TEACHERS LEARNING IN A LONDON SCHOOL: AUTONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE 1950S

A contribution to The inescapability of language, a special issue of L-1

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ABSTRACT
In the first two decades after the war L1 teachers in an 'experimental' London 'comprehensive' school (11-18) devised a common English curriculum and pedagogy for the entire ability range of students. In the absence of official support the teachers acted as a self-constituted professional learning community, engaged equally in developing school practice and participating in the optimistic politics and culture of post-war Britain. The article describes both the innovatory work in classrooms and the teachers' learning experiences and offers an argument of potential relevance today, drawing on a research project gathering a rich range of data that include oral history interviews with former teachers and students and documentary evidence.
The account focuses on one aspect of English: the relationship between spoken and written language. It follows a succession of teachers who discovered new ways of exploiting that relationship in the classroom while collaborating in a new professional association not only with other teachers but with university colleagues involved in theoretical work on language development and students' learning. I argue that what powered the teachers' innovatory energy was their belief in education as a political project and their commitment to collaboration and professional autonomy.

KEYWORDS: professional development, history, London, talking, writing, Harold Rosen

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> [E]very image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. (The good tidings which the historian of the past brings with throbbing heart may be lost in a void the very moment he opens his mouth.) Walter Benjamin (1969, p. 255)[1]

The 'tidings' from the history that follows speak to our present concerns as L1 teachers and educators more generally. The study I report deals with the ways in which and conditions under which L1 teachers can develop through engaging in the job, irrespective of any provision of continuing professional education and development. It describes something that *did* happen and therefore *can* happen – and thus might be induced to again.

Even without organised provision, teachers continue to learn after their initial training through their engagement with students and fellow teachers, and also with the outside world. In the case I will present, talking, planning and writing with colleagues seem to have contributed as much to teachers' development as their growing experience with their students. But the school is not a closed world, nor is the developing teacher affected any less than other thinking citizens by political, intellectual and cultural movements in the society. He or she is not immune to ideas, whether educational and psychological and so bearing directly on the profession, or cultural – pertaining to the arts and public discourses – or political, bearing on the citizen. New notions in language, literature and child development will have their effect on receptive teachers, but so will discoveries and ideas in philosophy, history, sociology and science; the changing climate in art, film, theatre, music and popular culture is part of the teacher's world too. At certain periods political ideas and commitments may contribute most of all, though the link between them and the lessons taught in school may be quite indirect (though less so in language and literature teaching than in science). Evidence from this study suggests teachers with an interest in ideas and culture engaged actively in professional learning.

The article selects for consideration one aspect of developments produced both in and by a group of teachers who taught in a particular time, place and historical situation. The aspect in question was central to a reconceptualization of L1 (English) teaching. It concerns a radical realignment in the relationship between speech and writing in the pedagogy of English in a London school in the 1950s and 60s.

1. THE RESEARCH

The L1 teachers whom this study concerns taught the subject called English in secondary schools in London, England, in the first two decades after the war, to students aged 11-18 nearly all of whom were native speakers of English.

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[1] *The second sentence is missing from the later English translation (Bullock & Jennings, 1996, pp. 390-391) which is based not on the two-volume* Schriften *of 1955 but the* Gesammelte Schriften *of 1974.*

The account presented here results from a research project, 'Social Change and English: A Study of Three English Departments 1945-1965'.[2] The study was initiated for two reasons. The few existing histories of English teaching, based as they are almost entirely on official documents and publications by and for English teachers, give a misleading account of those post-war years and fail to convey what English looked and felt like in classrooms for teachers and students (or pupils, as they were known in our period) (Ball, 1982, Ball, 1983, Ball, 1985; Mathieson, 1975; Shayer, 1972; Peel, Patterson, & Gerlach, 2000). They tend also to represent the decisive innovations in English as having arisen in the 1960s climate of expansiveness, modernisation and prosperity. Our own sense was that it was radical innovations by a small number of teachers in the austere 1950s that formed the basis for a later widespread reconstitution of the subject. The climate from which these changes emerged was a specifically post-Second World War sense of democratic and often socialist possibility. Since the surviving individuals who could throw light on the story from their own experience were now in their seventies and older, it was important to secure their testimony without delay.

Since our need was to capture the texture of change as it occurred at the level of school and classroom we decided to conduct detailed case studies of three schools that we understood to have been influential in new developments in English, and to select London schools because of our shared experience of education in the capital. Our research methods were based initially on oral history interviews with former teachers and students, but as time went on we were able to gather a rich variety of documentary evidence including syllabuses , mark books, students' written work, examination papers and photographs. Some informants, including a number overseas, were contacted through the Friends Reunited website and through our own website and blog, and with some an initial contact led to protracted email exchanges. Contacting and interviewing two of the Walworth teachers (Simon Clements and John Dixon) involved renewing acquaintances that originated in the 1960s; these had been maintained only intermittently but led now to sustained conversations, to the point where the engagement of these 'informants' in the project's ongoing discussions became far more extensive than that title suggests, to the great benefit of our understanding. Patrick Kingwell, a Walworth student who Medway had taught in the year before he left for university and had since become an experienced local historian, joined the team as a part-time unpaid volunteer and was able to bring his wide local contacts and experience with ar-

[2] *The three-year project is funded by the Leverhulme Trust and directed by John Hardcastle at the University of London Institute of Education. The other researchers are Georgina Brewis (Institute of Education), Peter Medway (King's College London) and David Crook (Brunel University). Patrick Kingwell has been associated with the project and has participated extensively in the thinking, data collection and analysis. After the end of the project in late 2012, the audio recordings of interviews will be available in the British Library and the transcripts and other documents such as copies of children's work deposited in the Archives of the Institute of Education.*

chives and websites to the project, as well as taking part in interviews, presentations, the organization of local project events and the interpretation of data.

What might be called our *historical* motivation (two of the team are historians) was thus to set the record straight and refine our understanding in relation to a period that we understood to be important for the later development of the subject. An additional purpose, however, reflecting the interests of the two members who were teacher educators in English teaching, related to our present-day world, to make our contemporaries aware of a period when English teachers' thinking was optimistic and adventurous – a period from which those working in education today might draw inspiration and generative ideas.

2. THE SCHOOL

There is space here to draw on only one of our three case study schools, an 'interim comprehensive school' in a working-class district of south London. Its official name was Walworth County Secondary School. (Since a pilot study had focused on this school, we knew that its English curriculum influenced thinking and practice nationally and internationally.) A *comprehensive school* was an institution which, on the American model that influenced it, all the secondary-school-aged children (aged 11 and over) in a locality would attend rather than being segregated by ability into separate schools, the system that prevailed in most of England into the 1960s. At the end of the war London's education authority, the London County Council (LCC), had no comprehensive schools but had resolved to introduce them across the system. In the financial state of post-war Britain, however, the best that could be done was to establish in 1946 a few 'interim' or 'experimental' comprehensives, including Walworth, in existing buildings. These would have to be smaller than was thought desirable (800 students rather than 2000) and would lack a proper representation of the ablest children who, for the time being, would continue to be recruited by the selective *grammar schools*. Its intake was almost entirely of '11+ failures', so called after the test at age 11 that selected students for grammar school.

The poor but long-established population from which Walworth drew its students was almost entirely working-class and was housed in overcrowded nineteenth-century terraces (typically two families per two-storey dwelling) and twentieth century 'council' flats and houses built by the boroughs and the LCC. The area, which had sustained heavy damage during the Blitz, had a vigorous street life, especially in its markets; there were cinemas that had been music halls and a great many pubs. In addition there were bomb sites and derelict buildings, providing favoured play spaces with their piles of rubble, constant fires and exposed cellars. Like many working-class districts at the end of the war the area was shabby and run-down (Esher, 1981, p.45), a state of affairs still in evidence even in the early 1960s. New building did not take off on any scale before the mid-1950s. Such is the environment in which Walworth pupils lived and played.

Despite its many disadvantages, under two strong and progressive head teachers who took it through its first two decades Walworth School lived up to its 'experimental' brief while establishing a good reputation with local parents, the more visionary London teachers and the LCC leaders who had created it. It attracted lively and dedicated teachers who were committed to the comprehensive vision, some direct from training or university, others from posts in grammar schools. Children who under the traditional system would have been unlikely, outside the grammar schools, to have been taught by university graduates and the ablest products of the colleges of education now had teachers with a depth of knowledge that could enable them to select material and devise topics and activities that their students would find meaningful.

