

Literacy and Language in East Asia

EDUCATION IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION: ISSUES, CONCERNS AND PROSPECTS

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Marilyn Kell • Peter Kell

Literacy and Language in East Asia

Shifting Meanings, Values and Approaches

 Springer

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Series Editors' Introduction

This important and informative book examines the nature and character of literacy in the twenty-first century with regard to the dynamic, rapidly changing and developing East Asia region. International education for development organisations such as the OECD, World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, and the Asian Development Bank all recognise the importance of literacy in contributing to economic and social development. This is particularly true in East Asia which contains many 'tiger economies' many commentators predicting that the twenty-first century will be the Asian Century.

Although Students in countries in the East Asia region are amongst the best achievers internationally in school-based international literacy tests such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study). However, teachers and learners stress the concern that student assessment in the region is overly examinations based, with rote learning, memorization and factual recall, rather than creative and lateral thinking is being stressed by teachers and learners. As a result it is argued that students do not have the best profile with regard to literacy and language skills which are flexible and which promote creativity and initiative. Many employers also stress the importance of 'soft skills', which include values and attitudes regarding problem solving, collaborative work practices which promote effective team work, and a positive work ethic which emphasises the value of work and the importance of punctuality.

This book argues that there are important disconnections between the examination driven education systems in countries throughout East Asia and that there is a need to educate graduates with employability skills. The volume brings together case studies (of Mainland China, Hong Kong, Australia and Malaysia), country analysis, empirical research data and public sources of data to question the status given to what the authors argue are static and iconic forms of literacy 'where student achievement and reductionist approaches to "worker" literacy are not adequate in responding to the complexities and multi-modalities of globalisation'.

This is an important contribution to the study of meaning, values and approaches with regard to literacy and language in education, with particular reference to the

East Asia Region. It examines various approaches to literacy and its contribution to the change and reform necessary for countries in the region as they seek to fully participate in the global economy. The book comprehensively describes and evaluates widely respected and used international testing, namely PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study). The volume critically examines the growing popularity of international testing and the consistently high ranking achieved by countries in East Asia with regard to these tests, and the response of Western nations to the ascendancy of Asian nations. It explores the exams-based and standardised curriculum which impacts on teaching and learning in ways that stress uniformity. In doing this it presents several country studies from East Asia which document the influence of language policy, cultural values and norms on the character of national education systems. In drawing their conclusions, the authors argue that 'by approaching literacy from a pluralist perspective, policy makers, teachers and industry will find benefit through valuing a range of non-traditional literacy skills that are not included in what has been a mainstream examination-based curriculum'.

This book will be of considerable interest not just to countries in East Asia but also to the international education for development community, since the East Asia experience is of great interest to many countries world-wide as they seek to strengthen and upgrade their education systems in response to meeting the important demands of globalisation and economic and social development.

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Education (CRICE), University of Malaya
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The book, along with the authors travelled to a new home in Darwin, in the north of Australia and it is a product of working at Charles Darwin University from the middle of 2011 where Dr. Marilyn Kell has worked in the School of Academic Language and Learning and Prof. Kell was appointed as Head of the School of Education, both in the Faculty of Law, Education, Business and Arts. We acknowledge the support of Charles Darwin University in enabling final presentation of the manuscript of this book. Special mention is made of the work that Ms. Rupa Khadka and Ms. Emma Richards did in assisting in the presentation of the final manuscripts and of the library staff who accessed interlibrary loans for us at remarkable speed.

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