spaces, but interact with the "actual global" within a space of assemblage. In this regard, an emergent global education policy is also an example of a global form. But Collier and Ong's conceptualization of global assemblage lends a new perspective that helps us see an emergent global education policy not as a standalone "global form" that asserts uniform pressure on local national education system; rather, it is perceived as part of an assemblage that national education systems put together with other elements to deal with the shifting contingencies and demands of globalization.

Because "assemblage" is an operative word in Collier and Ong's conception of "global assemblages", there is a need to explain the conceptual meaning of this term. Deleuze and Guattari use "assemblage" in their work to refer to "the play of contingency and structure, organization and change" (Wise, 2005, p.77). Put simply, "assemblage" is a machinery of ideas, tactics and practices assembled to deal with a problem at a historical time and contextual moment. As a conceptual metaphor, "assemblage" adds to our understanding of the volatile nature of education policy formation, which has to be assembled and reassembled from time to time depending on what problems are at stake at a given historical time. What needs to be pointed out is that an assemblage is made up of "a collection of heterogeneous elements" (Wise, 2005, p.78) derived from the surroundings and contexts. This is why conceptually in terms of global education policy analysis "global assemblage" foregrounds the importance of taking into consideration place-based knowledge and a culture specific reading and analysis of national education systems for their policies and practices.

The composite of "global" and "assemblage" suggests that global forms exist in relation to an assemblage of elements tied to the "national". There is, however, an inherent tension in the composite concept in that "global" suggests all things mobile, encompassing and seamless whereas "assemblage" implies contingent, unstable, partial, heterogeneous and situated" (Collier & Ong, 2005, p.12). What all this means is that a global assemblage "points to the fact that different constellations of relationships create situated conditions of possibility" (Ong, 2009, p.93). Global assemblage therefore draws analytic attention to the "situated interactions, decisions and practices... to account for the heterogeneity of outcomes

that issue from entanglements with global flows” (Ong, 2009, p.89). Herein, lies the conceptual usefulness of “global assemblage”. It contributes to an understanding and analysis of global education policy that is always reflexive, mindful of “the interplay of global forms, politics and ethical regimes” (Ong, 2009, p.89).

I move on now to discuss the distinctive characteristics of Singapore’s “global assemblage”. While Ong and Collier (2005, p.12) say that “an assemblage is the product of multiple determination that are not reducible to a single logic”, the space for assemblage in Singapore, I argue is, on the contrary, motivated by an enduring logic of an ideology of survival and pragmatism (cf. Chan, 1971; Chua, 1995). In a major study on the Singapore state and the paradoxes surrounding its governance, Yao Souchou (2007, p.xiii) re-termed this ideology aptly as a “culture of excess” motivated by “totalitarian ambitions”. This ideology works together with an underlying discourse of crisis construction about the vulnerability of a small city-state whose nation-hood is born out of a tumultuous history of near economic collapse because it was evicted out of a joint venture under the Malaysian statehood in 1965. Therefore, Singapore’s flexible capitalist project is very much mobilized by an assemblage of “siege mentality” (Brown, 2000, p.94) – a culture specific kind of mindset - that *disciplines* Singaporeans to keep pace with globalization and its demands, otherwise the materiality of the good life will elude them. Such is the ethos and ethics that constitutes Singapore’s global assemblage.

While obvious, it also needs to be pointed out that Singapore’s global assemblage points to a “center” from where assemblages are conceived, harnessed, assembled and reassembled. The salience of Singapore’s globalization project is interpreted and re-interpreted from time to time by the PAP government and its elite team of technocrats. This “salience” could be a projection of the niche areas of the Singapore economy or “solutions” for an impending crisis about to strike its economy. So well calculated is its management of the economy that it has turned “globalization” to become something like a “problem-space” where the PAP government seems to have developed a knack for coming up with “solutions” to arrest all problems associated with the vagaries of globalization (Koh, 2010).

