

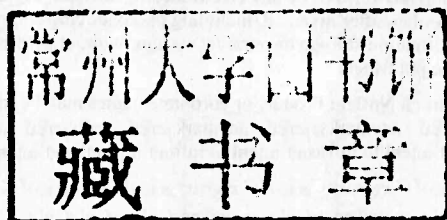
ROUTLEDGE SERIES ON SCHOOLS AND SCHOOLING
IN ASIA

A Chinese Perspective on Teaching and Learning

Edited by
Betty C. Eng

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A Chinese Perspective on Teaching and Learning

Routledge Series on Schools and Schooling in Asia

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Series Editor's Note

The so-called "Asian century" provides opportunities and challenges both for the people of Asia as well as for those in the West. The success of many of Asia's young people in schooling often leads educators in the West to try to emulate Asian school practices. These practices, however, are culturally embedded. One of the key issues to be taken on by this series, therefore, is to provide Western policymakers and academics with insights into these culturally embedded practices in order to facilitate better understanding of them outside of specific cultural contexts.

There is vast diversity as well as disparities within Asia. This is a fundamental issue, and for this reason, it will be addressed in this series by making these diversities and disparities the subject of investigation. The 'tiger' economies initially grabbed most of the media attention on Asian development, and more recently China has become the center of attention. Yet there are also very poor countries in the region, and their education systems seem unable to be transformed to meet new challenges. Pakistan is a case in point. Thus, the whole of Asia will be seen as important for this series in order to address not only questions relevant to developed countries but also to developing countries. In other words, the series will take a 'whole of Asia' approach.

Asia can no longer be considered in isolation. It is as subject to the forces of globalization, migration and transnational movements as other regions of the world, yet the diversity of cultures, religions and social practices in Asia means that responses to these forces are not predictable. This series, therefore, is interested in identifying the ways tradition and modernity interact to produce distinctive contexts for schools and schooling in an area of the world that impacts across the globe.

Against this background, I am pleased to welcome this book to the *Routledge Series on Schools and Schooling in Asia*.

Kerry J. Kennedy
Series Editor
Routledge Series on Schools and Schooling in Asia

Foreword

The challenging intellectual and ethical work of teaching pivots on our ability to *experience ourselves as actors and participants in a complex, dynamic and forward-charging world*—a world to explore and discover, to re-imagine and to shape—and, simultaneously, to be *wide-awake to the propulsive farrago of students who appear before us each day*, people who come to us filled with expectation and aspiration. In each direction we find fire and ice, pleasure and pain, and surprise, ecstasy and agony.

Our going-world, already up and running, churning and spinning and careening onward, is filled with undeserved suffering and unnecessary pain on one hand, breathtaking beauty and enduring potential on the other. And our students, each a work-in-progress, much like ourselves, with hopes and dreams, aspirations, skills and capacities; with minds and hearts and spirits; with embodied experiences, histories and stories to tell of a past and a possible future; with families, neighborhoods, cultural surrounds and language communities all interacting and entangled; unruly sparks of meaning-making energy on a voyage of discovery and surprise.

The knotty and complicated work of teaching, earth-shaking and breathtaking in the same moment, might be summed up as a three-step challenge: Pay attention! Be astonished! Get busy! (Repeat).

In an era of accelerating globalization and transnational experiences, Betty Eng has assembled a dazzling cluster of scholars and educators who uniquely illuminate the three-step challenge even as they extend our sense of the possible in school and society. *A Chinese Perspective on Teaching and Learning* is an invitation and a challenge: It invites us to rethink and reinvent our teaching on our own terms and in our own ways, and it challenges us to draw on a deep well of experience and ancient wisdom as we create our classrooms anew.

In my youth, “Confucius says” homilies were always spoken with a sense of mocking superiority, edged with Orientalism, and yet they were also infused with insights for right living and gems of wisdom for me. Confucius saw every person as evolving and in-motion, which remains a central idea for me: “At fifteen, I thought only of study; at thirty I began playing my role; at forty I was sure of myself; at fifty I was conscious of my position

in the universe; at sixty I was no longer argumentative; and now at seventy I can follow my heart's desire without violating custom." We must all keep moving and growing; we must never stop learning; we must embrace every day that aching sense that whoever I am, "I am not yet."

