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BOOK REVIEW: Arocena, F. & Bowman, K. (2014). *Lessons from Latin America: Innovations in Politics, Culture, and Development*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 204 pages, ISBN: 9781442605497.

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**Abstract**

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**Keywords**

Latin American Culture, Latin American History, Cultural Pluralism, Politics, Immigrants, Development, Socioeconomic Influences, Democracy

**Cover Page Footnote**

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*Lessons from Latin America: Innovations in Politics,  
Culture, and Development.* Toronto: University of  
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This book is written by an American political scientist at the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs at the Georgia Institute of Technology and a Uruguayan sociologist at the Universidad de la República, and its ten chapters are a result of their extensive collaboration. Arocena and Bowman have led Latin American study programs and fieldwork in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Honduras, Mexico, and Uruguay, and through these experiences, they desired to write a book that would draw attention to the myriad areas Latin American countries have had to address, often drawing strength through their diversity, and the innovative ways in which they have done so. The reader may get the sense that they are fighting urgently to be a voice for Latin America, while often chastising United States foreign policy in the region. By the end of the book, the reader is also left with the impression that they have plenty more to say about the region.

The authors begin by addressing United States stereotypes of Latin America specifically, stereotypes that, they point out, have not only demeaned the region but homogenized it as well. This is followed by chapters discussing some aspect at least one Latin American country has had to address, and they are grouped into one of three categories, “Politics: Election and Participation,” “Cultural Rights: Racism, Discrimination, and Multiculturalism,” and “Social Policy, Inequality, and the Beautiful Game.” Each chapter concludes with a summary of lessons learned, sample discussion questions, and suggestions for future reading. The chapters could stand-alone for very specific topic discussion, and the text includes clear references to other chapters within the book. Clearly labelled sub-sections, make the book easy to reference for more country-focused discussion or research. The book is written in a way that is friendly to the layperson, and its liberal sprinkling of exclamation marks may surprise academics.

“Politics: Election and Participation” connect chapters two through four. Gender is the focus for the political discussion in chapter two. Women’s involvement in politics, specifically through the effects of institutional innovation, is examined. Latin America has been especially remarkable in using innovations, like quota systems, to affect women’s political representation.

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The possibility that women will have a greater chance at the political stage as a result means comparative and international education practitioners may, in the future, examine gender effects on political platforms, with implications for education, as well as the broader career opportunities available to women as their political involvement changes. Civil society involvement through elections and participatory government is also examined. This section closes (chapter four) with the argument that demilitarization is a real and viable approach for some countries and regions with effects extending well beyond the realm of defense. The effects, including those for education, are exemplified particularly using Costa Rica as an example. American readers, in particular, may find the discussion of militarization in Honduras particularly timely as it helps to explain the situation left by many recent migrants, especially children, who have arrived in the United States and are enrolling in its public schools.

The second section, including chapters five through seven, focus on cultural rights. In chapter five the history of Bolivian indigenous populations, from exclusion to presidential power, is traced and Bolivia's transformation from a nation-state to a "free, independent, sovereign, multi-ethnic and pluricultural" country (p.68) with a bilingual education system incorporating the languages of the indigenous people is described. Multiculturalism and national identity are revisited numerous times in the book, with the stress inherent to the struggle acknowledged, and the constitutional issues it raises addressed. Such laws are covered in chapter six as Brazil attempts to address discrimination leading to economic and social inequality for the Afro-Brazilian population. These laws include an education guideline, requiring African history be taught alongside the history of the population of African descent in Brazil. The struggles of the indigenous Brazilian population, though much smaller and historically different than Afro-Brazilians, is also examined.

Chapter seven switches focus to the United States and the recent influx of large numbers of Latinos. The authors use Samuel Huntington's analysis of United States national identity, laid out in his book *Who Are We?*, as the starting point for examining the strikingly different scenario for Latino immigrants today than for any other group of immigrants in United States history. In this way they point to a scenario that American educators have never before seen or had to accommodate, with movement away from assimilating to embracing dual identities. An academic discussion of multiculturalism is included in light of this as well.

