

Book Reviews

Martin Lawn and Gerald Grace, Editors.
TEACHERS: THE CULTURE AND POLITICS OF WORK
London: The Falmer Press, 1987
pp. 239.

During the last several decades, educational researchers have made increased use of observational, ethnographic, and historical methodologies to examine important aspects of the day-to-day life of elementary and secondary schools, for example, their rules and rituals, student culture, "hidden curriculum," and so forth. Until very recently, however, relatively little attention was paid to the experiences and perspectives of the key participant in this setting: the classroom teacher. Aside from a focus on instructional technique, the teacher was generally treated as an invisible member of school life. Given the make-up of this occupational group, there was perhaps more than a hint of sexism in its marginalization by the research community. Many observers now recognize that to better comprehend schools, and for educational reforms to have any chance for success, we must more fully reckon with the ideological and pedagogical commitments of teachers and the complex ways they experience and organize their work situation. Edited by Martin Lawn and Gerald Grace, who are themselves important contributors to a growing body of literature, *Teachers: The culture and politics of work* is an excellent collection that greatly advances our understanding of and appreciation for a wide range of topics relating to the work of teachers. Lawn and Grace hope that their book will provide teachers and student-teachers in particular with the opportunity "for systematic reflection about the nature of their own occupation and the nature of their work" (p. x). Although some of the subjects discussed may initially seem a bit removed from the daily concerns of teachers, and all but one of the chapters relate specifically to the English context, this is an

informative and thought-provoking volume that can be read with great benefit by researchers and practitioners alike, on both sides of the Atlantic.

Each of the ten chapters of the book offers well-written and interesting analyses. In the space available for this review, however, I can only offer brief mention of what I found to be particularly illuminating.

Four of the chapters deal directly with the experiences of women in teaching and help to clarify why gender is a crucial category to consider in conceptualizing how teachers experience career, professionalism, and politics. Geraldine J. Clifford examined hundreds of diaries and letters of nineteenth century women teachers and discovered that many of these women, "in the process of pursuing the independent life of an unmarried schoolmistress, . . . came to different conclusions than their mentors intended about woman's God-given nature and her place in society" (p. 4). Although by no means generalizable to the whole population (or perhaps even the majority) of women teachers, such a finding shatters our stereotypical notions of these early women teachers. Through their work, many of them became more assertive and economically independent, and developed oratorical, organizational, and other skills that motivated and enabled them to participate in electoral politics and agitation for women's causes. Sarah King details a forgotten chapter in English educational history, the work of members of the National Union of Women Teachers (NUWT) to advance both educational and feminist causes during the 1920-1940 period. Here too, the portrayal of women teachers as quiescent must be amended: these teachers "battled relentlessly in and outside the classroom to achieve a radical new vision of the role in society for which education should prepare girls" (p. 32). One of King's more interesting findings is that the NUWT was ambivalent about coeducational schools, recognizing that "mixed schools did not provide true coeducation since girls were subject to a gender-differentiated curriculum within them" (p. 41).

Drawing on interviews with eleven feminist teachers in different educational settings, Marilyn Joyce discusses some of the problems, contradictions, and pressures of their work situation. Among the most difficult problems that they face are a lack of resources, and the time-consuming task of having to create new sets of resources, and the ridicule that they must endure from colleagues, which often results in a feeling of isolation. One of the most interesting quotes that Joyce includes is the following: "Feminists continue to carry a triple load. They must possess male knowledge otherwise they are not regarded as competent. They must possess female knowledge otherwise nothing changes, thus they must spend hours reconstructing knowledge of themselves in the past which men have written out. And they must do all this in the context of resisting the offensive comments and abuse unleashed by such engagement" (p. 80).

