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The Third International Conference on the Teaching of English in Sydney, Australia, August 18–22, 1980, attracted nearly eight-hundred people, about fifty of them from the United States. It was, by all accounts a friendly, often intense, spirited mix of interests and needs.

John Allen, Camberwell Grammar School in Australia, summarized the Conference as follows:

Dartmouth was a watershed. With some thirty-nine participants working together for six weeks, and with John Dixon acting as observer, recorder, and interpreter, there is little wonder that so much came of it. The Sydney experience was to be different in so many ways. Unlike Dartmouth, it was not a cross-Atlantic but an International Conference drawing delegates from ten countries who worked together under the banner, “English in the Eighties.” Perhaps the term working together is a misnomer. The Commissioners that gave structure to the Conference ensured that each delegate concentrate energy in one particular area, at the same time having opportunity to attend lectures on a multitude of subjects during late afternoons. What results from the experiences we have yet to see. If the papers delivered are published, the mass of material in the area alone will be enormous, and one assumes a detailed report will result from each of the Commissions. What we can judge is that for many participants the process experienced was far more important than any final product.

We asked four participants to report briefly on their impressions and experiences: Robert E. Shafer on his overall reactions; Nancy Thompson on the Commission on Teaching English in the Multi-Cultural Environment; and two people, Mike Angelotti and Mary Sucher, reporting from the different perspectives on the Commission on Literature.

The Conference

Unlike the 1966 Dartmouth Conference but similar to the 1971 York Conference, the Sydney Conference was organized in Commissions: (1) English Teaching in the Multi-Cultural Environment; (2) Teacher Education; (3 and 4) Schools, Learners, and the Community; (5) Assessment and the Implications of Failure; (6) Language Development (including strands on writing, the nature of narrative, and “the continuity of experience in language for personal growth”; (7) the Place of Literature, including children’s literature; and (8) Research, the Teacher, and Change. Participants committed themselves to one Commission for the entire week of the Conference.

Sir Herman Black, Chancellor of the University of Sydney, welcomed us with recollections of his school English assignments, particularly the writing of new scenes for Shakespearian plays. In “A Retrospective and Prospective View of the Art of English Teaching,” James Britton began the Conference and chronicled the ’40s and ’50s, as a time when “primary teachers increasingly influenced secondary teaching in England.” Such a trend, he noted, “was marked by a return to child-centered learning” in the ’60s and ’70s and represented a “grand procession from Dartmouth to the Bullock Report.” Britton proposed that in the ’70s “we learned the importance of intention” and “learned to use language as a means of learning, including the uses of talk, reading, and writing to organize our inner lives.” Of Frank Whitehead, critical of the participant/spectator role in language development, Britton stated, “He doesn’t recognize values, when they
crop up outside literature.” Of the proponents of accountability systems and back-to-basics movements, he quoted Auden: “Their visions shrink as their dreams die.”

As commissions worked through the week, I was struck by common issues faced English teachers no matter where they taught. Several Commissions agreed upon the necessity of understanding the nature of the community, the larger society and the community concerned with a particular school, and the effects on English programs. Harold Rosen reminded the Conference more than once that our attempts to understand the community and to develop a “content of culture” for a new model of multi-cultural education have not “been informed” by the work of Raymond Williams or other students of culture.

Jill Borthwick, (Chair, Commissions 3 and 4, Schools, Learners, the Community and the Teaching of English), focused on the effects of two communities on English teaching. One, the larger community—particularly parents and employers—and two, the community of the school, particularly with ways administrators and other teachers think about English. In her opening statement, Borthwick noted, “The community, and perhaps in particular the employers, places great stress on the notion of educational products and tends not to be interested in the processes which underlie these products. . . . What a student is able to produce is dependent upon becoming involved in language situations in such a way as to feel the need to respond, encouraged by a teacher who has established rapport.”

The commission explored ways in which stress upon product is related to stress upon utility in the use of certain methods and materials rather than growth in language development. The Commission explored the conflict between the “ethics of work and morality” in the community wherein many parents and community members value students working at “clearly defined tasks” and do not value participation in “imaginative and creative programs.”

The Commission observed “non-English teaching staff can be critical of the way the English classroom is set up and the search of activities that take place in it” and traditionally “teachers of other subjects blame the teachers of English for any lapse in student’s language use.” The Commission pointed out that “a picture is emerging of the teacher of English as beleaguered on a number of sides.”

Gary MacLennan and Miriam Henry argued in one paper “the oblique vagueness of Britton, Barnes, Rosen and Martin (the London school) . . . has never looked carefully at the type of society which they are preparing children to write in. Ours is a society where writing assessment is used as a means of social control, ultimately by deciding who gets what jobs in society”.

Donald Graves and Geoffrey Summerfield spoke on the importance of developing a “personal growth model” in using language and experience of the child to improve writing abilities and responsiveness to literature.

