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Promoting Oral Language Development in the Primary School

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“Before man’s arrival on earth language did not exist. And what is it? Barely a breath! A few noises strung together . . . it is a mystery impossible to fathom.”¹

Knowledge of language has enabled humans as a species to develop and adapt in most spectacular ways. Not available to any other species on the planet, “language sets humans apart from other animals . . . and enables complex thoughts and innermost feelings to be shared” (Rudman & Titjen, 2018, p. 2). In fact, “many, if not most, of the things we make use of in our everyday lives rely on specialised knowledge or skills to produce. The information behind these was historically coded in verbal instructions” (Pagel, 2017, p. 64). Shared linguistic knowledge enables users to exchange information, feelings and ideas in a communicative process. Of critical importance to the successful development of language is an understanding of what constitutes such linguistic knowledge.

The structures of the human vocal tract enable us to make a wide variety of **sounds** (Owens, 2012). Unique to our species, as speakers of language we have agreed that sounds and sound pattern combinations become **symbols of meaning** expressed in the form of **words** (Fromkin et al., 2011). We also know that if we combine these words in a shared, systematic, rule-governed way in **sentences**, we can successfully transfer information from one to another. Shared knowledge of the sounds, patterns of meaningful sound combinations and rules governing sentence structure underpins the

¹ Montessori, 1967, p. 108.

human capacity to **generate** an infinite number of meaningful utterances which express and receive information in the process of communication: “knowing a language means being able to produce new sentences never spoken before and to understand sentences never heard before” (Fromkin & Rodman, 1983, p.7). All of this combines to make language “a communicative tool that is used to achieve **social** ends” (Owens, 2012, p. 24) and essentially a tool around which the world turns and has turned since the arrival of humans on earth. Its importance is underpinned by its contribution to children’s self-regulation, learning and thinking, imagining, acceptance by peers, academic success and sociability (van der Veen et al., 2017).

What is Language?

Communicating through the complex developmental linguistic modes of speaking and listening requires knowledge of and facility with a wide array of important interdependent skills. Of central importance is knowledge of the *components of language*.

Phonology—What is the sound?

A fundamental piece of language knowledge involves knowing which sounds (or in the case of those who are deaf, signs) are used in the language. Each language has its own set of sounds. Each distinctive sound in a language is called a *phoneme*—“the smallest linguistic unit of sound that can signal a difference in meaning” (Owens, 2012, p. 22), for example the /d/ and /t/ sounds in *bad* and *bat*. There are approximately 43 phonemes in the English language. In addition to knowing the sounds of a language, a competent speaker of a language also knows the agreed patterns of combining sounds in that language, for example, while the sound combination *ate* is commonly used at the end of words in English, the sound combination *pwg* is not a pattern that could ever

occur at the end of an English word. Knowledge of *phonology* involves knowing the phonemes in a language and knowing how those phonemes are combined and distributed within the language. Becoming aware of this knowledge, *phonological awareness*, is an important prerequisite for the development of literacy skills.

Semantics—What does it mean?

Knowing how acceptable sequences of sounds are combined in agreed ways to symbolise particular *meanings* in a language enables the development of word knowledge. In language, the most basic unit of meaning is the word (Fromkin et al., 2011). Competent language users know many words in their spoken language (vocabulary). Word meaning knowledge functions at the categorical, overarching level—at a superordinate level, e.g. *vehicle*. At a subordinate level a subset within the categorical level contains same-level word meanings, e.g. *car/bus*. Within this subset are words with more specific meaning, e.g. *automatic car, electric car/school bus, tour bus* (Resnick & Snow, 2009, p.14). Each language assigns particular meanings to specific sets of sound sequences. The relationship between the sounds and their meanings is arbitrary, e.g. consider the four-legged animal that barks - *dog, madra, chien, hund, perro, cane* etc. Familiarity with these arbitrary relationships is essential in order to communicate in a language. While vocabulary knowledge is at the core of the meaning-making process, semantics involves knowledge of all linguistic components and their interaction to make meaning in a communicative context.

Morphology—How can it change?

A key aspect of word knowledge is knowledge of the internal structure of words. Each root word has assigned meaning. Altering the root word can *change its meaning* in an agreed way, e.g. the meaning of the word *dog* (root word) is changed when a plural *s* (meaning “more than one”) is attached to it. Similarly, the word *happy* (root word) is changed when the prefix *un* (meaning “not”) is attached to it. Equally the meaning is changed when the suffix *ness* or *ly* is added. When a tense marker is added to a verb, e.g. *walk(ed)* the meaning of the root word (“to move at a regular pace by lifting and setting down each foot in turn”) is changed (occurring in the past). Knowledge of words and their meanings requires knowledge of morphology so that the range of forms of a word is readily acquired and understood. Morphology refers to knowledge of *morphemes* (the smallest units of meaning in a language)—knowing the root form of a word as well as knowing how changes to the root form of a word can contribute to a change in meaning of the word. As well as acquiring *breadth* of word knowledge (number of different words known) when developing linguistic competence, language users also need to acquire *depth* of word knowledge (number of different forms of a word) (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2012).

Syntax—Where does it fit?

While it is possible at a very basic level to communicate using individual words alone, a less cumbersome and considerably more efficient form of linguistic communication involves **combining words** in acceptable ways into meaningful phrases and sentences. Sentences “are composed of discrete units that are combined by rules” (Fromkin et al., 2011, p. 78). The rules governing sentence structure are called syntax. The rules of syntax specify **word order** in a language, e.g. *the elephant trumpeted*

loudly is readily recognised as being an acceptable sentence in English unlike *trumpeted the loudly elephant* which contravenes the rules of syntax in the English language. The rules of syntax also dictate **relationships** between words in a sentence, e.g. both *the dog jumped for joy when he saw the boy* and *the boy jumped for joy when he saw the dog* consist of the same words in an acceptable order, but each sentence has a different meaning as a result of how the words are arranged in that sentence. Knowledge of the rules of syntax enables the competent language user to order words in an acceptable way so that they fit together and relate to one another to make sense.

Pragmatics—How do we use language?

We use language for a **purpose**. Language is a tool used for many reasons, e.g. to greet, inform, explain, describe, report, question, express and justify an opinion, or to narrate. When we use language, we use it in a wide variety of contexts. Depending on the context, we need to alter our **style** of language. Knowing how language is used for communicative purposes in a range of contexts is called **pragmatic** knowledge—“pragmatics concentrates on language as a communication tool that is used to achieve social ends” (Owens, 2012, p. 24). Pragmatic knowledge enables competent language users to interact successfully in order to engage socially with others in a wide variety of contexts and for a wide range of purposes.

