



PROFILE: A Day in The Life of Brian Cambourne: Teacher, Activist, Scholar

Author(s): Denny Taylor

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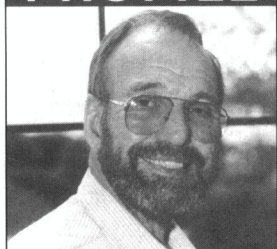
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PROFILE



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF BRIAN CAMBOURNE: TEACHER, ACTIVIST, SCHOLAR

Denny Taylor

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Profile

Editor's Note

In this article, Denny Taylor has a series of conversations with distinguished educator Brian Cambourne, this year's Outstanding Educator in the Language Arts. Recipients of this annual award are selected by members of the Elementary Section Steering Committee of the National Council of Teachers of English.

Published interviews are nearly always fictional. The interviewer meets with the interviewee, maybe once or twice, takes notes or audio records the conversation, and then works with this documentation to produce a text. There are no "ers" or "ums" in the final draft, the reader only has the finished product. My interview of Brian is also fictional. I have collapsed conversations which took place over an eight-year period into a single text. I first interviewed Brian in January 1993, and I've included verbatim quotes from that text. I've also included quotes from a second interview which was conducted especially for this publication via e-mail. The questions for this e-mail interview were developed from a review of eight hours of video recordings of Brian's participation in an International Scholars' Forum in November 1999, at Hofstra University. In his responses to my questions, Brian included quotes from texts he has written and speeches he has given. Added to these documents are quotes from Brian's field notes from the day he spent with a group of doctoral students and myself at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, in November 2000, and quotes from a presentation that he made at a gathering of doctoral students at Joan Zaleski's house during that visit.

From all these different texts, I've constructed "the interview." I've taken poetic license, played with time, and made up a story which, paradoxically, is both fiction and fact. The events all took place, and all of Brian's answers are verbatim. If you are to become text analysts as Brian suggests, then it is important that you have some insights into how the text was produced and also some understandings of my agenda. My agenda is easy to discern—Brian and his work mean a lot to me. He is a teacher and a researcher of extraordinary integrity. It's a privilege to have this opportunity to "interview" him.

PORT WASHINGTON, NEW YORK: NOVEMBER 2000

It's past midnight when the taxi arrives. Brian has been traveling for more than twenty-four hours. He lives just south of Sydney, Australia, and we live twenty miles east of New York City. Brian has with him two small bags. He is a veteran traveler. On this trip he will spend three days with us at Hofstra University before flying to Tucson, Arizona to speak with teachers. After that he will fly to Milwaukee to attend NCTE's Annual Convention. Brian goes straight to bed.

We've made no plans for the morning. At lunchtime we'll head into Hofstra and Brian will spend the afternoon with Alan Flurkey talking about eye-movement research and miscue analysis, and probably also about other stuff. Both Brian and Alan lived their young lives as surfers, and, on different occasions, I have heard both of them talk about reading waves. Then in the evening Brian will have dinner with some of our master's students, who are beginning teachers, and their principals. But this morning we drink tea and talk about family. I wonder if Brian can remember learning to read.

"I remember *not* being able to read," Brian says, "and then one day being able to read, as if the puzzle of how it's done suddenly fell into place."

"I remember before I was old enough to go to school being read to by my dad every Sunday morning in bed. He would read the Sunday comics to me and explain all the pictures. I can remember waiting anxiously for the paperboy to arrive, calling out 'Paaaaper! Get your Sunday paper!', and my dad opening the window, calling the boy over and purchasing *The Sunday Sun* because the comics were in color.

"Then would be a delicious hour or two of lying in bed with dad, listening to him and watching him as he read such gems as *Ginger Meggs*, *The Katzenjammer Kids*, *Blondie*, and *The Little King*. To me, it was magic that dad knew what the words said. But I never recall thinking that some day I would be able to do it, and I can't recall ever actually asking to be taught."

"What about at school?" I ask.

"I can't remember being taught to read in the formal sense of didactic teaching, though I can remember snatches of some of the lessons I had at school. So I must have started formal schooling as a non-reader.

"I can remember learning the alphabet and the sounds that letters made in kindergarten, but not actually doing any reading of texts. All I can really remember is the smell of egg sandwiches from the kindergarten year. 'A for apple' 'B for bat'—alphabet lessons and egg sandwiches.

"In first grade, we were given what were called 'Primers'," Brian continues. "These were grade level books which were used by grade 1 teachers to teach us to read words and sentences. I can recall being terrified of read-around-the-class lessons that happened each day. We would start at the front of the room and each child would read a certain amount out loud, and the next child would read the next part, and so on around the class. Children who 'lost the place' or 'didn't know the words we'd practiced' got yelled at and punished, sometimes by being smacked with the ruler.

