
Reviews/Comptes rendus

The Mind of a Child: Working with Children Affected by Poverty, Racism and War

*Producer, Gary Marcuse, Associate Producer-Consultant,
Lorna Williams.*

Face To Face Media Ltd, Documentary—VHS

In *The Mind of a Child*, Gary Marcuse has provided a documentary that will prove useful to ESL teachers working with children who have been separated in full or in part from their own cultures. The children they meet in this film will seem hauntingly familiar. TESL educators will want to use this film as a provocative catalyst for class discussion on cultural awareness. It will corroborate the relevance and importance of a learner's early experiences, according to the "mediated learning" theory of Dr. Reuven Feuerstein, an Israeli psychologist and renowned educator.

The video production is hosted by Lorna Williams, First Nations consultant to the Vancouver School District. Lorna Williams is part of the St'at'yemc Nation and a survivor of the residential school system that separated young children from their families, negating cultural values by forbidding the use of Aboriginal languages, as well as devaluing prior learning. In that setting a child's first language was considered detrimental to academic progress. Lorna Williams' mandate to help disadvantaged children, children with behavioral problems, and many others is intrinsically motivated. She tells us in the film that she and a group of her peers were mistakenly labeled incapable of academic achievement!

In her search to alleviate the difficulties Aboriginal children experience in the school system, she was introduced to Reuven Feuerstein and later travelled to Israel to study his methods. Dr. Feuerstein's approach is used throughout the world by 30,000 teachers.

His basic premise, as illustrated so well in the documentary, is that children develop the skills they need to be efficient learners from their original caregivers in an environment structured for the needs of its own societal group. His early work with survivors of the World War death camps is brought to life in the video as he talks about these children and his struggle with them. Because they were deprived of parents, relatives, country, and language in many cases, it was Dr. Feuerstein's task to give them a reason to live before he could engage them in assessment of learning potential.

Unfortunately, this documentary lacks explicit descriptions of the methods of testing and learning, but makes it clear that the self-esteem of the

learner is considered in every step of the process. The children chosen to illustrate the success of the mediated learning theory make the 59.5-minute video fly. They are previously scorned kids awakened to the joyful knowledge that they *can* learn and *will* be heard. Some demonstrations are shown, using culturally unbiased materials consisting of logical arrangement of geometric shapes. Interaction between teacher and learner is constant, as is positive feedback and encouragement. The viewer, however, is left craving details.

In addition to the ingenuous charm of the children, the artistry of the film moves it along quickly. There are no tedious moments. Its scope spans more than one continent. The segments include Vancouver, where Lorna Williams works with Aboriginal children, Washington, DC, where we are introduced to Lettie Battle, superb educator of Black American inner-city children, and Israel where Dr. Reuven Feuerstein works with young Ethiopian refugees.

The challenges presented by the learners are immediately evident.

Clarissa, an Aboriginal learner in Vancouver, makes faces for the camera and tries every trick in the book to distract her teacher, who explains the importance of not giving up on her.

In Washington, the youngsters articulate their former feelings of unworthiness in an educational setting. The sense of humor demonstrated by one of them makes it clear that he can learn very well indeed.

In Israel Dr. Feuerstein shows how Ethiopian children give and receive with their whole selves, behavior learned at their parents' knees and essential to their well-being and how they perceive themselves. He goes on to explain how much is lost when the child's culture is undermined or replaced by another. A poignant moment shows Lorna Williams and Reuven Feuerstein walking side by side, deep in conversation, no doubt plotting to the benefit of one or more unseen, needy learner.

No ESL educator would want to miss the grin on the inner-city boy's face as he tells Lettie Battle how adults previously perceived him. Repeating his words here would spoil the impact. It is enough to say the remark resonates.

The Mind of a Child will be a valuable addition to an ESL or TESL specialist's library, but more important, is likely to provide a springboard to further exploration of Dr. Feuerstein's methods, used so successfully by 30,000 teachers worldwide, and by Lorna Williams right here in Canada.

