

## Developing Life and Work Histories of Teachers\*

IVOR F. GOODSON\*\*

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\*\* Professor of Education, School of Education & Professional Development, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ Norfolk, Inglaterra, CE: I.Goodson@uea.ac.uk

Although there has been spasmodic interest over the last century, life history studies of teachers have remained a sadly neglected genre until recently. There have, however, always been exceptions, and in some cultures, for example Japan, a long tradition of teacher autobiographies has provided valuable data for those involved in life history work. The general neglect of the teacher in educational study has been summarised by Lortie. Whilst these were very different economic and social times, his judgement stands up well today:

Schooling is long on prescription, short on description. That is nowhere more evident than in the case of the two million persons who teach in the public schools. It is widely conceded that the core transactions of formal education take place where teachers and students meet. ... But although books and articles instructing teachers on how they should behave are legion, empirical studies of teaching work - and the outlook of those who staff the schools - remain rare. (Lortie 1975: vii)

A conference in the early 1980's at St. Hilda's in Oxford, attended by leading American and European researchers, addressed the theme of teachers' lives. In the book produced from the conference, *Teachers' Lives and Careers*, Stephen Ball and Ivor Goodson (1985) argued that British research on teachers had moved through a number of contemporary phases in the last forty years. At the beginning of this period, in the 1960s:

teachers were shadowy figures on the educational landscape mainly known, or unknown, through large scale surveys or historical analyses of their position in society, the key concept in approaching the practice of the teaching was that of role. (*ibid.*: 6)

Thus, in this decade, in most research studies, teachers were present in aggregate through imprecise statistics, or were viewed as individuals only as formal role incumbents, mechanistically and unproblematically responding to the powerful expectations of their role set.

As we moved to the late 1960s and early 1970s, new approaches were well underway which began to address some of the limitations of these paradigms. Case study researchers began to scrutinise schooling as a social process, focusing their work on the manner through which school pupils were 'processed'.

The sympathies of the researchers lay primarily with the pupils, working class and female pupils in particular, who were the 'under dogs' in the classroom, teachers were the 'villains of the piece'. (*ibid.*: 7)

By the 1980s, we saw a further shift where attention began to be directed 'to the constraints within which teachers work... Teachers were transformed from villains to 'victims' and in some cases, 'dupes' of the system within which they were required to operate' (*ibid.*: 7).

The latter characterisation of teachers opened up the question of 'how teachers saw their work and their lives'. By this time, I was developing an explicit argument for the use of life history methods in studying teachers. Writing in 1981, I argued that researchers had not confronted the complexity of the schoolteacher as an active agent making his or her own history. Researchers, even when they had stopped treating the teacher as a numerical aggregate, historical footnote or unproblematic role incumbent, still treated teachers as interchangeable types unchanged by circumstance or time. As a result, new research methods were needed:

The pursuit of personal and biographical data might rapidly challenge the assumption of interchangeability. Likewise, by tracing the teacher's life as it evolved over time - throughout the teacher's career and through several generations - the assumption of timelessness might also be remedied. *In understanding something so intensely personal as teaching it is critical we know about the person the teacher is.* Our paucity of knowledge in this area is a manifest indictment of the range of our sociological imagination. The life historian pursues the job from his [sic] own perspective, a perspective which emphasises the value of the person's 'own story.' (Goodson 1981: 69)

Whilst studies of teachers' lives and careers now began to be more generally pursued in the educational research community, unfortunately, political and economic changes were moving sharply in the opposite direction and this has acted to reverse, at least for a time, the move towards more life history studies. The development of patterns of political and administrative control over teachers has become enormous between the 1980s and the new millennium. In terms of power and visibility, in many ways this represents 'a return to the shadows' for teachers in the face of new curriculum guidelines (in some countries like New Zealand and Britain, an all-encompassing national curriculum); teacher assessment and accountability; a barrage of new policy edicts, and new patterns of school governance and administration. Cochran-Smith and Lytle lay out the educational climate of standards and accountability in the introduction. They argue that the standards movement 'de-emphasises the construction of local knowledge in and by school communities, and de-emphasises the role of the teacher as decision maker and change agent' (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999: 22).

A singular focus on 'practice' and 'practical knowledge' accompanies these changing patterns of educational governance.