The purposes of language are summarised in the widely-used work of Michael Halliday (1975) referred to as the Functions of Language (see Appendix 2, Primary Language Curriculum, 2019, p. 119 for a comprehensive list of language functions). Acquiring pragmatic knowledge involves developing the facility to use language expressively and receptively for a wide range of purposes. Central to this knowledge is acquiring a facility to alter the speaking style appropriately as the context dictates,

depending on the *audience* (familiar or unfamiliar; age; social status), *situation* (formal or informal), and *intent* (what the speaker intends to accomplish) of the communication. It requires awareness of polite forms (*gimme the book* vs. *please may I have that book*); appropriateness in choice of words and complexity of syntax (direct—*please pass the salt* vs. indirect—*I wonder if you would mind passing the salt*); ability to “read between the lines” (e.g. literal—*it’s pouring rain* vs. nonliteral—*it looks like the sky has opened up outside*). Of particular significance in terms of pragmatic knowledge is the ability to engage in conversation, as well as to produce and comprehend narrative and expository language genres appropriately.

While each of the components of language is discrete and requires specific knowledge to maximise its potential communicative impact, equally the components are **inter-related**, interacting simultaneously in the process of linguistic communication—as we use language

we code ideas (*semantics*); that is, we use a symbol—a sound, a word . . . to stand for an event, object, or relationship. To communicate these ideas to others, we use certain forms, which include the appropriate sound units (*phonology*), the appropriate word order (*syntax*), and the appropriate words and word beginnings and endings (*morphology*) to clarify meaning more specifically. Speakers use these components to achieve certain communication ends, such as gaining information, greeting, or responding (*pragmatics*) (Owens, 2012, p. 18).

Extralinguistic Knowledge

In addition to the knowledge and skills necessary for effective linguistic communication (i.e. the components of language), the linguistic code is enhanced by the addition and appropriate use of *paralinguistic features* and a facility to use and interpret *non-linguistic cues*. **Paralinguistic features** or prosody, superimposed on

speech include the use of *intonation*—the upward and downward glide of the voice; making use of *pitch*, e.g. rising pitch signaling a question; *emphasis*—stressing a word or phrase for effect; *pace* of speaking; use of *pause*, and *volume*. Paralinguistic features combine with language to effect and clarify meaning. **Non-linguistic cues** also interact with speech to clarify meaning. They include the ability to use and interpret gestures (e.g. thumbs up signaling agreement), body language, eye contact, facial expression, and physical proximity.

An important factor contributing to our linguistic competence refers to a speaker’s ability to “talk about talk” (Ely et al., 2001, p. 357). **Metalinguistic** ability—being able to reflect on language as a carrier of meaning (Spataro et al., 2018)—is where a speaker has a conscious awareness *about* language (Fromkin et al., 2011, p.361). In a typical interaction a speaker’s focus is not on the discrete language components but rather on the intention of the communication—the meaning being conveyed—as the Duchess cogently outlines in *Alice in Wonderland* “—and the moral of *that* is take care of the sense and the sounds will take care of themselves”. Focussing attention on the act of using language is a complex task making considerable cognitive demands on the speaker. However, this ability to consciously reflect on the process of language is of critical importance, particularly for success in learning (Chen & Myhill, 2016) and the development of literacy skills.

Knowledge of the components of language, combined with extralinguistic and metalinguistic ability work in tandem to enable the language user to communicate effectively. The core focus of language development in school is to build the learner’s linguistic knowledge. In the Primary Language Curriculum, this knowledge is represented in the form of elements, the overarching focus of language teaching and

learning, and learning outcomes, the particular skills and aptitudes of each element to be targeted. Of central importance for explicit, focussed planning for language development is an awareness of the trajectory of language growth during the school years. This is the focus of the next section.

Language Growth during the School Years

“As long as one talks, one must keep on learning how to talk” (Berry, 1969, p. 185).

Despite the complexity of knowledge required for linguistic communication, the overwhelming majority of children have acquired an impressive level of competence by around the age of five. Among their linguistic accomplishments, very young children can produce intelligible speech sounds more than 90% of the time, may have a vocabulary repertoire of up to approximately 10,000 words, can produce both compound and complex sentences, ask *wh*-questions, express negatives, use a range of tense forms, participate in conversations, taking turns, contributing relevant ideas and information, and can share anecdotes (Nippold, 2016, p. 4). Such is the ease with which young children can communicate with others orally it is unsurprising that developing oral competence in language is sometimes overlooked or relegated to that of “incidental by-product” (Kirkland & Patterson, 2005, p. 391; Wright & Gotwals, 2017) during the school years. However, language learning is a lifelong process—“becoming a *native* speaker is a rapid and highly efficient process, but becoming a *proficient* speaker takes a long time” (Berman, 2004, p. 10). Developments in each of the components of language and emergence of facility with extralinguistic features lay a solid foundation on which to build greater competence during the school years (Berman & Ravid, 2009; Hoff, 2009). What does this language growth trajectory look like?

Developmental Trajectory: Phonology

During the school years, children learn to produce all English speech sounds (Owens, 2012) and improve in the co-ordination of speech production, becoming increasingly adept at correctly articulating complex sequences of sounds and multi-syllabic words (Vihman, 1988), for example *pi/rot/it/ies* vs. *pri/or/it/ies*. Other areas of phonologic development include identification of syllables, increased facility with vowel shifting (e.g. /i/ in *divine*—*divinity*; /ai/ in *explain*—*explanation*); stress patterns (e.g. *green house* vs. *greenhouse*; noun vs. verb stress pattern—*present* vs. *present*; Owens, 2012, p. 349). Additionally, children improve in ability to perform tasks such as repeating novel sound sequences (phonological memory), rapid naming tasks, and phonological awareness (Goswami, 2000). The development of these phonological skills is linked to children’s emergent reading skills, while learning to read contributes to the development of phonological awareness (Hoff, 2009). All of these phonological challenges apply also to children who are learning English as an additional language (EAL). In addition, the development of phonological production abilities of children learning English as an additional language is complicated by the fact that some of the sounds of English are different from their native language, for example the uvular /r/ in French as compared with the glide of /r/ in English, or may not exist in their native language. For EAL learners, acquisition of accurate pronunciation of English sounds is heavily influenced by the sounds of the native language (Tarone, 2005) and some studies have found evidence of cross-linguistic interaction in relation to phonological development among this group of children (Keffala et al., 2018).

