this volume to spend a moment in celebrating the contribution of James Britton to our theoretical understanding of this. He has always insisted that children are most likely to learn from writing or talking which is about something that matters to them as an audience who wants to hear and reply: teachers should encourage talking and writing 'for real' and not 'dummy runs'. It is this that will encourage and strengthen young people's ability to think and judge for themselves.

Adults need to be able to reflect and analyse as well as to act. Thus it is necessary to reconcile the embeddedness that can bring schooling closer to action in the real world with the detachment which schools also provide. It is this detachment that at best allows the learner the elbowroom in which to understand the world in a critical manner by providing occasions for him or her to reflect, choose and judge. It has already been suggested that it would be possible to design a 'practical' curriculum which would arise from closer involvement in the world of action, and which would also include access to more decontextual ways of thinking, approaching these in a critical manner. The failure of education has not been a failure of relevance to the economy, but a failure of relevance to the students' perception of what is worth doing. Detachment threatens that sense of relevance, so that any curriculum has to tread a narrow path between confining children to the reality they already experience and alienating them with what appear to be irrelevancies. There is cause for fear that either of the official policies with which this paper began would lead to an uncertain curriculum, one by promoting an unthinking pursuit of 'technique', skills and methods treated merely as means, and the other by a return to a curriculum which avoids controversy by transmitting pictures of the world which are so simplistic as to be finally untruthful.

Learning Listening
Gordon Pradl

As teachers we naturally have much advice to give, much information to dispense. If only our students would listen to us, the educational puzzle would be solved once and for all. Yet, ironically, students think they are listening all the time; in fact, they believe that schools are precisely concocted to make them listen as part of an endless, captive audience. But we know differently, for the continuing challenge of teaching/learning involves creating the right conditions of mutually intended attention, which inevitably leads us to the imperatives of relationship – of dominance and control, of sharing and trust, of collaboration and cooperation.

To give someone something, even knowledge, means we will have to come to terms with the other person's outlook on our very act of giving. For suspicion is constantly afoot. People who give exert a decided influence over those who receive; being on the receiving end, we hold disdain for those who would have power over us. And so as teachers we are constantly caught up in this dilemma that Soren Kierkegaard so precisely pinpointed:

all true effort to help begins with self-humiliation: the helper must first humble himself under him he would help, and therewith must understand that to help does not mean to be a sovereign but to be a servant, that to help does not mean to be ambitious but to be patient, that to help means to endure for the time being the imputation that one is in the wrong and does not understand what the other understands [1982, pp. 27–8].

The lesson Kierkegaard would have us learn, yet one we resist, even as we hear echoed its commonsense wisdom in our own experience, is simply that no one likes being placed in an inferior position to an advice-giver. Being sensitive to this possible resentment, the teacher serves as listener in order to draw out and explore the learner's evolving representations of the world. Teachers who would foster the student's emerging language competence grasp the importance of their selfless role.1 Already secure in their obvious dominion over the learner, such teachers stand waiting to receive the performing inquiries of their students.

A concern for listening has been a crucial part of James Britton's lifelong preoccupation with language and learning.

Whenever Britton locates a point of emphasis in his thinking, invariably
it involves some kind of active taking in of the world within an attending social matrix. Thus spectating, for him, is not an idle, languishing endeavour; rather, it is filled with high seriousness, the kind of seriousness many have attributed to play - that time when we try on the fit and possibility of a behaviour without suffering the blows of real consequences. Taking the role of spectator alternates cyclically with periods when we are participants in the ongoing affairs of the world, for as spectators we judge how validly these same affairs are being represented both by ourselves and others. Accordingly, when we spectate, we are testing the correspondences of texts - what is the goodness of fit for the words to the world and vice versa?

It is no surprise that the character of Britton's own professional conduct parallels his deep fascination with this spectator stance toward human discourse. The spectator stance is rooted in our profound human need to manipulate symbols and assess values. Through active spectating we forge a map of our accumulated experiences - a process involving sharing and negotiating, narrating and metaphorizing, legitimizing and invalidating. Consequently Britton has come to champion the role of expressive writing in education, whereby students come to determine the relationship that is emerging between themselves and the knowledge of others. Making knowledge personal requires language that is infused with one's own attitudes, connections, revelations. Expressive is not a melody of idiocy excuse, but a harmony of connection. It is listening to how one feels about what one knows or is coming to know. Without this joining relationship, this continuity between cognition and affect, at whatever level of maturity, a person's theories about the world remain out there under someone else's control and jurisdiction.