Obviously, moves that de-emphasise the teachers' agency, at the same time deter research workers from focusing on teachers' lives.

### **New Directions for Studying the Life and Work of Teaching**

In spite of the attack on teachers' agency, recently a new range of contemporary work by qualitative researchers suggests innovative and interesting ways to address the goal of understanding teachers' *personal knowledge* (see Kridel 1998; Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Goodson and Sikes 2001; Roberts 2002). The addition of the personal aspect in this formulation is a positive development, hinting, as it does, at the importance of biographical and personal perspectives.

Other traditions have focused on the reflective practitioner, on teachers-as-researchers of their own practice, and on phenomenological approaches to practice. In these genres, personal experiences are linked irrevocably to practice. It is as if the teacher *is* her or his practice. The 'teacher-as-researcher' approach suggests a number of problems. Stressing that the teacher

becomes the researcher of his or her own practice appears to free the researcher in the academy from clear responsibility in this process. In my view, such researchers have a primary but somewhat neglected responsibility for sponsoring and sustaining the teacher-as-researcher. Hence, new traditions are developing which oppose the notion that the focus of the teacher-as-researcher should be mainly upon practice. For teacher educators such specificity of focus is understandable, but broader perspectives might achieve even more, not solely in terms of understandings but ultimately in ways that feed back into changes in practical knowledge, public policy, and infinitely broader theoretical understandings.

The danger with a focus on personal and practical knowledge is that it can rupture the links to theoretical and contextual knowledge. Only if these new modes link to wider narratives about social change and globalisation will teachers' knowledge become fully generative and socially and politically efficacious. As Hargreaves has argued, the challenge for post-modern educational research is:

to connect the localised narratives of students, teachers and parents within their own schools, to the big pictures or grand narratives of educational and social change that are taking place 'out there' beyond their classroom walls, in ways that directly affect their lives behind them. (Hargreaves 1999: 341)

The daily work of teachers is politically and socially constructed. The parameters of what constitutes practice, whether biographical or political, range over a wide terrain. To narrow the focus to 'practice-as-defined' is to make the focus of research a victim of historical circumstances, particularly political forces. In many ways, 'the forces of the market', as articulated by many politicians, is often having the effect of turning the teacher's practice into that of a routinised and trivialised deliverer of a pre-designed package. To accept those definitions and to focus on 'practice' so defined is tantamount to accepting this ideology. By focusing on practice in a narrow way, the initiative for defining the research agenda passes to politicians and bureaucrats. Far more autonomous and critical research will be generated if the research community insist on a broader, more contextual focus. We need above all to move well beyond the grasp of what I have called earlier the 'practical fundamentalists' (Goodson 1995a: 145), but as we see there are dangers within more 'friendly' discourses that have sought to sponsor teacher-based research.

The new traditions that seek to broaden the focus of work with teachers, range from life history and biographical studies (Goodson 1981, 1992, 1995b; Goodson and Walker 1991; Tierney 1998, 2000; Roberts, 2002), to collaborative biography (Butt *et al.* 1992; Fine 1994), to teachers' professional and micro-political knowledge (Russell and Munby 1992; Goodson and Cole 1993; Goodson and Hargreaves 1996), through a wide range of interesting and innovative feminist work (Acker 1989, 1994; Smith 1990; Dehli 1994; Munro 1998). This work seeks to broaden the focus of teacher education and development, to include the social and political, the contextual and the collective.

A major aspiration of life history studies is to broaden the focus of work with teachers. Such work might take the 'teacher-as-researcher' and 'action research' modes as valuable entry points, but it moves to extend the immediate focus on practice and on individual classrooms. Life history work is *par excellence* qualitative work. The pioneering work of Thomas and Znaniecki (1918-1920) and other proponents at the Chicago School in the 1920s and 1930s is part of the qualitative legacy. Subsequent work, notably by Dollard (1949) and Klockars (1975), has continued the tradition of American scholarship. In Britain, the work of Paul Thompson (1988) and his use of life histories to study ageing has continued to rehabilitate and

develop the life history tradition (Thompson *et al.* 1991), and also the work of Ken Plumer (2001).

