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AUTHOR Cahir, Stephen R.; Kovac, Ceil
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ABSTRACT

This series, designed for use in inservice teacher workshops, addresses the question, "How do children and teachers use language to get things done?" The transcribed classroom discourse presented and discussed in each volume illustrates functional language in a real context based on the videotaping of undoctored classroom events from kindergarten and grades 1 to 3. Each manual contains workshop exercises to be used with the videotape, describes the theoretical framework from which the work stems, and includes verbal transcripts of the language used in the tapes. The present volume provides a visible demonstration of the many functions of teacher talk (teaching, answering, evaluating, managing, and reprimanding). The videotape depicts reading, math, and science lessons. (Author/JB)

TEACHER TALK WORKS

Participant's Manual

Stephen R. Cahir
Ceil Kovac

EXPLORING FUNCTIONAL LANGUAGE
Stephen R. Cahir, Series Coordinator

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S.R.C.
C.K.

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FOREWORD

Exploring Functional Language is a unique set of materials that addresses what is probably the most important question one could ask about language use in the schools. "How do children and teachers use language to get things done?" However obvious such a question may seem, it is unfortunately true that we seldom ask it Instead, the schools usually try to determine such questions as "How correct is the usage of the children?" or "How mature is the children's language development in terms of pronunciation or grammar?" These are not unimportant questions, but they focus only on the *forms* of language rather than on its *functions* That is, the questions address the social judgments we can make about language (is it correct or not) rather than the cognitive functions (what does the language get done)

These protocol tapes and manuals effectively illustrate functional language in its real, classroom context with videotapes of the undoctored, actual classroom events. The manuals contain workshop exercises to be used with the videotape, describe (in clear language) the theoretical framework from which the work stems, and include verbal transcripts of the language used in the tapes All videotape samples (15 to 20 minutes in length) were taken from a large research project conducted at the Center for Applied Linguistics (Peg Griffin and Roger Shuy, *Children's Functional Language and Education in the Early Years*, 1978). Separate manuals accompany each videotape

A Way with Words describes the principle of functional language in some detail, calling into question conventional school language assessment which deals only with language forms (sounds, vocabulary and grammar) while often ignoring meaning relationships (semantics) and language use (pragmatics).

What's What with Questions explores the use of question asking strategies in the classroom. It points out that questions do a great deal more work than merely getting information Children have a variety of ways to use questions and this protocol suggests ways that educators can make use of them for in-service or pre-service training *It's Your Turn* provides information about the verbal and non verbal aspects of classroom turns at talking, when it succeeds as well as when it breaks down *Transitions, Activity between Activities* focuses on what has been conventionally considered "down time" by educators. The videotape and manual describe how transitions can function as an actual learning event, socially and cognitively A similar focus is presented in *When Is Reading?*, which illustrates visually that learning how to read extends far beyond "official" reading time in classrooms Although much of the focus of these videotapes and manuals is on children's functional language use, teacher talk is also noted, especially in *Teacher Talk Works*, a visible demonstration of talk that teaches, answers, evaluates, manages, and reprimands.

There is no way that a brief overview of this sort can capture the richness of the actual videotaped events in this series That is precisely the reason, in fact, that the authors decided to present this important information in protocol form These are *not* books about children's functional language. They *are* children's functional language, captured in natural, real life settings, selected from hundreds of hours of research samples and presented in a way which is convincing, clear and dynamic

Roger Shuy

INTRODUCTION

☆ **What makes teacher talk special?**

☆ **What are some of the characteristics of classroom language?**

☆ **What does teacher talk do?**

☆ **How does the material in this booklet relate to my teaching?**

The preceding are some of the questions that will be dealt with in these materials. This participant's manual is part of a packet of materials that includes an accompanying instructor's manual and a videotape entitled *Teacher Talk Works*. These materials result from a research project that examined children's language and social behavior in school. The videotape presents excerpts from actual classroom events that clearly illustrate some of the interesting and intricate workings of the school day. Both manuals offer discussions of the tape's major points and provide additional background information for those who may wish to pursue a particular topic further. Also, each manual suggests exercises and activities that will sharpen and personalize your understanding of the topics covered. We hope that you will find these materials relevant and useful to your own teaching experience.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THESE MATERIALS

The discussion and exercise sections of this manual are designed to be flexible and interchangeable, to accommodate individual learning styles, time schedules, and your own goals.

If you are a participant using this manual in pre-service or in-service training, your instructor will plan a workshop based on these materials. **If you are working on your own,** you may find either of the following approaches helpful or you may wish to devise one of your own.

The transcript reflects the contents of the videotape. Satisfactory work can be done with this manual when the videotape is not available.

OPTION A

(1) Read through the transcript. We suggest this as the first step for any approach, since it is often difficult to read while listening to and watching the tape at the same time.

(2) Look at the tape, if available.

(3) Read the discussion section.

(4) Read the "Theoretical Addendum" section (optional).

(5) Do at least the following exercises:

I. Section A #1,5,6
Section B #1,4,6
Section C #1,5

II. General Exercises #1,4,5

(6) Do as many of the remaining exercises as possible, rereading the discussion section as appropriate or necessary.

OPTION B

(1) Read through the transcript.

(2) Look at tape, if available.

(3) Do the following exercises:

I. Section A #1,5,6
Section B #1,4,6
Section C #1,5

II. General Exercises #1,4,5

(4) Read the discussion section.

(5) Read the "Theoretical Addendum" section (optional).

(6) Do as many of the remaining exercises as possible, rereading the discussion section as appropriate or necessary.

DISCUSSION

This discussion section is intended mainly as a point of reference for persons participating in workshops or classes based on these materials, however, issues raised here also can serve as departure points for further discussion or as a basis for assignments

THE MAIN IDEAS

The title of these materials is *Teacher Talk Works*. Our general purpose is to present some of the classroom jobs that teachers regularly face and some of the language strategies that they have developed to get these jobs done.

