

BOOK REVIEWS

Schulz, R. (1997). *Interpreting teacher practice: Two continuing stories*. New York: Teachers College Press. (Softcover) 154 pages.

In her text *Interpreting Teacher Practice: Two Continuing Stories*, Renate Schulz makes a courageous attempt to come to terms with the aftermath of 'narrative research gone bad.' In her study a research subject refused the narrative written about his teaching practice. This was indeed serious since Schulz works in an area of study firmly committed to promoting, securing, and reproducing the stories of teachers against other more esoteric depictions of classroom life. In her study Schulz sought to understand "good teaching practices in secondary English classrooms" (p. 4) by producing the narratives of two exemplary high school English teachers, John and Raymond. Both narratives are included in the text. Raymond believed, quite rightly in my estimation, that he was depicted in his narrative as "a frenetic, insensitive moralist" (p. 73). His response is vividly and painfully detailed in journal entries also included in Schulz's text. Despite having observed and talked with Raymond for two years, Schulz was unprepared for his reaction. Attempting to make sense of what went wrong, she discusses the ethics and methodology of narrative inquiry, drawing on the work of Nel Noddings. She ends the text using a selective reading of literary theory, as a means of understanding what is required in order to better read teachers' stories. According to Schulz we are "new readers of teachers stories" and require new reading practices.

New ways of reading and writing research, and new ways of thinking through the ethical issues of research are certainly worthy of discussion, perhaps more so than what Schulz's brief text provides. There is a great deal of discussion in various research communities about the ethics of qualitative research: the issues of working with human subjects in and against the power relations that frame university research practices, the difficulty

of representation, and the vulnerability of participants involved in long-term studies in which close collegial relations develop. The fear of reinscribing relations of power in research committed to transforming such relations, haunts many of us. Schulz offers a spate of different methodical ideas about conducting narrative inquiry, but in my opinion needed to acknowledge and challenge more vigorously the issues and ideas outlined. In the end I feared Schulz was creating what Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin describe as a "smoothing narrative" that would allow her to continue to do the research she was committed to, albeit more collaboratively and more "caringly." I do not believe the tensions and difficulties of qualitative research generally, or narrative inquiry in particular, will be so easily resolved, ethically or methodically. While this should not paralyze important research, it does demand careful and critical assessment of the possible directions forward, even if this means questioning an "ethics of caring."

Schulz uses Nodding's "an ethics of caring" to suggest that "how we relate to family and friends should ... become our model for a caring relationship and a primary fidelity to persons should guide our thinking during research" (p. 83). Such a model she claims could lead to a "truly collaborative inquiry" with "genuine mutuality" (p. 84). Certainly research subjects should be respected, and an "ethics of caring" may go a long way to easing research relationships, but missing here was a discussion of the limits or risks of turning research subjects into friends and family, or the limits of the family as an ideal model for research relationships. Among other things, there are power dynamics that name and organize family relationships and the nature of caring within families that may or may not be useful in research relationships. Furthermore research produced within a relationship based on a notion of family caring will take a particular form: the stories old, not told, or told in a way to ensure affiliation, peace, and continuity of the relationship may be different than in other research relationships.

The limits of "mutuality" also need to be acknowledged and discussed. The assumption that mutual understanding is always possible seems to underlie much of the discussion of collaborative work. It is possible that there may be important and interesting

places and spaces where common ground, common understanding, may not be attained or even reasonably expected. Rather than wishing or working differences away, the conflicts and compromises become a part of the study.

Also important is the question how truly collaborative research may limit the pool of teachers who can and will participate in research. What teacher will have the time, energy, and interest to engage in intense, long-term, collaborative study with university researchers who may not share their views? Do researchers, then, end up studying the exceptions; or, in securing collaborative research participants, find or create teacher-versions of themselves? Whatever else there is a need to name and discuss with our subjects and with the research community the dynamics that determine and organize our research relationships.