In teacher education and teacher development, much pioneering work has been undertaken. The work of Sikes *et al.* (1985) and Goodson and Sikes (2001) is helpful in developing our understanding of teachers' careers, as is the study, *Teachers' Lives and Careers* (Ball and Goodson 1985). The study by Hargreaves (1994) adds a valuable contextual commentary to our understanding of the enormous global changes that are affecting the life and work of teachers, so also does Hargreaves' new work on the emotional dimensions of teaching (Hargreaves 1998, 2001). Sandra Acker's work is also illuminative of the gender issues embedded in teachers' lives and careers (Acker 1989, 1999).

Martin Lawn (1990) has written powerfully about teachers' biographies and of how teachers' work has been rapidly restructured in England and Wales. Bullough's work has begun to tell us a great deal about the process of becoming a teacher (Bullough 1989, 1998; Bullough *et al.* 1991). Michael Huberman (1993) brings a social psychological tint to his work on teachers' life histories, and also in his recent work has provided considerable methodological insight and illumination (Huberman *et al.* 1997).

Likewise, Susan Robertson (1994, 1996, 1997) has analysed teachers' work in the context of post-fordist economies. She argues, that again the teachers' professionalism has been drastically reconstructed and replaced by a wholly 'new professionalism'.

Such major restructuring of the work-life of teachers highlights the limitations of those methods which focus on the practical and personal worlds of teachers and are limited to story and narrative modes. Teachers' personal and practical reminiscences and commentaries relate to their work and practice. So such data, in the new domain described by Lawn and Robertson, will be primarily about work where moral and professional judgement plays less and less of a part. By focusing on the personal and practical, teacher data and stories are encouraged which forgo the chance to speak of other ways, other people, other times and other forms of being a teacher. The focus of research methods solely on the personal and practical is then an act of methodological abdication, of the right to speak on matters of social and political construction. By speaking in this voice about personal and practical matters, the researcher and teacher both lose a voice in the moment of speaking. For the voice that has been encouraged and granted space in the public domain, in the realm of personal and practical, is the voice of technical competency, the voice of the isolated classroom practitioner, the voices of workers whose work has been restructured and reconstructed.

By using life history methods in studying the teachers' life and work in a fuller social context, the intention is to develop insights often in a grounded and collaborative manner into the social construction of teaching. In this way, teachers' stories of action can be reconnected with 'histories of context'. Hence teaching stories, rather than passively celebrating the continual reconstruction of teaching, will move to develop understandings of social and political construction. It is the move from commentary on what *is* to cognition of what *might be*, or to use Shotter's terms, from the enlightenment mode of rational order the 'imaginary' (Shotter 1993: 199).

Life history studies of the teacher's life and work as social construction provide a valuable lens for observing contemporary moves to restructure and reform schooling. Butt *et al.* have talked about the 'crisis of reform', when so much of the restructuring and reformist initiatives depend on prescriptions imported into the classroom but are developed as political imperatives

elsewhere. These patterns of intervention develop from a particular view of the teacher, a view which practical genres of study often work to confirm.

All their lives teachers have to confront the negative stereotypes - 'teacher as robot, devil, angel, nervous Nellie' - foisted upon them by the American culture. Descriptions of teaching as a 'flat occupation with no career structure, low pay, salary increments unrelated to merit' have been paralleled with portrayals of teaching as 'one great plateau' where 'it appears that the annual cycle of the school year lulls teachers into a repetitious professional cycle of their own'.

Within the educational community, the image of teachers as semi-professionals who lack control and autonomy over their own work and as persons who do not contribute to the creation of knowledge has permeated and congealed the whole educational enterprise. Researchers have torn the teacher out of the context of classroom, plagued her with various insidious effects (Hawthorne, novelty, Rosenthal, halo), parcelled out into discreet skills the unity of intention and action present in teaching practices. (Butt *et al.* 1992: 55)

In some ways, the crisis of reform is a crisis of prescriptive optimism - a belief that what is politically pronounced and backed with armouries of accountability tests will actually happen. But the data which will challenge these simplifications, data rooted in the teacher's life and work, will have to move beyond the currently popular 'practical' viewpoints to develop a broader counter-culture of commentary which is focused on the everyday life and work of the teacher, student and school.