Talk That Teaches: Discussions and Questions

It is hard to overstate the role that classroom language plays in the teaching and learning of academic subjects. While many models have been devised to capture the process of teaching and learning, the one that we find most convincing sees this process as a cooperative conversational partnership. Both teacher and students participate in the day's lessons. Teachers have a body of information which they must pass on to their students by means of language. Students not only have to learn this body of information through language, but they also must be able to communicate their successful mastery of the academic material. An educational goal, then, is to get what is taught and what is learned to be one and the same. We would like to discuss some ways teachers have devised to accomplish this.

One of the traditional teaching methods that is still very popular, particularly in higher education, is the *lecture*. Teachers prepare formal presentations of the topics to be covered, students attend these lectures, take notes, and occasionally ask questions. Depending on the size of the group and the amount of material, the teacher may then ask questions of individual students. *Written examinations* are given to measure student achievement, grades are assigned, and students subsequently pass on to other courses, all the time building their own curriculum.

More typical, however, of the lower grades are the types of teaching and learning illustrated on this videotape. Here the teacher deals with smaller numbers of students and in a more individualized manner. Teachers and students *discuss* the lesson topics with teachers *verbally quizzing* the class to determine what and who needs more attention, practice, or drill. Identifying these areas for further discussion is done largely through a question-answer sequence which is itself a basic teaching strategy It is worthwhile to look closely at how teachers use questions in lessons and how this usage differs from questions that appear in conversation for other purposes.

Questions are a part of any conversation and are asked for any number of reasons, in a variety of different forms You may want permission and ask a yes/no question *May I go home early?* A

wh—question (who, what, when, where, why, and how) may serve as a request for information: *What time is it?* or as a request for clarification, repetition, elaboration, and the like. The point is that everyone knows about questions and asks them all the time.

Many occupations—law, medicine, and education, to name a few—require skillful questioning on the part of the practitioner. What makes the questioning done by educators tailored to the task of teaching? One feature is that the vast majority of teachers' questions are *known information questions*. Simply stated, teachers generally ask questions for which they know answers. Some of the questions may have only one correct answer:

What's the capital of Illinois?
When did Columbus discover America?

This is one type of known information question that teachers ask. Another type includes questions for which teachers know what constitutes a correct response:

What's a word that begins with D?
Would you give me the name of a four-legged animal?

Plans for future lessons and reviews of past classes depend upon the students' answers and the teacher's ability to evaluate those responses. This evaluation is the topic of the next section.

Talk That Teaches: Questions, Answers, and Evaluations

A second characteristic of teacher talk is the *evaluation* that teachers supply and students look for when responding. The basic pattern is as follows:

Teacher: Question
Student: Answer
Teacher: Evaluate
Teacher: Next Question

In the other kinds of talk, we do not normally evaluate the answers others provide to our questions. The typical sequence is a two-part one: question—answer.

Teacher talk is known for its three-part sequence referred to as *elicitation—reply—evaluation*. Different things can happen at each point in the process. The elicitation strategy used might vary according to the topic, the student, and the anticipated reply. For example, the teacher may formulate a question which provides a clear indication of the desired response. On the other hand, the same response might be solicited by a question which supplies no hints. Both approaches depend on the teacher's perception of a particular child's ability. A child who has difficulty with basic arithmetic might be asked a question like: "What does 2 plus 2 equal? 3 or 4?" Another student in the class might simply be asked: "What does 2 plus 2 equal?"

The reply also might vary from correct to incorrect, partially correct, or even silence. Of course, the evaluation of a reply might be positive or negative, and within positive and negative evaluations there are many possible variations. Just as teachers demand answers to their questions, so students demand evaluations of their answers. Let's look at some of the possible ways

these necessary evaluations get done. In its simplest form, the pattern shows four potential teacher language strategies:

Positive overt evaluation
Negative overt evaluation
Positive covert evaluation
Negative covert evaluation

The first two types are easily recognized, although the second one seems to occur very infrequently. Examples of *positive overt evaluation* and *negative overt evaluation* are respectively

Very good. That's correct. You're absolutely right.

and

No. That's not it. You're wrong. try again.

The concept of *covert evaluation* is more difficult to describe. Perhaps some examples would be the best way to introduce this topic.

Example 1

Teacher. What's the fourth letter of the alphabet? Mark?
Mark. D.
Teacher. What's the second letter of the alphabet? Joseph?
Joseph. B.

Here, the teacher moves the lesson forward immediately after Mark's answer by asking Joseph a new question. In this way the teacher lets everyone know that Mark's reply was correct without ever explicitly saying so. Compare this example to the following:

Example 2

Teacher: What is 4 times 4? Billy.
Billy: 12.
Teacher: What is 4 times 4? John.
John 16.

Or another possible variation.

Example 3

Teacher: What is 4 times 4? Billy.
Billy: 12.
Teacher: John?
John: 16.

In these cases, moving on to John is not a positive covert evaluation as in example 1. Billy's answer is wrong and, by re-issuing the same question to John, the teacher effectively communicates this to all without overtly stating it. In example 3, the strategy is remarkably streamlined when the teacher simply calls on another student and simultaneously:

- Ends the turn with Billy
- Lets Billy and everyone else know that 12 is not correct
- Asks the question "What is 4 times 4?" again
- Designates John as the next student to reply

Thus, while the evaluative words are not openly present, the way the teacher *uses* language makes the status of the response (correct or incorrect) apparent to everyone. It is hard to imagine students long tolerating the situation where they didn't know they were right or wrong. This issue of evaluation will be examined again in the specific discussions to follow.

