

Listen to Your Own Self, Inside:
Literary Discussion and Problem Solving in a K-1 Classroom

By Elizabeth Thompson

What ties the fantasyland of children's literature, where tigers can be subdued with a pack of gum, to the everyday frustrations of sharing blocks during choice time? In the Den classroom it is the act of discussion; learning to use language to problem solve, to articulate one's perspective, and to connect with the perspective of someone else. Over the past two and a half months I have been working to build habits of deep discussion driven by the twin engines of confidence in one's own opinion and respect for the opinions of others. This work has spread across the contexts of read aloud, writing, and social problem solving. It has led us to the jungles of Wild Island in *My Father's Dragon*, and back to our familiar block area. Although this process looks very different for five, six, and seven year olds than it does for older children, the interpersonal skills and habits of thought involved are much the same. I hope that these habits and skills will provide a strong foundation of empathy and clarity of communication to carry these beginning students through the rest of their educational careers as independent learners. And what does a developing mind of one's own look like at this age? According to Jenny, age six: "It means you listen to your own self, inside. And maybe sometimes you don't listen to your mother."

The land of childhood is so far from where we are as teachers, and never farther than at the beginning of a child's school career. What are our students capable of? Where are the places we can fruitfully push them, and where should we give them developmental leeway to be exactly as they already are? The longer I teach, the more fully I am convinced that a developed worldview is something that starts very young. Triumphs and disappointments, passions, and sense of justice are no less keenly felt or fully pursued for being matched to the scope of a smaller world. Children fill that world from horizon to horizon with a sense of self and a specific perspective just as surely and completely as people do at any age. In order to learn and to grow, they must learn to look carefully at the landscape before them (and within them), and then to make connections beyond it, to people, perspectives, and knowledge outside themselves. To

move from a developed world view to an articulated one, and then beyond it. For these children, then, learning to be students means developing the language to express themselves, and using it to reach out, both to what we are trying to offer them and to the worlds of their classmates, spinning fully and absorbingly alongside their own. The building blocks of this ability to reach lie in the development of language and the ability to share it with others. Whether they are discussing their thinking about a book or problem solving with their peers, language provides them with the ability to know their own minds and hearts, understand the minds and hearts of others, and find their way into a common community. This repeated process is at the heart of a meaningful education.

It is the day of my first read-aloud and discussion lesson in the Den. I have carefully prepared a lesson on mental images; becoming aware of them and expressing them to each other, based off of the book *Reading With Meaning*. ‘This is just what they need’ I think to myself. I explain to them that good readers often understand a story by paying attention to the mental images conjured for them by the text, and by making connections to their own lives. They seem to accept this. But when I read the page about “great owls with marble eyes who swoop among the trees” and ask them what they see, the answer comes back “I see owls flying.” “Can we see the picture? It looks like that.” When I read them the page about the night songs of the frogs, they say “I see frogs.” They are starting to get restless. I rally, and ask them to make the sounds the book describes instead. As I read about the creaking of the old farmhouse, William (perhaps out of confusion and certainly to be silly) makes animal noises instead. When I finally get them creaking and thinking along, they don’t want to stop. I feel like I’ve completely missed the mark. While the children in *Reading With Meaning* were providing succinct summaries of their mental images by page three, my children don’t seem to know where to start, and don’t seem to want to. So what’s the matter? Where do I go from here?

I initially conceived of this project as a linear series of lessons designed to present important conversational elements related to agreement and disagreement. I thought the most responsible way to develop conversational aptitude was to break it down into named skills, and then teach each component sequentially, with a lesson or two per skill, until the children became perfect conversationalists, of course. In attempting to teach one very small slice of

conversational skill to my students, I realized that this was not the way that I have ever used or studied conversation, nor is it the way that kids tend to discuss. Although it felt like a personal commentary on my teaching, my students' behavior and abilities provided useful information about where they were and what we needed to work on. Once I allowed myself to deviate from a more structured curriculum to make space to use that information, I was able to respond to their individual contributions in a more productive way. They didn't want to spend fifteen minutes talking only about their mental images, but they love to discuss books, especially when that discussion creates space for them to be experts and intellects in their own right. I found that when I followed the pull of the lesson in response to them, the wiggle of our class conversations took us from skill to skill in an integrated way. In this more flexible environment, children were able to concertedly cultivate the elements I was aiming for; listening carefully, asking questions to identify relevant information (What am I wondering about? What do I know? How do I know it? Does this relate to anything else I know?), using information to formulate an opinion, remaining responsive to new information and perspectives, using language to articulate their opinions, and learning to productively agree and disagree with one another. I still needed to think hard about what skills I wanted to be working towards, but I could slip them in organically when an opportunity presented itself rather than artificially limiting us to one at a time.