Figure 1. Walworth School, 1882 building.

3. THE PEDAGOGICAL ISSUE: SPEECH AND WRITING IN ENGLISH

A theme to which Walworth teachers came to give increasing attention, certainly from 1956, and which I select as a focus to illustrate what teachers came to do, how and why, was what speech should have to do with writing in the English classroom. This attention was associated with a decisive new understanding of how the majority of children, and not just the so-called 'ablest', might become effective writers. The process by which this discovery was reached illustrates what teachers could do in collaboration, with some support from colleagues in higher education, without prescription by 'experts' or politicians and as a part of a broader cultural engagement.

This was the issue. If we ask – as teachers in 1945 had not learned to – what resources students draw on in writing, it is clear that all have the spoken language of everyday interaction that they acquired in infancy and, at least in passive form, the language of radio, films and (from the mid-1950s) TV. Some but not all have the written language of books. Grasp of that simple truth seems essential to understanding the teaching of writing, yet it was an insight gained only over time and with difficulty. In the period we are studying, while most teachers knew that not all children read books, few had the concept of children having *resources* for writing, and when many saw reading as a route to good writing, few considered experience with the spoken language as also relevant. One of our teacher-informants, indeed, describes preparing a talk on children's writing in 1961 or 1962 as the occasion when he first consciously registered that his pupils' writing drew sometimes on the written language of books and sometimes on the speech of ordinary conversation:

> I remember using two pieces from Clive [surname], one from year 2 [age 12], a narrative when he was setting off to go fishing, very Walworthy, the other from year 3 [13] when he was evoking something (a mining disaster we'd discussed?). It was obvious to me that the first was based primarily on his oral resources, the second on literary ones he'd somehow internalised. (I was surprised at the time by the sudden leap he'd made….) (John Dixon, email, 6 June 2011).

In Walworth most children knew little of the language of books beyond a limited experience in school.

4. ENGLISH IN ENGLAND AFTER THE WAR

By way of context I need to indicate the general state of English teaching in the earlier part of our period – and in most schools persisting throughout it – particularly in respect of speech and writing and their perceived relationship.

George Allen, who had been an HMI (Her Majesty's Inspector [of Schools]) whose job had been to visit and report on the teaching of English in many schools, had this to say about the subject in the first post-war decades:

> As recently as 1960 English as a school subject was in a state of suspended animation which had hardly changed over forty years….In practice it embraced two main areas

> somewhat uneasily, the communication arts or skills on the one hand, and literature on the other. The tradition also included a great deal of language study, usually rather obsolete in form and discontinued just at the stage when many pupils might have been ready to begin a serious study of language; until very recently any serious study of the spoken word was excluded (Allen, 1973, p. 30).

The written language, which was the sole object of 'language study', was what English was almost exclusively about. The tenor of English in the 1940s and 50s is illustrated by a 1952 paper from the O (Ordinary) level English Language national examination that represented the acme of achievement at age 16. Though designed for only the 20 per cent or so who attended grammar schools, it effectively determined the priorities for English throughout the secondary school system.

6. (*a*) Punctuate, supply the necessary capitals, and paragraph the following passage:—

electioneering as we should of course expect has always been a fruitful soil for repartee charles burleigh in the middle of an eloquent denunciation of slavery was struck in the face by a well aimed and very bad egg doesnt that prove he said calmly producing his handkerchief and wiping his face what i have always maintained that pro-slavery arguments are always unsound now my friends said a whig candidate on another occasion making a last effort to arouse his hearers enthusiasm what do we need to carry this constituency by the biggest majority in our partys history another candidate sir yelled a voice from the back of the hall

(*b*) Write down *six* of the following words, and against each write a word of opposite meaning:—

advance, barren, strange, glut, improve, persist, magnify, following, augment.

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UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION EXAMINATION

Ordinary Level

SUMMER, 1952

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Examiners:
E. E. ALLEN, Esq., B.A.
J. A. SHEARD, Esq., PH.D.

THURSDAY, June 12.—*Morning*, 9.30 *to* 12

[*Answer* QUESTION 1 *and* QUESTION 2 *and* TWO *other questions.*]

1. Do *two* of the following exercises, *one* from Group A and *one* from Group B, allowing about half-an-hour for each:—

A

(i) Describe any *one* school function at which you have been present during the past year.

(ii) Describe the most pleasant (*or* unpleasant) experience you have ever had.

(iii) Write a letter to your aunt thanking her for the one pound note you received from her on your birthday and telling her how you used it.

(iv) Describe a typical day's harvesting *or* fishing *or* shopping.

B

(v) Give your views on School Prizes *or* School Punishments.

(vi) Give your reasons why you would (*or* would not) like to become a detective *or* a nurse.

(vii) Write a short composition on "Boredom, and the best ways to avoid it or overcome it".

(viii) "Pictures are taking the place of books." Discuss this statement, giving your views as to whether this is a good thing or a bad thing.

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2

2. Summarise, *in your own words* as far as possible, the argument of the following passage (which contains about 490 words), reducing it to about 160 words. At the end of your *précis* state the *exact* number of words you have used.

The word "adventure" embraces a company of great words, including courage, tenacity, selflessness and faith, but its most potent ingredient cannot be expressed in one word: it is the spirit that urges men to volunteer to undertake hazardous tasks, for adventure implies the readiness and desire to 5 embark on a course of action that entails risk. A young child may display an instinct for adventure by climbing out of his play-pen to explore the mysteries of the nursery, but this kind of adventure is hardly laudable because the child has not yet sufficient reasoning power to realise the potential risk in such 10 an action. As we grow older, however, the spirit of adventure tends to be restrained by caution; the fire is often smothered by reason, which gives warning of impending dangers and coldly counsels safety first. Yet in some men the urge for adventure may be so strong that it overwhelms the primary 15 instinct of self-preservation and inspires them to attempt the impossible, to reach out for the unattainable.

To evoke our admiration adventure need not be successful; it is enough if the adventurer is impelled by courage. Indeed, the failure of a gallant enterprise often touches our hearts even 20 more than its success. Scott's tragic failure excited our imagination and drew our applause more richly than any success could have done, and the vision of Mallory and Irvine toiling indomitably through the swirling mists up towards the summit of Everest, never to return, inspired us more than if they had 25 gained their objective and returned in triumph to tell their story. Success in dangerous enterprises often brings material rewards, but a glorious failure that inspires those who follow after brings a greater honour than any material reward.

It was said of Mallory that "a fire burnt in him that caused 30 his willing spirit to rise superior to the weakness of his flesh". Yet it would be a fallacy to assume that the conquest of the flesh is easier for such adventurers than for us humbler mortals. There has never been a man who knew no fear, but the finer the courage of a man, the less will he betray his 35 fears. When we imagine that men who deliberately set out on perilous adventures are endowed with a disregard for danger, let us remember that their bodies are sensible of the same pains as ours and that their minds suffer the same anxieties. What they have that we lack is the ability to call up 40 some impelling force from within that we all possess but that lies dormant in most of us, although we admire its manifestation in others. It is the power of the spirit to stifle self. To summon this power the individual must fight gigantic battles within himself; reason, hunger, love of life, the insistent call of home 45 —all these present vast obstacles which he must surmount and which yet rear up before him inexorably again and again.

3

3. The following questions relate to the passage in Question 2. Answer them as far as possible in complete statements *in your own words*.

(*a*) Why does "climbing out of a play-pen" (ll. 7-8) not fit the writer's definition of "adventure" in the fullest sense of the word?

(*b*) What is the exact meaning of "self"? (l. 43.)

(*c*) Explain the difference in meaning between "potent" (l. 3) and "potential" (l. 10).

(*d*) What is the exact sense of "coldly" in l. 14, and why is it a particularly good word to use here?

(*e*) Why is "self-preservation" called a "primary instinct"? (ll. 15-16.)

4. (*a*) Explain the meanings, in their contexts, of *five* of the following words in the passage in Question 2:—

tenacity (l. 2), implies (l. 5), laudable (l. 9), indomitably (l. 24), objective (l. 26), fallacy (l. 32), endowed (l. 37), manifestation (ll. 42-43).

(*b*) What picture does each of the following metaphors conjure up in the mind, and how does this picture throw light upon the meaning of the phrase as used in the passage?

(i) the fire is smothered by reason (ll. 12-13);

(ii) rear up before him (l. 47).

