

Book Review

Teachers' Know-How: A Philosophical Investigation (2017) by Christopher Winch

(New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-119-35568)

Wayne Hugo

School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa
hugow@ukzn.ac.za

Robyn McQueen

School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa
robs393@gmail.com

(Received: 30 October 2019; accepted: 25 November 2019)

Christopher Winch's *Teachers' Know-How: A Philosophical Investigation (2017)* is a must-read for teacher educators, especially where market forces and political expediency are pushing towards an education universe that emphasises market relevant skill sets. In a world in which unemployment and dissatisfaction are high, pushing for a skills discourse does much for those in power. The state can claim to have provided market relevant skills, and so blame the individual for not finding work, saying something like, "We have provided you with the skills so, if you cannot find a job, then it's your fault, you layabout." The danger, for us as academics in education, is that this abusive use of skills discourses by the state and its neo-liberal disciples can result in a strong sense of repulsion for anything based on skills. Exclusion of skills-based discourses from education can result in an overly academic and general picture of education. This exclusion, in turn, can result in teacher education students feeling an existential split between the "know-how" of professional modules and teaching practice on the one side, and more intensely abstract education studies on the other. Winch charts a philosophical path that takes the notion of skills seriously and shows us how to integrate skills into the overall picture of teacher education and teaching practice.

This book offers a comprehensive guide to the kinds of knowledge and "know-how" educators need. In it, the teaching profession is situated as an occupation, and the major question addressed is how to be skilful as a teacher. Winch uses a combination of epistemological theories, finely tuned conceptual frameworks, and extended examples to illustrate how the theory and practices of teaching are inseparable. He is wary of making overly strong commitments to the teacher as producer of new knowledge. Since producing

new knowledge is a highly specialised area of expertise requiring massive dedication and resources, it is not something that can (or should) be added blithely to the many other functions of teaching. A teacher might become a researcher at a certain stage of her or his career, but to somehow expect that researching one's own teaching practice is adding miraculously to the fund of new knowledge in the world is to mistake self-reflexive practice for research. First and foremost, teachers must know how to teach. Unpacking what this means in a philosophically principled way is the achievement of this book.

Teachers' Know-How does this by revealing the necessary collaboration of craft and technical skills teachers need if they are to be effective. The book synthesises many of Winch's points in earlier books and articles into one synthetic and readable whole. At the University of KwaZulu-Natal, we tried having our honours and masters students read systematically through Winch's articles, but most students got stuck on the arcane arguments of English analytical philosophy over the logical meaning of concepts like "know-how." The endeavour did not work, and we had to shift to using other resources. But the current crop of post graduates are finding *Teachers' Know-How* lucid and exciting. Our WhatsApp groups are buzzing, the book is being read, not once or twice, but over and over again, and it is becoming a baseline for our thinking and research, hence this review. Our students are also teachers, and their experience resonates with Winch's conceptual analysis on the occupation of teaching, on what teaching expertise looks like, and how to find some kind of occupational equilibrium between teaching as a craft and teaching as an executive technician. Teaching as a craft requires more than just the mastery of a skill since a craft requires proud attention to the whole cycle of production—taking something from inception to completion while also paying attention to the multiple demands surrounding the process. A craftsperson produces a worthwhile and useful artefact, often using a tacitly acquired knowledge base, learned through imitating an expert. This conception of teaching as a craft emphasises the need for applied subject knowledge that involves the acquisition of "know-how" on the part of student teachers by observing expert teachers and practising under their watchful eye. Winch compares this conception of teacher education as craft to the learning process of an executive technician: the student teacher is given a worked-out curriculum and has to learn how to execute it properly. A teacher technician does not make the curriculum, but, rather, she or he makes sure that it is carried out successfully. Teachers conceived of as executive technicians have an ability to grasp and pursue a pre-given end, have a clear understanding of how to achieve the goal, and know why that might be necessary. In the language of both conceptions of teacher—as craftsperson and as executive technician—there is a focus on "know-how" rather than on some academic characterisation of teaching. Winch provides us with the philosophical principles to negotiate between these two competing conceptions of what it means to teach and offers much more as well.

