

Book Review

English Language Education and Assessment: Recent developments in Hong Kong and the Chinese Mainland

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Society is in a state of constant change. In the context of language education, a pedagogical approach or instructional practice which previously worked well may not be fully compatible with contemporary thought (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). *English Language Education and Assessment: Recent Developments in Hong Kong and the Chinese Mainland*, edited by David Coniam, allows readers to keep pace with the changing needs and expectations of stakeholders by providing an update on current thinking. The book captures and reflects on the latest trends, developments and innovations in English language learning and teaching, curriculum and assessment in Hong Kong and China.

Targeting researchers, educators and graduate students, the book, comprising 16 standalone chapters, is divided into two parts reporting empirical studies conducted in Hong Kong and China. Part I examines curriculum changes and innovative practices in English language learning and teaching in the secondary and tertiary sectors, whereas Part II focuses on issues pertinent to different forms of language assessments, from low-stakes to high-stakes, and from classroom-based to large-scale, currently practised in primary, secondary and tertiary settings. Importantly, the book opens with easily-accessible summaries of the education and examination systems of Hong Kong and China. This essential introduction provides readers with the information they need to understand the two different systems.

Part I focuses on a range of curriculum issues in China and Hong Kong. Included are: the potentials and challenges of incorporating popular culture texts in English lessons (Chapter 1), teachers' beliefs about task-based language teaching (Chapter 2) and about curriculum innovation (Chapter 3), discrepancies between expected and actual curriculum implementation in vocational settings (Chapter 4), how EFL teachers learn and grow into effective teachers (Chapter 5), how the systemic functional linguistics approach to genre has the potential to overcome the current deficiencies in English teaching (Chapter 6), and a review of the shadow education system which compares students' attitudes and expectations with actual outcomes as reflected in their examination results (Chapter 7). Part I finishes with a focus on tertiary education, looking first at language play and its usefulness (Chapter 8), and then the use of English-in-the-discipline courses (Chapter 9).

Part II of the book focuses on English language assessment in China and Hong Kong. It looks at the responsibilities, limitations and opportunities of large-scale, high-stakes examinations (Chapters 10 and 11) and also examines specific aspects of lower-stakes assessments, considering assessors' perceptions of traditional scoring and confidence scoring (Chapter 12), the challenges of task-based assessment (Chapter 13) and the positive role of assessment for learning in writing classrooms (Chapter 14). The final chapters make a comparison of onscreen and paper-based marking (Chapter 15), and discuss the challenges of a graded approach to assessment (Chapter 16).

While efforts have been made in this collection to ensure a thorough coverage of contemporary issues in the field of English language education, the use of digital, mobile and information and communication technologies seems to be one area that has been neglected. This is a strand which is receiving growing attention in Hong Kong and China and its inclusion would have increased the value of the book to readers with an interest in that region (and probably for all readers). It would have been good to see chapters reporting studies investigating, for example, how mobile technologies can enhance out-of-class language development, how social networking platforms can play a constructive role in the language curriculum by encouraging more authentic language use, and how Web 2.0 may afford and promote a more constructivist, collaborative, interactive and participatory approach to learning in language classrooms (see Lankshear & Knobel, 2011 for a discussion).

Despite being contextualized in Hong Kong and China, many of the chapters examine non-context-specific educational and assessment principles and practices which will make the book of interest to a wider audience both in other Asian countries and beyond. Indeed, all the topics and themes in this book are current and relevant to the global TESOL trend. Each chapter, with a balance between theory and practice, presents comprehensive and up-to-date coverage of its topic. Readers thinking about introducing curriculum and assessment innovation in their classroom will find the advice and practices discussed and recommended in the book insightful and exemplary, enabling them to make an informed decision. By compiling, in a single volume, many up-to-date studies conducted under the two diverse education and examination systems of China and Hong Kong but based on students who share many similar values and characteristics, the book offers a valuable comparison of the implementation of the latest developments in the field. This book provides much to reflect on for professionals who care about English language education and assessment.

About the reviewer

Patrick Leung is an assistant lecturer at the Centre for Applied English Studies, The University of Hong Kong. His research interests include academic literacy and content-based language learning and teaching.

References

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