Talk That Teaches: Managing and Reprimanding

Asking questions and evaluating answers obviously are not the only jobs that teachers' language must accomplish. In order to establish an environment where questions and answers, teaching and learning can take place, teachers must also establish and maintain order in the classroom. Teachers must use language to make students stop actions that are disruptive and to encourage them to behave more appropriately. The student who is misbehaving interferes with the ongoing classroom activity to the detriment of everyone's learning. Teachers' verbal intervention, done to stop the disruption and return attention to the original activity, further interrupts what is going on. Clearly, the goal is to intervene with a minimum of additional interference.

Developing strategies for effective intervention requires that teachers take several things into account. At the outset of the disruption, the teacher must assess (1) the child's (or children's) behavior itself, (2) possible responses to this behavior, and (3) placement of the response in the on-going action. Let's look at these three decisions one at a time.

(1) The teacher must be aware of the behavior and decide that it is indeed disruptive. While this may seem obvious, consider what goes into this decision. The teacher must look at which student or students are involved and ask questions such as:

- Is there some valid reason why this behavior is happening?
- Can this behavior, in any way, be seen as or turned into something constructive or participatory?
- Is this behavior best overlooked?
- Will my intervention merely prolong the interruption, or can I effectively intercede?

(2) The teacher must then decide on how best to request that the child or children stop what they are doing. There seem to be two basic, related dimensions along which strategies are developed. The first is *explicitness*, which refers to how clearly defined each element of the request is. For example,

"Stop that talking, Joan, you're being extremely rude!"

is a very explicit command, while

"I can't hear Johnny" (said to Joan)

is far less explicit. The second dimension is *directness* or the amount of choice the student has interpreting the meaning of what the teacher has said. "Quiet, Linda!" is an example of a very direct request. An indirect request would be "Linda, would you like to share with the rest of us what you have been talking to Susan about?" Explicitness and directness clearly occur simultaneously as the following examples illustrate:

(1) Direct and Explicit; Sit down. You must sit down.
(2) Indirect and Explicit: Would you sit down. May I have your attention?
(3) Indirect and Inexplicit: Please, you'll have a chance. Who's giving directions here?
(4) Direct and Inexplicit: No! Please! Excuse me.

There is also a characteristic content and order to many of the reprimands that teachers use. For instance, look at what happens when students are talking inappropriately. The content comes in two parts that stop the talk and clarify the nature of the violation. The order of these two parts is almost invariable:

- Shh, I want to hear Mary now.
- Quiet! You've all gotten too noisy.
- Tom, it's not your turn.

These strategies in this order might be called *squelch and explain*, a language pattern which exists in the classroom for very definite reason. The teacher must first get the floor to be heard and then inform those involved of what specifically is wrong. This content in this order appears to be a very effective and widely used strategy.

(3) The teacher's final decision has to do with timing. It is critical that the request itself be minimally disruptive. This requires that the request be placed at a time when it will interrupt the least.

Any discussion of teacher talk and especially its role in maintaining order would be incomplete without some mention of the teacher as conversational manager. We have briefly mentioned the three-part questioning sequence. In addition to its pedagogical value, this sequence also serves to establish a rhythmic order to the lesson. Turn-taking rules which are established require only the mention of a student's name to evaluate the last response and re-issue the lesson question, once the pattern is set.

As conversational manager, the teacher also helps students to "keep the floor" once they have it. In their eagerness to give the correct answer or to correct another student's wrong answer, students often call out when it is not their turn. It is the teacher who maintains the delicate balance between getting the right answer and giving that answer at the appropriate time. For example:

Teacher: Your name isn't Michael.
. . . Wait a minute. Let Michael think.

This eagerness to display knowledge becomes painfully apparent when the teacher moves on to the next topic while children's hands are still waving in the air. Sighs and groans replace the waving hands, with occasional reassurances offered by the teacher:

"Don't worry Don't get frustrated. It's all right."

Thus, teacher talk must impart knowledge and do so in a structured way that allows everyone a chance to make contributions and errors. The competitive atmosphere of the classroom sometimes masks the true reason for its existence: learning. Teachers encourage learning by not allowing "being first" and "being correct" to overshadow everything else. It is evident that the primary tool of the teacher is language. In response to the special demands of the classroom, this tool—teacher language—has many predictable patterns, such as those described above. This predictability is not the most important aspect—it is the fact that teacher talk works.

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION

Kindergarten: Reading Readiness with Rows

This lesson is almost too good to be true as far as providing clear examples of some of the language strategies discussed earlier. Briefly, the situation is the following. The teacher has arranged figures in rows on the flannel board and is asking the students one at a time to identify the figure, given its location. The lesson question quickly becomes established in the form:

What is the _____ thing in the _____ row, _____?

This question is issued four times, with the correct answer given by each of the four students asked. Notice that there is no evaluation after each response, simply another question. Since each subsequent question does not ask for the same information as the preceding one, it is implicitly understood that the answer given was correct. Here is *covert positive evaluation* in action. It is also important to note that this procedure is totally accepted by the class. There isn't a single instance of a child asking for any evaluative feed-back. The teacher's elicitation immediately following a response efficiently serves a double function: elicitation and evaluation.

On the question's fifth time around, Carter breaks the lesson's "rhythm" by hesitating with his answer. He begins to restate the question—possibly an example of the common strategy we all use to "buy time" while we formulate an answer. The teacher then completes this restatement of the question and Carter responds with the correct answer. Here the teacher gives the first *overt positive evaluation*—at the moment when the system threatens to break down. This "very good" also feels like the necessary final beat in the exchange between Carter and the teacher.

The next question is directed at Robert, whose answer is not accepted by the teacher. In this case, however, she elects a strategy we have not seen before. Rather than an overt negative evaluation or a hint at the correct answer, she chooses what might be called a "mini-version" of the lesson. Step by step, she very explicitly directs Robert's attention to the lesson task at hand. In the end, she asks the very same thing that she had asked before and that Robert had answered incorrectly:

Teacher: Here is the first row, Robert. Here is the second row, Robert. Here is the third row, Robert. Tell me the last thing in the third row.

