

2015

Introduction: Working with, against and despite global 'best practices': Educational Conversations Around the Globe

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Citation of this paper:

Nivozov, Sarfarozi and Tarc, Paul, "Introduction: Working with, against and despite global 'best practices': Educational Conversations Around the Globe" (2015). *Education Publications*. 160.

<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/edupub/160>



Working with, against, and despite global 'best practices'

EDUCATIONAL CONVERSATIONS
AROUND THE GLOBE

A volume of articles from April 2014 RICE/CIDEC
Symposium at OISE, University of Toronto

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A RICE/CIDEC compendium...

**WORKING WITH, AGAINST AND DESPITE GLOBAL ‘BEST PRACTICES’
EDUCATIONAL CONVERSATIONS AROUND THE GLOBE**

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

Background to the compendium

In the unfolding 21st century, there is an expansion and intensification of *transnational* educational interactions and initiatives across the globe. Increasingly educational actors—as school teachers, teacher educators, researchers, development specialists, and community organizers—are working in transcultural contexts (in interconnected locations) in Canada and around the globe. In this context, we are increasingly confronting idealizations of “best practices” that are travelling across political borders, especially from the ‘west’ to the ‘east’ and to the ‘south,’ in an uneven world. Once legitimated as “best practices”, these techniques and strategies travel across the geographic, national, and cultural contexts to provide solutions to the problems faced by particular education systems. Educational transfer has been central to comparative, international, and development education for more than a century, but as of late the intensifying transnational rhetoric of ‘best practice’ requires much scrutiny as both danger and opportunity. What are global best practices? What is the character of these so-called best practices, their conceptual underpinnings and routes of assemblage? Which ‘best practices’ are travelling, how, and to which ‘local’ educational domains? How are they interpreted and engaged in local contexts and what are their effects? And ultimately, how are progressive and critically-minded educators to *work with, against and despite global ‘best practices?’*

To address these conditions and questions as framed above, a symposium for Ontario-based comparative and international educators and researchers was convened at the Ontario Institute of Studies of Education, University of Toronto on April 25, 2014. The forum was a

collaborative project between the two comparative and international education centers in Ontario: Western University's *Research in International and Contemporary Education* (RICE) and OISE's *Comparative, International and Development Education Center* (CIDECE). Though small in scope and modest in its format, this symposium proved to be a unique opportunity for Canadian education scholars, practitioners, and graduate students to converge and to critically and collectively engage these questions. Twelve faculty and twenty graduate students from Universities of Toronto, York, Western and Ottawa served as panelists and discussants. Professor Gita Steiner-Khamsi, a leading scholar in the field of educational borrowing and lending, from Teachers College, Columbia University gave the keynote address. In addition 80 participants from Ontario's education faculties, NGOs and government agencies attended this one-day intensive symposium.

The forum served as a unique place for Ontario comparative and international educators to exchange ideas, as well as to develop theoretical insights and practical strategies to more proactively engage in our respective trans-national/cultural contexts across the levels of policy, pedagogy and research. One of the key recommendations of the symposium was to make this theme-focussed forum an annual or biannual tradition in Ontario. The event of the full day symposium was preceded by a series of meetings between the two key organizers of the symposium (who are also the editors of this compendium). During those meetings six key conceptual themes were identified, reiterated with a number of colleagues and used to identify graduate students working in these areas. About half of the graduate student panelists eventually contributed to the compendium; their contributions herein should be seen as reflecting the work of collaborative processes begun in the planning stages of the symposium to the call for contributions post-symposium. The articles provided by the students underwent a double review process before their inclusion in this compendium. In concluding this background information we would like to thank the forum participants and discussants, the keynote speaker, the support staff, and especially the compendium contributors.

Global 'best practices': Engaging the terrain

As organizers of the symposium and editors of this compendium, we are well aware of the contested nature of so-called best practices. In this introduction, we think it valuable to present

our perspectives on this overarching theme. We intend our notes in this section to work as a guiding framework for this multi-authored compilation.

