Language and Experience
(Rereading *Growth Through English*)

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'*Any true understanding is dialogic in nature*. Understanding is to utterance as one line of dialogue is to the next.'

V.N. Vološinov (1986 [1929]), *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, p. 102

1. **Introduction**

This essay takes John Dixon's *Growth Through English* as a prompt to revisit the question of the relationship between language and experience. For Dixon a consciousness of that relationship is at the heart of English curriculum and pedagogy, requiring sensitivity on the part of teachers to attempts by their students to give meaning to their experiences through language and the other semiotic resources available to them. To be sensitive to that struggle is to acknowledge the struggle we all face – teachers and pupils alike – when creating representations of our experiences in order to achieve a sense of our identities and an understanding of the world we hold in common.

We are mindful that such a reading of *Growth Through English* goes against the grain of accepted accounts of 'personal growth' pedagogy. Dixon's work has been subject to a number of critical readings that ascribe to him a narrow focus on the individual pupil and an equally narrow focus on language as personal expression. This emphasis has supposedly been at the expense of any recognition of how people use language for social purposes. Frances Christie, for example, has argued repeatedly that the 'growth model' presupposes 'an essentially romantic notion of the individual' (Christie, 1991, p.77; Christie, nd; Christie and Macken-Horarik, 2007, p.162) that privileges middle class students. Those students might be eager to express their experiences of the world through personal writing of the kind that Dixon values, but children from socially disadvantaged communities require support in the form of explicit instruction as to how language works for them to communicate effectively. And in order for such children to overcome their social disadvantage, teachers need to do more than encourage them to write stories about their personal experiences. Their job, rather, should be to scaffold their students into the 'powerful' genres that constitute the realms of public discourse (cf. Cope and Kalantzis, 1993, p.6, Locke, 2015, Martin et al. nd, Christie et al., 1991).

We seek to challenge such readings of 'personal growth' pedagogy and the binaries with which they operate. For Dixon, 'experience' is not a private space to be cherished that only finds expression in writing of a narrowly personal kind. Dixon's understanding of 'experience' is predicated, rather, on an understanding of language as mediating between the private realm of the 'self' and the public realms that people negotiate each day, between the 'personal' and the 'social', between 'inner' and 'outer', between 'thought' and 'word'. These words echo Vygotsky (1987 [1934]) and Vološinov (1986 [1929]), who both emphasise the role that language plays in the relationships and activities in which people engage in their daily lives. Yet for both theorists this recognition of language as a social phenomenon gives rise to an equally important recognition of the need to explore how through language individuals become conscious of themselves and the world in which they find themselves and so begin to play an active role in the life that is happening around them.

Indeed, Vološinov explains the impetus behind his work as arising from this insight into the significance of language as it is felt personally, as a part of an individual's growing awareness of 'self'. Although 'the reality of the word, as is true of any sign, resides between individuals', a word is also a phenomenon of inner life or an individual's consciousness (p.14).

The distinctive quality of *Growth Through English* derives from the way Dixon is able to show through his careful analyses of students' writing how they use language to negotiate a relationship between the 'personal' and the 'social' as they experience it. He thus provides a framework for a culturally sensitive pedagogy that understands classrooms as vitally important sites for enacting a social democracy more responsive and more accountable than that which we and our students tend to encounter in the world beyond the classroom.

2. Beyond 'Models' of English

The opening chapter of *Growth Through English* famously heralds 'personal growth' as a new model of English that has displaced the previous models of 'skills' and 'cultural heritage'. Dixon presents this as an 'historical' perspective, associating the focus on 'skills' with an era of rapid industrialisation 'when initial literacy was the prime demand' (Dixon, 1972 [1967], p.1), while the 'cultural heritage' model had its apotheosis in the Newbolt Report of 1921 (p.3). Dixon's strategy is clearly to promote 'personal growth', and in so doing he allows the question of the adequacy of this representation of the history of English teaching to go begging – any attentive reading of the Newbolt Report, for example, shows it to be a multifaceted document that resists being labelled simply as promoting a 'heritage model' (see Doecke and Mead, 2017; Doecke, 2017; Departmental Committee, Board of Education, [1921] 1938]⍰). Dixon is hardly the first person to ring out the 'old' and ring in the 'new' – educational reforms are typically announced as opening up a bright new future that sweeps aside a benighted past - but the schema he presents in the opening pages of *Growth Through English* has none the less posed a serious obstacle to attempts to think about our history as English teachers in a reflexive way that might enhance our capacity to grapple with the complexities of the present. Subsequent advocates of educational reform have found it easy to repeat Dixon's litany of 'models' of English, merely extending the list by adding their own 'model' as embodying the newest and best approach to the teaching of English (cf. Reid, 2003, p.98), with the result that 'personal growth' has itself been vulnerable to the same broad brushstroke treatment that Dixon metes out to 'skills' and 'cultural heritage'.

