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LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION

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Language is a way of communicating between people by the use of symbols, signs, writing and oral speech. Language is used in different ways in different communities, countries and cultures throughout the world. Lindfors (1980, p.43) suggests that language consists of three major components: Semantic, Syntactic and Phonological.

Language is seen as being acquired by human beings through their own interaction with the environment that surrounds them. Human beings are able to build an overview of their language through personal experience, and also a cognitive structure developed from their world view.

One's way of thinking and of viewing the world is determined by the language he is necessarily learning the categories and relations it encodes.

(Lindfors, 1980, p.45)

Therefore, because language helps us conceptualise the world around us, the way in which we use language is important. As Piaget suggests, (Bee, n.d., p.224) the child is continually interpreting the world around him, firstly by actions defined as pre-operational and developing through to operational, concrete and formal. In the same way children use their language skills as a way of interpreting their environment. Tough (1976, 77a, 77b) suggests that, by classifying the functions used in language, we will be able to understand how children use language to direct their and others' actions, to explore and project as well as hypothesise and experiment as a way of interpreting their environment.

This further suggests that we must also consider the social and ethnic backgrounds of children. Basically this is because, if the world view of children is developed through their use of language and its functions, then the particular type of language experiences (influenced by social class, race, etc.) must therefore have a significant influence on the developing child's world view.

* See profile, previous pages.

Tough also notes that this is particularly relevant to the fourth of her functions, the relational function. Research by Saphir & Whorf suggests that

the way in which the individual comes to perceive and respond to the world around him is largely a result of his experiences of the language forms and patterns used by the group to which he belongs.

(Tough, 1977, p.61)

This is particularly relevant for some children in our schools. For instance, the Aboriginal child who, with his own language, would come to perceive his world around him in terms of his own language. The Aboriginal child's view would be seen to be quite different from that of an Anglo-Australian child. For instance, an Aboriginal child living on a "mission", with his own set of unique experiences relating to his social and cultural needs, would use his language to interpret, hypothesise and experiment in relation to these unique needs. Because of this, the Aboriginal child would develop a world view, through his language processes, which would be significantly different from that of a non-Aboriginal child living in a city environment.

Considering this point and relating it to the theories of development outlined by Piaget and supported by Vygotsky, Luria, Lewis, Bruner and Bernstein, Tough (1977) suggests that the functions enable us to analyse the child's language development in terms of his or her use of language in different situations.

Tough outlines four functions of language which she used to classify children's uses of language. These functions are:

THE DIRECTIVE FUNCTION. This involves the direction of operations and actions. It is primarily concerned with two types of actions - *self directing* (the child verbalises directions and monitors his/her own actions) and *other directing* (directing the actions of others).

THE INTERPRETATIVE FUNCTION. The interpretative function of language looks at communicating the meaning of events and situations that, as it were, the child witnesses. The interpretative function also contains two parts - the reporting use and the reasoning use. In the reporting use, the child labels or identifies particular parts of a recalled experience, as if making a report of the scene. With the reasoning use the child begins to make reasoned interpretations of experiences.

THE PROJECTIVE FUNCTION. This function appears to depend upon drawing on the imagination and using elements of known experience. With this function, also, a child may attempt to explore events that are still in the future. The projective function contains three uses: predictive, emphatic and imaginative. Through the predicting use the child is involved in projecting beyond the present experience. The child is also able to think about events that are likely to occur in the future, or project into events which are not part of direct experience. Emphatic use focuses on imagining and expressing feelings as well as the reactions of other people to their experiences. The imaginative use is seen as children playing alone or with others.

THE RELATIONAL FUNCTION. This language function is seen to play an important role in establishing and maintaining relationships between people. It can also be observed within each of the other functions.

