

SEEING CHILDREN.

*Education and Everyday Life:
Short Stories with Long Endings.*

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As I walked through the airport terminal in Vancouver, returning home from the 2008 NAACI conference (held at Viterbo University in La Crosse), I saw a mother yank the arm of her young child who had been temporarily mesmerized by the ceiling-to-floor waterfall that was fronted by a large white pine First Nation's medallion. "How many times have I told you: stay by my side," the mother screeched.

My first thought was: "Lalia would never have done that." The Lalia to whom my thoughts had drifted at that moment is Eulalia Bosch, the author of *Education and Everyday Life: Short Stories with Long Endings*. *Education and Everyday Life* was the book that I had been reading on my flight home, and Bosch's words suddenly seemed profoundly foreboding. She writes: "the family, like school, can harbor the most sophisticated authoritarianism—. . . all (those) reprimands that leave the bitter aftertaste of not being a full member of the group to which one has the impression of belonging" (46). The unspoken assumption that is woven into the picture that Bosch so lovingly paints is that we adults err because we cannot see our children! And Bosch attempts to rectify our stifling adult blindness by offering 28 short self-contained "travelogues" into the mysterious world of children's minds.

Though gentle and often amusing in its presentation, *Education and Everyday Life* has a powerful message and important reminder that ultimately philosophy is about living well, and that those of us who have any influence on young minds must recognize that we are situated on a threshold that can connect the most spontaneous comments of our youngsters with the deepest philosophical issues. Our responsibility lies in recognizing this space and learning how to move it (13). And we cannot delegate this crucial job of helping youngsters "figure out life" because experts, Bosch reminds us, only deal in matters of facts, not in the important issues of philosophy and evaluation (31). With regard to finding a trajectory toward the good life, we are all ultimately our neighbors' teachers (56).

And if you listen carefully, you will hear the subtle valiant roar that this little book makes against the pervasive post modern ideological web that places so much, sometimes sole, value on the linguistically sophisticated mind. It warns us that our haste to push our children "to learn as many things as possible and as fast as possible . . . prevents them from leaving their eternity tanks full," (83) because, after all, "children do not arrive directly into our restricted world, rather they are born into eternal life" (81), "and our haste is more of a hindrance than a help to them, because it ends up placing limits on eternity, which is even more daring than putting fences around a field" (83).

Habermas, in his book *A Theory of Communicative Action*, argues that we cannot understand, let alone judge, the adequacy of any agent's response to any given situation unless we first understand the invisible personal larger context—i.e., a person's life-world (or *lebenswelt*)—from which assertions and/or actions make sense, i.e., seem rational, to that agent. And though Habermas deals almost exclusively with what he refers to as “criticizable validity claims” of linguistically sophisticated adults, both child- and horse-whisperers know that when you are trying to dance with another whose language you do not speak, understanding how that other views the world is essential for non-violent harmonious cooperation and mutual flourishing.

“What would change in the practice of teaching if children were thought of as foreigners?” (12) The point of this lovely question is to remind us that, precisely because we can literally understand the meaning of children's words, we too often fail to take up the challenge of trying to understand what those words mean as spoken *from within* the child's worldview.

Can the moon be pregnant? (23)

Why isn't France pink? It is pink in my geography book. (112)

If my Dad spends 4 months in Rwanda, will he come back black? (173)

These are questions that come from the “inside” of a child (90), and this little book about education warns us that in our hurry to educate our children by bombarding them with questions from the “outside,” we overlook the potential of building on unique perspectives and individual strengths, and in the process may dampen, or forever disfigure, the natural enthusiasm with which life seeks to assert itself.

But why should we adults be in such a hurry? Why do we adults so often fail to appreciate that pouncing on every feasible opportunity to travel into a child's world offers the prospect of immeasurable treasure? At least part of the answer lies with our misplaced awe of status and wealth that blinds us to the ultimate value that is right before our eyes—a truth that is underscored by the fact that most of us would be far more puffed up and excited about being invited to give a keynote lecture (88) than about discussing with 9-year old Johnny whether people who sleep on the street are dead or alive (60).

But there is potential healing medicine for our pervasive crippling blindness, and it can be found in this little book. If every teacher and every parent reflected on the wisdom that is woven—almost invisibly—into the tiny portraits of children's moments couched in brief philosophical musings that Bosch offers through 28 short vignettes in *Education and Everyday Life*, the world—and our children—would be immeasurably better off.

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