

# 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

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

*(Stories, book talk and intercultural learning project/Comenius Association/NATE Multicultural Diversity Cmtee. Collaborative Learning website)*

## 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

*(Coults, 2007 Constructive Talk in Challenging Classrooms)*

# James Britton: talk, language and personal expression

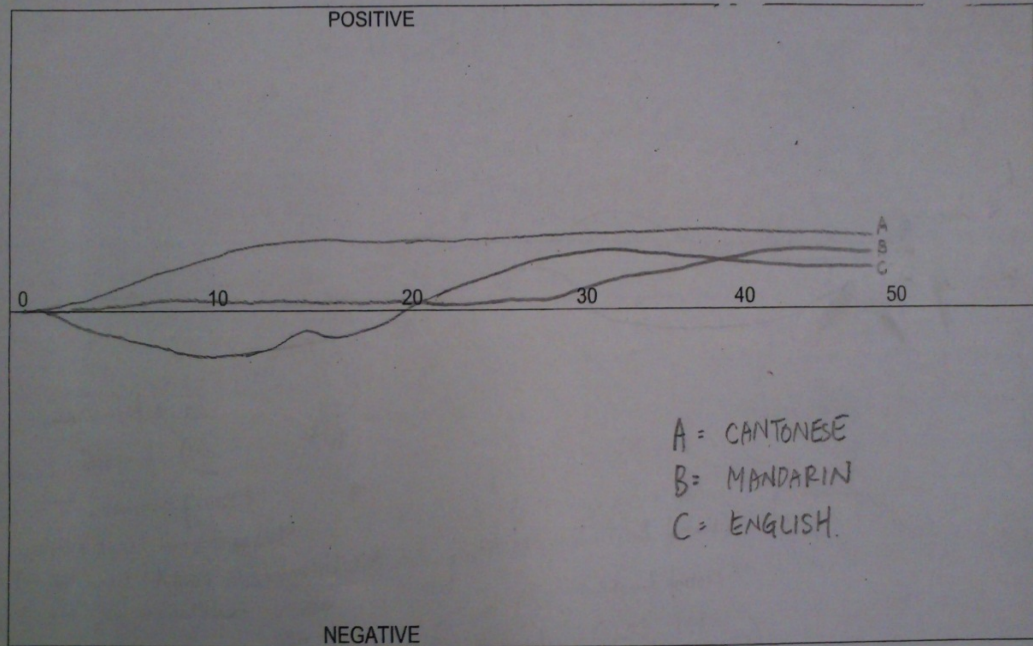
‘Reading and writing and talking go hand in hand’ (1982:38)

‘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





# 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

Coultas, 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 (Coultras, 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)

# Bibliography

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Sartre, J-P (1965) *Nausea*