

Book Reviews

Developing professional practice 0–7

Sonia Blandford and Catherine Knowles

Harlow: Longman, 2009

ISBN 978-1-4058-4114-6

This weighty tome is one of a series of three texts that aim to provide a comprehensive guide to working across the education system from babies to young adults. This first in the series crosses an ambitious range from babyhood to the end of Key Stage 1 while providing no clear demarcation within the text of the different phases either developmentally or in terms of the different curricula.

This is an ambitious undertaking in terms of the breadth of provision across the early years sector in particular, and the authors avowedly set out to meet the needs of everyone from foster parents to teachers. There is, however, a narrower demographic underlying this, as the book explicitly relates to the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) standards, and also makes reference to the National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL). In terms of target audience, it would be fair to say that this book works best as a study guide for students and practitioners on this route. To aim for a comprehensive approach to the needs of this sector is a challenging task, especially given the rapid changes in government policy, curriculum, qualifications and funding that make any text of this nature quickly outdated. The EYPS is now transforming into the hotly contested Early Years Teacher (EYT) qualification, and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) has also experienced significant change. However, by taking a principled approach and focusing on effective practice rather than specific details of the curriculum the writers do manage to circumvent many of these dangers.

There are both advantages and pitfalls to the approach that deals with all age ranges at once. There is a clear historical precedent for arguing, as many theorists and practitioners have done, that the years from nought to seven should be considered holistically. The authors take this view and are deliberate in seeking

to reference each age group within each chapter. In truth, however, there is a massive divide between the practices, underlying theoretical background and expectations for children in most settings between the different ages. Although the authors clearly endeavour to cross the age ranges, there is a stronger focus on the 0–5 age range, drawing more on the literature and expertise of early years writers and practitioners. While it would be encouraging to think that Key Stage 1 students and practitioners might learn from the practices described, these are far from the reality of most Key Stage 1 imperatives in schools today and, sadly, of many reception classes too.

The book is divided into sections that indicate the focus on developing high-quality practice across the sector, namely, 'Influences on learning', 'Framing learning practice', 'Enhancing learning practice' and 'Learning futures'. There is a rational progression through the book that builds effectively on the understanding of early learning out into dealing with the breadth of everyday practices and the complexity of multi-agency work. Both authors are highly respected academics who draw upon an impressive depth and breadth of knowledge. To combine confident synthesis of theories with the application of these to the nitty-gritty detail of life in settings is a rare skill and the authors have achieved this admirably.

It is challenging to provide a comprehensive guide to practice in one volume, though, and compromises are clearly made in this respect. The sections that focus on the history and theoretical background of approaches to early learning are brief and provide only a glimpse of the complexities; however, further reading is clearly signposted at the end of each chapter. The layout provides the now almost obligatory textbook-style boxes with 'discussion points', examples from practice, and prompts for reflection. A helpful innovation is the technique of highlighting key words and concepts within the text, with a definition provided at the side. This enables the reader to check their understanding without breaking the flow of their reading, and these definitions are also provided in a glossary at the end of each chapter. This is no

glossy 'tips for practitioners' publication that skates superficially over knowledge, but rather encourages readers to engage in depth with the implications of the different chapters for improving practice. It is a shame that the photographs accompanying the text have rather poor production values and are variable in the way that they illuminate the text.

Overall, this is a serious and rigorous text that provides an accessible but robust approach to developing and improving practice. Its ambitious scope means that some aims are more fully met than others. However, it is certainly of great value to those studying for the EYT and the NPQICL despite the recent changes, and would be an accessible way into thinking about key issues for many early years students on a nought to seven pathway.

Reviewed by Fran Paffard

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Rethinking children and families: the relationship between childhood, families and the state

Nick Frost

London: Continuum, 2011
ISBN 978-1-8470-6080-8

This text is systematically set out, and although the subject matter is highly complex, the content is fairly easy to access and follow. The aim of the book is set out in the introductory chapter, 'To explore the complex nature of the relationship between childhood, families and the State', which it achieves through unpicking the layers that make up this complex hierarchy. To help the reader through this exploration, each chapter begins with a clear introduction and key questions making intentions clear all the way through the book. Professor Frost uses research and reflection to guide the reader in analysing key points, while maintaining an unbiased position.

Each chapter follows a logical sequence and the book is set out over three parts: starting with the notion of childhood, it moves on to the idea of families and their relationship with the state, and finally part three focuses on being a child and the implications for children.

The text develops logically and the reader is led through a progressive sequence of the history of childhood, using key texts from historians such as Philippe Ariès to define notions of childhood. As is acknowledged by Frost, the work of Ariès has been widely criticised, but it has been used as a basis for exploring childhood and is contrasted with other historians in order to give a wider viewpoint.

