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Tackling Talk Through Action Learning

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Tackling Talk Through Action Learning

By

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and

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Executive Summary

Tackling Talk Through Action Learning was a collaborative research project sponsored by the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA). In this project, teachers from both metropolitan and regional independent schools, together with researchers from Edith Cowan University, investigated the English curriculum strand of Speaking and Listening through action learning projects. The teachers were supported in carrying out these projects by on-line/electronic materials, professional development sessions and individual mentoring provided by the university team. This project built on earlier projects investigating oral language including *The Oral Language Development and Assessment of Middle and Upper Primary Students* and *Tackling Talk: Teaching and Assessing Oral Language.*

The purpose of this action learning project was to help teachers recognise and develop their students' communicative competence, that is, the speaking and listening skills they use to interact effectively in a wide range of situations with different audiences. The stimulus for the current action learning project and those previous projects cited above came from an earlier study by Oliver, Haig and Rochecouste (2003). In this study, teachers reported their difficulty in developing the communication skills of their students but, at the same time, they recognised that these skills are essential for success in work and social environments.

Teachers involved in the current project indicated that there continues to be a lack of emphasis on oral language, and particularly on communicative competence, in the current school curriculum. They also acknowledged the importance of this aspect of language development to students' present and future communication needs. At the beginning of the research process the teachers expressed concern about their feelings of inadequacy when addressing this area of the curriculum. The four cycles of the action learning process provided a way of addressing this issue for the teachers involved in the project.

The four stages of action learning carried out by the teachers included: Cycle 1: in this cycle teachers used web-based and CD ROM materials to guide their ethnographic study of a specific aspect of oral language use in local communities. Cycle 2: where the teachers presented their findings from the first cycle at a professional development session and the project team helped them to plan the next stage of their learning. This involved them devising ways in which to identify and

record their students' current level of communicative skill in a selected area of oral language use. The teachers then returned to their schools and carried out the planned action. Cycle 3: in which the project team provided further professional development to assist the teachers match their findings from Cycle 2 with the skills their students would need in the future (as indicated by their findings from the ethnographic research conducted in Cycle 1). Then, using existing curriculum documentation and materials, the teachers identified learning outcomes for their students directly related to improving communication skills. Cycle 4: the teachers developed classroom interventions which addressed their students' needs and assessed, either with existing progress maps or new assessment criteria, the success of their students. At the conclusion of the action learning projects, teachers, and in some cases their students, reflected on their new understandings of oral language, particularly as related to communicative competence.

The findings from these action learning projects confirm those reported in *Tackling Talk: Teaching and Assessing Oral Language,* namely that with appropriate support teachers can design effective means to teach and assess the communicative competence of their students. Further, the assessment of the students' learning outcomes within these projects demonstrates how this approach (i.e. learning to use language and learning about language) not only increases students' communicative competence, but also their metalinguistic awareness.

As a result of involvement in action learning, the teachers in this project gained a greater understanding of the communication needs of their students, an increased repertoire of strategies to address those needs and greater confidence in addressing this area of the curriculum. Their careful documentation of their projects and reflection about what this involvement taught them provides a useful model for other teachers wanting to improve the communicative competence of their students.

This research also contributes valuable knowledge about the communicative demands made on young people both within school and in the wider community. The findings describe a range of communicative contexts and the linguistic nature of these in terms of the functions of language, the vocabulary, the paralinguistic behaviours and the metalinguistic understandings required for successful communication within them. These findings contribute to teachers' understandings of the communicative demands that their students face now and in the future and so

complement the curriculum documents which detail the desirable outcomes for education.

It should be noted that as a result of this project and the earlier related research, there have been a number of changes made to the curriculum materials being prepared for the teaching and assessment of speaking and listening. In particular, the newly developed *Indicators of Achievement* (Curriculum Council, in press) for the English Learning Area reflect an understanding of the difference between oral and written language, the importance of communicative competence in a range of formal and informal contexts, and, of metalinguistic awareness. These aspects of oral language competence are also central to the development of the third edition of the widely used *First Steps* (in press) materials.

August 2006

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Acknowledgements

The Tackling Talk Through Action Learning Project

Introduction

Tackling Talk Through Action Learning was a collaborative project involving teachers in both metropolitan and rural independent schools in Western Australia and a team of researchers from Edith Cowan University. The research was sponsored by the Association of Independent Schools of WA (AISWA) through its literacy funding. The teachers who volunteered to be involved in the project were guided in their investigation of the teaching and assessment of oral language based on an understanding of their students' oral language needs in the broader community. The teachers investigated how language is used in their local area and what communication skills their students would need to participate successfully within their communities in the future. Following this investigation, teachers designed teaching and assessment strategies to meet their students' specific oral language needs and implemented these strategies.

Tackling Talk Through Action Learning was a follow-up project to *Tackling Talk: Teaching and Assessing Oral Language*. The broad focus of the research was oral language and it was aimed specifically at guiding teachers to investigate and support the development of communicative competence in their students. In terms of the school curriculum, this research falls within the English Learning Area, specifically the listening and speaking strand. The impetus for this research came from earlier studies by members of this team (Haig, Oliver & Rochecouste, 2004; Oliver, Haig & Rochecouste, 2003; 2005a & b) which showed that teachers lacked confidence in both teaching and assessing this strand of the English curriculum and that students were not confident in many daily communicative contexts. Despite the success of the *Tackling Talk* project it was clear that further research and work with teachers was needed to enhance our knowledge about the ways to develop the communicative competence of students in our schools.

Communicative competence

Communicative competence is about how we use our linguistic and pragmatic resources to communicate within our families, schools and communities. It reflects our understanding of the relationships between what we say, how we say it and

where we say it. That is, our communicative competence relates to the success we have in using our linguistic and pragmatic resources differentially according to the audience, purpose and context of the interaction.

Communicative competence is more than just understanding the rules of grammar or the correct pronunciation of words. It is knowing:

- that people do different things with different types of language;
- that certain sorts of speech are used by particular people and not by others;
- how to talk to different people in different ways; and,
- how to respond to a request or to interpret a person's need from a hint or a question.

Undertaking the action learning

Teachers from schools affiliated with the Association of Independent Schools of WA (AISWA) were invited to participate in this action learning project. Those schools which accepted the invitation to be involved included primary and secondary schools in both rural and metropolitan areas.

The teachers were guided in their action learning projects by the university research team who provided individualised mentoring and support through a professional development program. The teachers worked through a series of four cycles to complete their individual action learning projects. A specially designed website:

http://members.iinet.net.au/~lingwa/TT/

and CD ROM[1] provided theoretical background and guidance for the design and implementation of the first two cycles of the learning project.

In the last two cycles, the teachers worked with curriculum documents to link the findings from their research to their pedagogic practices.

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[1] The original pilot study (Oliver, Haig, Rochecouste & McFarlane, 2002) found that accessing the website was difficult at some schools due to problems with internet connections. Teachers were thus provided with a CD ROM with the contents of the website.

The Action Learning Process

Cycle 1: Investigating oral language in a communicative environment

In the first cycle of their action learning, the teachers went out into their local community and identified a particular **communicative environment** to investigate. A **communicative environment** is any context in which people are communicating. Teachers selected this environment on the basis of it being one in which their students would need to communicate in the future. The teachers were guided in their investigation of this authentic language situation by information on the website/CD ROM and they also received assistance from the project team.

The website/CD ROM provided these simple steps for teachers to follow in order to map the communicative environment they observed.

How do we map a communicative environment?

- We observe the way people talk to each other in the environment.
- We observe who they talk to.
- We observe when and how often they talk to each other.
- We observe the words they use.
- We observe what they talk about.
- We observe the type of language they need.
- We observe how they change their language in different settings.

It also provided teachers with a simple methodology to follow in order to record their observations.

How is all this done?

- You can draw concept maps to show how people communicate and how often.
- You can make notes of the types of things they use language for.
- You can note down or record the situations in which they use language.
- You can make a note of the things that they most often talk about.
- You can note the things that they most often say.

Additionally, the website/ CD ROM provided the teachers with information regarding the linguistic and communicative features of **communicative environments.** This information was provided in the form of examples of these environments to aid the teachers in selecting and analysing a communicative environment relevant to their students' needs. Some of the examples are provided below:

<u>Communicating in entertainment venues:</u>

Most of your students will have communicated with staff at an entertainment centre. They would have asked for a ticket, negotiated the choice of food with their friends and bought pop corn etc, before seeing a movie. They may have visited TimeZone and had to report that a pinball machine wasn't working to the manager. They may have been to McDonald's and placed an order with the counter hand.

In this communicative environment speakers need to be able to ask customers for information, tell them the prices and relay the information to other staff members, such as kitchen hands. They might have to ask people to repeat themselves because of the noise of the crowd or the kitchen, etc. Sometimes they might have to use polite language even when people are rude to them.

<u>Shopping:</u>

All your students will have experience at shopping. They may visit supermarkets where very little interaction takes place because they select their own goods, they may go to small shops where they have to ask for what they want or they may go to local markets where it is sometimes possible to negotiate prices.

In this communicative environment speakers need good communication skills. They need to organise stock purchasing, handle telephone enquiries, oversee sales staff or be salespersons themselves. They also need to build good relationships with customers and handle difficult customers tactfully and this requires good oral language skills.

<u>Visiting the doctor or dentist:</u>

Most of your students will have experience at talking to their doctor or dentist. They will have had to explain what is wrong with their body or with their teeth. They would have had to answer questions about the severity of the problem, etc.

In this communicative environment speakers need to ask questions, first general questions and then more specific questions, in order to pin point the specific health problem. They may ask a patient to recall an activity where an injury happened or they may try and define the cause of an illness with questions about life at home and at school, etc. These professionals also have to advise on taking medicine and warn of side-effects.

To ensure that this task was manageable, the teachers were asked to focus on one specific feature of the communication such as questioning, negotiation, vocabulary, or the like. The teachers then recorded samples of the speech in the communicative environment on audio and/or video tape.

Cycle 2: Investigating students' current oral language skills

At the end of Cycle 1, teachers met with the project team for a professional development session. At this they shared their findings, discussing what they had found. Cycle 2 then began when they were asked to fill out a 'Reconnaissance' form regarding their school, their students and what they currently do with regards to oral language. This began the process of thinking about their school situation, the cultural and linguistic background of their students, and their current practices in teaching and assessing oral language.

Reconnaissance

In the following sections provide sufficient detail to give a clear indication about your situation:

Name:_____

School (e.g., location – distance from Perth, urban, rural; size – approx. no. of students, organization – primary, district high; buildings, description of staff; other relevant information).	
Students (e.g., cultural and linguistic background, home background, SES, academic standing, special needs).	
What is done in oral language now Briefly describe what is done in your class/school, what practices are undertaken, what type of things are assessed and what is explicitly taught.	

With their particular school context in mind, the teachers then designed the next cycle of their action learning. This cycle involved teachers looking at the way their students used language, so they needed to decide what aspect they would investigate. To assist them with this decision, the teachers analysed the language data that they had collected from their chosen communicative environment (Cycle 1) and identified an aspect they could investigate in their students' current language use. In order to facilitate this process, a range of suggested classroom-based investigations were provided on the CD ROM. These projects were to guide the teachers to find out their students' use of particular vocabulary (Projects 1- 9) or set of language functions (Projects 10-18) in nine different communicative environments using their usual assessment tools. In each project, research questions, access to relevant background information, and a brief methodology for implementing the activity in the classroom were provided. Some examples of the projects from the CD ROM are provided in Appendix A.

A research plan framework was provided to guide them in this process. A copy of this framework is provided on the next page.

Research Plan

Name:_____

Area of research

To pick an area of research, select a topic from column A and also one from column B:

Column A	Column B
Oral language development	Sounds
Metalinguistic awareness	Rules
Language for learning	Words
Language for Social Interaction	Behaviour
Language variation	
Functions	

Therefore the area I wish to explore is:

_____ **x** _____

My research question:

State very specifically what it is that you wish to find out. Make sure it is written in a question form (e.g, How..., What ....., In what ways....)

_____

_____

_____

Targeted students

Whose oral language will you be investigating? State the number of students you will focus on and give details of their particular characteristics (e.g., 3 students each of a different achievement level; 4 students - 2 x Year 4 and 2 x Year 7; 6 students – 3 x girls & 3 x boys).

_____

_____

The teachers were helped to fill out their research plan and then they selected the students with whom they would do this research. Next the teachers were

provided with a simple procedure to follow in order to find out what their students could and could not currently do in relation to their research question.

Procedure

On the next page there is a table for you to complete in the following way:

- In the first column state how you will go about collecting your data (e.g, noting problems in DWP as they occur in class, tape recording students, interacting in groups, interviewing individual students).
- In the second column describe how you will record the data (e.g., compile DWP records, transcribe tape recordings, write running commentary of interview responses).
- In the third column give some indication of the time line for your study. (It is very important to be realistic. Remember you only have <u>seven</u> teaching weeks until we meet again!).
- In the fourth column record how the aspect of oral language you are investigating is currently assessed and how this is currently recorded.

Name:_____

Data collection	Recording data	Time line	Current assessment

The teachers were also provided with example projects (see below) during the professional development session to help them set realistic parameters and procedures for their own research.

Additional information was supplied to the teachers on the website/CD ROM, in the form of links to other pages, to provide the teachers with some theoretical background regarding their chosen project. These links included information regarding development and variation, language and cognition, metalinguistic awareness, conversation analysis, listening, and the use of language for social interaction. (Examples of these are provided in Appendix B).

Cycle 3: Supporting students' oral language development

In this cycle, the teachers met with the project team for the second professional development session in which they discussed their findings on what the students could and could not do in the classroom in relation to their chosen topic. In addition, the teachers planned for Cycle 4. The teachers undertook the following tasks in this session:

- Reported on their students' current communicative skills as evident from their investigation of their students' current language use in Cycle 2;

- Matched their students' current skills with their future needs, as exemplified in the observation of the chosen communicative environment in Cycle 1;

- Mapped their students' communicative needs in terms of the outcomes they needed to achieve using existing curriculum documentation and materials;

- Identified any apparent 'gaps' in the Curriculum Framework documentation, i.e., where curriculum resources do not exist to assist students achieve the communicative skills expected for their prospective involvement in social or work-related communities of practice.

The teachers used the following forms to guide them through the tasks in Cycle 3.

1. What they can do now.	2. What they need to do. (Outcome to be achieved.)	3. Gap between what the students can do now and what they need to do.
Area of language investigated:	Outcome to be achieved:	The understandings, skills and attitudes the students will need to achieve the outcome.
What the students can currently do.	What the students need to be able to do (understandings, skills and attitudes)	

What will I teach? (skills, knowledge, understandings)	How will I do it? (teaching and learning strategies)	How will I know it is learnt? (assessment)

Cycle 4: Implementation

In the final cycle, the teachers implemented their teaching and learning plans and assessed the learning outcomes achieved by their students. They then reported these to the research team.

The next section reports the teachers' action learning projects.

