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Book Review

School-University Partnerships in English Language Teacher Education: Tensions, Complexities and the Politics of Collaboration, by Cheri Chan, Switzerland, Springer, 2016, 123 pp., 49.99 € (Hardcover), ISBN: 978-3-319-32617-7

This book provides a rich and nuanced account of university-teacher collaboration in the context of Hong Kong. Informed by a critical perspective, the author unpacks the complexities, tensions and negotiations between university teacher educators and school teachers in their joint research efforts to promote language teaching and learning.

The book consists of 7 chapters. In Chapter 1, the author sets up the context for the inquiry on university-school partnership by clarifying the critical terms such as collaboration, reflecting on her personal experiences, and presenting the research procedures and principals. Chapter 2 is concerned with the concept of collaboration, and by drawing on the existing literature, the author offers a critical and socio-cultural framework which depicts collaboration as a discursive and social practice influenced by various discourses and stakeholders in specific contexts. In particular, the view which emphasizes how collaboration is shaped by different participants' personal beliefs as well as their power relations and social identities generates fresh insights into current collaboration research. Related to Chapter 2 is a detailed historical review of collaboration offered in Chapter 3, which elaborates how this term has been conceptualized and operationalized in varying educational discourses. The author not only presents different interpretations/discourses of teacher collaboration (e.g., collaboration for educational change, for emancipation, and for community partnership) in general, but she also reviews the social and political forces shaping and reshaping teacher collaboration in the context of Hong Kong.

From Chapter 4 to 6, the book offers very interesting and insightful narratives about the collaborative experiences between the teacher educators and school teachers in a university-school action research project in Hong Kong. Differing from many previous studies which focused on the perspectives of teachers (e.g., Yuan & Lee, 2015), the experiences and reflections of the teacher educators (including the author herself) have been carefully examined and interrogated to shed light on the intricate and dynamic nature of collaboration. Specifically, Chapter 4 reports on the teachers' and teacher educators' beliefs about collaboration with respect to its goals, values and implementation in their professional work. It is interesting to note that while the teacher educators attached great importance to collaboration as a powerful route for professional development, the teachers adopted highly institutional and pragmatic attitudes towards collaboration to serve the practical needs of their school against the background of local curriculum reforms. Their different perceptions further influenced how the teachers and university researchers negotiated their social relations as reported in Chapter 5. As revealed in the email exchanges and conversations in the project, although the teacher educators attempted to create an equitable and democratic relationship, their efforts were impeded by the traditional institutional boundaries, their unconscious use of professional authorities and languages, as well as the teachers' own expectations and reliance on the teacher educators.

In line with the unbalanced power relations, Chapter 6 delineates the identity struggle and conflicts experienced by the participants in their collaborative research. This part is particularly interesting as it

demonstrates how the teacher educator, Ana, tried to balance her institutional identities (e.g., an expert) and desired identities (e.g., a facilitator) in her collaborative experiences. The use of a critical discourse perspective is fresh and effective in shedding light on how different power relations and social identities were enacted and transformed through specific language use (e.g., questions, hedges and modality) in the professional activities in the project. In the final chapter, in addition to a summary of the major findings identified in the study, the author discussed the intrusion of dominant educational and socio-political discourses, which transforms how teachers and teacher educators practice and collaborate in their everyday work. The author challenges our taken-for-granted assumptions about collaboration as “good” and “necessary” (see page 115) and urges us to problematize our collaborative practice from a critical perspective in particular institutional and socio-cultural settings. Furthermore, the book argues that teachers and teacher educators need to be reflective about their own identities, languages and actions in collaboration and develop an open and flexible collaborative relationship to meet their mutually negotiated needs.

While this book excels at its critical observation and insightful analysis about university-school collaboration, on a slightly negative note it pays limited attention to the teachers' collaborative engagements in the school where other important stakeholders such as their students, colleagues and school leaders were involved. To gain a more comprehensive picture of how a university-school partnership operates and develops, it would be meaningful to explore the voices and experiences of other stakeholders as part of the collaborative enterprise. Overall, teaching is a social profession and collaboration is one of the key features characterizing teachers' professional development (Levine & Marcus, 2010). This book is a must read for those interested in language teacher collaboration and development. From this book, we can gain rich and meaningful insights about the complexities, tensions and potentials of teacher collaboration and try to use such insights to analyze, understand and improve our collaborative work in language teaching and teacher education.

References

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