Developmental Trajectory: Vocabulary and Morphology

Growth in vocabulary during the school years is the most clearly manifested aspect of linguistic development. The etymology of English vocabulary has two major sources: Germanic languages, which are the source of the majority of high-frequency words in English, and Latin (with approximately 6% of English vocabulary being of Greek origin). Words sourced from Latin are typically multi-syllabic and more formal than those of Germanic origin. Acquiring facility with the vocabulary of English is a challenge both for first language English learners and children with EAL alike (Nation, 2005). For most typically-developing children acquiring English as a first language, several new words are added to their vocabulary knowledge every day, so that thousands of new words per year are added to their repertoire, with children typically knowing approximately 10,000 words in grade 1 and growing to 40,000 words by grade 5² (Anglin, 1993). Some children, however, come to school knowing fewer words than others. Hart and Risley (1995) studied young children's vocabulary development and found that when children from families with low incomes were 3 years old, they knew 600 fewer words than children the same age from families with higher incomes. By grade 2, the gap widens to about 4,000 words (Biemiller & Slonim, 2001) and continues to widen each year (Juel, 2006). Additionally, while children with EAL have been shown to vary substantially in relation to their English language skills (Strand & Demie, 2005), some children with EAL have been found to know fewer English words than native speakers of the language (Spencer & Wagner, 2017).

In addition to increasing the **number** of words known, the **types** of words learned

² Read the word "grade" as equivalent to "class" in the Irish primary school system.

become increasingly complex, children becoming adept at using words that are longer, less frequently used, more formal, or domain specific (Berman, 2009).

Of particular significance in terms of vocabulary growth during the school years are the following:

- Growth in children's facility with **polysemous** (multiple-meaning) words (e.g. *kitchen cabinet/president's cabinet*)—younger children are more familiar with the high-frequency meanings of polysemous words while knowledge of the less-common meanings of such words develops over the course of the primary school years and beyond (Durkin et al., 1985; Nippold, 1992). This knowledge leads to growth in facility with ambiguity and synonymy and contributes to the ability to use and understand humorous language in the form of puns, jokes and riddles (Nippold, 2016).
- **Abstract nouns** (e.g. *courage, kindness*), which are increasingly developed as children grow, due to increased exposure (Nippold et al., 2005).
- Production of **word definitions** (Snow, 1990).
- Understanding and use of **figurative language** (Siltanen, 1990; Spector, 1996; Colston & Kuiper, 2002; Nippold, 2016) and **multiple-word phrases** (e.g. *take sides, change hands, put the cart before the horse*; Smith & Murphy, 2015).

The ability to produce an accurate Aristotelian *definition* of a word (the word, its superordinate category, characteristic features of what the word means)—e.g. *a dog is an animal which has four legs and a tail and barks loudly*) is important for clear, concise and effective communication both in school and outside (Nippold, 2007). From the earliest stages of school, young children are both exposed to and required to express word definitions. This however, is a complex cognitive and linguistic skill that is

refined as children grow through the school years (Snow, 1990). As children are exposed to the formal language of schooling, their capacity to produce accurate definitions increases (Kurland & Snow, 1997) so that their definitions are more likely to include a superordinate categorical term, along with a wider range of important characteristics of the term being defined, e.g. *bicycle—you use it to go to your friend’s house* vs. *a bicycle is a vehicle with two wheels, handlebars and a saddle which you sit on and it has pedals which you push round with your feet to propel the bike getting the cyclist from one place to another* (Nippold et al., 1999, p. 481).

Understanding *figurative language* use is of fundamental importance in interaction as well as for academic success (Chouniard et al., 2018). It is suggested that up to four figures of speech occur per minute in typical oral discourse (Pollio et al., 1977, in Honeck & Hoffman, 2018). Young children regularly use metaphor (e.g. responding to a loud hooting noise from a car while stationary in a traffic jam, a three-year-old declares *I wish he would stop hooting the horn he is giving me a **headache in my ear***), and can produce figurative language regularly from third grade (Pollio & Pollio, 1979). Children can comprehend metaphor from as young as 7 years of age (Kogan, 1975) as well as proverbs (Honeck et al., 1978), while children show developing trends in understanding and explaining figurative language as they grow (Aguert et al., 2018; Deckert et al., 2019; Hessel & Murphy, 2019; Honeck & Hoffman, 2018; Nippold & Taylor, 2002; Pollio et al., 1979, in Crutchley, 2007). This development is influenced by a child’s level of verbal intelligence, maturity, the level of difficulty of the play on language (Deckert et al., 2019; Demorest et al., 1983), the frequency of occurrence (Hessel & Murphy, 2019) and the informational context surrounding the figurative language use (Cain et al., 2005; Levorato & Cacciari, 1992). Poor knowledge of figurative meanings may impact comprehension and thus facility

with figurative language is an essential feature of language knowledge (Qualls & Harris, 1999).

Morphology

Additionally, children learn how root words are changed in internal structure through the use of affixes and compounding and how these changes generate new meaning (Hoff & Shatz, 2009). During the preschool years young children use morphological markers, e.g. past tense *ed*: *I rubbed the cat*; but it is thought that at this stage such use occurs as a result of memorisation of the whole word (Owens, 2012). Inflectional morphology (affixes such as plural *s*, most *est*, negative *un*, manner *ly*) is generally well developed by the age of 6 or 7 years (Kuo & Anderson, 2006; Levin et al., 2001). Morphological development during the school years is most pronounced in relation to derivational morphology (where prefixes and suffixes added to the root form of a word generate derived forms of the word in which the class of the root word is changed, e.g. verb *move* to noun *movement*) (Green et al., 2003). Derivational morphology development begins later and takes longer than inflectional morphology (Kuo & Anderson, 2006). By third or fourth grade children begin to become more explicitly aware of the structure and meaning of derived word forms (ibid.). This knowledge continues to grow and is linked to exposure to the written word during the school years, in particular above grade 3 level, where content area textbooks are replete with morphologically-complex vocabulary e.g. *estimation*, *probability*, *filtration*, *organism*, *magnetic*, *unsaturated*, *interdependence* (Nippold, 2016, p. 68).

Developmental Trajectory: Syntax

Despite the remarkable syntactic competence of preschool children, research has repeatedly established that syntactic complexity in children's language continues to increase throughout the school years (e.g. Frizelle et al., 2018; Hoff & Shatz, 2009; Honig, 2007; Loban, 1976; Menyuk, 1995; Nippold, 2009; Westerveld & Vidler, 2016). However, variation in syntactic development associated with socioeconomic status (SES) is evident (Leech et al., 2016). Children from higher SES groups have been found to use a wider range of complex utterances earlier than children from lower SES groups who persisted in using a narrower range of complex utterances for longer (Vasilyeva et al., 2008). While all children can and do use a wide range of complex linguistic structures, some children may use them less frequently. Unlike the speed of acquisition of syntactic competence in the early years, however, developments in syntactic complexity through the school years are more protracted and may emerge in spurts at particular times (Reed et al., 1998). Increasing syntactic complexity is manifested in a number of ways, among which is **sentence length**. Using Mean Length of Utterance in words (MLUw) for older children, a pattern of steady increase in MLUw has been observed (Frizelle et al., 2018). Increasing syntactic complexity is also evident in the production of sentences with more clauses (a group of words with both a subject and a verb) realised through increasing **clausal density and complexity** (Gutierrez-Clellen & Hofstetter, 1994). This type of syntactic complexity is expressed through both coordination (e.g. using connectors such as *and*, *but* etc.) and subordination (e.g. when a subordinate clause, which augments the meaning of the main clause and cannot stand alone, is embedded in a main clause). Subordinate clauses are often introduced by a

