nect their teaching goals with approaches that match. And readers interested in understanding the ways composition studies has addressed the “social turn” will also want to read this text for its examination of service-learning’s role in teaching writing as social action.

Fargo, North Dakota

Works Cited


Reviewed by Kristine Hansen, Brigham Young University

It’s clear why this collection of essays, edited by Eileen Schell and Patricia Lambert Stock was co-winner of the 2002 CCCC Outstanding Book Award. The book consolidates in one volume a wide array of success stories, cautionary tales, analyses, arguments, strategies, and models, which, taken together, suggest how composition programs can make real progress toward resolving the vexing and seemingly intractable concerns arising from the use of contingent labor in higher education. The book’s fourteen chapters are framed on one end by an introduction that not only previews the book’s rationale and contents but also provides a succinct history of contingent labor in the academy and a critical reading of 30 years of research on such labor. The other end of the frame is a 40-page bibliography of works (published through 1998) on contingent labor issues in higher education, especially composition. The editors point out that most of this research can be sorted into three categories: studies that outline the scope and demographics of contingent labor in the academy, articles that generalize on how to improve conditions, and polemics that expose the politics of hiring practices in higher education. While these kinds of studies provide a necessary foundation, the editors argue that “local narratives” are needed now to document how employment practices have been transformed within “site-specific bureaucratic structures: programs, departments, colleges, universities” (28-29). And local narratives are, largely, what the book offers.

Many readers don’t find local narratives interesting or compelling. In fact, I have often heard a bias expressed against the telling of local narratives. At professional conferences, for example, I have heard disapproval of speakers who talk about what they do in their courses or their writing programs. Reviewers of manuscripts sometimes reject research because it is anecdotal, based on a case study, or founded on too small a sample and therefore not generalizable. Many seem to want research and writing in composition studies to be like that in the natural sciences, based on and aiming to produce general and abstract theories that hold true across time and place. I was reminded of the bias against the local and specific when, trying to estimate how many pages to write, I called up on my computer a review I wrote last year of Bent Flyvbjerg’s Making Social Science Matter, a book that makes a compelling argument for the power and generalizability of case studies. I meant only to count words and pages, but as I re-read the summary of Flyvbjerg’s argument, I was struck by how his proposal for re-thinking the social sciences applies to understanding and changing the material conditions under which composition teachers labor.

Briefly, Flyvbjerg’s argument is that social science can never be an episteme in the way natural science is because human and social action cannot be reduced to rules. Since theory depends on rules, no grand predictive theory can ever come from the study of human and social action. Flyvbjerg proposes that social scientists cease attempting to ape the natural sciences and instead focus on what they do best, i.e., analyzing political and social practices reflexively and discussing values. He proposes that the social sciences conceive of themselves as applying the Aristotelian concept of phronesis, usually translated as “prudence” or “practical wisdom.” Phronesis is developed by experience, by taking note of the particulars of many cases (i.e., local narratives), thereby developing good judgment that leads to beneficial action. Phronesis is a sense of the “ethically practical”; it is “deliberation about values with reference to praxis” (Flyvbjerg 56-57). Thus, it contributes to developing society’s value rationality as opposed to its instrumental rationality, dominant since the Enlightenment. For Aristotle, phronesis was the supreme intellectual virtue needed in the social and political realms. Yet, because Aristotle and his followers neglected to account for the role of power and conflict in democratic societies, Flyvbjerg adds the dynamic of power to phronesis to fit it for analyzing contemporary social action. He proposes that anyone applying phronesis to the solution of a problem should answer these four value-rational questions: (1) Where are we going?
(2) Is this desirable? (3) Who gains and who loses and by which mechanisms of power? (4) What should be done? (Flyvbjerg 145).

Although we compositionists are not social scientists, we do face serious social and political problems as we consider what to do about the ever-increasing use of contingent labor in writing programs. We need to deliberate about the values our praxis embodies and about what is ethically practical. I propose to show how Flyvbjerg’s four questions are precisely the ones asked and answered by the local narratives in Schell and Lambert’s collection. These questions help connect the dots between the narratives and create a larger picture, resulting not in a theory or a one-size-fits-all formula, but in a kind of practical wisdom we can use to analyze and change our own situations.

