Children's Reading of Film and Visual Literacy in the Primary Curriculum

Jeannie Hill Bulman

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A Progression Framework Model

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For my husband, Chris.

Foreword

Conducting longitudinal studies of classroom practice, in which children are followed as they move across year groups, is one of the most challenging of tasks for researchers. There are a number of reasons for this. First, sustaining contact with one school over a number of years requires a high level of commitment and regular communication, which must be maintained even through staff changes. Second, tracing children's progress across year groups means that the researcher must become familiar with a new context each year—usually facing a change of teacher, a change of room and, inevitably, a change of practice. Third, good relationships must be sustained with the children if they are not to feel tired by, or bored with, being the focus of observations and conversations across a number of years. These challenges are daunting for even the most experienced of researchers, yet Jeannie Bulman demonstrates in this book how she managed them all, most brilliantly, to produce a study that has not only attracted a national prize (The UKLA Student Research Award 2016), but also led to the development of insights that will be of great benefit to many primary teachers.

It is rare to find a progression in learning that is informed by observation of children's development over time. Often, progression is determined by examining simultaneously the achievements and attainment of children at different ages. The value of tracking how the knowledge and understanding of individual children changes over time is that one can become familiar with the complexities of learning and begin to understand what the influences on the acquisition, and transformations, of knowledge might be. This is very much the case in this book. From the in-depth insights Jeannie developed of children's responses to film, we realise that progression in this area depends

upon the development of skills and knowledge across a range of areas, which are orchestrated in the attempt to make meaning. This inevitably demands an interdisciplinary approach to her study, and in her analysis of the area, she draws on research in the fields of literacy, multimodality and film theory.

A key focus throughout the text, however, is the relationship between film and reading, and Jeannie makes a number of important observations about this dynamic. Across these media, she notes that children move from a literal to a deductive and then inferential reading, but that this journey is not a linear one, nor is there a symmetrical relationship between these skills as they are applied to print and moving image. She offers fascinating insights into how children, as they become skilled readers of both print and film, can understand authorial/directorial intent and can make wider connections. Jeannie draws on well-established models of reading, such as those developed by Rabinowitz (1987) and Luke and Freebody (1999), and in the application of these frameworks to film, she draws out important points about how, as Margaret Meek (1988) put it, 'texts teach what readers learn'. Just as it is important to enable children to have access to high-quality children's literature, so they should have opportunities to view good-calibre films. Nevertheless, Jeannie also recognises the value of the everyday moving images that children experience, which provide them with much pleasure, not least in providing them with opportunities to join particular affinity groups and develop communities of practice in relation to specific aspects of popular culture.

Throughout the book, Jeannie makes explicit her belief that we should never lose sight of the pleasure that watching films brings, and while, she suggests, teachers should support children's reading of film texts through explicit instruction in related areas (e.g. genre, narrative, film techniques), this should not be done in a way that takes away the magic of film.

This is a book that should inform primary practice in an era in which moving image media have become even more central to young children's lives. It is no longer sufficient, indeed if it ever was, to use film simply to enhance children's print literacy skills. As Jeannie so cogently demonstrates, unless children's understanding of moving image media is challenged and extended by informed educators, they will not become digitally literate citizens who will be able to navigate the multimodal, multimedia world of the twenty-first century.

University of Sheffield, England Jackie Marsh

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To my parents, who instilled a lifelong love of learning and a self-belief to help me achieve my goals and aspirations.

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