

International Trends in Educational Assessment: Emerging Issues and Practices

Myint Swe Khine, editor

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Reviewed By

Anne-Marie Ellithorpe
Vancouver School of Theology

This slim edited volume is comprised of selected and invited papers from international scholars, presented at the first International Conference on Educational Measurement and Assessment, in 2017. The focus of this book is on issues, practices, and trends; it is not a how-to-guide.

The first chapter concentrates on the global three-yearly “Programme for International Student Assessment” that evaluates how successful fifteen-year-old students are likely to be in applying school knowledge and skills to “an uncertain and challenging future” (1). Peter Adams notes the possibility of achieving excellence with a strong degree of equity, and highlights the unacceptable data of indigenous students in his home country performing at a level approximately three years below non-indigenous students (3,4). Of further concern are indications from various countries of a weakening in students’ “sense of belonging to the school community,” along with a significant percentage of students indicating that their sense of safety and well-being at school was being “violated” by the bullying behaviors of other students (5). Assessment data of this nature is relevant to the concern of public theology for the common good and highlights concerns to which scholar-practitioners must be attentive in their work of advocacy and community building.

What then is the role of the teacher, the school community, and of assessment itself? Patrick Griffin and Nafisa Awwal advocate for a competency-based approach to education, where the teacher and community’s role is transformative rather than transmissive (63). Don Klinger reminds us of the variously attributed truism: “Not everything that matters can be measured, and not everything that is measured matters” (57). Readers are reminded that change is best based on a thoughtful analysis of what skills are most needed for students’ educational journeys and future lives, and the teaching and learning (rather than the measurement) thereof.

Elsewhere, learners come to the fore. While studies on assessment reform tend to focus on systems and teachers, thus “silencing young learners,” Vicente Reyes and Charlene Tan advocate for listening to the voices of learners, to whom issues of assessment are most relevant (35). While challenges persist in balancing the effectiveness and efficiency of assessment, feedback that is both meaningful and timely is recognized as invaluable in supporting ongoing learning (40). Mark Russell and his co-authors note that student assessment literacy can be fostered through induction processes that highlight the interrelationship between assessment tasks and develop student awareness of assessment types, whether formative, summative, or diagnostic (48). Faculty are to collaboratively reflect, on a continuing basis, on how they conceive and implement assessment, and to utilize interdisciplinary tools developed for this purpose (49). Listening to learners and fostering learner assessment literacy within religious and theological educational contexts may also prove invaluable, even if assessment is taking place on a smaller scale.

This volume has value for religion and theology educators, not only in terms of principles regarding assessment, but also for the social and educational issues it draws attention to. While some papers are highly specialized, this resource is nevertheless a source of invaluable insights, whether one’s work is focused on specific learning contexts or on the improvement of education systems.