

Gross, J. (2013) *Time to Talk*. Oxon: Routledge.



Teaching talk

Introduction

Providing children with an authentic reason to talk is a great start, but, as we have seen, it needs to be complemented by approaches which scaffold language and actively teach component skills.

Take circle time as an example. It can be an excellent way of giving children a reason to talk, and encouraging quieter children to participate through the use of games and rounds. It has also, however, been criticised as a language-learning opportunity because it does not allow for dialogue between the teacher and the individual pupil. The teacher may not comment on or expand what the child has said, or ask the question that takes them to a higher level of thinking. Teacher-pupil dialogic talk may be absent. So as well as the *opportunity* provided by the circle, it might be necessary to build in teacher response and also think about the scaffolding provided by sentence starters for rounds – ‘If I were a . . . I would . . .’ – to scaffold the language of the hypothetical, for example. It might also be necessary for the teacher to introduce and model new vocabulary for the children to use.

In this chapter I describe some of the most effective approaches I saw to actively *teach* language skills in ways like this. Evidence suggests that these will be helpful to *all* children’s learning, but particularly important for those whose out-of-school experiences give them little exposure to reasoned discussion.

Building vocabulary

The child who tells us ‘In the book the writer says . . .’ will do less well than the one who knows how to say ‘In the novel the author suggests . . .’. These are the key words of our subject – novel, play, dramatist, suggests, proposes, implies – so let’s display them and teach them much more explicitly.

(Geoff Barton, head teacher at King Edward VI school, Bury St Edmunds,
September 2011)

A key piece of learning for me in my role as Communication Champion (which, incidentally, neither my training or experience as a teacher and educational psychologist ever taught me) was the critical role which vocabulary size and depth plays in children’s learning.

Vocabulary breadth refers to the number of words that have some level of meaning for us; vocabulary depth means the richness of knowledge that we have for words that we know. There is some evidence that depth rather than breadth is the strongest predictor of reading comprehension.

We should never assume that children know the meaning of even simple words. As a former educational psychologist, I assessed many children of all ages using a test that asked them to say what 'on purpose' meant. Very few could do this, despite often hearing 'You did that on purpose' at home and in school. Similarly, work with young offenders has shown that they often don't understand very basic words like 'victim', 'punishment', 'appointment'.

Maths vocabulary is particularly tricky, especially when words have a real-life meaning that is different from their mathematical meaning. 'Take away' might be a pizza, for example, and 'tables' something you sit at. One teacher recounted how, when she introduced the word 'prism', a child in the class immediately put her hand up to say 'My Dad's been in one of those!' Science presents similar difficulties when everyday words have different meanings in a technical context – think of 'agent', and 'uniform'.

Children start school with very different vocabulary size and depth, and starting with poor vocabulary has a cumulative effect. Andrew Biemiller, an expert on vocabulary learning, estimates that while the average primary-aged child learns new root words (words like 'rock' from which related meanings – rocking, rocky and so on – can be derived by adding prefixes and suffixes) at a rate of about 1000 a year, the 25 per cent of children with the poorest vocabularies acquire roughly 400 fewer root meanings each year than their average peers (Biemiller, 2011). The statistics are truly frightening. If a child is in the lowest 20 per cent in vocabulary knowledge at age five, and you want them to move to an average level within three years, they would have to learn *20 new words a day, every day, for each of those three years*.

An analogy I owe to Robert Robinson, School Development Consultant in Blackburn with Darwen, helps explain why this happens. Robert uses a metaphor of a football net. If you have a good net of words when you start school, you can easily catch all the new words you will learn – just by hearing them. If you have many holes in your net you won't be able to pick up the vocabulary from a language rich environment. It will have to be explicitly taught to you.

As we saw in Chapter 1, children who experience social disadvantage are much more at risk of starting school with a limited vocabulary than better-off children. Hart and Risley (2003) found that three year olds in higher socio-economic status families had vocabularies five times larger than children in lower socio-economic status families. Other American studies have found that disadvantaged and linguistically 'poor' first-graders (aged six) knew 5000 words, whereas linguistically 'rich' first graders knew 20,000 words. The differences are marked for secondary aged pupils, too; in a study in England which compared students from schools serving disadvantaged areas with students from more affluent areas on standardised language tests, the biggest differences were in vocabulary. US research (Beck *et al.*, 2002) shows that senior (Grade 12) high school students near the top of their class knew about four times as many words as their lower performing classmates.

Because of the 'football net' effect, children who start school with poor vocabulary find it harder to pick up words from context. This can apply to EAL learners, too – though not if they are secure in their first language, so that they have the conceptual web in which to place new English words, and not if schools make efforts to provide bilingual resources and involve bilingual adults in the classroom so that the child can make the link between the English word and their first language 'net'.

The cumulative deficit caused by starting off with a poorly developed vocabulary intensifies if children then go on to be struggling or reluctant readers. Encountering a new word repeatedly when reading independently is a prime way in which children's vocabulary develops as they grow older; one study (Nagy *et al.*, 1987) calculated that a typical 10- to

11-year-old could learn around 800 to 1000 words a year from their independent reading. Even if they do not have reading difficulties, having a low vocabulary can trap children in a vicious circle; they cannot read more advanced texts, so miss out on opportunities to extend their vocabulary.

The effects of 'ordinary' schooling

There is some worrying US research (Biemiller, 2007) showing that a year of being in Kindergarten, Grade 1 or Grade 2 typically adds nothing to a child's vocabulary – that teachers were better at teaching children to read words than to understand them. Cassels and Johnstone (1985) found that pupils had little understanding of important vocabulary (words like incident, component, random, negligible) and that this persisted throughout their school years. If they did not understand the word to start with, they still wouldn't understand it several years later.

Why does this happen? It happens partly because we may not realise that children don't know words that seem to us basic. Teachers may be aware that they need explain subject-specific technical vocabulary, but not know that they need to teach non-specialist vocabulary that recurs across learning contexts. We know from research, too, that teachers typically introduce a new word and explain it just once (Scott *et al.*, 2003), whereas children need to hear a word around six times (more if they have language difficulties) in a range of contexts that help them internalise its meaning, if they are to remember it.

Effective approaches to use in school

I came across excellent ways of changing normal classroom practice – ways of clarifying what vocabulary should be actively taught, and ways of teaching it so that it will be remembered.

First of these is deciding what vocabulary to teach. These ideas come from speech and language therapists Stephen Parsons and Anna Branagan, who have built on work in the US by Isabel Beck (Beck *et al.*, 2002) to devise a training programme for schools on an approach they have called STAR (select, teach, apply, review). They have now written a book about this approach (*Word Aware: A Whole School Approach for Developing Spoken and Written Vocabulary*, published by Speechmark) which I thoroughly recommend. In their programme, teachers are asked to identify the 'Goldilocks' words for the topic they are teaching – words that are not too easy and not too hard, but 'just right'. These will be useful words that children will use again in other contexts, rather than everyday words or words children won't meet outside the topic. Table 6.1 gives some examples.

Table 6.1 Goldilocks words from Victorian England topic

Too easy – words children will be using in everyday conversation and will generally pick up incidentally, without specific teaching, unless they have speech, language and communication difficulties	Goldilocks words – useful beyond the immediate topic and should be systematically taught and reviewed. These will be words that are in the average adult's vocabulary.	Too hard – topic-specific words that just need explaining. The average adult may not have an in-depth knowledge of these words
toys	petticoat	gruel
children	hoop	workhouse

Other important Goldilocks words will be those abstract words that are used across the curriculum, and often in exams – words like ‘describe’, ‘compare’, ‘evaluate’, ‘conclusion’. Staff then teach these Goldilocks words systematically on the basis of their sounds, their meaning, the words they go with and their links to the child’s own experience. Teaching is multi-sensory – acting a word out or thinking of a consistent gestures for the word (like mopping your brow for ‘weather’), and using songs or raps to aid recall. It might include agreeing a student-friendly definition of the word (not looking it up in a dictionary). An example from Beck’s work is ‘benevolent’: while a dictionary definition might be ‘characterised by expressing goodwill or kindly feelings; desiring to help others; charitable; intended for benefits rather than profit’, this is of little help to children. They might come up instead with the more useful definition: ‘a person who is happy and kind and does things to make other people happy and kind too’.

