BOOK REVIEWS

Learning how to learn: tools for schools, by Mary James, Paul Black, Patrick Carmichael, Colin Conner, Peter Dudley, Alison Fox, David Frost, Leslie Honour, John MacBeath, Robert McCormick, Bethan Marshall, David Pedder, Richard Procter, Sue Swaffield, and Dylan Wiliam, London, Routledge, 2006, 106 pp., £20.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-415-40026-8

From the outset this book establishes an emphatic relationship between assessment for learning and learning how to learn (LHTL), arguing that the notions of LHTL are implicit in formative assessment practice. That this has implications for professional development and for the development of learning organisations is fully acknowledged: indeed, the structure of the book supports the process of questioning and changing practice at an individual practitioner and organisational level.

As the title suggests, the book is very much a tool-kit, although this would be to oversimplify its considered organisation. Each of the four main parts provides outlines of activities and support materials (such as audit materials and questionnaires). Many of the activities are further supported through accessible reference to a range of background reading and research. For example, the article *Assessment for learning: what it is and what research says about it* (7–13) which opens Part I covers exactly this, and raises key issues for critical consideration by schools keen to sharpen their assessment practice. Similarly, the workshop materials in Part II are prefaced by transparent summaries of research evidence (including the work of Wragg and Brown 1993, and Sadler 1989). This research-based approach is underpinned by data drawn from the staff questionnaires included in the book: the 'values-practice gaps' (5) in assessment and school ethos and culture that emerge could, as the authors suggest, provide the basis for discussion within school. At the very least, these differences might allow teachers to say, 'We're not alone'.

Indeed, one of the strengths of this book is its consistent recognition of the investment in teacher reflection and professional development needed to make significant change work: teachers need to be 'enabled to take a wider perspective on how a school can share and profit from its own learning' (63); 'classroom-based inquiry' is key to the 'promotion of learning how to learn' (63). Another strength is the constantly implicit sense that the authors have anticipated and answered many of the questions that might arise when introducing these materials in staff rooms: the research summaries are clear and practical, and examples of how many of the workshops have been used in school contexts are included. The balance of theory and practical application is in itself engaging. In the light of this, the workshop on *How people learn* stands out as particularly theoretical and, lacking the examples of prior use in schools, might be less appealing to the school-based practitioner. On the other hand, all of the workshops could be adapted for use with students in ITE

contexts, developing, for example, reflective practice or evaluation skills in preparation for or on completion of teaching practices.

In spite of its essentially practical quality, this book is not an off-the-peg programme of INSET. The authors are clear that schools should select tools and workshops according to their needs, and it is a mark of the thoroughness of their work that each discrete resource upholds the principles that underpin the whole.

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A handbook for learning support assistants: teachers and assistants working together, by Glenys Fox, Abingdon, Oxon, David Fulton, revised edition 2003 (orig. pub. 1998, reprinted 2007), 96 pp., £17.99 (paperback), ISBN 1-84312-081-X

This handbook offers an updated, accessible overview of the roles and responsibilities faced by learning support assistants (LSAs) and teaching assistants in mainstream schools. The conversational style of advice and guidance is particularly useful for those hoping to become an LSA or who are new to the role.

The author, an educational psychologist, contextualises provision for SEN today with an exploration of the meaning of 'inclusion', an introduction to the Code of Practice, IEPs and Statements. This is followed by a realistic guide to aspects of the job and expectations that the LSA is likely to face, offering practical tips and suggestions to enable the effective use of support in the classroom.

The guidance on Special Needs is helpful, especially the section on supporting children with emotional and behavioural difficulties as it takes a practical stance. Working in partnership with teachers, SENCOs, other professionals and parents are given due consideration, with support contacts and website addresses provided, and recommendations for further reading. The section on the needs of the LSA, which vary in terms of qualifications, training and progression into Higher Education, will be informative for those interested in gaining further professional qualifications and to CPD managers.

This is a readable text, which avoids or explains jargon without being patronising, and remains succinct and relevant throughout. Unfortunately, an index is lacking, and this would have increased accessibility and ease of use for all. However, it offers a holistic 'chalk-face' guide to life in schools, more so than some of the texts that accompany particular courses such as NVQs and Diplomas, and would be useful alongside these. This is not a 'how to qualify' textbook or theoretical tome but a reassuring 'how to do the job well' handbook, and as such is a valuable resource for the staffroom, college libraries, and individuals training or in the role.

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