

G. Robert Carlsen & Anne Sherrill.
VOICES OF READERS: HOW WE COME TO LOVE BOOKS.
Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1988.
156. pp. \$8.75. NCTE members, \$6.95.

Voices of Readers: How we come to love books provides an unusual insight into the way we learn, not only to read, but also to want to read. With the assistance of Anne Sherrill, Robert Carlsen draws on over a thousand protocols or "reading autobiographies," written by student teachers of English over thirty years. The autobiographies present a picture of the influences, experiences, and kinds of reading that turned these individuals into lovers of books.

Each set of excerpts is organized under an appropriate heading and followed by a commentary. The chapter headings give clear focus to widely-varying issues that include "Literature and the Human Voice," "Subliterature," "Libraries and Librarians," and "The Classics." Subsections such as "Memories of Alternative Libraries," "Books Discovered by Accident" and "Books That Give Solace" show the sensitivity of Carlsen and Sherrill to categories of reading-experience that may be unusual but offer a deeper understanding of some young readers' lives. The text closes with a brief but valuable discussion of "Conditions That Promote Reading" and a chart that shows which experiences appear to be most important at different age-levels.

Voices of Readers differs considerably from other studies of reading-development, such as Donald Fry's *Children Talk About Books: Seeing themselves as readers* (1985) and Margaret Meek's *Achieving Literacy: Longitudinal studies of adolescents learning to read* (1983). The material was collected over an unusually long time, thirty years instead of briefer periods such as eight months or three years. *Voices of Readers* relies entirely on the readers' own memories, freely written, and not on teachers' or researchers' observations and questions. The authors make no claim to be presenting scientifically-verifiable information. They recognize that their sample is a highly specialized one, which does not deal with a representative school-sample ranging from the least advanced to most advanced readers, but instead with the minority who do become lovers of books. Yet a composite, impressionistic picture of the process of becoming a reader emerges strongly. Within this, individual voices recall experiences that encouraged or damaged a positive relationship with the written word. The very fact that the authors have no particular thesis to prove or disprove allows this work its richness and range; it can be mined by people with vastly different interests for whatever may concern them.

The actual findings of the study confirm with remarkable force what recent research into reading and writing has shown. We learn to read by

reading, and by being allowed to enjoy reading – not by being put through a barrage of mechanical activities that promote a technical skill at the expense of meaning, value, and emotion. Positive role-models in addition to frequent and widely-varying reading opportunities make a crucial difference. Respect for individual quirks and concerns, as well as for individual rates of progress, distinguish the best teachers of reading from the rest. One student recalls the disappointment of encountering dull first-grade texts after years of being read to by relatives whose selections had included the *Police Gazette*, *National Geographic*, and *Poultry Journal*. Another writes with affection of "the plump librarian who never shushed, never frowned, who led me constantly to new books. One day she asked me if I knew about gods and goddesses and showed me to the mythology section. I scarcely moved from it for a month" (p. 114). Curiosity and enthusiasm carry some young readers into very strange areas, but, like the "hot topics" Donald Graves would encourage in student writing, these reading areas have the value of urgency and personal significance.

Some of the most painful accounts in *Voices of Readers* concern incidents in which a child's choice of book is criticized, and in which reading ahead of a group is greeted with disapproval or even punishment. Almost universally, the contributors dislike book reports, though they enjoy a chance to discuss the book freely on their own terms. Many also dislike having to read aloud and hear class-mates do so too. They approve of having free access to a wide variety of books and quiet times to look at them, and listening to a teacher with dramatic talent or a sensitivity to language read aloud. While findings such as these may not come as surprises, their vivid first-person delivery and the intensity with which they have been remembered, sometimes over ten or twenty years, give them a special force and relevance.

The intimate interconnections between reading and writing, speaking and listening, and above all, thinking, are becoming ever more apparent, and demands for a literate population are growing. There is a crucial need to recognize school-age children as possessors of a complex symbol-system which they have already acquired, and which must be nurtured and extended by the school in collaboration with family, community, and society as a whole. Hilary Minns (1988) points out that even a "culturally disadvantaged" child, and by extension a culturally-disadvantaged family, can be helped towards higher literacy if a sensitive effort is made, if materials are available, and if the real value and meaning of reading are recognized. *Voices of Readers* confirms this again and again in its recollections of readers who came from less privileged backgrounds; a single loved or admired older reader (a parent, grandparent, teacher, or librarian) often gave a child access to a world of knowledge that might otherwise have remained unreachable.

The work involved in preparing this book must have been enormous, yet the text is both brief and clear. Rather than providing firm answers or giving directives to those concerned with literacy, *Voices of Readers* asks its own reader to look with fresh eyes at familiar assumptions. It also offers an even more precious encouragement to hard-working teachers and librarians by reaffirming the central importance of positive role-models. It presents a chorus of voices expressing appreciation for the enthusiasm, insight, and knowledge that have helped new readers to develop.

Ann Beer
McGill University

REFERENCES

- Fry, Donald. (1985). *Children talk about books: Seeing themselves as readers*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Meek, Margaret, with Stephen Armstrong, Vickey Austerfield, Judith Graham, Elizabeth Plackett. (1983). *Achieving literacy: Longitudinal studies of adolescents learning to read*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Minns, Hilary. (1988). Teacher inquiry in the classroom: Read it to me now. *Language Arts*, 65(4), 403-409.

Eamon Callan.

AUTONOMY AND SCHOOLING

McGill-Queen's Press, 1988.

172 pp. \$24.95.

Autonomy and Schooling is a difficult but excellent book in philosophy of education. The author offers a clarification and a thorough philosophical defence of a moderate version of a child-centered perspective in education. It goes beyond the superficiality of popular discussions on the topic which, unfortunately, is at times found in the writings of educationists associated with child-centered education. *Autonomy and Schooling* offers the most philosophically refined and acceptable work in contemporary philosophy of education that deals with child-centered education.

The book, which consists of an introduction and five chapters, can be divided into two parts. The first part, including Chapters 1 and 2, as the author himself notes, may require some patience from those who are not interested in ethics or social philosophy. (But, then, would one be really interested in education?). This part deals with an examination and justification of freedom and autonomy, and the connection between the two.