



Book review

L'épicentre: Démocratie, Éco*Citoyenneté mondiale et Éducation transformatrice / The Epicenter: Democracy, Eco*Global Citizenship and Transformative Education / El Epicentro: Democracia, Eco*Ciudadanía Mundial y Educación Transformadora

Editors Paul R. Carr, Gina Thésée and Eloy Rivas-Sanchez, DIO Press, 2023, Paperback, \$39.99

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The background for this volume is the Symposium organized in 2021 by the UNESCO Chair DCMÉT (*La démocratie, la citoyenneté mondiale et l'éducation transformatrice*). The symposium resulted in a final synthesis report; further developed and reworked, this report is now published in this edited volume.

Altogether, 46 authors have contributed to the 25 chapters in the volume. The anthology is an ambitious collaborative project carried out in three languages—French, English, and Spanish. The authors are scholars and educators from around the world, the Americas, Europe, and Asia, with different academic backgrounds. The book comprises a range of disciplines, including history, psychology, education, and



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sociology, and the authors hold different perspectives and use distinct research methods. The common thread is the illumination of three areas of study: democracy, citizenship, and transformative education.

The backdrop of the volume rests on the understanding that colonialization has shaped and continues to shape society. Racism, gender imbalance, capitalist exploitation, and imperialism frame and structure power relations in the world. The book articulates a strong criticism of the neoliberal tendencies that prevent citizenship for all. Several chapters deal with how minorities or expatriates and their organizations work with citizenship and inclusion.

The book begins with a foreword by Michael Hoechsmann, who links the challenges in democracy to what he calls a *communication crisis*, in which fake news and conspiracies abound. Hoechsmann discusses the causes and consequences of the rise of right-wing extremism, the antivaccination movement and the global spread of political polarization.

The first part of the present anthology, which focuses on *Democracy*, can be seen as a contribution to the decolonization perspective introduced in the preface, and it includes a theoretical literature review of post-humanist theory, discussions of the concept of democracy, and empirical studies. Several chapters deal with the Indigenous people's struggle for autonomy and social mobilization against neoliberal policies.

At first glance, it is difficult to separate part 1 on *Democracy* from part 2 on *Eco*Global citizenship*. In part 2, the authors continue to draw on decolonialism and engage with global citizenship in different parts of the world, connecting it to ecosystems in a broad sense. The argument is that democracy is a prerequisite for developing a world that can respond to the needs of people, species, and the environment. *Eco*Global citizenship* also includes more philosophical-psychological perspectives, as illustrated in Peterlini's chapter entitled "Feeling the World: Dilemmas and potentialities for a planetary empathy as a prerequisite for Global Citizenship Education." Peterlini refers to the danger of dividing the world into dichotomies, such as "us and them" or "humans and nature"; at the same time, he underscores the global value of empathy.

The connection between democracy and education has existed since Dewey wrote *Democracy and Education* a century ago. And as its title suggests, Part 3 on *Transformative education* takes a critical perspective. This part provides examples of how education can lead to change, describing practices from Belgium, Haiti, and Quebec, among other locales. Most of the chapters in this section are concerned with education for adults, whether adult immigrants or students in teacher training. Part 3 also provides insights into different understandings of the purpose of education, bringing in educational–philosophical perspectives.

What makes the book valuable is, first, its topicality. It presents and analyzes situations we are experiencing

today and the politics that are happening now. Second, it provides an understanding of the social, environmental, and economic challenges of many different sizes and at different levels. It spans from the local to the global, from the past via the present to opportunities in the future, and from the individual level to the community level. These scales are challenging to deal with and require the reader to move mentally along large spans of time, space and quantity.

That the authors write in their languages—whether French, English, or Spanish—which mirrors the purpose of the book of ensuring that voices from all over the world are being expressed, both linguistically and culturally. For readers, the multilingual format is two-sided: While it gives readers access to chapters in a familiar language, some of the articles are inaccessible unless the reader is fluent in French, English and Spanish. Central concepts and issues common to each section are highlighted as an introduction in all three languages, as are the summaries of each chapter.

For those with a slightly pessimistic view of the world, who read social or ecological analyses of the state of the world with increasing unease and perceive the world around us as an increasingly dangerous place, the anthology does not provide peace of mind. The threats emerging globally, the decline in democracy, natural disasters, increased inequality, war, and the pandemic are brought to light. However, in the middle of the storm, the authors present constructive insights and paths to take that can serve to confront the challenges. They convey meaningful ways of discussing, and creating space for democracy and emancipation, showing how we can manage to connect education with civil society at a local level and around the world, generating deliberative and dialogical processes as we do so.

The authors have created a meeting point, an epicenter of a “real societal earthquake” (as we can read in the afterword) for learning together; it is a place where commitment to transformation stands strong. The edited volume goes beyond being interdisciplinary to being a transdisciplinary, integrated, and transcendent dialogue.

The Epicenter is an important book on the research front for interdisciplinary qualitative social analyses, and it may be valuable to anyone with a social interest. For teacher educators, the book makes a valuable contribution on how to approach the democratic mandate in teacher education, including political perspectives, equity, and the purpose of education at large.