

Military Education as a Dimension of Security in the Western Hemisphere

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Abstract


An overlooked yet salient aspect of security issues in the Western Hemisphere is adult education as a developmental phenomenon deeply rooted in society and culture. Studying the relationship between educational trends and security in this hemisphere may help political and security professionals anticipate challenges and opportunities in other world regions. The author examines these key issues related to the role public education plays in western hemispheric security and conflict: (1) security-related aspects of education, (2) the concept of human capital as a social-cultural relationship between education and regional security or lack thereof, (3) the nature of related transnational threats to education, and (4) implications of education for future stability and development. As a result, the author highlights the linkage of professional military schools to the development of human capital that has become a foundational element of national security. Military educators and civilian policy makers can collaborate to improve collective human capital within the context of regional security. In this multifaceted and globalized context, leaders—both those within the Western Hemisphere and those who have a geopolitical interest in the region—in military learning have a unique opportunity to foster societal development and regional security.

Why is education a national security issue? ... America's educational failures pose five distinct threats to national security: threats to economic growth and competitiveness, U.S. physical safety, intellectual property, U.S. global awareness, and U.S. unity and cohesion Military might is no longer sufficient to guarantee security. Rather, national security today is closely linked with human capital, and the human capital of a nation is as strong or as weak as its public schools (Klein, Rice, & Levy, 2014, p. 7).

This article examines how professional military education (PME) systems in the Western Hemisphere are linked to the concept of security. Pundits of power and analysts in North America often conceptualize hemispheric issues of national security with the military or other instruments of national power as part of a greater chess match among states and organized criminal networks (Carey, 2016; Fuentes & Aravena, 2005). As the epigraph attests, an overlooked yet salient aspect of western hemispheric security discussions is education's role in society and culture (Tanner, Arnett, & Leis, 2009). The linkage between public education (pre- and post-secondary), PME (i.e., formal education programs offered over a career), and national security has not been extensively examined; however, this linkage should be considered for both enlisted and commissioned personnel when expanding normative concepts of security and conflict across disciplines (Bagley, Kassab, & Rosen, 2015; Klein et al., 2014; Pherali, 2016; Skaggs, 2014; see also Tran, Oliveira, Sider, & Blanken, 2018). When many of the world's school-age children are denied access to school due to conflict and related cross-border migrations, there are long-term implications for national and transnational security (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack [GCPEA], 2014; Novaro & Bartlett, 2017; Pherali, 2016).¹ Arguably, educational gaps may affect security in the region or continent. Accordingly, institutions of PME in the Western Hemisphere should adapt curricula to address dynamic social needs such as individual development, citizen education, and economic stabilization. In this sense, PME consists of public and social components because of its charter to educate future military leaders for domestic and international service. Education within a society is inherently political in nature, and cultural and historical in context.

PME can play a critical role in the transmission of cultural values and traditions related to national security. The concept of human capital assumes individuals bring value to society and links educational progress to cultural and economic development that, when applied throughout a region, should contribute to greater transnational security as well (Bennett & Bell, 2010). To ensure this progression, educational stakeholders—such as program administrators, course facilitators, curriculum developers, and policy makers—need to be aware of threats that may limit long-term societal investment in human capital.

Addressing key concepts of this discussion will both facilitate further dialogue and enable the exploration of new aspects of hemispheric security issues—that is, regional stability, civil-military relations, and public education for vulnerable members of society—through an educational perspective. In this article, the author will discuss these key elements related to the impact of PME on western hemispheric



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security and conflict. Together, they constitute a framework that links education to regional security: (1) security issues tied to education, (2) the concept of human capital as a social-cultural relationship between education and regional security/conflict, (3) the nature of related transnational threats to education, and (4) implications for future stability and development.

