

BOOK REVIEWS

GRACE FEUERVERGER. *Oasis of Dreams: Teaching and learning peace in a Jewish-Palestinian village in Israel*. New York & London: Routledge (2001). 208 pp. C\$34.95. (ISBN 0415-92939-3).

Grace Feuerverger's book *Oasis of Dreams: Teaching & Learning Peace in a Jewish-Palestinian village in Israel* is a beautifully woven qualitative investigation of a cooperative community in Israel. Her study explores the bicultural, binational, and bilingual initiatives that have been taken in a village society called Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam¹ that was founded in 1972.

This exploration is embedded in the matrix of the dynamics of meaning-making through language and cultural awareness. Whether in the elementary school or in the "School for Peace" conflict resolution program in Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam, Feuerverger's participant/observer status is one of a particularly poignant subjectivity. Although she is herself a non-Israeli Diaspora Jew, the project is like a homecoming to her since she shares with her participants her own reflective narrative as a child growing up in a multicultural and multilingual home in Montreal, "psychologically scarred and tormented by the events of the Holocaust."

She acknowledges that the shaping and the construction of that story, an in-depth ethnographic examination of the teaching approaches at Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam 'experimental school in Israel, are necessarily filtered through the multiple lenses of her own life story. Yet she also succeeds in pulling together the multiplicity of socio-linguistic, multilingual and multicultural theories of language learning and of values in education that are exemplified in that great experiment.

Feuerverger weaves her quilt with a rich spectrum of sources ranging from writings on narrative and autobiography, to ethnographic and qualitative research, to socio-linguistic research, to research on moral education, to writings on multicultural and multilingual education, to theories of language learning. She does not leave a stone unturned in terms of the integrity of her qualitative methodology and the choice of her tools. She is a researcher who is not only concerned about, but also fully aware of the

complexity and tenuous nature of the terrain she is exploring. Her awareness of her own subjectivity was a very good safety mechanism in a project that could have had many land-mines in it; the political and structural problems in which that 'Oasis' (as she rightly entitles it) is situated are hugely complex.

As a Palestinian Canadian researcher, I was very intrigued by (and in awe of) her courage in undertaking a project of such magnitude. The school/village she investigates is certainly like an oasis in the midst of a political reality that is far from transparent to the outside world. Since she is of Jewish heritage, she was constantly struggling to create a balance between distancing herself and yet acknowledging her implication as participant/observer in ethnographic research that involved both Israelis and Palestinians. I believe her brilliance as a researcher shines through her utilization of that awareness; I agree with her that her emphasis on reflexivity in ethnographic research is successfully congruent with many contemporary qualitative researchers. This is one of the strengths of the book. Among many other authors, she quotes Robert Coles (1997) who refers to the "stubborn subjectivity" with which the road to objectivity is paved. (2000, p. 186)

Feuerverger presents an in-depth look into a pedagogy of *peace and emancipatory discourse*, and intersperses discussions on language awareness and meaning-making, bilingual, multilingual, and biracial theories with a description of the project, and portraits of teachers and students. The interplay of narratives in the book ranges from the description of the school's programs, teachers, and students to her commentary on the dialogues and conversations amongst students in *the conflict resolution program* of the School for Peace. The multiplicity of reflective and critical pedagogical sections, and the interweaving of ethnographic material with academic theory makes the book a very enriching read.

The sections carry equal weight in terms of the overriding themes of her investigation, and she generally succeeds in capturing the mood of the school, as well as the confluence of pedagogical perspectives in this ambitious experiment. Feuerverger is keen on capturing the existential, emotional, and moral dilemmas of her participants, dilemmas that reflect the agonizing realities the participants live with on a daily basis. Although the school director and teachers may not themselves be aware of the magnitude of the implications of their work, she certainly lends credence to their efforts with her exposure.

The pedagogical and cultural perspectives guide the researcher and highlight to the reader the nooks and crannies where the gems of insight reside. These perspectives are very sound and represent the highest points of interest in current research in those areas. For example, using narrative itself as a tool for investigation, as well as recognizing its importance in knowl-

edge and meaning-making, is a major trend in research in the areas of curriculum and instruction, moral education, as well as second language and language teaching in general. Many philosophers and educational psychologists now espouse the use of narrative; it supports a paradigm shift from an absolute God's eye view of the world, to an embodied human moral imagination. This shift necessitates authentic involvement in exploratory, reflective, and critical evaluation of action, relationships, and communal well being (Johnson, 1993). The deconstruction of the dominance of the empirical paradigm in research makes Feuerverger's book all the more important.

