

better “meritocratic” society which values humanism in educational and cultural life.

ZHOU Yong

East China Normal University

E-mail: yzhou@kcx.ecnu.edu.cn

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English language education and assessment: Recent developments in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland. David Coniam (Ed.). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2014. xiii + 281pp., (paperback), \$129, ISBN: 978-981-287-070-4.

With various forms of assessment incorporated into official policy and curriculum documents in an increasing number of countries, *English Language Education and Assessment: Recent Development in Hong Kong and Chinese Mainland* provides timely and instructive insights into how assessment is practiced in classrooms in both the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong.

The editor’s introduction is essential for orienting the target readers of the volume. It identifies the potential readership (professional educators, graduate students and other interested parties). It also offers some background for two different education and examination systems and perspectives on key themes related to curriculum change and implementation as well as language assessment. As Prof. Coniam observes in the *Preface*, the volume covers forms of assessment at both macro- or “societal” level and at the micro-level of school and classroom, including teachers, learners and the interplay between them.

The book is divided into two main sections. The first includes major developments in English language education in Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland. The second focuses on issues in testing and assessment under the background discussed in the previous section. In the 16 chapters that comprise the book, the first nine chapters report on studies on learning, teaching and curriculum change, with the remainder involving theoretical and explorative

studies in different assessment contexts.

There are also recurring themes. The implementation of large-scale innovative curriculum has entered an evaluation and consolidation stage. Benson and Patkin reported a study to examine the implementation of new English language curriculum (NSS) in Hong Kong where popular culture and language arts were involved as the “bridgehead” of the curriculum. Under this backdrop, the effectiveness of the new curriculum also crucially depends on the ability of the teacher, which often requires a significant shift in existing beliefs and practices of teachers. In their studies Chan and Wang emphasize the interplay of teachers’ beliefs, practices and their working context in secondary education. Innovative programs in tertiary education are also given importance with two chapters investigating the role of language curriculum in university programs. Moving from a curriculum perspective, the linguistic and sociological dimensions of language education are also discussed. Coniam expands our understanding of English learning in the shadow system by providing a picture of how far results obtained match up to students’ aspirations. Maxwell-Reid shows the link between social purpose, text origination and linguistic features by advocating genre-based teaching.

Another line of studies takes an assessment perspective, focusing on the various issues involved in the process of testing and assessment. Among them, high-stakes examinations remain a great concern for researchers and policy makers. Two large-scale English exams in China (*College English Test* and *National Matriculation English Test*) have been examined. After discussing the consequences of test use, Jin calls for cooperation among all stakeholders to share the responsibility of promoting an ethical approach in the field of language testing.

Individual chapters will also be of great value to language testers who are interested in topics related to the various aspects of testing. For example, Cheng and Yi explored the influence of writing features on rating behaviors between novice and experienced raters, leading to implications for test fairness within the Chinese context. Jin introduced a new scoring method—confident scoring—by exploring the rater perceptions and comparing it with traditional scoring. The new approach provides a more flexible and detailed way of assessing the speaking proficiency of candidates. Lee and Falvey discussed the principles of AfL (Assessment for Learning) in the context of Hong Kong writing classrooms

while Luo summarized the implementation and task-based teaching and assessment in the mainland.

To conclude, this is a potentially useful collection of works about assessment in a broad sense. This collection of studies has two attractive features. First, the organization of content and breath of discussion in the book reflect a dedicated professional's concern for thoroughness and completeness of coverage. The editor takes a practitioner-oriented perspective that also signals the concerns of a teacher educator. In many ways the chapters can be read as independent units for those who are in a hurry, while readers can return to the book time and again to look up specific themes or issues. Second, there is a sustained effort at balancing theory and practice. Theories are interpreted and filled out on the basis of solid empirical studies. L2 practitioners interested in assessment will find a great deal of informed advice as well as background information on assessment in both the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong to enrich their understanding of what lies behind policies and recommended practices. The book therefore not only offers readers a general perspective on issues involved in English language teaching and assessment but also presents practices with strong local features.

In a fundamental sense the book is as much about English language assessment as it is about English language education and it has more than succeeded in showing us the importance of embracing both. It also serves as an important stepping stone towards inspiring more studies in language education and assessment in the Chinese context.

LIU Li
Renmin University of China
E-mail: liliu@ruc.edu.cn