"I was terrified when it was my turn to read because, for a long time, I couldn't see the writing clearly. It was all fuzzy. I've no idea why. I had been sick with a mild form of pneumonia and perhaps it temporarily affected my eyes, but I can remember relying on another boy who sat behind me, whispering what I was supposed to read, and I rarely got caught out. The next thing I can remember is one day being able to see the page very clearly and the words made sense."

We talk of other sign systems and I tell Brian that I could read music before I learned to read alphabetic scripts. "What other symbol systems did you read?" I ask.

"I learned the banjo mandolin from about age eight," Brian says, "and I could read and play music from the textbook the teacher used. I scored 98 percent on the final theory and practice exam at the end of my course.

"When adolescence began to kick in and I became a member of the local surf club and began to surf, I soon let all that fall into disuse. Other symbol systems? I guess I learned how to 'read' the surf and 'read' waves. I considered myself quite expert at that."

It's a perfect segue. It's time for us to leave so that Brian can meet Alan Flurkey. In the car we talk about Alan's research. He is extending the work he did for his doctoral dissertation on the reading process and is interested in conducting eye-movement studies using miscue analysis. Brian says he is looking forward to talking

with Alan. He explains that he developed the conditions of learning as a consequence of his doctoral research.

"Can you talk a little bit about your doctoral research and how you developed the conditions of learning, Brian?"

"My doctoral dissertation was entitled *A Naturalistic Study of the Language Performance of Grade 1 Rural and Urban School Children*. The focus of this thesis was the verbal interactions which children encountered in their everyday life.

"When the dissertation was finished I had this huge set of archival data which I decided would be worth analyzing again, from different perspectives. I went through these data from the perspective of metaphor. What kinds of metaphors were kids exposed to in their daily lives? What kinds of metaphors did they actually use in the daily ebb and flow of their linguistic worlds? When I finished analyzing these data from that perspective, I was dealing with the issues of complex learning, like learning to read and write. I refer to all of this in that 1995 *Reading Teacher* article, 'Towards an Educationally Relevant Theory of Literacy Learning: Twenty Years of Inquiry.'

"I had also been influenced by Ken Goodman's notion that written language and oral language were parallel versions of the same thing, and by a metaphor Frank Smith used of the brain as an organ of learning. I decided to explore how the ecological environment contributed to the complex learning involved in learning to control and use the oral form of language. My argument was that we might learn something from the environment that could be transferred to school learning."

"So I re-analyzed the data from the doctoral archives I still had. The conditions emerged from this analysis, except for engagement which I added later. I then took these conditions back to some local teachers and asked them if they thought that these conditions, minus engagement, could be applied to their classrooms, especially with respect to the teaching of literacy. They agreed to try and gave me the privilege of observing them and generally doing an anthropological study of them as they tried to implement the conditions. The model went through several evolutions before it emerged as it did in *The Whole Story* in 1988."

"Why do you think the conditions of learning are important?" I ask.

"My ideas about the condition of learning continue to evolve. Why do I think they're important? Because in my opinion they simulate, not replicate—as some accuse me of claiming—the way the brain has been designed to learn complex things. This in turn increases the probability that more learners will be able to succeed in