SECTION 2

This particular field study was done with Grade Two children at the Swan Hill North Primary School. The age of the children varied from six years to eight years. The Swan Hill North Primary draws children from an area of Swan Hill which includes Housing Commission estates, and generally the children are from a lower-socio economic background, although there are some children who do not fit into this category. In the grade there were also three Aboriginal children and one Italian child.

The study consisted of three parts, and was done over a period of one week of my school experience.

PART A

This part was done with children in an Art session during which the grade teacher was not present. However, there was an art teacher and myself. The children did appear to act differently in this setting. Most of the conversation took place with the children sitting at tables doing their work. Throughout the lesson there was considerable noise, from the conversations taking place. This made it difficult to transcribe the tape. I have attempted to overcome some of the difficulty of identifying individuals on the tape by referring to unknown voices as 'child' (see appendix). The Art teacher and I were involved in some conversations with the children during the lesson, but most of the conversation was between children and related to work which they were doing. See Appendix 1.

PART B

This activity was organised and implemented by me, as the teacher. It consisted of a small group of children in the classroom, while the rest of the grades was at P.E. The group of children consisted of three boys and three girls. One of the males was Italian, the others were Anglo-Australian. There were several factors that are worth noting. The presence of the tape recorder appeared to distract the children's attention, even though I had placed it at the back of the room. Another factor was the fact that the children were unfamiliar with the material used. The material had been introduced to them that morning, and the children took some time to associate themselves with the equipment. This was apparent by the children's unsettled behaviour. The equipment used was improvised and consisted of materials such as foam rubber, rulers (for the bridge), and paper. This activity was based upon the Bridge Problem, as outlined by Tough in *The Development of Meaning*. (See Appendix 2).

PART C

This activity involved two children. It was done in the classroom during recess, and was a non-directed activity - I sat at the back of the room and took no part in any activity. It was done in the classroom because one of the children had a hip disorder and was unable to go outside. The other child was chosen to stay back with him. This was a normal part of the child's daily routine. One of the children was Aboriginal, the other had an Italian father, however, both his parents were bilingual. A southern Italian dialect was spoken regularly at home. The child was also bilingual. The two boys occupied themselves during this time with some beads which were in a box. (See Appendix 3).

COMPILATION

All situations were recorded and a transcription made from the tapes. The whole of the tapes was not transcribed because of the length, however, a significant section has been transcribed from each activity. The transcriptions are included in the appendix. From the transcriptions I was able to categorise the children's language according to Tough's four functions. A comparison of the results from these three transcriptions has been included as Appendix 4.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Activity 1

From the chart (Appendix 4) there can be seen how much the four functions were used through the three activities. At some time or another the children in the study had used the four language functions, with the directive function and the interpretative function being used the most. Activity 1 shows the directive function being used 45 times and the interpretative 30 times.

The projective functions and the relational function were not used to such a large degree as the directive or interpretative function. The children at the time of Activity 1 were in an Art lesson and were quite talkative and noisy, which may be the opposite of some Art lessons where the children tend to be quiet. It would appear that the children were working quite constructively even though there was considerable noise going on. By the number of times the directive and the interpretative functions were used it can be seen that the children were actually interpreting, hypothesising, explaining and reasoning through the lesson. So, from the four language functions it can be seen that the children were involved in an active learning process through their language. By comparing the results of the directive and interpretative function it appears that children learn and perform very well without much interaction even when the teacher is not present.

ACTIVITY 2

Activity 2 shows the interpretative function and the projective function being used a lot, while the directive function and relational function are not used as much.

During this activity I was present as the teacher and did engage in conversation with the children. Due to the activity that was being performed there was a greater need for the interpretative and projective function. Because of my interaction with the children and the activity there was not a lot of directive function taking place on the children's part. Possibly I was fulfilling that role. The children were involved in thinking, communicating, perceiving, remembering, sampling, experiencing and imagining from the activity. All of those functions are considered to be of importance to language acquisition.

