



Language: English

Oral Language in the Integrated Language Process

This document deals with the issue of planning oral language in the Primary School. It is based on Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the Teacher Guidelines (English).

The purpose of this document:

- to offer a framework for a Whole School Approach to Oral Language.
- to give important background information that will inform any planning for oral language

Background and Rationale:

Planning for oral language can be a very difficult task because of the very nature of language itself. It is hard to pin down into concrete terms.

One of the five Principles of the English Curriculum is:
“The central place of oral language throughout the curriculum.”
(Teacher Guidelines p.2)

Another important Principle is:
“The dual function of Learning Language and Learning through Language”

The English Curriculum reflects the complex and indivisible nature of language in the Four Strands:

1. Receptiveness to Language
2. Competence and Confidence in Using Language
3. Cognitive Development in Language
4. Emotional and Imaginative Development in Language

What used to be our principle divisions - Oral, Reading and Writing, are now sub- divisions of each of the four strands. They are still important ‘frames of reference’ in our planning – but always in the context of the four strands.

For the purpose of writing up the English Plean Scoile document, it is accepted that the section ‘The Integrated Language Process’ can be written under the headings ‘Oral’, ‘Reading’ and ‘Writing’. This framework allows for a short, concise document.

With this in mind, the following will now focus on the Oral Language section of the English Plean Scoile and look at a structured Whole School Approach to it.



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Oral Language in the School Plan

The Introduction

It is useful to begin this area of the plan with a 'brief' Introduction (i.e. a few sentences will suffice). This can be informed by the oral language references mentioned above and other ones from the Teacher Guidelines - in particular p.12, 13 and 38, 39. General statements can be made about e.g. *the oral language needs of the children, the school's vision for oral language development (this should always be realistic and attainable) and the way the school is going to present this section of the English School Plan (as below)*

Three principle sources of content for Oral Language Activities are mentioned in the English Curriculum: (Teacher Guidelines Section Three 'School Planning for English' p.13):

1. The other subjects *
2. The English Curriculum
3. Discrete oral language

* (In Gaelscoileanna this section will not be relevant to the English Plan)

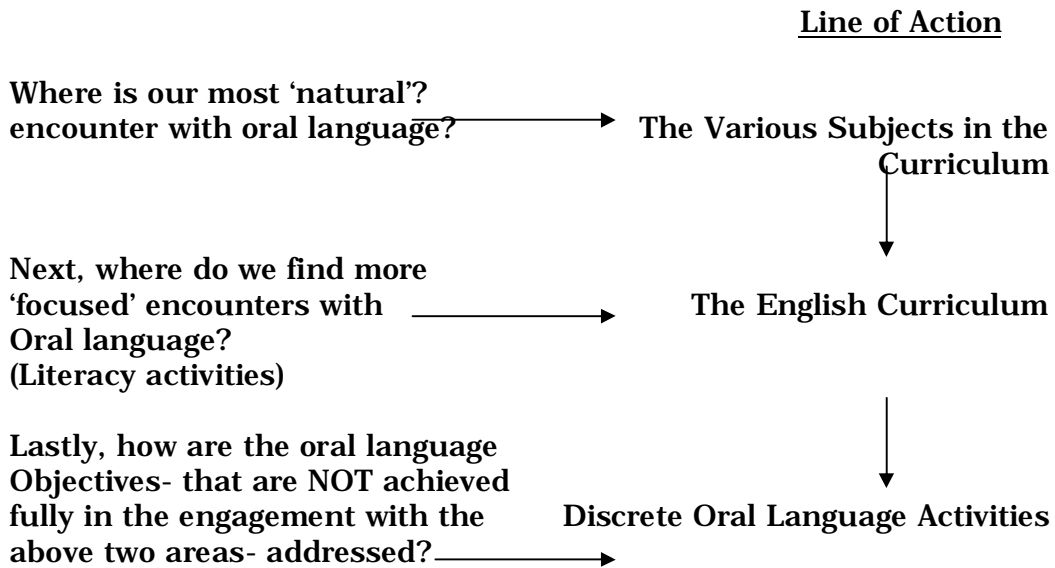


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For the purposes of planning, these three main sources can be rephrased and used as the headings for our Oral Language Plan: -

1. Oral Language Across the Curriculum:
2. Oral Language in Literacy
3. Discrete Oral Language

These three sections are not mutually exclusive. The following diagram illustrates how each of the sections are related:



The School Plan for Oral Language can follow this line of action.