In the final plenary session, James Moffett urged teachers to remember the conference existed to “generate tensions” in teachers who should keep their eye, “looking at things as they are now and at things as they ought to be in the future.” Ian Pringle pointed to “the common commitment” of an English teaching profession and announced plans are underway for a conference in Canada between 1984 and 1986. Lesli Stratta called upon teachers “to study the effects of testing in the classroom during the ’80s from national assessment to self-assessment.”

Rob Eagleson, President of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English, challenged conference participants to “see ourselves as members of the community joining with parents in the important role of developing children’s language.”

Robert E. Shafer
Arizona State University

The Commission on Teaching English in the Multi-Cultural Environment

My most memorable experience participating in the Commission on Teaching English in the Multi-Cultural Environment was working with individuals from all parts of the English-speaking world. We learned about complex multi-cultural situations in many countries and we discovered our differences and commonalities.

Communication was not easy. Subtle language differences were often a factor. We had to concentrate to understand the subtleties of each others’ ideas, and sometimes listening was difficult because we were eager to express our own ideas and feelings.

We agreed the classroom focus must be on the individual. As James Moffett told us, we must practice double vision—look-near yet look-far simultaneously, entertaining visions of both present and future, considering what is and what should be.
On Monday morning, August 18, 1980, Commission Chair John Collard opened the session with concepts of multi-cultural education. He launched the week-long exploration of ideas with a film, “Anyway, What Is an Australian?” The film showed images from daily lives representing different cultural groups in Australia. Noticeably absent from the film were Australia’s Aboriginal people, an absence widely discussed throughout the week. Our desire for information was evident in our purchase of Eric G. Vaszolyi’s book, *Aboriginal Australians Speak, An Introduction to Australian Aboriginal Linguistics*, sold just before the final Commission meeting.

Harold Rosen, University of London Institute of Education, spoke Monday about his research on linguistic diversity in London. As he made clear, teachers need to scrutinize their cultural backgrounds and values to understand and teach in a multi-cultural society. The London researchers view linguistic diversity as healthy, and they see their research as an enterprise in identifying linguistic resources in the community. Rosen underscored the gap between research and teaching practice, urging mother tongue teachers and ESL teachers to come together, ESL teachers to understand regular classroom teaching, classroom teachers to understand and apply ESL techniques. Rosen stressed the necessity of using literature that speaks vividly and directly to different minority groups.

On Monday afternoon the Commission broke into the following seven groups: Philosophy and Its Implications for School Systems; Teacher Education; Research; English Courses; TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language), Bi- and Multi-Linguai Education; The Role of the Resource Teacher (which later dispersed into other groups); and Classroom Practices. We worked in these groups until Friday afternoon when we met in the Commission Plenary to report our work.

Our work ended with presentation of these recommendations.

1. This Commission supports a proposal to establish a clearinghouse for the collection of materials and articles produced for the teaching of English in a multi-cultural society. This clearing-house will (a) collect and circulate classroom materials and (b) collect and assist publication of articles and materials to contribute to English teaching in a multi-cultural world.

2. Education in a multi-cultural society must be seen as a perspective rather than a package. The issues involved in it relate not only to language learning in all curriculum areas, but also to school organiza-

3. Dialogue among teachers of English, whether to pupils who speak English as their mother tongue or English as a second language, and teachers of other languages, should be implemented.

4. Research funding authorities should be urged to ensure that those involved in a research project have access to information which concerns them and that they have the opportunity to be involved in the generation, implementation, and dissemination of that research.

5. This Commission recommends the creation of a national Centre for Applied Linguistics to co-ordinate research and to disseminate research results in ways appropriate to the needs of different audiences.

Nancy Thompson
University of South Carolina

**The Literature Commission: I**

When I discovered “response to literature” was to be the central issue of the Literature Commission, I wondered, why response? Hadn’t we done that enough at Dartmouth? What new could be written after that conference and the subsequent work of Moffett, Britton, and others?

The major concerns and developments of the Sydney Conference proved Dartmouth was a solid beginning, but it was not enough for the eighties and beyond. Nor is Moffett. Nor is Britton. For that matter, nor is Sydney. Its value will be measured in its sharpening of Dartmouth and York and in its attempts to evaluate where we have been, where we are, and where we ought to be going. Geoffrey Summerfield captured the prevailing mood at the closing session of the Literature Commission when he said “it reached no resolution except to stay crucial,” a quotation from Les A. Manning’s sonnet sequence “Sidere Mens Eadem Mutato.”

David Malleck, chair of the Literature Commission, set its theme nicely in his opening remarks. “When a teacher of literature provides narrow experiences for students, is the teacher limited or is the literature pedagogy limited? We need a theoretical foundation for teaching literature.” The 180 delegates, working in nine subgroups in pursuit of this theme, centered their talk on four major ideas: definitions, roles, pedagogy, and processes.

“Responding to literature,” alas, was not ultimately defined. The complexities of simple definition become more obvious considering that response to literature is doing something as a result of an encounter with literature. Precisely what is done de-
pends on a number of physiological, cognitive, affective, and environmental factors. As teachers we seem more comfortable when students publicly respond right away (we can react to and grade that), although as readers we (and our students) more likely prefer private response in our own good time. The pedagogical problem becomes how to encourage and allow a full dimension of response for each reader at the same time intervening (or not) at times most appropriate to effective teaching of literature.