Chapters eight through ten fall under the heading "Social Policy, Inequality, and the Beautiful Game." Varying development strategies are addressed in chapter eight with the Kuznets inverted U-curve from economics as the starting point. Two vastly different countries with vastly different approaches to social and inequality policy are examined: Costa Rica and Brazil. The authors point out that Costa Rica's growth with equity approach, led by decisive politicians, was based largely on human capital development, including strong investment in education; the Kuznets effect was not the guide for Costa Rican policy (p. 124). Brazil, in contrast, relied less on leadership and more on market growth (p. 124). Relying on the Kuznets effect to produce growth while reducing inequality, these results never came and inequality increased, with many never experiencing much of the economic growth (p. 129). A shift in 1994 by Brazil ushered in new social policy emphases, including in the area of education. Two approaches applied to target education included equality in funding and conditional cash transfers, targeted at making school attendance more lucrative than child labor (p.130). A discussion of the application of conditional cash transfers in various locales across the globe to address education and gender equity in education follows.

Pension reform is examined in chapter nine. This topic seems unrelated to the field of comparative and international education, except that Chile's pension privatization program has roots in approaches students from the Catholic University in Santiago, Chile learned while on

scholarships provided by the University of Chicago. The goal of this exchange was to transport the University of Chicago's particular brand of conservative economics back to Chile, where more students could become familiar with these approaches (p. 141). This exchange began in the 1950s (Skousen, 2008 in Piñera, 2010). Its fascinating effects, however, rippled all the way to the US Republican primaries leading up to the 2012 Presidential elections (p. 144). The book concludes with a look at soccer as a political tool, as well as a detailed account of the journey of the Uruguayan soccer team as a roadmap for other nations interested in becoming dominant forces on the world soccer stage.

Data is referenced in several instances in this book to offer an empirical look at the identity claimed by both individuals and nations, particularly in Bolivia and Brazil. Multiple census surveys are referred to in order to elucidate the difficulty of defining identities and the power these definitions bestow. These difficulties, which the authors point out have been seen in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, former Soviet republics, Eritrea in Africa, and East Timor in Asia (p. 81), and are still being seen across the globe today, make it imperative to learn from the paths others have forged.

While education does not appear in the index and is not ostensibly addressed in the book, it is mentioned in numerous contexts, affected or improved by problems encountered and solutions implemented. The contexts include demilitarization, racism, affirmative action, multiculturalism, socioeconomics, globalization and study abroad.

This book offers extensive background on Latin America, providing up-to-date social, political, and economic context for schools' situation in the region. While Latin America is the focus, the American reader specifically will gain from viewing the United States through a regional frame, revisiting interactions between the two that have occurred throughout history. The American reader will also find it timely as it provides background on thirty years of Latino immigration into the United States and contrasts this influx with those of previous immigrant groups. American identity historically and the multiculturalism, a concept they define with reference to definitions and descriptions given by Will Kymlicka, Charles Taylor, John Bunker, and Lorman Ratner, presenting itself now is discussed (pp. 114-119). In the United States, educators at many levels will find this discussion helpful for reflection both personal and professional. As with any good history, references to literature, art, political cartoons, pop culture, and, in this case, soccer dot the pages.

The timeliness of *Lessons from Latin America: Innovations in Politics, Culture, and Development* is addressed in terms of South America as a coherent entity, the Union of Southern Countries (UNASUR), ready to work globally in the same way as other regional blocks, including the European Union and numerous Asian organizations (p. 184). The reasons that it is unlikely that Mexico and Central America will never be able to integrate into this regional coalition are alluded to but not addressed specifically. After the regional focus of the book, it would be interesting for the authors to develop these reasons in the future. The fact that all South American and Central American countries have embraced democracy underlies much of the book, as does its emergence from the shadow of US economic influence. The creative and innovative approaches to democracy described would be interesting to any comparative and international education practitioner worldwide because the subject is viewed through numerous lenses with broad effects on education.

With so much territory covered, a map of the region would have been a welcome addition. An explanation of the term "Latin America" would also have been helpful in the introduction. The authors have very little positive to say about United States-Latin American relations, possibly leaving some American readers to further study the relationship between the two. Perhaps in this way the authors surpass their goal of casting a bright light on Latin

America to make up for time lost. Perhaps in some ways they simultaneously provoke the reader to further study of this vast and diverse region.

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### **About the Author**

Elizabeth R. Bruce is a graduate student in the Comparative and International Education program at Lehigh University, USA. Currently she is working towards a Certificate in International Development in Education. She plans to begin the Master of Education in Globalization and Educational Change in Fall 2015. Her research interests include STEM education to coincide with her undergraduate degree in textile chemistry, as well as technology used in education and data gathering.