Most of the 30 different contributors to this volume, who represent some 20 different institutions, answer Flyvbjerg’s first two questions similarly. The answer to “Where are we going?” is that higher education is moving steadily toward completely embracing the corporate model, in which education is deemed a commodity sold to consumer-students who are increasingly provided this product by the least expensive labor the colleges can find. The hiring of part-time and temporary teachers was at first, as several essays note, a short-term solution in the 1960s and 70s to the problem of burgeoning student enrollments requiring more diverse courses than before. But college administrators found the low cost of part-time and non-tenure-track faculty an attractive long-term solution to the problem of declining public support for higher education and the need for flexibility in meeting budgetary requirements elsewhere. Although the nation’s Ph.D. programs have since turned out enough qualified persons to fill tenure-track positions, Schell and Lambert cite Benjamin’s statistics indicating that, from 1975 to 1997, the numbers of part-time faculty grew four times faster than full-time, with tenure-track appointments declining by nine percent. Over half of all teaching faculty now in American higher education are not on the tenure track—and that figure does not include graduate students who teach (4-5).

The answer to the second question—“Is this [increasing use of contingent labor] desirable?”—is decidedly “no.” Repeatedly, the authors underscore the fact that the use of contingent labor undermines the quality of teaching and learning in higher education. Why? Because in an institution where more than half of teaching positions can be made temporary, what is to stop administrators from making all or nearly all of them temporary? Those who doubt that this would undermine educational quality should read Helen O’Grady’s “Trafficking in Freeway Fliers: (Re)Viewing Literacy, Working Conditions, and Quality Instruction.” O’Grady applies the tools of critical pedagogy to analyze the working conditions of part-time teachers who try to make a living by teaching at several institutions. Noting that institutions often boast of their small teacher-to-student ratios, she demonstrates how those ratios are deceptive when the teacher who meets 20 students on one campus is meeting up to 60 other students on two or three other campuses. Not only is the teacher overloaded with students and papers, she is using up precious time commuting and attempting to negotiate the demands of different curricula, textbooks, and other institutional requirements. Walter Jacobsohn asserts in “The Real Scandal in Higher Education” that the “greatest threat” to the integrity of education is “our attitude toward teachers. Whether it be in a virtual university or a traditional classroom, teachers’ ability to teach remains the most important element in our educational system” (174). When a teacher’s ability to teach effectively is compromised by inadequate pay; lack of time due to competing demands; lack of resources such as an office, a computer, a telephone, and access to a photocopier; lack of respect; and constant worry about future employment, students and their learning suffer. Though cheap labor may be instrumentally rational in the short term, it is a poor value in the long term if we accept the belief that “our nation’s greatest resource is an educated citizenry” (Schell and Lambert 40).

The book’s answer to the third question, “Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?” is partly clear and partly not. The clear part is who loses. Certainly, the contingent faculty lose for reasons already pointed out; consequently, students lose as well because poor teaching conditions usually make for poor learning conditions. The public and future employers lose when students earn diplomas that aren’t necessarily indicative of a solid education. While it may seem that the full-time tenure-track faculty are winners, Jacobsohn points out that they will be big losers if, in their comfortable existence teaching upper-division and graduate courses, they don’t attempt to understand the experience of their part-time colleagues:

Mining the experience of these faculty—the canaries in the infrastructure of an educational system we are creating to serve us in the twenty-first century has much to teach us, has the potential perhaps to inform us about some surprises that may be waiting for us just around the corner. Without a dialogue based on the experiences of faculty who teach service courses, extension courses, clinical courses, provisional courses, understanding of the current status of higher education and how it must change will be seriously uninformed. (160)

