

Developing Language and Literacy 3-8

3rd Edition

Ann Browne



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The author

Ann Browne's professional life has been as a teacher and lecturer in primary education. Throughout her career her main interests have been language and literacy and the education of young children. She is the author of a number of books about teaching and learning language and literacy.

Introduction

When I wrote the first edition of *Developing Language and Literacy* 3–8 I wanted to provide an informative, up-to-date guide to good practice in teaching English for all those who work with young children. This continues to be my intention in this third edition.

This edition has been thoroughly updated to take account of developments in research, policy and practice. Many of the chapters have been rewritten and contain new examples of children and teachers at work. Each chapter contains a number of reflective activities and a list of annotated reading. The book now has a companion website which contains additional activities and links to sources of information. These features should enable readers to explore topics further. Visit <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/Browne>.

I know that teachers and children are both male and female but throughout this book when writing about teachers and children I have used ‘she’ and ‘he’ respectively. I have used this convention for the sake of simplicity. When writing about individuals I have referred to them as he or she as appropriate.

The children, students, teachers, researchers and writers whom I encounter in my work have provided me with many opportunities to reflect on learning and learners, to consider an appropriate language and literacy curriculum for young children, and have made it possible for me to collect the material that is included in this book. I would like to thank them.

I hope that this book recognises the expertise and importance of all who contribute to the education of young children and acknowledges the willingness and curiosity that children bring to learning, and that it can make a contribution to the quality of teaching and learning about language and literacy.

Ann Browne

1

Speaking and listening

Introduction

This chapter covers:

- **how and why children learn to talk;**
- **the connection between language and learning;**
- **organising for speaking and listening;**
- **drama;**
- **speaking and listening across the curriculum;**
- **standard English and received pronunciation.**



Children learning language

Language acquisition

By the time that children are four or five almost all of them have achieved an amazing competence in at least one language. Studies of the vocabulary development of young children have shown that the average five-year-old knows at least 2,000 words and may know over 10,000 (Crystal, 1987). The number of words that a young child understands is thought to be far more than either of these figures. As part of the process of gathering this extensive vocabulary, most young children have mastered most of the phonemes or sound units of the speech used in their home or community. Research has shown that, by the time they go to school, children's speech is mostly grammatically correct and children from English-speaking homes use all the basic sentence patterns of English in their speech (Strickland, 1962; Loban, 1976). Although some children may make grammatical errors, saying, for example, 'she bringed it' rather than 'she brought it', such mistakes are usually the result of the overgeneralisation of a grammatical rule rather than a random mistake, in this case an awareness of how past-tense verbs are often formed. As well as being competent speakers young children are also expert listeners. It is

their ability to listen that allows them to join in with the speech of adults from the time that they are a few months old. Listening gives them clues about the sounds and sound combinations which are used to form acceptable words and provides children with an understanding of how sentences are formed.

By the age of three or four months children are actively developing as participants in spoken communication. Babies respond to the talk of others with smiles, movements and sounds. They discover their own voices and gurgle with pleasure as adults speak to them. This stage in language development, known as babbling, gives very young children the opportunity to experiment with and imitate the sound patterns of their home language. As children experiment with producing sounds they gain greater control over their throat and mouth muscles and begin to engage in turn-taking behaviour, characteristic of spoken dialogue. For example, they wait for a pause in the speech of others before producing their own sounds. By about five or six months babies may begin intentionally to use their voices to attract attention and to initiate social exchanges. During the next few months babies start to establish a range of sounds, some of which are wordlike. These might include sounds such as 'baba', 'da-da' and 'ma-ma'. Adults are often delighted with the emergence of sounds that resemble familiar words and attribute meaning to them. They respond to children by repeating and expanding those words that they recognise, saying such things as, 'Da-da, yes, what a clever girl. Here's daddy now. Daddy is opening the door.' With encouragement such as this children gradually begin to attach meaning to particular groups of sounds and words, hearing, for example, that 'da-da' can become the word 'daddy'. Adult responses encourage babies to experiment more and provide examples which children use to build a vocabulary that sounds increasingly like that of adult speakers.

From the age of about 15 months onwards, children begin, with increasing accuracy, to imitate the sounds that they hear others use. They show that they want to join in communicative acts with others, signalling their intentions through their actions, gestures and the tone and nature of their utterances. Their communications increasingly resemble the words and phrases used by the adults around them. At about two years children's speech is characterised by abbreviated utterances that transmit meaning (Brown and Belugi, 1966). They produce correctly ordered groups of content words that can be understood by others. For example, a young child may say, 'Mummy gone shops'. The typical adult response to an utterance of this sort is to acknowledge the meaning, praise the utterance and expand what was said by giving the child the 'correct' adult version by replying 'Yes, that's right. Mummy has gone to the shops, hasn't she?' This kind of response provides children with models of the extended grammatical structure of language which they incorporate into their own speech. From about the age of three years most children begin to construct longer, more complex sentences and are able to use a number of tenses and styles. Their development as speakers and listeners continues until, by the time they start school, the majority of children are accomplished communicators with a large vocabulary, a command of a range of sentence types and a clear sense of grammatical correctness.

How and why children learn to speak

Most children develop their capacity to speak and to listen without any direct instruction or teaching. How children do this reveals a great deal about them as learners generally as well as about how they learn language. Adults can learn from this process. Understanding the way children develop speaking and listening provides teachers with an understanding of the conditions that support learning and strategies which help children to learn.

Babies are learners from the moment of their birth. The first cry that they utter as they are born, as with their later cries and sounds, results in attention and responses from those around them. From the start adults respond to children's facial expressions and the sounds that they make, with encouragement, praise and an expectation that the child's communication has meaning. At the same time as babies are learning that producing sounds enables their needs to be met, the adults who surround them are demonstrating the nature and use of speaking and listening. Care-givers assume that even very young babies are potential conversation partners and as they interact with babies they speak to them in a way that assumes that the baby is listening, may understand and has the potential to respond. Children overhear a great deal of conversation between those around them and are exposed to a great deal of conversation addressed directly to them. Adults interpret, repeat, support, extend and provide models of speech for children as they communicate with them. They do not limit their language or the child's learning but rather expose the child to the full range of language that is used in the child's environment. As children are exposed to more and more language and are supported in their production they become increasingly proficient in their language use.

