
Book Review

Smyth, J., Dow, A., Hattam, R., Reid, A. & Shacklock, G. (2000) *Teachers' work in a globalizing economy*. London: Falmer Press.

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This book is the outcome of the work of three PhD students, their supervisor and a research associate. All are interested in the area of teachers' work and despite the potential for a fragmentary treatment there is a concerted attempt to bring the different pieces of research together to provide a theoretical framework and agenda for action.

As the title suggests, the context for the work is globalisation and its impact on teachers' work. The first chapter argues that the forces of globalisation of capital are having an enormous impact on teachers' work. The human capital view of education has become dominant whereby schools are responsible for preparing students for the world of work. Education as a cultural process is being ignored. The authors suggest that the systems of modern advanced capitalism, while appearing to give greater autonomy to the individual worker and teacher, often impose a covert form of surveillance based on what the market requires. The authors propose to use the sociology of work approach known as labour process theory to guide their analyses of teachers' work.

Chapter two provides the theoretical basis of the book. This is found in labour process theory and is based on the PhD thesis of one of the authors, Alan Reid. He locates the origin of labour process theory in industrial sociology and Marxist theory reapplied by Braverman (1974). The exploitation of labour requires that capital control the labour process through forms of surveillance and direction. To achieve this, mental and manual work are separated so that the mass of workers are deskilled and perform mundane tasks designed and planned by a small elite.

Labour process theory was briefly used by educational theorists but it came in for some heavy criticism and went into decline. The key issue was, does labour process theory with its basis in Marx's view of surplus value, apply also to workers, such as teachers, who are employed by the state? The chapter argues that since teachers are subject to the pressures resulting from the capitalist system such as unemployment, surveillance and deskilling and, moreover, because they educate the

future producers of surplus value, the workers, then labour process theory is relevant to them. Reid (p. 24) rightly notes that crucial to the whole argument is an analysis of the object of teachers' labour. He asks the key question 'what is the labour process of teaching?' (p. 25). He argues that control lies at the heart of labour process theory and that the nature of this control in teaching is evident in the curriculum, both formal and informal. It is the curriculum that specifies the outcomes required by the state, so 'the curriculum ... is the centre-piece of any education settlement' (p.30). Reid sees control over teachers exercised in a number of forms, as a regulated market, through technical means, bureaucratically, corporately and ideologically as well as through disciplinary power. The effects of this control on teachers include, deskilling and an intensification of their work.

I found this chapter clearly and cogently argued and a fascinating trip down memory lane. The theoretical hegemony of post-structuralism (if that isn't a contradiction in terms!) has meant the powerful theoretical insights of neo-Marxist approaches have been largely ignored. Here there is an attempt to apply them to the new situation.

Chapter three, titled 'The Critical Case Study Method', is clearly an attempt to combine the research methods chapters of two theses. The methods used in the studies of the two schools, named Gallipoli High School and Appleton College, were so different that the chapter links them only with difficulty.

Chapter four reports the research at Gallipoli High School. It is a case study of teachers' work in a specific high school in relation to specific initiatives being undertaken at the school. These were a 'flatter management structure' and collaborative teaching.

The school was adopting a flatter management structure, this involved opening up teacher manager positions such as subject coordinators to applications from all staff on a yearly basis. The author identified this as 'post-Fordist' as it moved away from a surveillance model of teacher's work toward multiskilling. However, this also led to the intensification of teachers' work. The school was also keen to implement a model of collaborative teaching without being sure what precisely this entailed. The impediments to more collaborative team teaching including timetable constraints, transfer of teachers, lack of interest, and teachers' affiliations with specific subjects are all explored.

The flatter management structure led to teachers 'supervising themselves' as they took on the goals of the school and hence lessened the need for overt surveillance. Although there was discussion of the intensification of teachers' work it did not seem to me that the theoretical model that informed the case study was labour process theory. There seemed to be appeals to a range of theoretical frameworks, which did not strike me as thoroughly integrated. The insights into teachers' work were useful but the theoretical coherence was rather less clear.

Chapter five describes the findings of a research project into teachers' work centred on one school, Appleton College. The school is a non-denominational

private school in a regional area. Eight teachers were interviewed and from their accounts their views on a number of issues related to their work were identified. The author identifies the method as 'work-stories' approach but the narrative aspect of the accounts is rather attenuated, and the research method might be more simply called interview.

