From the writings of

of

James Britton

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1. Language and Representation

Events take place and are gone: it is the representation that lasts and accumulates and undergoes successive modification. It is from the representation we make that we gain a sense of a continuing existence in a world that has a past and a future, a world that remains in existence whether we are there to prove it or not. Cassirer calls the world of space and time a human world. 'Only symbolic expression', he says, 'can yield the possibility of prospect and retrospect, because it is only by symbols that distinctions are not merely *made,* but *fixed* in consciousness.' (Cassirer, 1946, p. 38)

What is fixed in consciousness is there to go back to: a prediction, an expectation, is formulated by reference back. Our representation of past experience constitutes a frame of reference by means of which we recognize familiar aspects of the present (the face of a friend in the crowd or the strange face recognizably a child's or an old man's or Chinese). Moreover what remains in consciousness is there to go back to and *modify* in the light of the fresh encounter: it is a continuing sense of the world that is continually brought up to date.

We can discuss representation no further without making specific reference to language. Language is one way of representing experience, but it is, as we shall find when we examine the matter more fully, a key way. It is for most of us the means by which all ways of representing combine to work efficiently together.

The modification, the ‘bringing up to date’, of our representations of experience is something that we habitually accomplish by means of talk. We have spoken so far as though the ‘successive reconstruing’, the modification of our representation, took place only as our expectations were put to the test in moment-by-moment encounters with the actual. But we habitually use talk to go back over events and interpret them, make sense of them in a way that we were unable to while they were taking place. This is to work upon our representation of the particular experience and our world representation in order to incorporate the one into the other more fully. We may of course achieve a similar end without talking: we may simply meditate in silence upon past events. In doing so we should, in my view, be using processes which we had acquired as a direct result of our past uses of language.

We habitually use talk also as a means of modifying each other’s representations of experience. Martin Buber, the Jewish philosopher, came to London many years ago and gave a series of lectures that I have never forgotten. One of the things he said was, ‘Experience comes to man “as I” but it is by experience “as we’’ that he builds the common world in which he lives.’ We each build our own representation of the world, but we greatly affect each other’s representation, so that much of what we build is built in common.

Language and Learning (1970), pp.18-19

2. Retrospect and prospect

It is the process of representation that makes a man's view of the world (if we interpret behaviour aright) so vastly different from that of the other animals who live in it with him. Indeed, to speak of an animal's 'view of the world' at all is probably misleading whereas man's every response to the environment is likely to be mediated by <u>his</u> total view of the world as he knows it. By symbolizing, by representing to himself the world as he experiences it, man creates, if Cassirer is right, a retrospect which by projection gives him also a prospect (Cassirer, 1946, p.38). In the human world, the here-and-now is set in a rich context, a world constructed of experiences derived from elsewhere and other times. In such a world, what goes away may be expected to come back, 'out of sight' does not mean 'out of mind', change need not be kaleidoscopic, and very little that happens to us will be wholly unforeseen.

I have laboured the point because I want to suggest that it is typically human to be insistently preoccupied with this world representation, this retrospect and prospect a man constructs for himself. It is of immense importance to him, I believe. It is his true theatre of operations since all he does is done in the light of it; his hopes for the future depend upon its efficacy; and above all his sense of who he is and what it is worth for him to be alive in the world derive from it. We might even say that he is more preoccupied with it than he is with the moment by moment interaction with environment that constitutes his immediate experience. A man's consciousness, in fact, is like the little dog with the

brass band: it is forever running ahead, or dropping back, or trotting alongside, while the procession of actual events moves.

What's the Use? *Educational Review* (1971), 23 (3), 205-19

3. Shared social behaviour as the source of learning

If speech in childhood lays the foundations for a life-time of thinking, how can we continue to value a silent classroom? And if shared social behaviour (of many kinds, verbal and non-verbal) is seen as the source of learning, we must revise the traditional view of the teacher's role. The teacher can no longer act as the 'middle-man' in all learning – as it becomes clear that education is an effect of community.

Vygotsky's Contribution to Pedagogical Theory, 1987

4. Using language to make sense of the world

Putting this at its simplest, what children use language for in school must be 'operations' and not 'dummy runs'. They must continue to use it to make sense of the world: they must *practise* language in the sense in which a doctor 'practises' medicine and a lawyer 'practises' law, and *not* in the sense in which a juggler 'practises' a new trick before he performs it. This way of working does not make difficult things easy: what it does is make them worth the struggle.

Language and Learning, p. 130

5. Total acceptance of the language that children bring with them

Given such a situation, the first thing I would say is that we must begin from where the children are: in other words there can be no alternative in the initial stages to total acceptance of the language the children bring with them. We cannot afford to 'make a fresh start'. From there I would go on to develop an awareness of difference among forms of speech: at a fairly explicit level this might lead to the recognition of interesting differences in the way different people speak and the way they speak for different purposes. Much less explicitly, it will enter into dramatic improvisation - the need for a king to talk like a king and his wise men, perhaps, to talk like a book. An acceptance of differences seems to me more important throughout the whole junior school age-range than any sense that approval narrows down upon one form, the socially acceptable. And from awareness of differences can grow, without anything of the sort necessarily being formulated, the habit of adapting speech to suit different purposes and occasions.

