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Book Reviews

Jay C. Thompson, Jr.
Book Review Editor

Developing Educational Insight through Stories: Opportunities Worth Exploring

Stories constitute a wonderful way to communicate issues, dilemmas, values, cultures, and understandings. From our personal experiences we know that children are fascinated by good stories and often request to hear them repeated again and again. The process of using stories as metaphors and learning devices can assist our professional growth and development as well. Stories as communication vehicles allow us to see children, educational practices, and educators through different perspectives and venues. Belief in a student's ability to learn, belief in our ability to teach difficult concepts effectively, learning from the experiences of other educators, and using the experiences of others as a mirror to see and understand ourselves more clearly are some of the benefits available through the medium of stories.

The following books provide insight into this captivating process. Once we open our minds to the opportunities available through stories, we journey into a critical examination of our beliefs, our practices, and our opportunities to influence both the lives of our students and our personal and professional growth.

The Kindness of Children by Vivian G. Paley

Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999

Reviewed by Paul Vermette

Niagara University, Lewiston, N.Y.

Their stories depend on the interference, which is to say, on the kindness of children. When joined by a companion, loneliness vanishes, allowing goddesses to step forward and play a part in their story (p. 95).

It is an interesting thought—combining kindness with interference—but this thoughtful, humane, wonderful little book sees the combination as its prime thesis. By “interfering,” children become real entities and a part of others' lives, their thinking, and their communities. (Glasser would call this “their quality world.”) Paley, who has spent a career observing little children and inducing them to join, learn, care, and share, is *the* storyteller of our profession; she has written about the children we will teach in a way that will touch us forever. In many ways, this is a book that tells stories about children and adults telling stories! Paley convinces us that knowledge (facts and concepts), intelligence (the ability to fashion products and solve problems), and wisdom (making moral decisions) all flow from our shared involvement in the stories we encounter across the landscapes of our lives.

That said, here is my story:

Jay C. Thompson, Jr., Ed.D., is professor of curriculum, Teachers College, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana.

In the introductory course I teach in a teacher-education program, I have used Paley's *White Teacher* (1980) as the first book. It has been everybody's favorite text since its publication: it shows us how teacher reflection and journalizing take place; it shows us how expectations alter truth; it shows us how race, religion, and gender realities exist in a heterogeneous world; it shows the importance of student activity for learning; it shows us how silly standardized tests are; it makes Vygotsky and Piaget practical; it makes Gardner's multiple-intelligence theory come alive; and it demonstrates how important community is to people. I have had many students tell me that "reading it made me think of kids—and myself—in new ways"; or "this is the best book that I ever read: teachers are people who really do care about kids"; or "this is the first time I have ever seen the world through the eyes of an old Jewish woman." My story, then, is simply that Paley writes in ways that touch me and my students, making us care, giving us ideas, and validating our own struggles at various times of our lives.

In *The Kindness of Children*, Paley connects the wisdom of the very old with that of the very young; she connects the readers' own fears of loss, alienation, and exclusion with those of the children in her stories; and she connects the solutions of problems to moral concerns such as kindness and respect.

Paley's new book does all the good things *White Teacher* did, and more. She has provided great stories for students to reflect on. The book provides an enticing "window" that helps students begin to see into their newly chosen profession.

As a cooperative-learning theorist, Paley has presented evidence that small children *need* to talk, listen, act, and help each other regularly to develop the social and moral "skills" that the culture desperately wants. Paley's analysis gives me pause about how schooling drives natural empathy and a sense of community *out* of young people as they move from K-5 to 6-8 schools. Fortunately, she also provides hope that in the sharing and respectful acceptance of *their* stories, teens can regain empathy, tolerance, and understanding.

