



LATE



**10th Harold Rosen Lecture, to mark the launch of
Harold Rosen: Writings on life, language and learning
1958–2008, given at the UCL Cruciform Building,
20 March 2017**

By John Richmond

Hello everyone, and welcome. And thank you, Betty and Michael, for those kind words. We're here this afternoon to launch this book, which is a bringing-together of a selection of the educational writings, stories and poems of Harold Rosen.

Harold studied for an English degree at UCL between 1937 and 1940, he did his post-graduate teaching qualification at the Institute of Education, and much later, between 1962 and 1984, he taught in the English department at the Institute, rising to become head of the department and a professor of the university. So it's most appropriate that we're here in UCL, of which the Institute is now a part, although my principal memories of this beautiful building are of 40 years ago, when it was University College Hospital and I was sitting next to friends' bedsides.

The need to bring together Harold's writings, as Betty Rosen and I have done, lies in the nature of the thinker and doer that Harold was. There are academics who write, and leave behind them impressive doorstops of books containing their thoughts and findings, and that is of course fine and many of those academics have made important contributions to the advancement of knowledge.

Harold *was* a leader of thought in the world of English teaching and language education in the second half of the 20th century, and he *had* the intellectual equipment to pursue a conventional academic career of great distinction, but that wasn't the choice he made. His output of educational publications is large, as you will notice if you buy this book (as I hope you will) and have to carry it home, but he put his greatest efforts into collaborations with colleagues, always addressing the needs and concerns of practitioners. That decision was a natural consequence of his socialist understanding of how to

bring about change in organisations and systems: it has to be done by collective endeavour.

Most of the words in today's book are educational writings. They are grouped in the book under three loose headings: The politics of language and English teaching; The role of language in learning; and Story. But their concerns very often – in fact more often than not – chafe against the boundaries, bleed across them. That is the nature of the thinker and doer he was.

Some of Harold's stories and poems are interspersed amongst the educational writing. He wrote stories about his childhood in the East End of London and his own education. They are already gathered in two volumes: *Troublesome Boy* and *Are you still Circumcised?* The stories are by turns shocking, funny, poignant and loving, and questions of language hover within all of them. There is one story about an experience in Berlin in 1945 when he was a soldier in the US Army. Seven of the stories, including the Berlin story, are republished in today's book, together with a selection of his published poems. One poem appears for the first time.

I've included the stories and poems with the educational writings because, unlike many full-scale scholars of language, literature and culture, Harold actually dared to do the thing he wrote so authoritatively about. And they're there in the book as plums in the pudding too: if the educational writing is getting a bit relentless, you can read a story or a poem for a different kind of pleasure. And I'm going to follow my own advice by dropping a few extracts from the stories, and one poem, into the mix in the course of this talk.

Here's a bit from a story in which Harold remembers his mother, and her early influence on him. It contains two themes which stayed with him throughout his life: the centrality of education to change lives, and a turbulent and challenging approach to the powers that be. He had gone with his mother to London's County Hall, then the seat of London government, because there was some doubt about whether he qualified for a scholarship enabling him to go to grammar school.

I was eleven, sitting on a hard chair, looking at the man across the desk. He looked weary, perhaps even cross. My mother was sitting on a chair next to me. She too was looking across the desk at the man. I thought I

could detect the glint of battle in her eye, but the man hadn't noticed. He wasn't looking at either of us but down at the buff-coloured folder which he frowned at while opening it.

The man across the desk looked up and gazed at my mother without saying a word. Teachers do that, I thought. It's how they get on top of you from the word go. My mother wore for the occasion her best black gloves, a newish grey hat and a fox fur. Gloves, hat, fur – she was putting on the style. The man began talking in a rusty voice, affecting infinite patience and civility, cultivated in dealing with the lower orders, especially those from the East End. I heard heavy condescension and controlled insolence. I worried desperately. My scholarship to the grammar school was at stake.

'Before I hear what you have to say, Mrs Rosen, and I shall do, rest assured, you simply must understand I have noted all the details. I have read your letter most carefully. I see from the form you've filled out that you and your husband became U.S. citizens in 1913. I am very sorry to tell you that makes the boy an alien. You won't have read the regulations, of course. Oh, so sorry, you have? Well, they are very clear, aren't they? We are obliged to see that all conditions are met before we can...'

'Just a minute, just a minute. No one has asked me about what happened to my citizenship after I came back to England in 1922. You certainly haven't, have you? I reclaimed my British citizenship in 1924 after they changed the law. There's quite a few things which concern this scholarship which I've not been asked about.'

