

BOOK REVIEWS

PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACEMENT: A CRITICAL GUIDE TO OUTSTANDING TEACHING

Reviewed by Rose White

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This book is a comprehensive and practical guide to primary school placements. Written by experienced lecturers in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) from the University of Worcester, it is set in the context of the varying routes into teaching currently available in England. It is likely to appeal to trainee teachers and also perhaps would be useful for colleagues who are new to the mentoring role in schools.

The book has 11 chapters, each dealing with a topic related to primary school placements. Each chapter is clearly structured and starts with a flow chart, which outlines the content of the following text. Every chapter is linked to the specific English Teachers' Standards (2012) covered and uses a mixture of helpful information, case studies and critical questions to support trainees' understanding. Further suggestions for reading are also offered as well as a useful 'frequently asked questions' page and glossary at the end of the book.

Chapters in the book cover all the essential areas the trainee will need to focus on, including behaviour management, professional attributes, employability and placement practicalities. The first chapter, on reflection throughout practice, is an excellent starting point. It discusses the importance of reflection as a vital tool in informing trainee (and teacher) practice and outlines various models that can be used to support this. All

the topics are covered in clear and accessible language.

Planning and assessment, teaching of the core curriculum and teaching inclusively are also covered in depth. However, with the introduction of the new national curriculum in 2014 and the new special educational needs (SEN) code of practice (2015) there is a need for these chapters (6, 7 and 8) to be rewritten and updated. 'Stepping stones' (p. 76) are referred to as part of the EYFS (early years foundation stage) curriculum despite this terminology being dropped some time ago and superseded by 'development matters' in 2012. I also felt that some of the language and information in the 'Teaching inclusively' chapter needed updating and tweaking. For example, when discussing children for whom English is an additional language (EAL) we need to ensure that trainees do not think of them as having a special educational need. On p. 112 a critical question relating to the case study talks about a child's difficulties with language when in fact the issue he has as a learner, who is new to English, is a lack of English vocabulary, not a problem with language itself. Equally, the guidance about seeking advice from a SENCo as opposed to the inclusion manager in this situation may be misleading.

That notwithstanding I thought this was an incredibly useful book, which I feel would be very helpful for trainee

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teachers whatever their route and one that I (especially when it is updated) will be recommending they find in the library. ■

EDUCATION STUDIES: AN ISSUE BASED APPROACH

Reviewed by Mark Tymms

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Education studies: an issue based approach has been written to work across a wide range of reader stages and abilities, from undergraduate to postgraduate study, offering what the authors state is a critical and authoritative approach to the wide and diverse sub-topics that make up Education Studies as an academic subject. Covering 20 topics within 254 pages the authors have sought to challenge what they see as commonly accepted perspectives on education and ask the reader to question education in a thorough and critical manner, with a strong focus on the contexts of education in terms of political and socio-economic drivers, as well as issues of social and individual inclusivity. Linked to these are further connections to citizenship and globalisation, with the inclusion of globalisation acknowledged as a particular point of significance within the introduction. As the authors state, the text seeks to place discussions around education within what is becoming an increasingly uncertain landscape.

Certainly, it is difficult not to praise books that seek to make students question their preconceptions about education and raise the levels of criticality with which they approach the topic. Indeed, just the presence of 20 chapters, each on a different topic, must surely act to at least highlight the complexity of the field being studied and the breadth of knowledge that the reader will require to evidence a full understanding of education in all its forms. In this vein I particularly value the inclusion of community and alternative education as a way of forcing students from their often limited view of learning as a lifelong and life-wide endeavour.

The intentions of the book are therefore

to be applauded and certainly many of the authors have succeeded in their primary purpose to represent the depth and complexity of the field that the reader has chosen to engage with and ask them to see that field in a much more critical manner. However, concerns remain regarding the number of topics covered, the number of authors involved in producing the text, and the impact of those factors on the quality, consistency and criticality offered throughout the book as a whole. While the number of topics covered serves to highlight breadth within the field, the depth in which they are covered is quite variable and at times the structure of some chapters is a little fragmented and even confusing: lots of subsections but not always a clear intellectual route through them.

