



## BOOK REVIEW

# The Art of World Learning: Community Engagement for A Sustainable Planet

Richard Slimbach

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*(xii + 251 pages, ISBN 1-57922-966-5, \$27.50)*

### Reviewed By

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The at-a-glance profiles featured on college and university websites often advertise how many of their students study abroad. Publicizing these numbers proves that schools perceive global learning to be a selling point. I had never thought of this aspect of higher education as a commodity whose value could be exploited, but reading *The Art of World Learning* by Richard Slimbach opened my eyes.

Slimbach directs the Global Learning Term at Azusa Pacific University, so he clearly has experience in creating such programs. He is both a critic of the dominant model of international programming within higher education and an advocate for an alternative that would unite global education and civic engagement.

I found his critique compelling. Slimbach has watched higher education champion study-abroad semesters, travel seminars, intercultural immersions, international research, and the like, and does not shy away from naming the moral ambiguity: “Educational travel has ambiguous effects: It can either encourage learners to extract personal pleasures *from* the world, or it can support them in constructing a competent and caring response *to* the world” (171, italics in original). Too often it serves students’ (and parents’) desires for “life-changing experiences” that they can put on their résumés. Educational organizations compete for consumers, so “they often feel intense pressure to sign up any live body,” while field organizations “agree to host foreign workers without raising some fundamental questions” about what value those workers will bring (170).

Slimbach goes on to point out that within higher education, international study and community engagement generally occupy separate silos. His alternative model would correct this, and thereby address the moral problems of global learning that is not service oriented. He outlines a vision of world learning that would transform both the world and individual learners. In six chapters he sketches out the Why? What? How? Where? For Whom? and For What? of educational travel. It should ultimately serve the greater good, not merely the self-enlargement of students or institutions. It should aspire to provide a global liberal arts, integrating intellectual, moral, and intercultural competencies. It should employ a worldly pedagogy, stressing meaningful social interaction between guests and hosts along with guided introduction to new ideas so that students learn with both heart and head. It should redraw “the field,” so that students’ learning about the world starts at their doorsteps and only later takes them abroad. It should balance the benefits accrued by students and the communities they visit and study. And finally, it should strive to make the journey worth it, so that returning students come home with new skills, attitudes, and outlooks to continue changing the world.

I wish that, given his experience, Slimbach had offered more direct and practical advice for teachers and administrators on how to design such programs. Slimbach’s writing tends to migrate into discussions about threats our planet faces, such as climate change. But other books accomplish that. Shifting educational paradigms is hard, and concrete illustrations and examples help. The book does, however, stimulate the reader’s thinking about the purpose and design of global learning in higher education.