In order to create a rich foundation for these opportunities, I came at the problem in a different way. Rather than starting with the skill, I started with the book. I considered the children's books I loved. What about them caught my imagination, causing me to think, wonder, and engage? I used these texts to catch my students in a similar manner and launch them into the process of class discussion. Though Primary students are avid thinkers, I found they were best supported developmentally by structures that were experiential and concrete. In support of this I experimented with different methods for scaffolding engagement in analysis and conversation.

After my experience with my first lesson, I decided to focus on teasing out visual and verbal ways of studying and interpreting material. I still wanted to direct the Denner's attention to their own thought processes, as I hoped to do initially, but rather than taxing them immediately with verbally abstracting the ways that they saw a text, I asked them to respond pictorially. During read aloud I asked them to create illustrations for the rich language of *Night*

Sounds, Morning Colors, using their own personal interpretation of the story as the basis for their response. After I had them focused on their own thinking, I read them a book called *It Looked Like Spilt Milk* in which a cloud changes into a variety of shapes. I then had them create Rorschach-blot-style clouds, paying attention to the images called to mind by the patterns they created. We discussed how each pattern could give rise to a multitude of interpretations, and practiced generating a variety of them as a whole class. Together the Denners wrote a class book of their own following the same structure as the original text, and we gave it pride of place on our class bookshelf. This lesson served to move them between visual, verbal, and written analysis, and helped them to become more comfortable with the idea that discussion was less about finding a ‘right answer’ than it was about developing meaningful ideas. By honoring their final product as a ‘real book’ I also hoped to give them a sense of ownership and efficacy in regards to their thinking. I wanted my students to trust themselves, to be unafraid to assert their own opinion just because it happened to be different from someone else’s, understanding that differing opinions were an opportunity for richness, rather than a threat.

I used Art Look as a natural place to introduce my students to *ways* of agreeing and disagreeing, as it is already set up in the format of a conversation guided by questions aimed at gathering and interpreting evidence. For those who are unfamiliar, Art Look is an exercise from the Visual Thinking Strategies curriculum in which students examine a single image, usually a painting or a picture of a sculpture, and answer two questions, first “What do you see?” and then “What do you think is happening?” Since our Old Hands were already familiar with the structure and thinking involved in Art Look, this served as a good context in which to focus on specific strategies for expressing an opinion in a community discussion. Paring down the scope of their focus and providing a strong visual support to their understanding helped them to sink into discussion more readily and practice noticing more closely.

As a final lesson in this string I had them use their experience with verbal synthesis of illustration in the context of read aloud, using a book without words called *Journey*. In *Journey*, a girl with a red crayon goes on a *Harold and the Purple Crayon*-style trip through a fantasy world, creating boats, hot air balloons, and magic carpets with the power of her pen. I asked the Denners to narrate the story as they interpreted it from the illustrations. This pushed them to

synthesize what they saw and what they heard from their peers, and to build a collaborative vision of the book through discussion, something I want them to do with all the books we read. In many ways, discussion is about pulling out the hidden story of the book, whether or not that book has words. And the Denners did that admirably: “Once there was a little girl. She was lonely” Jenny said, when the first page showed the girl on her front steps with her chin on her knees, everything in the image a dull brown except the girl’s red scooter.. “Everyone was busy” Colin added, as the next page showed her peeking in on mom, and dad, and big sister, “She had no one to play with.” Starting with strong visual support and working in familiar structures allowed my students to begin practicing the habits of thought and discussion I wanted them to develop, giving them a stronger base to work from in other contexts.

Although a visual focus helped my students to pay attention to their thinking and begin bringing it into discussion, I also wanted the Denners to examine language closely as part of their analysis, in support of their own language use and development. In support of this, Lori and I created a series of cloze activities based off of the short stories from Arnold Lobel’s *Fables*. In addition to studying ways of using sentence context to determine word type, length, formality and meaning, this activity supported repeated reading of the text as we puzzled through what word might fill each blank space. At the end of the activity we read the story in full, discussing the story structure of a fable and creating our own alternative morals.