5. (*a*) Analyse the following sentence into clauses, writing out each clause in full. Give the grammatical description of each clause and state its grammatical function in the sentence:—

After *considering* the matter for some time, his father told *me* that if his financial circumstances continued *to improve*, it was his intention that his son should proceed to the University, where he would study for the medical profession, a calling that the father had always admired more than any other because it offered such opportunities for serving the community.

(*b*) Name the part of speech and state the grammatical function of each of the three italicised words in (*a*).

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Figures 2a and 2b. O level English Language Examination paper 1952.

The two-and-a-half-hour paper begins with an hour of extended writing on one narrative or descriptive and one argumentative topic. It is hard to imagine any of the eight titles being tackled in any spirit other than of dutiful compliance; these are unashamedly just exercises, with no pretensions to provoke interest or a desire

to communicate. We might note in passing the assumption that in the candidates' families aunts are liable to send pound notes and nephews and nieces to send thank-you letters. Next, a précis is called for, the condensation of a passage to a third of its length (according to civil service tradition[3]). The examiners do not hesitate to impose a text that no child would choose to read, of that unworldly 'improving' character to which young people tend to be allergic; nor do they show any concern for the quality of the writing, in which a metaphorical *fire* ('the spirit of adventure'), after being *restrained* by *caution* is then *smothered*, *given a warning* and *coldly counselled*! That passages set for analysis in examinations should have some literary merit was established only in the 1960s (Rosen & Whitcombe, 1967).

Questions 3 and 4 fall within the category of exercise known as 'comprehension' and takes for granted that you share the examiner's estimation of the quality of the prose: 'What is the exact sense of "coldly" in 1. 14, and why is it a particularly good word to use here?' The spirit of 'comprehension' as exemplified here was minutely analytical, as it was also with 'clause analysis' (question 5). The final question requires a text to be punctuated.

That the English course in the secondary school reflected the O level syllabus is confirmed by an inspection of the textbooks of the time, which are divided into sections on composition, précis, comprehension, grammar and punctuation (Medway, 1990; Allen – 1973, pp. 37-38 – comments on the damage done to the teaching of English, and to its textbooks, by the effect of O Level.) The concern was far more with analysis than production. Meanwhile the spoken language received almost no focal attention, apart from the hard-to-sustain demand that pupils speak 'correctly and clearly' and by the 'correction' in class of non-standard grammar and dialect features and of answers not couched in 'complete sentences'; the emphasis on clarity and articulation might be promoted via the staging of formal debates. Speech in classrooms tended to be stilted and constrained; it was far from the free flow of the exchanges familiar to children outside school. Minutes from the 1950 meetings of the HMI English Panel record their wish to see freer exchange in the classroom and for pupils not only to 'cherish words' and 'be lucid in expressing their thoughts' but also 'to take part freely in classroom conversation, and to improvise in movement and speech' (Minutes of Meeting 21 of 23 April 1954, The National Archives ED 158/31). 'Attention was drawn to the danger of self-consciousness, where too much stress was lain on the manner of speaking, and not enough on matter' (Minutes of Meeting 14 of 12-13 December 1950, The National Archives ED 158/30).

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[3] *This was established by Harold Rosen when, on behalf of the London Association for the Teaching of English, he questioned the examiners on the one-third stipulation. 'I had found out it is because the Civil Service used it and if somebody has to read through a set of papers and present them to their boss, they reduce them by a third' (Harold Rosen, interview, 30 November 2004).*

The general point that needs making in the context of this argument is that whatever the relative emphasis on speech and writing, they were clearly seen as separate abilities that needed to be addressed separately, their only connection being the danger that 'bad speech habits' might 'corrupt' students' written language. What was needed, of course, was the concept of *language* as a 'faculty' or 'higher mental function', with speech and writing as alternative modalities whose varied relationships could be of educational significance. The relevance of categories that crossed the divide might then be apparent, such as those of monologue and dialogue. Given such theoretical understandings – not necessarily in explicit discursive form – teachers might grasp the possibility that language resources acquired in one mode might be drawn on in developing the other. As was clear by 1967, 'if we could transfer some of this animation and volubility [from their talk] to their written work, we should get something worth having' (Gwynne & Gurrey, 1967, p.47).

5. THE PROFESSION: NEW DEVELOPMENTS

The professional situation of English teachers in this period is characterised not only by no national or local curriculum but by a near total absence of courses, advisers and local centres to promote development. There was no provision for English teachers to meet their colleagues from other schools; they effectively worked in isolation. The situation was particularly difficult for those who were trying to do new things: 'There is no doubt about it…there was a terrible sense of isolation: '"I'm the one who believes this, nobody around here does"' (Harold Rosen, interview, 30 November 2004).

It was in response to this isolation that in 1947 London teachers, with a few lecturers from the University of London Institute of Education and teacher training colleges, formed the London Association for the Teaching of English (LATE).

> And that was a critical thing about LATE. You know, there were other people who stood up to be counted – enormous help, that – and battled with things, puzzled by ideas, puzzled by kids' responses and so on, but which we shared. And there were older and eventually more mature teachers who could, we could help each other, that's the point (Harold Rosen, interview, 30 November 2004).

(On the history of LATE see Gibbons 2008, 2009a, b, c.) One of the main initial purposes of LATE was to campaign for the reform of the O level examination described earlier. As time went on, however, LATE came to perform much of the function of continuing professional development, entirely of its own initiative and in no way as an agency of central or local government. The Institute of Education was certainly an important player in LATE, but only through the participation of individual members of its English department. LATE became, as we shall see, important to what happened at Walworth.

6. ENGLISH AT WALWORTH: THE STORY 1946-65

What now follows is, first, an account of the stages that Walworth English teachers' practice went through in relation to the handling of speech and writing, and then a discussion of the their own development.

About English at Walworth in its first three years we know next to nothing. In the school by 1950, however, in at least one teacher's classroom speech had begun to be 'talking' in the familiar sense, rather than simply answering questions, making speeches and uttering pronouncements. John Sparrow told us that Arthur Harvey (head of English 1949-55)

> came into one of my classes once, he was going round, he wanted to get to know the pupils and that sort of thing, he came in, he had a sort of magnetism, and he started asking them questions, like what football team they supported or whether they liked dancing, and as soon as he got an answer from someone he plunged to one of the others and said, Is that right? Do you agree with that? He had them all arguing like hell within three minutes. It was uncanny, I hadn't seen anything like this in a classroom. He had a sort of way of personalising things, he didn't want them to make impersonal comments, he wanted to know what they thought. And they were always very willing to tell him, once he'd broken the ice which didn't take more than a few seconds (John Sparrow, interview, 22 April 2010).

This is one of many pieces of testimony we have received that stress the talkative nature of Harvey's lessons. He was an unusual head of English and typical of the bold appointments made by the first head of Walworth (and impossible to imagine today). Despite being in his late 40s he had taught, apparently, for only one year. He was an Oxford English graduate who had also studied at the Sorbonne, and a serious published poet; he had been an actor and theatre director and an HMI (of French) in Northern Ireland where, quite apart from his job, he had worked successfully with working-class teenagers in drama groups. He seems to have located his professional identity in these other domains, especially literature and theatre, rather than in teaching. While recorded as a member of LATE, he appears to have played no active role (Simon Gibbons, personal communication).

Despite his ability to engage children of all types, he taught those in the lower-ability groups only for the odd lesson. His comprehensive school vision was to secure academic success (measured by examination results but also by a developed taste for reading, writing and theatre) for those who had narrowly failed to secure places in grammar school. The students in this group were nevertheless working-class and in no way different from most of their peers except in their (notoriously unreliable) classification by ability at 11, so that when Harvey developed a way of using the pupils' spoken offerings to engage their interest, make classic texts accessible and stimulate thought and imagination in preparing written assignments, that model had potential value more widely across the school. Harvey seems to have seen classroom talk less as having value in itself than as a means to other ends. While tolerating his students' cockney (London dialect) speech and the tales they related of home and neighbourhood – which he was able to relate to situations in

Jane Austen and Shakespeare – his attitude to the local culture seems to have been dominated by distaste for the squalor and meanness he saw in the neighbourhood.

Whatever discoveries he made about English teaching, Harvey made on his own. He was willing to help other members of his department with ideas but was not seriously concerned with their teaching, any more than he was with the English teaching community in London. His colleagues essentially found their own way as best they could.