Asking the same question, even in a different form, negatively evaluates the answer just given. Prefacing the same question with some additional information increases the likelihood that the

next answer will improve. In this case, the teacher provides the following information: proceed from the top to the bottom and count the rows in that order. What Robert must then be able to follow the left to right order, know the meaning of the word "last," and give the name for a rabbit. Unfortunately, the success of such a strategy goes unproven as John whispers the answer in Robert's ear. Now, teacher talk must manage and reprimand. In this version of *squelch* and *explain*, the squelch is accomplished simply by calling out the violator's name: "John." The explanation follows immediately:

"I don't want to know about this now. You're not helping him by doing that."

The teacher then appeals to the common knowledge of the class: the "you" (John) becomes the "you all" (fellow students). In this way a classroom rule—whispering the answer in someone's ear is not helping that person to learn—is established or, more likely, reinforced. The choral agreement from the group ends the discussion, which the teacher immediately redirects to the lesson at hand. However, the lesson question is not reissued to Robert whose turn was never completely realized. Instead the teacher calls on Andy:

Teacher: . . . Andy, tell me the second thing—what is the second thing in the fourth row?

It is worth noting that she starts out asking Andy a question that calls for the same information as and is similar to her second question to Robert. However, the teacher does not use the same questioning form as she has used with any of the children called on earlier, including Robert. She stops talking mid-sentence and begins again, this time using the original form of the question. It is as though she is attempting to re-establish the rhythm that was disrupted during Robert's turn. The lesson continued in the same vein even after this taped segment was completed.

Grade One: Math Lesson with Squares

The opening moments of this excerpt set the stage: close your eyes, think of the name of something square, raise your hand. The teacher has carefully specified both what to do and how to do it. The first turn is Amanda's: a box. The teacher's acceptance of the answer (positive evaluation) is indicated by her statement-like repetition of the answer. The answer was right, but notice how Amanda's calling out for a turn is not seen as a disruption in this instance. The evaluations that follow are essentially of two types. They appear to differ according to whether the object named can *only* be square in shape ("Good for you," "Great") or whether the object might *possibly* be square ("Could be," said after three different answers). The overt positive evaluation in this part of the lesson seems to have two levels, highly acceptable and acceptable.

Within these exchanges Hugh's turn with the teacher is noteworthy. Although he has indeed located a square object, his answer doesn't come in the right form. He didn't name it, and the teacher insists that he does. What he comes up with—"A feet of a chair"—is still not without problems, but he has fulfilled the lesson task and the teacher moves on to Josh.

Josh repeats an answer given earlier, clearly not an admissible response, and Jenny is called on next. She offers "a record," which, given the well-known fact that records are round, would

seem to indicate that Jenny is way off base. However, the teacher does not reject the answer out-of-hand but chooses to question Jenny further for a more specific name. By asking the same child a question related to the topic, the teacher covertly evaluates the answer. Additionally, as Robert's teacher did in the kindergarten lesson, this teacher does part of the work necessary to construct a correct answer. She turns Jenny's attention to the physical properties of the record and indicates that a selective analysis of the record parts is appropriate. The teacher also gets Jenny to use a real object to help formulate the answer. "Show me," says the teacher. This approach pays off as Jenny does name "the outside of it," square object which encloses a circle (the shape of a record). The teacher completes this conversational exchange by supplying a name for the square thing that Jenny has offered as an answer.

The lesson task soon changes as the teacher now tries to elicit some facts about squares. With the shift in topic comes a moment or two of student uneasiness. "Sit down. Don't worry. Don't get frustrated." Also in this portion are two more examples of teacher reprimand strategies:

"Your name isn't Michael."

"Seth, are you a part of this group?"

Considering these along the lines of *explicitness* and *directness*, both are inexplicit and indirect. The point of the first statement obviously is not to establish the fact that the child's name isn't Michael, nor is the teacher actually seeking information in the second instance. What these utterances do accomplish is clear: The teacher reaffirms the turn-taking rules in the first case and redirects Seth's attention in the latter. No one misinterprets the teacher's intentions.

The remainder of this excerpt is rich with other examples of how teacher talk works. The three-part elicitation-reply-evaluation sequence reappears when the teacher repeats the students' answers as a strategy for positive evaluation, in the same way as in her opening exchange with Amanda. At another point, the teacher uses a question directed at the class—"Do you agree with her?"—to elicit corrections and as a device to keep the lesson elicitation going. She concludes by tying together the two major lesson tasks, identifying square objects and facts about squares, and by engaging the entire class.

Teacher: OK, Seth—you go over to the block area and see if you can find one block that's a square and one that's a rectangle. . . Now see if you agree with Seth. . . .

Grade Two: Science with Pots and Rocks

This brief segment shows yet another group of strategies that teachers use to educate, to evaluate, and to direct students during learning times. The lesson question is thrown open to the entire class: "Does anyone know what happens when you fire something?" Patti anticipates the question when she overlaps her request to respond—"I think so"--with the end of the teacher's question. The end of the question must therefore be repeated and Patti is put "on hold." It appears that the teacher has assigned Kate the first opportunity to answer. Hesitant though she might be, Kate is encouraged to take her turn, "take a guess."

Earlier in our discussions about teaching and learning, we noted a model of schooling that envisions the process as a cooperative conversational partnership. The exchanges that take place between the teacher and Kate are an excellent illustration of one way that teacher talk can work in this partnership. These exchanges are like those described earlier for Robert and Jenny, but here the process is a bit more difficult to notice. This lesson is more "advanced" and the atmosphere is one of an open discussion. However, the conversational mechanisms that the teacher uses are very much like the earlier instances.