But, as Britton asks, why would anyone risk using language to generate an expressive genre, so filled with errors and misdirections as it is, unless there were others around who prized such writing, listeners who through their own acts of responsive listening reinforced the learner listening to herself. Thus, not surprisingly, when he and his research team (1975) were looking at the development of writing abilities of students during the early seventies, they found that little of the writing done by upper-level students was either expressive or addressed to a teacher as 'trusted adult'. Without an audience to encourage listening connections, there will be few forays into this forbidding territory, however central it might be to actual learning. As long as student measurement and subject evaluation hold priority, listening time can always be surrendered.

It may be easy to dismiss this brief for listening as being yet another apology for loose living and lax standards, especially in a climate where many are convinced that only objective and impersonal rigour and discipline lead to real mastery of a subject's content. But this opposition misrepresents the true dilemma of learning, namely that there is a relationship to contend with between the 'knowner' and the 'known'. And, what is most important, we are now discovering, is that this relationship, between a sense of self and a sense of an impinging world made up of objects, operations and others, characterizes learning even in the youngest of infants. As Britton has commented:

we have begun to realize how language behaviour builds on earlier non-verbal behaviour; how cooperative routines set up between infant and adult, mostly in the form of play, increasingly generate meaning for the infant; and how early language comes in to highlight meanings already established in this way (1982b, p. 202).

The Earliest Listening Environment

In his study of the infant's emerging sense of self, Daniel Stern (1985) offers clear support for our intuitive grasp of the central role listening plays in a person's development. Drawing on a number of observations that have shown how infants 'have distinct biases or preferences with regard to the sensations they seek and the perceptions they form', and that from birth infants seem to show 'a central tendency to form and test hypotheses about what is occurring in the world', Stern demonstrates that early on the infant has a defined sense of self, one with clearly demarcated boundaries (pp. 41–2). In other words, differentiation between a me and a not-me, which psychoanalysis had posited as occurring much later in development, has now been shown to exist between two and six months. Further, the infant uses this sense of self to learn about the world during the endless series of encounters supported by the fostering stimulation of the parent or caretaker.

Included among the evidence which developmental psychologists have used to infer this sense of self are a number of 'experiments' with young infants which reveal their capacity to make fine discriminations among the objects of the presenting environment and actually to choose preferentially among a variety of stimuli. For instance, at four months infants were shown different animated cartoons side by side along with a sound track appropriate to only one (p. 85). Whichever image matched the sound track was the image attended to by the infant. In fact infants have been shown to notice a 400–millisecond discrepancy between an expected sound-sight relationship such as lip synchronization. Another experiment involved a pair of
Siamese twins who, being joined on the surface between the sternum and the umbilicus, were in a continual face-to-face relationship (p. 79). Observation revealed that they alternated in sucking each other’s fingers. When the psychologist gently pulled the hand away from one twin’s mouth, its attempt at recovery varied depending upon whose hand it was. If it was the twin’s own hand, the hand itself strained to go back to the mouth, but if the hand belonged to the other twin, the head moved forward to recapture the fingers, precisely the kind of consistent body control one would expect if a coordinated and coherent sense of self existed.

Stern uses such evidence to sketch out the existence of four developmental stages ending with the infant’s sense of a verbal self. What turns out to be crucial during each of these stages is the responsive listening role played by the adult caretaker. As the infant is solidifying its sense of self, it is learning a range of behaviours, such as agency, the appropriateness of which is determined by the kind of interpersonal relationships established during this period. Stern, for example, describes one mother, who was very dominating, listening to her own desires, not her daughter’s:

She had to design, initiate, direct, and terminate all agendas. She determined which toy Molly should play with, how Molly was to play with it (‘Shake it up and down – don’t roll it on the floor’), when Molly was done playing with it, and what to do next (‘Oh, here is dressy Bessy. Look!’). The mother overcontrolled the interaction to such an extent that it was often hard to trace the natural crescendo and decrescendo [sic] of Molly’s own interest and excitement. It was so frequently derailed or interrupted that it could hardly be said to trace its own course... [Molly] seems to have learned that excitement is not something that is equally regulated by two people – the self and the self-regulating other – but that it is mainly the self-regulating other who does all the regulating [p. 196-7].