First, the symposium title presupposes the problematic nature of ‘best practices’ and their global take up. We believe and argue that so called global best practices are produced from particular locations, built up with the strengths and limitations of socially located individuals and collective geniuses, interests, and limitations. The social constructedness of best practices does not mean that they are without material force and effects; we acknowledge the reality of the global discourses, perceptions, and operations of certain educational ‘practices’ elevated and circulated as ‘global’ and ‘best’ in fields of power and through particular terminology, procedures and operations. These perceptions and concomitant realities have significant consequences for both the providers and users of education, such as the students and parents and societies in which they live. These consequences, both positive and negative, need to be taken seriously. Given both the problematic and material consequences of global ‘best practices’, we suggest that educators and researchers need to strategically work with, against and despite global ‘best practices.’ This and-both approach is complex and non-dichotomous; it is open to possibility, strategic and/yet critical; we suggest engagement and dialogue and reflexivity of one’s locatedness with/in the power-knowledge fields and effects of global ‘best practices.’

To unpack the concept further, we discuss four sets of issues to further situate the articles of this compendium. The first set of the problems, as we have already signaled, is definitional. The notion of best practice is inflected by the theoretical and practical inclinations of its users. What is or are best practices for liberals or critical pedagogues, for example, may not be so for conservatives or neoliberals. It is thus important to know how the author of ‘best practices’ is mobilizing the term; one could ascertain, for example, the authorial agenda and who is served and underserved by it. Some have neutrally proposed *best practices are those which work in one or more contexts to produce desired outcomes with high degree of quality, efficiency, effectiveness, and within defined time and with limited resources*. Of course, in practice, neutrality dissolves as it becomes necessary to make determinations on what constitutes “desired outcomes,” “quality,” etc. Terms such as efficiency and effectiveness are often rejected as being fundamentally technical and economic, conceiving of education as neutral, commodity and deterministic, rather than as a public good to be democratically debated and enacted in pluralistic societies, as a human right, or as unpredictable existential endeavour. Notions of quality,

efficiency, time and resources are not only contested, but become manifest in unequal and radically distinct contexts. Differentiated understandings and manifestations of best practices emerge dramatically, for example, when they confront human diversity as marked by gender, religion, ethnicity and language. In sum, ‘best practices’ requires a nuanced examination of underlying assumptions, modes of deployment and the material consequences of their deployment.

The second set of problems relates to the sometimes limited scope of the term ‘practice’. We believe the use of word practice is purposefully misleading. Practice sounds not only catchy and ‘real-world’, but also straightforward—unencumbered by sophisticated theories of social reality, subjectivity and development or by political agendas and various ideologies. So, on the one hand ‘practices and their effects,’ can be researched and validated *atheoretically* by simply surveying “what works” whilst maintaining an internal methodological validity. On the other hand, ‘practices’ as where we face the ‘real world’ can be seen as ideology-blind; Tabulawa (2003) has usefully exposed a deep connection between the technical terms and their ideological underpinning. English as a global language of communication, for example, is often framed as politically neutral or as simply a technical acquisition issue; such blind spots/omissions are critically engaged by Diane Dekker in this volume. Conversely, child-centered techniques and strategies are unproblematically tethered to progressive visions of democracy, human rights and choice, but can effectively operate seamlessly in the prevailing neoliberal ideology of competition, privatization, financialization, and economically driven education agenda; or, alternatively these techniques when applied to different educational contexts can produce outcomes contradictory to the spirit of the progressive visions. Wu addresses this train of the adoption of ‘progressive’ Western pedagogies in the Chinese context. In summary, we suggest that the word ‘practice’ be understood as much broader than techniques and strategies. It is constituted by ideas, concepts, models, programs, and approaches. The papers in this compendium emphasize the less visible underpinnings of the term ‘practice,’ making explicit that best practices are fundamentally representational/discursive and thereby politico-ideological and theoretical.