I also continued to build a culture of group discussion through a more standard daily read aloud format. As I read through the book I would pause to ask questions, notice parts of the text or illustrations, and ask the Denners to share their thinking. As they became more comfortable in this structure, and developed more tools for analyzing and discussing books, these conversations blossomed. In order to support careful analysis, as well as to build towards my later goal of social problem solving, I oriented our discussions, and my book choices, towards problem solving. When we read *The Runaway Bunny*, for example, we considered the different ways the bunny’s mother could respond each time he changed shapes: “If he’s a bird, she could be a nest!” “If he’s a rock high up on the mountain, maybe she can pick up all the rocks and see which one wiggles!” “I think it will be pretty easy for her to tell which one he is. Look, he’s the only rock with ears. And eyes!”

Finally, I wanted them to put all of these skills together in tackling a larger text over a longer period of time. Our afternoon read aloud was the short chapter book *My Father's Dragon*. For this book we built on our journey theme and included a map and an illustrated packing list to support student engagement and thinking about the story. Continuing the theme of problem solving, we used the consistent narrative structure of Elmer's encounters with hostile animals to consider what packing list items he could use to get him out of each sticky situation he ran into. Perhaps because it provided a reliable structure for considering and discussing conflict and potential resolution, this context gave rise to some of our most successful book conversations.

Through these many styles of interacting with and recording student reactions to text and artwork I was hoping to achieve many things at once. I wanted my students to enter fully into the story, granting it their complete attention. Once they were engaged, I wanted them to become more aware of and more willing to share their thoughts, thought processes, and interpretations. I wanted to cultivate their enjoyment of analysis and discussion for its own sake, for the sheer joy of developing and sharing ideas. Through this investment and joy I hoped to empower them to think for themselves, to trust their own thinking, and to feel ownership of the process of interpreting a story. Finally, I wanted them to value and build off of the contributions of others in their community.

Analysis may seem like an overserious word to describe to Kindergarten discussion. I was describing my project to my sister and she started to laugh. "Ah yes" she said, "The recurring motif of the bear in every illustration highlights the ineluctable tension between social and biological forces." Though her role-playing was facetious, and much of the conventional analytic vocabulary is not yet in place, the thinking itself is present. In my classroom discussions, I observed my students becoming facile at connecting text, illustration, authorial intent, and story purpose. In reading short stories from Arnold Lobel's *Fables* we discussed the general format and purpose of a fable, including the idea of a 'moral.' Now when I finish reading the story to the students, they love to come up with morals of their own before looking at what the author decided to write. On one such day we read a fable about a young rooster who takes on the job of crowing up the sun when his father dies. At first the young bird is unable to crow, and the sun doesn't come up, but he comes back and tries again the next morning, and is able to make the

sun rise. When I asked for a possible moral, Phillip raised his hand “When someone dies, it’s important to take over for them and do their job. That’s why we have to learn.” And when I called on Sarah: “Well, if you fail one time it sometimes helps you know how not to fail the second time. Failure is when something doesn’t go the way you want it to.” Though simply put, these morals served as compelling theses about the larger purpose of the story. They were clear, concise, based in the text and dependent on a full synthesis of events, and yet were still individualized to match each child’s perspective. When supported by clear rhythms and structures, The Denners proved themselves to be fully capable of literary analysis. But they didn’t stop at formulating individual opinions. “Maybe,” Phillip added on later in our conversation “The moral can be all of the morals at once.” More and more throughout the unit I would see evidence like this that indicated the children were beginning to listen to each other’s ideas, and that they were comfortable living in the multiplicity of ‘maybe.’ They were using their analysis to think more deeply about the story and its meaning, but they were also moving past individual analysis to join in a community of thinkers. They were becoming more comfortable with the idea that questions worth considering probably have more than one potential answer, and that the people around them, large and small, could serve as a good resource for pushing that consideration further.

