

Management education and training: the role of integrated language development

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ABSTRACT

The paper outlines the role of language in learning and cognitive development and argues that management education and training needs to be integrated with language development to enable students to cope with the demands made of them at university as well as with those of careers in the business world. An integrated language development project developed by the Department of Management and academic language practitioners at Rhodes University is described and suggestions are outlined as to how university Management departments can integrate language development in their mainstream teaching.

plays in developing an understanding of concepts and in constructing knowledge is less well understood. Peggy Nightingale describes the relationship between language and knowledge as:

... interlocking spirals up which a learner moves unevenly: at points where the language and cognition intersect the learner is capable of articulation of the knowledge. Sometimes learners have the vocabulary but lack understanding of concepts; but sometimes the concept is grasped intuitively while the vocabulary is inadequate to express it. Nevertheless, having the language (in the broadest sense of the term) does seem to make it easier to learn ... (in Taylor *et al* 1988: 81).

INTRODUCTION

This paper has been written as a result of a research project conducted jointly by members of the Department of Management and Academic Language Practitioners at Rhodes University in 1995. The paper will begin by discussing the theory of the role of language in learning and cognitive development (the rationale and motivation behind the research project). We shall argue that management education and training needs to be integrated with language development to enable students to cope with the demands made on them at university as well as with those of careers in the business world. We shall then give a brief account of the project. Finally, some suggestions as to how university management departments can integrate language development in their mainstream teaching will be made.

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN LEARNING AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

The role that language plays in expressing ideas is acknowledged by most educators but the role that it

The role of language in student learning can be further understood by an understanding of the term "academic literacy" (Ballard & Clanchy, in Taylor *et al* 1988). A broad definition of the term would include "being able to read and write within the academic context with independence, understanding and a level of engagement in the work" (Leibowitz 1995: 34). Many students (both English first and second language speakers) do not arrive at university with an understanding of the "rules and conventions" for academic discourse which is shared by most academics. These rules and conventions define what can be construed as knowledge, as they relate not only to textual conventions but also to ways in which what counts as knowledge is explored and constructed (Boughey 1994: 24).

To complicate matters still further for learners, each discipline has its own set of rules and conventions which the student has to acquire in order to learn effectively. Lecturers, who are immersed in their disciplines, often do not explicitly indicate to students the particular literacy required for learning in that discipline. Dison and Rosenberg (1995: 2) express the belief that "the development of academic literacy is at the heart of students' ability to succeed at