

BOOK REVIEWS

Ben-Peretz, M. (1995). *Learning from experience: Memory and the teacher's account of teaching*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 192 pp. (Softcover).

As a teacher and writer I often feel like the man who asked the ring-master of a circus for a job. The ring-master said, "What can you do?" Without speaking the man rose slowly into the air. He flew in graceful loops for several minutes, and then landed at the ring-master's feet. His face glowed with expectation and pride until the ring-master barked, "Is that all you do? Bird impersonations?" I remembered that story several times as I read *Learning from Experience: Memory and the Teacher's Account of Teaching* by Miriam Ben-Peretz who is a Professor of Education at the University of Haifa, Israel. I remembered the story because Ben-Peretz has made a significant contribution to the rapidly expanding literature that investigates stories of teaching, but I also have nagging reservations about her contribution. In a paradoxical way the strength of the book is also its weakness: the book addresses many issues that are relevant to the ongoing discussion of teachers' stories, but the issues are generally discussed and dismissed with almost dizzying dispatch.

As Ben-Peretz explains, "this is a book about recollected events in the lives of retired teachers in Israel" (p. 5). Ben-Peretz asks two main questions: "How is experience transformed into professional wisdom?" and "What is the role of memory in this process?" (p. 2). She addresses these questions in several different but related ways. First, she includes brief stories from several retired teachers, and interprets some of the main themes in these stories. In addition, she engages in some consideration of the rhetoric of stories, as well as the value of stories for understanding teachers' practice. Attention is given to the diverse contexts in which teachers teach, and implications for teacher education and school administration are discussed.

Ben-Peretz deserves special praise for her innovative work in connecting teachers' stories to current concepts and conclusions of research on memory. I hope that many more education researchers will follow her lead. For example, she distinguishes between episodic and semantic memory and defines the nature of autobiographical memory and explains various ways that memory is structured. She uses statistical procedures to spell out shared

characteristics of teachers' memories. Connections are drawn between teachers' memories and their understanding of themselves as teachers.

Nevertheless, I still have many reservations about *Learning from Experience: Memory and the Teacher's Account of Teaching*, and I feel a little churlish because Ben-Peretz has done so much. My general concern is that by attempting to cover so many ideas and approaches and concepts, the author has opened window after window in a grand castle, and gives us tantalizing glimpses only. As I read, I was consistently delighted with what Ben-Peretz offered in each chapter, but I always wanted more. For example, in her interpretations of some of the teachers' stories, she presents the basic and obvious themes, but I wondered what themes might emerge if she devoted her attention to a closer hermeneutic reading of the stories. Many of the stories are engaging, and I wanted to hear the voices of the retired teachers more. I wanted to linger with their stories without having to rush to the next topic. Also, chapter 6 on the rhetoric of stories investigates how stories are structured with beginnings and endings and coherence and point of view. This attention to the construction and craft of stories is much needed in the research on teachers' stories, but this chapter ought to be placed near the beginning of the book, not near the end, in order to prepare the reader for understanding the teachers' stories. I am also concerned that Ben-Peretz ignores the current work on narrative that is informed by postmodern perspectives. Issues of autobiography, lifewriting, subjectivity, memory, textuality, hermeneutics, and identity are all integrally connected to postmodern interrogations, and there is no evidence of postmodern perspectives in *Learning from Experience: Memory and the Teacher's Account of Teaching*. Attention to postmodern perspectives might have helped Ben-Peretz avoid what I regard as a slavish alliance to the many scholars she cites. Instead of interrogating the views of F. Michael Connelly and Jerome Bruner, for example, she is willing to cite them only in order to demonstrate how her research confirms or is confirmed by their pronouncements. I wish Ben-Peretz had engaged in more critical discussion with the many scholars she refers to.

Learning from Experience: Memory and the Teacher's Account of Teaching is a book that I will recommend to my students and colleagues. It has many significant strengths, and in offering this critical review I do not wish to diminish the contributions of Ben-Peretz to the continuing growth of research on teachers' stories. The more I engage in this kind of research, the more I realize how many possibilities there are. Ben-Peretz has shown me more possibilities, especially connected with research on memory. I especially appreciate the humane and optimistic spirit which sings in her words: "Listening to the voices of retired teachers can serve to create

empathy with other practitioners, and a sense of belonging to a vital, though vulnerable, profession" (p. 154). I will not be like the circus ring-master who asks, "Is that all you do? Bird impersonations?" I applaud the accomplishments of Ben-Peretz in her new book, and eagerly anticipate future scholarly developments in examining the connections between teachers' stories and memory.

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Tochon, F.V. (1993). *L'enseignant expert*. Paris: Nathan, D.P.E., 256 pp. (Softcover). Préface de M. Huberman.

A un moment où la plupart des Facultés d'Education du Canada travaillent à réorganiser leurs programmes de formation des enseignants pour des raisons économico-pédagogiques, le présent ouvrage de F.V. Tochon arrive à point nommé. L'auteur accomplit une synthèse qui s'organise autour du paradigme désormais incontournable – bien qu'encore en gestation – de l'expertise enseignante. Ce paradigme articule plusieurs dimensions dont les champs respectifs pourraient bien recouvrir les questions de recherche que les institutions pré-citées sont amenées à se poser.

Il est intéressant de noter ici que cet ouvrage est publié en France au sein d'une collection qui s'adresse en premier lieu aux étudiants des Instituts Universitaires de Formation des Maîtres (I.U.F.M), autrement dit aux tout derniers venus dans le courant d'intégration de la formation des enseignants à l'Université. Conjointement, le contenu relève d'un champ plus traditionnellement anglo-saxon, où le rôle des Universités dans la dite formation est questionné. Ce constat permet d'emblée d'éviter le risque d'interpréter cet ouvrage comme incarnant une volonté de replacer la formation au niveau des écoles et de déresponsabiliser l'Université à cet endroit. En ce sens et Michaël Huberman le souligne très justement dans sa préface "l'approche de F. Tochon nous mène sur un terrain relativement nouveau" (p. 8). Ce terrain pourrait bien être celui d'un nouveau partenariat entre les responsables de la formation et au niveau de la recherche une