Findings from the action learning projects

The teachers involved in this research conducted action learning projects in a wide range of contexts. However, all were undertaken with reference to the English curriculum Speaking and Listening strand. The teachers' findings provide interesting information that may support other teachers' pedagogical practice and together with the website/CD ROM material presented here may serve as a practical guide to support other teachers interested in undertaking action learning of their own.

In the following section a case study of one teacher's work is presented. It shows the four cycles of the project with explanations of how the action learning was carried out. Following this, each of the four cycles is examined in greater detail including explanations and annotated samples from other teachers' work. The final section contains a second case study.

Case Study One: Zara's[2] Project

Zara's Cycle 1

Zara chose to investigate the communicative environment of the school canteen because of the relevance this context had to her students' lives. She pointed out that

> "the students must communicate effectively with either the manager or assistants. The skills students adopt and use in this communicative environment could presumably inform the way students interact in other communication experiences outside of the school environment, such as shopping and when undertaking business transactions."

Zara first described the communicative environment that she observed:

At the School Canteen

The communication involves ordering and buying food and beverages. In this communicative environment, students are interacting with non-familiar adults. They need good communication skills to quickly make a selection and purchase their items. Students are expected to interact in a friendly, respectful and courteous manner.

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[2] Pseudonyms have been used through this text.

Zara noted the language functions used by the customer (the student) and the server (the manager or assistant) at the school canteen and categorised them in the following way:

Typical Communication Sequence	Function performed
Greeting: Simple welcome and acknowledgement of other person	Greeting - Language function 6: Socialising

Customer requests for information or product description
       Questions relating to:
       Price of products
       Availability of product
       Request for information about the product
	Request-Language function 1: Imparting factual information

Server's explanation or description of products
       Description of ingredients
       Provision of information on a product
 	
       Recommendation of a product
	Explanation - Language function 1: Imparting factual information
	Recommendation - Language function 3: Expressing emotional attitude – preference

Customer statement of order
       Short, list-like order
       Courteous
	Statement - Language function 1: Imparting factual information

Server's clarification of order
       Questions relating to: clarifies size,
       number or type of products ordered
	Clarification - Language function 1: Requesting factual information

Negotiation of money between customer and server
       Statement of total cost
       Request for specific change
       Negotiation if customer has insufficient money
       Statement of change
	Negotiation - Language function 1: Imparting and seeking factual information

Brief general conversation Occasional and requiring a very brief response	General conversation - Language function 6: Socialising

Final greeting
       Statement of thanks
       Farewell
	Greeting- Language function 6: Socialising

Zara's Cycle 2

After completing Cycle 1, Zara filled in the Reconnaissance form in order to guide her next step of the action learning process. This involved considering her current situation (school, students, current oral language practice), deciding on an area of research, formulating a research question, selecting students, and developing a procedure to collect her classroom data.

Reconnaissance

In the following sections provide sufficient detail to give a clear indication about your situation:

Name: Zara

School (e.g., location – distance from Perth, urban, rural; size – approx. no. of students, organization – primary, district high; buildings, description of staff; other relevant information).	Private school (primary & secondary), outer metropolitan area Approximately 600 secondary students Research to be done in secondary
Students (e.g., cultural and linguistic background, home background, SES, academic standing, special needs).	All boys school with students predominately from the city, but country boarders and overseas students are also present. Middle-high socio-economic status Christian
What is done in oral language now Briefly describe what is done in your class/school, what practices are undertaken, what types of things are assessed and what is explicitly taught.	Group work is commonly used as a learning strategy. Assessment: formal oral/ tutorial style presentations. Role plays/ drama.

Research Plan

Name: <u>Zara</u>

Area of research

　　To pick an area of research, select a topic from column A and also one from column B:

Column A	Column B
Oral language development	Sounds
Meta-linguistic awareness	Rules
✓**Language for learning**	✓**Words**
✓**Language for Social Interaction**	✓**Behaviour**
Language variation	
Functions	

Therefore the area I wish to explore is:

<u>Language for learning & Social Interaction</u> x <u>Words & Behaviour</u>

Project 10: Tackling Talk in Small Groups

My research question:

State very specifically what it is that you wish to find out. Make sure it is written in a question form (e.g, How..., What ....., In what ways....)

What particular language functions are required to communicate successfully within a group? What words or behaviours lend themselves to effective group work?

Targeted students

Whose oral language will you be investigating? State the number of students you will focus on and give details of their particular characteristics (e.g., 3 students each of a different achievement level;   4 students - 2 x Year 4 and 2 x Year 7; 6 students – 3 x girls & 3 x boys).

8 students: 2 groups of 4 Year 10 boys

In Cycle 1, Zara developed an interest in the concept of language functions through her analysis of the communicative environment of the school canteen. In Cycle 2, her Reconnaissance form showed her that she often used group work for learning. Combining these two aspects, Zara chose to

focus on her students' use of language functions in the context of group work in the classroom. This was reflected in her choice of Project 10 as indicated in her research plan (see Appendix A for full description of Project 10 as per website).

Zara then developed a procedure for collecting data in her classroom to determine what her students could and could not do in relation to the use of language functions and words when working in small groups.

Name: <u>Zara</u>

Data collection	Recording data	Time line	Current assessment
Using set English lessons in which students are working on a creative project involving writing a script and staging a drama collaboratively.	Observe the two groups and note down words used and behaviours displayed (analyse as effective & ineffective).	3 consecutive English lessons	This is not currently assessed nor recorded.

Zara noted the words and behaviours used by the students during her observations of the two groups. These are reported in the following table.

Group A	Group B
Sample Words	Sample Words
'Yeah and what about...?'	'I don't know'
'Good point'	'I don't want to'
'Well done'	'That's dumb'
'Yep, OK'	'Nah, how about...?'
'Now we need to...'	'What have you done?'
'We should...'	'We need to...'
'What do you think?'	'What did you put?'
'Anyway, let's look at the next bit'	'You were supposed to do that'
'Who thinks that we should...?'	

Group A	Group B
Behaviours	**Behaviours**
Turn taking	General discussion – no focus on specific task
Break up task into parts	Talking over each other
Delegation of tasks	2 members dominating discussion, others saying little
Appoint a leader/director	Internal arguing and indecision
Develop a plan/agenda	
Self monitor- use of time, progress and individual involvement	
Democratic decision making- e.g., hands up	

She then analysed the words and behaviours that the students used to fulfil a range of language functions within the group context. She examined these in terms of their effectiveness for small group communication.

Ineffective words and behaviours

Words:

Critical - 'That's dumb'

Dismissive – 'Nah, I don't want to'

Blame/Lack of ownership – 'You were supposed to do that'

Indecisive – 'I don't know'

Individual point of view - 'I' 'My' 'Me' 'You'

Behaviours:

Lack of self monitoring (time, productivity) – needing teacher assistance

Off task, distracting each other

Internal arguing

Lack of compromise

No delegation of tasks or appointed leader

Poor listening skills – talking over each other

Over dominant and passive group members

Zara's analysis of these words and behaviours provided the basis for her subsequent intervention in the next two cycles of her project.

Zara's Cycle 3

In this cycle, Zara recorded the things she had found in Cycle 2 that her students could already do. She then mapped this information, along with what they needed to demonstrate, on the English Progress Maps

(Curriculum Council, 2005). A summary of this information is provided in the following chart.

What they can do now	What they need to do Outcome to be achieved	Gap between what the students can do now and what they need to know.
What the students can currently do: • Delegate tasks • Ask questions to elicit information, clarify information and suggest ideas • Follow peer discourse in group discussions • Work independently and form individual ideas	What the students need to be able to do: Select, apply and adjust strategies for monitoring and improving education. LS 3.2 Recognises and uses forms of spoken text associated with particular contexts and purposes. LS 4.2 Considers the appropriateness of text form and register and the conventions of non-verbal communication in relation to audience when listening and speaking in familiar situations. LS 4.1 Develops and presents familiar ideas and information and supports opinions with some detail in a variety of classroom situations. LS 5:1 Interacts with others to discuss accessible topics involving challenging ideas and issues. (Curriculum Council; English Progress Maps*)	The understandings, skills and attitudes the students will need to achieve the outcome: • Take Turns • Include all members in the discussion (using inclusive language) • Ask questions to each other to direct and probe • Praise each other or give positive feedback • Build on each other's ideas • Monitor each member's level of involvement

* Curriculum Council, 2005

By indicating what the students could already do (Column 1) and what they needed to do in terms of the outcomes described in the Curriculum Council's Progress Maps (Column 2), Zara was able to clearly identify the students' gap in knowledge (Column 3). Using this information, Zara was then able to plan a specific teaching and learning program to address the

students' needs she had identified. This process is described in Cycle 4 of the project.

Zara's Cycle 4

In this final cycle, Zara planned a teaching and learning program based on the needs identified in Cycle 3. She also identified the assessment strategies she would use in order to determine if her students achieved the outcomes she had addressed. To guide her planning, Zara first used the following chart.

Cycle 4: Developing group cohesiveness and inclusivity: words and behaviours for effective group work

What will I teach? (skills, knowledge, understandings)	How will I do it? (teaching and learning strategies)	How will I know it is learnt? (assessment)
• questioning • praising • turn taking • monitoring • building on ideas • use of inclusive language	• before & after group tasks • before: students complete a preliminary group activity & self evaluate • explicit teaching & discussing of skills & ideas needed for inclusivity & cohesiveness • after: second group activity , conscious application of skills • final discussion	• group self evaluation x2 • observation: criteria checklist • class discussion

Using this process Zara developed the following teaching and learning program in which she first made her students aware of the language and behaviours which promoted successful group interactions and then explicitly taught these. She divided this content into a series of three lessons. Her teaching and learning plan, along with the materials she created to support it, are presented below.

Teaching and Learning Plan

> ## Area Investigated:
> Words and behaviours required for effective group work
> LS 3:2 Recognises and uses forms of spoken text associated with particular contexts and purposes.
>
> ## Outcomes:
> LS 4.2 Considers the appropriateness of text form and register and the conventions of non-verbal communication in relation to audience when listening and speaking in familiar situations.
>
> LS 4.1 Develops and presents familiar ideas and information and supports opinions with some detail in a variety of classroom situations.
>
> LS 5:1 Interacts with others to discuss accessible topics involving challenging ideas and issues.
>
> ## Year: Ten
>
> ## Students need to be able to:
> -Take turns in discussion and delegate tasks effectively
> -Include all members in their group discussion
> -Ask questions of each other to clarify, direct and probe
> -Praise each other or give positive feedback
> -Build on each other's ideas
> -Monitor each group member's level of involvement and redirect if necessary
>
> ## Lesson One: Pre-Activity
> 1) Students will be involved in a preliminary group activity. Students are formed into groups of four, each group is numbered.
> 2) The students complete a 'placemat' activity, or similar, based on the subject content being taught at the time. The task should have a broad enough scope to allow for detailed and complex discussion and will require all students to contribute.
> 3) Before completing the task inform the students that they will be asked to reflect on how well their group worked together at the end of the task. No further specific instructions on effective group work is given.
> 4) Students complete group task (approx. 20 minutes)
> 5) Students are individually issued Self Evaluation of Group Work
>
> ### Lesson One: Self Evaluation of Group Work
>
> **How well did your group do the following: (1 least – 4 best)**
>
> | | | | | |
> |---|---|---|---|---|
> | Take turns | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
> | Include all members in the discussion | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
> | Ask questions of each other | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
> | Praise each other or give positive feedback | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
> | Build on each other's ideas | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
> | Monitor each member's level of involvement | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Describe how effectively your group worked as a team.

_____

_____

What did your group do well and how did it help you?

_____

_____

What do you think your group needs to do in order to be more effective?

_____

_____

Lesson Two: Explicit teaching of effective group work skills

1) Review and brainstorm the group work skills that the students were asked to self assess at the end of the previous lesson. Discuss whether any other skills should be added or any omitted.
2) Class discussion on why each skill is important to group work.
3) Card cluster activity: Headings of each skill are drawn up on the board and on card board around the room (e.g. Give positive feed back; Ask questions; Build on ideas). Using 'Post-It' notes or whiteboard markers students give examples of words and actions they could say or do to show that skill. For example: "Good idea", "I like that point" – for giving positive feedback. Review as a class at the end.

Lesson Three: Use of effective group work skills in context

1) Students form into the same groups as in 'lesson one'. Review discussion of prior lesson if necessary. Inform students that in today's activity their group should aim to incorporate the skills of effective group work they have been learning about. Tell the students that they will again be asked to reflect on how well their group worked together at the end of the task.
2) The students complete a group activity similar to that of lesson one. Again the task is connected to the subject content the students are currently studying and should be meaningful.
3) Students are issued Self Evaluation of Group Work sheets to complete at the end of the lesson.
4) Closing activity: In their groups or as a class, students discuss how focusing of the group work skills affected their effectiveness and productivity as a group.

Lesson Three: Self Evaluation of Group Work

How well did your group do the following: (1 least – 4 best)

Take turns	1	2	3	4
Include all members in the discussion	1	2	3	4
Ask questions of each other	1	2	3	4
Praise each other or give positive feedback	1	2	3	4
Build on each other's ideas	1	2	3	4
Monitor each member's level of involvement	1	2	3	4

Describe how effectively your group worked as a team

_____

_____

What did your group do better today, compared to last time?

_____

_____

How did focusing on these areas improve the way your group worked?

_____

_____

Assessment:
Formal –
-Self Evaluation sheets completed individually by students at the end of their group tasks. Students were asked to put their group number and/or name on the sheet to allow for later comparison.
-Teacher observation sheet completed while monitoring both group activities. Compared at the end for changes to the frequency in which the group work skills were observed being implemented in each group.
Informal – Through class/group discuss and review activity.

Teacher Observation Sheet

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
Turn Taking					
Inclusion of members					
Questioning					
Praise or feedback					
Build on ideas					
Monitoring involvement					

By comparing the students' before and after Self-Evaluation sheets, Zara found that the students noted an improvement in the areas of group productivity; individual and group effort; greater generation of ideas; quality of ideas; the amount of time work was sustained; group involvement and inclusion; and peer relations. She categorised the students' comments accordingly.

Areas of Improvement	Sample Student Comments
Group productivity	• "We got more work done." • "We improved our group efficiency." • "We improved by giving more positive feedback resulting in more productivity." • "Worked well, finishing all tasks given." • "We got a lot more done."
Individual and group effort	• "We put more effort in." • "We discussed more." • "We worked well and got all of the work done."
Greater generation of ideas	• "We had a lot more ideas." • "It gave us a wider range of ideas and information." • "There were more ideas to expand on and write down." • "The discussions just got bigger and bigger."

Quality of ideas	• "The ideas [we had] were originally small, but we added on to them." • "It improved ideas." • "We got good ideas." • "We came up with more ideas and better quality ideas." • "We all built on ideas."
The amount of time work was sustained	• "The discussion stayed on topic most of the time." • "We stayed on task longer."
Group involvement and inclusion	• "This time everyone was involved." • "It got everyone more involved." • "We shared the load better this time." • "We included all group members."
Peer relations	• "Our group communicated better and we gave more positive comments." • "I believe our group worked better as a team today."