So what does meaningful analysis in the Den look like after all of our practice? At the back of the group Emily conducts a one woman yoga class, pushing up on her hands and feet into crab-walking position, before arching into a bridge. Kristin trots off for a glass of water. Connor, hidden in his enormous hood, chews on a plastic zip tie of unknown origin. For five to seven-year-olds, fifteen minutes is a long time to do anything, let alone sit quietly, listen actively to others, and engage in conversation. It’s an important developmental truth to acknowledge and respond to. And yet, what appears to be distraction can also be their way of engaging. Phillip pretends to be the flea-ridden gorilla in the story, wriggling and scratching at his chest, and giggles when he catches Mary’s eye, but when I ask how to solve the poor animal’s plight both of their hands shoot up, ready with a solution. And when Emily hears what they have to say she drops down with a bump into her seat, latching on with a comment of her own. They are using movement to process the text, to problem solve, and to communicate, and then they are

translating that movement into spoken language. Connor, though he doesn't volunteer anything today through his mouth full of plastic, watches raptly, eyes twinkling at funny moments. And tomorrow, when we read again, he too will volunteer. Each read aloud provides openings to engage, allowing children to build on their level and type of participation over time. For some of them, at the beginning of the unit, this meant simply sitting and listening, both to the book and to the conversation of their fellow students. Now? It's no somber and attentive college seminar, but these small people are engaged in the same project. They are using language to create shared meaning with each other, through wiggles and short attentions spans, and they are learning that what they say and how they say it matters to their community. Discussion and problem solving in the Primaries may take some translating, but these children are nonetheless grappling with meaningful ideas in a rich way.

At its best, this type of engagement is led by the students themselves - not every day for every student, but as part of an ongoing process that ultimately leads, for each of them in their own way, to greater and greater ownership of their own educational experience. The Denners are gathered in the back corner of the classroom, squeezed on the floor between the white couch and our desk, elbow to chin to knee. As I pick my way through the group and sit down, someone shouts "Jenny was gone yesterday! She doesn't know!" "Can someone tell her?" I ask, and we're off. Two weeks into *My Father's Dragon*, we are nearing the end, and the kids have settled firmly into the rhythm of our afternoon read aloud. In fact, the magic of this tale and their excitement over puzzling through it has spread through nearly every other part of our day, from lunchtime to writing to math. Behind me on the wall is an enormous map of Tangerina and Wild Island, colored in craypas by the kiddos themselves. The little orange sticky note with a stick-figure-picture of our protagonist Elmer Elevator has lost most of its stick through the course of his adventures, but clings valiantly to the map next to a picture of a gorilla. Next to me, the illustrated packing list and our ongoing tally of tangerines lie ready and waiting. Every time Elmer moves through the jungle, every time he eats an orange or comes up against another problem with a wild animal, someone's hand shoots up into the air, to take note, to move the sticky note on the map, calculate provisions, or suggest a potential solution. And now, without my prompting, the Denners are moving to recap for Jenny, situating us back in our story. Once

they catch her up on the tale of the gorilla and his fleas, I launch into the chapter. “So we hadn’t decided yet what he might use. What different solutions can you come up with?” Well versed in this particular pattern, hands are already up and waving all over the group. Suggestions range from “We could give him a shave with the jackknife. Then they could see the fleas, at least.” to “Maybe he just needs that set of clean clothes.” Most of the group knows that Elmer Elevator is about to take out the magnifying glasses, but they are content to puzzle through it in a different way. And in this routine, they are comfortable venturing deeper: “Maybe he’s so mean because he’s itchy all the time.”

In launching this project, I had a larger goal than simply engaging my students in literary discussion. One of the major inspirations for my topic was the observation that my students often seemed to struggle when it came to talking their way through interpersonal differences. Although the context for those discussions is very different from read-aloud, in terms of the heightened emotions, the level of investment, the independence needed, and the even more personal nature of the viewpoints involved, I believe that the skills remain the same. Students still need to have a clear view of their own thinking, a willingness to try to listen and understand the perspectives of their peers, and a mentality that focuses on problem solving and allows for more than one “right answer” in order to move forward. My hypothesis in launching the project was that skills developed in one area, where there was less emotional complexity at play, would lay the groundwork for developing skills in a very different context. Now that book discussions were humming along, now that my students were showing more independence in their ability to observe, question, discuss, and problem solve, I thought they were ready to consider social problem solving more directly.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the second arc of my project followed a strikingly similar path to the first arc. I started with a specific, skill-based lesson that I thought would target my students’ developmental level, and in the process of teaching it, I found that I would need to adjust to the skills, language, and motivation of my students. In my discussions with Lori, she mentioned that during her visit to the Nueva School she had gotten to observe some of the social emotional learning curriculum they had put in place. One of the many things they emphasized was the

