



An Elementary School in Holland: Experiment in Educational Practice. Loren S. Barritt. Utrecht, the Netherlands: International Books (Chicago: LPC Logan Group), 1996. 256 pp.

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I appreciated Barritt's book as a useful vehicle for discussion of classroom practices and research in the classroom. Barritt encourages teachers, parents, and policy makers in both the Netherlands and the United States to consider "the look and feel of a single school" (p. 12). As an observer-participant, Barritt defines and depicts the phenomenological argument that "the ordinary and everyday are important because they structure our daily lives, usually without our realizing" (p. 10). His descriptive/interpretive study primarily presents the events in one Dutch elementary school (preschool through sixth grade) during 1985-1986. The school's setting, activities, routines, classrooms, representative students, and principal are documented and discussed.

Strengths of the book embrace the introduction, which effectively outlines the focus of the research, the numerous details that would be appropriate for analysis, and Barritt's recognition of teachers' responsibilities and issues. I appreciated the description of teachers' working conditions: "Teachers always have more than one thing to do and think about at the same time. They are usually forced to act without the time to think through their choices" (p. 88). Teachers also deal with classroom control: "All of these means of control depend on the child caring. If a child doesn't care and cannot be frightened there is little that a teacher can do to 'control' him or her" (p. 94). Teachers will appreciate the definition and reminder about students' knowledge of the "hidden curriculum": "Getting along in a classroom is a complicated matter which requires understanding of the teacher as well as the rules and also calculation of the probability of getting caught, which is not a stable probability" (p. 72). The reminder for teachers and researchers to consider how time is allocated is also important. For example, in the Dutch school, cleaning up sometimes took precedence over classroom activity (p. 60).

Some weaknesses remain in the first chapter, which contains too many travel brochure descriptions of the Netherlands. The discussion of picture windows could have been taken out or condensed, because the current version sounds more poetic than informative (p. 22-23). Additionally, I still have questions about the concept of *gezellig*, toleration of, or even pleasure in, the close presence of other people in this densely populated country. For example, further explanation is needed for the following quote: "Gezellig is the end which justifies social activity" (p. 22). I



wondered how the teachers and parents defined this Dutch concept. I also wanted more information about "pillarization," or the "system of replicated political, social, and educational structures" for Protestant, Catholic, and nonsectarian schools. Each of these groups has separate governing boards funded by the public (p. 28).

The overall contributions of the book are the detailed description of an elementary school, the perspectives of teachers, and the concerns of a researcher.

Barritt's book provides abundant topics for discussion; therefore, I specifically recommend this book for teachers for research in the classroom and in education. One specific area for discussion is individualization. Teachers in the Dutch school dealt with the time-consuming and debatable aspects of individualization with "weekly sets of tasks for each student [which] meant that teachers were monitoring student progress daily and weekly" (p. 139). An additional feature of the extensive record keeping was that some parents did not understand the final reports they received, which they saw as a "puzzle of irrelevant information" (p. 141). Additionally, the Dutch team of teachers had more control and authority than in the United States, where "local control means that teachers are prohibited from professional participation in the decisions that affect their classrooms and school" (p. 218). Barritt concludes that an effective school that develops "thoughtful, socially responsible citizens will in fact run with a good deal of conflict. Effective teaching begins in conflict, which teachers are ready to use" (p. 191).

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