

# Oral Language

Members of Primary Curriculum Support Programme outline etc....



**T**he Primary School Curriculum recognises that proficiency in oral language is essential for the development of the child's skills in:

- literacy;
- cognition; and
- social and emotional skills.

It also acknowledges the importance of learning language and of learning through language. The use of talk and discussion is advocated as a methodology throughout the curriculum. While promoting the integration of the three strands oral language, reading and writing, discrete time should also be set aside to achieve specific oral language content objectives as are outlined for each class level in the curriculum document.

The curriculum document presents strand units and content objectives in a spiral so that the child is developing and extending his/her language skills as he/she progresses from infants to sixth class. The following outlines some short activities which may be used to support the development of specific language skills and thereby attain appropriate content objectives.

## Listening and concentration

Developing listening skills is fundamental to attaining objectives in the strand unit receptiveness to language, at all class levels.

In the junior classes activities might include

- **Identify environmental sounds** Use tapes, sounds produced by teacher/child or musical instruments
- **Games** Musical Chairs, Traffic

## ■ The Primary School Curriculum advocates play as a crucial learning medium in the junior classes, expanding imagination and language

Lights, Simon Says, Oranges and Lemons, Remote Control

- **Repeat rhythms or word lists** "I went to the Market and I bought a ..." each child repeating previous items and adding another...
- **Focused listening** Children count the number of times they hear a word/ phrase/ character name as teacher reads story or show appropriate prop as

mentioned in story.

- **Mime** feelings, actions, everyday situations such as eating breakfast, making a sandwich.

In the senior classes, the following activities can further enhance listening and concentration.

- **Identify an error in a sentence** I saw an invisible man at the shop

At all levels children should be enabled to recognise facets of good listening. Teachers can model situations demonstrating good and poor listening skills. In this way children identify the need for eye-contact, commenting or questioning without interrupting and the use of appropriate facial expression and body language.

The strand unit Competence and confidence in using language involves children extending vocabulary, developing sentence structure and fluency.

## Extending vocabulary

Extending vocabulary and understanding of the relationship between words is important in learning language and in accessing all areas of the curriculum to learn through language.

The following activities are aimed at developing vocabulary.

- **Teacher tells a story** During the story teacher shows individual pictures/ props representing characters or events in the story. Children name these.
- **Children name associated words with chosen theme** All children clap twice for each new word for example,

tree (clap, clap), branch (clap, clap), nut (clap, clap).

- **Parts – whole** Children identify topics when given three clues eg. trunk, tusks, grey (elephant).
- **Odd one out** Child selects the odd one out from a series of words or objects and justifies choice.
- **Create themed lists in round robin fashion** Each word starting with the final letter of the previous word.
- **Name three** 3-4 players. Each player names three items from category on card eg, three things that can fly, three things that are found in a freezer, three things that live in water.

Children should be encouraged to develop banks of interesting words. Words encountered during reading can be added so that children experience new words in context and can use these appropriately when writing.

#### Describing

The development of accurate and elaborate descriptive skills adds to the child's competence and confidence in reading, while enhancing creative writing skills. The following activities may be adapted for all class levels.

- **What am I?** Child gives clues about a picture or item so that peers can suggest what it might be.
- **Feely bags** Include items of different shape, size, texture and materials eg, feather, thread, stone, page etc. The child describes these facets in order to identify unseen object in the bag.
- **Paired drawing** One child describes a picture to partner who draws it.
- **Barrier games** Children have pictures which have a number of differences. They take turns to describe their picture and thereby identify the differences.
- **For sale** Children describe an item that they have for sale.
- **Discovery** Children describe an item they have found. This may be fictitious and lead to a discussion about who may

have used it and for what purpose.

- **Pictures of people (not famous) taken from magazines** Children invent a life for them – family? job? hobbies? car? mobile phone?
- **Freeze-framing characters** Pause while reading narrative story and children assume character roles and speak their thoughts.
- **What happened before and after?** The children can describe a picture or suggest what is just outside the frame.
- **Commentator**

## ■ The development of accurate and elaborate descriptive skills adds to the child's competence and confidence in reading, while enhancing creative writing skills.

Create commentary on short excerpts of football match/ race/ fashion show.

#### Denoting Position and Sequencing

These language skills have a positive impact on the child's comprehension, mathematical language and understanding and can be fostered at all class levels.

- **Teacher and child give positional commands** This may be done through PE as child instructs peers to move five steps forward and to the right.
- **Build it** Two children given the same materials instruct each other to construct an identical object on each side of a screen.
- **Directions** Use local/street maps to give and elicit directions. Check your local tourist office for resources.
- **Sequencing** Sequence a series of pictures from a well known story
- **Instructions and Procedures** Give/follow a series of instructions eg, how to make a cup of tea, create a pattern.
- **Make a story** Chain stories whereby a story is told in round robin fashion.

#### Developing Cognitive Abilities through Language

The strand unit, developing cognitive abilities through language, involves discussing, questioning, predicting, reasoning and justifying. The following activities can be used to promote these language skills.

- **Predict** What would happen if... Ireland won the World Cup? Westlife visited our school?
- **Word tennis** Partners compose sentence or a story one phrase or sentence at a time.

justify their selection. Such topics can be extended to compose questions and conduct surveys, the results of which can be illustrated during a maths lesson. Strategies to improve debate or persuasive argument could also be modelled.

- **Story bag** Use three props as a stimulus for group story telling. These stories can then be presented to the class, typed and used as reading material or a springboard for further development in writing.

Through meaningful interaction with adults and peers in one to one, group and whole class situations, objectives within the strand unit, Emotional and imaginative development through language can be attained. The Primary School Curriculum advocates play as a crucial learning medium in the junior classes, expanding imagination and language. Role play also provides an excellent context for this interaction at all levels. It can be supported by Language Experience Approach activities which can vary from making sandwiches to tending to the school garden. Board games also provide a motivating method of teaching specific language skills such as turn taking, listening, questioning and vocabulary extension.

How to Identify and Support Children with Speech and Language Difficulties by Jan Speake (ISBN 1855033615) provides practical guidelines and checklists for identification of children who are experiencing language difficulties.

Further language activities can be found in Teaching Talking (second Ed) by Ann Locke and Maggie Beech (ISBN 0-7087-1484-6) and under Oral Language in the English section on [www.pcsp.ie](http://www.pcsp.ie) which also provides comprehensive suggestions on planning and organisation for oral language in the classroom.

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