

a synopsis of the content covered and an extensive list of references, combined with a comprehensive index, to enable further reading.

This interesting and very readable book is likely to be of most interest to those focusing their work on the very early years of childhood, who are seeking a short overview of some of the influential theories in the field and who are also interested in understanding, questioning and ensuring ongoing enhancement of their own practice.

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## The International Handbook of Research on Teachers' Belief

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Edited by Helenrose Fives and Michele Gregoire

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When teachers walk into classrooms, their beliefs about their role can be more critical than their lesson plan, the assessment, the students, or the structure of the class. A book dedicated to these beliefs is welcome. This book, one of the first on this topic, is more an introduction via a pleasant dip than full immersion.

The authors cite beliefs related to teaching methods (transmission, transactional, constructivist), the role and nature of dialogue, growth versus fixed, mastery versus performance, deficits, responsibility, content, learning, structures, differentiation, expectations, assessment and collective efficacy. Like most new areas, there is an (over) emphasis on commentary about how everyone needs to improve their research design but very little discussion about how to better measure or change these beliefs. Buehl and Beck introduce the limited but interesting possibilities about these relationships to practice. Most scholars claim, with limited evidence, that beliefs have an impact on student learning. Less emphasis is placed on the effects of those beliefs on willingness to stay at school, a reinvestment in learning and student beliefs, especially about learning.

A more comprehensive set of measures about beliefs is needed, while overcoming problems such as positive bias, claims versus actual beliefs and the human judgment approach (not mentioned in the book, but worth pursuing). While Australia uses the term *beliefs*, in the United States the word *epistemology* is more commonly used. In Europe, it is *conceptions*. How do these terms differ, and does it matter? Without more cohesion in the field, too many researchers will bypass each other because of the jingle-jangle of terms. The chapter by Lunn et al. is a great place for a beginning of such an overview. Gill and Hardin illustrate differences between beliefs and emotions, while Levin contributes an exemplary chapter of how these beliefs develop. Some areas are further researched than others. For example, compare the richness in Rubie-Davies (expectations) or Watt and Richardson (reasons for teaching) with the tentative (but optimistic) chapters on collective beliefs and in some of the chapters on content domains. This book does not explore the beliefs of principals, students,

policy makers or parents, despite the influence of these beliefs. Maybe this could form the basis of a companion handbook?

Like most handbooks, *The International Handbook of Research on Teachers' Belief* is a hefty tome and hard to hold in one's 'hand'. It covers a pot pourri of ideas with few major themes other than a discussion of the lack of research methods needed to improve this area — and this theme is critical. The book has no integrating conclusion chapter, leaving readers to put the pieces together themselves. Where to next? The editors have provided a commendable introductory chapter and Skott introduces the topics, concluding that the field may be seen in crisis: 'the key construct of the field, the one of beliefs is ill defined; its methods are acknowledged to be problematic; and the fundamental rationale, the one of beliefs as an explanatory principle for practice, is refuted as much as confirm'. This is why this book is so critical. It brings together various perspectives, and poses a great direction for future researchers, for PhD teams, and for those who have innovative measurement skills. If, as I would defend, it is the beliefs of teachers that matter most, then this field needs to grow up. I commend this book, warts and all, as a forerunner for exciting things to come. That, at least, is my belief.

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