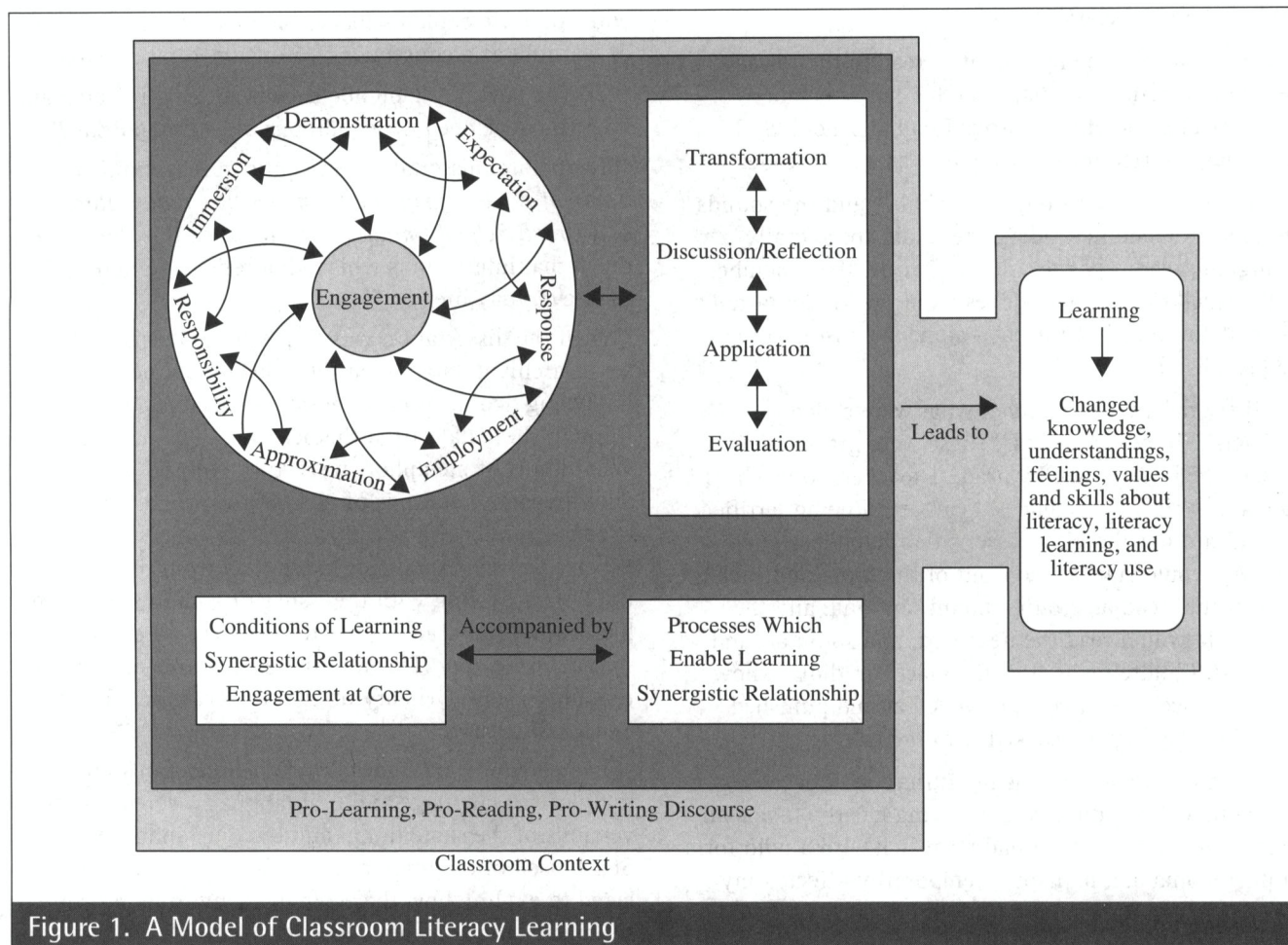


Figure 1. A Model of Classroom Literacy Learning

acquiring the complex things like literacy they need to gain access to power in our cultures. I suppose it's part of my ideology that teachers have no right to put barriers in the way of learning such important things as reading and writing. I also believe that while fragmented, mindless direct instruction can be shown to 'work' it also complicates and distorts the learning process and this in turn alienates many non-mainstream kids from access to literacy."

Long Island is actually just a giant car park and the drive to Hofstra is a slow one. Both Alan and Brian have built theoretical perspectives of the reading process and teaching and learning that have been influenced by the work of Ken and Yetta Goodman. We talk about Ken and Yetta and the influence they have had on Brian's own research. "When did you first learn about Ken and Yetta's research, Brian?"

"I first became aware of Ken's work when I was a professor at Wagga," Brian explains. "I was teaching in a little teachers' college in the Western District of New South Wales, in Wagga Wagga. I read an article called 'Let's

Dump the Uptight Model in English,' and it came at a time when I had been given the job of running courses in reading and writing. Back then, reading and writing were taught separately and my background in reading was fairly traditional, but I had done a lot of research into kid's language, and because I was given the responsibility of developing a curriculum I was reading as widely as I could and I was dissatisfied with what I read.

"I had read all the articles in the *Reading Teacher* and *Reading Research Quarterly* for a three- or four-year period, and I think it was because I had done a qualitative doctoral dissertation and everything I was reading was quantitative." Brian talks about the usual statistical procedures used in quantitative studies and then adds, "I distrusted what the articles were saying."

"When I read Ken's article, it resonated with the dissatisfaction I was feeling. And from that article I read one written by Yetta on miscue and from that point on I just grabbed anything I could by the Goodmans. I taught myself miscue and I guess I became a bit of zealot in my own country—looking at reading as language. In one of

his articles, Ken made the statement that it was all language, reading included. All of the literature I was reading implicitly treated reading as a different form of language and Ken's statement 'it is all language' helped me put the big picture together.

"It was at that time that Peter Rousch arrived at Wagga Wagga as my dean, and when he walked into my office he saw Ken Goodman's work all over the place and he asked me if I liked Ken's work and then he told me he had just got back from Wayne State University where he had studied with Ken. Peter and I became good friends, and I was able to learn miscue from an insider.

