

Review:

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Chris Searle (1998). *None but Our Words: Critical Literacy in Classroom and Community*. Buckingham/Philadelphia: Open University Press, 172 pages, Cloth (0-335-20128-8) £50.00, Paperback (0-335-20127-X) £16.99

Key words:
language of
empathy, social
commitment and
responsibility,
cultural reflection
and action,
political struggles,
creativity,
multiculturalism

Abstract: SEARLE's book is crucial reading for those interested in critical pedagogy. Based on his teaching experience in different countries over a period of twenty-five years, SEARLE describes education as it is connected with social concerns. Following the principles of the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo FREIRE, SEARLE encouraged his working class students to express their reality through poems, plays, and short stories. In doing so, both SEARLE and his young students became aware that they had the power to drive the curriculum towards goals that were connected with their own social problems or those of other working class communities. In addition, the students were empowered to make a difference in their own lives. This book is a good resource for educators who are willing to try alternative ways of teaching.

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1. Words Connecting the World

During my school years I learned that "the old" and "the new" continents are separated by the big ocean. Reading *None but Our Words: Critical Literacy in Classroom and Community* I have learned that both continents are not separated but connected by the ocean. Actually, people all over around the world are linked not geographically but by many of the principles I found in SEARLE's book. In ten chapters SEARLE made me experience with him and his students 25 years of teaching. From his Literacy class he shared with me every critical lesson he and his students learned; doing so, he allowed me to learn too. Teaching critically, SEARLE shows us how he broke down the traditional neutral view regarding the curriculum and teaching practices. His vivid narrative includes experiences teaching working class students in East London, the Caribbean, Canada, Mozambique and Sheffield. The Foreword written by Corin LANKSHEAR and the Afterward written by Michael APPLE are the best way to start and finish the book. [1]

Reading his book I found myself in conversation with SEARLE through remembrances my own teaching experiences and the ones my colleagues and I have talked about for many years. Among the principles shared by SEARLE and me

are: language of empathy, social commitment and responsibility, cultural reflection and action, political struggles, creativity, multiculturalism, and so forth. [2]

2. Collective Words and Cultural Action

SEARLE is committed to the ideas of the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo FREIRE, and explains how FREIRE's principles are connected to his teaching. They are present in each experience depicted in the book. SEARLE argues that they are stages. Stages are the principles that are expressed by the "c" words: creation, consideration, consciousness, confidence, collaboration, consolidation, cultural action, crossover and correction. However it appears to be a permanent process in which he and his students searched continually for critical knowledge. What seemed strange to me was that SEARLE did not mention "conflict," which is very important to critical theorists to whom FREIRE thoughts are connected. [3]

Chapter two is named "Stepney words." The name comes from the first of several books that SEARLE published of his students' work. In this section SEARLE describes how he taught Literacy in East London. Children from about 11 to 15 years of age were reading and writing poems, seeking to understand not only the word but also the world, and then becoming aware of the power they had in making a difference. As we can surely guess, the conservative educators who were in charge of making decisions in the school did not value such a teaching approach. SEARLE was fired. [4]

SEARLE's teaching practice was framed by linking language and action. Reading and writing poems, children had the chance to express themselves and their world rather than working only as "duties" in Literacy class. While writing, young students became aware of their everyday struggles within their social contexts and then were motivated to take collective cultural actions. There were teaching strategies that helped the students to see their context critically. The students' poems dealt with loneliness among the aged, the marginalized, and the alienated. The language of empathy was the way in which they expressed their feelings and the feelings of the people around them. Imagination played a crucial role in SEARLE's teaching. He brought to his class diverse readings, music, films and even a collection of photographs that he found at an exhibition. SEARLE met Ron McCORMICK, a young photographer from Liverpool, who caught the same local reality the students expressed in their poems. The match was incredible, and it made them think of publishing a book that would show their world in visual images and children's words. SEARLE writes that even though the school administrator did not support the book, he and the children worked hard and found local people who funded the project. [5]