I would also query whether it is realistic to target so many learner groups in the same text, and would use the pitch at which some of the text has been levelled as an example of the problems that may be produced when doing so. Some chapters feel very much like traditional Educational Studies texts, built on straightforward historical explanations of policy and research, effective in explanation although perhaps a little dry to read, but in others complicated themes and concepts are introduced without any attempt at genuine explanation. For instance, can a first-year undergraduate student be expected to understand concepts and terms such as 'non-linear principles of dynamical systems theory and chaos' (p. 18)? Similarly, will they necessarily understand the nature of 'meta-cognition', in this instance incorrectly clarified as 'learning to learn'? In these instances, I do feel some of the text fails to provide adequate foundational knowledge and

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therefore places too much responsibility on the student to search out additional information to help them understand the comments made by the author. Again this is a matter of consistency, or indeed inconsistency, and how the novice learner in particular will respond to it as a challenge to either accept or reject it as a useful text.

In a similar vein, I would suggest that such examples also serve to highlight another concern with some authors in this book, in that their writing reads as opinion and that where they have undoubtedly reached their conclusions critically that process isn't made explicitly clear to the reader. This surely limits the ability of the text to act as an exemplar to the student coming to criticality as a novice. Again, as an example, we cannot argue with the statement that systems theory has been applied to education, but can certainly question whether it has been useful. The question remains as to whether the lack of validation supports or hinders the reader's willingness to critically challenge the point being made.

Sound in intent and largely effective in content, this book highlights the problems associated with raising criticality in students. As with all books of this type, questions remain regarding the quantity of background information required to drive criticality; the assumptions of previous learning; levels of terminology; and the ability of authors to promote criticality of their own thinking. Here, I feel that these questions have gathered significance through a focus that has proved a little too broad and inconsistencies in writing style and structure that may challenge the engagement of the novice learner in particular. ■

HARNESSING WHAT WORKS IN ELIMINATING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE: A TALE OF TWO CLASSROOMS

Reviewed by Neil Herrington

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This collection of essays is a collaboration between Demos, a cross-party think tank, and Durham University, from where the majority of contributions are drawn. These are accompanied by contributions from Helen Barnard of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and from two authors whose experience of late reminds us of the ‘fragility’ of life as a policy-maker: Tristram Hunt, writing as shadow secretary of state for education prior to the last election, and Sam Freedman, now at Teach First but former senior policy advisor to Michael Gove.

The essays set out to engage with educational differences associated with socio-economic status, often referred to as educational disadvantage or inequality. Higgins and Tymms point out that this is not a straightforward challenge, with only some of the solutions lying within education. Barnard points out that ‘differences in attainment between children from different socio-economic backgrounds are far greater than those related to gender or ethnicity’ (p. 35), a fact that is a major driver of poverty.

Both Barnard and Gorard raise concerns about the present focus on the reform of school structure, when there is scant evidence of any effect this has on educational disadvantage – ‘new school types... are not the way forward’ (Gorard, p. 26) with ‘comprehensive, centralised and equitably funded school systems’ (Gorard, p. 25) tending to produce smaller attainment gaps. Instead, viewing disadvantage as a problem of causation, Gorard points out that ‘practitioners and policy-makers need to take much more notice of decent research and development... [while] researchers need

to change what they do and start providing the kind of evidence that practitioners and policy-makers can use safely’ (p. 30). Merrell et al. and Torgersen then give some consideration to the development of more rigorous approaches to research and evaluations, with Torgerson making a strong case that policies and interventions ‘must be tested before implementation through carefully designed and rigorously conducted studies’ (p. 67). While largely agreeing with this, Merrell et al. recognise the ‘need to consider mechanisms to embed research findings into practice and policy effectively’ (p. 50).

