

Stanley Cavell and the Questioning of the Foregone: Openness to Conversion as a Political Act

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This paper makes the case that Stanley Cavell's thinking on conversion, developed in "Normal and Natural" in *The Claim of Reason*, offers resources that can be used to develop a politics that acknowledges the importance of learning from the voice of skepticism instead of seeking to silence the skeptic through the pursuit of policies and practices that promise a type of certainty that will forever silence skepticism. I develop this case from my position as a teacher educator who knows very well the desire to silence skepticism in the form of finding a way of teaching future teachers so that I/we can be certain that they will be effective and engaging educators after graduation. Giving up the belief that we can achieve certainty when it comes to teacher preparation does not consign us to hopelessness, but it does suggest that teacher educators may have more to learn from listening to the voice of skepticism than is suggested by current discourses in teacher education. Though I write from the position of a teacher educator and my examples are drawn from the work of teacher education, the main goal of this paper is to develop a reading of "Normal and Natural" that may help us appreciate new dimensions of the political implications of Cavell's work.

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Public school teaching in the United States is highly-regulated. Programs of teacher education must be accredited, students seeking certification must meet many requirements, including—but certainly not limited to—multiple and varied standardized

exams, and once teachers begin teaching, their performance will be assessed by administrators, often using the results of student scores on standardized tests to determine effectiveness of teaching. Yet, for all this regulation, for all this oversight, how many of us have been in classrooms or heard about a teacher and wondered: How is this person teaching? How did this person meet every professional standard we have set, and yet cannot educate children effectively and humanely?

These questions can give rise to a skepticism about the efficacy of regulating the human act of educating. And, this skepticism—as Stanley Cavell teaches—can go in at least two directions. The first—call it the most easily recognized as a political direction—denies skepticism with the promise of more certainty. That is, we can seek better regulations to ensure better teachers entering classrooms, or we can give up the very idea of regulating teaching altogether. These responses strike me as dominant poles of political discussion in educational policy. One group seeks better regulation, while the other questions the very idea of regulations. What neither group seems to appreciate is that the voice of skepticism will not be quieted with more—or no—regulation. We will be cast imaginatively back into the classroom, left wondering: How do we get good teachers in front of children?

More regulations, less regulations, we have schools and students attend them. It seems important to acknowledge that there will be teachers teaching and students subjected to that teaching, and so we will never have silence: being concerned with the improvement of education is our fate. In education, we are fated to questions of improvement so long as we are concerned about the education of children and its implications.

The seeming unavailability of asking about improvement in education leads me to feel that we should try to develop a politics that doesn't deny—through the quest for certainty—the inescapability of questioning our educational practices—as if more, or different, or no regulations can ever be enough—but works in acknowledgement of it. Though Cavell's thinking is not political in the sense that it will help us pick sides in the regulation/deregulation debate (or debates like it), it reminds us that even when we realize our better policies (no, more, better regulations), there will be a remainder. The voice of skepticism remains, asking: How do we *really* know that we are better off with this new policy? How do we know that students will turn out better now that we've

made these changes? Instead of silencing these questions, we must acknowledge their force and the limitations of even our best attempts at working to improve the human act of educating. More, we can come to see the importance of asserting this remainder as a political act. Instead of seeking policies and practices that will silence the voice of skepticism, we can give it play: learning what it might mean to educate in acknowledgement of the limitations of even our best thinking and our best policies.

As a teacher educator, this acknowledgement is unsettling. Students need good teachers, teaching well is hard, and instead of succumbing to the voice of skepticism, I need to use the very limited time I have with students to teach them what we—as a community of educators and educational researchers—know about good teaching. Schools of education and teacher educators like myself need to prepare teachers who can *enact*, in very concrete ways and in diverse contexts of learning, the concepts and ideals that lead to effective teaching.¹ We don't have time for skepticism; what we need are better and more effective practices that can be taught to teachers. But—as I will develop below—this effort to silence skepticism, though motivated by a desire to produce effective teachers, will often keep us from realizing this aim, because there will always be moments in our lives as teachers where what is needed are not new or improved practices, but a change of heart.

To begin getting at what I mean by a change of heart, consider an example, one too common in schools. It is deeply difficult—if not impossible—to teach a child when she does not trust us, or because she has learned to distrust authority figures. Changing teaching practices will not provide a response that will make a difference to that child. Instead of looking to practices—skills, strategies, techniques—for solutions, we are thrown back upon ourselves, left wondering if anything at all will work. More, we may come to wonder how it is that these practices ever work for any child, seeing how they can fail to reach this student who stands in need right now. We turn away from the quest for solutions, seeing how even the best strategy can so quickly leave us wanting, and we thus re-open ourselves to the voice of skepticism.