Similar points are made by the authors of “Distance Education: Political and Professional Agency for Adjunct and Part-time Faculty, and GTAs,” who show that contingent faculty are more likely than full-time faculty to be assigned and to volunteer to use the new technologies involved in distance education. In one sense, the contingent faculty “win” because they acquire more technical expertise than full-time faculty and perhaps make themselves more employ-
able. But they also often lose because the effort required to learn and teach in new settings further eats up their time, thus lowering their earnings per hour. Repeatedly, authors of these narratives stress that tenured, full-time faculty stand to lose much if they do not make common cause with their contingent colleagues. Karen Thompson, author of “Faculty at the Crossroads: Making the Part-time Problem a Full-time Focus,” calculates that “part-time faculty are replacing full-time faculty—through attrition, if not directly—at a rate that will do in the teacher/scholar profession by 2030 if left uncorrected” (186).

But if the losers are obvious, the winners are not as easily identified nor are the mechanisms of power they are using to win. Vaguely, the winners are “the administration” or “the institution,” i.e., managers who look at budgets more from a business perspective than an educational one. Richard Ohmann’s observations are pertinent here. He states that the new “managed university” has become an extension of the global capitalist system. “Like agile corporations, universities look to develop new products, enter new markets, preserve flexibility in labor and plant, and in general direct their efforts where they can generate income in excess of costs. They are not profit-making institutions as a whole, but they seek profit-like gains in whatever part of the operation they may be generated” (par. 19). This new identity has, in some ways, been forced upon universities as they have experienced reductions in funding from public sources at the same time for-profit institutions, such as the University of Phoenix, have multiplied. Administrators attempt to win the competition by cutting labor costs.

What are the mechanisms used to make these cuts palatable? Administrators’ misrepresentations of budget “crises” are hinted at. Thompson points to the erosion of faculty governance and to attrition: as full-time faculty retire, they are not always replaced by new full-time faculty. Another strategy hinted at is “divide and conquer.” Again, an observation from outside the book seems pertinent here. According to the late James Sledd, the best instrument to divide and conquer is tenure:

I don’t believe that essential faculty unity against exploitation will become possible so long as tenure exists. . . . Tenure is defended as necessary to academic freedom; but when only a minority of teachers are tenured, the defense is a confession that the majority is un-free. Even the tenured have no sure protection against marauding administrators, who have cultivated numerous modes of harassment. The most powerful instrument of control is the seven-year probationary period, in which the faint-hearted learn the arts of mousiness. But a tenured mouse may quickly transmogrify into a cat, ready to pounce on the untenured. (par. 37)

As he has in numerous other essays, Sledd also blames “boss compositionists,” writing program administrators who buy into the system and are given the privileges of tenure and professional status for controlling contingent workers.

While it’s no surprise the book does not specifically identify the institution of tenure or the perks of professional WPAs as instruments by which the exploitation of contingent workers continues, I think changes in these must at least be considered in a comprehensive discussion of answers to the final question, “What is to be done?” The book has plenty of other answers. In Part I, “Transforming the Cultural and Material Conditions of Contingent Writing Faculty,” Barry Maid describes the creation of a separate Department of Rhetoric and Writing staffed by full-time, non-tenure-track teachers at University of Arkansas—Little Rock. Eva Brumberger describes the University of Wyoming’s full-time lectureships. Carol Lipson and Molly Voorheis describe Syracuse University’s establishment of a merit-tier system to create a career path and better working conditions for part-time faculty. However, all three of these chapters describe the limits of these solutions. Chris Anson and Richard Jewell’s dialogue in this section also highlights the need for massive nationwide organizing on various fronts to thwart creative administrators bent on cost-cutting. The solutions proposed or described in Part II of the book, “Collectivity and Change in Non-Tenure-Track Employment: Collective Bargaining, Coalition-building, and Community Organizing” are compelling statements of the need to organize and be persistent. I particularly recommend Jacobson’s and Thompson’s analyses of why and how solidarity between full-time and part-time faculty in strong collective bargaining would improve matters. Other chapters in Part II give detailed accounts of how persistent labor activism brought about change in California institutions. In Part III, “Re-thinking Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Roles and Rewards,” are the chapter already mentioned on distance education and another that makes a strong case for contingent faculty as makers of knowledge in the scholarship of teaching and therefore well-positioned to help the academy renew its focus on teaching. In the final chapter, Schell sums up the four conditions needed to provide quality writing instruction in higher education: fair compensation, dependable contracts, working conditions that foster a viable teaching culture, and coalition building. She outlines how unions or committees can analyze local labor conditions, do comparative studies, create proposals for change, and then form alliances with others, including students, to bring about lasting reform.