Teachers might also increase vocabulary depth by exploring differences between the Goldilocks word and similar words (the difference between ‘benevolent’ and ‘generous’, for example, or between ‘steal’ and ‘seize’ – both mean taking something that is not yours, but *seize* implies the use of force). The teacher can generate examples and non-examples (‘If the man patted the child’s head and gave him a coin, would that be benevolent? If he just smiled at the child, would that be benevolent?’). Linking to the child’s own experiences is a particularly important step – ‘Have you ever known anyone who was benevolent? What was it about them that makes you think so?’.

Once words have been taught, they can be Blu-tacked onto the back of a door at child height so children can pull them off to use in their writing. This means that they have opportunities to apply, their new learning. The words taught are regularly reviewed at increasing intervals – at the end of the lesson, a week later, at the end of the half term, the next term and so on. A simple way of doing this is to have a Word Pot from which child or teacher can pull out cards of the words which have been taught and give a definition. Teachers can give a definition and ask if it is true or false, have children complete a quiz about the words, or ask children to tell a partner what they know about the word. Homework can also be involved, and might for example include writing the word on a sticker that says ‘Talk to me about...’.

Evaluation of this approach in Worcestershire schools proved that words taught using these strategies were recalled; children could later on explain what they meant. Words taught in the normal classroom way (introducing the word and explaining it just once) were recalled much less easily.

A web of associations

I saw another good way of ensuring systematic vocabulary teaching across a school at St Mary’s, a special school in Sussex. Here the school’s network has a set of interactive white board (IWB) slides (visual organisers) for all staff to use to teach new vocabulary. The system (Figure 6.1) aims to build a rich web of associations and is based on the ways we encode new words in our brains, using semantic (meaning), syntactic (grammar), phonological (sounds), orthographic (writing) and motor (speech) routes. So there is a slide (phonological) to enter the word and note with the children’s help what it begins with, rhymes with, ends with and how many syllables it has. The next slide (semantic) maps where you would find it/what you do with it/what category it is in/what it looks like/how it feels. Then there is a ‘words that go with it’ slide; teachers link the new words with things the children already know. For example, they might say ‘Triangle: do you know any other words beginning with “tri”? What do you think “tri”

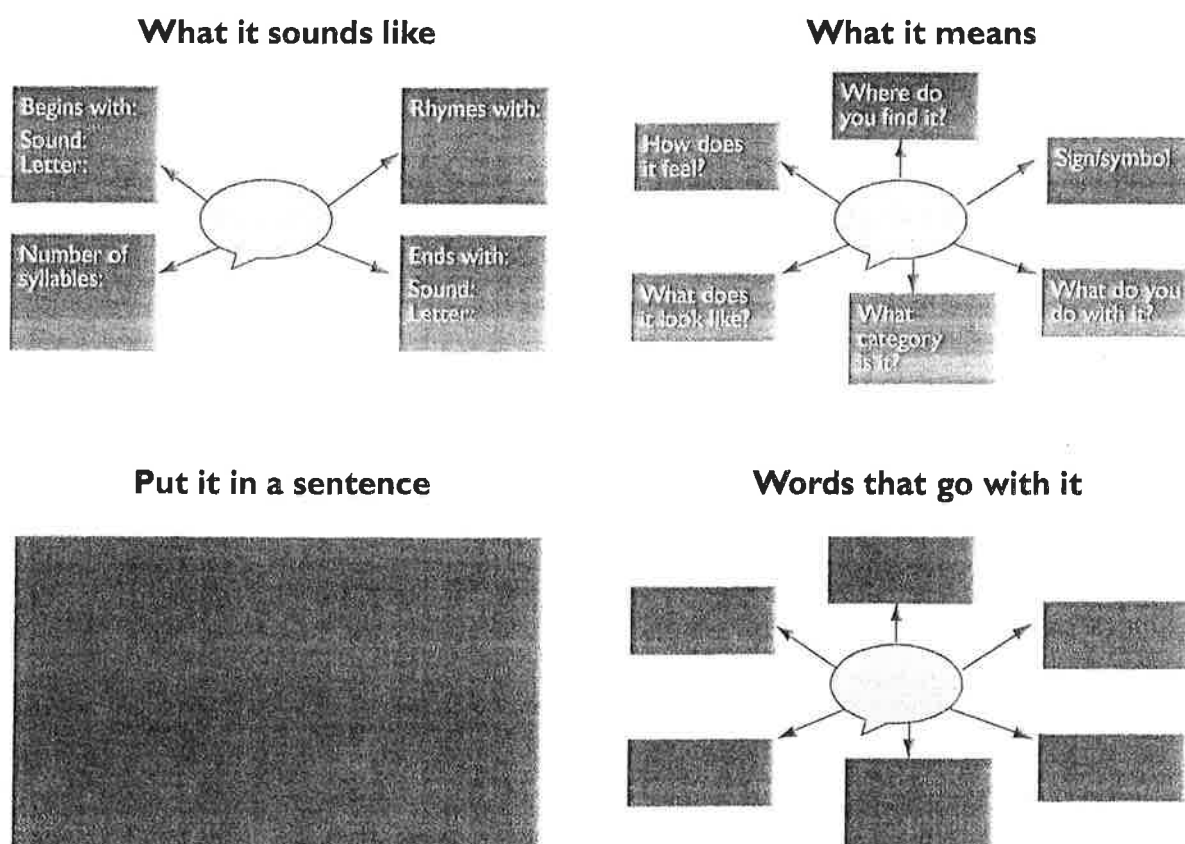


Figure 6.1 Teaching vocabulary

means?'. Finally there is a space for children to put the word in a sentence (syntactic route). All the learning is multi-sensory. Children write the word, say it, see it and hear it.

Another idea (Stahl and Nagy, 2006) is a 'four-square' semantic map (Table 6.2), which children complete following discussion, and the use of semantic feature analysis (Table 6.3). Research has shown that students who were taught using these techniques made greater gains in vocabulary knowledge than those who simply worked on word definitions (Bos and Anders, 1990; Nash and Snowling, 2006). Steele and Mills (2011) also suggest the use of Venn diagrams (Figure 6.2) to identify how two words may overlap in meaning but also may be distinct, and Mary Hartshorne at ICAN has a lovely example of 'word scales', like the one in Figure 6.3.

Table 6.2 Four-square semantic mapping

Target word nutritious	Examples Grapes Apples Bread Eggs
Student-generated definition Foods that are good for you	Non-examples Chips Chocolate bars Crisps

Table 6.3 Semantic feature analysis

	Lives in trees	Lives on ground	Makes nests	Uses tools	Lives in groups
gibbon	yes				
chimpanzee	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
gorilla		yes	yes	yes	yes
orang-utan	yes		yes		