At first babies use language for functional reasons; to express their needs and to get others to do things for them. At an early stage they may also see the social purposes of language. Because the attention of others is usually pleasurable babies soon discover that the production of sounds and language is one way for them to initiate and sustain interactions. Babies seem to enjoy producing sounds and at times produce long repetitions of similar sounds as they babble and gurgle and later experiment with real and nonsense words. Finally children seem to develop language because they are cognitive beings and active explorers of their worlds. Language is one method of finding out about the world that they live in. It enables them to widen their understanding by questioning, commenting, suggesting reasons, drawing upon previous experience and receiving information from others.

Language and learning

Being able to listen and to speak are essential if children are to succeed both inside and outside school. Speaking and listening occupy more time than reading and writing in the lives of most people. In school a developing facility with oral language is crucial for learning. In the early years a great deal of teaching and assessment is carried out through talk as the teacher explains, describes and questions children.

Learning to read and to write are founded upon children's oral language competence. As they learn to speak they discover that language contains meaning, follows a particular structure and consists of sentences, words and parts of words. They can apply this knowledge about language as they learn to read and write. As children progress through the education system knowledge and information are increasingly transmitted and recorded through reading and writing and their learning depends on a growing competence in a language mode that grows out of their ability to speak and listen.

From the start children's language development is associated with their exploration and growing understanding of the world they inhabit. Through listening, hypothesising, questioning and interpreting the responses they receive from others they learn a great deal. Language supports children's cognitive development by providing them with a tool to make discoveries and make sense of new experiences and offering them a means of making connections between the new and what is already known. All learning depends on the ability to question, reason, formulate ideas, pose hypotheses and exchange ideas with others. These are not just oral language skills, they are also thinking skills. We explore what we think and know through language. As we share events and describe our emotions to others and try to find the correct way of expressing these we often begin to discover what we really remember, feel or understand. Talk can help us to clarify and focus our thinking and deepen our understanding. As we struggle with expressing our ideas to others we often understand them more clearly ourselves. So perhaps the most important reason for developing children's oral language is the link between language development, learning and thinking. This kind of talk is not one where there are swift, short 'right answers'. It is often tentative. Words are changed and ideas expressed in a number of different ways. In order for the link between thinking and talking to be realised, children need time to think about what they know, time to think about how to express their thoughts and time to articulate and reformulate their ideas.

The extract in Figure 1.1 shows the potential language has to be a powerful tool for learning across and beyond the early years curriculum. Three Year 1 children, Suki, Martin and Thomas, were working together in the art area. They had been asked to print a large area of sky as part of a background for a display relating to the story *Charlie's House* (Schermbucker, 1992). The teacher had asked the children to work together to complete the activity. They had to decide on the colour they would use for the sky and then decide what equipment they would use for the printing.

This extract shows children using talk to focus carefully on the activity and to do it well. They were using talk for a number of purposes and in a number of ways. Through their talk they were reflecting on a previous learning experience which occurred when they listened to the story, and integrating this with their own knowledge and understanding of hot countries. Although they had seen the pictures in the book, they had not realised the significance of the grey skies in relation to the climate. Martin's contribution is an excellent example of taking time to think and express his growing understanding

- S:** Blue ... This sky is blue.
- M:** Like, like ... the sky in the book.
- T:** Is it? ... I mean ... just ...
- S:** Course it is ... the sky in South Africa's always blue, like the sun is always shining.
- M:** Doesn't.
- S:** Does ... What do you mean?
- M:** Has to rain sometimes ... that's why, that's how they got the mud ... and in the winter ...
- S:** Yeah, I remember it rained.
- T:** They got paint pots to get the water.
- M:** But it's not in the book. [M goes to find the book and brings it to show the others] ...
- M:** Look ... nowhere ... nowhere blue.

Figure 1.1 Children learning through talk

through talk. At first he seems prepared to go along with Suki's suggestion but Thomas's question prompts his thinking. He then disagrees quite bluntly before being able to justify his new position. Thomas also gives reasons for his opinion after taking some time to think. As the children talk they listen carefully to one another and give each other time, and Suki seems happy to adjust her thinking in the light of what has been said and the evidence contained in the book. Exchanging ideas has given them the opportunity to re-evaluate what they assumed and to extend and amend their previous knowledge. Had the children been working at this task singly or with an adult who was directing them, it is unlikely that this learning and reflection would have taken place. In this extract the conversation emerging from a collaborative activity has been a valuable way of exchanging opinions, sharing knowledge, justifying ideas, reflecting on previous experiences and accepting new learning.

Concerns and solutions about teaching speaking and listening

For some time speaking and listening was a neglected element in the English curriculum. The publication of the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1998) placed the emphasis for English teaching firmly on reading and writing and classroom practice reflected this. More recently the importance of teaching speaking and listening has been recognised. In 2003 new guidelines were developed by the DfES to support teachers and the Primary Framework for Literacy (DfES, 2006a) contains yearly objectives for oral language as well as for reading and writing. The review which preceded the framework (Rose, 2006) also recommended that the teaching of reading should be accompanied by teaching which develops children's abilities in speaking and listening.

These publications are doing a great deal to ensure that speaking and listening have a significant place in the English curriculum.

Classroom management

Routines and rules about quiet or silence while the teacher marks the register, when children move from the classroom for PE, lunch, playtime and assemblies and silent periods for reading, PE and stories reduce the time available for talk in the school day. Too many rules about times when children's talk is not allowed can also transmit negative messages about the importance of talking and listening.

Sometimes teachers think that the sound of children talking signals that children are not working and tell children to 'Be quiet' and 'Stop talking' so that they can get on with their work. They may fear that talk will develop into noisy and undisciplined behaviour. Teachers who do not understand the place of talk in learning and who feel insecure about noise in the classroom will influence their pupils' perceptions of talk. When children are taught by teachers who silence them or who suggest that talking is not work they learn that speaking and listening have little status at school. They will not see speaking and listening as a means of learning, and when they are given opportunities to speak often use talk to chat or gossip.

