Autobiography, talk and the power of the personal in the teaching of English

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Three examples of using talk and autobiography in English language teaching

Activity, Example One: school teaching Inner London

The Day I got into Trouble… Cascade autobiographical storytelling (Coultas, 2007)
James Britton: Literature in schools and universities

‘Literature in schools and universities was not something students DO, but always something that other people HAVE DONE’ (1982:49)
James Britton: reader response and personal response

‘It is impossible to separate response to literature sharply from response to other stories, films or television plays, or from children’s own personal written and spoken narratives.’ (1982:49/50)
James Britton’s continuum of language development
Key strategies for intercultural learning and personal/reader response, Mechelen, Belgium 2017

**Stimulus/framing**
- Picture/moving image
- Key moment/key character
- Key themes

**During reading**
- Reader’s theatre
- Literature circles
- Video diaries
- Cloze/sequencing
- New scene/new character
- Genre transformation
- Drama/role on the wall/teacher in role


**After Reading**

**Questions:** Tell me if this story reminds you of anything? Tell me if anything puzzled you?

**Tasks:**
- Retelling in pairs or groups
- Letter to the author
- Dramatising a key moment
- Casting characters for a film
- A film trailer of the story
- Finding a piece of music, a picture, a poem that could link to the story
- Collaborative talk and writing tasks
- Blog/email conversation between the characters

**(Coultas, 2007 Constructive Talk in Challenging Classrooms)**
James Britton: talk, language and personal expression

‘Reading and writing and talking go hand in hand’ (1982:38)

‘all that children write……takes place upon a sea of talk’ (1970: 29)

‘the roots of it all remain the expressive’ (1982:110)
Secondary
National Strategy
for school improvement

TALKING TO LEARN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

POSITIVE

0 10 20 30 40 50

A: CANTONESE
B: MANDARIN
C: ENGLISH.

NEGATIVE

Literacy and Learning network meeting November 2005
Example two

MA ELT/ITE
Talk and language autobiographies
Evaluation

- Personal expressive mode of LA allowed students to understand role of talk in learning in a much deeper way than simply reading research
- Humour and confessional aspects were modelled by lecturers and this framed the talk and writing
- The process of writing the LAs bonded the group together as they shared their high and low points of language learning

Coultras, V and Booth P, (2017b) *Exploratory talk and task based learning: a case study of a student’s learning journey on an MA (Education) English Language Teaching course* Draft for publication
Example 3: talking and reading around the world/
NATE M/C Committee SOW

English Department: Autobiography and Wider Reading
scheme of work (SOW)

Aims:

- to engage in autobiographical story telling
- to promote wider reading and reading for pleasure
- to present a comparison of one text with another in speech
  and in writing
- to produce an autobiographical narrative of high quality
- to practice and develop awareness of language change while
  moving from reading text to presenting orally and
  subsequently reshaping as writing moving along the language
  mode continuum  (See Collaborative Learning website)
We are surrounded by stories..

‘... a man [sic] is always a teller of tales, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through them; and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it’.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1965) *Nausea*
Stories, autobiography, book talk and intercultural learning

- We learn through narrative (Bruner, Britton, Sartre)
- Our common humanity is reflected in common themes in narratives
- The expressive and personal modes of language are often the most accessible (and other modes such as transactional and poetic draw on the personal, expressive mode)
- Great literature and stories are based on personal truths and inspire intercultural learning
- Autobiographical talk and writing allow students to create stories and literature of their own thereby enriching the imagination and sharing cultural experiences (Coultas, 2017a)
Stories, book talk and intercultural learning: Mechelen 2017

- International training week
- Five European schools of education/lecturers and students
- Workshops
- Directed task in schools

- Evaluation of intercultural teaching and learning: how to develop this? Refugees and language of resilience?
James Britton and the ‘enlightened view’ of English teaching

‘the enlightened view..has roots back to Dewey and beyond and it is deep rooted in the intuitions of the most successful teachers over a much longer period than that’ (1982:199)
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