development of a wide vocabulary to describe emotion, often supported by anchor charts, the idea being that until children had the words to express themselves, it would be difficult for them to process their emotions or problem solve with each other. This made a lot of sense to me, and my initial lesson in the unit aimed to develop an emotional word bank with the class that we could use in later discussions. We read *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* and thought about the emotions that might be involved for Alexander in each scene. Although the kids liked the book very much, they did not respond well to the more limited scope of our discussion.

In my desire to set my students up with the language they might need to talk about their emotions, I neglected to build on the habits I painstakingly built up through my many experiments with read aloud. Although the context was the same, we did not follow our regular format of student-responsive discussion. Upon reflection I decided, once again, to return to the support of our regular story discussion format to make the leap from abstract, narrative based problem solving to interpersonal problem solving. In each context I wanted my students to shift their perspective of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ in order to consider multiple perspectives, but this is always easier when the conflict is situated inside a character’s story than when it is living in your own. In reflecting on why the lesson had not been received the way I expected, I considered what had consistently engaged my students in our discussions thus far. I realized that recognizing the arc of a story at work is in itself a powerful skill to have, one that transcends contexts in giving shape and meaning to a series of events or an exchange of words. Even the act of formulating and sharing an opinion in a discussion is a kind of storytelling, a fitting together of disparate pieces to make a coherent whole. And certainly when people disagree it is most often because of a conflict between the larger narratives through which they interpret the world (does sharing mean I forget about myself?) rather than because of the thing under contention in itself. It made sense, then, to frame our investigation of problem solving through an investigation of story, both the stories we told about our life together as a class and the ones we found in the world of books. Vocabulary without story had no draw for my students because it lacked a larger dynamic to give it purpose and relevance. K-1 children are constantly seeking to understand what is true about the world, what larger structures can make sense of the overwhelming and novel input they are

bombarded with every day. Humans have always used story to serve this purpose. On top of this, these children are making their way in a community outside their nuclear family, often for the first time and certainly more seriously than they have before. Of course they want something that speaks in an understandable way to their own attempts to navigate a whole community of relationships. Although the development of vocabulary was important, I needed to be clear about the ways it connected to my students' lives and interests. With this in mind, I tried several different ways of using story to think about social problem solving.

First of all, I decided to make a direct connection to the considerations and potential conflicts in my students' daily lives as a way of developing an agreed upon way to discuss and work through problems in our classroom. Lori and I roleplayed a situation where we were fighting over the markers. I had gotten to them first, but Lori just wanted to use a blue marker to color in her sky. Although this was a source of disagreement that had occurred in the class in the past, it was not a contentious issue. I thought it was important to strike a balance between choosing a problem that had meaning for my students and choosing a problem that was likely to give rise to more intensely personal feelings attached to a particular side or a feeling of being singled out. The kids loved trying to help Lori and me with our marker problem, and, as we had practiced in so many read alouds before, quickly came up with a multitude of potential solutions. When I asked them about a larger, more generalized problem solving *process* that we might be able to use on other problems as well, I was met with blank looks and more suggestions of how to solve the specific problem at hand. Lori and I continued our role play, and through it illustrated what we thought were important steps to take: 1. Pause and take a deep breath 2. Talk it out using "I" statements 3. Find a win-win solution. We then had the Denners watch us to see if we were able to follow the process, and point out to us when and how we slipped up. Although it took some direct instruction to move from the idea of solving a specific problem to creating a problem solving process, I thought it was nevertheless important to establish a common way to think about responding to conflict in the classroom, something that we could refer to in our later discussions and that would help students start to develop some independence around it.