Her evaluation of her students' group work using the Teacher Observation Sheet confirmed improvement in these areas.

Zara's also reflected on her students' learning experiences:

> *"Before teaching the lessons I was unsure how the students would respond to specifically being taught group work skills in class, as the class had previously been quite content driven and I had not often attempted to teach them how to learn. The students, however, responded openly and enthusiastically to the tasks and discussions and provided very insightful feedback in their self-evaluations. During my observation of the second group task, I was surprised at how quickly the students implemented the new skills and how much it impacted on the work they produced. Reviewing the second Self Evaluation sheets confirmed my observations, with the students themselves commenting on how much more effective they were in the second group task."*

Upon completing her action learning project, Zara provided the following comments regarding the process and her own professional development as a teacher.

> *"Having completed the four cycles of the Tackling Talk project I have gained a greater appreciation for the need to explicitly teach oral language skills. I have learnt that frequently as teachers we expect a high degree of assumed knowledge and skill from our students, especially when they are participating in oral language tasks. What may appear to be a straightforward exchange between people often draws upon many culturally-specific and situation-specific skills and understandings. I chose to focus on the skills needed to work effectively in groups. I selected this area because group work is increasingly becoming a standard learning strategy used in classrooms, yet I have often noted how ineffectively many students interact and learn in groups. I chose to complete a before and after group activity to allow me to compare how the effectiveness of group work changes after the explicit teaching of these skills. This method proved useful and allowed a clear point of comparison. Having completed this research, I have realised the need to explicitly teach oral language skills to students and that even a small adjustment to my teaching focus can lead to significant improvements in learning."*

In the following section, the findings from each of the four cycles of the action learning projects undertaken by all of the teachers are examined in turn. In each cycle the teachers' findings are described in detail. Annotations in the right hand margin provide further explanation of the content of the research.

Cycle 1: Investigating the communicative environment

In Cycle 1, the teachers were asked to choose an aspect of oral language to investigate. It was suggested that they select an authentic language situation outside the classroom. This communicative environment was to be one that was already familiar to the students or an environment that the students would need to become familiar with in the future. Teachers then observed, recorded and analysed the language used in that situation. Some examples of the communicative environments investigated by the teachers are listed below:

> A **communicative environment** is any context in which people are communicating.

- The staff and students in the school canteen
- A hairdresser and her client
- A coach and her netball team
- A specific student communicating about Information Technology in the classroom and the workforce
- A violin teacher and her student
- Family members at dinner time
- The staff and customers at fast food restaurants
- Participants in a committee meeting
- Patients talking with doctors and medical practice staff
- Conversations between people of differing socioeconomic classes on the train
- Disabled people and their support workers
- Telephone representative and client
- Police and a community member who has offended
- Extending book loan periods at a library

The teachers investigated the authentic language used in their chosen communicative environment by using a tape-recorder, video camera or notes to capture examples of how language is used in that situation. In analysing these communicative environments, the teachers focussed on the functions of language, or the vocabulary, used. They also looked at other aspects of the discourse such as displays of sociolinguistic competence, and patterns of interaction. The following annotated sample highlights how one teacher, Shona, analysed a communicative environment

related to the use of Computing and Information Technology. She identified the functions of language that are necessary in this community of practice as well as who talks to whom and the way they talk.

Shona's Cycle 1

Communicating about IT	Annotations
Glenn might be heavily involved in computing, in fact he might be a real geek and dream of becoming Bill Gates, or he may just need IT to use a management system at his job as a mechanic. Regardless, Glenn would need communication skills in the four following situations: 1) learning new language about IT from the teacher, 2) sharing terms learned about programming, games and software from friends, 3) taking instructions of how to use software programmes and hardware devices, and 4) peer tutoring - explaining how to fix or use something to someone more frustrated and less proficient.	Shona identified the future real world needs of her students. Shona also identified the students' current communication needs.
Learning from a teacher: In this case the teacher will do most of the talking, he/she will usually focus on the vocabulary or technical terms as classes tend to have limited experience of using software programmes (Digital Media). This includes:	
Talking about the best care for your system and computer;	Language function 2: Expressing and finding out opinions.
Step by step instructions on where to click on mouse and insert code, checking that each step has been carried out and the programme works;	Language Function 1: Imparting factual information
Dealing with frustration if other students are not so quick to learn; and	
Reiterating the instructions to aid peers in the learning process, (this may incur some negative responses and other students' frustration).	Language Function 1: Imparting factual information
Sharing ideas with friends: In this case, there will be an exchange of information and a series of 'show and tell'. Language will be a mixture of jargon and slang.	
Praising a player for the goal he kicked (*"Nice goal, Michael"!*);	Jargon and Slang-Specialist vocabulary needed in this context.
Discussing a new game (Defining the game's perimeters - 'installing', 'levels', 'RPG', 'First Person', 'Third Person', memory, etc.);	
Playing a new game (Instructions for use *"Click"*, *"Use your keys"*);	

Telling friends about sites and software discovered;

Encouraging others to use different ideas and experimentations.

Giving/ taking instructions: This sort of talk usually involves one speaker, the listener would be expected to react (e.g., by moving mouse or pressing keys as instructed) rather than provide an answer. It might include:

Warning a user to not attempt to hurry the system along;

Using language and hand gestures to show where information needs to be applied;

Praising a user for getting the information accurately ("*Excellent work*"); and

Having to endure reiteration ("*No, not like that, like this*").

Explaining how to fix or use something: In this case it would only be the spectator/instructor who is speaking. They might be directing their speech to user who is not expected to respond. This includes:

Praising ("*That's right, now open that folder.*");

Warning ("*If you do that too fast the system will crash!*");

Simple two to three word instructions ("Click on 'Tools', 'Open Systems', Upload to desktop.").

Finally, what can be said about Glenn's communicative needs? Glenn is likely to use formal speech in his day to day work, but he will need to have good oral communication skills to be able to negotiate with others who are using the system. He will need a highly specialised language (*vocabulary*) to be able to share ideas and have a good range of instructional words to define the terms he uses. Fortunately, many of the things he needs to explain take into consideration his hand gestures and the ability to physically show what he means. He might need to develop and substantiate a good argument to convince his boss of the necessity for certain systems and products.

Glenn will need further language skills in his social activities. He will want to identify with the group so will use the same jargon and slang as his friends do. He will need to develop a logical system of discussing so that his ideas follow a systematic series of connected ideas. He may need to articulate his decisions,

negotiate objections to them, give praise, sympathy, and advice. Hopefully, he will learn to talk to girls too (but who knows, you can't have it all and besides he'll probably be too busy playing 'Doom'). In fact if Glenn's lifestyle is as we imagine it, he will need a very broad range of oral language skills.

Using this analysis of the communicative environment in IT, Shona was able to pinpoint some language functions that her students would need now and in the future. This provided a basis for the next cycle in her action learning project where she investigated her students' current level of control over these functions.

As already noted, Shona and the other teachers involved in the action learning projects were provided with a variety of information to assist them in analysing the communicative environment that they had observed. This included information about the functions of language; vocabulary; and social interaction. Data from the teachers' findings are used to illustrate these aspects as shown below.

The Functions of Language

Some of the teachers chose to analyse their communicative environment by using language functions which had been discussed in the professional development session. The functions are listed and examples from the teachers' findings are given.

1. Imparting and Seeking Factual Information

- Identifying things

> In Joanne's analysis of fast food restaurants and shops, she determined that staff members would need to be able to identify available products and services and provide information to the customer regarding what is available.

- Reporting about things using description or narrative/giving information

> Joanne found that telemarketers often describe and explain their products, and customers give personal details to the telemarketers.

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> Zara found that in the school canteen servers would use this language function to describe ingredients of products and provide information regarding price, flavours and availability.

- Correcting factual information

> Shona found that in the communicative environment of instructions being given on how to use software programs and hardware devices, the language function of correcting factual information is necessary. She noted language like: *No, not like that, like this.*

- Asking for factual information

> In her investigation of the school canteen, Zara noted that customers used this language function in regard to asking the server to describe the products available, their prices, and their ingredients.

2. Expressing and finding out intellectual attitudes (agree, disagree, asking permission)

- Expressing an opinion

> Zara found that in the school canteen, servers would recommend a product to the customer.

- Expressing agreement and disagreement

> In Patricia's investigation of the communicative environment of the library, she found that effective oral language skills in expressing disagreement with the ability to 'retain respect' were very important.

- Seeking, giving and denying permission to do something

> When Patricia was at the library, she sought permission to extend the loan on her books. She found that the librarian, who was not very nice about it, would not allow her to extend the borrowing period, thus denying her permission.

- Negotiating

> Zara found that in the school canteen, the language function of negotiation was used by the customer and the server. The process included: statement of total cost, request for specific change, negotiation if customer had insufficient money, and statement of change.

3. Expressing and finding out emotional attitudes

- Inquiring about and expressing pleasure and displeasure, liking and disliking

> Melissa found that in the communicative environment of a disabled man who lives at home with support workers coming in to help him daily, he needs to be able to express his likes and dislikes as well as what pleases him and what does not. Based on this the support workers can make good decisions about what to do next. If he cannot express these well, there is a risk of inappropriate decisions being made on his behalf.

- Expressing interest or lack of interest

- Inquiring about and expressing satisfaction or dissatisfaction

> Camilla found that at the conclusion of the service the hairdresser seeks approval from her / his client. She also found that often during this part of the service the hairdresser reaffirms with the client that s/he has carried out what was asked of them. It is also a time where a client has the opportunity to comment and voice her / his judgement. She remarked that "most of the time these are positive, even when the customer may not be convinced they like the cut / colour".

> Melissa found that disabled people who are looked after by support workers need to be able to express that they are dissatisfied with, for example, a support worker's behaviour or a decision that was made. Melissa also found that support workers and coordinators needed to be able to inquire about dissatisfaction. She gave some examples of the language used to do this: *What happened that upset you? Do you feel upset about something? Do you want to tell me about something?*

- Inquiring about and expressing disappointment

- Inquiring about and expressing preference

> At dinner, Barbara found that family members use this language function to express what food they would like to eat.

- Expressing gratitude

> Phyllis noted that in the great variety of language functions that student leaders use, one is that of thanking. Student leaders need to be able to thank teachers, staff, students and other student leaders in their role particularly after an event has been held.

- Expressing sympathy/empathy

> Joanne found that when trying to settle disputes the language function of expressing empathy was useful. She noted the language used: *I know what you mean but...*

- Inquiring about and expressing intention

> Phyllis found that at meetings, student leaders needed to be able to use language to express intention. She noted the following language: "Next we plan to..."

- Inquiring about and expressing want or desire

> Camilla found that at the hairdressers, the time before the cut/colour is crucial for establishing trust. She indicated that a hairdresser will begin by asking the client to describe what s/he would like done that day. It is then up to the client to describe her/ his needs. During this time the hairdresser listens intently to either very detailed verbal descriptions of the cut/colour and/or a visual representation of the image.

> Ruth found that when young people go to the doctor they need the language function of being able to ask the doctor questions and to be assertive.

4. Expressing and finding out moral attitudes

- Apologising

> Joanne noted that in the communicative environment of driving and being pulled over by the police, the citizen will use the language function of apologizing. The particular language she noted was:
>
> Officer: *Do you realise it is an offence?*
>
> Citizen: *I'm sorry, no, oh, I didn't realise.*

- Forgiving

- Expressing approval or disapproval

> Phyllis noted that the student leaders need the language function of being able to express complaints and criticisms assertively and constructively at committee meetings as part of their role.

> During the netball game, Camilla found that the coach used language to encourage the players and the players also encouraged each other.

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- Asking about approval or disapproval

- Expressing appreciation

- Expressing regret

5. Getting things done

- Suggesting a course of action

> Shona found that in the communicative environment of working in Information Technology the worker would need to be able to "develop and substantiate a good argument to convince his boss of the necessity for certain systems and products". In this way, the worker would need to use the language function of suggesting a course of action to his boss.

- Asking others to do something

> Phyllis found that student leaders often need to ask others to do something and commented that this language function is important for them.

- Inviting others to do something

- Advising others to do something

> Camilla found that during netball practice a coach offers advice from the sidelines using language such as "move this way", "try to direct passes to the circle", and "always keep your eyes up". S/he would also further develop the skills of each player through individual tuition which would also happen during this time.

- Warning others

> Shona found that in two communicative situations, both involving computing, giving instructions and explaining how to fix something, the instructor needs to use the language function of warning others. For example, "If you do that too fast the system will crash!"

- Asking others not to do something

> Barbara found that at dinnertime, parents often use this language function to teach table manners to their children by asking them not to do something.

- Instructing or directing others to do something

> Camilla found that before netball practice, the coach instructs students to complete warm up activities. S/he may refer to previous games and may make encouraging remarks and/or give advice for the future. Further instruction would be given for drills and practice play. Any monies may also be collected at this time. Students generally have limited interaction with the coach. They may pass comments or offer suggestions.

- Offering assistance, goods or service

> Camilla found that at the end of the hairdressing appointment the customer handed over money for the service and the hairdresser would generally make a point of booking in the client for future appointments and selling products.

> Joanne found that at garage sales, the seller may offer assistance to the customer by saying, *Shall I carry that box for you?*

- Requesting assistance

6. Socialising

- Greeting/welcoming people

> Camilla found that in the professional environment of the hairdressers, the client is greeted in a warm and friendly manner by the hairdresser upon entering the salon. She indicated the actual language used, such as open ended questions like, *Hello, how are you going?*, which begin the conversation. The client is usually instructed to move through to the cutting/colouring area. At this point, clients generally respond to the greeting.

- Meeting/introducing people

- Leave taking

> Zara noticed that in the school canteen customers used this language function to say thank you and farewell.

- Attracting attention

- Congratulating

Vocabulary

Other teachers chose to analyse their communicative environment in terms of the vocabulary used by the participants in the interaction. A full example of one teacher's analysis follows:

Example: The specialist vocabulary of a violin lesson

> In Danielle's investigation of the communicative environment of her son's violin lesson, she found many specialist terms (recorded here in bold) relating to music and the violin in particular. She stated that in order to participate in such a communicative environment it would be necessary to understand what these terms mean. The following is an excerpt from the transcription Danielle made of the conversation between her son (S) and his music teacher (M).
>
> ---
>
> M: We are going to do this **bar** again. You don't have it right. Here we go.
>   (Plays)
> M: And again. Now...**1st finger and up bow together**...good. From the beginning.
>   **Smooth.**
>   (Plays)
> M: What does that mean?
> S: That's quieter and that's louder.
> M: Okay.
> S: It really bucketed down at school. It was really unpredictable.
> M: Yes, it can be like that sometimes. Are you going to **use your music**? What does **dolce** mean?
> S: Mmm **sweetly.**
> (Plays)
> M: We haven't finished yet.

