

Wilson, J. (1993). *Reflection and practice: Teacher education and the teaching profession*. London: Althouse Press, 265 pp., (softcover).

In *Reflection and Practice*, John Wilson presents a cogent and articulate analysis of what he believes is wrong with teacher education today. Although most of the arguments presented and examples drawn are contextualized in the political milieu of a unitary state where power and authority are centralized, such as in Britain, they none-the-less have significance for North American educators, especially at the Provincial and State level. Policies and trends such as the reduction in government support for education, increased use of internship models, movement towards increased testing and national standards in the name of accountability, and the increased movement towards outcomes-based learning and the reliance of behavioural objectives are some of the recent influences affecting teaching and teacher education. Much of the analysis provided by Wilson is flavoured by such influences.

The main thesis of the book is that "the absence of a clear and coherent philosophy of teacher education and education generally encourages us to spend time in casting about, with a kind of neurotic and often ideological busyness, for some role which will at least convince us of our own worth" (p. 161). For Wilson, the development of such a philosophy is neither a daunting nor impossible task and he uses his skills as an analytic philosopher in developing his arguments, often using sharp and unpleasant criticism of what he sees as the practice of teacher education. Some of his critique is not only unpleasant, but I find he often couches it in language that has a tendency to denigrate those who might disagree with his reasoning. That being said, however, one is compelled to read his book with passion, and at times even anger. As a teacher educator steeped in curriculum theory, I found myself nodding in agreement with much of what he writes, while at other times being furious with his statements.

Wilson claims that in the writing of the book he attempted to "exclude any prejudices or ideological preferences" (p. 6) of his own. It is, however, very obvious to the reader that he relies heavily on his own form of philosophy and rational thought. He places disciplinary experts on an intellectual pedestal and others, curriculum theorists for example, he considers tutors, not intellectuals or experts in a discipline. His notion of discipline is interesting but argumentative. In addition, I would question any writer's ability to completely objectify their writing in order to remove prejudice and bias, as objectification is in itself a prejudice.

Wilson believes that the fundamental questions facing education today are philosophical and conceptual and that too many of the issues (or questions) discussed are practical, arising from political or economic restrictions or various kinds of ideologies. He begins by looking at the possibilities of teaching being (becoming) a profession. In his opinion, professionalism is determined by the level of judgment and conceptual abstraction required by the job, not by the usual definitions of salary, self-regulatory bodies, importance of job, specialized knowledge, and so on. He believes that teaching is a profession in principle, but unfortunately he finds that in practice, teaching is not generally considered to be a profession. He also indicates that teaching is not a mixture of theory and practice (i.e., a mastery of a body of abstract knowledge and the kinds of practical skills one might acquire through practice). It is here that he establishes the ground of his argument for the separation of theory and practice, a dichotomy which has plagued Western logic for hundreds of years.

As he develops his argument for the separation of theory and practice, he develops the notion of two cultures; one, based on practical school-based knowledge, and two, based on the intellectual study of disciplines. He states that the educational disciplines have been replaced with a program of ideological values and practices that focus on topics (rather than disciplines) which are selected for political or social concerns rather than educational concerns. It is his belief that as educators we should be focusing on more fundamental issues (e.g., social justice, moral education) via the disciplines (philosophy, sociology) rather than on more mundane practical issues.

Wilson also believes that a return to a study of the disciplines will bring a return of authority and power to educators. It is his assertion that schools generally, including teacher education institutions, have rejected the idea of power and authority in favour of more tender-minded attitudes. This is brought about by teachers and educators having a general fear and misunderstanding of the concept of authority. The return to tradition and appropriate authority (the ultimate of which is pure reason) will, in his opinion, bring about an increase in the quality of education.

As he further develops his notion of two cultures, he tries to indicate the importance of each: "A rational approach to education does not have 'theory' or 'research' in one corner and 'practice' in another – not because we have to 'combine theory and practice' but because the theory/practice distinction simply does not work in this field" (p. 75). What he proposes is an educational team comprised of curriculum tutors and school-based personnel for the practical knowledge, and discipline experts housed in universities to teach an intellectual study of the disciplines. He sees the integration of theory

and practice as problematic. When we try to integrate the two one will generally take over the functioning of the other, such as in England where school based practice is being emphasized over the disciplines. However, I would think it is possible that what is needed is a rethinking of the notion of integration. If it is thought of as a mixing of theory and practice, then what he claims is probably true. If, however, we view integration as praxis where each informs the other, domination of one need not occur.

Wilson then moves to the development of a tentative taxonomy of the qualities or attributes of a good educator or teacher. He bases his taxonomy on a distinction between virtues and skills, or moral character and teaching competence. His taxonomy, like any other, excludes as well as includes and of course is open to interpretation. He believes, however, that we can come to an understanding of the meaning of the items on the list through analytic philosophy.

In his concluding chapter, Wilson provides what he calls some practical conclusions. In it he differentiates between practical experience and sophisticated reflection. He indicates that “the types of learning in each are too different from each other, and the staff required to deliver each are too different in the types of abilities and personality necessary for them to co-exist in the same institutions” (p. 148). He would abolish teacher training institutions as they currently exist in favour of a serious study of education and sophisticated reflection (via the disciplines) within the universities, and practical work done in the schools.

It is very obvious that Wilson has thought long and deeply about the ideas presented in his book. I found the book and his call for a resurgence of the study of the disciplines in teacher education – a very modernist perspective – of interest, if at times stressful, and it caused me to revisit my own beliefs on teacher education. It has, therefore, done what I think the author intended. I would find it helpful, however, to see him move beyond the more traditional analyses of teacher education, and education in general, and provide a more postmodern perspective.

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