

Reflective Teaching and Learning: a guide to professional issues for beginning secondary teachers, ed. Sue Dymoke and Jennifer Harrison, London, SAGE, 2008, 315 pp., £19.99 ISBN 1-4129-4647-6

What is the role of the university in preparing those who are to become teachers? What does it mean to say that PGCE courses in England and Wales are now, by and large, Masters-level courses? What are the implications of this rebranding for those now embarking on initial teacher education programmes? This compendious collection offers answers, of a kind, to these questions. The emphasis, from the title onwards, is on reflective practice as the defining characteristic of the M-level course.

What emerges more gradually, however, is that what is envisaged is both a rather anodyne form of reflection and a rather limited conception of practice.

Part of the problem lies in the very compendiousness of the approach that is adopted here. The authors are concerned that all bases should be covered, that the reader should be provided with a comprehensive overview of the territory of secondary schooling. So a single chapter entitled "Classroom Management" covers everything from long- and short-term planning and the physical organisation of the classroom to behaviour management and the use of questioning to working with teaching assistants and new technologies. It is hard to see how so much ground could be covered in a way that allowed the reader to draw breath, let alone begin to reflect critically on the issues involved.

What is disappointing, though, is that so little use is made of recent, relevant research – research that might illuminate and excite, research that might suggest that M-level work entails entering into debate and controversy. Nowhere in the account of the classroom as a physical environment is there any acknowledgement of the multimodal analyses of classrooms carried out by Gunther Kress and others, nor even of the recent revival of interest in the materialities of schooling. Nowhere in the treatment of new technologies is there any reference to the fascinating study of IWBs in use in Maths, Science and English classrooms. What makes these lacunae more puzzling is that the book comes with web-based additional resources, provided through the SAGE website.

Coverage becomes even more problematic in Sue Dymoke's chapter, "An Overview of Learning." We are presented with a whistle-stop tour through everything that might possibly be encountered marching under the banner of learning theory – with VAK and brain gym getting more space than Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner put together. There is, clearly, a real dilemma for the authors. What beginning teachers are likely to encounter in their schools is a thin diet of learning styles and VAK. So, to the extent that the purpose of this book is to serve as a vade mecum to school experience, there is a need to provide at least a cursory examination of such fashionable apologies for theory.

There are, of course, other conceptions of what a Masters might look like – the MTL. Somewhere, though, standing back from and reflecting on practice might entail a critical perspective on that practice, and by this I mean practice at an institutional as well as a personal level.