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Book Review

English Language Education and Assessment – Recent Developments in Hong Kong and the Chinese Mainland, by David Coniam (Ed.), Singapore, Springer, 2014, 281 pp., \$129 (US), ISBN 978-981-287-070-4

This book is a collection of papers on studies of English language education and assessment in the context of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (thereafter referred to as Hong Kong) and the Chinese mainland (thereafter referred to as China). The series editor, Professor David Coniam, deals with many important facets relevant to curriculum change and implementation along with different forms of assessment being practiced in Hong Kong and China. Each contributor focuses on one area and the collection consists of these papers in individual chapters.

The chapters in this book fall into three major sections. In the first section, the Preface, Coniam and Falvey provide a brief introduction of the education and examination systems in Hong Kong and China. Generally reflecting the framework of China's education system, which has 9 years of compulsory education plus 3 years of senior secondary education, Hong Kong's restructured education system since 2009 has greatly improved its annual candidature for the Hong Kong Diploma in Secondary Education (HKDSE), for university entrance purposes, from about 40,000 Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) candidates before the reform to approximately 82,000 in 2013. Correspondingly, a 4-year undergraduate curriculum was launched in the higher education system as a substitute for the previous 3-year system in Hong Kong. Unlike Hong Kong, where public examinations were conducted by the Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority (HKEAA), examinations at the end of junior high and senior high in China are administered by municipal-level education bureaus, as China has no public school examinations body. In addition, the College English Test (CET) is a requirement for undergraduates in China, and the candidature for the CET was approximately the same as that for the National Matriculation English Test (NMET). By the end of the preface the readers are provided the background of the book, and learn that the curriculum has changed radically from that of the earlier times in the process of implementation.

In the second section, 'Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Perspectives', the authors of Part I of the book focus on a wide range of facets relevant to innovations and recent developments in English language teaching and learning practised in Hong Kong and China. The nine chapters of this section cover a broad range of topics in often-researched areas in English language teaching, particularly teacher development and course development, and relevant studies are conducted at both secondary and tertiary levels of educations. These chapters provide an up-to-date summary of the similarities and differences in changes and challenges initiated by the new curriculum in English language learning and teaching of the two regions, which contribute the most impressive feature of the book under review. In addition, the chapter focusing on the Hong Kong shadow education system impresses me most as it reminds me, a teacher of English and a researcher in China,

of a ubiquitous but controversial problem which English language learners and teachers as well as parents face in China. As an issue seldom researched in the context of China, this chapter serves as a good reminder that shadow education is an enduring, influential factor to be considered in English language learning experience, especially for secondary school learners.

Seven chapters addressing a number of assessment perspectives in Hong Kong and China constitute the third section, Part II of the book. Chapters in this section present a judicious selection of information and discussion on matters of assessment, a public concern among various stakeholders. Comparatively, with the common interest in test fairness, the academics in China give more attention to scoring approaches, and raters' perceptions and behaviours. In contrast, the academics in Hong Kong mainly address the changes in Hong Kong's examination resulting from the new curriculum. I consider this section quite enlightening for English language teaching because it provides multiple perspectives on test developers, test raters, decision makers and English language teachers on the approaches, processes and impact of scoring on English language assessment. However, it worth mentioning that assessment for productive skills such as speaking and writing are particularly addressed in this book, leaving space for future reconsideration of assessment for receptive skills including listening and reading under the new curriculum.

The expected readers of the book are not only English educators but also other interested parties who wish to be familiarised with the innovations and changes taking place in the two regions. The book brings ideas for encouraging teachers and researchers to exploit a range of sources for innovations in curriculum implementation, especially in assessment. Meanwhile, it establishes an ongoing theme throughout the chapters on the development of English language teachers in Hong Kong and China.

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