7. HAROLD ROSEN

His successor, Harold Rosen (1956-58), was different in three ways, besides being equally inspiring as a teacher. He appreciated working-class speech, made a priority of helping his colleagues and had an unusually thorough grounding in theory. In relation to the first he gave lectures to teachers that attempted to convey its strengths. One lecture influenced his successor, John Dixon (1959-63, still teaching elsewhere at the time: 'Through Harold we learned to think positively about working class experience and uses of language (in their unions, coops, and political organizations), and – with cockneys especially – their wit, delight in word play, and story telling' (John Dixon, 'A Golden Age? v1', p.4, unpublished paper). The lecture was part of a course on 'English in the comprehensive school' taught by Rosen and the second head teacher of Walworth, Guy Rogers. Rogers was himself an English teacher and had been a founding member and secretary of LATE; he therefore knew Rosen and suggested he apply for the Walworth post.

Rosen's ability to relate to working-class language and culture is attributable to his origins. As a boy he had won a scholarship from a poor Jewish family in the East End of London to a grammar school where the teachers failed to conceal their contempt for the local culture and people. He had no intention of treating his own pupils as teachers had treated him and his peers. Walworth pupils in classes that Rosen took over from Harvey found him a more 'ordinary' person with an accent and manner that were classless. This we know from Valerie Avery who included both teachers, in fictional form, in her trilogy of novels (Avery, 1964, 1982, 1985).

The effect on his students of Rosen's approach was described for us by someone who, as a student teacher in the school, found herself observing one of his lessons with a low-ability group:

> …the door would come open, and there'd be Harold, all goggly eyed, looking around, and slightly smiley, as though, 'Right chaps, now we'll get going!' And it was amazing…. Basically he got them…I can't sort of imitate, but he said – I want to talk about, we are going to talk about today – only he didn't say that – neighbourhood. Your neighbourhood, where you live, who are the people you know, the neighbours who come in, all these kinds of things, the interaction with people, you and the neighbourhood. And these kids were absolutely jumping with stories about the people who lived, as you can imagine, little [South London] kids. And the lesson was packed with the excitement of all this experience that they had. It was wonderful, and then, of course, eventually, they wrote up their pieces, we heard their pieces, and it was astounding to me (Betty Rosen, interview, 26 May 2011).

(It was after a contact years later that she became Harold's second wife.)
This middle-class observer was astounded by what these children – who the system had judged 'failures' – were able to do, and even found herself envying the vigorous lives they led as children, so different from her own respectable upbringing. Coming into teaching with the intention of bringing enlightenment and culture to children who had been dealt a bad deal, she learned that, on the contrary, they already 'had what it took' and were in need not of being handed culture but of being shown how to use their existing resources in ways that would allow them to develop and expand. She also learned about teacher development that 'one [observed] lesson can affect so many, forever more….the effect of somebody like Harold, tremendous effect on me….it's thousand, thousandfold isn't it?' (Betty Rosen, interview, 26 May 2011).

Unlike Harvey, Rosen had had a full academic and professional education at University College, London, and the Institute of Education. (See my entry on Rosen in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, forthcoming.) He was a full and active member of the community of English teachers, making a major contribution to LATE and leading its O level campaign. He was moreover a serious and responsible head of department. And while Harvey was well-read in English and French literature, Rosen was a communist intellectual who not only knew European, including Russian, literature but was up-to-date in his knowledge of educational theory, linguistics and psychology. It was a feature of the culture of LATE, in fact, that not a few of the teachers were as well-informed as the lecturers who attended from the Institute of Education (where Rosen was subsequently to join the staff). The sophistication of Rosen's view in 1958 of the relationship of speech to writing is evidenced by the syllabus he wrote for Walworth in that year. The way into writing is the students' talk about their experiences in home and community, in the language they have learned from their environment. (As John Sparrow, who worked under Rosen after Harvey, put it: 'Harold didn't want them to use special language. In fact he used to fire them into using whatever language they could lay their hands on. Oh, yes, he was a born teacher, he was' – interview, 22 April 2010).

> The teaching of English at Walworth calls for a sympathetic understanding of the pupils' environment and temperament. Their language experience is acquired from their environment and from communication with the people who mean most to them.... However narrow the experience of our pupils may be (and it is often wider than we think), it is this experience alone which has given their language meaning. The starting point for English work must be the ability to handle effectively their own experience. Oral work, written work and the discussion of literature must create an atmosphere in which the pupils become confident of the full acceptability of the material of their own experience (document in project archive; see the discussion in Clements & Dixon, 2009).

Accepting the children's speech – at least as a starting point – went along with accepting their experience as worthy of inclusion as matter for the lesson. Harold identified for us the expression that best conveyed the attitude a teacher needed: 'I just felt that running through what most of us [in LATE] were trying to do

was…being *hospitable to their experience*. Not being…anchored in it. But there is no other place to begin' (Harold Rosen, interview, 30 November 2004). Clearly, that went for their language, too – at least provisionally.

8. FROM INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVE TO PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION

Rosen was followed from 1958 by a number of remarkable teachers whose work I will mention in so far as it related particularly to speech and writing.

Arthur Harvey, as far as we know, had devised his approach to English entirely on his own. Harold Rosen, although much more involved with the profession and deriving support from LATE, does not seem to have had any close collaborators in arriving at the theory and practice he introduced to Walworth. From 1958, however, as the department became more cohesive with the appointment of John Dixon and two enthusiastic new teachers, individual initiatives led to intensive collaborative development and innovation. The practice I report next, concerning first students' talk and then its relationship to developments in the teaching of writing, should be read as the work not of an individual but of the Walworth English *department* – or at least of members who chose to work together: some members who were not persuaded, and never adopted the innovative approaches, nevertheless participated in the meetings; differences were respected and there seems to have been no active hostility – not least because 'the staff [across the whole school] were very united around making the experiment work and thus there were no outsiders[;] there was a team atmosphere' (Mike Murray, note attached to email, 09 November 2011; this observation is from outside the department: Murray taught science at the school from 1956 to 1961).

8.1 The full development of talk at Walworth

Over the years since 1949 a distinctly new pedagogy of extended oral elicitation – mainly of children's experiences – had emerged. Its character is best conveyed by Simon Clements' account of his work in the late 1950s and early 1960s:

> I think I knew that the children had experience, which our job as a teacher would be, if you like, to get it out of them. So if a boy or girl started talking…you would go on *[i.e. stay with that pupil, not move on to someone else]*. And I was actually having to learn to develop a skill of … not exactly teaching, nor is it tutoring. It is the skill … the nearest I have come to it is…those very, very good radio interviewers who… have been amazing at getting stories out of people. And I think I knew that they were my model. So that the English lesson would be that suddenly a clue came, there was an experience: 'Come on, Peter, tell me more. Where were you?' And so you started to fill in … and then you were watching the rest of the class to see that they were listening. And usually they were, because it was a child talking.… And I hadn't made it a philosophy, but somewhere I knew that that is what mattered (Simon Clements, interview, 20 March 2006).

While more traditional teachers continued to frown on the vernacular speech of working-class children, maintaining the value of 'talking properly' in the classroom, others began to find the language that was now being allowed to appear not just interesting but attractive and even poetic. The latter teachers, some of whom read academic research, may have been influenced by the less judgmental accounts of language varieties that were coming from linguists (no such thing as better and worse ways of speaking). In addition, the current Folk Revival brought with it, along with an interest in folk music, an appreciation of the strengths of vernacular language – and there may have been a realisation that that magical 'folk', from an earlier, less disenchanted world, was still with us, here and now, in the middle of our working-class cities. (A BBC radio producer, Charles Parker, edited recordings of working-class speech along with newly commissioned 'folk songs' into a series of broadcast 'radio ballads' that had huge influence and were later distributed as records. See for instance *The Ballad of John Axon* about a railway disaster with heroic actions by railway workers. Parker gave talks at LATE and the Institute of Education.)

But also underlying this encouragement of talk was the sheer respect, not to mention liking, fascination and delight, that teachers like Clements felt for the vitality, humour, moral qualities and verbal creativeness of Walworth children. With pupils you felt like that about, you couldn't simply be the traditional distanced classroom authoritarian. As Rosen told us, 'Walworth kids – you had to love 'em.' Simon Clements has lucidly explained in our many exchanges that, if giving the pupils their head in a 45-minute full-class discussion meant a situation that might sometimes verge on disorder, that was a price occasionally worth paying, despite the strictures of colleagues who prized unchallenged control. In the best of those interactions, the compensation for nervous exhaustion was an intensity, drama and often humorousness of engagement that it was impossible to believe were not educationally significant. Behind Clements' knowing that 'that is what mattered' was instinct, of course, but also emerging theory.