"I then took a sabbatical and did a postdoc at Harvard. Courtney Cazden was an outside reader on my dissertation defense committee and she invited me to study at Harvard. I was at the Harvard School of Education with Jeanne Chall, Courtney Cazden, and Carol Chomsky. I had cross-registration privileges at MIT and I spent a lot of time with the people in artificial intelligence, people like Minsky. I could see all these bright, young people doing graduate work at Harvard never studying the work that Ken was doing. I challenged Jeanne Chall and told her I was going to write a paper and analyze Ken's work and she said that was a good idea.

"When I was researching Goodman I decided to go and talk with him, so I phoned Ken. I asked him how far it was to Detroit and he said, 'Oh, not far.'" Brian laughs, "And so I took a bus from Boston to Detroit and I spent two weeks living with Ken and Yetta in their house. It was there that Ken gave me a study that he was finishing on the analysis of kids from different linguistic groups in America. I told him I was going to work back through his findings, from his conclusions through his analysis to his original raw data. My own doctoral work had taught me that this was a good way of testing the validity of his taxonomy, and it all stood up.

"In 1980, I spent three months at Illinois Center for the Study of Reading, and then Ken and Yetta invited me to stay with them in Tucson and I taught a qualitative research course at the University of Arizona." Brian laughs, "Ken and Yetta have a knack of making you feel at home."

At Hofstra, Brian meets with Alan and we arrange to meet later in the afternoon before the master's students in Literacy Studies arrive with their principals to have dinner with Brian. We arranged the dinner because we are concerned about the difficulties that beginning teachers are facing as the curriculum narrows and the American fetish for testing increases the pressures on their first years of teaching. The master's students were eager to come but getting their principals to accompany

them had been difficult. However, the principals come and even a superintendent attends the dinner. Brian talks with them about his observations of children learning to read and write in schools and about his research on the conditions of learning.

At the dinner, Brian says to the beginning teachers and their principals that literacy is an "umbrella term," and so later I ask him what he meant. "You said that literacy is an umbrella term, Brian, under which you can place a whole range of behaviors depending on which ideology or set of values you carry around with you. Can you talk a bit about what you mean by literacy? Behaviors? Ideology? Values? What does literacy mean to you?"

"Perhaps the best way to address these questions is to share with you some of the comments I made to a group of Aussie high school teachers who were concerned about the teaching of literacy," Brian responds.

"I talked with them about what I learned from a literature review I completed a couple of years ago to discover how 'literacy' and 'English' are defined by those who were considered to have some theoretical and/or research expertise in the field. 'English' is the Aussie term used to describe the literacy of Language Arts curriculum.

"One thing I remember from this experience is the obfuscation I encountered. However, to cut a long story short, I identified what I perceived to be three distinct categories of beliefs expressed in the literature about the kinds of 'literacy' and 'English' that schools should be engaged in teaching. These were: 1) Functional Literacy; 2) Literacy for Personal Growth and Development; and 3) Literacy for Social Equity and Social Justice.

"*Functional literacy* refers to the kind of literacy that I used to teach when I first began teaching in the mid-fifties. Garth Boomer once described this kind of literacy as 'enough to get by on.' It was based on assumptions about society, about learning, and about language which many today would vigorously contest. For example, it assumed that schools had the responsibility for graduating students who could read/write well enough to understand and cope with basic signs, newspapers, official forms, the etiquette of letter writing and responding to letters. A hoped-for bonus of teaching this way was that some of those graduates might be able to read well enough to enjoy literature as a socially acceptable form of escapism or pastime, or in some cases even begin to read to find out things independently.

"It was the era of lonely farmer bachelors, who lived way out in the danga—in the U.S. you would probably say 'boonies,'—who read each night by the light of a hurricane lamp, suddenly appearing on shows like 'Pick-a-Box,' which was a national radio quiz show that

later made the shift to TV, and displaying amazing knowledge which had been developed solely through this kind of literacy. It was also a time of almost full employment, where the majority of the workforce could earn a living with their labor through the use of muscle power. They didn't need to be highly literate in order to enjoy a successful working life.

"It was also believed that once this basic form of functional literacy had been acquired it could be applied to any domain of knowledge or concern, and was therefore a necessary prerequisite for success in later learning. Therefore it had to be mastered by the end of primary school so that students could enter the secondary system technically ready to use reading and writing well enough to learn, and be tested on the 'factual' knowledge they had to imbibe. Literacy, and by implication language, was seen as a kind of conduit between the learner and a source of information. Language in both its oral and written form was a conduit for information to be transferred from one source—a book, a teacher—to the learner's mind. It was also the medium through which the learner displayed the degree to which he/she had internalized this information. Given these assumptions, it followed that the two major literacy skills required by the learner were encoding and decoding.

