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Imagining teachers: Rethinking gender dynamics in teacher education

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Book Reviews


Building upon an award-winning doctoral dissertation (1998 Gail P. Kelly Award for the best doctoral dissertation in comparative education), Gustavo Fischman’s analysis of the professional preparation of elementary school teachers in Argentina makes two important contributions to the fields of comparative education and teacher training. First, because *Imagining Teachers: Rethinking Gender Dynamics in Teacher Education* is informed to a great extent by elementary education teachers in training and the faculty members who prepare them, it goes to the heart of the educational process. Second, Fischman enriches comparative education and teacher training research methodology by including a brilliant use of “portraiture research” and an insistence on the importance of context.

Based on research conducted in six Teacher Education Programs (TEPs) in Buenos Aires, Fischman begins his work by skillfully weaving a theoretical, historical, and sociological backdrop that not only allows the reader to better appreciate the Argentine teacher education case but also to explore identity formation, classrooms as gendered workplaces, and the production of “truths” about teachers and education. In particular, this book sets out to analyze critically factors that appear to limit the aspirations of teacher education students worldwide and to drive them from careers as teachers. Fischman asks, “What happens with students in teacher education programs that is so powerful to transform hope and a sense of vocation into despair? Are their original dreams an expression of a romantic vision of teaching? Are they developing some sort of false consciousness influenced by the media or extraordinary high expectations? Or is the sense of burnout a direct result of stressful working conditions and disagreement with their salaries? Perhaps, but there is more to it than that. A guiding hypothesis for this book is that gender dynamics are very important and often overlooked when the educational community seeks to provide answers to these questions” (pp. 4–5).

*Imagining Teachers* is a rich addition to the comparativist’s library, for it not only models the use of less traditional research methodologies but also anchors its research to an analysis of data obtained directly from teacher educators and their students. In Fischman’s words, “this project has employed ethnographic and sociohistorical perspectives as well as tools from image-based research that incorporated not only the speaking voice of the subjects involved in the institutional situations under study, but also alternative forms of expressing those voices. . . . The combination of procedures used in this study has permitted both an in-depth study of competing policy visions, and ideologies about gender, and an analysis of the interactions between students and the individuals that teach them in teacher education programs” (p. 57).

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In particular, Fischman’s use of “portraiture research” methodology not only enlarges our research options and appreciation of context but also provides us with an invaluable tool for understanding how education students perceive and experience social reality. An analysis of student drawings of both real and ideal classrooms indicated that students perceived their future classrooms as troubled locations filled with hopelessness, poverty, violence, and defiance of teachers’ authority, while ideal classrooms often reflected heroic defenders of enlightenment; idealized, powerful mothers; and all-loving teachers. For example, one teacher education student depicted teachers as being both donkeys and superheroes. In a drawing that portrayed the student’s perception of a real school in Argentina, we see a poor, dilapidated school, with teachers and students depicted as donkeys because the student educator felt they were dumb to support such a system. In contrast, this same student depicted an ideal classroom as a human figure supporting the world. The person (depicted as neither male nor female) had a look of hope and represented an empowered teacher as superhero. However, while student educators might have perceived their role as caring professionals within the ideal classroom, this image was often in sharp contrast to faculty perceptions, which often focused on what their students were not. They often saw these students as no longer from the middle class and less academically prepared than previous students. However, given the decline in numbers of students entering Argentine TEPs, this has left the faculty with a difficult decision. Either accept this “new” student or see their programs close.

As I read the book, I often reflected on the situation of my own university’s teacher education program and the challenges and opportunities that were similar to the Argentine case. However, this reflection has also led me to one substantial criticism of this book: the lack of an international comparative focus. In the introduction, Fischman suggests that “although this book analyzes data collected in teacher education programs in Argentina, thus dealing with particularities and local stories, it also shares common problems and challenges with teacher education programs in other contexts” (p. 11). While this may be so, it is left up to the reader to make these connections.

Moreover, while Fischman’s dissertation formed the basis of this book, it is unfortunate that more effort was not made to move beyond a dissertation format to one that would have embraced a broader teacher education audience. For example, the book devotes a great many pages to a very detailed description and analysis of Argentine education and history. While this detail certainly helps the reader appreciate the Argentine case, it might have been of more value if Fischman had devoted a greater portion of Imagining Teachers to the goals and frustrations of teacher education students in Argentina, for these are of great interest to teacher education practitioners worldwide. My fear is that these readers may not persevere through the earlier portions of the text in order to arrive at the very skillfully prepared chapter titled “Teacher Tango: Caring, Suffering, and Smiling.”

These shortcomings notwithstanding, Imagining Teachers remains a solid contribution to the field of teacher education and to improved methodology within the field of comparative education. It uses a multiform discourse format (including emotional, rational, spoken, written, and pictorial) to infuse gender dynamics into an analysis of teacher education programs, while allowing readers to better un-
derstand how teacher education students perceive the current realities of teacher education programs, as well as imagined alternative scenarios.