'Mrs Rosen, we have checked the details very thoroughly.'

'You haven't got all the details so how can you have checked them?'

At this point she took out of her bag a little sheaf of papers. I marvelled at her composure. The desk-man made an attempt to speak but my mother, certain she had the initiative, cut him off.

'No, no, don't rush me. Are you in a hurry? Let's go through these papers one by one. And you should know that my local councillor, Mr

Silver, will be coming to see you and my MP, Mr John Scurr, tells me he'll be writing to you.'

The official's manner was changing. Not that he became affable, but he was no longer dismissive and patronising. I had by now shed all my discomfort and sat revelling in my mother's aplomb. I was sure I'd get that scholarship.

And he did.

In the next part of this talk, I'm going to highlight some themes in Harold's book which created the climate which I entered and enjoyed when I became a teacher in 1974, and which I believe still offer the best hope for our children and young people in the area of English teaching, language and learning.

Here's the first.

In 1956, Harold went as head of English to one of the pilot comprehensive schools in London, Walworth School.

He wrote a syllabus for the English department during his time there, which he handed on to his successors when he left in 1958. Most of that syllabus is in today's book. It's an extraordinary document, in some of its language very much of its time, but with a central, revolutionary principle which is for all time: that the curriculum must take notice of and respect the language, culture, interests and enthusiasms of the students. Old hat? Not in 1958, not in a school then serving an entirely white, working-class population, not in an overall intellectual environment which then regarded the working class as usually deficient in language and intelligence, and in need of the enlightenment which more fortunate, cleverer people were kind enough to offer them.

Here is the first paragraph of Harold's introduction to the syllabus:

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 matter most to them. This highly localised language is likely to stand out in their own minds in strong

contrast to the language experience being consciously presented in the framework of English lessons in particular, and school work in general. This contrast can all too easily become a conflict, 'aversion to poshness', and affectation can easily bedevil the teaching of English. Whatever language the pupils possess, it is this which must be built on rather than driven underground. 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 pupils' 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. Only in this way can they advance to the next stage.

That understanding, and the work of the Walworth English department from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s, has filtered by countless channels into the theory and practice of progressive English teaching in the UK and the English-speaking world.

So that is the first of my string of thoughts, the first of the insights, initially revolutionary, later accepted, taken for granted, incorporated into much mainstream practice, then challenged, undermined, travestied, sneered at by reactionary voices and forces, for which Harold and his colleagues and contemporaries were responsible: that the content of the curriculum which the teacher brings to the classroom must respect the culture and experience which the learner brings there.

The second of the string of thoughts owes its existence to an organisation which Harold helped to found, in 1947, and which is one of the sponsors of this occasion: the London Association for the Teaching of English. LATE was the first locally based organisation in the UK in which English teachers came together to debate ideas, share resources and formulate policies for future practice. It was the spur to the setting-up of other local English teachers' associations, and to the establishment of the National Association for the Teaching of English in 1963. Harold describes LATE's early work, and a crucial development of that work.

In the Association we are all more or less specialist teachers of English and for many years we busied ourselves with our own fascinating specialist concerns... Increasingly, however, we found ourselves being

pushed beyond the boundaries we had come to accept or perhaps helped to create. We found ourselves discussing the relationship between language and thought, how language represented experience, the functions of language in society, different kinds of language and how they were acquired, the difference between talking and writing, the nature of discussion and group dynamics... Soon we found ourselves talking about 'language in education', or 'language and learning', and finally about 'language across the curriculum'. We felt sure that language was a matter of concern for everybody, that if children were to make sense of their school experience, and in the process were to become confident users of language, then we needed to engage in a much closer scrutiny of the ways in which they encountered and used language throughout the school day. For this we needed all the help we could get from other subject teachers.

At a weekend conference in May 1968, LATE produced a document called 'A Language Policy Across the Curriculum'. (I think that it was on that weekend that the very phrase 'language across the curriculum' was invented.) It was more widely disseminated when it appeared at the end of the first edition of this book, *Language, the Learner and the School*, which Harold co-authored with James Britton and Douglas Barnes (and it's wonderful to see Douglas here this afternoon). Harold's contribution to the book, from which I've just quoted, and the LATE document itself, are in the book we're launching today.

