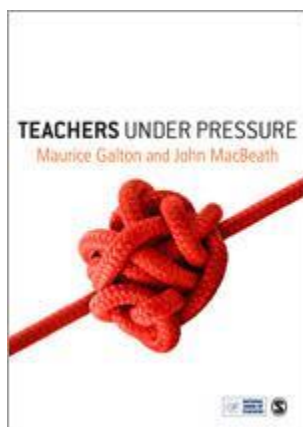


Book Review



Teachers Under Pressure

By Maurice Galton and John MacBeath
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Reviewed by **Deepa Idnani**

Galton and MacBeath present a fascinating account of 'Teachers Under Pressure' in a cross-cultural global context – an area that has not been extensively researched. Galton and MacBeath's work builds on the report by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC, 2001) and subsequent research carried out from 2002 over a five-year period in primary and secondary schools. The book casts a critical gaze on the "working lives of teachers" over the past two decades and tries to determine whether the British government's remodelling agenda has actually changed the situation of teachers on the ground and made their working lives easier and more fulfilling.

The initial chapter places the book's theme within the larger academic discipline and considers how the working lives of teachers have changed in the last few years. In particular, they consider the effects of 'intensification' and the resultant loss of autonomy and a sense of no longer being in control of how and what one teaches (p. 1). Stress, burnout and growing concerns around accountability and bureaucracy as well as work-life balance are persistent themes raised by teachers.

The next chapter provides an historical perspective and reviews the issue of *workload*, which is quite central to what goes on in the school since most aspects of how the school functions as well as teachers' work depends on it. The next chapter analyses case studies of work-life balance from teachers with different contexts, backgrounds and experiences but in common they all share the dissatisfaction and frustration with their job and the feeling of not "being trusted as professionals" leading to growing disillusion with life in teaching (p.28).

In chapters four and five the authors portray how inclusion and the special needs provisions are working and how this may not work for all kinds of needs and the challenges students and teachers actually face on the ground. The changes introduced in the school particularly relating to the provision of time for Planning, Preparation and Assessments (PPA) has been enjoyed the most by teachers and teachers felt happy and relaxed during that time. But the teachers also noted that 'behavioural problems' among students have increased and how teachers have to record the smallest details and spend more time with the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO). Another theme in the book has been the loss of status and respect in the teaching profession, highlighting the reasons teachers choose to leave the profession, while others view their struggles, agony and pain as the consequences of staying on and fighting for what one believes and is passionate about.

Chapters six and seven highlight the continuing trend towards inclusion, which has been seen as a welcome and positive step by all stakeholders. However it is also important to note that their study revealed that teachers widely agreed that exclusion of certain children from the mainstream of school, social and academic life could not only harm them but also render them

invisible to other children, so depriving them of important facets of a social and political education (p. 67). The various case studies detailing partnerships with parents are sections that are interesting to read and reveal that children's learning needs are diverse and supporting the transition from home to school requires support as well as resilience from all stakeholders.

In chapter eight the authors present the background to the process of restructuring the teaching workforce, called remodelling, which has led to reconfiguring teachers' work and remuneration to create a new division of labour within the pedagogical process, allowing teachers to focus their efforts on the core tasks of teaching and learning. This has eventually resulted in an increase in the use of non-qualified staff (e.g. teaching assistants) to work alongside teachers, described as "various supporting roles" (p.80). To some extent teachers have benefitted, as it is possible to provide individual attention to students who need it the most. However, this ignores the harsh reality that it is an *ad hoc* arrangement usually dependent on the management of the school and the funds available, which is constantly compounded by job insecurity for the teaching assistants (p.85).

Chapter nine provides the international perspective from four countries (Canada, Hong Kong, Australia and New Zealand) that have similarities with UK schooling. The chapter provides insights and comparisons among the different countries about the stress that teachers experience due to various reform agendas, increased accountability procedures, mounting parental expectations and a decline in student behaviour. The common thread running through the book has been how the teacher's individual freedom has been declining and how trust and professional competence have less space in today's educational systems across the globe.

In chapter ten, the authors explore whether remodelling the workforce changed structures or is it about changing the mindset? There are numerous challenges in the system, but even then teachers have been able to exert their agency. If resources are utilized efficiently and each teacher feels a sense of responsibility towards the school and the system at large, there would be mutual gain.

The book does not explore the reasons why, despite so much stress and pressure, people are attracted to the profession, and what sustains their interest and keeps them going once they are teachers. Another aspect that Galton and MacBeath have not elaborated is the role of school leadership in building the ethos of the school as an institution, which is a crucial determining factor in teachers' professional lives. The reader would have benefitted if it would have also incorporated some narratives on the relationships between teachers and school leaders, which would have provided a holistic view. Overall the book is designed very well and each chapter begins with a brief introduction as well as some questions to explore, discuss and reflect upon. It is an interesting book to read and would be of interest to teachers, parents, school leaders and educational policymakers and would be of interest to researchers or people involved in teaching from across the globe.

References

PWC (2001) *Teacher Workload Study: A Report of a Review commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills*. London: PricewaterhouseCoopers.