

Being a Teacher Educator in Challenging Times: Negotiating the Rapids of Professional Learning

Mike Hayler and Judy Williams

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This volume is a duoethnography that charts the journeys of two individuals to becoming teacher educators and shows how their journeys influence their teaching. Growing out of an earlier edited volume that explored the journeys of other teacher educators, Hayler and Williams wondered what they would learn if they captured their own journeys. This volume is a record of their experiences.

This volume captures the collaboration and perspectives of a professor of education from England (Hayler) and from Australia (Williams). The authors ask the question, “How have our personal and professional life experiences shaped who we are as teacher educators?” (24). This key question rests on the authors’ foundational assumption that the identity of the person teaching determines the “what, how, and why they teach” (77). This book then examines the teacher educator’s journey, discovering the various influences that shape an educator’s identity and pedagogy.

Structurally, the book follows Hayler and Williams through their journeys in becoming teacher educators, ending with five chapters on working as teacher educators. Two early chapters of the book chart how both Hayler and Williams fell into careers as teacher educators and show how these early experiences shape their teaching. These narratives challenge readers to search their own lives for experiences that shape their teaching.

The latter chapters note political, institutional, and personal challenges of teaching while offering encouraging narratives about collaboration, pedagogy, and identity. The authors show how a teaching context, institutional and personal, shape a teacher’s identity. Despite constantly changing contexts that shape identity, teacher educators grow and develop through self reflection, which is a key resource to grow during challenging times (179). The book concludes with a discussion that succinctly identifies its key findings.

The volume is chock-full of references to other literature for further research. However, its true success is in making the reader have an experience by reading another’s narrative, provoking the reader to examine his or her own story and how it affects their identity and teaching. This book also demonstrates collaboration within both the text and methodology. This challenges today’s individualism and encourages scholars to reimagine the task of scholarship.

While some may dismiss this work due to its narrative nature, this would be a mistake; the stories make the work memorable and have a transforming, not just an informing, effect. Indeed, a key contribution of this book is that it teaches the power of story, reminding teachers of religion to anchor their content to stories and historical events. Similarly, this book is a test case in self study, illustrating the power of reflecting on one’s journey and how this reflection can construct identity and influence one’s teaching. Ultimately, this book does not just offer information, but offers an experience as the stories of others challenge the educator to examine their journey, pedagogy, and identity. This book belongs on the religion professor’s bookshelf as a reminder of the benefit of self-reflection to discover one’s identity and how that identity shapes how a professor teaches.