The third set of issues deals with the long-running historical trajectory of sharing practices across human societies and groups. Human beings have always borrowed and lent ideas to each other as individuals, communities and nations (Bereday, 1964). As such there are

changes and continuities in the ways practices have been borrowed and lent across times and places. Human history shows that ideas have been both borrowed and imposed: In the ancient times, the West, including Greece and Rome, heavily borrowed ideas, techniques and methodologies from India, Egypt, Iran and China, the superpowers of the time. In the medieval ages, Arabs and Muslims borrowed from Persians, Indians, Chinese and Greeks and early Christians, which they subsequently lent to the West. At the same time, the conquering Greeks, Romans, Persians, Arabs, and others imposed their best ideas on the conquered. The scale of these impositions has been as small as changing names of cities and as large as, what Anwaruddin notes (in this compendium), epistemicide—a concept one can apply to the swallowing up of ancient Phoenician and Persian civilizations by the Romans and Muslim Arabs. In other words, the current transferring of best practices is not necessarily new or uniquely Western. They should, as Froman argues in the compendium, be seen as results of ongoing transformations and updating of existing practices.

Still, in the last two to three centuries the trajectories of official borrowing and lending has been rather unidirectional, flowing from the West *to* the peripheries, eastbound and southbound. The western imposition and lending has been dramatic and qualitatively overwhelming. Furthermore, many of the recent so called south–south transfers have been nothing more than a second hand transference, transmission, and translation of the existing western ideas and practices (Steiner-Khamsi, 2000). In the 17-19th centuries, these practices served the purposes of western colonization and *mission civilitaire*, assembled through orientalist, eugenic and other supremacist ideologies. According to these discourses, non- Westerners have ceased to produce anything worthy of borrowing and emulation. The white man had to take the burden of civilizing for all of humanity. In the 20th century, epitomized in the post WWII period of international development, global best practices were imposed as part of the development projects, leading to few successes and fortifying dependencies in neocolonial fashion. Subsequently, current global best practices come out of these past trajectories as products of late modernity, embedded in the ideological and political enlightenment civilizing mission—to release and unleash human freedom and capabilities to innovate and create new technologies that have supposedly made the West what it is now: the pinnacle of humankind, still showing others the paths of progress and democracy as the only social imaginaries, imaginable to humanity. While some of these claims of western modernity in terms of unleashing human

potential and technological and intellectual progress are understandable, these ‘developments’ are also implicated in colonizations, world wars and conflicts and vast ecological destruction. From the perspective of a Eurocentric modernity with an Anglo-American globalization as the most recent chapter, it is important to trouble the notion of ‘global’ given how often, at least in macro policy discourses, global is synonymous with Western.

The notion of global therefore can serve as camouflage hiding the contextual production and parochial intentions with universalizing moves; in effect the ‘global’ here ‘speaks’ on behalf of all humanity as proposing these best practices as non-contextual and equally applicable in any context and culture worthy of the modernizing path. This tradition leads to the neo-institutionalist claims of non-imposition and of voluntary borrowing by developing countries and different cultural and epistemological milieu due to their quality, efficiency, practicality, effectiveness, and production of equity (Meyer and Ramirez, 2002). What is missing once again is a historical memory, which shows that the new lending and transfers are often simply recycled or adapted solutions to the earlier lending and impositions such as (for a particularly weighty example) a universal model of modern schooling. In the current situation of multi-generational and recurrent lending, where educators in non-western contexts have lost much of the indigenous capabilities under colonization, and who now must rely on the earlier borrowed and out-dated western frames and structures, *it is difficult* to criticize the updated western ideas that may indeed propose better solutions to the existing problems that colonizations have helped shape.

And yet still, the call for and work in, the revival of non-western practices is burgeoning and a number of the articles of this volume illustrate this movement. Whether the papers discuss language, internationalization, knowledge production or indigeneity, the thread of critical examination and alternative possibilities in reference to a history of domination or inequality surfaces in each. However, it is also important to not frame Western concepts and practices solely in negative terms. They need to be understood with attention to their conditions of production and to their purposes and effects. In doing so, we may identify empowering and liberating ideas and practices from individuals and networks working in the West. We may also be able to translate these practices to serve different, global humanistic, just purposes, as Afridi suggests in her article in this compendium.

