

and evokes emotion as well as intellect and itself possesses both rhythm and poetry.

If this review appears more eulogistic than critical then all I can plead is that Egan's approach is nowhere more needed than in the centralized state system of England, where teacher training has been reduced to lists of competencies by order of a centralized Government Teacher Training Agency which openly and explicitly promotes the notion that teaching can and should be an exact science and that enclosed with its 1999-2001 Corporate Plan an endorsed essay which includes the statement, "there is a quaint old fashioned and ultimately damaging British view that teaching is an art, not an applied science." It goes on to call for more political intervention in teaching methods.

'Egan – England hath need of thee. She is a fen of stagnant waters.' I feel it is a subversive act to place this book in the university library and I have enthusiastically done so.

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Neilsen, Allan R. (Ed.). (1999). *Daily Meaning: Counternarratives of Teachers' Work*. Mill Bay, BC: Bendall Books Educational Publishers. (Softcover). 197 pp.

In her novel, *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley creates a mystical morality tale about what happens when we dare to transgress the limits of knowledge, the accepted boundaries between human self and other, between what has been socially and scientifically established as typical and atypical. The nameless creation of Victor Frankenstein embodies the transgression, blurring the boundaries between, and constituting a hybrid of human and non-human characteristics. Here, Shelley is playing out the problem of identity construction in the arena of transgression.

It is this relationship between identity and transgression that seems central to *Daily Meaning: Counternarratives of Teachers' Work*. Teachers tell stories of their struggles to live outside the

boundaries of commonly held cultural codes in teaching – codes that require teachers to be invisible, silent, uncritical, compliant, and nice – what we euphemistically call professionalism.

Pat Clifford and Sharon Friesen recount their efforts to live differently as teachers – to work interpretively (rather than technically) with children, to research their collaborative practice, to write, and to publish. The more the teachers invested in their research and teaching practice, the more compelling their lives as teachers became, and yet, the more excessive they appeared to colleagues and administrators. Responses to Pat and Sharon varied from: "Right royal pain in the ass!" to "Split up these two" (p. 48). They become problems to be fixed. "Difference, willfulness, stubborn independence, relentless questioning, defiant insistence" are not to be tolerated (p. 54).

While Pat and Sharon rendered themselves visible and monstrous to colleagues, Sonja Singer describes her efforts to maintain invisibility. Sonya revisits her early years of teaching in a small community in Eastern Canada. When community members chose to believe the teacher's partner was her sister and not her lover, the "potentially subversive consequences of having a lesbian teacher in the school" could be ignored (p. 139). The unwritten ideal that teachers purvey mainstream (heterosexual) ideologies is maintained while the teacher's identity is erased. Once again we are reminded how difficult it is to broker difference through the institution. We wonder what other differences remain closeted in our schools, afraid to show themselves.

Jeff Doran provides a fascinating, if not depressing, set of reflections about the violence that we do to ourselves and to one another in schools, the resentment, hatred, and guilt that teachers often feel. Teachers often hate students. Students learn to be polite but insincere. Conflict must be avoided at all costs. Everyone tries to be nice. Teachers rarely challenge one another or their students. Everyday something is spilled, Doran writes, "but it isn't blood" (p. 25). Meanwhile the busyness goes on and the teachers who try to be civil, "to look us in the eye, to talk one-on-one, to listen until we are finished, will be turfed out by lunchtime" (p. 39). Yet teachers keep coming back, Jeff writes, back to the loneliness, the crowds, the abuse, the disappointment, and to the silence.

Not unlike Shelley's monster, Doran and his fellow writers in this text find themselves wondering: What does this mean? Who am I? What am I? Whence did I come? What is my destination? Pain, suffering, personal trauma hover over the pages and teachers' search for daily meaning is evident. It is disturbing that such a culture of darkness exists in a profession that prides itself on bringing children into the light. These "counternarratives" invite the reader to ask: How does a teacher teach and live within these terms? What does teaching do to teachers? How is a teaching identity shaped as a result? How are teachers themselves complicit in creating and reinforcing these ideals?

One of the most compelling narratives in the book takes up the foregoing questions in an interesting manner. By recounting a series of incidents from her life as teacher of her own son in a public school, Geraldine Hennigar powerfully depicts the dance that teachers must do as they negotiate among multiple, contradictory positions of power and powerlessness. The dance is a difficult if not confusing one as Geraldine begins to understand the complexity of her life as teacher and woman. From moment to moment, teachers are at once perpetrators and victims in our schools.

Stories can testify to the surprising range of the possible in life. These stories are no different. An ordinary place like school suddenly appears strange to us. And *teacher* becomes a bounded entity, fixed and contained beyond our former imaginings. Should we believe these stories? I do. The teachers with whom I have shared them do. Somehow we recognize ourselves in the authors. We recognize the regulatory ideals that undergird who we can be and how we can act in schools. We remember the times we too were rendered monstrous. We try to forget our prompt retreat from the gaze. Prospective teachers express welcome relief at stories which dare to interrupt the often romanticized, heroic quests presented to them as teaching. We all wonder at the courage of these teachers who seem unafraid to transgress, to become monstrous. But then what?

Finding the courage to teach seems all too familiar an adage these days. While Allan Neilsen's book invites such courage, it also demands much more of its readers. It's brand of courage is not that of the rugged individualist who learns to survive despite the difficulties. Each story in its own way encourages teachers to

be monstrous, to view our work critically, and to speak out in insistent voices about the difficulties we face in schools. Ultimately, these stories attest to what teaching can do to teachers.

Reading this book will not enable us to transcend the difficulties of teaching once and for all but it may afford ourselves and our colleagues some insight, some momentary escape from that which has deceived us and held us captive.

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