"There is one story worth telling": An Essay for James Britton and Nancy Martin
Author(s): John S. Lofty
Source: *English Education*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (October 2009), pp. 29-60
Published by: National Council of Teachers of English
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40607916
Accessed: 22-09-2016 19:23 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://about.jstor.org/terms

National Council of Teachers of English is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *English Education*

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

"There is one story worth telling": An Essay for James Britton and Nancy Martin

John S. Lofty

In 1992, the University of New Hampshire (UNH) held a conference featuring leaders in the field of composition studies, attended by a wish list of luminaries, including Lil Brannon, Ed Corbett, Peter Elbow, Donald Murray, and Ken Macrorie. James Britton and Nancy Martin flew over from England to join the conversation. NCTE's prestigious research awards now recognize the contributions of James Britton, Janet Emig, and James Moffett, all of whom were keynote speakers.

The conference was conceived by Thomas Newkirk and the late Robert J. Connors, a well-respected historian of composition. To take advantage of what in Tom's words proved to be an "amazing gathering," Bob provided faculty members and graduate students with questions to interview speakers about their academic histories and view of the future of writing instruction. From these interviews, Bob planned to create the UNH oral history archive based on portraiture of key figures in the field.[1]

As an Englishman, I was honoured by the opportunity to interview Britton and Martin. When I began my own teacher education in London in 1965, the then-new ideas of Harold Rosen, John Dixon, Mike Torbe, and Douglas Barnes were soon to transform the teaching of English for several generations to come. We can continue to find much value in their research and a model of language that provides an enduring foundation, not only for the teacher-researcher movement and the expressive writing tradition but also for thinking about what it means to teach and to learn.[2] The interviews with Britton at age 84 likely are among the last before his death in 1994. Martin continued to write about teaching until her passing at age 91. In a memoriam, Lynne Alvine (2003) speaks to the life and work of her colleague

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

and friend: "The legacy of Nancy Martin lives on in classrooms where teachers understand the importance of writing across the curriculum; where students write to discover and make meaning from their texts and from their lives; and where teachers value students having a say in what they learn, how they learn it, and how they take stock of their progress" (p.11).

Although the level of detail in the interviews is sometimes teasingly elliptical, Britton's animated voice and passion for teaching and learning are as fresh and engaging as his writing. Martin would listen intently to Britton recalling long-distant details of a career and work that began in the 1930s and join in the conversation to add insight from her teaching and scholarship. Compared to Martin, Britton was a person of fewer words—carefully weighed, thoughtfully provocative. As they exchanged ideas and visions for the future, I envied their tag-team energy practiced over many years of dialogue.

The enduring value and legacy of Britton and Martin's key ideas lie in their opinions about talk as the language of learning and writing across the curriculum. Britton's critique of the writing process movement, of "shaping at the point of utterance," is worth serious attention, as is Martin's work on the importance of students using their own language and on a writer's sense of audience. Britton and Martin collaborated over 50 years, so the authorship of their evolving ideas is often shared and owes much to the Schools Council Project researchers at the London University Institute of Education.

More recently, the 2005 CEE summit marked a critical juncture in reflecting on the roles that English educators should play in how English is being defined both "for" and "by" the profession. Britton's and Martin's prophetic cautions about the need for teachers to maintain local control of the curriculum and to resist by all possible means its appropriation by government agencies are timely. Their worst fears about what governments might do to undermine the professionalism of teachers came to fruition first in the UK under the 1989 National Curriculum and then several years later in the United States with the standards reform movement.

Martin and Britton became friends when they began teaching—a career that neither had planned nor initially wanted.

A Lifelong Partnership

Our conversations in Durham were shaped more by Britton and Martin's ideas and model of language and less by their personal and professional history. In London, at the Imperial Hotel, the popular gathering place for faculty and students at the Institute of Education, the tenor and content of the interview changed. The clink of glasses set an informal atmosphere for talking about their work.

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

Martin and Britton became friends when they began teaching—a career that neither had planned nor initially wanted. Tony Burgess, a close friend and colleague of both Britton and Martin, writes, "Relationships with [Britton's] lifelong colleagues of Nancy Martin and Harold Rosen began in these productive teaching years [1933–38], the triumvirate of Jimmy, Nancy and 'Johnny' later became well known to English teachers" (2004–2007, par. 2).

After graduating in 1931 from University College in London with a BA in English literature, Britton taught for 8 years in state secondary schools. He recalls: "All my university stay, I said that I would do anything within reason, but I didn't want to teach. I wanted to do a journalistic kind of job. I was a writer and wanted to write, not teach. But I ended up teaching. I got into it and liked it very much."

From 1927–30, Martin read English at Exeter University and considered graduate studies but explained, "We were hard up by then, so I thought I had better get started. . . . I didn't want to teach either. I wanted to write as well. However, like Jimmy, it was a question of what are you going to do? So I thought, 'take the training course.' In my practice school, I was attached to a superb teacher." As was the case for Britton, once Martin was teaching in her own classroom, there was no looking back for her either.

In 1933, Britton and Martin were hired at the progressive, coeducational Harrow Weald County Grammar school in London. Harold Rosen, a lifelong colleague, also taught with them. Harrow Weald sharply contrasted to Merchant Tailors, a traditional private girls' schools where Martin had begun teaching: "The whole atmosphere of Harrow Weald was just another world where I had come from. It was not stuffy. I'd say it was very populist." Britton, her new colleague and senior master at Harrow Weald, had already published *English on the Anvil* (1934), a course book for elementary students based on R. L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island*.

In 1938, Britton left the classroom and, until 1953, worked for the education department of John Murrays, a book publisher. There he expanded what was to become a deep interest in theory to all subjects: "[I] had learned a lot by going to schools and seeing authors and editing the publications that came out." Britton produced "a series of stories for children from war books and mountain climbing books. . . . But in the end, publishing became very slow, and you couldn't make much money off it." During World War II, Britton distinguished himself as a Royal Air Force pilot and wrote about his war experiences in Crete in *Record and Recall* (1988). *Literature in Its Place* (1993) and *The Flight-Path of My Words* (1994) are his last publications.

During the war years, Martin took a diploma in public administration: "I felt that I had five wonderful years at Harrow Weald. They couldn't have

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

been better. But I couldn't see where I was going next. So I thought I'd do something else and see what comes up." She was invited to apply for a job at the London Institute of Education in 1946, where Britton had begun part-time work at the end of the war. Britton was head of the English Department at the London Institute of Education from 1954 to 1970.

By the 1960s, the accomplishments of the British primary schools were attracting major international interest for their innovative work on language. As chairman of the newly formed National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE), Britton became a leading figure in preparing for the 1966 Dartmouth Conference. During the Anglo-American seminar, 50 participants would consider rapidly changing concepts of how to define English. In the month-long seminar, educators shared their practices and ideas about 11 major concerns, from the role of the learner and approaches to subject matter, to the place of literature in the curriculum and how to educate teachers. In 1967, a party of American educators led by James Squire visited English schools to learn more about teaching in England and to create bridges between English teachers in both countries. The success of the seminar led to the formation of the International Federation of Teachers of English (IFTE).

The seminar yielded two reports: *The Uses of English* (Muller, 1967) and *Growth through English* (Dixon, 1967), in addition to six NCTE monographs of the proceedings. Commenting on significant topics, Sublette (1973) notes, "[T]he conference considered several questions, one of which is 'What is English?' Both reporters of the conference interpret the answer given to the question. However, both the answers which are suggested and the methods for achieving the answers are different" (p. 349).

Britton remembered the seminar in terms of a "great conflict between linguists and literature people. . . . The disagreements were with the linguists who thought that language wasn't getting enough attention in teaching. On the whole, the conference agreed that the use of language was what mattered and is all that is needed to be known about it. You don't need to study [language]; you need simply to prove the use of it." For Martin, the place of literature in Moffett's "universe of discourse" needed to be more visible. She writes, "It is curious that the part of the Dartmouth program which deals with talk and with the personal uses of language has been fairly widely assimilated into the vanguard of classroom practice and theory, whereas that part which articulates the notion of a universe of discourse in which one of the uses of language is literature—and a highly significant one—has not been assimilated; it has in fact been quite overlooked, so that many people think it isn't there" (1983, p. 43). Martin's comment seems to more accurately

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

describe the UK than the US context where literary studies are prominent in teacher education.

