

Johannessen's credentials and expertise as not only an experienced teacher but a Vietnam veteran are clearly evident in this volume. He offers sensible and sensitive insight into dealing with the violence and strong language that characterizes much of the literature of the war, often a concern to both teacher and parent. If his approach is employed students and even the most conservative of parents should be able to understand the validity and value of both the violence and the strong language. Johannessen's approach encourages teachers to promote critical thinking. He wants students to analyze the values and experiences of the generation that lived the Vietnam war, so that they can perhaps better understand why and how that war became America's longest and most divisive conflict.

His work should serve as a useful compendium for the classroom teacher who for lack of time for reading and research has not yet put together the materials to teach the much-needed unit on the Vietnam war. They can use *Illumination Rounds* and get on with it.

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READ WITH ME

Lockwood, UK: Thimble Press, 1988.

APPRENTICESHIP IN ACTION

Lockwood, UK: Thimble Press, 1989.

As I sat in my chair having finished Waterland's, *Read With Me* (1988), I tried to think of something, anything, which children learn in a way even remotely similar to that which used to be universal in the teaching of reading. I was unsuccessful. Still, I was disturbed and intrigued by Waterland's use of the term "natural" throughout the book as though she had discovered something fundamental about children. What is natural to children anyway? Well they play and through play they seem to discover things and create meaning in their lives. Traditional schools must appear as singularly odd and unnatural places to children, especially very young ones. This is no accident, schooling was not designed with children in mind, except as products or outcomes. It is eerie that this language, the language of the industrial metaphor, rings so ominously familiar.

In days like these it is easy to lose sight of what schools might be and to abandon the dream of liberal education in favor of a retreat into the cocoon of simpler ideals: measurable inputs and measurable outputs. It is easy to forget what we have learned and experienced in the drone of the new futurism and the application of corporate logic and balance sheet accountability to what we do in schools. After all it is widely held that the Western educational project has lost its moral rudder and is now a careening, nihilistic juggernaut. Change is everywhere in the wind. Educators are inundated with half-baked paradigmes as Thomas Kuhn's profound ideas are appropriated to elevate fluctuations in the business cycle to the status of epistemological shift. We are admonished that we must look to the future. Then we are told what the future will look like and I have seldom seen children in the picture.

Children learn by playing and imitating the behaviour of those around them, and in this way they learn enormously well. Obviously, I was able to imagine analogous situations where children are taught everything from sports, to chess strategy, to mathematics, to reading, piece by piece, by adults who have taken the trouble to break the task down into component parts. We want to make things manageable for our children whom we have tended to view as rather simple and limited little people. It is presumed that by taking the task apart, the child will more easily grasp the whole, one step at a time. This is natural to us. We are scientific, linear people who make sense of the environment by cutting it down to size and analyzing the small bits.

Such an approach has immediate appeal to the modern adult mind and obvious utility in manufacturing, creating new chemical compounds, making computers do what we want them to, setting up nuclear fission, and so forth. In this society it is natural to take something apart in order to understand it. Some adults in some places have clearly benefited from atomistic thinking. But is it good pedagogical practice? And how about reading; is it more appropriate to do what is natural for adults or for children? The great debate! In my reading *Waterland* argues for transforming school environments which have been natural for adults, into ones which she feels are more natural for children.

Reading With Me is an invitation extended to the child by a teacher who questions the utility of the atomized approach to the teaching of reading. *Waterland* presents a view which contradicts her own previous practice and that of teachers who see reading as the progressive appropriation of a set of discreet skills. This view attempts to capitalize on children's inherent attraction to good books (*organic* is the term *Waterland* uses, appropriating the nomenclature of Sylvia Ashton-Warner) and their persistent desire to make sense. *Read With Me* is theoretically informed but not

theoretical, drawing upon the psycholinguistic school of Goodman, Holdaway and Smith. It is short, practical and well written.

The pivotal insight for Waterland was the notion that children could and should find their own way into literacy. She describes how the focus of her teaching practice shifted away from a preoccupation with mechanics to an emphasis upon abstraction and meaning. In this context the role of the teacher (and parent who is seen as a partner in the education of the child) changes radically from that of the mother bird methodically feeding her chicks to that of the craftsperson slowly leading an apprentice through a real task, patiently allowing the child to make mistakes, actively construct meaning, and increase mastery through trial and error.

Waterland changed not because she was convinced by theory, but because she was unsatisfied with practice; she sensed and saw that children were simply not interested in reading. The children were "doing their reading" and they were doing reasonably well on the standardized tests, but they were not becoming literate in the sense of cherishing books and experiencing reading as an enjoyable or even a useful activity. To be blunt, they were bored by reading nonsensical tripe. She concluded that this is because children were being led into literacy in a way which had little or nothing to do with them as human beings with individual interests, experiences, and tastes.

Alternatively, Waterland began to allow children to actively control their reading development, they were trusted as autonomous learners and given choice, they were participants in a democratic classroom in which their decisions had real meaning. The typical teacher's preoccupations with objective scales, norming, and grading came to be replaced with a noncritical, noncompetitive, supportive climate in which the important thing is the establishment of the observable yet nontestable "structure of understanding" in the head of the beginning reader. In fact Waterland recently (1992) described the curious and frustrating experience of having to administer a nationally mandated standardized assessment of reading attainment to children who had learned to read in an apprenticeship classroom.

