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Claremont Cameos

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BOOK REVIEW

Hunt, L. and Trotman, J. (2002). *Claremont Cameos*, Churchlands, Edith Cowan University \$29.95

In 1902, Claremont Teachers College opened with 11 male and 30 female students and they studied Scripture, English Language, Literature and History, Latin, Geography, Physiography, Arithmetic, Geometry, Drawing, Singing, Reading and Recitation, Theory and Practice of Teaching. Male students also took Chemistry and Physics, Algebra and Manual Training (Woodwork). Female students also took Kindergarten, Needlework and Domestic Economy. At the end of the first year, the Principal of the Teachers College, Cecil Andrews left to become Inspector General of the Education Department of Western Australia and he remarked in the 1902 Annual Report 'It is with great regret that I am leaving this most interesting and attractive sphere of work'.

Claremont Teachers College began, as it continued for most of its time, with a distinctive curriculum and expectation for its female students. *Claremont Cameos* presents accounts of the educational and other life experiences of 21 of the College's female graduates. Most, but not all, of the accounts are of extraordinary careers in education or other fields of endeavour. They are women who, in the words of the 1952 Box Report, 'had they but been men would have risen to the highest ranks of the Education Department'. One of the more recent graduates did become CEO of the Ministry of Education in Western Australia.

As these accounts are based on oral interviews, a potential problem for a book of this kind is a lack of balance due to a preponderance of interviewees being active retirees. *Claremont Cameos* is fortunate in being able to present accounts of a student who entered the College in 1911 and others who entered in 1922 and 1923. It shows editorial balance in also recording the

accounts of students who entered in the 1960s and in 1979. It is also indicative of its editorial style that only female interviewers were used. Given the nature of publishing accounts based on interviews, 'the integrity of each woman's perspective has been respected in each chapter by reporting as closely as practicable the transcript of her interview.' (p.22) The accounts, as presented, trace 'historical variations in the social definitions of gender and teacher professionalism...(and) examines the ways in which individuals interpreted and resisted social messages about being a woman teacher.' (p.270)

The editors also provide a brief introduction and methodological explanation for the accounts and a concluding overview that sets the accounts in a theoretical framework. The editors claim that *Claremont Cameos* 'describes and names eight decades of the terrain of what it has meant to be a woman teacher in Western Australia.' (p.286) It does this and more. It provides an easily accessible means to consider the accomplishments of teachers over this period that have helped to change the skills, understandings and attitudes of the children in their charge. These changes have enabled teachers to engage in careers and women to live lives at the end of the twentieth century in ways inconceivable at the beginning of the twentieth century. *Claremont Cameos* also provides a challenge for contemporary teachers to consider how they may work with the children in their charge and with their colleagues to bring about desirable change in schools and society.

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