Language, the Learner and the School had an enormous and immediate influence in promoting two major ideas: that learners need to use their own language, especially their spoken language, in coming to grips with new knowledge which the school wishes them to take on; and that schools as whole institutions need to consider how the language through which they offer knowledge to learners is actually experienced by those learners. Implicit in the second of these two ideas was the judgement that learners very often experienced the language demands of the school as incoherent, or deadeningly repetitive, or simply mysterious.

The 1969 edition of *Language, the Learner and the School* sold about 35,000 copies in two years. A revised edition of the book was published in 1971, and sold equally well. Those numbers, incidentally, give an idea of a time when groups of teachers, working

voluntarily, not under the impetus of government instruction, admittedly in this case with the help of a sympathetic publisher, had the confidence to generate ideas which were taken up by the profession immediately and widely.

'Language across the curriculum' was a banner raised to signal a concern and to invite action. A few years later, Harold and his colleagues in the English department at the Institute conducted a piece of research, which emerged in 1975 as this book, *The Development of Writing Abilities 11-18*. It showed that, overwhelmingly, the experience of writers in secondary schools was that of low-level factual report and the generalised re-presentation of previously given information, written by the pupil for the teacher as sole examiner and judge; there *was* deadening repetitiveness in that area of those pupils' language experience, usually not realised by their teachers. The chapter which Harold contributed to that book is in today's book.

Another of Harold's productive collaborations in the study of language and learning was with his first wife Connie Rosen; they worked together, for example, on this very influential book, *The Language of Primary School Children*, published in 1973. There's an extract from that book in today's book.

Does the idea that there should be conversations between teachers as to the experience of language which they are providing for their pupils, with the aim of increasing coherence and reducing deadening repetitiveness: does that idea seem so obviously right that it's almost banal? It didn't in 1968 and 1975; and its rightness is equally urgent now.

Time, I think, for a change of note; but still on the topic of writing. There's a story in the book called 'Penmanship', in which Harold remembers the trials, tribulations and punishments he suffered as a schoolboy because of what he and his teachers regarded as his terrible handwriting. (I never found it so difficult to decipher; perhaps it had improved over half a century.) He had a teacher at his primary school who regularly caned him because he couldn't do his k's right; though Harold sportingly acknowledges that at least Mr O'Carroll caned his left hand, he being right-handed. (He doesn't say what was Mr O'Carroll's approach to left-handed boys. I say 'boys', because of course primary-school classes were then segregated by

gender after 'Mixed Infants'. This being the 1920s, it's probable that neither boys nor girls were allowed to be left-handed in that school.)

Going off the point a bit, I have my own story about the segregation of children in the old London School Board elementary schools. It was told to me by the vicar of the church my family attended in the 1950s. As a young clergyman before the war, he had been passing an elementary school on the first day of the new school year. He came upon a little child, heavily wrapped up in coat, scarf and hat, weeping profusely outside the building. He asked the child what was the matter. 'I don't know how to get in!' was the agonised reply. The young clergyman took the child by the hand, and led it to the boys' entrance. The child, who evidently could read, looked up at the beautifully sculpted word above the gate, and said, 'I'm not a boy!' Puzzled, the clergyman took the child round the corner to the girls' entrance. Again the child looked up at the sculpted word and, weeping ever more piteously, said, 'And I'm not a girl!' 'What are you, then?' asked the clergyman. The answer came immediately. 'I'm a mixed infant!'

Back to Harold. Amid the misery he was suffering as a result of his handwriting, there was a bright interlude: an example of what, when I was working on the National Writing Project in the 1980s, we called 'writing for a real audience'.

It takes some believing but only a month or two [before these humiliations] my writing had been in demand. I wrote love letters for a sailor. I was in the Reading Room of the Whitechapel Library where some of us used to do our homework. A wiry little chap slid into the seat next to me and started muttering something or other. Eventually it turned out that he was a sailor whose ship had docked somewhere in the Thames nearby and that he needed to write to his beloved in Liverpool. He pushed a cheap little writing pad under my nose and asked me to do the job for him. It was obvious to me that he couldn't write but at first I assumed he'd dictate in whispers and I would simply be his scribe. (Me, his scribe!) But no, he wanted me to compose as well and it had to be a love letter. Somehow he made all this clear. I don't remember what I wrote though I could make a good guess. I'd not yet written any love letters myself but I had read a lot of novels and with shameless confidence I wrote a nice devoted piece to Agnes in Liverpool. My sailor watched my writing flowing out of my pen as though I were performing

magic. He couldn't take his eyes off it. I whispered my text back to him and did the envelope. He took the letter and envelope and pushed sixpence across to me – the first money I earned by my writing in both senses of the word. I did the same job for him half a dozen times and then my sailor stopped coming to the Reading Room, which was just as well because he never showed me replies from Agnes, if there were any, and I was running out of ideas. At the time I was grimly amused by the fact that I was earning money from my penmanship while my teachers waged an unceasing and ineffectual war against it. I wonder how Agnes managed.