1. The concept of *enactment* is an important one in teacher education literature. For excellent starting places into this conversation, see: Mary M. Kennedy, "The Role of Preservice Teacher Education," in *Teaching as the Learning Profession: Handbook of Teaching and Policy*, ed. Linda Darling-Hammond and Gary Sykes (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999) and Pam Grossman, Morva McDonald, Karen Hammerness, Matthew Ronfeldt, "Dismantling Dichotomies in Teacher Education," in *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education*, ed. Marilyn Cochran-Smith, Sharon Feiman-Nemser, D. John McIntyre, Kelly E. Demers (New York: Routledge, 2008).

There are too few resources in educational literatures to help us learn from the voice of skepticism, and for this reason, I see the section “Normal and Natural” from Cavell’s *The Claim of Reason* as a greatly underappreciated resource for teaching.² Though this section will not help us find our way in teacher education discussions as they are presently framed, I find “Normal and Natural” to be a text that offers a deeply important and much needed vision for the work of teaching and teacher education. And, as all work in teacher education is inherently political, given—at the very least—its ties to regulation and how often it is made the object of political discussion,³ I see Cavell offering us a politics—though one not normally seen as such given its lack of a direct tie to present policies or practices—for teacher education that we need, especially when we open ourselves to the voice of skepticism.

A central theme of “Normal and Natural” is Cavell’s thinking about how the process of becoming educated leads us to accept many things as normal or natural; foregone conclusions not open to question. Cavell begins with Wittgenstein’s example of teaching a child to continue a series. We judge teaching a success when the child successfully completes the series as *we* would, when, for the child, “the continuity is a matter of course, a *foregone* conclusion.”⁴ Much is accomplished when the young continue as we do, when their reactions are the same as ours—this is pain, this is what it means to count, this is being in love—but, the accomplishment also comes at a cost. Although it is important that another person recognizes my wince as a sign that I am in pain, the fact that my pain can be almost instantly recognized as such can cause me to worry—to echo Wittgenstein—that this instant public recognition can somehow take away from my pain being *mine*. If something so seemingly personal as my pain is not wholly mine, at least mine in the ways I took it to be, then what else follows? Why do I/we call this a painting? Why do I/we call this school? Why do I/we value the things we do in the ways we do?

The problem with asking these questions is that, if our education has been successful, it is not as if I can simply decide to change the way I inhabit my world. As

2. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 111-25.

3. For a brief and insightful overview, see Marilyn Cochran-Smith, “The Politics of Teacher Education and the Curse of Complexity,” *Journal of Teacher Education* 56.3 (2005): 181-185.

4. *Ibid.*, 122.

Cavell writes, “I cannot *decide* what I take as a matter of course.”⁵ I begin to feel that my education goes all the way down. Before I was fully conscious of being formed, I am formed. And, once I realize that, much is foregone; so much so that I can begin to wonder where my judgments begin and where convention stops. I can worry that I do not judge, I simply do—and see, and feel, and respond—as *we* do. I can’t get behind those judgments to question them, I am caught by conformity and do not know how to reanimate my life or my ways of expressing my life as *mine*.⁶ Here is how Cavell puts it:

I may feel that my foregone conclusions were never conclusions *I* have arrived at, but were merely imbibed by me, merely conventional. I may blunt that realization through hypocrisy or cynicism or bullying. But I may take the occasion to throw myself back upon my culture, and ask why we do what we do, judge as we judge, how we have arrived at these crossroads.⁷

This is a key moment, and a political one. If I decide to throw myself back upon my culture, then I can begin to wonder why “we do what we do, judge as we judge” and think about the education that has brought me to “these crossroads.”

As we ask questions about *our* ways of doing things, and whether I assent to them, we are cast back to scenes of instruction, the education that has led us to these crossroads and that mark our culture. We are forced to consider how much of what we call education is marked by “hypocrisy or cynicism or bullying,” especially when our elders, or the elder we are now, are confronted with questions—the questions of youth and adolescence—that threaten to bring *our* ways into question. As we skate along the grooves of the foregone and expect the child to follow, we may be brought up short by a question. As Cavell writes, “if the child, little or big, asks me: Why do we eat animals? or Why are some people poor and others rich? or Why do I have to go to school? or Do you love black people as much as white people?...I may find my

5. *Ibid.*, 122-123.