Teachers can find the prospect of organising collaborative activities for the whole class daunting. They may restrict opportunities for developing speaking and listening to whole-class discussion times or believe that allowing quiet talking when children work is sufficient. Whole-class discussions are rarely productive and their use needs to be limited. The majority of children are usually silent while one child or the adult speaks, very few children get the opportunity to contribute and interaction among the children is rare. Permitting quiet talking during an activity is not the same as children talking about an activity and using talk to exchange ideas, to question, to solve problems and to explain. Collaborative activities that demand pupil discussion need to be consciously organised by the teacher – productive talk does not just happen.

Teacher talk

The pressure to cover the statutory curriculum has encouraged some teachers to employ a more didactic style of teaching, a style that is concerned with the transmission of facts rather than the exploration of ideas (Moyles et al., 2001). This approach to teaching reduces the opportunities and necessity for discussion and the interaction that does occur is more likely to be concerned with eliciting and giving correct answers rather than using oral language for any of its other purposes.

When comparing children's language at home and at school, Wells (1986) found that at school children speak less with adults, get fewer turns, express a narrower range of meanings and use grammatically less complex utterances. They also ask fewer questions, make fewer requests and initiate a smaller proportion of conversations. In comparison with parents, teachers dominated

conversational exchanges, giving children far fewer opportunities to speak in class than at home. He concluded that 'For no child was the language experience of the classroom richer than that of the home' (Wells, 1986: 87). This is dispiriting if we believe that school should present children with opportunities to broaden their experiences. A survey of classroom talk (Alexander, 2003) suggests that in school interactions between children and adults are brief rather than sustained, closed questions where children are expected to give brief correct answers predominate and there is little speculative talk. Both Alexander and Wells suggest that teachers need to see children's questions, explanations and comments as important and valuable. While listening may be an essential part of the speaking and listening curriculum, the opportunity for children to develop their own meanings through talk is a vital part of learning and language development.

Young children are strongly influenced by the models of talk presented to them by the adults who are important in their lives. Teachers are significant adults and as such can present a powerful model of language use to children. But how often do teachers present children with a model of talk used for speculation, enquiry or debate, or demonstrate that they too are exploratory users of language (NCC, 1989)? Very often the teacher's talk is perceived by children as being mainly expository or interrogatory. The teacher tells, commands or judges when she speaks to children and very often her questions give children too little time to respond and elicit only minimal answers (Mroz, et al., 2000). Wells (1986) suggested that in order to encourage children to use talk as a means of learning teachers need to be good listeners. When they listen to children they need to give them their full attention and let them see that what they are saying is valuable. They need to be supportive of and encouraging to children in their use of language and intervene in children's talk only when it is appropriate. Their questions should be real questions asked because they truly want to know the child's opinion or thoughts, not asked merely to check that children know what the teacher wants them to know.

Understanding the value of talk

It is easy for adults to place most emphasis on work that is regularly recorded, that can be seen and that can be assessed easily. Talk is none of these things. How do we tell if children have made a real effort to listen or to speak? How do we justify talk to others if there is no visible product? If teachers view talk as an inferior means of demonstrating learning and emphasise the more visible parts of the curriculum such as writing and recording, productive talk is unlikely to happen.

In this chapter I have tried to make a strong case for the learning potential of talk. By learning to speak children demonstrate that they are active learners and constructors of their own knowledge and as adults support the development and use of children's speech they enable children to articulate and satisfy their curiosity. The teacher's willingness to explore topics collaboratively with pupils, allowing them to negotiate meanings and extend their

understanding through talk, is the key to developing children's learning. This means that teachers have to allow time for children to talk to adults and to each other about tasks that are undertaken and new ideas that they meet.

Respecting children

Children will feel confident and comfortable in speaking if the teacher shows a positive respect for and interest in their language and gives status to the different varieties of language they use. If this is not the case then they are less likely to contribute confidently and fluently to discussions and conversations. Confident talk develops when children's own language and way of talking and their right to be silent are respected. They also need to feel comfortable about making mistakes, being tentative and using language to think aloud. Children need to receive the message that talk is valued at school, that it is not second best to reading and writing as a measure of ability, but that it has a place in developing shared understandings, sorting out one's own thoughts and passing on information. Making time to praise good examples of talk in the classroom during the school day can help children to appreciate its importance.

Wells (1986) found that where teachers had high expectations they were more likely to encourage children to express their ideas at length, but that when they held low expectations of children as speakers and listeners, they gave children few opportunities to sustain a topic of conversation. Low expectations also led to teachers controlling discussions by asking simple questions which were answered briefly and quickly.

Teachers and children working collaboratively

The teacher can share her role as an organiser in the classroom with the pupils. She can involve members of working groups in decisions about the role to be assumed by each group member and the specific tasks that the group takes upon itself. For example, a group of children working on the class theme of 'Food' may decide that they want to make an information book about different kinds of bread. Will each child in the group research one type of bread, its ingredients, how it is made and where it is most commonly eaten? Will any of the children be able to bring different sorts of bread to school? Will the children ask the classroom assistant to help them make different sorts of bread? What will their information book look like? Who will make it? Who will illustrate it? What headings will they use to record their findings? How will they make all their decisions? The teacher can encourage the children to consult one another in order to plan their tasks and allocate roles.

The teacher can also share the role of expert. In the example given above the teacher could encourage the children to take as much responsibility as possible for their project. She may help them to establish some initial ground rules for their work but she will also help the children to identify each other as experts and to access information from other people or from books. As the task proceeds or once it has been completed the group may report their findings to

the class. At this point the teacher could share the role of questioner with other members of the class rather than being the initiator of the questions and the focus for the group report.