Lastly, the fourth set of challenges with global ‘best practices’ is more empirical and literal. Many ‘best practices’ are themselves struggling to find substantive adoption and impact

in the idealized Western well-resourced classroom. Various modes of progressive education as ‘child-centered’ pedagogy and inquiry learning are perceived as play-like ideas, promoting relativism and validation of diverse viewpoints without deep engagement, or confuse means (specific teaching methods) with aims (higher purposes as intellectual autonomy). In the first case—under the trend Biesta (2014) names “learnification”—they can confuse the role of the teachers, who in many countries have abandoned their intellectual and authoritative roles (expected from them) in favour of facilitation and validation of diverse perspectives, playing safe, and political correctness. Further, this movement to progressive education as “facilitation” in a wider context of privatization and standardization can further inequalities and marginalization along class, gender and ethnic lines. Standardization has led to the narrowing of education to technical and measurable outcomes and has marginalized humanistic, arts, and social subjects as not directly related to the market or application (Lyotard, 1984). In many countries, teachers and schools are unprepared to apply this form of best practices and often see them as unnecessary intrusion and imposition on their discretion and wisdom. They have too few resources, too little time and insufficient moral support to implement these potentially useful approaches. Their salaries are meagre, their students are undernourished, and their classrooms are overcrowded. The teacher training models that accompany their induction are often inadequate for ensuring teachers’ mastery of these good practices. Largely top-down and outside in, these practices are seen as an imposition and denigration of the teachers’ existing knowledge and a disregard of their classroom realities and life and work conditions. Indeed the irony of *imposing inquiry learning* (given that inquiry learning is founded on the recognition of the autonomy of the learner) on teachers in “developing” country contexts should not be overlooked! These models of teacher professional development are often promoted by the international agencies or outside change agents through a cascading approach, which has proven unsustainable for ensuring the incorporation of these ideas and practices. Many of these best practices require additional resources that are not available in the context of poor schools in the West and public schools in non-western contexts. As soon as the political (e.g., elections or joining a particular ‘club’ such as in the Bologna process), and economic gains (funding transferred and some attempts at implementation) coalesce, the sustainable application of these global best practices on the ground remains more aspiration than achievement supported through sufficient resources and top-down commitments. The search frantically starts for new global best

practice on the horizon, because of the latest political and economic opportunities to chase. (Steiner-Khamsi, 2000)

In the second case, it is important to note, that even in the idealized classroom of the West, as progressive pedagogies have been mainstreamed, the emphasis on the underlying deeper visions as learner autonomy and critical thinking are sidelined under schooling, where the need for standardization, measurement, (equitable) sorting and, indeed, the development of teacherly ‘best practices’ tend to press for recipe creation and following, and the instrumental take-up of critical thinking. So for example having more sophisticated recipes to follow or devising entrepreneurial solutions to fundraising (as an answer to social inequality) may represent important skills in 21st century learning contexts, but this approach is unlikely to be what the progressive reformers of the 20th century had in mind in terms of the learner’s capacity for thinking and self-authorship (Dewey, 2007).

Finally one must consider the inevitable subjectivity and agency on the part of those who ‘borrow’ global ‘best practices.’ In addition to the financial, there are also political and cultural forces shaping the borrowing and lending of best practices. Policy makers, including top level politicians, may be interested in how global best practices help them get re-elected, gain access to large scale funding, or join the ‘club of civilized nations.’ International agencies and civil societies obtain more funding and legitimacy if they promote western ideas and can produce evidence of their implementation. Schools can improve their ranking and budgets if they accept being part of these best practices schemas. Teachers may get exposure to new methods of teaching, free travels to meet their colleagues, release from their routine work, and may secure promotion. At times, and over time, it is difficult to contest the convincing rhetoric of these practices and even more difficult to *not* play along. Parents and children may feel that learning English and accessing other forms of academic capital is necessary in the struggle for upward social status and mobility; at times native language and cultural capital may become secondary. Nevertheless, global ‘best practices’ undergo numerous transformations such as full-scale acceptance, creolization, glocalization, modification, indigenization, domestication, and out-and-out rejection. Anderson-Levitt (2003), Steiner –Khamsi (2000), Niyozov and Dastambuev (2012), Nykiel-Herbert 2004), Silova (2006) and others have documented many of these single and multiple transformations on the ground. Wu’s article in this paper represents an example of how these transformations are taking place in the case of one Chinese college.