The third of my string of thoughts concerns the relationship between theoreticians and practitioners. Though Harold participated in important conventional research, in which people with the time and the funding to do so find out things about what's happening in schools, publish their findings, and hope that the publication of the findings will effect some change for the better, he became increasingly dissatisfied with it because of its essentially hierarchical nature.

However much the researchers might be grateful to the teachers and schools providing their 'data', it was easy for an 'upstairs/downstairs', 'us and them' relationship to prevail, a state of affairs which could turn antagonistic if teachers who had provided the 'data' later read critical or condescending reports of their practice written in books and journals by people with more leisured working lives than theirs.

On the other side of the blanket, such an approach to research could encourage a 'canteen-culture', 'poor bloody infantry', 'too busy for all that airy-fairy waffle' philistinism in teachers, when often the research *did* yield insights which could make their and their pupils' lives happier and more effective.

So Harold came increasingly to see research as a truly respectful, collaborative endeavour between people working in schools and people working and studying in universities. And he enacted structures to guarantee that better relationship. In 1976, he and his colleagues at the Institute launched an initiative called 'Language in the Inner City', which was to be a broad-based network of enquiries, involving collaborations between teachers, advisers, teacher-trainers, researchers – anyone with an interest in any aspect of that large topic. He wrote this to Betty Rosen in the autumn of that year.

This morning I told my Diploma students about our project 'Language in the Inner City', about the particular way it was developing and that it was above all founded on notions of teacher initiative. Did they want to join in? In what ways? The flood gates opened and new possibilities poured through, including using our workshop time to make a video of one multi-linguistic classroom incorporating each child as a linguistic cameo. The room was agog. It confirms our notion that we must turn research upside down. No more pirate raids for 'data'. We become facilitators, donkey-workers and learners instead of 'experts'. And the students, with a precious year off to study, not being located as blotting paper but getting a chance to do things they hadn't dreamed of. So even in this job [with adults] the authentic moments come and you can feel them in the air just as you might with eight-year-olds.

The activities generated in the project, which came to be known as 'Language in Inner-City Schools', were discussed in twice-yearly conferences at the Institute. They were organised by a group of people, of whom I was one, in and beyond the English department there. They turned into very large affairs; at their peak, around 500 people attended every January and June. They ran for more than ten years, and were a significant exchanging point of ideas and practices for teachers (many of whose homes and schools extended well beyond the inner city).

The spirit of that entirely voluntary endeavour was later adopted by the government in the form of two national (by which I mean England-and-Wales-wide) projects: the National Writing Project and the National Oracy Project. I was involved in the first of these. They provided funding for a central team, and for representatives in a number of local education authorities, to devise, discover and publicise interesting and often inspiring examples of practice in the teaching and use of writing, and in the use of the spoken language in learning, in all areas of the curriculum; with the simple aim that teachers beyond those involved in the projects would read or hear about the activities and try some of them for themselves. Harold was an enthusiastic supporter of both projects.

They were the first – and almost the last – government-funded projects of that kind. (There was one more, which I shall mention in a second.) Thereafter, most government money was spent with more

directive intentions. The Language in the National Curriculum project, in which I was also involved, was intended to be a giant piece of pyramid selling by which secondary English teachers and all primary teachers in England and Wales would be acquainted or re-acquainted with a Latinate model of sentence grammar. It was a disastrous failure so far as the government was concerned, although we did manage to produce much more interesting professional-development materials than those the government had ordered, which soon gained the reputation and popularity of *samizdat* publications in an oppressive state.

Harold, retired by now, followed these developments with close interest. I told him one day that sales of the *samizdat* materials had exceeded 20,000. Ronald Carter, the leader of the project (and a kind endorser of today's book), sold them at cost price from Nottingham University. 'Fantastic,' said Harold. 'You've given them the status of a dirty book!' I replied that this hadn't exactly been our intention, but thanked him for his enthusiasm.

Later, he watched with mounting despair as government initiatives like the Literacy Hour and the National Strategies became more and more authoritarian, abandoning any idea that professional development might be something to do with a partnership between equals, some with more knowledge and experience certainly, but all involved in a common pursuit.

