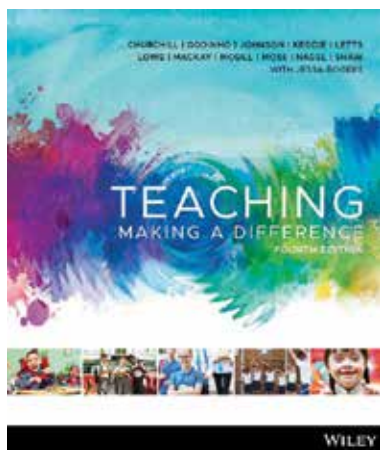


# Kritikos

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## Teaching: Making a Difference

By Rick Churchill, Sally Godinho, Nicola F. Johnson *et al.*

2018, 4th edn

John Wiley & Sons Australia

E-book and paperback (632 pages)

RRP: \$65.00, \$139.45

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Reviewed by Dr Katrina Burge, teacher candidate, University of Melbourne

This is probably the closest thing you'll find to a teaching degree in a book, and it offers reflections that could be helpful no matter what your career stage. As a first-year teacher candidate, I've turned to it again and again, for whatever assignment, question or concern came my way. While it refers mainly to the Australian Curriculum, the content is not tightly subject-specific and it does not leave the Victorian reader feeling sidelined.

The title is evocative as it seems to be the core motivation for so many teachers, and it underscores the student-centred focus of the book. The book is divided into four main parts:

1. The Teaching Profession—two chapters that contextualise the development of classroom teaching
2. Understanding Learning and Learners—three chapters about the psychology of learning, diversity and motivation
3. Preparation, Practice and Process—seven chapters that extensively cover key concepts such as pedagogy, classroom organisation, ICT, engagement and assessment
4. Effectiveness, Professionalism and the Future—four chapters that focus on the teacher as a professional practitioner, encompassing self-reflexivity, ethics and equity.

There is a good balance of theory and practical discussion. Key research is integrated into the discussion so it becomes easy to grasp concepts such as how neurons work. That's not something you might spend much time thinking about in the classroom every day, but it does help to understand something of the physical process of learning, particularly when working with students who are not neurotypical.

The organisation of the book is fairly effective as a learning resource. Scattered throughout are reflective exercises headed 'What are the implications for me?' and practical applications headed 'What can I take into the classroom?'. These activities help to construct and cement one's knowledge along the way. Each chapter lists its learning outcomes and includes an opening case study to contextualise the topic. Visual learners are accommodated by the numerous diagrams throughout, most of them quite helpful. Each chapter concludes with a useful summary (the must-read part of the chapter) and study questions (not quite so engaging, but useful).

This review is of the online version. The user-friendliness of online platforms varies enormously between publishers, and the Wiley version leaves a bit to be desired. Counter-intuitively, it is much harder to navigate. In the print version, a quick glance at the contents page gives enough information to know where to dive in, but navigating through the online contents is a clickstorm of false starts and long, tedious returns. Key information that in the print version is an obvious sidebar is inevitably a hyperlink online, and basic reader/user psychology dictates that usually it is ignored. The online version features numerous videos (also available to owners of the print copy), mainly by experienced practitioners and educators, but does not allow playback at faster speed. The videos are mainly of talking heads rather than classroom practice, and I found myself wanting a transcript so I could skim the content in seconds rather than sit through numerous three-minute videos.

The inclusion of essentially 'spoken text' videos and 'interactivities', which are simply static pictures and spoken text, doesn't add much value to the work, but is indicative of a 'twenty-first century' obsession that permeates the book. The latter term is mentioned nearly ninety times, not including reference lists, with the usual exhortations to adapt 'twenty-first century' techniques and methods. What this boils down to is simply incorporating current notions of student agency and using digital technology. While the book has many strengths, this emphasis isn't one of them.

Despite that quibble, this book is an invaluable companion on the journey to becoming a teacher, and the experience of being one. The student-centred focus is also very teacher-friendly, sharing an understanding of the ideals and challenges of this profession.