Language and Learning, p. 134

6. Learning to read

'Read it as though it made sense' is advice that we can hardly introduce too early in the process of learning to read. At the same time, what is available for children to read must be stuff that makes sense, and can make sense to them: easy enough to say, but behind it lies a whole vexed question – the question of 'graded readers' versus 'real books'. Graded readers, as a species, are notorious for providing a kind of language that is found nowhere else - language that does not make sense as language. At the heart of the problem lie divergent views about 'vocabulary'. A reading scheme that concentrates upon phonic generalisation in learning to read will tend to stress a 'sight vocabulary' in comparative isolation from a 'speech vocabulary'. This leads to severe restriction of the items used, both in order to ensure rote learning by repetition and in order to ring the changes upon a limited number of written symbols. Where, on the other hand, the effort is made to provide a written version of *what a child says* for him to read (either when the teacher writes it or the child composes it in the way we have seen), these severe restrictions on vocabulary cannot be imposed, and are no longer necessary since the child's whole speech vocabulary is being treated as potential sight vocabulary. But the whole notion of 'vocabulary' as a reservoir at the child's disposal is somewhat misleading to my way of thinking. It cannot be denied, of course, that a text containing more than a certain proportion of words unfamiliar to the reader is one that he cannot make sense of. Nevertheless, when the proportion is not disabling, to succeed in making sense of a text

containing unfamiliar words is the normal way of enlarging one's linguistic resources.

Language and Learning, p. 162

7. Cognitive and affective

On page 325 of his 326-page volume *Studies in Cognitive Growth,* Bruner makes reference to a recent work on the influence of emotional factors upon cognitive organization, and then admits that we may be in danger of overlooking man's emotional needs. The real danger, it seems to me, lies in imposing a disjunction between thought and feeling, between cognitive and affective modes of representation. Psychologists in general have traditionally concentrated upon cognitive organization and tended to regard emotion as itself disorganized and possessing a disorganizing influence. We need to recognize the value and importance both of the discursive logical organization and at the same time that of the undissociated intuitive processes, the organization represented in its highest form in works of art.

Language and Learning, p. 217

8. Beyond language

Any response we make to what confronts us will be a fuller and subtler response than anything we could put into words: that is to say, relying as we do upon what language has done for us, we are able, in any living situation, to achieve more than we could achieve by the sole agency of language. By the use of our senses; by taking up cues derived from past experience of our own bodily movements in space; by reading signs in other people's behaviour that we may not be in the least aware of (responding for example to the meaning of a gesture without ever having consciously attributed that meaning to that gesture, and without having consciously recorded that such a gesture has been made on this occasion); by reading off the dials of our own feelings - fear, anxiety, love, hate- without being aware that we have done so - by these means we shall be influenced in our behaviour in this situation.

By going back and analysing a situation we may be able for the first time to formulate, to make explicit, some of these processes. We may, for example, realize that we made a particular remark out of a growing uneasiness. But such an analysis always seems, in the attempt, to reach a frontier that cannot be crossed: the processes grow more difficult to 'pin down', until we give in to a sense that the rest must remain unexplained.

Language and Learning, pp. 276-7

9. Language and learning

In order to accept what is offered when we are told something, we have to have somewhere to put it; and having somewhere to put it means that the framework of past knowledge and experience into which it must fit is adequate as a means of interpreting and apprehending it. Something approximating to 'finding out for ourselves' needs therefore to take place if we are to be successfully told. The development of this individual context for a new piece of information, the forging of the links that give it meaning, is a task that we customarily tackle by talking to people.

A Language for Life: The Bullock Report (1975), 4.9

10. Talk and make-believe

A closer look at adult/child interaction will make quite clear how important is the role played by exchange of talk. Here is a brief interaction between Laurie, my grandchild, at thee years eight months, and myself. She is paying a visit to our home and we are in the garden, talking. About a thrushes' nest, now empty.

Laurie: Where's the birds' nest?
Me: It's still there, Darling, but . . . they're not ...
L: Are the birds coming?
M: No, they're not coming, darling because ...
L: Why?
M: Because they've left the nest.
L: When will they be little babies?
M: They were little babies – they're not now – they're big birds now.
L: When were they little babies?
M: Oh, about six months ago.
L: 's a long while ago.
M: Yes.
L: And I was BIG!
M: Were you?
L: Yes – big.
M: How big were you?
L: Not like Mummy and Daddy.
M: Mm?
L: Not like Mummy and Daddy ... (a distraction) Fluff!
M: That's fluff from the tree-that's seeds that fall down from that tree. Do you see where it's coming down? ... Do you see that coming down? That's where all that comes from.
L: How are they coming down here?

