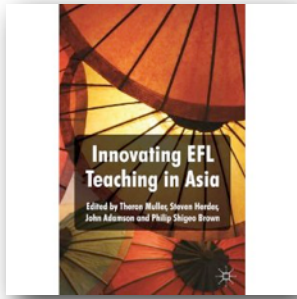


Review 書評

Innovating EFL Teaching in Asia, edited by Theron Muller, Steven Herder, John Adamson, & Philip Shigeo Brown,



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Is the teaching of English as a Foreign Language different from teaching English as a Second Language? And is teaching English in Asia different from teaching it in other parts of the world? The editors introduce *Innovating EFL Teaching in Asia* by tackling these questions directly in order to justify this new collection of wide-ranging teaching practice and policy in very diverse contexts. Social context is arguably one of the thorniest issues in TESOL, since the particularities of any context undermine all attempts to impose or create a global practice or theory on local pedagogic practices. This raises an interesting paradox for a collection such as this: contexts are unique, and yet the collection of these articles in one book implies that the terms EFL teaching and Asia signal some kind of collective similarity. Theron Muller and Philip Shigeo Brown wisely skirt around this problem at the outset, explaining that they “resolved to avoid making broad brush strokes about the region and (...) tried to ensure teacher-researchers living Asia paint pictures of their context and experience, leaving it to the reader to draw comparisons

and contrast with their own circumstances and potential similarities across borders” (p. 6).

The volume is divided into five parts, each with an editorial introduction. The first section, Defining the Asian EFL Context, includes an account of teachers’ reactions to the new English curriculum for Chinese high schools by Xi Fang; a model for teaching intercultural awareness with examples from Thailand by Will Baker; a teacher development scheme in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools by Gillian Palmer and Itje Chodidjah; and an exploration of Korean students’ learner beliefs by Andrew Finch. The title of the section perhaps misleads slightly, as what emerges is a confirmation of the diversity of national settings, as well as the realization that what passes for national culture is often something else. For example, the senior and most expert teachers in the Chinese high school report that the pedagogical approaches advocated by the reform are already a part of their teaching practice. In the same vein, Korean students, who have been stereotypically portrayed as passive and lacking in autonomy, do not conform to this picture and in fact are highly responsive to the rapid changes in Korean society and to innovative teaching practices in its language education.

The second part of the book, Empowering Asian Voices, introduced by John Adamson, includes articles that seek to present the perspective of learners themselves. Fumiko Murase, for example, contrasts views of “inner-circle” outsiders with those of local teachers and of the learners in order to explore Little’s

(1999) contention that learner autonomy is an appropriate goal in all cultural settings. Chutigarn Raktham takes Thai national culture as a starting point for students to think about insider and outsider views of different cultures. In his investigation into teacher beliefs about academic and teaching qualifications, John Adamson presents an original research method that seeks to merge emic and etic perspectives of the researcher and interviewee. Finally, Rosemary Erlam and Susan Gray conduct a study of pre-service teachers' changing conceptualization of self as teacher in Malaysia. A common thread running through these chapters is the concern with giving a fair and accurate representation of learners' and teachers' voices and views. Power discrepancies in EFL, for example, between teachers, researchers and learners, are bolstered by cultural and ideological beliefs that cannot be simply ignored. These chapters collectively remind us that empowerment comes from openness and the courage to compare differences of interest and perspective.

Part C, *Innovating Teaching Methodology in Asia*, is introduced by Theron Muller, who cites the difficulties that Asian teachers sometimes report on returning to classrooms in their home context after completing teaching or academic qualifications in the West. Four articles offer vivid pictures of theory-based new classroom practices that show how the theories propounded on such courses can be successfully implemented. The chapters in this section range from L2 conversation strategy instruction in Hong Kong, vocabulary learning strategies in Japan by Philip Shigeo Brown, a comparison of peer and teacher scaffolding in task-based learning by Theron Muller and Mark de Boer, and an exploration using Activity Theory of teachers' readiness to teach

a variety of reading strategies instead of relying on translation in Chinese universities by Hongzhi Yang and Eva Bernat. The common concern of these chapters is to show how innovative practices are likely to be successful when they are adapted through discussion with local practitioners to suit prevailing conditions and beliefs.