I finished the book feeling that moving a mountain is possible. But all of us—tenured full-time professors, temporary full-time teachers, part-time teachers, and graduate students—will have to identify ourselves as fellow
laborers in a common cause, and we will have to enlist the help of professional and accrediting organizations. It won’t happen if most refuse to take up shovels and start moving the earth. To that end, I call readers’ attention to events such as Campus Equity Week (celebrated this year October 27-31, 2003), a time when teachers on every campus should “bring attention to issues of the use and abuse of contingent faculty appointments, fairness, and quality of education” and should organize “events or actions” appropriate for local conditions and audiences (CCCC Web site). If you are in doubt about what to do on your campus, read this book.

_Provo, UT_

WORKS CITED


Reviewed by Joe Marshall Hardin, Northwestern State University of Louisiana

Dawn Skorczewski and Matthew Parfitt’s _Conflicts and Crises in the Composition Classroom—and What Instructors Can Do About Them_ is a collection of classroom narratives, but it is also more than that. The text is also an argument for the power of personal narrative to create disciplinary knowledge. In their introduction, the editors assert that classroom narratives such as those contained in this collection demonstrate clearly the link between theory and practice: narratives, they write, “are the threads that connect the concrete experience of classroom practice to the abstract generalization of theory” (x). That we are meant to learn from these stories is evident from the subtitle, and the editors report that the authors of these essays “share the conviction that stories about a teacher’s moments of crisis in the classroom afford invaluable sources of knowledge about our craft” (ix). So this is a book about stories and their value as disciplinary knowledge, although it is also simply a collection of stories from which other teachers might learn.

Recently, the value of personal narrative as scholarship has been a disputed issue in rhetoric and composition, with some scholars calling for the use of personal experience and narrative voice as a way of resisting the masculinist discourse of mastery they see in the rhetoric of traditional scholarship and in theory. Increasingly, we see calls, such as the one made by Sheri Stenberg and Amy Lee, for “critically reading our teaching in the same careful way we’ve learned to engage scholarly and literary texts in English studies...to develop ways of studying our teaching, or reading our pedagogical interactions and our pedagogical development (exploration, critique, revision) as texts” (328).

I have no argument with the assertions that personal narrative can create knowledge and that teaching is an intellectual activity worthy of scholarly study. In fact, I must believe in the academic value of the personal essay because I generally employ it in my own classes in the form of a literacy narrative assignment. In assigning personal writing, my hope is that students might explore the possibility that their experiences can, like the essays in this collection, produce meaning beyond the purely personal. I believe in the ability of my students’ narratives and of the narratives in this collection to do academic work. For my students, writing a personal narrative will also provide an example of the level of personal commitment I want in all their class work, a commitment that is evident in the narratives collected by Skorczewski and Parfitt.

In her introduction to the recent special edition of _College English_ devoted to the personal in academic writing, Jane E. Hindman asks for a way of reading that will accept that alternative scholarship might hold rewards for those who are willing to defer their usual expectations of what scholarship should be. She asks readers of scholarship that employs “embodied rhetoric” to produce readings that are likewise “embodied.” Such readings would seek to empower authors of alternative scholarship, employ self-reflection to examine how readers position themselves in relation to alternative texts, and examine how that position is motivated by the reader’s material conditions. I’m happy for the direction that Hindman provides because I’m initially uncomfortable, as she suggests many readers are, when reading alternative modes of scholarship that rely heavily on personal narrative, as do those collected in _Conflict and Crises in the Composition Classroom_.

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