Frost focuses our attention on children as 'objects' in research and policy, and how they are, as prime stakeholders in the education system, often 'invisible'. He discusses how children are seen as passive in society, demonstrating the power divide between children, families and the state. He goes on to make a clear argument for children as active subjects making their own decisions in life and shows how those that are marginalised can face profound challenges in making their voice heard.

The reader is encouraged to consider how the media and society view childhood, and Frost discusses how these perceptions can be problematic as there is no 'one size fits all' definition. Policy change is examined and events that brought about the Every Child Matters strategy are evaluated with a focus on how the state intervenes and influences childhood. This brings Frost to look at a new paradigm of childhood, a 'new sociology of childhood', as childhood being perceived in its own right rather than as the future of mankind.

Frost moves on to review families and family construction. Again, what a family is is a contested debate but Frost provides us with opposing opinions and asks us to reflect upon these. As the definition of 'family' is a fluid concept, the reader is asked to consider the notion of the traditional family against the contemporary family, and those that sit outside society's idea of what is a family. Thus family begins to be defined through its actions rather than what a family actually represents.

The final chapter looks at reinventing the relationship between childhood, family and the state. Frost calls for more children to be involved in research on childhood and families in order for their voice to be heard and for them to have a valued place in society. More importantly, action needs to be taken on children's views, and children need to see the results of this action for them to realise that they have a place in society.

As stated previously, the aim of the book is to explore the relationships between childhood, family and the state. This is done through synthesising the work of

historians, theory and relevant policy. Frost draws extensively upon the literature and the research of others which helps create a broader view on the points raised, with additional reading at the end of each chapter making it a helpful text for further research. Taking a predominantly Western point of view, this text is useful reading for anyone studying the sociology of childhood.

Reviewed by Julie Gariazzo

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Developing professional practice 7–14

Viv Wilson and Sue Kendall-Seatter
 Harlow: Pearson Education, 2010
 ISBN 978-1-4058-4115-3

This book is aimed at those who are in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) or the early stages of their teaching careers. The authors aim to help provide the required knowledge, skills and understanding for student teachers to work within the 7–14 age phase. The book is well structured and focuses on four main themes: 'Teaching and learning', 'Teaching for learning', 'Enhancing teaching for learning' and 'Learning futures'.

The 'Teaching and learning' part delves into influences on education, not only those of local authorities and government policies but also international influences, such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) surveys. Historical background is provided on the implementation of some government policies, for example, the tragic death of Victoria Climbié as driving the formation of the Every Child Matters initiative, which helps student teachers understand the rationale of government policy for safeguarding children.

The 'Teaching for learning' part also looks at the different types of knowledge that teachers need to support students' learning. These chapters are interesting to read as they are informed by relevant research studies. A good example of the provision of such theoretical background is Shulman's research on teacher knowledge as well as subsequent studies based on his findings.

Methods of improving teaching and learning through 'teacher reflection' and consideration of 'pupil voice' are studied in the 'Enhancing teaching for learning' part. The chapters flow easily and each topic is strongly supported by background information relevant to those training to teach. For example, the chapter 'Reflecting on learning' provides references to John Dewey, who is considered among the first to write about reflective practice in 1933, as well as Donald Schön's more recent work *The reflective practitioner* in 1983.

'Learning futures' looks into some current developments that are likely to affect teaching and learning in the future. One of them is the government endeavour to incorporate the 'global dimension' and 'sustainable development' themes in the curriculum. The rationale for this initiative is discussed with references to curriculum approaches in different countries. The logic behind incorporating cross-curricular themes is correlated to fostering learners' attitudes, values and skills in order to have a better future in a global community. The chapters also explore changes in the role of teachers to reflect the perceived needs of twenty-first-century society. They provide information on the 2020 Vision review group report and discuss how personalised learning might develop in future.

The student teacher will find this book an easy read, with a useful glossary on the side of each page explaining key terms and policies mentioned. Additional glossaries, extra case studies, interactive chapter tutorials and podcast interviews with students and practitioners are available online on a companion website. The consistent layout of the chapters helps focus the reader to reflect upon the various case studies and scenarios. The book examines research studies in the 7–14 age phase and their impact on classroom-based practice. The reader can evaluate the impact of contemporary research studies on their everyday practice by going through the research briefings provided in the chapters.

Reflective practice, vital for students and teachers, is encouraged at regular intervals, with 'Thinking it through' and 'Over to you' sections. I found the section 'Taking your practice further' very good in promoting critical reflection and discussion. I believe this could stimulate and foster further academic reading which will facilitate master's level writing, paving the way to acquire a Master's in Teaching and Learning (MTL).

The book gives a good overview of the key educational theories and issues but does not cover them in enough detail to be considered a complete reference book. However, it is written in a way that impels the reader to explore the detailed further reading list and the web links for downloadable materials given at the end of each chapter.