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> (Plays)
>
> M: Did you get **stuck at the tip of the bow?**
>
> S: About 3 times
>
> M: **Do long down bows.** Good. We are going to **do a G scale.**
>
> S: I think I have done this before.
>
> M: So you can practise going slow and then fast and then slow. **G scale-down, up, down** 1,2,3. That's not what I'm playing.
>
> S: **D scale?**
>
> M: **G scale.** Don't you know your **notes?** Let's go. **Up bow.** Listen to what I'm playing. 1,2, 1,2 **Down, up. Long down, short up bow** 2,3
>
> (Plays)
>
> M: **Up!** My goodness.
>
> S: I didn't get to start soon enough.
>
> M: Follow my **bowing.** 2,3
>
> (Plays)
>
> M: So it's fast then slow. Fast and **light**, keep it **lighter.** Right. I want to hear you do it. Make the **down bow** heavier so that there is evenness in the sound. That was a good one. **Full bows.** Lighter and faster. Can you hear most of them, the **up bow** is heavier than the **down bow.**
>
> S: That will make the judge's hair stand on end.

Social interaction

In addition to identifying the language functions needed in the various communicative environments, and the vocabulary used, teachers also noted the strategies that people used to assist effective communication. These strategies are part of a person's *sociolinguistic competence.* The participants observed the following strategies used in the communicative environments that they investigated:

- Some teachers noted that in service providing situations, particularly in fast-food contexts, customers' orders were short and list-like.

- Teachers also noted that in service contexts, both the staff and customers needed to be courteous and to use polite forms such as please and thank you (thanks).

- Several teachers noted changes in register. They also observed shifting style according to the formality of the situation (e.g., with family and friends at home compared to with customers at work), context and the relative status of those involved in the interaction;

- Patricia noted in her investigation of the communicative environment of the library that "non-verbal communication can determine whether you communicated effectively or not". She noted that particularly in situations where people disagree (e.g., where permission is not being granted), non-verbal communication such as facial expressions and tone of voice, can affect the level of respect that the people in the transaction show for each other.

- Joanne noted that telemarketers used the customer's name often suggesting a certain level of familiarity.

Teachers also noted in their observations of communicative environments that there appear to be particular *patterns of interaction*. For example,

- Phyllis noted that student leaders participate in meetings, using a pattern consistent with group interaction. At other times, student leaders will also interact one-on-one with teachers, students and staff. As this involves both known and unknown teachers, staff, and other student leaders, they need to adjust the register of their speech to do this successfully.

- Ruth talked to people working in two different contexts - a kebab shop and a medical practice. She reported that the staff in these places had noticed that when talking to groups of young people they tend to be more demanding than when the interactions are with individual young people.

- Teachers who investigated commercial transactions found that there was a certain level of formality between the customer and service providers, and that the transactions were often formulaic and brief in some contexts, particularly in fast food outlets. In situations, such as the school canteen, where the customers and servers have repeated contact, brief general conversations could take place such as *What's the weather like?*, and *How are your studies going?* In other transactions, however, such as at the hairdresser, the exchanges can be more extended.

Teachers also noted *topics of conversation* in their observations of communicative environments. They reported on the types of topics discussed in a range of contexts, which could be categorised into topics

discussed at work, social settings and in educational settings. Some specific examples of these follow:

Topics discussed at work:

- Zara found that at the school canteen topics about transactions (e.g., pricing, product information, payment, etc.) were discussed.

- Zara found that at work in the school canteen, social topics were discussed briefly (e.g., *What's the weather like? How are your studies going?*).

- Camilla found that at work in the hairdressers, social topics were discussed more often than in other work contexts.

Topics discussed in social settings:

- Barbara found that in the social setting of dinner time, topics discussed were the food, what had happened during the day, reminders about manners, and sharing humorous stories about what had been heard or had happened during the day.

- Rose found that the topics discussed by a family on the train were a camping trip and a party that they were planning to attend.

Topics discussed in educational settings:

- Camilla found that at netball practice, previous games and suggestions about play were topics that were discussed. After the game, topics of discussion were the next week's plans, rejoicing or commiserating depending on the game's result, and things that happened during the game. Camilla also noticed that this time was "a fantastic opportunity for students to share experiences with one another".

- Danielle found that in the educational setting of a violin lesson, the topic of conversation is mainly how to play the violin, but there is also some social talk.

A final example of an analysis of a communicative environment in terms of sociolinguistic competence is presented on the next page. This teacher, Joanne, observed the social interaction that takes place in a number of different contexts and noted who was talking to whom, how they were talking to one another and what language they were using. She categorised the language used in these different contexts and presented her findings in the following table.

Joanne's Cycle 1: example of social interaction observations (sociolinguistic competence and patterns of interaction)

	McDonald's	Garage Sales	Settling Disputes	Phone with Rep
the way people talk	Basic courtesy to customers: "How can I help you, is that dine in or take away?"	Friendly, casual, 'how ya going' style	Often as if 'it's your problem' sarcasm is sometimes used; good settlement involves apologising, empathy.	Very formally- in a usual work environment; phone telemarketers are more casual and act as though they know you personally.
who they talk to	Customers, other workers, managers	Each other, customers	Each other	Customers, other workers, managers
how often they talk	As needed with manager. One worker (female) tended to talk through things, e.g. "I haven't eaten all day"	As needed- adding up, etc., but also to give help, information about goods, etc. More helpful: "Shall I carry that box for you?"	As needed.	As needed. To require information or give it. Telemarketers talk constantly.
words they use	"OY! Need some more... CHEESE! MORE FRIES!"	"How are you today? That's the shot, yeah, beautiful day. Thanks very much."	"It's your problem/ fault."	"Sorry, I didn't catch that, you spoke so fast. What school are you from? How do you spell that? I'll put you through to..." Telemarketers- "How was your day? You have yourself a good evening." They also use your name constantly.
language they need	Very basic; problem solving	Basic courtesy, bargaining language, being able to resolve conflicts	"I know what you mean but..."	Language to communicate problems, solve issues and inform.

how their language changes	According to who they are talking to.	According to need.	According to the respect and attitude of the other person.	Various reps have different manners: some are very abrupt and put you through without saying a word, then you have to repeat everything all over again. Others talk while solving their problems: "Oh, the order SHOULD be through, hang on, I'm having trouble with this computer."

Joanne noticed the recurring theme of problems and disputes in her analysis of these communicative environments. She, therefore, decided to see if her students could settle disputes and chose it to be the focus of the next cycle of her action research project.

Cycle 2: Investigating students' current oral language skills

In this cycle, the teachers used their analysis of the communicative environment from Cycle 1 to identify an aspect of oral language that their students would need now or in the future. During this cycle, the teachers had their first professional development session with the project team. In this session, they first reported their analysis and findings. The research team then provided the teachers with background information to support their work in the next phase of the action learning. Following this input, the teachers selected an aspect of language they thought may be useful for their students. Students' skills and understandings about this aspect of language were then investigated in Cycle 2.

First, however, the teachers filled out a 'Reconnaissance' form to remind them of their current situation. Here is an example of one teacher's form.

Reconnaissance

In the following sections provide sufficient detail to give a clear indication about your situation:

Name: Danielle

School (e.g., location - distance from Perth, urban, rural; size - approx. no. of students, organization - primary, district high; buildings, description of staff; other relevant information).	Private Christian School Rural city about 360 students Almost 40 staff members New buildings Mostly adequate facilities
Students (e.g., cultural and linguistic background, home background, SES, academic standing, special needs).	Mostly middle class, some students with learning/ behavioural issues, and from single parent homes
What is done in oral language now Briefly describe what is done in your class/school, what practices are undertaken, what type of things are assessed and what is explicitly taught.	Year 11 & 12 Senior English As SE is a CAF (Common Assessment Framework) course much work is done to prepare students for formal tasks through mini tasks, making requirements for demonstration of outcomes explicit. In terms of talk, students deliver impromptu and prepared orals in contexts ranging from sitting in a circle recounting an aspect of their lives, to talking in front of the class, to delivering a formal oral in the auditorium using a microphone and being videoed.

With this understanding of their current situation, the teachers then proceeded to devise a research plan. The steps involved in this included: determining their research question, identifying students who would participate and deciding on a way to collect the data needed to answer their question.

Research Plan

Name: <u>Danielle</u>

Area of research

To pick an area of research, select a topic from column A and also one from column B:

Column A	Column B
Oral language development	Sounds
Meta-linguistic awareness	Rules
Language for learning	✓Words
✓Language for Social Interaction	✓Behaviour
Language variation	
✓Functions	

Therefore the area I wish to explore is:

<u>Language for Social Interaction & Functions</u> X <u>Words & Behaviour</u>

My research question:

State very specifically what it is that you wish to find out. Make sure it is written in a question form (e.g, How…, What ….., In what ways….)

To what extent are my Year 11 students able to conduct interviews using language appropriate to the context and interviewee, while employing effective feedback skills and obtaining the information they seek?

Targeted students

Whose oral language will you be investigating? State the number of students you will focus on and give details of their particular characteristics (e.g., 3 students each of a different achievement level; 4 students - 2 x Year 4 and 2 x Year 7; 6 students – 3 x girls & 3 x boys).

Select Year 11 students of different language abilities and levels of confidence.

Next the teachers outlined their data collection method, how they would record data, their time line and an outline of current assessment methods. The following is an example of how Danielle used the *Data Collection Sheet* to organise her research about what the students could and could not do in relation to interviewing and according to the language functions she had identified.

Example: Danielle's Data Collection Sheet

Data Collection	Recording Data	Timeline	Current Assessment
• Students randomly select the name of another student whom they will interview • Students select from a range of topics and devise 6-10 open and closed questions • Prior to undertaking this class exercise, students were given outlines for a formal CAF task involving researching and interviewing someone on an issue of interest. Students were given guidelines on interview etiquette and the importance of using feedback and follow up techniques • Students were informed ahead of time that their interviews would be recorded and analysed as part of this study • All students in Year 11 group were involved in conducting interviews and	• Video taped interviews • Observed interactions between students, both verbal and non-verbal • Noted the main strengths and challenges facing a select group of students. (Time constraints necessitated observing responses of only a few students in detail.)	• Students were informed of the interviews a week in advance. Interviewees and topics were selected and students were given time to conduct research on the internet if they wished before devising questions. • Interviews conducted in the latter half of term 2.	• Students are given the opportunity of engaging in practice orals in a variety of contexts and degrees of formality to build confidence and improve presentation skills among others. • Students are doing Senior English and as a result have a number of formal orals that are delivered across the year, one of which is an interview with someone on an issue of historical, biographical or community interest. Students are generally encouraged to interview someone who is not a family member or close friend. This assessment is one of their formal Common Assessment Framework (CAF) tasks.

being interviewed • Students were seated at desks at front of class • Teacher observed how students articulated their questions and responses, maintained eye contact and showed interest and used techniques to probe deeper and used language appropriate to the context and audience			

After choosing a way to investigate what their students could do (and/ or choosing a project from the CD ROM to guide them), the teachers carried out their plans in order to assess whether or not the students could do the aspects of oral language that they had chosen to investigate. For example, in Cycle 1 Danielle chose the communicative environment of her son speaking with his music teacher during his violin lesson. This one-on-one situation made her wonder what her students could do in one-on-one interactions, and specifically in interviews. Being that this real world communicative environment was within the realm of education, she chose to use *Project 17: Looking at Language Behaviours in Talking and Education*, to help guide her classroom investigation in Cycle 2.

Danielle then answered the research questions as follows:

1. What language functions are needed when speaking in educational environments?

My students will need to further develop their skills in utilizing language for each of the objectives. In their Senior English course, they undertake a range of prescribed tasks, which afford them the opportunity of demonstrating their proficiency in the six outcomes in various combinations. In terms of speaking, they need to be able to communicate confidently in a range of contexts for different audiences. At school, it is possible to provide only a limited range of contexts in which students practice their communication skills and often their language can be arranged and planned to suit the context devised by the teacher. Students will, therefore, speak to the teacher or share their ideas in the classroom,

consciously adjusting their language for the particular audience and often displaying a measure of stress and loss of confidence when they feel that all eyes are on them. Fundamentally, they will use language to seek assistance, find out information or clarify their understandings or express an opinion.

2. Do your students currently have control of these functions?

I found that some of the students, who would usually be fairly competent speakers, chose to 'play up' and give the person interviewing them a hard time by responding in monosyllabic grunts, making wisecracks for the benefit of their peers in the audience, or not giving honest responses. This was a response noted among a few of the boys. By contrast, a few of the girls were concerned to 'deliver the goods' and support me as the teacher, by performing well. I had to reassure them that whatever they said and however they were able to communicate their ideas would be fine and useful for what I was observing.

As many of the topics students chose afforded them the opportunity of expressing personal opinions, this reinforced one of their outcomes, which involves showing their awareness of the attitudes, values and biases in media texts. They are often required, as part of their course, to demonstrate that they are able to identify the viewpoint of speakers (and of course, writers) and acknowledge that their own speech will reflect their personal biases.

They also use language for the purpose of 'getting things done', which may necessitate them asking for assistance or guidance on how to approach a class exercise or formal task.

Much of their language in unchecked moments is used for social communication. This language is naturally less structured and more\littered with contemporary slang and 'oral' grammar. Students of course adapt their language to suit the audience and the level of friendship they share with the person they are talking to. For many students, formal talk presents an unwelcome challenge and several of the students lack confidence when communicating in unfamiliar situations or with people who are 'on a higher rung of the social ladder'. The students in the Year 11 class, who were the subjects for my investigation, vary quite considerably in confidence, with some students being markedly stronger at speaking than they are at writing, so they welcomed the opportunity of engaging with the interview task. For the most part, the greatest difficulty that students face is increasing the degree of formality of their speech to suit the demands of their CAF tasks. Some students struggle to articulate their requests and observations clearly and fluently, but generally they are all students from an English speaking background and are capable of using language to converse with others adequately.

3. What additional functions do your students still need to be able to communicate successfully in this type of speech environment?

The students need greater confidence to make eye contact, to provide feedback to the speakers that they have understood what was shared, and to remember to appropriately introduce and thank interviewees.

Areas of language investigated

The teachers selected various areas of oral language to investigate in Cycle 2. These areas are presented below according to those aspects of language that were investigated.

1. Functions of language
   - Expressing opinions regarding personal reading [Year 8]
   - Expressing emotional attitudes [Year 9, primary]
   - Expressing intellectual attitudes [Year 9]
   - Getting things done: specifically, Asking someone to do something [Years 5-7]

2. Social interaction
   - Using computer language to inform, educate and function within the workplace and how do we incorporate 'warmth' to oil the passing of information [Secondary]
   - Interaction of student councillors with students and teachers [Years 8-10]
   - Interaction in groups in classrooms [Year 10]
   - What makes some students popular and others unpopular [Years 8-9]
   - Conventions of social interaction (LS 1.2) and recognition that behaviour is used to communicate (LS 1.4) [disabled people at community centre]

3. Specific skills
   - Skills in providing feedback and obtaining information in interviews [Year 11]
   - Use of polite language forms [Years 5-7]
   - Settling disputes appropriately [Primary]

4. Patterns of speech associated with particular contexts
   - Group work in classrooms [Year 10]
   - Interacting with community members/ guest speakers [Year 9]
   - Panel discussions [Secondary]

5. Issues dealing with register

- Ability to modify oral language for different purposes and audiences [Year 7, Years 8-10]
- Being able to communicate with familiar and unfamiliar people and in groups [Year 10]
- Formal and informal interactions [primary school]

6. Vocabulary

- Computer language [Secondary]
- Using appropriate words in small group work [Year 10]

To collect their evidence about whether or not the students could do these things, some teachers used a specific task to elicit the language they were researching, while others simply observed a non-specific classroom task or communication in various school settings, e.g., playground, youth group, etc. Some teachers also had discussions with their students about the language under investigation. To document their evidence and to aid their analysis, some teachers transcribed their students' speech while others made observational notes.