"Until recently, I thought that the belief in Functional Literacy as a desired outcome was long since dead. Not so. Last year, I analyzed four consecutive days of teaching and learning in Year 12 Voc. Ed. and Legal Studies classrooms in a State High School. I was shocked to find the same assumptions inherent in the way the teachers taught and the kids learned in these classes. In my opinion, striving to achieve this kind of literacy produces dependent learners, who believe that what they read and what they hear is 'true.' They are compliant learners, who don't know how to, nor do they expect to have to look for implicit messages or agendas.

"*Literacy for personal growth and development* demands more than functional literacy. It demands readers who can read the 'great works of literature,' and understand the issues, conflicts, themes in these great works, and apply them to their own lives. Understanding literature in this way is believed to have a 'humanizing' effect on students. This kind of literacy demands writers who can write creative as well as factual texts. It assumes that lurking inside each student is a potential Shakespeare, Hemingway, or Dylan Thomas. It assumes that by encouraging creativity, students will discover their true selves, and that this kind of discovery is an essential accoutrement of personal growth and development. It assumes that the ideal society is one in which every citizen

has been 'developed to their full potential'—whatever that means—and that every citizen has 'individual rights' that must never be compromised. It also recognizes that those who are most successful in such a society have been successful because their innate potential is greater than those who are not so successful. In other words, it promotes and is prepared to accept individual differences—and, therefore, different levels and/or forms of 'rights' to be protected. It is the kind of literacy that I think lies at the core of cultures which are fiercely proud of something they call 'individualism.'

"In my opinion, if successfully achieved, it has the potential to produce a citizenry that admires and values individual achievement and expertise, and overtly promotes it. By the same token, it demeans and devalues a lack of expertise as 'failure,' and tends to lay the blame for those who fail to achieve on some inadequacy in them or their culture.

"In my mind it is also a self-serving form of literacy that implicitly teaches students to be 'I-centered,' to use reading and writing as a means of increasing their own self-worth, self-esteem, and for pursuing their own self-serving agendas. Admittedly, this self-serving is supposed to be done in a way that has been tempered through reading and reflecting on the great works of literature, and on having been 'humanized' and 'sensitized' to the needs of others by them. I see this form of literacy reflected in the way that writing is taught in many U.S. schools.

"*Literacy for social equity and social justice* is a much more recent form of literacy and much more complex than the other two. While there might seem to be a lot of overlap between this kind of literacy and the previous one, they are, in my mind, very different. This form of literacy is based on several complex assumptions about society, language, literacy, and learning.

"Firstly, this view of literacy sees literacy as inherently political in several ways. For example, it assumes that in our society and societies like ours, there are groups and individuals who are constantly engaged in acquiring more and more power and wealth at the expense of others. It also assumes that those who have managed to acquire great deals of either have a vested interest in ensuring that they and their descendants keep it, and even acquire more. A related assumption is that language can be used to either include or exclude people or groups of people from different kinds of power and rewards.

"A second assumption is that literacy can be equated with high degrees of control of language in all its forms. 'Control over language' means being able to use language effectively to critique, challenge, and where nec-

essary, deny and refute the versions of 'truth' contained in what is written or spoken, especially by those who are trying to persuade us that their 'truth' is correct and that we should accept it as so. A corollary of this assumption is that such control of language—i.e., literacy—is a cultural resource which can be used by all who acquire it, to gain access to power, to prevent a privileged elite from perpetuating their own agendas and thus continually keep moving society away from privilege and elitism, toward social equity and social justice.

"Such literacy demands that readers move beyond reading for enjoyment, or reading to comprehend, or reading to learn—although these are still important. It means that we must learn to be text analysts, deliberately looking for the way that language has been used; which linguistic devices have been used to construct meaning; what is the author of the text's agenda; and how has it been communicated linguistically, and what is my evaluation of it?

"The ability to do this means understanding language at a much deeper level than we have previously been asked. It means that teachers need to have a more-than-basic understanding of a theory of language and a basic theory of learning that enables them to help students get control over those forms of language they need to control if they are going to be able to acquire the knowledge, understanding, and problem-solving skills and know-how they need to use such literacy for creating and maintaining a fairer, and more equitable society.

"The kind of literacy that I think should underpin our current English syllabus is predominantly a third kind. I believe that much of the political debate which has erupted around literacy for social equity and for social justice has been generated from a number of sources. One of those is politicians who have become aware of just how threatening a school system which produced thousands of highly critically literate students might be to the current ways power and wealth are distributed in our society, and they are terrified of the potential for thousands of noncompliant, critical thinkers challenging their policies. Obviously, I'm one of those committed to the third kind of literacy. Most of the work I do is based on the political prejudices I have and these must of course impact on what I research, and how and why I teach the way I do."