To define "literature," within a school context anyway, is critical. One delegate, underscoring the wish for all-inclusiveness held by others, defined literature as "any way that language users choose to represent life," i.e., literature should be redefined in relation to contemporary culture and language use. Questions basic to a definition (or definitions) of literature must be addressed. Can we exclude forms of popular literature (television, film, song, radio, etc.) from a general definition? For that matter, how can we realistically exclude children's and adolescent literature from programs of literature study? How can we in good conscience exclude children and adolescents from pleasurable reading of literature? Should not school literature be representative of the cultural pluralism of the society in general?

Too frequently, research and literature on language processes that could make a difference in the classroom remain the private estate of researchers, convention goers, and journal readers—few of them classroom teachers able to translate theory into practice. What will become, for example, of the exciting findings of the current two-year study on children's writing processes being conducted by Donald Graves and associates? How many elementary school children will profit? Who will profit from a decade of work in psycholinguistics and reading?

One way to do this, argued Peter Moss, is for the profession to analyze and use available power mechanisms from the media, professional groups, and schools themselves. We need to expand our perceptions of teaching literature through teacher exchange programs, sabbaticals, team teaching, and teacher observation within schools. We need to spend more time learning about literature teaching by working with others who teach literature. We need to attend to our students' responses, each of us becoming classroom researchers, sharing our discoveries as we go along.

The value of working closely with other professionals was never more evident than in the subgroup work, a humbling experience—here was passion for children, for literature, for teaching bared in hours of close communion that ended too soon. This report would not be complete without sharing some thoughts from those sessions as group members reflected on a week's work together:

There is a sense of passion for literature that makes the world of literature different from any other world in the school curriculum. What we are about as literature teachers is to open kids up to that passion, to catch them up in it.

Literature teachers must be articulate about the uses of literature in life (to justify its inclusion in the curriculum, even though we feel that it needs no justification).

There must be more joy in the classroom.

The important thing in growth in literature is levels of pleasure as children grow. We must foster courageous response, from private to public, in ourselves as well as in our students, because it is important we learn to share response with others.

We must be careful to not allow reading interest studies to become self-fulfilling prophecies.

For there to be truth in responding, students must see the teacher responding. How often do teachers write about their own inner responses? Often enough to know how it feels? How often do teachers go public with their inner responses to students?

"We can live a life inside a book or play, but do we keep kids outside?"

Mike Angelotti
Texas Tech University

The Literature Commission: II

I was surprised that no librarians had been invited to take a vital part in the work of the Literature Commission. I nevertheless considered myself fortunate in being part of Geoffrey Summerfield's section which included the English supervisor for Auckland, New Zealand, and the director of reading instruction at Adelaide University.

Summerfield's thoughts often revolved around the interplay between the writer's world and the reader's world, and teachers' need to know both.

He mentioned that literary criticism is not an important constituent feature of our real lives. To him, literary criticism classes in high schools and universities seem like behavioral laboratories miles away from Henry James' "To appreciate is to make it your own" and Samuel Johnson's "No one but a fool would open a book except for pleasure."

Randall Jarrell and W. H. Auden are Summerfield's favorite critics, marvelous for sixteen or seventeen-year-olds. Jarrell is unpretentious, laying his sacred objects on the table, and affirmative, a non-preaching critic discussing books he likes. Sum-
Summerfield quoted Auden, "A poem is a means of paying homage to a sacred object." Summerfield would ask about literature, "What does this text have that you like? Where were you disappointed, irritated, amazed, confused, frustrated, puzzled, delighted?" Getting immersed in reading, Summerfield believes, is that state of blessedness and total self-obliteration when we hear other voices in our head—a total response to the text. He advised us to read to our students, letting them respond to the sounds of a poem, for example, for if we want to share books with children, it is because we want to share that blessedness.

Serious, mature adults are becoming interested in children's literature, a matter about which he feels strongly. He is disturbed children are not allowed to answer questions coming from inside themselves but rather those posed by teachers.

What did I get out of English in the '80s? Meeting alert teachers interested in their work and their children, and a chance to listen again to the marvelous Margaret Meek (The Cool Web).

But most of all, it was the daily contact with our section chair, Geoffrey Summerfield—a warm, caring teacher and scholar, a man aware of the best in literature and the best to be reached in children.

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so many boxes within boxes
i am so tired of boxes
living in them
living out of them
so many boxes within boxes
without secrets or surprises.

there are boxes
mating in the hall closet
with the door open
i close my eyes
when reaching for my jacket.

at night
i fear walking in my sleep
for the carton
beneath the basement steps
is giving birth any day now.

even shoe boxes scare me.
they hide under my bed
wait for me
to turn out the lights.
i never do.

Dawna Maydak Andrejcak
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