I enjoyed reading this book and recommend it for student teachers as well as in-service teachers. However, having come out in 2010 it lacks information on any changes, research details or policies implemented since then. It would therefore be timely for the publisher to bring out the next edition so that the book can be updated to meet the needs of today's student teachers and also current in-service teachers.

Reviewed by Sheeba Viswarajan

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Leading and managing in the early years

Carol Aubrey

London: Sage, 2011 (2nd edition).

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This book aims to explore and integrate leadership and management practice with a real understanding of early years settings and a consideration of some theoretical perspectives on leadership and management. It is written for students on early childhood courses, early years practitioners, and local authority employees involved with integrated centres initiatives. We are told that the starting point for the first edition was the views and opinions of some leaders in early years settings. They felt that the changes being imposed on the sector by external forces were so great that a critical review of leadership and management in the sector would enhance the outcomes for children in such settings.

This second edition aims to look afresh at these issues, especially in the contexts of an increasing diversity of children, family structures, the effects of poverty, the increasing instability and change in work, and the development of electronic communication.

One of the key aims of the book is to provide effective links between so-called theory and practice, not least in a context where the effectiveness (or otherwise) of leadership is usually judged by reference to children's learning. This perspective informs the structure of the book, which opens with an introduction examining some theories of leadership in early childhood contexts; most of the other chapters then concentrate on describing and analysing the contributions of practitioners in different settings and teams, and linking them in places to theoretical perspectives.

Thus, chapter 1 reports on the views of 25 leaders in a conference on leadership, and chapter 2 reports the findings of a survey of perspectives on early childhood leadership, focussed on 12 settings located in a Midlands city and representing the full range of early childhood provision. Chapter 3 explores these different perceptions further, reporting on in-depth conversations with leaders and staff in their settings, while chapter 4 examines a 'typical day' in the life of a variety of leaders. Chapter 5 examines leaders' and practitioners' views on entrepreneurial and business-orientated approaches; chapter 6 the varied journeys into leadership that participants took; and chapter 7, the notion of mentoring as a leadership strategy. The last three chapters concern the challenge of leading multi-agency teams, of leading in a time of change and of reflective practice.

Given the author's aim to provide a link between theory and practice, I think it is appropriate to make two comments based on that distinction. With regard to 'practice', an important aspect of the book is the picture it paints of the lives of real people and real groups in real settings. Each chapter contains extracts from practitioners' logs, discussions, the results of surveys, and the like. These all have the ring of authenticity about them, so one feels confident that the picture they paint is well grounded. However, as the reader I would have liked to have been able to identify more clearly particular individuals and settings (identified, of course, using pseudonyms), to enable me to contextualise the details more specifically. With regard to 'theory', I would like to have seen more criticism of some so-called theories, not least those of Schön, about whom I have written myself (Newman 1999). But other theories too are ripe for criticism.

I would suggest that a holistic interpretation of the evidence within the book gives the reader the opportunity to see how 'early childhood leadership clearly meant different things to practitioners in different settings' (p. 35), and that 'the differences in roles, responsibilities and components of leadership

that emerged from the survey should also be considered in the light of the very different purposes of early childhood leadership in different types of settings' (p. 36). The contextual and social nature of meaning which emerges requires such (often implicit) meanings used by one group of practitioners to be made explicit to those in different contexts. I would argue that the evidence contained within this book provides some examples of practitioners from a variety of teams (including the author) doing just that. With this interpretation, some of the so-called theories mentioned in the book (for example, Kolb's learning cycle, and Schön's notion of reflection), and techniques (such as the GROW technique) can be seen as ways of describing or facilitating social 'meaning-making'. In the same light, the methods used (questionnaires, conversations, surveys, etc), and indeed, the book itself, can be seen as ways of helping to make meanings explicit to others, and of coming to shared understandings. It is perhaps an irony of this social aspect of meaning-making that, as social contexts change, so too can meanings, and so the book's glossary is helpful – the continuing changes which prompted the book to be written make some terms obsolete as new ones emerge.

Inevitably, in a fast-changing environment, the danger is that some terminology will quickly appear rather dated, not least as political diktat influences the scene, organisations are closed down or have a change of name or purpose, and where there are shifts in educational priorities. Overall, this is a useful book as a source of evidence of the varied understandings that inform the work of those in early years settings.

Reviewed by Dr Stephen Newman

References

Newman, S. (1999) *Philosophy and teacher education: a reinterpretation of Donald A. Schön's epistemology of reflective practice*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.

Dr Stephen Newman is a Senior Lecturer in Education and Continuing Professional Development at Leeds Metropolitan University. His main interests include the relationship between theory and practice, reflective practice, teacher education, and the application of philosophy to issues of educational importance, including teacher education. Dr Newman is an academic referee for two international education journals.