M: Well ... that's ... see, lots of it – some more there – everywhere there's fluff – come down from that tree – that's called a ... an aspen.
L: Why is no more birds going in there - in the nest?
M: Eh, I don't know, love - I think -they've gone somewhere else, perhaps.
L: Why are they leaving all the nest there?
M: Well, praps they'll come back to it next year when the birds have another family – praps they'll come back.
L: Why?
M: Well, they built it there, didn't they?
(Other members of the family arrive on the scene and the conversation is over.)

It will certainly not be true of all children everywhere, but with a great many of the children I have known, or learned of from records, by far the greater number of exploratory, interactive meaning-making occasions have been in the context of make-believe rather than in daily real-life activities. In cooperative make-believe the child is likely to be the one who calls up the scene and directs the action; and in doing so, Vygotsky points out, "the child learns to act in a cognitive, rather than an externally visual realm, by relying on internal tendencies and motives and not on incentives supplied by external things" (1978, p. 96). In this way the number and variety of activated concerns is vastly increased, but – even more significant – these concerns are inherently representative of the child's state of experience. There is no shortage of recordings to illustrate this aspect of interaction: here Laurie and I take part in a game of shops earlier on the same day as the garden encounter recorded above. In one form or another, playing shops had become a

favourite make-believe scenario with the three-and-a-half-year-old:

(A shop space is marked out by a tea trolley (a pretend cooking stove) and a gate-legged table)

Laurie: Switch. I turn 'em all on – they're cooking – switch – What cake do you like?

Me: Have you got chocolate cake? I like chocolate cake.

L: Yes ... Why does this fall over? It's ... Why does this tip over this one doesn't tip over – it's got wheels! Why? (The coffee table versus the tea-trolley) Look there. Are you coming? There! I turn the cakes off: they're READY!

M: Oh, good – are they cooked?

L: I'm going to pass these – I'm walking did you see – Come here! Come in my shop and I'll give you one. What kind?

M: I'd like chocolate cake please.

L: O.K. How much money?

M: Two shillings – twenty pence – twenty pence.

L: Here 'tis then.

M: Do I give it to you, then? 0.K. There's twenty pence for the cake ... What's that cake?

L: A shallow cake?

M: Yes.

L: A brown one or a yellow one or a pink one.

M: Chocolate-a brown one. Do you say these are shallow cakes – do you call them? What are these then?

L: Those are chocolate cakes with banana.

M: Oh, that sounds lovely. How much are they?

L: Fifty pence.

M: How much?

L: These will be ...

M: Fifteen pence?

L: Thank you.

M: Thank you ... Lovely. What kind of cakes are those?

L: China cakes.
M: Chung cakes..? What's the word,
L: Chi-i-i-ina cakes.
M: China cakes – oh – I'll have one of those.
L: (*abashed*) Well – there are only these many. Please can you go to another shop?
M: Oh – yea – OK. OK.
L: Ask Alison for one.
M: Bye-bye, thank you.
L: Bye!

Literature in its place (1993), pp. 2-5

11. Grammatical forms and literary experience

It was early evening on a September day: I had fallen asleep on the sofa and when I woke I had, momentarily, some glimpse from a fading dream-or perhaps some image germane to the half-waking state. I wrote a line which seemed a way of approaching what I wanted to say - *Opening my eyes on the half-light of an autumn evening* – and I needed to find a way of suggesting that the world I awoke to seemed one which I could appropriately share with the recent dead – the family and companions whom I had outlived. The logic – if logic could be found – lay in the idea that the difference between us was one of timescale rather than total severance – and the evidence for that lay in the extent to which aspects of what had survived them as legacy made up a great part of my environment.

I struggled with the second line that should approach that idea: one attempt began *Here were* … – but as I worked on that construction (which above all involved *listening to it* – "word speaking to word") I became aware that it already carried *somebody else's meaning;* that is to say, it was another of those powerful remembered cadences that I have discussed on previous occasions. I tried to fill out that recalled fragment: I surmised that what followed the words *Here were* in the original were words that described features of some landscape long familiar to the writer – but that the recollection would be short-lived, some other image supervening. By now I had Dylan Thomas clearly in mind – thence to *Poem in October* – and recall of that line

that made the break: *But the weather turned around.* So I went to the source and found what I wanted:

> A springful of larks in a rolling
> Cloud and the roadside bushes brimming with whistling
> Blackbirds and the sun of October
> Summery
> On the hill's shoulder,
> Here were fond climates and sweet singers suddenly
> Come in the morning where I wandered and listened
> To the rain wringing
> Wind blow cold
> In the wood faraway under me.

– and then – at the end of the following stanza –

> There could I marvel
> My birthday
> Away but the weather turned around.

Had the recollected fragment been such words as *A springful of larks* I should probably have known the source at once. What is interesting is that so semantically neutral a phrase – so simply structural a signal – as *here were* should have that evocative power. I wondered whether it was the tautness of the whole construction – *Here were such and such suddenly come* – that made it memorable. But as I realized this I remembered some of the other fragments that had shown the same characteristics- the same memorableness: *but not this* from Auden's poem *Taller today we remember similar evenings;* from Wallace Stevens' poem *The Idea of Order at Key West,* the skeletal fragment *and I knew that we should … ? ... often. for … ? …* ; and a

similar algebraic formula from Auden's *Age of Anxiety, Whether by A or by B, in X or in Y (English Education*, 19(2)*,* 1987, pp.83-4). What I must conclude is that the structural framework – the grammatical forms that enter such expressions – are a more powerful part of the total literary experience than we usually reckon.