The following examines these three areas in detail.

1. Oral Language across the Curriculum

Here we are primarily dealing with children *'Learning through Language'*. All the other subjects (except Gaeilge) are mediated through the English Language. In their engagement with these subjects, children are using their language skills to help them understand, explore, question, discuss, debate and generally learn more about the specific themes and topics at hand. But, as they are transferring the language skills they possess into the different subject areas they are also developing their language skills in many ways. A prime example of this is the *specific vocabulary* that goes with every subject. This vocabulary is developed and expanded in a spiral way as the child moves up through the school.



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In writing up this section of the Oral Language Plan, the following pointers may be useful as a guide.

- **Integration – practical suggestions**
Many of the subjects deal with similar themes. Is there any way of gathering and storing (in a central location) the resources teachers/the school may have to do with commonly occurring themes?
- **The use of concrete materials**
- **The use of audio- visual material e.g. pictures, posters, postcards, photographs, video, C-D Rom, song/story tapes, listening centres, colouring sheets, worksheets.**
- **The use of ready-made educational packs from different organisations/publishers.**
- **The use of a challenging vocabulary bank – *nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, compound words etc.***
- **The use of the five principal contexts for oral language development (p.38 of the Teacher Guidelines):**
 1. **Talk and Discussion**
 2. **Play and Games**
 3. **Story**
 4. **Improvisational Drama**
 5. **Poetry and Rhyme**
- **Organisational Settings** (this point may be already dealt with as a general issue relevant to the English plan as a whole)
-Whole- class, pair work, group work, individual presentations etc.
- **Use of hypothetical, exploratory language**
- **Participation of all the children**
- **Use of ICT.**
- **The Role of the Teacher p.38-40 Teacher Guidelines**

This section of the Oral Language Plan can make a *brief* reference to the above points and/or others in a succinct way that ‘personalises’ them for individual schools.



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2. Oral Language in Literacy:

This section focuses on 'Learning Language' – but now we are looking at the opportunities for developing oral language skills while we are engaged in Reading and Writing Activities. Naturally the children are also 'Learning through Language' as they engage in Reading and Writing.

When writing up this section of the oral language plan the following pointers may be useful as a guide:

- Outline broad strategies, approaches, frameworks, games etc that help to develop oral language skills during literacy activities. Teacher Guidelines p.63 should help to inform this section.
- To ground this section in good current practice, staff in class groupings could examine the following questions:
“What oral language strategies do we use with our class when we are involved in reading activities?” (e.g. *reading aloud, oral book reports, questioning etc*)
“What oral language strategies do we use with our class when we are involved in writing activities?” (e.g. *brainstorming, conferencing, mini-lessons etc*)
- The information can be recorded on the accompanying template. (See appendices). One template will suffice for the ideas from Infants to Sixth. This page will then be a useful document for teachers in both their long-term and short-term planning.

3. Discrete Oral Language

Discrete Oral Language:

Here we are principally dealing with 'Learning Language'. Oral language is timetabled daily/weekly and during this time specific oral language skills are taught and practised e.g. Listening, vocabulary development, analogies, idioms, memory etc.

These skills are laid out clearly for us in the English Curriculum Statement. The oral language skills for every class level are bulleted comprehensively and concisely under the four strands in the form of *content objectives*. Many of these objectives can also be achieved during engagement with other subjects and during literacy activities.



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What do we do during discrete oral language time?

- Firstly, the teacher needs to be aware of the oral language content objectives for his/her class level. This awareness will enable the teacher to target specific oral language skills that his/her class need more work on.
- If he/she notices a general weakness in the class in a particular language skill, while involved in any lesson (history, maths etc.), he/she can proceed to plan a 'discrete' oral language lesson for the following day/week/etc to give the children an opportunity to practise and develop this skill. e.g. the skill might be 'questioning other children', 'sequencing the events of a story', 'miming emotions' – any of the skills mentioned in the content objectives for his/her class.
- Where he/she notices one child or a small number of children who are having difficulty with a language skill that the rest of the class are fairly competent in – he/she can organise a 'discrete' mini-lesson for them.
- Some schools use skill- based oral language programmes on the market (in part or in whole) and agree, at staff level, to teach a number of lessons every year. This allows for continuity up through the school. Other schools put together their own 'set of lessons' for every class – from a variety of resources in the school (about 20 per class to be covered over the year) based on the specific language needs of the children attending their school. This also allows for continuity up through the school.
- No one programme 'has it all'. Teachers generally find it more useful to dip into a number of resources in order to tailor the programme to suit the needs of the children. It is advisable not to spend all the *discrete oral language* time over the year on the set school programme (detailed in the bullet point above). It is important to leave some gaps to address the language difficulties that may crop up with a specific class (2nd bullet point above)

Where do we get ideas for lessons on specific oral language skills?

