Exploring How Visible Thinking Supports Oral Language Development

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Morwell East

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Context

In 2009 St Vincent de Paul Primary was chosen to be a research school for OLSEL. The Oral Language Supporting Early Literacy research initiative was implemented by the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, within eight schools in low SES school communities across Victoria.

It is from our participation in this project that we were able to identify the need to further develop the skills of teachers to improve the growth of oral language in the middle years.
Cameron Greenslade and Helen Watson were selected to take part in this project and together they created an action plan to guide us through the year. Meagan Blewett took on the role of Key Leader for the group. When creating the Action Plan (see following slide) they took into consideration the learning abilities and learning behaviours of the children involved and came up with the inquiry question:

*How does visible thinking support read-along's in the classroom?*
How does Visible Thinking support Read-Alouds in the classroom?

**GOAL**
Find a measureable response to our focus action learning project

**EVIDENCE**
- BAS
- Video Observations
- Naplan 2013 / 2015

**POSSIBLE ACTIONS**
- Hugh McCluskey PD on oral language and class demonstrations
- Reading from OLSEL and GLIS
- Learning walks
- Ellen / CEO
- PD for the rest of the school run by Action Plan Group

**What will it sound like?**
- Complex Questions
- Discussing / Interacting
- Enthusiastic
- Productive
- Balance between teacher directed and student directed conversations

**What will it look like?**
- Visible Thinking
- Prior Knowledge
- Work about book
- Comprehension that is literal or inferring
- Children to be engaged
- Children contributing to class discussions

**What change could I expect in my teaching?**
- More focused
- Enthusiasm
- Increased knowledge in OLSEL
- Step up to challenges and out of comfort zones.
- Increase in team collaboration

**What change could I expect in the students?**
- More focused
- Engaged
- Improvement in the correlation of written and oral language
- Improved reading comprehension results
- Improved learning behaviours
- Improved reflective learning

**What areas of learning will improve from Read-Alouds?**
See attached AusVELS scope and sequence
The Action Plan represents the development of the thinking process involved. This plan was developed over time. It gave the group a direction and helped support the thinking about assessment and resourcing.

The key focus areas are:

- What changes could I expect to see in my teaching
- What will it sound like?
- What will it look like?
- What change could I expect from the student’s learning?
Exploring How Visible Thinking Supports Oral Language Development

The teachers set out to explore how they could ensure that their students were more focused and engaged in their literacy learning. They considered the correlation between written and oral language and effective learning behaviours, with an emphasis on comprehension, prior knowledge, building vocabulary and strategic questioning.

The focus of the powerpoint presentation is to show the development of a new approach to use the Read Aloud strategy in the 2/3/4 classrooms to develop oral language as a result of this action learning.
**Assessment results** – The beginning of the year assessment using Benchmark Assessment System (Fountas and Pinnell) identified comprehension as an area to improve. The teachers identified oral language as being the key learning area for improvement required to impact reading comprehension.

**Action Research**

The teachers looked within the school to utilise the **skills and resources already available**. Helen and Cameron observed junior teachers unpacking big books over a number of sessions and discussed ways to implement the strategies into their own grades and modified these to suit older children.
Actions

Additional Professional learning

Hugh McCusker, Speech Pathologist & Education Consultant took part in a school Professional Learning Team meeting to reiterate the importance of strong oral language skills and developed the teacher’s understanding of how much can be done to support students with big books / read-alongs including:

- building vocabulary
- unpacking phrases
- developing comprehension
- unpacking illustrations to discuss feelings of characters and predictions, and
- developing strategic questioning
Learning Journals

The teachers introduced **video recording of read-along sessions** in both grades. The LSO’s recorded the sessions and the teachers replayed the video to the children to prompt reflection. The teachers introduced ways for students to self-reflect using anchor charts, rubrics, work samples analysis. Teachers helped students re-evaluate and set goals for improved learning behaviours. Teachers helped students understand that self-reflection and goal setting needs to be a rich experience and flexible to suit individual learning styles.