Esther Chassé

The Reviewer

Esther Chassé has been teaching in the Development Studies Department at Yukon College for 16 years. Before that she taught in Toronto, Yellowknife, and Alberta. Although it was seldom a full-time endeavor, ESL happily threaded itself through her career. This term she is teaching an ESL evening class once a week and working on a curriculum project sponsored by the Literacy Secretariat. She is the Yukon representative for TESL Canada and values this association greatly.

Partnerships in Learning: Teaching ESL to Adults

Julia Robinson and Mary Selman

Pippin Publishing, 1996, ISBN 0-88751-074-4

The aim of this thoughtful and informative book is to provide entry into the basics of second-language learning, and to share ways of teaching that have been proven through extensive years of experience. The authors have also included their understanding of adult learning principles.

The book is divided into an introduction and seven sections. Section one focuses on the notion that teaching should be learner-centered and thus concentrate on the needs of the learners. It also gives a brief, but comprehensive overview of what language is and outlines various historical approaches to teaching. Although all approaches are considered to be of benefit to language teaching, the book is geared toward a description of how the teacher can work collaboratively with learners in identifying their learning needs.

Section two includes a description of what a needs assessment is, the reasons for its importance, and strategies for conducting one. I appreciate that the authors have tried to clarify in great detail what in reality can be a complex and messy process, and although I believe that they have been successful in putting their ideas across, I think it would have been worthwhile to have included some anecdotal information in this chapter. Stories relating to the problems one can encounter using a collaborative approach might help to prepare the teacher-reader for encountering the constraints as mentioned on page 34. I would also like to have seen a more detailed segment addressing teachers' learning styles and how these affect how she or he teaches. Turning into a collaborative teacher necessarily means having to confront the tendency to control, which is a legacy of much of our sociohistorical conditioning.

Section three shows the reader how the information collected through the needs assessment can be developed into planning units. Units are classified as project-based, which denotes the completion of a concrete task; content-based, which is centered around a topic of interest as defined by the learners; and topic-based, which is related to learning the language necessary to perform life-related tasks. The units are organized around language as meaning-making in contrast to grammar principles, and several reasons are given for organizing the curriculum in such a way. A detailed planning unit for a level-4 class is described. The thoroughness with which this lesson is elucidated will probably be of great benefit to beginning teachers. In contrast, it would have been useful to include a unit plan for low-level students. In the same section, a process for unit planning is described in which the involvement of the learners is seen as key, and where lessons and tasks

become detailed plans only through interaction with the learners. Also seen as important to unit planning are searching for authentic materials and organizing the units by mapping out key real-world tasks and the skills and content required to perform them. Concerning evaluation the authors state that learners should be tested on their abilities to use language effectively for authentic purposes. For this to happen successfully, we are told that teachers must create learning tasks that build on one another and that serve to stimulate and motivate learning. In addition, a learning environment where the learner feels safe to make mistakes and to grow in confidence during his or her learning process should be fostered.

In section four the value of using meaningful language in preparation for successful communicative encounters in real life is stressed. An excellent set of principles is laid out for teachers to keep in mind while choosing language tasks, and a variety of different tasks are also described in a step-by-step procedure that will greatly benefit the beginning teacher in particular. In some instances the authors also explain how to go about tasks in a way that respects the learner.

In section five elements of a typical lesson are described, which include warm-up activities, outlining the main activities of the lesson to the students, taking a break, providing closure, and looking ahead. This kind of information often runs the risk of being taken for granted, and therefore remains unexpressed. I am glad to see it discussed in this book. This is followed by an expanded explanation of language tasks; how these tasks might be organized in terms of reading, listening, writing, and speaking activities; ideas and a form for creating a lesson plan; and an example of a lesson plan. The inclusion of notes to explain the reasons for doing the activities and also to point out other areas of learning is helpful.