He does this by going back to ancient Greek philosophy, as well as to the modern British, French, and German philosophers. At the heart of it lies the threefold distinction of *phronesis*, *techne*, and critical reflexivity. For those of us who remember Habermas (1971), this resonates with his notion of the relationship between knowledge and human interests (the practical, the technical, and the emancipatory). Teacher education needs to work with all

three. Phronesis is a type of know-how, a knack of being able to do something, of being able to achieve a goal in complex and changing conditions. This practical and situational wisdom is developed through on-the-job practice. Together with *techné* (a conceptual understanding of technical information) creates the ability to reason rationally through technical problems and find solutions based on experience and technical knowledge. However, the success of actually solving a problem depends on critical self-reflexivity (an ability to review the past with an intention to work more successfully the next time) which provides context for the necessary decisions to be made according to learned behaviours that have worked in the past. This way of doing comes with an ability to describe the *what, how, when, where, and why* of a project which leads to the ability to do and describe the process intelligently. This takes us way beyond a skills discourse in teacher education but does not let slip the need to embody teaching in a philosophical space that is what we might call skill-full.

The forms of knowledge discussed by Winch in this book apply directly to both general and vocational education—a double bonus! They relate well to the teaching of electrical engineering (which requires teachers to be well-versed in the theoretical and practical information required to build circuit boards, for example, and an ability to learn from past mistakes), but they can also be useful when we are teaching general schooling subjects. For example, when teaching mathematics, teachers need to have a solid foundational knowledge about the subject matter, know how to perform certain technical operations to rearrange mathematical constructs, and how to develop new lessons based on the success of others. A teacher needs to climb a ladder of expertise, just as any other technical or occupational professional does. A teacher needs transversal skills that shift upwards, beyond techniques and skills, into an ability to manage competently the whole process of production. A good teacher is focussed not only on getting through the current lesson but on the lesson sequence, the demands of the term and year, collaboration with colleagues, professional development, parental and community engagement and so on. This is very similar to the demands of any occupation that is held together in a holistic way, rather than being fragmented into isolated skills. Rather than a fragmentation of labour that has an occupation divided into isolated skills, Winch argues for a division of labour, where specialism is encouraged, but holistic control over the whole process of making is maintained. His advice is that we should not see a need to fragment teaching into skills, but, rather, learn how to hold the whole process together in a principled and integrated way.

These insights are vital in a world that is increasingly emphasising vocational education. In South Africa, there is currently a massive project underway to improve the quality of vocational education. The European Union, in collaboration with the Department of Higher Education and Training, has funded a Teaching and Learning Development Capacity Improvement Programme (TLDCIP), one component of which is the improvement of technical and vocational lecturers through a specialised lecturing qualification. This involves whole new qualifications for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) lecturers, with new curricula specifically focussed on vocational education. *Teachers' Know-How* provides a powerful and systematic philosophical framework for thinking through what vocational education means. There is a real danger that curriculum writers engaged in

producing the new TVET lecturer qualifications in TLDCIP courses will either copy and repeat their existing school teaching curricula, with minor vocational add-ons or attempt their own new version of what vocational education means, based on a hodgepodge of popular synthetic accounts of vocational education. Winch provides a useful corrective to both possibilities. *Teachers' Know How* provides a deeply and thoroughly considered philosophical foundation that took a lifetime of work to produce in a way that combines both general and vocational teacher education into a synthetic whole. Winch does this, not by taking on the powerful dualisms of Plato or Descartes, but rather through a sustained elaboration on how “know-how” works in teacher education. Those of us involved in the process of restructuring vocational education in South Africa should engage intensively with this work.

Reference

Habermas, J. (1971). *Knowledge and human interests*. (J. J. Shapiro, Trans.). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.