one another, theorizing, and reading widely in many disciplines. "Education," he says, "is an effect of community" ("Second Thoughts" 72).

This last comment brings me to two themes which seem to tie all parts of this collage together, for they emerge from and run through the entire body of Britton's work. The first is Jimmy's firm belief in the interactive nature of learning and teaching. We build our world, he insists, in cooperation with others. The second theme, related to the first, is an abiding respect for learners and teachers as knowledge-makers, and the necessity therefore for learning and teaching to center on exploration and discovery of knowledge rather than on simple transmission of knowledge, and on a willingness to take risks and learn through mistakes.

Because I've spent so much time studying Britton's work, this sketch seems to me to dwell on the obvious. But the obvious sometimes needs to be said for us to look again and revalue the contributions James Britton has made as both a scholar and a practitioner for over fifty of his eighty-plus years.

Collaborating with Jimmy Britton

Gordon M. Pradl

My title immediately suggests a certain ambiguity or competition among at least three possible readings. First, one might be considering what it's like to work with Jimmy on some piece of writing or some research project (say, what Nancy Martin's done over the years, as have other members of the London Writing Research Group)—but I must confess that except for serving as editor for two of his recent articles I have not shared such a collaborative role relation with Jimmy, so I can offer no insider insights in this area. I'm sorry, but I have no secret revelations of what a disagreeable fellow Jimmy really is. Second, one might be referring to a direct working relationship in some teaching-learning situation. Again, though Jimmy and I have spent the odd week together doing various kinds of team teaching, this experience hardly recommends me as a commentator.

Finally, however, collaborating might merely be pointing to the intellectual process of holding a fruitful dialogue with Jimmy's ideas. Here, I think I can offer some representative experience, because Jimmy has offered his readers and his listeners a challenging, but open, invitation to play with and extend his ideas about language and how people go about learning. So it's this last reading of collaboration that most interests me, since I want it to shed some light on the way we conduct our affairs in our profession of English teaching—how in some instances conversation is possible, how in other instances personality swamps response and turns tentative theory and hypothesizing into rigid dogma and sermonizing. For the kind of tribute I'd pay to Jimmy focuses on his extraordinary persuasiveness as a listener. His style reflects the
triumph of the true teacher—he provides a low-cholesterol intellectual diet meant to relieve hardening of the categories.

My first connection with Jimmy's ideas occurred when I was reading a review copy of *Language and Learning* in 1970, just as I was writing the final chapter of my dissertation. My work was on David Holbrook, a very different kind of collaborator from Jimmy, and so I found *Language and Learning*, especially with its tantalizing presentation of George Kelly's work in psychology, much more dialogic, much more open to me participating in the creation of our collective understanding of what we might be doing for our students when we serve as English teachers. From this beginning with Jimmy's written words, in due course I was fortunate enough to converse with him directly, and there I discovered his remarkable talent for listening, for reversing your expectations whenever you came to him as inexperienced neophyte—he quickly put you in the talking seat, not the genuflecting and obsequious listening seat.

Indeed, a concern for listening has been a crucial part of Jimmy's lifelong preoccupation with language and learning. Inspired by his continuing active presence as teacher-listener, many students and colleagues have benefited from his supportive conversations, conversations which provided extensions and elaborations for their own emerging meanings. Indeed, how unusual to find a learned person willing to step aside and let another do the stretching—a teacher willing to serve as convener and facilitator, not director and transmitter. Rare, in other words, to discover a living embodiment of Oliver Wendell Holmes' maxim, "It is the province of knowledge to speak and it is the privilege of wisdom to listen." And since we recognize Jimmy as a teacher who has never stopped learning, what lessons might we gain from him about how to "listen" as professionals?¹

Whenever we locate a point of emphasis in Jimmy's thinking inevitably it involves a person actively taking in some part of the world within an attending social matrix. Spectating, for Jimmy, is not an idle, languishing endeavor; 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 behavior 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 Jimmy'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 not only to manipulate symbols, but to assess and assert values. Through active spectating we

¹A version of the next three paragraphs appeared in "Learning Listening" (33–34).
forge a map of our accumulated experiences—a process involving sharing and negotiating, narrating and metaphorizing, legitimizing and invalidating. Consequently, Jimmy has come to champion the role of expressive writing in education, whereby students explore the relationship that is emerging between themselves and their knowledge of others. Making knowledge personal requires language that is infused with one’s own attitudes, connections, revelations. Thus expressive is not a melody of idiosyncrasy, but a harmony of connection. It is listening to how one feels about what one knows or is coming to know. Without this conjoining relationship, this continuity between cognition and affect, a person’s theories about the world, at whatever level of maturity, remain out there, under someone else’s control and jurisdiction.

But, as Jimmy has wondered, why would anyone risk using language to generate an expressive genre, so filled with errors and misdirections as it is, unless there are others around who prize such writing, listeners who through their own acts of responsive listening reinforce the learner listening to herself? Not surprisingly, when he and his research team 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. So there’s a challenge for us as English teachers: how to restrain ourselves, apply some gag rule if you will, and give our students the supportive listening they so desperately need.