What is innovative about the teaching of English for Young Learners, the subject of Part D, introduced by EYL specialist, Barbara Hoskins Sakamoto, is that in most Asian countries, English teaching is now considered appropriate for ever younger populations of learners. Many countries such as Turkey (Yasemin Kirkgoz) and Japan (Junko Matsuzaki Carreira, James Hall, Tomoko Yamazaki, Chohei Takahashi and Takeru Ishigame), which are the contexts for studies in this section, have extended compulsory English education to primary education, a prime area for new research. Here, different countries do seem to share common problems: in particular, a lack of teachers with the confidence and competence to teach English to young learners, and difficulties with the shift from teacher-led to learner-centered classrooms. In all three contexts, the success of the innovation depends on the innovators' willingness to listen to the concerns of teachers and to accept their limitations, as well as their suggestions for change. Innovation might be initiated from the top-down, but, as the Picture Books project in Iwate (Hall et al) and the activity-based learning curriculum for resource-poor government schools in Tamil Nadu (Kirsten Anderson and Parvathy Narayanan) both show, a bottom-up approach to change is necessary to make the reform sustainable.

The fifth and final part of the book focuses on innovations in teaching EFL writing and is introduced by Steven Herder, who is also the author with Peter Clements of the first chapter in this section on a fluency-first approach to writing instruction. Peer feedback is not necessarily a new practice in writing pedagogy, but in the Asian context there has been little research conducted on learner perception of this practice. Huahui Zhao's study is therefore helpful in showing that students in her study valued the teacher's feedback more highly, but actually found their peers' comments to be more understandable. Similarly, the final chapter in this section by Toshio Hisaoka suggests that Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) could help teachers to establish clear criteria for assessing communicative competence, and not merely linguistic accuracy.

A novel--indeed, compared with many other anthologies of EFL research and practice, I should perhaps say, innovative--ending to this book is an Epilogue in which Theron Muller and John Adamson describe and evaluate the process of creating the book. They state that "the theme of this book has been empowering the voices of teacher-researchers in Asia to help them to better define for themselves what teaching and working in this diverse geographical area means" (p. 267). To be honest, this seems to me to be rather overstated. Nevertheless, I can appreciate that this aspiration of understanding and seeking to improve language learning practice and research within local contexts is reflected in the process, which is very clearly and transparently described, of researching, writing and editing, and crystallised in the publication of this book. Indeed, it is this, the publication by Palgrave Macmillan, a global publisher, that I would

argue is the real empowerment, bringing to international attention the work of a collection of relatively unknown researchers. This is by no means intended as a criticism. Quite the contrary: having been involved in editing a similar collection of articles by "local" practitioners in Japan (Irie & Stewart, 2012), I am full of admiration for the *Innovating EFL project*. I particularly applaud the editors' decision in the Epilogue to detail the process so that other teacher-researchers can undertake this kind of project themselves. Whether or not this can be called empowerment is perhaps a moot point; but it is certainly inspirational.

This brings me back finally to the paradox that I highlighted at the beginning: If Asia's dominant characteristic is its diversity, does this justify a book that limits its purview to Asia? Why not EFL in other contexts, such as South America or Africa, or some other area far from the center of power over ELT? A number of authors throughout the book claim to challenge a stereotyped notion of a monolithic Asian educational culture and Asian learners as conservative and resistant to change. In addition, the introductory prefaces to each of the five sections serve to remind the reader that the old stereotypes no longer hold water. But stereotypes are sometimes hard to escape entirely. In his introduction to the section on Teaching Methodologies, Muller draws attention to the fact that "the dominant journals and scholars at the center of power tend to take a theory-driving and theory-creating perspective, limiting non-dominant countries and contexts to theory-testing and affirming (Lillis & Curry, 2006)" (p. 124). But he then has to admit that the examples that follow in this section do not in fact depart from this unfortunate norm.

A question that is not raised by the studies concerning methodologies is whether innovative practice must inevitably come from the outside. Holliday (1995) was one of the first to question whether new methodologies or technologies were always appropriate and drew attention to the ideological dimension inherent in the willingness of administrators and teachers to buy into Western ideas and practices. Three of the four chapters in this section deal with the teaching of learning strategies in some form or other. Strategy instruction has become part of the mainstream of EFL teaching in the past couple of decades, and it seems perverse to question it, but is it really a more effective method for teaching reading or vocabulary than translation? What about innovative methods that build on or adapt methods that are well established, such as grammar-translation or rote memorization? A recent award-winning book by Guy Cook (2010) serves to restore the reputation of translation, a language learning practice banished into outer darkness by the dominant Communicative Language Teaching approach. Are there local language learning and teaching practices in Asia that merit a closer look and reappraisal?

The best of the papers in *Innovating EFL Teaching in Asia* are those which seek to understand existing local practices and aim to integrate new practices with them rather than replace existing practice with new. My hope is that readers of this book will rise to the call in the Epilogue to “continue to explore the themes investigated in their own contexts” (p. 267) and in doing so, will create new, locally generated theories that will influence other parts of the world, including the “inner circle”. Now that would truly be empowerment.

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