There is now a great deal of interest in creating classrooms where teaching and learning are discursive and open, a style of working that has been termed dialogic (Alexander, 2006). In such classrooms teachers and children address learning together. Learning is a shared endeavour in which teachers and children build on each other's ideas. They listen to each other and discuss their ideas freely. Tentative talk, wrong answers and changing one's mind are all part of the learning process. In this context teachers treat what children have to say as worthy of attention and listen carefully to what they say. What the child says and means is the starting point for the teacher's response and her teaching. Dialogic teaching places speaking and learning at the centre of learning by harnessing the power of talk to stimulate and extend thinking, learning and understanding.

The teacher's role

Teachers and other adults in school, can play an important part in extending the oral language of young children. They are likely to do this well when they:

- attend to and support the child, only responding to what is said after having carefully listened to the child's words and meaning;
- create shared experiences and reasons for talk by engaging in dialogue during and about shared activities;
- create meaningful social, functional and communicative situations for talking in which speaking and listening can be used for a variety of purposes and with a genuine audience;
- spend time with children giving them experience and models of conversations;
- pose open questions and explore issues which are of interest to all the participants;
- extend children's vocabulary through demonstrating an interest in language and the way in which it is used and encouraging children's interest in the way words sound, are chosen, are interesting and are fun;
- assume that children have something important to say;
- view speaking and listening as an equal partnership and expect the child to contribute to this partnership; and
- provide an atmosphere of safety in which children feel confident enough to voice or rehearse opinions and ask questions.

Organising for speaking and listening

Productive talk can occur in a range of situations in the classroom. It can occur with the whole class, in specially created groups, during collaborative

tasks and during independent work and play. Using a range of situations means that children get opportunities to use talk in different ways and engage with different speakers and models.

Whole-class opportunities

Story time

Introducing slightly different activities at story times and varying the way children listen to stories can be a productive way of encouraging listening. The teacher can announce that as she reads a story she is going to make a deliberate mistake and can ask the children to listen carefully and to put up their hands when they hear the mistake. The teacher can read a story containing a refrain such as 'but my cat likes to hide in boxes' (Sutton, 1973) and the class can be invited to join in with this. The class can be asked to listen out for particular words in stories, such as the children's names in *On the Way Home* (Murphy, 1982). After the story reading they might try to recall all the names of the children in the book. The teacher can ask the children to help her with a story-telling session. The teacher can begin the story and then ask the children to contribute sentences as the story develops. The teacher can keep the story focused by beginning sentences for the children using phrases such as 'One day ... On the way ... Then ... At last ...' Using a wordless picture book that the children are familiar with, at story time is an opportunity to invite the children to tell the story. Each child can be asked to volunteer a sentence as the pages are turned. This activity can be repeated and the class asked to identify the differences between each version. Games such as 'Simon Says' and word games such as 'Odd One Out' encourage children to listen and give them a reason for listening.

Circle time

During circle time children express their own thoughts and ideas. As the children sit together only the child or adult who is holding an object such as a ball or an imaginary microphone can speak. Circle times can become repetitive and children can get bored with them but, if used infrequently and to explore issues that are of importance to children, they provide a useful forum for children to express their opinions.

Talk partners

Talk partners is a way for all the children in the class to have an opportunity to talk and be listened to during whole-class discussions. The children work in twos. Very often the partnership is an established one but it can be varied by linking children's names on a large class list or asking children to pair up with the child sitting next to them. Pupils can use their talk partner to help them as they:

- try out ideas;
- formulate responses;

- discuss an issue;
- raise questions;
- explain a point;
- share an anecdote from their own experience.

Children can use their partner to remind themselves about what they were doing in an earlier session or to talk through the teacher's instructions before starting work. They can also consult their talk partner when they are working independently. They can discuss their work with their partner or ask them to act as a reviewer or editor when they are writing.

Plenary sessions

Children need to be given the opportunity to reflect on speaking and listening in order to improve as users of talk. By making talk the subject of a plenary session, commenting positively on the way in which children use talk and discussing ways of improving it, the teacher will be treating talk like other areas of the curriculum and raise its status in the eyes of the class.

Specially created groups

Specially constructed groups used during work in all areas of the curriculum provide opportunities for children to talk freely, creatively and clearly and to explain and clarify their thoughts. They allow children to experiment with ways of talking for different purposes and to a range of audiences. Group work also provides purposeful contexts for speaking and listening because when working collaboratively it is important to ask questions and to share ideas or knowledge.

The group structures that are described need to be clearly explained to children and may require a few trial runs before they work smoothly. However, it is well worth persevering with them since their value lies in the way in which they encourage children to communicate with one another rather than directing their thoughts and questions to the teacher. This is a much more natural way of speaking. They also provide all children with someone who will listen and respond to them straight away.

Snowball

This is an extension of the talk partners strategy and can be used for the same ends. Individuals' ideas are shared with partners, then shared in a group of four and finally reported to the whole class. In the process ideas change and grow. It can be used as an alternative to conventional news times. For example, four young children who have shared their news with each other can choose one child to tell their news to the whole class. The child who shares his news can then take questions about what he has said before handing back to the teacher.

Brainstorming

This can be done with talk partners, in small or large groups or with the whole class. The children contribute and record their ideas about an issue,

topic or question. All contributions are listed quickly. This is a useful way of finding out what children know about a topic and opening up lines of enquiry for the class. If necessary the lists can be collated and the children can use these as a starting point for their work. If the children are not able to write easily the teacher can act as a scribe for whole-class contributions during this activity.

Visiting listener

One person – either the teacher or a child – visits each discussion group and notes good ideas or examples of supportive listening or speaking and reports these to the whole class during a whole-class discussion time, possibly a plenary. What is to be looked for can be discussed with the class before the listener begins his visits and used to construct a checklist. This draws everyone's attention to the good features of talking and listening.

Rainbow groups

After working on a topic, each member of each group is allocated a colour. All the children with the same colour meet together in new groups to share ideas, to report on their research or to compare what their original group did.