Local papers, important educators, the teachers union, poets, and others showed appreciation for the work. Diverse opinions were expressed about the students' poems: "unliterary but full of honesty and conviction" (p.17) or "a unique and important venture" (p.29) or "contains the qualities of freshness and honesty and sincerity" (p.30). Since the book was published against the opinion of the school administrators. SEARLE was accused of "flagrant disobedience" and then was

fired from his job. About 800 students between 11 and 15 years of age protested and staged a strike. Parents joined them. The courage and organization shown by the students became a national and international issue. Eventually, SEARLE was reinstatement. [6]

As I read the students' poems I become aware of the critical role we teachers play in dealing with social issues and seeking for a better place in which to live. In FREIRE's view word and action are linked by consciousness. This is what we can find in SEARLE's teaching. [7]

The third chapter takes its name from an episode that took place in SEARLE's elementary school neighborhood: "Ferndale fires." In 1973, a group of people protested against the conditions of their flats. Large families were living in uncomfortable, cold and cramped units. The flats were lacking any form of central heating; they had only one electric socket in the living room, so electric heaters could only be used in that room, causing entire families to sleep there. In short, the flats were unhealthy. [8]

SEARLE knew from his students that their living conditions were terrible. Because of cold and sleepless nights, very often the children came to school cold and tired. Because families lacked a heating system, sometimes they used paraffin stoves, which caused serious accidents. SEARLE thought that as an elementary school teacher he should help parents not only by empathizing or just working in campaigns in their favor, but also in a curricular sense approaching these problems so important to his students' lives. It became a school project. Teacher as well as student was drawing the curriculum around a particular struggle involving students and families. This project meant building a bridge between school and community. [9]

SEARLE invited children to write down their feelings about what was happening to them. SEARLE wrote a play, which was performed by the students in the school and then in other places. It supported the parents' campaign but it was important in another way. It made elementary school students raise their awareness regarding their real problems and then to make decisions in solving them. Again, SEARLE was in the eye of the hurricane. What is the teacher's role? Should a teacher be directly involved in parents problems? Some important but conservative figures spoke aloud to say "No!" SEARLE was accused of being an "indoctrinator," a "brain washer," who took advantage of his position. Since he had the children "caught" in his classroom, they could not escape being "indoctrinated." [10]

According to GIROUX (1988) it is virtually impossible to live without an ideology. So, it is easy to understand that the teacher's role is related to the view we have regarding the role of education in society. If we think that education is an important way to change society, then we should argue that students should view education as a transformative experience. In this view, we should expect SEARLE to perform as he did, taking the curriculum in his hands and making any and all changes he needed for supporting critical education, and then

encouraging students to be critical and active agents of social change. What SEARLE offers us in this section is an example of courage and conviction regarding social commitment and teacher responsibility. [11]

The fourth chapter is called "The basement: poetry's open door." In this section, SEARLE describes the work done for diverse people who meet in a basement, unified by their interest in poetry. As "Stepney Words" was published and read many people saw poetry as an opportunity to express themselves rather than being only for geniuses. In this experience people were engaged who historically had been labeled "illiterate" often without a voice in deciding their own lives. They were elderly people, workers, teenagers, and so forth. At the very beginning "The Basement" was comprised only of young people who were committed to the aged. Soon the young writers were taking action on behalf of their community. Many others found "The Basement" as an open door and the group increased its membership. "The Basement's" work was a fusion of creative writing and cultural action, turning words into actions. [12]

The writers ranged in age from 15 to 65 years. Age was not a barrier; they were all connected by literacy. They learned that poetry is an expression of their lives and communities; they had presentations reading poetry in public spaces expressing their social concerns about pensions, unemployment, and poverty. They also learned that they could produce and publish poetry in diverse ways. They wrote a series of poetry posters posted them in many public spaces. They also self-published a series of pamphlets; one of them wrote a critical comic that later was turned into a musical show that the writers performed in a local festival. Some of them found poetry as a vocation. But even for those who did not, the lesson they learned, as did the reader of SEARLE's book, is that poetry can move the world. It depends on how we approach social reality and how aware we are of our role as subjects rather than objects. [13]

