

## BOOK REVIEW

THOMAS G. RYAN. *The Reflexive Classroom Manager*. Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises. (2005). 240 pp. \$25.95 (ISBN 1-55059-292-0).

In its stated purpose “to support and facilitate professional development” in classroom management, *The Reflexive Classroom Manager* adopts a worthy goal. The preface indicates that this book is directed at new and practising teachers, for both of whom issues of classroom management can certainly be challenging. The book contains ten chapters, which divide roughly into three different areas: three chapters about action research as a basis for reflection, two chapters of actual reflections on classroom management situations by elementary and secondary student teachers, and five chapters revolving around philosophical and theoretical notions about teaching and communication complemented by practical ideas about classroom management.

The first three chapters, about action research, provide detailed information on this subject: definition, history, roles, modes, and procedures for data collection and data analysis. A case study demonstrates the use of some of these procedures. In the first chapter, a range of definitions of action research (e.g., Noffke, 1997; Carr & Kemmis, 1986) is provided, accompanied by a description of several models of action research: participatory, practical, community-based. Diagrams of two models (Lewin, 1946; Stringer, 1996) are included. At the end of the chapter, the author draws on a range of sources as the basis for his own concept of action research, although in doing so, his own concept becomes somewhat obscured in the numerous quotes from other authors.

The second and third chapters on collecting and analyzing data also provide useful information about action research, particularly through the inclusion of practical aspects of the process such as teacher observation, journals, and questionnaires as collection strategies, and predicting results, looking for patterns, using memos, and working with critical friends as important aspects of analysis. In each chapter a case study attempts to clarify the process.

Overall in these three chapters, the author makes clear the opportunity for reflection provided by action research; what may be less clear is the under-

standing of reflection adopted here. I note, for example, the explanation of reflexivity put forth in the first chapter: “a semantic quality attached to all words, terms, and phrases used as a language.” A discussion of researcher reflexivity and the potential confusions that may result from different understandings of terms follows. However, given the attention paid to reflection in action research and the “reflexive” dimension in the title of the book, as well as the lack of clarity between the two terms in the literature on reflection generally, I wonder if additional clarity is not needed here to help situate the reader. I could find no definition of “reflection” itself, for example.

An interesting and potentially useful part of this book for many readers is the section devoted to reflections of student teachers on specific classroom experiences. Chapters 4 and 5 offer the voices of student teachers at both the elementary and secondary levels. Each reflection ends with questions for additional consideration of the situation by the reader. The voices of the students are authentic and engaging, and the variety of classroom management situations described provides a good basis for discussion among either new or practising teachers. Among the twenty-four reflections included here, many with intriguing titles, are the following: Shock and Awe, Surprise, Where Do I Fit?, The Reprimand, A Developmental Journey, 1,2, 3 Magic!, and Time-Out is Not the Answer.

The following chapters, about teaching, verbal and non-verbal communication in the classroom, and tips and strategies for effective management, move between theoretical notions (a definition of teaching, short explanations of management philosophies, levels of verbal and non-verbal communication) and practical suggestions and guidelines for ways to prevent or handle problematic classroom management issues. The author devotes one chapter of this section, “365 Days of Teaching,” to a detailed set of suggestions for month by month readjustment of the classroom seating plan and a discussion of seven models of effective classroom management: assertive discipline, democratic, behaviourism, choice theory, withitness, self-discipline, and child-centred. A final chapter of strategies follows, with a list of teacher tactics to close this section. There is a definite attempt to merge the theoretical with the practical in these chapters, yet I felt some tension in the balance between the two.

This book viewed as a whole presents definite challenges for the reader in two respects. The sudden introduction of action research as the major topic at the beginning seems to contrast with the title. In a way, I had the impression of entering a conversation that had already started. Contributing to this impression is the frequent reference to a course the author teaches; clearly the book stems from this teaching experience, but it does not readily allow the outside reader a place from which to approach the topics and thereby may restrict the potential audience. Should it be regarded as a textbook for a course on

classroom management? as a guide for practitioners? as an introduction to action research? The tension between the theoretical and practical parts of the book raises such questions. A second troubling aspect is the presence of frequent inconsistencies in organization, format and language. I was familiar with the first edition of the book and hoped that these inconsistencies would be resolved in the second edition, but I am disappointed to see that many have not been. I offer some examples: Chapters 1 and 3 include summaries, but others do not; extensive definitions of many terms are included, yet one for classroom management appears only on page 232; praxis is defined in two ways on page 18, but in a different way on page 27, making it difficult to situate the author's position; Appendix A referred to in Chapter 1 does not exist; some diagrams have been added, but are not always connected to the text in clear ways; some words are misused (e.g., illicit for elicit). I suggest also, given the frequent introduction of terminology throughout the book, that an index would be a helpful addition.

The multitude of practical suggestions, however, means this book has obvious appeal for new teachers and practising teachers who are looking for ideas about handling problematic classroom management issues. There is a wealth of practical advice provided, as well as helpful explorations of such issues through case studies and reflections, and sample letters and forms for the practitioner to use or adapt. If the reader has a focus on dealing with specific classroom problems, this book could be a helpful resource.

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