The teacher's encouraging words are followed by a series of hints and prompts. She notifies Kate that uncertainty is all right and then issues several "leading" questions: "Think about making something out of clay and then what do you think happens?" . . . "What happens to the clay, honey?" . . . "Why does it get hard?" The strategy here is to begin by contributing your own information, then zeroing in on what the child knows by actively building on the information currently on the floor. The teacher encourages Kate to use her past experience as information for building an answer. It seems almost irrelevant who supplied the information (the teacher herself or the student) so long as it leads to an acceptable answer.

Patti, who has been "on hold" from the outset, now has her chance, while Teddy seems to slide into Patti's former holding pattern. His turn is next after Patti's answer, and the teacher then puts an eager Jonathan "on hold". This procedure brings to mind airplanes on an airfield ready for take-off but waiting for clearance. This turn-taking arrangement is one of the more interesting sophisticated adaptations in the repertoire of teacher talk.

The content of the replies does not sufficiently advance the state of knowledge about the process of firing pottery. It does, however, afford the teacher the opportunity to introduce a new term, "fusing," and to provide an impromptu definition. Jonathan tries to reformulate the same content once again, but the teacher decides to try a new strategy. Her hinting and prompting now take on the form of an analogy: she decides to ask Jonathan to remember a former lesson on volcanic rocks. This is done clearly with the hope that Jonathan and others might see the relationship between the current topic and what was learned about rocks, particularly volcanic rocks. Perhaps her new approach will work as Teddy ends this segment with a promising comment: "Now I really . . ."

EXERCISES

The following set of exercises is divided into two sections. In the first one, the exercises are based directly on the tape and transcript. The second section consists of general exercises. In both sections, the exercises may be done independently or as assignments in either a workshop or a class setting. While the exercises may be adapted to different workshop or class formats, many of them are best done with pencil and paper and a tape recorder.

The general purpose of these exercises is to focus and refine your understanding of the topic at hand, both through *observation* and *discussion* of the tape segments and through *application* of what is learned from these observations and discussions. It is *not* the purpose of the exercises to elicit criticism of the behavior of the children or the teachers seen on the tape.

I. EXERCISES BASED ON TAPE AND TRANSCRIPT MATERIAL

A. Kindergarten: Reading Readiness with Rows

(1) Examine this piece of transcript. Does the language of this lesson have a pattern, and if so, where does it get established? What is the first instance of the pattern?

(2) Does the pattern appear to break down at different points? If so, why? What does the teacher say to re-establish the pattern?

(3) Define the objectives of this lesson. Would you say that the teacher's language reflects the lesson objectives? How might the language be different if the lesson content were the same and the objectives different?

(4) Think about and jot down the kind of language you would use to accomplish a lesson like this one. How is it similar to or different from the language used in this lesson?

(5) When a child provides an appropriate answer does the teacher evaluate overtly? What happens in the case of an inappropriate answer? Are the circumstances in which an overt evaluation occurs special in any way?

(6) Which teacher utterances are part of classroom management? List them on one side of a page. Opposite each utterance, list some alternatives to it. For example:

Are you part of this group? Sit down and shut up!

Discuss why teachers choose one kind of utterance over another, and whether utterances appropriate in another setting would be inappropriate in the classroom.

(7) Consider the academic content that is developed in this segment of a large group lesson. Write a script for a **lecture** covering the same content. Write a script for a **tutorial** (with a teacher and one student) that treats the same content. If you are familiar with **interactive computers,** write a script for this same lesson. Compare and contrast the language of each of these scripts with the actual lesson. Which situation seems best suited for the content of this particular lesson?

B. Grade One: Math Lesson with Squares

(1) Examine this piece of transcript. What are the objectives of this lesson? How does the teacher use language to accomplish the academic portion of the lesson?

(2) Does the teacher in this section have different "academic goals" than the teacher in the first section? If so, how is this reflected in the language she uses?

(3) How are turns assigned during this lesson? Is it appropriate for the children to call out an answer without having been assigned a turn? What happens when the children do call out an answer?

(4) Let's say there are at least four different kinds of student answers possible: appropriate, marginally appropriate, potentially inappropriate, and inappropriate. Pick an example of each and look at the teacher's response to each kind of answer.

(5) When an answer is inappropriate, why does the teacher not say "Well, that's a stupid answer!" or "No, you're absolutely wrong"? Why doesn't she choose to evaluate negatively in an **overt** manner? What do you think are other reasons why overt negative evaluation occurs so rarely in the classroom?

(6) How does the teacher maintain order both in the class conversation and in the behavior of the students?

(7) Consider the academic content that is developed in this segment of a group lesson. Write a script for a **lecture** covering the same content. Write a script for a **tutorial** that treats the same content. If you are familiar with **interactive computers,** write a script for this same lesson. Compare and contrast the language of each of these scripts with the actual lesson. Which situation seems best suited for the content of this particular lesson?

C. Grade Two: Science with Pots and Rocks

(1) Examine this piece of transcript. How does this lesson differ from the other two in terms of academic content and conversational management?

(2) How are turns assigned to students during this lesson? What happens when someone speaks out of turn? Is the teacher's language or behavior in regard to turn-taking different than it is in the previous segments?

(3) How does the teacher develop the lesson's content and topic throughout this lesson? Why is it that this lesson's development is different from the other lessons?

(4) What about evaluation, both negative and positive? How does it happen? When does the teacher evaluate, and why?

(5) Consider the academic content that is developed in this lesson. Write a script for a **lecture** covering the same content. Write a script for a **tutorial** that treats the same content. If you are familiar with **interactional computers**, write a script for this same lesson. Compare and contrast the language of each of these scripts with the actual lesson. Which situation seems best suited for the content of this particular lesson?

