

## ***FLEXIBILITY AND LIFELONG LEARNING: POLICY, DISCOURSE AND POLITICS***

Katherine Nicoll. Routledge, London, 2006, 170 pages.

With the growth of formal and non-formal education systems in many post-industrial countries, there is now a greater need to foster broad debate on lifelong learning as a means to guide educational planning and decision-making. Katherine Nicoll provides the reader with insights into key aspects of this debate by addressing how flexibility and lifelong learning are positioned within policy. Using a post-structuralist approach and a rhetorical analysis, the author examines policy documents from Australia, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. As Nicoll points out, one of the main purposes of the book is to understand the process of theorizing and study of lifelong learning policy. Thus, two main audiences who would benefit from the viewpoints espoused in this book are graduate students in adult education and academics working in adult learning and policy implementation.

Nicoll maintains that using the work of Michel Foucault, Jonathan Potter, and others as a backdrop for policy analysis opens the door to questions of power and politics in the themes of flexibility and lifelong learning. To do this, she draws upon Foucault's earlier writing as well as his later genealogical work, and it is in this latter theoretical resource that Nicoll links her own research interests to the notions of rhetoric within the policy studies literature. Here lies a strength of the book: Nicoll's choice of theoretical tools for the policy analysis. Readers looking for meanings of flexibility and lifelong learning and how these are positioned with Foucault's work and rhetorical notions will find Chapter 2 interesting. As a heuristic device, the author uses differing foci such as institution, context, and conceptualization to characterize the emergence of these meanings. Of particular interest is the section that discusses the interrelations between the policy themes of flexibility and lifelong learning and the wider discourses that they promote by examining both the education policy studies literature and the post-compulsory education literature.

Continuing with this exploration of meanings within education policy, Nicoll argues for alternative and more critical approaches in considering flexibility and lifelong learning in Chapter 3. Another strength of the book is a well-written section that weaves aspects of Foucault's work and rhetorical analysis as resources for the key point of departure that focuses on systems of exclusion (p. 55). It also serves as the beginning of the detailed examination of each particular policy document or, as Nicoll calls it, "trails of theorization and exploration." Also helpful to the reader is the final part of this chapter, which "takes stock" of the travelling of Nicoll as the nomadic theorizer. On the other hand, this "nomadic" process is also cumbersome for the reader at times. As much as it is Nicoll's intentions to reveal and place specific issues at stake in struggles over flexibility and lifelong learning, this is not always evident in her wanderings.

The structure of the book then moves into the three main theorizations, each covered by a chapter. The first discourse emerges from an Australian post-compulsory education policy review of higher education financing and policy known as the West Report. In the analysis, the author explores the various orientations surrounding an "event" of the policy review in terms of the discursive constraints that are part of its context. She then focuses on the review

committee's terms of reference and how these both constrained and enabled the production of policy discourse. Of particular interest in the analysis are the specific rhetorical strategies inherent in the final report. As Nicoll writes, "it suggests that flexibility operates rhetorically within descriptions of a terrain to be managed, defining and limiting the 'necessary' role of the government in decision making, and positioning institutions and individuals as those who are then 'required' to act to become more flexible and responsive" (p. 67).

For the second theorization, the author explores the interrelated themes of flexibility and lifelong learning as metaphors within policy discourses. For example, Nicoll uses metaphors and metaphorical readings as rhetorical strategies to explore its potential for different forms of theorizing. Throughout the chapter, the policy document is again taken as an event of discourse and statements of policy are the units of analysis. In the final analysis, these interrelated themes are viewed as promoting the reconfiguration of post-compulsory education systems around the globe. Although this argument is well-presented, it is difficult to see how readers from across the global community are invited into the discussion.

The focus of the third analysis is on action for reform specifically promoting lifelong learning through policy documents in the United Kingdom and the European Union (EU). Here the author identifies additional resources for analyzing the policy events by using the different genres of rhetoric such as forensic, deliberative, and epideictic (Leach, 2000). However, the shortcoming here is why the author draws upon these specific genres and not others. A central argument in this section is that the EU Lisbon agreement of 2000, which was to make the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven society by 2010, appears to have had some influence in supporting the reconfiguration of U.K. policy statements on lifelong learning. As Nicoll maintains, "forensic rhetoric, based on logos and ethos, appears more the name of the new game, as EU policy increasingly requires such narratives within the reporting mechanism from member states" (p. 132). Readers with an interest in the U.K. Skills Strategy will appreciate the author's discourse analysis of flexibility as the particular economic reform reconfigures lifelong learning policy toward a focus on skills. In the final chapter, she concludes that these trails of theorization do make a contribution to the study of policy, and in its own way, the book has produced some novel ways to consider discursive relations and rhetoric by drawing on resources not widely used.

After reading this book it is clear to me that the author has skillfully chosen a methodology that is well-suited for this topic of discussion. Throughout the text, arguments are well-supported and detailed in such a manner as to provide a roadmap for the discovery of new alternative truths. In one way the book falls short, in that there are only three formal policy documents used as sites for analysis. It may have been useful to include one more seminal document from the EU. However, its contribution to the field of adult education lies in the process of theorizing as espoused by the author in her personal journey to formulate a textual politics when examining education policy.

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