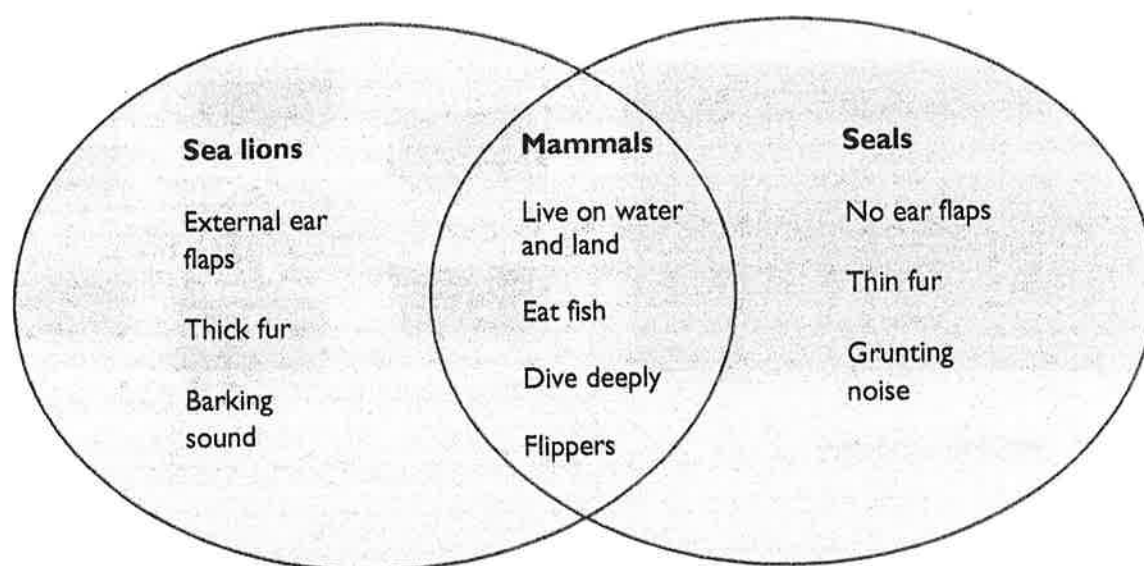


Figure 6.2 Semantic feature analysis – Venn diagram

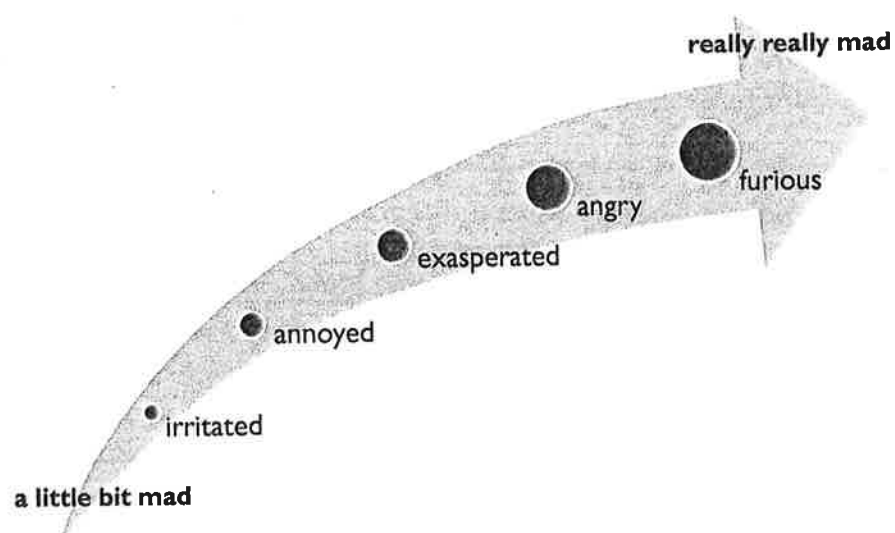


Figure 6.3 Word scales

All of these ideas use visual support to deepen understanding of important vocabulary. Visuals can also be used to make words more memorable – presenting subject vocabulary graphically, as in the examples in Figure 6.4.

Present words graphically



In geography lay out river feature words from source to delta...

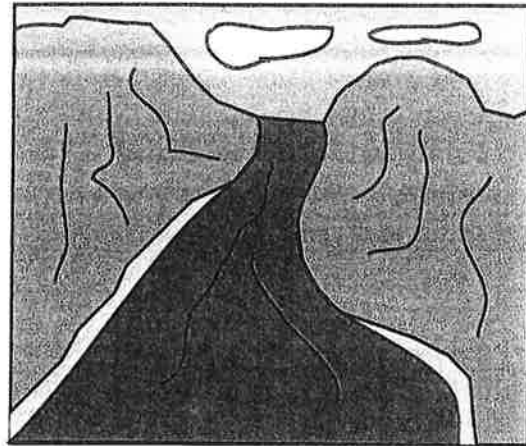


Figure 6.4 Examples of visuals to make words more memorable

Source: Bristol SENCO newsletter, Spring 2011

Other great ideas which use visual support, in combination with ‘Goldilocks words’, come from the work of specialist teacher Pip St John. Pre-teaching vocabulary (PTV) is a free downloadable resource (www.widgit.com or www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resources) that gives children practical tools for independent word learning. The resource consists of prompt cards supported by Communicate in Print 2 symbols, which encourage children to think about the different features of a word, tapping into their semantic, phonological and perceptual word knowledge – what the word means, sounds like and looks like. Adults model how to learn the new words, either for the whole class or for small groups. The activities can also be given to parents as a talking homework task. The PTV prompt cards are presented in different formats; A4 for use on the wall, A5 on a washing line or small strips for use in the games. An A4 ‘how we learn new words’ learning wheel/mat as a prompt for adults is also provided. The resources are very helpful for support staff to use to pre-teach key vocabulary to a child or group before the class begin to work on that topic. Again, this work has been evaluated and shown to make a significant difference to children’s retention of taught words.

Teaching vocabulary may need to be a frequent and intensive classroom activity, for some children at least. The PTV and STAR approaches, both of which involve a relatively light touch, were both found to have a significant effect on the vocabulary that was actually taught, but not on children’s scores on a more general vocabulary test. Beck and her colleagues in America, however, did find a significant increase in scores on standardised tests of vocabulary and reading comprehension for classes of ten year olds following five months of daily, thirty-minute vocabulary instruction that focused on learning in-depth word meanings, compared to a control group who received traditional text-book curricular instruction.

More ideas for teaching vocabulary

Table 6.4, taken from the former Key Stage 3 National Strategy resources, is a very useful resource for secondary subject teachers, giving them a range of different ways of developing pupils' vocabulary. Here are some other ideas I came across:

- Continuing to read aloud daily to children who are not reading independently themselves, in school and at home, using books with many unfamiliar words and discussing their meanings, and reading the same book two or three times.
- Using new and interesting words yourself, in the classroom – for example, instead of telling a student that they didn't quite close the door, say that they left it ajar.
- Explicitly teaching children word-learning strategies, such as using context and word parts to work out the meaning.
- Bringing explanations of words to life by using the interactive whiteboard to show pictures and video clips.
- Pulling key words from a display down onto the whiteboard at relevant moments, so that they are not just a static list.
- Having students complete a vocabulary grid of 'amber' words ('I'm not quite sure what this word means') and 'red' words ('I've never heard of this word ') when reading, so that the class or group can work on those words later.
- Using a student-friendly dictionary like *Collins COBUILD Advanced Dictionary*, which defines word meanings in accessible language.
- Using a quiz – give two incorrect and one correct definitions of a word and ask students to vote for the definition they think is correct.
- Teaching important Latin and Greek stems like -ology (the study of), which never existed as root words but combine with others to form meanings.
- Building a wow-word wall in the corridor, where children can add interesting new words once they can give their meanings.
- Having fun at www.wordle.net, which generates shapes and patterns from words. Ask pupils to come up with as many different words as they can that mean the same thing (words for 'very big', for example), and enter them into Wordle, where the patterns produced will give greater prominence to words that are more commonly used.

Teaching listening skills

After how to build vocabulary, the second most important knowledge for teachers in my view is how to teach listening skills.

What do you think your pupils would say if you asked them 'What do you do when you listen?' They would probably just say that you have to sit still. Like pupils, most teachers also tend to assume that listening is a passive process and children automatically know how to listen. One of the most interesting things I learned in my role was that both of these are myths. Listening, as experts like Maggie Johnson have taught us, is an active skill, and one that can be taught.

Listening skills develop over time, too. Every speech and language therapist knows the stages in the development of listening and attention described many years ago by Joan Reynell (Table 6.5), but many early-years practitioners would benefit from this information, as would many teachers of older age groups who have children in their class who are still at the earlier stages of being able to control their attention.

