

inroads of mass schooling programmes but was an ongoing battle about gender and the politics of patriarchy concerning who controlled these institutions – men or women? Whitehead's book resounds with battles won and battles lost.

But there is more for the reader to appraise. Whitehead positions her book as a “transnational history”, a relatively new discourse that allows Whitehead and other adherents to “encapsulate the transnational flow of ideas” that are evident in de Lissa's own story but in the broader politics played out in the book. This approach is particularly useful for portraying the nuances of the imperial networks that are the backdrop to this age and de Lissa's story as a “British” colonial. Whitehead also gives presence and visibility to the lives and views of de Lissa's graduates in both South Australia and England. The archival detective work must have been enormous. As a pivotal generation, their lives are a window onto changing gender codes and the burgeoning opportunities (and its challenges) for young women choosing careers in early years education. De Lissa urged her students to be “makers of society”. Again, there is much that resonates to those of us working in early childhood teacher education, albeit now mainly in the university settings that de Lissa would have eschewed. We urge our students, who undoubtedly have many more opportunities in life and career than de Lissa's students, to be advocates for children's rights; to be vigilant and bold in the politics of gender and like de Lissa, to believe that through early childhood education we can make a difference in the lives of children, women and families that will make for a better and fairer society.

Helen May

College of Education, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

Educational Reform and Environmental Concern: A History of School Nature Study in Australia

Edited by Kass Dorothy

Routledge

Abingdon

2018

xvii+217 inc. index

Keywords Environmental concern, Australian schools, Educational reform

Review DOI 10.1108/HER-01-2018-0002

What does this book do? It examines the history of nature study and environmental education in Australian schools. It relates that history to the more general history of conservation and appreciation of the Australian environment. It also expands our knowledge of the neglected history of the Australian primary school in the early twentieth century. In so doing, it contributes to the history of the educational reforms associated with the New Education in Australia and beyond. It also provides an exemplary study of a curriculum area that should help educational historians write better histories of school curricula, and pedagogy in the future.

This history of nature study has even broader significance. It may be read as an episode in the historical alienation of humankind and its societies from the rest of the natural world, where humanity is imagined as separate from nature, with superior, exploitative rights over all other animals, indeed all living things. Redress of this destructive process is very slow. “Educational Reform and Environmental Concern” charts an important part of that redress, when schools and school curricula were attached to new understandings of the relationships between the natural world and human society.

The author situates her story in the broader intellectual history of such developments. She does not underestimate the post-Enlightenment emergence of romanticism. Wordsworth looked at the English countryside, shuddering at the impact of the first industrial revolution, in a way that was in part nostalgic. He wrote about the beauty of the natural world, as a force for life and good. Of course, in Australia, the non-Indigenous population from the late eighteenth century had a hard time imagining Australian landscapes and bush in the Wordsworthian, romantic style. Arguably this did not really occur until the 1890s. We have artists such as Arthur Streeton and Tom Roberts among others to thank for this. Also, as John Hirst has so usefully argued, even the move toward federation contributed. There could be a new love of bush, flora and fauna—country, as a “sentimental” nation came into being (Hirst, 2000).

This book tells us how schools contributed to the changed thinking about nature. The new nature study curriculum certainly owed much to the New Education, progressivism in education, that had its recent origins in the USA and the UK. Kass is the first of the historians to give due weight to the Australian origins; and how nature could be studied in the elementary school curriculum. We have been bedevilled in Australia, in interpreting our intellectual and educational history through the lenses of words like “imitation” and “adaptation.” More recent historiography gives greater weight to the “transnational” exchanges of persons and ideas. This provides a far more useful way of thinking about how ideas arrive, are formed, are adapted and influence others elsewhere. Centers and peripheries become fluid, there are occasional reversals in the assumed relationships. Sometimes the idea of center and periphery breaks down all together.

There is a much stronger place in this approach for what Australian thinkers, publicists, journalists, university and college academics, and writers of school magazines, syllabuses and curricula thought, wrote and invented for local circumstances. The founders and exponents of an Australian nature study were adaptors, and original thinkers. The Australian school curricula for nature study were original, and distinctive as a result. They contributed to Australia’s distinctive intellectual history. A monograph such as this also makes us realize what we do not have. There are no parallel texts exploring the history of literacy, numeracy, the physical sciences, English and the languages, history and the social sciences as they emerged over the centuries in Australian schools.

“Educational Reform and Environmental Concern” guides its readers through the virtues and deficiencies of the existing historiography. It links us to the debate swirling about the New Education and nature study transnationally. It identifies the key intellectuals, the scientists and others, who framed the debate in Australia. Kass outlines the struggles that occurred in order to make this nature study curriculum a legitimate part of the elementary school curriculum. She identifies the volunteers, voluntary organizations and education department employees who sustained the subject for decades through their writing and publishing for children and teachers.

A great virtue of this book is that Kass gives a highly credible account of what happened when this new subject arrived in schools. The wonderful photographs help tell the story. The book tells us more than we previously knew about the writing and experience of ordinary teachers—and the children who believed they were seeing the world differently as a result of this curriculum. This book is highly recommended for those interested in school and curriculum history, in New South Wales, Australia and beyond—and those interested in the fraught question of how to reconcile our planet’s environmental survival with the too often rapacious demands of economic development and population explosion.

Craig Campbell

Sydney School of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

Reference

Hirst, J.B. (2000), *The Sentimental Nation: The making of the Australian Commonwealth*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

The Australian Idea of a University

Edited by Glyn Davis

Melbourne University Press

Carlton

2017

170pp.

ISBN: 9780522871746 (pbk), 9780522871746 (ebook)

Keywords Managerialism, Neoliberalism, Australian universities

Review DOI 10.1108/HER-03-2018-0009

105

Glyn Davis, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, is an influential and frequent participant in Australian public debate – such as it is – about higher education. *The Australian Idea of a University* (“Idea”) is his second book-length contribution on the topic, following the 2010 series of radio lectures published as *The Republic of Learning*. In a prologue and five short chapters, Idea offers a potted history of Australian universities from the foundation of the University of Sydney in 1850 to the present day, in order to explore how “shared origins, student expectations, academic culture and federal regulation contribute to a single idea of an Australian university” (2). This history is not a mere chronicle: it comes with a warning and some recommendations for policy change. The warning is about the vulnerability of Australian higher education to threats from e-learning “providers”: “if Australian public universities are more alike than different, then disruption from Silicon Valley may affect the whole sector, simultaneously” (30). The suggestions, elaborated and justified in the book’s last chapter, concern the desirability of “a single policy perspective over the post-school sector, funding for teaching and research that reflects actual costs” – as the surrounding discussion makes clear, Davis is actually urging higher student fees – and “the creation of new universities to accommodate growth” (121).

Davis’ opening chapter places the advent of online learning in the context of earlier economic cycles of “creative destruction”. The second chapter discusses the establishment of Australia’s first universities in Sydney and Melbourne, which Davis sees as initiating the path dependency that has shaped the subsequent history of the country’s higher education system. In the third chapter, he describes the origins of different regional and suburban institutions. Chapter four mainly concerns the far-reaching reforms of the 1980s, a key source of the current un-Darwinian uniformity that he deplores. The final chapter makes the case for the changes Davis wants to see.

How to understand this work on Australian universities, written by someone with almost unequalled control over one of them? Not, apparently, as original research – while Davis’ book can usefully serve as a concise, though unadventurous, primer in the official history of Australian higher education, it contains little that is new, and nothing that is seriously developed, by way of either research or analysis. Davis simply ignores some of the most important recent work on Australian universities: the reader will not find Forsyth’s 2014 history of the modern Australian university cited anywhere in the book, nor Richard Hil’s two extremely important – and critical – essays in qualitative sociological analysis. John O’Brien’s 2015 history of the National Tertiary Education Union is similarly missing. In reading Davis, the naive reader would not gain any