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When I saw this book, I was excited but cautious. My excitement came from my belief in the importance of more research on ethnicity, race, and nationality in education. If anyone ever doubted the necessity for research and practice to be more ethnically and racially sensitive, the events of September 11, 2001 serve as a reminder that there are differences in cultural perspectives that must be considered in attempting to understand different ethnic groups. I was cautious, however, because the book grew out of a series of an annual Rutgers Invitational Symposium on Education (I am always suspicious of the quality of work that comes from symposia), and the title claims “a global perspective.” I am also leery of books that make global claims with only a few perspectives represented, usually western European and Asian countries. My caution soon dissipated as I began to read the chapters in this book.

Although there are limited ethnic, racial, and national perspectives represented in this book and although the quality of the chapters is somewhat uneven, there is much in this book that is beneficial for comparative and international research. As we focus on particular countries or regions of the world, it is easy to forget to situate our research in the context of traditions and ways of knowing of those that we are examining.

The authors make a compelling case for the importance of considering ethnicity and race when conceptualizing educational achievement. These authors confront, in a way that is palatable to a range of readers, the debates regarding ethnicity and race as key concepts in notions of individual and collective identity. In their chapters about ethnicity and education, Douglas Foley (“Reconceptualizing Ethnicity and Educational Achievement”) and Sandra Tomlinson-Clarke (“Education and Identity within a Psychological and Social Context”) do this by addressing the historical and current discourses around these topics. The other authors provide an analysis of how these issues play out in China, Israel, Japan, South Africa, Ukraine, and Wales. All of these researchers include a historical perspective to guide the understanding of educational issues related to different ethnic groups, to provide a particular cultural context for understanding each group, and to present the often difficult tensions that ethnic and racial groups face in “accommodating without assimilating.” These are all issues that are often addressed in
comparative and international research but are often not used as key concepts. Ruth Hayhoe’s work on China, Nelly Stromquist’s research on women’s education, and James Anderson’s book on African-American education provide examples of research that thoroughly considers ethnicity, race, and culture. I hope my research in Hungary has also been sensitive to that culture. The authors of this book demonstrate that without appropriate historical and cultural perspective, research can be void and findings can be misguided.

The introduction by N. Ken Shimahara and the chapters by Foley and Tomlinson-Clarke are particularly enlightening, providing a broad overview of the dilemmas and debates on the issues of ethnicity and educational achievement. Foley’s work is particularly instructive, highlighting the contributions of ethnic ethnographers to changing the way that we perceive the educational achievement of ethnic youth. Although focused on diversity within U.S. society, Tomlinson-Clarke succeeds at outlining psychological and sociocultural influences on education and identity.

I learned much from reading this book and found only a few things that could have been done differently. For example, the book could have benefited from a different organizational structure. The content of some of the chapters would seem to lend themselves to different parts of the book. The Tomlinson-Clarke chapter would have fit better in part 1 or part 2, which deal with broader, contextual issues. The Vivian Wang chapter ("Confucianism and the Educational Process: A Comparative Analysis of Chinese and Chinese American Identity Development in Education"), on the other hand, would have been better placed in the country-specific section instead of among the contextual selections. Following the overview of the Shimahara introduction and the Foley chapter, another broader chapter would have strengthened readers’ understanding of the salient issues prior to delving into country-specific topics.

Additionally, I go back to my other note of caution. Because several of the case studies come from China and South Africa, the book could have benefited from perspectives from a wider variety of countries. We rarely have perspectives from ethnic and racial groups in countries like Australia, New Zealand, African countries besides South Africa, eastern European countries, Arab or Muslim countries, or even from western European countries. All too often, the focus of comparative and international research is too familiar. We do not have nearly enough opportunities to learn about tensions and conflicts around ethnic and racial issues in different countries. We do not have enough opportunities to make the strange familiar.

These issues aside, this book is a worthwhile addition to readers’ libraries and certainly a worthwhile resource in comparative and international education courses. I was especially pleased to see that the authors assert the importance of understanding cultural context in order to understand global educational issues. It is always good to read research that supports this perspective. Through my research with African Americans, I have repeatedly made the case for providing a cultural context for researching and developing educational programs (see Kassie Freeman, ed., *African American Culture and Heritage in Higher Education Research and Practice* [Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998]). When researchers and practitioners dismiss cultural context, they may devise ineffective educational programs. This
book demonstrates that in order to understand more fully how to develop effective educational programs, ethnicity, race, and nationality must be taken into account.

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Fourteen papers selected from nearly 700 presentations made at the tenth Congress of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (CIES) in South Africa in 1998 compose the book *Education, Equity and Transformation*. These papers address a wide range of issues, including educational policy changes, curriculum development, higher education, theoretical concerns, citizenship education, and gender equity. Although a comparative approach was supposedly employed as a method of analysis in these papers, there is little apparent evidence of this. However, the main strength of this book is its emphasis on policy implications for achieving educational equity and transformation. Educational issues span all levels of educational practices covering a variety of contexts and concerns in different countries. The content, format, and methodology of these papers are wide ranging, and while they are extremely interesting, it is this diversity that makes them seem somewhat disjointed.