The challenge is to re-read *Growth Through English* attentively in order to engage with the language of the text as it unfolds in the course of Dixon's argument. Not that the debates surrounding *Growth Through English* can be resolved through a close reading that is somehow truer to the original text than the summary judgements made by the commentators we have been considering. Our epigraph is meant to signal, rather, that any re-reading is always part of a continuing dialogue in which we should try to be mindful of what we ourselves are bringing to the conversation. We need to cultivate an awareness of all that mediates our reading of *Growth Through English*, trying to imagine the historical conditions to which Dixon was responding before judging his views and values. Such an historically reflexive stance also includes reflecting on the ideological assumptions that shape our own reading of the text.

For us the abiding significance of *Growth Through English* does not lie in its account of changing 'models' of English. A few pages in and Dixon puts this programmatic schema

behind him to focus on entries from the diary of a ten-year-old boy in order to explore the complexities of reading and responding to students' writing. But his analysis amounts to more than an illustration of 'personal growth' pedagogy, and the diary can be read as a text in its own right:

> 1st April. Rainy with sunny periods. After breakfast I went to get some newts. I got a large jar, washed it and put a stone in it, then went to poplar pond with a stone and a tin [....]
> 2nd April. Very rainy dull and wet. Today I made a fishing net, not to catch fish but newts. I caught six. I picked out the ones I thought best [...]There were lots of newts in the pond t-day. I daresay they like this kind of weather [....]

Although Dixon proceeds to show why he finds this text interesting, the richly concrete detail of the entries – they tell of the boy's efforts to catch newts, his failure one day and his success the next - invites readers to gauge their own responses to the writing without necessarily subscribing to the terms of Dixon's analysis. Indeed, the question that motivates Dixon's analysis is: 'What, as English teachers, can we learn from such an extract?' (p.5). Even though Dixon is arguing the value of a particular lens for exploring this text's features, by posing this question he is also giving the diary an independent status as a focus for our attention. He thereby acknowledges that no one can pretend to have the last word about this text, that it is not something that can be pinned down in any analysis of it. We would certainly not be doing it justice if we were to fall back on the kind of judgments that teachers have traditionally made by giving it a mark and a summary comment at the bottom of the page. The standpoint that we are invited to share, rather, is that of English teachers who are committed to observing the language of their students 'in operation from day to day' (p.4), who try to remain open to new insights that their students' uses of language make available to them, even insights that might cause them to 'modify' their preconceptions about the nature of language (p.4). English teachers are thus encouraged to bring all their knowledge of language and literature to bear on their engagement with their pupils in classroom settings, but this is not to suppose that they have nothing else to learn through their exchanges with them.

This standpoint, involving a disposition to learn from the language and experiences that children bring to school, is not unique to Dixon – we might consider Marjorie Hourd's analysis of the writing her students produced in her classes during the 1930s and 1940s (Hourd, 1968 [1949]). Nor is this a practice that has completely fallen into disuse since the time that Dixon first wrote his account of Dartmouth – we might think of how students' writing is featured in studies like *The Development of Writing Abilities* (11-18) (Britton et al., 1975) or Peter Medway's *Finding a Language* (Medway 1980) or Brian Johnston's *Assessing English* (Johnston, 1987 [1983]) or Dixon and Stratta's exploration of the role of storytelling in students' writing in *Writing Narrative – and Beyond* (Dixon and Stratta, 1986). With colleagues we have ourselves tried to follow Dixon's example when writing accounts of English teachers' work in classrooms in Australia and England (Yandell, 2014, Yandell and Brady, 2016, Doecke and McClenaghan, 2011, Doecke and McClenaghan, 2009). Yet the fact remains that our current policy environment is one characterised by the imposition of forms of accountability that demand teachers continually judge their students' writing against certain pre-defined 'outcomes' that supposedly demonstrate the acquisition of skills that are taken to be the defining properties of effective writers. It is therefore timely for English teachers to consider what they might learn from students' writing by suspending the criteria they habitually employ and recognising that even the most modest sample of student writing is open to interpretation (cf. Sawyer, 2005, p.141).

