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Book Review: International Education in Global Times: Engaging the Pedagogic

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Book Review

International Education in Global Times: Engaging the Pedagogic. By Paul Tarc. (2013) Peter Lang: New York. 132 pp. (ISBN 978-1-4331-1476-2).

Reviewed by Michael O'Sullivan, Brock University

Paul Tarc's book *International Education in Global Times* emerged from a pre-service class which he designed for teacher-candidates who are considering teaching abroad. In the Preface, he defined the challenge that he undertook both in this class and in the resulting publication as bringing "a level of criticality into the largely celebratory and Western-centered imaginaries of international education" (p. xv). This is an essential task in an era in which a growing number of frequently for-profit organizations offer what amount to little more than tourist experiences in poor countries to well-off young people to bolster their resumes. Short of travel abroad, students are encouraged to attend rallies designed to pump up their energy levels with messages about what "we" can do for "them". Both of these are charitable models, in effect, reinforce unequal north/south relations while making the charitable northerner feel good about themselves while feeling sorry for the marginalized southerner. Tarc offers teacher-candidates, and those that teach them, a critical model that far from discouraging teaching and acting from a global perspective, challenges those so engaged to do so from a critical "eyes wide open" perspective. The learning that he offers future educators constitutes a form of "difficult knowledge" (Britzman, cited by Tarc, p. 33) precisely because he offers a deeply critical analysis of the largely celebratory imaginary cited above and moves the reader to a much more critical space which challenges both complacency and the "feel good" charitable impulse that our engagement with issues of poverty and inequity often evoke.

The book, despite Tarc's commitment "to explain, represent and analyse a small set of current tensions of international education in a non-specialised language" (Acknowledgements), does not quite deliver on this particular promise, at least according to several of my graduate students with whom I used this book. As evidenced by our class discussions, they found the content was challenging both because of its critique of long-held assumptions and the language. Nonetheless, the students acknowledged that our review of the book, coupled with other readings (e.g., Pike, Selby, Dower, Richardson), gave them a new and critical insight into the issues of international and global education. One of these students was a teacher who, the year prior to the class, had used materials produced by Free the Children. She accompanied her students to the Me to We rally at the Air Canada Centre. She admitted she was not comfortable with my critique of that model of student engagement which I had spoken about in an early stage of the class. She did a complete turn-around after reading the book and wrote a compelling critique of the "Me to We" phenomenon. All of the students, including one whose undergraduate studies particularly well prepared him to understand Tarc's argument, agreed that they found the introductory chapter and particularly the last chapter to be challenging. This difficulty, however, did not dissuade them. These students did not resist the critique contained in the book even though it challenged their presuppositions. Because they found the material compelling and pertinent to their interest in teaching from a global perspective, they struggled to embrace the critical pedagogy advocated by Tarc and apply it to their lived and to their professional experience.

Despite their struggles with the first and last chapters, the students found Tarc's use of the parable of the three blind men and the elephant to be very enlightening and they appreciated the way he extended the metaphor. So, too, did they appreciate the presentation and discussion of the now widely cited experience of Tayla Zemach-Berson. These sections gave them the grounding they needed to better comprehend the more theoretical chapters.

International Education in Global Times: Engaging the Pedagogic makes an important contribution to an under theorized object of study. Students will not find this an easy read nor should they given the book's stated objective – to challenge the celebration of the northern impulse to help the southern poor without ever coming to terms with the historical and structural reasons for their poverty and the benefits that have flowed north albeit unequally. It constitutes a welcome addition to the reading list of a senior undergraduate or graduate course on international or global citizenship education.