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Kirk Branch. Eyes on the Ought to Be: What we Teach About When we Teach About Literacy. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2007. 216 pages

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The title and thesis of Branch's book—"eyes on the ought to be"—come from Myles Horton (1905-1990), an American educator and activist who established with fellow educator-activist Don West the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee. Highlander is one of three sites of nontraditional adult education Branch examines to illustrate ideological and material consequences of educational literacy practices. Writing from a perspective informed by New Literacy Studies and critical pedagogy, Branch analyzes educational discourses and literacy practices in three sites—a jail, a job training program, and the Highlander school—to demonstrate how teaching literacy "always involves a vision of the present inextricably tied to a vision of the future" (214). Whether explicit or veiled, this vision of the world as it "ought to be" shapes debates about adult educational practices and determines which conceptions of literacy will be valued and implemented in particular settings. A central aim of Branch's book is to identify and evaluate the ideal worlds that such discourses and practices invoke.

Branch's own "ought to be" is firmly rooted in social justice, and his book challenges all teachers of literacy to view education as a social

project and to view themselves as activist citizen-teachers. Branch's activist orientation stems from Horton's philosophy of education, which closely resembles Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, and from volunteer and work experience in community learning centers, a vocational institute, and a correctional educational program, which are briefly narrated in the book's introduction. Though intended for all scholars and teachers of literacy, readers with experience or interest in such sites of extracurricular education will find Branch's analysis especially relevant and compelling.

Branch covers much theoretical ground in his first chapter. Echoing Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton's critique of the New Literacy Studies as fostering a limiting view of literacy as local, Branch argues that understanding and evaluating the literate practices of the classroom requires attending both to the local conditions of literacy and to the kind of world such practices imagine for their students. By accounting for the "rhetorical construction" of the world that ought to be, Branch theorizes a model for analyzing educational literacy practices that serves as a corrective extension to the primarily local work of the New Literacy Studies. This methodological position, which is further informed by Basil Bernstein's work, allows Branch to counter strictly empirical or wholly objective treatments of educational literacy practices that yoke conceptions of literacy and literacy education to the world as is.

This tendency among literacy theorists to privilege the real rather than ideal world is illustrated in the second and third chapters, where Branch critiques dominant discourses of correctional and vocational education for perpetuating literacy myths. In correctional education discourse, basic literacy functions to remediate the social and cognitive defects of prisoners to prepare them to become upstanding, tax-paying citizens. Such assumptions reinforce the assumed causal link between illiteracy and criminal behavior and obscure the role of institutions and social systems in shaping reductive notions of criminality and correctional

education. In contrast, viewing correctional education as a social exercise in democratic participation radically reconfigures prisons as sites of rehabilitative education rather than as sites of punishment and remediation. Branch reviews strands of correctional education research that draw on cognitive-democratic theory to illustrate how creating alternative educational spaces within coercive institutions has enabled prisoners to engage in self-directed learning and genuinely democratic practices. Such spaces redefine not only the nature of prisons but also the role of all persons and systems connected to prisons—"prisoner-students," teachers, correctional officers, the criminal justice system, and public officials. In this instance, revised literacy practices revise the world of correctional education as it ought to be in a democracy.

In his chapter on vocational education discourse, Branch shows how the literacy of job training is understood in terms of discrete competencies and as a tool to serve economic needs. Such vocational literacy education is assumed to hinge on the neutral transfer of basic skills that can transform people into competent, autonomous, lifelong workers and learners. Competency in this discourse is understood as a skill rather than an inherent human capacity, and literacy is understood to be functional rather than critical. As with correctional education discourse, the consequence of framing literacy education in this way is an emphasis on individual deficiency in need for remediation through basic education, which in turn serves to reinforce not simply impoverished literacy education practices but also glaring economic disparity, perpetuating a world that clearly ought not to be.

Readers unfamiliar with Horton or the Highlander Folk School will find the fourth chapter particularly interesting. Branch elaborates on the school's history and philosophy, analyzes the literacy practices of its citizenship classes, and critiques the discursive practices of local critics and the FBI that led to the school's closing in 1961. Branch's analysis suggests that Highlander constitutes a rich site of inquiry for

understanding how literacy education ought to function in a democracy by furthering social justice.

Branch addresses the tension between real and ideal worlds of educational literacy practices in his final chapter, acknowledging the dilemma activist teachers face when attempting to disrupt systems of domination while working within institutions that regulate instructional discourses and thwart critical pedagogy. Elaborating on Bernstein's model of the pedagogic devise, which describes the transformation of knowledge as it moves from specialized to instructional fields, Branch highlights vulnerable points in this process where teachers can resist dominant instructional discourses that too often limit literacy education. Branch turns to critic Lewis Hyde's synthesis of the trickster as a rhetorical trope to frame such resistance, suggesting that teachers adopt a "trickster consciousness" that will enable them to work within and against dominant pedagogic discourses and institutional practices.

In a field often preoccupied with academic literacies and pedagogies, Branch's thoughtful analysis of three discrete but related extracurricular educational sites compels literacy teachers to consider the worlds their teaching practices endorse. If twenty-first century composition studies continues its public turn, then Eyes on the Ought to Be can help us envision the kind of world that literacy instruction ought to create.