



Hutchings, M. (2010). Review of *Industrial Relations in Education: Transforming the School Workforce*. *Workplace*, 17, 109-115.

Review of *Industrial Relations in Education: Transforming the School Workforce* by Bob Carter, Howard Stevenson, and Rowena Passy (Routledge, 2010)

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When I first heard that the majority of the teacher unions meet with the government once a week to develop policy related to teachers, and that their discussions are confidential, such that the union leaders cannot seek their members' views on ongoing topics of discussion, I was astonished. And I have found that teachers and other educationalists have had a similar reaction. Yet the Social Partnership of unions, employers and government is responsible for a wide range of policies that affect all schools and teachers, including workforce modelling, restructuring of responsibility posts and performance management, and is a significant development in government-union relations. I therefore welcome the publication of this book, which explores the workings of the Social Partnership and the workforce reforms they have introduced.

The book reports the results of an ESRC-funded research project, 'Workforce remodelling, teacher trade unionism and school-based industrial relations' (RES_062-23_0034_A). The first chapter introduces themes that underpin the analysis. First, the authors argue that it is critical that school workforce reforms in England are viewed in a global context in which education is seen as a way to develop skills which are key to competing in a globalised market, and there has been a shift to more functional curricula combined with a pressure to assess and improve performance. Secondly, they argue for the use of a labour process analysis to examine the changing nature of teachers' work in England. And thirdly, they argue that the neo-liberal restructuring of State education, and the impact of this on teachers' work, will not go unchallenged, and that in a highly unionised workforce, teachers will engage with educational reforms through their unions. Three potential teacher union responses are outlined: 'resistance' through which teacher unions actively challenge the policy agenda; '*rapprochement*', which refers to strategies that 'go with the grain of the new educational agenda and seek to maximise gains for their members within that' (p. 14); and renewal, the idea that centralised union structures are no longer for purpose, but that union renewal might involve more flexible, rank and file driven forms of organisation and negotiation within the workplace (Fairbrother, 1996). Currently, the Social Partnership represents *rapprochement*, while the NUT's position outside the social partnership can be seen in terms of resistance.

Carter, Stevenson and Passy's research focused both on the unions inside the Social Partnership, and the perspective of the NUT, who are outside it, and involved interviews with relevant individuals at national, local authority and school levels.

The book sets out the concerns that led to the formation of the Social Partnership. There was a growing crisis in teacher supply, particularly in some secondary subjects, and a concerted move by all the major teacher unions towards industrial action over teacher workload. This led to the government holding formal national talks with the teacher unions, resulting in the signing of the National Agreement *Raising Standards and Tackling Workload* in 2003, which initiated the process of workforce remodelling; the agreement aimed to secure a progressive reduction in teachers' hours by transferring those tasks that did not require a teacher's professional expertise (including administrative tasks and cover for absent colleagues) to support staff. In order to do this, support staff roles were extended to taking responsibility for whole classes; this was the clause which the NUT (one of the largest teacher unions) said prevented them from signing the agreement. The Workload Agreement Monitoring Group (WAMG), was formed to oversee the implementation of the agreement, and was made up of teacher and support staff unions (with the exception of the NUT), employers' organisations and government. WAMG, which later expanded its remit to include the Rewards and Incentives Group (RIG), became more broadly known as the Social Partnership.

While tackling workload was one aspect of the National Agreement, the other aspect, and the one that was central for government, was raising standards. Initially the assumption was that the agreement would enable teachers to focus on teaching and learning, and that this would result in improved standards. The standards agenda was more fully addressed in subsequent aspects of the Social Partnership's work, which involved changes to posts of responsibility and the introduction of performance management – or, as Carter, Stevenson and Passy put it, 'increased accountability buttressed by a strengthened and extended managerialism in schools' (p. 137).

The authors present data from interviews conducted at national level, local authority level (focusing on the working of local WAMGs) and in schools. The data collected in schools are used to explore how workforce reforms have changed teachers' work. They report that despite the aim of tackling teachers' workload, there has been little reduction in the hours teachers work (and this is borne out by data from other sources, including the annual Teachers' Workload Surveys conducted for the STRB). Instead, teachers have experienced an intensification of work, with fewer opportunities for respite, which was formerly provided by some of the administrative and routine tasks undertaken. In secondary schools, pastoral responsibilities have been removed from teachers. Thus, the authors argue, 'teaching is re-cast as the technical task of improving students' (narrowly defined) academic performance' (p. 130), i.e. performance as defined by national tests and examinations.