Among the papers compiled in this book, three interesting themes emerge as noteworthy. These three common themes are the guidance of neoliberal principles for policy reform, the relevance of theory to educational policy formation, and the impact of international discourse on educational development.

Four papers fit under the first theme. They discuss and analyze how the neoliberal principles of the market shape educational reform policies and how these policies affect the reconstruction of society and educational opportunities across gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. In particular, the paper by David N. Plank and Gary Sykes highlights the relationship between parental choice policies, such as the voucher system, and the free-market principles in the United States. They argue that education reform based on freedom of choice may ultimately result in a more modern form of school segregation. Their paper notes that states employing the free-market school reform ideologies fail to resolve the age-old question of how a free-market approach to education helps to achieve both equity and accountability in schools. The other articles by Fhulu Nekhwevha, George Subotzky, and Shirley Walters analyze how globalization has impacted educational policies in South Africa, where education is considered critical for economic development and social reconstruction in the postapartheid period. For example, the forces of globalization have clearly delineated a new hierarchy by implementing polices of nationwide testing in basic and secondary education and, further, by choosing English as the medium of instruction. In these cases, those with access...
to better education remain advantaged and form the candidate pool of those entering into the more elite universities. Moreover, research approaches and policies favor privileged elite universities, where the students and faculty are predominantly white. The authors of these papers express concerns that education policy changes have reversed the effects of multiculturalism and have negated efforts to reclaim native language and culture. The net effect of these changes has been a decrease in the social mobility of disadvantaged groups in South Africa.

The second theme of the book highlights the relationship between theory and educational policy formation. Four papers address how different theories contribute to research, curriculum development, and policy development. Rosa Nidia Buenfil Burgos’s paper raises concerns about the withdrawal of theory in educational research and policy debates. She contends that epistemological debates are the bedrock of critical knowledge and underlie ethics in educational policy making. The current lack of research-based arguments implies that the cult of efficiency is possibly tied to hidden political agendas in policy development. Alicia De Alba’s paper ambitiously asks a difficult question about the relationship between curriculum and society in the Western academic context, where coherent social subjects, endowed with reason and freedom, have been fundamentally challenged by subjects constituted by multiple identities. She suggests the notion of a contemporary subject positioned in a constantly changing society should replace the fluid identity of the subject. Through a particular positionality, social subjects are able to construct their meanings and communicate with one another in an emergent public sphere constituted by frequent, deep, and diverse cultural interactions. The positionality of a subject, therefore, is the key to a socially conscious curriculum. Despite De Alba’s conceptual effort, the notion of how a contemporary subject can be reorganized and appropriated in curriculum development in the Mexican context remains vague.

Leon Tikly’s essay proposes a postcolonial perspective to expand our understanding of the nature, origins, and weaknesses and strengths of comparative education research. He suggests a way to reread globalization in order to recapture how racism, culture, language, and curriculum have been appropriated to legitimate the emergent global order in a postcolonial context. Changu Mannathoko’s paper discusses the spectrum of feminist thought in educational literature regarding gender inequity issues in eastern and southern African countries. She argues that although feminist thoughts have grown out of the northern hemisphere, the roots of feminism can also be found in the South, where individual researchers have visualized women’s oppression and have attempted to employ a variety of feminist theories to explain and solve gender inequity in their societies.

The third theme of this book is concerned with the influences of various international discourses on educational policy formation. International discourses of education play an important, yet controversial, role in expanding and reforming educational services in many countries. The expansion of basic education, improvement of girls’ education, reconstruction of higher education, development of continuing education, and lifelong learning (LLL) are each discussed in several articles in relation to international discourse. Karl Weber and Jurgen Wittporth compare continuing education programs in Germany and Switzerland to show how the development of continuing education policies has resulted from the interplay
between international discourses and the sociocultural and political traditions of each country. Essentially, LLL has been primarily promoted by international agencies. Two papers discuss LLL with contrary approaches. Rosemary Preston argues that it is more conservative and rhetorical because it serves the market more than the individual’s development and empowerment. Walters, in contrast, explores the emancipatory potential of LLL strategies in terms of empowering people who envision a more democratic and inclusive society in South Africa.

Claudia Mitchell, Marilyn Blaeser, Barbara Chilangwa, and Irene M. Mambilwa-Sinyangwe and coauthors discuss how international discourse contributes to promoting girls’ education in Zambia. They suggest that a participatory process of policy making that involves all relevant educational stakeholders is needed to change the gendered nature of schooling. Their study concludes that the existence of an international discourse, a critical mass, a wide range of stakeholders, and active local nongovernmental organizations are important for leveraging fundamental changes in educational policy. Within the framework of human rights and gender equity, Margaret Sutherland calls for comparative research to better understand gender inequity issues. She argues that the gender inequity outcome is reinforced by several common factors—employment prospects in relation to educational levels as well as attitudes of peer groups, teachers, staff, parents, and society—that are found in her research. She also warns that a naive comparison between the achievements of male and female students cannot fully capture, let alone solve, the gender inequity problem.

