

Rothstein, Stanley, W., *The Power to Punish: A Social Inquiry into Coercion and Control in Urban Schools*. London: University Press of America, 1984, 171 pp., \$19.75 (U.S.) cloth, \$9.75 (U.S.) paper.

Never before, I fear, in the field of educational endeavour, has so little of substance been written using over and over again so many highly-charged words (e.g. "arbitrary," "assault," "regimentation," "bureaucracy," "surveillance," "robots," "docile," "rebels") in such ill-edited fashion. The opening acknowledgements betoken the poor, presumably non-edited, form of what is to come:

The author has been fascinated by urban schools . . . He often wondered why they were so unpleasant. The idea of writing . . . came to me while I was working . . . I . . .

Toward the end of the book we read:

The schooling institution did not consciously cast out the disruptive and under-achieving youth . . . It provided failing students with additional opportunities to fail . . . They were legally unable to dismiss or suspend the youth to be incapable of doing the schoolwork . . . (p. 167).

This sort of thing reflects very badly on the academic study of education.

The substance of the book is only marginally better than its form, gaining most of its clout by means of continual repetition of certain words and phrases. The author claims not to be doing history (p. xi); perhaps that licences the massive reliance on M.S. Katz, E. P. Cubberley and D. Tyack. But the thesis is of a historical nature:

The picture that emerges from the history and pedagogy of urban schools is that of an institution dedicated to the repression of the immigrant, urban poor and racial minorities; to the rejection of their cultural and familial backgrounds and value systems; . . . to the segregation of racial, ethnic and religious groups. In the inner city schools there were the assaults on the self of children, there were the efforts to substitute for their competent, personal identity an incompetent, impersonal one (p. 170).

The motivation behind this book is clearly a genuine compassion for the children of the poor and the immigrant. Rothstein reiterates the new familiar criticism: on the basis of an arbitrary, middle-class set of values, schools create docile or deviant youth, condemning both, but particularly the latter, to meaningless jobs; serving as they do the needs of mass industrial society, authoritarian schools are obsessed with control, evaluation and social stratification of young people. In short, if you don't conform, look out.

The urban school was and is a state agency where schooling takes place in an atmosphere of confinement, regimentation, social class bias and failure. It is the place in modern society where children are trained to accept their social and intellectual positions in the larger culture by experiencing a series of traumas spread out over their formative years. For the present, as in the past, a state institution continues to perform an unpleasant, dirty little task: that of acting as the forcing ground for personality change of children in our society; and as the locale where urban youth learn to accept authority and the status quo in contemporary life (p. 161).

Perhaps the single most important outcome of the urban school and its sustaining of the social structure of society was that it made the power to punish children seem legitimate and universally accepted by adults (p. 167).

This line of criticism, better made I think by J. Bowles and S. Gintis, and by I. Illich, has not lost its sting. But it must be tempered with some compassion for the front-line teacher and some appreciation of the difficulties and achievements of the "system." All large institutions have to be concerned with order, and therefore control, and therefore power, including the power to punish, since order is a necessary condition for achieving anything at all, humane or otherwise. Alternative modes of education should be spelled out, not merely alluded to using words like "humane." And the curriculum and values of the school system are not arbitrary, that is, are not whimsical,

rather they are consciously and deeply held by society in general. Consulting children as to what they would or would not like to do would be truly arbitrary since children live for the next half hour whereas intelligent adults consider long-term effects and possible ramifications on this and on the next generation. Moreover, punishment is implied by *any* set of values — a test of whether one really holds in serious fashion any value, the right not to be sexually harassed, for example, is whether one is prepared to punish, that is, hurt in some way, those persons who persist in violating the right in question. Power can be used for good or ill. Power is not, in my view, already evil.

Notwithstanding the above criticisms, Rothstein's general plea for sensitivity to the problem of overcrowded, inner-city schools, particularly in such cities as New York, can't fail, must not fail, to evoke a positive response from the reader, ill-edited and over repetitious though the book may be. I give Rothstein, therefore, the last word:

Since the end of the 19th century, the life of urban schooling continues to manifest itself in the disciplinary structures associated with huge, bureaucratic organizations — condemning new generations to an education obsessed with selection, confinement, and discipline, resisting, with the aid of powerful forces in society, all calls for a more humane, more scientific, more success-oriented training. We are in the habit of subjecting children to public humiliation on a daily basis, righteously, without thinking deeply about the effects of such traumatic handling on the youth of our nation. I end this book with what I consider to be an appropriate quote from the Jewish Talmud: Whoever humiliates someone in front of others is to be considered as one who has killed him (p. 171).

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Widdowson, Frances, *Going up into the Next Class*. London, Great Britain: Hutchinson & Co., 1980, 98 pp.

Frances Widdowson is interested in explaining why the social class composition of British elementary teacher training colleges began to change from 1850, when equal numbers of working-class boys and girls attended, on through the remainder of the century to become, by 1914, feminized and more middle-class in character. She seeks also to uncover the effects of such changes on the teaching profession as a whole.

A specific question for Widdowson is: "Why did girls from the professional classes usually shun elementary teaching. . . . Why, conversely, did girls from the lower middle classes begin so overwhelmingly to dominate the profession in the latter part of the century, effectively elevating it from a working-class to a middle-class occupational domain" (p. 11)?

By utilizing an assortment of primary historical sources, Widdowson is true to her call for the restoration of women's experience to the records of time. Referring to the element of class as a "largely ignored, but crucial, aspect of the history of education," (p. 11) she asserts that, as educational research has gone, "the subtle interaction of class and gender . . . is what has been missing in our understanding of both the past and the present" (p. 9).

Widdowson thoughtfully brings several dimensions of human attitude and action to bear on the issues she analyzes; among these, the expressions of parents and students towards colleges and diary musing of school staff. In the process, however, she also exposes a number of important questions, which if answered, would result in an enhancement of the meaning of the work.

An overriding question posed by the book is one that grows from a central assumption, namely, that a higher "class" of student would make (or lead to) a higher quality training school, and, ultimately, a higher calibre teaching profession. While this assumption "sounds" entirely feasible, Widdowson never really validates it by showing how such an interactive process actually "works." What kinds of dynamics existed between what students did and how schools benefitted?