Security Issues Tied to Education

Educational experiences among the diverse peoples in the Western Hemisphere are not uniform across the region. For instance, in areas in which most demographic groups have ready access to quality education, outcomes for employment, health, food security, and resilience tend to be improved (Acker & Gasperini, 2009). Such factors indicate enhanced social stability that reinforces inclusive “peace and democracy” (Acker & Gasperini, 2009, p. 106). Conversely, in areas in which citizens struggle to participate actively in education without fear or personal repercussions, the same social stability indicators mentioned earlier tend to be lower, thereby, threatening the task of providing human security (Acker & Gasperini, 2009; Fuentes & Aravena, 2005). Other factors of securing educational programs in this region are difficult to measure over time: the types of attacks, numbers of schools attacked, declining staff recruitment, disruption of student attendance, posttraumatic stress suffered by students and faculty, and unrepaired infrastructure (GCPEA, 2014). Regardless, “hundreds of thousands of children have been denied access to education, in some cases for years, because of the length of time schools are closed” (GCPEA, 2014, pp. 58–59) due to the unwillingness or incapability of local governments to rebuild. This diverse range of educational experiences of migratory populations in the Western Hemisphere continues to influence the social stability and thus security in the region.

Educational practices can particularly impact cultural perceptions of power in both positive and negative ways. Education leaders advocating for social liberation through greater awareness of antidemocratic, exclusionary practices by those in power have led to significant movements in Brazil and the United States. This has been exemplified by institutions such as the Highlander Folk School, which bore the fruits of Deweyan pragmatism (Dewey, 2008; Freire, 2011, 2014; Thayer-Bacon, 2004). While social-political movements of power such as the U.S. civil rights movement have promoted liberation, education can also foster the entrenchment of values and practices mandated by those in power (Acker & Gasperini, 2009; Pherali, 2016). Given these contradictory effects, education has the power to “generate favourable conditions for violent conflict” (Pherali, 2016, p. 202). In other words, educational practice in the Western Hemisphere has often reflected a dynamic dichotomy of facilitating or harming security.

If public (particularly military) educational institutions fail to value social investment in human capital, risks to internal and regional security will remain. Educa-



tors have argued that the social-cultural contexts of public education for emerging generations ultimately relate to the rise of social issues of security, governance, and justice (Giroux, 2015; Gramsci, 2002). The neoliberalist trend currently expanding in educational institutions helps to entrench social inequalities. In these instances, the society's youth may appear to have been commodified and could even be considered disposable to those in power (Giroux, 2015; Pherali, 2016). Conversely, education can serve to raise public consciousness of structures of oppression, thereby linking education to personal experiences and social resistance (Freire, 2011; Kim, 2016). Military and civilian educators can play a significant role by promoting social awareness and action among transnational populations.

Developing Human Capital: Relationship of Military Education to Security

Education and human security are integrally linked through civic empowerment and the acquisition of essential skills (Fuentes & Aravena, 2005). Human capital is a theoretical concept that embraces the civic benefits of education for societies and cultures. It places knowledge at the center of local, state, and regional levels of economic development by establishing education as a long-term investment (Tan, 2014). Within this developmental context, human security educational programs can foster awareness of human rights for all members of society to promote civil discourse, sustainable peace and development, and governance throughout the Western Hemisphere (Al-Rodhan, 2007; Fuentes & Aravena, 2005). In this sense, human security is a subset of national security with long-term implications for civil society, rule of law, and the civilian control of the military. This section examines human capital in terms of its regional context and the tension of peace and conflict studies.

Contemporary context of education. Internal frictions within states have often stymied the development of social and public services, including education. Since their independence, many Latin and Central American states such as Colombia and Venezuela have largely struggled against internal conflicts born of violent revolutions, counterrevolutions, and authoritarianism. Strife within these states has influenced and constrained the advancement of governance and education throughout the region. "In this regard, internal armed conflict and authoritarian rule devastated South America, leaving many countries acutely divided and militarized, governed by corrupt, weak states, bereft of effective and trustworthy institutions" (Brett & Florez, 2016, p. 439). In other words, internal struggles have hampered the development of mature institutions, including education systems.

