

Book Review

The Professional Practice of Teaching: An Introduction to Teaching, Learning and Curriculum

CLIVE MCGEE AND DEBORAH FRASER (EDS.), 1994.

Palmerston North: The Dunmore Press. 315 pp. \$64.95

When asked to review this book some time ago I quite willingly agreed but as time passed began to procrastinate. Questions I kept asking myself included, what value would such a task have for me or for my school? Do we really need such a book? What value or purpose would such a book serve?

After reading the book my initial impression was that it would be ideal for pre-service teachers and for those people contemplating a return to teaching but of limited value to those currently teaching. Fortunately, I then asked two very experienced members of our staff to read parts of it. Their comments pleasantly surprised me. "It is a practical book, easy to read and relates to real teaching", "The format is logical and easy to follow", "We need extra copies in our school", "The planning section is excellent", "We should give copies to our beginning teachers", "Very real", and "Would be useful for teachers on staff having basic management problems". As I hinted earlier these comments were very positive and helped me focus my re-reading. To reinforce these opinions I also sampled, with similar results, a larger cross section of our staff.

To their credit the editors of the book have avoided the trap of letting their contributors use the educational jargon that all too often characterises educational books. As a result the book is written in a largely non-academic style and as such is very easy to read. The format used in all chapters is a very good one. Discussion questions are posed at the beginning of each chapter and are designed to direct reading. The text is well set out with good use of sub headings and each chapter concludes with a summary, some suggested activities and then a list of suggested further readings.

These activities were, I'm sure, designed for pre-service teachers but once again teachers on our staff found them useful. For example, asking us to analyse our school reports to see what they really say about progress and achievement was a useful task. An interesting staff discussion occurred when we examined the respective benefits or otherwise of multi-level and vertical groupings in classrooms. With recent curriculum documents being so prescriptive, the question of just how much freedom schools have to use local initiative was another example of a worthwhile discussion that evolved around our school.

The book covers a wide range of topics with chapters titled: Becoming Familiar with Classroom Life; Learners and Learning; The Teacher and Curriculum Development; Planning for Effective Teaching and Learning; Assessing and Evaluating Student Learning; Managing an Effective Classroom; Classroom Interaction; Effective Schools and Effective Teachers; The teacher as the Professional Leader; Putting it into Practice; and, A Curriculum Exemplar: Mathematics.

Readers would need to be selective in their reading as it would be of little value to read straight through. A better approach would be to select chapters of interest and get a sound understanding of issues raised before moving on to another.

The index is well set out and is easy to use and will be of great use to practising teachers who are under pressure but want to research an idea quickly. Another excellent feature is the inclusion of a list of selected readings at the end of each chapter. Once again this enables busy people to concentrate on the readings that are pertinent to their topics of interest. A full bibliography is available at the end of the book.

All topics would be of interest to pre-service teachers but there does appear to be some duplication. The chapters *Becoming Familiar with Classroom Life*, *Managing an Effective Classroom* and *Classroom Interaction* in particular could have been condensed into either shorter, or perhaps two chapters. Three of the really strong chapters from a student teacher's point of view are first, *Putting it into Practice* which includes contributions from a practising Assistant Principal and explains quite clearly what students should look for and expect from a school. Second, the chapter on *Planning for Effective Teaching and Learning* also appealed to experienced teachers on our staff because it is full of good ideas and practical suggestions. A key point the authors make is the need to plan for evaluation. This is an issue schools are certainly grappling with currently. Third, the *Learners and Learning* chapter provides a basic introduction in clear, simple language. It would also help practising teachers refocus and reflect on what they are currently doing in relation to knowledge on learning theory.

Tutor teachers will find the chapter *Managing an Effective Classroom* a useful reference for their Year One and Two teachers. Although a lengthy article there are lots of useful hints and ideas that, from my experience, do actually work. Teachers generally will find the chapter *The Teacher and Curriculum Development* good value as it refocuses their thinking and revisits ideas that they would already have worked through; as should be the case with the discussion on questioning in the chapter on classroom interaction. The theme of the need for teachers to be reflective practitioners is a recurring one throughout the book.

A real strength of the book is the chapter *Assessing and Evaluating Student Learning*. It deals with issues that all of us in schools are struggling with. The quotes from Terry Crooks that "it is essential that teachers assess what really matters" and that it is "easy to assess trivia" help highlight the problems schools are facing. The discussion in the second half of the chapter on some of the issues to do with assessment will help clarify a lot of people's thinking.

The book fails to address three important areas that it probably should have. There is room in a book of this nature to look at Treaty issues, Bilingualism and the move towards Kura Kaupapa. These are issues facing schools on a daily basis and pre-service teachers and teachers would enjoy easy access to some informed debate. The second major omission would be a discussion on some of the issues in the area of special education. Teachers are increasingly facing the challenge of trying to cater for children with special needs or abilities and schools are enrolling more and more children who have little or no English. Extra government financial support is virtually non-existent. Unfortunately the Special Education Service is able to provide discretionary help to only the most severely disabled, so

some discussion of these and other issues would have been useful. One of the cornerstones in the philosophy underpinning *Tomorrow's Schools* is the relationship between schools and their community. Waikato University staff have been heavily involved in researching this area so it would be relatively easy to include chapters on this and the other two areas in a second edition.

In the foreword to this book, the Dean of Waikato University's School of Education expressed the hope that the book would be widely used by those preparing to teach in our schools and by those already there. I would go a stage further and say that all teachers and prospective teachers should read it and that it would be a most valuable addition to the staff library of any school.

JEFF FREEMAN

Principal of Knighton Normal School, Hamilton