Because of my interest in staff development, I am enamored of the power of teachers' storytelling to create productive change. Paley begins *The Kindness of Children* by telling us of the wheelchair-bound Teddy and what she learned from him—and how he has become a central part of *her* stories. She tells us the powerful

urban story of Damone and Albert and of its impact on others. She tells of traveling to schools to engage teachers in dialogue and in sharing. She tells us of Minna, Miss Elliot, Mr. Flambeau, and most important, she tells us of her mother. All these real people shaped Paley's life—and changed her as a person *and* as a teacher.

Finally, as an aging man in a changing culture, I thank Paley for re-acquainting me with a sense of perspective about children. By nature, human beings are moral, social, giving, sharing, empathetic, trusting, and *helpful*. The culture that we provide them, most notably the schools we are now reforming, can support or reject those qualities. Moreover, Paley hints that we can personally accomplish great ends with simple means—by our daily interactions with people and by our continued commitment to bring out the "good" in other people's life stories.

***The Disciplined Mind:
What All Students Should Understand***
by Howard Gardner

New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999

Reviewed by William I. Bauer

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Both educators and the general public have been preoccupied in recent years with educational reform—how children can best acquire the knowledge and skills they will need for success in life. In *The Disciplined Mind*, the Harvard psychologist and educator Howard Gardner attempts to raise this level of discourse above the more mundane dialogue concerning vouchers, charter schools, national standards, and the like. Gardner presents his vision for K-12 education, discusses in detail what he believes an educated person should be, and provides suggestions and guidelines on how these goals can be achieved.

Gardner values an education that features depth over breadth of learning. While recognizing certain educational basics that all students need to master, he adamantly opposes an approach such as E.D. Hirsch's "cultural literacy," which requires students at each grade level to master specified content and then assesses achievement by standardized paper-and-pencil tests. Gardner proposes instead an educational program that helps students acquire in-depth understanding of a relatively few disciplines, engendering in students the ability to think as people in that discipline do. Gardner believes education should help students explore the meaning of truth and falsity,

beauty and ugliness, and good and evil as defined by their cultures. To illustrate how these concepts might be approached, he discusses truth and falsity in terms of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, analyzes beauty and ugliness through Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, and examines good and evil through the lens of the Holocaust.

Multiple intelligences can help achieve these outcomes by providing many different ways to begin studying an area—numerous entry points—enabling the use of analogies to bridge the gap from the known to the unknown, and allowing the central ideas of a topic to be expressed in many different ways. Gardner, realizing that not everyone may share his view of what education should be, suggests that there be more than one type of school for students and their parents to choose. The various approaches or “pathways” include: 1) the Canon Pathway; 2) the Multicultural Pathway; 3) the Progressive Pathway; 4) the Technological Pathway; 5) the Socially Responsible Pathway; and 6) the Understanding Pathway. Gardner's hope is that students who follow his preferred pathway, the Understanding Pathway, will come to a deeper understanding of disciplines and continue to act as “pursuers of knowledge”—perhaps even “creators of knowledge”—for the remainder of their lives” (p. 245).

Gardner challenges us to step back and look at the big picture in education. Readers who have immersed themselves in a discipline and experienced learning that leads to a depth of understanding will most likely agree with Gardner that all students can benefit from such experiences. Whether they are attainable in this era of state-mandated standards and assessment is uncertain. However, if the goal of education is preparing students to succeed in the world of their future, whatever that world may be, then Gardner's proposals merit serious contemplation by all those involved in education and the development of educational policy.

***You Sound Taller on the Telephone: A Practitioner's View of the Principalship*
by Dennis R. Dunklee**

Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 1999

Reviewed by Jack Conklin, Education Department
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
North Adams, Mass.

This book follows a recent trend in which studies of administrators or leaders have been novelized. Thus far this year I have read *The Goal*,

by Iliyahu M. Goldratt; *Leading with Soul*, by Bolman and Deal; and *You Sound Taller on the Telephone*, by Dennis R. Dunklee. All three books, following a developing leader through various stages of growth and increased enlightenment, captivate as novels and provide insights into the lives and thoughts of leaders most people never get to know.