Overall, this book provides valuable analyses on how interaction between macrostructural forces and hegemonic discourses shape educational policy development in different countries.

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Brian Street’s edited volume is part of the Literacies series, of which David Barton (Lancaster University) is overall editor. This fifth volume in the series provides an excellent addition to the study of literacy practices by interdisciplinary research at the crossroads of ethnography and linguistics. The series addresses the rapidly changing uses of the printed word in all social, economic, and technological spheres, especially education, the workplace, the media, and, of course, everyday life. The authors in this edited volume respond to a common point of departure that considers literacy as a social practice and seeks to situate it within broader contexts. The volumes are intended to be accessible, interdisciplinary, and international in scope as well as to cover a wide range of social and institutional contexts. The editorial board of the series includes some of the best-known ethnographic
researchers and scholars in the English-speaking world, whose study of literacy complements and challenges those of us coming from more comparative and international education backgrounds or from the sociology of education. It further challenges those of us who have careers in international organizations where simplification and slogans frequently exhort countries to respect “literacy for all” or “education for all” without undue concern for literacy practices and needs among potential learners of all ages.

Indeed, Street’s introduction begins with the affirmation that many literacy projects are developed by so-called literacy experts and planners with clear assumptions about the uses of literacy and its benefits. I have had the opportunity to work with individuals such as David Barton (Great Britain), Mary Hamilton (United Kingdom), Peter Freebody (Australia), Anthony Welch (Australia), Martin Prinsloo, Carol Bloch (South Africa), and certainly Brian Street (Great Britain) and a number of the authors in this current volume. A considerable number of them participated in the 1998 Language and Literacy Commission of the World Congress of Comparative Education Societies in Cape Town, South Africa, for which UNESCO BREDa published my edited volume of the proceedings (Leslie Limage, ed., *Comparative Perspectives on Language and Literacy* [Dakar: UNESCO-BREDa, 1999]). This commission, like the outstanding Street volume under review, provided the opportunity to confront ethnographic approaches to literacy and the difference between literacy programs and projects grounded in actual practice with those imposed by a particular “sell” methodology or prepackaged approach. As Street argues, the dominant approach to accounts of literacy programs remains effectiveness, based on some statistical measure of skill outcomes and attendance, and an assumed correlation with development indicators such as health, economic takeoff, or small business development. Increasingly, international organizations immodestly associate literacy and basic education (literacy in primary schools in organizational “Education for All” language) with poverty alleviation, sustainable development, elimination of social exclusion, and HIV/AIDS prevention.

Ethnographers in this volume and those who inspire their work insist on a radical rethinking of what counts as literacy in the development context. As Street has personally demonstrated, the gap between literacy theory and practice must be grounded in a complex, more current analysis. In terms of internationalization and economic distribution, ethnographers see new orders suggesting that the phases of economic growth and development are shifting, indeed, that in specific contexts in the developing world, they never actually occur as classically described. Street, Gee, and others see a New Work Order around shifting forms of production to niche markets. And of course, Street reviews his own autonomous and ideological models of literacy, which have made a major mark on ethnographic research since the publication of his volume *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

The current volume is a collection of case studies of literacy projects around the world. The case studies include studies on India, Namibia, Eritrea, the Peruvian Amazon, Ghana, Bangladesh, China, and Pakistan. The chapters examine a wide cross-section of contextual themes: literacy, schooling, and development; multilingual literacies; ideology and teaching methodologies; women’s literacy and health; household literacy environments; and literacies, gender, and power. The contrib-
tors include Sheila Aikman, Archana Choksi, Priti Chopra, Caroline Dyer, Pat Herbert, Bryan Maddox, Uta Papen, Clinton Robinson, Anna Robinson-Pant, Regie Stites, Martha Wagar Wright, and Shirin Zubair. The afterward is written by Alan Rogers, a long-standing figure in education in development issues, particularly adult education and literacy. Each of the authors studies the multiple literacies embedded in social practices in specific contexts. They describe their complex interaction, relations of contestation, dominance, marginalization, and uses. Above all, the authors ask (with respect to the role of literacy and the social constructions of knowledge based on complex uses of language), what can development mean in the specific contexts that ethnographers examine? They also question their own relations with the people that they observe and with whom they interact.

