Studies in Educational Learning Environments

An International Perspective

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Edited by

Swee Chiew Goh
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*National Institute of Education
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STUDIES IN EDUCATIONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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Foreword

S. Gopinathan

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There is increasing recognition that many of the school reform initiatives currently under way in school systems everywhere will depend for their success on how well teachers and policymakers understand the classroom environments in which learning and teaching take place. A burgeoning literature has emerged which provides insights and data on such relationships as links between classroom environments and patterns of student learning, and the impact of innovations in curriculum and teaching strategies on learning. Researchers have also recognised that different disciplines and their particular ways of knowing reality will impose different demands upon learning environments. It can confidently be said that a robust knowledge base exists that will prove valuable in teacher preparation and professional development courses and policy making that seeks enhanced student achievement.

This volume *Studies in Educational Learning Environments: An International Perspective* represents an exciting advance in that it brings into one volume work by some of the leaders in the field, notably Barry Fraser, cross-cultural approaches and recent work from such Asian countries as Singapore, Taiwan, Korea and Brunei. The influence of culture is deservedly given an important place in these studies and will contribute to the emergence of models for classroom environment studies that will, by remaining sensitive to cultural variation, have greater explanatory power.

The co-editors, Swee Chiew Goh and Myint Swe Khine, are to be congratulated for their initiative and efforts in preparing this volume. Their efforts will, I am sure, be amply rewarded when learning environments research is more and more utilised in improving schooling.

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Preface

Barry J. Fraser

*Curtin University of Technology
Australia*

“Constructive educational climates may be so vitally important that priorities should be drastically rearranged.” (Riorden, 1982, p. 310)

This book is devoted to conceptualising, assessing and investigating what happens to students during their school and university education. In particular, the main focus is on important aspects of classroom learning environments. Clearly, having positive classroom environments is a valuable goal of education. But, it should not be assumed that the equally important issue of student outcomes is ignored. Rather, this book presents compelling evidence that the classroom environment so strongly influences student outcomes that it should not be ignored by those wishing to improve the effectiveness of schools and universities.

The curriculum of schools and universities consists not just of content and outcomes, but also of classrooms where the business of learning takes place. It is the quality of life lived in classrooms that determines many of the things that we hope for from education. As this book clearly shows, classroom climate can be assessed and studied. In fact, remarkable progress has been made in conceptualising, assessing and researching it.

In particular, over the years, researchers have developed quite a few questionnaires to assess students' perceptions of their classroom learning environments. These questionnaires have been used in different countries and at different grade levels. They have been translated into various languages. They have been used by hundreds of researchers, thousands of teachers and millions of students around the world.

Given the ready availability of questionnaires, the importance of classroom environment, the influence of classroom environment on

student outcomes, and the value of environment assessments in guiding educational improvement, it seems very important that researchers and teachers give it greater priority. Although educators around the world pay great attention to student achievement and only a little attention to the environment of school and university classrooms, research on classroom environment should not be buried under a pile of achievement tests. Hopefully, this timely book will encourage and guide important research and practical applications involving classroom environment, especially in Asian countries.

From The Editors

This book on educational learning environments is conceptualised as a platform for researchers and educators to share the results of their work with others who are interested in the field of Learning Environments Research (LER). It is also hoped that the book, in bringing together recent research conducted in various parts of the world, will help consolidate the achievements and developments of the field for the past 30 years.

Background to LER

Historically, learning environments research began to attract attention from the late 1960s with the much publicised work of firstly, H.J. Walberg and colleagues in connection with the Harvard Physics Project and secondly, the work of R.H. Moos in clinical and family therapy that was later extended to education. The efforts of Walberg and Moos pioneered many major research studies in perceptions of classroom environments from the 1970s. There emerged a distinct tradition of research on students' perceptions of their classroom environment. The studies of B.J. Fraser and his associates in Australia, particularly the studies in science classrooms, contributed to the momentous growth of LER. In The Netherlands, Th. Wubbels and his colleagues worked on the model of teacher interpersonal behaviour to explain the significance of teacher-student relationship in the classrooms. Past research on classroom learning environments has been accompanied by the development and validation of several instruments over the last 30 years and these instruments formed the backbone of all studies in learning environments. Thus, LER has evolved into a field of study providing alternatives to explain students' learning success other than through students' examination performance.

As LER is carried out in many countries, it is our pleasant task to invite prominent scholars and educators from all over the world to contribute each a chapter on the research in their respective countries. This gives the book its international outlook. We would like to express our thanks to all the contributors for responding to this call of 'duty' and for making this book a reality. It is the only one of its kind and this book is our joint achievement.

Organisation of book

This book is organised in a special way. It contains 10 chapters. The first chapter is written by Professor Barry J. Fraser, a distinguished name linked to learning environments research. He has been greatly involved in the field for many years and is the best person to write on “Learning Environments Research: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow”. The chapter offers insights that will set directions and stimulate further growth in LER.

The remaining nine chapters are devoted to LER in nine countries. Each chapter presents LER in the context of the country concerned and is unique in its own way. Chapters 2 to 5 present LER in Australia, Canada, The Netherlands and the USA. Chapters 6 to 10 highlight LER in the Asian countries of Brunei, Indonesia, Korea, Singapore and Taiwan. Owing to restraints, studies documented in the various chapters are not exhaustive of LER carried out in their respective countries.

Currently, research in Asian countries is gaining impetus and this prompts the authors to not only present the significant findings of their research but also provide information on the educational systems in their countries. The “What is Happening in this Class” (WIHIC) questionnaire is used in a number of Asian studies and this book has the privilege of including translated versions of the WIHIC in the Indonesian, Korean and Chinese languages. This will enhance the understanding of learning environments in different educational, social and cultural contexts. All the LER documented in the chapters bear testimony to a vibrant field and it is no wonder that there are increasing publications and conference presentations at international levels. LER has attained a level of distinction in the field of educational research that we are all proud of.

We would also like to express our thanks to the Dean of Foundation Programmes, National Institute of Education, Professor S. Gopinathan, for his unstinting support throughout the publication of this book.

Indeed, we extend our big thank you to everyone who has assisted in the publication of the book.

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Barry J. Fraser is Professor and Director of the Science and Mathematics Education Centre at Curtin University of Technology in Perth, Australia. He is co-editor of the 72-chapter *International Handbook of Science Education* published by Kluwer, and editor-in-chief of the Kluwer journal *Learning Environments Research: An International Journal*. He is a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Academy of Education, Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia and Australian College of Education. He is an eminent scholar in learning environments research.

Swee Chiew Goh is with the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Associate Professor Goh has been in teacher education for more than 20 years. She also undertakes supervision of Master in Education students in their research and dissertation. Her research interests include the studying of learning environment at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels and classroom management.

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