Non-Traditional Entrants to Higher Education: "They Talk about People Like Me." Marion Bowl. Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Books, 2003. 196 pp. ISBN 1858562988

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Marion Bowl's book analyzes the experiences of 32 people who participated in the Birmingham Reachout Project, a British program designed to increase the higher education success of nontraditional students. The participants are nontraditional students in that many are returning to school after a long absence, of the working or poverty class, and are largely ethnic minority, single mothers. Bowl was a co-coordinator and the only full-time worker in the Reachout Project. From the data, primarily interviews, gathered in her four-year study, she seeks to determine whether recent rhetoric and programs for the inclusion of nontraditional students are in fact bringing about educational equity. The first chapter profiles the participants and delineates the context and methodology of the study. The rest of the book is divided into two sections.

The first section consists primarily of participants' academic stories portrayed through selected interview excerpts. Their stories begin with their early schooling experiences in which they describe factors that led to their initial disengagement from institutionalized education. The stories unfold as participants describe their decisions to return to school, to gain entry into the Reachout Project, to select particular higher education institutions, and to enter higher education. Many of the participants describe the issues that lead them to once again leave institutionalized education. However, some do decide to remain in higher education and one finishes her four-year degree. Section one finishes with participant reflections concerning their first year in higher education.

In the final section, Bowl analyzes participants' stories within theoretical frameworks provided by Bourdieu and Michael Apple. Using Bourdieu's concept of "habitus," she examines "why those from working class and ethnic minority backgrounds find themselves outsiders in this game: why they are ruled out of making progress and how they conclude that they themselves have contributed to their own exclusion" (p. 123). Using Apple's theoretical frame, she "explore[s] in more detail the way in which exclusion works in the everyday practices of university life" (p. 123). Drawing from these analyses, Bowl delineates the mechanisms creating the paradox between the lack of educational equity experienced by the participants and the academy's rhetoric and

programs for inclusion. Based on her findings, she offers suggestions for policy and practice of higher education.

Non-Traditional Entrants to Higher Education: "They Talk about People Like Me" is well worth reading. The rich descriptive narratives and Bowl's analysis of the participants' experiences provide additional insights concerning mechanisms that maintain inequities. Unfortunately, several major problems, mostly dealing with the author's reflexivity, mar this otherwise important book.

The first major problem is Bowl's lack of awareness with respect to the manner in which her institutional role may have influenced participant responses (see, e.g., p. 33). A second concern is a lack of clarity in her conclusions concerning the cause of unequal educational outcomes. In describing public schooling, she situates the problem as: "At the macro level, the process is geared toward meeting the society's needs [emphasis added] rather than the individual child's needs" (p. 41). Yet she provides no explanation of what counts as societal needs. Later in the book, she abandons the focus on societal needs as the problem and turns instead to mechanisms that serve to maintain the economic, symbolic, and social privileging of the elite. Perhaps what she means to say is that the process of public schooling is geared toward societal needs, which actually means maintaining the elite's privileged positioning.

A third problem is a lack of reflexivity concerning shifts in her viewpoint. Initially she cites "the lack of information and support from family" (p. 28), as one of the four factors that lead to student's initial disengagement from school, a viewpoint that positions the participants' families as problematic to participant success. However, later on Bowl positions schools as problematic to participant success. Here she describes their unequal access to symbolic, social, and economic capital, hidden curricula, and the multitude of ways in which schooling institutions did not provide participants equal opportunities to gain equitable schooling. Thus, she shifts from seeing the families to seeing the schools as the problem. Bowl does not mention this very important transition in her thinking, which would have greatly enriched her analysis.

A fourth concern is that although Bowl clearly depicts the manner in which schooling at all levels acts to exclude or disadvantageously channel nontraditional students and advocates changes for greater access to higher education and economic rewards, she fails to provide any specific suggestions for change at the earlier levels of schooling, despite the ample relevant data included in the first section. One is left wondering about the plight of all who, with good reason, disengage and never find the means to reengage in schooling. Considering the brevity of the book and data presented, this

section would have been substantially improved had she also suggested specific changes needed in earlier schooling policy and practice. In addition, she fails to address, even briefly, how such changes might affect larger society and why those with a disproportionately large amount of capital may consistently reject such changes.

Despite the above difficulties, the book is worth reading. Bowl clearly exposes the manner in which, albeit the rhetoric of equity, existing educational practices, understandings, and assumptions act to continue inequities of education based on one's ethnicity, economic class, and gender or, in other words, how British school systems are "widening participation whilst maintaining elitism" (p. 144).