Of course, the government relies on an assemblage of authoritarian politics, state apparatuses and global techniques to make globalization work to its advantage. Take for instance the contentious Foreign talent policy – a policy (read: global technique) that aims to “correct” the shortfall of talents in Singapore that would engineer Singapore’s economic growth. This policy has been propagated by state officials and the media, also the state’s apparatus, to ward off public criticisms and disgruntled Singaporeans who perceived they



have been made worse off economically because they now have to compete with foreign talents for job opportunities (see Koh, 2003).

To sum up, Singapore's global assemblage is no doubt a state ordered assemblage embodied by an ensemble of heterogeneous elements of global techniques conceived and calculated by an elite team of technocrats that works in combination with state apparatuses such as the media, and a distinctive Singaporean culture and habitus. In the remaining section, I shall discuss how and in what ways education policy and its practices is also an assemblage shaped with distinctive Singaporean characteristics *for* globalization.

### *Digging into the culture of Singapore's education policy making*

Singapore's global assemblage includes an ensemble of other state apparatuses like schooling and education. If we trace Singapore's early nation formation, "education" has been (and still is) a contributing factor to the economic and social development of Singapore (cf. Hill & Lian, 1995; Gopinathan, 1995). The logic is simple. What Singapore has as its only natural resource is human capital. This being the case, investment in education and training has always been a top priority whether its economy is in good or bad state. There is of course an economic rationality and instrumentality to this investment: an educated populace would have the requisite skills to support and grow Singapore's economy.

My point is the economic sustainability of Singapore's economy and a constant evaluation and re-interpretation of the perceived needs of its economy is a cultural characteristic endemic in Singapore's education policy making. This tight coupling between education and its economy must also be read in sync with its "culture of excess" – a perpetuation of fear and anxiety that its economy would collapse if education and training do not keep up with the exigencies of the economy. This is why I argue that if we do not dig into the culture of Singapore's education policy making, we would only see the economic side of the argument to the assemblage of Singapore's education policy side-stepping "culture" as an assemblage compressed in Singapore's global assemblage.

In mid 1990s, the government reinterpreted the skills needed for its economy that was, at that point, shifting from an industrial to a high value-added economy. There were already plans in store to grow its burgeoning biomedical, banking and telecommunication sectors (Gopinathan, 2009). These new industries demanded a range of complex "skills" identified as problem-solving, creating and applying knowledge, innovation and collaboration. These skills were, however, assessed to be lacking in Singapore's education system although it was by and large an effective education characterized by high academic standards and low

attrition. There was an underlying fear (read: culture of excess) that its education system was not preparing school leavers with a set of completely new skills that the new economy would require.

Added to this, the government saw a global trend in education reform in other national education systems in the U.S., U.K, and Japan motivated by a volatile and emerging global knowledge economy. This led the then Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong to announce a nation-wide education reform called the “Thinking Schools, Learning Nation” (hereafter TSLN) policy that aimed to reproduce Singaporean students with the requisite skills to participate productively in the next phase of Singapore’s economy.

But as an educational reform package, what is strikingly odd about the TSLN package is that the implementation of teaching Critical Thinking, the use of IT in teaching and learning, and National Education (which is citizenship education in a new name) is inherently contradictory in terms of the “allocation of values” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.71). While critical thinking and IT skills are ostensibly the skills, values and dispositions orientated towards the global economy, National Education is, on the contrary, a parochial vision that fosters patriotic sentiments and values for the nation (Koh, 2004).

It is easy to see the instrumental rationality that underpins the re-configuring of the curriculum priorities in the TSLN reform package as an assemblage influenced by an emerging transnational space of global/izing education policy. But what needs foregrounding is an internal “cultural” logic that underpins Singapore’s global assemblage embodied as a state led curriculum initiative called National Education. The aim of National Education is to cultivate in all schooling Singaporeans, who would eventually be part of the workforce that supports the Singapore economy, a desired set of ethics and values that bind them to the Singapore nation even if they “go global”. Stripped of its ideological dressings and inflections, I have argued elsewhere that the National Education program is an indirect admission of the state’s paranoia that as it encourages Singaporeans to “go global”, it has to counter the backlash of the many who might not “stay local” (Koh, 2008).