connector (e.g. *that, when, because*) or a relative pronoun (e.g. *who, which*).³ Other forms of growth in syntactic complexity involve increasing **informational density**, facility with the use of a wider range of **conjunctions** along with increased frequency of use of these forms, awareness and use of the **passive** (Leech et al., 2017) and better overall **cohesion** of expression in the language of children as they grow through the school years (Hoff & Shatz, 2009, p. 281). Coupled with facility in producing increasingly-complex utterances is an **increased efficiency** in accessing these structures (Nippold, 2009) thus enhancing the “communicative functionality of language, the ability to talk about temporal relationships, motivations, and causes, and the possibility of foregrounding specific information” (Frizelle et al., 2018, p. 1192).

Developmental Trajectory: Pragmatics

Pragmatic knowledge—ability to use language appropriately in a communicative context (Menyuk, 1995))—has been described as the “area of most dramatic growth during the school-age . . . years” (Owens, 2012, p. 319). Key areas of development during these years are facility with conversation, narrative, and expository language use. The developmental trajectory is characterised in part by the level of support needed when engaging in each genre so that the preschool child is “heavily scaffolded” (Hoff & Shatz, 2009, p. 357) during caregiver-child interactions, and leading ultimately to enhanced facility with independent monologic production of narrative and expository text, both orally and in written form.

As children grow, their topics of **conversation** change. They develop increased awareness of the conversational partner leading to an enhanced ability to take the

³ See Appendix A for examples of subordinating, coordinating, and correlative conjunctions.

listener's needs into consideration and to interpret underlying meanings more effectively (Menyuk, 1995). They ask more questions of clarification during conversation and adjust the content and style to suit the context and relationship with others during conversation (Brinton & Fujiki, 1984, in Nippold, 2007). Social, cognitive and linguistic growth support conversational development by enabling the child to engage in longer conversations and remain on topic, making more relevant contributions (Nippold, 2007).

A more challenging discourse genre than conversation, **narrative** ability begins when children are very young and progresses in terms of organisation and quality of language used as children grow (Manhardt & Rescorla, 2002; Pinto et al., 2016), continuing to develop into early adulthood (Makinen et al., 2014). Narratives become longer, use a wider range of vocabulary and more complex syntax, such as more relative clauses (Dassinger & Toupin, 1994; Makinen et al., 2014). Narratives are increasingly effectively structured (Pinto et al., 2015) around familiar conventions to include the main macrostructure components of narrative such as introduction, setting, characters, episodic events, problem, and resolution (Genereux & McKeough, 2007). Cohesion (linking ideas within and across sentences using e.g. conjunctions) is realised by using a wider range of connectives to include additive (*and/also/then*), temporal (*when/before/until*), and causal connections (*because/although/since*) as children grow (Lahey, 1988). Additionally, their ability to maintain clear references through e.g. clear and correct use of pronouns throughout a story, improves, replacing much of the ambiguity of early childhood narratives (Makinen et al., 2014). Better quality of overall narrative coherence, connecting events and episodes to one another has been found to be linked with age (Liles, 1987, in Nippold, 2007). It is important to be aware that variation in communication styles across cultures may influence the development of

narrative style among children whose first language is not English (Jokinen & Wilcock, 2006).

Areas in which Gradual Improvements Occur in Conversation and Narration as School-Age Children and Adolescents Mature

	CONVERSATION	NARRATION
1	Stays on topic longer	Produces longer stories with more details and better organization
2	Has extended dialogues with others	Produces stories with greater number of episodes
3	Spends more time conversing with peers	Produces a greater number of complete episodes
4	Makes greater number of relevant and factually based comments	Embeds smaller episodes within larger episodes
5	Shifts gracefully from one topic to another	Achieves greater cohesion across episodes
6	Adjusts the content and style of speech to the thoughts and feelings of the listener	Says more about the characters' emotions, thoughts and plans
7	Offers more support to the conversational partner	Makes more effort to entertain and engage the listener

(Source: Nippold, M. 2016, *Later Language Development: School-Age Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults*, p. 214)

Expository language use refers to using language to inform. Examples of expository language use include explaining an outcome or the rules of a game, summarising, describing, giving directions or instructions (Nippold, 2016). This category of language use is also realised when using language to persuade, negotiate, argue or justify (Hoff & Shatz, 2009). This discourse genre is used frequently and variously in everyday life. However, it is a genre which requires the ability to “control discourse assertively” as well as to show “willingness to compromise” involving a complex interaction of linguistic, social and cognitive abilities, and therefore follows a long developmental trajectory (Berman, in Hoff & Shatz, 2009, p. 358).

Young children demonstrate the ability to distinguish between narrative and expository discourse, and children as young as 9 years of age have been found to be able to use differentiating linguistic markers when producing expository texts, such as the timeless present, impersonal pronouns, abstract noun phrases and the passive voice (Berman & Nir-Sagiv, 2009, p. 82). However, the development of expository discourse structure is mastered later than that of narrative, improving in terms of clarity, specificity and density of information, based on exposure, maturity and broader knowledge base (Nippold, 2016). The complexity of the expository genre requiring an integration of top-down generalisations supported by bottom-up sub-categories and specific instances, allied with reduced exposure to this type of genre are presented as explanation for this longer and later developmental trajectory (Berman & Nir-Sagiv, 2009; Berman, in Hoff & Shatz, 2009).

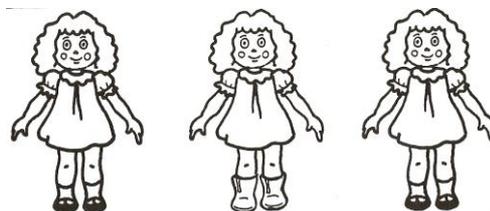
Language Challenges of School

Much of the language growth during the school years develops as a consequence of maturation, influenced by cognitive and social development along with external experiences (Hoff & Shatz, 2009, p. 345). Equally important in this developmental process, however, is the experience of school (Hoff & Shatz, 2009; Menyuk, 1995). Attendance at and participation in the formal context of the institution of school both expects and requires facility with language. Moreover, “success in school calls for using language in new ways to accomplish increasingly challenging discursive tasks across grade levels and school subjects” (Schleppegrell, 2012, p. 409). Children are taught through language, learn through language, demonstrate knowledge and understanding through language, and are evaluated through language in school. Communicating, thinking and learning about disciplinary content in school requires specialised language use (Nagy & Townsend, 2012).⁴ A key challenge for this specialised language use in school is competence in academic language.