Comparative and international education remains a field open to the widest possible group of disciplines. Some of us have expressed early concern, myself included, that concentration on the specific without a clear statement of larger political, economic, and social assumptions or frameworks would lead to naive suggestions and policies. Our fears have proven groundless. The possibility remains, but the dangers of a single approach that suits all are even greater. Volumes such as this one should be strongly recommended reading in comparative education courses for alternate approaches as well as to observe the distance that the field has come within the past 10–15 years. The authors, especially the series editor and the volume editor, have further bridged a long-standing personal research and practical concern in looking at both industrialized and developing country literacy issues as parts of the same larger fabric. While the concern for local literacies may have begun in industrialized countries such as the United Kingdom, it has certainly been thoughtfully carried forward around the world. It has much to offer development agendas regardless of where they are set.

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Robin Alexander’s aspirations for this long book are monumental: he sets out to document how culture affects classroom processes, using as examples the cultures of England, France, India, Russia, and the United States. The study on which the book is based “sought to describe, illuminate and explain primary education in five countries in terms of ideas about culture and power, schools, curriculum and pedagogy” (p. 271). For attempting to tackle an empirical task of such scale, Alexander deserves considerable credit, whether or not the book lives up to its promise, captures national cultures well or accurately, or reflects these cultures in the classroom.

How well has he captured the five cultures? Since the watershed events of
September 11, 2001, I have observed the enduring architecture of U.S. culture reemerge: I see community, teamwork, patriotism, resilience, and tolerance, as well as elements of intolerance, fear, a loss of trust, and a quest for justice. The individualism that Alexander notes as central to U.S. culture, through words such as “decentralization,” “local accountability,” and “the dominant values of freedom, individualism, self-help and anti-statism,” is scarcely evident. Did Alexander miss something important that was triggered by tragedy, or are national cultures and institutions fragile in the face of external shock? Are there latent features of the other four cultures that are not revealed through the research? These questions are difficult to answer but should inform the reader.

The book includes five parts of varying length titled “Settings” (the comparative education context), “Systems, Policies and Histories” (descriptions of the primary education system in each of the five countries), “Schools” (descriptions of schools in each of the five countries), “Classrooms” (comparisons of pedagogy among the countries), and “Reflections.” Nowhere is there a chapter on “Cultures.” Alexander recognizes that he has, in effect, written two books: one on comparative education (the first three parts on the school and the state) and one on comparative pedagogy (the last two parts on teaching and learning). He is more successful with the latter than with the former.

One reason for this is that there is no obvious audience for the first half of the book. Alexander notes that the book is directed toward British educationalists to help inform and improve British primary education by placing it in an international context. Comparativists may be particularly disappointed by the brevity of the country chapters, and specialists may find more serious faults. Having written on education in both the United States and India (Primary Education in India [Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1997]), I felt dissatisfied by selected portions of the chapters on both countries. Students of development education will find Alexander’s treatment of this literature limited, although the inclusion of India and Russia is justified for reasons familiar to that group of scholars: “the condition of children in India or Russia is more globally representative than that of children in England, France or the United States” (p. 45).

The second half of the book, which treats classroom practice in the five countries and seeks to link this practice to qualities of national culture, is more successful. But the limited treatment of culture and the relatively modest database are troubling. The data come from fieldwork in 30 schools in five countries, plus an additional “sixty or so” English schools. During these visits, 166 instructional lessons were observed, annotated, and recorded on videotape (20 lessons in France, 19 in India, 33 in Russia, 19 in the United States, and 75 in England), of which six to nine from each country (for a total of 36) were transcribed. The analyses focus on 40 lessons—eight language and mathematics lessons in two grades in each of the five countries—but does not indicate the balance of lessons, subjects, and grades. Moreover, some analyses are based on subsets of these 40 lessons.

How representative are the classrooms chosen for study? Alexander mentions that he selected “a range of schools which included both small and large, and rural, urban, suburban and inner city” (p. 268). But a comparativist might argue that Delhi, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh are no more representative of India than is Michigan of the United States or Nice and
Paris of France. Finding six representative schools in countries the size of those studied would be, in any case, very difficult.

Are the observations valid measures of genuine classroom practice? The use of videotape technology certainly biased the observations in some classes. Alexander asserts that “teachers and children acclimatize remarkably quickly to observers and cameras, especially if the camera remains on its tripod rather than roams the room on someone’s shoulder” (p. 277). This may be true for students in developed countries where cameras are ubiquitous, but for students in India, the unfamiliar is endlessly distracting. A scan of the photos at the end of the book shows children in India glancing at the camera or something just off-camera. I have little doubt that these children and their teachers never acclimatized to the presence of cameras or researchers and that as a consequence the behaviors observed were stylized rather than representative of ongoing instructional practice.