- Suggestions for oral language activities are given (in italics) under many of the content objectives in the Curriculum Statement and there are three oral language exemplars in the Teacher Guidelines p.38 – 49.
- SPHE Teacher Guidelines p79 -85
- Resources in the school. Many oral language lessons can be derived from old publications lying around the school. Old workbooks are especially good for getting vocabulary lists, lists for teaching grammar points, synonyms, idioms etc. The teacher



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can use these as reference books for devising oral language activities.

- **Learning Support Room.** Before buying any new resources, it would be advisable that the L.S Teacher would let the staff know of the Oral Language resources he/she has in the room. Many of them could be used for oral language activities in 'mainstream' also. It is from these resources that many schools put together sets of discrete oral language lessons for all their classes.
- **Resources on the market.** Many schools feel that they are generally quite well resourced in the infant classes but not so well in the middle and senior classes (mainly because Oral language did not feature as prominently in the senior classes). Some of the Language Programmes currently being used in schools include boxes / folders of discrete oral language lessons. The lessons are clearly laid out with the relevant language objective(s) included at the start of every lesson.

Criteria for Discrete Oral Language Lessons

- The lesson should be well-planned and structured to suit the needs of the children
- The relevant content objective/s in the Curriculum Statement should be noted (not necessarily written down – a mental note or number ref. is enough)
- Children need to know that this is the 'Talking Time' lesson for the day/week etc.
- Rules and routines for this special time are established – in consultation with the children.
- Children are regularly reminded of these rules and routines.
- The children need to do lots of TALKING during the lesson.
- The teacher needs to do very little talking.
- The 3 – Step lesson framework: -
 - (1)The lesson generally needs to begin with teacher input to the 'Whole Class'
 - (2)The organisational setting needs to move swiftly into pair/small group activities.(An exception to this would be if individual children were giving oral presentations to the whole class as the main part of the lesson or if the lesson took the form of a whole class circle time/thinking time)
 - (3)The lesson generally concludes with feedback from the pairs/groups
- Mixed ability groups are essential for all group activities.
- The teacher models the language skill(s) he/she is hoping to develop in the children at appropriate times during the lesson.
- The teacher models and encourages '*exploratory talk*'.



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- Evaluation of the lesson. Teacher reflection e.g. did it go well?, do the children need more practice at the skill or is it now firmly established?

What do we write in the English Plan for section 3: Discrete Oral Language?

In terms of the 'school plan', it is important to list the 'generic oral language skills' that the children will be developing over the years in primary school. (This can be achieved by looking closely at the oral language objectives in the four strands for each class level. Most of skills are common to each of the four levels. Specific ones like 'debating' can be listed and the relevant class levels mentioned in brackets.) The complete objectives for every level should not be written in the school plan. It is sufficient to write the key word(s) such as – 'listening', 'following instructions', 'debating' etc. in a bullet-pointed list.

It is also important to list the resources that the school will be drawing on in the teaching of these specific oral language skills. If they differ from class to class, this should be specified.

It is important that there is whole- staff agreement on a *minimum* weekly time allocation for discrete oral language for every class. This time is taken out of the suggested weekly time frame for English (Primary Curriculum – Introduction book page 70) Whatever time allocation is agreed will need to be piloted for a number of months and then reviewed. Some classes may need more or less time to achieve the curriculum objectives. The timetables can be adapted accordingly for the following term / school year. The time allocation for discrete oral language should be written into the school plan. Reference to the five principal contexts (teacher guidelines p.38) is recommended. Teachers can brainstorm the teaching/organisation strategies that are used and include a list of these.

The template included in this document is an example of one way in which a school could approach the recording of this section of the oral language plan.