In our modern world, and tethered to our consumerist ideology and culture, we suffer a kind of metaphysical blindness, investing materialism with god-like power, assuming that the market, for example, operates outside of values and moral choice, that it is invariable and solid, like the law of gravity. In this frame, work is construed as either a "necessary evil" or an "item of cost." The ideal situation for the worker is to perform less and less work, or to earn income without working at all; the ideal for the owner is more and bigger output, or greater production without any workers. The consequences of this ideology are many: alienation and conflict; the myth that reducing the workload is always and forever a good thing; "standards of living" always measured in terms of consumption, and the delusion that more material goods always make us better off.

But Confucius illuminates a non-materialist alternative: work as a central vitalizing aspect of life that allows human beings to develop and use their human skills, capacities and knowledge; work as one means by which we construct our human identities; work as an activity that enables us to locate ourselves in community and overcome narcissism in the interest of the common good. This helps us upend the common-sense frame and to consider learning and teaching without material incentives or acquisitiveness, and to take as a goal for our teaching and learning not the production of things, or the multiplication of wants, but the cultivation of free human beings.

Confucius saw sloppy language—clichés, official pronouncements, dogma—as an ethical challenge: "If language is not correct, then what is said is not what is meant; if what is said is not what is meant, then what must be done remains undone; if this remains undone, morals and art will deteriorate; if justice is lost, people go astray. Hence there must be no arbitrariness in what is said." I want to be clear in what I say; I take it as a serious instruction to follow, an injunction to work toward.

Teaching requires dispositions of patience, curiosity, respect, wonder, awe, reverence, simplicity and non-violence, with more than a small dose of humility. It demands sustained focus, intelligent judgment, inquiry and investigation. It calls forth an open heart and an inquiring mind since every judgment is necessarily contingent, every view partial, and each conclusion tentative. Our job is to do our best to take the side of enlightenment and liberation, to blow on the embers of reason, truth and beauty, to support growth and wisdom, to bring the light. We dive into the wreckage and swim alongside our students toward an indistinct shore.

The challenge involves, as well, an ethical stance and an implied moral contract. The good teacher offers unblinking recognition and attention, and communicates a deep regard for students' lives, a respect for both their

integrity and their vulnerability. An engaged teacher begins with a belief that each student is unique, each the one and only who will ever trod the earth, each worthy of a certain reverence. Regard extends, importantly, to the wider community—the wide, wide world that animates each individual life—and an insistence that students have access to the tools with which to negotiate and then to transform all that lies before them. Love for students just as they are—without any drive or advance toward a future—is false love, enervating and disabling. The teacher tries in good faith to do no harm and then to support students as they reach, reinvent, and finally seize an education fit for the fullest lives they might hope for. The Confucian idea of “love with distinctions” fits here, the challenge to take care of one’s elders, for example, as a step that extends toward taking care of others’ elderly, or loving one’s own children as we reach toward loving all children.

Teaching at its best is characterized by a spirit of respect, harmony, cooperation, inclusion, social engagement and full participation. Classrooms then become places that honor diversity while building unity, basing work on the fundamental faith that every human being is of incalculable value, that each is unique and distinct and still part of a wildly diverse whole, and that altogether we are, each and every one of us, somehow essential. We recognize that the fullest development of all is the condition for the full development of each, and conversely, that the fullest development of each is the condition for the full development of all. Balance, harmony, justice, peace: The pursuit of learning increases day after day.

This calls forth and is sustained through a culture of respect and mutual recognition that encourages students to develop the capacity to name the world for themselves, to identify the obstacles to their (and other people’s) full humanity, and the courage to act upon whatever the known and the unknown demand. We work to open the school door and in so doing to close a prison door.

We learn to live in dialogue, speaking with the possibility of being heard, and listening with the possibility of being changed, asking essential questions again and again, and finding ways to live within and beyond the answers we receive: What’s your story? Who are you in the world? How did you (and I) get this far? What do we know now? What do we have the right to imagine and expect? Where are we going? Who decides? Who’s left out? What are the alternatives? Why? In many ways these kinds of questions are themselves the answers, for they lead us into a powerful sense that we can and will make a difference.