Without the mutuality occasioned by responsive listening, Molly is developing a sense of self devoid of agency, and as such she will tend to avoid subsequent opportunities for inquiry and learning, feeling always a need to take her cues from others.

Stern’s picture of the infant and its learning environment is characterized by an ‘experience of being with an other’. The time the infant is with the caretaker constitutes ‘active acts of integration’, not ‘passive failures of differentiation’ (p. 101). As the infant attempts to fathom the regularity that appears to exist within this world of intersubjectivity, ‘what is ultimately at stake is nothing less than discovering what part of the private world of inner experience is shareable and what part falls outside the pale of commonly recognized human experiences. At one end is psychic human membership, at the other psychic isolation’ (p. 120).

The kind of responsive listening which is most supportive of the infant’s developing sense of self, and which in turn will determine the person’s frame of mind toward the future world of experience, Stern calls *attunement*. This is when the caretaker monitors the infant’s states and actions of inquiry and provides feedback which in turn can be integrated and matched within the infant’s perceptual field. For instance, ‘the loudness of a mother’s vocalization might match the force of an abrupt arm movement performed by the infant’. Through the means of absolute intensity, intensity contour, temporal beat, rhythm, duration and shape, the caretaker sends positive signals to the infant that its exploration of the world is both satisfactory and gratifying (p. 146). As Stern further elaborates:

An *attunement* is a recasting, a restatement of a subjective state. It treats the subjective state as the referent and the overt behavior as one of several possible manifestations or expressions of the referent. For example, a level and quality of exuberance can be expressed as a unique vocalization, as a unique gesture, or as a unique facial display. Each manifestation has some degree of substitutability as a recognizable signifier of the same inner state... If one imagines a developmental progression from imitation through analogue and metaphor to symbols, this period of the formation of the sense of a subjective self provides the experience with analogue in the form of *attunements*, an essential step toward the use of symbols [p. 161].

Without this responsive listening represented at the pre-verbal stage by the caretaker’s *attunement*, the infant is not properly prepared for the rush and crush of language looming on the horizon.

Not surprisingly, Stern is attracted to a ‘dialogic’ view of language, one which emphasizes that linguistic meanings in the world are jointly or socially owned, not merely personally controlled, even though this latter position has contributed in fundamental ways to the West’s *expectation* of the individual.

The acquisition of language has traditionally been seen as a major step in the achievement of separation and individuation, next only to acquiring locomotion. The present view asserts that the opposite is equally true, that the acquisition of language is potent in the service of union and togetherness. In fact, every word learned is the by-product of uniting two mentalities in a common symbol system, a forging of shared meaning. With each word, children solidify their mental commonality with the parent and later with the other members of the language culture, when they discover that their personal experiential knowledge is part of a larger experience of knowledge, that they are unified with others in a common culture base [p. 172].

The infant’s pre-verbal explorations have set the necessary conditions of perceptual and body knowledge that can now be linked with words. Words
are initially given as a gift from outside by the caretaker, but there is a thought in the infant's head ready to receive it. Words, in this sense, serve as 'transitional phenomena', belonging neither completely to self nor completely to the other. Rather, they occupy 'a midway position between the infant's subjectivity and the mother's objectivity... It is in this deeper sense that language is a union experience, permitting a new level of mental relatedness through shared meaning' (p. 172). But this union experience is dependent upon the mother deliberately suppressing her own needs to perform for an audience. As Catherine Snow remarks, 'Mothers who talk a lot are apt to quickly leave behind topics that are of interest to the child. Children learn how to talk faster when mothers pick up on the topics the children introduce and request input from the children instead of always telling them what to do.'

Finally, as Stern notes, the evolving presence of the word in this last stage of the infant's development of a sense of self provides a new way of storing and manipulating the motivated and episodic scripts that mark the world of social relatedness:

The advent of language ultimately brings about the ability to narrate one's own life story with all the potential it holds for changing how one views oneself. The making of a narrative is not the same as any other kind of thinking or talking. It appears to involve a different mode of thought from problem solving or pure description. It involves thinking in terms of persons who act as agents with intentions and goals that unfold in some causal sequence with a beginning, middle, and end. (Narrative-making may prove to be a universal human phenomenon reflecting the design of the human mind) (p. 174).