Although Britton and Martin focused on the language vs. literature conflict, the two reports suggest that American educators held alternative views of the different approaches on teaching English that sparked the conference. In the words of one anonymous reviewer of this article, the conflict was between

> [Dare] I say common sense—skills and American cultural heritage (Muller's *The Uses of English*) vs. dynamic, meaning centered, personal growth through language in use etc. [Dixon]. For me, and most of my generation, the Brits had overwhelmed the Americans. (Moffett, for us, was the exceptional American.) But the important thing was that Dartmouth introduced all of those Brits to Americans and had a huge impact over the next 25 years and more. Barnes, Dixon, Summerfield, Medway, Torbe, Barrs, Burgess and on and on became part of the conversation. None of that would have happened without Dartmouth, and it is our continuing shame that NCTE has pulled out of IFTE and this dialog has largely died.

As I listened to Britton and Martin discussing Dartmouth, their American colleagues, and their careers, I was moved by their recounting of memories of a professional friendship over half a century. Few partnerships last as long or are as productive. Their lives were enriched from their first days of teaching in the same school to working together on research projects at the London Institute of Education. They did so over a time period when schools and how teaching and learning were viewed underwent a sea change.

"There is one story worth telling"

Britton's speech is valuable as much for his familiar message on the power of story as for the window it offers on how he composes. I had anticipated that he might speak, as others had done, at some length to those aspects of his teaching philosophy and to critique current trends in English education. I was surprised, then, by the extent to which he quoted from Susan Langer's *Philosophical Sketches* (1979) and cited the works of Susan and Nathan Isaacs, Dewey, Vygotsky, and Buber. By center-staging the work of others and speaking less directly about his own ideas, Britton graciously handed the torch to the next generation of teachers and scholars. His modesty in speaking through the words of others is evident in his writings but was dramatically so in his talk, a strategy consistent with the collaborative spirit of his work. He reminded his audience of the importance of dialogue across the disciplines and writers we should read and reread. Martin explains how Britton develops his ideas by using other writers' work as a foundation for his own ideas:

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

> His usual procedure is to begin with the general statement of an idea he wants to develop; then he draws on work by other researchers, which bears on the topic and constructs a kind of narrative of quotations, which becomes his argument. Then he restates and develops his own thesis as an extension of the argument. . . . It may be that his synthesizing, narrative mode enables his ideas to move quickly into people's personal experience and to lodge there. (Martin, 1988, p. xv)

In his talk, Britton modeled the value of reading literature as a springboard for students to use their own language in an imaginative response. The opening lines to Robert Graves's *To Juan at the Winter Solstice* inspired his talk and announced his theme:

> There is one story and one story only
> That will prove worth your telling,
> Whether as learned bard or gifted child;
> To it all lines or lesser gauds belong
> That startle with their shining
> Such common stories as they stray into. (11.1–6)

Britton read these lines not once but twice to reiterate his message that teachers must provide opportunities for students to tell their own stories and for us to attend closely to what they have written. Acknowledging that he was using a poem to make a "severely" practical point about the role of narrative in children's lives, he commented:

> The importance is to get boys and girls in school and in college to write about their own lives, and what a wealth of material that opens up. They are not only writing about themselves but about how the whole world looks to them. . . . I think most of us tend to find ourselves and our views about life of interest, and worth talking about. (1992)

If students are going to share their stories with teachers, argues Britton, then the students must trust that their writing will elicit conversations that show a genuine interest in their lives. For both Britton and Martin, writing and talking are closely bound; to discuss one language mode is to evoke the other.

The Language of Learning

One of the most significant contributions that Britton and Martin made to English teaching was to the role of children's talk both in English classes and also across the curriculum. Their research projects (1966–77) into understanding the central role of language in all learning were made possible by the Schools Council and conducted at the London Institute of Education.

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

From 1966–71, the Council set up a project to study secondary-level writing, the results of which were published in *The Development of Writing Abilities 11–18* (1975). About 2,000 writing samples from 65 high schools were studied to understand how student writers used writing. The research explored the interrelationships in the process of writing, a writer's evolving sense of audience, and three broadly differentiated kinds or functions of writing. The report provides a finely grained description of audience and the major function categories: Transactional ← Expressive → Poetic. Martin (1983) summarizes them as follows:

> Expressive writing reflects the ebb and flow of a writer's thoughts and feelings and takes for granted that the writers themselves are of interest to the reader, so expressions of attitude are an integral part of this kind of writing. . . . Transactional writing, often called "expository," is concerned with some direct result or transaction, such as giving information, presenting an argument or a literary judgment, or writing reports, essays, notes, etc. . . . Poetic writing on the other hand is without any such direct practical purpose, and includes stories, poems, and plays. (p. 158)

When the first project ended, Martin directed a second project whose intent was to disseminate the research results by examining its practical implications for teachers. A gifted theorist, Martin always balanced theory with her concern for classroom practice. As one of the anonymous reviewers of this article put it, "It's quite possible that Martin in her attention to praxis, especially with regard to writing across the curriculum, and her advocacy for teachers as writers and researchers, may have made a more significant contribution to actual teaching practice than did her colleague and friend Jimmy Britton."

Although *Writing and Learning across the Curriculum 11–16* (Martin, D'Arcy, Newton, & Parker, 1976) is mostly about writing, in "From Talking to Writing" Martin and her coauthors argue persuasively for the importance of talk: "[W]e have found it impossible, and undesirable, to ignore the opportunities for talk which also occur across the curriculum. Neither form of language at the secondary level can be used for long to the exclusion of the other . . . many learning situations could often be improved if the two [forms] were more closely interrelated" (p. 35). Martin argues that teachers need to capitalize on the diverse functions that children's talk serves: communicating needs, developing social relationships and individual identity, understanding how and why the world works as it does, predicting new situations, and "hav[ing] fun—sheer sensual and aesthetic pleasure" (p. 37).

Martin discovered the value of taping small-group conversations to understand the varieties and complexity of children's talk. She demonstrates

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

the need to turn classrooms into language learning labs where teachers observe the balance of expressive and transactional speech in student-initiated discourse. When teachers transcribe their own dialogue with students, teachers can see dramatically the kinds of talk that their questions and comments elicit and how overemphasizing "staying on track" may unwittingly close down students' natural curiosity. Martin reminds, then, that teachers need to be not only fluent speakers but also good listeners:

> By definition almost, where this is the case the learning context becomes more co-operative because there is scope in it for the pupils to make genuine contributions of their own and to follow the thread of their own thoughts instead of trying most of the time to guess what is in the teacher's mind. . . . [Pupils] value and appreciate teachers who listen and pay serious attention to what they have to say. (p. 39)

Martin's essays in *Mostly about Writing* (1983) prompt teachers to better enable their students to explore new understandings and to express their own real and imagined lives by using everyday language. These essays, first published from 1966 to 1983, encourage teachers to understand and appreciate more fully the need for children to use their own talk in all learning. In "So All Talk Is Significant" (Martin et al., 1976), Martin explains the functions of oral language and argues that large-group instruction characterized by the question-answer-evaluate model often will be less valuable than small-group expressive talk. The range of student-initiated talk can surprise the teacher in its breadth and complexity. She explains: "A school could be, and we think should be, an environment in which all kinds of talk do in fact happen; where children can talk to adults in both formal and informal situations, where purposive, or directed talk goes on—as it always has—and where undirected and unconstrained conversations are also seen as part of the educative process" (p. 8). Martin argues that students' everyday speech is well suited for "new learning situations and first formulations, first drafts of new thinking" because it is the most familiar, well-practiced and "nearest-at-hand" language (p. 8). She continues:

> [E]veryday speech should be seen as the matrix from which one moves into other modes when they are needed, and to which one reverts in new or difficult situations. This would mean that teachers could not only rest easy with their pupils' everyday language for much more of the time than most of them now think is appropriate, but they could encourage it and create situations where it could occur, knowing its importance to a learner. (p. 8)

