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Book Reviews

John Deasy  
*Bridgewater State College*

Zon-I Chang  
*Bridgewater State College*

Kevin Wall  
*Bridgewater State College*

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Bruno Bettelheim and Karen Zelan are concerned because so many children fail to learn to read as well as they could. Their book, *On Learning to Read: The Child's Fascination with Meaning*, ascribes much of the blame for this state of affairs to destructive teaching methods and dull repetitious reading books that are devoid of meaning. They argue strongly for the importance of meaning and would like to see children encountering literature right from the beginning of their experiences with the printed word.

Although all of this has been said before, there is something new and valuable to be gained from the ideas presented in this book. Bettelheim and Zelan put forth a theory about the cause of children's oral reading errors and report on a study of the influence that the teacher's reaction can have on a child's misreadings. The development of their theory is an interesting story in itself.

For many years Bruno Bettelheim was the director of the University of Chicago's Orthogenic School, which served emotionally disturbed children with severe learning problems. As Bettelheim observed these children overcome their handicaps in a program that used therapeutic and educational methods based on psychoanalytic thinking, he speculated about the contribution a psychoanalytically oriented approach might make to the understanding of the reading problems of normal children.

Bettelheim theorized that many of children's oral reading errors are not the result of lack of attention or inability to decode words or understand the text. Children make mistakes because they understand the text all too well and reject it as empty and meaningless or because they are subconsciously occupied with thoughts that account for the misreading. Thus all children's misreadings are meaningful and occur for what seem to the child valid if not always conscious reasons.

To test the theory, Bettelheim, Zelan and their associates carried out a four-year study of the reading behavior of some three hundred children in the primary classrooms of eight public and private schools in California and Massachusetts. They went into these classrooms and observed the interaction that took place when a child read with a teacher. They then talked with the child about his thoughts and feelings concerning the material he had just read. They also talked with the teacher. As the study progressed, they themselves read with children.

Their approach was to involve the child in a casual conversation about what a misreading conveyed to the listener within the context of the story as printed. Neither accepting the misreading without comment nor correcting it, the listener treated the misreading as an interesting statement about which he wanted to learn more so far as the child's conscious understanding of the matter went.

The book contains a number of descriptions of how children reacted to this approach. In most cases, the child spontaneously corrected the misreading, often rereading the part of the text on his own initiative. Bettelheim and Zelan see these reactions as supporting their theory about the causes of misreadings, and it is precisely here that their ideas are likely to have the greatest impact on the teaching of reading.

For several generations, teachers were trained to analyze children's oral reading for clues to deficiencies in skills development. Oral reading errors were taken as evidence of a limited reading vocabulary, lack of fluency, inadequate phonics ability, etc. Since the late Sixties, there has been a trend to modify this approach, with teachers encouraged to see in oral reader mistakes evidence of the strategies the reader is using and the oral language and knowledge background he brings to the reading task. Miscues are classified according to graphic similarities and syntactic and semantic acceptability.

Now Bettelheim proposes that teachers treat all misreadings as subjectively meaningful on some level and react positively in a way that suggests to the child that his reading is being taken seriously. When the child is supported in what he is trying to do (find acceptable meaning in what he is reading), he will often then be able to move in the direction the teacher wants him to go (read the text the way it is printed).

*On Learning to Read* suffers from one minor weakness. The authors vent so much negative feeling toward reading methods and basic readers that communication with those most responsible for developing literacy may be jeopardized. Few teachers will recognize themselves in the statements about their single-minded concentration on word recognition at the expense of any attention to meaning or their tendency to restrict children's spontaneous reactions to what they are reading.

A more serious flaw is the failure of the authors to validate their advocacy of using literature right from the beginning of reading instruction. They never do come to grips with the question of how the beginning reader can be taught to recognize words. Bettelheim may see the emphasis on the technical aspects of learning to read as detrimental and often destructive of the child's ability to enjoy literature, but his unsubstantiated references to children who learn to read without training in decoding or other skills and to preschool children who teach themselves to read do not constitute a viable alternative to the skills approach to beginning reading.

