

Book Reviews

The Art of Educational Evaluation: A Personal View

Elliot W. Eisner
Philadelphia

Taylor & Francis, Inc. (Falmer Press),
1985

—Reviewed by Gerald V. Teague, Bureau of Educational Research and Field Services, University of Maryland, College Park.

Quantitative measurement of outcomes as the exclusive assessment approach is challenged by Eisner in his autobiographical view of education evaluation. From his vantage point, overemphasis on the scientific aspect of evaluation, particularly the focus on test scores, distorts assessment and creates an imbalance in curriculum development. Drawing on his humanities background, Eisner argues persuasively for inclusion of "artistic" judgment as a complement to traditional measures. Basic premises underlying conventional evaluation methodology are questioned and alternatives offered. Education evaluation is redefined to incorporate a values orientation, and the evaluator portrayed as a "connoisseur" of student endeavors. A thought-provoking work for practitioner and researcher.

Available from Taylor & Francis, Inc., 242 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19106-1906, for \$25.00.

Sandbox Society: Early Education in Black and White America

Sally Lubek
Philadelphia

Taylor & Francis, Inc. (Falmer Press),
1985

—Reviewed by Wesley Little, Northern Michigan University, Marquette.

By using ethnographic research, Sally Lubek provides new insights into how young children acquire cultural and social identity. Lubek compares the divergent preschool experiences of black Head Start and white middle-class children to develop her theory of

cultural transmission and enculturation. She identifies the child-rearing strategies of female teachers in both education settings and describes how those strategies enculturate children. The "sandbox" is symbolic of common experiences shared by all children as they learn and grow.

Written in a research format, *Sandbox Society* compels the reader to reexamine preconceived ideas on the effects of schooling on young children. For educators interested in the cognitive, social, or cultural development of children, *Sandbox Society* offers some fresh concepts and an excellent review of related literature.

Available from Taylor & Francis, Inc., 242 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19106-1906, for \$24.00 (hardcover) and \$12.00 (paper).

Teachers' Lives and Careers

Edited by S. Ball and I. Goodson
Philadelphia

Taylor & Francis, Inc. (Falmer Press),
1985

—Reviewed by Jerrold Hopfengardner, University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio.

Isolation, euphoria, frustration, and collegiality are the emotions of today's teachers—dramatically yet realistically described at St. Hilda's College, Oxford, in 1983. School administrators, teachers, and teacher educators will find this book reflective of concerns that contemporary classroom teachers must reconcile to maintain mental equilibrium in their personal and professional lives.

Teachers' Lives and Careers, viewed from sociological, psychological, and pedagogical perspectives, analyzes career development stages through which education practitioners evolve. The offerings in this book intimately describe critical incidences in the everyday lives of today's classroom teachers. Through this kaleidoscope of teachers' lives, the reader experiences teachers' feelings of success/failure,

growth/stagnation, optimism/depression, and acceptance/rejection. Analyses suggest how the institution, peers, the public, authority figures, and students affect the daily lives and careers of educators. Although case example explanations are based on the British education system, Western world educators in general can identify with these poignant accounts.

Educators and laypersons concerned with supporting the day-to-day lives of teachers will find this book insightful.

Available from Taylor & Francis, Inc., 242 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19106-1906, for \$29.00 (hardcover) and \$17.00 (paperback).

Tales Out of School: A Teacher's Candid Account from the Front Lines of the American High School Today

Patrick Welsh

Edited and with an introduction by
Dan Morgan
New York

Viking/Elisabeth Sifton, 1986

—Reviewed by Neil Postman, New York University.

An illuminating way to grasp the import of this book is to read it in tandem with another book, the late John Holt's *How Children Fail*. Published 22 years ago, Holt's book is a description of how the standard operating procedures of an American classroom work to inflict on the young the twin nemeses of fear and boredom. The classroom, Holt concluded, is a stupefying place, and his book inspired a Niagara of similar complaints, many of which offered specific alternatives to prevailing practices. The idea was to make schooling better through more imaginative and relevant materials and methods.

Now comes Patrick Welsh with what might be called an update. As Holt was, Welsh is a classroom teacher, a

man of integrity, realistic perceptions, a fondness for children, and a straightforward style of exposition. But the story he has to tell is as different from Holt's as Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* is from Kafka's *Metamorphosis*.

Welsh is an English teacher at a fairly typical suburban school, T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, Virginia. His book grew out of a series of nine articles he wrote for *The Washington Post* in 1983-84. It is not entirely clear to me if Welsh intended his title—*Tales Out of School*—to suggest a double meaning but, in truth, his book is only marginally about what goes on inside an American school. It is mostly about what has been going on outside of school. To be precise, the main impression one gets from these tales is not that American schools are unfit for our children but that the perverse culture in which our children live makes them unfit for school.

John Holt's book was a plea to improve schools, written at a time when it was plausible to believe that by improving the classroom, education and schooling could be brought to some reasonable accommodation. Patrick Welsh's book suggests that this is now a forlorn hope. Without excessive theorizing and in vivid detail, he shows us youth who are over-sexed, over-drugged, and under-cared-for. He tells about a mother who phones the school to request a guidance counselor to tell her son he can't take the car on the next weekend. He tells about kids whose parents actually encourage them to drink liquor. He tells about 121 of the school's girls who had become pregnant since the previous year. One of them got pregnant in April, had an abortion in June, got pregnant again in August, had an abortion in September, became pregnant again in November, and had another abortion in December. The Family Life teacher at a local junior high school reports that the conversations of 14-year-olds sound like those of her 30-year-old friends. A school nurse adds, "I've seen girls you'd want to have as

your daughter in here debating among themselves the advantages of oral sex." On the substance of that debate, a high school senior tells Welsh, "The message is, 'It's okay, Prince does it.'"

In his most devastating two paragraphs, Welsh summarizes the facts of a youth culture that attacks the foundations of school. Perhaps you will agree with me that the following description is closer to a Kafkaesque nightmare than to a Twainian journey of discovery.

"By the time kids reach their teens, they're beginning to be drawn into a youth culture that competes with schools and families for their time and attention. Huck Finn would rub his eyes in disbelief at the lives of fourteen-year-olds these days. Huck never sneaked out of school to watch rock video on TV, take drugs or engage in casual sex in the homes of fathers and mothers who (in the case of our clientele) are often off saving the country and the world at the Pentagon, Capitol Hill, or other Washington power centers.

"We have thirteen-year-old kids who drink heavily at parties and throw up in the bushes in some of Alexandria's most prestigious neighborhoods. Older kids often party through the weekend at houses from which parents seem to have disappeared. Alcohol flows, drugs are routinely available and there are plenty of empty beds upstairs."

In the face of all this, one would expect that Welsh has no alternative but to seek work in another field. After all, John Holt eventually concluded that schools are unfixable and turned his attention to the problems of non-school learning. But Welsh is made of—well, let us say—sterner stuff. The tone of his book, particularly at its end, is courageous and optimistic. It is clear that Welsh will stay in his classroom doing honorable and humane things until it is emptied of all but the Visigoths. Even then, he may stay a while. Which is why when I came to his last page, I was comforted by the charming delusion that if we could only get

10,000 Patrick Welshes into our classrooms, things might yet turn out all right.

Available from Viking/Elisabeth Sifton, 40 West 23rd St., New York, NY 10010, for \$15.95.

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