The concept of academic language derives from decades of research on the particular requirements of the language of school. Unlike casual conversation “academic language contains decontextualized talk, which *relies on language rather than gesture or context to develop meaning* [emphasis added]” (Barnes et al., 2016, p. 40). In oral language, this language style is required in formal contexts, such as for example, making an oral presentation, giving a description, explaining, expressing an opinion, or justifying a stance.

⁴ See Timothy Shanahan: *Disciplinary Literacy in the Primary School* for a full review on disciplinary literacy.

When asked to indicate which of the dolls is the odd one out, below are some descriptive responses from children in senior infants:



Child A: *all the dolls with the shoes . . . two that . . . with the shoes . . . the girl with the shoes on and one is not different*

Child B: *the one with the black shoes . . . the . . . the one with . . . the two of em with black shoes cos she has wellies on and they have shoes on*

Child C: *the middle one because she has boots instead of shoes* (Cregan, 2007).

Only the response of Child C uses decontextualised language in the form of explicit vocabulary embedded in a complex sentence structure, which facilitates interpretation without the support of the context of the image.

A number of key linguistic **features of academic language** which consistently emerge from the literature include the use of the following:

Complex vocabulary, in particular:

- morphologically complex words—*predisposition*
- words of Latin/Greek rather than Germanic origin—*eat/dine, be/exist, right/correct, tooth/dental, hand/manual*
- abstract vocabulary—*length, subtraction, accommodate, analogy*
- domain-specific terminology—*metamorphosis, rhombus*

- multiple-meaning words—e.g. please turn on the *light*/she is really *light* on her feet/the box is very *light*/the mood was extremely *light*/let's *light* the fire/that shirt is *light* blue/she has a *light* touch
- a commonly-accepted classification system for vocabulary is the tier system as conceptualized by Beck et al. (2013): Tier 1, basic words frequently occurring in oral interactions (*warm, tired, run, swim, dog*); Tier 2, highly-useful words more frequently encountered in written text and important for developing a rich repertoire of vocabulary (*circumstance, contradict, precede*); Tier 3 words, low-frequency words, often occurring in specific topics or domains (*pantheon, epidermis*) (Beck et al., 2013). See the Academic Word List, Coxhead, 1998, as a comprehensive resource of word families occurring across a wide range of academic disciplines.

Complex syntax “allowing for concisely expressing technical, abstract, and/or nuanced disciplinary ideas” (Nagy & Townsend, 2012, p. 94) realised through e.g.

- embedded structures
- nominalisations (turning another part of speech into a noun, e.g. *destroy/destruction*)
- long noun phrases.

High levels of **informational density** (where a lot of information is packed into a few words), e.g. *With her hand firmly clenching the knife, the petrified girl slowly began to carve the glowing pumpkin.*

Increased use of **figurative language**, e.g. *food for thought*.

Coherent organisation of text structure in a range of genres, with, for example:

- appropriate use of repetition
- synonyms
- pronoun reference
- transitional words
- use of specific language functions, e.g. science: explanation, description, comparison, assessment; mathematics: definition, organisation, summarisation, analysis; history: temporal ordering, description, comparison and contrast, argument (DiCerbo et al., 2014).

An **impersonal stance** (Snow & Uccelli, 2009).

(Cummins, 2014; Luna, 2017; Townsend et al., 2012).

Such competence is summarised as “knowing and being able to use general and content-specific vocabulary, specialised or complex grammatical structures, and multifarious language functions and discourse structures—all for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge and skills, interacting about a topic, or imparting information to others” (Bailey, 2007, p. 10). Facility with the academic register in school is required in both oral and written language use (Fang et al., 2006; Haneda, 2014).

Fundamental to the development of competence in academic language is the importance of building *metalinguistic awareness* (Galloway et al., 2019; Gebhard et al., 2014; Leung, 2014). Two hallmarks of metalinguistic awareness are (1) the ability to pay attention simultaneously to the form and meaning of language, and (2) the ability to talk about language as distinct from using language to communicate (Zipke et al., 2009). A statement such as “the man’s nails were sharp” represents an example of one language form that may express two meanings. Metalinguistic ability requires the

language user to be able to (1) recognise that there are two possible meanings even though they are expressed in the same form, and (2) talk about this fact (Zipke et al., 2009, p. 301).

Metalinguistic awareness is positively correlated with cognitive development and impacts on the development of literacy skills (Benelli et al., 2006). Such is its perceived importance for schooling, it is increasingly included in curricula worldwide (Chen & Myhill, 2016). Because of the complex cognitive demands of metalinguistic awareness, it is less easily acquired than general language development (Cazden, 1974). However, young children naturally engage in the playful manipulation of sounds and words, and children as young as 3 or 4 can recognise two distinct meanings for one word in isolation although they tend to opt for the more common meaning of the word regardless of the fact that it may not fit the context (Zipke, 2011). Some research has highlighted an impressive focus on metalinguistic skills in interaction at home during the preschool years, e.g. politeness forms when interacting with adults—*say please and thank you* (Ely et al., 2001). These findings suggest that building a capacity to attend to language is one that can be usefully exploited in school. Indeed some research suggests that developing metalinguistic awareness and building academic language proficiency can be effectively accomplished in school when there is *explicit focus* on these aspects of language (Snow, 2014). Arising from research findings, the remainder of this paper will explore the pedagogical implications for successful language development in the primary school.

Pedagogy of Language

“It is largely through the teacher’s talk that the student’s talk is facilitated, mediated, probed and extended” (Alexander, 2018, p. 563)

The importance of the teacher in promoting oral language development in the classroom cannot be over-stated. Classrooms where children, both first language learners and those learning English as an additional language, successfully develop language skills are classrooms which have knowledgeable teachers who systematically, deliberately, and explicitly target the development of oral language skills (Graham et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2006). Successful acquisition and development of language requires an *encounter with language* (input), ample interaction giving the language learner *opportunity to use language* (output), and *scaffolded support and feedback* which serve to enhance the quality of language used by the language learner. These conditions are necessary for all learners, whether the learner is developing proficiency in a native language or an additional language. Thus, successful pedagogy in an instructional context is one which **deliberately and explicitly** facilitates language development through

- high-quality *input* (Beckman, 2008)
- establishing multiple opportunities for *output* (Ribot et al., 2018) through meaningful communicative interaction
- mediating that output through focussed *scaffolding* (van de Pol et al., 2010) and *feedback* (Clark, 2014) where learners are supported through tailored prompting, probing and extension to refine and extend their language knowledge.

