

BOOK REVIEWS

Hurren, W. (2000). *Line dancing: An atlas of geography curriculum and poetic possibilities*. New York: Peter Lang. Softcover, 149 pages.

A confession to start: Hurren's title struck a note of discomfort in me. You see, I have never line danced. Not even once. This may not seem like a big deal, but it is interpreted by many as a serious deficit in the context of a Western Canadian upbringing. My self-consciousness immediately vanished upon the first cursory flipping through her engaging and experimental text.

The author describes her book as an atlas, and the metaphor serves to anchor all of the meandering passages to discursive spaces that open into the broad fields of curriculum, pedagogy, and Social Studies teaching. As an annotated roadmap to these fields this thin book offers enough familiar signposts along the way to define necessary terms and concepts while encouraging side trips at any time for digressions into other areas of interest.

Hurren offers a multilayered and intricately intertwined analysis of current curriculum theory around geography pedagogy with her own explorations of embodied knowledge through creative writing. She has woven a rich fabric indeed in this decidedly postmodern narrative with an eclectic assortment of threads including original poetry, snippets of texts, graphics, reflections, maps, and scholarly writing. My favourite way of exploring a new book is somewhat in reverse, leafing from the end to the beginning, and *Line Dancing* matches this approach nicely.

This is not to suggest that the book drifts aimlessly, or is unfocused, but absent here is the typical linear progression of a standard dissertation. Her work draws a distinction between our Western school geography with its "disembodied gazing" (p. xiii), and the more robust current academic treatment of geography, characterized by a "current attention to issues of poetics, politics, social theory, and critical reflection regarding what geography is/does" (p. 127). Hurren decries the shortfalls resulting from contemporary schooling's disempowering hidden narratives:

We are led to believe that the world has already been written, and it is our job to read and learn the lines, rather than to take an active role in creating and writing lines. It seems that the lines are already drawn. (p. xiii)

Hurren's incisive engagement with semiotics draws the reader's attention to some standard educational markers in a new light, opening

up new possibilities for where we might draw our own lines through the spaces she illuminates on this polemical pedagogical palate.

The author's playful use of language includes a seemingly endless free-association and pun-spinning around lines and dancing, revealing them to be two of the more malleable words in the English language. I was drawn to recollections of endless philological banter – and the inevitable groans that puns predictably evoke – over the years in English high school staff rooms. But this is not simply word-play for its own sake, as each connotation demarcates another strand of understanding that reveals the interconnectedness of disparate fields of study, and more importantly, of the worlds of the curriculum, the school, the educator, and the learner.

Hurren's intensely personal style, replete with excerpts from her own journals, artwork, and autobiographical notes, might turn off readers with a desire for a more detached style that is the norm for scholarly texts on Social Studies. She includes, for example, a travel note from her visit to a Matisse exhibit of line drawings and cut-outs that he only began to create during a physical illness; she asks, rhetorically: "what if we considered how our line drawing affects our emotions, the two-way mingling, the line dancing between word and world, or between lines and living?" and ends the entry with a poetic "desk note:"

*yellow creamy light from lamp
shadows from my hand and pen on the page
sometimes cause me to write in the shadows
and sometimes
because of the angle of my hand
I write outside the shadows
just on the edge of them.*

Mingling personal memories and feelings with academic analyses of social theory is accomplished smoothly in most instances, and has the effect of adding both an immediacy and vulnerability to the narrative voice that readers may find refreshing, unsettling, or both.

Her discussion of Canadian schools would simply not be complete without the vivid depiction of the ubiquitous elementary school geography lesson: Photocopied maps of Canada distributed as each student sits with a freshly sharpened set of those vibrant Laurentien pencil crayons at the ready for colouring in the spaces. These spaces seem to represent for Hurren the "performative possibilities" she seeks across and between the lines of more formalized analyses of curriculum. Her scholarship is informed by contemporary gurus of post-structural thought on schooling from Derrida to Aoki, and she extends their provocative work seamlessly into the grounded terrain of the lived experiences of teachers and students struggling to draw their own lines

in the shifting sands of awareness of place and self.

I would highly recommend this singular book to anyone with an interest in geography teaching, an appreciation for language play, a sensitivity toward creative analyses of curriculum, or an abiding desire to rediscover the poetic possibilities that open up to those who like to draw their own lines. Now *this* is my kind of line dancing.

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Lagemann, E.C. (2000). *An elusive science: The troubling history of education research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Hardcover, 302 pages.

It was with a great deal of anticipation that I looked forward to reading this book. Based on the dust jacket alone I was ready to relish an intellectual feast of the type that does not occur as often as might be hoped. Thus, I began reading with enthusiasm and great expectations, only to find myself now laboring under the banner of the old saw about judging a book by its cover. The book is enjoyable enough, solidly researched and written, but it does not deliver on its promise. Yet to say this is perhaps not entirely fair, since my difficulty with it has to do far more with an unmet set of expectations than it does with the author's presentation. Much of the book is devoted to reporting historical information and discussions of the relative status of education in research universities and society generally, curriculum reform, large-scale funding for research, education policy, and the role of theory in education administration. While this is neither inconsiderable nor unworthy information, I found it frustratingly unrevealing with regard to the deeper purposes, values, and understandings that have played out in formal agendas for research.

I expected a critical review of the history of educational research to explore, for example, what it meant, epistemologically and methodologically, to aim to become a scientifically-based field of study, as early psychologists and educational scholars sought to do. What, exactly, did Edward Thorndike and his fellow thinkers believe they were doing when they introduced the concepts of standardized testing into American education? What were the presuppositions of their science, and how did they fit into prevailing ideological and value systems regarding the purposes and aims of education? How did the adoption of the ideology and values of science shape research, practice, and policy in education? How did research, policy, and practice in education reflect