To see students as writers, to treat their work as worthy of careful and serious reading, reflects a particular understanding of the way language mediates our sense of self in relation to others and our capacity to know and to act within the world around us. This, in turn, reflects a particular understanding about the nature of knowledge (who has it) and experience (its value) which positions teachers and students differently from the hierarchical structures that have historically characterised schooling in capitalist society. The promise of 'personal growth' pedagogy lies in the way it provides the foundations on which to enact more humane, socially responsible, democratic pedagogic relationships. Or perhaps we should say: *begin* to enact. For Dixon's stance in *Growth Through English* is a tentative and exploratory one, despite his rhetoric about ringing in the new in the opening pages of his book. The essential modesty of his claims about 'personal growth' is evident in both the original volume and the revised version published in 1975 (subtitled 'Set in the perspective of the seventies'), where his diffidence about making claims for the socially emancipatory potential of 'personal growth' is echoed by James Squire and James Britton, two other prominent contributors to the Dartmouth Seminar, who in their Foreword to the new edition sound a warning about the threat posed by government attempts at 'intervention in the educational process' in the form of 'back to basics' and a growing emphasis on 'accountability' through standardised testing (Squire and Britton, 1975, p.xii).

It is as though at the very moment of the publication of *Growth Through English*, system-wide educational reforms emphasising narrow forms of 'accountability' and 'efficiency' were in train that would prevent 'personal growth' pedagogy from ever being fully implemented. For Squire and Britton this increasing focus on 'holding schools and teachers accountable for what pupils learn' (p.xii) is symptomatic of the 'widespread economic and social dislocation' that had occurred since the Dartmouth Seminar, including 'the crisis in values in the United States accelerated by growing rejection of the Viet Nam Conflict and the revolt of students on campus and in schools' (p.xi), which had prompted governments to take measures in order to stifle dissent. Dixon himself, in a concluding chapter to this new edition, remarks that his own perspective has changed since Dartmouth, but that this change is not one that can be 'confined to English teaching', which is 'just one microcosm of a far wider struggle' (Dixon, 1975 [1967], p.111). He then goes on to refer to the 'uneasy wakening' he has experienced that has forced him to confront 'the dilemmas of coercive authority and inescapable subordination', bringing him to 'recognize again and again how prone the teacher is to use language to dominate and constrict' (p.111), a lesson that he has learnt not only by watching other teachers in action but through monitoring his own exchanges with students. He recognises, in short, that whatever his intentions might be as an educator (intentions that he powerfully articulates in *Growth Through English*), his practices as a teacher are also a function of the institutional setting in which he is operating, producing contradictions with which he continues to struggle.

We are brought to contemplate, in short, a vision of a critically aware pedagogy that raises larger questions than the value or otherwise of particular 'models' of English teaching, which remain, after all, mere abstractions in relation to the concrete particularities of classroom life. English teachers need to reflect on how their professional practice might be mediated by larger social and economic contexts beyond the immediacy of everyday life in school. Any affirmation of the promise of 'growth pedagogy' or for that matter any new approach to teaching and learning demands, simultaneously, a recognition of the ways schools operate to reproduce the inequalities of capitalist society. This is not to deny the need for teachers to remain actively committed to making schools sites for the achievement of social democracy. For all the reified structures arrayed against teachers and their pupils, it remains vitally important to seize those moments of communication and insight within classrooms

that 'personal growth' pedagogy highlights. To borrow from Raymond Williams, 'growth pedagogy' is one of 'the many forms of opposition and struggle' against the 'hegemonic process' that schools in capitalist society attempt to impose. (Williams, 1977, p.113) Teachers can hardly turn away from their ethical responsibility to be fully responsive to the efforts by their students to make sense of their lives and the society in which they live through writing personal narratives about their experiences.