The fifth chapter is called "Classrooms of resistance." It was the book that SEARLE published in 1976. If previous works were focused on social concerns, this book was much more combative, marked by a sense of a collective of students working together and sharing their views about social problems. This book showed even more, the social approach in teaching poetry. It was as a curriculum challenge to demonstrate that given the classroom opportunity, inner-city students would respond positively and enthusiastically toward knowledge that directly affected them, their communities and other working class communities, and struggling people all over the world. Students wrote poetry related to either local or international issues. The commercial redevelopment of dockland and the loss of housing, the closure of a local hospital, the experiences and struggles at a local Ford factory, miners, building workers, women workers in a local metal box factory. They also were inspired by a massacre and the anti-apartheid resistance in South Africa, the coup in Chile, and the repression of school children by British soldiers in Belfast. [14]

Certainly, SEARLE was the subject of harsh criticism of his previous books, but now the journalists reacted even before the book was published. One of them

wrote "Teaching revolution in the classroom" (p.60). Another wrote, "There is no doubt that Classroom of Resistance is clear indoctrination" (p.63). There were other similar criticisms. Again, the content of the journalists' protests was the message: "Education must be neutral." The most important lesson the students learned was that they were aware their voices were heard. Their poems questioned basic principles of traditional education and, consequently, and made some people feel uncomfortable. The critics clamored for a neutral curriculum that had nothing to do with social concerns and action. [15]

The sixth chapter is entitled "The people marching on." Again, it took its name from a book that presents the teaching experiences SEARLE had while teaching children from 1974 to 1976. Keeping the social approach, SEARLE describes his work closing the gap between subjects. Teachers are always dealing with this difficulty. SEARLE tells how his students learned history and English by valuing their own local history, working with an integral vision and imaginary empathy. [16]

Since students belonged to a community in which many historical events took place, SEARLE encouraged his students to uncover local history by checking the nearby central library, newspapers, and talking with some people who took part in the historical events. Five teachers were involved in this project. It was developed as a collaborative effort. Teachers and students worked to find sources of information, either published or unpublished; they could be books, newspapers, letters or pamphlets. Sometimes, information came from grandparents who lived at the time of the episode. This was a curriculum made by a community of learners and their families building knowledge back to the source material. The subject content was local movements like strikes, campaigns for suffragettes, and workers' struggles during the first years of 20th Century. [17]

Very often we teachers seek to motivate students to learn while we are teaching our subject. Primary History or Literacy teachers are frustrated because their students do not show any interest in learning dates and places, or authors and titles. This experience invites teachers to take the curriculum in their hands and make decisions regarding not only teaching methods but also the content. SEARLE shares with us the creative methods he used while valuing the students local history. The language of empathy connected with rich sources of information were part of SEARLE's experience and represented an effective teaching strategy that allowed the students to learn History, Literacy, Sociology, and so on. At the same time they were developing research skills and positive attitudes to learning. Last, but not the least important, students were learning and valuing their community's contributions to national and world History. [18]

The seventh chapter is called "Wings of racism." In this section, SEARLE describes his experiences in Mozambique as well as in England. During the time that SEARLE was in Mozambique, he was teaching English. When SEARLE came back to London, he incorporated his learning from the revolutionary educational system in Mozambique. At that time, a tragedy occurred in London. It was a terrible example of racism in which a black 19 years of age, died. SEARLE reports that a group of black youths were attacked by a group of white youths.

When the group of black youths went to the police station for help, they did not get the expected support, contributing to the black boys' death. Again, SEARLE encouraged his students to be active in expressing their indignation regarding this terrible incident. [19]

As he did in Mozambique, SEARLE worked with collaborative teaching techniques. He organized four small groups in order to have a mixture of abilities, gender, culture and level of confidence. Students were reading newspapers regarding the death of the black boy. Once they were informed from diverse sources, SEARLE suggested that they work on a collective play. Students were enthusiastic and they also wrote an introductory poem. Each of the four groups had part of the narrative to dramatize: the attack on the street, the scene in the police station, the reaction of the boy's family, the protests following the authorities' refusal to release the boy's body to the family. The result was a creative piece of dramatic narrative of the event. It was not a "history of heroes and villains." It was an active way of protest whenever and wherever they presented this play. [20]

