Prospect and Retrospect: Selected Essays of James Britton, edited by Gordon M. Pradl, presents articles and speeches spanning 1953 to 1982 on Britton’s theories of language and behavior, the basis of his Language and Learning (1970) and of The Development of Writing Abilities, 11-18 (1975). Here the teacher can find clear discussions of Britton’s key terms, such as the participant and spectator roles and transactional, expressive, and poetic discourse, and see their application to the classroom. The essays, none of them excerpts, provide a clear picture of Britton’s ideas on education, especially concerning language’s role in creating and organizing meaning in our lives.

The first section of the book, “Literature and the Shaping of Experience,” deals with Britton’s view of literature as a crucial instrument of growth. In “Reading and Writing Poetry,” he asserts that children younger than eleven should be exposed to the poetry of Dickinson or Auden; their time should not be wasted on stories in verse or comic verse. While young children will enjoy exploring new realms, he indicates in “Words and the Imagination” and “The Role of Fantasy,” adolescents will often favor conventional situations as a refuge from their changing worlds. “Poetry and Our Pattern of Culture” compares a child’s witch story with Dickinson’s “Ample make this bed” to show that both reconcile logic and emotion, thus both can increase the child’s understanding of confusing new situations.

“Response to Literature” further considers the proper treatment of literature in school. Children should read both widely and closely starting with any works they enjoy; in time extensive reading and free responding will generate a sense of literary form and worth. Even with older students, literary criticism should play a small role:

To have children take over from their teachers an analysis of a work of literature which their teachers in turn have taken over from the critics or their English professors—this is not a short cut to literary sophistication; it is a short circuit that destroys the whole system. (p. 34)

The last essay of this section, “Spectator Role and the Beginnings of Writing,” provides a broader theoretical picture of Britton’s thinking on literature and development. The poetic end of the discourse continuum—starting at expressive writing closest to speech and incorporating viewing of events, gossip, and literature—allows a child to generate and refine values needed for transactional situations and discourse. This connection of literature with non-literary activities does not denigrate it, as Britton’s critics have claimed, but instead reveals its centrality to human behavior and learning.

In the second section, “Language and Intention,” Britton’s theme is the wider range of language: speaking and listening, writing and reading. These essays especially deal with value development—with the centrality of a speaker’s or reader’s immediate intentions and needs.

“The Speaker” and “A Reader’s Expectations” explain a child’s development from age one to seven through oral naming, monologue, and running commentary to inner speech and verbal thinking, and from action to speech and reading. Thus talking and reflecting, like reading and writing, create children’s structures for experience, and help them form and voice their own intentions. Language in this value-building spectator role should be the primary concern of the English teacher:

I do not see him then as a teacher of literature: for this defines his function in extrinsic terms: rather I believe that the process of structuring personal experience demands the writing and reading of what is essentially literature—language in the role of the spectator... acquiring skill in language must be secondary to achievement through language—and what is to be achieved through language in English lessons is the organizing and interpretation of the

(Continued on page 16)
child’s personal experiences and their extensions in an organized way. (p. 78)

In three other essays from this section, Britton speaks more specifically on writing and its origins in speaking. “Writing to Learn and Learning to Write” provides a detailed analysis of participant discourse for dealing with a situation in progress and of spectator discourse for placing it within a world view. Here Britton also discusses the expressive middle ground of children’s first writing and of rough drafts. “Notes on a Working Hypothesis about Writing,” first published in The National Writing Project Newsletter, lists qualities of good writing instruction, including encouragement of expressive heuristics and the teacher as trusted audience. In “Shaping at the Point of Utterance,” Britton further discusses the importance of unstructured first drafts and explorative writing for developing the writer’s intentions fully.

The third and final section, “Perspectives on the Profession,” concerns Britton’s theories on language and development in relationship to our current educational system. “A Note on Teaching, Research, and Development” urges researchers and teachers to work together to affect instruction. In “Take it From . . . Where?,” Britton examines the trend toward behavioral objectives, criticizing their rigid enforcement. For Britton, as for George Kelly and Michael Polanyi, learning is not a special activity created and controlled in school, but the basis of all human behavior. As children learn language naturally outside of school, so in-school learning should be open to the unexpected results from individual, group, and class experiences.

In “How We Got Here,” Britton discusses the last fifty years of English teaching and chronicles a growing movement which can counteract strict behaviorism—one toward teacher-and-child centered classes. Excerpts from lesson plans, talks, and reports also reveal Britton’s own evolving attitudes during these years. In “Reflections on the Writing of the Bullock Report,” Britton reviews his involvement with a three-year British study of the school system. Although the 1975 report contains too much compromise, he concludes, its value lies in strongly endorsing humanistic education, which especially needs support during recession, “a time of shrinking perspectives” toward literacy represented by the “back to basics” movement (p. 190).

The final essay, “English Teaching: Retrospect and Prospect” summarizes many of Britton’s ideas on interactive learning and growth. As in “How We Got Here,” he speaks enthusiastically for the future of the profession and for our increasing recognition of the individual student’s intentions and needs. Especially in turbulent times, as we face for example the reality of nuclear warfare, we need training in the spectator role to cope and grow: thus the eighties should be the decade of the classroom teacher. Paraphrasing an American Quaker, Rufus Jones, Britton concludes: “I pin my hopes to quiet processes and small circles in which I believe I shall see, if I’m still alive at the end, vital and transforming events taking place” (p. 214). Fine essays such as these and Britton’s continued dedication to the teaching profession will have caused many of these “vital and transforming events.”

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**Book Review**

**WRITING FOR LEARNING IN THE CONTENT AREAS**
by Denny Wolfe and Robert Reising
J. Weston Walch, 1983

How many times have we heard at inservice sessions the question from math teachers, social studies teachers, science teachers: “But I’m not a writing teacher; how do I integrate writing into what I do in the classroom?” We all have devised our own ways of answering this question, but now we have a resource that may be more convincing than our usual responses. *Writing for...* Learning in the Content Areas offers a concise process model that can be adapted easily to a variety of subject areas. But unlike most of the cross discipline writing texts available to us, this book does not spend time telling us what ought to be done—it shows.

The authors, both of whom are involved with Writing Projects, stress the principle of “writing as a way of knowing and learning.” They offer practical steps for introducing this principle into English, social studies, mathematics, science, business education, and vocational...