Such insight into the life and thoughts of a school administrator is one of the best reasons to read Dunklee's book, which follows the career of Grant Sterling, a school principal, through a series of vignettes at several schools. Because it is in a novelized form, we get to observe Sterling's thinking process, his foibles, his best attempts to “solve” problems, his successes and failures. We are there when events unfold. Observing Sterling's best efforts at dealing with actual episodes, for which no theory discussed in his college or university classrooms prepared him, we gain a new awareness of the complex nature of the school principals. Although some of the solutions and the principal's private thoughts might be considered politically incorrect or clichéd, reading the book gives one an almost voyeuristic pleasure at looking inside the mind of a principal.

These “errors” of thinking actually provide fodder for the other part of the book, which was written as a text for a school-administration course. At the end of each chapter, there are reflective questions relating to the prior episodes. The “errors” give future administrators the opportunity to challenge something and thus provide a jumping-off point for lively class discussions and, perhaps, some authentic learning. Occasionally Dunklee's situations seem contrived, stereotypical, or pat, but overall the situations are realistic enough to provide the student of school administration an opportunity to understand the metacognitive processes of a principal.

The worst problem I had with *You Sound Taller* is the fact that the publisher's Web site for material not included in the book malfunctioned when I tried to reach it. (I was able to obtain the information by e-mailing the author.) I found the extra information to be only moderately related to the book and would argue that you do not need a frustrating search on the Web to enjoy or benefit from reading the book.

I recommend this work to anyone who wants to peer into the mind or life of a busy principal. Be prepared to disagree with or be offended by some of the hidden thoughts or solutions offered

by Grant Sterling, but that is one of the reasons you will find the book engaging.

Ilyahu, M.G., and J. Cox. 1992. *The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement*. Great Barrington, Mass.: The North River Press.

Bolman, L. G., and Deal, T. E. 1995. *Leading with Soul: An Uncommon Journey of Spirit*. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Discipline with Dignity for Challenging Youth

by M. N. Mendler and R. L. Curwin

Bloomington, Ind.: National Educational Service, 1999

Reviewed by Jim Powell

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Most of us have heard about professors so disgusted in their search for a good text that they were driven to write their own. These stories probably have more truth to them than we would like to admit. My recent quest for a good textbook on classroom management nearly set me on a similar path. Most of the classroom-management texts I reviewed briefly explained psychological or sociological theories underlying student behavior and then provided a series of various management strategies. The most common comment in my class about such texts was "This wouldn't work in my room or with my students."

Discipline with Dignity for Challenging Youth is a refreshing and needed change from the traditional format. The preface alone provides enough substance to create at least one successful class discussion, if not the basis for a full semester of critical reflection on what teachers mean when they talk about discipline and management. The authors' statements of belief, both in the preface and at the beginning of each chapter, can be used to force students to explore and define not just their management philosophies but the educational belief systems upon which they are built.

Chapter 2, "Change Starts Within," and Chapter 3, "Attitudes and Beliefs," should help students examine how their belief systems are enacted within the context of the classroom. Teachers will probably find the chapter on student misbehavior and discipline strategies useful and familiar. That chapter is as close as the authors come to handing out management recipes. Chapter 7, "Seven Goals for Successful Discipline," is a great template for teachers to identify and implement effective management strategies. The authors do not simply tell teachers to create caring class-

rooms. After going into some detail on the ways in which teachers can accomplish that task, they emphasize that teachers can use such suggestions only as a beginning point, not a complete system.

The two chapters I found most interesting dealt with "Special Discipline Problems" and "Frequently Asked Questions." Under the special-problems section, the authors present various ways in which teachers can deal with ADHD students and gangs. I have not seen those two issues, which impact almost every teacher's classroom today, directly covered in other texts. For anyone who has been on the Internet, the chapter on FAQs will be familiar. The questions are as timely and the responses as direct and practical as they would be on-screen.