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Assessment

The same tools of assessment are used for assessing all aspects of English. Therefore, to avoid repetition of the school's rationale and methods of assessment, this area can be dealt with under a general heading towards the end of the English Plan. Guidelines for this section of the plan are clearly laid out on pages 60-69 of the Curriculum Statement. Schools can read this chapter (colour-coded Green) and take from it what is relevant to the context of their own school. When the school has 'personalised' the relevant points and issues, they can summarise them succinctly to fit neatly under the 'Assessment' heading of the English Plan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Oral Language section of the English Plan can be comprehensively written up under the headings outlined below with specific attention given to the particular needs of the children in your school:

- Introduction
- Oral language Across the Curriculum
- Oral Language in Literacy
- Discrete Oral Language



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Whole School Plan for Oral Language Development Section 2: Oral Language Strategies in Literacy	
Oral Language Strategies in Reading	Oral Language Strategies in Writing



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Sample completed table

Whole School Plan for Oral Language Development	
Section 2: Oral Language Strategies in Literacy	
Oral language Strategies in Reading	Oral language Strategies in Writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Comprehension and oral language' -9 bullet points T.G.p63 • <u>Think aloud</u> - teacher models this during whole class reading and encourages chlrn. to use it - especially during pair/group reading (T.G. p63) • <u>Read aloud</u> - chlrn. have opportunities frequently to take turns reading to the group/class/other audiences (narrative, drama, poetry expository text, own personal writing) • <u>Oral Book Reports</u> - using jigsaw technique, when a book has been read by a whole group • <u>Radio plays</u> and talking stories. Children have to rework a text into a short script and provide directions and sound effects. • <u>Picture Stimulus</u>. Ask children to interpret a bare text or part of it through drawing and this can be used as part of a class discussion (cf. Visualising and Verbalising by N.Bell) • <u>Picture books</u> -. Good quality illustrations to aid visualising and verbalising skills and enhance the content and quality of exploratory talk. • <u>Thought tracking</u> - choose two characters from a story and at various times in a story discuss what they might be thinking ('snowball' this one -pair with another pair) • <u>Think-pair-share</u>, -all the class read a set piece of text quietly on their own and then discuss it using this strategy. • <u>Twinning</u> : using a theme from a recently read story or expository text, children create a story with a partner. • <u>K.W.L.</u> - (in pairs) ch. will have been taught this strategy in 3rd/4th. They use this strategy as they work in pairs on researching topics (project work) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Brainstorming. Webbing. Research</u> T.G.p79 • <u>Conferencing</u> - T.G.p82 • Ask three before me - chlrn. are encouraged, where possible, to ask (at most) three other peers for help before approaching teacher. • Organise '<u>Response Partners</u>' within the class - with charts to clarify roles and responsibilities (more structured than the latter point) • <u>Think Aloud</u> - chlrn. use this as part of the process of writing • <u>Read Aloud</u> - sharing personal writing with group/class/other audiences. T.G.p84 • <u>Active Listening</u> - to other children reading their personal writing and commenting constructively. • <u>Mini- lessons</u> - opportunities for children to ask questions and look for clarification e.g. T.G.p88 • <u>Character Portfolio</u> - chlrn. develop a personal one over the year. They write profiles of characters from novels etc and lists of words to describe them. Every child is asked to prepare an oral presentation (once a year) on particular character or characters from their portfolio. (1-2mins) • <u>Word Wall</u> - whole class activity on blackboard. to help clarify the functions of words in sentences. • <u>Adjective Frames</u> - whole-class activity on blackboard. Names of characters are written across b.b. and chlrn. brainstorm adjectives for describing characters. (They can refer to their character portfolios) • <u>Thought tracking</u> - in pairs, write some of the thoughts of characters in a story in thought bubbles • <u>Make word webs</u> - invented language/slang



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or just a piece of expository text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideas from the following websites: www.scoilnet.ie
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<u>Whole School Plan for Oral Language Development</u> <i>Section Three: Discrete Oral Language Time</i>			
<u>School Year:</u>			
<u>Time per week:</u>			
Junior Inf:	1 st	3 rd	5 th
Senior Inf:	2 nd	4 th	6 th
List of <u>SKILLS</u> in set lessons:			
Five <u>CONTEXTS</u> for Oral Language (p38 T.G.)	List of <u>STRATEGIES</u> in use (e.g. pair work etc.)		
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
Oral Language Resources in Use (in set lessons and/or in mini-lessons)			