### **The Value(s) of Studies of Work and Life**

A major value underpinning studies of teachers' work and lives is that such studies increase the visibility and indeed usability of teachers' perspectives. In many of the educational changes and reforms currently being undertaken with accelerating speed around the world, teachers' perspectives are too often missing. Hence, research studies of teachers' work and lives provide a powerful antidote to such wilful obfuscation. By focusing on teachers' work and life histories, a wide range of different perspectives will be provided about new moves to reform, restructure and reconceptualise schooling. All too commonly, the new prescriptions and educational changes that are being legislated work against the history and context of the teachers' work and life. By not considering these teacher perspectives, it is likely that a new crisis of change and reform will be generated. For, all too clearly, if teachers are not fully considered in the new initiatives, their centrality in the process will 'act back' against the very essence of the reforms.

One good example of this is provided in Casey's study published in 1992. Her work provides an illustration of how studying teachers' lives can illuminate a range of practical reform problems: in this case, the issue of 'teacher dropout'. She shows how a certain framework of taken-for-granted assumptions have pervaded the way in which the problem of teacher attrition has normally been defined. The definition presumes managerial solutions, and this presumption is confirmed in the discourse which arises from management in phrases like, 'teacher defection', 'supply and demand' and 'teacher turnover'. By focusing managerially, the question of teacher dropout is essentially obscured. Casey shows how, in studying the problem, teacher dropout has been largely looked at statistically rather than in person, and that information has typically been collected from sources, such as State departments of public instruction or district files, or through researcher dominated surveys. As she points out, these strategies too often work with the grain of power/knowledge as it is held by management and bureaucratic elites in the educational system. Casey argues that:

The particular configuration of selectivities and omissions which has been built into this research frame slants the shape of its findings. By systematically failing to record the voices of ordinary teachers, the literature on educators' careers actually silences them. Methodologically, this means that even while investigating an issue where decision-making is paramount, researchers speculate on teachers' motivations, or at best, survey them with a set of forced-choice options. Theoretically, what emerges is an instrumental view of teachers, one in which they are reduced to objects which can be manipulated for particular ends. Politically, the results are educational policies constructed around institutionally convenient systems of rewards and punishments, rather than in congruence with teachers' desires to create significance in their lives. (Casey 1992: 188)

The vital importance of teachers' life and work testimonies is that they expose the shallowness, not to say inaccuracy of the managerial, prescriptive view of school change. A further advantage of studies in life and work is the insights that are provided on the question of teacher socialisation. An underpinning belief in much of the literature on teacher socialisation has defined the period of preservice teacher training and the early phases of inservice training as the prime formative socialising influences on styles of teaching. There is, however, an alternative research tradition developed from life and work-studies which points to a far more complex progress at work. Many studies from the 1960s onwards have focused on the teachers' experience as pupils: the teacher's own experience as a pupil. In his study, *Schoolteacher*, Dan Lortie (1975) has referred to this pupil period as an 'apprenticeship of observation' where the would-be teacher internalises many future role possibilities. Teacher socialisation in this tradition occurs through the observation and internalisation of models of teaching. Lortie argues that these models, which he calls 'latent models', are activated but not implanted during the training period, having often been 'carried in suspension through the interim period of time'. To explore this alternative conceptualisation in teacher socialisation requires that we do far more life history work covering the pattern of socialisation of teachers over the full span of their work and life in teaching. Teacher life and work histories also allow considerable elucidation of gender perspectives. This work has been pursued in interesting ways by feminist scholars, such as Sandra Acker (1989, 1994, 1999), Sue Middleton (1992, 1993, 1997) and Munro (1998). Their studies and other feminist work provide vital and insightful perspectives into teaching as a gendered profession. For instance, the work of Margaret Nelson has sought to reconstruct the work experiences of women teachers in Vermont in the early twentieth century. She notes:

Numerous studies have shown that there is a gap between what we can discover when we rely on published accounts of some historical event and what we can discover when we ask questions of the on-site participants of those same events. This gap looms larger when we are looking at women's history because of the private nature of so much of women's lives. (Nelson 1992: 168)

In general, life history studies of teaching aid the production of a wider range of teacher-centred professional knowledge. To move educational study in this direction requires a major upheaval and reconceptualising of existing educational research paradigms. Nonetheless, the emerging work from a range of genres, from teacher journaling through to teacher thinking, through to work on teachers' practical and professional knowledge, as well as the emerging studies of reflective practitioners and action-researchers, is a solid baseline for such a newly conceptualised mode of educational research. In this sense, life history studies of their nature insist that understanding teacher agency is a vital part of educational research and one that we

ignore at our peril.