6. Here is where I see Cavell as such a deeply insightful reader of the voices of Wittgenstein’s *Investigation* that express exasperation and fear that *my* pain is somehow not my own. This isn’t just a problem of epistemology, it goes to the very root of my being-in-the-world.

7. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 125.

answers thin, I may feel run out of reasons without being willing to say “This is what I do” (what I say, what I sense, what I know), and honor that.”⁸

We can replay the questions we asked as children, and we can replay the questions children ask us. I can replay these questions as a way of connecting me to what our educations have formed, I can use these questions as an “occasion to go over the ground I hitherto thought foregone.”⁹ Is it a foregone conclusion that our society must be marked by inequality? What would it mean to call my “natural” reactions to the existence of inequality—or racism, or sexism—into question? Instead of seeing *our* ways as wholly natural, we can begin to listen more to the questions of childhood, responding with openness, not cynicism, bullying or fear. This listening to the questions of childhood strikes me as one of the most important political implications of Cavell’s work for teaching and working with future teachers. As much as we can prepare future teachers to anticipate the limitations of our way of life as it currently stands—for example, teaching about white privilege, teaching about cis privilege—new questions will inevitably arise, and we need to prepare future teachers for this reality. Instead of taking unforeseen questions as a threat or an affront, teachers can respond to these questions as opportunities; an “occasion to throw [themselves] back upon [their] culture.” The voice of skepticism offers a political education where teachers see the good of throwing themselves against their own enculturation as teachers, and the culture of schooling that they find themselves in.

Cavell is deeply instructive here. He writes: “Why do we take it that because we then must put away childish things, we must put away the prospect of growth and the memory of childhood? The anxiety in teaching, in serious communication, is that I myself require education. And for grownups this is not natural growth, but *change*. Conversion is a turning of our natural reactions; so it is symbolized as rebirth.”¹⁰ An educator must stand open to the need for conversion and rebirth, and this conversion is not necessarily brought about by anything that she learns in her teacher education, but it is occasioned by “the prospect of growth and the memory of childhood.” Both are worth fuller attention. First, the prospect of growth is something that should be much more central to learning to teach than it currently is. Anyone entering the complex work of

8. *Ibid.*, 125.

9. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 125.

10. *Ibid.*, 125.

teaching will seek some certainty, especially when it comes to the very real challenges of effectively managing a classroom for learning. That is, she will want to have certain things “figured out” before teaching. But, this desire for a way of being in the classroom that allows for order and effectiveness (to take two things most new teachers worry about) should not harden into the fixity of the one and only routine, or the lesson that works and never invites revision. Rather, the prospect of a life of teaching should be one premised on the promise of continuous growth.¹¹ One’s subject is always changing, one’s students are always changing, the context of school and society are always changing, and the educator is the one who learns through change, not in avoidance of it. Though one may have never imagined—say, as a public educator in North Carolina—that the bathrooms in a school would be charged with the significance they have at our moment in history, an educator welcomes the moment as an opportunity to grow: to make the school—and our society—more humane, more educative, more just.

It is hard to know just how a future teacher can be prepared for this openness to growth, but I find Cavell’s thinking on the artist as deeply suggestive. Cavell writes, “Artists are people who know how to do such things, i.e., how to make objects in response to which we are enabled, but also fated, to explore and educate and enjoy and chastise our capacities as they stand.”¹² Again, it is important to prepare students to think about and respond to the issues and politics of the moment, but the issues and politics that consume the culture at the start of a teacher’s career will likely be very different as she grows into her work. For this reason, it is important that future teachers see the need to be responsive to questions beyond the options that are on offer by society as it presently stands. Instead of looking to what we teachers know to be solutions to the problems we face in the classroom, we may need to look elsewhere. The ways in which we’ve been educated—as teachers—to see certain behaviors or outcomes as foregone, may be a commentary on the limitations of our teaching practices, and not necessarily an accurate depiction of what is possible or desirable. For this reason, Cavell asks that we let our responsiveness be educated broadly, especially by things like the arts. Teachers need to

11. Here I use growth in much the same way that John Dewey does. On growth, Cavell and Dewey may be closer than Cavell may be ready to concede, though it would take a separate paper to develop this point. Outside of Cavell’s own discussion of Dewey—especially in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1991)—I find Philip Jackson’s discussion in *John Dewey and the Philosopher’s Task* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002) particularly useful in relation to educational themes of this paper.