Stern's synthesis is especially salient for our thinking about listening because it shows us the importance of pre-verbal ways of representing the world. These pre-verbal 'intentions' to make meaning out of the patterns of the world are quite complex and not simply the infant's reactions to the imperatives of its bodily functions. At this pre-verbal stage in the infant's development we notice a primary integration of affect and cognition. This should give us pause when later we tip the scales in favor of purely cognitive representations of experience owing in large part to the dominating presence of our verbal constructs.

**Listening as Taking in the Other's World**

To understand the dynamics of listening it is necessary to have some model of the individual's mental representation system and how that system might be subject to influence or change. Such a model, as Britton pointed out in *Language and Learning*, is found in the work of the psychologist George Kelly (1955). The fundamental postulate of Kelly's theory of personal constructs asserts: 'A person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events'. Organized as it is around the idea that as individuals we carry constructs or mental models around in our heads which allow us to predict social events, Kelly's thinking views the notion of role and relationship as central to understanding human motives and actions.

These mental constructs that govern both perception and conception generally work smoothly, invisible to our conscious awareness or attention. Only through some breakdown in the system - what we sometimes label 'mistakes' or 'errors' when we get a response that we had not 'expected' - do we come to understand how powerfully determinant are the theories we carry around in our heads. Max Wertheimer tells the story of an anthropologist who was working on the grammar of a native language. On one particular occasion his informant was unable to translate a certain sentence. Puzzled, he tried to find out what words or grammatical inflections might be causing the trouble. It was only after some time that the native burst out, 'How can I translate this sentence of yours. *The white man shot six bears today?* This is nonsense. It is impossible that the white man could shoot six bears in one day!' (1959, p. 274). Failing to share the anthropologist's point of view whereby words need not match actual conditions in the world, the informant's linguistic behavior was stopped dead in its tracks.

Yet, despite the control our theories of the world exert over our behavior, these theories are subject to modification when they are exposed to the continual give and take of social relations. This dialectic of resistance and change constitutes the arena in which listening occurs. In this regard Kelly's 'sociality corollary' suggests that listening is not a mere activity we sometimes choose to do, but is indispensable to life itself. 'To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person.' This does not imply an exact eye-to-eye relationship; rather, if the venture is to be beneficial, there must be some mutual acceptance of the other's point of view. As Kelly explains, 'the person who is to play a constructive role in a social process with another person need not so much construe things as the other person does as he must effectively construe the other person's outlook' (1955, vol. 1, p. 95). With this in mind, we see that any taxonomy of listening will need to correlate both the needs and intentions of the speaker who is sending the message with the needs and intentions of the listener who is deciphering the message. Because these dimensions defy neat alignment, the listening
puzzle remains complex indeed. A speaker, for instance, may need to be supported in terms of self-worth, even when his/her more immediate intentions appear to be directed at bringing about a change of opinion in the listener. If the listener fails to see beyond the intentions to this need, his/her message in reply may end by disrupting the communication. How many times have we seen a speaker deeply upset after an ‘innocent’ reply by some listener and the listener left wondering, ‘But, what did I say?’

Having to balance conversational intentions with personal needs and, in turn, having to attempt to check that there is general agreement as to what background referent system is governing the conversation guarantee that taking in the other’s world is a risky venture, one requiring conscious effort. In this regard it is useful to distinguish between listening which serves the other and listening which serves the self, though often these will be intertwined.

The kind of responsive or reflective listening I have been referring to serves the other by actively mirroring or playing back the speaker’s utterances. With such a response the speaker can corroborate its intended effect on the listener or the effect of the written text on a reader. Such listening begins in attunement, as we saw at the pre-verbal stages of human development, and is a continuing source in the world for legitimizing or sanctioning the words and deeds of the speaker. We will, of course, also have had the experience of being helped by a listener even when he/she says nothing in return – no mirroring, no evaluations. Simply hearing our own words in the presence of another can be enough to trigger off connections, even solutions, that had previously eluded us.

