Book Reviews

Psychology for Teachers
Scott Buckler and Paul Castle, 2014
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For trainee teachers looking for a stimulating introduction to applied psychology, then *Psychology for Teachers* is recommended. The authors take every opportunity to explain the relevance of concepts and theories to teachers' everyday classroom experiences. One of the book's core themes is how teachers can use insight from psychology and other fields to enable individuals to succeed in school. There is also a strong emphasis on reflective practice, where readers are invited to review their teaching styles in the light of research, personal experience and what is known about high quality teaching.

The book is organised into four parts. It begins with an overview of psychological perspectives on education, where the reader is taken on a tour of classical approaches to learning (i.e. behaviourist, cognitive and humanistic) and the contribution of major figures including Watson, Skinner, Maslow, Rogers, Bandura, Bowlby and Piaget. More recent (post-behaviourist) theorists are also dicussed, such as those associated with positive psychology (dubbed 'happiology') – including Martin Seligman and Western students' spelling and pronunciation nightmare, the Hungarian Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. The second part explores how teachers can meet the needs of individual learners. The authors draw on various fields to illustrate the physical, social and emotional changes that teachers can expect as children develop with the caveat that 'thinking in terms of age-related development does not help in understanding how abilities develop and mature' (p. 162). Part 3 focuses on enhancing 'the self' with sections covering building self-efficacy, motivation and solutions-focused therapy to overcoming learning and behavioural difficulties.

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Finally, part 4 explores a range of techniques to build resilience, create a positive learning environment and empower learners. There are suitable points for debate, for example on the role of praise and the authors include appropriate correctives to popular terms such as behaviour 'management'.

Occasionally topics are not given sufficient scrutiny: for instance in discussing the controversies associated with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in chapter 9 or learning styles, which are presented as being widely advocated as 'models of best practice'. The section on 'Age and gender differences' does not say anything about the former while chapter 12, entitled 'Empowering the learner', is very much about teachers rather than learners. More generally, some of the references are quite dated, for instance those in chapter 3 on school effectiveness are almost all written before 2000.

There are a few niggles regarding the coherence of the book. For instance, chapter 14 discusses the 'ideal' teacher which includes material on the principles of effective pedagogy which would seem better placed in chapter 3 entitled 'The effective teacher'. The concluding chapter asks 'why does psychology matter for teachers?', a question which surely deserves attention earlier on in the book.

However, this is a book which keeps the reader interested through a range of figures, activities and well-conceived tasks. Each chapter has clear learning objectives, reference to the Teachers' Standards for those teaching in England, annotated 'further reading' and pointers towards the accompanying website full of practical ideas. This includes handouts on a wide range of topics, from enhancing memory recall through doodling to understanding changing perceptions by tracking cups of coffee drunk through the day. There are also Powerpoint presentations for lecturers who register on the accompanying website (*https://studysites.uk.sagepub.com/bucklercastle/main.htm)*.

As a general text, *Psychology for Teachers* should provide a solid grounding for undergraduates. The authors have succeeded in their aim to provide a psychological 'pencil case' for those entering the profession. Whether teaching in the Foundation Phase or sixth form, teachers should take something valuable from this which will make them think about their practices in a different way and recognise the value of psychology in their everyday professional lives.

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Leadership for Teacher Learning: Creating a Culture Where All Teachers Improve So That All Students Succeed
Dylan Wiliam, 2016
West Palm Beach, Florida: Learning Sciences International
+ 277 pp.
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This book is aimed at a wide readership and could be useful to government advisers, school leaders, teachers and school governors. It is written from a USA contest, but the messages are sufficiently universal to be valuable to a UK audience.

The book is written in an accessible style, but is clearly based in a substantial research base. Research is drawn from a range of sources, including many from the USA, to provide a resource for school leaders and teachers to use when creating the arguments and evidence base required to convince others of necessary reforms in their own context. The chapters are structured to stand alone, allowing readers to dip into sections they require rather than demanding that the whole book be read in one session. Having said that, Dylan Wiliam's style is very accessible and many readers will wish to follow the arguments through from beginning to end.

The main argument of the book is simple: that the job of school leaders is to improve student learning by improving the quality of teaching. This may seem to be a statement of the stunningly obvious. However, evidence is presented that in many schools this focus is lost amongst a wide range of other policy priorities.

The book argues that many reforms to improve the quality of learning and teaching 'have either been complete failures or, at best, have had only marginal impacts because they have ignored the crucial importance of teacher quality'. The quality of teachers is known to 'vary considerably in their effectiveness in promoting growth in student achievement'. Unfortunately, the reliable identification of the lowest performing teachers is notoriously difficult. Improving the workforce by removing the lowest quality and raising the recruitment bar is not considered to be a viable option. We are not good at the identification of expertise and the research suggests that lower quality teachers progress rapidly in the first few years.

It is claimed that natural or born teachers are relatively rare and that 'talent is overrated'. The positive message from the book is that: 'the vast majority of teachers could be as good as the very best if their leaders provide

the right learning environment for those they lead'. The importance of specific pedagogical content knowledge is considered to be more important in high school where 'mathematical knowledge for teaching' accounts for 'about one-third of the variation in teacher quality'.

The book begins by considering what the future holds for our students in an increasingly globalised and automated world. The chapter is entertainingly written with some chilling predictions based on past automation and outsourcing of jobs. Like all such attempts at futurism, it probably has a limited shelf-life. However, it describes the development of the 'hollowed out middle' in the USA as graduate salaries have increased and those of the poorly qualified have decreased, while jobs in the middle are being outsourced or automated. It seems likely that our students will not only require achievement in traditional school subjects, but that creativity and entrepreneurship will come more to the fore.

