

## EITN Issue 17 Book Reviews

Edited by Sarah Cornelius and Claire Molloy, November 2009

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### **Practice-based Learning: Developing Excellence in Teaching. Policy and Practice in Education 24**

**J. Reeves and A. Fox (ed.)**

**Edinburgh: Dunedin Press (2008), pp. 96, Pbk., £14.50, ISBN 9781903765821**

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**Reviewed by Donald Gray, School of Education, University of Aberdeen**

This handy sized book is number twenty-four in Dunedin Press's Policy and Practice in Education series and is a welcome addition to the growing range of topics covered in the series. There are six chapters in the eighty-three pages in the volume. As the editors acknowledge the book is the "*culmination of the first six years of thinking, discussing, arguing, writing, teaching and learning within the Professional Enquiry Network at the Stirling Institute of Education*" and represents the current position of that network. Perhaps what is interesting in this book is the way in which the different voices of the chapter authors, coming from different professional contexts but joined in a common purpose, comes through in the different contributions. Three of the chapters focus on experiences of school-based practitioners (participants in the Professional Enquiry Network) and the other three chapters offer more theoretically based reflections on the notion of professional enquiry from those involved. The three school-based contributions provide interesting insights into the contextual aspects of professional enquiry drawing on their own experiences and providing some guidance for others in undertaking professional enquiry in their own settings. The other three chapters provide some contextual and theoretical reflections on the professional growth of established teachers, as it is very much the professional learning and growth of established teachers, rather than beginning teachers, that is the focus of this book

In the introductory chapter, Alison Fox and Jenny Reeves provide a concise description and analysis of models of professional development to be found in the UK, with a particular focus on the Standard for Chartered Teacher in Scotland. From this initial examination Fox and Reeves then state that the book is "*devoted to looking at what practice focused learning entails and the conditions that both foster and*

*hinder it taking place.*” In chapter two, Carroll, Smith and Whewell examine what is meant by professional growth and the conditions under which it occurs, suggesting that there are four inter-connected elements: reflection on practice, experiential learning, social learning processes and cognitive development.

The school based practitioner chapters draw on the authors’ own experiences to examine particular aspects of professional enquiry. The chapter by Buchanan and Redford is a fairly matter of fact and unproblematic account of the basic principles of professional enquiry in the classroom. While the unproblematic nature of the account could be critiqued, it nevertheless does provide some context for discussions elsewhere in the book. Further illustration of contexts, purposes and outcomes with some reflections on these and the impact it had on their own professional development, is provided by Dunlop, Massey and Scott, who describe three differing accounts of professional enquiry they conducted in their own classrooms.

The notion of professional enquiry is extended further in the chapter by Drew, Fox and McBride. They focus on the notion of collaborative professional enquiry and how this contributes to the development of practice. In the final chapter, L’Anson, Reeves and Whewell attempt to draw together what they have learned about engaging in the four processes mentioned above in a professional enquiry context. Drawing on theoretical perspectives such as socio-cultural theory, evolutionary theory and discourse analysis they frame the requirements for professional growth in terms of space and dialogue, making connections across spaces to enable learning and growth to take place. Given its size the book covers a lot of ground and, I believe, does so very well. While elements of the chapters focussing on the professional contexts of enquiry might be under-theorised and largely descriptive, as a whole the book raises a number of interesting points which are worthy of being discussed by any groups involved in the professional learning of teachers.