Here is an example of an activity that one of the teachers devised in order to elicit the language she was researching.

Carolyn decided to investigate language for social interaction and behaviour specifically related to interacting with community members. In order to find out what her students could and could not already do in relation to this, she set up two tasks. Firstly, she conducted a group discussion in the classroom about appropriate social protocols when guest speakers visit. Students put forth ideas and this was videotaped. Afterwards, they viewed the tape and main points were noted. Carolyn then had the students prepare for and manage a visit from a community member. The interaction between the students and the community member was videotaped. After the visit, they viewed the videotape and discussed the main points. This formed the basis of Carolyn's Cycles 3 & 4 in that it told her what the students could and could not do, and thus what needed to be taught.

As a result of their Cycle 2 investigation, teachers found that their students already possessed abundant knowledge, skills and understandings related to oral language. These are presented according to the categories as listed above.

1. Students' abilities to use functions of language:

   Students could *ask*:
   - questions to elicit information [Year 10]
   - questions to clarify information [Year 10]

   Students could *express*:
   - suggestions [Year 10]
   - individual ideas [Year 10]
   - their understandings fairly clearly [Secondary]
   - opinions in the classroom [Year 10 students with learning difficulties]
   - opinions forcefully (but in ways that may put people 'off side') [Year 9]
   - arguments (but without backing them up logically) [Year 9]
   - feelings when prompted by an adult [Primary]
   - likes and dislikes [Special Education- primary]

   Students could *respond*:
   - when pushed [Years 8-10]
   - to teacher initiations [Upper Primary]

2. Students' abilities in social interaction

   In this area some teachers found that students could:
   - engage in a discussion about a prepared topic [Secondary]
   - 'be nice' by including everyone [Primary]
   - instruct peers to do things [Primary]

3. Students' abilities to use specific communicative skills

   In relation to specific communicative skills, some of the teachers observed that their students were able to:
   - delegate tasks [Year 10]
   - follow peer discourse in group discussions [Year 10]
   - communicate verbally with reasonable success [Secondary]
   - clarify [Year 11]

- provide feedback [Year 11]

- make eye contact [Years 8-9]

- use humour in conversations [Years 8-9]

- initiate conversations [Years 8-9]

- encourage others [Years 8-9]

- confront peers about issues with teacher assistance and peer support [Primary]

- make some requests [Special Education- primary]

- respond appropriately to tone of voice [Special Education- primary]

- seek attention from an adult when anxious [Special Education- primary]

- select appropriate people to interpret particular communications [Special Education- primary]

- use appropriate behaviours [Special Education- primary]

- use objects to indicate wants [Special Education- primary]

- retell personal stories and/ or describe situations [Special Education- primary]

- use verbal and nonverbal communication with reasonable success [Secondary]

The following is an example of how one teacher described what her students could already do.

> Patricia observed her students during a panel discussion and she found that one student, Felicity, led the panel discussion successfully. "She appeared relaxed and friendly. She executed the tasks of the leader comfortably: greeting the audience, introducing the panel and the topic. She addressed panel members directly and tried to set them at ease by smiling and nodding. She used hand gestures and facial expressions to demonstrate effective speaking and listening. She included all members in discussions and attempted to guide answers or probe for more information. She remained relaxed when she had a moment of confusion and acknowledged the help she received from Kelly. She kept to the time limit and concluded the discussion with a short summary and a thank you to the panel members. It was clear that she is a capable speaker and listener."

4. Students' abilities to effectively use patterns of speech associated with particular contexts

   In this area some of the teachers observed that their students could:

   - participate in meetings [Years 8-10]
   - offer simple explanations using fairly limited vocabulary in 'threatening' contexts [Year 11]
   - assist teachers and fellow students with technology problems [Upper Primary]

5. Students' range of vocabulary

   From their research some of the teachers noted that their students had the vocabulary:

   - to communicate effectively in a group [Year 10]

Zara found that her students used the following words to communicate effectively in a group:

Group Questioning –
   to clarify (What part are we looking at?)
   to redirect (What do we need to do next?)
   to make decisions (Who thinks that...?)
   to make suggestions (How about...?)

Individual Questioning
- to include (What do you think? What did you put?)
- to assist (Why don't you...?, How are you going?)

Praise and recognition of idea – (Well done, Good point)

Offering suggestions – (Yeah and how about also...?)

Challenging ideas constructively, providing a reason or another suggestion – (I don't know if that will work because...)

Inclusive Language – (We, Our , Us)

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6. Student's abilities to change register

   Some teachers observed that their students were able to change register to:

   - relate to others in a sensitive way [Year 11]
   - adapt language to be more formal [Year 11]

- be polite while working in groups in the classroom [Year 10 students with learning difficulties]
- select, apply and adjust strategies in a range of communicative contexts [Years 6-7]

After identifying what aspects of oral language their students were already able to do well, the teachers found that there were many other aspects that the students needed to learn. These areas of need are categorised in the same manner as the previous sections:

1. Need for a greater repertoire of language functions to:
   - praise each other [Year 10]
   - describe/ reiterate tasks [Secondary]
   - speculate on explanations and solutions [Year 5-7]

2. Need for improved social interaction skills to:
   - take turns [Year 10, Year 11]
   - include all members in group discussion [Year 10]
   - ask questions to probe and direct [Year 10]
   - build on each other's ideas [Year 10]
   - monitor each group member's level of involvement [Year 10, Secondary]
   - express ideas/ values without being insensitive [Secondary]
   - distinguish between fact and opinion and respond appropriately [Secondary]
   - keep gesturing appropriate [Year 11]
   - develop sensitivity [Year 11]
   - not dominate [Year 11]
   - support and encourage others through verbal acknowledgement and attentiveness [Year 11]
   - interact in a group with unfamiliar members [Year 10]
   - listen and respond to peers in problem-solving groups [Year 5-7]
   - generate plans for completing a task [Year 5-7]

3. Need for specific communicative skills to:
   - give positive feedback [Year 10]
   - improve listening skills to allow for more lively responses [Secondary]
   - listen [Year 11]

- use appropriate and active listening strategies [Primary]
- improve vocal and non-verbal communication by paying attention to articulation, intonation, pace, etc. [Secondary]
- speak clearly and confidently [Year 11]
- speak fluently [Year 11]
- express feelings more calmly [disabled people at community centre]
- relate feelings to needs [disabled people at community centre]
- express value to others when listening to them [disabled people at community centre]
- use sentence starters/ ways to express responses and suggestions [Primary]
- use 'because' to justify opinions [Primary]
- use strategies to 'pull apart' problems, e.g., brainstorming [Primary]
- interpret, with an awareness of cultural differences, verbal and non-verbal messages, e.g., showing emotions and understanding through body movements, tone of voice, intonation, facial expressions [Primary]
- attend to responses of others and review or elaborate on what has been said [Primary]

4. Need for vocabulary expansion to:
   - develop a better understanding of jargon [Secondary]
   - refute and defend arguments [Year 9]
   - express feelings in an acceptable way [Year 9]

5. Need for improved repertoire of language (for different registers) to:
   - be able to alter their speech to suit a new group of people with whom they are unfamiliar [Year 10]
   - recognise the difference between formal and informal language [Year 10]
   - be able to change expressions (i.e., vocabulary, tone, expressions) to suit the audience when presenting arguments [Year 9]

Cycle 3: Supporting students' oral language development

In Cycle 3, the participants met again with the project team for a professional development session and discussed the findings of their classroom research. They reported on their students' communicative abilities and then determined what their students' current and future needs were. They then looked for ways to address their students' communicative needs using existing curriculum documentation and materials. Using the Curriculum Framework, teachers either identified the outcome which reflected their students' particular needs, or, if there was no such outcome, wrote one incorporating these needs. They then identified the skills, understandings and knowledge that the students would need to demonstrate in order to achieve the outcome/s.

The teachers completed tables, such as those that appear below, to record this information.

Danielle's plan for Cycle 3

1. What can they do now?	2. What do they need to do? (Outcome to be achieved)	3. Gap between what the students can do now and what they need to do.
Area of language investigated: interviewing skills **What the students can do currently:** -Adapt language to context and audience (relate to others in a sensitive way) -Adapt language to be more formal -Offer simple explanations using fairly limited vocabulary in 'threatening' contexts -Confident in speaking -Able to clarify and provide feedback	**What the students need to be able to do:** -Keep gesturing appropriate -Support and encourage others -Speak clearly and confidently -Speak fluently -Develop sensitivity -Not dominate -Take turns -Listen	**The understandings, skills and attitudes the students will need to achieve the outcome.** -Strategies for listening effectively -Strategies for developing fluency in communicating ideas and opinions -Support and encourage others through verbal acknowledgement and attentiveness

Phyllis's plan for Cycle 3

1. What can they do now?	2. What do they need to do? (Outcome to be achieved)	3. Gap between what the students can do now and what they need to do.
Area of language investigated: Expressing disapproval or disagreement in school situations in ways that are socially acceptable and achieve the desired outcome	LS 3.1a-4.1a "Interacts to express opinions and perceptions, participates in problem-solving discussions…" "…supports opinions with some detail in a variety of classroom situations"	**The understandings, skills and attitudes the students will need to achieve the outcome.**
What the students can do currently: -Express their opinions forcefully but in ways that may put people 'off side' -Present arguments without backing them up logically, e.g. 'That's gay', 'This is stupid', 'Why can't we ever…?'	**What the students need to be able to do:** -give opinions -adjust expression of opinions to make it appropriate to the audience -accept or react appropriately to the ideas and opinions of others -self-monitor appropriateness of content and structure for different audiences -offer considered reasons and arguments to support a point of view -think about, plan and possibly rehearse what they are going to say	-structures for introducing own opinions -vocabulary to argue- refuting other arguments politely, defending own arguments, e.g. 'This is logical', 'this is like that situation', etc. -change expressions to suit audience: vocabulary, tone, expression -vocabulary to express feelings in an appropriate way

Cycle 4: Implementation

Finally, in Cycle 4 the teachers designed ways to teach and assess those skills, understandings and knowledge that comprised the outcome(s) that they had identified in Cycle 3. This process was recorded using the following framework:

Area of language investigated:
Outcome:
Year:
Students need to be able to: (Cycle 3 middle column)
Teaching: (what did I teach)
Task: (how did I teach it)
Assessment: (how will I know it is learnt)

Developing the outcomes

In these final cycles, the teachers focussed on a range of outcomes, which reflected the needs of their students. In particular, they focussed on the language required for social interaction, for learning (mainly in small groups) and on issues related to register.

Language of social interaction

In this area of oral language, some of the teachers addressed the outcomes related to:

- using language to settle disputes
- understanding what encouragement and consideration look like, feel like and sound like (being sensitive to others)
- using appropriate language and behaviour in order to be popular (or not to be so unpopular)

Language for learning

In this area, the teachers focussed on aspects of group work including:

- turn taking
- including members of the group

- providing praise/ feedback
- building on others' ideas
- monitoring members' involvement
- listening skills
- problem solving
- working creatively

Paralinguistic features

In this area, one teacher focussed on how we use tone of voice and non-verbal communication to influence others.

Specific language functions

Some teachers focussed on language functions which were required for the achievement of a range of outcomes. These included:
- expressing needs (making requests)
- expressing and responding to ideas and opinions
- requesting and giving particular information
- persuading others

Register

The outcomes in this area focussed on:
- adjusting speech for a range of audiences and contexts
- adjusting speech according to the degree of formality of the situation
- expressing ideas in unfamiliar contexts

Metalinguistic awareness

When assessing metalinguistic awareness, teachers focussed on outcomes that promoted:
- strategies to improve the effectiveness of communication
- group processes, e.g., how to turn take, build on others' ideas
- register- awareness and extension of students' repertoire of strategies
- rehearsal/ practice of more complex or unfamiliar speech.

While many of the teachers were able to locate an outcome to address their identified need in the existing curriculum documents, others had to write their own. Some teachers identified an existing outcome, but rather than defining it in terms of formal

learning contexts as is indicated in the curriculum documents they adapted it to the everyday language needs of their students.

Developing outcomes

Danielle wrote an outcome for her students to address their need to develop sensitivity toward others and supporting/ encouraging others through verbal acknowledgement and attentiveness.

Outcomes to be achieved:
-Students will be able to show sensitivity towards others;
-Students will be able to support/ encourage others.

Understandings, skills and attitudes students need in order to show sensitivity and support/ encourage others:
-effective listening strategies
-verbal acknowledgement strategies
-turn taking skills

Unpacking the demands implicit in the outcome in terms of the chosen communicative context was a very useful way for teachers to plan effective learning programs. The teachers used the general terms of the outcome, but then were explicit about the particular linguistic behaviours their students would need to demonstrate in order to achieve the outcome.

Contextualising existing outcomes

Marie investigated the skills required to be a successful student councillor with her Year 8-10 students. She found the following outcomes appropriate:
    4.1: develop and present ideas and information
    4.2: choose text form/register in relation to audience
    4.3: express/interpret meaning and present ideas and information
    4.4: adjust listening and speaking to needs of the task
She then contextualised these to fit what a student councillor would specifically need to be able to do:
- Speak to other students in class situations, assemblies and social situations (at times as a leader)
- Speak to teachers and staff to enquire, help/ assist with tasks, introduce
- Speak with unfamiliar adults to welcome, explain, enquire, direct
- Speak to other student councillors to organise, cooperate, delegate

She then defined what the students would need to understand and do in order to achieve this outcome:

> Understand different contexts, different purposes and different audiences
> express their ideas
> present information clearly and completely
> take turns in a group
> assume certain roles in a group
> actively listen to group members
> serve as well as lead

Teaching, learning and assessing the outcomes

Once teachers had selected (or written) the appropriate outcome(s) to reflect their students' needs, they then designed a teaching/ learning program focussing on this. They outlined the type of teaching they would do, the type of learning tasks they would have their students do, and how they would assess whether the outcome had been achieved. The following examples show the wide range of programs the teachers developed in Cycle 4. The examples are presented using the same frameworks provided to the teachers.