12. *Ibid.*, 123.

experience art “in response to which we are enabled, but also fated, to explore and educate and enjoy and chastise our capacities as they stand.”

As someone who knows the very real pressure to teach a student in ways that will effectively prepare her for her first year of teaching, it sounds fanciful—at best—to suggest that students should engage with art if she wants to prepare for a life of teaching. At the same time, I cannot deny that I would not be the teacher I am if I didn’t have the experience of attempting to let art—broadly understood—educate my responsiveness to the world.¹³ Art can create a space of play where what appears fixed in society is made to move. Though the world may feel just as fixed when I am done reading or experiencing the art, somehow the sense of motion—the energies unleashed by the art—empower us to keep asking questions and not be put off by the cynicism or the bullying of elders who would preserve our ways, even if these ways are not educative, just, or life-giving.

I appreciate that Cavell shows us that “we are enabled, but also fated” to ask questions when moved by art. Art opens possibilities, but we are also fated to see those possibilities whenever a child asks us: “Why do I have to ask permission to use the bathroom? Why are only some children good at math (in your classroom)?” We are fated to think the questions with the students, we cannot “put the pupil out of sight—as though his intellectual reactions are disgusting to me,”¹⁴ we are cast into moments of decision where we can continue running our classroom along the groove of what is done, or seek change, growth, conversion. Our best practices come to an end—our teacherly spade is turned—and we must find our way forward, trying to create a way of being together in the classroom that avoids what is deadening in favor of possibilities for growth. Making the attempt to break with the foregone is difficult, and Cavell is right—I feel—to liken it to a rebirth. Our classroom, who we are in the classroom, who our students can become in the classroom are different if we make the move to go against, or resist, the foregone.

Just as we shouldn’t put away the “prospect of growth” if we want to be effecti-

13. I see much of Cora Diamond’s work on the moral life to be about literature’s ability to educate our responsiveness to the world. For two examples, see “Henry James, Moral Philosophers, Moralism,” *The Henry James Review* 18.3 (1997): 243-257 and “Losing Your Concepts,” *Ethics* 98.2 (1988): 255-277. For a discussion of this work as it relates to education, see Megan Laverty, “Learning Our Concepts,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43.1 (2009): 27-40.

14. Cavell, *Claim of Reason*, 125.

ve educators, Cavell calls us to remain in touch with “the memory of childhood.”¹⁵ I teach students who plan to become secondary teachers, so I would include the memory of adolescence with the memory of childhood. The educator, of all people, needs to remember, needs to be in touch with, the feelings of resistance, the longing for connection, the willingness to question, the acceptance and fear of difference, the deep hurt of a felt injustice—and much else—that mark childhood and adolescence.¹⁶ By maintaining touch with these, the educator will be less apt to feel threatened by a child’s questioning, and more willing to learn from and with the questioning. This, again, will allow us to resist the foregone, thereby remaining receptive to the possibilities of what Cavell calls conversion or rebirth.¹⁷ Cora Diamond describes the need for conversion or rebirth—in relation to her reading of *A Christmas Carol*, by Charles Dickens—this way:

We all know that we were once children, but that may be mere abstract knowledge, incapable of entering our adult lives. Or it may be imaginatively available to us; the acceptance of our own past childhood may be imaginatively present and active in us as adults. Without the imaginative presence in us of the child we were, we are as adults incapable, Dickens thought, of enjoyment and hope, and that cripples us morally.¹⁸

The sense of being crippled morally makes a great deal of sense to me in relation to teaching. When a teacher puts herself outside the realm of childhood and adolescence, as if the deep concerns and feelings she felt as a child were mere abstract knowledge, she ceases to be responsive to the life of, to what is alive to, her own students. In this situation, when the teacher is at a remove from what is living in her classroom, what is necessary is not new practices, but a change of heart.

We might—following Cavell’s fondness for troping images from the Bible in a

15. For a beautifully moving discussion of being in touch with childhood, see: Cora Diamond, “The Importance of Being Human,” in *Human Being*, ed. David Cockburn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

16. For a beautiful discussion of remembering in teaching, see David Hansen, “A Poetics of Teaching,” *Educational Theory* 54.2 (2004), esp. 142.