II. GENERAL EXERCISES

(1) Think about the concept of language "doing work." Is that concept a valuable one? Does it provide insights into the language you use as a teacher?

(2) Consider how the teacher's talk "fixes" wrong answers given in class. How does this "fixing" change with various age groups and for different topics? What are the ways in which this is a good feature of education? What are the drawbacks? What are some other basic jobs of teacher talk that are done differently with differing student age levels?

(3) Think about the covert evaluation strategies. Are there occasions outside of lessons when these strategies may cause misunderstandings? For example, have you ever repeated a question to someone because you didn't hear the answer only to have that person change the answer or ask what was wrong with the first answer? Do the language patterns of covert negative and positive evaluation ever cause communication problems in school?

(4) Select several occupations (e.g. doctor, lawyer, waiter, TV anchorperson, etc.) and consider whether these occupations are characterized by special language. Specifically, consider:
- ☐ The tasks to be accomplished by language,
- ☐ The particular features that distinguish that language according to task,

(5) Using a tape-recorder, record a colleague conducting a group lesson and have a colleague record you. Listen to your tapes and discuss the language used in terms of:

- ☐ How you accomplished the academic side of the lesson,
- ☐ How you maintained order,
- ☐ How you evaluated the information that the children offered.

(You may find it useful to transcribe all or a portion of your tapes—see Guidelines for Transcription.)

THEORETICAL ADDENDUM

How are the structural properties of teacher talk related to the teaching tasks that this talk is designed to accomplish? In this section we address that issue, looking at strategies that show how teachers and students interact verbally to learn.

Teacher Questions and Other Strategies

In the discussion section, we described the two basic kinds of questions teachers ask: known-information questions and those for which there is a domain of possible correct answers. We also presented the characteristic three-part sequence of elicitation-reply-evaluation observed in teacher talk and stressed the importance of teacher questioning as a pedagogical strategy. **Teacher-posed questions or elicitations** stand out as teaching tools, especially in the lower grades. Presumably, lessons could be presented with what we call **"informatives"** as the major type of verbal interaction. This approach is characteristic of higher education with its lecture formats. Lessons could also be constructed of pupil-initiated **elicitations** with the teacher asking only one question to open the lesson. "Are there any questions?" Students would then seek information or clarification from the teacher. It seems to be the case, however, that teacher-initiated elicitations are the preferred type of verbal interaction, particularly in the elementary classroom. Let's look at some of the work carried out by these elicitations.

Unlike the responses to most questions in ordinary conversation, the answers to these elicitations do not provide new information to the teacher. The very presence of the third part of the sequence, the evaluation, depends on the fact that the teacher either knows the correct answer or knows what constitutes a correct answer. However, the special attributes of elicitations do allow students to join in on the production of academic information. Extended sequences, such as the "mini-lesson" within the first lesson we presented, are evidence of this.

Teacher. Here is the first row, Robert. Here is the second row, Robert. Here is the third row, Robert. Tell me the last thing in the third row.

A lesson where the informative type of interaction (i.e. the lecture) predominated would not allow teachers and children to construct answerable questions and correct answers together.

Teacher and Student Building a Lesson

There is another contrast between elicitations and "informatives" as ways to exchange instructional information. This contrast sheds more light on how the teacher talk we observed is remarkably suited for the classroom. Each student's reply in a series of elicitations provides the teacher with information about that student and about the class. This information improves teaching effectiveness since the teacher gathers evidence to evaluate the respondent's grasp of the lesson con-

tent. The teacher also has a better indication of how to formulate the next elicitation to suit the needs and abilities of the class if responses indicate that the question is unclear or that the students have not understood the lesson. Finally, teachers have reported that the information gained in this way helps them to plan subsequent lessons and units covering several lessons. It seems reasonable that elicitations are preferred to "informatives" since 1) they allow the active participation of the whole class in the academic information exchange; 2) they allow teachers to design even more suitable exchanges for future classes; and 3) they allow ongoing evaluations of students' learning

At the outset we mentioned pupil-initiated elicitations as a possible instructional mode. There are very practical reasons why this type of elicitation is not more prevalent. First, given the number of students in an average classroom, it is unlikely that whole group lessons could continue to stay with an instructional topic. Second, when a group the size of a normal class is involved in discussion without turn-allocation devices (remember that teacher elicitations also serve to assign turns to talk), different ongoing conversations soon emerge. These are difficult to manage as well as to develop meaningfully. Third, this format would put a great deal of pressure on each student to formulate the precise questions needed to obtain information and then to get the floor in an acceptable manner in order to present those questions. In brief, the "equal access to information" rule makes lessons constructed primarily of individual student elicitations unfeasible. This is not to say that students with a "good question" or a "curious mind" do not play a powerful and important role in the information exchange process.

Evaluations and Sanctions

Let's move now to the other teacher's part of the three-part sequence—the evaluation slot. The dichotomy between covert and overt evaluation was discussed earlier in this material, as were the polarities of positive and negative evaluations. This leads to a four-part schema, positive overt, positive covert, negative overt, negative covert. With this previous discussion of evaluations and their forms in mind, we can turn to a similar area of teacher-student conversational interaction, sanctions.

There is a distinction between what has been referred to here as evaluation and something called a sanction. In general, sanctions can be seen to assess the **placement** of a child's utterance in a lesson, while the other evaluations provide feedback on the **content** of the child's response For example:

Setting: Group lesson. Teacher in center of circle of children.

Teacher: First of all, there are blocks in here. Can anyone tell what kind of blocks?

Andre: Like, like the, like =

Teacher: = No, put your hand up if you want to say something, so we don't interrupt. Ramsey?

In this case the teacher does not allow Andre to complete his answer to the question because he did not place it correctly within the lesson by raising his hand. Sanctions, then, can control and manage the form that the classroom talk takes by enforcing rules such as turn-taking.

