Book Review

Bringing Memory Forward: Storied Remembrance in Social Justice Education with Teachers Teresa Strong-Wilson (2008). New York: Peter Lang. 186 pages. ISBN: 978-0820488745

In her multi-layered book, Teresa Strong-Wilson addresses the pressing concern of white teachers' resistance to challenging their memories and experiences of race and privilege. She questions how white teachers can come to recognize and critique their own attachments and their constructions of "difference." Her response, as illuminated in this book, is to invoke the autobiographical through critical self-examination of "stories heard, read and experienced , and memories of those stories" (p. 3) which can become the landscape for a recognition of how such stories have shaped them and contributed to their formation as teachers. In the text, Strong-Wilson draws upon her own literary education and an excavation of her "storied formation" as a white teacher in a northern Aboriginal community, and upon interviews with eighteen in-service teachers who met once a month in four different literature groups to read and discuss children's literature and to write about their literary histories.

The text *Bringing Memory Forward* is organized around eight chapters, framed by an explanatory introduction that sets out the intent of her book, and a brief conclusion that revisits her central question of the potential of storied formations for social justice education. Chapter one explores notions of excavation and relocation, considering how teachers can ground themselves in recollections of their personal histories, to reconnect with their own landscapes of experience in order to understand more clearly who they are as teachers. The ideas in the chapter draw predominantly on Grumet's (1988) processes of autobiographical excavations, Pinar's (1978) theories of "currere" or critical self-examination, and Greene's (1978) work on metaphors of landscapes. In reflecting on her own autobiographical writing and that of the participating teachers in her study, Strong-Wilson attempts to redirect the reader's focus away from a confessional self to a consideration of how this personal writing takes account of the audience the writer is trying to reach and attention to the message they are trying to convey.

Strong-Wilson's critical self-reflections of her childhood experiences and her travels north to teach in Aboriginal communities form the basis of chapter two of her book. As a reader, I had the sense I was stepping into the midst of a story already told in previous writings. In the chapter she re-views and re-examines her experiences in the First Nations community of "Ravenwing," contextualizing them within a historical

Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry, 2009, 1(1), pp.55-57
ISSN 1916-3460 © 2009 University of Alberta
http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/cpi/index

framework of female travel narratives as described by Pratt (1992). From her self-imposed "exile" as a teacher in the North, Strong-Wilson comes to understand the notion of "estrangement" to herself, a state of self-doubt that allows new insights into the cultural myths she had taken for granted. This sense of estrangement underpins many of her later reflections in the book, as she ponders possibilities for white teachers to re-experience childhood stories and fears of the "Other" in order to come to new understandings of themselves and their lives as teachers.

Chapters three and four explore in more detail white society's fear of difference, drawing on the writings of novelists Toni Morrison (1992) in the United States and Margaret Atwood (1978), in Canada. Both these novelists, as Strong-Wilson suggests, point to the canon of North American literature as positioning its readers as white. Any "Black" or "Aboriginal" characters in most of these texts exist only in the margins or as shadowy presences in the background of the stories. These stories have formed what Strong-Wilson terms the "touchstones" of our imagined nation, ones that have received a privileged position in our homes, libraries, and school curricula.

In the following chapters, (four, five, six and seven) Strong-Wilson expands on this concept of literary touchstones with her description of a research study with eighteen female in-service teachers who met once a month in literature circles, and then participated in reflective individual interviews. The teachers wrote literacy biographies and shared their reflections on their early reading and the stories that were most meaningful for them in their lives.

In the study, Strong-Wilson juxtaposed re-readings of the teachers' favourite books from their childhood with contemporary fiction that offered counter-narratives to the limited viewpoints or racist perspectives of the earlier texts. I found these chapters to be the most engaging part of her book. Hearing the teachers' voices and silences as they confronted and often resisted the knowledge of how their favourite stories marginalized or stereotyped those outside the white mainstream was fascinating reading. In this study, Strong-Wilson also explored the notion of "counter-memory," repressed memories that are forgotten or resisted because they touch on deep-seated fears. For the teachers in the study, coming to terms with these counter-memories meant reflecting on family histories in which relatives had "looked away" from the treatment of Aboriginal children in residential schools or other forms of colonial injustices. Accepting these memories as part of their own storied lives appeared to be a first step for the participants to move forward with a new consciousness of the need for social justice education and their role in this process. Strong-Wilson effectively supports her research findings with references to the work of many different literary and curriculum theorists.

In the final chapter of the book, Strong-Wilson looks to the current and future literacy curricula in schools with the increasing use of technology and multi-media. She

draws on the work of Mackey (2002) to consider how hypertext and the internet are reshaping narratives and the world of stories as we know them. The role of affect and the desire for story appear to remain unabated even as the medium shifts. Strong-Wilson concludes with a reminder that literacy teachers in a changing technological world need to continue to recognize and critically examine their own literary touchstones and help their students to do the same.

Bringing Memory Forward is a significant book in its exploration of the power of story, and the potential for white teachers in particular to begin challenging their own memories and experiences of race and privilege. At times, particularly in the early chapters, the writing becomes overwhelmed by an excessive use of quotes and references. As a reader, I found the middle section of the book most satisfying where Strong-Wilson offers us details of her action research study and presents her findings with rich details of literary texts and quotes from the teachers in her study as they reflect on the influence of these texts on their lives and their teaching. Her book is a valuable reminder of the power of storied remembrance to bring about change and should be of interest to all curriculum scholars and teachers interested in social justice education.

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