

BOOK REVIEWS

THOMAS G. RYAN. *The Reflexive Physical Educator*. Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises (2005). 150 pp. \$18.95. (ISBN 1-55059-299-8).

The Reflexive Physical Educator is an easy-to-read book where both pre-service and in-service teachers will find useful suggestions to improve their practice and grow professionally as they recursively plan, teach, and think about their teaching and its outcomes. Reflection, the author explains, is “the process or act of looking back at what you have done, what you have thought, and how you felt at the time in order to generate new understandings.” This seemingly simple act has the potential to make educational practices evolve in a truly transformational manner, particularly – Ryan argues – if performed as an essential component of a broader action-research process.

Chapter 1 situates the reader by placing the role of physical education teachers within the larger context of directives, policy, and philosophy that inform physical education curricula in Canada. Drawing mainly upon examples from the province of Ontario, Ryan shows how physical education teachers are expected to become competent at a number of teaching tasks in relation to planning, instructional delivery, classroom management, and student evaluation. Although a suitable beginning for the book, I do not find the title of the chapter – “The induction of physical educators” – the most appropriate, taking into account the content, it presents.

Given the centrality of student evaluation to the instructional process, Chapter 2 begins by establishing early an important distinction between assessment as a means of data collection and evaluation as the act of judging and assigning value to the evidence collected. The chapter continues with an historical account of some of the events that have shaped current assessment and evaluation philosophies and practices in Ontario. In so doing, Ryan helps the reader to understand the conflicting views currently opposing teachers and governing bodies in the aforementioned province, the latter endorsing and pushing for standardized testing practices that the

former reject in favor of more authentic or contextualized classroom-based performance assessment and evaluation. Caught in the middle of this situation, physical educators have to become “assessment literate” in order to make sound decisions based on their own needs and those of their students. Chapter 2, indeed, is an effort to help physical education teachers in Ontario, and across Canada for that matter, to become assessment literate in order to better respond to the challenges involved in contemporary assessment and evaluation debates and issues. I consider this suggestion one of the most valuable ones in the book.

After a brief introduction in which Ryan synthesizes the spectrum of teaching styles in physical education developed by Muska Mosston, Chapter 3 provides useful examples of lesson, unit, and yearly plans developed by the author at Nipissing University. Here, the reader will find several planning formats that, as Ryan points out fittingly, teachers can use as a guide provided they make the necessary adjustments so formats remain flexible and context-sensitive. I particularly enjoyed how opportunities for reflection are built within the lesson plan formats presented, the examples of assessment rubrics accompanying the unit and yearly plan formats, and the questions for discussion at the end of each plan to help teachers examine critically the information presented.

Chapter 4 introduces a number of real-life scenarios where the reader can see examples of student teachers engaging in reflection and a basic action research process mainly in relation to classroom management, which the author points out is not usually covered in most lesson, unit, and year plans. Once again, at the end of each scenario, Ryan introduces several questions for discussion to initiate a process of reflection and basic action research that both pre-service and in-service physical educators will find useful. In addition, the book includes an Appendix where interested readers will find practical resources to further their knowledge about reflection and action research.

Despite my feelings that some topics could have been further elaborated and clarified, the presence of a few typographical errors, and some references missing from the reference list, I found this book a useful and concise resource for both pre-service and in-service teachers concerned with improving their teaching practice as they grow professionally and personally. The book will appeal as well to physical education teacher educators, who may benefit from the wealth of Ryan’s experience and from his relevant suggestions to create opportunities for student teachers to engage in a collaborative and reflective process that positively influences their professional development.

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