In addition to their focus on placement as opposed to content, sanctions also contrast with evaluations in the area of overt/covert use. We noted in the discussion on evaluations that while both positive and negative evaluations occur in the classroom, positive overt-evaluation is much more common than its negative counterpart. That is, teachers tend to supply positive evaluation whenever it is appropriate but tend to introduce negative evaluation covertly. Sanctions have a different pattern: teachers criticize a student's placement of a turn during a lesson in an open manner—overt negative sanctioning. Rarely does a teacher praise a pupil overtly for an appropriate turn placement. It could be understood that by not saying anything the teacher is issuing a covert positive sanction. Thus, sanctions appear to be almost exclusively as negative while evaluations may take any of the four forms mentioned earlier.

Finally, what is the relationship between classroom sanctions and ordinary conversation? Sanctions function as teacher declarations that the student utterances at which they are directed were made "illegally," without the teacher's consent or approval. Alternatively, from the perspective of everyday conversation, the teacher's sanction itself can be viewed as "illegal." In ordinary conversation, sanctions—or complaints about an interruption—are usually placed at the end of the interruption. In this respect, sanctions in lessons differ from complaints in conversation. Teachers often do not wait for the child to complete the misplaced remark. In effect, they interrupt the interruption in an effort to regain order and appropriate turn-taking. Another difference is that usually only teachers use sanctions (although students may sanction each other) while usage rights of complaints in conversation are not so restricted.

A Final Note

We called this section a "Theoretical Addendum;" perhaps it is more an expansion of some of the general points raised in the previous discussion section. Either way, its ultimate purpose is to emphasize a statement we have made repeatedly: the prime resource at a teacher's disposal is language. Teachers use this resource in remarkably varied ways, and their verbal strategies are, to a large extent, an integral yet implicit part of what any teacher already knows. We have offered some explicit descriptions and some possible explanations of something we are very certain of: TEACHER TALK WORKS! Here are a few suggestions for further reading on the topic:

- Mehan, Hugh. *Learning Lessons: Social Organization in the Classroom*. Cambridge, Mass.. Harvard University Press, 1979
- Mehan, Hugh. "Structuring School Structure." *Harvard Educational Review* 48:1, 1978
- Merritt, Marilyn and Frank Humphrey. "Teacher, Talk and Task: Communicative Demands During Individualized Instruction Time." *Theory into Practice* XVIII:4, October, 1979. Although this particular article has been highlighted, the entire issue, entitled "Communicating with Young Children," is well worth reading.

GUIDELINES FOR TRANSCRIPTION

Several of the exercises in this manual require tape-recording and transcribing portions of conversation. The following are some basic guidelines for transcribing. A look at the transcript in this manual will also be useful.

(1) Decide how you will refer to each speaker, either by full name or by initial. Put this full name or initial in front of every new turn taken by that speaker:

Ann: Okay.
Melissa: Wait. Okay.
Ann: Measure—Do it again.

(2) In order to transcribe accurately everything a given speaker says, you may want to listen to a small segment, stop the tape, write down what you remember, and then listen to that segment again. Do not be surprised if what you *think* you hear and what is actually said are two different things. That is the reason for replaying difficult or quickly spoken segments. It may be helpful to listen to longer stretches on both sides of the troublesome sequence.

(3) Sometimes two people start talking at once, or one person interrupts another. This is usually shown in transcription with brackets marking the overlapping section:

Melissa: It's [as far out as] it can go.
Ann: [No, it might not be]

It is, of course, often difficult to hear what either speaker is saying in a case of overlap. As you can note, the continuing utterance of the person who keeps on talking after the overlap should be transcribed.

(4) Sometimes it is simply impossible to hear or understand what someone has said. This is dealt with by using square brackets; sometimes the word *unintelligible* is also included.

T: I'm going to [unintelligible] I'm going to go over to the listening center.

In other cases, you may not be entirely sure about a given word or sequence. This can be indicated as follows:

Pupil: I think we're gonna have some fun.

It may sometimes be impossible to tell who is talking. This can be indicated as follows:

(Unknown Speaker): I don't think so.

(5) There may be some information concerning nonverbal behavior or pauses that you want to include in your transcript. Parenthesis can be used for this:

Albert: Bambi.
Garnett: (shakes head "no")
Albert: What?
T: [unintelligible] (pause) Who is Dan talking to?
Pupils: (raise hands)

TAPE TRANSCRIPT

"The Bear Went over the Mountain"—song

T: This is a mountain. What is this that goes right through the mountain?

Pupils: Tunnel.

T: Right. OK. Here's your bear. He's gonna start out on one side—let's have him come down this hill

Songs can be associated with events or places or times in our lives, like the song these children were singing. But talk, too, can be associated with events, places, and sometimes occupations. Oftentimes talk for one kind of use in one kind of place differs from other talk in ways that are very predictable. The work that the talk has to accomplish can best be done with talk that has certain characteristics On this tape, the focus is on teacher talk

Please remember, it is harder to look at tapes of really occurring activities than at tapes of actors presenting a performance. Remember, too, that the eye and ear of the video equipment emphasize certain things that might not be noticed if you were present in the classroom. Most important, remember these are only short examples, and it is not reasonable to make judgments about the abilities or personalities of the teachers or the students.

While you're looking at these tapes, you'll be asked to notice certain features of teacher talk. Of course, teachers aren't the only ones who ask questions and give directions. But the talk of the teacher works to accomplish academic matters, to keep order, and to display teacher perceptions about the child.

Kindergarten: Reading Readiness with Rows

T. I'm making rows here

Pupil Why?

T: You'll see. 'Cause it's not gonna be easy now.

Carter: Yes it is!

T: Unn-uhh.

(Pupil) How do you know? Yo-he, she hasn't, she, she hasn't even done it yet.