Joyce's conclusion is one that I particularly share, the hope that someday "an anti-discriminatory perspective [will be] seen as a prerequisite of good educational practice" (p. 87). Finally, while I think that to some extent Carolyn Steedman reduces reality to the extremes, she does present one of the most thought-provoking chapters in the book. In part it is a personal account of her own experiences as a teacher. Her realization that teachers are in effect expected to engage in a kind of "mothering," combined with Simone de Beauvoir's suggestion that the having of children is the swiftest route to a woman's slavery, gives new meaning to the frustration that some women teachers experience in the classroom. She is worth quoting in considerable detail on this point:

I didn't know this history when I entered that enclosed place, the primary classroom. I didn't know about a set of pedagogic expectations that covertly and mildly – and never using this vocabulary – hoped that I might become a mother. And yet I became one, not knowing exactly what it was that was happening until it was too late, until I was caught, but the pressure of fingers, looks and glances . . . I was very tired, bone-achingly tired all the time. I was unknowingly, covertly expected to become a mother, and I unknowingly became one, pausing only in the cracks of the dark night to ask: what is happening to me? (pp. 125 and 127)

The other six chapters deal more generally with topics related to the context of teachers' work and teacher-state relations. Jan Lee studied the ideologies and pedagogical practices of teachers in an inner-city multiracial infant school, and how they serve to legitimate the class structure of English society. The teachers' views seem "remarkable for their naivete as regards the structural, political and wider relational features of society . . . [which] expressed itself in their professed 'classless', 'apolitical', or 'neutral' view of society" (p. 93). In fact, Lee contends, these teachers do act on certain specific class assumptions but are able to distance themselves from them "under the cover of the ideology of professionalism" (p. 110). Martin Lawn recounts the various changes in the conditions and management of English school life during World War II and their profound effect on the nature of teachers' work that continued "for the next few decades and remains with us still" (p. 50). Because of wartime priorities, teachers were given a new role in the development of the welfare state and a new sense of being part of the national purpose. For example, they were expected to collect salvage, issue clothing coupons, help to provide rest and emergency feeding centers, collect children's savings for National Savings Certificates, assume dining service duty, and help to develop new curriculum that focused on aspects of the war effort. The effects were significant but contradictory for teachers' work: they were given a valued place in the

reconstruction of the new society but they were expected to spend more time on school affairs and, viewed as agents of the national interest, they became more susceptible to control by the state. After examining the experiences of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) school representatives, Jenny Ozga reveals that the prevalent assumption of teacher "apathy," especially among women teachers, stems in large part from the failure of mainstream analysis to take full account of three contextual factors. First, the indicators of activism conventionally deployed are inappropriate because they magnify the importance of mundane aspects like attendance at meetings. Women activists in particular support fellow staff against unfair and arbitrary managerial pressure in less public "caring" ways. Second, there is a simple and misleading dichotomy made between professionalism and militancy, one that incorrectly assumes professionalism to be inherently antagonistic to activism. And third, the full extent of the hostility to organized teachers in some Local Education Authorities (LEA) is not accounted for. Membership "apathy" can in fact be seen "as a rational response to the situation, rather than something inherent in the nature of the membership itself" (p. 139).

Kieron Walsh discusses two different kinds of teacher appraisal: managerial control-oriented, which is individually focused, judgemental, and hierarchical; and participative, which is collectively focused, developmental, and cooperative. Walsh's important point here is that the emphasis being placed on performance appraisal of the first kind is because of the crucial role that it can play in attempts to establish greater central control of education. Concerns about such appraisals being irresponsible and unfair because they ignore the fact that teaching is fundamentally a constrained activity are getting lost amidst the push to specify and control more completely the teachers' conditions of service. Richard Pietrasik details "The Teachers' Action, 1984-1986," revealing that attempts to tighten management of the workplace is in fact leading to low morale among teachers. Pietrasik, a math teacher in a London Comprehensive School, believes that recent negotiations between teacher unions and the government resulted in "a pathetic deal" (p. 184). This occurred in part, he believes, because of the rivalry between the leadership of teachers unions (NUT and NAS/UWT), which adversely affected their role in the negotiating process. Finally, Gerald Grace contributes a detailed and sophisticated exploration of the current crisis in relations between organized teachers and the state. Adopting a socio-historical perspective, Grace outlines four phases in this relationship since the turn of the century, leading up to the current stage ("the Conservative education offensive") in which one finds the "steady reassertion of central and visible control over state schooling, and a steady erosion of teachers' professional autonomy, and certainly of any remaining sense of partnership in education" (p. 217). Teachers now find themselves dealing with overly confident (and condescending) state agencies, centralized curriculum initiatives, parent power initiatives, "the new economic ideology

of education," a union structure that has been slow to grasp important ideological and political changes, and, in the process, a devaluation of the status of teachers. Teachers in general have become "depoliticized" and "incorporated," and thus a far less threatening entity for the central state to have to deal with. In the "war of position" over the terrain of professionalism and its associated correlates, teacher-state relations in Britain are at a critical juncture.