8.2 Writing too: 'Walworth English' in maturity

My theme, to recap, is the teachers' changing view of the relationship between spoken and written language in the teaching of English, and the sort of professional development that occurred as understanding evolved. So far I have discussed changes in the place of talk, but from these sprung developments in the elicitation and handling of children's writing. They happened like this.

'Ordinary speech', as I have described, began by degrees to pervade the classroom (though often, of course, in heightened, prolonged and structured forms very different from those found in the children's world outside: thirty or more participants, for instance, with a single interlocutor/chair). The occurrence of lively vernacular exchange chimed with the democratic and socialist leanings that consistently motivated sections of the staff and aspects of the school's official ethos. The

case of Valerie Avery, already mentioned, illustrates one way in which this development affected writing.

Valerie Noakes (née Avery) was a pupil in a top stream class taught first by Arthur Harvey and then by Harold Rosen. Rosen, we have seen, appreciated and respected working-class values and speech in a way Harvey perhaps did not. Valerie flourished under both, in different ways. Harvey instilled in her a devotion to literature and creative writing, and taught her to speak in Received Pronunciation when reading in class and acting on stage – 'talking posh', in the view of some of her peers. Rosen taught her not to despise her own way of speaking or the representation of familiar local life and speech in her stories, both of which, she told us, Harvey, greatly though she respected him, would have discouraged as demeaning and inappropriate (Valerie Noakes, interview, 23 February 2009). (Her first novel, *London Morning*, was written with Rosen's encouragement while in his class. It was published in 1964 and sold well as a school text, to be followed by two sequels. The significance of Valerie's story is discussed by Carolyn Steedman, e.g 1997. Other testimony suggests Harvey's approach was more receptive than this – Roy Boardman, email, 31 October 2011.) This tendency to let the vernacular into stories (discussed by Medway & Kingwell, 2010) was no doubt reinforced by the increasing use of improvised classroom drama in which children took on the roles of people like those they knew from their homes and streets.

So we find, for instance, a chunk of working-class local dialect in this, from an unnamed 13 year old around 1960 (spelling and punctuation original):

> *The Slums*
>
> It's mid-day on Mydyke Street, and the houses look as dead as door nails. Their windows shattered by young kids who have thrown bricks at them in their play. The way some of these people live is unheard of. The houses which have been up since world war I. are starting to crumble at their roots. As a door slams you can hear the windows clash together. The roofs are flat and deaf-traps *[death-traps]* to little kids who play on them. Play, a thing not really understood round here, for the children it's either glass or bricks that's the only things they have. Around the back of the houses dust-bins lurk, full up and smelling like the Black Hole of Calcutta. Here is where the cats are scrounging for food, in and out of the dust-bins like bullets from a gun. Also this back alley is where the Monday washing is hung out to dry. Nice clean washing, and by the time it's taken in it will be grimey and dirty again from the filth which lies all round the houses, from chimneys, dust-bins etc. Women come down here with babies to collect their washing. Surely this dirt and grime must hinder their lives. This alley is what you might call "the meeting place of the street", for it's here that women talk together. Just listen for a minute of two.
>
> "Well Flo said to me that her ceiling was letting in pale-fulls *[pail-fulls]* of water from the toilet upstairs."
>
> "Can't she get no one to do it for her?"
>
> "No! the council keep telling her that they will do it, but they never seem to get round to it."

> Well, now you can see what horror it must be to live in a rat hole like this. Across the road a demolition firm are pulling down some of the houses, ready to put up new ones.

We have gathered a sizeable collection of writing like this from children of younger secondary age (11-13), whether in descriptive or fictional form. It is typical of what teachers both in the school and in London more widely came to know as 'Walworth English' (somewhat imprecisely, since at no time would this approach have been found in all classes), associating it with an emerging new paradigm for working-class education in English.

The admission of children's normal language into some classrooms, however, affected their writing in more profound ways, not directly but because it either induced or manifested a far-reaching change in what classrooms were. They became for the first time places for ordinary communication, of a sort recognisably like that experienced outside school, rather than sites of often stilted and constrained performance – or sullen silence. By 'ordinary communication' I refer to the way that speech was being generated by students not for the purpose of being assessed as speakers (more or less correct, articulate, clear and 'pleasant') but to say things behind which there was an urgency and desire to communicate; 'ordinary' also in that their communications were received as, precisely, communications, for what they said rather than for how they were said or as linguistic performances. Lastly, beyond the teacher, who was responding in a new 'ordinary' way, their audience was also emphatically their peers, who expected to *respond* with another utterance, or jostle for the chance to.

The notion of ordinary communicative transactions came also to apply, though not necessarily from conscious policy, as a criterion for writing. Whether or not vernacular and dialect expression was permitted there, as it increasingly was in speech, the children as writers came to behave as if in their writing too they were engaged in exchanges, of the sort familiar from the rest of their lives and from their classroom discussions. John Sparrow's remark about Harvey and pupils' speech, that 'He didn't want them to make impersonal comments, he wanted to know what they thought', could stand for the essence of the Walworth approach to writing as well. That is, pupils wrote to say or tell something, not to generate an example of 'written work', and their teachers responded accordingly. By the mid-1960s it was observed that in schools across the country 'the fluency of informal speech is found in written work. In writing, children are learning to trust their own native vivacity' (Summerfield, 1966, p. 9) – exactly as Gwynne and Gurrey, quoted above, wished.

In the more thoughtful writing of older pupils, while the racy vernacular language fell away, a personal tone persisted, of a person conversing with someone interested and sympathetic. The influence on writing of this new *dialogic* classroom relationship is seen in the following extract from a piece on local public housing provision by Jennifer Fraser (14-15) and the written response of her teacher, Alex McLeod, who briefly comments on the *quality* of the piece but at more length takes

up an issue of content, about what Jennifer has been writing *to say*. Jennifer begins with an account of the house in which the council has re-housed her family, describes the new flats being built opposite and the tea-drinking builders who whistle at the girls, and then moves into arguing for a better housing exchange scheme. She goes on *[spelling original]*:

> As the flats are built round our way, room space is easily seen through the brick shell. It certainly is no wonder people on our Estate asked to move from the houses to *flats [*note between lines*: *boxes on stilts] get annoyed. What I said about exchanging would make it cheaper as far as moving is concerned and in furniture for the extra rooms if a large family is moved to an extra bedroomed house. The reason is, that e.g. a couple with a girl of 8 and a boy of 16 has to move from a 2 bedroomed place to a three bedroomed place quite a distance away. Meanwhile, a couple who across the road lives with their own son in a 3 bedroomed house (their daughter has just married) moves to the first couples 2 bedroomed place. It would be cheaper and easier to let the families exchange, but the council say's no. There a quite a few families that could do an exchange on Elizabeth Estate, but are not all ?allowed to.
>
> And if the builders across the road don't get cracking, I'll give them a right old raspberry for their woolf whistles.[4]
>
> In actual fact I'm glad their building homes from old rat fested Victorian *[illegible]*. But I wish they would plan them to be bigger rooms an get a move on instead of bird watching.
>
> Comment by Alex McLeod:
>
> A-/3This is really very good. What reason does the Council give for not letting people arrange these exchanges? Who is your local M.P? Has anyone been to see him about it?
>
> Jennifer's response:
>
> 1 No adequate reason given, except its not they're policy, which is most idiotic.
>
> 2 Ray Gunter
>
> 3 Yes, also been in touch through Councilor Greening at meetings who is doing a lot to help.

This dialogic model of writing as exchange was apparently new. Implicit in it was a new model of writing development, one later to be laid out in theoretical terms by James Britton and his colleagues (Britton et al, 1975). The Walworth syllabus of the late 1950s was collaboratively devised by the department, in part over a working weekend (and, as must always be remembered, with some participating more enthusiastically than others). Covering the four years of compulsory attendance at secondary school, it apparently – we have been unable to find a copy – envisaged a progression from narrative writing based on familiar experience to both more developed fiction and argumentative or expository writing that was closer to the public discourse in which society conducted its transactions – and that would secure a

[4] *'Raspberry' is what is politely called 'a rude noise' while the unreconstructedly sexist and largely unwelcome 'wolf whistle' expresses approbation of passing females.*

pass in the O level English Language examination. The teachers are clear that the development they sought was also *intellectual*, towards rational thought that could deal with generalising and concepts. One way that pedagogy was adapted to this end was Leslie Stratta's practice during class discussion of writing emerging ideas on the blackboard and then, at the end, asking, 'What have we got here? What does this add up to?' After this invitation to organise and abstract the pupils would be launched into writing (Simon Clements, personal communication). Douglas Barnes, in another of our schools, learned the same technique from Harold Rosen (Douglas Barnes, interviews, 15 October 2007, 3 March 2011).