The panel themes and introductions to the graduate students' short articles

This compendium reflects the organization of our 2014 April symposium. The symposium consisted of six thematic panels, dealing with various issues around the principal theme of 'global best practices.' The first of the six key themes addressed the question of *Idealizations of the 'Good' in Internationalizing Higher Education: Curriculum, Research, and Service Learning*. In contrast to the neoliberal manifestations of internationalization coming under much critique, the participants of this panel focused on what *is* or *might be* desirable—either as exemplary current initiatives/'best practices' or as alternative potentialities. Accordingly, presenters engaged with what constitutes ideal forms of internationalization in terms of research, curricula, partnerships and service learning in the global South. Two papers from this panel, by Momina Afridi and Ali Khorsandi are presented in this volume. While acknowledging the value of internationalization, Ali Khorsandi Taskoh criticizes the gradual extension of commercial logic and market rationales into the educational and academic initiatives in the Canadian context. For best practice, he suggests that the central goals of internationalization activities should be educating new generations of world-aware students who are globally competitive, academically creative and critical and politically committed to the values of democracy, diversity, and equity. Momina Afridi, on the other hand, proposes that *Globally Networked Learning Environments* (GLNE) can become a global best practice, if managed well, i.e., grounded in equal and mutually inclusive dialogue between scholars, educators, and students across the North–South boundaries. As a dialogical site of critical engagement with existing and new practices, the GLNE can produce practices and models that serve the interests of global justice and equitable growth represented through multiple epistemological frameworks.

The second thematic panel, *Knowledge Production and Publications: Center – Periphery Relations*, addressed important questions as the following: What are the current limits and possibilities of international knowledge production in an uneven world? What are the implications of the dominance of English in the construction and dissemination of research publications? How are more peripheral knowledges produced in non-Western societies interacting (or not) with mainstream knowledge production in the university under imaginaries of modernization? And, how might relations be more reciprocal as in the spirit of internationalism?

Critically engaging the post-colonial thoughts of Alatas, Tabulawa, Santos and Paraskeva, among others, Sardar Anwaruddin presents a provocative concept of *epistemicide* as the swallowing up of non-western epistemologies by western education systems, which leads to colonization of mind, deskilling, and academic dependency. Anwaruddin ends his chapter with proposing an idea of rooted cosmopolitanism, which, as a best practice, he borrows from the Ghanaian scholar Anthony Appiah. As an open and embracing concept, rooted cosmopolitanism denounces dichotomies such as West and East and tradition and modernity but, most importantly, replaces the idea of epistemicide of any kind with dialogical synthesis and syncretism. Olivier Bégin-Caouette takes us into a thrilling journey of global inequalities in academic publication. He suggests that global knowledge production is dominated by the Anglophone countries, English language, and natural sciences. To overcome this troika, Bégin-Caouette suggests how knowledge production and dissemination inequities be remedied, an approach that in itself could be called an alternative best practice, based on concerns for equity, diversity, relevance and rethinking what is a worthwhile knowledge. In the last paper in this section, Clara I. Tascón, invites us to rethink the whole process of knowledge production in international research collaboration. Grounding her paper in the experience of Latin American scholarship, Tascón informs us on the developments in knowledge production alternatives from the continent. She mentions contextualized network analysis (something reminiscent of Afridi's GLNEs) as an approach that is based on dialog, collaboration, relevance, and validation of alternative forms of knowledge.