Table 6.4 Vocabulary activities for secondary subject teachers

1. Write key words on the board as they are used	2. Personal word books in which pupils record words as they are introduced to them
3. Highlighted key words in work sheets, notes and text	4. 'Jigsaw cards' – pupils match words with definitions
5. Read through the list so that students hear the words and repeat them	6. 'Lucky Dip' – pupil picks a word and explains what they know about it
7. Displays in rooms of key words/word banks	8. Group words/concepts – the whole group arrange words and their definitions into themes and concepts
9. Making sentences – pupils make sentences using the words in the box to show their meanings	10. 'Just a minute' – pupils select a word from the box and talk for a minute about it
11. 'Guess my word' – pupil picks a word and talks about it without saying the word – rest of the group have to guess the word as quickly as possible	12. 'Draw my word' (a version of the game 'Pictionary') – individuals pick a word out of the box and draw it for the rest of the group in 30 seconds
13. Word search – with definitions	14. 'Word bingo' where the teacher reads out the definition and the pupils strike out the word on their cards
15. 'Blockbusters' – a version of the TV game in which pupils or teams compete against each other to cross a frame made up of initial letter, for which definitions of subject-specific vocabulary are given	16. Anagrams
17. Subject-specific dictionaries	18. Word banks of subject-specific words located on writing frames
19. Interactive glossaries – lists of subject-specific vocabulary to which pupils add definitions at the end of lessons in which words have been introduced	20. Crosswords
21. Calligram posters – visual representations of words that reflect their meaning	22. Pupils create mnemonics for subject-specific vocabulary
23. Icons alongside words – icons or symbols alongside subject-specific words	24. Word cluster posters
25. Cloze passages with subject-specific words omitted	

Source: Key Stage 3 Strategy: Literacy across the Curriculum – spelling and vocabulary

There are also many different *types* of listening. Children may need to be cued in to what is expected of them – is it appreciative listening (to music, or poetry for example), or critical listening (detecting bias, distinguishing between fact and opinion, preparing to agree or

Table 6.5 Stages in the development of attention and listening

Level 1 (0–1 year)	Extreme distractibility. Attention shifts from one object, person or event to another. Any new event, such as someone walking by, will immediately distract. Attention is involuntary and 'captured' by stimuli.
Level 2 (1–2 years)	Single-channelled attention. Can concentrate on a concrete task of their own choosing. Cannot tolerate (ignores) verbal or visual intervention from an adult. May appear obstinate or wilful, but in fact need to ignore extraneous stimuli in order to concentrate on the task in hand.
Level 3 (2–3 years)	Still single-channelled. Cannot attend to competing auditory and visual stimuli from different sources (e.g. listening to an adult's direction while playing). But, with an adult's help, they can shift their full attention to the speaker and then back to the game.
Level 4 (3–4 years)	Still alternates full attention between the speaker and the task. Now does this spontaneously, without the adult needing to focus and re-focus that attention.
Level 5 (4–5 years)	Attention is now two-channelled. The child understands verbal instructions related to the task without interrupting the activity to look at the speaker. Concentration span may still be short, but group instruction is possible.
Level 6 (5–6 years)	The final stage. Auditory, visual and manipulatory channels are fully integrated. Attention is well established and maintained. Gradually able to shut out unwanted, irrelevant information and concentrate only on the essential aspects.

Source: Joan Reynell

disagree, or summarise), or empathic listening (listening for the emotions behind the words and the speaker's intent)?

Each of these types of listening will have a different set of skills associated with it, such as connecting, checking, deciding on importance, inferring, predicting, questioning or synthesising.

Students can be taught specific listening strategies:

- Repeating an instruction to yourself – silent rehearsal.
- Identifying the key words in an instruction.
- Drawing mind maps to link ideas and words together.
- Saying if you did not understand.

I was struck by how important this last point – saying if you don't understand – is for learning, and saw many examples of teachers who took pains to create an 'asking' environment where children felt comfortable to ask for repetition or explanation. They did this by praising children who asked for clarification, giving children practice in deciding whether instructions or requests made sense, and modelling 'asking' language (Table 6.6).

I also saw teachers give children cards they could hold up to tell the teacher what they needed. Figure 6.5 shows an example, but children could also choose their own images from the web.

Table 6.6 Showing children how to ask if they have not understood

Communication breaks down because	What you can say
The other person speaks too fast	Please could you slow down a bit?
The other person speaks too quietly, or there is a lot of background noise	I'm sorry but I couldn't hear what you said. Could you say it again, please?
The other person uses unfamiliar vocabulary	I don't know what X means. Please could you explain?
The message is too long	Could you say it again please, it was a bit long for me to remember?
The message is unclear	Did you mean...?

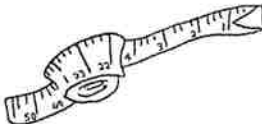
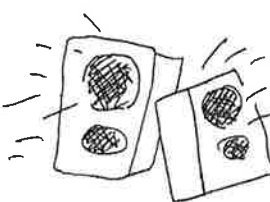
	Too fast		Too long
	Hard word		Too quiet
	Too noisy		Too confusing

Figure 6.5 Ways of showing you haven't understood

A great activity from a resource called *Tactical Teaching: Speaking and Listening* (Bindon, 2006) is to give children specific listening roles such as:

- Build on – agree with and add to what you have listened to.
- Summarise – summarise what you have listened to.
- Compare it – compare what you have heard with other things you may have heard or read.
- Question it – ask a question to clarify or seek more detail.
- Disagree – 'I don't agree with what has been said because...'

The roles could be allocated within small group or whole class discussion. In whole class discussion, they could be combined with a useful technique called 'bouncing' (Gershon, 2012) in which the teacher takes what a pupil has said then asks another pupil to comment on it – 'Thank you for making that point, Jo. Andrew, what are your thoughts on what Jo just said?'. Teachers can extend this to 'Can you build on what Jo just said/summarise what she said/compare her ideas with Andrew's/decide whether you need to ask Jo for more detail/give reasons for agreeing or disagreeing?'

CASE STUDY

At Haverstock School, as part of a very successful project in a number of secondary schools in Camden and Islington, speech and language therapists have worked with teachers to develop a structured approach to teaching listening skills. Posters set out the key themes of looking, taking turns to talk, thinking, focusing and checking understanding. These are actively taught; for example, students are given specific ways of saying that they have not heard or understood something. Feedback from students has been very positive – 'I can work better in class because I have better understanding of what the teacher tells us'; 'If the teacher says a word that you don't know then you can ask – say "I don't understand that word"'.

There are several good resources which make it easy for teachers to develop listening skills. *Teaching Children to Listen*, by Liz Spooner and Jacqui Woodcock (Continuum Press, 2010) is a book packed with ideas to use with a whole primary class or with groups. It has training ideas for staff, and includes a straightforward way of evaluating each child's progress. Teachers are also given guidance on how to improve listening conditions for children, using the noise level audits described in Chapter 4 and changing seating arrangements so that during whole-class teaching children sit on chairs arranged in a horseshoe rather than the carpet. Local research has already shown that the approach makes a big difference in the classroom, reducing the numbers of children rated by their teachers as having severe listening and attention difficulties from 21 to 4 per cent in just six weeks.

Liz and Jacqui's model defines good listening behaviours as:

- Looking at the person who is talking.
- Sitting still.
- Staying quiet so that everyone can listen.
- Listening to ALL the words.

For each of these there are active games – like 'Is it me?' for listening to all the words ('If you are a boy and you are eight line up at the door'; 'If you are a girl with dark hair, put on your coat'), or for looking at the person who is talking, 'Who is the leader', where one child goes out of the room then comes back to guess who has been given the role of leading actions (clapping, tapping...) for others to follow.

Other excellent resources include *Learning to Listen to Learn*, by speech and language therapists Helen White and Christina Evans (2005), which has an easy-to-implement programme of two fun and interactive teaching sessions and a follow-up booster session to develop pupils'

listening skills, with comprehensive facilitator instructions and all the resources needed for the sessions.

Teaching inference skills

A subset of listening skills are the skills of inference – working out the implicit meanings behind words.

The ability to make inferences is, in simple terms, the ability to use two or more pieces of information in order to arrive at a third piece of information that is implicit. Inference can be as simple as associating the pronoun ‘he’ with a previously mentioned male person. Or, it can be as complex as understanding a subtle implicit message, conveyed through the choice of particular vocabulary by the writer and drawing on the reader’s own background knowledge.

(Kispał, 2008)

A good example of one common type of inference (‘gap-filling’) is the well-known poem by Ogden Nash.

Algy met a bear.
The bear met Algy.
The bear was bulgy.
The bulge was Algy

The poem does not state that the bear ate Algy – that is what has to be *inferred* from the listener’s previous knowledge of bears’ behaviour.