Taken together, the TSLN policy is an example of an assemblage that the Singaporean government puts together to re-think its education formula for a global economy that is constantly shifting and evolving. As an assemblage, the TSLN is an ideological educational package that compressed “global techniques” (think here in terms of the cultivation of “global” skills such as critical thinking and IT) and a situated politics of re-crafting a more robust local/national identity and feelings for the Singapore nation – ethos and ethics – that

tie Singaporeans to the “national”/“local” as they respond to the government’s call to “go global”.

After the rolling out of the TSLN policy in 1997, Singapore’s education policy terrain continues to be transformed in unprecedented ways. Summarily, these transformations are in the broad domains of “curricular” (with new additions such as Project Work to promote critical thinking and investigative learning; Life Sciences in line with the government’s projected vision of developing Singapore’s nascent pharmaceutical industry, and a 30% curriculum reduction to allow curriculum time to promote critical thinking and self-directed learning (see Koh, 2004)), “organization” (where schools are decentralized and organized into clusters supervised by a Cluster Superintendant rather than the central governing body, the Ministry of Education (See Tan & Ng, 2007 and Tan, 2008 for a discussion of the politics of this “decentralized centralism” re-organization of Singapore schools) and “new education pathways” (where there are new types of schools that cater to students based on their academic abilities and inclinations (See Lee’s (2010a) National Day Rally Speech).

Call this a brave new world of education reform in Singapore “prescriptive experimentation” (Koh, 2010, p.67) or a hybrid model drawing on and influenced by neo-/post- Fordist strategies (Sharpe & Gopinathan, 2002), there is no denying that there are many neo-liberal elements present in the education reform post TSLN policy if one were to purposefully look for these elements. But I would argue that what we are witnessing in the bigger picture of Singapore’s education reform is a technocratic reading of the global economy, and of globalization, where neoliberal reason and method in educational policy and its practices are used as tactics as part of Singapore’s global assemblage. What must not be forgotten in this assemblage are the equally important heterogeneous elements that are nationalistic in characteristics which remain enduring in the culture of Singapore’s education policy making. I turn to a recent newsworthy media account to substantiate this point, but some contextual background about Singapore’s bilingual language policy is necessary.

Without going into the details of the history and politics of language policy in Singapore schools (see Hill & Lian, 1995; Gopinathan, 1995; Rappa & Wee, 2006), suffice to say that English is the medium of instruction in all schools whereas the other three official Mother Tongues Languages (hereafter MTL), Chinese, Malay, and Tamil are taught as second languages. Whether one sees the “linguistic instrumentalism” (Wee, 2003) underlying its bilingual language policy, this language policy remains a core cornerstone in Singapore’s education system. To tinker with it would be unimaginable.

In April 2010, however, its Education Minister, Dr Ng Eng Hen announced to the press that his Ministry was “studying” to reduce the weighting of the MTL in the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) – this being a high stake public examination taken by all Grade 6 students before they are further streamed into Secondary schools - arguing that students who underperform in their MTL but do well in other subjects might in the end be disadvantaged from progression to a choice secondary school (*The Straits Times*, 21 April 2010).

While Dr Ng had good intentions in mind, his intentions however did not go well with the public. Unexpectedly, a slew of criticisms and deluge of letters came fast and fury opposing what the public perceived to be a lowering of the status of MTL. There were also reports of a petition launched with over 2000 signatures at Hong Lim Park – what is to be a “Speakers’ Corner” in Singapore – and the setting up of a Facebook account with more than 5000 members expressing their unhappiness over what they saw as a sudden policy change. The saga invited the intervention of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong who held a press conference to assure the public that there was no intention to reduce the weight of MLT at PSLE (Lee, 2010b). The saga ended in a rare public apology by Dr Ng published in a press release:

“In my interview, I said MOE was looking at options to address the over-emphasis on exams, where “MTL counts for so much in the PSLE.” Singaporeans became concerned that MOE was proposing to reduce the weighting of MTL in PSLE. This is not the case. The MTL Review Committee has not proposed any change to the PSLE scoring system. But I should have chosen my words more carefully and apologise for creating that wrong impression” (Ministry of Education, 2010).