Interneine conflicts between states and normative theories of political science that emphasize power dynamics have traditionally resulted in a state-centered focus in western hemispheric case studies. Brett and Florez (2016) describe this realist focus and its



impact on localized analysis: “Scholarship on peacebuilding in Latin America generally, and South America in particular, has tended to adopt a state-centric approach, focusing upon formal peace processes and other top-down mechanisms of conflict transformation, dismissing the role of locally driven initiatives in conflict transformation” (pp. 442–443). Localized structures of social and cultural stability, such as public and military education systems, have received relatively little notice. Theoretical approaches to studies of security and educational issues in Latin America should expand to include multidimensional aspects of social-cultural realities regarding conflict resolution and the development of local structures of stability and cooperation (Brett & Florez, 2016; Rockwell & Anderson-Levitt, 2017).

Besides dealing with aspects of conflict, many Caribbean and Latin American countries continue to face barriers to the development of educational institutions—particularly for less privileged and underrepresented populations. One indicator of this is the relatively low level of reporting for “standardized learning assessments using inclusive strategies that enable data collection on populations with disabilities” (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016, p. 20). Since the end of major civil strife in the 1980s, the relative calm in Latin America has allowed room for some domestic institutions to develop, albeit at a slower-than-desired pace. This laggard pace is due largely to the continued presence of transnational criminal networks (e.g., *Los Perrones Orientales and Mara Salvatrucha* [MS-13]) and remnant corrupt bureaucratic structures such as money-laundering activities in El Salvador and Honduras (Mace, Thérien, & Gagné, 2012).

Still, outside of the United States, little research in the Western Hemisphere has examined the effect on the development of young adults, even in developed nations such as Argentina (Tanner et al., 2009). The quasi-legal status of many migrant populations who traverse borders—sometimes in both directions, and often undocumented—coupled with reactive or inactive national legislation, have complicated migrants’ stability and identity over the last several decades (Novaro & Bartlett, 2017). An indication of this is the recent ethnographic research into the impact of immigration experiences on young adult psycho-social identities (Whitaker, 2012).

Over time and generations, ethnocentric understandings of complex issues such as educational investment in human capital can have a deleterious effect upon security policy and development. When national governments and societies can only see problems defined in their own terms, they are less capable of creating solutions that deliberately assist citizens of others. As a result, regional cooperation can deteriorate and thus negatively impact migrants in the region.² Additionally, the migration of educated, skilled workers such as one in 12 from Latin America and one in two from the Caribbean can siphon human capital reserves and may hinder technological development in transnational areas (DIA Internship Programs; Di Maria & Lazarova, 2011; see also Jerez, 2018, for skilled labor data). Because of such barriers to economic and political development, socially situated programs such as education have suffered in many areas. This continuous tension



between conflict and peace characterizes the contemporary reality of security and stability throughout the hemisphere.

Two sides of the security coin: conflict and peace. Imagine that hemispheric security is represented by a coin. On one side resides peace and development; on the other side lurks conflict and crisis. This is not to say that conflict and peace are mutually exclusive; they often overlap. Looking at this image through the lens of education in the public sphere can help clarify the relationship between education and security. In a sense, PME can be value-neutral. On one hand, it can help perpetuate parochial ideologies of conflict and crisis. On the other hand, it can promote peace by empowering individuals to envision long-term development and develop creative solutions to systemic problems entrenched for generations in their social-national narratives (Gramsci, 2002). The substantive element of this coin is the human capital that makes the stakes of flipping it so high. The potential implications of this peace/development and conflict/crisis dialectic are significant for all security stakeholders in the Western Hemisphere (Al-Rodhan, 2007; Fuentes & Aravena, 2005; Mace et al., 2012).

Education is a political phenomenon because it requires the social-cultural and economic investment of limited resources by stakeholders—that is, citizens, classes, military, political leaders, and institutions—to develop human capital for future generations. Given this article’s scope, military and civilian educators often make open-minded, political decisions that favor certain peoples over others within particular cultural-historical contexts (Freire, 2014; Gramsci, 2002). Freire (1992/2008, 2014), the Brazilian educational philosopher, contends that education is a distinctly human and necessary political activity that involves an awareness of our limited knowledge and an iterative process of becoming who we are. This approach builds upon education pioneers Dewey (2008) and Lindeman (1926/1989) who asserted that adult education has a humanist goal of forming better citizens of a society who learn to act responsibly from lived experiences. In other words, adult education is primarily an act of communication based upon a reflection of lived experiences over a life course and how they may apply to a learner’s future (Dewey, 2008). When communication breaks down, conflict can often arise and negatively impact the delivery of education to the underserved.