Further extensions of this caring for the expression of the other, are seen in the supportive listening developed by Carl Rogers (1967). His form of creative, selfless listening involves a therapeutic technique which, in valuing and accepting openness, operates on the belief that the client should be responsible for his/her own determinations. Rogers’s commitment to listening is realized in the language game played out in conversational sessions with his client. His conversational strategies try to withhold evaluation, probing instead what the client is actually saying and feeling – ‘Could you tell me more about this? How does that relate to what you said earlier? What made you think of that? Yes, that’s interesting. Sure, I think so. Why not pursue more of the details? ’ The rules of this conversational technique of neutral encouragement and exploration were so explicit they even inspired an early artificial intelligence computer program called Eliza. Written by Joseph Weizenbaum of MIT in 1965, this interactive program showed a remarkable ability to induce people to believe that they were actually conversing with another person. Although a question may arise as to how far to take such non-directedness, from a supportive listening perspective it is really non-directed at all; it is a matter of the client or speaker being served in such a way as to begin to create his/her own agenda.

Another kind of listening directed towards the other might be termed protective. When two people are arguing or when one person has angered or insulted another, conditions are ripe for the overt revelation of sensitive and potentially destructive material. A disparaging epithet suddenly bursts forth. Its power to wound deeply is great because we have been attending so long to the other person’s themes and idiosyncrasies that we know where he/she is vulnerable. In fact we spend a great deal of time covering, or ignoring through protective listening, these underbelly soft spots. The danger in this moment of anger – say in a lovers’ quarrel when we abruptly lose sight of the other person’s perspective – is that we stop listening protectively and go too far in giving voice to a name one cannot forgive or forget. Such escalation, especially in public, can end even a long-standing friendship with extreme prejudice. In serving the other we should always remember the role that discretion plays in our listening.

Listening which serves the self grows out of those many situations in which the messages we have to take in are conveyed within a strict ‘transmission’ context. Because such a context ignores the fact that meanings are socially constructed, we need to develop strategies for receiving the message so as to shape it for our own purposes. Such listening we might label performing or rehearsing. We incorporate the content of the message into our own words, making connections with our experience and previous knowledge. By giving the message back to the world of the speaker, we make it our own; or if the speaker is unavailable, we seek out others to try on our new script. Listening, in this sense, is never passive regurgitation – learners can assert control even within the ‘transmission’ model of education.

Finally, there is reconstructive listening, which, following the path of accommodation, makes our individual construct systems productive. Reconstructive listening is the mattock which breaks through the crust of our outdated beliefs. Unless we confront our own theories about human motives and actions with the construals of others and listen for the results, we have no way of monitoring and thus developing these theories in the first place. Attending to the results of our ‘experiments’ is akin to operating an early-warning radar system – we listen to the strength of the signals bouncing off approaching objects and adjust our behaviour accordingly.

If there are to be any participants in the life they are constructing,
speakers are under certain obligations to help us play the role of listening others. Thus, in learning to participate in the social discourse of our speech communities, we come to master the particular constitutive rules that make conversational exchanges possible. Paul Grice (1975), for example, has attempted to capture the logic of conversation in what he calls the 'cooperative principle'. Basically, this includes four maxims: quantity (make your contribution as informative as necessary, but not more so); quality (don't say what you believe to be false or what you have no evidence for); relation (be relevant and coherent); and manner (follow the appropriate code of politeness - in other words, avoid obscurity, ambiguity, prolixity and disorder - be perspicuous, and, as Scarle [1979, p. 50] adds, 'speak idiomatically unless there is some special reason not to'). Whether participating in a mutually initiated dialogue or being entrapped by some speaker such as happens when we receive one of those solicitation phone calls which increasingly plague the sanctity of our homes, these conversational underpinnings govern our basic expectations when we talk with others.

Though we constantly violate these rules, what is important to note is how these basic assumptions that we have about the other's contribution to a conversation even govern how we understand the intent behind a speaker's violation. What have been labelled 'indirect speech acts' are a case in point. Stating 'It's cold in here', for instance, more often than not is a veiled request that the listener shut the window or turn up the heat. Similarly, much humour and irony depends on the listener picking up a reversal of expressed meaning or intention.

In the area of monologue, specifically when someone is telling a story, implicit rules also obtain. Listeners constantly pressure the speaker to tell a tale that fits within some shared context. As William Labov remarks:

Pointless stories are met with the withering rejoinder, 'So what?' Every good narrator is continually wading off this question; when his narrative is over, it should be unthinkable for a bystander to say, 'So what?' Instead, the appropriate remark would be, 'He did!' or similar means of registering the reportable character of the events of the narrative [1972, p. 306].

