



Book Review: Adams, P., Vossler, K., & Scrivens, C. (Eds.) (2005). *Teachers' work in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Melbourne: Thomson Dunmore.

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One of the clearest things about teachers' work is that it exists in a context of continual contestation. Teachers, their work environment and labour processes, are caught in a series of contradictory tensions: between state and community, between classroom and community, between funding and desire, between instruction and facilitation, between theory and practice, between the teacher as an efficient and perhaps effective predetermined curriculum delivery agent and the teacher as motivator of some yet to be discovered potential in the student for a new form of society, and even between competing theoretical disciplines. These all embody political notions in the broadest sense of the word. In spite of Ira Shor's ideas about the transformational potential of education (see Shor and Freire, 1987) there is very little public recognition of how very political teaching is.

We can see changes in recent history that have resulted from the pull between two contradictory but simple views about schools and teaching that the reforms of the 1990s set in play. The first view is that schools are decentralised to serve each community but lack adequate controls and appropriate accountability, and the second, that schools are centralized to serve national interests but give no place for the development of individual dispositions or particular community needs. These ideas then become cross-cut with two other views about teachers' occupation: teachers are regulated technicians, or teachers are autonomous professionals.

And so, every few years we see the government produce yet another review of teaching or teacher education in order to find the simple answers or the silver bullet to strip out the complexity of its own questions. The current version of this is to be found in the 2004 review of teacher education (Ministry of Education, 2004). Once again, the government signalled that the way forward was through the regulated control of entry to an occupational category and a regulated teacher education curriculum. The policy environment seems to imply 'if we could better control the teacher educators we might be able control how or what children learn'. This time the government is using the concept of 'levers' as its navigational guide to control teachers.

On the last day of teaching a post-graduate course on educators' work I received a book that could really stimulate these students' thinking because it is a New Zealand one. It continues a tradition of critical sociology, providing a lens through which the complexity of teachers' work I talked about above could be examined. Paul Adams, Kathleen Vossler, and Cushla Scrivens have pulled together a series of chapters by various colleagues at Massey University

College of Education. There is a wide ranging amalgam in the chosen 25 chapters that nicely illustrate both the complexity of the historically constructed, socio-political and ethical context of teachers' work, and what this means for a process of 'becoming' (p.18) an educator in New Zealand, as Kathleen Vossler, Hine Waitere-Ang and Paul Adams set out at the beginning.

There are five sections in the book, and in each has been crammed a huge palette of ideas. Originally, I suspect, the book grew from a matrix of ideas to support a course, the themes of which are discussed in the introduction: that teaching is fundamentally a political process; the term 'education' is contestable; education is embedded in professional relationships; and finally, that examining teachers' work is fundamentally a labour process. These were then matched to various authors and the whole assembled. The complexity of the subject, however, may have overwhelmed them as the quality of some of the sections and articles seems to reflect.

The initial section covers the social, political and ethical context of teaching in New Zealand, including policy and policy making, and the big picture ideas and concepts that the following sections elaborate. Chapters that stand out here for comment include the very clear exposition from John Codd about politics and policy making in education. Codd sets the scene for an understanding of the politics of education. John O'Neill begins to tackle the complexity of the labour process of teaching, and the controls that form constraints on any notion of the autonomous profession. John Clark grapples with the notion of ethics and teaching although this is argued somewhat unconvincingly for a teacher who is or will be in employment as a 'servant of the state', or to be more accurate, now is 'a servant of the Board of Trustees'. How that teacher sits in a potentially uneasy relationship between employment requirements, as set by the Board of Trustees, and either their own or the profession's ethical code is not explored either here or in Clark's later section relating specifically to ethics. However, it could be the subject of an interesting tutorial or even assessment task.

The second section provides a beginners' map to consider how education is a contested term. We see the shifting territory of education as a profession, how a profession determines its own education, how even the notion of children and families and the purposes of teaching are debateable ideas. It is therefore appropriate that the articles in this section are all entitled, 'Shifting conceptions of ...'. Those reading the section quickly get the idea that while much in education may seem fixed by the 'dead hand of history', most of it is socially constructed and therefore potentially subject to change. This section includes discussion by Anne-Marie O'Neill of the occupational tools of the teaching profession – the curriculum, and whether this is an object or a process. The section then ends with a very interesting philosophical tilt at neo-liberalism by Paul Adams and Kerry Bethell using a contextualised examination of liberal humanism that considers the socio-political context of Beeby's statement in 1937 of equality of opportunity.

The third section drills down to structural aspects to consider the various micro-political processes and discourses surrounding the organisation of teachers' work, the nature and control of that work through, for example, assessment, and teacher accountability systems. John O'Neill introduces the very useful concepts of micro-politics, identity and discourse to help readers to better understand their roles and how various power systems might be challenged.

Section four deals with the rather more controversial area of teachers and ethics. Here the nature of the relationship between student and teacher, and the nature of educational ethics itself is explored. Sadly, this section is the weakest. The exception is a very thoughtful contribution by Joy Cullen which introduces the ethical issues raised when undertaking research in educational settings.

Section five brings all this material together for the beginning teacher, and moves from the more abstract to the particular, dealing with some very important 'how to' matters of the 'real world.' There is: how to get the first job, finding your way as a beginning teacher, what you might expect in terms of advice and guidance entering into the strange space of that first job, and how to really learn from others' more expert experience. It is fitting that the final chapter in the book deals with the reality of entering a stressful profession and the need to consider a work-life balance. These scenarios are a great improvement on the 'old teacher educator's advice' that beginning year one teachers had to be aware that they would 'hit the wall at Easter and plan a holiday.'

There are some surprising omissions in the text. The lack of a specifically Māori or Pasifika view of students, teachers, and teachers' work is a major shortcoming. Dealing with diversity effectively seems to surface in discussions with many beginning teachers and this represents an area for future investigation. Beginning teachers' stories of their actual work lives in their own classrooms provide a myriad of possibilities. Similarly, there is no recognition of the role of the tertiary teacher in the age of 'massified tertiary education', as Howard Fancy called it when he introduced the Teachers Registration Board Ethics project (1993 per. com). Maybe we as a society haven't yet recognised the need to teach people in tertiary education about teaching or education.

The breadth of the ideas and the density of each new thought in some of the chapters make this a text more suitable for those working towards the end of their degree. However, all people interested in teachers' education, both preservice and in-service, will welcome this very timely addition to the field.

REFERENCES

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