Literature in its place, pp. 10-11

12. An interaction between the work and the reader

To have children take over from their teachers an analysis of a work of literature which their teachers in turn have taken over from the critics or their English professors – this is not a short cut to literary sophistication; it is a short circuit that destroys the whole system. A response to a work of literature is, after all, an interaction between the work and the reader – not a free interaction, of course, but even the most disciplined responses of two different persons must reflect something of their individual differences. Further, while Shakespeare may continue supreme and Samuel Rogers forgotten, some very general differences of opinion must be expected even among the initiated: there will probably always be respected critics who judge *Silas Marner* to be a bad novel and other critics, equally respected, who regard it highly.

Perhaps the meaning of a work of literature may be compared (as most other things have been) to the ripples that move out from a stone thrown into water; what happens to them depends to some extent upon the configuration of the pond. To me, Blake's poem 'Never Seek to Tell Thy Love' has some relevance to the arguments I put forward earlier concerning the difference between a critical statement and a response; I do not expect the poem to suggest that to another reader, unless perhaps his interest in language resembles my own.

How then do we encourage the improved response, the developed sense of form?

A girl of eight was asked what sort of things she liked reading. 'Well,' she said, 'there's *Treasure Island* – that's a bloody one for when I'm feeling boyish. And there's *Little Men* – a sort of half-way one.' 'Don't you ever feel girlish?' she was asked. 'Yes, when I'm tired. Then I read *The Smallest Dormouse.'*

We must expect, and encourage, reading to go on for various purposes at various levels and not concern ourselves solely with performance at maximum effort. 'Reading for enjoyment' (to pick up an ancient controversy) will certainly be an apt description of the lower levels of effort but is probably misleading when applied to the most demanding kind of reading. Satisfaction, however, the appropriate satisfaction we have repeatedly referred to, must be there in the end, and no examination or other external incentive can take its place; reading without satisfaction is like the desperate attempts we make to keep a car going when it has run out of petrol.

Prospect and Retrospect (1982), chapter 4, pp. 34-5

13. Reading in men’s ways and women’s ways

It seems to me that what above all else is required in education is that girls and boys, men and women, who have learned to read in men’s ways, should learn to read in women’s ways – open to the same demands of caring and connecting, of playing the believing game as they approach possible new sources of imagined or recorded experience. McCracken concludes her chapter by saying: “Only as we add literature written from multiple perspectives and teach ourselves and our students to read as both men and women will we start to reap the individual and cultural benefits long attributed to the reading of literature”.

I envisage a mode of reading that promotes “care, concern, and connection” – one that could become a central mode of response to spectator-role offerings throughout the range from fairy stories to Shakespeare and the whole academically accepted literature, including the kind of children’s offerings that form stepping stones on the high road of their imaginative satisfactions – a highroad that stretches the length of a lifetime.

Literature in its place, pp. 88-89

14. Play

I want to see play, then, as an area of free activity lying between the world of shared and verifiable experience and the world of inner necessity – a 'third area' as Donald Winnicott has called it. The essential purpose of activity in this area for the individual will be to relate for himself inner necessity with the demands of the external world. The more the images that clothe inner instinctual needs enter into the play activity, directly or indirectly, and the more they engage and relate to images from the world of shared experience, the more effectively, it seems to me, is the activity achieving its assimilative function. In the range of activities that come into the category of play as we have defined it, some will take up more of the demands of the inner world and are likely for that reason to include features that are inconsistent with our everyday notions of reality. It is activities towards that end of the scale that we shall most readily, and rightly, call 'fantasy', whether they are children's own creations or the stories they read.

Prospect and Retrospect, chapter 5, p. 43

15. Literature and the role of the spectator

The theory I want to pursue is one that I first put forward many years ago (Britton, 1963), in what seems to me now a crude form. My purpose then was to find common ground between much of the writing children do in school and the literature they read. I was concerned that, unlike the arts of painting and music, literature, as far as schools and universities were concerned, was not something that students DO, but always something that other people HAVE DONE. To bridge this gap, I looked for what seemed to be the informal spoken counterparts of written literature – not the anecdote as such, I decided (Langer's tale of the two Scotsmen) – but the kind of gossip about events that most of us take part in daily. To quote from that account, "The distinction that matters ... is not whether the events recounted are true or fictional, but whether we recount them (or listen to them) as spectators or participants: and whenever we play the role of spectator of human affairs I suggest we are in the position of literature [Britton, 1963, p. 37]." The roles of spectator and participant were differentiated in this way:

> When we talk about our own affairs, clearly we can do so either as participant or as spectator. If I describe what has happened to me in order to get my hearer to do something for me, or even to change his opinion about me, then I remain a participant in my own affairs and invite him to become one. If, on the other hand, I merely want to interest him, so that he savours with me the joys and sorrows and surprises of my past experiences and appreciates with me the intricate patterns of events,

> then not only do I invite him to be a spectator, but I am myself a spectator of my own experience. … I don’t think it is far-fetched to think of myself talking not about my own past, but about my future, and, again, doing so in either of the two roles. As participant I should be planning, and asking my listener to participate by helping or advising or just ‘giving me the necessary permission’. As spectator I should be day-dreaming, and inviting my listener to share in that kind of pleasure [Britton, 1963, p. 39].

