

## Book reviews

Marilyn Cochran-Smith; Sharon Feiman-Nemser; D. John McIntyre & Kathy E. Demers (orgs.) (2008). *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education. Enduring Questions in Changing Contexts*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. New York: Routledge & ATE

### THE TEMPTATION (AND THE NECESSITY) OF TOTALITY

The *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education* is an obligatory reference tool for everyone interested in teacher education as a field of scientific research in education.

The third edition of the *Handbook* was published in 2008. Like its predecessors – the first was published in 1990 with W. R. Houston as editor, the second in 1996 with J. Sikula – maintains its objective of assisting and promoting educational change on the basis of solid scientific evidence, although it differs from the earlier two editions in terms of its general layout and structure.

Each edition of the *Handbook* constitutes, relative to the moment of its publication, an attempt to respond to the enduring questions which necessarily elicit different responses at different times – the contexts in which teachers train and work are constantly changing, while an ever-expanding body of knowledge is accumulating both in new and traditional fields of research, which themselves often undergo significant changes in orientation. The challenge, then, is to codify the available body of scientific knowledge so that at any given moment we can continue with our research into teacher education and into how to train teachers as best as possible. A difficult – if not impossible – task, this codification of knowledge is designed to impart a sense of globality or totality to the thousands of research papers which have been produced in the United States over the last twelve years, without ignoring the diversity of scientific,

paradigmatic and methodological options which underpin all this research, and without concealing how some of this research is more influenced by the political and social agendas which shape education and teacher education than by the “natural” advance of knowledge. It must also, necessarily, point up cases where research has led to contradictory findings.

The major questions remain: how can scientific knowledge be used as the foundation for improved training programmes? how do we know which scientific knowledge is valid and viable in the field of teacher education? There have never been easy, or linear, answers to either question. But there have been increased attempts to examine and understand what these questions involve, and some very promising progress has been made towards a more critical and prudent appropriation of the evidence yielded by empirical research.

This *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education* is divided into nine sections, each of which attempts to provide an answer to the following questions:

- What’s the point? The purposes of teacher education
- What should teachers know? Teacher capacities: knowledge, beliefs, skills and commitments
- Where should teachers be taught? Settings and roles in teacher education
- Who teaches? Who should teach? Teacher recruitment, selection, and retention
- Does difference make a difference? Diversity and teacher education
- How do people learn to teach?
- Who’s in charge? Authority in teacher education
- How do we know what we know? Research and teacher education
- What good is teacher education? The place of teacher education in teachers’ education

Each section is similarly structured, consisting of an introduction by the editor, followed by 3-5 articles providing background, a section designated “Artefacts” containing texts or photographs from different periods of research, and, finally, a section containing comments by 2 or 3 researchers whose opinions on previous research findings are judged to be authoritative.

Structurally, the artefacts and comments sections are the most innovative features of this third edition of the *Handbook*. The former offers the reader a chronological perspective on the question under examination, enabling him/her to identify enduring features and turning points. The latter encourages a critical appraisal of the materials presented, insofar as the reader is confronted with a multiplicity of viewpoints from a diversity of invited authors.

We have not read the *Handbook* from cover to cover, and we do not expect anyone else will either – it’s a rather unwieldy single volume of 1354 pages. But on the evidence of what we *did* read – the introductions, an article here, an article there, and two sections in full – we can venture that if there is one dominant keyword in the entire *Handbook*, that word is “diversity”. All education, all teacher education and all research into one and the other revolves around this necessarily ambiguous concept. How can we use diversity to build the provisional scenarios which each one of us, and all of us as a whole

(researchers, teacher trainers, training institutes) needs if we are to continue with our work? The *Handbook* provides us with the foundations, and plenty of building materials, but leaves the responsibility for the actual building to the reader. Which, in our opinion, is exactly as things should be.

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Translated by Mark Ayton

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