A useful resource for teaching inference skills is *Language for Thinking*, published by Speechmark (with training information on www.languageforthinking.co.uk). The resource can be used with small groups in the classroom. It is suitable for Year 1 and Year 2, and older primary children with SEN. It is based on fifty photocopiable picture and verbal scenarios with associated question sheets carefully structured to promote children’s development of inference. A simple black and white picture scenario of a crowded bus, for instance, is presented to a group of four to six children. A brief story is read to the children and questions asked to promote discussion. Questions start with the concrete, such as ‘Who is sitting down?’, extending slightly to ‘What might happen if the bus goes too fast?’ before reaching the most abstract level questions such as ‘Why might the old lady feel upset if she didn’t get a seat?’ The materials include prompts for further discussion and practical activities, as well as optional literacy activities.

Other than this resource, most of the work on inference I came across tended to be about reading rather than listening comprehension. This need not matter. A literature review (Kispał, 2008) by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) identified strategies for teaching inference in a reading context, but there is no reason to believe they would not be appropriate for listening comprehension too. Indeed, the report suggests that one evidence-based strategy for improving reading comprehension is practising inferential questions on aurally presented texts: inferring ‘can be practised outside the domain of reading with pupils of all ages’, and ‘one way of cultivating these skills in young readers and reluctant readers is to do it in discussion, orally.’

The strategies the NFER review suggests include:

- Teacher modelling – teachers ‘thinking aloud’ as they read aloud to pupils and asking themselves questions that show how they monitor their own comprehension.
- Teachers making explicit the thinking processes that result in drawing an inference.
- Teacher questioning: asking ‘How do you know?’ whenever an inference is generated in discussion of a text, asking questions about relationships between characters, goals and motivations, asking questions that foster comprehension monitoring, such as ‘Is there information that doesn’t agree with what I already know?’.
- Questioning by pupils: training pupils to ask themselves ‘why’ questions while reading; teaching the meaning of the question words ‘who’, ‘when’, ‘why’ and so on; asking pupils to generate their own questions from a text using these question words.
- Activation of prior knowledge: asking pupils to generate associations around a topic, and discuss and clarify their collective knowledge.
- Choosing the right texts: taking care not to choose texts that are too easy for classwork, since very explicit texts provide few opportunities for inferences to be made.

So, for the ‘Algy met a bear’ example, the teacher might think aloud (‘I’m wondering what it means when it says the bulge was Algy. What do I know about bears? I know they sometimes attack people and eat them. So that’s what it must mean – the bear ate poor Algy’), or activate prior knowledge by asking the children what they know about bears, or ask ‘What do you think happened to Algy? How do you know?’.

The NFER report concludes that inference can be seen in children of all ages. It can be practised early on, with pre-readers, using picture books, but research indicates that pupils are most receptive to explicit teaching of inference skills in their early secondary years.

Teaching children to work in groups

Observing schools’ responses to No Pens Day Wednesday, I was struck by the differences in children’s ability to work together in groups. In some classrooms, they were able to listen to each other, build on one another’s views, stay on track and reach a conclusion. In others they argued, cut across each other, meandered, split off into pairs to chat, or simply gave up – just like many adults in meetings!

The difference related to opportunities the children had previously been given to *learn* the skills of groupwork, and the *structures* they were given to support their talk – like the children in the case studies below.

CASE STUDY

At Gresham primary in Croydon, observations of a Year 6 class showed that children were able to use paired talk effectively. Then they were asked to share their ideas in a group:

We noticed an immediate change...the quieter children stopped talking, some pairs still continued as pairs, children did not take turns and did not listen to each other. After ten minutes the children were getting frustrated and it was clear they were getting off task.

In the next lesson children were asked to think about what makes good group work. Each mixed ability group prepared a poster then presented their ideas to the class. Children recorded their thoughts about their own strengths in contributing to group work, and areas they could develop.

The posters were displayed and regularly referred to. After a few weeks, observations showed a marked improvement, with more turn taking and greater participation by the quieter children.

CASE STUDY

At St Paul's Academy in Greenwich, students were considering different features of a film text such as genre, audience and narrative. Groups were organised with roles allocated to students such as 'scribe' and 'expert'. At a given point, the experts moved around to present their ideas to a new group, their thoughts meticulously noted down by other students. In a third lesson, with a bottom set in Year 9, students were asked to debate the pros and cons of an issue related to the text they were studying. Roles were allocated in each small group, for example, 'speaker', 'summariser' and 'chair', and issues were formally debated. Students were fully engaged, listened carefully to each other and attempted to make use of the rhetorical devices that had been previously discussed (from Ofsted, 2011b).

There are many good ways of teaching children groupwork skills. The 'Getting on and falling out' theme materials from primary SEAL, for example (www.sealcommunity.org) systematically develop children's abilities in working with others, using the developmental framework of learning objectives proposed in the QCA/Primary National Strategy's guidance on teaching Speaking and Listening (Table 6.7).

The SEAL resources include checklists ('Working together self-review checklists') for different age groups, which can allow children to reflect on their developing skills. An example of one of the checklists is shown in Table 6.8.

The progression in the SEAL programme helps ensure that, in Ofsted's words, 'the group work is planned carefully and structured so that all students have a role and know what is expected of them. It does not become an opportunity for some students to sit quietly knowing that others will do all the talking' (Ofsted, 2011b).

Another very useful scheme for both primary and secondary schools is Cambridge University's successful 'Thinking Together' approach (<http://thinkingtogether.educ.cam.ac.uk>). Devised by Neil Mercer, the scheme teaches children how to hold a reasoned discussion, tackling problems through talk. It is based on over a decade of classroom-based research into the relationship between talking and thinking. Children are explicitly taught about exploratory talk and as a class agree on a set of ground rules for talking together. They then work in groups of three, using exploratory talk for curriculum-based activities. There are ideas for these activities on the website and in the team's books *Talk Box* (ages 6–8), *Thinking Together* (ages 8–11) and *Thinking Together in Geography* (ages 12–14).

The approach has been rigorously evaluated using experimental and control groups to enable comparisons to be made of the quality of children's talk in groups, the development of

Table 6.7 A progression in learning to work in groups

<i>Year group</i>	<i>Group discussion and interaction</i>
Foundation stage	Interact with others, negotiating plans and activities and taking turns in conversations
Year 1	Take turns to speak, listen to others' suggestions and talk about what they are going to do Ask and answer relevant questions, offer suggestions and take turns Explain their views to others in a small group, decide how to report the group's views to the class
Year 2	Ensure that everyone contributes, allocate tasks, consider alternatives and reach agreement Work effectively in groups by ensuring each group member takes a turn, challenging, supporting and moving on Listen to each other's views and preferences, agree the next steps to take and identify contributions by each group member
Year 3	Use talk to organise roles and action Actively include and respond to all members of the group
Year 4	Take different roles in groups and use the language appropriate to them, including the roles of leader, reporter, scribe and mentor Use time, resources and group members efficiently by distributing tasks, checking progress and making back-up plans
Year 5	Plan and manage a group task over time using different levels of planning Understand different ways to take the lead and support others in groups Understand the process of decision making
Year 6	Consider examples of conflict resolution, exploring the language used Understand and use a variety of ways to criticise constructively and respond to criticism
Year 6 progression into year 7	Adopt a range of roles in discussion, including acting as a spokesperson, and contribute in different ways such as promoting, opposing, exploring and questioning Identify and report the main points arising from discussion Acknowledge other people's views, justifying or modifying their own views in the light of what others say Work together logically and methodically to solve problems, make deductions, test and evaluate ideas.

their reasoning skills and their curriculum attainment, before and after the scheme was implemented. Results show that after around six months students engage more effectively with tasks for longer periods of time, with all participants being included more in discussions and an increase in reasoned discussion. The word 'why', for example, was four times more likely to be used in the experimental group than the control group. There were significant impacts on attainment in science and maths, and in non-verbal-reasoning.