At the same time, Alexander has provided extremely rich descriptions of the classroom practices he did observe, beginning in chapter 10 and continuing for the next 250 pages of the book. Here, I think, most readers will find Alexander’s unpacking of the black box of the classroom both thought provoking and informative. Chapter 11 begins with a summary of 16 videotaped lessons, which he uses to demonstrate the differences among the countries in terms of how lessons are characterized according to time frame, duration, and structure—analogized in musical terms in chapter 12. Chapter 13 describes the organization, task, and activity of classrooms and presents the beginning of analysis whereby the countries are compared. In chapter 14, the analysis turns to topics of differentiation and assessment and compares the five countries again on these dimensions. Chapter 15 deals with classroom interaction, time, and pace; Alexander reports that most interactions in the U.S. classrooms involved individuals, whereas most interactions in India and Russia involved the whole class. Chapter 16 deals with learning discourse and provides extended samples of classroom dialogue from the five countries. These chapters will stimulate reflection and offer a window on classrooms typically inaccessible to most monolingual speakers of English.

But, at the end of the day, I am unconvinced that Alexander has achieved his goals—“to uncover relationships within education systems between the state and the educational practice conducted in its name” (p. 271)—because I am unconvinced that he has managed to uncover the deep architecture of the cultures that he has sought to reveal. Nevertheless, I do find that his work contributes to our better understanding of the nature of teaching and learning, and it should be welcome in that regard.

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BOOK REVIEWS


The Strategies for Advancing Girls Education monographs are investigations of girls education programs that provide models and frameworks for education planners and practitioners. These monographs are suitable for individuals who are beginning to explore efforts to expand access to and/or quality of girls basic education programs because they provide straightforward conceptions of girls education programs. Andrea Rugh and Karen Tietjen systematically and comprehensively incorporate development organization project information, personal interviews and field experiences, and current empirical literature to present an exhaustive list of girls education projects as well as to devise several frameworks to define challenges and possible solutions for girls education projects. The two monographs prove complementary, as Tietjen further develops Rugh’s recommendations to enlist multisectoral support for girls education.

In Starting Now: Strategies for Helping Girls Complete Primary, Rugh’s goal is not merely to provide a survey of girls education but also to add depth to the current discussion. While she highlights key concerns about girls education, her methodology limits this discussion. Throughout the monograph, Rugh’s rationale is “a simple one . . . higher development returns to national investment . . . accompany education of girls” (p. 3). Yet, Rugh wrestles with the problem that personal returns to the girl and her family continue to lag behind societal returns. As this implicit rationale is translated into the objectives of girls education programs, it limits the scope and therefore effectiveness of the programs by not viewing girls as individuals in their own right but rather as “mothers of development” (p. 32). Does the framing of this rationale contribute to the regressive figure that keeps girls from attending or completing school, as girls are viewed as the means to, rather than the objective of, these educational policies initiatives?

Rugh provides a framework for understanding the main constraints to girls education and utilizes program initiatives as examples to formulate strategies. In chapter 2, she identifies constraints that affect girls’ participation and retention in primary school: accessibility of opportunities, parental attitudes toward girls education, and girls’ own attitudes about participation in school. Chapter 3 addresses these constraints by introducing initiatives in various countries, largely carried out by nongovernmental organizations.

After presenting the various initiatives, chapter 4 proposes basic strategies to increase girls’ participation cost effectively: to expand children’s schooling opportunities, to improve the capacity of programs to increase skill levels, and to provide relevant, practical content with the potential to enhance development goals. Taking the four strategies into consideration, Rugh identifies two implementation models. The process model is designed to “solve individual development problems through a series of steps that include all partners in the process of..."
identifying, defining, addressing and improving education opportunities” (p. 124). Second, the accountability model restructures educational institutions into a quasi-market forces mode that emphasizes the girl as the main client. Rugh believes that if both models were to be “used in conjunction . . . [they] can serve as a framework for solving long-term education problems” (p. 124). She asserts that reform is “likely to prove more appropriate and gain wider acceptance” (p. 129) if political will and policy dialogues are increased. For example, policy makers could be encouraged to “broaden the dialogue” (p. 129) by experimenting and gauging the success of smaller experiential projects at the local level before replicating the policy or program on a national level.

The strength of these strategies and implementation models lies in the conceptual framework of how they can and should be implemented. Nevertheless, Rugh explains that most projects are not as effective as they could be because they do not follow through with all of the steps. Therefore, it seems worthwhile to spend some time exploring the reasons for the lack of follow-through in the model. Does it need to be adjusted? Or does a revised model that incorporates missing considerations need to be developed to provide the desired results? Specific examples to aid the reader in visualizing the process of linking these models to constraints, initiatives, implementation, and evaluative processes would greatly increase the efficacy of these proposed models.

Although it is not Rugh’s intent to provide in-depth information, the limited analytical input available to assist the reader in understanding the quality (process, reach, sustainability, and comparison across projects) of the programs described restricts the validity of projects. Rugh recommends that the reader draw “a matrix of possible actions for solving specific problems” by comparing the constraints discussed earlier with the initiatives listed to “help reveal gaps in the accumulated wisdom requiring innovative approaches” (p. 47). However, she does not provide sufficient information to engage the reader in this exercise. Additionally, Rugh includes four case studies of projects, partially funded by United States Agency for International Development, which grapple with different primary education issues. However, she makes no comment on the quality of the programs mentioned in the cases except to say that the “(cases) were chosen because they were large-scale efforts to deal with issues believed to be significant in enrolling and keeping girls in school” (p. 131). While these cases provide interesting examples, it is not readily apparent how they demonstrate Rugh’s suggested frameworks for successful initiatives. Rugh does recognize this shortcoming by stating that one of the concerns in reviewing initiatives is the paucity of data, which probably results from the lack of candor in most project documentation.