Input

Keep the language learning focus clear.

As indicated at the outset, communicating through the complex developmental linguistic modes of speaking and listening requires knowledge of and facility with a wide array of important interdependent skills. All of the components of language are inter-related and interact simultaneously in the process of linguistic communication. Therefore, *all planned talk experiences should engage children so that each element of language (communicating, understanding, exploring and using) is continually in focus.*

While maturation and experience contribute substantially to the growth of language during the school years, the undeniable impact of the knowledgeable teacher on children's language growth, underscores the paramount importance of explicitly promoting oral language development at all levels of the primary school. Therefore, an *explicit focus on oral language development throughout the primary school* is critical. In addition to the teacher behaviour outlined above, this necessitates *sustained emphasis on the development of vocabulary*. Research findings suggest that vocabulary is most successfully developed when teachers

- **explicitly target** vocabulary development
- are **selective** about which words to teach, paying particular attention to tier 2 and tier 3 words

- foster a **positive disposition** to words in children, promoting word consciousness (metalinguistic awareness). This ensures that implicit, incidental vocabulary encounters also contribute to vocabulary development
- provide **multiple encounters** with target vocabulary
- promote both **breadth** (number of different words) and **depth** (morphology) of word knowledge
- teach children **how to extend their word knowledge** through morphemic analysis and awareness of multiple-meaning words
- **scaffold** children to know and understand vocabulary appropriately through the use of a variety of visual, aural, and tactile supports.

(Flynt & Brozo, 2008; Lane & Allen, 2010)

Model high-quality language.

The language skills of children are strongly influenced by their language experience both in terms of quantity (Hart & Risley, 1995) and quality (Hoff & Core, 2013; Naigles, 2013). The extent and quality of language experience impacts on first language children's knowledge of vocabulary (Hessel & Murphy, 2019; Hoff, 2003) as well as syntactic complexity (Huttenlocher et al., 2002). This also holds true for L2 language learners (Delcenserie et al., 2019). Teaching may be viewed as a performance where *the quality of language used by the teacher has the potential to embellish children's learning* (Healey, 2018). Of particular importance in terms of teacher talk is the quality and diversity of vocabulary used (Lane & Allen, 2010), along with the grammatical complexity of teacher utterances (Justice et al., 2018), and appropriate modelling of academic language style (Johnson, 2019). A core practice identified for

developing the language skills of EAL learners is to model comprehensible input (Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012; Pang, 2019). Differentiating for variation in children's language skills may require a teacher to modify the language model by restating key information, using a range of vocabulary, slowing down the pace of speaking, and taking shorter turns thus creating increased opportunity for child talk (Hollo & Wehby, 2017).

Increase children's encounter with high-quality literature.

Research has found benefits for language development when *oral input is combined with written input* (Graham et al., 2017). When children are exposed to high-quality literature—both narrative and expository—through read-alouds, shared reading, or independent reading, in a wide range of genres, they encounter a standard and style of language not readily available in typical interpersonal interaction, which benefits not only first language learners but also children who are learning English as an additional language (Collins, 2010). High-quality texts present children with sophisticated and complex language (Serafini & Moses, 2014), using an abundance of features of academic language style (Nagy & Townsend, 2012). For example, more complex words such as *ledge, murk, bothersome; and commotion, jostled, lumbered*, not frequently featured in day-to-day interaction, are to be found in stories such as *The Circus Ship* (Van Dusen, 2009) and *The Mitten* (Brett, 1989) (in Snell et al., 2015). Through literature, children come into contact with a complex literary language style (Bunting, 2000; Gamble & Yates, 2008), language play (Serafini & Moses, 2014), and the organisation of text structure (ibid.; Kersten-Parrish & Dallacqua, 2018). Children are motivated to engage with literature through interest and curiosity (Larragueta & Ceballos-Viro, 2018), and new language is introduced in context thus enhancing

children's intake of the language presented.

Increase children's encounter with poetry.

Poetry is a genre of literature that offers significant *opportunity to experience and explore language creatively* in the classroom (Cullinan et al., 1995). It is a genre that is both accessible and interesting for children, based on exposure in the early years to rhymes, chants, and jingles. Poetic language style is manifested in children's early playful inventiveness manipulating language in a make-believe context (Concannon-Gibney, 2018; Cumming, 2007), and in the fascinating ritual of word play among older children (Hall, 1989). An encounter with poetry in the classroom is an experience of how poets play with language through the deliberate and precise use of words, word patterns, and figurative language to create images—"in poetry, words are put out to work" (Causley, 1997, p. 16). The strong oral quality of poetry, its creative manipulation of sounds, generates a profound impact (Hadaway et al., 2001) —we should not "ignore the powerful effect of the sound of verse" (Causley, 1997, p. 16). See, for example, "The Rhythm of Life" (Michael Rosen) or "Sshhhhhh!" (Julia Donaldson).

***The Rhythm of Life* (Michael Rosen)**

Hand on the bridge

Feel the rhythm of the train.

Hand on the window

Feel the rhythm of the rain.

Hand on your throat

Feel the rhythm of your talk.

Hand on your leg

Feel the rhythm of your walk.

Hand in the sea

Feel the rhythm of the tide.

Hand on your heart

Feel the rhythm inside.

Hand on the rhythm

Feel the rhythm of the rhyme.

Hand on your life

Feel the rhythm of time

Hand on your life

Feel the rhythm of time

Hand on your life

Feel the rhythm of time.

***Sshhhhh!* (Julia Donaldson)**

Don't russh

Or the fox will be off

With a swishh

Of its brussh.

Hushhh!

Don't splassh

Or the shhimmering fissh

Will be gone in a flassh

Shussh!

Don't crassh

Or the sshhy thrussh

That sings in the bussh

Will vanisshhhhhh.

The song

Will

Finisshhhhhhhh.

The experience of poetry presents “concise and memorable . . . language, with intense feeling, imagery, and qualities of sound that bounce pleasingly off the tongue, tickle the ear, and leave the mind something to ponder” (Temple et al., 2002). It engages, mystifies, provokes children and fuels their instinctive creative capacity with language (Crystal, 1998). Hearing and speaking poetry not only delights, but develops articulation, pronunciation, fluency, stress patterns; particularly important for children who are learning English as an additional language (Hadaway et al., 2001). Nonsense poems, where poets manipulate sounds and words in novel ways, invent words or muddle phrases are not only great fun in their absurdity, contradicting what children know to be true (Chukovsky, 1966), but in the process such word play draws children’s attention to language, contributing to the development of metalinguistic awareness.

Output

Stimulate children to talk.