To complete the account I then made reference to taking up the role of spectator of imagined experiences in fantasy or fiction.

Three years later I prepared an advance paper for discussion at the Anglo-American Seminar at Dartmouth, a paper on “Response to Literature” (Britton, 1968), and as a brief postscript to that document, I referred to the “unorthodox view of literature” that characterized it as a written form of language in the role of spectator and so related it to the spoken form, gossip about events. The paper was discussed by a study group under the chairmanship of the British psychologist, D. W. Harding. It was not until the first meeting of the study group was over that he asked me whether I knew his own papers putting forward a similar view; and that evening, in Dartmouth College Library, I read for the first time “The Role of the Onlooker” (Harding, 1937) and “Psychological Processes in the Reading of Fiction” (Harding, 1962). There I found a fully and carefully argued case for distinguishing the role of an onlooker from that of a participant in events and for relating gossip to literature as

activities in the former role.

The final report of that study group was prepared by Harding and included this comment:

> Though central attention should be given to literature in the ordinary sense, it is impossible to separate response to literature sharply from response to other stories, films, or television plays, or from children's own personal writing or spoken narrative. In all of these the student contemplates represented events in the role of a spectator, not for the sake of active intervention. But since his response includes in some degree accepting or rejecting the values and emotional attitudes which the narration implicitly offers, it will influence, perhaps greatly influence, his future appraisals of behavior and feeling [Harding, 1968, p. 11].

Prospect and Retrospect, chapter 6, pp. 49-50

16. Outline for a case study

My records on the development of Clare, the 4-year-old whose pretend writing I have referred to, may illustrate some of the points Vygotsky has made in his account of "the developmental history of written language."

(1) Her conversational speech was quite well developed by the time she was 2 years old. Much of her talk was playful (seeing me at the washbasin, *What have you got off, Daddy?* – at 2:3) and she used made-up forms freely (*I'm spoonfuling it in, I'm see-if-ing it will go through, smuttered in your eyes* – for uncombed hair – all at 2:7). Her curiosity about language was in evidence early (*When it's one girl you say "girl" and when it's two three four girls you say "girl* ***s****." Why when it's two three four childs you say "child* ***ren****"?* – at 2:10; *"Fairy girl with curly hair," that makes a rhyme, doesn't it?*-at 2:11; on hearing something described as 'delicious,' *Is delicious nicer than lovely?* – at 3:1).

(2) Extended make-believe play, involving her toy animals in family roles, was established by the time she was 3. Storytelling developed from it, the animals becoming the audience. The toy animals (she was given dolls from time to time but they were never adopted into the family) seem to have sustained a key role. They were the dramatis personae of her make-believe play, the subject of the stories she told, of her drawings, and later of the stories she wrote. Vygotsky's point that in make-believe play the plaything is free to take on a meaning that does not rely on perceptual resemblance is amusingly illustrated by the fact that when Clare enacted a queen's wedding, the least suitable of the

animals – a scraggy, loose-knit dog – was chosen for the role of queen!

(3) Her earliest recognizable drawings came just before she was 2 and though they are clearly attempts at human figures, the talk that always accompanied the drawing was often in anthropomorphic terms (*the mummy bird, the daddy bird*). A picture drawn in colored chalks at 3:5 shows a large figure of a girl on the left-hand side and a house on the right. Her commentary as she drew explained: *The girl is carrying a yellow handbag and she has a brown furry dog on a lead. Her feet are walking along. … I have put a car outside the house. I am putting blue sky, now I am putting in the sunshine.* (Here the diagonal blue strokes that had indicated the sky were interspersed with yellow ones.) *She's got a tricycle with blue wheels and a chain. Mrs. Jones across the road has yellow and brown on her windows. I shall put yellow and red on mine.*

It is an important part of Vygotsky's thesis that a young child's drawing is "graphic speech," dependent on verbal speech: The child from what he presently observes; and that what he knows has been processed in speech and is further processed in the speech that accompanies the drawing. The space in Clare's picture is well filled, but not in terms of topographical representation: The girl and the house are upright; the car is drawn vertically standing on its head; the dog vertically sitting on its tail; and the tricycle has its frame, wheels and chain spread out, looking more like an assembly kit.

(4) What circumstances could be supposed to facilitate the

process that Vygotsky calls the move from drawing objects to drawing speech? Imitating the general pattern of writing behaviour, Clare at the age of 3:6 produced parallel horizontal lines of cursive scribble, saying that she was *doing grownup's kind of writing.* At 3:11 she produced the little story book I have described with similar lines of scribble but interspersed with words she could actually write *(mummy, and, the)* and with a drawing on the cover. The stories she wrote from 5:6 on ward were in cursive script with headings in capitals. She was by this time reading a good deal, mainly the little animal stories by Beatrix Potter and Alison Uttley.