ACTIVITY 3

This activity was of a shorter length than the first and second. During this activity there were only two children and they used only three of the language functions: directive, interpretative and projective. The projective function was not used as much as the directive and interpretative. The activity involved the boys in interpreting, hypothesising, explaining and reasoning with one another

SECTION 2

From my observations and suggested readings it becomes evident that children do need to be able to verbalise - discuss and experiment with language if they are to learn and comprehend their environment and the world around them. It appears that the idea of the silent classroom being a good classroom cannot necessarily be seen to be justified in providing adequate learning in light of this evidence. Overall, all children are using the four language function at school constantly, whether in the classroom or outside, with a teacher present or not. From the evidence available it showed that Joan Tough's functions work, and from the functions I was able to categorise conversation into the four categories. Again, from the small amount of evidence available, it appears that the Aboriginal children and the Italian child were using the same four functions. However, I would need further evidence to support this - but I would like to follow it up, and I feel it would be valuable if followed up. This study has also been valuable through the observational exercise to understand the way children learn language, and also the opportunity to look at data and consider it within an educational framework, and the important role that language plays in learning. Also the types of language functions used can, to some extent, be affected by the type of activity provided by the teacher. Therefore, it is important for the teacher to consider the lessons provided.

APPENDIX 1

Transcription: Part A

Taken during the Art lesson, teachers present, but not directing activities to a large extent. Because of the large number of children I was unable to identify each child. Where I have not been able to identify the individual child, I have named the person 'child'.

Shane - There's a chair in there.
David - Hey!
Child - There you go.
Child - Where's mine now?
Child - I've got three.
Child - I've got the green colour.
Child - Fantastic.
Child - I done it in one shot.
Child - What did you do?
Child - I've got heaps of
Shane - Help. Help.
Child - I've done the knot.
Janet - Look at mine.
Child - I've gone over the edge.
Adam - I've already got a knot in the end of mine.
Child - I can't get mine.
Child - I can't do a knot.
Janet - I feed this right through...
Child - This are easy.
David - Now what do you have to do?
Child - Right in the middle of the outside.
Child - You put a knot in the end.
Child - In which end?
Child - Any end.
Child - Did it wrong.
Child - No if you don't use a knot.
Child - Look at the mistake in...
Child - No.
Child - I've done mine like that.
Adam - Can I put this on the front?
Child - You'll get into trouble here.

Child - That's yours.

Child - Yours has got enough hasn't it?

Child - I did do it right but look.

Adam - I done it right.

Adam - I've done a mistake.

Child - I put it on the wrong bit of the needle.

Child - I won't have enough.

Child - Nor will I.

Child - You tie mine.

Adam - You know when you were naughty in the library to morning.

Child - This going to get up.

Adam - Do I have to go up like this?

Child - I like this like this.

Child - Hey!

Child - Put your hands

Child - Boy I'm going big.

Adam - Look at this Shane.

Shane - What's that?

Shane - Mine's not going to make it.

David - So is mine.

Adam - Mine's going to get tied.

Child - Fall out.

Shane - I've ran out.

Child - Hey have you got the other colour?

Child - Which colour do you?

Shane - The blue one. The blue one.

Adam - That much you leave.

Adam - Do I have to go to the bottom?

Child - I've got a new knot. Look.

Adam - U-O I've done it right in the middle of it.
Child - I've only got one more and I've run out of it.
Child - Same colour?
Child - I didn't mean to, but I
Child - I've done all that.
Child - I've already gone around the corner.
Child - I've finished.
Child - Come on goose.
Child - How do you do it?
Child - Can't ya?
Child - I've done it wrong.
Adam - Do you go under the other way?

APPENDIX 2

Transcription Part B

Teacher: How would I get this car and the people across to
the other side of the river?
Janet: Get a boat.
Scott: Get a boat.
Michelle: Get a bridge.
Teacher: You said get a boat Scott, so did you Janet, but
what did you say Michelle?
Michelle: Get a bridge.
Janet: Get a flat boat to drive the car on to.
Teacher: Get a flat boat. You show me what you mean with
the blocks.
Troy: A fish.
Janet: A ferry
Teacher: What did you call it Janet?
Janet: A ferry.