When the focus should be on the needs of students' learning, Martin is concerned that students are being "pushed too hard and too soon" (p. 8) away

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

from their own language into acquiring the public language of education modeled in textbooks and teacher presentations. Although transactional language has wide currency and must be learned, it can be difficult for many children to learn and explore new ideas within its constraints. Her position, then, is to respect children's vernacular speech as teachers also foster other kinds of talk. "In Their Own Words" (1974) examines the strengths and limits of children's everyday language and recognizes that students must acquire the public language of Standard English for social and economic reasons. But as Martin points out, there is a danger in diverting a student's evolving understandings from "what he is saying to how he is saying it." (p. 11)

Alvine (2003) describes how Martin's work has influenced her teaching: "After hearing Nancy talk about students' sense of 'personal purpose' in their learning, I began negotiating curriculum with my students and having them assess their achievement. I embraced the belief that talk is central to learning. I challenged myself to take multiple perspectives on whatever I might encounter in literature and life. I learned to help my students explore classroom interactions from multiple views. Prospective teachers now learn with me to metaprocess all that they do and see" (p. 11). When I first worked with new teachers, I analyzed transcripts of our classroom discussions and discovered that I was doing most of the talking, and for a more limited range of purposes than the learning required. I overevaluated students' comments in the question-answer-evaluation pattern without allowing students an adequate opportunity to critique their contributions and generate questions. Teachers can study how interactive their classrooms are simply by asking students to "map" the distribution of talk, patterns of turn-taking, and to code the varieties of talk that students and teacher generate in different learning formats. Such mapping can illuminate the need for teachers to listen-in to their teaching, understand how classroom talk is functioning, and make it more effective.

When I first worked with new teachers, I analyzed transcripts of our classroom discussions and discovered that I was doing most of the talking, and for a more limited range of purposes than the learning required.

Britton (1990) reminds us that for interactive teaching to work,

> Genuine discussion is *exploratory*, an opening out of possibilities in order to arrive at a configuration, a nexus of some kind. Guessing what is in the teacher's mind, on the contrary, is a closing-in process, a mental variety of 'hunt the thimble'. A recognition that talking can be a means of learning; that its effectiveness as such a means relies on a relationship of mutual trust between those taking part in the talk; . . . all this clearly assumes an interactive view of learning; and this in turn has important implications for our view of curriculum. (p. 127)

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

He contrasts an interactive view of learning with an "output model of curriculum," characterized by a sequential "uni-directional view of teaching" (p. 127) with preplanned course outcomes.

Britton's and Martin's concern that an output model would largely replace an interactive one was soon realized. The widespread but questionable public belief that academic standards had fallen led the then Conservative UK government to pass the 1988 Reform Act that established the National Curriculum. In 1989, the mandated curriculum was phased in. No curriculum change ever had been implemented so swiftly. It fulfilled a campaign promise to raise standards in the government-maintained schools of England and Wales by ensuring that all students would receive a broad, balanced curriculum. It features core subjects—English, math, science—and foundation subjects—design and technology, information technology, foreign language, history, geography, music, art, and physical education. Readers interested in a full description of *English: The National Curriculum for England* (DEE, 1999) can visit www.nc.uk.net. Most teachers strongly resented the unprecedented degree of government intervention into curricular content, and their disempowered professional status led many to a kind of resistance to the curriculum and low morale (Lofty, 2006, pp. 23–24). Dialogic learning became much more difficult for teachers and students to achieve.

Martin's position that both students' talking and writing need to begin with everyday language is echoed in Britton's 50-year-long battle to enable students to use their own language in expressive roles. Blau (1986) notes:

> The expressive function is not simply one of three equally distinct discourse functions, but the wellspring and generative source both in terms of a child's language development and [in terms of] a language user's composing process for all mature and fully realized discourse types. . . . [Britton's] antagonism from his first year as a teacher in 1930 has been the tradition and sometime official policy (at least in London schools) of discouraging children from bringing to school the language and concerns for their personal lives at home. Britton has stubbornly insisted that such language and such concerns are the best instrument and richest material students possess for exploring their own interior representation of reality and experiencing the liberating and reconstructive power of discourse. (p. 366)

In "Talking" (Pradl, 1982), Britton explains, "[Talking] is the normal way in which we endeavour to make sense of our own experiences, so that we store in memory not the raw data of events but the meaning we have attributed to them. Speech is of all language modes the best suited to this task because it has grown its roots in infancy, deep into our first-hand experiences" (p. 115). Given that Britton's functional view of language always advocates

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

language in use, he highly values the home as a "language workshop." Drawing on the studies of Bruner and Cazden, he argues that home is where "the give-and-take, the rough-and-tumble of language as it is unconsciously used for work and play constitutes a better learning situation than would anything more deliberate" (1977, p. 118).

Britton believes that expressive talk is central to all learning. In the essay "Writing to Learn and Learning to Write," he uses an oft-quoted metaphor of the "sea of talk on which all our schoolwork should be floated" (Mayher, Lester, & Pradl, 1983, p. 110). In answer to a question about his relationship to the writing process movement, he spoke first to the need to see "progress in language coming on all fronts at the same time. Language as a means of thought, reading and writing. . . . [You] are not dealing with writing or speech but with speech and writing together. . . . [It] seemed to pay off in the long run to see them combined and to see talk as the wheel on which the whole thing turns." The writing process movement, he believed, was an American phenomenon, and he did not see the concept of *writing as process* as especially useful: "I think 'language of learning' is a better one. The use of language as a means of learning—I think that does more than the idea of a process. . . . [I] think it tends to be dichotomous. You'll come back and look at does product matter, process matters or both. I think it tends to split. Writing should be just one total concept."

Britton's central belief in the power of talk to provide the foundation of all learning is evident across his writings and led him to collect extensive samples of talk from his own children, and from small and large groups of school students. His theorizing is frequently grounded in examples from the transcripts. For example, he uses his infant daughter Clare, exploring how she will arrange her model farm, school girls talking about parental relationships, and boys talking about the value of education in one group and creating hypotheses about chemical reactions in another. Although his narratives and personal experiences often provide the starting point for "talking to learn," students also are prompted to respond to tasks that stretch and extend their talk repertoire from close, expressive talk with a known audience to communicating with unknown audiences. Britton's eclectic talk samples help to illuminate how children initially learn and then continue to understand and create their own worlds.

Britton's essay "Talking to Learn" (Pradl, 1982) provides his readers with case evidence on which his theorizing is constructed and illustrates how he interprets the exchanges among pupils. He perceptively explores, for example, how the correlation of low-frequency student generalizations in relation to the number of individualized statements and personal examples

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

can provide a window on group solidarity, and reflects students' unwillingness to risk statements that would challenge commonly held opinions. In another exchange, the interplay between students' appeals to "common sense," rather than to reason and logic, provides evidence for how students can scaffold each other's learning. "[A] leap-frogging of listening and speaking may in fact be the characteristic feature of a joint exploration in talk and account for its value: each may give what he could not have given had it not been for the 'taking,' and in turn what he gives may provide somebody else's starting point. If it works that way, talk would indeed be a cooperative effort yielding a communal harvest" (Barnes, Britton, & Torbe, 1990, p. 120).

Britton's and Martin's work on discourse powerfully demonstrates what teachers and students can learn about talk in the classroom. A persistent theme in their writings is the teacher's role in creating opportunities for students to talk together and with their teachers about what they are learning and what it might mean, an approach in sharp contrast to teachers over-determining the learning. Britton's and Martin's approaches to teaching discourse can provide students with valuable opportunities to practice talk for different purposes. Their interactive model also provides teachers with situated knowledge as a basis for continuously assessing students' talk and for their future instruction. Most importantly, talk is central not only to all school learning but also to prepare students to use their voices to participate in a democracy.

"Shaping at the point of utterance": Painting in Watercolours

In our conversations about teaching English, Britton's and Martin's views on the value of revision were most thought provoking. Few U.S. writing teachers would question the value of multiple drafts, conferencing, and revision. In many classrooms, though, such practices are less often adhered to than followed. Time constraints and the prospect of the next piece of writing often truncate the drafting stage. Britton and Martin question these premises and prompt us to reconsider invention. About the value of multiple drafting, Britton replies, "I wouldn't want to—I mean you can vouch for it, and some kids would want to do it maybe, but I wouldn't want it. The best writing would be with direct shaping at the point of utterance, when writing is straight from the heart and doesn't need revision."