Learning Journals provided ongoing self reflection on and for their own learning growth. Students grew in their ability to critique their own work and helped them set further goals for learning. They became aware, through watching themselves, that their behaviour impacted positively or adversely on the learning of the class. This led to better learning behaviours and enhanced learning within the class.
Cameron’s Story

- Provided unique ways for students to engage in the development of oral language
- Used reflection journals as a tool for self reflection and goal setting
- Students developed positive learning behaviours by watching footage of themselves learn and reflecting on these behaviours
- Created critical thinkers with the ability to use higher order levels of questioning
- Made the learning ‘real’ for students by linking the learning to students prior knowledge and experiences
- Engaged the senses in an effective way to create experiences (prior to reading the text) which students could use to engage with text
- Used visual prompts to support thinking as an effective way to stimulate discussions which led to the development of oral language
- Sought knowledge from colleagues about existing programs in the school which could assist in achieving the overall National Partnerships goals
Provided unique ways for students to engage in the development of oral language

Digitising texts

Recording audio and video using a green screen

The use of a microphone in class to share answers/work

Multimodal texts (audio, visual images, video, interactive stories, etc.)
Used reflection journals as a tool for self-reflection and goal setting.
Developed positive learning behaviours by watching footage of themselves learn and reflecting on these behaviours.

Reflection example
Created critical thinkers and higher order levels of questioning

My goal
I want to ask more complex questions, I have achieved my goal but there are more to improve in this book
Used visual prompts to support thinking as an effective way to stimulate discussions which led to the development of oral language.
Helen’s Story

In this course I have learnt to adapt my teaching even more to the children’s needs and let this be my guide for where I direct my teaching.

I have always known, but this course highlighted the fact, that the subject matter needs to engage the children’s interest. I determined that to make a difference to the children’s oral language learning the following criteria needed to be followed:

• the quality of the material used
• the use of open-ended questioning
• the way I facilitated the discussion
• the freedom to spend quality time to follow the children’s interest.
Evidence
The evidence that this approach was working included:
• the children’s response to the material presented
• the way in which the children’s interest was gained
• how the children related to the material presented in the form of big books
• in the use of the smart board as a reading tool
• tapping into their prior knowledge of any topic we discussed
• exploring their experiences
• eliciting the vocab expansion.
Further evidence of student learning included:
• formatting of short page/ paragraph/ illustration to promote the discussion
• practice subject specific vocabulary
• children recognise and use vocabulary studied
• Using content vocabulary in their ongoing conversations and oral language development activities.

The space themed topic was an example of this. The topic really fired their imaginations.
• Drawing a moon environment showed up the children’s higher order thinking during a guided reading group.
• The use of correct terminology in discussion, topic related language used outside of formal learning lessons.
• The most engaging part for the children was watching themselves on the video feedback after a taped session
Strategies
Touch stories using the interactive whiteboard provided language
development and a desire to share with others and provided an avenue for
the children to observe their own behaviours.

Students were asked to provide an evaluation of their individual contributions
to the discussion topics through the use of learning journals and a range of
different reflective learning tools.

Many modifications were made to the teaching and learning journey:
• the length of time we spent on a page/ paragraph/ illustration was often
  modified to suit the children’s level of engagement
• the questioning techniques used
• placement of the children within the room.
Further development
Having a clear reflective focus for the learning allowed my teaching to be guided by the children’s interest and background, continually challenging their thinking. This included continuing to have the children evaluate their learning contributions.

Whole school goals for the future
• To expand this approach to the next grade levels and use as a guideline for further student learning
• To immerse the children in language/terminology they would otherwise not necessarily encounter
• To think about how vital the spoken language is in the total area of language development.
Next steps for 2014

The teachers discovered during their journey that there needed to be a greater emphasis on developing and capitalizing on prior knowledge. In our school community there are a large number of students who do not have exposure to life experiences that relate to learning in school. The teachers are now developing ways to enrich the prior knowledge experiences of the students through exposure to:

- A range of media and texts
- Multi-modal texts including digital learning environments
- Vocabulary building conversations
- Developing ways for students to use all of their senses
- Using a green screen and Claymation to retell stories, recreate new endings and alternate sequences to stories.

Evaluation
All assessment including BAS will be analysed in an ongoing way to determine future plans. The school will continue to embed the oral language focus in the middle years and across all grades. The plan will also address the correlation of oral language to writing. The school will also track this year’s grade 3’s and monitor their growth using Naplan in 2015.
What were the benefits of all of this work?
**Student Reflections**

What makes a good learner?
- Always listening
- Asking questions and trying to get lots of information
- Doing your work and what you are told
- Sitting where no one will talk to me so I can listen
- Take lots of information and make it as small as possible to write down (summarise)

Reflection Journals have helped by:
- Look back at the goals
- Helps me think about what I can and can’t do
- I can see what I am achieving