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REVIEW ARTICLE

Means and ends in professional development

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Valuing and educating young people
Jeremy Harvey, 2006
London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers
£14.99 (pbk), 158 pp.
ISBN 1-8431-0056-0 (pbk)

Learning to teach in the primary school
James Arthur, Teresa Grainger and David Wray (Eds), 2006
London, RoutledgeFalmer
£19.99 (pbk), 467 pp.
ISBN 0-4153-5928-7 (pbk)

Learning to teach in the secondary school (4th edn)
Susan Capel, Marilyn Leask and Terry Turner, 2005
London, Taylor & Francis
£21.99 (pbk), 494 pp.
ISBN 0-4153-6392-6 (pbk)

Professional development, reflection and enquiry
Christine Forde, Margery McMahon, Alastair D. McPhee and Fiona Patrick, 2006
London, Paul Chapman Publishing
£19.99 (pbk), 200 pp.
ISBN 1-4129-1937-1 (pbk)

I get by with a little help…: colleague support in schools
Bill Rogers, 2006
London, Paul Chapman Publishing
£18.99 (pbk), 232 pp.
ISBN 1-4129-2119-8 (pbk)

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All teaching is the enactment of a philosophy of education. This is true whether or not the teacher realises it. Indeed the most important of our beliefs are probably those least accessible to us, the fundamental assumptions we get up in the morning with. Today's dominant orthodoxy in teacher development is that of reflective practice: teachers are abjured to consider themselves autonomous professionals continuously reflecting on both the ends and means of their work. In considering the books before us we are prompted to review this basic proposition. What are the main factors bearing down on teachers that promote reflective practice? What are the impediments to reflective practice? What, in fact, does reflective practice amount to *in practice*?

The first and principal fact about reflective practice is surely that it deals in values. You cannot have teaching without values, without a sense of what is worth doing and what counts as a good way of doing it. To strip values out of teaching is to reduce it to a merely technical activity, a set of procedures where the whole point and purpose lie outside the activity and are the subject of another jurisdiction. This is of course not to say that teaching requires no skills and techniques; only that the skills and techniques deployed by teachers need to be understood as integral to the activity itself, not as means to ends but as part of a continuing flow of activity. The values lie within not outside the techniques and skills of teaching.

How far is it possible under modern conditions to sustain this vision of autonomous professional activity and its associated notion of the teacher as independent professional? Can teachers in modern public education systems exercise educational judgement that is not routinised and technical, even if highly efficient, but also informed by a close understanding of the unfolding nature of learners and the society where they must function? Can students in today's public education systems be autonomous learners following and developing their interests in what they take to be of value in human life?

It is just because these basic and profound questions will not go away that we welcome Jeremy Harvey's book on George Lyward. For this is a book all about values. This is an account of the life, work and thinking of George Lyward, a pioneer in the field of therapeutic education. Lyward (1894–1973) led a therapeutic community, Finchden Manor, in rural South East England over a period of 43 years specialising in caring for 'intelligent and emotionally damaged young boys from fourteen upwards' (p. 18). The emphasis was on providing the boys with 'hospitality' and 'respite from social pressures and unhelpful expectations' which he believed were the fundamental reasons for lack of success in conventional schools. Lyward like many other progressives subscribed to a 'stage theory' of child development. Such a theory holds that we must all pass through a number of periods of development from childhood to maturity. Failure to respect the integrity of each stage and to allow sufficient time for its fulfilment will result in subsequent problems. The prime practical requirement of theories of education of the kind exemplified by Lyward is therefore to provide time and space for each of the envisaged stages of development. Here Harvey introduces the concept of 'slowness'. Lyward's pupils could be called, some of them, 'slow'. But more importantly the

pace of events in school needs to be slowed so that there is time to study the child, to deliberate. Since students develop at their own pace curricula must be flexible enough to accommodate individualised programmes. The speed of the convoy can no more be that of the slowest vessel than that of the fastest, for learning is necessarily personal.

Pioneers like Lyward working in unique environments with students not typical of the general population nevertheless provide experimental evidence in favour of a person-centred view of education. The idea of personal uniqueness is central here. Progressives emphasise personal uniqueness rather than commonality. This brings into relief the individualism that was later to became derided as 'Sixties me-first' philosophy. Lyward via Jeremy Harvey reminds us that all teaching must respect the nature of learning and the developmental needs of the individual. But of course there are practical as well as philosophical reasons for also acknowledging the social nature of learning. Schools are communities, not sites for private personal learning. A balance must be struck between the individual and the community. Again, residential communities such as Finchden Manor, small in scale, intimate in social relations, while providing a test bed for these balances, also have a relatively easy task. How is the balance between individual and community to be struck in a comprehensive school of over one thousand pupils with a rapid turnover of students and staff and a socially, perhaps ethnically, mixed constituency?