The third panel, *Aboriginal and International Education: Conjunctures and Disjunctures*, in fact overlapped with the previous theme, while also having unique elements. On the one hand, the 'international' or intercultural may represent a less assimilative and/or 'treaty-blind' inflection than that of the 'multicultural' education. On the other hand, international educational discourses have often privileged elites' mobilities and been blind to historical and ongoing forms of colonialism in their idealizations and practices. Critical perspectives on global citizenship education GCE have begun to bring these overlaps and conflicts to light. This panel examined the (potential) conjunctures and disjunctures of these two discourses/imaginaries/'practices in the world.' Michelle Froman's short piece debases the Eurocentric and Anglo-Saxon claims of educational best practices, suggesting that best practices, even though claimed by the West and western-based scholars as their own, may in fact be assumptive and subsuming of ideas from

other sources, such as indigenous cultures. Eurocentrism did not occur in a vacuum, suggests Froman. She presents two of the 49 UNESCO-listed Canadian best practices, both of which are in fact indigenous approaches. Froman ends by detailing one of these best practices, *Generative Curriculum Model*, a bicultural community-based model for building capacity for early childhood care and development.

The fourth thematic panel addressed the question of *Internationalizing Teacher Education*, focussing on how faculties of education are beginning to awaken to the growing number of Canadian and other Anglo-Westerners teaching in international (and first nation) contexts. From private IB international schools to hybrid English/National schools to national schools in developing contexts, the demand for international school teachers has intensified. It asked: how are teacher education programs are responding through curriculum, international practicum, and specialized programming? Presenters in this panel focussed on ‘best practices’ or programing to support teachers’ cosmopolitan capacities in their (prospective) international or transcultural contexts. Regrettably, no paper was submitted from this panel.

Panel five examined themes related to *English Language Pedagogy in Transnational Contexts*. Using English as a medium of communication in teaching and research is seen as one such best practice. The demand for English had made English language teaching an expansive industry across the globe and engendered so-called best practices for teaching English as a foreign language. Native and non-native English teachers as expats and locals are teaching English to students in many educational jurisdictions in Anglo and non-Anglo countries. Across the various kinds of institutes and levels of education there seems to be a notion of ‘best practices’ for English Language teaching, albeit how these largely Western/’progressive’ language pedagogies interact and perform across the diverse contexts of English language classrooms remains complex and in need of greater examination. This panel focussed on conceptions, interpretations and responses to/of ‘best’ English language pedagogies in transcultural (East-West) contexts.

The three papers of this panel are best summarized by Dr. Stephen Bahry,¹ who coordinated the work of this panel and summarized their contributions, as follows:

¹ Stephen Bahry, Visiting Scholar, Comparative International and Development Education Centre, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto s.bahry@utoronto.ca.

The three papers in the compendium on language and education each raise interesting and significant issues related to the field of comparative international and development education and, in particular, the question of *the place of language* in comparative, international and development education. These three papers taken as a whole bring language to the forefront and raise several problematic issues in regard to second language teaching and learning. Dekker's piece on education and development in the Philippines argues that in such a fundamentally multilingual, multicultural context, taken-for-granted notions of monolingual English education as "best practice" are incompatible with quality education, and implies a broader critique of the "best practice" of using dominant languages of global metropolises as primary languages of instruction. Plonski's look at international students studying academic English at a Canadian university takes up the complex interplay of language learning, intercultural learning and individual identity development in adult second language learning and the importance of teachers opening themselves to learning from and about their students as part of providing a space where language learning and personal development can flourish. Kandil shifts the theme to the identity of teachers, namely the frequent identification of teachers as native or non-native English-speaking, another example of a taken-for-granted distinction based on a precritical, atheoretical prejudice. Kandil problematizes defining teachers by what they are not: just imagine if we termed Native English-speaking teachers as ISLLs (Incomplete Second Language Learners) or FBTs (Failed Bilingual Teachers). Rather than Non-native English-speaking Teacher (NEST), Kandil argues for a term that valorizes plurilinguallism and the self-identification of teachers, which raises further questions about the "ownership" of language.