Section six deals with the realities of interacting with learners and the need to learn their names, give encouragement, use the talents and strengths of the learners, engage in group work, and to leave some room for laughter. The authors also tell us that it is important for teachers to instill confidence in the learners by attempting to introduce them to new ways of learning and by introducing difficult materials gradually. Other considerations raised include creating a comfortable physical setting, being able to use equipment effectively, knowing how to set up group activities, and being able to cope with the challenges of teaching multilevel classes and literacy students. A description of resources for literacy students, and a lesson plan, if only in point form, would have been useful. Other issues brought up in this section concern time management, dealing with the individual needs of learners, record keeping, how to use questions effectively, providing effective feedback, and the creation of useful homework assignments.

In section six the authors also talk about communicating with students and creating positive relationships with them. I would like to point out what

I believe is a discrepancy between the following statement, "Adult students respond well when teachers genuinely share who they are and what they feel" (p. 99), and what is said later on about how teachers should not talk in class other than to direct the class lesson (p. 109). It is my personal view that the collaborative process of teaching and learning necessarily invites the teacher to participate more fully with the learners by talking about herself or himself. I believe that when we teachers allow our students to come to know a little more about us, then the collaborative process becomes more genuine.

Section seven focuses on how the teacher can reflect on, evaluate, and make changes in the way she or he teaches. I like the encouragement given to teachers to seek out colleagues for the purposes of obtaining feedback in a situation where they will not be evaluated for institutional purposes. In the last pages of the book the authors speak of ways for teachers to keep learning, the necessity of acting as advocates for ESL learners in institutional contexts, and suggest that teachers become knowledgeable about other institutions where ESL programs are offered, that they participate in professional ESL organizations, and also work with volunteers.

In summary, this is a wonderful resource book for any ESL teacher. It is written in an accessible style and is a valuable contribution to the field.

Leslie Ann Crawford

The Reviewer

Leslie Ann Crawford is nearing completion of her doctorate in Adult Education at OISE. She has a strong interest in teaching and learning and has taught ESL for a number of years in Canada, China, and Japan.

Access Denied

Producer: Premika Ratnam

Shadow Catcher Productions Inc., Length 44:39

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Access Denied is a new video produced by Shadow Catcher Productions Inc. out of Toronto. This video was created in order to publicize one of the great paradoxes of the Canadian immigration policy: that each year Canada encourages hundreds of well-educated and experienced professionals to immigrate to this country, yet continues to support systemic barriers that prevent these same professionals from working in their occupation.

The video starts with an introduction describing recent immigration statistics: one half of all immigrants coming into Canada are chosen for occupational skills, professional or trade. Clips are shown of Canadian advertising overseas luring professionals to this land of opportunity. Then the

reality of what professionals face on arrival is described; how their credentials and experience go unrecognized and their skills and talents unused.

Next the viewer is presented with a series of vignettes showing various individuals who have struggled with the restrictions of various licensing bodies, including a Sikh lawyer with a Master of Arts degree who, after sending in his documents to be accredited, was told he had the equivalent of grade 12 and would need to start with grade 13 in Ontario.

The video then moves into a closer examination of the issues facing health care professionals, such as nurses. The video chooses to center this discussion first around credentials and later around the politics of language testing. An interview with an official at the College of Nursing in Ontario demonstrates clearly how political the situation can be. The official justifies the licensing criteria with a need to protect public safety. The huge barrier these criteria present for immigrant nursing professionals is detailed further; that even if their training is recognized, they must still sit an extremely difficult exam.

Using the nursing experience, the video raises another political issue, that of language testing as part of the accreditation process. Before the College of Nursing will consider foreign credentials, a candidate must achieve a prerequisite score on both the TOEFL and the TSE. For many candidates the language test is as far as they ever get in the process. One nurse in Ontario has written the TOEFL 18 times!

A class of visible minority nurses are filmed as they attend a nursing refresher course at George Brown College in Toronto. The instructors are interviewed and issues of self-esteem, wasted skills, and lost time are mentioned. Throughout this section of the video are included clips from interviews with representatives from a government commission that wrote a report on immigrant accreditation and the VP of the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. Both are sympathetic to the plight of the immigrant professionals. One mentions the added burden of economics to government decision-making. Health ministers across the nation are facing cutbacks, and as a result even locally educated physicians are having difficulty establishing practices.