When I ask if Britton believes that young writers are able to find what is in their hearts at that point of utterance, he replies, "I do, yes, I do. They may need some assistance." But that assistance must come in the form of supportive listening.

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

> [Listening] applies just as much as shaping at the point of utterance as it does to revision. In other words, having a sympathetic listener interested in what you are *saying*. Work straight away. It doesn't need to be revised. . . . I might be interested in something you could be interested in, like how you get from London to Birmingham, and that joint concern means we are joined. We are contributing. We aren't revising.

Although an "utterance" can refer to writing and to speaking, in UK English *utterance* is more often used to refer to talking. For Britton, "the point of utterance" is not limited to that moment in time when fingers meet keyboard but encompasses conversations between writer and a listener around an idea.

Martin elaborates, "I think it depends a bit on what students are writing. If they are writing an historical piece . . . there's much more need for revision because things get out of order. . . . Whereas, if it's a piece that is centered more from the imagination, like a poem or a story, I found that the first version is often the best." Thinking about the function of writing to discover possible meanings and to surprise the writer, I ask Martin if she believes revision can detract from the original. Sensitive to my belief in the value of revision, she hesitantly replies, "I hate to say so, but I do think that can be true."

One of Britton's most important contributions to the understanding of invention is the importance of allowing time for ideas to incubate. The duration of time in composing is critical: "[T]o communicate a thought, to be thinking something, and then to find a way to say to someone else what you think takes time." What Murray later describes as "writing while not writing," Britton discusses here in terms of an organic metaphor of "sowing the seeds of a problem in writing, and letting them rest, letting them come back to the mind when you are doing something else. And that does work."

Britton's concept of invention is further explicated in "Shaping at the Point of Utterance" (1982). Much of the richness of this essay lies in Britton's ability to synthesize the work of scholars from different fields—Michael Polanyi, Mike Rose, and Kenneth Lashley—in contributing to understanding invention. Illuminating here is how Britton considers analogous processes from the arts, humanities, and the sciences to understand how a writer's meanings may emerge in a dialogue between the subconscious and conscious mind, between thoughts and their expression in language.

Britton (1982) recognizes that his position differs from his colleagues' in the United States: "Rhetoricians, in their current concern for successive drafts and revision processes in composing, may be underestimating the importance of 'shaping at the point of utterance', or the value of spontaneous inventiveness" (p. 139). He observes: "When we start to speak, we push the

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

boat out and trust that it will come to shore *somewhere*—not just *anywhere*, which would be tantamount to losing our way, but somewhere that constitutes a stage on a purposeful journey" (p. 139).

Britton (1982) emphasizes not overlooking the "carry-over" from how we express ourselves in moving from one medium to another—from talk to writing. Successful writers, he observes, adapt their invention strategies rather than switching to a different mode: "Once a writer's words appear on the page, I believe they act primarily as a stimulus to continuing—to further writing, that is—not primarily as a stimulus to *re*-writing" (p. 140). Britton's theorizing about writing is grounded in hundreds of hours of classroom observations. To support his claim that writing precedes conscious awareness of an idea, he cites the thought-provoking words of an eight-year-old schoolboy: "[Writing] just comes into your head, it's not like thinking, it's just there. When you get stuck, you just read it through and the next bit is there. It just comes to you" (p. 141).

Britton's (1982) account of composing explores the nexus between individual psychology and the social world of listeners and readers. He recognizes the role of readers' expectations in how writers will shape their messages but privileges the generative role of a writer's mental perceptions:

> I want to associate spontaneous shaping, whether in speech or writing, with the moment-by-moment interpretive process by which we make sense of what is happening around us; to see each as an instance of the pattern-forming propensity of man's [sic] mental processes. Thus, when we come to write, what is delivered to the pen is in part already shaped with the image of our own ways of perceiving. But the intention to *share*, inherent in spontaneous utterance, sets up a demand for further shaping. (p. 141)

To account for shaping at the point of utterance, Britton utilizes a model of mind that can explain how what he sees as linguistically unshaped data are represented in language (Pradl, 1982). (Readers will ask here the ways and extent to which that data are already shaped by language, a perspective that Britton does not address.) He finds that explanation in a new line of inquiry referred to as "the philosophy of experiencing," work pioneered by Perl, Egendorf, and Gendlin, who describe pre-representational thought as "the felt apperceptive mass to which we can inwardly point" (p. 141). Britton is interested in how the "implicit meanings" of that mass of prior knowledge and experience are transformed and shaped in speech or in writing. At stake here is the change,

Britton is interested in how the "implicit meanings" of that mass of prior knowledge and experience are transformed and shaped in speech or in writing.

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

and potential loss of meaning, that occurs when we speak or write to translate and express our thoughts.

The psychologist D. W. Harding demarcates the words and images that writers create from the nonverbal background of their thinking. Britton's quote from *Experience into Words* signals what he sees as the potential for revisions to separate writers progressively from their original thoughts: "The words we choose (or accept as the best we can find at the moment) may obliterate or slightly obscure or distort fine features of the non-verbal background of thinking. . . . . A great deal of speaking and writing involves the effort to be a little more faithful to the non-verbal background of language than an over-ready acceptance of ready-made terms and phrases will permit" (1982, p. 142).

Britton's (1982) reason for wanting to shape at the point of utterance is to respect and preserve the writer's intentions. Perl and Egendorf describe "retrospective structuring" as the process of "shuttling back and forth from their sense of what they wanted to say to the words on the page, and back to address what is available to them inwardly" (p. 142). Assumed here is that writers have access to their intended, internal meanings in contrast to the view that they write less to record than to discover and understand their thinking.

Britton (1982) compares this retrospective process to a sculptor observing the effects of each cut before making the next. Retrospective structuring is also accompanied by "projective structuring" as writers shape their meanings for intended readers. He continues, "It is in this aspect of writing that 'discovery', or shaping at the point of utterance, tends to break down: a mistaken sense of a reader's expectations may obstruct or weaken the 'sense of what [the writer] wanted to say'" (p. 142). Britton's concern is that "too restricted a sense of reader's expectations may result in 'projective structuring' coming to dominate the shaping at the point of utterance, to the exclusion of severe restriction of the 'retrospective structuring', the search for a meaning that in its expression satisfies the writer" (p. 143).

Britton's (1982) view of invention has roots both in the social world of public talk and in the private, meditative tradition that James Moffett popularized:

> [S]haping at the point of utterance, involves first, drawing upon interpreted experience, the results of our moment by moment shaping of the data of the senses and the continued further assimilation of that material in search of coherence and pattern (the fruits of our contemplative moments); and, secondly, seems to involve by some means getting behind this to a more direct apperception of the felt quality of 'experiencing' in some

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

> instance or instances; by which means the act of writing becomes itself a contemplative act revealing further coherence and fresh pattern. (p. 143)

Britton envisions here a two-stage process by which the writer first distills initial meanings from sensory experience and then moves to the deeper (metacognitive) level of apperception. In writerly contemplation, the mind becomes conscious not simply of content but of its own intentionalities such that new patterns and understandings evolve and become visible. The shaping, then, is reminiscent of the generative power that a hurricane has in drawing heat to gain momentum and energy.

When young children learn to write, they usually draw on prior texts. By exposing students to many different kinds of language, teachers help their students to acquire a rich, varied stock of internalized forms from which they can develop their own writing. Young writers bring to their writing their linguistic resources as speakers and listeners and the forms of writing that they have heard or had read to them. In Britton's (1982) words, "I see the developed writing process as one of hearing an inner voice dictating forms of the written language appropriate to the task at hand" (p. 144).

But once initiated, how does the "dictating" process sustain itself? Britton's (1982) answer presupposes a *pre-setting* mechanism that "continues to affect production throughout a given task" (p. 144). He finds evidence for this in the challenge that writers face in locating a point of entry, in finding their voices and in the writerly practice of rereading to prompt new writing. For this reason, Britton does not want to see the internal aspect of invention interrupted by external interventions, such as conferencing, that can distract writers from pursuing their primary focus of creating their meanings.

