

percentage of African-American students in college preparatory and advanced placement tracks to 10% and was notified by the white-dominated school board that he was being dismissed. Roussell said in an interview in the February 21 issue of *Education Week*, "Of course, as you can imagine, most of the students in the bottom level were black, although many had standardized test scores as high as or higher than those in the upper level" (Spring, 1998, p. 107). It required a school boycott by African-American students before he was reinstated. White parents reacted by threatening to remove their children from public schools and sending them to private institutions.

Throughout the book the reader will find several more examples of these underanalyzed claims and propositions, indicating that on certain issues the book is not thoroughly researched.

A further problem with the book has to do with an editorial flaw. The author uses the Chicago referencing style, but there are works and quotes cited in the book that are not referenced in the chapter notes. For example, in chapter 7 citations on pages 95-100 and citations throughout chapters 17 and 18 are not referenced in the notes. These omissions seriously detract from the book by leaving the reader in a kind of informational limbo and by creating doubts in the reader's mind about the credibility of the sources cited in the book.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, I enthusiastically recommend the book to all educators interested in issues of equity, diversity and multicultural education. It contains several propositions for transforming schools into communities of difference able to acknowledge and honor all students rather than questioning or submerging their legitimacy.

Reference

- Dewey, J. (1966). *Democracy and education*. New York: Free Press.
Spring, J. (1998). *American education* (8th ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.

Daily Meaning: Counternarratives of Teachers' Work. Allan R. Neilsen (Ed.). Mill Bay, BC: Bendall Books (P.O. Box 115, Mill Bay, BC V0R 2W0), 1999, 197 pages.

Reviewed by *Meredith Rogers Cherland*
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Critical ethnography in the field of education is the result of the following dialectic: On the one hand, critical ethnography has grown out of dissatisfaction with social accounts of "structures" like class, patriarchy, and racism in which real human actors never appear. On the other hand, it has grown out of dissatisfaction with cultural accounts of human actors in which broad structural constraints like class, patriarchy and racism never appear. (Anderson, 1989, p. 249)

Meredith Rogers Cherland, a former elementary schoolteacher, is a professor and Associate Dean of Education. She believes that literacy education is an important site of struggle for justice and social change. She is the author of *Private Practices: Girls Reading Fiction and Constructing Identity* (Taylor & Francis, 1994), a critical ethnography of grade 6 girls' pleasure in reading that is framed in critical feminist theory and Marxist literary theory.

I like these words from Anderson because they so neatly encapsulate the discussions and disagreements my colleagues and I have been having over the past 20 years about a proper focus for educational research. The truth is that some of us do believe that critical ethnography is the best of all possible forms for research: We respond to its ability to bring the macro and the micro together, to present lived experience in vivid and moving ways while keeping the workings of the larger society visible. But it is also the truth that most of us who admire critical ethnography attempt it only once. In my experience, researching and writing a critical ethnography takes more time than any committed university teacher (or any other teacher) can muster.

Daily Meaning comes as close to critical ethnography as it is possible for educational research to come without actually being critical ethnography. Eight classroom teachers, or people who have recently been classroom teachers, tell their stories of teaching, their "insider tales," each one in a different chapter. Editor Allan Neilsen, as one might expect, introduces the chapters with a tribute to teachers' struggles to make meaning of their lived experiences. But he also provides glimpses of the larger social framework in which these tales reside. He identifies them as "counternarratives," as challenges to the dominant cultural narratives that normalize our everyday beliefs and practices. He reminds readers of the inequitable distribution of the society's resources; he mentions the social devaluing of education in Canada and the US; he tells us we will be reading about acts of "resistance," and all before we even begin to read the stories. He frames the micro with the macro at the start and engages my heart and mind the way no other approach to understanding education can.

These are eight vivid narratives. One teacher writes about his searing emotional connections with high school students who are about to drop out; another talks about the lives of five closeted lesbian teachers; another explains his reasons for leaving public school teaching; four women principals present portraits of the emotional labor of school leadership. Some of the individual stories stay with the personal and the individual, but others make connections with the larger society. Those that stay solely with the personal are not as meaningful for me.

The first story, "Rough Cuts" by Jeff Doran, a high school English teacher from Nova Scotia, is one of these. Doran's novelistic writing conveys the essence of the place "school" beautifully. Reading Doran, I feel I've been in that workroom and that staffroom 1,000 times. His scenes of classroom life, the students-as-characters that people these pages, are realistic and wonderful. I read and I feel his frustration, his anger, and his hopelessness. But that's it. Doran doesn't make connections with the larger society. He describes his own lived experience and leaves it at that. I can only nod my head and sympathize with him in his misery.