Rugh concludes with an emphasis on the need to create transportable, low-cost, and flexible programs. She believes that these programs will ensure obvious private returns for girls, thereby resulting in increased participation and overall returns to the nation. She speaks of the need for governments to widen the pool of resources from which they draw to include talent, expertise, and funding.

Tietjen’s monograph on Multisectoral Support of Basic and Girls’ Education describes the roles and motivations of business, religious, and media sectors in educational initiatives. Her theoretical framework posits that governments have limited resources and recommends multisectoral support for girls education. However,
instead of encouraging the state to develop innovative strategies to augment current resources with private support, the message is to shift the burden of responsibility from the state to the business, media, and religious sectors. What are the implications of this message?

Well-structured chapters allow the reader to scan across the sectors and to discern similarities (e.g., motivations, financing, etc.). Each chapter begins with a historical background on the roles played by a given sector of the education field. Tietjen gives a current overview of the sector’s support for education, specifically the efforts for girls education. Next, she turns to the practical implementation and financing of programs and activities, and she concludes with considerations, constraints, and challenges in each sector. She defines the categories of multisectoral support as policy advocacy, opinion making, and service provision. Tietjen then provides historical, multisectoral initiatives from the United States, Canada, and Europe as examples of traditional sectoral involvement in basic education, which are insightful for international audiences.

Tietjen briefly mentions the involvement of essential civil society stakeholders in her multisectoral definition, but they are noticeably missing from her conceptual framework. Using the “locus of decision making and source of funding” as requisites, she filters out most activities by secular organizations or nonbusiness-founded nongovernmental organizations, community service organizations, and community-based organizations since they are “recipients” rather than “sources of funding” (p. 6). She also omits the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation from the discussion. The absence of these critical partners from her framework leaves an overly simplified model of multisectoral support.

Within this abbreviated multisectoral context of business, media, and religious organizations, Tietjen presents generally accepted views on sector motives and involvement in education. She points out that each sector has explicit motivations that tend to promote traditional roles and stereotypes of girls and women. However, she does not discuss whether these sectors will be expected to change in light of the paucity of current projects that bring together girls education and the business, media, and religious sectors. What possible incentives could be used to create new innovative models and ideas for multisectoral support to create gender-equitable and transformative education programs?

The three sectors reflect a bias, as they represent supply-side rather than demand-side attitudes when it comes to the aforementioned support. On the other hand, communities and schools are not incorporated as active stakeholders into the framework. Therefore, they appear vulnerable and lacking in demand-side impetus to influence these multisectoral arrangements. It might be useful to include schools in the framework in order to offer a more realistic picture of multisectoral relationships.

Tietjen refers to possible abuses of commercialization of the classroom to suit corporate rather than student’s needs (p. 88) and the media’s “perverse affects” through mixed messages about females’ roles in society (p. 220). How is this different from government or development agencies’ implicit rationales to improve development indicators—societal returns by purporting that the focus and the benefits are for the girl and her family?

Because of her extensive presentation of initiatives, Tietjen limits her ability
to describe thoroughly the process through which the linkages between the three sectors and the education sector are made, leaving the reader curious about the details of the process and effectiveness of these initiatives. Tietjen cautions the reader early on that the book is not a “how-to” (p. 9) guide, yet the monograph’s value would be enhanced with a basic level of introduction to the process and ways to initiate the connections and relationships that are valuable to practitioners and policy makers. Although the initiatives themselves prove insightful, it would have been constructive if there were further analysis on the possibility of expanding on these and other initiatives mentioned. How can previous barriers be lifted to design more effective and sustainable multisectoral initiatives?

Both monographs are suitable for readers who are novices to the field of girls education and multisectoral support and who would benefit from an overview on initiatives in these areas. As a primer, the monographs act as an excellent resource and a solid springboard (through the extensive bibliographies, Web site links, and many initiatives) for further investigation. Furthermore, they provide general frameworks and approaches that are useful to consider in strategizing effective policies or programs for girls education.