There are undoubtedly some aspects of workforce remodelling which have been welcomed by teachers; in particular, primary teachers have welcomed the introduction of planning, preparation and assessment time, while secondary teachers are positive about

the reduction in time spent covering for absent colleagues. Both of these have largely been brought about through the use of support staff to take classes. Even in schools where staff were unhappy about this development, the authors conclude that the economic argument has been 'difficult to resist' (p.131). Consequently support staff are now engaged in 'all the fundamental tasks of teaching' (p. 132) – planning and delivering lessons and assessing pupils, though with varying degrees of support and supervision. Thus the division of labour in schools has been reshaped, with a blurring of the distinction between teacher and teaching assistant in terms of what they do, though the distinction is maintained through the degree of accountability that the individual has for student performance, as well as by obvious differences in pay and conditions. In addition, much more defined hierarchies have been created by the performance threshold and the development of a larger leadership group. This has been accompanied by a culture of performativity and increased managerialism through which middle managers have increased responsibility and accountability, and have to 'sign up' to the key principles of school reform if they are to survive or progress.

Drawing on the work of Braverman (1974), the authors argue that these developments represent 'Taylorisation' of teaching through which the majority of the workforce find their roles 'increasingly codified and intensively policed'. Teachers' roles are less concerned with the education of the whole child, and are increasing seen as 'part of a process to maximise output, measured in terms of student performance in standard tests' (p. 141).

The analysis presented by Carter, Stevenson and Passy follows many other analyses of the negative impacts of increased managerialism on teachers' work. But what distinguishes this book is the focus on the way in which teacher unions have engaged with government in an unprecedented way. They have played a key role in bringing about what might be constructed as a change for the worse in the nature of teachers' day-to-day work, with intensification, increased accountability and increased monitoring and surveillance. Yet it is noticeable that while the authors appear to see such changes as negative, this was not generally the case among union and school interviewees. I turn now to consider some of the reasons for this.

The extracts that Carter, Stevenson and Passy present from interviews with national union officials put forward their rationale for involvement in the Social Partnership, and show how they have constructed the workforce reforms that have resulted as beneficial. They said that the key benefit of being inside the Social Partnership was that it gave them some ability to influence policy, whereas previously they had had little access to government and no influence. They argued that membership had enabled them to negotiate new contractual entitlements for teachers, and had also offered opportunities for damage limitation, where they had been able to modify policies they opposed.

However, they were aware that they were vulnerable to accusations of being 'in the pocket of government' (NASUWT official quoted on p. 148). A particular issue here is that the National Agreement placed a responsibility on all parties to promote the agreements made. As an ATL national official explained:

... when you have come up with the agreed settlement, then you have to go out and defend it. I, for example, spent quite a lot of time ... going round to branch meetings having to defend the position on teaching and learning responsibility points to members who were losing money. And that's hard ... that's not your usual job as a union official. (p. 57)

This is a very different way of operating for unions, and carries a danger of becoming disconnected from members. This appears to be borne out in the authors' conclusions that in primary schools, workplace organisation was often limited, and school-based union representatives tended not to be significantly involved in decision-making. In secondary schools, where union activism has historically been greater, they report 'resistance is occurring without any seeming guidance and support from coherent and coordinated national strategies (p.125). In some schools there appeared to be a strategy of bypassing or undermining the effectiveness of workplace representatives.

While Carter, Stevenson and Passy present extensive interview data, they say relatively little about the perspectives of classroom teachers who are neither part of management nor union representatives. Yet they assert at the start of the book that 'in a context where teachers are highly unionised, then it is not only likely, but inevitable that teachers will engage with educational reform ... through their union representatives' (p. 3) and at the end, that 'resistance ... may well increase in the context of greater financial stringency' (p. 156).

In school workforce research that I have been involved in, we have found very little evidence of resistance to the various reforms. There seem to be a number of reasons for this. Among these may be the fact that changes have been brought in gradually, and teachers become accustomed to new ways of working, identifying each change as another government initiative to be endured. Moreover, we found that most teachers felt that they had benefited from at least some aspect of the reforms (e.g. planning preparation and assessment time, or reduction in cover), even if they were less happy with other aspects. But there also seemed to be something about the way that teachers define themselves and their role that made resistance unlikely. Some suggestions are offered by Hargreaves (1994) in relation to his study of intensification of teachers' work in Ontario. He argued, 'The time and effort these teachers commit to their preparation and teaching comes not so much from grudging compliance with external demands as from dedication of doing a good job' (p. 127). The teachers in his study felt guilty when they were not working. This notion of 'teachers' guilt' recurred in our recent research about lesson planning (Hutchings *et al.*, forthcoming); guilt was seen as an almost inevitable feeling, because, despite the hours worked, more could be done. In some schools this has led to a culture of long hours; one teacher explained:

The feeling is, if I don't stick to this planning ... that I'm not doing my job, I'm not spending enough time like other teachers, really. All teachers spend lots of time, so I have to spend my time as well ... maybe it is the way they train us. ... It's professional to do lots of paperwork. (Quoted in Hutchings *et al.*, forthcoming)

Some of the teachers interviewed about their planning practices reported a strong culture of monitoring and accountability, but rather than resisting it, some, particularly in primary schools, tended to respond with feelings of inadequacy. While this was described as pressure that they put on themselves, it could only have arisen in a context where plans are sometimes scrutinised. One experienced primary teacher told us that she wrote detailed plans ‘because I’m frightened not to’. She explained:

I’m not at all worried that I can deliver and move the children forward and meet their needs, and that sort of thing. I am very bothered about the piece of paper that I have to prepare that somebody can go over with a fine tooth comb ... You’re bothered about getting it wrong; always bothered about getting it wrong ... and I do spend hours trying to get it right. Hours and hours and hours.
(Quoted in Hutchings *et al.*, forthcoming)

Secondary teachers tended to be more pragmatic; many had found short cuts to save time, but others admitted to spending very many hours writing plans.

It seemed that most teachers were simply unable to step back and consider whether the demands made of them were reasonable or unreasonable, and therefore resisting intensification of work or increased accountability was not even considered. But we noted a range of other responses: increased stress (see Troman and Woods, 2001); moving to part-time work (in our research we encountered teachers who worked ‘part-time’ in order that they could fit all their work into five days and have a clear weekend); moving to work as a cover supervisor in order to be less accountable (our research suggested that some ten per cent of cover supervisors in secondary schools have teaching qualifications); or leaving the profession (workload, stress and government initiatives were identified as the main reasons for leaving by e.g. Smithers and Robinson, 2001, 2003).

Finally I want to consider the perspective of school support staff. Carter, Stevenson and Passy’s research was focused on teacher unions and teachers’ work, but it is concerned with reforms that affect the whole school workforce. It is perhaps a pity that they could not expand the research – and the book – to include a wider range of support staff voices. Those who are included are mostly those in management roles, rather than classroom support staff who are engaging in teaching. The only clue as to how this group feel about workforce reforms comes from a primary head who expressed the view that taking on a teaching-type role offers support staff enhanced status and esteem in the school, though they are ‘incredibly poorly paid’ (p. 89). Our research into workforce remodelling (Hutchings *et al.*, 2009) showed that support staff involved in taking classes generally welcomed the challenge and the opportunity to learn and develop, but that they were less happy about their pay and conditions, many reporting that they undertook substantial hours of unpaid overtime. This is confirmed in Blatchford *et al.*’s (2009) research, which showed that around 80 per cent of support staff in teaching and learning and administrative roles regularly undertake unpaid overtime, and that schools run on this ‘good will’.

In primary schools, Carter, Stevenson and Passy argue that there is ‘the sense of a small community in which each staff member needs to pull his/her weight and is valued for doing so,’ and a ‘willingness of staff to contribute to the school in ways perceived to be necessary’ (p. 97). These points certainly applied to the primary and secondary support staff who were interviewed in our study of remodelling. But at the same time, the most explicit statements of resistance came from support staff, although, as in the case of the teaching assistant quoted below, these were often accompanied by a wry resignation:

I think sometimes the financial rewards just don't match what you are doing. You know, they want you to take all that extra responsibility but they don't want to reward you for it. ... You will see a supply teacher come in, that is going to sit there with her arms folded gazing out the window, and is not actually doing anything, and you think ‘this is not fair’ – but there you go. (Quoted in Hutchings *et al.* 2009, p. 98)

Despite their expressed dissatisfaction, it appeared that loyalty to the school community would prevent most support staff from taking action.

The final chapter of the book considers the present state of, and future prospects for, school sector industrial relations, Carter, Stevenson and Passy argue that there are a number of threats to *rapprochement* and the Social Partnership. One is that as more schools are created which are not covered by national terms and conditions, the partnership may become redundant. Another may be the election of a Conservative government. Thus the Social Partnership may be simply a passing episode in the history of teacher unions in England, or may be a continuing arrangement, and possibly one that is emulated elsewhere.

This is an important book, both in relation to the workings of the Social Partnership, and in its focus on school workforce reforms. The only pity is that it is not available in paperback so that it could be more widely read.

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