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The Ethics of Reading: **Freire, Literacy, Democracy, and McDonald's**

Carlo Ricci

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

To those who are being submissive to globalization and argue that it is inevitable, and therefore a *fait accompli*, Freire says, "I have always rejected fatalism. I prefer rebelliousness because it affirms my status as a person who has never given in to the manipulations and strategies designed to reduce the human person to nothing" (*Freedom* 103). Freire criticizes globalization as being a theory that speaks of ethics, yet hides the fact that its ethics "are those of the marketplace and not the universal ethics of the human person" (*Freedom* 114). Freire goes on to say that, "Its fundamental ideology seeks to mask that what is really up for discussion is the increasing wealth of the few and the rapid increase of poverty and misery for the vast majority of humanity" (*Freedom* 114). Freire acknowledges the difficulty of putting into practice an ethic that puts man and woman before profit; nevertheless, we must participate in this fight with those, as we will see, who are engaged in it, and work toward this ethic.

Corporate Celebrities

On March 8, 2001 Naomi Klein gave a talk at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. In it she alluded to the fact that she thought her book, *No Logo*, met with success because it was about 'stars.' These new breed of stars are not human stars, but corporate stars. In this article I will look at the impact that these corporate stars are having on students and how we all can benefit from an emancipatory literacy, a reading of the word and of the world by examining these new corporate stars. The corporate star that I will focus on in this article is McDonald's and a book by Eric Schlosser titled *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. Arguments will be made for the importance of reading the word and the world, and examples for how we can successfully fight the oppressive direction in which these corporate celebrities are leading us. We will look at how activists have challenged these corporate celebrity's practices, thereby transforming society and helping reduce oppressive, exploitative conditions. We need to

recognize that we are not powerless against these huge corporate celebrities, but, as we will see, we can use strategies aimed at getting them to alter their practices. This is a message that we as educators need to ensure our students understand.

Of American children, ninety percent between the ages of three and nine have visited a McDonald's restaurant (Schlosser 47). In fact, the probability of our students not being familiar with McDonald's is slim. Since, our students inevitably have had contact, albeit to differing degrees, with these corporate stars it is useful to engage them in dialogue, and to use them as springboards for a reading of the word and of the world. Engaging in dialogue about these stars is a way of teaching students to be literate of the word and the world. Recall that Freire insists that literacy is not about syllabification, but should be about "discussing the national realities with all its difficulties ...of raising the issue of the people's political participation in the invention of their society..." (*Literacy* 66). So, just as Freire used the peasant's real life experiences in order to teach them about literacy of the word and the world, we can extend his concept and teach our students about literacy by appealing to their real life experiences.

Literacy: Reading the Word, and the World

In a chapter in *Literacy: Reading the Word, and the World* titled "The People Speak Their Word: Literacy in Action," Freire shows us an example of emancipatory literacy in practice. The chapter is about adult literacy in the context of the republic of Sao Tome and Principe. The texts that are used to teach adult literacy are *The Popular Culture Notebooks*. Freire tells us that this is a generic name given to a series of books and primers. By examining a few of the passages in the text, the political nature of the text quickly becomes apparent. Note that Freire insists that all teaching is political and that teaching in a directive way is not problematic, but it is only when teaching is done in an authoritarian and manipulative way that it becomes problematic. Here are some sample passages from the texts:

We all know something. We are all ignorant of something. For this reason, we are always learning.

Let's read, think, and discuss.

Working with perseverance, we produce more. Producing more, on the land that is ours, we create riches for the happiness of the people.

With the MLSTP (Liberation Movement of Soa Tome and Principe) we are building a society in which everyone participates for the well-being of all. We need to be watchful against those who are trying to bring back the system of exploitation of the majority by a dominant minority.

Now try to write about what you read and discussed.

(Freire, *Literacy* 72)

And,

Let's read.

We become independent at the cost of many sacrifices. With unity, discipline, and work we are consolidating our independence. We repel those who are against us and we gather together those who demonstrate their solidarity with us.

You the colonists, you were wrong to think that your power of exploitation was eternal. For you, it was impossible to believe that the weak, exploited masses would become a force in the struggle against your power.

You took with you almost everything that was ours, but you couldn't take with you our determined will to be free.

Maria, Julieta, and Carlos — they struggled to increase production. They always bring with them the certainty of victory.

We, us, with us.

You, you, with you.

They, they, themselves, to themselves, of themselves, for themselves, with themselves, to them, them, them.

Write sentences with:

Us, to them, with us.