Neither does he want to see what he referred to in conversation as language coming "straight from the heart" getting lost as writers attend to the semantic and syntactic features of language. He views a process guided by an individual's intentions as paralleling Michael Polanyi's distinction between focal and subsidiary awareness. In writing, Britton observes, writers focus primarily on emergent meanings while attending secondarily to the words and structures that they use, that are available to them. To focus on the words would inhibit the production of meaning. Polanyi (1996, p. 146) evokes here the metaphor of a pianist freezing up and losing meaning by concentrating not on the emergent meaning of the music but on the movements of the fingers. Writers who restrict their focus to the means, the medium, likely will obscure their meanings.

The analogy that writers, like pianists, must focus on the meanings, the music they are making, rather than on the medium and the means works

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

better for music than for writing. Yet I recognize the sought-after writing experience when our consciousness dissolves into the movement of fingers across a keyboard, a movement out of clock time into a fugue state. More often, though, my focus shifts as I find and track meaning in the interplay between words, grammatical structures, and ideas. I resist the philosophy that separates thought and language, content and form, and here, meanings and means.

Britton's (1982) closing paragraph illustrates well his ability to combine analysis with an imaginative exploration of his key concept. His use of metaphor illustrates how the poetic can support the transactional and informative functions of language:

> Painting in oils, where one pigment may be used to obliterate another, is a very different process from painting in water colours, where the initial process must capture immediately as much as possible of the painter's vision. Do modes of discourse differ in production as sharply as that? And does our present concern with pre-planning, successive drafting and revision suggest that in taking oil-painting as our model of writing we may be underestimating the value of "shaping at the point of utterance" and hence cutting off what might prove the most effective approach to an understanding of rhetorical invention? (p. 144)

After rereading Britton's account of composing, different from the one I have taught and practiced, I revised my views in terms of genre. For me, his claim is stronger for expressive, imaginative writing than for transactional writing such as an exposition or argument. It is important to remember that for Britton, writing is a social act that floats on a "sea of talk." Talking and active listening, then, are critical parts of that initial shaping of writing, even though he sees little value in subsequent conferencing and revising. To understand Martin's skepticism about the value of multiple drafting and the importance of the relationship between students' intentions and their audience, we need to turn to her work with the Schools Council Project.

A Writer's Sense of Audience

In *Writing and Learning across the Curriculum 11–16*, Martin and her research with the Schools Council Project build on her earlier work with Britton regarding audience. Martin simplifies and illustrates the classifications with a rich set of writing samples drawn from different subjects. (Her work on the role of language in all school learning was strongly supported by the influential Bullock Report, *A Language for Life* [1975]). Martin's team summarizes the audience categories as follows:

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

1. Child or adolescent to self
2. Child or adolescent to trusted adult
3. Pupil to teacher as partner in dialogue
4. Pupil to teacher seen as examiner or assessor
5. Child (or adolescent) to his peers (as expert, co-worker, friend, etc.)
6. Writer to his readers (or unknown audience) (Martin et al., 1976, p. 18)

As students attune the focal distance of language between an audience that is close and familiar to one that is more distant or unknown, we see dramatic differences in voice, word choice, and personal reference.

For Martin, how writers view themselves and their relationships with different audiences is at the center of what she refers to as the "webs of learning and language" (Martin et al., 1976, p. 123). Writing and publishing stories and poems for the "first audience" of the class "[bring] reading and writing into the children's view of what they themselves do, that is they begin to see themselves as readers and writers" (p. 125). Martin observed how literacy can transform student self-image so that students "[taste,] if only momentarily the 'literary tradition' which is part of all of our lives and which assumes readers. A real readership with its attendant usefulness and pleasure [comes] into sight" (p. 125).

Students' view of themselves may in turn be heavily shaped by how writing teachers define their role. Martin asks, "Does [the teacher] see himself as someone who is in some sort of senior partnership relation to his pupils or a figure of unquestionable authority by virtue of his role?" (1976, p. 124). Working with samples from across the curriculum, Martin showcases students with positive self-images who are writing to clarify meanings and express their own ideas. But in another instance, she observes the effects on the confidence of one 16-year-old studying for exams who overinternalized the stylistic demands of the teacher examiner. The student explained, "I'm always thinking of writing in their style . . . you're thinking so much of writing in their style that you're not really thinking what you're writing about." When asked if he could write in his own style, he replied, "I wouldn't think that was possible now after studying the texts that I have studied, because I've been influenced by the other teachers—they've influenced me. I don't think I could think for myself" (p. 131).

In those four years of research into the nature of school writing, one of the most predictable, yet previously undocumented, findings was that

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

teachers served as the primary audience for their students' writing. About half of all school writing was used to test students' ability to reproduce knowledge, a constraint that hindered, Martin argued, students' overall writing development by limiting their practicing other kinds. Martin comments, "Of course teachers must assess their pupil's progress. But that so much of secondary school writing appears to be concerned with assessment is worrying because it suggests that the more important function of writing—its potential contribution to the mental, emotional and social development of the writer—is being neglected" (Martin et al., 1976, p. 22).

When students write primarily for their teachers, students often produce "inert, inept" writing without a strong personal voice or a genuine commitment to the topic:

> [S]tories, if they are any good, are always more rooted in the writer's self than consciously built to an audience. In speech, the actual or potential feedback from the listener continuously modifies what is said because the audience is physically present. . . . In writing there is no such feedback. The actual audience, normally, slips away into the background leaving the writer free to pursue the meanings he wants to get down on paper. But somewhere, out of the direct focus of attention, a sense of an audience remains, ready to take shape when summoned, or stepping forward uncalled. (Martin et al., 1976, p. 132)

Although Martin is not speaking about multiple drafting and the revision process, she clearly believes that while composing, a writer's sense of audience needs to be in the background so that the writer can pursue his or her meanings as freely as possible. This would be especially true for expressive writing.

For producing transactional writing, for example, an informative report, teachers frequently give their students the advice "to write as if for someone of your same age, and you've got to tell them about it" (Martin et al., 1976, p. 134). Ironically, though, these high school-age students did not report, nor expect, that fellow classmates would ever respond to their writing. (One notable exception was when students wrote feature stories for a real audience of newspaper readers, including younger children.) Martin found that in an effort to move students from writing for the known to the unknown, an increasing number of teachers created situations for audiences other than themselves that were real or imagined. She

Martin found that in an effort to move students from writing for the known to the unknown, an increasing number of teachers created situations for audiences other than themselves that were real or imagined.

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

cites psychologist and educator George Kelly: "He says that at moments of risk we would be greatly helped if we deliberately abandoned the indicative mood and operated in the invitational mood with its language form, let us suppose" (Martin et al., 1976, p. 135).

For Martin (1976), the best way to develop competence is not by recipe but by "the constant interaction of a personal viewpoint with information from secondary sources. We think this dynamic is the actual process of learning as well as of language growth" (p. 161). As a reader of those students' writings from the 1970s, I was most engaged by writing grounded, for example, in accounts of grandparents being relocated into government housing as well as issues coming from multiracial adoption at a time when multiracial adoption was still contested. Students clearly were invested in topics that spoke to their interests as young adults and were writing in "everyday language" for a teacher-reader audience who they believed would value what they had to say and with whom they had a personal connection. In the 1970s climate of exams requiring new critical interpretations and demonstration only of content knowledge, student-oriented learning marked a radical departure from that tradition. In Martin's words, "[These studies] are realistic educational documents, and they contrasted violently both in content and language with most traditional examination answers" (p. 160).

