

Book Review

Tarc, P. (2013). *International education in global times: Engaging the pedagogic*. New York: Peter Lang

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To venture beyond one's locale in order to enhance and complete one's education through encounters with new ideas and different others is not a contemporary educational program: the concept goes back to ancient times, for example, 3rd century BC Alexandria, or Nalanda University in 5th century India. International education in our times, while maintaining similar claims of promoting intercultural, international and global literacies is largely enacted uncritically, unsupported by research, and appears to be tainted by instrumental ideologies in a globalized educational marketplace.

In inviting critical conversations on significant core issues relating to internationalized learning and teaching, Paul Tarc's book, *International education in global times: Engaging the pedagogic*, is both refreshing and timely. Through personal narrative, observations in his own classroom, examples from the literature, data, theoretical discussion and analyses

from his research, Tarc brings our attention to what is missing and what ought to be at the heart of international education without claiming to be prescriptive. He makes a sustained argument for why it is important to avoid the common traps and rhetoric of international education, whether they be claims of transformation, learning about others and across difference, or the imperative of internationally located learning experiences, inviting us to reconceive international education in more educational, and more specifically, pedagogical terms. "Reconception" Tarc argues, "is vital because although the opportunities for international education have increased and intensified, so have the risks" (p. 6). Tarc's main line of inquiry throughout, is whether international education as it is commonly practiced can 'be educated' (p. 97), and offers pathways towards that goal.

The book appears to have evolved from a seeking for appropriate texts to engage preservice teacher candidates in a critical exploration and understanding of international education. From this first educative inquiry, Tarc moves into a more in-depth and wider critical inquiry to establish "a framework of intelligibility" (p. 5) on the complexities of the 'educational' in international education. This framework, in turn, creates a strong case for what Tarc terms 'cosmopolitan literacies', representing an intervention in current dominant discourses in international education – a way of more fully acknowledging and responding to the complexities of learning and subjectivity and the challenges for pedagogy inherent to this expanding and morphing enterprise under globalization (p. 107).

Mirroring the complex layers of the international experience itself, Tarc selects three sites of the international experience, courses on intercultural

difference, the study abroad experience, and teaching in the global south, to first describe and critique common assumptions. These discussions move the reader into the final chapter where the notion of cosmopolitan literacy is defined, discussed and implications identified for the classroom.

The introductory chapter establishes the theoretical influences that inform Tarc's discussion and the direction of the argumentation in reconceiving international education. He begins by identifying the contexts of international education, namely, globalization, and the dominant influence of neoliberalism. A very useful and succinct discussion of how performativity (informed by Lyotard and others) is located within wider discursive practices of economic globalization, neo-liberal economics, and competitiveness, frames these opening analyses on the evolution of international education. What is established here is the erosion of the very goals and purposes of international education: "At stake is the diminishing of the more idealist dimensions under neoliberal logics" (p.15). This section is good synthesis of the arguments that lay bare the commodification of international education.

In this chapter, Tarc also takes on the coopting of global citizenship logics to justify international education programs, in particular, study abroad, international placements and experiences. Citing Jefferess (2008, cited on pp 12 - 18) to critique the current discourses on global citizenship, he shows how these strategies are "deeply and subtly techniques of neoliberal governmentality (Foucault, 1991, cited on p. 12), marked by unequal power relations among the global north and south, and widely unpredictable in their purported outcomes. The critique and analysis in this opening chapter identifies the kinds of honest and in-

depth appraisals that are needed for “ a deeper – if complicated, imperfect and never guaranteed – humanist aim that an ethically oriented learning and becoming may indeed be supported in spaces of schooling” (p. 18).

From these beginnings, Tarc takes the reader into one of the core areas of international education, intercultural learning across difference. He uses the parable of ‘The Elephant and the Blind Men’, related here in the form of the 1878 Saxe poem (as cited on p. 20-21), to discuss and argue for what he calls the ‘impossibility’ of learning across difference. Tarc describes the ways in which he invites students to look at the partiality of knowing. In summary, Tarc argues how learning across difference requires understanding social contexts and histories, how language and experience shapes perception and exerts limitations on what one can know and learn.

The scholarly discussion that informs this chapter is insightful and innovative especially in challenging the common approach of using development models to facilitate intercultural learning. While acknowledging the dangers of becoming simplistic with the Blind Men and Elephant analogy, the analysis generated from the parable illustrate complex theoretical ideas well, demonstrating the usefulness of this approach in the classroom. One of Tarc’s aims is to write in an accessible style. However, as he acknowledges, it is a challenge to do so when using theories and ideas that are difficult and require explanations and even prior understanding of their import, such as Britzman’s scholarship on the psychoanalytic. If this book is aimed for use in the classroom, a little more explication of the theoretical background of the scholarly ideas would enhance the effectiveness of their use.

