

Preface

What Kind of Book Is This, Whom Is It for, and How Should It be Read?

I hope that this book will be of interest to a number of audiences, each with a different purpose, background, and prior knowledge base. Four in particular come to mind, although there may well be more.

In some ways the reader I imagined most frequently while writing this book is another educational researcher, perhaps more specifically someone with interest in questions of workplace learning, professional practice. If this is you, some of the references and concepts that I draw on will be very familiar; others may be glaring in their absence. Chapter 2, which describes the research site, might be particularly important as an introduction to an unfamiliar context, while Chap. 3 might reveal differences in our theoretical understandings and perspectives. The book is offered as a contribution to and extension of sociomaterial and practice-based approaches, what Paul Hager calls a third tranche of workplace learning research, embracing an overarching metaphor of emergence. On this basis I hope it offers something different, perhaps challenging, in terms of the account it offers of professional learning and practice. There are no doubt problems and lacunae in my account (I acknowledge the absence of critique and detailed attention to affect several times), and I look forward to joining the conversations in which these and other issues will be thrashed out.

Another reader I have in mind is the educational ethnographer. I have been fortunate to participate in whole conferences and special interest groups formed precisely around this community. I recall my early days as a doctoral student, reading school-based ethnographies from cover to cover (Willis, Beach, Lacey, Walford), and the influence of Delamont, Atkinson, and Hammersley in my formation as a particular kind of educational researcher. Again, Chap. 2 will be crucial, given that a parenting service may seem a strange context for an educational ethnography. To you, I hope that the methodological account in Chap. 4 offers some meaningful space of recognition, and that the opportunity to journey with me through

the detail of empirical data, getting close up to the actions and artefacts of life on the Residential Unit, offers something of the vicarious pleasure I experience when reading ethnographic accounts of schools, universities, and other educational institutions.

I am aware, too, that I may also be addressing an audience with no a priori scholarly concern for questions of education, professional practice, or learning. As I devoted myself to exploring practice theory, I sought out both the original theoretical texts and the accounts of empirical studies where perspectives and concepts had been put to work. Perhaps, then, you are reading this book out of an interest in practice theory or sociomaterial approaches, particularly, maybe, Schatzki. To you I confess that I have appropriated Schatzki's and others' concepts playfully, perhaps mischievously or even wrongly (in the sense counter to the original author's intent). In my defence I point to Schatzki's own admitted "appropriation" of Wittgenstein's and later Heidegger's work, and argue that for me, the concepts come to life, and bear fruit, only in contact with empirical material. If a little bit of bending reveals something of relevance and value in my empirical work, so be it. To this audience, Chap. 3 will offer a key positioning, while Part II may be the most rewarding.

Of course I cannot forget a fourth audience (and the order bears no reflection on their importance): those who work, or plan to work, in similar professions or settings to those described in this book. This may be child and family health nurses, parent educators, social workers, psychologists, speech pathologists, child-care workers, and many more. I hope this book meets you in a recognisable but perhaps not instinctive space: one in which you can see yourself or features of your work, but perhaps notice new things. In my many interactions with the staff of Karitane since completing my fieldwork, one of the most rewarding and exciting forms of feedback I have received is when professionals have made comments such as: "Yes, that's exactly what we do, just not in the words I'd have used!" or "Hmm, I wouldn't have described my work to you that way, but I can see how it makes sense". It may be in Part III where the most immediately useful tools for (re)thinking about your practice are provided, although I anticipate that each of the four dimensions explored in Part II will reveal aspects that you may recognise but perhaps not have addressed so directly in the past. I have gained confidence from comments made by practitioners that the account I offer affirms and perhaps reveals anew, the craft, skill, and expertise in their work, and the valuable contribution it makes to families and society at large.

There may be other audiences of course—perhaps readers from organisational studies, or those like my co-presenters in the *Time, Space and Body* conference for whom there are different points of connection and shared interest. To you, indeed to all my anticipated readers, I have tried to present ideas in a meaningful and intelligible way. As I have intimated above, I am not convinced a linear reading of this book will always be the most useful or fruitful. To that end I encourage dipping in and out, jumping around—what we might call an emergent approach that follows the signposts forwards and backwards wherever they point somewhere that seems interesting.

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