This glue of shared context naturally binds speaker and listener together, for any speaker is in deep trouble when the audience is silently wondering, 'Why is he telling me this?' When this occurs there has been some error in correspondence between the emerging text and the set of listener expectations waiting to receive it. And such mismatches frequently arise because the speaker himself has not been listening adequately to the surrounding and shaping moments of the discourse.

Conversation, as opposed to one-way communication, assumes a mutual enterprise. The schemas being referred to by the words are being constructed even as the words are being uttered. Neither party assumes definitional priority in a true conversation and thus we see continual evidence of checking and rephrasing. In written texts we also see numerous explicit markers which connect writer to reader in this shared project of meaning making, though in modern writing these tend to be much less direct. I was struck by how much these markers, so reminiscent of speech forms, have receded when recently I read Rebecca Burlend's A True Picture of Emigration, an autobiographical story, written in 1848, about an English woman's homesteading in the United States. Continually Burlend establishes an immediate relationship with her audience by expressions such as:

And now, kind reader, if thou has any intentions of being an emigrant...

Having referred to the prairies, it may perhaps be necessary to be a little more explicit...

Let the reader imagine himself by the side of a rich meadow, or fine grass plain several miles in diameter...

Does the reader ask for an explanation? Let him consider for a while our condition... [pp. 79, 83, 84, 112].

By addressing her reader so plainly, the author clearly locates her perspective and thus helps the reader entertain a more fully bodied picture of her communication intentions. Reciprocally, if the reader or listener is to complete the conversational link, she must not trick herself into assuming that words and worlds always mean the same thing. Shared referent systems are only built up slowly over time. For a person to listen with permeable constructs is an earned condition, a constantly practised way of life.

Listening to Ourselves

In The Excursion, Wordsworth describes:

A curious child, who dwelt upon a tract
Of inland ground, applying to his ear
The convolutions of a smooth-lipped shell;
To which, in silence hushed, his very soul
Listened intensely; and his countenance soon
Brightened with joy; for from within were heard
Murmurings, whereby the monitor expressed
Mysterious union with its native sea.

[Book IV, l. 1132]

Having to say something, we wait impatiently, our ear pressed to the shell
of our own thoughts. What correspondences will we discover between the demands of the present moment of communication and our yet-to-be-uttered words? We have all experienced the fear that the shell will be empty; but, if we attend, beyond the paralysis of self-consciousness, to the issue at hand, the loud roar of the sea follows.

Magically, it seems, much of our verbal power resides in potential body states. Our public utterances in other words rely on some inner reservoir of immediate intentions. They are not simply the result of isolated thoughts or speech scripts that have been carefully rehearsed in advance of the moment of delivery. Sometimes our ability to access specific verbal scripts even requires the circumstances of place; recall is blocked unless the context fits. I remember, for instance, having a secret fear of forgetting the combination of my locker at school. And whenever this fear came over me, I would try to rehearse the sequence of numbers, but inevitably my mind would go blank. Yet standing in front of my locker, actually engaged in spinning the cylinder with my fingers, the combination never deserted me.

Prior to its entry into the verbal world, the infant experiences a natural correspondence between its own bodily actions and the attuned responses of the caretaker. Out of this earlier integrated wholeness, we might suppose, grows the infant's eventual confidence in being able to represent the world with words, but this capacity for representation is inevitably tied to specific occasions. The listened-to infant learns that its agency will be equal to almost any present novelty. Because the infant associates these exploratory routines as leading to interpersonal satisfactions, a foundation is established for relating the affective with the cognitive aspects of language. In this way knowledge is person connected, at least when the infant's primary need for attention has not been thwarted. It is on this basis that we speak of being in touch with our intuitions. We know about the world through words which have been linked with bodily states, and this is what we feel when in uttering an expression we have the sensation of getting it right.

This phenomenon of inner listening, of feeling the necessary correspondences between our words and our intentions, has been explored by Britton in 'Shaping at the Point of Utterance' (1982). He emphasizes how the process is socially driven – that listening to ourselves and coming up with expressions that we feel are right for the occasion depend in part on the influence of audience. The guiding and caring presence of others, real or imagined, can help to draw out the words from us. Focusing specifically on the writer composing, Britton summarizes this relationship:

shaping at the point of utterance involves, first, drawing upon interpreted experience ... and, secondly, ... by some means getting behind this to a more direct

appearance of the felt quality of 'experiencing' in some instance or instances; by which means the act of writing becomes itself a contemplative act revealing further coherence and fresh pattern. Its power to do so may depend in part upon the writer's counterpart of the social pressure that listeners exert on a speaker, though in this case, clearly, the writer himself is, in the course of the writing, the channel through which that pressure is applied [1982b, p. 143].