After the dinner, our conversation about literacy continues until it is quite late, but on Saturday morning we are up early. My husband, David, and I drive with Brian into New York City to meet with a group of Hofstra doctoral students who are conducting an ethnographic study of the literacies of the Metropolitan Museum of Art with me. On Saturdays the traffic is light and we arrive at the

museum in time for coffee with the students who are working with us. We go off in two's to observe and take ethnographic notes. Brian sits on a stone seat at the entrance to the cafeteria and when we come back at lunch time we find him still sitting there taking notes. After lunch we disperse and return at three o'clock to debrief and drink a last cup of coffee before leaving.

Several months later, Brian sends me a write-up of his field notes. "Feel free to give it out to the students who were also part of the day," he tells me. "It probably doesn't fit the generic parameters of a 'true' ethnography. It's more along the lines of a set of field notes with overtones of Barker and Wright's concept of 'specimen record.'" Brian's notes provide a detailed and systematic record of the literacy events he observed at the museum. I used Barker and Wright's (1951) research when I was working on *Growing Up Literate* (1988) with Cathé Dorsey Gaines, but I have not thought much about their research since that time. However, Brian continues to use Barker and Wright to create an ecological frame for his anthropological research in schools.

"Brian, you've talked about an 'ecological' perspective. What do you mean by that?" I ask.

"It should really be stated as an 'ecological psychology' perspective," Brian responds. "In my early research career I was looking for a naturalistic paradigm that could be applied to classroom settings and I came across the work of Roger Barker and his colleagues. They developed a naturalistic approach to psychological research which explored the relationship between events, structures, relationships, behaviors, and the settings in which they occurred. They convinced me that the context—the ecology—in which behavior occurred influenced those behaviors in predictable and lawful ways.

"I'm currently using it again to develop what I call 'ways of talking about teaching' that local schools can develop to help us in the practicum experiences our students need to have. I figured that if we can talk about classrooms as learning settings in ways that are accessible to all, but which do not reduce the complexity of what goes on within them, then it would get us 'all on the same page,' as it were. I imagine that you're very familiar with Barker's work—you seem to see the world through a very similar lens.

"According to Barker's theory, behavior settings are 'stable, concrete environmental units.' They are 'stable' because they continue to exist day after day. They are 'concrete environmental units' because they are bounded by physical and temporal boundaries which are easily recognized. Examples of them abound in the world.

"The Church service at St. James' each Sunday at 9:00 a.m. is a behavior setting. So too is Woolworths, the corner cafe, the saloon bar at the Oxford Pub in Wollongong, the corner news agency. All are stable, all are bounded by physical and temporal boundaries. All are 'natural' in the sense that they have not been created by researchers for research purposes. All have two classes of components, namely humans behaving—praying, listening, singing hymns, buying and selling goods, etcetera—and non-psychological objects, paraphernalia with which behavior is transacted—such as pews, hymn books, glasses, chairs, walls, doors, goods, and so on. In each of them, both the behavior and the physical objects that constitute them are internally organized and arranged to form patterns that are not random. All are predictable in terms of the behaviors which are likely to occur within them given normal, everyday circumstances and the purposes for which they are set up.

"I interpret the core proposition of Barker's theory in the following way. The behaviors which typically occur in the everyday settings that make up any human society can be understood and explained in terms of the interactions and tensions between: 1) the physical properties of the setting; 2) the number and character of that setting's human components; and 3) the program(s) of events which typically occur within that setting's organization.

"I believe that the classrooms in which I have made observations can be described using Barker and Wright's concept of a 'behavior setting.' Not only are they 'stable, concrete environmental units' where people engage in behavior—the teaching and learning of literacy—but they can be understood and explained in terms of the interactions between the three classes of variables identified by Barker and Wright, namely physical properties, human components, and the programs of events that occurred within them."

At the museum, we split up and head back to Long Island. We will see the doctoral students again at Joan Zaleski's house where we will have dinner and Brian will talk about the politics of literacy. We are short of time and hurry home to get ready for the evening. In the car we talk about our observations at the museum about time and space.

"When you talk about 'time' you sometimes talk about the way teachers 'distribute and organize it,' I say to Brian. "Can you share with us some of your ideas about time? For teachers? For children?" Joking, I add, "I'm practicing 'wait time'!"

"When I was a young teacher the 'unit of organization' that I had been taught to use was 'the lesson'," Brian

explains. "Typically, the lesson was a tightly structured sequential blueprint for instruction which lasted for discrete units of time—fifteen minutes in lower division which is the equivalent in the U.S. of kindergarten and first grade, increasing to thirty minutes to an hour in upper grades, which would be fifth and sixth grade in the U.S.