It is inevitable as schools develop in scale and complexity that these issues should become ever more difficult to resolve. The 'transmission' model of teaching evolved for the very reason that it became necessary to teach large numbers in short time scales. It was a 'mass production' model of schooling. It became necessary to suppose that material to be learned could be passed directly from the mind of the teacher to the mind of the learner. This system depends on clearly prescribed objectives or targets and efficient teaching methods to produce uniform and required results by way of learning. The favoured transmission model provides a ready-made tool for centralised and hierarchical systems of education. It promises to provide uniformity of both processes and outcomes. Teachers are conceived as technicians, agents or conduits through which a tightly prescribed curriculum is 'delivered'.

Educators such as Lyward dissent. The great virtue of Harvey's book is that it reminds us of an educational heritage at a time when it is under ever greater threat from centralised curricula and pedagogical orthodoxy, the 'mass production' model. We are reminded that all pupils proceed at their own varying rates and make their own sense of what they are presented with, sense derived from personal experience. It is small wonder therefore, that the transmission view of teaching and its underlying philosophy is challenged by groups of people who retain at least a folk memory of the likes of Lyward. There remain teachers and teacher educators whose starting assumptions are those of the progressives.

We have before us two texts that may legitimately be taken to represent the state of the art in primary and secondary school teaching in England and Wales today.

Learning to teach in the secondary school and *Learning to teach in the primary school* systematically set out the knowledge, understanding and skills required of teachers for the foreseeable future. There is however one point of contrast between the two that makes comparisons difficult. The secondary volume was first produced in 1995 at the height of the vogue in England and Wales (and up to a point in Scotland) for school-based initial teacher education; indeed it is subtitled *a companion to school experience*. As such, the book is relatively light on formal theory. This by itself need not be a criticism provided only that it does not pretend otherwise and that teacher educators using it are not led to take it to be a comprehensive text. There are frequent warnings within the text that teaching is theory laden, that 'everyone who teaches has a theory of how to teach effectively and of how pupils learn' (p. 2). Teaching it is asserted is both an art and a science. These two statements highlight the inevitably diminished compass of any work of this kind. It is a vade mecum to 'learning on the job' but it takes the job to be a set of performances in conditions that are taken for granted. Learning 'how to teach and how pupils learn' is only the beginning of becoming a teacher. Beyond those immediate questions lie others, such as 'what are schools for?', 'what explains today's curriculum?' and 'how can the curriculum be shaped for tomorrow?' This book does not have that compass and tutors and students must look elsewhere for serious attention to these wider aspects of becoming a teacher; for we would say that to understand teaching as 'both a science and an art' blinds us to the more fundamental fact that teaching is more even than either of those things. It is a social and moral enterprise, a project in human development.

Learning to teach in the secondary school is then a survival manual and a very adequate one for a teacher learning on the job at the end of the last century. Much of the book is designed to raise awareness of statutory requirements and the various contemporary protocols concerning classroom management, lesson planning, assessment and record keeping. It is indicative of the structural weakness thus introduced into the book that the section on 'The School, Curriculum and Society' is perfunctory and damaging to the real education of teachers since it treats its subject matter dryly and, probably inevitably, in a superficial way.

Learning to teach in the primary school is a companion, and a contrasting, volume. It is first of all a later work, being published in 2006. Perhaps some of the mania for 'practicality' evident in the sister volume has abated somewhat since 1995. Strangely enough, the range of contributors is greater in the Primary book but the overall depth considerably greater. The focus remains securely practice based yet the commitment to understanding the foundations of the practice of teaching is conspicuously greater. We believe this is probably a legacy of the learner-centred tradition in primary schooling. This tradition, though never fully coming to fruition, has been a campaigning part of primary schooling since at least Edmund Holmes's seminal *What is and what might be*, first published in 1911. There is stark evidence of this contrast between the two books in their contents list alone. After a first chapter in each on 'Becoming a Teacher', the Primary work launches a sensitive exploration of 'Learning and Teaching' while the Secondary book goes straight to 'Beginning to Teach'. They go on

respectively to 'Planning and Managing Learning' and 'Classroom Interactions and Managing Pupils'. There could be no better illustration of the dominant modes of thinking about education in the primary and secondary schools and in their supporting literature and theory.

How far do these definitive texts acknowledge the heritage of the progressives, challenging the mass production model? How far do they incorporate a sufficiently rich view of reflective practice to sustain practitioners in the face of all the pressures upon them? Of the two the Primary book makes the better fist of the job.

Two further recent volumes address the problem of supporting professional values. Initial impressions suggest that Forde *et al.* might offer help to teachers wishing to develop their practice according to personal professional mores. They claim that teachers have lost their professional autonomy to central control: 'we believe that teachers have been removed from the decision making process: that the sharing of good practice has become synonymous with standardisation and central control' (p. 13). They argue that teacher professionalism must lie at the heart of any changes aimed at improving children's learning while centrally imposed diktat is relatively impotent. Forde *et al.* contend that teachers need 'to work within a broader role than one which is merely technicist' (p. 27). They suggest that professionals are all obliged to consider the needs of their clients and how they are affected by policy and practice (p. 167). While in any democratic society, public education must necessarily be accountable for itself, total uncritical compliance with government regulations is an unprofessional way of proceeding. Rather 'debate and discussion should become the core process of *reflection and enquiry* within a professional learning community' (p. 168). Therefore teachers need to reclaim the central ground by developing a more meaningful approach to professional development where personal reflection and enquiry must lie at the centre of the process.