Right at the end of his life, he was encouraged by Teachers TV, which was based on the same principle as the writing and oracy projects, and in which I was also involved. It used television and the internet to disseminate interesting and often inspiring practice in all areas of the curriculum across the UK and indeed the world. He watched some of the programmes and commented on them to me, in his ever trenchant, critical but fundamentally supportive way. He didn't live to see the arrival of Michael Gove at the Department for Education, one of whose first acts was to close Teachers TV down, despite its popularity among teachers.

So that's the third in my string of thoughts, an idea for which Harold takes a large share of credit, and in the realisation of which he practised what he preached: that classroom practice advances best when the doers and the supporters of the doers are engaged in mutually supportive enquiry.

Time for another change of note. In the last part of Harold's story 'Cribs', he and his fellow students in their first year at UCL are required to translate passages of Old Gothic. (Incidentally, and I apologise to any senior people here from UCL, Harold was caustically uncomplimentary about the ancient, arid content of the BA English course at UCL before the war.) The only remnants of Old Gothic which had survived until 1937 were fragments of the New Testament. Harold was Jewish. All his fellow students were Christians, however nominally, and more or less familiar with the New Testament; once they recognised the story being told in the Old Gothic, translation was easy.

There wasn't a copy of the New Testament in the Rosen household, for obvious reasons. Harold was deeply reluctant to spend money on buying one. Then the idea came to him: try the Christian Mission to the Jews in Philpot Street.

I pushed open the door and there in the large hall was a desk... A man behind the desk looked up when I came in... I had prepared my great *chutzpah* performance.

'Do sit down. Can I help?'

'Yes,' I said firmly. 'I have never read the New Testament, you see, and I'd very much like to do so.'

The man brightened up.

'Do you think I could borrow one for a short while?'

'Borrow one? We'd be happy to give you one.'

He pulled open a drawer and with a touch of ceremony handed me a New Testament. I have it to this day. Soft black leather covers extending beyond the body of the book and fine rice paper made it flexible and different. I got up to go. But he wasn't going to let this occasion slip by so easily.

'Would you mind waiting just a moment? I'd like you to meet our Director.'

He edged me into a nearby room. I hadn't bargained for this. The Director, a man with a gold watch chain across a black waistcoat, in no time was asking me questions. 'Was I a student? Why did I want to read the New Testament? Would I like to know more about Christianity? Would I like to meet a group of Christian students?'

I improvised feebly, almost always with a lie. When they asked for my name and address ('to keep in touch') I invented them. They pressed pamphlets on me. I fled from the place, knowing things hadn't turned out to be such a laugh after all. But I had my New Testament and when I next saw [my friend] Manny I gave him a full report.

'I missed being baptised by a whisker.'

I was still sufficiently aggrieved about the [Old Gothic] to be determined to be quite open with my New Testament. I went into class, smiled at the others and spread it out at the right page. When my turn came I consulted it with slow deliberation. Dr Brookfield drew up alongside me.

'Mr Rosen,' she said... 'have you prepared this passage?'

'Most carefully, Dr Brookfield.'

'In that case, why do you need this crib?'

She lifted the New Testament, rather irreverently, I thought. By now I was sick of the childishness of it all.

'No, Dr Brookfield, this is not a crib, as you call it. This is your New Testament.'

She was taken aback and I instantly regretted my improvised rudeness and wished I could withdraw it.

'Well,' she said, 'in this class my New Testament is, I am afraid, a crib and using it is not fair to the others.'

'No,' I said, 'can't you see that the whole of this class is unfair to me?'

I closed my books, stood up, stumbled along the row and left the room.

When Harold showed me this story, about 20 years ago, he was entertained to hear that, in the 1950s, at the church in Bromley, Kent which I have already mentioned, we used to have mission Sundays, at which a visiting preacher would come once a year to report on converting various groups of people around the world to our particular version of evangelical Protestantism.

Sure enough, someone from the Mission to the Jews turned up on a Sunday morning in spring, to tell us about trying to persuade the Jewish community in the East End that Messiah had indeed come; he was always bracketed on that day with a person from the Irish Church Missions, who preached at the evening service, and who told us about efforts to convert Dublin Catholics to Protestantism. It's fair to say that the progress reported was always slow, but we kept the faith, and put our sixpences into the plate as we sang the final hymn.

