Literature Teaching

Narrative, Bildung and the Teacher's Role

Geert Vandermeersche
Ghent University
"the question of how language is connected with reality, of what it is to say something"

- Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, p 72
Research on effectiveness and accountability of education “in fact never address the question of good education itself. They rather displace the normative question of good education with technical and managerial questions … not what these processes are supposed to be for”

Gert Biesta, Good Education in the Age of Measurement, p. 2
“there has been no research on the topic of (curricular) goals of literature education in this period”

Helge Bonset & Martine Braaksma, *Het schoolvak Nederlands opnieuw onderzocht* [The educational discipline of Dutch Re-examined]
Consider, first, how certain ideals of education ... have to be brought into being, made real ... and done so again and again in terms that speak to different generations and kinds of people.

Richard Smith, “Proteus Rising: Re-Imagining Educational Research”, p. 193
Should Novels Count As Dissertations in Education?
(Saks, 1996)
All narratives are 'didactic' … [we] stress that all works do teach or at least try to … and that no reading can be considered responsible that ignores the challenge of a work’s fixed norms. We may [however] dispute what it teaches.

“Narrative is the very stuff of teaching. Teachers love to tell and hear stories about teaching … Indeed, many English/Language Arts teachers chose their career because it involved narrative”

Mary Kooy, “The Telling Stories of Novice Teachers”
Cultural Literacy & Media Change
“The public also understands that these shared meanings are essential for communication inside our nation — or, to put the matter simply, they are essential for reading”

Whose Literacy?
Whose Literacy?

Lists
Whose Literacy?

Lists

Media

Competition
"what does the transformation of certain forms of literary reading … suggest about popular literacy … what readers are now led to believe they need to know in order to be culturally literate, not by E. D. Hirsch and company” but by popular culture

Jim Collins, *Bring on the Books for Everybody*, p. 18
Multitextured Teaching - Organizing the Literature Curriculum in an Age of Multiliteracies

1. It means using all the texts at your disposal
2. It means using these texts to help adolescents to critically read the texts of their own lives as teenagers in contemporary society.
“Highly recommended.”
—Brian K. Vaughan, *Y THE LAST MAN*

FOR,

HE BELIEVED THAT STORIES TOUCH THE WORLD IN SPECIFIC PLACES, BUT ALSO THAT STORIES TOUCH EACH OTHER— THAT THERE ARE PLACES WHERE THEY MEET.
“Criticism is the art of knowing the hidden roads that go from poem to poem”

Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 96
I learn about how stories work for the same reason that soldiers learn how to strip a rifle.

You should, too.
"if the powerful stories we tell each other really matter to us—and even the most skeptical theorists imply by their practice that stories do matter—then a criticism that takes their "mattering" seriously cannot be ignored"

Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: an Ethics of Fiction*, p. 4
I must remember to be cheerful and obedient. I must remember to be cheerful and obedient. I must remember to be cheerful and obedient. I must remember to be cheerful and obedient. I must remember to be cheerful and obedient. I must remember to be cheerful and obedient. I must remember to be cheerful and obedient. I must remember to be cheerful and obedient. I must remember to be cheerful and obedient. I must remember to be cheerful and obedient. I must remember to be cheerful and obedient. I must remember that school is hell.
Teacher education entails acquiring **the role of teacher**.

"person's own **narrativization** of what consists of his or her (never fully formed or always potentially changing) core identity as a teacher"  (Gee 2000)
Narrative identity

“a self \textit{instructed by cultural symbols,} the first among which are the narratives handed down in our literary tradition”
School movies …

“a popular movie that is in some way (even incidentally) about an educator or a student”

James Trier, 2000, p. 3
We want to investigate the various ways in which popular fiction matters to educators and students … (critically) engage with the narrative patterns of popular film and television … how popular films and television can be used in education and, in turn, what these fictions can teach us about education. … how is education imagined in film and television; and how can popular movies and television be used in the classroom to study and question the cultural patterns and stereotypes in society and education?
The Teacher as Storyteller
A good curriculum should tell a story. That story should be one in which the student plays one or more roles ... ones that the graduate of such a program might actually do in real life or might actually need to know about ... good education relies upon the creation of stories that a student can participate in.

Roger C. Shank
We are not only the authors but also the classroom narrators of our courses. … teaching fiction provides an opportunity to play with the teacher’s narrative role and perspective … every literary convention of narrative structure can be turned into a classroom practice.
Lessons should be “good stories to be told rather than sets of objectives to be attained”

- Kieran Egan
The Project

2010-2011 and 2011-2012 (n=83 and n=91)

pre-service teachers (language and literature)

make a fictitious lesson plan based on Egan’s work and critically discuss it
Main Insights

(minus)
could not be applied to all topics or subjects
⇒ Bruner’s paradigmatic versus narrative paradigm

too abstract, vague or hard to understand
⇒ narrative interpretation vs. production of narrative

(plus)
a good way to remember content
⇒ Herman’s *story logic*: “a powerful tool for rendering the world cognizable, manageable, and rememberable” (24).
Teaching as Artistry

Teaching is also the making of something—clear explanations, the motivation of children, knowing when and how to change the subject, for example. … These in-flight actions of the teacher are matters of artistry … when artistry in teaching becomes an ideal towards which teachers strive, the conditions used to enhance artistry in other fields become relevant resources for thinking about the improvement of teaching.
In Other Words …

**redescribe** lots and lots of things in new ways ... until you have created a pattern of linguistic behavior which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it ... It says things like 'try thinking of it this way'

Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*, p. 9
Geert.Vandermeersche@UGent.be

Ghent University
Faculty of Psychology and Pedagogical Sciences
Department of Educational Studies