The notion of writing *development* was one manifestation of a tendency that was beginning to spread from primary education into secondary, in ways consistent with an influential strand of child psychology (most notably Piaget), namely to think of education generally in terms of development rather than effects of instruction. It took the work of Vygotsky (1987), not then available in English, to refine an account of the relation between the two (instruction leads development). The older way had been to provide instruction, practice, correction and models to bring children into competence in public discourse, rather than to encourage expanded functionality to emerge, out of the language that 'came naturally', by a process of changing the topics and purposes and adjusting the teacher's modes of response. According to Britton later (e.g. Britton 1982, a convenient summary), the most unforced and effective way was for the relatively undifferentiated language of young children to become gradually more specialised with increasing age, maturity and knowledge, resulting in distinct types of writing that were recognisably focused on arguing, explaining, persuading on the one hand and, on the other, representing an imagined world in language that was shaped in satisfying patterns (the 'poetic function').

9. ACHIEVEMENT & LIMITATIONS

The prime achievement of the Walworth writing curriculum (not that there was any such concept at the time in England since writing, even when addressed in separate lessons, was seen simply as an aspect of English) was to turn a significant number of children of whom not much had been officially expected ('11+ failures') into willing and fluent writers, albeit not, of course, for the first time in English state schools: see for instance Hartog, 1907). 'The business of writing' had been turned, in Summerfield's words, 'from a miserable chore to keen pleasure and intelligent personal application' (Summerfield, 1966, p. 9) – for the 'significant number', of course.

Although few Walworth pupils reached at 16 and 18 (let alone 15, the age when about half left school) the proficiency of many in the selective middle-class schools – whose progress into higher education and the professions was assumed from the start – what the teachers accomplished must surely be admired, working as they did in poor conditions with children whose primary school experience had been

patchy, let alone whose homes often made reading and homework difficult. Academic success at O level, moreover, exceeded what was expected of young people who had not been selected for grammar schools.

What some teachers at Walworth learned to do, with little outside help, was tap into what Rosen (1958 – the only publication from his Walworth period) called 'the springs of language' – those impulses, interests, experiences and concerns that generated the prolific conversational speech of the homes and streets of inner London – and redirect those energies and resources into writing, so that writing became for many an activity to which they would willingly have recourse. These English teachers further succeeded with a respectable number of their older students, like Jen Fraser, in moving students beyond writing that did *the same sort of things* as speech – urgently or humorously communicating perceptions, experiences and ideas – into a relatively mature discourse that performed a function for which writing was better adapted than speech. At minimum, our extensive collection of pupil writing shows that pupils learned to express in a sustained written monologue what in speech would normally have been managed in a dialogic exchange. How far the teachers at Walworth in the late 1950s and early 1960s would have explained their pedagogy in these terms is unclear, but they could recognise it was 'working' and producing good results.

An advance that could probably not have gone further unless children had started such a programme in the primary school and carried it on for longer than 15 or 16, was getting students fully to appreciate those possibilities that writing distinctively offered in comparison with speech. Only perhaps the sort of theoretical model that came later could have told Walworth teachers that they were taking characteristics associated with speech and, by removing certain proprieties and inhibitions conventionally associated with writing, generating written genres that shared those characteristics. While writing could not be interactive or dialogic in the instant manner of speech, the same sort of dialogic *response* could be offered: the class's appreciative reaction to the reading out of a piece; the teacher replying rather than evaluating; rapid and uninhibited production (for revision only later); use of one's own spontaneous language; a content that might include subjects one normally talks about, and not just the regular school topics. Such a model became available later with, for instance, Halliday's work in linguistics (Halliday, 1989) and that of Bereiter and Scardamalia in cognitive psychology (see for instance the chapter with the exactly apposite title, 'From conversation to composition' in Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). In practical application, the use of writing as a *heuristic* process of thinking and discovery awaited a fuller development in the 'language across the curriculum' movement of the 1970s (in other subjects more than in English – see for instance Medway 1973a, 1973b, 1973c, Martin et al, 1976, 1983; Department of Education and Science, 1975) by which time Vygotsky's (1987) work on language and thought was better known and relevant work had been done by American researchers into the writing process (starting with Emig, 1971, then a succession including Perl, 1979, Sommers, 1979 and later Graves, 1993).

10. THE ROLE OF THEORY

In considering the role, if any, of ideas and research in the ongoing formation of Walworth teachers, we should first note that research in the now familiar sense of classroom observation and recording – the sort that later gave such a boost to our understanding of the role of talk in learning and the workings of the writing process – was not then recognised in universities or in research degrees in education. The context most relevant to teachers where serious thinking and disciplined observation and recording were practised was LATE's study groups, in which teachers from higher education participated alongside those from schools. 'A membership list from 1948 shows active members divided into seven study groups: "drama in the classroom"; "speech"; "school certificate English"; "English syllabus in the modern and non-selective secondary school"; "projects and group work"; "textbooks"; and "methods of teaching composition"' (Gibbons, 2008). Groups on talk and writing in the 1960s and early 1970s resulted in published books.

Teachers who had been trained at the Institute of Education and some of the colleges would have been introduced to the theory judged relevant at the time. They could have enjoyed continuing contact with Institute staff through attendance at LATE and participation in its working parties and study groups, where well-read teachers such as Rosen and Dixon were fully capable of working alongside the academics in developing a coherent rationale for English.

We can assume the key theoretical texts up to, say, 1958 to have been those referenced in the works of Percival Gurrey, particularly in *The teaching of written English* (1954) which refers to works by Bühler, Isaacs, Koffka and Piaget. (Gurrey had been the head of the Institute of Education English department until 1948 and wrote influential texts on English teaching after his retirement in 1954 from teaching in Africa.) By the end of our period the (by then wider) Institute reading lists, reflected in the bibliography of Britton's (1970) *Language and Learning*, included works from psychology (Piaget, Bruner, Harding, Luria, Simon, Winnicott), linguistics (Jesperson, Firth, Halliday, Jakobson, Sapir) and philosophy (Cassirer, Gusdorf, Langer, Oakeshott, Polanyi). The approach laid out by Britton in that work, however, had been articulated in essentials much earlier. An unpublished LATE paper of 1956, 'The Aims of English Teaching' (London Association for the Teaching of English, 1956), argues (without scholarly references) that English has to pick up from the informal processes of interaction by which language was acquired in the home, and then continue to base itself on the child's motivated communication, in interaction with an 'interested and sympathetic adult', of what he or she wants to say, and, eventually, write. This will typically be about his or her own experience. But to this 'linguistic development' aim, LATE (one suspects the author was Britton) is already adding for English a cognitive, emotional and moral mission, that of *ordering* experience (through language), the better to 'gain control' of it.

We can see that while this general account of aims and principles would have sat comfortably with Walworth practice, it hardly as yet constituted the operational

basis one would need for designing a programme. Walworth English was not a case of 'applied theory'. We lack a full account from Rosen of how he developed his approach to English but John Dixon, as we will see, is very clear that what governed his emerging practice was immediate pragmatic concerns – what would work with these working-class kids – addressed from a principled political and moral standpoint (what education and what sort of human treatment did they *deserve*, both on grounds of justice and because the working class were, as Rosen believed, 'the hope': '…if you can't do something with working class kids it isn't worthwhile doing. Because they are the hope' – Harold Rosen, interview, 30 November 2004).

> The relationship between currently articulated theory and Walworth practice seems rather to have been that the story told by Britton and his colleagues offered a satisfying justification for practices that the teachers had arrived at from another direction; and of course they increasingly incorporated it into their own articulated rationales and helped to develop it. It may even have been that sometimes it was classroom discoveries that gave rise to fresh thinking by the academics, whose job it was, after all, to produce discursively elaborated accounts of English. Simon Clements, asked what role the theoretical insights of James Britton and the Institute of Education had on teachers like himself, answered that theory *followed* practice: for instance, the teachers discovered the value of extended class discussion (and learned how to run it), and Britton was then able, drawing on sources such as Cassirer, to supply the theoretical background in terms of, for instance, human beings' symbolic mediation of experience. (Conversation (not recorded), Sheffield, 3 June 2009).