The subtitle of this collection of essays resonates with the class-based nature of the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, and with the research approach taken to identifying effective interventions to eliminate such discrepancies – namely properly controlled evaluations. This book is a good starting point to begin to engage with what is surely the most important issue facing education.

This book (along with all of Demos’ work) is available to download for free, under an open access licence, from www.demos.co.uk. ■

Authors: Claudia Wood and Ralph Scott (eds.)

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EFFECTIVE SUPERVISION: THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Reviewed by Zarina Waheed, Ph.D. Student, University of Malaya, Malaysia; Lecturer, SBK Women's University Quetta, Pakistan.

Classroom supervision is a way of improving the quality of the teaching-learning process in schools. The authors Wayne K. Hoy and Patrick B. Forsyth are experts in educational administration, and this book is a good reflection of their expertise. The book is well written and covers almost all essential aspects of effective supervision. It provides an in-depth and detailed explanation of a model and its practical implications in classroom supervision. The book is an attempt to outline a model of supervision that improves instruction by employing open-systems theory. It proposes a diagnostic cycle of supervision by linking it to the classroom performance model so as to improve teaching-learning and the supervisory process. The application of theoretical concepts to real school and classroom examples is the hallmark of the book. The writing style is very fluent and engaging. Comprehensible tables, charts, and the use of examples make each chapter very interesting and engaging. The authors have synthesized everything effectively and each chapter summarizes its contents at the end, which enables the readers to revise the whole chapter.

The book has fifteen chapters that have been arranged in three parts. The 'Introduction and Overview' part comprises of three chapters. These chapters introduce the models of effective supervision, performance, and the diagnostic cycle. The second section 'Organizational Context' describes and analyzes the elements of school organization that influence classroom behaviour. Out of the five chapters included in this part, the authors explain the organizational context of schools in chapters 4 to 7 whereas chapter 8 provides its practical application. In the last part— 'The Classroom Social System and Teacher Performance'— the authors

have analyzed competency, attitude, motivational needs, and expectations of students and teachers. Furthermore, formal classroom arrangement, classroom climate, teaching tasks, and outcomes of classroom performance with a focus on the classroom performance model are the areas covered in this section.

The notion of "organization as a social system" (Katz & Kahn, 1966) is still influencing the recent literature on schools (Hussein, 2014; James et al., 2006; Muhammad Faizal, 2013). Although, the book under review is a similar attempt to explain how social systems are organized, it goes a step forward by elaborating 'the classroom as a social system'. It explains the classroom as a sub-system of the school where supervision plays the role of input factors. Nevertheless, two important and most influential factors on the supervision process have been overlooked while describing supervision as a process of change and innovation; the authors include task-oriented and relation-oriented leadership behaviour as input factors in their model. Change-oriented leadership behaviour without which change and innovation is not possible and has been completely ignored (see, Yukl, 2010).

Overall, the first part of the book can be challenging read. It is complicated, dense, and at times difficult to comprehend. On

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the other hand, parts two and three are very interesting and easy to understand.

As a reviewer, I recommend this book to every supervisor, headteacher and teacher. They can apply it in their supervisory practices as the narration has a strong practical relevance. In order to reap the full benefits of this masterpiece, the reader should start from chapter 4 to 7 first, followed by chapters 9 to 14. After reading ten chapters in the above mentioned order, readers become fully prepared to grasp the knowledge contained in chapters 1 to 3. Chapters 8 and 15 that have a pool of cases should be attempted in the end. In this sequence, readers will find the book easy to comprehend and will make full use of it. The authors too have recommended repeatedly in chapters 8 and 15 to revise first three chapters. After that, they can grasp the technicalities of models and in end the application of models in cases. Although the book is mainly on classroom supervision in schools, it is equally important and relevant to all levels of education including colleges and universities. A new edition of this book encompassing new insights developed in recent years would be very timely. These new insights include the application of technology in education, and professional learning communities in schools, which have a strong bearing on school and classroom supervision. ■

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