Shaping A Professional Identity: Stories of Educational Practice

F. Michael Connelly & D. Jean Clandinin, (Eds) London (ON): Althouse Press, 1999, 184 pp., ISBN 0-920354-47-5

The editors, Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin, present this book as the result of 20 years of work with graduate students, teachers and student teachers. The book presents reflections and insights into teacher knowledge acquired through conversations and reflections on these conversations. It is a paperback text consisting of four sections. Part One presents teacher stories, stories of teachers, school stories and stories of school. Part Two looks at the editors' reflections on knowledge, context, and identity. Part Three highlights administrators' stories, stories of administration and system stories, followed by Part Four which again explores the editors' writings on knowledge, context and identity. In the introduction, the editors state that "the puzzle we pursue in this book is the connectedness between teachers' questions of identity and their own teacher knowledge" (pp. 3).

The first two stories written about classrooms in Part One are stories with which all educators can relate. They are stories about students' interactions, parent-teacher conferences, and those special children who have a lasting impact on us. The stories capture the joy of teaching, the frustration and pressures, and the isolated world of public school. The third story presents the challenges a nurse educator faces in teaching a dense curriculum to a group of adult students from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. The fourth story travels between a new teacher's experiences and the reflections of a principal. It captures the importance of relationships in the development of our profession and the difficulties of establishing learning communities when staff changes occur. The fifth story illustrates the need for shared visions and the importance of symbols such as banners and logos and physical space. In Chapter seven, the sixth story unfolds by presenting the story of an adult ESL class. The unstable job security adult educators face, and the complexities of the work they are engaged in with adults who experience settlement issues, parenting and marital problems, and even challenges working with immigration and government agencies, are painted in this story.

In Section Two the authors attempt to identify themes which emerge from the stories. They present the teachers as curriculum makers. They then analyze three stories in light of the theme of curriculum and identity shaping. Chapter nine presents a lens through which to view the stories. The authors talk about the importance of stories. They conclude with this statement: "With a knowledge of the narrative history of school stories and of the central stories to live by for teachers and others in the school, we believe that it is sensitive to the question of who we are as practitioners" (pp 102).

In chapter ten the authors describe the nature of school as a landscape with borders and cycles. They present a detailed analysis of what they call "spatial

and temporal borders". They draw out aspects and particular incidents from the stories to help present a picture of the teachers' professional identities. Chapter eleven merges the authors' stories with the ESL adult educator's experiences. The changing nature of education is vividly presented through the authors's musings of their stories, their previous writings and Norman's (the ESL adult educator) story.

Part Three of the book relates three administrators' stories. The first story illustrates the tensions a teaching administrator experiences. The split existence this administrator faced presents him with a dilemma. Must he eventually choose one role - an administrator or a teacher? The next chapter deals with the unique experiences an administrator of an inner city adult ESL program has, in addition to the expected report writing and classroom visitations. The last story portrays a "principal as a rebel". This administrator "viewed situations differently than school officials" (pp. 152). The author of this chapter describes numerous incidents where the administrator went against tradition, and explores the tension he experienced. The concluding chapter highlights the dilemmas the administrators experienced as they attempt to make a difference. The authors present the differences they observe between the administrators and teachers' stories.

This book is an enjoyable read as one can relate to the experiences of the educators and administrators. They are the stories we have experienced and observed our colleagues work through. There were many themes that emerged through the telling of these stories and I wanted to explore them fuller. At times the editors' analysis left me frustrated and the stories at times seem to end abruptly. It felt as if there were still things to be said. The constant shift of metaphors becomes confusing at times. Images are painted as one reads the stories and the analysis, but there are too many shifting pictures. I enjoy metaphors; however, they are overused at times in this text. The administrators' section was particularly short and the editors acknowledge this in the concluding chapter. It would have benefitted from a few more stories. This would add some depth to the second analysis.

As I was reading, I was thinking about the audience for which this book was written. Teachers and administrators would enjoy the stories but may get lost a little in the analysis. Graduate students studying teacher education would find this a useful text. I read the book twice and found that I was able to draw out different points from each read. The stories are rich real experiences and it is important we document these. Teaching is a complex profession and this text does capture the complexities of these teachers' daily lives. The authors describe this when they say "Given the idea of landscape of teaching, these multiple qualities of teacher identity are to be expected"(pp 172). Another strength of the text is how, in every story, relationships are identified as critical. Teaching is built on relationships; this should have been explored a little more in their analysis.

This is a text which causes one to pause and reflect on the experiences presented, the analysis the editors undertake, and how we have experienced similar and different perspectives. It is a relaxing read, capturing "*Stories of*

Educational Practice". The editors have a great respect for educators and administrators, and feel that we have a lot to learn from each others' stories.

Vianne Timmons
University of Prince Edward Island