### **Studying Teachers' Lives and Careers**

This is a difficult and, in some senses, a dangerous time to be promoting studies of the teacher's life and work. Such studies are both potentially enormously useful in elucidating our understandings of the teacher's work life, and also deeply amenable to misuse by some of the forces currently advocating the restructuration of schooling. In favour of studies of the teacher's life and work is the belief that, by building our knowledge of teachers' perspectives, we can interrogate the experience and reform of schooling in helpful ways. The teacher is a central agent in the delivery of all versions of schooling, and the disavowal of teacher perspectives is a worrying feature of a good deal of recent change and reform. Hence, by studying the teacher's life and work, it is hoped to redress this imbalance.

Against the study of teachers' lives is the considerable potential for misuse by those administering and seeking to restructure schooling. Understanding and, indeed, surveillance of the teachers' life and work could be of immeasurable use in defining and promoting reforms which in many ways are antithetical to many teacher perspectives. For instance, some of the new battery of tests and accountability devices might be seen in this light. Knowing more about the teacher's life and work and integrating these perspectives into reforms can be presented as developing new 'ownership' for the teacher or, in less subtle terms, as 'professional or human resource development strategies'. The new discourse of sensitivity to the identities of the teacher/deliverer of other people's intentions is part of the general marketisation and co-modification of the professions.

This Janus-faced aspect of the study of teachers' lives makes it imperative that we think very carefully about the ethical procedures and patterns of disclosure (and anonymity) which are associated with this kind of work. My view is that these questions of ethics and data ownership are *always* central to work on life histories and personal perspectives. It is true that the current period is a time for extreme sensitivity in this regard, but it is always the case that personal data can be misused by administrative and political interests and, therefore, it is both a timeless and timely issue.

A good deal of post-modern and feminist writing has been deeply thoughtful about these matters and has begun to provide a number of useful ways forward. However, it is important to be cognisant of the fact that the 'colonising' aspect of all work on teachers' lives is not confined to the administrative and political, but also to our own work as researchers. As we saw earlier in the article, this has led to some work on teachers' personal, practical knowledge which confines the researcher to the role of 'scribe', recording in faithful and exact form the teacher's voice and limiting commentary to a minimum. Whilst cognisant of the dangers of a more authorial position, it is important to seek some thematic and contextual understanding of the personal data which is elicited from studies of teachers' life and work histories.

In the following section a number of such themes and concepts are delineated and these may seem too logical and, indeed, linear for some post-modern fashions. They may, for example, be seen as presenting a desire for 'closure and coherence' of the sort that is far too painstaking for the disparate, diverse and dissolving aspects of lives in teaching.

Although there are aspects of 'closure', in the way that accounts and representations are made of the teacher's life and work, this is not the central site of 'closure'. Much as we academics may wish to believe in the centrality of our work, no teachers' lives are subject to degrees of 'closure', largely because they take place in one of the most historically circumscribed of

political and social spaces. Increasingly, as we have seen, schools are now subjected to a battery of government regulations, edicts, tests, curricula, assessments and accountabilities. It is in this domain that the perimeters for teacher agency are both patrolled and controlled. Hence, it is this domain where 'closure' is most evident and needs to be most carefully monitored and witnessed.

Given this historical circumscription, we find ourselves unable to follow post-modern fashion in seeing teachers as having selves that are multiple, disparate and free-floating, subject to constant change and flux. Such a vision of the possibilities of teacher agency ignores the socialised and circumscribed spaces and trajectories of the teacher's life and work. By focusing our study on teachers' life and work histories in these closely patrolled institutional venues, the intention, far from seeking academic 'closure', is on the contrary to create vital spaces for reflexivity and commentary. The work aims to develop our strategies for teachers to reflect upon and analyse their life and work in teaching, in ways that allow a more profound and powerful response to the socially constructed world of schooling.

In arguing for an extended range of studies of teachers' life and work histories, I listed a number of conceptual foci for such work (Goodson 1991).

*Life experiences and background* are obviously key ingredients of the person that we are - of our sense of self - to the degree that we invest our 'self' in our teaching, experience and background, therefore shapes our practice.