In order to support this thesis Forde *et al.* explore the nature of professionalism, cite evidence from recent research and suggest that ubiquitous public perceptions about a decline in the standards of public education are more the result of a 'discourse of derision' than real regression. They examine the concept of reflection and argue that while personal reflection is a 'useful tool' (p. vii) a more sophisticated approach is required and advocate an institution-wide approach to professional development. They cite the Scottish Qualification for Headship as an example of a scheme that has reflective practice at its heart. All this looks very promising for the teacher who wants to place learners at the centre of their practice.

Forde *et al.* cover many aspects of reflection. They differentiate between reflection that fosters empowerment and is a 'potential for agency' and that which can be a negative force (p. 75) and highlight the dangers of selective reflection (p. 74). They refer to the rapid development of reflective practice in the health care movement and suggest that 'in any profession that is prey to ambiguity reflective practice is now seen as a means to enable professionals to cope with a need to respond to imposed change that may leave them struggling to find a definitive purpose for their professional role' (p. 67).

All this is very encouraging but while they assert that a more sophisticated model of reflection is required they fail to provide precisely this. What appears to be missing from this book is any serious effort to examine the nature of reflection. Forde *et al.* suggest there is no definitive model of reflection (p. 68) and appear to have failed to explore the underlying principles of reflective practice relating to critical theory. There are no references to seminal texts such as Carr and Kemmis (1984) or discussion of wider social and political contexts. Without any understanding of these fundamental elements reflection is in danger of becoming anecdotal and trivial.

In another book Bill Rogers suggests that the support of colleagues in school can affect the well-being, professional esteem and professional coping of teachers in schools. Does he offer any advice to a teacher who may wish to hold a more progressive view than that which is currently in vogue? Rogers's assertion that colleague support is an underrated aspect of a school's existence and mission is doubtless true in a number of educational establishments. However, while his practical, easily read and often humorous guide to developing a more collegial atmosphere may be helpful and reassuring to those who wish to operate within and cope with the status quo, it appears to offer little to those who wish to challenge the way things are in schools. Rogers's book emanates from his doctoral work in the 1990s. It is based on qualitative research conducted in Australian schools and is essentially practical in nature. The book explores factors that determine colleague support and develops, from several sources, an original 'typology of colleague support' model. Rogers's use of a metaphor 'black dot—White Square' (p. 180) provides a useful heuristic device that clarifies the reader's understanding of what the model implies and is typical of the way Rogers makes his ideas accessible to his reader. Consequently he offers a great deal of practical advice about developing a whole-school policy. This includes the importance of raising awareness about the value of colleague support; of the need for formal and informal mechanisms; advice for those with managerial responsibilities; and suggestions as to how to go about implementing such mechanisms through stress auditing, needs analysis and whole-school reviews.

We look in vain in Rogers for any help for those who would wish to provide their pupils with time and space to develop their own natures. His book appears to be concerned more with coping with the way things are than bringing about any change in the philosophical approach to teaching and learning. His methods (needs analysis, whole-school reviews, etc.) reflect, even endorse, an approach to education that seems to prioritise processes before people and the business of schools before quality teaching and learning, one where the child rather than being placed at the centre is marginalised, a spectre at the feast. Furthermore he makes the assumption that professional development can be effectively managed by systems, an approach that minimises the importance of context and personal values in professional practice. Notwithstanding this criticism, in so far as schools exhibit common features resulting from a common history, this book deals competently with collegiate support and school development. In this sense it is a very realistic book that will speak to the condition of many teachers and their schools. It fails however to present any analysis of the underlying causes of the problems it deals

with. For that reason the directions of change it advocates are unexamined and alternatives unexplored.

What do we conclude from the examination of these books? Lyward offered a convincing humanistic vision of educational purposes, albeit for a special category of learners in special circumstances. Since Lyward's death in 1973 Harvey claims that 'Lyward lives on in what he achieved, wrote and spoke about' (p. 148). While this may be true of a few isolated special situations this vision is not one that could come fully to fruition in mass compulsory education. That was never going to happen. The Primary school handbook has a foothold in Lyward's philosophy but fails to take many steps forward. The Secondary book has become bogged down in a quagmire of taken-for-granted processes, many of which it can be claimed obstruct the processes of real learning. Forde *et al*. set the readers on a promising path towards a more reflective approach to teaching and learning but fail to broaden the idea of reflection into a contemplation of fundamental values. Rogers offers some useful pointers to those seeking direction but does not provide any coherent underlying vision.

These five volumes therefore have merits and shortcomings but as such are symptomatic of a modernity where there is no overall consensus about means and, more importantly, ends in education.

Reference

Carr, W. & Kemmis, S. (1986) *Becoming critical* (Lewes, The Falmer Press).