

Book Review

Title: *Both Sides of the Table: Autoethnographies of Educators Learning and Teaching With/In [Dis]Ability*. Disability Studies in Education, Vol 12. Eds. Susan L. Gabel and Scot Danforth.

Editor: Phil Smith

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Reviewer: Steven E. Brown, PhD

I just finished this exciting book. But I would find it exhilarating. After all, I wrote the poem, “Tell Your Story,” in the early 1990s and this book is all about telling—and making sense of—stories.

What is “autoethnography”? “Simply, autoethnography is a kind of self-writing—by which I mean not simply a writing about the self, but a writing *of* the self—a making and performing of me-in-culture” (p. 16). There are pages more of explanation of what autoethnography is, far too many to summarize here. It is described as political, radical, subversive, strategic, autobiographic, cultural, identity focused, among other perspectives. In this work, it might be considered a way to look at, reflect on, analyze in a multitude of ways (for examples: poetry; seemingly stream-of-consciousness writing; familial deconstruction; and imagined panel) how teaching and learning are impacted, de-and re-constructed by life stories, and how they fit into challenging—and changing—ways we teach and learn.

The book is divided into four sections, with the first and last ones containing four chapters by editor Phil Smith explaining why autoethnography (Ch. 1) and how to use it and how the chapters contained in this book move forward to change the paradigm of teaching and education, especially related to those with disabilities and even more particularly those with disabilities who are in Special Education. Smith also has a chapter in the section titled “Living with Disability—Stories by Labeled People,” called “This Closet,” which is about his own struggles with depression (Ch. 5) and is one of two book chapters written entirely as poems. Another chapter in this section is Elizabeth Grace’s “Autistethnography,” looking at her experiences with education as someone labeled on the Autism spectrum.

The section entitled, “Living Alongside Disability—Stories from Family Members,” describes parenting, being a sibling, deconstructing a family’s dynamics and an eccentric family. Yet, these descriptions do not to justice to these chapters that are personal, exploratory, revelatory and deeply emotional; all the while the authors work to place their stories in the dynamics of education, teaching and learning. In “That’s OK. They are Beautiful Children,” Kathleen A. Kotel, concludes:

“My hope is that all kids play together and go to school together; that there are more open, honest conversations about disability, acceptance and diversity; and that all teachers teach all students. My hope is that when children see people with disabilities, they will have no need to point. That’s the kind of world I want my children to grow up in” (p. 211).

This book belongs in disability studies libraries and courses, but just as importantly, it belongs in all libraries and all courses that address issues of disability, education, or understanding each of those subjects. Kudos to Smith and each author for a challenging, provocative, and engaging book.

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References

Brown, S.E. (1995). Tell Your Story. *Pain, Plain—and Fancy Rappings: Poetry from the Disability Culture*. Las Cruces, NM: Institute on Disability Culture, pp. 6-11.