Turning from the general pattern to the detail, Clare at the age of 3 played very often with a set of inch-high letters made of plastic in various colours. Among more random, playful uses, she learned to make her name in these letters and she was interested in what each letter was called. (One effect of this play was evident: When first she at tempted to write words, an "E," for example, was an "E" for her whether it faced right or left or up or down.) One of her activities represented a link between letter recognition and writing behaviour in general: At 3:5, in imitation of picture alphabets she knew, she was drawing a series of objects and writing the initial letter of each beside the drawing. Most of them she knew, but she came to one she did not: "rhubarb." When I told her, she said*, R-that's easy-just a girl's head and two up-and-downs!*

(5) The final stage in Vygotsky's "developmental history" is that by which the written language ceases to be second-order symbolism, mediated by speech, and becomes first-

order symbolism. I can offer no evidence of this from the records of Clare, and indeed I seriously doubt whether that transition is ever entirely appropriate to the written language we have been concerned with, that of stories.

(6) I think the most important conclusion to be drawn from the case of Clare and other children who have taught themselves to write by writing stories is a point that is central to Vygotsky's argument, that of the effect of *intention* on a child's performance. It would appear that the spoken language effectively meets young children's needs in general, and we must surmise that it is that it is only as they come to value the written language as a vehicle for stories that they are likely to form an intention to write. Much of Clare's behavior indicated that she had done so. Slobin and Welsh (1973) have effectively demonstrated that mastery of the spoken language cannot be adequately assessed without account of ''the intention to say so and so'' – a lesson that as teachers or researchers we have been slow to learn.

Prospect and Retrospect, chapter 6, pp. 59-61

17. The Speaker

It is during the first year of speaking that he makes the discovery that everything he sees has a name: thereafter, by dint of constant questioning, he learns a great many of these names. When he has increased his resources in this way he begins to chatter to himself as he plays, naming the objects as he handles them and saying what he is doing with them. He has, thus, two kinds of talk at his command: monologue and dialogue, talking to himself and conversational exchange. At first the two kinds are indistinguishable in form, but later they become differentiated; by the time he is about three and a half the tone of voice in which he speaks when he wants an answer is different from that of his monologue, his 'running commentary'. It is the difference in function, however, that concerns us here: the running commentary represents a first stage in a far-reaching sequence of mental developments.

Talking to himself about what he is doing helps him in two ways: first he interprets to himself the situation that confronts him, clarifying and defining it; secondly, he organizes his own activity within that situation. At this stage his monologue is in a strict sense 'a running commentary': he talks about what he *is* doing for the powerful reason that he is able to use only words about things actually present and actions actually being performed. It is a major step forward when, after about eighteen months of this here-and-now speech, he acquires the ability to use words *in place of* things, to refer to things not present and actions

not being performed.

Freed of this restriction his language becomes a much more powerful instrument for the two purposes I have mentioned. Now his interpretation of the situation is enriched by reference to past situations. Indeed the *interpretative function* of language appears in its true light as the bringing to bear of the past upon the present. Similarly, in organizing his own activity within the situation, he begins to envisage what *might* be done, potentialities not tied to the means of achievement actually present: he can speak now of what he will do rather than what he is doing. Moreover the process of putting into words the possible courses of action reinforces his ability to resist random distractions – those shin-barking obstacles to achievement – and pursue the activity he has envisaged….

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In the young child's picture of the world as it seems to him there is much that further experience will correct. A new experience may require the modification of whole areas of the structure, for gathering experience is no mere process of rolling a snowball over fresh snow. Many of the adjustments required may be achieved in the actual process of responding to the new situation, but there will be others which will be too deep-seated to be so readily achieved. If the experience is not to be rejected he needs in some way to go back over it and work upon it: and the rejection of experience means that the required adjustment is not made and the child is left with a false picture, erroneous expectations.

Fortunately, the child is already in the habit of going back over past experiences, re-enacting them, improvising upon them, for the sheer fun of it. Make-believe play is at its zenith at the stage of existence when deep-seated adjustments are most frequently demanded: how much of this play is to be explained as merely for the fun of it and how much as a means of coming to terms with past experience, it is impossible to say.

In re-enacting the experience in his own terms, as a game, freed from the obligation to respond socially that holds in real situations, the child adjusts his expectations to conform more nearly with what the actual world has manifested. Speech will normally play an important part in the game: what is said will often represent indeed the essential substance of the readjustment that has been made.

We can in fact parallel all that we have said about make-believe games in the realm of speech without re-enactment. The child in his talk will draw upon past experience, improvise from it, spinning long yarns of imaginary events around the briefest encounters, for example, with a bus conductor or a door-to-door salesman or a neighbour. All this is for the joy of it, but it is itself a process of extending (if on a somewhat 'provisional' basis) his world picture by incorporating his own view of other people's views of the world: it is at least a first step away from his exclusively individual angle of vision.