"This way of organizing and distributing time very clearly reflected a behaviorist, fragmented view of learning. Each lesson was structured into steps: step one was motivation; step two was transmission of information—usually called 'demonstration' or 'discussion' even though it typically took the form of tightly controlled, catechistic, question/answer tirades controlled by the teacher; step three was application; step four was correction, and step five was closure.

"I used to say to my kids 'close yer books and get ready for the next lesson'.

"Years later I noted that teachers who changed their theories of learning to a more constructivist view also changed their units of organization. Instead of the lesson, they seemed to develop larger, less structured units of organization which were highly congruent with the 'behavior episode' described by Barker and his colleagues. We decided to call them 'episodes.' They had a clearly discernible structure and purpose, a set of routines which kids and teachers understood and could articulate, certain kinds of learning and cognitive behaviors, specific kinds of 'commerce' with inanimate physical objects—such as books, pens, pencils, etcetera—and a clear 'direction.'

"When any of these changed, the episode also changed. Teachers began to talk about the way they organized their days. So a teacher might say, 'I start with teacher read-aloud, then move into demonstrations time, then we do DEAR time, then it's activity time, after activity time we do group sharing time, and then just before morning break we do sharing out time.'

"I also noted that one of the barriers that many teachers seemed to have when I introduced them to a constructivist view of learning was how to put it into practice. Many couldn't seem to make the connection that they had to change their unit of organization from the 'lesson' to something more like the 'episode.' Once they made that connection they just zoomed ahead in constructivist teaching and learning."

"I was trained in the fifties and I am really concerned that my university colleagues who teach the basic methods courses still teach lesson planning based on the old unit of organization. I now talk about 'redistributing the time you have' because it gets around the old concept of

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a 'lesson' and the concern that many teachers have about 'needing more time' to be a constructivist teacher."

We arrive back at my house in time for tea before going to the evening meal and discussion. Again we talk. Since Thursday I have been trying to pull together the theoretical and pedagogical theories and practices that are central to Brian's understandings of human learning. In a way, I've been constructing Brian. One of the concepts that he uses is "reflective learning," and it seems to me that the idea of reflective learning ties together much of Brian's work. So my next question is "What do you mean by 'reflective learning' Brian?"

"For me reflective learning is what happens when one has a discussion with one's self and clarifies one's conceptual confusions," Brian explains. "It's a form of discussion—except it occurs within the same nervous system not between different nervous systems—it's a form of soliloquy and it serves the same function

Hamlet's famous soliloquy served: to address and resolve the big questions of life and/or learning. As such it's also a form of language behavior, a form of meaning making which occurs at the conscious level, so I suppose it's closely related to what many people call 'metacognition.'

"I've noted in my own work that those kids who are explicitly taught how to reflect seem to be more confident and more aware of how and why learning 'works'—or reading, writing, spelling, and so forth, 'works'—than those who operate at the automatic level. They're also more prepared to question and evaluate the ecological validity of the meanings they actually end up comprehending. I suppose that's why I'm concerned about the push towards teaching which promotes 'automaticity' as a mega-desirable outcome of literacy instruction. I've seen too many kids who rely on automatic pilot when reading, who can often pass a comprehension test, but

never learn how to interrogate the meanings they construct as a consequence of this automaticity.

"These are the children who the amoral spin doctors con when they want to influence politics or the political process. If I ever design a course called 'Responding to Spin-doctoring 101,' reflective learning would be one of the major instructional strategies I would use."

"When we are working with kids," I say, "you talk about making explicit the rationale for what we are doing. Why is that important?"

"When I've asked kids why they engage with some of their teachers' demonstrations more deeply than they do with others," Brian explains, "their responses seem to indicate that when they have an idea of the rationale or the big picture they find it easier to make sense of what they are doing and therefore engage more deeply. They have some idea of where all the stuff is taking them."

"You talk a lot about teachers and the need for them to be able to describe what they do in 'strong coherent language.' Can you expand upon what you mean by that?" I ask.

"I've often noted in my observations and conversations with kids and teachers," Brian reflects, "that learners who are in control of their knowledge and truly understand what they've learned also seem to be able to express the meanings they have constructed in words and phrases that are uniquely theirs."

"Those who are masters of their knowledge can express the same sets of meanings in a variety of ways to achieve whatever purposes they're using the language for with a whole range of different audiences. They have sufficient control of the meanings they're trying to express and a sufficient range of linguistic choices to express these meanings that they can argue and/or persuade others, or at least express their points of view in ways that are accessible and make sense to most who hear or read them. Hence teachers who wish to be taken seriously by those to whom they're accountable need to display such control of their language and ideas. One of the best ways to develop this—so our research shows—is by reflective learning."

I ask one more mischievous question before we drive to Joan Zaleski's house. At the dinner with the principals and master's students, Brian had said that he has come up with another "condition," but that this one interferes with learning. He called it "dyspedagogia." "How would you define dyspedagogia?" I ask.