The first issue the chapter deals with is professionalism. The responses from the teachers reflect common perceptions that teaching should be defined as a profession because of the qualifications required for entry and because of the hours and dedicated nature of the work both inside and outside the classroom. The teachers felt that the community in general did not realise the extent of this commitment and so questioned the professional nature of teaching. This is richly supported by the findings of the Senate inquiry, *A Class Act* (1998).

It is the theoretical component of the chapter that I found less satisfying. A rich array of what might be called socially critical theoretical overlays are identified in the chapter and links are made to the teachers' accounts. And yet it was not clear that the one advanced the other particularly effectively. It is clear from the teachers' accounts that their work is expanding and it is equally clear that at Appleton College this is particularly because of declining enrolments and the parlous financial situation of the school. The presence of this local variable makes it difficult for the author to argue that the data establishes any general trends in teachers' work, as it could equally be entirely because of this local set of circumstances. As a result, the attempts to link this particular piece of research to the general literature on teachers' work was rather over-inflating the theoretical contribution made by the research.

In chapter six the authors begin to tie the threads together. They wish to revitalise critical theory, particularly as it applies to teachers' work. The analysis needs to relate the impacts of globalisation to the classroom. In other words, the forces that impinge on teachers' work are no longer simply school based or even state based but are part of a larger global process. The theory needs to account for the effect of these global changes on teachers' work. At the global level the theory needs to take into account the 'political-economic, socio-cultural and technological dimensions' (p.147) of globalisation. At the local level it needs to take account of the subjectivity of teachers' perceptions and actions. In order to do this, the authors opt for a theoretical framework based on the idea of constellation or theory as constellation. Here there is not a tightly ordered, single focus theoretical construct but one which includes a number of propositions each throwing light on the others. It is an interesting idea, but one wonders when the constellation may become a jumble of unrelated propositions. The authors summarise their position thus:

we have begun to sketch out what a critical theory of teachers' work might look like that aims to revitalise labour process theory through a contemporary reading of life in schools, within a frame of globalisation. (p.149)

The authors discuss eight propositions within their constellation. Unfortunately, space does not allow me to explore these in detail but they highlight the controlling, economically dominated, and anti-educational nature of the changes

being foisted on education in the current climate. It is a powerful critique, if rather evangelical.

In the final chapter the authors set out to answer the question 'How might a critical theory of teachers' work resonate and continue to nurture an educator's sensibility in schools committed to the struggle for socially just schooling?' (p.173). The authors are concerned to nourish schools that are democratic and teachers who are socially critical and actively involved in the formation of educational policy both at the local, state and global level. They call for resistance to the proposal to de-professionalise teachers and reduce them to technicians. Under each of the eight propositions listed in the previous chapter the authors identify modes and areas of resistance which teachers might pursue. Both in their classroom practice, their curriculum formulation and their wider political activity, teachers are urged to resist the 'neo-liberal' education agenda. To do so, they can find support in teacher unions, preservice and postgraduate teacher education programs and collaboration with university researchers.

In summary, it is obvious from the forgoing that I found many useful features of the book. Its focus on teachers' work and the attempt to identify a theoretical model from which to view this work in the new context are valuable contributions. The authors have made a concerted effort to bring together their different studies in a coherent manner. The ethnographies do cast light on the current pressures being placed on teachers in their workplace. On the other hand, there is a lack of theoretical consistency. Despite references in later chapters to the labour process model outlined in chapter two, the ethnographies and later theoretical chapters are much more scattergun in their approach to theory. The end result is not as theoretically homogeneous and not as powerful as it might have been. I am not convinced that theoretical promiscuity is an effective way to go. I am sure, however, that the authors would argue for the value of this approach as they do in suggesting a 'constellation of propositions' approach. The final issue I would raise is the unrelieved negatively critical stance of some sections of the discussion. It is as if all current change in education is viewed through a prism that only reveals the negative outcomes, of which there are no doubt many, but does not see any positive outcomes at all. I think critical social theory needs a more nuanced analysis, but would recommend this stimulating contribution to the ongoing discussion of teachers' work.

References

Braverman, H. (1974) *Labour and Monopoly Capital*. London: Monthly Review Press

Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee (1998) *A Class Act: Inquiry into the status of the teaching profession*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.