Bahry concludes that,

these three papers constitute an intriguing exploration within Comparative International and Development Education (CIDE) in Canada of the role of first and second languages in quality education and the interconnection of language(s) and identity development, all of which run counter to views of language as a neutral fixed instrument that can simply be taken up or put down at will, and is easily separated from experience. The papers are consonant with Gadamer's view that language is the medium in which human life overwhelmingly takes place. Clearly, taking a hermeneutic view of language and

experience has strong implications for the search for best practices, suggesting that a sensitivity to context, relationship, interaction, personal meanings and identity can point us to good practices and even better practices, but challenging the assumption that universally valid “best practices” can or even should be found.

The last, sixth panel addressed the theme of *Peace and Conflict Education*. It suggested that education, as ‘double edged,’ could promote peace-making, peace building and conflict resolution as well as hate, conflicts, wars, and animosities. From school bullying, to ‘emergency education’ in conflict or disaster zones and classes in refugee camps, locally and internationally, schools and teachers are engulfed in different kinds of conflict and conflict resolution. Why has education, both formal and informal, seemed to have done so little to reduce wars, conflict, and violence? How can education’s peace building potential be more fully realized? What can education do in sites of, and in the aftermath of, conflict? What can we learn from the approaches, achievements, and challenges of international education research? This panel aimed to respond to these questions, issues and themes. The paper by Ahmed Salehin Kaderi takes us into a critical analysis of grade 9-10 Bangladesh and Global Studies textbooks where Salehin explores how the binary approaches to creating heroes and evils in the Social Studies and Humanities textbooks in South Asia contribute to political violence or to its reduction (Lall, 2008). Salehin suggests that pedagogies of cooperation and solidarity, as well as critical analysis of historical narratives, of myths and truths, and “teaching history as a fallible human construct can ...guide young citizens’ democratic decision making about their political engagement”. This may lead to political democratization and subsequently to “cultivating peace-building citizenship.”

Professor Gita Steiner-Khamsi’s afterword, *Crossing the Thin Line between a “Best Practice” and an International Standard*, presents a fascinating extension to the discussions engendered by the articles of the compendium. She unpacks three facades that collectively serve as a cover-up for turning contextually-produced practices into universally applicable best practices: (i) rationality, (ii) precision, and (iii) universality. Building on numerous critical analyses of global neoliberal-induced education reforms and her own research experiences, Steiner-Khamsi demystifies the uses of numbers, statistics, evaluation schemas, and the ‘what went right approach’, which provide legitimacy to the “export of reform packages from one country to another.” Steiner-Khamsi examines two key methodologies used to elevate local

solutions the status of universal applicability: (i) standardization and (ii) comparison. Taking the reader through three methods of comparison, she draws our attention to standardized comparison, which, as a new fashion:

privileges international over local developments, in that globalization is presented as a pervasive external force overwhelming local influences, which somehow renders the nation-state motionless by paralyzing policy actors (p. 86).

Lastly, Steiner-Khamsi questions practices of making education systems comparable and disregarding the unique contextual challenges between the lenders and borrowers, so as to get the ‘best’ education practices travelling and justified by policy makers on both the lending and borrowing sides. To deny that policy transfer has actually occurred or to downplay the differences between the systems, using methods of standardized comparison, are just two of such methods. Exposing the politics and economics of borrowing and lending, Steiner-Khamsi asks: who do international standards and policy transfer empower and who do they disempower? The ultimate lesson that needs to be acknowledged is that:

There is no wholesale policy borrowing and lending. In the same vein, there is no wholesale adoption of international standards. What is adopted, what is not adopted, and how, and why, international standards or “best practices” are locally reinterpreted are topics of great academic interest and professional curiosity (p. 88).

With this lesson, this compendium comprises a humble contribution toward Silova’s call (2014) to critique the prevailing ‘normative’ task of comparative international education and to revive its analytical task of proposing alternative social and education imaginaries to the dominant (neoliberal) ones. We invite our readers to an enjoyable intellectual journey in engaging our graduate students’ contributions upon such a complex and contested terrain as global ‘best practices’ in education.

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