That said, it remains the case that the critiques of 'personal growth' made to promote alternative 'models' of English have been characterised by a loss of historical memory that has obscured the insights made available through the samples of students' writing that Dixon analyses in the course of his argument. The issue turns on the impulse to classify pieces of writing in order to judge whether they satisfy certain criteria. As James Britton and his collaborators observe at the beginning of *The Development of Writing Abilities* (11-18), 'we classify at our peril': 'even the lightest touch of the classifier's hand is likely to induce us to see members of a class as more alike than they actually are, and items from different classes as less alike than they actually are' (Britton et al., 1975, p.1; cf. Doecke and McClenaghan, 2009). To become obsessed with classifying a piece of student writing is to risk failing to recognise, let alone appreciate, its distinctive features as a text and the desires invested in it. But the fact is that the flexibility of judgment that Britton and his collaborators see as integral to the work of English teachers has been undermined by the very kind of mentality that they caution against. We are thinking especially of the expectation that students should produce writing that accords with the requirements specified for particular text types or genres, writing that is shaped by and assessed according to a set of pre-specified criteria.

3. Language, Experience, Reification

We have said enough to indicate that the history of English curriculum and pedagogy in the post-war period can hardly be represented in the form of a series of 'models' of English. An historical imagination requires us to trace how the beliefs and practices associated with any particular pedagogy might have intersected with larger social and economic developments. This is not to say that we should treat those 'models' as merely a reflection of those developments (as in that form of Marxist analysis that reduces the superstructure to a mere epiphenomenon of the economic base). The task, rather, is to gauge their ideological character as responses on the part of educators to the circumstances with which they were faced. We can then make a judgment about the adequacy or otherwise of those responses to the challenges posed by a specific historical moment, which includes identifying the social interests they served. This is as distinct from the rationale that the historical actors might give for their actions. The proponents of Systemic Functional Linguistics, for example, are no doubt sincere when they claim that their aim is to provide students with an explicit knowledge of 'powerful' genres that will enable them to overcome their social disadvantage. Yet it is only necessary to ask how they define the place of 'human beings in the world' (to borrow again words from Raymond Williams, 1977, p.21), to sense that the ideological work they are performing may be the opposite of what they intend.

To tease out the ideological nature of so called 'genre' pedagogy, we shall look at an analysis of students' writing that Jim Martin, Frances Christie and Joan Rothery presented in the early 1980s, when they first emerged as prominent players in debates about language and literacy education. Their treatment of the following sample of student writing also serves to show how their approach differs from the way that John Dixon uses students' texts. We shall

present only a small excerpt of the text, which was published originally by Brian Gray as part of a 1985 Conference Proceedings (see Gray, 1986, pp.198-199, Martin et al. nd, p.72):

> All the things are on the table. We will use them to make toast. There is honey, vegemite, peanut butter, bread, margarine, jam, a knife, a plate and a toaster. We are ready to make toast. Kevin is getting two slices of bread out of the packet. Then he puts the bread in the toaster. […} Kevin watches the bread inside the toaster cooking. It is still white. The toast came popping out [….]

As with the diary entries about collecting newts, such writing, at this distance in time, is intriguing for the traces it offers of lives and circumstances that are otherwise inaccessible to us. Samples of children's writing almost invariably provide insights into the way children and adolescents inhabit the present, enabling us to sense how their expectations shape their engagement with the world around them. Yet if the excitement of this bunch of kids preparing breakfast is imbued with the poignancy of a moment that is now irretrievably in the past, the verdict that Martin, Christie and Rothery deliver about the quality of this text has all the gravity of a life sentence. We are told that 'this kind of writing is not functional in our culture' (Martin et al., nd, p.72). This is because 'generically speaking it is neither recount (i.e. what we did), nor procedure (i.e. how to do something)', which they illustrate by pointing to the confusion of tenses within the text, and the fact that it reads largely like 'running commentary', which is 'spoken, not written down'.

Such judgements reflect an inability on the part of educators to evaluate a text on terms other than those that conform to their preconceptions as to the form that a piece of writing should take. Their condemnation of the text is all the more perplexing for their refusal to recognise its value as a joint composition featuring the use of the first person plural that typically combines photographs and sentences in an effort to represent the joy of this fleeting moment: of being together, of making toast and spreading it with vegemite, peanut butter or jam. We suspect that most English teachers have at some stage facilitated the creation of texts of this kind, involving the juxtaposition of photographs and language in an effort to represent a special moment that the class has shared together. Brian Gray, who originally used this text, included the photos alongside the written language, thus providing a stronger sense of its context and function, though he also struggles to grant it legitimacy, claiming that 'such texts waste the opportunity to extend the literacy competence of the children through exposure to models of factual texts which deal with the generalisation of information' (Gray, 1986, p.200).