Table 6.8 Working together example self-review checklist (Year 5/6)

Level	Question	How well did we do?		
All	Did everyone feel OK about being in the group?	Very well	So-so	Not very well
Year 5 Term 1	When you were planning, did you think about and plan how long the task might take overall, how many sessions you would need to complete it and so on, as well as thinking about what you needed to do straight away?	Very well	So-so	Not very well
Year 5 Term 2	When you needed to make a decision in the group, did you think about the consequences of each possibility?	Very well	So-so	Not very well
	Did you make sure everyone had a say?	Very well	So-so	Not very well
	Were you able to reach a compromise when people had different ideas?	Very well	So-so	Not very well
Year 5 Term 3	Did you have a leader of the group?	Very well	So-so	Not very well
	Did you agree what the leader of the group should do – for example, encouraging others and making sure that everyone has a turn and deciding what to do when people can't agree?	Very well	So-so	Not very well
Year 6 Term 1	If you did not understand something, did it feel OK to ask the person to explain again?	Very well	So-so	Not very well
	Did you say if you did not agree with something and did you have a chance to explain why?	Very well	So-so	Not very well
	If someone said they didn't agree with what someone else said or did, did that person ask them why and listen to their reasons?	Very well	So-so	Not very well
	Did it feel OK for people in the group to disagree?	Very well	So-so	Not very well
Year 6 Term 2	Did you use 'peaceful problem-solving' to try to find a win-win solution if people didn't agree in the group?	Very well	So-so	Not very well
	Did the language you used and the way people said things to each other make a good solution more likely?	Very well	So-so	Not very well
Year 6 Term 3	Were the language you used and the way people said things appropriate for working together in the classroom? Did it help everyone feel comfortable?	Very well	So-so	Not very well

An example of an activity used in Thinking Together – Magic Squares

In this lesson the task is to talk together in a group in order to agree a strategy for solving a magic square, in which each row, column and diagonal must add to the same number. Agreed ground rules for talk are displayed and each group uses 'Talk Cards' ('What do you think? Why do you think that? I agree because... I disagree because... Any more ideas to share? Do we all agree... or shall we talk some more?') as a prompt to support their discussion. At the end each group gives an example of a problem and explains their strategy for solving it. The class review how they organised their groups and arrived at solutions, and how they used the ground rules for talk.

Talk frames

Talk frames provide children with a scaffold of sentence starter or structure appropriate to the particular language purpose – recount, agree/disagree, justify and so on. Figure 6.6 lists some of these purposes; I am sure there are many more.

Teachers can use charts like the ones in Figure 6.6 and Table 6.9 when planning learning opportunities, to consider whether a breadth of purposes are covered, and which ones might be missing from their lessons. They can scaffold language for any given purpose by providing and modelling talk 'frames'.

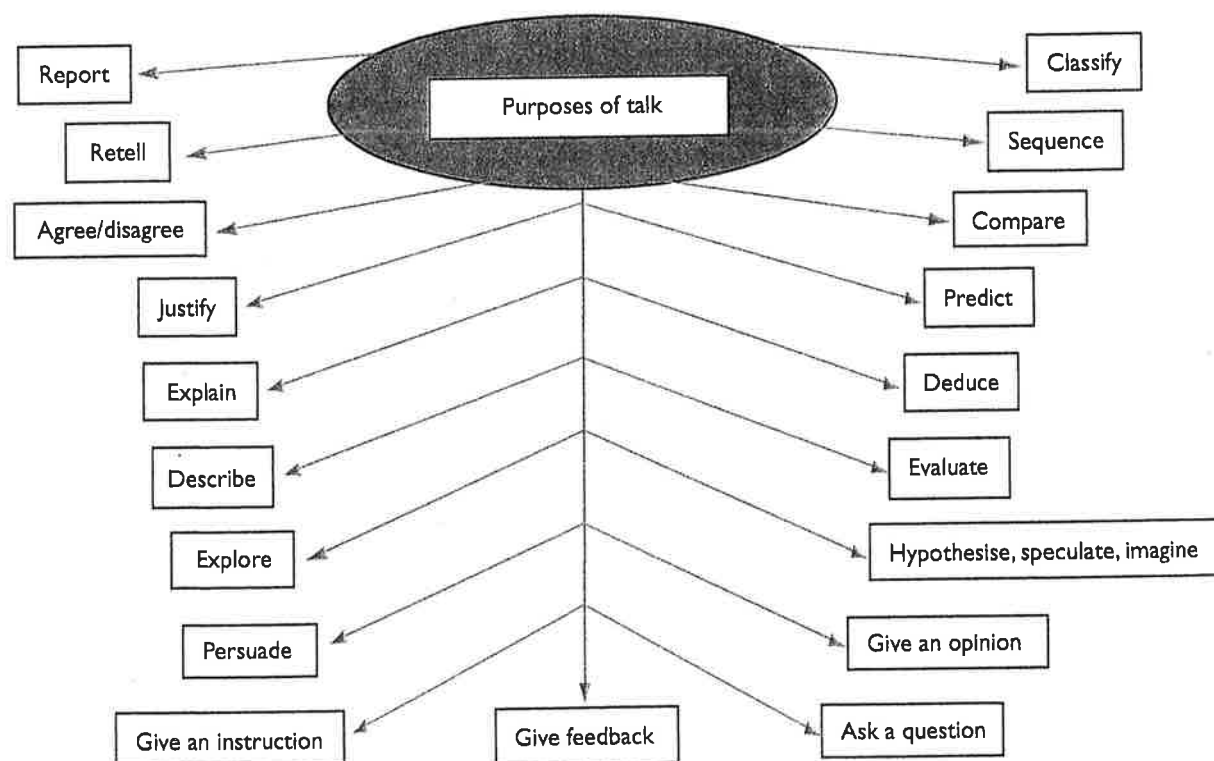


Figure 6.6 Purposes of talk

Table 6.9 Useful activities for developing talk

Purpose of talk	Teacher prompts	Example activity
Report	What happened?	Making a podcast news report
Retell	What happened first...next... finally?	Telling a familiar story to younger children
Agree/disagree	What do you think about what x said?	Class debates
Justify	What makes you think...how do you know?	Maths problems
Explain	Talk me through it...why do you think?	Review learning from a previous lesson by asking students to come to the front and talk the class through the concept
Describe	What could you say about?	Mock courtroom witness statements
Explore	What do we think...?	Philosophy for children discussions
Persuade	Convince me that...	Walk the line activity – children position themselves on a line to show where they stand on an agree/disagree continuum in relation to a statement (e.g. 'Eating animals is wrong') – they then pair up with someone from the opposite end of the line and have to put their point of view and try to persuade the other person to change their position – at the end of the exercise the walk the line activity is repeated
Give instructions	What do I need to do?	Barrier games
Give feedback	How was it, in your opinion?	Plenary sessions
Ask questions	What will you ask?	Hot seating, preparing a quiz for classmates to complete
Give an opinion	What do you think?	Soapbox activities
Hypothesise, speculate, imagine	What do you think might...?	Alternative endings for stories or films
Evaluate	What do you think of...?	Working with a partner to self-assess a piece of work
Deduce	What conclusions have you reached?	Be a detective – explore a bag of objects or a set of pictures
Predict	What might happen...	Science experiments
Compare	How are they similar/different?	Children choose two items from a topic related selection and say what is the same and different about the two things – record using Venn diagrams
Sequence	What comes first...next...?	Re-ordering paragraphs or pictures
Classify	Which go together?	Sorting objects, pictures, word cards

Many teachers are familiar with frames from their work on writing – ‘first, next, finally...’ for a recount, and so on. What is often forgotten, however, in this approach is that talk is not just a preparation for writing. It exists in its own right. In life and work we need to know how to give instructions, recount an event accurately, justify our ideas and so on *orally*. It is only in school that the assessment tail has wagged the dog and talk is seen as the bit part, not the main player.

Talk frames need to be age-appropriate. But what does ‘age-appropriate’ mean? What are the language structures we might model for a Reception class, a Year 1 class and so on? One of the most useful resources I saw in my time in as Communication Champion was a publication from the Tower Hamlets Ethnic Minority Achievement team, which provides guidance on what the progression might be, across the primary years.

The publication covers the purposeful use of spoken language to:

- agree and disagree;
- explain;
- compare;
- hypothesise;
- deduce;
- give an opinion;
- describe;
- predict;
- evaluate;
- retell;
- explain; and
- sequence.

For each of these, a progression is mapped from Reception to Year 6. Table 6.10 shows an example; the complete publication (*A Progression in Language Structures*) can be obtained from the Tower Hamlets Learning and Achievement Team.