Educators and parents are instrumental stewards of future human capital, whose impact can greatly influence the security requirements throughout the hemisphere. The political nature of military education can complicate matters when the security coin is tossed. Perhaps a theoretical, but no less applicable, issue concerns the varying characteristics of public education in the Americas. Even in the same country, public schools vary in state/provincial laws, measures of performance, budgeted resources, and student demographics—not to mention separate programs for indigenous communities. For this reason, the relationship between security and public education becomes more complex as researchers and policy makers probe more deeply. For instance, “In recent years, education has also become an integral part of counter-insurgency strategy [including the U.S. and Canada], resulting in militarization of



education aid in conflict-affected countries,” (Pherali, 2016, p. 195) particularly as within Colombia since 1999 (see also King, 2011; Novelli, 2011).

The presence of conflict adversely impacts local schooling. In fact, “Violent conflicts disrupt educational processes. Schooling often becomes paralysed when educational infrastructure is destroyed and teachers, children and educational authorities are caught in violent conflict” (Pherali, 2016, p. 194). As a result, military activities taken in the name of security have often harmed the education of young citizens: “Assaults on education are carried out for ideological, political, ethnic or military reasons, but the direct victims of violence are usually innocent children and teachers” (Pherali, 2016, p. 194). Examples of such assaults include state-controlled militaries and police forces as well as criminal organizations in Colombia and Mexico seizing local schools and putting students, teachers, and administrators at risk (GCPEA, 2014; Pherali, 2016).

Perhaps a more fitting metaphor is light (the development of human capital as a result of educational progress and the military support of civilian authorities) shining in dark areas. This is not meant to infer that regions within the Western Hemisphere are inherently unenlightened by the light of democratic institutions; rather, education can positively impact the quality of life for individual citizens, provide them hope, and, thereby, facilitate regional development. Regardless of the metaphor, conflict and peace underpin the developmental and security currents in the Western Hemisphere.

Dealing with Transnational Threats

The linkage of educational failures to regional security may initially seem specious, but there is ample evidence of contemporary threats to quality education that have continued to challenge societies throughout North and South America. This section presents but a few of these instances that highlight security issues and the roles of adult educators.

Adult educators as historical-cultural messengers in transnational contexts.

Transnational structures offer some promise for educators to counter instability such as weak governance, limited social mobility, opaque justice systems, and joblessness (Isacson, 2015; Manwaring, Fontela, Grizzard, & Rempe, 2003). Ongoing initiatives by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at global and regional levels to coordinate educational policy and opportunities for disenfranchised Latin American and Caribbean populations of all life stages indicate the linkage of global citizenship education to national strength and quality of life (UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2016). In particular, the direct relationship between education for rural people and the development of quality of life (e.g., health, food security) over time has motivated many policymakers to strengthen national and regional education programs (Acker & Gasperini, 2009).

Regional educational programs in the Americas have nurtured an awareness by social stakeholders to promote stability and therefore security. For example, region-



al organizations such as the Caribbean Council for Adult Education have promoted programs for adults that go beyond literacy so that adult learning is accepted as a “lifelong phenomenon with the power to transform human lives across national boundaries” (Alfred & Nafukho, 2010, p. 101). Additionally, heightened advocacy for protecting institutions of public education, from primary to higher levels, have “called greater attention [and some response] to the issue of attacks” (GCPEA, 2014). In other words, nations that invest in policies and programs supporting lifelong learning will contribute to the development of citizens who can think clearer and make better decisions to create cultures that protect human rights and promote stability—key implications for hemispheric security.