In any case, in relation to the specific preoccupation about talk and writing that has concerned this essay, little beyond the broadest generalities was available. Teachers no doubt knew and welcomed the fact that in the process of writing essays older students clarified and extended their thinking, but it took a later generation consciously to make use of the attributes of writing that had been identified by linguists and writing researchers, and to show how writing could be a prosthetic extension of mind for discovering and developing insights and ordering ideas; for thinking and learning, in fact. Meanwhile, whereas toward the end of the period the claim in the LATE paper might have been more widely entertained that young people could come to 'deal with' emotions, perplexities and conflicts through 'creative writing' (as later expressed most vigorously by David Holbrook – e.g. 1961 and endorsed by the Schools Council – 1965), there is little suggestion in the evidence that the notion drove practice at Walworth. The impulses were to do rather with what the teachers saw as the core mission of English, to develop children's linguistic and intellectual capabilities, and, second, with enabling them to take their place as effective and self-respecting participants in a democracy – by encouraging them to think about the world and find the language to develop and express their thoughts. It was also strongly felt, not least on political grounds, that working-class children had a right to express what they thought and felt. (Rosen in particular felt about the adherents of the later 'Personal Growth' orthodoxy that 'there was always a political aspect of things which they either underplayed or didn't bring out' – Harold Rosen, interview, 30 November 2004.) Needless to say, no such 'ortho-

doxy' was in any position before the mid-1960s either to govern teachers' practice or to constitute a 'bandwagon' or 'expert' prescription to which teachers would feel it prudent to subscribe. Whatever the 'Personal Growth' model meant in later years (particularly in Australia where it was the slogan of one side in a bitter dispute), a glance at Reflections would be enough to dispel the idea that it was what Walworth was about.

To summarise, then, the curriculum and pedagogy side of this story: by the end of the school year 1963-64, when the key innovators had left the school, the Walworth English department felt they had put in place the elements of an English for the comprehensive school, one that would work across the entire population, or at least that of urban London. Judging by its sales, teachers throughout the country judged that the innovative Walworth course book, *Reflections* (Dixon, Clements, & Stratta, 1963), suited their pupils too. The approach informing *Reflections* embodied a newly dynamic relationship between speaking and writing. (See my colleague John Hardcastle's discussion of the book in Hardcastle, 2008.) I should stress, however, that the picture presented in this short article of what was achieved at Walworth has inevitably been over-simplified. Educational success was, of course, partial and intermittent; there were still unmotivated children, pupils who disrupted lessons, ones who made little progress. Nevertheless, the overwhelming message from the testimony of those who were there, teachers and students, is of a school that was successful and an educational process that 'worked' in a locality and situation where the expectation for most children was of failure. Certainly, the influence nationally and internationally of 'Walworth English' is indisputable. Well documented, for instance, is the influence of the *Reflections* authors in Canada and Australia. English teachers clearly did something right at Walworth, and the point now is to draw out what that was, *beyond* their crucial achievement of a better understanding of speech and writing.

11. A LEARNING CULTURE AND A TEACHER DEVELOPMENT MODEL

I now turn from curriculum and pedagogy to teacher development; Walworth teachers developed themselves as well as their teaching. They, as much as those pupils who thrived within their regime, came out of Walworth different from how they went in, as a result of what would now be called a professional development process supported not by an outside agency but by their interaction with each other, with LATE and with the Institute of Education. Their testimony is clear:

> For me to find myself immediately with teachers in the English department who talked and thought all the time was probably a main reason why I stayed teaching….There was no doubt that for me working with [them] was an education….I used to think of my time at Walworth as my little university (Simon Clements, email, 14 November 2006).

> Their daily interest and conversations challenged me and the opportunities for teaching creatively were frequently encouraged. To find myself included in intellectual discussions and practice about curriculum change and teaching was exciting. I have often thought of my years at Walworth as a "second university"' (Simon Clements, 'Postscript to the meeting at University of London Institute of Education Wednesday 25th May 2011', 1 June 2011, project archive).

Clements would sometimes travel up to the university after work to find his friends from the Institute in a favourite pub.

Re-reading a report he wrote about a visit to the West Riding education authority shortly after leaving Walworth, Simon Clements notices how he was by that point in his career

> able to observe confidently other schools' work and [how I] enjoyed in particular being in the classrooms, responding to children and listening to them talking about their work. I notice strengths and identify quality of work. But I also notice that I was raising critical questions about the work. In other words I was developing a critique about values and practice. I can only suggest that this early confidence and professional insight came from the experiences of Walworth and LATE (*ibid*).

I can give some idea of this teacher development by tracing one individual's trajectory, describing what teachers' learning looked like and pointing, in conclusion, to conditions and attitudes that made learning possible.

11.1 John Dixon's journey

Two Walworth heads of English, Harold Rosen and John Dixon, had started their learning as teachers in their previous jobs in grammar schools. Both seem to have arrived at Walworth with a general sense of what needed to be done in a comprehensive school. Their grasp of how that might be achieved, however, was far from complete. While we have little knowledge of Rosen's teaching in his grammar school years, and he is no longer alive to be asked, John Dixon has been able and willing to help us consistently with recollections and documents. It is his story that I will use, necessarily summarising from his interviews and the memoranda he has written for us; every point not presented in his own words can be supported by a direct quotation. It is in the nature of this sort of research that most of Dixon's specific recollections have not been able to be checked, but the general thrust of his account of Walworth is consistent with Simon Clements' reports.

John Dixon went in 1951 from Oxford, military service and the Institute of Education to Holloway Boys Grammar School, an LCC school in North London. The school became comprehensive in 1955, after which he stayed for a further four years before moving to the job in Walworth. In his own words, he fell at Holloway 'into a [grammar school] department that stuck to the textbooks through grammar, comprehension exercises, set compositions, and [the] set literature texts…until 60% or so failed the [O level] exams in Language, and more in Literature' (John Dixon, 'A Golden Age? v1': unpublished paper, project archive). (A 60 per cent failure rate in a *grammar school*, where O level was the explicit goal of the five-year

course, was scandalously bad.) With no hope of help from a somnolent English department, he found support instead amongst colleagues in other subjects and in the National Union of Teachers, where teachers gathered who were angry at the treatment working-class children were getting; these teachers were committed to, and actively preparing for, comprehensivisation. When the change happened Dixon gained two sympathetic English colleagues and several departments, including his own, introduced a common syllabus (i.e. not differentiated by ability) for all classes in each of the first three year-groups (aged 11-13). (This initiative is described by Dixon and two colleagues from other subjects in a strongly left-inclined collection – Brown, Dixon, & Wrigley, 1957.)

> [I began] to run lessons entirely given up to 'discussion', based for example on students' experiences with the police in their district. Chairing such exchanges in the role of an enquiring but interested observer was a first step into a new form of teaching, we thought. It gave *their* knowledge the priority (John Dixon, 'A Golden Age? v1', 4: unpublished paper, project archive).

Dixon mentions attending Harold Rosen's lecture on working-class language and Rosen's subsequent suggestion that he apply for his soon-to-be-vacant Walworth post.

We learn from Dixon's material what a long and arduous struggle it was to get from little more than his own experience as a pupil and the minimal help provided by his Institute of Education tutor to an insight and competence that almost no one could have passed on to him since at that time they barely existed in secondary schools. Dixon and those who followed similar paths had to *discover*, bit by bit and item by item, how to do things. In his case it took a decade. At one level the process could be described as successive *problem-solving*; problems were constant and had to be solved – Holloway and Walworth comprehensives were, after all, a quite new type of school; but that description fails to take into account that it was a particular (socialist) political and ethical perspective that determined what was *seen* as a problem, and that it was also a matter of noting and exploiting previously unregistered *possibilities*, with what counted as a *desirable* possibility similarly determined.

It's striking how often Dixon mentions that, 'We could have done X but *we didn't know how to*' and 'That was when *I learned you could Y*'. Going through his testimony and enumerating, we find that over the years he learned what urban working-class boys were like, how to run discussions and improvised drama, how to link the traditionally separate elements of English, how to use personal and social experience as ways into English, how to get students evaluating each other's writing and then literature (starting from 'What did you like?'), how to ask questions (at the instigation of work by James Britton), that 'personal writing' could be different from and preferable to the typical grammar school literary 'essays', how eloquent students could be under the right circumstances, that the best work is done when help rather than obstacles are offered (reading out the poem in an exam, indicating a wish to know what a pupil has to say in an oral assessment), that it is preferable

not to put marks on work, and how to organise small group work (learned from an Institute student on teaching practice). *Reflections* at the end of his period at Walworth represented the final stage of this development, 'as far as we'd got' – 'we' being the innermost team of himself, Stratta and Clements (John Dixon, interview, 21 June 2004).

