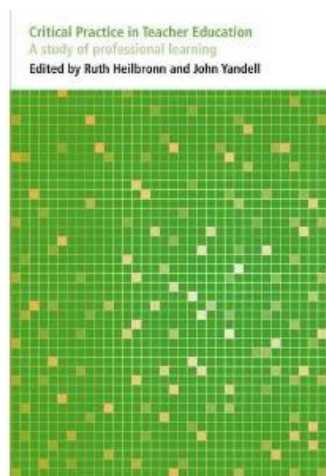


## Book Review



### **Critical Practice in Teacher Education: A Study of Professional Learning**

Edited by Ruth Heilbronn and John Yandell

London: Institute of Education, University of London (2010).

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Review by **Lisha Liu**

In general, teacher education aims to equip student teachers with corresponding theoretical knowledge and technical skills through a series of policies and procedures, so that they can gradually acquire effective teaching competence in their subject areas, schools and communities. *Critical Practice in Teacher Education: A Study of Professional Learning*, comprising twelve chapters written by experienced teacher educators, seeks to go far beyond this goal and focuses more on student teachers' professional learning. All the contributors believe that teacher professional learning is a part of student teachers' self-awareness and self-development. They argue that 'qualified' teaching status is only the first step and should be further developed into a 'principled' teaching status where student teachers have a full comprehension of their own professional identities. High-quality teacher education should not only make an effort at developing student teachers' own critical perspective on both pedagogical theories and practices, but also help them develop their teacher professional identities.

The book is composed of three main sections. It adopts a step-by-step approach to identifying the issues that should be considered for the design and delivery of high-quality teacher education. Section one provides an in-depth theoretical rationale for the basic principles of teacher education and lays a solid foundation for further discussions in subsequent sections. The three chapters in this section sketch out a conceptual framing for teacher professional learning, which I believe is the most impressive strength of this book. In Heilbronn's first chapter, she puts forward the concept of 'teacher education' as a balanced integration of both theory and practice by comparing it with the term 'teacher training'. Then, she stresses that teacher educators need to understand the development of student teachers' practical judgement. The second chapter describes documentary research conducted by Yandell on the nature and functions of PGCE students' school experiences, which reveals that the student teacher's position is relatively powerless and marginalised for much of the time, but their peripheral participation could also be a privileged vantage point in the hurly-burly of schools. However, Yandell's research is solely concentrated on the significance of student teachers' professional learning in schools, not in higher educational institutions. To some extent, Yandell's essay only displays a one-sided exploration – an investigation into the role of higher education in teacher education. Regrettably, the last chapter does not mention this 'missing side' either, but moves to a discussion of student teachers' critical reflection, a crucial capacity in which practitioners develop a deep understanding of the practice of teaching.

The second section demonstrates how student teachers' professional judgement is developed in specific ways. Chapters four to six direct much attention towards the key modes

of professional learning: reading, writing and assessment. Wright examines how student teachers find ways into forms of academic discourse as readers and writers, such as reading module-related educational journal articles for their pedagogical practice, joining and writing within the academic communities. Turbey and Anderson regard writing and reading as useful tools for student teachers to develop their intellectual identities. They argue that a space for student teachers' reflection should be created. Turner further discusses the role of portfolios in the learning assessment of the Masters of Teaching programme and examines whether student teacher portfolio construction supports their professional learning. This section implies that student teachers' personal philosophy has to be nurtured via explication and mutual interaction; their individual 'being' should become part of a professional and intellectual community.

After the key principles that inform our view of teacher professional learning as a critical practice are addressed, section three presents five in-depth case studies of professional learning and assessment. The Foreign Language education case study discusses learning in the intercultural space; the Drama education case study emphasises the importance of collaborative work and provides an innovative way of integrating theory and practice; the Geography education case study concentrates on the development of a theoretically informed practice and a sense of their role as Geography education professionals; the Music education case study refers to the challenge of different modes of learning related to different student teachers' experiences; the Social Science education case study presents a dilemma between performativity and engagement. These case studies may be more useful for teacher trainers because they offer very sensible advice to them and specifically reflect various facets of the theoretical framing proposed in the first chapter. Nevertheless, if this book could include some student teachers' articles rather than comments about their perspectives on professional learning, it would be more helpful and thorough for readers to understand the current situation of British teacher education. The final chapter, chapter twelve, written by Lawes, explores the role of higher education in teacher education. It eventually moves to the 'missing side' - the function of training providing institutions, but one chapter's work is apparently insufficient since there might be more issues worth discussion in a wider context on both initial teacher education and Master's level courses.

Overall, all the authors convey their sparkling, insightful, and enlightening views of critical practice in teacher education. Even though this book introduces an unbalanced critical study of teacher education in school contexts rather than in the higher education context, I still recommend this book to prospective readers worldwide because of its brilliant points and excellent writing quality.