

1997

Colin Marsh (1996) Handbook for Beginning Teachers. Addison Wesley Longman: Australia. 406 pp

Robert G. Baker
Curtin University of Technology

Recommended Citation

Baker, R. G. (1997). Colin Marsh (1996) Handbook for Beginning Teachers. Addison Wesley Longman: Australia. 406 pp. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 22(2).
<http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.1997v22n2.8>

This Book Review is posted at Research Online.
<http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol22/iss2/8>

BOOK REVIEWS

Crittenden, B. (1996), *Thinking about Education: Essays for discussion in teacher education*, Addison Wesley Longman, Melbourne, 180 pp. \$29.95.

Brian Crittenden provides 22 short essays (3-10 pages) on topics organised under the headings of "The Educational Role of Schools", "The School Curriculum" and "Social Values, Public Policy and Education". Each article is supported by several discussion questions and a short reading list. While the issues considered are complex and contentious, the essays are written in a fashion which would make this book suitable as a text in a general, introductory course in education.

Crittenden considers the issues raised from a range of perspectives but makes clear that the essays are based on his own views, eg. "The basic role of schools and those who teach in them is to induct the members of each new generation into a culture's systematic bodies of belief and values together with their related ways of thinking, feeling, imagining and acting." (p.22) He notes that the two main counterviews to Oakeshott's conservative ideal of a school, viz., progressive education and schooling as socialisation, "are particularly virulent in the policy and practice of contemporary Australian education." (p.32) Although Crittenden prescribes Charles Taylor as an antidote for postmodernism, he is able to discern educational value in postmodernists'

work, for "Despite what I regard as radical flaws in postmodernism, exponents have highlighted features of contemporary industrial societies that have clear relevance for the practice of education." (p.42)

A common core curriculum is supported as a means to the ideal of a society based on open pluralism in which "It is crucial to recognise that if ideas without skills are inert, skills without content are empty." (p.67) The study of English literature is favoured by Crittenden to provide some of the content and learning to speak and write Standard (Australian) English are favoured skills. While moral education (p.95) and nurturing democratic values (p.103) are part of the core of school education, the compulsory two unit study of work in the Victorian Certificate of Education is not.

Examinations, equality, rights (parent and child) and competencies all receive brief treatment. Teacher education students would benefit from being introduced to these important, contentious issues through these carefully argued essays.

Bruce Haynes

Edith Cowan University

Lokan, Jan (Editor), (1994), *Describing Learning. Implementation of Curriculum Profiles in Australian Schools 1986*, Melbourne, ACER Press, Research Monograph No. 50, xxviii + 420 pp.

"Describing Learning" is the book which resulted from a study commissioned and funded by the Curriculum Developments Projects Program of the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs in 1995. The brief for the project was "to research, analyse and report on the effective use of the curriculum profiles for Australian schools, and their role in classroom assessment and reporting of student learning outcomes to teachers, parents and employers". The study would "draw attention to assessment and reporting practices and strategies ... I being used effectively in Australian classrooms', including the use and role of testing" (Piv).

The book presents the findings of the study in five main sections. Section one provides an introduction which has an overview of developments with the national statements and profiles to 1993 and a summary of the 1992 - 93 ACER calibration studies. Section two outlines in eight separate subsections the implementation initiatives as at the beginning of 1997 of each of the six states and two territories of Australia, written by eight contributing authors. Section three reports the findings of a nation - wide survey which sought to discover the views of administrators and teachers engaged in the implementation process. Section four documents the information from case studies in which teachers and principals were interview in order

to determine best practice strategies in classroom use of profiles for assessment and reporting. Section five, titled "Bringing It All Together" has the self-explanatory sub-title "Some Good Things Are Happening: How Can We Salvage the Situation Everywhere Else?"

The book is a detailed record of the current situation in what might be termed the politics of curriculum in Australia. There are tables, figures, a glossary and a list of seventy-three acronyms, which perhaps illustrates better than anything else the complexities facing those who attempt to draw together events surrounding the rise of the national curriculum and the saga of curriculum profiles.

As is commonly the case with many large scale policy developments, there is in this one the all too familiar gap, to which the editor draws attention, between formulation and implementation. While noting (p.363) the "enormous amounts of resources, time and professional energy" that have gone into developing and implementing curriculum profiles in Australian schools, she is sufficiently realistic, in summing up the present situation, to state that "It would be doing all parties a disservice to expect such a massive change, as the outcomes - based approach behind the statements and profiles for all areas of the curriculum entails, to be fully adopted anywhere in less than five years" (p.363).

Clearly implementation is a problem both for teachers and for systems. "Teachers will not embrace or endorse something which is not being committed to by the leadership in the systems...

Some of the systems have indicated plans which do not seem ... to be well advised" (p.367).

The conclusion drawn is that too much effort has been put into this particular attempt at curriculum reform for it not to continue. Time (for teachers) and money (from systems) are seen to be the elements necessary for success. One can only note that these are both commodities which seem to be in short supply at present in education in Australia.

The book provides a national perspective on curriculum policy which should be of interest to curriculum theorists and educational policy analysts, be they teachers, administrators, politicians or academics.

H E Melville Jones

Edith Cowan University

Colin Marsh (1996) *Handbook for Beginning Teachers*. Addison Wesley Longman: Australia. 406 pp

Colin Marsh has added yet another most useful book to his extensive list of publications. The cover leaf of the Handbook says this is 'his sixteenth book published in the field of teacher education' establishing him as a person well

qualified to produce a comprehensive text for neophyte teachers tentatively entering the complex world of teaching and learning. At the time of writing this review I notice that a seventeenth has now been added to his personal collection: the second edition of his popular *Teaching Studies of Society and Environment*.