Prospect and Retrospect, chapter 7, pp. 72-77

18. Words and a World

We build in large measure a common world, a world in which we live together: yet each of us builds in his own way. My representation differs from yours not only because the world has treated us differently but also because *my way of representing* what happens to both of us will differ from yours. We are neither of us cameras. Admittedly, we construct a representation of the world we both inhabit: on your screen and mine, as on the sensitive plate in the camera, is reflected that world. But we are at the same time projecting on to the screen our own needs and desires. In this sense then, we build what is for each of us a representation of the world and at the same time is to each other a representation of a different individuality, another ‘self’. More literally, it is by knowing in what terms I think of and respond to the objects and people and events of my environment that you know what sort of a person I am.

Prospect and Retrospect, chapter 8, p. 83

19. A cumulative representation of the world

From many diverse sources has come the idea, the hypothesis, that the importance of language to mankind lies not so much in the fact that it is the means by which we co-operate and communicate with each other as in the fact that it enables each of us, as individuals and in co-operation, to represent the world to ourselves as we encounter it: and so to construct – moment by moment and year after year – a cumulative representation of 'the world as I have known it'. In infancy the representation is made in talk; as for example this four-year-old who represents to herself, at the moment of encounter, the objects and events that engage her as she plays with her toy farm- to which had recently been added some model zoo animals:

> I'm going to have a zoo-field ... now we've got more animals ... three more, so I think we'll have a zoo-field (Whispering) Well, now, let's see ... let's see how *it feels* ... Get this pin now – there, you see. Haven't got a case ... should be a zoo man as well ... Look, must get this zoo man, then we'll be all right. Really a farm man, but he can be a zoo man … Depends what their job is, doesn't it, Dad? (She goes off and fetches him.) There now, you see … What do you want … Well, if you could look after these two elephants ... I'll go and see about this ... this panda. Well, all right. He squeezed out, and he got in. Shut the gate again ... He said Hello ... He said Hello. Dad, what I want to know is if the bear sitting up and the mother can fit in the house ... Spect she can though ...

> The bear … Dad, I'm going to call the fellow Brumas, the polar bear fellow. Look, the man and the lady are talking. The man's looking after the elephant and the lady's looking after the polar bear. They're talking over the wall. … You didn't see any polar bears, did you?
>
> When a person's standing it's taller than when it's sitting ...when an animal's sitting it's taller than when it's standing. Spect it's because they've four legs. It's because of the legs … your legs go up on the ground, don't they? But really an animal's front paws is really its hands, isn't it? When he sits up (i.e., the polar bear) he's as tall as the lady ...
>
> Daddy, are we in our house, Daddy? (Yes.) Well, why shouldn't the polar bears be in *their* house?

Her chatter constitutes a verbal representation of the things she sees and the things that happen - in this case mainly the events she causes to happen. Some of the more general formulations may be important elements in her cumulative representation of the world (as for example her conception of 'home' in the final comment quoted): all may be seen as facilitations at some level of subsequent encounters. On one occasion, over a year earlier, when she turned reluctantly from her engrossment with that same toy farm she said: "Oh why am I *real* so I can't live in my little farm?'' – a representation that surely would persist and evolve through the years.

Prospect and Retrospect, chapter 9, pp. 88 - 89

20. Observing two sisters

That same four-year-old had a sister two years younger than herself. One Saturday morning, when they were respectively four and a half and two and a half, I tried, for about fifteen minutes, to keep a record of all that happened and everything they said. During the course of it the older child, Clare, sat on the sofa with coloured pencils and a drawing block and, in spite of interruptions from Alison, the younger child, she completed two pictures; one of a girl riding a pony and one of a girl diving into a pool – both of them references back to things she had seen and done on her summer holiday three months earlier. She talked to herself from time to time about what she was doing ('Want to make your tail a bit shorter – that's what you're wanting.') – but sometimes inaudibly.

Meanwhile, Alison

1. Pretended she was a goat and tried to butt Clare.

2. Tried to climb on to the sofa.

3. Came over to me and claimed my pen.

4. Saw a ruler on the table and asked what it was, wanted it.

5. Crawled under the table.

6. Came out and asked me what I was doing.

7. Climbed on to a chair by the window, looked out and made 'fizzing' noises.

8. Climbed down, saw her shoe on the floor and began to take the lace out.

9. Came over and asked me to put the shoe on her foot.

10. Saw the other shoe and did the same with that.

11. Went over to Clare and pretended to be a goat again.

12. Climbed on to the sofa and claimed the pen Clare was using.

It will be clear, I think, that Alison’s behaviour arises almost entirely in response to the various stimuli of the here and now, and is in this respect in direct contrast to Clare’s sustained activity. A principal conclusion from Luria’s experiment would be that language is the primary means by which the behaviour typical of the four and a half year old is derived from that of the two and a half year old – a gain which might crudely be called one of ‘undistractability’.