I also continued to use read aloud as a place to consider problem solving, and specifically social problem solving, but rather than focusing on vocabulary specifically, we opened up our

discussions to consider character interaction, motivation, and potential ‘win-win’ situations for everyone involved. We read *Poppleton* and considered the ways that he could approach telling Mary Sue that he doesn’t want to eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner with her everyday even though they are friends. We read *Jerome*, a book about a frog who gets turned into a ‘prince’ and has to save the kingdom from various menaces, by convincing the fire breathing dragon who is burning down houses to take a job burning trash in the town dump instead, for example. We used a similar format here to that we used during *My Father’s Dragon*, but with an emphasis on win-win solutions, where the protagonist is able to bring conflicting perspectives together, rather than simply escaping or outsmarting those who disagree with him. We also started *Mrs. Piggle Wiggle* as our longer chapter book for afternoon read aloud. Although it is a work in progress, the kids are quite excited about thinking up potential ways of reframing problems to transform them into adventures, in some ways an act of creating win-win solutions for oneself.

As part of the Journeys curriculum, Primary students take on the character of an individual traveler aboard the Mayflower, considering what they ate and how they passed the time, creating a character self-portrait and writing journal entries about the voyage. This undertaking provided rich opportunities for students to empathize with people from a time and culture very different from their own, to practice considering someone else’s perspective and how to integrate it with their own. Given that they were already primed for this particular roleplay, I thought it would be interesting to discuss the Mayflower Compact with my kids, and have them create one of their own. The Mayflower Compact was an agreement written up by the Pilgrims after they made land in what is now Massachusetts, rather than in Virginia as they had originally planned. This meant they were outside the territorial jurisdiction of the company that had financed their voyage, and many of the passengers who were sailing for economic reasons argued that this meant they could disregard their agreement to send goods back in exchange for the voyage. As I explained it to my students “They had lots of different ideas of what to do, and were worried that if everyone did just what they wanted, their group would fall apart and they wouldn’t survive.” We had talked about “Saints,” those who had come for religious reasons and “Strangers,” those who had come for economic reasons; names unsurprisingly created by the “Saints” and the children knew which group their character belonged to. I explained how each

group felt about the matter, and the danger of splitting off into separate groups, especially with the impending winter. I then had the Denners turn to their neighbors and discuss, keeping their characters in mind, how they might go about solving the problem. “It’s not where we live, it’s that we live that matters” Isabel said, as my jaw dropped to my chest. In addition to coming up with a variety of solutions, we also brainstormed the rules and agreements by which the Primary Den Pilgrims wanted to govern their colony. Although I had given some background on the climate in which the Mayflower Compact was created, I had not given any hints as to what the Pilgrims had actually decided. Entirely without my prompting, the Denners decided on the following. That they should create a court of law, so that disagreements could be solved fairly. That we all needed to stick together for survival, but that they would make group decisions by voting. That we should come up with a set of laws: no stealing, but if anyone found food they needed to share it with the whole group so everyone had enough. Be kind to animals. No killing. I was frankly stunned at the ability of these tiny people to consider the elements of a situation so far removed from their own lives in order to synthesize a thorough and insightful response. Jenny, remarkably, also made the connection to our earlier lesson about the steps to solving a problem. “It’s like this one” she said, referring back to the page where we’d written our process down. “That’s how we do it, and that’s how we could do it.”

Although I know we still have a long way to go in terms of bringing the whole class along to the point that they can consistently bring their skills to bear in an actual conflict situation, they are becoming more open to the idea that the way to the solution is through discussion. Even though my formal research project is over, I would like to continue discussing more potentially fraught situations and how to solve them with the Den students, and to work towards more active use of our problem solving process to let them independently work through their own disputes.

In undertaking this project, I learned so much about recognizing the beginning stages of complex habits of discussion and problem solving. Iris saying “Let’s just say good game” having just won a tense checkers match or Phillip saying “It could be a frog or it could also be a pair of glasses” when interpreting a picture are deceptively simple ways of linking their perspective to a different one to synthesize a solution. It’s not that I expect that these young kids become perfect

communicators, above their emotions and fully empathetic at all times. Rather, I want them to begin school with the sense that they can trust themselves to find a way through by engaging. I think that this sense, as much as anything else in their lives, will make them successful, happy students and people who are able to maintain meaningful relationships. When we find that place of anticipation and joy in response to challenge, we find the sustainable reward that balances out the struggles and hardships of life. So much of that depends on our faith in ourselves as thinkers and feelers, our disposition towards listening and empathizing with others, and our belief that community contribution and compromise make our lives bigger and richer rather than smaller and poorer. Although young children may not be as studied or possess as large a vocabulary, they are closer to that wellspring of honest joy. I believe that, through our teaching, we can keep them there.