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**Book review: International education and schools: Moving beyond the first 40 years**

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## Book reviews

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### International education and schools: Moving beyond the first 40 years

by Richard Pearce (ed.)

London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013

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**Reviewed by:** Terry Haywood, *International School of Milan, Italy*

There are conventional ways to celebrate anniversaries in school life, with alumni reunions and gala dinners among the most popular. Apart from bonding the community and generating a collective sense of place and history, these events are also important opportunities to recognize individuals who have contributed to the survival, success, and growth of the institution. I am sure that the International School of London (ISL) organized a number of celebratory moments during its 40th year in 2012–2013, but it deserves particular credit for using the anniversary stimulus to sponsor the publication of this important compilation of chapters from a group of leading researchers and practitioners whose reflections on the condition of international education today will resonate as a source of inspiration for a long time to come. Richard Pearce, with his own distinguished association with ISL and with cutting-edge ideas in education, has brought together an outstanding collection of essays, which will surely become an important landmark on our professional ambience.

In his opening comments, the editor pays tribute to his *collaborative team of experts*, and one of the impressive features of this collection is that it displays the hallmarks of an over-arching design. The essays cover a fascinating and diverse range of topics across a wide spectrum of research interests, but the authors cross-reference each others' work fluently, and the book demonstrates a genuine unity of thematic intent. This is rare in a compilation of this sort, and it is a welcome achievement. It not only ensures that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; it also results in the impact of each part being greater than it would be if taken in isolation. A consequence of the holistic design is that a number of themes emerge repeatedly. It doesn't matter whether this was a conscious intention of the editorial team or an unexpected convergence of conclusions from different perspectives. Whatever the case, readers are consistently encouraged to reflect on the inter-disciplinary links and connections that reinforce the arguments of individual chapters, and while each essay can be read independently in any order, the book never loses its appeal as an organic entity.

In these paragraphs, I will focus on just one of the compilation's recurrent themes and leave readers to discover others for themselves. I have, however, chosen a question of immense significance, which is already hinted at in the book's subtitle *moving beyond the first 40 years*, and which presents the shared perception that international education has reached something of a crossroads. A sense of optimism currently pervades the field (or the market, as some would have it), and the authors give plenty of recognition to the progress and successes of the past, but they are united in questioning whether the future can be (and should be) projected simply as an extrapolation of

trends and tendencies of the last decade. Sure enough, Nicholas Brummitt and Anne Keeling offer an insightful and compelling forecast of continued quantitative growth based on the data collected by the International Schools Consultancy Group, which is proving to be a mine of valuable and provocative information. However, any suggestion that this vision of the future means 'business as usual' had already been destroyed in the opening chapter, in which Mary Hayden and Jeff Thompson's more qualitative approach leads them to identify four 'metaphors' describing alternative ways that international schools might evolve in the years ahead. The term *metaphor* derives from the catch-phrases employed as titles for these models of possible evolution: the *hotel chain* (in which international schooling is provided by brands associated with star categories that reflect levels of service and cost), the *exclusive* (in which the rise of *national* international schools leads to English-medium institutions becoming a smaller but highly prestigious network with stringent accreditation and certification credentials), the *spa resort* (in which technology drives the provision of online courses for consumers at a distance), and the *food court* (in which schools and curriculum designers develop a spread of academic and vocational courses enabling individuals to select options for study according to their personal preferences and needs). These scenarios are deliberately visionary, emerging not from empirical studies but from the intuition and experience of the authors after an articulate summary of the history of international schooling thus far. In the closing chapter of Part 1, Susan Shortland presents her highly innovative research on the way that corporate policies are changing the demographics of expatriate employees' conditions and thereby impacting the make-up of the traditional international school population distributions. This fascinating contribution is indicative of the novel ways that Pearce and his team have set out to document the patterns and problems of international schools through methodologies and approaches that are new to the field.