11.2 Surprise and learning

Classroom phenomena that in most classrooms had been disregarded as of no significance attracted the notice of the English teachers I'm discussing as potentially offering clues from which they might learn. Some adventitious occurrences are recognised as exactly the sort of outcome that English should be aiming for; the obvious next step is then to engineer situations that would *induce* them to occur.

One way of putting it is that lessons had become more *interesting* to a particular sort of teacher so that, instead of taking what pupils did for granted, he or she was constantly being puzzled and surprised. Thus after Harold Rosen had read the first chapter of Dickens' *Great Expectations* with a class

> we explored the idea of being frightened, and being frightened of certain kinds of adults….they couldn't stop talking about frightening adults, quite different kinds of course, and I was surprised at how often they were people encountered in the markets, and who grabbed hold of them, and so on, tried to get money from them (Harold Rosen, interview, 30 November 2004)[5].

He and other teachers in LATE 'battled with things, were puzzled by ideas, puzzled by kids' responses and so on'.

Would we normally expect that a teacher would still regularly find himself puzzled and surprised after at least ten years' experience in grammar schools? Dixon and others had similar responses. This capacity is an index and essential attribute of people who are learning. Puzzlement and surprise arise from contradicted expectations. Expectations in turn arise from theory, usually inarticulate but in the right conditions getting spelled out, as it begins to be in Rosen's syllabus.

For learning of this kind to be actively sought by teachers they perhaps needed already to have formed a notion that English could be broader and that there was nothing God-given about the way it had traditionally been. We have come to associate that questioning sense with the post-war decline of deference to received wisdom and authority. What Donald Davie says about poetics applies to an equivalent group of practitioners in education: 'What my friends of those days took for granted was that the Second World War had invalidated even those radically diminished principles and sentiments that had survived the war of 1914-18….the as-

[5] *We have now learned, incidentally, that the novel had particular significance in Harold's own story – Rosen, Michael, 2011.*

sumptions of the 1920s and 1930s had to be questioned….We had to go back to basics,' that is, to first principles (Davie, 1992, p. x). This spirit is evident in the story Simon Gibbons tells of LATE in the late 1940s taking it upon themselves to challenge the University of London Examinations Board (responsible for O level) and assert their own professional authority (Gibbons, 2009b).

It was certainly a factor in the situation that schoolteachers – at least graduate teachers – and staff in higher education were able to cooperate with little sense of status difference; they all, after all, had the same background of bachelor's degree and teaching in schools. Those working in universities and teacher training colleges were able in those days to regard themselves as still essentially teachers – teachers with more time to think and write – without incurring criticism from superiors. They were not driven to spend years working for PhDs or to publish in journals that were refereed as if they were in a discipline like psychology. *English in Education*, the journal of the National Association for the Teaching of English (formed 16 years after LATE), was hospitable to articles by university people like Harold Rosen, James Britton and Nancy Martin that were engaging, uncluttered and readable and sat alongside pieces by practising teachers that might be of equal intellectual quality. The academicisation of the journal as a place for assessable 'research outputs' is one of the many sad developments in English since that day.

But why, apart from the decline of deference, was this determination to break new ground found quite widely in that generation and not so obviously in earlier ones? Attempted answers might be relevant to L1 teachers today.

The question behind the teachers' searching arose from a social mission: how can this comprehensive education, an education for all the people schooled together, be made to work? (That it *could* work they had little doubt.) For the first time since the introduction of universal education in 1870 some of the capital's best qualified and most dedicated teachers had now elected to teach the mass of the capital's children. They needed to know who their pupils were, what they thought, what made them tick, what could they do and in what conditions. Given the lively intelligence that so many Walworth pupils displayed, that they *could* do vastly more than had been traditionally assumed was evident. So those teachers approached their work in a spirit of attentive inquiry, with each outcome eagerly awaited, and it was this state of constant hopeful expectancy that made them so susceptible to surprise; the quality of that surprise was an index of the learning that accompanied and made possible their teaching.

For all its excitements, teaching in post-war Britain was an exhausting and confining way of life; many teachers, after a stint 'on the front line', felt they had to get out. But while exhaustion, poor pay, the demands of young families and long commuter journeys were certainly factors, they also felt the need for intellectual space and a broader cultural engagement than were possible with the unrelenting and often myopic demands of teaching over a hundred children and marking their work. Thus Rosen, Dixon, McLeod and others in the end took less exacting college

and university jobs that offered at least more time to read, write and work on professional bodies while still contributing to the development of English teaching.

In the meantime, though, while still at Walworth, that group – among them young and unattached teachers – were unwilling to forego the life of the mind just because they were teachers rather university lecturers or other paid intellectuals. Despite the realities of their employment, their comportment in society constituted a refusal of the constricted role of minor state functionaries. Nor were the effects of their wider involvements confined to their extra-curricular lives. The interest of Dixon and Clements in town planning and architecture (Clements had intended to be an architect) led directly to sections in *Reflections* on new housing and civic developments; their attention to cinema, as active members of the National Film Theatre, influenced the film Clements's class made in 1962; their experience of contemporary plays at the Royal Court Theatre affected classroom drama; the revitalised post-war cultural programming on the BBC suggested a style of classroom interrogation. As Harvey had known the key poets of his era, this group mixed with people distinguished in the new cultural studies (Stuart Hall – another London teacher), photography (Roger Mayne's photographs in *Reflections*), architecture (influencing students' studies of the streets of Walworth) and the beginnings of oral history (Paul Thompson).

12. THEN AND NOW

What can be the relevance today of what a small group of teachers did fifty and more years ago in a school and a system that no longer exist? It would seem that the contrast between then and now, in educational terms, could hardly be greater. Not only are the constitution of today's schools, admission procedures, teacher education and teacher demographics, and the manner of determining and policing the curriculum different; so are the students themselves, many of whom are from the families of recent immigrants from very different cultures. Fundamentally changed, too, are the culture that determines the attitudes of young people to schooling and authority and, of direct relevance to English, the technology through which both mass media and personal communications are conducted.

The relevance lies in the fact that some things nevertheless don't change, including, it would seem, the sources of teachers' desire to (a) learn and (b) enter into relationships that are productive of learning. The possibility of satisfying those impulses, however, was undoubtedly helped at that time by the profession's working conditions. Though highly unfavourable in terms of workload, amount of non-teaching time, class sizes, availability of resources, suitability of buildings and helpfulness of the public examinations at 16, it was nevertheless possible for a culture to emerge and be maintained, both among a school staff and in a London-wide association, that encouraged mutual support, the generation of ideas, experiment, the sharing of practice and the habit of continuous discussion of curriculum and

children. The key was that the system at the time, apart from the constraints arising from public examinations, largely left teachers to 'get on with it'.

> …one of the most jealously guarded of the conditions under which we work is the freedom of the teacher to construct his own scheme of work in fulfilment of the aims he believes in: and his continued freedom to adapt his plans, and even his objectives, in the light of changing conditions, new needs, unforeseen difficulties (London Association for the Teaching of English, 1956).

Teachers in most schools, however, do not seem to have taken advantage of that freedom to develop strong professional cultures of their own. That Walworth teachers did so seems to have been in part the result of the idealistic founding vision under which the school was set up by the LCC – though other schools established under the same initiative were judged less successful – and the appointment of two successive headteachers (Anne O'Reilly and Guy Rogers) who believed in that vision and were confident in the support they enjoyed from the authority.

Teachers thus came to the school – and not only to teach English – with educational, social and political convictions. The exceptional heads of department who Walworth attracted were able, within that climate and with that support from headteachers, to inspire a team of colleagues who wanted to teach well, do the best for their pupils and advance the position of the working class. These members of staff had a need for and took pleasure in learning, making their teaching into a continuation of a broader intellectual and personal development (as well as a way of engaging in a social movement). As one of them put it, teachers were able to act as if they were really professionals: 'We were not *semi*-professionals – we had ownership of the curriculum' (Robert Thornbury, interview, 10 December 2007).

So oppressive is current regulatory regime in England and so striking the contrast with what L1 teachers were able to do when left with neither tight monitoring nor deprofessionalising 'expert help', that we have hopes that these tidings from a distant era will not, now they have been brought to light, be 'lost in a void'.

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