William Ayers
Chicago, Illinois, US

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This book is a collaborative and familial endeavor. The support of the contributing authors and colleagues has brought together this book to feature, affirm and celebrate the “good practices” of the Department of Applied Social Studies at The City University of Hong Kong. Alex Yui Huen Kwan, Head of Department, who nurtures a sense of family in the department, gave his generous and enthusiastic support for the book. The idea for the book had its roots in the “A-Team,” a committee to review for quality assurance and prepare for a university quality audit, ably led by Raymond K. H. Chan, Associate Head, with its members, Alice M. L. Chong, Tak-yan Lee, Kin-Kit Li and myself.

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1 Introduction

Why a Chinese Perspective to Teaching and Learning?

Betty C. Eng

*All individuals are like no others
All individuals are like some others
All individuals are like all others*

(A Chinese Proverb)

This seeming contradictory saying from a Chinese proverb conveys how people from around the world are unique, similar and the same. The central purpose of *A Chinese Perspective on Teaching and Learning* is to explore how a Chinese perspective can inform, contribute and transform ways of teaching and learning that can be shared by educators and policy makers while also focusing on our diversity and commonalities. Learning from Asian cultural values and beliefs provides a different lens through which to understand and envision how our curriculum and pedagogy can be adapted and transformed for the students we serve and to our local teaching context. The context for *A Chinese Perspective on Teaching and Learning* is international Hong Kong, the Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, and the reader will find many of the educational issues are different, similar to and the same as their own classroom. By understanding how such issues are viewed and addressed from a Chinese perspective, the reader is provided the opportunity to reflect and rethink new ways of teaching and learning. This chapter discusses the origins of the inquiry, its significance and contribution and frameworks that guide the discussion, followed by an overview of the book's contents.

THE ROOTS OF THE INQUIRY

All authors of the book are teachers or research project staff in the Department of Applied Social Studies at the City University of Hong Kong, one of the eight universities or tertiary level institutions in Hong Kong funded by the public through the University Grants Committee. Founded in 1984 as the City Polytechnic of Hong Kong, it attained university status in 1994. The Applied Social Studies Department is interdisciplinary and is composed of the fields of social work, psychology, sociology, criminology, counseling and education. A significant characteristic of the department is

its commitment to and care for learners, which has resulted in its teachers receiving a high proportion of the annual Teaching Excellence Award, one of whom is featured in this book, and consistently achieving one of the highest teaching evaluation ratings in the College.

The idea for the book began as part of an exercise for assessing and monitoring quality assurance for the university, which became an ongoing and sustained journey to explore fundamental and complex issues of pedagogy and curriculum-making deliberations when the department's staff was invited to share their "good practices." The pioneering research conducted by Tak-yan Lee, Esther O. W. Chow and Joannes M. W. Lee in their chapter, "Subjective Process and Outcome Evaluation of a Social Work Methods Course: Findings Based on the Perspective of the Students," is illustrative of the systematic efforts to intentionalize the curriculum with outcome based teaching and learning. Though not explicitly directed for the authors to address, the discussions that emerged in each of the chapters are grounded in the social, cultural and political context of Hong Kong—a former colony of the British for over 155 years, which returned to the sovereignty of the People's Republic of China in 1997. Many of the issues and questions addressed are ones that are commonly shared by other educators, while others are framed by the particularities of Hong Kong: What constitutes effective teaching and learning practices? How are teaching philosophies developed to inform our practice? What do learners need and how are their voices engaged in the curriculum? Is there a "Chinese way" of teaching and learning? What is the relationship of social, political and economic factors of international Hong Kong to educational reforms? Many of these issues and questions are echoed and shared among educators throughout the world. Our shared commonalities also inform and connect us as educators. Others are rooted in the cultural context of Hong Kong and provide a Chinese perspectives to inform teaching and learning. These issues, among others, are explored in the chapters that follow in various forms of inquiry using social-cultural-historical analysis, empirical studies and evidence-based methodologies, anecdotes and personal narratives.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTRIBUTION

A Chinese Perspective on Teaching and Learning contributes to the scholarship in education in a number of significant ways. First, in a global and international community, this book provides the opportunity to engage in an exchange of knowledge and dialogue to understand complex and diverse issues in education that crosses cultures and continents. An international, rather than an isolated, understanding of our knowledge of teaching and learning is developed. Second, with a fluid and shifting world order where the recent focus of attention is drawn toward China and Asia economically, politically and socially to respond to crisis, catastrophic events and