A common feature in many teachers' accounts of their background is the appearance of a favourite teacher who substantially influenced the person as a young school pupil. They often report that 'it was this person who first sold me on teaching'; 'it was sitting in her classroom when I first decided I wanted to be a teacher'. In short, such people provide a 'role model' and, in addition, they most probably influence the subsequent vision of desirable pedagogy as well as, possibly, choice of subject specialism.

Many other ingredients of background are important in the teacher's life and practice. An upbringing in a working class environment may, for instance, provide valuable insights and experience when teaching pupils from a similar background. I once observed a teacher with a working class background teach a class of comprehensive pupils in a school in the East End of London. He taught using the local cockney vernacular and his affinity was a quite startling aspect of his success as a teacher. In my interview, I spoke about his affinity and he noted that it was 'coz I come from round 'ere don't I?'. Background and life experience were then a major aspect of his practice, but so they would be in the case of middle class teachers teaching children from the working class, or teachers of working class origins teaching middle class children. Background is an important ingredient in the dynamic of practice (see Lortie 1975; Munro 1998).

Of course, whilst class is just one aspect, as are gender or ethnicity of more general patternings, teachers' backgrounds and life experiences are idiosyncratic and unique and must be explored therefore in their full complexity. Treatment of gender issues has often been historically and sociologically inadequate (Sikes *et al.* 1985). A growing body of work seeks to redress this inadequacy (Smith 1990; Casey 1992; Middleton 1992; Nelson 1992).

The teacher's *life style*, both in and outside school - his/her latent identities and cultures - impact on views of teaching and on practice. Becker and Geer's (1971) work on latent identities and cultures provides a valuable theoretical basis. Life style is, of course, often a

characteristic element in certain cohorts: for instance, work on the generation of 1960s' teachers would be of great value in studying professionals who came in with profound and particular commitments to education as a vehicle for social change and social justice. In a case study of a teacher, focusing on his life style, Walker and I stated:

The connections between youth culture and the curriculum reform movement of the sixties are more complex than we first thought. For Ron Fisher there definitely is a connection, he identifies strongly with youth culture and feels that to be important in his teaching. But despite his attraction to rock music and teenage life styles it is the school he has become committed to, almost against his own sense of direction. Involvement in innovation, for Ron at least, is not simply a question of technical involvement, but touches significant facets of his personal identity. This raises the question for the curriculum developer, what would a project look like if it explicitly set out to change the teachers rather than the curriculum? How would you design a project to appeal to the teacher-as-person rather than to the teacher-as-educator? What would be the effects and consequences of implementing such a design? (Goodson and Walker 1991: 145)

This, I think, shows how work in this area begins to force a reconceptualisation of models of teacher development. We move, in short, from the teacher-as-practice to the teacher-as-person as our starting point for development.

The teachers' *life cycle* is an important aspect of professional life and development. This is a unique feature of teaching. For the teacher essentially confronts 'ageless' cohorts. This intensifies the importance of the life cycle for perceptions and practices.

Focus on the *life cycle* will generate insights into many of the unique elements of teaching. Indeed, so unique a characteristic would seem an obvious starting point for reflection about the teacher's world. Yet our research paradigms face so frankly in other directions that there has been little work to date in this area (see Huberman 1993).

Fortunately, work in other areas provides a very valuable framework. Some of Gail Sheehy's somewhat populist work in *Passages* (1976), *Pathfinders* (1981) and *New Passages* (1995) is, I think, important. So, also, is the research work carried out by Levinson (1979) on which some of Sheehy's publications are based. His work, whilst regrettably focused only on men, does provide some very generative insights into how our perspectives at particular stages in our life crucially effect our professional work. (For women's lives, see later work published by Levinson and Levinson 1996.)

Take, for instance, the case study of John Barnes, a university biologist. Levinson is writing about his 'dream' of himself as a front-rank, prize-winning biological researcher:

Barnes's dream assumed greater urgency as he approached 40. He believed that most creative work in science is done before then. A conversation with his father's lifelong friend around this time made a lasting impression on him. The older man confided that he had by now accepted his failure to become a 'legal star' and was content to be a competent and respected tax lawyer. He had decided that stardom is not synonymous with the good life; it was 'perfectly all right to be second best.' At the time, however, Barnes was not ready to scale down his own ambition. Instead, he decided to give up the chairmanship and devote himself fully to his research.