Children learn to talk by talking. *In diverse classrooms all children must feel that they have something worthwhile to say; that their talk is valued*, since research has found inequitable distribution of talk time in classrooms, generally favouring students from advantaged backgrounds (Clarke et al., 2016). This involves establishing an environment of trust and respect, both between the teacher and the children, and among

the children, empowering children so that no child fears rejection or ridicule when expressing a thought, feeling or idea, or asking a question (Galton, 2008; Ponzio & Matthusen, 2018). A teacher needs to *listen to* children, *hear* what they have to say, and *value* their contribution.

As well as establishing a safe environment for talk, children need to have something to talk about—“input is necessary to spark language production (output)” (Beckman, 2008, p. 474). While actively engaging in interesting and stimulating first-hand experiences is the most powerful motivator for child talk, in the context of the classroom it is prudent to complement these experiences, which of necessity are more difficult to construct, with a wide range of vicarious experiences. These experiences fulfil the dual role of establishing the content of children’s talk while simultaneously motivating children to talk. Literature acts as a source of vicarious experience (Serafini & Moses, 2014) which is a powerful motivator for children to talk. Other sources of vicarious experiences to stimulate talk include, for example, remembered experiences (e.g. a trip to the beach/zoo/cinema/doctor), play, drama, music, art, games, print media, TV, video, the internet. However, arguably the most valuable source of vicarious experience for developing language outside of the language lesson, is disciplinary learning in other content areas—history, geography, mathematics, SESE—all of which offer an abundance of content to form the basis of meaningful talk.

Give children opportunities to talk.

Despite the preponderance of verbal communication in the classroom, it is widely recognised that the majority of language used continues to be delivered by the teacher (Howe & Abedin, 2013). In order to facilitate children using language in the classroom, it is necessary to *plan intentionally for many opportunities for children to*

talk (interaction), deliberately and explicitly targeting the components of language as appropriate, and controlling the linguistic load to the level of the student (Beckman, 2008). Using the planned cross-curricular experiences to stimulate talk identified above, children are facilitated to articulate a response. The process of engaging in talk contributes to the development of language for both first language learners (ibid.) and EAL learners alike (Pang, 2019; Swain, 2005). For EAL learners in particular, using language for meaningful communicative purposes provides opportunities to test hypotheses, develop automaticity and improve accuracy (Vaish, 2013). It has also been found to be particularly important for students to notice language features, which leads to improved syntactic and morphological learning (Izumi, 2003; Nunan, 2005).

The “interactive setting” where the talk takes place (Alexander, 2018, p. 567) can take a variety of forms (e.g. whole-class, small group, pair), although greater opportunity to talk is best delivered in small group and pair settings (Haworth, 1999) which provide for more balanced turn-taking. For EAL learners it is important to interact frequently with competent first language speakers. The *talking tasks* assigned should involve children using talk for a variety of purposes such as to *narrate, explain, speculate, imagine, explore, analyse, evaluate, question justify, discuss, argue* (Alexander, 2018, p. 568), for example:

- **Whole-class, teacher-led interactive setting**—e.g. whole-class discussion based on an experience—summarise, relate, prioritise, critique, identify cause-and-effect, predict, describe, take perspective, evaluate, interpret; teacher-in-role, hotseat, line of opinion, conscience alley.
- **Small group, teacher/student led interactive setting**—e.g. group discussion, problem-solving tasks; production tasks—construct/create; improvisation, still

image, devise a script, prequel/sequel, compare and contrast, trick another group, narrate, recount, retell, report, persuade, give/follow instructions, outline/explain a procedure, prepare an illustration/brochure/debate/crossword.

- **Pair talking tasks**—e.g. barrier games, telephone talk, conduct an interview, find a partner who..., spot the difference, role-play, true or false, silly sentences, sequencing, classifying, what is happening in the picture, solve the riddle.

Scaffolding

As well as ensuring that children encounter high-quality language, and are facilitated to use language frequently in a range of interactive settings, it is necessary for a teacher to mediate the output in order to refine and extend the language used. This is facilitated through a scaffolding (guiding) process, “a dynamic intervention finely tuned to the learner’s progress” (van de Pol et al., 2010, p. 272). In the context of teacher/child interaction, two important characteristics of scaffolding are *contingency*—support which is adjusted to the child’s current level of language proficiency, and *fading*—the gradual withdrawal of the scaffolding, dictated by the level of the child’s competence in language, leading to the gradual release of responsibility (ibid., p. 275). This scaffolding is most successfully realised through the promotion of dialogic talk, with particular emphasis on teacher questioning and feedback patterns.

Promote dialogic talk patterns.

The traditional and dominant pattern of initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) of classroom interaction is one where a teacher asks a closed question, takes a response from a student and evaluates that response (van der Veen et al., 2015). This pattern of interaction reduces the child’s opportunity to talk, prioritises the “correct” answer, and

diminishes the possibility of extending the dialogue. Therefore, teachers are encouraged also to establish and use dialogic talk patterns which are “teacher led but student owned” (Resnick & Schantz, 2015, p. 344). This “productive classroom talk” has been found to promote oral communicative competence (van der Veen et al., 2017, p. 697). Dialogic talk patterns are characterised by teacher and children, or children and children, jointly constructing meaning through the give-and-take of sharing ideas freely, a pattern which has been found to be important in the development of children’s language (Justice et al., 2018). In such dialogic talk episodes:

Teachers ask divergent, open questions, listen attentively to children’s responses, respond to what children say with specific feedback, and scaffold children to reflect on their contributions and levels of understanding by seeking clarification and supporting children to connect ideas.

Children take many turns, give lengthy contributions, listen, and build on what has already been said.

(Reznitskya, 2012, p. 447, p. 448).

Studies of dialogue during collaborative group work have found that children’s language use is richer than the language used in the traditional IRE model (Howe & Abedin, 2013). Child talk in the context of collaborative group work, referred to as accountable talk (Michaels et al., 2008), requires children to:

- listen actively
- speak directly to others
- articulate clearly
- respond to others’ statements

- take turns
- respect the ideas of others
- contribute meaningfully to the discussion
- ask for information/clarification
- ask questions
- agree/disagree politely
- offer support and encouragement
- check if others understand
- try to ensure participation by all.

(*A Guide to Effective Literacy Instruction*, 2008, Volume 4, p. 81)

Use questioning to extend language.

A core mediating practice in promoting dialogic interaction is the use of questioning—“questioning patterns of teachers are the key to creating an interactive classroom” (Vaish, 2013, p. 538). As well as asking closed questions, which have one correct answer, generally require very few words and focus on eliciting children’s content knowledge and understanding, plan to *ask speculative, open-ended questions which encourage children to produce longer, more authoritative, elaborate, analytical and reflective responses* (Boyd & Markarian, 2011; Wasik & Hindman, 2013) and drive the interaction forward (de Oliveira, 2016).