This episode must not be dismissed as a trivial incident of local authoritative politics although in some sense it is. What it made clear is the kind of situated, nationalist politics about an enduring education policy that has been put into practice and perceived to work well for the nation, so much so that any attempt to change it would invite resistance and debate. Singaporeans clearly see the benefits of MTL, and the bilingual policy that has served Singapore well. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (2010b) said that – pointing to the utilitarian and economic value of MTLs – “many parents want their children to retain their cultural heritage, they want to respond to the rise of China and India as well as the links between Singapore and our immediate neighbours in Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia and Indonesia (p.3)”. This articulates what is to me an exemplar of “situated politics”, to echo Ong (2009), unique to Singapore’s culture of policy making, where core pillars of its education policies, such as the MTL/bilingual policy will remain a national imperative

despite “global techniques” such as neo-liberal thinking and practices that has seeped through its education system harnessed together as Singapore’s global assemblage.

### *Conclusion*

At the time of writing this article, the Ministry of Education (2010b) announced the result of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009 conducted by the OECD. It is no surprise that Singaporean students have emerged top spots ranking fifth in Reading, second in Mathematics and fourth in Science out of the 65 countries who participated. In concluding this article, I use this account of Singapore’s participation in PISA and its successful achievement to reiterate a few arguments made.

There is no doubt the OECD as a globalizing agency is turning the transnational space of global/izing education policy into “a global space of measurement” (Lingard, 2010, p.132), and indeed PISA is the embodiment of a global education policy. But before we think of a global education policy as a totalizing force impacting on national education systems, I have critiqued the formation of an emergent global/izing education policy as an instance of a master category that globalization has produced. As a master category, an emergent global/izing education policy has the tendency to occlude the underside of its ideological formation and influence, such as to pit educational systems against each other in some form of “global” educational measurement and attainment. Such “global” orientation towards the assessment of “skills” in specific subject areas seems to point to the “global” influence that transnational globalizing agency such as OECD is asserting on national education systems.

However, a central argument that this paper has put forth is that we must not overlook national education systems and their *culture* of education policy making. As I have alluded to in the paper, by a culture of education policy making, I am referring to a combination of factors such as a country’s national histories, its political ideologies, national aspirations, and even a country’s habitus (in a Bourdieuan sense). All these factors can shape and contribute to a culture specific education policy terrain. As my analysis of the TSLN education reform as an example of Singapore’s global assemblage has detailed, the TSLN policy is conceived as a combination of “global techniques” (embodied as the teaching of Critical Thinking and IT skills) and “situated politics” of indoctrinating national sentiments and belonging – ethos and ethics that tie Singaporeans to the “national”/“local” even as they participate in “going global”. Yet if we dig into the motivation of this education policy formation, I have argued that we can see that it reveals a culture specific education policy underpin by a national ideology of “culture of excess” – a perpetuation of fear and anxiety that its education system

must catch up with the skills required for the global economy otherwise its national economy would collapse.

Returning to the news story of Singapore's participation in PISA, a similar culture specific reasoning can be offered. Instead of suggesting that Singapore follows a homogenizing global educational trend stemming from a globalizing agency, its participation in PISA must be understood as part of Singapore's "global assemblage", read as a "global technique" to affirm its increasing global reputation as an excellent education system. Furthermore, as "situated politics", the small city-state continues to craft a national ideology and identity for the Singapore success story (Chong, 2010) to which its success in a "global" educational assessment has contributed yet another chapter. Indeed, Singapore takes pride in all "global" achievements and accolades as they are important for the hegemonic construction of the Singapore story and national identity building.

Finally, I started out this article with the claim that Asian education systems are under researched and represented in an emergent global/izing education policy. What I have done in this article is to fill the gap by presenting an analysis of Singapore education policy landscape vis-à-vis the debate surrounding a globalizing education field. While Singapore cannot be representative of all other education systems in Asia, and I cannot say for certain how other education systems constitute their global assemblage, what I am certain is, in whatever configurations their assemblage is, there is definitely a culture of policy making that is intrinsic to their education systems. I hope my analysis of Singapore's education policy making will pave the way for other scholars to research and reveal culture specific analysis of other education policies and practices in Asia in the debate on an emergent globalizing education policy field.

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