He stepped down from the chairmanship as he approached 41, and his project moved into its final phase. This was a crucial time for him, the culmination of years of striving. For several months, one distraction after another claimed his attention and heightened the suspense. He became the father of a little boy, and that same week was offered a prestigious chair at Yale. Flattered and excited, he felt that this was his 'last chance for a big offer'. But in the end Barnes said no. He found that he could not make a change at this stage of his work. Also, their ties to family and friends, and their love of place, were now of much greater importance to him and Ann. She said: 'The kudos almost got him, but now we are both glad we stayed'. (Levinson 1979: 267)

This quotation, I think, shows how definitions of our professional location and of our career direction can only be arrived at by detailed understanding of people's lives. Studies of professional life and patterns of professional development must address these dimensions of the personal.

Likewise, *career stages* and *career decisions* can be analysed in their own right. Work on teachers' lives and careers is increasingly commanding attention in professional development workshops and courses. For instance, *The Open University* in England has used our book, *Teachers' Lives and Careers* (Ball and Goodson 1985), as one of its course set books. This is a small indication, yet symptomatic of important changes in the way that professional courses are being reorganised to allow concentration on the perspective of teachers' careers.

Besides the selection of career studies in *Teachers' Lives and Careers*, a range of new research is beginning to examine this neglected aspect of teachers' professional lives. The work of Sikes *et al.* (1985) and Goodson and Sikes (2001) has provided valuable new insights into how teachers construct and view their careers in teaching. More recent work on women's lifestyles, to add to earlier work on men's life stages, will help new studies in this area (see Levinson and Levinson 1996; Middleton 1997).

Moreover, work on teachers' careers points to the fact that there are *critical incidents* in teachers' lives, and specifically in their work which may crucially affect perception and practice. Certainly, work undertaken on 'beginning teachers' has pointed to the importance of certain incidents in moulding teachers' styles and practices (see Lortie 1975).

Other work on critical incidents in teachers' lives can confront important themes contextualised within a full life perspective. David Tripp's (1994) recent work provides a range of elegant examples of critical incident studies. Also, Kathleen Casey has employed 'life history narratives' to understand the phenomenon of teacher dropout, specifically female and activist teacher dropout (Casey 1988, 1992; Casey and Apple 1989). Her work is extremely illuminating of this phenomenon, which is currently receiving a great deal of essentially uncritical attention given the problem of teacher shortages. Yet, few of the countries at the hard edge of teacher shortages have bothered to fund a serious study of teachers' lives, to examine and extend our understanding of the phenomenon of teacher dropouts. I would argue that only such an approach affords the possibility of extending our understanding, and this is particularly important when new initiatives, as those suggested by the Labour Party in the UK, seek to bring back teachers who are over fifty into the profession.

Likewise, as with many other major themes in teachers' work, the question of teacher stress and burnout would, I believe, be best studied through life history perspectives. Similarly, the issue

of effective teaching and the question of the take-up innovations and new managerial initiatives. Above all, in the study of teachers' working conditions, this approach has a great deal to offer.

Studies of teachers' lives might allow us to see the individual in relation to the history of her or his time, allowing us to view the intersection of the life history with the history of society, thus illuminating the choices, contingencies and options open to the individual. *'Life histories' of schools, subjects and the teaching profession* would provide vital contextual background in this respect. The initial focus on the teachers' lives, therefore, would reconceptualise our studies of schooling in quite basic ways (see Goodson 1991; Goodson and Sikes 2001).

Whilst these foci for studying teachers' lives are by no means exhaustive, they do indicate how substantial the insights provided by such work might be. As we have seen, there are dangers in pursuing such work at a time of rapid restructuring, but to forgo such work would be even more dangerous. Teacher perspectives on change are crucially important, and developing our longitudinal understanding of how teachers' practice is being transformed by contemporary changes is central to understanding the ongoing transformation of schooling. As the work in the next section evidences, just as important is realising how teachers' personal beliefs and mission relates to new reform efforts. For, as will be seen, reforms that ignore these matters may be destined not to be high-profile successes but high-cost failures.

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