That this text was actually produced by Indigenous students in a school in the Northern Territory makes the judgment that it is 'not functional in our culture' even more disturbing. Gray sketches this context in his paper, although, as we have just indicated, this knowledge does nothing to modify his own judgment about the 'confused nature' of the text (Gray, 1986, p.197). Later in the paper, he does at least provide samples of written texts that arise out of bi-lingual programs, admitting to feeling challenged by the fact that they display generic features deriving from traditional culture that do not correspond to any accepted 'text model' in English (p.205).

This early example of analysis of student writing by leading proponents of genre pedagogy shows that they are doing more than advocating the value of a body of linguistic knowledge that might be imported into English classrooms which would otherwise be organised along familiar lines. Fundamental to the understanding of language that underpins *Growth Through English* is a recognition that schools and classrooms provide children and

adolescents with an opportunity to engage in meaningful communication with one another. This is to say that classrooms are constituted by the social relationships enacted within them, where language and other semiotic resources play a crucial role in enabling people to get along together and to learn from and with each other. This notion of the classroom as a social space where students engage in purposeful communication reflects a fundamentally different understanding of the way language mediates our experience and our relationships with one another to that which is being advocated by genre theorists.

There are many paradoxes here, not least the way genre theorists claim to anchor language within society in contradistinction to the view of language as personal expression that they ascribe to Dixon's work. In an early exchange with Dixon, Christie sees herself as restoring a proper focus on language as a social phenomenon, arguing that a child's individuality 'is constantly shaped in the endless processes of interaction with others… created, negotiated and sustained in social experience' (Christie, nd, pp.29-30). It seems unlikely that Dixon would disagree with this proposition – he always analyses a student's text as arising out of the social context of the classroom, as the product of continuing interaction and negotiation with others who occupy that space, and hence as a quintessentially social phenomenon, like all language. Christie, however, persists in constructing his stance as reflecting what she sees as a romantic focus on the individual, picking up a reference that he makes to 'classroom genres' as 'mind-forg'd manacles' (Dixon, nd, p.9) as showing that 'it is Blake's sense of the individual' that 'lies in Dixon's work' (Christie, nd, p.30). Quoting David Butt, she contends that 'o understand human communication, one begins in the community system and arrives at the individual; not the other way round' (p.30).

Such a view posits language as something external to students, as a set of conventions to which they must conform. Leaving aside the question of the validity or otherwise of Christie's characterisation of Dixon's standpoint, she is advocating a definition of language that Vološinov characterises as 'abstract objectivism' (p.45), where the focus is less on the way people actually use language to achieve social purposes than on the construction of a system at a remove from the interactions in which people engage in their daily lives. That this system is posed as comprehending the richly diverse exchanges of everyday life only underlines its abstract and reified character, for no definition of language can ultimately contain that diversity, or, for that matter, provide a framework in which teachers and their pupils might participate in and learn from the linguistically mediated social interactions that are a feature of classroom life. For all Christie's claims to swing our attention from the individual to the social, the social space of the classroom is elided. The 'social' in genre theory exists only as a reified concept of society that exists beyond the classroom. The classroom itself is seen not as a social space in which people use language for authentic purposes, but merely a site for formal language exercises at a remove from the language and experience of students – the very kind of exercises that Dixon criticises in *Growth Through English*.

And it is not only the 'social' that disappears in genre theory, but the social world of students as they each *personally* experience it. The first person representations of experience that are a feature of *Growth Through English* can all be read as linguistic investigations into the relationship between 'I' and the social world that is implied by grammatical person. Genre theorists typically treat such writing as examples of what they call 'recount' - it is symptomatic of their ideological standpoint that they reify a verb into a class of things to which all children's stories must conform. For genre theorists, 'recounts' are characteristic of an early stage of writing development that is superseded by the more 'powerful' genres of public discourse, such as factual writing and reasoned argument.

Captive to an ideology that crudely asserts the primacy of the system over the individual, they have no capacity to appreciate the multiple ways in which people might occupy the first person and thus begin to use language in order to understand both 'self' and the world. As Adriana Cavarero argues, autobiography always emerges out of a self that 'belongs to the world, in the relational and contextual form of self-exposure to others' (Cavarero, 2000, p.36; Kottman, 2000, p.xvii; cf. Doecke and McClenaghan, 2011, p.72). A first person account of experience always involves a degree of reflexivity, a sense that this is the world as 'I' am experiencing it through my relationships with the people around me.