Waterland's formulation of the structure of understanding unfolds with the child first realizing that books are worthwhile. As the beginning reader comes to be more attuned to the relationship between language and what is in books, s/he brings unconscious understanding of language, experience in the real world, and basic book skills to bear on the task of uncovering the relationship between print symbols and meaning. The teacher and parent observes and encourages the child's progress through the process of learning to read. Given that the child is provided with access to interesting books s/he will want to come to reading.

The apprenticeship method is not prescriptive, and while she admits that in some cases it has been viewed in this way, Waterland is very careful to point out that she is simply sharing her experience with those who are interested. In a follow-up to *Read With Me* entitled *Apprenticeship in Action* (1989), Waterland and other teachers who have been stimulated by her experience share their stories. Waterland is a classroom teacher and her writing is unpretentious and practical. Both books present an approach to the teaching of reading which places the child's decisions and interests squarely at the centre of the reading process. Unlike so many books of its kind, Waterland's book is eminently practical; it is above all, a teacher's story.

Unfortunately, many teachers' stories are not explicitly political and assume that by focussing upon the internal dynamic of the classroom, teachers can empower children. To a great degree this is probably true. However there are problems which will not be solved by giving children freedom to choose among materials in which they cannot see themselves. I think that it is important to examine our own practice in order to establish in clear terms, the ideological principles upon which that teaching is built. For example, Henry Giroux (1988, 1992), Paulo Friere (1970, 1973) and others have attempted to present education as an essentially political enterprise evaluating educational practice in terms of democratic principles. Thus, Giroux cuts out an ethical space within which educators must place themselves as moral and political agents moving the level of the discussion of educational issues out of the realm of neutral, generic skills and knowledge into the messy world of competing interests.

In this light, I have some difficulty with Waterland's analogy between learning to speak and learning to read. Children learn to speak at home and for the most part in their neighborhoods where they grow up hearing and imitating a language which bears some similarity to the standard English which they will encounter in books. Children coming to school from broader environments in which non-standard English, or another language, is spoken will obviously encounter dissonance in terms of the "fit" between their own language and that of most available books. To a greater or lesser degree this will happen to all children as they enter school. However, since the availability of "organic" or relevant and interesting materials with which the child can identify is so central to Waterland's framework, the cultural bias reflected in the kinds of books which get into print and make it into schools, will make an enormous difference in terms of particular children's ability to find organic materials relevant to his/her experience.

It is important to raise questions concerning the internal structure of schools and address questions pertaining to the empowerment of children

within the institution; this Waterland does admirably. It is also important to situate this debate in a larger political context, paying attention to school not only as an adult dominated institution, but also as one which is biased in terms of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation for example. In other words, any debate which attempts to speak to the democratization of schools and of individual children's experience within schools must also speak to larger questions of political engagement in community struggles and democratic access of collectives to relevant resources which serve children as representations of the world.

Questions concerning the place of nonstandard English and the advisability of using materials written in, say, a Cockney, Newfoundland, Metis, or Acadian dialect are central to this debate. Organic reading materials for some children may have to be written in a way which some would consider to be a "substandard" approximation of the language of instruction. Should such materials be made available? I think so and I am somewhat concerned about Waterland's assertion that it is the place of the schools to stand against the mediocrity which children normally experience in their lives. At one level it is hard to disagree, but the problem is that one person's mediocrity may be another person's culture. Historically, schools have not had a good record in diminishing the social and economic chasms of race and class. As Western schools become more multicultural places, issues such as these will have to be given serious consideration.

The notion of apprenticeship conjures many positive images: the acolyte studying under the watchful and benevolent eye of the master, slowly appropriating the skills necessary to carry on the craft. On the other hand, apprenticeship also recalls indentured subservience not only to a master but also to a set of mandated practices, techniques, and experiences handed on across the generations, typically along strictly delineated social lines. Books can be interesting to children and yet still alienating as generations of working class literates schooled in the classical tradition can attest. Then there are issues of which books ultimately "pay off" for their readers which raises questions of which traditions and disciplines are socially valued.

I have come away from Liz Waterland's books wondering if adults can improve upon the strategies which children seem to bring to a learning they perceive to be important and worthwhile. I think not, and the power of the apprenticeship model is in its attempt to capture the flavour of a child's natural inquisitiveness, giving teachers and parents a relevant and supportive, but not intrusive or judgmental, role to play in the process.

I suppose the apprenticeship learning scenario which Waterland describes might well approximate the way children learned to read before men

of science, the great nineteenth-century reformers and school promoters responsible for the character of modern schooling, separated children into grades (and later into levels within grades) and started marching them through a lock-step curriculum, one bit at a time. This was a political project, a grand scheme contrived with the sometimes explicit but usually implicit goal of social reform of the working class in an emerging industrial society. It is ironic to observe that the debate over public schooling is assuming an increasingly reformist cast.

The positivists are back and as Giroux (1988) has observed they have taken the high ground left vacant in the radical critique of the last couple of decades. Part of the reason for this void, according to Giroux, has been the inability of radical educators to articulate a moral vision and to implement pedagogical practices which are truly democratic in the substance of classroom life. The best ammunition in the struggle ahead may lie in a more public articulation of what educators like Waterland are telling us about how children learn. Perhaps wholistic educators have been too narrowly focussed upon classroom life to be politically engaged. I think Michael Apple puts it rather well when he asserts that the proponents of whole language "need to join with others in wider social movements that aim at democratizing our economy, politics and culture, and that act against a society that is unequal in gender, race and class terms" (Apple, 1991).

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