17. Though it would be impossible to pursue this line of thinking here, there are interesting connections between rebirth as used in *The Claim of Reason* and Cavell’s thinking on remarriage, see: *Pursuits of Happiness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

18. Diamond, “Being Human,” 42.

way reminiscent of someone like Emerson¹⁹—think of conversion for an educator in terms of pouring new wine into old skins. That is, the best in-service training, or book on pedagogy or workshop will have next to no impact on the teacher whose memory of childhood is not “imaginatively available.” By contrast, the teacher who remembers childhood, might not need these practices or training, because she can play the classroom by ear, figuring out—finding, founding—modes of responsiveness as she goes along. I see something like this happening when I read the moving and artistic work of Vivian Paley, a writer and early childhood educator who models what it means to resist the foregone conclusion and learn to listen to, to get closer to, the worlds of children.²⁰ Hers is representative of the aversive effort: turning away from mere conformity—turning away from the conventionality of what *we* do—and to what the world is trying to teach. More, Paley acts on what she learns. When she learns—for example—the expansiveness of exclusion and its long-lasting effects that happen in classrooms under the banner of the common phrase, “You can’t play with us,” she enacts a new rule in her classroom: “You can’t say you can’t play.”²¹ Where most parents, educators—and even the students themselves—see it as natural that some children are not allowed to play, while other children are, Paley—through responsiveness to the life of her classroom—sees this so-taken natural act as the exclusionary practice it is. Though this classroom rule and practice may seem like a minor thing, I take it to be representative of openness to conversion, and hence a political act. Teacher writers like Paley demonstrate that listening well to children and responding to what one learns can be a political act, though it may not ever be recognized as such given the terms we’ve been taught to talk about politics as it relates to teaching and education.

Teacher writers like Paley demonstrate how Cavell’s politics of resisting the foregone help make us more present to our students. In addition to being open and receptive to their questions and their questioning of what we’ve taken as foregone, we become open and receptive to who they are and how they’ve internalized their place in the foregone order. This openness, this receptiveness is deeply important, and has

19. On troping, see Richard Poirier, *The Renewal of Literature* (New York: Random House, 1987). Cavell’s use of religious language can be seen in “childish things” as quoted above and will be explored briefly below with relation to turning the other cheek.

20. A good starting place may be her *White Teacher* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) or *The Boy Who Would be a Helicopter* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

21. Vivian Paley, *You Can’t Say You Can’t Play* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

—though this way of stating it seems to risk something like overstatement—the power to transform lives and the foundations of educational practices. We can see this transformative power most clearly when Cavell discusses the child who *we* see as disgusting until one adult does not recognize the child as *we* do. Cavell writes:

Sometimes a stranger does not find the child disgusting when the child's parents do. Sometimes the stranger is a doctor and teaches the child something new in his acceptance of him. This is not accomplished by his growing *accustomed* to the disgusting creature. It is a *refusing* of foregone reaction; offering the other cheek.²²

At least two points are worth noting. First, it is important that the stranger does not grow accustomed to the child and thus come to learn that the child is not disgusting. Rather, the stranger refuses the foregone reaction; the child is not disgusting, it is the criteria that force us into this conclusion that are disgusting and stand in need of reformation. Here is a key point for teachers and teacher educators to remain mindful of. When working with students we can—and often should—refuse the foregone reaction. No student is bad at math—or English, or science—just as no child is irredeemable—or disruptive, or any other label that becomes convenient for educators but fateful for the child—and teachers must risk the possibilities of learning when she acknowledges that the child is not her label and so discover—through the conversion of human responsiveness through contact with the living child—how to be with and educate the child.

The second point to highlight is Cavell's use of offering the other cheek. It is important to appreciate the full weight of what Cavell is calling for. In a fascinating reading of the parable of the good Samaritan, Ivan Illich makes the case that one of the lessons of the good Samaritan story is that we are called to love whoever is in front of us calling for our love.²³ This offers a radical break with ethics based on obligations to *our* group—fellow adherents of *our* religion or citizens of *our* nation—or an

22. Cavell, *Claim of Reason*, 124.

23. See: Ivan Illich, *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2005). For an interesting gloss of Illich's reading, see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 737ff.

ethics based on obligations to *our* principles—the Law tells us we do X in situation Y—and opens us to a new way of being that calls us to learn what it means to respond with love whenever our love is called on. Now, I am not making the case that Cavell is a Christian writer in the way that Illich is, but I think Cavell would find something important in how Illich sees the good Samaritan parable as offering this type of radical break with how *we* do things and endorse its transformative power. Instead of relying on how *we* do things or relying on *our* principles, we are called to offer the other cheek, to see what it might mean to not go on as *we* do, to discover the possibilities that emerge and open when we forego the foregone conclusion and try to respond to the life in front of us.

