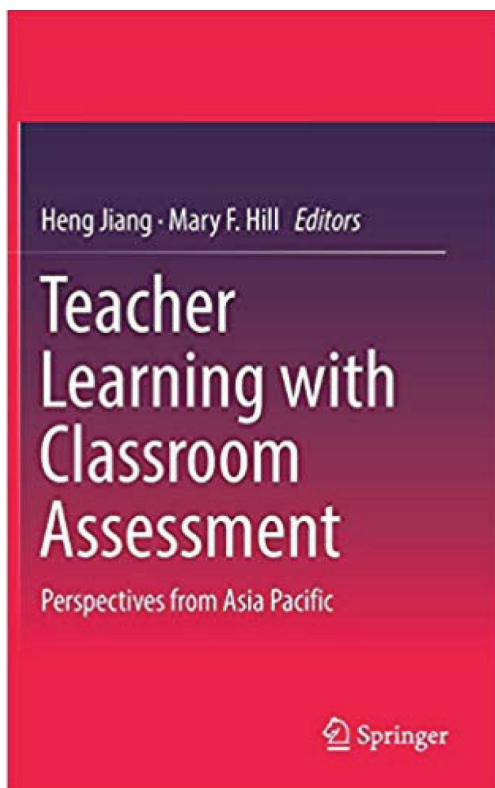


Book review

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Teacher Learning with Classroom Assessment: Perspectives from Asia Pacific, edited by Heng Jiang and Mary F. Hill

Singapore: Springer Nature; 201pp; 2018;
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This book makes an original contribution in three ways: first, it focuses on teacher learning about assessment; second, it does this within the classroom; and third, the majority of chapters are situated in the Asia-Pacific region. It is exciting and refreshing to read a book written by those from the area presenting their own perspectives that encourage home-grown ideas, developments and thinking to come to the fore. Similar geographically specific books have often had as core contributors well-known European academics to boost either the quality or the attraction. Seasoned academics from the Asia-Pacific region provide valuable contributions, and all the chapters are of a good standard and quality. Another positive feature is that the two commissioned chapters from the Netherlands and South Africa confirm the universal nature of the issues raised, which have international resonance and further demonstrate the importance of the themes researched.

The linking of classroom assessment and teacher learning is a very interesting focus, particularly as it sets in motion an organic understanding of classroom change. The chapters are written from the perspectives of teachers, researchers and teachers as researchers, and highlight relationships with students and classroom dynamics. They reveal how teachers can not only take ownership of their learning within their classrooms, but this also demonstrates the interrelatedness of assessment and learning for both teachers and learners. The linking of classroom assessment and teacher learning means that the chapters focus on what is happening in classrooms, why it is happening and how this affects learners and teachers. It showcases just how important it is to focus on assessment in a very dynamic and tangible way in diverse contexts. It clearly highlights the importance of communicating processes and principles of assessment between teachers, learners, the school, parents and wider communities.

An obvious question is why so little of this type of research has been done previously. Another would be: why are assessment literacies for teachers and learners such a recent area of exploration, when the whole fabric of learning and teaching depends on it? Linking classroom assessment and teacher learning means that all aspects of learning are scrutinized. Importantly, 'Teachers are appropriating various cultural resources to develop their assessment practices, not only in terms of technical procedures of implementing assessment, but also actively constructing their interpretations on what they can learn from the process' (p. 197). The book could and should engage a broad spectrum of educators at all levels from macro to micro, that is, from policy and institutional level all the way to classroom level. The issues raised in the Asia-Pacific area are relevant to all educators who wish to support teachers in improving and supporting classroom learners and learning. Assessment is important to everyone, and we still have much to learn. The variety of situations and scenarios will be invaluable. Having so many different examples will benefit readers, and help them to think about classroom assessment processes and how their own may compare to developments across and within different contexts.

The book consists of twelve chapters that focus on greatly diverse contexts and school levels. Chapter 1 is well structured, and clearly provides a well-researched background and introduction to the book. It situates the themes of teacher learning and classroom assessment within the literature and discusses the issues, as well as providing useful conclusions. The second part of the chapter maps out the structure of the book and summarizes each individual chapter. The breadth and variety of the case studies provides an exciting panoply of diversity: Australia has excellent case studies in primary and secondary school written by experienced academics; China has an ambitious study evaluating 15 years of curriculum reform and meta-assessment knowledge of teachers, marred by over-reliance on dated references; Hong Kong selects two extreme examples from eight respondents of previous work; the interesting chapter on India analyses the contradictions inherent in upskilling, change and internal and social belief systems; Japan juxtaposes the traditional classroom processes with new theories to build on prior feedback expertise; Nauru provides another exciting chapter in terms of location, cultural capital and colonial past, and resolving the contradictions of the classroom and community; New Zealand is a masterclass in how discourses and theories can coalesce with practices and principles, and how teachers live the assessment process; and last but not least, Singapore evaluates the internal conflicts and contradictions in a teacher teaching different subjects. Chapter 12 provides a useful overview of themes in the case studies, demonstrating that the total is much more than the sum of its parts.

There are always caveats about any book, and this one is no exception. Although the standard is very high, chapters vary in quality: the better chapters provide clear and explicit research.

For me, a major failing is linked to lack of precision in definitions. Perhaps the obvious major one is that of classroom assessment. Without clarity of process, which is generally provided by a definition, the whole conceptualization of theory is on shaky ground. The vagueness and all-inclusiveness of the definition of '*classroom assessment*' (p. 1) means that the very important aspects of transparency and explicitness are difficult to put into practice because processes become implicit and unchallengeable. This book has excellent chapters and case studies, but does not provide explicit and focused definitions of either informal or formal classroom assessment processes, despite signalling both in the introductory chapter:

To adopt a reciprocal relationship between teacher learning and classroom assessment would have three important implications. First, there seems to be a need for greater explicitness by both assessment experts and teachers about the stances for both classroom assessment and teacher learning. Our sense is that these stances may be implicit in practice and underspecified so that the professional development and learning activities pertaining to the classroom assessment seem to lack the situated understanding. (p. 8)

If 'stances' refers to practice, then generally this is explicit in many chapters; if 'stances' is theory, then there is a deficit that results in the whys and wherefores of practices not being justified, explained or supported. I believe that any assessment process or practice may and should be explained by the same theory of assessment. Lack of explicit discussions about classroom assessment (theory and practices) may be evidenced by the perceived importance and use of key terms: in a book on (classroom) assessment, of 201 pages and a guestimate of ninety thousand words, 'criteria' appears 22 times, 'standard' 88, 'feedback' 104, 'self-assessment' 9 and 'explicit' 16 times.

In general, this is a very accomplished and readable book that will excite and inspire readers to question and look at their own practices, as well as those of colleagues at all education levels, and also perhaps persuade them to commit to those all-important definitions.