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Book review: *Facing Challenges and Complexities in Retention of Novice Teachers*, edited by Denise McDonald

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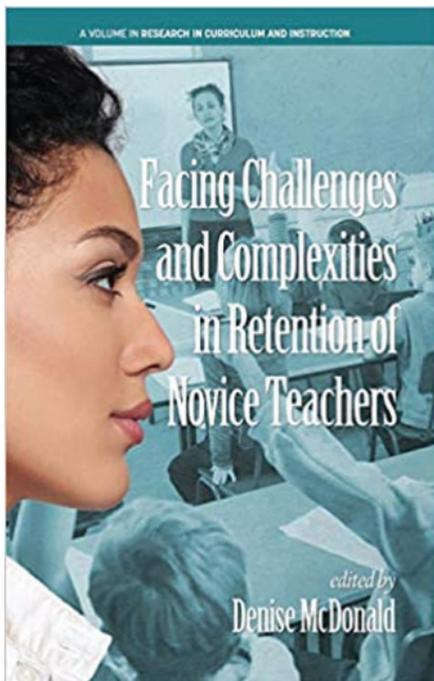
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Book review

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Facing Challenges and Complexities in Retention of Novice Teachers, edited by Denise McDonald

Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing; 2019; 292 pp.;
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Most people do not think about new teachers and what they go through when starting their teaching positions at school. Parents assume that teachers have only one responsibility – that of educating their children – and they may not know about other responsibilities that teachers have. People also often do not think about why some teachers are not able to do their best in educating children. It may not be because they are not skilled but because they face a lot of challenges. What should teachers do when they face struggles in their induction school years? What emotions do they have to face? What are the work-related issues? *Facing Challenges and Complexities in Retention of Novice Teachers* helps answer these questions. Besides, it considers questions such as: How do teachers ensure that they have the time and energy to enact and sustain equitable learning environments? Why would anyone want to pursue a career in education? Answering these questions could be very beneficial for those interested in becoming a schoolteacher, and it helps to raise awareness of the experience that novice teachers have in their first five years of joining a school.

This book, edited by Denise McDonald, provides a clear understanding of the situations, struggles, emotions and work-related issues, as well as the deep learning, which novice teachers gain during their induction years of urban teaching in Houston, USA. It could also be very valuable for scholars and educators in other parts of the United States, as well as in countries such as the UK.

Around half of newly qualified teachers leave the profession within five years. In the Houston area, 80 per cent of teaching staff, including school principals, have five years or less of experience in the teaching profession. Thus, this book is essential for novice teachers in all subject areas as it links teacher induction, attrition and retention. The material also brings out questions such as: Why do novice teachers want to pursue this profession? Do schools in the Houston area not have good teacher-training programmes that can equip incoming teachers? The book also explains why students experience inequalities, with which teachers must deal (Polanin *et al.*, 2012).

One of the major strengths of this book is the inclusion of practical stories of professional life. For example, we hear about a teacher named Edith who joined a school where there was no furniture in the classroom (35–55). She felt that she was given leftovers that other teachers did not want. She intensely experienced 'practice shock', and she had to scramble, adapt and utilize her own resources to succeed and survive. She had to go beyond her teaching responsibilities to acquire and accumulate materials and arrange her room on her own. She is an inspiration to her students to 'beat the odds' in their lives. Many teachers experience substantial swings of emotions, bad feelings and a clash between expectations and reality. Although this might sound discouraging, the positives can outweigh the negatives, if you are confident enough. Edith decided to stay in her job; her new year in school was about staying on task, and she started to build self-confidence. By the end of her third year, she had learned that while she can never completely fulfil 'mastering the teaching practice', her experimental knowledge can temper her anxieties. Thus, the book emphasizes that if you want to be a teacher, you will face challenges, but it is up to you how you deal with the problems and move forward. The editor wants us to understand the practical situation of a teacher in school, and the stories presented in this book can inspire and be learned from.

The book presents the negative key stressors – such as insufficient experiential knowledge, lack of training, marginalization, affective aspects and subordinates, and inconsistencies of experiences and expectations – influencing beginning teachers' thoughts of leaving. Along with key stressors, commonalities in experiences and challenges across beginning teachers' stories are also significant for a successful career in teaching. These include relational and professional support, effective communication, effective, ongoing mentoring and provision of resources. This book is a must for students studying education who are planning to teach in the future and for current teachers, as well as for people in the administration who make policies so that they can be aware of the problems and customize policies for the retention of teachers in schools.

Readers outside the Houston area, for example in the United Kingdom or continental European countries, might find it beneficial to be aware of the situations that teachers in Houston are facing, so that these countries can learn from them and improve their own education systems. However, it would have been interesting if the study had been extended beyond the Houston area, because there is a big difference between American schools in rural areas and small towns and in big cities such as Houston. The situation for students is different in a small town, as they often face poverty, and they may not have internet access. Furthermore, the solutions provided

are not clear, since their implementation is not provided. On the other hand, the positive aspect of the book is that it focuses on the population in Houston who are native Spanish speakers and have language learners.

We believe that readers would benefit if they were provided with concrete models that novice teachers can follow in their induction years. The challenging questions presented by the author need to be addressed, and administration in higher education needs to work hard in order to take the necessary steps for improving the situations faced by novice teachers. It would have been helpful if this book had compared the situation of teachers who have at least ten years' experience teaching at school, and discussed why they are still teaching and what solutions they have found to these problems. The book makes it clear that beginning teachers will struggle in their induction years, but that if they work with confidence and keep doing their job, this career could be very satisfying.

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Reference

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