Prospect and Retrospect, chapter 9, pp. 91-92

21. Learning to write by writing

Given these conditions I want to suggest that children *learn to* write above all by writing. This is an operational view of writing in school. The world about the child waits to be written about, so we haven't the need to go hunting around for exercises or dummy runs. We have to set up a working relationship between his language and his experience, and there is plenty there to write about. An operational view implies that we have our priorities. Of course we care about spelling and punctuation, but not more than we care about what the language is doing for the child.

Reading and writing and talking go hand in hand. And development comes from the gradual internalization of the written forms so our standards, the standards we apply to their writing, must be such as to take care that we don't cut the writer out of the writing; or to put that another way, cut the writer off from his resources at the spoken level. Development comes in two main directions-towards the transactional and towards the poetic. And in either case, if we are successful, children will continue to write *as themselves* as they reach those two poles. Their explorations of the outer world demand the transactional; their explorations of the inner world demand the poetic, and the roots of it all remain in the expressive.

We don't often write anything that is merely communication. There's nearly always an element of "finding out," of exploration. So it's a very common process for us to be able to read into our own writing something

which we weren't fully aware of before we started to write. Writing can in fact be learning in the sense of discovery. But if we are to allow this to happen, we must give more credit than we often do to the process of shaping at the point of utterance and not inhibit the kind of discovery that can take place by insisting that children know exactly what they are going to say before they come to say it.

I want again to mention the importance of writing in the spectator role. Chaos is most painful in the area of values and beliefs. Therefore the harmonizing, the order-seeking effects of writing and reading on the poetic end of the spectrum are highly educational, important processes.

And then finally the teacher as listener. We must be careful not to sacrifice to our roles as error spotters and improvers and correctors that of the teacher as listener and reader. I could sum it all up very simply. What is important is that children in school should write about what matters to them to someone who matters to them.

Prospect and Retrospect, chapter 10, p. 110

22. Shaping at the point of utterance

Then what about writing? First it must be said that students of invention in writing cannot afford to rule out of court evidence regarding invention in speech: there must be some carry-over from expression in the one medium to expression in the other. Shaping at the point of utterance is familiar enough in the way young children will spin their yarns to entertain an adult who is willing to provide an audience. (A ten-minute tape-recorded performance by a five year old boy winds up: “So he had ten thousand pounds, so everyone loved him in the world. He buy-he buyed a very fast racing car, he buyed a magic wand, he buyed everything he loved, and that’s the end of my story what I told you.” A five-year-old sense of closure!) There is ample evidence that spontaneous invention of this kind survives, and may even appear to profit from, the process of dictating, where parent or teacher writes down what a child composes orally. That it is seriously inhibited by the slowing down of production when the child produces his own written script is undeniable. But it is my argument that successful writers adapt that inventiveness and continue to rely on it rather than switching to some different mode of operating. Once a writer’s words appear on the page, I believe they act primarily as a stimulus to *continuing-to* further writing, that is-and not primarily as a stimulus to re-writing. Our experiments in writing without being able to see what we had written suggested that the movements of the pen capture the movement of our thinking, and it is a serious obstacle to further composition not to be able to re-read, to

get ‘into the tramlines again’. An eight year old Newcastle schoolboy wrote about his own writing processes: ‘‘It 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.” I think many teachers might regard the outcome of such a process as mere ‘fluency’, mere verbal facility, and not the sort of writing they want to encourage. It is my argument that highly effective writing may be produced in just that spontaneous manner, and that the best treatment for empty verbalism will rarely be a course of successive draft making.

Prospect and Retrospect, chapter 14, pp. 140-1

23. A steady, slow, growing movement

I want in conclusion to remind readers that the 'enlightened' view of teaching and learning we profess is not an outmoded bandwagon, representative (as I have heard it said) of the 'dependent sixties'. It is, in fact, not a bandwagon at all, nor a pendulum swing. It is a steady, slow growing movement that has roots in philosophy back to Dewey and beyond; and is deep-rooted in the intuitions of the most successful teachers over a much longer period than that. It is under attack in many countries today as an effect, I believe, of the worldwide inflationary recession. I am not thinking primarily of budgets, a setback we can survive. I think the psychological effects of the recession much more intractable.

Prospect and Retrospect, chapter 19, p. 199

24: Small circles in which vital and transforming events take place

Walking down Euston Road ten days ago, I was thinking about this occasion and wondering whether ‘‘the age of the classroom teacher’’ was altogether too optimistic an idea to be realistic. Then I saw, outside the Friends’ House (the Quaker headquarters), a poster which seemed to me as I read it to be putting my thoughts into words. It contained a quotation from Rufus Jones, an American Quaker in the early years of this century: ‘‘I pin my hopes to quiet processes and small circles in which vital and transforming events take place.’’

Moving into the ‘eighties, into rough waters with plenty of problems, educational, social and political, I am not pessimistic. I pin my hopes to quiet processes and small circles in which I believe I shall see, if I’m still alive at the end, vital and transforming events taking place.

Prospect and Retrospect, chapter 20, p. 215

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Selection edited and compiled by

Tony Burgess and Myra Barrs

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