T. The top row has what in it? What's the first thing in the top row, Meredith?

Meredith & Others: A flag.

T: What is the last thing in the top row, Lisa?

Lisa: Umm, a duck.

T. What is the first thing in the second row, Joseph?

Joseph A bird.

T What is the last thing in the second row, Troy?

Troy: A pear

T. What is the second thing in the third row, Carter?

Carter. The second . . . ?

T Thing in the third row.

Carter. A Christmas tree

T. Very good What is the last thing in the third row, Robert C__?

T. Here is the first row. Robert. Here is the second row. Robert Here is the third row. Robert. Tell me the last thing in the third row

John. (whispers) A rabbit.

T: John. I don't want to know about this now You're not helping him by doing that.

Robert: Bu-. bunny

Pupil: He said [the bunny / is.]

T: Is Robert ever gonna learn. if somebody whispers the answer in his ear?

Tiana: Chris [whispered it]

T: [Are you-] I don't care who did it! I want you all to know that you can help him next time. If you're gonna help him next time. are you going to whisper in his ear?

Pupils: No.

T: Good! OK. Andy. tell me the second thing—what is the second thing in the fourth row?

Andy: Uhh.

T: Joseph?

Joseph & Others: The heart.

T: Good. OK. Look at all of the rows.

Grade One: Math Lesson with Squares

T C'mon. turn your shining faces this way Seth. I'm waiting for you. Close your eyes. and if you . . . Close your eyes. I want you to think about something that is square If you can name something that you know for sure. for certain is square. I want you to raise your hand

Amanda I know

T Amanda?

Amanda A box?

T: A box

(Chris raises hand)

T Chris

Chris: A townhouse.

T: Could be. Gabriel.

Gabriel [unintelligible] (Points to objects on table)

T Aha Good thinking. Mary?

Mary: A piece of paper.

T Could be. Laura?

Laura: A picture

T: A picture could be. Hugh?

Hugh: (Crawls over and indicates part of a chair)

T: What is that?

Hugh. A feet of a chair

T: Great. Josh?

Josh: A piece of paper.

T: Somebody said that. Jenny?

Jenny. A record.

T: A record? What part of the record would be square?

Jenny. The whole thing.

T: Show me.

Pupils. It's a circle No, it's a circle.

Jenny. No, the outside of it.

T: The container. Seth?

Seth: A window. A window to one of those doors.

T: OK, put your hands down and think about something else. Sit down. Don't worry. Don't get frustrated. It's all right. Sit down. I have another question for you—Michael. If I showed you three pieces of paper, and each piece of paper was a different size, and I said one piece of paper was square, how could you find out if it was square?

Pupil. [unintelligible]

T: Your name isn't Michael.

Michael: Um, look at it, carefully.

T. What would looking at it carefully do? What do you know about a square?

Michael: It has . . .

(Various hands raised)

T: Wait a-minute, let Michael think. What, Michael?

Michael: It has, um, eight corners . . .

Pupil: (whispering loudly) Eight?! You mean four.

Michael: uh, four, I mean, um, sides and . . .

T: Seth, are you part of this group? (pause) What do you know about a square? Who knows a fact about a square? Liz.

Liz: It has four sides.

T: Who knows another fact about a square? Amanda?

Amanda. Um, both ends are short lines, like, and then the sides are long.

T: Do you agree with her?

Pupil: That's a rectangle.

Pupils: [No. / That's a rectangle.]

T: What is the difference between a square and a rectangle? Hugh?

Hugh: A rectangle is longer than a square.

T: Sit down. A rectangle is longer than a square?

Pupil: Yup. On one side it's short, and on the other side it's long.

T: What are you talking about, the rectangle or the square?

Pupil: Rectangle

T: OK. What do you know that's the same about a rectangle and a square?

Laura: Oh, I know.

T: Uh, Laura?

Laura: They both have four corners.

T: They both have four corners. What else is the same about them, Hilary?

Hilary. They both have four sides.

T They both have four sides. What else is the same about them? Seth?

Seth They both have one—they're both flat—have one inside

T. OK, Seth—you go over to the block area and see if you can find one block that's a square and one that's a rectangle. Now see if you agree with Seth that he has brought me a rectangle and a square. Is that correct?

Pupils Yeah.

T: All right. Seth, tell us which is which

Seth: Tell us which is the rectangle. This is the rectangle and this is the square.

T: Marvelous. Sit down.

Grade Two: Science with Pots and Rocks

Patti: . . . When you first get out clay, it's damp and it has moisture in it. When you fire it, the . . the . . .

T What do you think might happen? Think about making something out of clay and then what do you think happens?

Kate: Un—

T. Huh?

Kate: Well, it'll—

T: What happens to the clay, honey?

Teddy. Now I get it.

Kate It gets hard.

T. It gets hard. Why does it get hard?

Patti: Because when . . .

Teddy: Oh!! Because—

Patti: Because when you fire it, when you first get out clay, it's damp and it has moisture in it. When you fire it, the, the hotness takes out the moisture out of it.

T That's one thing. What else happens?

Jonathan: And it sort of—

T Just a minute. Teddy?

Teddy. Un, it takes out vapor and besides, the clay, um, gets,

you know, heated, and um, even, so without some moisture, it's, it's . . .

T: Something else happens.

Jonathan: It sort of melts in a way and—

T: What melts?

Jonathan: The clay. Sort of melts in a way. And then, while it still has a—

T: It's a word called fusing. It gets together.

Jonathan: It still has, it's—but it gets together more and then the heat takes all the moisture out of it until it turns into . .

T: OK, Jonathan. Think back to when we studied—

Teddy: Now I really—

T: Think back when we studied rocks. Remember the volcano, the volcanic rocks.

Jonathan: Yeah.

T: Remember the light rocks that we had?