Now as we all know, any fruitful collaborative effort involves some creative tension between the individual and the group. In the realm of ideas this can be especially problematic when someone else’s theories seem so brilliant and original as to overpower our own. Thinking within the category boundaries of established thinkers can have a deadening effect, especially as the terms lose their exploratory quality and become the latest catechism. This is what Garth Boomer, for one, is so concerned about in some of his recent papers such as “The Helping Hand Strikes Again.” Garth is noting the all-too-prevalent situation within the institutional structures of education where a group of researchers have stumbled upon the TRUTH, and they’re going to insist that everyone else follow carefully in step. In such instances, theory becomes dogma when it stops inviting the active participation of conversation, where such conversation means a continual comparing and contrasting of the constructs of the theory with our own experience. Indeed, once truth takes hold, educators who ought to be on the same team philosophically suddenly act beyond the pale of compromise. And when this happens our notions of inquiry and community, our cooperative efforts of solidarity and concern, shrink accordingly.

In other words, I’m not convinced that we have devoted enough energy in trying to understand the dynamics of the social dimension of productive in-
quary. For as the philosopher Richard Bernstein insists, we must "consider the nature, function, and dynamics of communities of inquirers." Bernstein then goes on to quote Charles Peirce, who claimed that the "very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of a definite increase of knowledge" (176). Certainly we have a lot of flag-waving about community, but where in academia do we model the kinds of interpersonal skills necessary to build such communities? How do we learn to become coequal inquirers, rather than submissive consumers?

Bob Whitney touches on this point that we progress in our profession not by blind compulsion, but by working through discontinuities, when he describes the real discourse community I would like to belong to even when my conforming nature frequently dictates otherwise. In a letter to me, Bob says,

To contribute to the meaning making project of a community, the essential requirement is not sameness but difference—communities of inquiry move forward on disagreement, not on agreement (it is only static, non-inquisitive communities—fraternities, country clubs, royal families, cultural or economic elites, imperial overlords, etc. that base their raison-d'être on conformity and sameness). The collaboration which makes meaning is not a collaboration of conformity but a collaboration of opposition, dialectic, difference, and diversity. In other words it is a collaboration of individual meaning makers. You don't contribute to an inquiry by saying the same things others are saying.

What I see Jimmy standing for is a view of our language use, both as learners and as celebrators, which honors the intentions of the individual in constructive and mediating conversation with the group. And his own professional conduct is what serves as a model for us, not just his words. Wittgenstein once said, "What is the use of studying philosophy if all that it does for you is to enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic . . . if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life?" In a sense this summarizes Jimmy's attitude toward our own discipline of English. The distinction he makes, for instance, between the transactional and the poetic modes in part grew out of an autobiographic imperative—in other words, what we choose to front or emphasize or privilege in our lives reveals a particular set of salient contingencies. In Jimmy's instance, it's simply that poetry matters in fundamental ways to him, for it touches the deepest resources of life. Yet our culture consistently downgrades it, and so keeps its questioning presence, its assertion of values, from reaching us in our journey through school and beyond. In contrast, the poetic category for Jimmy was part of an invitation in and his privileging of the term has helped force me to recognize that we live not by exposition alone.

In a recent article in English Education Jimmy expounds upon this personal connection which gave rise to his categories:
But, when all is said and done, does the distinction [between transactional and poetic discourses] serve any useful purpose? I think when I first proposed it I was moved by school-based considerations. To begin with, there was the fact that art teachers were constantly discovering, in unexpected and exciting ways, the creative potential within children’s drawings and paintings. The London Association for the Teaching of English had for many years been closely associated with the Society for Education in Art—at a time when the ideas of Sir Herbert Read were strongly in the ascendant. Not only did Read view every person as a potential artist, he emphasized each child as artist in his or her characteristic and un-adult fashion. Then after my experience as an English teacher, I took a job teaching “education” in a College of Art. There I found the students possessed of a creative vitality that, for a time, made English seem dull as a timetable subject and English teachers appear trapped in a sober servicing routine.

When I left the Art College and came to the London Institute of Education English Department in 1954, I did find some splendidly rebellious colleagues and students. Yet while it was certainly true that a great many teachers in the school English Departments found satisfaction in the teaching of literature, they did little to foster the notion that a child might prove to be a creative writer as well as a reader, or that speech itself could, in a suitable enterprise, reach poetic intensity. In other words “literature” remained obstinately something that other people had done. Times may have changed in the intervening thirty-four years—but not dramatically. ("Spectator" 59–60)

When we can put our ideas in such frameworks of personal origin, as Jimmy’s done here, I think they become more accessible to others. The abstractions, in other words, take on a personal connection. Thus to see that our ideas are in part our individual response to particular circumstances, which we then try to pass off as universals, is to acknowledge their limits and also to provide a space for the next person’s contribution to the conversation. For instance, I’ve had a long-standing quarrel with Jimmy which he has conveniently labeled the “Pradl Heresy.” I keep wanting to replace the label “Expressive” with the label “Narrative” and have “Stories” as the primitive language form that branches off and leads upward to the transactional-poetic continuum. Without belaboring the argument, what interests me is not who’s right and who’s wrong, but how the dialogue grows out of Jimmy’s invitation to play with his ideas and how different categories and emphases finally fall back on issues of how we choose to narrate our autobiographies—a discovery which might give us all pause.

And so for me, Jimmy’s continuing example as collaborating listener certainly defines what I would hope to become as a teacher. The qualities of humility and irony, a need to keep one’s own ego and self-gratification in check—these qualities do not negate a sense of hardheadedness so necessary for a dialectical debate. In rubbing up against Jimmy’s ideas you discover that you are never being commanded to relinquish your own, and this finally is your basis for ownership in education. That’s the simple secret of the power of Jimmy’s collaboration.