'What's been tried' is analysed and the research evidence presented. The dangers of trying to copy other national systems by cherry picking aspects of their policies in response to studies like PISA are analysed and the significant limitations exposed. The particular limitations of the PISA sampling procedures are explained, particularly in relation to Shanghai.

The research evidence underpinning some commonly held and sometimes treasured current ideas in education is considered and the canards of 'Brain Gym' and 'Learning Styles' are rejected. Lesson Study is ill defined in the literature and time-consuming in most of its versions. Reliable evidence of its efficacy is not available. Neuroscience may offer something in the future but not yet. The limitations of meta-studies are analysed in some detail and Wiliam rejects them as inappropriate for complex fields such as education and offers convincing justification. The particular limitations of Hattie's research are considered.

As might be expected, Wiliam claims that interventions involving 'immediate interactions between students and teachers' based on formative assessment are likely to have the greatest impact on attainment. The book discusses formative assessment and assessment of learning in detail. Formative assessment is under-theorised, but Wiliam is a pragmatist and discusses what he and his colleagues have found to work over many years.

The book describes the strategies employed for teacher development by Wiliam and his colleagues over the last ten years. He claims that 'five principles of teacher learning have appeared to be especially important: choice, flexibility, small steps, accountability, and support'. Following the principle of flexibility, sometimes 'schools routinely modified the program

in ways that rendered it almost completely ineffective'. It seems that teachers rarely do as they are told.

To my mind, some of the features described seem to be superficial and operational. Much is made of a mathematics teacher using the 'traffic light' strategy, in which children show green (I am keeping up), amber (I am struggling to keep up), red (I want to ask a question). The language is interesting and may imply a didactic model of learning. In Wales we would probably use the word 'understand' rather than 'keep up'. It has never been clear to me why this pedagogical strategy would be effective in conceptually based subjects such as mathematics and science. There is a large literature on common misconceptions in mathematics and science. Characteristically, a student holding a misconception has arrived at that position logically and believes that they understand. A 'green' often provides false positive feedback. What is required is a well-chosen question, designed to expose a misconception. Wiliam describes a teacher modifying the process so that 'red' questions are answered by 'green' students, but although this is better, it is not quite as effective.

Wiliam wants teacher development 'to focus on things that are likely to have benefits for their students, so no more time on Brain Gym, learning styles, lesson study, or neuroscience because it's frankly self-indulgent to spend time on things that may or may not help students when there is solid evidence about what does help students'.

I recall being told that 'teachers in the UK behave as if they are self-employed'. I think that the speaker thought of this as a criticism. I have always considered it to be a strength.

This is a very interesting and well-written book that makes a valuable contribution to the staff development literature.

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Video Enhanced Reflective Practice: Professional Development through Attuned Interactions
Edited by Hilary Kennedy, Miriam Landor and Liz Todd, 2015
London: Jessica Kingsley Publications
+ 336 pp.
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There is no shortage of reference material regarding the value of reflective practice, especially for eduaction professionals. Teachers at all stages of their careeers are encouraged to consider their own practice and ways to improve upon this. One of the challenges we face is in ensuring that we are reflecting on the right things, and in *Video Enhanced Reflective Practice* an interesting approach to support reflection on one's own interactions is described. The underpinning premise of the book is that a wide range of professionals can use shared review of video clips to analyse and improve upon their day-to-day practice. The book evolved following the first international research conference on video enhanced reflective practice (VERP) in 2013. Throughout the book, the contributing authors explain how video reflection, based on viewing short episodes of one's own practice, can support the development of more attuned interaction.

The book is organised into seven parts. It begins with an overview of the theoretical framework underpinning the approach of VERP, as well as detailed guidance on how to undertake the process. This has a slightly commercial feel to it, especially since it is suggested that the VERP process should be facilitated by an accredited VERP guider. However, the basic premise – of taking a short video clip of one's own practice and using this to reflect upon – is powerful. Much is made of the need for the process to be based upon 'attunded interactions' – where individuals show respect and sensitivity to one another and act responsively and sensitively in their communications. To support this process there is a detailed grid of principles with useful prompts to help individuals reflect on their own communcation, as well as some examples of practice which bring the section to life.

The overall aim of the process of VERP is to change interactional skills so that individuals can better serve their clients. These clients may be in diverse contexts such as education, industry, social work, voluntary work, commercial enterprise or the medical profession.The second part of the book explores applications of VERP within such contexts, and parts three, four and five describe a wide ranging series of case studies to illustrate projects where VERP has been used successfully. These include examples from VERP with perinatal nurses, trainee educational psychologists, teaching assistants, the careeers service, early years practitioners and teachers. The case studies are global – including examples from Mexico, Australia, Finland, France and the UK. Part 6 provides some evidence of VERP being used in research-based projects. The book concludes with reflections on the potential of VERP in contemporary workplaces.

Overall, this is a well-structured, clearly presented, engaging read. The wide range of contexts described will broaden the appeal of the book, and the inclusion of some research-based projects gives a more rigourous feel to what is largely a book based on reporting on small-scale case studies. However, VERP is not the only method of video reflection, and I feel that the editors should have acknowledged this more openly. Whilst they do indicate that there are many methods of using video reflection – they argue that VERP is unique in that it develops from looking at interaction and is delivered by Video Interaction guidance (VIG) trained practitioners. However, the concept of using video reflection within a context of shared reflection is not limited to the VERP process (eg Tanner et al., 2011; Moyles et al., 2003; Forman, 2000; Rosenberg, 2008). However, overall this is a book which keeps the reader interested and which may prove useful for those considering how to develop the use of video as a professional development tool.

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