The implied conversation between ourselves acting both as speaker and listener is governed by the quality and quantity of our linguistic reserves which are built up through the frequenting of texts, both spoken and written. The language that we engage with is internalized 'through reading and being read to', and gradually a stock is built up that we can draw on at the moment of need. As Britton concludes: 'the developed writing process is one of hearing an inner voice dictating forms of the written language appropriate to the task at hand' (p. 144).

In 'Call it an experiment' (1987) Britton explores further these language resources which for the literate person have been accumulating over years of reading and rereading, especially those texts, literary or otherwise, that carry with them a distinctive style and rhythm. Probing his memory for the origins of literary fragments that had suddenly occurred to him – a poem by Stevens, a play by Auden – Britton touches upon the performance aspect of language:

identifying the source of a verbal fragment is, I am sure, a process of searching for a matching sound in my memory store. It seems likely that any item in that store will be more vividly represented when I have myself at some stage articulated sounds – creating a kinaesthetic as well as an audible image. The internalizations are not, I believe, usually the result of learning by heart but are more often a result of increasing familiarity with text over a period of time – and perhaps in particular the outcome of repeated readings aloud [1987, p. 85].

In listening to his own language resources, Britton underscores the central role played by reading, which 'can have a cumulative effect upon memory so that we internalize general schemata for constructing a text, cadences that constitute both ways of sounding and ways of meaning'. Not to cultivate this resource for listening is greatly to diminish our integrative powers of self-expression.

The Teacher as Listener

To exhibit the kind of selflessness I am speaking of here is not to be shared of identity or authority: as teachers we are not meek lambs drowning in the outpourings of our students. In fact, active listening suggests a strongly composed sense of self, for it involves knowing about intrusion and how
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one’s ego (especially in the peculiar arena of teaching/learning) constantly risks swamping the egos of others. The teacher as listener provides the transitional space for the learner to move between one mental representation of the world and another.

Yet sometimes in our responses to student writing we fail to accommodate to the emerging words of the student struggling toward the expression of relatedness. Rather than join in some kind of natural dialogue, we seem obsessed with correctness and form, whether of product or of process. Consider, for instance, the following paper written by a twenty-one-year-old woman who only recently had come to the United States from Taiwan:

An unexpected unhappiness happened to Leo — a handicap. He lived in a very poor, longly, old little room. He only have his oldstyle typewriter could play with, but there is a little business — selling pencils could convey him into a self-satisfaction. As many people in the world, who love themselves and have a very dear feeling to their parents. Leo’s mother dead had bring to him an independent life. How a handicap like Leo could handle such a damn time? In his eyes, the world is waited to be “guaranteed” it. In contrast, there are many people at our surroundings. Unluckily, most of people do not appreciate it. They lack themselves to keep safeness, but bodly and couldn’t be known. It had reflected to the high suicide rate. People should touch people, and make their life fill of energy. Don’t curse at morning when we just wake up. To stay cool, and try to make a sweet day.

After reading this paper with a group of teachers who were considering the problems we face when teaching writing to students whose writing abilities are below expectations, I simply asked what questions would they like to address the author: ‘Where would you begin your conversation with someone who said these things, had these thoughts?’ The responses generally concentrated on formal errors (spelling or ‘What does “a very dearing feeling” refer to?’) or focused on potential process problems (‘How did you go about doing this?’ or ‘What do you want to say?’). Only a few teachers stuck at the heart of meaning: ‘Do you have any handicaps?’ or ‘Why do people not appreciate their “healthy body”?’ The point I was trying to make involved realizing that there was a real speaking person behind this paper, a person who deserved listening to. And in listening we would be indicating our concern for establishing genuine conversation, as real people have outside of school. For in reading this paper my first curiosity centered on Leo: I was dying to know something about his handicap.