The story about the New Testament is, of course, a story about cultural conflict. It links to the fourth in my string of thoughts, which concerns the enormous changes in the ethnic and cultural diversity of Britain which occurred during Harold's lifetime; changes which were particularly marked in Britain's cities.

Harold's political upbringing and beliefs meant that he understood, from the beginning, the reasons why Britain became an ever-more multicultural society from the late 1940s on. The reasons lay in British imperialism and its consequences. This understanding meant that, while of course warmly welcoming the presence of people from the Caribbean, the Asian sub-continent, Africa, parts of China and parts of southern Europe to our country, he was immune from that hopeful, optimistic liberalism which assumes that as long as we, the indigenous whites, the so-called 'host community', are tolerant of new kinds of music and willing to taste unfamiliar foods, all will be well.

Harold was himself an immigrant, having arrived here from America at the age of two, and he experienced racism himself as a child and young person. So he combined an immediate interest in the implications of cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity for the teaching

of English in schools with a hard-headed recognition that the children and young people in our schools who had come, or whose parents or grandparents had come, from other parts of the world, would sometimes or often experience racism, subtle or unsubtle, implicit or explicit, in their daily lives.

There are numerous pieces in today's book where Harold addresses these questions, always in a spirit at once positive and unsentimental. I'll pick only one, which is an extract from the book he wrote with his colleague Tony Burgess. The book is *Languages and Dialects of London Schoolchildren*, published in 1980.

The book presents the results of a linguistic survey carried out in collaboration with teachers and pupils in twenty-eight schools in the Inner London Education Authority, as it was then, and the neighbouring London Borough of Haringey. It was the first publication to map, with some rigour, the linguistic diversity of schools in the capital.

Harold and Tony proposed that the (then) new situation of great linguistic diversity in classrooms presented a golden opportunity for the curriculum: take that diversity, and treat it as potential curriculum content. They worked with groups of teachers and pupils to design resources for lessons which would do just that. Here are a few lines from the extract from *Languages and Dialects of London Schoolchildren* which appears in today's book.

Groups of children have improvised plays on tape in different languages and dialects, translating for each other, registering the ways in which a dialect of English may produce differences of accent, structure, vocabulary, behaviour and even character. There were teachers who made use of the original survey or devised modified versions of it to get the pupils themselves, in pairs or small groups, to compile information about the languages they spoke...

One English department prepared for the survey by running a series of assemblies on the theme of the children's multi-cultural background. They displayed a chart to show the various flags of the countries represented. Another school is preparing to produce a booklet about the languages spoken by its pupils and to include in it useful information about the school and the community as well as stories written in the

different languages. Display and discussion of the wealth of dialects and languages a school or class could boast, as well as the high incidence of bilingualism and multilingualism, produced considerable pride, even competitiveness, and allowed for a demonstration of some consummate imitative skills.

Today's urban schools often contain a super-diversity of languages and dialects, yet more complex and varied than that which Harold and Tony encountered when they worked with those teachers and pupils. To study that diversity in the positive but unsentimental way that they did remains an essential element of a modern curriculum.

I could go on stringing thoughts together like this, but I'm going to confine myself to only one more. The topic which dominated the last period of Harold's intellectual life was narrative – or, as he usually preferred to call it – story. Stories of all kinds seemed to Harold a fundamental element of our humanity, both as individuals and as social beings. He contended that narrative had failed to gain the recognition and acceptance across the curriculum that it deserves, and that the curriculum, learners and teachers are the poorer for that.

Skipping through Part Three of today's book, trying to decide on one bit which might fairly represent Harold's thinking on story, a sort of meta-thought occurred to me, and I hope I'm not stretching a point in expressing it.

It is that, in a sense, Harold's concern with narrative in the last part of his life was a way of stitching together, of unifying, the great diversity of overlapping concerns which had driven him earlier.

For it's obvious that a man who writes in 1958 that children's language and culture must be respected and incorporated in the curriculum of the school they attend; a man who in 1968 and 1975 points out that learners' experience of the curriculum was dominated by the need to re-present factual information, with no opportunity to set those facts in a broader narrative context, oral or written; a man who in 1976 realises that the most productive relationship between schoolteachers and academics is when they are enabled to talk to each other as equals; a man who, throughout his long career, saw the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity in our schools as an opportunity for an exchange of experience, to the mutual enlightenment of all: it's obvious that such a man is going to be a

champion of the use of stories in schools, both as events in themselves, and also as key media of learning.