Part 1 is intended to be a *Historical Overview*, but the sensation that international education is at a crossroads continues in subsequent sections and penetrates almost every chapter in Part 2, entitled *Emerging Themes*. The title of Maurice Carder's contribution seems to celebrate the shift from the *English-Only* to a *Linguistically-Diverse* pedagogy in multicultural contexts, but he actually goes on to document continuing irritation with the fact that the theory, which is now an accepted part of our recognized canon, is rarely transferred into good educational practice. David and Veronica Wilkinson translate an academic study of Pestalozzi's influence on international education into a highly practical evaluation of how some of the philosophical principles that inspired the founding fathers of the International Baccalaureate (IB) are being undermined by an increasingly institutional focus on standardization and external validation over the freedom of teachers to develop courses that authentically respond to their students' contexts. Boyd Roberts, meanwhile, takes on the concept of international mindedness and declares that it is 'a term whose time is up'. His well-argued and amply referenced essay looks at how words inform understanding and action, and after showing how we may have been misguided in giving international mindedness such a high profile in our learning goals, he goes on to describe in some detail how the principle of *education for a better world* could be a more pertinent driver of global engagement and a more demanding driver of curriculum and learning. Editor Richard Pearce contributes a chapter himself, investigating the way that student diversity has been treated in international schools. He expands the context for his study by looking at the concept of identity, and by going beyond simplistic notions of global or national identities to investigate how diversity in general has been reflected in research and practice. His approach is intriguingly multi-disciplinary, taking in a socio-historical review of English and American cultural predispositions, a longitudinal empirical survey of conference workshops and journal articles, and a psychological review of our contemporary understanding of the concept of identity. In tune with other authors, he concludes that we may be on the turning point of a new era, pointing to the work of Damasio and Haidt in

identifying the central role of unconscious activity and emotion in any action or judgment, making it impossible to separate affective and cognitive categories. The persistent message of this section is that a number of important concepts and practices which have underpinned international education to date are no longer effective and need to be reviewed, rejected or taken seriously at last.

Part 3 ('The New Critique') is a collection of chapters with a more theoretical intent, but the themes of crossroads and change are still pervasive. Tristan Bunnell makes the case most strongly in his entertaining review of the role of 'pioneering' international schools. His professional association with ISL enables him to connect with the school's anniversary and look at the way that individual institutions have been pivotal for the IB at several stages of its development by taking on and testing experimental projects before they were institutionalized in an officially recognized format. Incidentally, he looks at several models that describe the phases of growth for both the IB and international schools in general. His appeal for ways to recognize the pioneering schools is passionate but not always convincing. After all, a football team is only as good as its latest season, and the important role that Accrington Stanley played in helping to found the English Football League in the 19th century does not earn the club a permanent place in today's Premier League. Nonetheless, his writing is lucid, and his arguments provoke a timely consideration of how innovation occurs and can be encouraged. Michael Allan picks up on some of the issues raised in Parts 1 and 2 by suggesting that for all its success in the market place, international education has so far missed the opportunity to establish itself as a philosophy rather than a discourse. He arrives at this conclusion by looking at the discourses of multinational and multicultural perspectives, on the one hand, and international and intercultural on the other. By not recognizing fully the validity of the former, where there is ample experience in national systems, he argues that international education has not yet come to terms with what it really means to develop an 'education free from cultural bias and equally accessible to all linguistic and cultural groups'. Further dilemmas in international education, especially within the IB framework, are exposed by Jim Cambridge using a Bernsteinian analysis of curriculum and assessment. I confess that I have never found Bernstein's writing easy to read, but his conceptual framework is made more meaningful and enlightening in Cambridge's application to systems with which many international educators will be familiar. Once again, the crossroads challenge emerges, and Cambridge poses questions about whether the IB is still serving international schools effectively or whether its involvement with national schools, especially but not uniquely in the United States, makes it less fit for the purpose for which it was founded. The final chapter by Richard Caffyn looks at a different kind of crossroads by throwing light on the psychodynamics and micro-politics of schools through the concept of virtual boundaries which pervade institutions.

All contributions demonstrate profound erudition on the part of the authors, but most of all, they convey a tangible passion for their subjects, not just writing as prominent theoreticians and practitioners but also delivering a sense of urgency and importance in the analyses that they present. This is a collection that will stimulate further research as well as provide ongoing and timely stimuli for teachers and educational leaders. Most of all, the book succeeds in what it set out to achieve, which is to identify our current place in a rapidly evolving scenario envisaging not just what international education is, but what it could still become. From recognizing the achievements of these past 40 years and the pioneers who made them possible, Pearce and his colleagues insist that there is no time for complacency. Even today, they suggest, there is room (and need) for pioneers who will continue the spirit of innovation and global concern that served the last generation of educators so well and who are now needed to avoid the risks that can also accompany success and recognition. This is a timely volume and one that deserves a wide circulation and readership.