"It's not actually a condition," Brian responds. "I use the term as a spoof when I want to draw attention to the tendency of many special education experts in Australia

who try to explain failure to learn in terms of some esoteric, scientifically sounding condition like 'dyslexia,' 'ADD' or 'ADHD,' 'scototopic sensitivity syndrome,' and so on. I suggest that I've discovered another of these exotic disabilities called dyspedagogia—in other words 'bloody lousy teaching'!"

On our way to Joan's we stop at an Italian restaurant and pick up the pasta dishes we'd ordered. The pasta is the contribution from everyone who participated in the day of observation at the museum. We meet up with the doctoral students who had worked with us at Joan's, and other doctoral students and faculty members arrive with large dishes of Egyptian and Moroccan food, signature dishes that everyone is eager to share. While people eat dessert and drink coffee Brian stands near the fireplace and talks about politics, Western Democracy, and literacy, which he refers to as a "ménage à trois."

"People in power recognized literacy as cultural capital and kept literacy for the elite," Brian says at the beginning of his presentation to us, "or alternatively, they tried to make literacy available. Print is one of the necessities for participation in democracy."

Brian talks about "economic rationalism" and "globalization" which he argues "provide politicians with a reason for interfering in literacy." He speaks of the "growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy. What's been played out in California is prototypical of other states," he says, "California's AB 1086 law supports one narrow pedagogy. The result is almost complete political control of the teaching of reading."

"In Australia, the government is intent on the privatization of public education by promoting a 'literacy crisis,'" Brian continues, "the government has taken control of public education."

Brian talks of lies and misinformation being presented as scientific fact, of corporate activism, and of strategic lawsuits against educators and public participation. Systematically, he moves back and forth between what is happening in the U.S. and what is happening in Australia. The doctoral students make the link to what is happening in their schools, and the faculty make the connection to events that are taking place at the university. At the time that he speaks we are in the middle of the review of our master's programs and there is no doubt in our minds that New York State is attempting to control the preparation of teachers. We are resisting dyspedagogia. New York State's theoretical frameworks are deficit driven and the concept of "a lesson" reflects Brian's experiences in the 1950s.

Later, when we drive to my home, we talk about the political situation. I ask my last question. "Brian, how do we cope with the political takeover of public education?"

"When I was a young teacher," Brian says, reflecting back, "I was confused by how a child could master such complex learning in the world outside of school and be considered deficient with respect to the kinds of learning that was supposed to occur inside school. Once again I find myself in a similar situation. Only this time I am neither young nor inexperienced. I am not taken in by theories of learning that divide reading and writing up into subsets and/or hierarchies of smaller collections of sub-habits. Or by pedagogies that, in turn, are organized into short sequences of skills with the mastery of any one being contingent upon the mastery of others earlier in the sequence. Repetitive drill and practice are once again the core teaching procedures that are being promoted. The underlying theory accords special status to errors. Teachers like me in the fifties and early sixties, who implemented this theory not only seemed to spend a lot of time and energy trying to develop automaticity, but also spent almost as much energy trying to extinguish errors from our students' repertoires.

"And now I'm almost back where I started. The theory of learning that underpinned my early teaching once again has strong currency among teachers, teacher educators, policymakers, curriculum designers, parents, and the general public. Although more than thirty years has passed since I had relied on this theory to drive my pedagogy, this theory—or one of its close relatives—is once again forming the underpinnings of much of what is going on in the name of education. I realize that the intellectual unrest I experienced when I was a young teacher has suddenly resurfaced. Only, this time, we know much more about learning and literacy and we are more capable of responding to it."

On Sunday morning, a taxi arrives and Brian leaves for the airport with his two small bags, bound for Tucson to talk with teachers. At the NCTE Annual Convention later that week, several Tucson teachers tell me Brian brought them my greetings from Hofstra. We talk like old friends about Brian and his work with teachers. His research in schools makes sense to us. The teachers express their concern about the changes that are taking place in

public education. They are strong, articulate, and knowledgeable about how young children learn to read and write. When the curriculum narrows, they expand it. When they are told to read a script, they participate in other literacy activities with the children in their classes. And, when they are told they must teach to the test, they find ways around it. They are a part of an international community of scholar-practitioners that Brian has helped to create. At the end of the day it's the way he cares for teachers and children—he has cared enough to spend most of his adult life observing in their classrooms—that makes the difference.

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Author Biography

Denny Taylor is professor and chair of Literacy Studies at Hofstra University and author of *Beginning to Read* and the *Spin Doctors of Science*. She has just finished writing *The Basal Chronicles* and the *New Word Order* with Joanne Robertson. She can be reached at taylor.d@worldnet.att.net