Bruno Bettelheim and Karen Zelan set out to suggest procedures based on psychoanalytic insights that facilitate learning to read. Their success in accomplishing their stated purpose has resulted in a major contribution to our understanding of the problems children encounter in acquiring literacy.

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**BOOK REVIEWS**

**On Learning To Read: The Child's Fascination With Meaning**

*By Bruno Bettelheim and Karen Zelan*

*Alfred A. Knopf, $13.95*

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John Deasy
**Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education**
The Soul of a New Machine
by Tracy Kidder
$13.95

This lucidly written description of how a small group of computer engineers at Data General created MV/8000, a powerful new minicomputer, is on the whole a very entertaining and readable story. No prior computer knowledge is assumed; most of what is needed is introduced in a readily understandable way. Kidder's story begins at Data General. Probably unaware of the market demand for 32-bit superminicomputers, executives at Data General are shocked to watch DEC's VAX computer go to market, to hear it described as 'a breakthrough' and not have a brand-new machine of their own to show off. Finally, they decided to build one within a year; it was nicknamed "Eagle."

The book introduced us to a group of brilliant and unusual computer engineers working together under extreme pressure, frequently for eighty hours per week without overtime pay. Many of them claimed that they did not work for the money, but for the opportunity to build a new machine, an opportunity which was seldom presented in a big company. The Eagle's team leader, Tom West, explains what kept the professionals going. "Pinball," he said. "You win one game, you get to play another. You win with this machine, you get to build the next one."

Time-sharing created several problems for the computer industry. One was the problem of protecting the stored information. Users of a time-sharing system could inadvertently alter the content of the host computer's memory and in this way destroy valuable data and foul up system software. As Mr. Kidder explains, the "rings" system which was used by both VAX and Eagle to protect stored information, can be compared to an Army encampment in which all the tents are arranged in several concentric rings. Because "inner circles are able to reference anything in the circles around them but not inside them," information remains confidential.

Another problem created by time-sharing is the shortage of storage space. Many people may want to use the computer at the same time, but the amount of information it can store is limited. To solve this problem, the Data General engineers used a virtual storage system, which creates a storage space much larger than that available in the primary storage. One of the most common methods of implementing virtual storage is paging. In this approach, the program is like a book which is stored in the virtual memory; individual pages can be brought into the main memory of the computer one at a time when needed. Mr. Kidder illustrates the idea of "paging." He describes a program called "FOOBAR" which has been running for a while when IP (Instructional Processor) discovers that it doesn't have the next instruction in its own memory; he next shows how the "page fault system" works to bring the next block of instructions in program "FOOBAR" into the memory system.

Mr. Kidder makes it very clear why it is so important to get all the bugs out of a new computer. But he also mentions that most new computer systems are found to have

"You win one game, you get to play another. You win with this machine, you get to build the next one."

Covered Jar by Dorothy Pulsifer
Beginning in the late 1960s, America's competitive advantage in the high-volume, mass-production industries gradually moved to Japan, Western Europe and less-developed nations with lower labor costs and better accessibility to raw materials. This transformation continued through the 1970s and the 1980s. A two-year study published in 1982 in the Harvard Business Review of a cross section of 195 U.S. industrial companies indicated the magnitude of the problem: fifty-two percent of the companies studied reported annual gains in production of less than five percent, another nineteen percent reported gains of five percent and ten percent; only three percent had gains exceeding ten percent; and twenty-five percent did not even know what their productivity performance had been. Worse still, because roughly half the companies did not correct information for inflation, these figures did not show that thirty-two percent of the companies actually experienced declines in productivity.

This decreased production has resulted in a great deal of discussion about its cause, effects and possible solutions. It has also led to the coinage of the phrase "industrial policy."

The Last American Frontier by Professor Robert B. Reich is partly a result and partly a catalyst of this focus on industrial policy. Reich, who teaches Business and Public Policy at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, was formerly the Director of Policy Planning for the Federal Trade Commission. His book examines the origins and history of this economic transformation as well as his proposed solutions to the problem of declining productivity.