Chapter eight is entitled "Butterflies of El Salvador." This represents SEARLE's claim for an anti-imperialist curriculum. He says that if it is true that today every educational system is pursuing multicultural awareness, and hence an anti-racist curriculum, it is also true that a next step must be the challenge: It is an anti-imperialist curriculum in which oppression and exploitation are central issues. In this way SEARLE argues why British professors should teach topics related to Latin America and other undeveloped countries. [21]

SEARLE's initiative was based on questioning imperialist social order and the United States' role in the world. He supported his curriculum approach with poetry from Latino-American authors like Nicolas GUILLEN from Cuba, Pablo NERUDA from Chile and many others whose poems were fighting against imperialism. Using their imaginative empathy, students wrote poems that expressed a copper miner's concerns, rural Salvadorian families' problems, and others like them. They were capable of connecting their own community with many other workers' communities, paying attention to diverse ways of oppression and exploitation. Far away from their place, social problems were the central issue that made the connection in such a way that consciousness emerged and then solidarity. [22]

Chapter nine is called "Remember Hillsborough." The central topic in this chapter is students' response to a violent incident in a football game that ended with the death of 96 people in 1989. SEARLE openly called upon his students and everyone in the community to write poems in memory of these people and their families. Poetry came from every corner and SEARLE published an anthology. The book reflected the people's views as critical insights, and their assertions of hope, which eventually were the sad lessons, learned from the tragedy. [23]

The final chapter is called "Valley of words." This last part of the book is dedicated to the time SEARLE was appointed head teacher in his school. As

soon as his nomination was known there were reactions against it. However, the city's chief education officer still supported him. [24]

3. Doves vs. Lions

SEARLE's critical approach, which he maintained throughout his career, was fundamental to him as a head teacher. From his first days in the position, two main issues occupied his interest: the emblem and the principles. [25]

In an international school where 83 percent of the students came from diverse countries like Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Jamaica and others, the heraldic lion that was the emblem had almost no meaning. SEARLE worked in searching for a new emblem, which would express the school's principles. He found it in three doves (black, white and brown) soaring upwards from an open book. The motto was "None but our words can free our minds." SEARLE was also committed to questioning the school's principles. He and the school community established new ones. They were excellence and high expectations; commitment to community; friendship, cooperation and respect; democratic development, and reward and emulation. [26]

Policies were those that supported these principles. They were in favor of inclusion rather than exclusion, even in the cases of students who were labeled as "trouble makers." Discipline was based on dialog and writing. Students who offended their peers were invited to think about their own behavior and to express their concerns in a creative way. Very often teachers could understand them and students changed their disruptive behavior to respectful behavior. Literacy was always in the middle of almost every strategy. SEARLE maintained his critical approach regarding social problems, both of his students and others. Some teachers were in his side, others were not. [27]

Even though he was working towards high standards for the students, eventually, his was removed. As had happened in the past, students expressed their displeasure in different ways, and things remained the same. The heraldic lion remained the emblem, and the traditional approach to education was brought back. [28]

In sum, SEARLE's book is great reading for those who believe that education is critical for social development. Even though we know that as educators alone we will not change the world, but we know that words and actions connected with a social consciousness can make a difference. Even for those who are just looking for creative teaching ideas, SEARLE's work can be a resource. [29]

I have one question I would like to ask SEARLE. Emancipatory education is not a common approach. Since the traditional school culture historically has been framing the students' education, and SEARLE represents clearly a revolutionary approach, did he deal with resistance from students and parents? I have done so in my own experience. However he does not write about his experience with such things. [30]

As a Mexican teacher educator, I found this book an important source of reflection. It made reflect on the Mexican Teacher Education program. Perhaps we are educating future teachers without almost any cognizance of a critical approach, and passing on to them that which we know does not exist, a neutral curriculum. [31]

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Citation

Cortes Camarillo, Graciela (2002). Review: Chris Searle (1998). None but Our Words: Critical Literacy in Classroom and Community [31 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3(4), Art. 31, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0204315>.