Jigsaw

The children work in groups on the class topic. Each member of the group is allocated one specific aspect of the topic to find out about and is designated as an expert on this. The next stage is for all those who were designated experts on the same topic to leave their original group and meet together to discuss what they discovered. The children then return to their original group and each child reports on their part of the group investigation. The original group then works together to finish its task or to plan a report incorporating all the information they have gained.

Envoys

If a group needs to check or obtain information, one child, who has previously been nominated as the envoy, can be sent to the teacher or to the book corner or library to find out what the group needs and then report back to the group. This is a very useful strategy for the teacher to use to prevent too many children asking for her attention at any one time.

Listening triads

The children work in threes and take on the roles of speaker, listener or recorder. The roles should change each time the group meets. The speaker explains or comments on an issue or activity. The questioner prompts and seeks clarification. The recorder gives a report of the conversation to the other two. This gives all children the opportunity to take on responsibility for supporting, sharing and summarising ideas. It helps children to evaluate and improve their use of spoken language.

Guided reading

The discussion that is the final part of a guided reading session provides an ideal opportunity for developing speaking and listening. The topics for the discussion can be set in the introduction to the session. The adult can ask the children to find something in the book that interested, surprised or disappointed them. The children should give reasons for their choices. The discussion should be free flowing as the children discuss the motives of characters or the author's message. For more ideas about discussions during guided reading see Chapter 2.

Independent activities

Resources

If the teacher is to plan experiences and create contexts for talk in the classroom, she needs to make sure that the classroom contains a number of resources that can be used by the children as they work together and that the environment is conducive to children talking together. Some resources may need to be purchased; others, such as masks and games, can be made by the children. The list that follows contains some suggestions about resources and the environment:

- tape recorders and tapes;
- telephones;
- dressing-up clothes;
- puppets;
- story props;
- a display board labelled 'Things We've Heard!';
- visitors who use various accents, dialects, languages;
- materials for practical activities;
- children's questions as starting points for investigations;
- magnet board and figures;
- games;
- masks;
- support for the use of home languages;
- role-play areas;
- role-play equipment;
- a listening area;
- interest areas and interactive displays;
- a carpeted meeting area.

Well chosen resources are important but the teacher also needs to demonstrate their use to the children. The following example shows the importance of not only providing children with the appropriate resources but also the need for the teacher to organise the activity, participate in the activity and support the activity in order to achieve the aims she has previously identified.

Classroom example: a teacher supporting children's role play

In the nursery the home corner had been transformed into a building site. The usual furniture and equipment had been stored elsewhere and replaced with large blocks and plastic bricks. There was also a selection of hard hats in the area. The preparation for building-site role play had included a display of tools and materials, reading *Miss Brick the Builder's Baby* (Ahlberg, 1981a) and *Charlie's House* (Schermbucker, 1992) and a walk around the locality to look at small and large building projects and repairs that were taking place. The first group of children to work in the building site were asked to build a number of walls to divide the area into different rooms in a flat. Each child worked on his or her own wall and there was very little exchange of conversation except to negotiate the use of the materials for each individual project.

When the teacher observed this she decided to become one of the builders and accompany the next set of children into the building site. She modelled the language used by construction workers and organised the group of three children to work together and with her as they planned and built one wall. At the end of the day she reread *Miss Brick the Builder's Baby* to the class and discussed the work that had taken place in the construction site. The children described how they had worked and gave examples of the type of language they had used. Further examples of building workers' language and behaviour were considered and rehearsed. As the week continued the teacher provided more resources such as Wellingtons, mugs and milk bottles and at sharing times the children participated in short role plays associated with building sites. Some children made safety notices for the area and others made orange and white streamers to mark out the site. From time to time adults participated in the play and guided the children's language and actions.

By the end of the week not only had a set of walls containing windows and doors been constructed but the children had also really begun to experiment with the vocabulary and language forms that might be found on a building site, one of the original aims for the activity. After a disappointing beginning this became a very successful activity. The teacher's clear focus and the support she offered to the children enabled them to get into role and to widen their understanding and experience of language in a new situation.

Collaborative tasks

In order to support productive talk and cooperative learning between children when they are working independently tasks need to be carefully structured. Before children collect their resources for the task it might be helpful to build in a planning stage where the pupils discuss how they will go about the task and decide what equipment they will need. It might also help to limit the materials the pupils can use. For example, allowing one sheet of paper for every two children means that the children have to work in pairs to complete the task. Productive collaborative tasks include making or designing something together. Sequencing a set of photographs or pictures or lines from a poem or a picture book also generate talk that includes reasons, explanations and debate.

Collaborative tasks can be used to generate ideas for writing. For example, pairs of children can brainstorm ideas about how to take care of a pet, then group or prioritise their ideas, then select a limited number of their best ideas and finally write up their instructions. It is a good idea to embed speaking and listening tasks in normal classroom work which leads to a tangible outcome.

Working with individuals

It is common practice for teachers to work individually with children who seem to be finding their work difficult. In such cases it is easy for adults to tell the child what they have done wrong and to tell them how to correct their work or what to do next. Adults can do most of the talking and children most of the listening. If instead teachers choose to use a scaffolding approach the balance of talk is reversed as the teacher guides the child's thinking by asking well thought through questions and responding to their needs (Wood et al., 1976). The significant features of interacting with children in this way are to:

- believe that the child can work out the answer;
- listen to what the child says as he identifies the problem;
- summarise what the child has found out so far and what the difficulties now appear to be;
- orientate the child's attention to the significant aspects of the difficulty;
- help the child sequence his enquiry;
- give the child time to continue to grapple with the problem;
- ask a limited number of genuine questions about the problem or about the child's approach;
- respond as one would in a discussion with an equal;
- use tentative talk, such as 'I was wondering' or 'Perhaps if ...';
- hold back and let the child do most of the talking as he continues to work out a solution;
- leave the child once he has resumed work but offer to provide support again if required.

This approach helps children to keep control of their learning and because the child remains actively involved, he is more likely to remember and understand what he has achieved. It also gives the child the opportunity to think about the difficulties and their approach and this may help them to solve the problem themselves.