I feel like I've taken us far afield from the discussion of teacher education regulations with which we started, but this is exactly why I find Cavell's thinking important for teaching and teacher education. Even as I prepare my students to do well on their edTPA exam²⁴ so they can become certified teachers and as I work to make sure they can implement best practices in their classrooms and lesson planning,²⁵ I also attempt to teach in acknowledgement that it is important—especially as an educator—to turn the other cheek so that we turn toward the preciousness of each student, each moment.²⁶ Even if something like turning the other cheek cannot be directly taught in the space of a teacher education program, it is important that we not let talk of best practices be the end of the story, as if one won't find oneself called to conversion and need to answer that call if one is to remain a good teacher by one's own lights. For this reason, in teacher education we need to empower self-trust and not give the impression that we are all-knowing and that knowingness is the goal, or result, of a life of teaching. We need to respond to the questions of our own students in ways that let them know that we don't know everything—no one can—about the human act of educating, and so we must often fall back on nothing more—though

24. A \$300 exam—one of many—that my students must take and pass before they can become public school teachers in New York. For a brief overview, see Raymond L. Pecheone and Andrea Whittaker, "Well-Prepared Teachers Inspire Student Learning," *Phi Delta Kappan* 97.7 (2016): 8-13. For a look at its predictive validity, see: Dan Goldhaber, James Cowan, and Roddy Theobald, "Evaluating Prospective Teachers: Testing the Predictive Validity of the edTPA," *Journal of Teacher Education* 68.4 (2017): 377-393.

25. For example, differentiated instruction, understanding by design and restorative justice instead of punitive classroom discipline.

26. The use of preciousness may be, well, too precious, but I use it because I think Raimond Gaita is correct to hold that this is the term that best captures our full human responsiveness to the other. See: Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 5.

nothing less—than our fullest responsiveness to the present moment. Instead of falling back on our way as *the* way—through bullying, cynicism, or righteous certainty—we can live the questions we can't yet answer, trusting that not following the foregone conclusion is our better hope, even if it is a hope that doesn't offer any promise of success.

In a way, it is up to the teacher educator to be representative of this way of living.²⁷ Our politics will have to be one of remaining open to conversion through resisting and questioning the foregone conclusion. We must remain present to the questions of the child and the adolescent—Does this work really prepare me for anything other than more school? Why do adults seem so uninterested in the world? Am I worthy of love?—and let the questions educate our responsiveness to the world. Though this work may not feel as politically efficacious as protesting educational policies or advocating for practices we feel are more effective than the ones we have, it doesn't mean it should be denigrated out of existence, or seen as a- or nonpolitical. Choosing to remain open to conversion is indeed political, and freeing a child to see herself as the eyes of love see her—not as disgusting, or stupid, or ugly—though not politics in any major key, is nonetheless transformative and needful. This is what I take to be Cavell's call to educators especially, and one I think deserves far more attention than we give it.

It is easy to get pulled into the world of adulthood, where it feels like we should only talk of serious things and put away all that is childish or reminds us of childhood, but it is just this reminder that we may need if we are to make schools more humane, more just, more educative. The teacher teaches children, not foregone conclusions in a world where possibilities are fixed and locked in place. Cavell's thinking shows us that there is far more play in the world, and we should join children in exploring possibilities that offer the hope of growth and conversion: "This seems to me a task that warrants the name of philosophy. It is also the description of something we might call education."²⁸ We teachers and teacher educators should wonder: Can education become philosophy and still recognize itself? I think we can only respond

27. For Cavell on the representative, see *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, esp. 31. For a discussion of this aspect of Cavell's thought, see Jeff Frank, "The Claims of Documentary," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 45.10 (2013): 1018-1027.

28. Cavell, *Claim of Reason*, 125.

to this question by thinking with children as they question the limits of our foregone conclusions, and always stand ready to leave even our best practices behind when we find them wanting. This process of learning how to be free from the foregone through human responsiveness needs to be one of the main goals of becoming a teacher, and though preparing for this work may not fit what *we* currently take to be teacher education, this is no reason to silence Cavell's claim on our attention as we—as a culture and as educators—educate future teachers.