



BOOK REVIEW

Convergence or Divergence? Initial teacher education in Scotland and England

Ian Menter, Estelle Brisard and Iain Smith

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Reviewer: Aileen Kennedy

The authors report on a comparative study of initial teacher education and training (ITET) in Scotland and England. Their book covers the methodology adopted, discussion of the respective policy contexts, consideration of the concept of professional knowledge in relation to policy and practice, the 'problem of partnership', and concludes with discussion of the extent to which ITET policy and practice are converging or diverging in the two countries. This is a very tall order for such a slim volume, but the book provides a satisfying combination of informative detail and theoretical analysis, of interest to those wanting to find out more about ITET in each/either of the two countries as well as those interested in the study of education policy and its interaction with national and global political influences.

The methodological justification is detailed and theoretically informed and will be of particular value to researchers interested in adopting comparative approaches, especially those interested in engaging in 'home-international' comparative studies.

The second chapter offers a detailed account of the policy contexts of ITET in Scotland and England. As elsewhere in the book, it manages successfully to combine descriptive reporting with theoretical consideration of policy sociology and the critical study of education policy. The separate reporting of the Scottish and English contexts will allow this chapter to be used by those seeking a brief overview of ITE policy in either country, without having to read the entire book.

The necessarily brief treatment of contentious issues, such as the impact of the standards/competence

agenda, the power of (and within) the GTCS, and the 'universitisation' of teacher education in Scotland, sometimes leaves the reader wanting more. However, the authors have published extensively elsewhere, leaving readers free to follow up specific issues of interest.

'The problem with partnership' raises issues which all Scottish ITE institutions are currently grappling with, portraying the complex and at times contradictory views of the various parties involved in delivering, managing and engaging in ITE. Despite this, the authors identify a Scottish position which they claim suggests a 'clear case of divergence' from the English position.

The book reports on a comparative study, but one still gets the feeling that it is written from a Scottish perspective, even though it considers explicitly the tensions/differences between the two discourses. This should not be seen as negative, however, as it makes a powerful contribution to a field which is currently dominated by English perspectives.

In summary, this book claims to cover a lot of ground, and it manages to do this exceedingly well. It is an informative and challenging piece, of use and interest to teacher educators, policy-makers, comparative researchers and policy scholars. While the book as a whole provides an in-depth and interesting read, the overall structure of the book also lends itself to 'dipping in' to particular areas of interest.

As one of the final publications (co-) written by Estelle Brisard (1973-2006) it provides a fitting tribute to her impressive contribution to education research.