Drama

Drama is an integral part of the curriculum for speaking and listening although it can, if based on a familiar book as many drama sessions in the early years are, develop children's understanding of a text and support their reading and writing as well. The use of drama techniques provides children with opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills when they speak

as a character, plan scenes, use dialogue and evaluate their own performance and that of others.

Young children's first experiences of drama probably occur in the role-play area. The example of children using the role-play area as a building site given earlier in this chapter shows children speaking in role, planning scenes and dialogue and refining their play. Other early dramatic experiences which often occur independently include using story props to retell or create a story and using telephones. In these activities children are exploring characterisation and using dialogue appropriate to the character they are imitating or creating.

More structured drama can be planned and led by the teacher. The starting point for such work is often a story that the children know. It can also be a photograph, a drawing or a painting. For example the painting, *The Boyhood of Raleigh* by J. E. Millais (Tate Britain) could be a stimulus for deciding what the sailor is saying, creating the conversation between the sailor and the two boys, acting out what happens next, acting out what might happen ten years after the scene in the painting and role playing the events that led up to the boys' meeting with the sailor. Texts created by the teacher such as letters, diary extracts or secret messages can be introduced at any stage of a drama session to change the direction of the children's production. Texts can also be used to introduce historical source material or add authentic details about places. Carefully chosen artifacts such as a key or a lantern can support the imaginary context and sustain the drama. Items from history collections can be brought to life in this way.

Drama conventions

There are a number of techniques that can be used by teachers when using drama. Some of these are described below.

Paired improvisation

This strategy helps to get children quickly into character and into the story. Pairs are given roles. After a short period of thinking time they begin a dialogue, making up their conversation in role as the characters.

Hot-seating

Hot-seating focuses closely on a character and enables motivation to be explored. Individual pupils take on the role of a character from a book or someone with a particular viewpoint on an issue. In role they answer questions from the rest of the class. The questions can be improvised or prepared. Children working in pairs to generate ideas and prepare questions can provide another opportunity for speaking and listening.

Teacher in role

Here the teacher plays the part of a character. Working in role can be a way of challenging children's ideas, introducing new ideas and guiding children's involvement without stopping the drama.

Role on the wall

For this activity the children work in groups. Each group is given a character from the drama and draws an outline of the character on a large sheet of paper. Inside the outline they write about the character's thoughts and feelings. Outside the outline they write about the visible characteristics such as age and appearance. The children can also list what they would like to know about the character and this could be in the form of questions which could be used during hot-seating.

Freeze frame

Freeze frames are still pictures or silent tableaux used to illustrate a specific incident or event. They are useful for scrutinising an incident or situation. The children are asked to represent the characters at a significant moment in the drama. Positioning and body shape need to be considered carefully in order to represent ideas or emotions. Freeze frames can slow down the action to encourage thought and reflection and then move the drama on after considering this key moment. Freeze frames can be brought to life through adding dialogue or a caption for the image.

Thought tracking

This is a good technique for creating and then examining the private thoughts of characters. It can focus on the characters in a freeze frame, or a character from an ongoing drama when the action has been frozen. Participants are asked to say what their character is feeling or thinking. Thought tracking can act as a focus to move the action on and provide an opportunity to share and extend ideas.

Conscience alley

This is a means of exploring a character's mind at a moment of crisis and of investigating the complexity of the decision they are facing. The class creates two lines facing each other and one child in role walks between the lines. As the character passes by the children voice the character's thoughts both for and against a particular decision or action that the character is facing or they offer advice. When the child reaches the end of conscience alley he should make a decision about his course of action.

Meetings

The teacher in role, perhaps as an official, can call a meeting for the whole class to attend. Meetings enable information to be shared with the whole group and give the children an opportunity to discuss the situation before they make a decision about what to do next. Meetings used at the start of a drama can be an efficient way of creating roles or focusing on a problem.

Forum theatre

Forum theatre allows an incident or event to be seen from different points of view, making it a very useful strategy for examining alternative ideas or exploring how a dilemma might be solved. A small group acts out a scene

while the rest of the class work as directors. They can ask the group to act or speak in a different way, suggest that a character might behave differently, question the characters in role or suggest an alternative course of action.

Classroom example: a drama sequence

What follows is an example of a drama based on *Six Dinner Sid* (Moore, 1990). To start with, the class, working in six groups, one for each of the residents of Aristotle Street, might undertake a role on the wall activity for one of the six neighbours. This could be followed by a hot-seating activity where one child from each group takes on the role of the resident they have been discussing. These two activities should add substance to the children's acting as they become the residents in the drama. Working individually the children might then imagine they are the resident they have investigated and then hold, stroke and feed Sid. This could be followed by a thought-tracking activity in which children could talk aloud to Sid and voice their thoughts about him and their relationship with him. Next the children could act out taking the cat to the vet. Again what might they say to Sid and what might they say to the vet? The next important event is the vet's phone calls. Working in pairs the children could improvise the conversation that takes place between the vet and one of the residents. Drawing on their knowledge of their character how would they react? What kind of words might they use? The final part of the drama could take the form of a meeting of the residents to discuss what to do about Sid. This could be chaired by the teacher and the children could discuss whether to act as the residents in the story do and only give Sid one meal each day or whether to be more understanding and continue to provide him with six dinners. If they decide to feed him just one meal the children could come together in groups consisting of the six residents talking to each other as they give Sid his one meal. This could be freeze framed and a caption added to the tableau. If they decide to continue sharing Sid they could, again working in groups of six residents, improvise their conversations as they get to know each other better.

Drama can be accompanied by other activities which can extend the children's understanding of the characters and events in their story. For example, during the work on *Six Dinner Sid* the children could each draw and paint one of the houses in Aristotle Street. This provides a further opportunity to get into role as one of the characters. The houses can also be used in the drama as scenery. At points in the drama characters can write a diary entry. It might be interesting to read Sid's diary for the evening that he left Aristotle Street and went to live with a more understanding set of neighbours. Digital cameras can be used to freeze frame an event in the drama and the pictures can be used later to evaluate the children's body language and physical interpretation of the scene or used as a stimulus for writing some dialogue.