Teacher: Do you all agree with that one?

All: Yes

Teacher: Why would you use a ferry?

Janet: Because you would be able to carry a car.

Teacher: What's another reason for using a ferry?

Janet: If you used a boat it crashes into the edge thing.

Teacher: Okay - say we didn't have a ferry. What would you use then?

Troy: A bridge.

Teacher: Let's try the bridge idea. You have a go at building a bridge and remember the cars have got to be able to get across the bridge.

Teacher: Do you think your bridge covers enough of the river?

All: Yes.

Teacher: Why do you think it's a good bridge?

Janet: Because it fits over.

Michelle: The car can drive over.

Teacher: Okay, I'm going to bring a boat along the river now. And this boat has a very tall mast on it.

Janet: It's an opening bridge.

Scott: The bridge opens up in half.

Teacher: That's a good idea, but...

Michelle: The car will fall off.

Rebecca: The bridge won't go up until the car goes off.

Teacher: It won't go up until the cars are across?

Janet: The boat will wait for the cars, then the bridge will go up.

Troy: Chug chug chug chooo choo choo chooo

Janet: Thank you.

Teacher: Let's say the bridge didn't open up.

Janet: The boat can't go ahead.

Teacher: Why can't the boat go ahead?

Janet: Because it's too big.

- Scott: Because it's too big. The funnel's too big and it won't fit. If it didn't have the funnel it would fit. Cause the funnel would break off if it tried to go straight through.
- Scott: If you had the bridge going up it would fit.
- Teacher: Okay. Our car has got across to the other side, but now the boat wants to go through. How are we going to get through. Remember the bridge can't open up.
- Scott: By lifting up the bridge.
- Adam: Get it higher up.

APPENDIX 3

Transcription: Part Child Part C.

Recording of two children in the classroom during recess. One of the children had a hip disorder and was not allowed too much physical movement, therefore he had to stay indoors. Another boy was chosen to stay behind and play with the boy who had the disorder. I was present. The children were playing together. I had no active part in the activities and sat on the other side of the room while they were playing.

SIGNIFICANT FACTORS:

The children were in Grade 2. Troy has an Italian father and an Australian mother. A southern Italian dialect as well as English is spoken at home.

Wayne has Aboriginal parents and would be familiar with non-standard English outside the school environment. Wayne, eight years old, was slightly older than Troy.

- Troy - That mine.
- Troy - I have a little one of those.
- Troy - I'm nearly finished.
- Wayne - Look at mine then.
- Troy - All we got to do is tie this one up.
- Wayne - Hey, you got all different shapes, but mines all the same.
- Troy - Now I'm going to get a short one. Then I'm going to put all big shapes on.

Wayne - Wish we had a big one.

Wayne - Look at the little one I've found.

Troy - I've found a middle-sized one.

Troy - Look a thing.

Troy - You haven't got one of them. That's a square inch one.

Wayne - Yes I have.

Troy - No, a square one, see.

Troy - I'm not going to put these on mine.

Wayne - Which ones?

Troy - You think you can beat me - Eh?

Troy - You grabbed little things like that.

Troy - My string's larger than yours.

Wayne - Can we play this at little play, Eh?

Wayne - Um - it's too big.

Troy - Ruby, I'm rich, I'm rich.

Wayne - We can make a heap of these at play time.

APPENDIX 4

	Total number of times a function occurred in the conversation transcribed		
Directive function	45	2	10
Interpretative function	30	13	11
Projective function	3	10	4
Relational function	2	3	0
Classroom teacher teacher absent - Art lesson	Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3
	Directed activity myself as the teacher. Group of six children	Running conversation at recess between two children	

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