Of course, in our conversations with students, especially younger children, what we hear will not always be immediately understood. Oftentimes we would do well to puzzle more and judge less. Britton’s story of Fat Ted and Knobby illustrates the listener’s need to take a long view on the rush to interpretation:

Fat Ted was no real Teddy Bear but a wartime substitute, overstuffed and unlively. By then he was also worn threadbare in patches from much affection, though this had done little to soften his sullen expression. Fat Ted and Knobby (a loose-limbed and under-stuffed toy dog) were in conversation with their four-year-old possessor when I overheard her saying to Knobby, ‘You see, Fat Ted was very, very naughty, so – (pause) – he grew up.’ Of all concerned, it seemed that I was the only one who was puzzled; the puzzle stayed with me and it was some time before I solved it to my own satisfaction [1978, p. 33].

How does the listener make sense of a puzzling remark, Britton wonders. While suspending judgement, the listener strives for context and connection. Imagine for a moment a world which yokes ‘naughty’ with ‘growing up’, and you begin to grasp some picture of the child’s imagined view of human behaviour wherein only the young are naughty, never the adults (regardless of whatever other bad traits they might be felt to have). So to grow up is literally to leave ‘naughtiness’ behind. Still, as caring listeners it may be a while before we can incorporate the referents of the other into our own world view.

What we seek to develop for ourselves as teacher-listeners is a kind of facilitating social script, one that embodies the values of reflective listening. Such facilitation supports and encourages as it draws the learner forth. This means we are striving towards that interpersonal role relationship described as mature dependency. Infants, because they are unable to survive without their mothers, determine the immature end of the dependency continuum. At its opposite is not independence, but rather the kind of relationship that is possible between two friends, or two learners, or two workers, or a wife and a husband. Each involves a kind of reciprocal dependency that in fact defines maturity (a social concept) as opposed to self-sufficiency (an individual concept). And the right kinds of listening allow for the reciprocity that makes mature dependency possible: the capacity to play a social role in relation to someone else while allowing others to play a role in relation to you. In this way listening is not merely a route to learning, it is learning itself.

Our responsibility as teacher-listeners never stops — there will always be one more story waiting to be told by a student. And deciphering its point, not merely pinning on a quick label, requires a great deal of energy and a great deal of restraint. For after a while one’s alertness fails, having endlessly to contend with growing selves vying for attention. So we need also to recognize the sheer drain, the personal costs extracted from the listener,
and thus find ways of creating settings where in turn teachers will experience others who reflectively listen to them, to their stories, to their real concerns. Still there is no escaping the central role the teacher as listener plays in the education of the young. As Britton concludes:

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 [1982b, p. 110].

If no one is listening to children their power and confidence with language inevitably withers.

Notes

1. One etymology of ‘listening’ even suggests its roots are to be found in a Sanskrit word meaning ‘obedience’.

Part Two  Literacy and the Growth of Consciousness

The essays in this section are research documents about children learning, but the way the writers look at what is happening and the way they talk about it is distinctive. They do not argue much, though they make their assumptions clear; rather they patiently take the reader through the conversations which are the stuff of the essays, pausing as they go to comment on what is happening. In the later essays the writers use details from the life of classrooms as starting points or illustrations for theoretical arguments whereas, for these writers in Part Two, the interchange with the child is the actual matter in hand. One might say that while the focus in Part Two is on the developing self, in the rest of the book it is on the impinging world.

Myra Barrs introduces the section with her discussion of the central role of symbolic behaviour in the development of literacy. Gesture, make-believe play, drawings and paintings represent children’s ideas of reality. Vygotsky has suggested that all these forms may play a part in children’s entry into the more abstract symbolism of print. Myra Barrs documents and discusses some of these transitions in her examples of children’s drawings, and first attempts at writing and shows the interrelationship of both modes of representation.

The other three essays in the section are narratives about narratives – records of the children’s drawn and written representations of happenings in their lives and of their speculative unwinding of the lives of others, and all these floating on a sea of talk. Furthermore, in these essays we can see ‘learning with’ in action. The teachers are ‘scaffolders’ in Courtney Gaden’s sense of the metaphor – active but gradually retreating partners in a joint enterprise.

Henrietta Dombey describes two story sessions, one at home and one in a nursery class. In the first we see two ‘readers’ following in talk a story presented in pictures with minimal text. The session’s sole aim is the enterprise of the story and its attendant speculations and we catch the pleasure of both readers in what is going on. Henrietta Dombey then goes on to explore the extent to which the particular quality of the session at home can be carried over into teaching in a classroom.

Margaret Meck is interested in the way children gradually learn the