Another very good resource for talk frames is Sue Palmer’s *How to Teach Talk for Writing: Ages 8–10* and *How to Teach Talk for Writing: Ages 10–14* (available from www.suepalmer.co.uk). Originally designed to support writing, these cross-curricular materials are even more useful for helping children develop the more formal spoken language they need for learning. The photocopiable resources provide frames for individual, paired or group talk. They cover, for example, comparing, contrasting, giving evidence, stating or justifying an opinion (Key Stage 2) and giving examples, giving definitions, presenting opposing views (Key Stage 3). Children use the frames to prepare a spoken presentation; they then deliver the presentation and receive feedback. The books also include advice on progression, and assessment guidance.

One brilliant use of talk frames I came across was to help children reflect on the types of contribution they made in class discussion. Here, secondary aged pupils were given a set of coloured cards. Blue cards were used to express doubt or offer an alternative (‘I’m not convinced that...’, ‘Yes, but on the other hand...’, ‘I wonder if...’, ‘Something else to consider is...’). Pink cards had starters which enabled the pupil to build on another person’s contribution (‘Thinking about what X said...’, ‘Going back to...’, ‘In that case...’, ‘Building on...’). Grey cards were used to ask for clarification (‘I’m not sure I understand, please could...’, ‘So, are you saying that...?’, ‘Does this mean...?’, ‘Why do you think that?’). Finally, yellow cards were about offering one’s own opinion (‘In my opinion...’,

Table 6.10 The language of argument – agreeing and disagreeing

Year group	Language structures
EYFS	He/she didn't share/take turns I want to I like I don't like I think Why? I think What do you think? I don't think Why do you think this? It is It's not Yes because No because I like I don't like
Year 1	Yes/no because I like because and I don't like because and I agree with because It is right It is wrong
Year 2	No because Yes because I agree/disagree because I think because and also because However Also
Year 3	An argument for is because An argument against is because I understand however/due to/but/therefore I accept your decision however I feel/believe because/as/due/to
Year 4	An argument for is because and An argument against is because and I understand that depending on the content but would argue I understand your point of view, however I disagree because
Year 5	In my opinion should be banned. I have two main reasons for believing this. First of all, as I'm sure you'll agree, ... My second important reason for wanting to ban is that Perhaps some people would argue that that However, I would point out that It is clear that a ban on would be a great step forward!
Year 6	On the one hand but Convince me that I am convinced Given that

Source: *A Progression in Language Structures*, available from Tower Hamlets Learning and Achievement Team, 3rd Floor Annexe, Mulberry Place, 5 Clove Crescent, London E14 2BG, Tel 020 7364 4677. Contact Tilly Nimako at Tilly.Nimako@towerhamlets.gov.uk.

'Unlike...', 'I disagree...', 'I partly disagree...'). As they made a contribution, pupils held up the relevant card, then put it to one side. At the end they could see whether they had a characteristic type of response. As a class, they were also able to reflect on whether any particular type of response was over- or under-used.

The need for practice using talk frames like these is underlined by research I came across (Bennett, 2003), showing the number of teenagers who have difficulty with using logical connectives which link together two propositions, such as 'moreover', 'consequently', or 'conversely'. Fewer than seven in ten 11- to 15-year-olds were able to use these connectives appropriately. They did better with the more commonly used connectives, which led the researchers to suggest that students' understanding of unfamiliar logical connectives would improve if they were exposed to them more frequently.

Talk for Writing

Although again badged (unhelpfully) as about writing rather than spoken language itself, Pie Corbett's wonderful 'Talk for Writing' approach (see the National Strategies Talk for Writing DVD pack) is brilliant for building vocabulary and sentence structures. In this approach, children work with a story or piece of non-fiction until they know it by heart and can perform it. Teachers are encouraged to teach (daily) a specific number of stories, poems or non-fiction texts per year, through communal and oral storytelling, using story maps and actions to help children remember key vocabulary. Initially the retelling should be communal and led by the teacher, leading to group story circles and then paired retelling of a story with children facing each other. Once the children have internalised patterns through memorable, meaningful repetition they can then use the 'storehouse' to create their own stories based on the ideas and structures learned orally.

Learning stories or non-fiction by heart in this way is a very powerful way of providing children with ready access to rich language which their everyday experience may not provide. For younger children, Bookstart's Rhyme Challenge and ICAN's Chatterbox Challenge provide similar opportunities to develop language structures by internalising rhymes learned by heart.

Social and emotional aspects of learning

Talk is not just about academic learning, 'cognitive' processes. It is also central to how we feel ('affective' processes) and how we relate to others – to social and emotional learning. The way we structure talk can support relationship building, or damage relationships; it can resolve conflicts, or exacerbate them. Children and young people can learn how to:

- Listen to others actively, in an empathic way.
- Ask open questions which encourage others to communicate.
- Communicate displeasure without blame, using 'I messages'.
- Give and receive feedback in ways that move learning on.
- Follow a communication rubric to resolve conflict.
- Use talk in teamwork in ways which help everyone contribute.

The National Strategies SEAL resources contain many activities to help develop these skills, particularly in the 'Getting on and falling out' primary theme, and the 'Learning to be together' theme in the secondary materials, which you can access at www.sealcommunity.org.

Below are some ideas for classroom activities, devised by SEAL expert Julie Casey.

Asking open questions

Ask the class to work in pairs, one pretending to be a celebrity of their choice and the other a journalist. The journalist has to come up with questions that will help readers feel they really know what the celebrity is like. Ask pairs to identify their best questions, and share these as a class. Draw out the differences between open and closed questions.

'I' messages

Give the class examples of things that might get said in an argument or conflict:

- 'You're always late – you're driving me mad.'
- 'How stupid was that – getting drunk and losing it?'
- 'You're so lazy – you never do your homework.'
- 'You've lost my top – I'm never lending you anything again.'

Ask what they would be likely to say in return. For each response, ask them whether it would cool or heat up the conflict. Explain that there is a special sort of statement that cools conflict, called an 'I message'. It has three parts:

- 'I feel ...' (the feeling you get).
- 'When you ...' (the action of the other person that is annoying you).
- 'Because ...' (the effect on you or on the other person).

Give an example – instead of 'You're always late – you're driving me mad', the 'I message' might be 'I feel angry when you're late, because I have to hang around waiting for you', or 'I feel really worried when you're late because I'm scared something might have happened to you'. Ask the class to turn the other statements into 'I messages'.

Resolving conflict

Show the class an onion. Explain it has an outer tough skin. Peel it back to show the layers beneath.

Sometimes when two people or groups are in conflict it can be useful to peel back the layers and see what feelings lie underneath. Show an extract from a TV soap or tell a story about two characters are in conflict. Ask the class, working in pairs, to 'peel back the onion' and identify how each character was feeling.

Teach the SEAL peaceful problem-solving process:

- **Ready** (are you ready to think together?);
- **Steady** (take it in turns to talk about the problem and how you feel – use 'I messages', say what you need, think of solutions together, choose one idea that will work for both of you);
- **Go** (try out your idea);
- **Replay** (think about how you did it, and check if things are OK).

Tell the story of two sisters, quarrelling over who should have an orange. There was only one orange. Both said 'I must have that orange'. In the end after a long argument they cut the orange in half. One sister threw away the peel and ate the fruit. The other sister threw away the fruit and used the peel to make a cake. What can we learn from the story? Try out the peaceful problem-solving process, enacting the roles of the two sisters.

Giving feedback

Watch the film *Mean Girls*. Ask the group to identify 'put-downs' they hear the characters give each other. Ask pupils in pairs to talk about 'a put-down that really hurt me'. As a class discuss:

- Do we all use put-downs sometimes?
- Why is that?
- Do put-downs have the same effect on everybody?

Ask pupils to watch a programme like *The X Factor* and note down negative 'cheap laugh' feedback given by the judges. Collect some examples of these 'put-downs' and ask pupils to place themselves on an imaginary line on the floor to show where they stand – whether they think it is OK or not OK to use put-downs. They should talk to someone close to them in the line to exchange views, then to someone in a very different position on the line. Bring the class together and scribe the arguments for 'OK' and 'not OK'. Ask the class to come up with a list of 'pick-me-ups' (the opposite of put-downs) they most value from teachers, so they can share these in the form of a letter or poster for staff.