Responding to and evaluating drama

The children's own drama sessions can provide them with opportunities to discuss performance and interpretation but giving them a broader experience of

drama will give them more to think about as well as giving them ideas that can be incorporated into their own improvisations. There are a great many Theatre in Education companies which visit schools and some classes may be able to visit local theatres which put on productions suitable for young children. To get the most out of these experiences there should be preparation and follow-up.

Speaking and listening across the curriculum

English is never just a discrete subject area in the curriculum. It draws its content from other subject areas and is used as a tool in all aspects of life in and out of school. It is always cross-curricular in its application and can be developed in every area of the early years curriculum. Teaching and learning in all subjects depends a great deal on children's abilities to interpret and use oral language. Teachers explain, question, describe and evaluate and children listen, answer, discuss and work out ideas through talk. Work in each subject area will introduce children to subject-specific vocabulary and particular uses of language. In time this extends children's ability to convey exact meanings and complex ideas.

Speaking and listening take many forms and can support thinking and learning in many ways. The list that follows outlines some uses of spoken language:

analysis	justifying
argument	making oneself understood
asking and answering questions	negotiating
challenging	participating
clarifying	persuasion
collaborating	planning
commenting	prediction
comparing	reasoning
describing	reflecting
developing ideas	rehearsing ideas, roles or experience
disagreement	reporting
discussion	requesting
entertainment	reshaping what is known or thought
evaluating	sharing opinions, experiences and emotions
exchanging ideas	speculating
explaining	stating
exploring understanding	suggesting
expressing emotion	summarising
giving orders	telling and listening to stories
hypothesising	thinking aloud
imagining	understanding ideas
initiating action or change	understanding others.
instructing	
investigating	

Mathematics	Subject-specific vocabulary which may carry a different meaning to everyday usage, e.g. <i>table</i> , <i>point</i> Comparison, e.g. <i>longer than</i> Reasoning, <i>if ... then</i> Explaining
History	Reasoning, using <i>so</i> and <i>because</i> to explain cause and event Comparing and contrasting then and now Exploring feelings through empathising with others
Geography	Describing features of the environment Comparing and contrasting similar features in the environment
Science	Formulating questions and hypotheses, <i>I wonder if ...</i> Comparison Prediction, <i>I think ...</i> Describing a process or procedure Reasoning, linking cause and effect

Figure 1.2 Talk in different curriculum areas

Most activities at school offer children opportunities for speaking and listening, but only if teachers focus on their talk potential. As teachers plan their work they might ask themselves which activities can be organised in a way that encourages or necessitates speaking and listening for different purposes and different audiences. Activities such as problem-solving, maths investigations, technology, experiments and writing and telling stories can incorporate a talk dimension if carefully planned. When planning for speaking and listening and planning collaborative activities it is a good idea to identify the types of talk that are being covered and check that over the course of a term children will have had the opportunity to use the full range of types of talk. Figure 1.2 lists some forms of language that are used in different subject areas.

Investigating speaking and listening with children

Undertaking a project on speaking and listening can be a good starting point for raising the status of talk, for encouraging children to reflect on their own use of language and as a preparation for introducing collaborative group work. Such a project might start by making a collection of words to describe talk. In the example in Figure 1.3 the words were contributed by the children over a period of a week. They consulted dictionaries and asked adults at home for their suggestions. All the words in Figure 1.3 were collected by the children and written on a large chart.

Using this as a starting point, the children could undertake a number of activities which would be more productive if carried out in pairs as more talk would be generated. They could:

- match rhyming pairs of words, e.g. ‘flatter’ and ‘natter’;
- match opposites, e.g. ‘whisper’ and ‘shout’;

- write dictionary definitions for the words on the list;
- consider when they use different types of talk;
- act out different ways of using talk;
- illustrate different ways of using talk;
- look for examples of talk written in books;
- alphabetically order the talk words;
- add speech bubbles to illustrations;
- construct their own talk history for a day, for a week, for their lifetime;
- list the kinds of talk they find difficult and easy;
- use talk in different role-play settings, for example as a cafe owner and customer, TV interviewer and interviewee, adult and child;
- find words for talk in different languages;
- identify what they like to talk about;
- consider what makes a good speaker and a good listener.

These activities would provide children with the opportunity to become familiar with some of the knowledge, skills and understanding outlined in the Programme of Study for Speaking and Listening at Key Stage 1 (DfEE/QCA, 1999a). These include learning to:

- choose words with precision;
- take into account the needs of their listeners;
- identify and respond to sound patterns in language;
- create and sustain roles individually and when working with others (DfEE/QCA, 1999a: 44).

In particular the project would help children to learn about language variation, especially how some words are more suited to formal situations and others to informal occasions. At Key Stage 2 children are expected to make a study of language and become more self-consciously aware of oral language. They can do this through reflecting on variations in vocabulary, exploring word choices and subtle variations in meaning and evaluating their own use of talk. These opportunities are present in a language project. The BBC website Voices <http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices> contains some helpful material for teachers planning a language project.

address, ad-lib, advise, agree, announce, answer, argue, ask, assert, babble, call out, challenge, chat, chatter, comment, communicate, converse, cry, declare, describe, disagree, discuss, drone, enquire, exclaim, explain, express, flatter, gab, gabble, garble, gossip, greet, groan, grumble, grunt, howl, inform, insist, instruct, interrupt, jabber, jeer, joke, lecture, lie, listen, mean, mention, mumble, murmur, mutter, name, natter, negotiate, observe, persuade, pronounce, question, rant, rap, recite, report, say, scream, share, shout, shriek, speak, speculate, state, suggest, swear, tell, think out loud, threaten, translate, utter, voice, waffle, whisper, yell.