In his opinion, the problem can be traced to the American belief that there are two sets of mutually exclusive values, one relating to government and politics, the other to business and economics. Since the close of the frontier, these values have competed for ideological dominance, producing pendulum-like vacillation in Americans' fundamental loyalties. Reich states that this sparring did little damage while the United States was isolated and economically unrivaled, but with the emergence of industrial powers in Japan and the Far East as well as Western Europe some resolution must be found. Reich then reviews the economic history of the United States since 1870 focusing on those issues which, in his opinion, most affected productivity. He terms the period from 1870 to 1920 the "era of mobilization."

Many of the businesses that comprised the backbone of the American economy during the era of management are in serious financial difficulty.

The early years of this era were characterized by tremendous economic growth, resulting from the combining of British and American technology, high-volume production and immigrant labor. The latter years of this era reflected a decrease in worker output due to a failure of America industry to organize itself. It was during this era that the issue of competing values was initially raised.

He defines the next period, 1920 to 1970, as the "era of management." This era was characterized by the use of organizations designed to integrate sets of simple repetitive tasks as well as the creation of a bureaucracy in government to facilitate this objective. By applying these management techniques, Reich says, America became the leading economic force in the world primarily because of its dominance in manufacturing of heavy goods, automobiles, steel, home appliances, rubber products and chemicals. New wealth was created by this high-volume standardized production which fueled further success, as rising real wages and a developing consumption-orientated middle-class spawned mass markets for standardized goods.

In Reich's opinion, the next period begins in 1970 and is continuing today. He terms it a time of "impasse" during which American productivity, corporate profits and the standard of living has declined. Many of the businesses that comprised the backbone of the American economy during the "era of management" are in serious financial
In the final chapters of his book, Reich proposes several solutions. He states that America must first accept two basic facts. Given the age of much of America's capital equipment, the economy must deal with the fact that many of America's basic industries are going to remain uncompetitive. The other fact is that much of America's production can be segmented into separately cheaper, globally scattered centers as material and labor costs continue to escalate. He suggests that we do not devote our resources to significantly refurbishing high volume, labor intensive, standardized production facilities. Instead we should develop a skilled labor force. We also must encourage the merging of traditionally separate functions such as research and development, finance and marketing into a highly integrated flexible system of production that would respond quickly to new opportunities. Reich states that three product groups are relatively secure against low wage competition and could be leaders in the new industrial policy. The groups include precision products such as castings which require precision engineering, testing, and maintenance; custom products such as robots, telecommunications, computer hardware and software, semi-conductor chips and specialized chemicals which could be produced in small batches and in close coordination with customers; and technologically driven products which are relatively free from foreign competition because they depend on accessibility to rapidly changing technology.

In order to implement the proposed solutions, Reich returns to a theme he raised early in his book: the issue of the perception of Americans that government and economics are mutually exclusive and competing values. It is his opinion that there must be a combining of the public and private sectors in order to have a successful, rational industrial policy. Coordinated, sustained training programs, subsidies and tax legislation must be undertaken in order to carry America towards its next "frontier." He refers to Japan's Ministry of International Trade in Industry (MITI) as an example of the use of government to bolster certain industries through the use of trade restrictions, government incentives and directives. He calls particular attention to the Japanese understanding of the crucial importance of maintaining a community of skills in relationships within the work force so that economic downturns are borne primarily by stockholders and government supported banks, rather than by the employees themselves. MITI spends nearly one-fourth of its budget subsidizing small businesses so that when workers are laid off they find new jobs, thus preserving their skills, pride and motivation.

Finally, Reich's conclusion calls for political institutions which are as versatile as the so-called flexible systems of production. These institutions must be less concerned with making correct decisions than with making correctable ones: less obsessed with avoiding error than with detecting and correcting for error; more devoted to responding to changing conditions and encouraging new enterprises than to stabilizing the environment for old enterprises. If we are to succeed according to Reich, the instruments for implementing active adjustment will not be the blunt tools of historic preservation -- broad-gauge tariffs, desperate corporate bailouts, and macroeconomics -- but more supple tools like restructuring agreements, training and employment vouchers, regional development funds and tax and financial codes that guide and accelerate market forces while discouraging paper entrepreneurialism.

Kevin Wall
Assistant Professor
Management Science

Tray with Boxes by Dorothy Pulsifer