

Title of Book: *Critical Narrative as Pedagogy*

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Review

This is a rewarding publication with a range of chapters to interest multiple audiences. Building on their previous work, Goodson and Scherto invite the reader on a journey that is both intellectually and emotionally satisfying, traversing the research into narrative, critical reflection and identity, autobiographical memory and critical narrative. However, the book does more than offer thought-provoking insights and a re-thinking of narrative, identity and critical narrative: it draws the reader in with stories about the authors' own experiences (both professional and personal) and the healing capacities of narratives and storytelling through the recounts of real-life traumatic experiences from individuals involved in the authors' projects.

The structure of this book moves from a clear outline of the dialogic aspects of critical pedagogy to individually written chapters, navigating critical narrative as pedagogy, autobiographies as critical narrative, narrative in various learning contexts, the role of memory and narrative in healing and biographical learning, and in doing so, integrates the thinking of scholars such as Friere, Dewey, Gadamer and Brewer. The book argues that through attending to memories and narratives, the individual is well-positioned to construct a clearer sense of identity and to draw meaning and purpose from experience and reflection on that experience and ultimately, an enhanced sense of well-being. To do this, the authors contend that narrative functions as a 'life-map' to explain the individual's actions, motivations and values as well as provide insights into contextual socio-cultural phenomena. Further, the authors hold that the critical dimension of narrative resides in its capacity to clarify our ethical obligations and moral objectives through an examination of our use of language and actions.

The Introduction provides a valuable overview of the book's structure and allows the reader to identify specific areas of interest. Scherto Gill provides a compelling example of the power of narrative in her recount of two men, both of whom had been opposing combatants in the Lebanese civil war and their participation in and witnessing of traumatic events. Through extended conversations labelled 'dialogue meetings' drawing on their painful memories, the two men are able to recognise how narrative can construct and demonize the 'Other', sustain destructive mythologies about individuals and whole communities but also reveal common human experience that is both harrowing and inspirational. The men also come to recognise that through the exploration of our internal narratives and the underlying psycho-dynamic demands in relation to the larger myths that have been absorbed into our 'ways of being', we develop the agency to expose and dissect these myths in order to reshape these memories into "stories of peace".

Central to the book's premise is the authors' development of a "theory of context". This involves the individual coming to understand the "historical periodization and cultural location" of the "resources" they use to develop their individual narrative and "selections of autobiographical remembering" which drive the narrative. The attraction of this theory is that it allows the individual to clarify "ethical commitments and moral aspirations" through examining actions and language. It allows us to understand varied experience by articulating the "situatedness" of our own stories and through further articulation and questioning of 'moral location', identify strategies to "figure out who we are".

For me, the chapter "Biographical Learning in Higher Education" was of particular interest where individual reflection, sharing oral narratives and exchanging written biographical vignettes provided the core of a systematic and logical approach to self-enquiry through the writing of a "learning biography". Specific (and uplifting) accounts of individuals involved in this programme are presented, charting their 'self-learning' journeys and interactions in their discussion groups. While the authors acknowledge that biographical learning is a "rarely explored field", this "whole-person" approach accepts and endorses the presence and role of emotions in learning within a safe environment, and in doing so, allows participants to use narrative as an "avenue for expression of their inner integrity, personal growth, professional learning."

Tertiary educators, health professionals and school-based teachers will all find something of interest and import in this work. For tertiary and secondary school teachers, whose work is increasingly situated within the crucible a myriad of accountability measures, the notion of biographical writing might well provide some respite from these demands, for both themselves and their students. In any case, the impressive scholarship and careful thinking and the strong resonances with the concerns of social justice make this publication a worthwhile focal point for further discussion and analysis.