So, in recognition of that championship, here's just one of Harold's many statements about narrative. It's the first few lines of a paper called 'The Nurture of Narrative', which formed part of this booklet *Stories and Meanings*, published in 1985 by the National Association for the Teaching of English, all of which is in today's book.

'Listen children,' runs the Yiddish folk song, 'listen with your nose and eyes,' and listen we did, for in the very next line a cow flew over the old gossip granny's roof. What nonsense! Listen with your nose and eyes, cows flying over the rooftop. I should be ashamed to be dealing in such trivial absurdities.

And I would be, were it not for the fact that our readiness to listen to and to tell stories is so universal and takes such a variety of forms and is made to serve such a range of functions that flying cows belong with fundamental processes of the human mind...

In the literature of language education it is often proposed that the ultimate goal for the teaching of composition is academic prose, objective exposition or some such. No one tells us why language development should not include as a central component getting better at telling and responding to stories of many different kinds.

We should have been warned. We know now that every Tom, Dick and Harry is a master of infinitely delicate language skills from a very early age, rich competences of grammar and modulated language use, and that every Tess, Bess and Hannah inherits a complex linguistic semiotic, systems of meanings developed in their culture, which include modes of story-telling.

We should have been warned that a common possession of humankind was not *ipso facto* of little account but rather an indicator of the functioning of the mind, a part of the deep structure of the grammar of our world.

'...a part of the deep structure of the grammar of our world': that will do for me as a pithy definition of narrative, and a reminder of its

centrality in all the interactions involving learning in schools, whether the interactors recognise the centrality or not.

So that's my string of five thoughts:

children's and young people's language and culture respected and incorporated in the life and curriculum of the school;

the need for conversation and coherence about approaches to language and learning across a school and across schools;

equality of esteem as between schoolteachers and supporters of schoolteachers;

seeing linguistic diversity as a great bonus and as a key element of curriculum content;

and the centrality of narrative in all learning.

It will have to do as the briefest of summaries of the major advances in our understanding of effective language learning which Harold and his colleagues helped to bring about.

But if Harold were here this afternoon, he would be saying (and I can catch his tone in saying it), 'It's all very well going on about my stuff. What are you people doing now?'

Some in the audience are aware of a project which culminated in the publication in 2015 of this series of booklets, *English, Language and Literacy 3 to 19*, published by Owen Education and the United Kingdom Literacy Association.

In the politics of education, and particularly in the area of English teaching and language education, there has for more than 30 years now been a struggle between those with the power but without the knowledge, by whom I mean some politicians and the whispering advisers who stand behind them in reactionary think tanks and influential cabals, and who are cheered on by large sections of the press, and those with the knowledge but without the power, by whom I mean teachers and those who support teachers, including all the people in this room.

We have moved from a situation where, when I joined the profession in 1974, teachers had a large measure of autonomy in deciding what to teach and how to teach it, to a situation today where teachers – and particularly primary-school teachers – are regarded by the government merely as machine operators, obliged to follow precise instructions as to curriculum content, teaching methods and systems of assessment.

And the trouble is that much of the curriculum content, teaching methods and systems of assessment thus imposed are simply wrong. They are ignorant of, or deliberately contemptuous of, the hard-won wisdom about curriculum, methodology and assessment which Harold and his colleagues and contemporaries spent so much time and intellectual effort accumulating.

In these circumstances, Peter Dougill and Mike Raleigh, the directors of Owen Education, came to me to suggest that we might put together a series of statements doing three things.

First, remind readers of some of the best that has been thought and written about English teaching, language and learning over many decades. Secondly, offer a detailed, robust critique of aspects of curriculum content, teaching methodology and assessment as they have been imposed with increasing stringency on teachers of children and young people aged 3 to 19 in more recent years. Thirdly, and most importantly, offer detailed, practical alternatives.

This is what we have done in these booklets. They contain, for example, a complete alternative curriculum for English 3 to 16; and a complete set of alternative proposals for assessment, tests and examinations 3 to 19.

We're here this afternoon principally to celebrate the publication of Harold's book, so if you only have £20 to spend afterwards, either here or in the café upstairs over drinks, spend it on Harold's book. But if you haven't seen the booklets, and you've got a bit more cash to spare, do splash out on some of them; they're only £7 each and, between them, I think they do cover the whole waterfront of English teaching, language and learning 3 to 19, including drama and media education. And while I'm in sales mode, we're also selling, for £10, Simon Gibbons' excellent account of the founding and first 20 years of

the work of the London Association for the Teaching of English, to which Harold made such a major contribution, and which is 70 years old this year.