Teamwork

Ask pupils to make a short video on 'the worst group in the world'. The video should illustrate the behaviours that prevent effective groupwork, such as talking over each other, putting others' ideas down, and so on. Or ask pupils to come up with a set of rules for the worst group in the world (for example, everybody must talk at once, nobody must ever disagree with anyone else), then turn these on their head so as to create into a set of rules for effective group work.

Self-assessment and monitoring

An important aspect of all the 'teaching talking' approaches we have looked at in this chapter – whether it be teaching listening skills or how to work in groups – is making the learning explicit to children, and enabling them to assess their progress. I like the idea of using 'WMG' – 'What makes a good...' (e.g. member of a team) – to help the class become aware of what they are aiming at in their language learning. This is an example from Broadmead Primary school in Croydon:

The class discussed WMG listening. We pulled out key listening behaviours, which included giving eye contact and staying quiet when someone is speaking. I used their ideas to make a poster to refer back to. I also introduced table signs that could be used by the children and other adults to reinforce the good listening skills. By talking about 'what makes a good listener' children were able to identify who in the class met the criteria. I

also modelled good listening to make the WMG explicit, and took photographs of the children who displayed the key listening skills.

(Croydon Local Authority, 2011)

Resources for teaching talking

In addition to the specific publications already mentioned in this chapter, I came across several general resources for teaching language. For 4- to 6-year-olds, ICAN's *Communication Cookbook* (www.ican.org.uk) is a resource book of activities focusing on essential ingredients that support children's communication skills in four areas – attention and listening, vocabulary, building sentences, storytelling and having conversations. There are four games for each area; most can be easily slotted into daily routines in the classroom or at home. The *Communication Cookbook* DVD, included with the book, demonstrates activities, top tips and information on ages and stages.

Another early-years and primary resource is *One Step at a Time* by Anne Locke (Network Educational Press). This is a programme that can be used without specialist training and systematically develops the skills of conversation (Nursery), listening (Reception), narrative (Year 1) and discussion (Year 2).

I Hear with My Little Ear 2, by Liz Baldwin (LDA, www.ldalearning.com), provides imaginative activities to develop key language skills in children aged 3 to 11, which can be fitted into PE lessons, circle times and spare moments in class.

Talk Across the Curriculum (www.educationworks.org.uk) is a cross-curricular reference guide and activity guide with over a hundred speaking and listening activities that can be delivered across all areas of the curriculum and for all ages from Reception to Year 8.

Communication in the Curriculum Language Packs (www.communicationitc.co.uk) are colourfully produced board games for groups of children, to promote language and communication development with children in Foundation stages and Key Stage 1, which link to common curriculum topics in geography, science and literacy. They are particularly useful for pre-tutoring: preparing children in advance for the vocabulary and concepts they will meet in the whole class situation. A bingo game, for example, relates to a Year 2 science unit of work on changing materials; children have baseboards describing features of living things, to which they match pictures, justifying the match ('I need this card because a horse has live babies.') The baseboards vary in difficulty (wings, four legs, swims, fur, feathers, scales versus wings, four legs, no legs, insect, has live babies, reptile).

For 14- to 19-year-olds, BT's *All Talk* DVD, workbook and website (www.bt.com/alltalk) is a fantastic free resource designed to be used in English lessons as stimulus material for discussion, role play and reflection. It simultaneously supports the study of spoken language for GCSE English language, and the development of pupils' own speaking and listening skills. The resource has 15 units, grouped into five contexts for communication and language – 'You talk', 'Offline/online talk', 'Street talk', 'School talk' and 'Public talk'. Here are some examples of the units:

- **Family talk over time** – This unit, part of 'You Talk', uses video clips and transcripts from TV soaps from the last 50 years – from *The Grove Family* to *Only Fools and Horses* and *The Royle Family*. Students compare the language used in the different periods then compile their own collection of conversations from recent soaps and sitcoms like *Coronation Street* and *The Kumars at Number Ten*.

- **Using talk in groups** – This unit has contrasting videos showing the same group of students planning a party together, more and less effectively. Students identify features of effective discussion and practise skills by, for example, working in groups to plan a flash-mob event. Follow-ups include watching Monty Python clips and *Vicar of Dibley* parish meetings, and exploring excerpts from literature like meetings in *Lord of the Flies*.

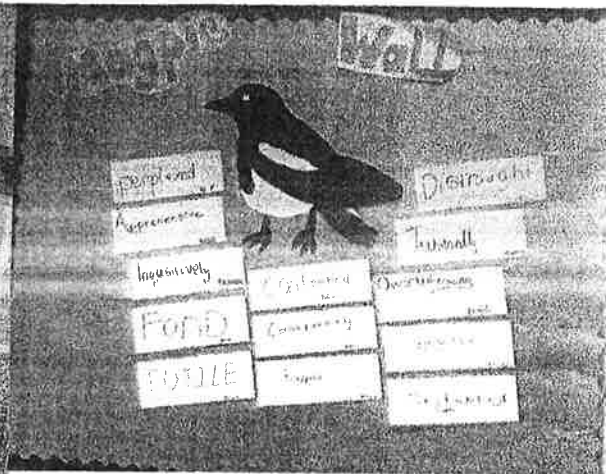
Another very useful resource for secondary pupils is BT's *Talk Gym*. It provides a tailored 'course' in communication skills based on an initial self-assessment. Students start with a Facebook app which asks them to rate their own skills (their talk fitness) by answering six questions about themselves, then nominate some friends or family to answer the same questions about them. Their answers appear anonymously in a graph. There is information on the communication skills needed for friendships, family, education and employment and practical exercises to build building strengths as a communicator – listening skills, being clear, group discussions and interview situations.

Finally, digitised spoken language collections are a good way to explore language. The British Library's Learning Playtimes website (www.bl.uk/playtimes), for example, has wonderful recordings and film footage of singing games, clapping songs, skipping rhymes and all kinds of imaginative play from over one hundred years of children's games. Or look at the archive of regional dialects and podcasts about the development of spoken English at the website of the British Library's 2010 Evolving English Exhibition (www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/index.html).

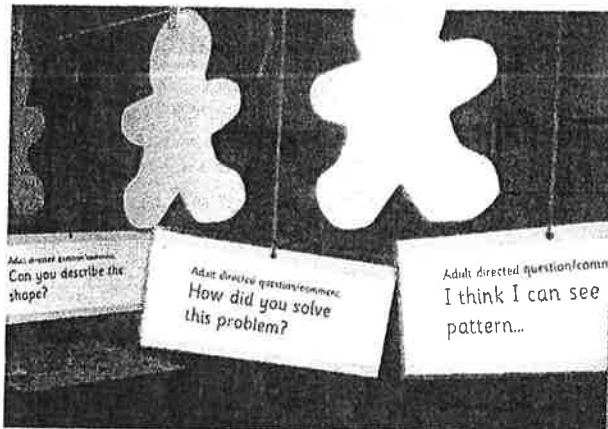
Teaching talk



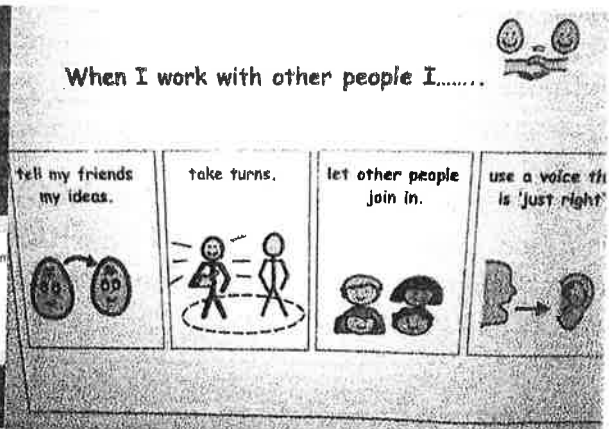
Teaching vocabulary: choosing words all the adults will use



Teaching vocabulary: a magpie wall of special words



Adult language: using open-ended prompts



Teaching children how to work in groups