I am no longer searching for a text for my classroom-management course. I have found it: a text not heavy on strategies and systems; a text that can focus the reader's attention on how his or her beliefs are used to create and support a classroom-management system; a text that is topical and timely. And at least for the next year or so, I can comfortably plan around it.

The School of Education: Its Mission, Faculty, and Reward Structure

by Jianping Shen

New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999

Reviewed by Thalia M. Mulvihill

Higher Education, Ball State University, Muncie, Ind.

The conflicts experienced by members of schools of education in the U.S. system of higher education are the primary focus of Professor Shen's important work. Why is this focus needed? Because, as Shen convincingly argues, schools of education are undergoing an identity crisis that is negatively impacting every part of the educational and social agenda to which they are responding.

These conflicts include internal tensions, such as how much time should be dedicated to research or to work "in the schools," and external tensions, such as responding to the public's expectations of the role schools of education ought to be playing. Shen concludes that the origins of these conflicts can be found in the rapid diversification of the mission of schools of education and in the result: competing demands for the time and attention of education faculty.

Although Shen does not present the methodology of his study in great detail, his appendix shows that the data were collected during the Study of the Education of Educators (SEE), a

national study of twenty-nine institutions of higher education directed by John Goodlad. This larger study, which produced a 59.6 percent return rate, sought data on various target populations associated with schools of education. Shen focuses exclusively on the data collected about faculty. He defines faculty as “tenure-line faculty associated with schools of education.” The 948 respondents who fit this definition were 65 percent male; 93 percent were white, 5 percent black, and 2 percent Asian/Pacific Islanders, Hispanic, or Native American. Eighty percent were over 40 years old. Professional rank was distributed as 43 percent full professors, 33 percent associate professors, and 20 percent assistant professors; 4 percent of the sample checked “other.”

Chapter 2, “History of the School of Education: A Perspective from the Concept of Pedagogy,” is a particularly useful contribution to the study. Tracing the evolution of the term “pedagogy,” Shen argues that the fluctuating purposes of schools of education, within university constructions, are directly related to the ways in which “pedagogy” is interpreted. By revealing the pervasive problem for teacher educators, this chapter provides the background necessary to understand the complexity of the faculty role within schools of education: “If we, as educators of educators, are unable to convincingly argue what teaching entails, which is the very essence of the concept of pedagogy, then we will not be able to persuasively define what we do, and by default, we will be defined by others.”

Shen offers a three-part solution to this identity crisis. In order to strengthen the concept of pedagogy, teacher educators must first “establish a more coherent concept of pedagogy” by revisiting the evolution of the concept and deciding what portions of the concept to harness. Second,

teacher educators should work to “ensure the status of pedagogy” by institutionalizing it, including its own protected budget. He offers Goodlad’s concept of Centers of Pedagogy as a premier example of reshaping the university as an organization that values schools of education as more than “cash cows” or the absorbers of public discontent. And last, Shen argues that teacher educators need to emphasize the normative and scientific aspects of teaching. The moral dimensions of teaching, essentially the domain of teacher educators, need to be reclaimed. Furthermore, he emphasizes that teaching practices are based on reliable and compelling research, even if the public, as consumers (including other members of the university community), has a difficult time accepting the findings of that research for economic or political reasons.

This argument leads Shen to the conclusion that the time is now to “reorient the schools of education to the concept of pedagogy” by taking it back from the liberal arts faculty. It is this final conclusion that I find problematic. Unlike other portions of his work, this idea, in my view, is not fully developed. It is perhaps better to articulate a need for teacher educators to recommit themselves to the interdisciplinary nature of their work than to reinvokethe problematic binary “education professor” and “content-methods professor.” Such distinctions, created by status-conscious and disciplinary-centric notions of preparing educators, have historically ended as all infighting does—annihilating progressive education agendas and facilitating state bureaucratic control of the formal and informal curricula associated with preparing educators.

Shen sets the table for everyone concerned with preparing educators. Are we ready to break bread together?