Before I close, there are some people I want to thank.

Raj Xavier runs the Prontaprint shop in Camden High Street. Through the wizardry of his technology, 90% of Harold's writings were converted from print or typescript to Word documents, which I could then manipulate (in the most innocent sense of that word, of course). Without Raj, I'd still be bashing in the text with my two fingers.

Tony Burgess, John Hardcastle, Jane Miller, Betty Rosen, Michael Rosen and Simon Wrigley were an advisory group who helped me make the decisions as to which of Harold's writings should go into the collection, and where some of them were to be found.

John Hardcastle and, later, Andrew Burn, arranged for me to have a Visiting Research Associateship at the Institute, which gave me access to the Institute's wonderful library and the archive of Harold's papers.

It was Andrew who introduced me to Nicky Platt, who runs the Institute of Education Press, and it was Nicky who, having had typescript for no more than a fortnight, said she would publish the book with no changes to the text – an author's dream. Thank you to Nicky, and to all her team at the Press – Nicole Edmondson, Sally Sigmund, Margie Coughlin, Jonathan Dore and Michelle Cannon – for the wonderful job they've done in bringing the book to completion.

Eve Bearne, Ronald Carter and Neil Mercer have written kind endorsements of the book, for which I'm very grateful and which will do the sales no harm at all.

Thanks again to Michael and Betty for introducing the evening. Betty was Harold's key collaborator for more than 30 years in the last part of his life. It was her idea that his writings should be brought together in one place, and she has been *my* collaborator and encourager throughout the project.

The last piece in the book is a poem. You've heard that Harold was an immigrant. He was born in Brockton, Massachusetts, and came to this country with his mother when he was two. Born in the USA, he was

officially an American citizen (and remained so throughout his life), and that is why it was the US army he joined when called up in 1945. In the last period of his military service, after the war had ended, he was posted to Germany. Many years later, he wrote this poem about an experience he had one night in Frankfurt.

It's nearly always a mistake to explain something about a poem before reading it aloud, but I'm going to take that risk by telling you that '*Wir sind die Moorsoldaten*' – 'We are the bog soldiers' – refers to a song written by prisoners – political opponents of the Third Reich – in Nazi moorland labour camps in Lower Saxony. In 1933, one camp, Börgermoor, held about 1,000 socialist and communist internees. They were banned from singing existing political songs, so they wrote and composed their own. The poem is called:

In the SS barracks, 1945

In the SS barracks in Frankfurt-am-Main
(home of IG Farben, makers of holocaust gas)
I lie in one of the beds allocated to the Occupying Power.

In the dormitory in the dark in 1945
I hear an anonymous hummer in the bed beside me
Wir sind die Moorsoldaten
The song of the concentration camps
I hum along with this master-ironist

In this army bed only a few killings ago
A fine young man stretched himself out
He had not yet heard the guns in the south
Not a speck of mud or blood on his uniform
His black uniform folded tidily beside him
Nor on his lovely black boots
Standing to attention by his locker.

My hummer has stopped now.
Comrade in the dark, in your SS bed,
Are you too asking yourself
Why is there no blood on these sheets?
And how can we sleep with ghosts?

In Frankfurt, and later in Berlin, Harold saw at first hand some of the results of the evil which fascism had brought upon the world. The dog had split the skin of civilisation, and snarled and slaughtered. In large parts of the world today, the dog is not far beneath the skin, and is growling. Harold would have been in no doubt that our responsibility today is to challenge and resist the forces of authoritarianism, isolationism, racism, fascism, fear and hatred of the other, in whatever ways – however small – we can.

There are drinks and bites to eat in the Cruciform Café upstairs, and an opportunity to talk and to buy the books. People will show you the way. The talk has been filmed, and will appear in due course on the Digital Arts Research Education website and on the Institute of Education website. If you'd like a copy, just of the text, more quickly, take one of my business cards here and send me an email. Thank you for your kind attention.

Harold Rosen: Writings on life, language and learning

1958–2008 is available to buy from the UCL IOE Press's website at www.ucl-ioe-press.com Also from other online retailers and good bookshops. Price £24.99. This book is also available to buy as a download in secure PDF format or to read online at www.ebooks.com

We are pleased to provide a digital inspection copy of this book to teaching staff who want to consider its use on a course, or to recommend it to their institutional library [Request inspection copy](#)

To review this book please contact m.coughlin@ucl.ac.uk