Moving from the health care field, the video has a number of quick clips from various other stories: a dentist who had to fly to other provinces at her own expense to challenge the licensing exams; an engineer from Romania with a master's degree who couldn't practice in Canada so decided to become a translator because he had been an official translator for the Italian government. He was told he would need to get a degree in languages.

One final theme of the video examines the issues of language testing as a prerequisite for entrance into professional cultures in Canada. The TOEFL and the TSE remain the benchmark by which professional associations evaluate an immigrant's language proficiency. The discussion around lan-

guage testing quickly becomes political. An ESL professor at York states “[language testing] says nothing about the ability of a student to produce appropriate language in an ordinary situation ... if you want to keep people out you can use language to do it.”

Access Denied is a powerful depiction of the frustration, heartache, and disappointment immigrant professionals experience in their attempt to become licensed in Canada. It is an important film about an important subject. It shows that here in Canada are trained, experienced professionals who have been educated at another country’s expense. In many cases Canada need only invest in language education to benefit from the skills of a fully trained and experienced professional.

This film is professionally produced and keeps the viewer’s interest throughout. One criticism is that there are no opposing opinions offered; the experts interviewed are solely sympathetic to the filmmaker’s point of view. In addition, the film is clearly biased toward an Ontario situation, as only Ontario examples and experts are used. This is unfortunate, as most of the professional licensing bodies in Canada are provincial, and therefore any licensing criteria presented in the film may not be accurate anywhere outside Ontario. One other criticism is that a narrow range of professions is detailed. Certainly the plight of health care and engineering professionals are the most publicized, but we mustn’t forget the huge numbers of well-educated scientists, psychologists, teachers, and lawyers in addition to talented and skilled tradespeople, craftspeople, and artists who will never be able to utilize their skills and talents in Canada.

Aside from these minor criticisms, this film is an excellent resource for anyone who anticipates working with new immigrants. It depicts the frustrations and anxieties that many new Canadians are suffering in their early years in Canada. I hope it will also provide a starting place for discussion surrounding both the issues raised in the video: the use of language testing in occupational licensing, and the accreditation procedure for education earned outside Canada.

Karen Barnes

The Reviewer

Karen Barnes is currently working at Alberta Vocational College, Edmonton. She spent many years working with adult immigrant professionals in second language classrooms. She also centered her master’s thesis research around the issues surrounding the accreditation of immigrant professional engineers in Alberta.

Reading in North York Schools

Mindy Polishuke and Sophie Theofilaktidis, writers and developers

North York Board of Education, 1995, ISBN 1- 55000-466-2

Price: #58.00 + GST Available from Materials Division, North York Board of Education, 5050 Yonge Street, North York, Ontario, M2N 5N8

At last! A book about teaching reading to K-12 that addresses the needs of both English-speaking AND non-English-speaking students, with well-informed care given to both groups. How often have we seen ESL students summarily dealt with in a brief paragraph near the end of language arts, reading, or English methodology books—or even in briefs on education! Educators in North York have recognized that there will always be students entering our schools for whom English is a second language. These children may be born abroad or in Canada, they may be immigrants or refugees; but although the flow of ESL children may rise and fall, it will never cease. The norm for Canadian schools will for the foreseeable future be K-12 classes containing a mixture of non-ESL and ESL students.

So it was with delight that I read the first sentence of the second paragraph in the introduction, which said, "You will find that the 'Teaching and Learning in North York' section sets the background for teaching literacy skills to multilingual, multicultural students" (p. xi). For North York substitute Halifax, Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina, Edmonton, Vancouver, or any one of hundreds of cities, small towns, or villages across Canada that each year attract a fresh group of immigrants and refugees.

The authors remind us that much of the curriculum and the resources used to teach the curriculum are "based on the values, perspectives, and expectations of the 'mainstream' culture." They continue, "In many classrooms, therefore, there is a cultural gap between teachers and students, and between the curriculum and the learners. In most classrooms there is also a significant number of children who are at various stages of acquiring English as a second language" (p. 3). The aim of *Reading in North York Schools* is "the development of a reading program across the curriculum that includes all the learners in a multicultural, multiracial environment" (p. 4). How successful were they? In my view, very successful.