Figure 1.3 Words to describe talk

Standard English and received pronunciation

Standard English

Standard English is one dialect of English. Like other dialects it is a systematic form of language that has accepted rules and conventions. 'In spoken Standard English significant features are standard forms of irregular verbs; agreement between person, case and number (especially with the verb "to be"); the correct use of pronouns.' In its written form, 'standard English comprises vocabulary as found in dictionaries, and agreed conventions of spelling and grammar' (NCC, 1993: 16). The difference between standard English and other dialect forms is that standard English is the form of language used for 'non-regional public communication' (Whitehead, 2004: 32). The public and official use of standard English, the term 'standard' and the association of the word 'correct' with the term can lead people to think that standard English is the most socially prestigious dialect form of English.

If standard English is seen as the 'best' form of English, dialects that differ from standard English may be rated as second class, careless and ineffective. As a result children who enter school fluent in the language spoken in their homes and communities but who are used to communicating in ways that are different from the language used and valued in school, often standard English, may be classed as having an impoverished form of language.

In the National Curriculum (DfEE/QCA, 1999a) standard English is given a significant mention in the programmes of study for speaking and listening and writing at Key Stage 1. The expectation is that children should be encouraged to use the oral and written forms of standard English in addition to other dialect forms of English. This continues earlier official advice (NCC, 1993: 16) which stated: 'The aim should be to equip young people with the ability to use Standard English when circumstances require it ... It is important to encourage pupils' ability to extend their speaking ... repertoires: to make their language "fit" the context.' Using the vocabulary and grammar of standard English with increasing fluency and proficiency in those circumstances that require it will, in the long term, help pupils meet the communicative requirements of education and employment. Standard English gives speakers of English access to a world language that is appropriate in formal or serious situations such as interviews, communicative situations beyond the home and with people outside one's immediate family or peer group. Young children, too, have the right to feel confident when speaking to a range of people and in a variety of circumstances. Consequently, as long as references to standard English are not interpreted as meaning that it is superior to any other dialect used by pupils, few would disagree that the teaching of standard English is both desirable and important.

It is important to remember that oral language is closely allied to one's identity. Consequently any denigration of a child's normal dialect may be seen as a criticism of the child, his family and his environment. It is not necessary to use standard English all the time. When communicating with friends or colleagues we can all use jargon and incomplete or irregularly constructed sentences. It is worth considering that, when they start school, the majority of children living in the twenty-first century are probably well aware of the standard dialect form of

English through exposure to the language used on television and radio broadcasts such as story telling, news and documentary programmes. They are also likely to be implicitly aware of numerous other dialect versions of English as viewers of and listeners to cartoons and films as well as TV programmes such as *Coronation Street*, *East-Enders* and *Neighbours*. They are well able to code switch as they listen to and understand these very different varieties of English and, as with the development of their early language, their ability to listen is the basis from which the production of language will emerge. It is likely that as children see the need to use different varieties of English their language use will change and develop to meet new needs and audiences as long as they are exposed to different models and to situations which demand the use of different dialects. In this way they will be able to judge the power, use and limitations of standard English and set it alongside their home dialect as yet another speech option.

One way in which teachers can encourage all children to use standard English may be through reading and writing. Standard English is the dialect most commonly found in books and the one that we all need and aspire to when writing for others. Book language provides a model of complete and grammatically exact language for children to listen to and respond to. As children themselves begin to write for audiences beyond themselves they will come to see the need for extended and clear communication that draws on a vocabulary and grammar that is shared by all potential readers. Sensitive intervention in children's writing will lead to the discussion of the different varieties of English that exist and the reasons for their existence and provide opportunities for children to use standard English purposefully.

Received pronunciation

Standard English and received pronunciation are sometimes thought of as synonymous; this is not the case. Standard English is a dialect and a dialect is characterised by its grammatical patterns and vocabulary. Received pronunciation does not refer to grammar or vocabulary; instead it refers to pronunciation or accent. Most accents reveal the speaker's geographical origins, but received pronunciation is a regionless accent used by a minority of English speakers. It is not used as the model of English pronunciation in British schools and speakers should be 'rightly proud of their regional pronunciation which identifies where they come from' (DES, 1988a: 14). In short, 'spoken standard English is not the same as received pronunciation and can be expressed in a variety of accents' (DfE, 1995: 3).

Perhaps the role of the school in relation to accents should be to counter negative attitudes towards them, since these can affect self-esteem and identity. A distinctive regional accent may identify a new entrant to school as coming from a different place or as being an outsider and impede the child's acceptance as a member of a new local community. Some people manifest hostile attitudes to English spoken, for example, with an Asian accent. If this occurs the teacher, drawing on her own knowledge and awareness of language, should discuss this with the pupils, stressing the need to respect one's own language and that of others. Relationships in the classroom among adults and

children and among the pupils themselves are often established through talk. Good relationships leading to feelings of self-worth and acceptance are essential for all learning and especially for the development of oral language. The teacher's own attitude to the language the children use is crucial for the development of children's personal confidence and their willingness to take the risks that will be necessary as they extend their language repertoire in response to new situations and new audiences.



Summary

When teaching speaking and listening we need to:

- understand the value of speaking and listening;
- select tasks that enable children to use talk to learn;
- plan carefully so that children use talk productively;
- create classrooms in which children do most of the talking.



Reflective activities

1. Observe a child's use of language at school in the classroom and in the playground. Does the child use language more confidently in some situations than in others? What conditions support or inhibit the child's talk?
2. Think about the conversations you have had in the past 24 hours. In which situations did you use language to learn or work something out? When and with whom did you use standard English and received pronunciation?
3. Observe a child's use of language at school. Does the child use language to learn? Can you give examples of what they were learning and how?
4. How could you use hot-seating, freeze frame and paired improvisation to develop children's understanding of and response to a narrative poem?



Suggestions for further reading

Alexander, R.J. (2006) *Towards Dialogic Teaching: Rethinking Classroom Talk*, 3rd edn. York: Dialogos (1st edn 2004). This booklet provides teachers with an introduction to the idea of learning through negotiation, discussion and questioning. It gives practical suggestions for encouraging dialogic teaching and learning.

DfES (2003) *Speaking, Listening and Learning: Working with Children in Key Stages 1 and 2*. London: HMSO. This pack contains advice about developing speaking and listening and practical examples of children using speaking and listening in all areas of the curriculum.