4. Language and Experience as the Content of English

Growth Through English is an attempt to affirm the complexity of human experience against its continuing devaluation in capitalist society. It might thus be compared with other contemporaneous attempts to treat students' experiences and their struggles to render those experiences into words as the content of English, such as James Britton's insistence that educators should 'begin from where the children are' (Britton, [1970] 1976, p.134), or Harold Rosen's efforts to conceptualise 'the whole school curriculum' in terms of 'its narrative possibilities' (Rosen, nd, p.19). But such work, as Rosen shows, is also a product of larger literary and philosophical traditions that have emerged in response to the reified structures and forms of consciousness of capitalist society. We might think of the socially critical stance of the English Romantic poets (cf. Williams, [1958] 1971, pp.48-64), as well as significant moments of cultural critique in the 20th Century, such as Walter Benjamin's reflections on the fate of human experience and storytelling vis-à-vis the horror of mechanised warfare during the First World War (see Benjamin, [1970] 1973).

By using the word 'reified' to characterise the forms of knowledge typically 'handed over by the teacher' (p.11), including the bodies of knowledge associated with linguistics and literary studies, Dixon explicitly locates his work within this tradition of social critique. He is protesting against the way schools socialise students into a sense of their place within society by confronting them with 'things' with which they can make no personal connection. School knowledge can have no lasting significance for students unless they can connect it with their own lives. Ultimately it only has significance as part of a social process that involves continually interpreting and reinterpreting the phenomena of everyday life as we make the world and ourselves anew each day. As common cultural resources, as representations of human experience, both literary studies and linguistics usefully provide 'frames of reference' (p.80) for teachers and their pupils to interpret and respond to what they say to one another in classroom settings. But the focus, according to Dixon, should be on the knowledge that 'may arise from pupils learning as well as teachers instructing' (p.73), on the knowledge that students might make their own through engaging in meaningful communication with one another and reflecting on such exchanges.

To participate consciously in that process of meaning making is in itself a crucial dimension of students' experience as Dixon conceives it. He is not substituting students' 'experience' for 'knowledge' (conceived in the conventional sense of disciplines like linguistics or literary studies), but inviting us to radically reconceptualise knowledge as inherently social in nature, as embodying conversations in which we might all join. This is to think of social relationships and intellectual exchange as inextricably bound up with one another (cf. Barnes, 1992 [1975], p.145). Part and parcel of this conception is a recognition that entry into such exchanges is crucially a personal experience, a matter of recognising that these issues matter to 'me'. You are taking a step towards making sense of the world and the social relationships in which you find yourself, both on your terms (how 'I' see the world) and in

negotiation with others who share this world and this life - and this language - with you (how 'they' see the world, involving reflection on why 'they' might see it differently.)

Dixon, in short, is far from advocating some kind of uncritical valorisation of the immediacy of students' everyday experiences or of life in their local communities. Nor should his insistence on seeing students as writers be construed as a denial of the value of a literary heritage, understood as a set of cultural resources for meaning-making on which everyone can draw. The word 'experience', as it is used in *Growth Through English*, always has a divided character, naming both the experiences on which students draw when they read and write and talk and listen to one another within classroom settings and – crucially – something that they make 'real' to themselves through the language they choose in an effort to represent and share their experiences and insights (p.6) with one another. It is in this sense that the work they do might be equated with the work of creative writers and other cultural workers, for all writing is an inquiry into the meaning-making potential of language.

But the point is that this inquiry begins with how 'I' experience the world in which 'I' find myself. And 'I' continually return to this starting point, not with a sense of defeat, as though 'I' have gone nowhere, but because each attempt to write in the first person opens up new dimensions, new knowledge about who 'I' am. With his long-time collaborator, Leslie Stratta, Dixon shows how 'stories about ourselves' might provide the foundations of an English curriculum (Dixon and Stratta, 1986), presenting analyses of first person narratives in the same spirit that he exemplifies in *Growth Through English*. The point of this book is that such a focus on personal narratives is more than a matter of 'cherishing private souls' (p.15, p.25), that stories open up possibilities for generalisation and argument that might prompt students to 'move beyond first-hand experience' (p.58) in order to explore other types of writing and dimensions of the world. Yet such writing is not something to be transcended on a journey to higher levels of abstraction, but continues to provide an opportunity to explore who 'I' am, how others see 'me', and whether 'I' accept the version of 'my' identity that 'they' ascribe to 'me'.

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