Open-ended questions typically have more than one possible answer and require multi-word responses. These questions can take a variety of forms, e.g. *Why? How? What would you do if? Tell me about. Give me an example. How do we know? Describe what is happening. Can you explain? Would you agree?* These question types not only

require longer answers using elaborated noun phrases and complex syntax, but also involve more complex ideas where children are encouraged to make connections, compare and contrast, and express and justify opinions. For maximum impact on children's language development it is recommended that teachers plan questions specifically to elicit target vocabulary and ensure that children incorporate that vocabulary into their responses, using complete sentences (Wasik & Hindman, 2013). Open-ended questioning not only facilitates the development of language but critically also contributes to the development of features of academic language style. This questioning style enables children to elaborate rather than shut down their contribution, thus adding significantly to stimulating talk, increasing opportunity to talk, and developing effective communication skills.

Give constructive feedback.

What a teacher does following a question is as important for a child's language development as the question asked. When a child speaks it is important to respond. To that end it is necessary to listen carefully and hear what the child is saying so that in "in-the-moment" responses, teacher *feedback is adapted* to build a child's capacity to use the best language a child is capable of producing at that time (de Oliveira et al., 2017, p. 127; Sharpe, 2008). Such feedback may take the form of

- an **elaboration**—Child: *He knocked over the thing*; Teacher: *Yes indeed, he kicked the can of paint by accident and knocked it over*
- **corrective guidance** on either the meaning or the form of language used—Child: *The doggy have the black thing*; Teacher: *You are right, the dog has a black paw*
- an **extended comment or explanation** (Wasik & Hindman, 2018)—Child: *The*

doggy have the black thing; Teacher: You are right, the dog has black paint on his paws because he walked in the paint on the ground

- a **contingent question** (Boyd & Galda, 2011); a question which follows a child's contribution and encourages the child to expand on and extend that contribution—Child: *There's a dog and there's paint*; Teacher: *Where is the dog and why do you think there is a can of paint in the picture?*

While feedback of this nature is necessary for all language learners, it is particularly important for EAL learners who use feedback to modify their language use (Vaish, 2013). Similarly, for children who do not experience such scaffolded feedback at home sufficiently frequently, it is critically important that it is encountered in school (Wasik & Hindman, 2018). This requires the teacher carefully attending to the child, giving adequate wait time for the child to express the idea, and tailoring and adjusting the feedback to scaffold the child's contribution (Reznitskaya, 2012). For all children, both EAL learners and children learning English as a first language, supportive teacher talk strategies include “talk moves” (Ferris, 2013) such as:

- **recasting** (reformulating a child's utterance using more appropriate words—Child: *The robber went into the car and closed the door*; Teacher: *That's right, the robber jumped hurriedly into the getaway vehicle and slammed the door*)
- **revoicing** (repeating what a child has said, checking to verify correct interpretation—Teacher: *Am I correct in thinking that what you mean is . . .*)
- **restating** (asking the child to repeat what has been said)
- **reasoning** (probing opinion—do you agree or disagree/why)
- **adding on** (encouraging the child to add more—would you like to add anything)
- **wait time** (reducing the pressure to respond—three seconds has been found to

be the optimum wait time).

(from Chapin, O'Connor, & Anderson, 2003, in Ferris 2013; Sharpe, 2008; Wasik & Hindman, 2018).

Explicitly scaffold the development of academic language.

Since research has established that academic language is “an additional register in children’s developing linguistic repertoire” (diCerbo et al., 2014, p. 449) and is fundamental to academic success, a core focus of language development in the primary school must be to *develop facility with academic language style*. While this is important for all children, it is of particular significance for children – including those from low-SES backgrounds and those whose first language is different from that of the language of instruction of the school – who encounter reduced exposure to this language style (Cummins, 2014). Key recommendations for pedagogy in relation to the development of facility with this language register are grounded in *affirming the identity of the child*. In that context it is suggested to:

- Maximise encounters with language, integrating all language modalities—listening, speaking, reading, writing.
- Explicitly teach academic language—promoting vocabulary development as outlined above, including a focus on the development of complex syntax, within a meaningful communicative context, developing metalinguistic awareness by focusing children’s attention on language through, for example, language plays, nonsense poetry, riddles, jokes and puns.

- Provide multiple opportunities for interaction, scaffolding and giving feedback as appropriate.

(Cummins, 2014; DiCerbo et al., 2014; Galloway et al., 2015; Snow & Uccelli, 2009)

Conclusion

“The goal of language instruction is not to develop language skill in and of itself, but to help children claim their humanity through the use of language” (Martin, 1967, p. 38)

Promoting the development of oral language in the primary school will not only result in improved communication and better academic outcomes, but will contribute fundamentally to the essence of the child. The child who is a competent language user is one who has enhanced self-esteem, assured self-confidence, uses initiative, and has the potential to lead. Competence in language underpins the development of appropriate social skills in the form of respect, tolerance, and empathy. Proficiency in the use of complex language generates a reflective and creative faculty. To foster oral language skills among all our children is not merely an option, it is an imperative.

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Appendix A

Subordinating

Example

Conjunctions

<i>after</i>	Thad bought ice cream after he left the dance
<i>although</i>	Although the exam was difficult, we passed
<i>as</i>	As the music began, the couple walked outside
<i>as if</i>	The child looked around as if she was lost
<i>because</i>	I bought an umbrella because my old one broke
<i>before</i>	We stayed in Verona before we went to Venice
<i>even if</i>	She'll be happy even if she doesn't win
<i>if</i>	We'll buy a road map if we rent a car
<i>since</i>	They're going home since it's already midnight
<i>unless</i>	We'll share our lunch unless you don't like tacos
<i>until</i>	The band practiced their song until the bell rang
<i>when</i>	When the cat came in she jumped on the sofa
<i>whenever</i>	They go out to breakfast whenever Grandma visits
<i>wherever</i>	We'll buy postcards wherever we go
<i>whereas</i>	A beaver is large, whereas a marmot is small
<i>while</i>	I listened to music while I wrote a letter
<i>Coordinating</i>	Example
<i>Conjunctions</i>	
<i>and</i>	Henry likes chess and David likes checkers
<i>but</i>	Tony wanted a hamburger but he got a hotdog
<i>nor</i>	It did not rain today, nor is any expected tomorrow
<i>or</i>	The couple will cook dinner or go out
<i>so</i>	Jane won two tickets, so she invited Alice

yet

Kim finished the exam quickly, yet she made few errors

Correlative

Example

Conjunctions

both . . . and

Jennifer would like both pie and cake for dessert

either . . . or

I'll take either chocolate or vanilla ice cream

neither . . . nor

Neither Dan nor Jim will plant squash this year

not only . . . but also

Mary wants not only corn but also tomatoes