Chapter 3 focuses on the study abroad experience, centering around the common claim of the transformational and life changing experience that is attached to it. Tarc first provides an insightful critique of the current enthusiasm for promoting an international experience for domestic North American students, challenging the certainty of transformative learning by asking whether it is indeed predictable or can be planned for. From personal experience, Tarc recognizes the potential of an international placement to lead one into critical awareness of global issues, and, in particular, self-awareness of one's privilege and social location. Nevertheless, he argues, simply going somewhere is not a prerequisite for transformational life changing experience. Using an interesting and oft-cited case study and personal account of an international experience by Zemach-Bersin (2008, cited in pp 45 - 54) Tarc provides an in-depth analysis of the account, as well as a discussion of other commentaries on the piece, both positive and critical. He demonstrates how the dissonance, difficult learning, and the frustration and anger expressed by Zemach-Bersin is discounted by some, and ascribed to the failure of her program, or her lack of preparedness for the experience, and as evidence of her failure 'to learn' or have the prescribed transformative experience. These views, as Tarc asserts, are representative of the problematic assumptions on what constitutes intercultural learning, and he goes on to discuss the importance of challenging fixed notions of culture, language, and identity using a few recent studies that problematize the outcomes of international experiences. "Coming to fully know oneself in relation to the 'world as it is' by working through the experience is a transformation in itself, given the demands this knowing places on the ego to be stretched or altered"

(p. 58) he concludes, recommending that practice and research recognize the complexity of learning in an international context. I found this to be a comprehensive and insightful discussion of issues that are rarely and inadequately addressed in study-abroad.

One of the more compelling chapters, at least for this reviewer, is Chapter 4, featuring experiences of international teaching, in the global south. Tarc draws on his own experience of teaching in an international school, an analysis of a study by Chin (2001, cited on p. 62, 70 - 75) on Canadian teachers in Latin America, and Tarc's study on teachers in an international setting. An excellent account on the rise of international schools, identifying the gaps in research, notably on how teachers engage conflicting and contradictory tensions that arise in teaching assignments located in the global south, precedes Tarc's discussion of his own experience. Dissonance and discomfort was generated by the gap between what the school and programs professed to be doing for diversity and local-foreigner relations, and the reality. Tarc identifies the lack of any real engagement with host country people, absence of mutuality, racialization and exclusionary practices of everyday activities. Some of these findings are similar to those in Chin's study, the close analysis of which was probably prompted by the lack of any other studies on international school teachers and their overseas experience. A key realization from both analyses was that learning from the international experience comes from sustained reflection after the fact, especially regarding the tensions that emerge from contexts and radical difference.

The highlight of this chapter, are the stories of the five teachers: Eric, Carrie, Beth, Donald and Andy. The profiles of each of the teachers are

rich, and illustrate the diversity of experience even in what appears to be common experiences and views, their “distinctive ways of framing the impacts of their international experiences” (p. 78). They have in common, discomfort over their privilege of White, Anglo-Westerner identity, feelings of guilt in observing difficult local conditions and differences, forming friendships and social relationships, and a general feeling of how things are not what they expected. Except for Andy who insists he has not changed, and that nothing has changed, they are aware of what they have learned, though it is different from prior expectations or romanticized views. From the youthful enthusiasm of Carrie to the almost curmudgeonly skepticism of Andy, the voices of these Canadian teachers powerfully illustrate learning and identity in Tarc’s analyses of their international experience.

The scholarly analyses of the earlier chapters and the narratives of teachers in Chapter 4, raise many questions about the value of international education that Tarc responds to in the final chapter. He returns to his overarching inquiry as to whether international education can be educated. His affirmative response from this inquiry is laid out in the form of ‘cosmopolitan literacies,’ which he proceeds to articulate in the final chapter.

The notion of cosmopolitanism has gained popularity in discussions on internationalization and global education. Tarc’s review of the concept is brief (perhaps a little too brief) and limited to references to Hall (2002, cited on p. 100-101) and Appiah (cited on p. 101). He concludes:

I am suggesting that the modifier ‘cosmopolitan’ then represents an orientation to be outward-looking, interested in engaging and

learning from others both inside and outside of one's own local or country, and reflectively aware of how one is situated within these webs or relations (p.101).

He then proceed to articulate how he aligns with Rizvi's (2009, cited on pp. 102 - 105) ideas on cosmopolitan learning.

For Rizvi, this cosmopolitan learning is hinged on a set of epistemic virtues and represents an ethical orientation beyond both the corporate, market-oriented and the universalistic, assimilative versions of cosmopolitanism (p. 102).

Tarc argues that Rizvi brings a postcolonial lens to this frame. Along with a 'psychoanalysis in education' these ideas form the basis of what Tarc terms cosmopolitan literacies which in turn are foundational for an 'educated' international education that has potential and promise.

Tarc acknowledges the enormous challenge of writing both for the classroom, avoiding the density and difficulty of academic text, and for a scholarly audience. I was left wanting a little more in-depth discussion of some of the ideas that he presents, such as the paradox of the impossibility of learning across difference, or the contradictions of intercultural learning in international education. In particular, I would have liked to see a more comprehensive discussion of the central idea of cosmopolitan literacies and connections to the pedagogical sites that were illustrated in earlier chapters. If, for example, international education is to foster cosmopolitan literacies in order to be more educative, how pedagogically can we deal with the impossibility of learning across difference? How can institutions, already averse to acknowledging the value and importance of dissonance, discomfort and very much travelling the 'high road' of transformative learning, take up

the idea of cosmopolitan literacies? The book has generated these and other very useful questions and in this regard, has done its work in provoking further inquiry and in-depth reflection.

As an instructor, I can appreciate how the case studies, examples, analogies, narratives and analyses form an excellent entry point into discussions at the graduate level, while its use for pre-service teachers, for example, would have to be supplemented by introductions to some of the theories and scholarship Tarc references. Overall, it is an excellent text to generate important conversations on complex ideas and practices, and I would agree with advance reviewers that this is the area where the book makes its most significant contribution.