In "Front Lines," on the other hand, Arlene Connell and Carol Johnston-Kline do better. They exchange letters about their daily lives as teachers, and from the first page of their chapter they make connections with the external societal forces that affect them: the provincial government budget cuts, media attacks on teachers and public schooling, and disgruntled community groups, all of which grow out of beliefs that education is or ought to be a commodity

that erases the effects of poverty and social disruption. Their letters to each other are thoughtful and reflective conversations about teaching. They do contain the vivid details that provide a sense of their lived experiences: They speak of being spat on in the lunchroom, of seeing handouts for home abandoned on the floor and stuffed into desks, of Rice Krispies stuck to the kitchen table at home after a long work day. I wish they had provided even more of this to keep me (the reader) grounded in their daily lives. But there is enough. And what they tell me of their daily teaching lives means more because I see how it is connected to the larger social world.

It's hard to strike the right balance between concrete detail and social analysis. J. Gary Knowles does pretty well in "Looking Back on 'Getting Out,'" in which he alternates passages from his own journals, some written more than 20 years ago when he was a secondary classroom teacher, and some written today as a teacher educator at OISE. The older entries provide a sense of the issues of daily lives in classrooms in Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea. There are encounters with controlling principals and angry parents who fail to understand the young teacher's innovative curriculum. There is an outdoor education field trip to the mountains, and a colleague's all-consuming production of a school play, both of which go unappreciated by the community. These older entries are juxtaposed with journal entries written in September 1997 while the Ontario teachers' strike rages on. Knowles connects his teaching life of 20 years ago with public responses to the 1997 strike, first telling stories of teachers struggling to teach well while they battle principals and parents who want to deskill and control them, then analyzing the Ontario media response to the strike to show that the issues have remained the same. His work is effective.

Taken as a whole, so is *Daily Meaning: Counternarratives of Teachers' Work*. It is thoughtful and readable and interesting. It is not as satisfying as a good critical ethnography because it doesn't have room for the thick description and the expansive theorizing I love in my favorite research genre. I would have liked more of Jeff Doran's novelistic realism, more of Geraldine Hennigar's rich encounters with parents and students. I would also have liked more of Mike Corbett's reflections on history and more of Jacqueline Barkley's philosophical analysis of the beliefs our children infer from a culture grounded in mass consumerism. At the end of the day *Daily Meaning* attempts to do what critical ethnography does, but on a smaller, more manageable scale. In many ways it is successful. What it conveys to us is important. And for those of us who struggle to find time to read critical ethnographies, and who fail to find time to write them, a book like *Daily Meaning* is a practical alternative.

In the final chapter of *Daily Meaning* Jacqueline Barkley discusses the nihilism that is poisoning the lives of many Canadian children today and that the other authors have portrayed so well. She argues that our children are failing to discern our adult values because we adults (parents, teachers, counselors, social workers) have been leaving our children alone to face mass marketing, unemployment, inequitable social practices, and poverty. She suggests that the only way to change the tide of children's rage and hopelessness is to attempt small and part solutions one-on-one with children, while we seek to understand the social causes of our educational problems so that we can

resist and struggle to counter them. She urges us not to see the world only in terms of the personal, or only in terms of the political.

Another dichotomy (that we ought to avoid) is in the separation of the private and personal from the social and collective ... Must our solutions be private or collective? Can they not be both? Why do those of us who want social justice tend to ignore calls for private accountability? And why do those of us who call for so-called "family values" and personal morality not demand the social justice in which these can flourish? Let's begin to think in holistic visions, not split paradigms. (Jacqueline Barkley, p. 192)

I plan to take her advice.

Reference

Anderson, G.L. (1989) Critical ethnography in education: Origins, current status, and new directions. *Review of Educational Research*, 59(3), 249-270.

A Sense of Themselves: Elizabeth Murray's Leadership in School and Community. Carol E. Harris. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Press, 1998, 188 pages.

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It is a fitting time for a book such as Carol Harris' to arrive on the educational landscape. In a period when education is under assault in Nova Scotia as in other parts of Canada, this book is indeed timely. In Nova Scotia the assault on education has included forced amalgamation, which has seen smaller, community schools replaced by larger, modern but sometimes alienating facilities often further removed from the communities they serve. Decentralization and site-based management have become code words for justifying the reduction of staff and services to schools and communities. The neo-conservative agenda of the government that hopes to reduce education to "work training" and "basic literacy" has created an unfriendly climate for support for the arts and the humanities in schools. In such a time a book that stresses the importance of community and the arts and arts education is welcome. Moreover, the story of one woman who devoted her life to arts and community education provides hope and inspiration to those resisting reductionist forms of education and schooling.

In a reader-friendly style that will appeal to both practitioners and lay people, Harris chronicles the life of Elizabeth Murray, or Betty Murray as she preferred to be called. The story is a fascinating one of a woman who grew up

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