



Book Review

Teacher Educators as Critical Storytellers: Effective Teachers and Windows and Mirrors

Libbi R. Miller, EdD. School of Education, Cal Poly Humboldt

email: elizabeth.miller@humboldt.edu

Review of *Teacher Educators as Critical Storytellers: Effective Teachers and Windows and Mirrors*

Edited by: Antonio L. Ellis, Nicholas D. Hartlep, Gloria Ladson-Billings, David O. Stovall

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Abstract

Teacher Educators as Critical Storytellers: Effective Teachers and Windows and Mirrors is a collection of curated stories that pushback against the narratives that define a “good” teacher. Told through critical storytelling methodology, the book draws on the “windows” and “mirrors” framework to invite multiplicities into the understanding of teachers. The book successfully contributes to a broader, inclusive and culturally sustaining narrative of teaching and education related professions and can be implemented as a text for learning with both preservice and inservice teachers.

In their book, *Teacher Educators as Critical Storytellers: Effective Teachers and Windows and Mirrors*, editors Antonio L. Ellis, Nicolas D. Hartlep, Gloria Ladson-Billings and David O. Stovall curated a collection of stories that pushback against the dominant and historical narratives that “good” teachers are young, white and female (Haberman, 2012). Through the use of personal stories, the book successfully contributes to a broader, inclusive and culturally sustaining narrative of teaching and education related professions. The book includes professional and personal narratives from highly accomplished educators, educational researchers and leaders who were invited to tell the story of their most memorable

teacher using indigeneity, race, and/or ethnicity lenses.

The book draws on Style’s (1996) “windows” and “mirrors” as a framework for disrupting the single story of teachers and teaching. Through this framework, effective educators serve as both “windows” and “mirrors” for students. Students must see themselves reflected racially and culturally through the mirror of the teaching population. While at the same time, students must be able to look through the windows of their teachers and their experiences to see opportunities beyond their current contexts. Style (1996) contends that context influences education in a way that is impossible to disentangle.

“Windows” and “mirrors” recognize and validate this relationship between meaning-making and context, which allows for participants to then engage in larger dialogues between themselves and the world. The “windows” and “mirrors” of this collection invite multiplicities into the definition(s) of a “good” teacher. These multiplicities broaden and complicate the discourse around who is the ideal teacher.

Through deeply rich and personal stories, the authors included in the book employ “critical storytelling” methodology to explore the intertwined experiences of race, gender, lived and learned experiences in schools. Critical storytelling is a form of auto-ethnography that creates a space for participants to tell their stories and validate their experiences (Bolen, 2015). The storytelling aspect of this methodology invites reflexivity, which progresses movement towards social justice (Fasset & Warren, 2007). Bolen (2015) notes that risks and vulnerability are associated with critical storytelling, but contends that there are also risks with silence. The risk of silence is particularly present in stories such as these that have traditionally been kept out of social science inquiry.

Teacher Educators as Critical Storytellers: Effective Teachers and Windows and Mirror is divided into four parts: 1) African American Perspectives: Toward “Demographic” and “Democratic” Imperatives, 2) Asian American Perspectives: Beyond Blackness and Whiteness, 3) Native American Perspectives: Indigeneity is Not Race, and 4) Latinx Perspectives: The Latinization of Education. In the collection, authors tell descriptive stories of their experiences with educators who maintained high standards while also acknowledging the strengths, experiences and funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) that the students brought with them to the learning environment. A critical component of the book is its position that optimism in itself will not lead to social change, but change requires critical interrogation of the systems that oppress which includes educational systems and spaces.

Each story in this book interweaves an analysis that draws on research in education, psychology and human development. Throughout the text, the authors employ research and theoretical frameworks to explore their experiences from a broader perspective, while maintaining personal elements of their story. For example, author Antonio Ellis explores their experience with their high school music teacher, Mr. McCloud, through the lens of Ladson-Billings (2009) “dreamkeepers”. Judy Alston analyzes their teacher Sister Mary Regis as a “tempered radical” (Meyerson, 2001) and a “refined revolutionary” (Alston, 2018). Nicholas Hartlep shares the story of their school counselor, Mr. Smith, through lenses of “primary needs” (Maslow, 1943), “gentle teaching” (Haberman, 2008), “presentism” and “active listening.” The storytelling component humanizes and brings to life educational research in a way that allows the reader to become immersed and, while limited by positionality, deepen their understanding of the experience.

The intended audience of this collection is a broad range of educators including preservice and prospective teachers, inservice educators and administrators in both K-12 and higher education, teacher education scholars and researchers, as well as those working in educational policy. This text is highly recommended for use in educator preparation programs with preservice teachers and leaders, as well as inservice mentors. Sections of the text provide short lists of recommendations for preservice and inservice teacher development. This book has potential to be highly impactful for preservice and inservice teachers, as they are able to read and engage with the text to develop recommendations and/or next steps in collaboration with their own community of practice.



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