In this context, educational stability is a relative term that places emphasis on students and educators in their contemporary society and cultures rather than affiliated institutions and locations. Transnational populations of students often fail to conform with Anglo-centric concepts of stable, progressive education systems in which borders—whether between school districts or international borders—are well defined (Rockwell & Anderson-Levitt, 2017). Much of this complexity derives from the fact that minority populations in the United States are often majorities in many Latin American nations and that migrants exhibit “complex cycles of leaving and returning, both across and within national boundaries” (Rockwell & Anderson-Levitt, 2017, p. 17). As a result of this transnational context of education in the Americas, educators can influence migratory students and their parents across a broad range of geography, cultures, and languages over lifetimes.

Implications for Future Stability and Development Efforts

Education’s span of social influence in the Western Hemisphere cannot be understated because it helps mold the foundation for future stability and development initiatives. In this section, the author describes a few of these initiatives rooted in the contemporary social-cultural context of the Americas: stabilization amidst globalization, PME programs, and the potential transformative properties of education in a contemporary society.

Political and economic stability in a globalized world. Social and military leaders, including elected and school officials, must choose to employ education as a tool for stability and development; otherwise, curricula can be—as they have been—used to reinforce unequal power structures and majority dominance. Freire (1992/2008, 2011) describes this implication as a public awareness, an awakening not only to entrenched oppression but also to potential opportunities for individual citizens.

In the era of globalization, education serves as a mechanism for social, political and economic control, which is exercised in the consensual mutuality between political elites and corporate interests. In this context, societies struggle to



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cultivate humanity against the dominance of neoliberalism as well as to make schooling relevant to disenfranchised populations while recognizing the social and cultural situationality of education. (Pherali, 2016, p. 193)

Put another way, globalization has facilitated economic development across borders, but it has also challenged the advancement of disenfranchised citizens in transnational contexts of education.

National security is one context in which military education has intersected with growth throughout the hemisphere in recent decades. National security and education, as key elements of developmental strategy, have continued to merge after the Cold War, influencing transnational policies by western powers (Novelli, 2011). Despite this growth in peacebuilding evident in peace accords brokered in El Salvador (1992) and Guatemala (1996), Central America now has one of the highest homicide rates in the world (Pearce, 2016). South America is not too far behind in violence levels, although it has only one extant internal conflict on the continent. To date, there have been over 250,000 casualties and more internally displaced persons in Colombia as a result of its decades-long armed conflict between the government and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, or FARC (Santos, 2017). This continual level of violence, albeit sporadic throughout the region, directly limits human development in affected communities and thus educational access (Pearce, 2016; Santos, 2017). One area that illustrates the potential of education to help or harm security is the militarization of education and educational institutions in conflict-ridden regions (Pherali, 2016).

Professional military education. Hemispheric stakeholders have invested educational resources for decades in their junior military leaders. The *Army Learning Strategy* highlights three primary lines of effort that epitomize the service's commitment to develop lifelong learners: learning environment, learning leaders, and program evaluations (Kem, 2017). U.S. military professionals have recognized the importance of designing and delivering content and pedagogies that appeal to upcoming generations of leaders while preparing them for complex challenges, especially in cognitive skills and science and technology subjects (DuBois, 2017; Polson, 2010; Zacharakis & Van Der Werff, 2012). After the relatively stable security environs of the Cold War, adult educators at U.S. and Canadian PME institutions foresaw a need to develop strategic-minded leaders through enhanced military cooperation and exchanges (Hernández, 2014; Mace et al., 2012). Recent curriculum revisions at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College that return to an emphasis on cognitive development and the management of large-scale operations reflect an historic trend in U.S. military officer education (Schifferle, 2010). It was apparent even at the turn of the millennium that military leaders from across the Americas and at all levels would require education in security studies and opportunities to develop as strategic



leaders by utilizing the resources from both military and civilian education institutions (Smith, 2001). Thus, military education in the Americas has had a transnational element for some time.

A PME institution that has embraced this transnational security mission is the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC). Not only does the school's curriculum offer mid-career officers from over 30 countries a graduate experience delivered in Spanish, but the school also offers students an accredited master's degree in military arts and sciences (Hernández, 2014). Concurrently, it exemplifies the tendency for U.S. PME schools to favor small-group seminars led by practitioners rather than scholars, which some suggest may not adequately prepare students for complex future operational environments (Robinson, Armbruster, & Snapp, 2015). This model of transnational cooperation illustrates the potential for PME institutions to transfer values and expectations throughout the region, but there is also the increasing demand for competency-driven, decentralized learning that individual schools cannot meet (Robinson et al., 2015). Educational and security leaders must also think beyond the traditional boundaries of institutions for the future development of human capital in a regional context.