Danielle's teaching and assessment plan

Area of Language Investigated: behaviour and language used in conducting interviews to obtain information, provide effective feedback and change register appropriately
Outcome to be achieved: • develop sensitivity toward interlocutor • support and encourage others through verbal acknowledgement and attentiveness
Year Level: 11
Students need to be able to: • develop sensitivity • take turns (not dominate) • listen effectively • encourage and support others
Teaching: • Understandings of what encouragement and consideration look like, feel like and sound like • Understanding that different individuals have different needs • Skills in praising each other meaningfully and sincerely • Effective listening
Task: 1) Discussion of what encouragement and consideration look like, feel like and sound like 2) Role plays: undivided attention vs lack of attention, eye contact vs no eye contact, smile vs no smile, considerate vs inconsiderate, praise vs no praise 3) student reflection
Assessment: students write a journal reflection on how they would like to be treated and how they felt when listened to, acknowledged, praised, etc.

Danielle developed this learning plan after finding out that her students did not often use verbal feedback, listen effectively or show sensitivity to others in interview situations. In Cycle 1, she had looked at a one-on-one violin lesson. So in Cycle 2, she set up interviews for the students to conduct and she noticed that they did not use effective feedback or listening techniques. She then prepared the above plan to help her students acquire these skills. Her plan shows that she explicitly explored the concepts of encouragement and consideration and then provided opportunities for the students to experience and practise these. Further, she had the students reflect on how these new skills affected them.

Other examples of teaching and assessment plans follow.

Zara's teaching and assessment plan

| Area of language investigated: |
| Words and behaviours required for effective group work |

Outcomes: Select, apply and adjust strategies for monitoring and improving education.

LS 3.2 Recognises and uses forms of spoken text associated with particular contexts and purposes.

LS 4.2 Considers the appropriateness of text form and register and the conventions of non-verbal communication in relation to audience when listening and speaking in familiar situations.

LS 4.1 Develops and presents familiar ideas and information and supports opinions with some detail in a variety of classroom situations.

LS 5:1 Interacts with others to discuss accessible topics involving challenging ideas and issues.

English Progress Maps (Curriculum Council, 2005)

Year: 10

Students need to be able to:
- Take turns in discussion and delegate tasks effectively
- Include all members in their group discussion
- Ask questions of each other to clarify, direct and probe
- Praise each other or give positive feedback
- Build on each other's ideas
- Monitor each group member's level of involvement and redirect if necessary.

Teaching:
Effective group work skills

Task: Pre-activity with group work
Explicit teaching of effective group work skills
Group work activity

Assessment:
Formal –
- Self Evaluation sheets (A) and (B) completed individually by students at the end of their group tasks. Students were asked to put their group number and/or name on the sheet to allow for later comparison.
- Teacher observation sheet –completed while monitoring both group activities. Compared at the end for changes to the frequency in which the group work skills were observed being implemented in each group.

Informal –
- Through class/group discuss and review activity.

| Area of language investigated: |
| In what ways can we improve panel discussions? |

| **Outcome:** LS 4,5,6 Conventions, Contextual Understanding, Processes and Strategies |

| **Year:** Secondary |

Students need to be able to:
- Obtain a more in-depth understanding of the topic; improve preparation by developing a better understanding of techniques and jargon. This will improve the verbal communication, evoking emotion and passion.
- Improve vocal and non-verbal communication by paying attention to articulation, intonation, pace, etc.
- Engage more active participation of all members.
- Improve building and probing skills.
- Offer more alternative meanings and respond appropriately.
- Improve listening skills to allow more lively responses.
- Learn to express ideas/values without being insensitive.
- Learn to distinguish between fact and opinion and how to respond appropriately.

Teaching:
- Revising the generic conventions and techniques to enable students to improve readings.
- Revising effective listening and speaking skills.

Task:
- Revise the short story using the diagram to learn conventions, techniques and values, etc. (As used in Year 12 Good Answers Study Guide.)
- Read poetry in another language. Ask students to keep their eyes closed, just listening to the voice.
  Students will then follow this up with a journal entry explaining what they think the text was about. They will have to base this purely on volume, pace, tone, etc.
- Play a section from an unknown video. Ask students to record what meaning they were able to make by watching facial expressions, gestures and body language.
- Arrange with other teachers for small groups of students to sit in on a lesson. Students record vocal, non-verbal and verbal communication and its effect on the audience.
- Explain how to DRIVE when listening effectively as explained on the video: Effective Listening Skills. (Learning Essentials)
- Arrange with other teachers for small groups of students to sit in a lesson: a) students record vocal, non-verbal and verbal communication and its effect on the audience, b) students reflect on what parts of the communication were successful and the reasons for the success.
- Students view the recording of their panel discussion: students assess the discussion by using the assessment sheet.

Assessment:
- Journal entries will display their level of understandings.   - Students produce their own short video/DVD to illustrate/demonstrate how a model panel discussion should be conducted. Assessment rubric: LS 4,5,6 of Conventions, Contextual Understanding, Processes & Strategies

Barbara's teaching and assessment plan

Area of Language Investigated: Social interaction (popularity skills)
Outcome to be achieved: LS 2.4 Experiments with and demonstrates an emerging awareness of the application of strategies for formal and informal interactions.
Year Level: 8/9
Students need to be able to: understand appropriate social interaction
Teaching: Explicit teaching of appropriate social interaction skills
Task: *Introduction*   - Students individually record advice on how to be popular to a student who has just arrived at our school.   - Discuss information with a partner.   - Whole class sharing of advice. Whiteboard aspects.   - Categorise aspects into: body language, speech, tone, phrases, actions. Build upon thought.   *Presentation*   - Identify scenarios where someone might feel unsure of how to act.   - Sample student-generated scenarios: *- You are friends with members of a popular group and one friend who is unpopular. Your popular friends begin putting down your unpopular friend, and question why you are spending time with them. In order to be popular you: Leave your unpopular friend and spend all your time with the popular group.* *- You see some popular students bullying an unpopular student. In order to be popular you: Confidently stand up for the bullied student and say, "Leave him alone, he's my mate."* *- You are doing a test and you see a friend cheating. In order to be popular you: Ask them why they are cheating and tell them to stop; you don't dob.* *- You see a friend who starts a fight and a teacher questions you about it. In order to be popular you: are dishonest to the teacher and say you saw nothing.*   - Role play scenarios. Reflect.   - In small groups students discuss and report back ways to feel included

and ways to tell someone you don't like something they're doing.

- If time allows debate "It is better to be popular rather than unpopular."

Conclusion

- Question: How can I tell the difference between being unpopular because I'm doing something wrong or being unpopular because other people are doing something wrong?
- Individuals record reflection: Something I did to make myself popular and unpopular. What do I think about it?
- Remind students of Proverbs 18:24: 'Friends come and go, but a true friend sticks by you like family.'

Assessment:

- Observation checklist re: students' understanding.
- Observation of discussion responses.
- Viewing student's reflection sheets.

Phyllis' teaching and assessment plan

Area of language investigated: Expressing disapproval or disagreement in school situations in ways that are socially acceptable and achieve the desired outcome
Outcome: LS 3.1a-4.1a "Interacts to express opinions and perceptions, participates in problem-solving discussions…" "…supports opinions with some detail in a variety of classroom situations"
Year: 9
Students need to be able to: -give opinions -adjust expression of opinions to make it appropriate to the audience -accept or react appropriately to the ideas and opinions of others -self-monitor appropriateness of content and structure for different audiences -offer considered reasons and arguments to support a point of view -think about, plan and possibly rehearse what they are going to say
Teaching: • active listening • process ideas; discuss/ respond to ideas, build on each piece of information • understand that each group member can offer ideas and opinions • confidence to respond, process idea, visualise then respond
Task: • Students generate Y chart about what encouragement looks like, feels like & sounds like • Reflect- self: what ideas did you hear? Conduct Think-Aloud with whole class. Students complete Graphic Organiser during discussion to include speaker's point of view and responses to each, how to arrive at consensus, etc. 1. Conducted Think-Aloud as a member of a small group that modelled a discussion that built on each other's opinions to reach a group consensus. 2. Rest of class recorded our discussion using a Graphic Organiser and identified in particular the process we engaged in. We blackboarded the process during whole class discussion. 3. Using a topic appropriate to our term's theme, students engaged in small group discussion with one member acting as an Observer/Reporter and recording the process, individual opinions and the final group consensus. 4. Students recorded their reflections of process in journal. 5. Next session, rather than have students design their own checklist in order to assess how well a group attained their consensus, students designed a personal goal for their participation in small group work (e.g., listen actively, consider other points of view).
Assessment: -Journal entries -Student generated checklist and their reflections of Think-Aloud.

Rose's teaching and assessment plan

Area of language investigated: Communicating effectively within groups
Outcome: Students listening and speaking with peers, teachers and adults in different situations in a more uncontrolled environment. Need to determine how they can achieve this effectively.
Year: 10
Students need to be able to: -Students need to be prepared to communicate with other individuals in an uncontrolled environment. -They need to be able to take the skills they utilise in the classroom and transfer the skills to an external and/or new situation. -At present the students would be working approximately at Level 2 but I would like to see them progress toward Level 4 as soon as possible. -They also need to be more confident within themselves to do this.
Teaching: -Speak effectively and confidently, not only in our classroom environment, but also in a new, external environment.
Task: 1. Students complete sheet about something that had happened to them during the school holidays explaining how and why they would tell different people the same story in different ways. 2. Elicit slang and colloquial language vs formal language. 3. Basic grammar lesson (looking at nouns) to teach them about the endless 'bank' of words that are out there for them to use (the use of a greater variety of vocabulary). 4. The final activity: annual Parent-Student-Teacher conference day (external situation). Apply appropriate language to the situation.
Assessment: 1. Assessment of Task #1. 2. Anecdotal teacher notes regarding use of formal language and variety of vocabulary.

In this learning plan, Rose, like many of the other participating teachers, used activities that made the way language works explicit for her students. She worked with her Year 10 students to explore the ways in which we change our language and vocabulary to suit different audiences (register). She particularly focussed on the use of more formal language.

Rose's assessment item

HOW DO I COMMUNICATE WITH OTHERS?

You have just returned to school from your Term One holidays!

Surely you did something that you enjoyed, or something that you'll remember for a long time. Usually when you do something you like, or that you are proud of or excited about, you want to tell someone. Who are the people that you would usually tell? Please make a list of these people below:

_____

_____

Now, think of something that you did in your holidays that you really liked doing or was different to what you would normally do and write it in the space below.

_____

_____

If you are telling a number of people your story, do you speak the same way to each person? For example: would you tell your grandmother the story the same way that you would tell your best friend?

Complete the table below explaining how you would tell your story to the listed person and tell me why you speak this way.

Person	How would you tell them?	Why would you explain it like that?
Mum Dad Sister Brother Grandma Uncle Best mate Neighbour Teacher		

In Cycle 4, the teachers used a variety of tasks to measure their students' learning outcomes. Some of the teachers used observation as a means of assessment while others devised worksheets that were used both in the classroom tasks and for assessment purposes.

To conclude the presentation of the teachers' data and findings another case study is presented here. It is hoped that it, along with other samples of the participants' work, will provide a model for other teachers to follow in order to develop their own responses to their students' communicative needs.

Case Study Two: Patricia's Project

Patricia looked at verbal and non-verbal communication with her upper school students. In particular, she was interested in the use of 'voice' and related this to panel discussions.

Patricia's Cycle 1

Patricia chose to investigate the communicative environment of the library, focussing on the returning of overdue books. Because her students often use the library, and will do so in the future, and because there is the possibility that their books will be overdue from time to time, she wanted to be sure that they would be able to manage this type of interaction.

She collected information by transcribing what happened between herself and a librarian when she was returning overdue books.

At the Library returning overdue books
I am studying part-time and because of limited time, I usually find it difficult to explore sources before the due date comes up. I live on a farm, about a 30 to 45 minute drive from the library. This happened on a Tuesday night, just before closing time.

Me: *Hello, I am sorry but my books are late. I was not able ...*

Librarian: (Looking up from the work on her desk, annoyed expression). *Yes, just leave them in the In Box.*

Me: (Still trying to keep the smile up) *I actually need them again. I was not able to finish my research because...*

Librarian: (Coming up to the counter and looking really annoyed) *I am sorry, but you can't have them now. They have to go back onto the shelf.*

Me: *What do you mean? Has someone else requested them?*

> Librarian: *No, they just need to go back on the shelf for 24 hours before you can take them out again. Come back tomorrow.*
>
> Me: *But that makes no sense. I am late with my books because I am short on time, now you want me to spend more time travelling. That means I have even less time to work.*
>
> Librarian: *This is Library Policy. Overdue books will go back on the shelf for 24 hours.*
>
> Me: *But it makes it really difficult for part-time students like me. It is already a challenge to balance work and studies. Are there no special circumstances for people who are more committed than a full time student?*
>
> Librarian: *You will have to come back tomorrow.* (Turns and walks off)

In her analysis of the communicative environment at the library, Patricia noticed that the language functions of being able to disagree and being able to deny permission effectively were important so that the parties involved would not feel maltreated or resentful. She also noted that nonverbal communication, such as facial expressions and tone of voice, were also important. Her analysis of the situation follows:

> *"As I was leaving the library, WITHOUT THE BOOKS, I could not help but feel really hostile towards the librarian. I felt that she was really unpleasant and clearly showed that she had no interest in my problems. I could not help but feel that somehow it was personal; she did not like my face or she does not like students in general or she dislikes people who do not follow the rules, etc. I was trying to understand why the library would have such a policy, but could not come up with a good explanation.*
>
> *Then I started thinking about what made the whole experience so unpleasant and I realised that if she had treated me differently, I would probably still be unhappy with the policy, but I would have accepted that she was just following the rules. I would have accepted that she did not have the authority to change or bend a rule.*
>
> *That brought me back to my classroom and my task to prepare students to communicate effectively (even when it is an unpleasant message) so that ill feelings are not fostered. (I now avoid that woman completely when I go to the library!) So, I decided I was going to put more effort into getting my students to understand that communication is more than saying it the way it is. Nonverbal communication can determine whether you communicated effectively*

or not. People can disagree and still retain respect for each other if the communication is done successfully. The panel discussion was meant to provide them with a forum where they could discuss different viewpoints, learn how to agree and how to disagree without making anyone feel bad. I also wanted them to realise that listening was extremely important in effective communication. (I did not feel that the librarian was listening to my side of the story at all. She was too pre-occupied with her rules and whatever else was on her mind to really hear me.)"

Patricia's Cycle 2

In Cycle 1, Patricia identified the real world needs of students in the particular communicative environment of the library. Next, in Cycle 2, she identified the gap between what the students already know and can do and what they need to know and do in such an environment. The first step in this identification process involved filling out the Reconnaissance form.

<div>

Reconnaissance

In the following sections provide sufficient detail to give a clear indication about your situation:

Name: Patricia

School (e.g., location – distance from Perth, urban, rural; size – approx. no. of students, organization – primary, district high; buildings, description of staff; other relevant information).	Bunbury Private School 360 students (Primary 200, Secondary 160) New buildings, satisfactory resources Staff coping quite well with OBE demands
Students (e.g., cultural and linguistic background, home background, SES, academic standing, special needs).	Mostly middle-class Christian students. Large number from single parent background. Mostly well-disciplined and well-adjusted. Most classes have a small high achievement group as well as a small section of low achievers. A few ADD students, a few autistic students.
What is done in oral language now Briefly describe what is done in your class/school, what practices are undertaken, what type of things are assessed and what is explicitly taught.	Students participate in weekly oral activities: group discussions, class discussions, formal speaking, interviews, role play, panels, etc. Students lead assemblies and organise and host functions.