Aside from the relatively minor disagreements with individual authors, I have a few concerns about the book's organization. For example, readers not particularly familiar with the English context might do well to read Part Three ("The Politics of Work") before Part Two ("Working in Contemporary Schools") since some of the terms (e.g., LEAs, the DES) and events discussed in the second part are made clearer in the chapters of the third part. Additionally, the brief Introduction by Lawn and Grace is helpful but equally helpful might have been a concluding chapter that links the chapters and compares their methodologies, data, and conclusions, especially when there are clear differences. For example: Ozga's suggestion that the confrontational policies of local employers and the central state ironically may be fostering those aspects of teacher professionalism that support unionism is followed by Walsh's depiction of central state policy in the realm of performance appraisals as seriously eroding the development of a collective professional voice. And Clifford's depiction of the ways that many women were able to use the work of teaching in self-empowering ways is followed by Steedman's portrayal of the school site as a kind of "prisonhouse."

These are minor qualifications for what is otherwise an excellent contribution to the literature on the culture and politics of the work of teachers. The ten authors of this volume address important research questions and present insightful findings about the ways that teachers formerly and currently experience their workplace. These studies should be read by all those seeking to better understand and improve the profession of teaching.

One final point perhaps deserves to be considered. During the last few years, in the United States at least, there has been a noticeable increase in attention to the issue of teacher empowerment. For example, university educators are considering how teachers can be colleagues (rather than only "subjects") in their research. Relatedly, through the use of videotaping, interviews, journals, etc., there is a focus now on discovering what teachers are thinking about before, during, and after classroom instruction. Teachers are also being urged to consider the value of conducting their own research to aid them in their pedagogical and occupational concerns. And in a particularly dramatic development, there have been calls for teachers to be

included in school leadership, especially when it relates to issues of curriculum development and discipline. This idea for "shared decision making," which is, to be sure, a contentious one (especially among school administrators), has been suggested in part as a way to "revitalize public schools." What is significant is that this idea has come not just from teachers themselves but also from teacher educators, state education department staff, and elected officials.

How, then, do these recent developments fit in with the general picture of the erosion of teacher professionalism that predominates in the Lawn and Grace book? Has the situation made a sudden turnaround during the last few years? If so, how do we account for it? Will these developments merely serve to incorporate teacher dissent into an acceptable and "domesticated" form? Will they turn out to be proposals that fizzle out in the long run? Are the situations in England and the United States and elsewhere in fact significantly different from one another, and if so, how and why? Clearly, this is a critical juncture in the work of teachers and there is still much to learn and think about.

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Mac Linscott Ricketts.

MIRCEA ELIADE: THE ROMANIAN ROOTS, Vols. 1 & 2.

Boulder, CO: East European Monographs

(distributed by Columbia University Press, New York).

1453 pp. US\$180.00.

Given Eliade's published notebooks, journal entries, autobiography, and novels containing autobiographical accounts, one may wonder why Professor Ricketts undertook the task of writing a detailed biography of the famed University of Chicago scholar. Yet, as one soon discovers upon reading *Mircea Eliade*, this book adds greatly to the already known facts.

Ricketts argues that to truly know Professor Eliade intimately, one must get acquainted with his formative years. This includes not only developmental milestones but also his intellectual growth as a budding scholar and genius. Thirty well-written chapters take us step-by-step through this erudite man's early childhood, the lyceum and university years, as well as his pre- and post-India adventures. Besides describing the events and experiences that shaped young Eliade, Ricketts also provides a detailed analysis of his journalistic contributions, as well as his fiction and nonfiction writings up to 1945. Eliade's novellas, for instance, are summarized, interpreted, and also deciphered in terms of the