(Freire, *Literacy* 73)

The political nature and messages championed in these passages are poignant examples for how when teaching students to be literate, the focus should be emancipatory literacy and not academic, utilitarian, cognitive development, nor romantic (these are other approaches to teaching literacy that Freire critiques in *Literacy: Reading the Word, and the World*).

Like the *Popular Culture Notebooks*, we need to focus on an emancipatory literacy that begins with the students' everyday lived experiences. We need to challenge them to read the word and the world in a way that will help them understand the oppressive pressure and practices of these mega corporations; we need to challenge them to question the status quo and aim for transformation, rather than merely affirmation. One way to accomplish this is to focus on a problem-posing pedagogy that forces students to think critically, to reflect, and to act. Of problem-posing education, Freire says,

They must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings and their relations with the world. "Problem-posing" education, responding to the essence of consciousness — *intentionality* — rejects communiqués and embodies communication. It epitomizes the special characteristic of consciousness: being conscious of, not only as intent on objects but as turned in upon itself in a Jaspersian "split" — consciousness as consciousness of consciousness. (*Oppressed* 60)

Since we can be assured that McDonald's is a corporation with which almost all of our students have come in contact and are familiar with, whether as employees or as

consumers, a dialogical counter narrative to this celebrity corporation needs to be presented. This problem-posing dialogical counter narrative needs to challenge the wholesome image McDonald's tries so hard to uphold.

Consumer and Employee Exploitation

Like the examples we looked at from the *Popular Culture Notebooks*, the aim needs to be political and guided by emancipatory literacy. For instance, students need to be made aware of how McDonald's exploits its workers, targets children, harms its consumers, and harms the environment. Unquestionably, McDonald's is a significant employer. Schlosser reveals how in the United States, McDonald's is responsible for 90 percent of that the country's new jobs, hires about one million people annually, and that an estimated one in every eight workers in the United States has at some point been employed by McDonald's (4). On a worldwide scale McDonald's has over twenty-eight thousand restaurants and opens almost two thousand new ones each year. While McDonald's amasses huge amounts of money, its employers earn relatively little. For example, while chicken nuggets, hamburgers, and other main courses have relatively low profit margins, the money McDonald's makes from its highest profit margin product (soft drinks) more than compensates. Schlosser quotes a high top executive at McDonald's who expresses that they are thankful that people like drinks with their sandwiches. Schlosser tells us that,

Today McDonald's sells more Coca-Cola than anyone else in the world. The fast food chains purchase Coca-Cola syrup for about \$4.25 a gallon. A medium Coke that sells for \$1.29 contains roughly 9 cents' worth of syrup. Buying a large Coke for \$1.49 instead, as the cute girl behind the counter suggests, will add another 3 cents' worth of syrup — and another 17 cents in pure profit for McDonald's. (54)

The point, and I'm sure it comes as no surprise, is that McDonald's makes a lot of money by exploiting its workers and consumers, as we will see.

So, while these celebrity fast food corporations are earning huge profits, they pay a higher proportion of their employees, as Schlosser tells us, the minimum wage (73). However, it is important to point out that not all of its employers are underpaid: "While the real value of the wages paid to restaurant workers has declined for the past three decades, the earnings of restaurant company executives have risen considerably" (Schlosser 73). Schlosser tells us that according to a 1997 survey in *Nation's Restaurant News*, the average corporate bonus was \$131,000, an increase of 20 percent over the previous year. It gets even more disturbing, my feeling of indignation rises, when Schlosser reveals that the minimum wage could increase by a dollar by adding two cents to the cost of every hamburger. Therefore, as the celebrity corporation and its executives earn huge sums of money, its front line employers merely earn the minimum wage — about \$23,000 a year (Schlosser 291).

McDonald's and other fast food chains also keep their labor costs down by

ensuring that they do not need to pay overtime. About 90 percent of fast food workers get paid an hourly wage, are provided with no benefits, and are scheduled to work only as needed. If the restaurant is busy they are kept longer, if it is slow they are sent home early (Schlosser 74). Schlosser informs us that,

Managers try to make sure that each worker is employed less than forty hours a week, thereby avoiding any overtime payments. A typical McDonald's or Burger King has about fifty crew members. They work an average of thirty hours a week. By hiring a large number of crew members for each restaurant, sending them home as soon as possible, and employing them for fewer than forty hours a week whenever possible, the chains keep their labor costs to a bare minimum. (74)

In addition, in an attempt to further avoid paying wages these celebrity corporations prefer to use "stroking." Stroking is a form of positive reinforcement, deliberate praise, and recognition (Schlosser 74).

The fact that McDonald's pays its employees low wages is not a recent trend, but it can be traced back through its history. Schlosser narrates how in 1972 Ray Kroc (one of the founders of McDonald's) gave \$250,000 to Nixon's reelection campaign:

That year the fast food industry was lobbying congress and the White House to pass new legislation — known as the "McDonald's bill" — that would allow employers to pay sixteen and seventeen-year-old kids wages 20 percent lower than the minimum wage. (37)

McDonald's concern with putting profits above treating its employee's with the proper respect they deserve by paying them a living wage is made evident by the incidents quoted above. To further put this into context, around the time of Kroc's \$250,000 donation "McDonald's crew members earned about \$1.60 an hour. The subminimum wage proposal would reduce some wages to \$1.28 an hour" (Schlosser 37). This disgusting display of exploiting its front line workers, especially given McDonald's success, needs to be challenged. We as consumers need to demand better working conditions for those who continue to service us despite their deplorable working conditions. If we value participatory democracy, then we cannot merely put the onus on those who work for McDonald's to fight for better working conditions on their own. As citizens who value participatory democracy we must all fight for justice and a better standard of living for all.

Of course this is not to say that those who work for McDonald's have not made laudable efforts to try to better their working conditions, because many have; unfortunately, they are fighting a skewed battle. For one, many of the McDonald's restaurants have such a high employee turn around rate that it is difficult for the employees to build solidarity. As well, the fact that so many of the employees work part time, coupled with the large numbers of employees that work at any given location (as we discussed earlier) also makes it difficult for them to build solidarity. Nevertheless, employees have tried to combat these and other obstacles by attempting to unionize in order to better fight for their rights.

However, the battle to unionize which results in improved bargaining rights, and working conditions is not an easy one for employees to fight, largely because of the extent that McDonald's will go to prevent its restaurants from unionizing. For example, according to Siegfried Pater, author of *Zum Beispiel McDonald's* McDonald's battles labor unions and has repeatedly fired union sympathizers (Schlosser 233). As well, in 1997 a group of teenagers in St. Hubert, a suburb of Montreal, applied to join the teamsters union. In short, after a hard battle, on February 12, just weeks before the union was certified, workers were given notice on the Thursday that the McDonald's would shut down for good on the following day. This tactic of closing down a restaurant, rather than having it unionize is not an uncommon practice for McDonald's. During the 1970s, while workers were successfully organizing a McDonald's in Lansing, Michigan, Schlosser relates that it resulted in all the crewmembers being fired, and the restaurant being shut down. McDonald's then opened a new restaurant down the block, and the workers who had signed union cards were not hired (Schlosser 77). In fact, Schlosser informs us that as of the writing of his book, "none of the workers at the roughly fifteen thousand McDonald's in North America is represented by a union" (77).

Given these deplorable conditions how is it that McDonald's can find employees to work at its restaurants? In part, the answer is that the fast food industry hires some of the most disadvantaged members of American society (Schlosser 71). This willingness on the part of McDonald's to hire these "disadvantaged" members of society may appear to be a laudable gesture by McDonald's; however, Schlosser reminds us, that given the stance the fast food industry takes on issues like employee training, minimum wage, labor unions, and overtime pay strongly suggests "that its motives for hiring the young, the poor, and the handicapped are hardly altruistic" (71). And more emphatically,

instead of relying upon a small, stable, well-paid, and well-trained workforce, the fast food industry seeks out part-time, unskilled workers who are willing to accept low pay. Teenagers have been the perfect candidates for these jobs, not only because they are less expensive to hire than adults, but also because their youthful inexperience makes them easier to control. (Schlosser 68)

Studies have shown that teenagers who work more than 20 hours a week while in high school are far more likely to cut class and drop out of high school (Schlosser 80). Furthermore, long hours contributes to the developing of substance abuse problems and the committing of petty crimes (Schlosser 80).

Part of McDonald's strategy is to create a work environment that standardizes all of the tasks that the employees are expected to do. This leads to the deskilling of the people required to do the job, resulting in them being easily replaced since very little training time is required to get someone to do a particular task. In 1948 the McDonald's brothers applied the principles of a factory assembly line to a commercial kitchen (Schlosser 19-20). Schlosser tells us that they divided the food preparation

into separate tasks performed by different workers: One person grilled the hamburger, another "dressed" and wrapped it, another prepared the milk shake, another made the fries, and another worked the counter (20). Once again, this deskilling of labor leads to individual employees being expendable since they are easily replaced. At McDonald's all the food is delivered to the individual locations so that it is easy, quick, and cost effective to prepare: the burgers, chicken, French fries, and buns arrive frozen; the shakes and sodas begin as syrup.

The McDonald's operations and training manual was first put together by Fred Turner in 1958: It was seventy-five pages long. Today this manual weighs four pounds and has ten times the number of pages (Schlosser 69). McDonald's has created a standardized work environment and product. Schlosser quotes a sociologist Robin Leidner who has noted that, "When management determines exactly how every task is to be done ... and can impose its own rules about pace, output, quality, and technique [it] makes workers increasingly interchangeable" (70). Cooking instructions, for example, are not only in the manuals but are printed onto the machines. Moreover, a McDonald's kitchen is full of buzzers and flashing lights that tell employers what to do.

Health

One popular cliché warns us that we are what we eat, and another warns us that if we take care of our body it will take care of us: the point is that the need to take care of our health ought to be a priority. In the United States only smoking kills more people than obesity. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that 280,000 Americans die every year as a direct result of being overweight (Schlosser 241-2). In the United States health care costs related to obesity is close to \$240 billion. Schlosser informs us that obesity has been linked to heart disease, arthritis, high blood pressure, infertility, and strokes (242). Schlosser makes clear that fast food restaurants are one of the vectors that lead to obesity. Whenever fast food restaurants invade a market the number of obese people in that country also increases. For example, this pattern was evidenced in Great Britain, China, and Japan.

In the face of competition the fast food restaurants have increasingly offered their customers larger portion sizes. For example, a typical McDonald's soft drink in the 1950s contained eight ounces of soda; today a child's size soft drink is twelve ounces and a large is thirty-two ounces and contains 310 calories. In 1972 McDonald's added Large French Fries to its menu; today their Super Size Fries is three times larger than the serving they offered a generation ago. Super Size Fries contains 610 calories and 29 grams of fat (Schlosser 241).

The fat content and high caloric intake are not the only health risk we face when we eat at fast food restaurants. In talking to fast food employees, they revealed to Schlosser personal stories relating to unsanitary food handling and preparation. Part of the danger is that e. coli and other toxins found in foods result when foods are not

properly prepared. The Center of Disease Control (CDC) estimates that about 37,000 Americans suffer food poisoning each year, 1,000 are hospitalized and about 25 die (Schlosser 222). Kitchen workers ultimately play a significant role in the safety of the food that they prepare. Schlosser cites nauseating examples that he suggests should cause consumers good reason to worry. The following are a few of the examples he cites: In 1997 an undercover investigation by KCBS-TV in Los Angeles videotaped restaurant workers “sneezing in their hands while preparing food, licking salad dressing off their fingers, picking their noses, and flicking cigarettes into meals about to be served” (Schlosser 222). In May of 2000, three teenage employees at Burger King in Scottsville, New York, were arrested for “putting spit, urine, and cleaning products such as Easy-Off Oven Cleaner and Comet with Bleach into the food” (Schlosser 22). They were allegedly doing this for eight months affecting thousands of customers. One final example, in a McDonald’s restaurant in Colorado Springs several employees independently confirmed and “provided details about cockroach infestation in the milk-shake machine and armies of mice that urinated and defecated on hamburger rolls left out to thaw in the kitchen every night” (Schlosser 222). These incidences are undoubtedly ones with which fast food patrons need to be aware.

Targeting Children

McDonald’s attempts to create a positive public image, and will go to great lengths to maintain this image. It is essential for consumers to be able to read the façade behind McDonald’s marketing team’s gimmicks. For instance, McDonald’s teams up with the NBA and Disney in order to capitalize on their positive images, to have consumers associate one thing they like with another (Schlosser 50). McDonald’s started a “My McDonald’s” campaign, with the aim of making customers feel that McDonald’s “cares about me” and “knows about me.” A corporate memo introducing the campaign explained: “The essence McDonald’s is embracing is ‘Trusted Friend’... ‘Trusted Friend’ captures all the goodwill and the unique emotional connection customers have with the McDonald’s experience... [Our goal is to make] customers believe McDonald’s is their ‘Trusted Friend’” (Schlosser 50). As we will see, armed with the knowledge that corporate celebrities will go to great lengths to protect their images, we can exert pressure on them by threatening their image.

McDonald’s unashamedly targets young children. Schlosser quotes a memo “that sought to explain the underlying psychology behind many visits to McDonald’s”: parents took their children to McDonald’s because they “want the kids to love them... it makes them feel like a good parent” (50). The ads were aimed at the “minivan” parents and suggested that by going to McDonald’s, “It’s an easy way to feel like a good parent” (Schlosser 50). Kroc once explained, “A child who loves our TV commercials and brings her grandparents to a McDonald’s gives us two more customers” (Schlosser 41). In order to attract more young consumers, in 1965 McDonald’s hired Willard Scott to invent a new clown to make restaurant appear-

ances: thus Ronald McDonald was born. Scott was previously the star of a children’s television show called *Bozo’s Circus*, which was cancelled in 1963. Before it was cancelled, however, Bozo made was a big hit appearing at various McDonald’s locations. So, McDonald’s hired Scott to create a clown that would act as McDonald’s mascot. In the end, Scott no longer played the part of Ronald McDonald because McDonald’s wanted someone thinner to sell its food products.

Another tactic, used by McDonald’s to attract young children is the fantasy world of McDonaldland (Schlosser 42) — the bright colored playgrounds that are a familiar sight in many of McDonald’s locations. The aim of targeting children, sometimes described as “pest power,” is a simple yet effective one: “get kids to nag their parents and nag them well” (Schlosser 43). A manufacturer of “playlands” explains it this way: “Playlands brings in children, who bring in parents, who bring in money” (Schlosser 47). McDonald’s is the company running the most ads aimed at children (Schlosser 243). In fact, some countries (Sweden, Norway, Belgium, Ireland, and Holland) have recognized the questionable ethics of directing advertising products at children and have responded with a ban.

A *Brandweek* article on fast food notes that the key to attracting kids is “toys, toys, toys” (Schlosser 47). Just to cite an example of how successful toys can be to lure customers into McDonald’s, in 1997 with the introduction of Teenie Beanie Baby McDonald’s went from selling 10 million Happy Meals in a typical week, to selling 100 million Happy Meals over the course of ten days (Schlosser 47). In addition, McDonald’s often distributes numerous versions of a toy to encourage repeat visits. Synergy, a marketing strategy pioneered by Walt Disney, has proven to be an effective way of selling a product. Essentially, using Teenie Beanie Babies to sell happy meals is a good example of how synergy works. Because of their success these types of pairings have become virtually ubiquitous.

McStore offers another example of how synergy works. The McStore is located at One McDonald’s Plaza in Oak Brook, Illinois, the company’s corporate headquarters. At the back of the McStore is the Ray A. Kroc Museum, which cannot be accessed without having to walk through the McStore. At the McStore the following are among the many items that can be purchased:

bean-bag McBurler dolls, telephones shaped like french fries, ties, clocks, key chains, golf bags and duffel bags, jewelry, baby clothes, lunch boxes, mouse pads, leather jackets, postcards, toy trucks, and much more, all of it bearing the stamp of McDonald’s. (Schlosser 31)

My personal favorite product, of course, is the T-shirt decorated with a new version of the American flag, with the stars on the flag replaced by McDonald’s golden arches. This, in my mind, is symbolic of how corporate celebrities have become even more powerful than the most powerful of nation-states.

Schools

Schools previously considered safe from celebrity corporations are no longer safe. With increasing cuts in education, many schools are forced to accept corporate funds. This corporate money inevitably comes at a large cost. Lifetime Learning Systems, America's largest marketer and producer of corporate-sponsored teaching aids, boasts that,

Now you can enter the classroom through custom-made learning materials created with your specific marketing objectives in mind. Through these materials, your product or point of view becomes the focus of discussion in the classroom... the centerpiece in a dynamic process that generates long-term awareness and lasting attitudinal change. (Schlosser 56)

The money that corporations spend on "educational" materials is tax deductible making it even more attractive. Channel One is a commercial television network. Its programming is shown in American classrooms almost everyday to eight million school students (Schlosser 56). This is fifty times larger than the teen audience watching MTV. A similar proposal in Ontario was recently successfully lobbied against. Since the only school that accepted technology in exchange for "news" was Mayfield Secondary School, the plan to invade schools and force students and teachers to watch television commercials and "news" failed.

About 30 percent of American high schools in the United States offer branded fast foods, including McDonald's. The deals that schools get are often contingent on annual sales quotas, exclusive rights to sell a product in a school and so on. Coca-Cola, for instance, signed a contract with a Colorado Springs School District 11 that specified annual sales quotas of at least seventy thousand cases of Coca-Cola products a year. If these quotas were not met the School District would face reduced payments by Coke (Schlosser 57).

Fighting Back

Given McDonald's size, power, clout, and its dependency on customers, we the potential consumers are not helpless. Like many individual and group activists have shown, we can put pressure on McDonald's to lead the way on many fronts. In the face of consumer pressure McDonald's has shown a willingness to act quickly (Schlosser 268). In the 1960s McDonald's opened restaurants in minority neighborhoods. When African Americans complained that McDonald's was not giving minority businessmen the opportunity to become franchisees, the company responded by actively recruiting African-American franchisees (Schlosser 268). When environmentalists criticized the chain for the amount of polystyrene waste it generated, in August 1990 the company responded by forming an alliance with the

Environmental Defense Fund and later announced that they would no longer serve hamburgers in polystyrene containers (Schlosser 268). When consumers began to demand that McDonald's no longer serve french fries made from genetically engineered potatoes, McDonald's responded resulting in the processors telling their growers to stop planting genetically engineered potatoes. In *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Food Supply* physicist and environmentalist Vandana Shiva warns of the danger of genetically engineered crops and reports that, "food free from genetic engineering is not a luxury for rich consumers. It is a basic element of the right to safe, accessible, and culturally appropriate food" (3).

McDonald's power, influence, and clout are not limited to its own practices, but it can also force its suppliers to act in more responsible ways. For example, in *Past Food Nation* Schlosser documents the unfair and dangerous treatments of workers, ranchers, and farmers who supply McDonald's with beef, poultry, and potatoes. Sometimes, inhumane working conditions lead to serious injury and even death. Since McDonald's is such a significant part of their business, and these suppliers are so reliant, dependent, and desperate to keep McDonald's business, McDonald's is in a position to influence the way these suppliers behave. For instance when McDonald's demanded that its ground beef be free of pathogens, their suppliers increased their investment in new equipment and microbial testing (Schlosser 268). Similarly, as the nation's largest purchaser of potatoes, beef, and the second largest purchaser of poultry (Kentucky Fried Chicken is the largest) McDonald's can and should demand safer working conditions and higher wages for farmers, meatpacking workers, and poultry growers (Schlosser 268). And if McDonald's were to demand these things their suppliers would comply.

I would like to end this section by outlining an attack made by the London branch of Greenpeace on McDonald's. In 1986, the group decided to target McDonald's for promoting Third World poverty, selling unhealthy food, exploiting workers and children, torturing animals, and destroying the Amazon rain forest, among other things (Schlosser 245). At the top of their leaflet were a series of golden arches with slogans like "McDollar, McGreedy, McCancer, McMurder, McProfits, McGarbage" (Schlosser 245). So, from 1986 to 1990 the group of five members distributed the leaflets without much attention. Then, in 1990 McDonald's decided to sue the group for libel, claiming that statements in the leaflets were false. Eventually, the others in the group backed out of the fight but Helen Steel and Dave Morris decided to stay and fight the world's largest fast food chain. To make matters worse, they neither could afford a lawyer nor were they given legal aid. In short, after many years of dirty fighting (for example, McDonald's hired at least seven different undercover agents to spy on Helen, Dave, and Greenpeace — on one occasion a spy broke into the GreenPeace office, took photographs, and stole documents [Schlosser 247]) and appealing, on March 31, 1999 "the three Court of Appeal justices overruled parts of the original McLibel verdict, supporting the leaflet's assertions that eating McDonald's food can cause heart disease and that workers are treated badly" (Schlosser 249). The

damages owed by Helen and Dave was reduced to 40,000 pounds. McDonald's, fed up with all the negative publicity had previously announced that it does not want the money; understandably, it simply wants the case to go away. Nevertheless, Helen and Dave are still not finished with McDonald's and have appealed the case again: first, to the British House of Lords who refused to hear the case, and then to the European Court of Human Rights. Helen and Dave can serve as inspirations for all of us who are looking for courage to fight a battle to better the lot of men and women regardless of how insurmountable it may seem.

In this way then literacy becomes not merely a matter of reading the word, but also of reading the world. Although all of the statistics are from the United States and the figures in American currency, the situation is not much different in Canada. Nevertheless, like the peasants learning to read both the word and the world by reflecting on their everyday lived experience, learning about their rights, and learning how to fight against oppression, in the same spirit, we need to follow their example and teach emancipatory literacy by engaging students in dialogue and directing them to reflection and action. This needs to be included as the aim of teaching literacy if we value participatory democracy.

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