</div>

In Cycle 1, through her analysis of the communicative environment of the library, Patricia became interested in the language function of disagreeing as well as non-verbal communication and effective listening.

Patricia then reported that in her classroom she wanted to:

1) prepare students to communicate effectively (even when it is an unpleasant message) so that ill feelings are not fostered;
2) get my students to understand that communication is more than saying it the way it is. Nonverbal communication can determine whether you communicated effectively or not;
3) get students to understand that people can disagree and still retain respect for each other if the communication is done successfully;
4) get students to be able to discuss different viewpoints, learn how to agree and how to disagree without making anyone feel bad; and
5) have students realise that listening was extremely important in effective communication because in her altercation with the librarian she felt that the librarian was not listening to her.

Patricia then set up her research plan which involved selecting a topic of research, formulating a specific research question, selecting students to participate and setting up a data collection system. With this information at hand, Patricia was then able to determine what her students could and could not yet do in regard to her research question. Because the students needed a forum for expressing points of view and where disagreement, non-verbal communication and listening would occur, Patricia chose to have the students participate in a panel discussion. This specific task would allow her to find out whether or not her students could already do these things.

Research Plan

Name: Patricia

Area of research

To pick an area of research, select a topic from column A and also one from column B:

Column A	Column B
Oral language development	Sounds
Meta-linguistic awareness	Rules
✓Language for learning	✓Words
✓Language for Social Interaction	✓Behaviour
Language variation	
Functions	

Therefore the area I wish to explore is:

Language for learning & Social Interaction x Words & Behaviour

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My research question:
State very specifically what it is that you wish to find out. Make sure it is written in a question form (e.g, How..., What ....., In what ways....)
In what ways can we improve panel discussions?
Targeted students
Whose oral language will you be investigating? State the number of students you will focus on and give details of their particular characteristics (e.g., 3 students each of a different achievement level;   4 students - 2 x Year 4 and 2 x Year 7; 6 students – 3 x girls & 3 x boys).
10 students- 2 groups: Group 1= 3 girls & 2 boys, Group 2= 2 girls & 3 boys

She developed a procedure for collecting the data in the classroom using the *Data Collection* proforma.

Data collection	Recording data	Time line	Current assessment
-Conduct a panel discussion on narrative techniques employed in the short story, *The Princess Who Stood On Her Own Two Feet*, by Jeanne Desy. -Explain the function and conduct of each panel member. -Use current desk groupings of 4 and add one student to act as facilitator.	-Make a video recording and transcription of discussion. -Note students' verbal and non-verbal communication. -Note individual ability to communicate clearly. -Note the level of understanding of techniques and making meaning.	Week 9, Term 2.	Assess according to Progress Maps.

After videotaping and transcribing the panel discussion, Patricia made the following observations about her students' abilities.

The panel discussion was successfully conducted according to prior instructions. All panel members showed awareness of their specific roles.
Felicity led the panel discussion successfully. She appeared relaxed and friendly. She executed the tasks of the leader comfortably: greeting the audience, introducing the panel and the topic. She addressed panel members directly and tried to set them at ease by smiling and nodding. She used hand gestures and facial expressions to demonstrate effective speaking and listening. She included all members in

discussions and attempted to guide answers or probe for more information. She remained relaxed when she had a moment of confusion and acknowledged the help she received from Kelly. She kept to the time limit and concluded the discussion with a short summary and a thank you to the panel members. It was clear that she is a capable speaker and listener.

Lack of adequate preparation of content prevented Teagan and Steven making a sufficient contribution to the discussion. Both students demonstrated a limited understanding of the topics discussed. In terms of speaking, they appeared uncomfortable, unsure of themselves and avoided eye contact. They spoke in quiet voices, sometimes not quite audible. They did not volunteer information and only gave limited responses when directly addressed. It was obvious that they were hindered by ill preparation as well as lack of confidence.

Kelly came across as quite passionate and very well informed. Her preparation for the discussion was thorough and she was capable of responding to any question. She appeared to be holding back in an attempt to avoid dominating the discussion. This body language could have threatened the security of the other panel members as they attempted to find the right answers, well aware that she was bursting to respond. She did make an effort to control her contributions. She spoke audibly, with good articulation and good pace. She used facial expressions and hand gestures to make her opinions clear. She displayed a good understanding of the topic and was probably the one who carried the discussion.

Josh appeared quite nervous. He spoke quietly, sometimes not quite audibly, but made good eye contact. He displayed a good understanding of the topic, but was certainly not going to volunteer information. He only spoke once during the discussion and that was only after being asked. It was clearly a matter of confidence as he did display a good understanding of the topic.

It was a fairly successful discussion in terms of revising the short story as well as communicating effectively. However, it became clear that better preparation was required in terms of understanding the topic and understanding generic conventions and techniques. This will allow students to participate fully and would lead to better verbal expressions. Students also need to become more aware of strategies to relax and how to use their vocal and non-verbal skills to improve their communication. It might be more useful to combine students of equal strength, although that might be problematic for weaker students.

Patricia used this analysis of the panel discussion to identify the specific needs of her students.

Patricia's Cycle 3

In Cycle 3, she identified what her students could do currently, what they would need to be able to do, and, then the gap between these.

What they can do now	What they need to do Outcome to be achieved	Gap between what the students can do now and what they need to do.
• Can engage in discussion about a prepared topic. • Can communicate their understandings fairly clearly. • Can use vocal and non-verbal communication with reasonable success. • Can communicate verbally with reasonable success. • Individual students achieved between Levels 3 and 5 for this discussion.	• More in-depth understanding of the topic; improve preparation by developing a better understanding of techniques and jargon. This will improve the verbal communication, evoking emotion and passion. • Improved vocal and non-verbal communication by paying attention to articulation, intonation, pace, etc. • Engage more active participation of all members. • Improve building and probing skills. • Offer more alternative meanings and respond appropriately. • Improve listening skills to allow more lively responses. • Learn to express ideas/values without being insensitive. • Learn to distinguish between fact and opinion and how to respond appropriately. **Outcome: Listening & Speaking, Levels 4, 5, 6** Conventions: word/ sentence, text Contextual understandings: purpose, audience, context Processes & Strategies: generating & accessing ideas, organising & processing ideas, evaluation & reflection	• More unpacking of the text to determine different readings. • More demonstration of effective listening and speaking (verbal & non-verbal communication skills).

Patricia's Cycle 4

Patricia was able to identify her students' oral language needs by looking at the knowledge, understandings and skills that she had noted as the gap between what students already knew and what they needed to know (as recorded in the third column of the chart above). She was then able to plan a teaching and learning program to address those needs and to design an assessment instrument to measure the students' learning outcomes.

What will I teach? in order for students to achieve the outcome.	How will I do it?	How will I know it is learnt?
• Revising the generic conventions and techniques to enable students to improve readings. • Revising effective listening and speaking skills (verbal & non-verbal communication skills).	Activity 1: Revise the short story using the diagram to learn conventions, techniques and values, etc. (As used in Year 12 Good Answers Study Guide.) Use "hot potato style" (rotating groups to get content of the short story). Activity 2: Read poetry in another language. Ask students to keep their eyes closed, just listening to the voice. Students will then follow this up with a journal entry explaining what they think the text was about. They will have to base this purely on volume, pace, tone, etc. Activity 3: Play a section from an unknown video. Ask students to record what meaning they were able to make by watching facial expressions, gestures and body language. Activity 4: Arrange with other teachers for small groups of students to sit in on a lesson. Students record vocal, non-verbal and verbal communication and its effect on the audience. Activity 5: Explain how to DRIVE (**D**ecide to listen; **R**ead all the stimuli: 7% verbal, 56% visual; 37% vocal; **I**nvest spare time wisely; **V**erify what I heard; **E**xpend real energy to listen) when listening effectively as explained on the video: Effective Listening Skills. (Learning Essentials) Activity 6: Students view the recording of their panel discussion and they assess the discussion using the assessment sheet. Activity 7: Students record what was done successfully and what could be improved and how improvements can be made.	• Journal entries will display their level of understandings. • Students need to produce their own short video/DVD to illustrate/demonstrate how a model panel discussion should be conducted.

Patricia used the following handout for Activity 1 where she wanted the students to revise the generic conventions and techniques to improve readings. This was because she felt that an improvement in this area would improve the students' confidence in their oral language when participating in panel discussions.

Good Answers Study Guide

Title:	Year of publication/release	Medium: Genre:	Author/Film maker:	In a nutshell:

Ideas	Techniques/Conventions	Quote/Example	Preferred Response

Author/film maker's context	Social context	My context
Preferred Reading	Resistant Reading	My Reading
Structure	Narrative elements	Conventions of the medium
Values	Representations	Audience

In Activity 2, poetry was read in a foreign language in order to get students to focus on 'voice' quality. By doing this, Patricia was trying to show her students that when speaking, it is important to be aware of tone, intonation, etc. One student commented in their journal that *"we did not understand the language but we could still make*

meaning through the volume and intonations. It was good to realise that communication goes beyond a common language."

In Activity 3, Patricia's goal was to make non-verbal communication explicit by watching a video. In response to the video activity (and the previous activity), one student noted that *"language can be specific for a particular area or group of people, and it can also be for a broader audience. I lived in another country for a number of years and could not understand their language at first, but I could communicate through using body language, facial expressions and gestures."* Another student's journal entry regarding non-verbal communication was *"I have now seen that communication is far more than talking. I now know that seeing that someone is angry is communication. I know how people use techniques to get the message across."* Another student said the following about non-verbal communication and further demonstrated a wide understanding of language and register:

> *"Our society is becoming more and more globalised, which means that every day we are exposed to different cultures, beliefs and languages. It is not always necessary for two people to understand each other's language to communicate with one another. Of course we will be limited to some extent, but focussing on 'how' it is being said will allow some understanding. Even in our own English speaking communities, we have dialects. It goes beyond that, we can speak English at different levels such as formal, colloquial or slang."*

Activity 4 had the students observing the verbal and non-verbal communication of teachers and students in other classes. The students found this particularly interesting and made quite a few comments in their journals regarding the communication of their teachers. One example follows:

> *"Mr F. spoke confidently and clearly, changing the tone of his voice. He used his eyebrows and body language to emphasise his speaking. I noticed that he spoke in a different way to the Year 9s (compared to how he speaks to Year 10s). He is aware of what is happening in the class and quite patient. He looks past the students to the back of the room, does not make eye contact with a specific student. He uses a lot of hand gestures. He lowers his voice when he speaks to a child individually."*

In response to learning about listening via the DRIVE video in Activity 5, a student commented that *"when we did an experiment in class to listen to everything we could hear, I was surprised at the things some students mentioned and I did not hear, like*

the sound of sweeping a floor from outside. I did not hear that. This probably means that I blocked that sound, and therefore I did not really listen well."

A final overall comment on the teaching and learning program from one of the students in their journal was *"Communication skills will be vital in life and I am thankful that I have learnt them"*. Another student commented:

> *"Talking, talking, talking, talking. Is this communication? Perhaps, but it is more than that. We will always be around some form of communication, whether we be performing it, receiving it or observing it, it's there. We use it non-verbally, through text, physical signals, symbols, drawings, numbers, noises, anything. Communication is power that can be used for good or for abuse."*

The journal entries made for Activities 1-5 show how Patricia's students had gained the understandings and knowledge that she intended to teach them. The examples of the students' reflections also demonstrate how this type of learning experience develops metalinguistic awareness.

For Activity 6, where the students viewed the recording of their panel discussions, the following assessment schedule was used. Both Patricia and her students used this assessment sheet to assess the students' knowledge and understandings through the written records of the oral tasks they had done. Not only did Patricia address her students' immediate oral language needs, she also helped them to develop complex understandings of how language works.

Patricia's ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT: Listening and Speaking[3]

Aspect	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
Conventions	*Word/sentence* Use vocabulary appropriate to purpose, situation and other participants in oral interactions. *Text* Use conventions associated with greetings, initiating conversation, introductions, modes of address, closure, questioning, inquiry and seeking assistance in ways appropriate to context.	*Word/sentence* Experiment with vocabulary, phrasing and non-verbal language in an attempt to enhance interest and accuracy and to influence others. *Text* Offer alternative viewpoints appropriately and express and respond to disagreement, lack of understanding and/or misunderstanding appropriately.	*Word/sentence* Use appropriate and varied vocabulary, phrasing and non-verbal language to achieve clarity and variety of expression or for persuasive or emotive effect. *Text* Interpret and employ conventions in oral interactions for orientation, emphasis, transition and recapping to clarify a train of thought.
Contextual Understanding	*Purpose* Communicate clearly for a range of purposes and identify relevant ideas while listening. *Audience* Demonstrate sensitivity to other people's values and expectations through use of vocabulary, tone and non-verbal language.	*Purpose* Explain ideas, information, opinions, suggestions, responses and/or questions in some detail and identify main and supporting ideas while listening. *Audience* Demonstrate awareness of other people's contexts by employing appropriate questions, allusions, illustrations or examples.	*Purpose* Generalise, draw conclusions, infer viewpoints, attitudes and/or feelings and reconstruct information from oral interactions. *Audience* Acknowledge the perspectives and contexts of other people and use language to accommodate, engage with or influence others. *Context*

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[3] Based on the Indicators of Progress for the English Course of Study (Curriculum Council, 2005a).

	Context Experiment with adjusting language for different roles, modes, genres and contexts.	*Context* Adjust language and behaviour to take account of different roles, modes, genres and speaking and listening contexts.	Employ conventions associated with formal and informal contexts as appropriate.
Processes and Strategies	*Generating and Accessing Ideas* Ask questions to clarify understanding and/or elicit additional information. *Organising and Processing Ideas* Acknowledge and respond appropriately to contributions/responses from others and elaborate appropriately when necessary. *Evaluation and Reflection* Distinguish between claims of fact and opinions.	*Generating and Accessing Ideas* Participate in oral interactions constructively, encouraging others to participate in order to progress discussion. *Organising and Processing Ideas* Use oral interactions to systematically obtain relevant ideas, paraphrase ideas appropriately for purpose and seek feedback to check understanding. *Evaluation and Reflection* Demonstrate understandings of how oral language may influence or engage listeners.	*Generating and Accessing Ideas* Use oral language to seek and explore different perspectives on topics and contribute creatively to interactive goal setting, problem solving and planning. *Organising and Processing Ideas* Build on the ideas of others to advance discussion and the development of ideas. *Evaluation and Reflection* Identify elements of presentation, persuasion and appeal in oral language.

Patricia also reflected on the understandings she gained through her action learning project.