Martin's and Britton's work on audience contributed to the larger context of writing across the curriculum. In the WAC 2006 Keynote Address "Writing across the Curriculum: The Power of an Idea," Anne Herrington and Charles Moran consider the principles that have provided an enduring vision of the power of writing to promote learning in all subjects. They acknowledge that *Writing and Learning across the Curriculum 11–16* (Martin et al., 1976) laid a keystone for the writing across the curriculum movement in the United States. In Moran's words:

> [W]e have pulled together what we think is still vital in Britton's work, and by extension that of Nancy Martin and the London Schools' Council project: the focus on, and trust in, the learner; a focus on teaching and learning across the disciplines; the assumption that learning is interactive; valuing a range of types and functions of writing; seeing expressive writing and talk as central for learning. . . . We've argued that this work was foundational in the Writing Across the Curriculum movement, and that it continues to be so. We've also pointed to a dimension that needs to be added to what we have inherited: a critical perspective on the values that inform the discourses and practices in the disciplines. (p. 5)

In their keynote address, Herrington and Moran feature their previous dialogue about these foundational principles. Their conversation evokes what I

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

imagine might have been the same kinds of exploratory, spirited exchanges between Britton and Martin.

Growing Points in Teachers' Work

In her conferences with teachers across the curriculum, Martin asked about the "growing points" in their work, and two ideas emerged: to promote creative thinking and to foster cooperative learning among students and also between teacher and students. To support such change, the teaching-learning relationship would need to move away from one of absolute authority toward a dialogic, partnership model (Martin, D'Arcy, Newton, & Parker, 1976, p. 161). These ideas, though not new, had been difficult to implement, in part because of the external examinations system. (Students take the General Certificate of Secondary Education [GCSE] at age 16 in several subjects including math and English.)

Martin (1976) relates creativity to students' intention for learning and notes that the curiosity and persistence seen in young children can easily be "snuffed out" in older students. "However benevolent, teachers' intentions for their pupils are dominant and reach into almost all corners of school life. . . . How [can] a teacher help a pupil without imposing a structure on his pupil's thinking (and work) which hinders rather than helps the pupil's development?" (p. 163). Martin combines case-study examples of actual projects with imagined teaching-learning scenarios of how they might proceed. In this way, her theory becomes truly practical. The kind of learning environments that she imagines "support the growth of creative thinking; and it hinges on the teacher's commitment to reciprocity, i.e. cooperative learning" (p. 164).

In the final section of *Mostly About Writing* (1983), Martin considers "Next Directions" and details some of her most significant contributions to the future of English teaching. In "Scope for Intentions," Martin reminds teachers of the need to recognize a writer's intentions, in contrast to their own. She explores intentions as a fundamental "aspect of commitment to writing and to learning" (p. 136). Intention may serve to transform the writer's knowledge and experience in a process with a double focus: to understand oneself and to communicate those emerging understandings to a particular or an idealized reader. Journals provide a safe place for writers to create bridges between their firsthand experience and secondary experience—information and book knowledge and a place to reflect on what and how they are learning.

"Contexts Are More Important Than We Know"(1983) explores inten-

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

tions but in the context of school life. For Martin, "*context* is taken to mean all that surrounds classroom events including the beliefs and attitudes of the teacher, the way the participants in the lesson see the classroom events, together with those aspects of the school context which impinge on the teacher's intentions" (p. 142). To understand the critical differences among classrooms superficially similar in pursuing a common curriculum and preparing students for exams, Martin considers the sources of "a teacher's personal constructs and the extent to which the managerial system in his school allows him to teach according to these" (p. 145). The system must fully support and not constrain a teacher's work.

To understand the environment that teachers most value, Martin (1983) considered case-study data from different schools in Australia (interviews, observations, and discussion of classes). She found that what distinguished teachers' learning priorities was "their measure of comprehensiveness" (p. 147). On the one hand, some teachers minimally considered students' intentions and evaluated their progress solely by their teachers' measures, yet other teachers wanted their students to understand the purposes of the work, to insert their intentions, and to reflect on their learning. Her findings presage the present ever-increasing constraints on teachers' work and intentions:

> Outstanding in what emerged from our interviews was the teachers' desire for freedom to teach as they thought best, and different teachers identified different features in the context of the school as preventing or assisting their work. It seemed that those with the most comprehensive learning priorities suffered most. For example, prescribed programs of set texts, chapter by chapter, linked to weekly assessments, made long assignments, ad hoc event, drama and projects very difficult, if not impossible. (p. 148)

In the 1970s, Martin considered how teachers, students, school administrations, parents, and media could negotiate the "multiplicity of intentions" operating in the context of schools. The main issue for teachers and administrators, then, was how to communicate clearly about what each needed to accomplish, to find ways to accommodate each other's agendas, and ideally to share learning priorities. She observed that although there had been piecemeal attempts to address such issues, "[t]he power of intentionalities in its widest sense is neither understood nor catered to" (Martin, 1983, p. 150).

When administrators failed to recognize or negotiate different intentions, teachers often were frustrated by working in relative isolation and formed subgroups as a response to an environment perceived as "hostile or indifferent to their educational aims" (p. 152). In contrast, when schools facilitated meetings to discuss ideas and practices and to share decision-

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

making, the high level of mutual intentions enabled teachers to "explode into action" (p. 153). Because teachers' beliefs and attitudes are the most powerful features in the context of learning, Martin argues for schools to be structured in ways to support and not to inhibit teachers and to create "habitats" (p. 154) favorable to students' learning.

Language, Politics, and Pedagogy

Until the late 1980s, although teachers and schools in England were visited by school inspectors, the profession was comparatively free from governmental regulation. The level of responsibility and trust placed in teachers underwent a sea change in 1989 with the introduction of the National Curriculum. By prescribing the curriculum and later phasing in national testing at the end of each key stage (age 5–7, 7–11, 11–14, and 14–16), the government instituted external "intentions" that teachers had to negotiate. Martin and Britton believed that given the decisions that teachers needed to make, they needed and deserved a high level of autonomy; the national curriculum, then, represented a deep, unprecedented mistrust in teachers' professional judgments.

In the 1992 interview conversations, Britton observed that "[The government prescribes] for everyone. You can't have people over here saying what my kids should be doing. I should have a say in it. That should be my task. . . . School has become a place where everything you do, you do in order to have someone tell you how well you've done it. And that is something I want to get away from." Martin added, "Our government wants control of education. The first thing he [the prime minister] did when he set up all those boards for the national curriculum was to say that we will have no representatives of any teachers' associations. . . . We find the whole scene very depressing."

Britton's and Martin's longstanding concern was that historically the English curriculum had addressed a limited range of language forms and functions and had overlooked the power of talk in preparing students for citizenship. In Newkirk's words, "If expressive language use is a human capacity that everyone has, then it is a democratically distributed gift. By getting to the heart of human language use, Britton and Martin open the door wide enough for everyone to come through" (personal conversation, 2007). By limiting students' access to a full set of forms and functions, whether unintentionally or quite deliberately, students were being denied the right to advocate for a critical literacy and for their own evolving values, beliefs, and cultures.

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

Recognizing this limitation, Britton and Martin argued for the centrality of talk in all learning and in becoming literate. For this to happen, though, teachers and students would need adequate time to talk, read, write, and think. Although time for such exploratory teaching and learning had major implications for school reform, the kinds of curricular and later instructional reforms implemented after the national curriculum, including the literacy hour, decreased rather than increased time for talk that was not directly related to attaining government targets. Teachers' professional rights to participate in curriculum reform by contributing research findings were again at stake.

From the beginning of their long collaboration, Britton and Martin had sought to empower teachers. As early as the late 1950s and 1960s, these pioneers fought a long (and continuing) battle in England's schools against those who regarded grammar study as the center of language work. Beyond promoting the need for students to learn key terms to talk about language structures, Britton and Martin were convinced that studying traditional grammar was largely a waste of time. Britton noted, "In the long run, [textbook grammar] proves not worth doing. You don't get any better [at writing] by doing clause analysis and diagramming." As in America, many parents, politicians, and also some teachers resisted an idea viewed as radical. Britton reflected:

> [Changing teachers' practice] was a very gradual process of realizing that we were getting good results in talking and writing that did not come from study. Results came from use, and the use did not require all this analysis. . . . [You] want to use language and do the things you want to do with it, using it for your own purposes. . . . [H]uman beings have a tremendous facility for doing what they want to do. And wanting to do it makes a big difference.

