

Review Response: Sarah Barrett's Review of "Between Caring & Counting"

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Review Response:

Sarah Barrett's Review of *Between Caring & Counting*¹

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It is fascinating to see how my book is taken up in reviews. For me the most interesting part of this review is the insight it offers into the 'double bind' experienced by the reviewer as someone working at the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT). If my book provokes this kind of self-reflexivity then it has achieved what I intended. Underlying the review is the sense of a nerve having been touched—of the reviewer's own autoethnography of her involvement in the OCT, and her defence of resisters within the OCT who were 'punished' and 'ignored.'

In terms of the critique of the book itself, there are basic errors and omissions which need clarification so as not to mislead readers. First and foremost, it is *not* an ethnography in the anthropological sense of describing a culture from the outside. It is an 'institutional ethnography' (IE). This is not *my* term but an alternative methodology developed by Dorothy E. Smith for doing sociological research. IE is described in considerable detail in Chapter 3. Although IE can be taken up in different ways and is not an orthodoxy, there are certain central tenets. One of the major critiques in this review revolves around whether or not it is an 'ethnography'—incorrectly taken to be the methodology used.

IE unpacks how the 'ruling relations' (or power relations) operate, and how the activities of people are coordinated across multiple sites, locally and translocally (or globally) through texts. It starts with the experience of people by taking the standpoint of the participant-informants (in my case teachers). I do not purport to sample *all* teachers, or present the opinions of *all* other 'stakeholders' in the system. Moreover, IE differs from narrative in the sense that it extends beyond individual voices to an analysis of how ruling relations work, through textual analysis of actual policies and practices. The reviewer may have a point about one of the shortcomings of IE—that informants' 'voices' may seem to drop away once the textual analysis begins. However, the three particular texts used as the starting point for the textual analysis were identified by teacher-participants in the focus group as problematic. The method is empirical and materialist in drawing out actual concrete instances in documents of the institution to reveal how the ruling relations actually work. In my case, the institution under examination is public education in Ontario, and it explores what my teacher-participants have identified as problematic. It is the researcher's responsibility to keep participants' standpoint in mind and remain truthful to it throughout the analysis. This avoids the trap of becoming entangled in obtrusive complication that all too easily slips into the dominant managerial mindset and becomes paralyzing.

¹ Sarah Elizabeth Barrett (2007). Review of *Between Caring and Counting: Teachers Take on Education Reform*. *Paideusis*, 16(1), 61-65.

Second, the OCT (as well as the Ontario Principals' Council, Ontario Parent Council, and Education Quality and Accountability Office) were *created* by the PC government through legislation to implement the education reform agenda. The crucial point is that these agencies *did not exist prior to education reform*—it is not simply a question of cooptation, but of being organizations of control from their inception. These bodies are not *depicted* as arms of government but are *assessed* as arms of government through the textual analysis. In IE, texts are not limited to print media, but also include electronic media. In this broader understanding of text-mediated relations, websites are treated as *sources of data*. My analysis uses an array of textual forms: legislation, press releases, journals/magazines, *as well as* websites, the latter being a lucrative data source for analyzing how the structures represent their missions, mandates, projects, funding sources, boards of directors, and affiliations (through the authorities cited and links made available).

To imply that the new structures created under education reform were subjected to the same pressures that teachers were sidelined the affect of restructuring on teachers' lives and work. My analysis shows that the OCT, by virtue of its founding mandate was established to control the professional identity of teachers and to reduce the power of the union. Evidence of teachers' conscientious objection toward this body include non-compliance with the Professional Learning Program and the fact that only 4 percent of teachers voted for representatives to the board of the OCT in the 2003 election (reported at the OCT website).

Third, is the issue of agency which is central to IE as an *activist* methodology that is quite different from positivist scientific research. According to my analysis, a dilemma for teachers is reconciling *structure and agency*. Empowerment arises from understanding (Freire might say literacy about) how the ruling relations operate in order to know what/how to resist the ruling relations and bring about social change. The strategies identified by the reviewer as used by OCT insiders ("flatter, cajole and scheme") to influence policy are gendered and conform to traditional notions of feminine guile; they hardly constitute agency. I hope *Between Caring & Counting* will aid others to do their own IE as a means to empowerment in their own terms. Sure, it can be unsettling when we see our own complicity. However, I disagree with the defeatist notion that institutions have a momentum of their own. IE involves an 'ontological shift' that takes the social world and institutions as constituted by the work of actual people; changing people's activities and practices can change institutions.

In working through the dilemma for teachers, I identify the contradictions between a professional ethic of care and a managerial accounting logic (as captured in the title). This key point is ignored in the review. To suggest taking advantage of the 'golden opportunity' to objectify teachers would be a fundamental betrayal of the trust granted to me by my teacher-participants and a violation of a central tenet of IE that participants are subjects, not objects, of the inquiry. IE makes no claim to objectivity nor neutrality--those highly contested terms. As a methodology for unpacking ruling relations, IE takes a perspective other than that of the dominant managerial perspective; in my case, it was (and is) the standpoint of teachers, and this is stated explicitly up front.

The reviewer's suggestion of taking the viewpoint of people at the OCT, OPC etc. and how they were subjected to similar control by government could indeed be the subject of another study. Let the dialogue continue. If my analysis is accurate, then like spokes to the wheel, these different locations or standpoints would likely confirm my conclusions—as indeed the reviewer does in the end.