The book is organized into seven sections. Its 351 pages fit into a three-ring binder. Color is used effectively throughout the book; print is large and clear and bold type catches the eye. Diagrams, photographs, and charts help to break up the print and to support theory and practice. But what of the content?

Section 1—Background Information presents a profile of North York students. (As an aside, in 1995 North York published a profile of every school in the district giving information on the percentage of ESL students in each

school, the number and variety of languages spoken in each school, and results obtained by each school on across-the-district tests in reading, writing, and mathematics.) The section continues with practical answers to the broad question "How do children learn language?" The next question, "What is the teacher's role?" is answered by a number of suggestions under "What teachers can do." Other questions in this section using the same question-and-answer format are "How can we validate the linguistic backgrounds of all students?" "How can we become more responsive to different cultural orientations towards teaching and learning?" and "How can we build on the knowledge and experience that children bring to school?"

Section 2—Framework deals with such topics as The Foundation for Reading, Learning to Read in a Multilingual Context, and Supporting Literacy Development. It provides an excellent four-page set of 27 guidelines on Common Understandings that reflect the North York Board of Education's philosophy on developing literacy and language in diverse classrooms. For example, No. 15 says, "Self-esteem is important." New teachers will probably appreciate the section on The Reading Process, which covers the four major cueing systems—semantic, syntactic, graphophonic, and pragmatic—and once again the section addresses the practical under "What teachers can do."

Section 3—Planning for Teaching and Learning in Reading presents desired student outcomes in reading and provides ideas for long-range, short-term, and daily plans, and offers approximately 150 selected learning experiences that support student outcomes.

Section 4—Instructional Strategies for Teaching and Learning in Reading is the largest section of the book and is a veritable treasure chest of ideas that relate back to the theory of earlier sections.

In this section the claim the authors make that the book will help teachers develop a reading program across the curriculum that includes all the learners in a multicultural, multiracial environment (p. 4), a program that will teach literacy skills to multilingual, multicultural students, is substantiated. For example, some of the topics are: Directed Reading-Thinking Activity; Reading Non-Fiction Materials; The Research Process; Summarizing; and 50 other strategies.

There is a description of how to set up a Drama-Tableaux—a frozen action shot—which can be used to explore feelings and the body language used to express feelings (p. 153). The authors warn the reader that touching is not appropriate in all cultures. (This exercise enables ESL and non-ESL students to learn about how people from different cultures communicate without using oral language.)

Section 5—Assessment, Modification and Evaluation in Reading reminds readers that "it takes some students between five and seven years of immersion in a second language to become academically proficient in that lan-

guage" (p. 247). Assessment of ESL students should therefore include procedures such as conducting the assessment in the student's first language for initial diagnosis or placement, and an interview with the parents. The section includes guidelines for program monitoring and other procedures.

The last two sections, Section 6—Resources and Section 7—Articles, are self-explanatory.

Suggestions are made regarding first language literacy: "Since it is a practical impossibility to provide all children with literacy instruction in their first language, multilingual reading materials for parents and older siblings can support literacy experiences at home in the first language. Schools need to reach out to the community so that these experiences occur before the children arrive in Kindergarten" (p. 31).

I hope by now I have convinced you that philosophy and theory are always followed by practice. Throughout the book are checklists, forms, and long spreadsheets giving the developmental stages of the reader and other important topics. Although the book is written for public school teachers, ideas in it could be snapped up by teachers of ESL adults.

I am struggling now to recall a weak point—I know there was one! Ah, yes, it weighs two pounds (sorry, I'm not into grams!), which I found a little heavy as I lay on my chaise longue with 97 Canada geese landing on and departing from the lake below. (Retirement is tough!)

Mary Ashworth

The Reviewer

Mary Ashworth retired in 1988 but is still active in ESL. She is currently collecting manuals and guidelines from school districts in Canada, Australia, England, and the United States to compare how these four countries educate their non-English speaking immigrant children, K-12.
