

***Teachers Under Siege*, Sandra Leaton Gray, Trentham Books, Stoke on Trent, UK and Sterling, VA, 2006.**

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Few would doubt that teachers – regardless of the levels at and sectors in which they operate – are required to engage in work that is challenging, complex and yet crucial to the educational enterprise. That work has been subject to ongoing scholarly scrutiny, with a view to understanding the multiple parameters influencing the ways in which teachers teach and the factors that impinge on how effective, efficient and equitable that teaching is.

Teachers Under Siege is part of a series of publications by Trentham Books related to teachers' work and identities. Previously a teacher and education journalist and currently a researcher at the University of Cambridge, Sandra Leaton Gray focuses on the assumed and actual roles performed by teachers in the contemporary knowledge-based economy. Her argument is critical and rather pessimistic: she contends that in that economy teachers face an almost impossible task, being required to educate youth in systems and structures that are outdated and constraining. The book's title was prompted by one teacher participant in the author's research likening the changes in the profession to "being under siege" (p. 3).

After a brief introduction in Chapter One, the book uses Chapters Two and Three to elaborate the theoretical framework informing the author's research, with Chapter Two tracing the British Government's increasing intervention in teachers' work since the 1988 Education Reform Act and Chapter Three examining the corollary of that intervention: the increased positioning of teachers as "political handmaidens" (p. 3) implementing government policies rather than as professionals in their own right. Chapter Four outlined the author's research, which used a combination of semi-structured interviews and an online interactive survey questionnaire with 40 educational professionals selected from four diverse Local Education Authorities and which deployed a 'futures scenario' technique of imagining teaching in 20 years' time in order to elicit participants' beliefs about the current situation. The project's data analysis is presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven: Chapter Five identifies the major themes that emerged from the interviews and the questionnaires; Chapter Six concentrates on the linguistic analysis of the participants' use of pronouns; and Chapter Seven employs causal layered analysis to focus on the participants' understandings of the social positioning of contemporary youth and hence of themselves as educators of that youth. The author calls the concluding Chapter Eight "something of a clarion call, encouraging teachers to galvanise their energy and directing them towards a remodelling of the teaching profession on their own terms" (p. 4) – for example, by direct lobbying of and involvement in the General Teaching Council.

Some of the book's liveliness of presentation and sincerity of purpose is conveyed by the chapter titles, which range from "The Beginnings of Hostilities" and "The Neo-conservative Offensive" to "Finding a Voice for Teachers" and "Despatches from the Front" to "Towards a Vision of the Future" and "Entente Cordiale?". Like most books based on Doctor of Philosophy theses, this one can be read at different levels and for multiple purposes, with some readers likely to empathise with the teachers' voices presented, others liable to focus on the identification of policy drivers and implications and still others interested in the intersection among the theoretical framework, the research design and the data analysis.

Ultimately we found *Teachers Under Siege* both a depressing and a hopeful book. It is depressing because of the author's convincing juxtaposition of the participants' voices about lack of agency and professionalism and the analysis of the structural changes that have generated that lack and that are unlikely to be reversed. It is hopeful because the focus on futures research alerts us to possible counternarratives and potential divergences from the seemingly unstoppable onrush towards standardisation and deprofessionalisation. Both of these elements of our response to the book are encapsulated in its concluding sentence: "Education needs to learn to value its human face over its organisational one, and teachers need to be at the vanguard" (p. 170).