> *I gained tremendous personal satisfaction from facilitating this unit. It is a wonderful experience when you literally see comprehension come to the faces of your students. For many (most) of them, it is the first time that they really understand how communication takes place and what an awesome gift it is. Suddenly, they find language interesting, even fun as they play with different words and expressions to achieve different outcomes. They realise that they have a mighty asset in being able to communicate. It goes beyond realising the enormous power of effective communication for inevitably they will need to consider their ethical stand on how to use their knowledge and skills. They discover that they need to be thinking in life, they need to be identifying motives behind communication to determine whether they can adhere or not. Ultimately, it is a life changing experience because for many of them, they only now understand why they had to sit through years and years of English lessons. They now have the understanding of effective communication which will help them to build relationships with others.*

Conclusion

The Tackling Talk Through Action Learning Project has been a collaborative effort involving materials development, professional development, mentoring and four cycles of action learning. As a result, this project has generated considerable data, much of which could not be detailed in this report. The research team are currently preparing a website and CD Rom to include material not presented in this publication. This new material will complement and extend the resources offered in this and the earlier *Tackling Talk: Teaching and Assessing Oral Language* report (Oliver, Haig Rochecouste, 2005a). It is hoped that together these materials will assist teachers to better ascertain and meet the listening and speaking needs of their students.

As demonstrated here, the teachers undertaking the action learning projects were able to determine their students' present and future needs and to develop appropriate pedagogical responses to these. In order to do this, they first needed the opportunity to explore one of their students' potential communicative environments outside the classroom. They also required new theoretical knowledge to extend their understanding of what is involved in successful oral communication. Finally, the teachers required support to explore the current curriculum documents and "unpack" the outcomes in terms of the linguistic demands implicit in them. They were then able to match their students' needs to these outcomes; identify appropriate teaching and learning strategies to provide students with opportunities to achieve them; and, develop assessment strategies to monitor that achievement.

The work of the teachers in this project has demonstrated the extent of the communication needs of students in a range of educational and wider community settings. By using an action learning model the teachers were able to look beyond the usual emphasis on very formal uses of oral language and more particularly, written language in current language teaching. This bias exists both in classroom practice and in the curriculum. Through their investigations, these teachers became more aware of the importance of communicative competence in day-to-day interactions. As a result, many of them expressed strong positive sentiments at their new-found understanding of the oral language needs of their students and the opportunities the project provided to develop more meaningful activities to address these.

The Tackling Talk Through Action Learning Project required a high level of commitment from the participating teachers in order for them to look at language use in their communities, to apply this knowledge to the teaching of oral language in their classrooms and to reflect on these experiences. The on-line materials and the professional development assisted the teachers to recognise a broader range of functions of language than those represented in current approaches to oral language pedagogy. Through the action learning process teachers became ethnographers of communication and learnt to observe and analyse the communicative environments that their students would participate in, for example, in shops, canteens, libraries, theatres, restaurants, hairdressing salons, music lessons, sporting events, or other contexts. They were also assisted to recognise those aspects of language required for successful communication within these environments, for example, socialising, warning, requesting services and information, giving directions, lodging complaints, denying requests, expressing agreement and disagreement, etc.

Having recognised the nature and the importance of oral communication in day-to-day contexts, the teachers assessed their students' current skills and needs, and then developed strategies to teach and assess the outcomes they identified. This provided the opportunity for teachers to broaden the curriculum they offered to their students to include those oral language skills that they had observed as important for successful communication. This included, for example, the careful observation and assessment of performance in small group discussions, and the development of students' metalinguistic awareness in terms of using the appropriate language for different occasions.

Action learning incorporating a high level of mentoring by way of specific materials and professional development can be seen in this instance to have had a considerable effect on promoting teachers' reflective practice. Many realised that their current practice did not address day-to-day communicative skills at all and as a result they themselves had failed to find out what their students could and could not do with oral language. For example, one teacher found that her class was lacking in an explicit understanding of those behaviours that promoted successful group discussions and another discovered that a student had a previously "hidden" range of leadership skills in a group context. Another teacher observed that her students had developed a high level of metalinguistic awareness as a result of her explicit teaching of aspects of oral language use and of their engagement in meaningful ethnographic tasks.

This research therefore has confirmed and extended the findings of earlier work in this area. It confirms two important outcomes from the *Tackling Talk: Teaching and Assessing Oral Language* project. That is, it provides further evidence that action research involving teachers in ethnographic tasks can contribute findings to support changes in the curriculum. In addition, it shows that oral language, and particularly communicative competence is vital and can and should be taught, developed and assessed systematically as part of the school curriculum.

Finally, action learning and other types of inquiry which actively involve teachers in researching their own practice are powerful agents of change for both the teachers and their students. It is therefore appropriate to end this report with one participant's reflection on how involvement in the project had impacted on her teaching and the lives of her students:

"All in all, I have felt that the students have benefited from me completing this research. Not only have I gained some great findings, but they [the students] have been encouraged to use new words and speak in environments and ways that they are not used to. I have had comments from other staff on how much these students are improving in their classes and I am very proud that they are transferring their knowledge to different classrooms. I am not sure if they are strong or confident enough to transfer this speech into the work outside the school environment, but I figure that this is a fabulous start for a group of students who only liked speaking with their mates in the past."

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Appendix A
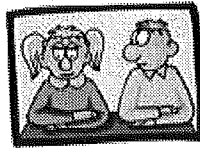
Project 10 - Tackling Talk in Small Groups*

What particular language functions are required to communicate successfully within groups?

Do you need some extra information on <u>functions of language</u>, <u>language for learning</u> or <u>social interaction</u>? It would also be useful to understand the <u>pragmatics of oral language</u>.

<u>Research Questions:</u>

1. What language functions are needed when participating in group discussions?
2. Do your students currently have control of these functions?
3. What additional functions do your students still need to be able to communicate successfully in this type of speech environment?

<u>Method:</u>

- Review the range of language functions used in the groups that you have studied (e.g., negotiating, explaining, etc.)
- Note in your DWP your students' current abilities with these language functions.
- Note how you would normally record your assessment of these functions, e.g., would you:
    - note them as anecdotes,
    - record them in a portfolio,
    - conduct a formal test,
    - note them in your DWP (daily work pad), or
    - not normally assess or record them.

Project 12 - Tackling Talk in Community Environments

What sort of language functions are used to take part in community activities?

Do you need some extra information on <u>functions of language</u> or <u>social interaction?</u>

<u>Research Questions:</u>

1. What language functions are required when becoming involved in community activities (eg, football, tennis, cultural clubs, Aboriginal communities)?
2. Do your students currently have control of these functions?
3. What additional functions do your students still need to be able to communicate successfully in this type of speech environment?

<u>Method:</u>

- Review the language functions that you have observed in a community (e.g., talking to older people with respect, negotiating, etc).
- Note in your DWP (daily work pad) your students' current abilities with these language functions.
- Note how you would normally record your assessment of these functions, e.g., would you:
  - note them as anecdotes,
  - record them in a portfolio,
  - conduct a formal test,
  - note them in your DWP, or
  - not normally assess or record them.

Appendix B

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Development versus Variation
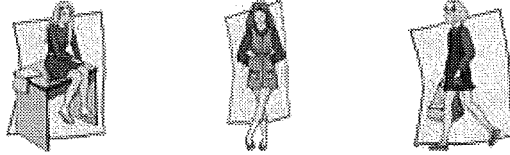
At about 14 or 15 years of age, we see the development of more adult speech due to contacts beyond the home and school. During adolescence language use changes rapidly because of the dense social networks that teenagers form (Chambers, 1995:8). Then, in young adulthood, use of the standard form of language increases for those involved in occupations which are "language sensitive" (Chambers, 1995:159). However, another view is that children as young as four demonstrate social and stylistic variation even before they master the pronunciation and grammar of their language. (Labov 1989:96). This would suggest that variation occurs as part of the development of linguistic competence.

> DID YOU KNOW?
>
> Speech is interchangeable, that is, we can repeat anything said by another human being, regardless of gender and this is rare in the animal kingdom.

Some features of speech are characteristic of both language development and non-standard varieties. For example, young children may use alternative forms of the past tense that are also commonly used by mature speakers of non-standard varieties, as in "Meg done it". Teachers may, therefore, interpret the presence of these features in their student's speech in different ways. For example:

- They might see these features as indicating immaturity if the child is young or as indicating poorly developed speech if the child is older (i.e., that it is a developmental problem).
- They might see these features as characteristic of deficient language skills That is, as evidence of non-standardness and therefore as a linguistic problem (Haig, 2001).

The development of language involves the development of speaking, reading and writing. But the development of specific oral language skills impacts on success in reading and writing. Specific oral skills also impact on the ability to deal with the communicative demands of the classroom and the specific requirements of classroom discourse.

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Language and Cognition

Some argue that language is dependent on cognition (i.e., language acquisition occurs as thought processes develop). For example, children start to name objects only after they understand object permanence, and as their cognition develops so too does their ability to use language in complex ways, such as developing the ability to describe.

Others suggest that language and thought are related but independent, because you can think without language, for example, you can think in pictures, musical notes or chords, colours or shapes.

What is metalinguistic awareness?
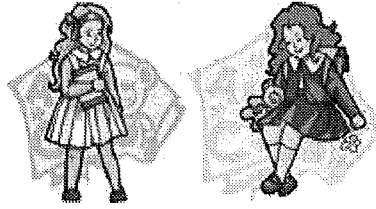
When children have *metalinguistic awareness*, they are able to *think about language* and *talk about it*. This requires them to have a *metalanguage*, or a set of words to refer to the way language is used. *Metalinguistic awareness* also helps us to be aware of how language is used around us and to describe this. It enables us to adjust our own language to fit into a group or to exclude ourselves. It enables us to respond to a particular situation with the correct language and non-verbal behaviour (body language, etc.).

As a child progresses through school, he develops an interest in language and learns how to use language to analyse and understand language itself. Metalinguistic awareness allows children to deal with the ambiguity present in language and can be seen in their ability to play on words, to ask for meaning, or to imitate someone else's talk.

Metalinguistic awareness enables a speaker to be aware of different audiences and how they affect the use of language, such as:

- a different choice of words (e.g., with teachers and principals);
- a different choice of tone (e.g., with the police or other public figures, with visitors to your home or school);
- a different choice of speed or loudness (e.g., with grandparents or older people).

Metalinguistic awareness enables a speaker to be aware of social situations and how they affect the use of language, such as:

- what happens in assembly - who speaks and who doesn't (e.g., the principal and selected students);
- what happens in class - when to speak and when not to (e.g., when it's your turn, when the teacher or others are not also speaking);
- what happens at home - when to speak and when not to (e.g., not when everyone is watching the news, when there are visitors);
- what happens at a grandparent's house - when to speak and when not to (e.g., not when others are speaking);
- what happens at the movies - when to speak and when not to (e.g., not during the film).

Metalinguistic awareness requires the speaker to be aware of social conventions and how they affect the use of language, such as:

- the language to thank someone;
- the language to greet someone;
- the language to introduce someone;
- the language to ask for help;
- the language to help someone else;
- the language to be polite.

Metalinguistic awareness requires the speaker to be aware of appropriate language behaviour (body language, eye contact, non-verbal communication), such as the language behaviour to show that you are interested and that you are listening (e.g., looking at the speaker, nodding, or saying "Mmm" and "Yes").

Conversation

The tools of trade for conversation analysis include:

- Turn taking
- Floor
- Adjacency pairs
- Repair
- Preference
- Feedback

Turn taking includes:
i) A *turn-taking constructional component* which defines the types of units a speaker can use in a conversation, [e.g., *hello*, to full sentences). Speakers predict from the type of unit where the turn will end, this is called the *transition-relevant point* or the moment when a change of speaker may (but does not have to) take place. This component not only explains how a speaker knows the *floor* is available but also explains why overlaps occur, that is, when the point of possible completion, as predicted, is for some reason delayed.

ii) The *turn-allocation component* specifies how a speaker is chosen. This happens in two ways:
- *Other-selection* – where the current speaker selects who will be next.
- *Self-selection* – where the next speaker selects him/herself and keeps on/starts talking.

Adjacency pairs are sequences of two utterances next to each other produced by two different speakers. e.g., a greeting, or a closing *Goodbye/See you* or *ciao/ciao* or with a question and answer:

A: What's the name of that colour?
B: Blue

Conversational repair occurs when speakers feel the need to 'fix' what they have said:
A: Someone said that he.. she will come

At other times the need for repair may be signalled by another speaker (a *repair initiator*):

A: Well who are you working for?
B: Well I'm working through the Ferado Corporation
A: The who?
B: The Ferado Corporation. It's a holding company
A: Oh!

Another type of repair used in teaching situations is called *feedback*, where correction (or recast) takes place and may or may not be taken up:

Student: We finish reading now
Teacher: You have finished reading?
Student: Have finished reading.
(An example where the correction is taken up).

Student: We finish reading now
Teacher: You have finished reading?
Student: Play Bingo now?
(An example where the correction is ignored).

Listening and listening behaviours

Listening skills are closely associated with achieving outcomes in any learning area. They help the student in

- note taking,
- seeking clarification,
- confirming information,
- and negotiating meaning.

In English speaking societies we have particular listening behaviours which we depend on to provide feedback when we speak. For us, a good listener will look at the speaker, will nod and say *Mmm* to indicate that they understand. A good listener will not speak at the same time as the speaker and will not interrupt. In our culture one is expected to 'listen when spoken to'.

In many other cultures these sorts of behaviours are not required, in fact, they may even be inappropriate. For example, in Aboriginal society it is inappropriate to look older people in the face and the sort of feedback which we need is not required. In Aboriginal culture, people are not required to listen when spoken to, it is their choice. There is a lot of ongoing talk and people can tune in or out as they please.

These cultural differences can have a big impact in the classroom where children who have not learnt the listening behaviours of the Anglo-English speaking world are still expected to demonstrate them.

We can measure listening skills with the following outcomes:

- the student responds to questions, instructions and statements
- the student follows peer discourse in group interactions
- the student obtains general information from spoken texts
- the student obtains specific information from spoken texts
- the student identifies key information in spoken texts
- the student is able to identify the main idea and supporting details in spoken texts
- the student is able to identify different points of view expressed in spoken texts

Language for Social Interaction

Language for social interaction requires consideration of:

    a) the range of different social contexts of language:
- formal,
- informal,
- familiar,
- unfamiliar,

    b) the range of cultural contexts of language:
- local,
- community,
- institutional,

    c) the possible interlocutors:
- people who are known,
- people who are unknown,
- children,
- peers,
- teachers,
- adults.

Then we must consider the particular function required of the language:

- give/ask permission; greet; invite; accept/refuse; apologise; express feelings; request - something, someone to do something; request information; respond; negotiate; encourage; express needs; interrupt; give and receive messages/information; and thank.

Finally, we must include the skills to:

- interpret paralinguistic features,
- open and close conversations - face to face, on the telephone,
- manage turn taking,
- manage topic changes,
- use non-verbal listening and speaking behaviours,
- sustain conversations, and
- repair communication breakdown.

All this shows language for social interaction to be highly complex.