Even if a "truly" collaborative, caring, and genuinely mutual relationship with a research subject is attainable, there are concerns about the reading of teacher narratives produced. Schulz uses reader-response theory(ies) to argue that meaning lies primarily in the reader and not in the text, and thus the focus and analysis should remain on the reader of teachers narratives. Our reading practices and perspectives do require analysis; however, by drawing strictly on reader-response theory(ies) Schulz leaves open the dangerous possibility that all readings and reading positions are personal and idiosyncratic. This may lead to the conclusion that all readings are relative. In such a case, it would be easy to defend against Raymond's negative response since even the reading of his own narrative would be particular and no more valid than anyone else's. More helpful may be literary theories which place the reader, text, and reading within larger social contexts and purposes. Such theories (postmodern, feminist, cultural critique) shift the emphasis to the interpretive frames, social positions, historical conditions, and textual conventions in which stories are collectively produced and read. Placing and considering the research relationship, the narrative, and its reading, within a social world may have alerted Schulz to the problems of Raymond's depiction as well as provided for thicker, richer descriptions and richer, more critical analysis. Among other things, the effects of Schulz's social positioning and theoretical perspectives would be included as a necessary part of the two

narratives. For example, considering that Schulz was a young woman researcher working with older male research subjects who had established reputations and more extensive teaching experience than she possessed, the gender dynamics affecting the research process, the narrative itself, and the later readings could have been a part of the research and the narrative that followed. Following another line, the conventions of narrative form impose structure on the meanings and readings made available in the two narratives and so would also require discussion. Considering the strong element of chronology in narrative, it is not surprising that the focus in both stories was on John's and Raymond's personal and professional history. They talked of their past. Oddly enough Schulz found this remarkable.

In the case of teacher narratives, the thicker, richer stories and analysis I am suggesting might demonstrate more aptly the complexity of teachers' lives in the classroom, personally, socially, and politically; as well as the complexity of qualitative research. But even if a researcher and subject collaboratively choose to produce and maintain a single, straight-forward narrative line as authentic and "real" (as was the case with John) what seems to me to be left out is the question of what the narrative does; that is, what is the social and psychological work done by a particular rendering of the professional or personal self? What does the narrative secure for the individual, for the researcher, for the readers? And what does it disavow or repress? In the case of teacher narratives what does this tell us about the enterprise of schooling and the effects of being a teacher, both socially and psychically? In this regard, recent scholarship in the area of psychoanalytic theory may be useful in extending and deepening the reading and writing of teachers' narratives.

I am heartened that Schulz and Raymond continued to work through what was undoubtedly a difficult and painful experience. Perhaps we can make amends to Raymond and others for the still clumsy nature of current research methods by pressing more carefully and more critically for better ways and means of conducting qualitative research. It is not a matter of continuing the story, but of critically determining best path(s) forward, acknowledging the limits and risks undertaken. As an academic who does not employ narrative inquiry, but has had her own

struggles with qualitative research, I look forward to Schulz's future work. As it is, *Interpreting Teacher Practice: Two Continuing Stories* should be read by all those attempting narrative research, if nothing else, as a cautionary tale, but more hopefully, as a invitation to deeper and more critical thinking about the narrative enterprise.

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Hobson, P.R. & Edwards, J.S. (1999). *Religious education in a pluralist society: The key philosophical issues*. London: Woburn Press, (Softcover) 184 pages.

This is a well-written, well thought-out book about teaching religion in public schools. After analyzing this situation in Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, the authors opt for what they call an approach called pluralistic liberalism. This approach sets out a methodology that deals honestly with the "truth" of the various religions but does not prejudge the various belief systems, either implicitly or explicitly, nor does it put on hold dicey questions of epistemology.

This volume is divided into four major parts, each of which comprises two chapters. The four parts are: The Legitimacy and Place of Religious Education in Schools, Responses to Pluralism in the Teaching of Religious Education, Ethical, Political, and Social Dimensions of Religious Education, and The Teaching of Religious Education: Case Studies and Recommendations. The first and fourth parts of the book are particularly germane to this review in light of the fact that the book's discourses makes no reference to the situation in Canada. Nonetheless, these sections do have relevance to the Canadian scene.

Hobson and Edwards appear thoroughly convinced that religious education ought to take place in public schools as a vital