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It has been a little over 10 years since Germany and Europe ceased to be divided by the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain, respectively. The study of educational systemic change in the wake of this transformation received wide attention then. This initial attention has waned as the events of 1989 and its aftermath faded from the headline news, but it ought not. For, in studying the unification of the two Germanys, we can gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics and effects of system-wide, large-scale reform. For scholars of educational reform in particular, the case of (East) Germany affords us an unparalleled view of how the imposition of a comprehensive educational system with new guiding philosophies, educational goals, curricula, methods, organizational structures, and behavior codes has shaped educators’ and students’ beliefs, attitudes, and practices. Such a view could be particularly useful for those believing that educational ills ought to be cured with systemic reforms, a point that I made in the article “Changing Core Beliefs and Practices through Systemic Reform: The Case of Germany after the Fall of Socialism” (Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis 21, no. 3 [1999]: 271–96).
David Phillips of Oxford University has edited a book on education in Germany that is a valuable source for those who want to know more about the case and for those who want to catch up with events 10 years after unification. The book contains nine chapters written by a cast of young and established authors. The editor’s introduction frames the pattern that traverses the subsequent chapters: swift comprehensive institutional transformation was coupled with a social psychology of disillusion and trauma and with astounding continuities of practice.

In the chapters following the introduction, E. J. Neather and Stephanie Wilde render a nuanced picture of this pattern as it applies to teachers. Clearly, they show that individuals, depending on their previous biographies, find different ways to adapt to the new system. Bitterness and defensiveness prevail. Left with little choice, most adapt swiftly and pragmatically to the new order. Some construct astounding subjective continuities through the objective ruptures. Although they have begun to enjoy new personal autonomy, they mourn the vanishing of the collectives that anchored their lives. To them, the new order in school and society appears colder, more formalized, and more individualized, less “Gemeinschaft” and more “Gesellschaft.” Status anxieties are pervasive. Since the full benefits of the new system have not materialized as of yet, most are skeptical. It is striking to me how thoroughly confusing and taxing the transformation must have been for teachers and how these processes transcended individuals’ rational meaning-making capacity. And yet, even if doubts, resentments, and contradictions are pervasive, job commitment and performance motivation are said to be high. The chapters offer a few explanations for this: traditional attachments of German Democratic Republic (GDR) teachers to their work; new opportunities for self-expression; compensation for status anxiety in contrast to putatively sleeker, but less committed Western colleagues; or the fear of becoming redundant from cutbacks because of horrendous fertility declines among East German women after the {Wende}.

The chapter by Bernhard Streitwieser embeds these sentiments into the public debate on schools. In a nice review of research on East German schools and influential opinion pieces in the print media, he shows that the current discussion is stuck. Rather than capitalizing on emotional distance to the GDR and the immediate events of the {Wende}, today’s debates reproduce old fault lines, stereotypes, and accusations. Charges of reform and democracy deficits, according to Streitwieser, are overdrawn by those who cannot bury the hatchet over the old GDR. The accused attribute these arguments to Western arrogance and eastern fringe. Streitwieser, from his detached U.S. perspective, pleads for a debate that is more balanced and constructive, taking as its point of departure the institutional and cultural amalgam of East and West in today’s school reality.

Higher education institutions experienced a fate quite different from primary and secondary schools. While schools maintained personnel continuity to a large extent, in higher education institutional restructuring was accompanied by an exchange of personnel. Nina Arnhold gives a brief overview of the reform process. A key institution in the restructuring was the federal Science Council that was charged to evaluate the performance of East German higher education institutions. Phillips was personally involved in the work of the council. He describes how the council operated in the area of teacher education and how those subjected to its evaluations reacted. His is a tale of unclear mandates, missed opportunities, and
empathy for the ones likely “condemned” to be unemployed. According to his account, while the council was charged to deliberate the quality of educational services, political decision makers were determined to align formal structures.

In the last two chapters of the book, Hubert Ertl and Rosalind Pritchard, respectively, describe the state of vocational education and instruction in matters of religion and ethics. As to vocational education, transformation was eased by the common tradition of the dual system of vocational education in both East and West Germany. Alignment with the West required some institutional restructuring in the East, most notably the takeover of formerly company-run vocational schools by the states and municipalities and the marketization of the relationship between employer and apprentice. But in this sector challenges of institutional restructuring pale in the face of a general collapse of the East German economic base, which has resulted in a persistent shortage of apprenticeships and youth unemployment.

The issue of religion in schools touches on the tension between church and state that has defined institutional arrangements for schooling in many countries. Pritchard reports on an interesting experiment in one state that attempted to accommodate the widespread atheism of the population and the constitutional rights of the churches to religious instruction in public schools by way of introducing a secular new subject: life skills, ethics, and religion. She analyzes how this subject found wide acceptance among parents and students but was ultimately disapproved of or rejected by the churches.

In sum, the book contains a wealth of information on the current situation of East German education. Containing much description and a collage of anecdotal evidence, it is an easy and enjoyable read. Some of the chapters could have benefited from more focus. Sometimes what the authors were trying to accomplish was not entirely clear: did they want to describe, or did they want to evaluate the process as to its fairness or success? The book does not provide, and probably does not want to provide, theoretical conclusions that might have made the findings from the East German case more generally applicable. But it is an account of East German developments 10 years or so after unification that is worth reading.

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