

International Education and Schools: Moving Beyond the First 40 Years edited by Richard Pearce. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. 264 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4725-1074-7.

Under the skillful editing of Richard Pearce, *International Education and Schools: Moving Beyond the First 40 Years* explores the past, present, and future of international schools. As Pearce highlights in the introduction, international education is a murky field that has been divergently defined: it is “a floating signifier, a phrase without circumscribed meaning which is invoked by a variety of users who feel it gives a valuable impression of their projects” (xii). While the term “international school” originally described schools that catered primarily to expatriate youth, the un-patrolled term is now loosely applied to many schools, including some that depart from local curricula, that offer English-medium instruction in non-English speaking environments or are founded on “global idealism” (xii). Pearce explains that the wide range of schools boasting to be “international” evade classification; rather, the only commonality between these international schools is that they are “intrinsically exceptional” (xii). The substantial variety across international school settings can be problematic, for as Pearce explains, “the field of operations is intrinsically atomized and the particularities so specific that cases are seldom replicated, yet there must be generalizations if we are to make sense of the past and benefit from experience in the future” (xiv). Pearce also highlights other factors that further complicate international education: globalization and internationalization trends, neoliberalism, and the International Baccalaureate’s (IB)¹ responsiveness to global market demands. Against such a nuanced backdrop, it is especially appropriate to approach international education through many lenses, which is precisely what Pearce does in this collection. Through eleven distinct chapters, Pearce assembles a collection of highly qualified authors to analyze a wide range of international education issues.

International Education and Schools is organized into three parts. The first section, “A Historical Overview,” provides a historical perspective on international education through three unique lenses. Hayden and Thompson open the section by offering a broad overview of international schools and categorizing these schools into three common types. While they begin to explore how market demands have compelled certain sectors of international education to boom, this concept is more deeply explored by Brummitt and Keeling, who consider trends in international business and also break down some of the shifts in international school market demographics. Shortland’s chapter explores the influence of children’s education on corporate expatriation trends. It reminds readers of the context of international schools and highlights the deep web of surrounding issues that embed international education.

¹ The International Baccalaureate Organization is a non-profit educational foundation that offers four international programs to over 1,228,000 students, aged 3-19, in 147 countries around the world.(IBO, 2014)

The second section of the book, “Emerging Themes,” highlights a range of sticky issues that lurk beneath the surface of international education. For instance, Pearce notes the educational baggage that teachers carry from their home countries: he suggests that, despite the diversity in international school settings, policy trends in the U.S. or the U.K. may still have strongholds. Carder’s chapter offers a critical look into the dangers of language discourse, curricula, and practices that tend to overemphasize English and minimize the importance of students’ mother tongue or linguistic diversity. Wilkinson and Wilkinson question the influence of the IB’s ideology on students today, specifically Pestalozzi’s educational philosophy that students’ minds must be guided by their hearts. At the end of Part Two, Roberts digs into the rhetoric surrounding terms like international, global, international-mindedness, and global citizenship. He draws on trends in both international and national systems in his discussion.

Part Three is grouped under the theme “The New Critique.” In this section, Allan utilizes discourse theory to highlight the shifts from the rhetoric of multiculturalism or multinationalism to internationalism and interculturalism. In so doing, he points out the power of market influences on educational trends and notes the gaps between rhetoric and pedagogy. Next, Bunnell credits international schools for their early role in the formation of the IB and its vision. He also suggests that the near economic collapse of the IB in 1976 caused it to dramatically shift its priorities and focus towards market expansion and away from its founding ideology. Cambridge’s chapter introduces several underlying tensions of the IB programs and uses Bernstein’s theory of pedagogic discourse to critique these tensions. Finally, Caffyn’s chapter concludes the collection with an interesting consideration of boundaries, from cultural to physical, the complexity of boundaries in international schools, and international schools as sites of constant boundary renegotiation.

As is evidenced above, *International Education and Schools* speaks to a wide range of international education issues. Each chapter adopts a new stance and highlights another layer of complexity in the field. While the collection is clearly focused on international schools, the breadth of topics included accentuates the wider appeal of research in these unique sites: international schools are embedded in a web of national and international educational concerns. Despite a superficial detachment from traditional systems, international schools are both influenced by and influencing national and international educational trends. For instance, by highlighting the pedagogy that teachers tend to bring from their home countries, global rhetoric trends, or global market demands, this collection demonstrates the malleable position of international schools. At the same time, by tracing the IB’s roots to international schools or by highlighting the exponential growth of international schools that cater primarily to national students, the collection demonstrates the impact that these schools have on the broader field of education. In short, the topics raised in this collection effectively highlight the interdependence of international and national education trends; they position international schools within larger global phenomena.

Perhaps its greatest appeal is the perspectives from a broad and formidable team of contributors this collection offers. Pearce brings together expert voices that rarely speak in such close proximity. The varied and uniquely knowledgeable authors successfully capture the nuanced and constantly evolving mosaic of issues and research linked to international education. This breadth is partially at the expense of in-depth consideration of any single aspect. This is accentuated by the fairly abrupt ending of the text, which lacks a formal conclusion and leaves the reader to string together themes across fragmented chapter subjects. Nonetheless, the kaleidoscope of perspectives juxtaposed within this text offers a unique tasting of contemporary issues in the field. Each respective expert offers fresh insights into his/her area of expertise. This allows the book to serve as an introduction to the field or as a fascinating read for a more seasoned reader.

Another noteworthy aspect of this collection is the inclusion of critical stances. This collection digs beneath idealistic rhetoric of global citizenship and international-mindedness. It flags questionable shifts in the International Baccalaureate. It repeatedly reiterates the grip that global economics hold over international education. Issues of power and privilege are alluded to in numerous chapters. Trends around global mobility, assessment, and internationalization are held under harsh lights. While there are often hints of criticism lurking in international education texts, this collection directly tackles such issues.

In short, *International Education and Schools* is a collection with a lot to offer. It addresses the field's history, contemporary structure, and potential futures. It presents engaging points on a wide range of topics. While each chapter can offer unique insight, its power rests in its ability to paint a nuanced panoramic picture. This broader view allows a reader to contextualize the questions posed by each respective author. It also demonstrates the relevance and influence of international education within the larger field of education.

References

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Reviewer

Sarah Lillo is a doctoral candidate in Social Sciences and Comparative Education: International Education at the University of California, Los Angeles. She is an experienced international educator and has taught in international schools in both South Korea and Uganda. She also holds multiple education degrees from Vanderbilt

University's Peabody College. Her current research explores community engagement efforts and conceptions of global citizenship in international IB secondary schools in the Africa region.