Harnessing education as a transformative force for conflict or peace: our choice. With the advent of more readily available information technology, local populations have progressively gained more control over education systems. This increased access to information has significant long-term implications for both military education and security domains in the Western Hemisphere—particularly in areas affected by conflict. Information can now spread quickly at multiple levels via “peer-to-peer learning platforms” (Robinson et al., 2015, p. 61) rather than through traditional educational institutes. With enhanced access to education, local populations will still need to choose how they apply what they learn.

Another transformative aspect of education in the Americas has been an increased awareness of the need to provide more population groups access to more programs. Besides the military, the U.S. interagency community has strived to attain and maintain professional educational quality, particularly for intelligence and security services. Since 1994, the National Security Education Act authorizes grants for U.S. citizen undergraduate and graduate students to attend targeted language and area studies programs abroad (Congressional Research Service, 2005). While programs such as this can help recruit individuals trained in critical skill sets, they can also set a precedent for sponsor institutions that wish to remain independent of federal interference in individual courses of study. “Peacebuilding education should help liberate minds from the tyranny of dominant ideologies that block progressive thoughts and erode learners’ confidence to seek alternative meanings of human life” (Pherali, 2016, p. 202). In other words, higher education leaders can make decisions now that will affect security throughout the hemisphere for future generations.



In the end, there are several long-term implications of securing educational programs against conflicts that arise from social-cultural instability throughout the Western Hemisphere. Many of these implications have yet to be analyzed because of the difficulty in consistently documenting the many different variables involved in educational security in this region. As a result, access to education remains a critical issue for local authorities and hemispheric security in the long term.

Conclusion

Scholars continue to question the normative, parochial perspectives of security as a state-centered phenomenon readily interpreted by liberal-realist theories and solved by military power (Bagley et al., 2015; Carey, 2016). Public education has and will continue to play a role in security issues in the Western Hemisphere. Particular issues related to this role were examined: (1) security-related issues in education, (2) human capital as a social-cultural relationship between education and regional security/conflict, (3) nature of related transnational threats, and (4) implications for future stability and development. Education, particularly in conflict zones, will continue to be a national and hemispheric security issue until leaders of local societies and cultures claim responsibility for their roles and impact on future stability and development.

Future areas of research may further address these and related issues. For example, comparing ethnographic educational studies could help discern trends potentially addressed by policymakers and other stakeholders throughout the hemisphere. These interdisciplinary inquiries should also address how policies and resources affect indigenous communities. Furthermore, comparative ethnographic case studies could not only examine the cross-border phenomena that impact the lives of migrational peoples but also the policies that influence their identities as members of multiple cultures (Novaro & Bartlett, 2017; Rockwell & Anderson-Levitt, 2017). Finally, critical theoretical frameworks (e.g., feminism, critical race theory, or critical pedagogy) that question the reproduction of or resistance to power structures in educational institutions could help clarify the complex relationships between military educational systems and national security not only in the Western Hemisphere but also in other geographic and cultural regions as well (Freire, 1992/2008, 2014; Kim, 2016).

The epigraph of this article highlighted the linkage of public military schools to the development of human capital, which has become the foundation of national security. If this premise is sound for the Western Hemisphere, military educators and civilian policy makers alike will succeed to the extent that they collaborate for the benefit of their collective human capital. In this multifaceted and globalized context, contemporary leaders of military learning have a unique opportunity to foster societal development and regional security. ❧



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Notes

1. Transnational populations are citizens whose individual behavior—for example, migration for asylum—is motivated by cross-border agencies like the military who sometimes operate across national boundaries.

2. Regional cooperation can suffer especially when it is unaided by cooperative educational programs that extend across borders such as the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency's program that affords employees opportunities to study in other countries to hone their language and functional skills.