However, there are areas in the book that could have been immeasurably enriched by the collaboration of a Palestinian co-researcher of equal status. For example, the sections entitled 'Deconstructing the Discourse of Victimhood' and 'The Specter of the Holocaust Revisited' could have benefited from a clarification of, and commentary on, the structural and political realities of Palestinian life on the ground both in Israel and in the Occupied Territories. Also, in the discussion of what Israelis term 'The War of Independence' of 1948, there was not enough insight where the Palestinian reality of the 'Al-Nakbah'² of 1948 was concerned.

At one point, she quotes Edward Said on the questions of Jewish Diaspora (p. 90). I found it remarkable, and perhaps unfortunate, that she did not quote this foremost Palestinian American writer and eminent literary critic on the multiplicity of issues that arise in the text that relate to Palestinian feelings about identity, home, dispossession and Diaspora.

However, Feuerverger's thorough documentation of the feelings of Palestinian students redresses the imbalance. She quotes a Palestinian student, Temada, as saying the following words in the context of discussing the social injustice in the Occupied Territories: "It's about time that we Palestinians are able to show our anger about the situation. When I think about what is going on in the Territories, and I have relatives there who are suffering daily – I want to scream." (2000, p. 106)

Feuerverger's research does a great service to the quest for peace because it is a unique attempt to document highly problematic emotions. It presents authentic negotiations between participants who are encouraged to abandon any fixed views of the other and to search for a common ground in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In that sense it is ground-breaking and refreshing research in academia.

Palestinian and Jewish participants who, in her own words, are located paradoxically at the margins and the center of history and ideology, are transparent in her text as diametrically opposed subjectivities that had to be restructured into a meaningful present. In all that, she sees language as the viable tool through which the process of re-creation and healing will take place:

In language we inhabit, construct, and extend realities. . . . Language is what permits our being to be, to occur, to be explored, carried out and carried on...where...our historical, cultural, and personal identities are not simply formed, but more significantly, performed. Language calls out for a voice, a body. Such a summons propels us beyond the limited refrain of instrumental speech and writing into song, dance, and dream. (p. 94)

In a subject as heated and contentious as the Palestine/Israeli conflict, issues are complex and volatile. The whole terrain is fraught with conceptual mind traps since the confluence of religion, politics, culture, language, and mythology form the bedrock of argument and war. A researcher cannot tread on one part of the soil without affecting the other.

Perhaps Feuerverger's next project will involve the collaboration of a Palestinian co-researcher; then it might not suffer from the minor drawbacks that this review has alluded to. She would then be able to render a more comprehensive perspective and her interpretations would be more inclusive of the contexts in which all participants' contributions are embedded.

Feuerverger's research is marked by intellectual rigour, by integrity, by passion and enthusiasm, and clearly by idealistic aspirations. Her contribution is great. She has succeeded in highlighting a very important project, one that could possibly propel future similar efforts. She has brought the attention of the academic world to a forgotten community that is in its own small way making a great contribution to the emancipatory pedagogy of peace. Feuerverger has done a marvelous job and must be congratulated.

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NOTES

1. Wahat Al-Salam means literally in Arabic 'oasis of peace.'
2. Al-Nakbah means catastrophe and is the term used by Palestinians to describe their dispossession in 1948.

MAUREEN DALY GOGGIN (Ed.). *Inventing a Discipline: Rhetorical scholarship in honor of Richard E. Young*. Urbana, IL: NCTE (2000). 480 pp. US \$ 34.95 (NCTE members \$28.95). (ISBN 0-8141-2375-9).

The essays collected in the volume *Inventing a Discipline: Rhetorical Scholarship in Honor of Richard E. Young*, edited by Maureen Daly Goggin, reflect on Young's important contributions to pedagogy, research, and scholarship on invention in the field of rhetoric and composition. The essays also offer a partial genealogy of the field. The volume presents an impressive collection of scholarly essays written by former students of Young and participants in his National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) seminars. As Goggin