Being an old social studies teacher familiar with many of the previous works of Marsh, I have fully appreciated the conceptual approach he has adopted for this book. The Handbook contains 25 chapters set in five sections focussing on student learning, teacher organisation, effective teaching, and the teaching profession. The first section (Part One) is a brief introduction to the content of the text and presents a framework of key concepts which helps the beginning teacher make sense of the complex and challenging world of teaching. The concept maps provided in this section, while clearly helpful for the new teacher are also most useful for the established practitioner. It is interesting to note that Marsh has provided a comparative matrix to illustrate how the Handbook compares with other more established beginning teacher texts (eg., Barry & King, 1993; Cole & Chan, 1987). Those readers who know of Marsh's previous writing will not be surprised to learn that, while this book equates well with the many areas addressed by its competitors, it excels in the areas of curriculum (decision makers,

national frameworks) and the professional aspects of teaching (legal and ethical issues, school culture, innovation and change). In terms of format, each chapter ends with Concluding Comments, Reflections and Issues, and Special References to enable reinforcement of some of the key points raised in each chapter, the main assumptions or ideas underpinning the chapter and some key research references or literature associated with the topic of the chapter.

A pleasing aspect of this Handbook, at least for this reviewer, is the early emphasis on the importance of understanding *Student Learning* (Part Two). Joyce and Weil (1996), the authors of another text related to this field (*Models of Teaching*), often state that their book should be entitled *Models of Learning* as the processes of teaching are created around the theories of learning. One cannot understand teaching without also understanding learning and the modes of teaching in today's classrooms are centred more on students learning how to learn, cooperatively constructing and taking greater responsibility for their own learning. In this section of the Handbook Marsh provides a very readable overview of the major learning theorists (Piaget, Bruner, Kohlberg, Vygotsky), the key concepts of self esteem and motivation, and classroom learning environment. To be expected perhaps, Marsh has stayed with the more established theorists and has not ventured

into the more controversial areas of multiple intelligence and constructivism.

Part Three (*How Teachers Organise and Teach*) is strong on the organisational and planning aspects of teaching at both the classroom and school level. A brief introduction to curriculum begins this section with some good examples drawn from social studies, health, and a secondary economics curriculum. The reader will benefit in this section from the many illustrations Marsh has drawn from his involvement with the development of curriculum frameworks at both state and national levels. In addition to the usual and necessary lesson planning and objective writing chapters has been added a useful chapter on school culture and planning with good practical examples drawn from the state departments of Victoria (eg: School Charters) and Western Australia (eg: School Development Plans).

Teaching Effectively (Part Four) is easily and rightfully, the biggest section of the Handbook. It deals with the all important teaching/learning processes of communication skills (explaining, listening, questioning), instructional modes (practice drills, demonstrations, discussions, role plays), classroom management (on-task behaviour), including C. M. Charles' useful guidelines for developing preventive, supportive and corrective discipline (Charles, 1989), and teaching resources (audio-visual and print). One of the major concerns of

beginning teachers is how to deal with the individual differences of all the children in their classrooms and communicate with their parents. Teacher education programs rarely provide opportunities for beginning teachers to develop skills in interacting with parents. The Handbook makes up for many of these deficiencies by providing some excellent guidelines for training parents and teachers and illustrates a useful continuum for the gradual development of parent-teacher partnerships in schools.

Surveys of beginning teachers frequently report assessment and reporting as one of the major concerns facing the newly graduated teacher and it is pleasing to see Marsh give it so much attention in the fourth section. The difficult teaching area of values and moral education, a feature of Marsh's earlier works, is also prominent in this part of the Handbook. The final chapter of this section *School-level Evaluation*, while useful, seems a little out of place in its present position. It would seem to fit better in Part Three with the chapter on *School Development Plans* or in the last section Chapter 24 (Innovation and Change) and Chapter 25.(Teacher Appraisal) where Marsh's long experiences with the Texas-based group of Gene Hall, et al and the highly successful educational change program *The Concerns-Based Adoption Model* clearly shine through.

The concluding section of the Handbook, Part Five: *The Teaching Profession*, is a major strength of this book. It provides an insightful overview of some of the more difficult issues facing teachers and the profession today. The crucial notion of school culture is explored initially and readers are treated to a decade by decade view of changing school culture, beginning with the *1960s* and ending with the *1990s*. Marsh provides beginning teachers with an introduction to the Australian Teaching Profession and the often neglected but vitally important area of legal and ethical issues (students' and teachers' rights). Newly graduated teachers and indeed many of their older more established colleagues, will benefit from some of the Question-Answer illustrations of the rights of students e.g.,

Q. Can I be grounded or stopped from going on a school visit?

A. *A school can deny you some special privilege. Any activity which is part of your education is not a privilege. So you cannot be denied teaching materials, or stopped from going on field trips during school hours if they are part of your education.*

Q. Do teachers have the right to search me or my schoolbag?

A. *Teachers have no right to search you or your school bag unless you agree. If you have nothing to hide, it may be easier to agree to a search, but you do not have to.*

The national move toward teacher competencies and standards (e.g., Mayer Committee, 1992) is well illustrated in this latter section of the Handbook. Teachers will appreciate the clear treatment of the advantages and disadvantages of the competency-based standards approach to teaching. Hughes' development model (Hughes, 1992) provides a useful overview of competencies associated with key stages in a teacher's career.

In summary, I have enjoyed reviewing the Handbook for Beginning Teachers. It is heartening to see another quality Australian publication in Teacher Education now available in our university bookshops. Its layout is logical, easy to follow and provides a concise and very readable overview of some of the key areas of concern for beginning teachers that is not only ideal for those about to enter the profession but is also a useful reference for the seasoned traveller.

Dr R.G. Baker

Curtin University