Changing public perception about the importance of grammar and teachers' practices required a radical campaign that began in London schools. Britton, Martin, and colleagues introduced the language-as-use message into inner-city classrooms through teacher-education programs. New teachers "spread the idea" in conversation with their cooperating teachers who in turn carried it into their own teaching.

Britton recalls the students' reception of this new approach: "I think it did have an immediate effect. If you had a teacher come into a school where they had been taught along strict lines, in which grammar was the type of instruction, and they got one of our student teachers, and they [students] began to get the greater use out of language, to do what they wanted to do—to

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

write their own lives, the experience was tremendous." The government later reintroduced the teaching of grammar, citing their own research in *The Grammar Papers* (QCA, 1998) to challenge the several generations of research that had failed to correlate grammar instruction with an improvement of writing.

Britton, Martin, and their colleagues formed the London Association for the Teaching of English (LATE) in 1947 to discuss these new teaching ideas. These local groups developed into regional associations. In 1964, the National Association of Teachers of English (NATE) was formed (see Mittins, 1988). What began as a pedagogical reform effort to prompt teachers to enable students to use talking and writing for their own purposes led to the birth of teachers' professional organizations in a countrywide political movement.

Martin's empowerment of teachers has been especially important as Burgess (2003) recalls: "Nancy's work was influenced by respect for teachers' understanding and by concern for building up ideas. In her approach to writing in the 1970s, she set up local study groups and school working parties, encouraging teachers' ownership of curriculum reforms and their development of her proposals. . . . This emphasis on teachers' judgment has fallen out of favour in recent years; the focus has been more on managing and changing what teachers do, rather than on engaging with their thinking" (par. 8–9).

What then did or would Britton and Martin recommend that teachers do to resist or overturn government reforms that constrain their abilities to teach in ways that decades of research had established were successful by any measure? I put the question to Tony Burgess, retired reader in education at the London Institute of Education, and to Bob Bibby, former chair of NATE, colleagues of Britton and Martin who could offer insiders' perspectives on the impact of the reforms. Burgess explained that any answer must be speculative because Britton retired in 1975 and Martin in 1976. Both remained active, however, teaching, writing, and critically observing developments.

Burgess judged that the UK English teaching community in the early stages of development underestimated the scale of change coming into being from the 1980s onwards. Teachers, who were still in a state of shock and disbelief at an unprecedented level of government intervention, tended to see reforms, according to Burgess, "too much in terms of national curriculum content with regard to English teaching." Between 1975 and 1995, teachers could not see fully the "scale of changes being introduced or make connections between the reforms and educational research, teacher education, professionalism, assessment and curriculum that were introduced discretely. I think they do so now, but that is with hindsight. Change was

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

cumulative and the present dispensation was not wholly apparent and anticipated at the beginning" (correspondence, January 2009).

The question, Burgess explained, needed to be understood in a context of reforms, each marking a new style of government that intervened progressively into what politicians regarded as the "walled garden" of teachers' work. The wholesale systemic changes initiated in 1979 with James Callaghan's "Ruskin" speech on the need to ensure equal access for all students by centralizing education continued across successive administrations. Such political "moves" reached deeply into all aspects of teachers' work, for example, by controlling the curriculum, setting national standards, introducing league tables of schools' test results, gearing assessments to school accountability, and founding government agencies such as the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) to monitor quality control. Each change was justified in terms of raising standards. The move toward systemic reform negatively affected much of the progressive educational work and posed major challenges to Britton's and Martin's work, as Burgess describes:

1. Limitations [are imposed] to the role of universities, in initial teacher training, professional development and research. The tone of [a significant] involvement of teachers in the development of ideas is replaced by centralised strategies from government agencies.
2. The whole idea of English teachers having a role in curriculum through subject associations is challenged; moreover, NATE had had a strong role in setting directions of Schools Council research and with the ending of the Schools Council (1983) a locus for this influence is also ended.
3. The redescription of professionalism as conformity to nationally set strategies and standards rather than through [teachers' agency] in developing educational work.
4. The redirection of assessment. Much of Britton's work, e.g., on writing, had a purpose in reforming assessment (as well as in developing pedagogy). This avenue is also foreclosed. (correspondence, January 2009)

When I put the question to Bibby, he noted that initially the national curriculum under Brian Cox, head of the committee for English, had been less problematic than anticipated. Although government defined curriculum content, teachers were still allowed to teach *how*, if not *what,* they wanted. In 1998, however, the National Literacy Strategy regulated teachers' practice.

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

Judging that too many pupils were achieving in the lower- to middle-end of the performance range, government sought to raise standards by recommending one hour of highly structured literacy instruction every day. This most restrictive initiative yet described the content, prescribed the means, and specified rigid time allocations. Bibby judged that Martin and Britton would have been horrified by an initiative that essentially took away decision-making power from teachers.

While Britton and Martin were deeply frustrated at the arrogance of a government refusing to consider teacher research, they could not have foreseen the full extent of government regulations. Given their belief in the power of teachers to transform teaching and learning, they probably would have supported any kind of organized protest. Martin, an active member of NATE, wholeheartedly supported the successful teacher boycott of national tests in 1993. While I can only speculate on the specifics of Britton's and Martin's responses to legislation based not on proven practices but on political promises to raise standards, Burgess reiterates the values for which Britton and Martin continued to argue:

1. for teachers to be partners in setting curriculum directions and in undertaking and developing assessment—for the special educational knowledge that teachers had in working with children;
2. for language and learning as an open-ended exploration leading to fresh enquiries and to accumulating educational knowledge—not as fixed and static;
3. for assessment to draw closer to practice and to what is understood concerning language and learning and development; not as something imposed on curriculum and inevitably shaping it;
4. resistance to the inequity of the league table culture and to faith in assessment as the route toward developing learning.

Burgess went on to conclude, "I think that they would have wanted to preserve the link between research (of a path breaking, fundamental kind) and practice and the partnership of all participants in educational processes—truly a different order to that which has replaced it" (correspondence, January 2009).

Conclusion

By way of a conclusion, I will fast forward to the May 2005 CEE summit and to the essay "The State of English Education and a Vision for Its Future: A

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

Call to Arms." The recent CEE summits have given teachers and teacher educators a forum to share knowledge about teaching and learning. Such meetings provide opportunities to strategize how "A Call to Arms" might enable teacher-researcher knowledge to inform our practice and assessments and to restore a professionalism that will enable teachers to meet more strategically the needs of individual groups of students.

In answer to the 2005 summit's central question, "What is English Education?" and to this working group's question of "Does it even matter?" the article's authors conclude:

> Indeed, decades of illuminating qualitative and quantitative research into literacy learning and teaching, as well as theoretically and pedagogically sensible standards documents created by teams of English educators, seem to have had a negligible effect on the shape of instruction in our nation's schools. In short, the last fifty years have witnessed our futile attempts to convince overworked administrators, cynical bureaucrats, and even our own skeptical preservice students that we really know valuable things about the teaching and learning of English. (Alsup et al., 2006, p. 279)

Britton and Martin recognized a similar impasse in 1992. They, too, looked at the under-harvested fruits of the teacher-researcher knowledge created by themselves, their long-term colleagues, and by the current generations of teachers who they had helped to educate and who hopefully would carry forward and build on that knowledge. They surely would advocate for more substantial efforts toward promoting dramatic reforms that will "foster critical thought, critical dialogue and a circumspect and vigilant American citizenry" (p. 280).

Britton's and Martin's long-term initiatives to prepare young people to gain and practice the oracy skills necessary to participate in a democracy and to shape future societies foreshadow the CEE authors' position that dramatic reform will be needed for American education to be "a vehicle" for much-needed societal change. Although policymakers have a legitimate advisory role to play in educational navigation, all too often they have been backseat drivers in a vehicle they themselves are unqualified to operate. Policymakers and politicians need to return substantial control to teachers, teacher educators, and school administrators, those who daily travel that road and who likely know what lies ahead.

Speaking at a time when UK teachers had been entrusted with a high degree of autonomy and professional self-determination (Lofty, 2006), Britton and Martin would applaud loudly the position that English educators need "to become even more political and play a more active role in the creation of educational policy, because educational reform is finally part and parcel

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

of working toward a more just and equitable society" (p. 280). The kinds of school-home-community alliances for which Fleischer (2000) argues further support literacy learning truly as "everybody's business." Although all professions rightly have been asked to explain their policies and practices, I see the new initiatives and redefinitions of English motivated strongly by democratic pedagogies.

Britton and Martin most likely would agree that English educators must recognize that pedagogy and politics are intimately connected, as witnessed by the swift appropriation of teachers' work by politicians and their government-appointed committees. The current push to transform teachers into technicians, in contrast to professionals, is checked only by political action by teachers. Burns (2007) argues persuasively for the importance of such action:

> The fact that non-professionals have successfully framed literacy policy discourse to exclude professionals from participating in their own governance seems like it should be considered *the* primary concern of an organization like NCTE. Does it make sense for the organization to publish journal articles and offer conference sessions based on the perceived and reported interests of various constituents when our field is being reframed without professional input and leadership? (p. 134)

As outspoken and eloquent as Britton and Martin were, their strategy for empowering teachers to be decision makers rather than decision recipients was to prompt dialogue at every level and to create opportunities to caucus with policymakers whose full support teachers need but lack.

Although the teacher-researcher movement has strong roots in UK soil beginning with Britton's (1987) "quiet form of research," English teachers' ability to share that knowledge with colleagues has been undercut and undervalued. As in the United States, too often outside "experts" have broken that ground for teachers by telling them what to plant, how to tend and harvest. Readers will recognize here Britton's idea of the quiet kind of revolution that is seeded in conversations among a few teachers but whose vision then grows over time.

In just two hours of conversation, Britton and Martin sought to capture historic moments and to distill enduring concepts that others might then integrate into their own teaching. Reading the transcripts again has led me to return to their writings to expand interview material and for the pleasure and enlightenment that comes from rereading what has enduring value. In these times when policymaking is driven by the mantra of change and by a stock market–style pursuit of higher test scores, such reading reminds me

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

to heed what they have taught about the power of language to transform students' lives.

If teachers were free to follow Britton's and Martin's advice to observe the varied uses of their students' language and to provide instruction to exploit that diversity, then students would be better served than by requiring teachers to read reams of policy, standards, and curricular statements that increasingly regulate their work. Britton's closing tongue-in-cheek comment speaks pointedly to the importance of plain English and grounded teaching: "I want to de-pedagogicalize teaching pedagogy. I want schools to be more like life." Seventeen years later, the field is even further away from achieving a philosophy that empowers teachers to create seamless connections between language, learners, and schools and that, in turn, will promote the kind of teacher professionalism that Britton and Martin envisioned.

Author's Note

This article is dedicated to Robert J. Connors, who urged us to listen to those who have redefined the recent history of composition. I would like also to express my gratitude to Thomas Newkirk, who encouraged me to write an article based on the archival material and then thoughtfully responded to each draft. Many thanks to the *English Education* reviewers and Michael Moore, who generously read earlier versions of this essay and suggested most helpful revisions. A special thank you to Tony Burgess, Bob Bibby, and Lynne Alvine for their memories of working with Britton and Martin and to Carol Kelley for her help with final edits.

Notes

1. After Robert J. Connors' tragic death in June 2000, the taped interviews disappeared for two years and were feared lost. Fortunately, they surfaced from among Bob's papers. Thomas Newkirk took the initiative to continue the work of his colleague and friend by arranging for the interviews to be transcribed and bound for the use of researchers interested in "figures who had helped to form the field of composition." Those interested in accessing the archive can do so in the UNH Dimond library in Durham; its title is "Portrait of Field: Interviews with Leaders in Composition Studies (1992)."

2. *Prospect and Retrospect: Selected Essays of James Britton* (1982) edited by Gordon Pradl will be a good starting place for *English Education* readers who want to sample some of Britton's best writing. Many readers will be familiar with seminal works that he authored or coauthored such as *Language and Learning* (1970), *The Development of Writing Abilities 11–18* (1975), and *Language, the Learner and the School* (1969).

References

Alsup, J., et al. (2006). The state of English education and a vision for its future: A call to arms. *English Education, 38*, 279–295.

Alvine, L. (2003). In memoriam: Nancy Martin. *English Journal, 93*(2), 10–11.

Barnes, D., Britton, J., & Torbe, M. (1990). *Language, the learner and the school* (4th ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook. (Original work published 1969.)

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

Blau, S. (1986). Review of *Prospect and retrospect: Selected essays of James Britton* by Gordon M. Pradl. *College Composition and Communication, 37*(3). Retrieved December 7, 2007, from http://www.jstor.org.

Britton, J. (1970). *Language and learning* (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Britton, J. (1982). *Prospect and retrospect: Selected essays of James Britton* (G. Pradl, Ed.). Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook.

Britton, J. (1987). A quiet form of research. In D. Goswami and P. Stillman (Eds.), *Reclaiming the classroom: Teacher research as an agency for change* (pp. 13–19). Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook.

Britton, J. (1992, Oct.). "There is one story worth telling." Keynote address. Presented at UNH conference on composition in Durham, New Hampshire.

Britton, J., Burgess, T., Martin, N., McLeod, A., & Rosen, H. (1975). *The development of writing abilities 11–18.* Schools Council Research Studies. London: Macmillan Education.

Bullock Report. (1975). *A language for life.* London: HMSO.

Burgess, T. Britton, James Nimmo (1908–1994). In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004–2007). Retrieved October 1, 2007, from http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/printable/54768.

Burgess, T. (2008, July 7). Nancy Martin. *The Guardian.* Retrieved March 31, 2008, from http://www.guardian.co.uk/obituaries/story/0,3604,992782,00.html.

Burns, L. (2007). On being unreasonable: NCTE, CEE, and political action. *English Education, 39*, 120–145.

Dixon, J. (1967). *Growth through English.* Reading, England: National Association for the Teaching of English.

Department for Education and Employment and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. (1999). *English: The national curriculum for England.* London: The Stationary Office.

Fleischer, C. (2000). *Teachers organizing for change: Making literacy learning everybody's business.* Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Graves, R. (1988). To Juan at the winter solstice. In *Collected poems.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Halliday, M.A K. (1973). *Explorations in the functions of language.* New York: Elsevier.

Herrington, A., & Moran, C. (2006). Writing across the curriculum: The power of an idea. WAC Keynote Address. Retrieved June 6, 2008, from http://wac.colostate.edu/proceedings/wac2006/keynote.cfm.

Kelly, G. (1963). *A theory of personality: The psychology of personal constructs.* New York: Norton.

Langer, S. (1979). *Philosophical sketches.* Manchester, UK: Ayer.

Lofty, J. (2006). *Quiet wisdom: Teachers in the United States and England talk about standards, practice and professionalism.* London: Peter Lang.

Martin, N. (1983). *Mostly about writing: Selected essays by Nancy Martin.* Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook.

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

Martin, N. (1988). Introduction. In M. Lightfoot & N. Martin (Eds.), *The word for teaching is learning: Essays for James Britton* (pp. ix–xvii). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Martin, N., D'Arcy, P., Newton, B., & Parker, R. (1976). *Writing and learning across the curriculum 11–16*. Schools Council Writing across the Curriculum Project, Univ. of London Institute of Education. Ward Lock Educational for The Schools Council.

Mittins, B. (1988). Jimmy Britton and NATE. In M. Lightfoot & N. Martin (Eds.), *The word for teaching is learning: Essays for James Britton* (pp. 262–263). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Mayher, J. S., Lester, N., & Pradl, G. M. (1983). *Learning to write/writing to learn.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Muller, H. J. (1967). *The uses of English*. New York: Holt.

Polanyi, M. (1996). *Knowing and being*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pradl, G. (Ed.). (1982). *Prospect and retrospect: Selected essays of James Britton.* Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook.

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. (1998). *The grammar papers: Perspectives in the teaching of grammar in the national curriculum*. London: QCA.

Sublette, J. (1973). The Dartmouth Conference: Its reports and results. *College English, 35*(3), 348–357.

John S. Lofty, a former classroom teacher from England, is a professor of English at the University of New Hampshire, Durham.

This content downloaded from 131.156.224.67 on Thu, 22 Sep 2016 19:23:27 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms