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ABSTRACT

Prepared as part of a series applying recent research in oral and written communication instruction to classroom practice. this booklet presents a holistic view of learning focused on the development of oral communication. The first section of the booklet provides a rationale for increasing oral communication skills instruction, and discusses the five functions of communication: (1) controlling, (2) sharing feelings, (3) informing/responding, (4) ritualizing, and (5) imagining. The second section discusses various milestones in children's communication development and their instructional implications, while the third examines classroom communication practices and proposes several communication promotion techniques. The fourth section discusses the use of student groups in the classroom, with emphasis upon group training time, misinterpreted assignments, and disruptions. The fifth section presents methods designed to promote holistic learning in which the child grows in reading, writing, oral communication, and the content areas. (FL)

ORAL COMMUNICATION IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

BY Barbara S. Wood

The Talking and Writing Series, K-12: Successful Classroom Practices

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The purpose of this series is to provide information to assist teachers and curriculum planners at all grade levels in improving communication skills across the major disciplines.

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PREFACE

During the past decade, teachers, education administrators and researchers, and the general public have become increasingly concerned about students' ability to communicate. This broad public concern for improvement in education led to the enactment of Title II, Basic Skills Improvement Act, Public Law 95-561. The Basic Skills legislation encourages Federal, State, and local education agencies to utilize " . . . all available resources for elementary and secondary education to improve instruction so that all children are able to master the basic skills of reading, mathematics, and effective communication, both written and oral." Section 209 of the act specifically authorizes the Secretary of Education to collect and analyze information about the results of activities carried out under Title II. Thus, improved instruction in the basic communication skills—speaking, listening, and writing—has become the focus of programs and research projects throughout the country.

The booklets in this series, *The Talking and Writing Series, K-12: Successful Classroom Practices*, provide information to assist teachers and curriculum planners at all grade levels to improve communication skills across all major disciplines. Developed under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education, the 12 booklets apply recent research in oral and written communication instruction to classroom practice. They contain descriptions of teaching practices; summaries and analyses of pertinent theories and research findings; practical suggestions for teachers; and lists of references and resources. Also included is a booklet on inservice training which suggests how the series can be used in professional development programs.

The booklets were developed through the efforts of an Editorial Advisory Committee comprised of 14 professionals in both the academic and research areas of written and oral communication education. The group worked with the sponsoring agency, the Department of Education's Basic Skills Improvement Program, and Dingle Associates, Inc., a professional services firm.

The committee members, in consultation with the Department of Education staff, chose issues and developed topics. Ten of the 14 committee members authored papers. The committee reviewed the papers and provided additional expertise in preparing the final booklets, which were edited and designed by Dingle Associates.

We are grateful to the committee members, advisors, and all others who contributed their expertise to the project. The committee members were:

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It is hoped that the booklets in this series will be valuable to classroom and administrative professionals in developing or restructuring their communication skills programs. They may also be useful to community and parent groups in their dialogue with members of the educational system. The ultimate benefit of this project, however, will be realized in our children's enhanced ability to communicate, both orally and in written language.

Sherwood R. Simons
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ORAL COMMUNICATION IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

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Special thanks to Chicago Public School teacher Jean Shepherd for her helpful guidance in the final preparation of this booklet.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, I overheard a conversation between two children that reminded me of a common practice associated with unfortunate generalizations by school children:

Jeffrey: How'd you do on your report card, Greg?

Gregory: OK—I got mostly "E's" and a couple of "G's." (E = excellent, G = good)

Jeffrey: Well, I got mostly "E's" too, but I got an "S" in library! I talked. (S = satisfactory, not considered adequate by most students.)

Gregory: Yah, you can't talk or you flunk Library. The only kids to get an "E" in library are those who don't dare open their mouths.

Jeffrey: You know, a lot of smart kids don't get good grades in library.

Children form a host of generalizations which associate negative consequences with oral communication. To bring about effective learning, we must insist upon some degree of classroom order. But when students conclude that grades or evaluations are directly proportionate to the amount of talking they do—regardless of its overall quality—something unfortunate is happening in the learning process. Children are associating a high value with quiet learning, while we as teachers are associating positive teaching with the same behavior. This booklet does not suggest that we reject teaching practices which regulate classroom talk; rather, it presents a communication framework that regards a "talking child" as a desirable student, rather than a troublesome one. Further, oral communication is seen as an integral component of the elementary curriculum, so that the development of academic competence in students is measured by their development of oral as well as written communication skills.

Instruction in effective communication has traditionally involved training in presentational speaking. The idea is to get students in front of a group and ask them to make formal presentations which accomplish a goal. Success in the task is measured in terms of physical behavior ("better not shake," or "stand up straight") and handling content ("Was your speech organized?"). We even demand kindergarten children to "show and tell": "Stand up in front of your classmates and tell us about the new toy or treasure you have." Some educators have challenged this traditional format, suggesting that other related formats are superior. The "show and question" format stimulates inquiry in kindergarten children, whereas the "show and tell" for-

mat does not (Manzo and Legenza, 1975). Many educators agree that "show and tell" is dying as a developmental activity for communication (Harris, 1982). But what activities can elementary school teachers use to develop oral communication skills in children?

Recent documents published in the communication field suggest that oral communication instruction in elementary school must adopt more informal and interpersonal goals (Allen and Brown, 1976; Wood, 1981). Authors suggest that students, instead of doing "show and tell" and making formal classroom speeches, should develop communication competencies in five functional areas important in everyday life. These communication functions are relevant to persons of all ages and cultures and apply to communication at home, work, or school. They are:

Controlling:	communication in which we seek to influence others or respond to controlling communication of others (e.g., bargaining, refusing)
Sharing feelings:	interaction which expresses our feelings or responds emotionally to others (e.g., getting angry, supporting)
Informing-responding:	messages we use to give information or respond to information given to us (e.g., explaining, questioning)
Ritualizing:	communication that seeks to initiate or maintain social contact (e.g., greeting, using small talk)
Imagining:	communication that deals creatively with reality through use of language (e.g., storytelling, fantasizing)

As a 6-year-old trying to get along with playground friends or a 40-year-old trying to influence the behavior of teenagers, people must be able to express themselves effectively in these areas.

To streamline the already demanding schedule of elementary school teachers, oral communication instruction can be integrated carefully into the curriculum for which professional training was provided, as in science, social studies, mathematics, and, certainly, language arts. I have found from in-service workshops that I have conducted that teachers more easily grasp and effectively use oral communication competencies when integration guidelines are provided. In fact, teaching in science and mathematics, for example, improves as a result of integration with oral communication. Holistic learning

is the goal. However, to accomplish this objective, we must reconsider traditional educational practices and begin to add new instructional strategies which round out our teaching practices. We will incorporate some new techniques essential to developing student oral communication. The idea is not to start all over; rather, this booklet asks for a "gentle reframing" of teaching strategies to accommodate the goal of holistic learning by students.

This booklet considers oral communication in the classroom from four perspectives:

1. The major *milestones* in the development of the controlling function as an example of communication development in children; implications for classroom practices are considered.

2. *Classroom practices* are considered from the standpoint of communication-promoting techniques as compared to communication-restrictive techniques.

3. Guidelines on the effective use of *student groups in the classroom* are provided.

4. *Communication activities* are suggested that assist in developing the five communication functions as integrated in a unit on science.

This booklet presents a holistic view of learning focused on the development of oral communication, specifically the functions of communication. The first section outlines developmental milestones in the controlling area as illustrative of the functional approach. While most instructional materials deal with the informing/responding function (Wood, 1981; Allen and Brown, 1976) the controlling function has recently produced a fairly rich data base to apply to instructional practices.

MILESTONES IN COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT

Research on children's communication development has dramatically changed our view of children as learners in the past decade. For example, we have discovered that the newborn has the ability to copy specific gestures (Metzoff and Moore, 1977) and to sort stimuli and remember facts (Pines, 1982). We have found more productive frameworks to describe abilities of young children. We are able to demonstrate, for example, that 6-year-olds are better conversationalists than 5-year-olds because they adopt nonverbal turn-taking cues which show some degree of empathy. This framework is called "conversational congruence" (Welkowitz et al., 1976) and helps explain why first-graders are more effective communicators than kindergarteners. Traditional studies of children's language and communication development focused on issues in vocabulary, syntax, and meaning. Now, with the broader focus of communication, findings seem even more relevant

to the classroom and more practical for teachers. The milestones in the development of controlling are illustrated using invented, but realistic, dialogues from classes involved in social studies units on the topic, "people in groups." Since elementary teachers usually teach such units, I am sure that we will be able to identify in some way with the interactions.

Early communication milestones

Most first-graders have acquired the basic structures of their language in terms of syntax (Wood, 1981, ch. 6). Further, their vocabularies are close to the adult's in terms of total number of words (Wood, 1981, ch. 5). However, the ability of typical 6-year-olds to control, and respond to control, forms in some important ways. Consider this discussion of "the family" (adapted from materials in Grossman and Michaelis, 1976, pp. 55-57):

Teacher:	See these pictures? What are these families doing?
Billy:	They're going tobogganing . . . and this family, they're playing some music.
Sara:	These guys are riding horses, and this sister is helping this guy ride a horse.
Billy:	Lemme see that picture? Gimme it.
Sara:	Don't grab it from me. I'm lookin' at it.
Teacher:	We can all see. OK, what does your family like to do?
Ben:	I like to go to movies. That's my favorite thing. I also like my Dad to take me bikeriding.
Teacher:	But what do you all do together, as a family?
Ben:	Well, we eat dinner together most of the time.

This brief discussion shows several illustrations of communication milestones related to the controlling function in young children, prekindergarten through second grade.

- Directives are major strategies of control aimed at getting someone to do something for you. Young children, such as Billy and Sara, use *direct forms* of directives: "Lemme see," or "Don't grab it from me." The direct forms are framed in clear, precise, and often blunt language (Garvey, 1975).

- The direct forms of the directives are effective in accomplishing children's goals with peers (and adults in some situations) when children communicate their directives with some degree of confidence. Direct forms are used less successfully by children who are not as sure of themselves (Wood and Gardner, 1980).

- While young children may not employ indirect means of control in their own communication, they do understand indirect forms used by others. When the teacher says, "We can all see," an indirect message to cooperate has been uttered. Indirect forms of three types are mastered by young children: (from easiest to most difficult) 1) *affirmative indirect*—"Can you let me see the picture?" 2) *negative indirect*—Can't you let me see that picture?" and 3) *state-of-affairs* (must type)—"Must you monopolize that picture?" and (should type)—"Should you hog that picture?" Leonard, Wilcox, Fulmer and Davis (1978) found that 4- and 5-year-olds understood only types 1 and 2, where the predicate specifies the action required (e.g., "Share the picture" or "Let me see the picture"). The difficulty of type 3 is that the predicate specifies the opposite of the required action (monopolizing the picture). However, 6-year-olds did fairly well in experiments where they were tested on comprehension of these forms. Though not up to adult standards, first- and second-graders understand more complex forms of controlling communication than kindergarteners.

Primary milestones

In a third-grade social studies discussion, one might find the topics more abstract. For example, topics include how to act in groups, outsiders in groups, and the role of leaders in groups. In one social studies program for the third grade (Quigley et al., 1980), the final unit concerns voting for leaders and the quality of good rules for groups. The following dialogue was created on the basis of the ideas in that unit:

Teacher: Sometimes groups may vote to decide what's right, or they can decide in other ways. See the picture of the teacher at the blackboard pointing to the problem without an answer? Would voting be a good way to choose the right answer here?

Mara:	No, you can't vote in math. There's just one answer and you can't argue for it.
Ned:	Yah, there's only one answer for the problem, but like in voting for president, there could be more than one president—like Carter or Reagan.
Teacher:	Good. What other things could you decide by voting, besides president?
Mary:	Like whether we're allowed to chew gum in class. (Everyone giggles.)
Teacher:	But I've already made the rule that there is NO GUM CHEWING in class, so could we really vote on that?
Mary:	Maybe if we could get the principal to vote on our side, you'd be outvoted. (Students chuckle.)
Teacher:	Hmmm. Sounds like wishful thinking to me.
Ned:	Well, if we promised to do all of our homework, maybe you'd let us chew gum one day.
Mary:	Yah, maybe just for a half hour or something.
Gail:	We'd promise not to make too much noise, really.

The controlling communication in the discussion with these third-graders is quite different from that of the younger children.

- Children are mastering the subtle strategies of bargaining ("I'll do my homework if you let us . . . "), gentle reminder ("Remember, you said once we could chew gum."), and verbal threat ("If you don't let us, we might sneak it."). According to Ervin-Tripp (1977), children of this age have mastered some rather perceptive strategies of control.

- The use of timing enters the picture for 8-year-olds, so that the more obvious and instant methods of gaining compliance are often discarded for the subtle and delayed request (Ervin-Tripp, 1977). Ned, Mary, and Gail may have decided that now was just the perfect time to ask for this special favor in class, since, after all, the topic came up in a most appropriate classroom discussion on voting.

- Finally, the children in this discussion are illustrating a most advanced stage in developing persuasive tactics: making something seem like "less than it is" and forecasting the denial. According to researchers, children of this age begin to understand their listeners well enough to begin phrasing requests in ways likely to be viewed favorably by others. Notice Mary's minimizing of the time element (just 30 minutes) and Gail's forecast (we won't make much noise).

Middle-grade milestones

By the time children reach sixth grade, they have entered what many educators call "the middle grades," launching their early teenage period of development. Consider this hypothetical social studies discussion (Cooper, 1979, pp. 347-398; skills workbook, p. 101).

Teacher:	In that story about the contacts Europeans made in West Africa, we learned something about contacts between groups. Would you say that their contact made life better for them?
Betty:	In one way it did—they were able to fight disease more and have better health.
Bob:	But the slavery was bad—that wasn't good for the Africans.
Teacher:	Is it possible that the negative effects, such as slavery, could be cancelled out by the positive effects, such as improved health?
Gil:	Well, our book says it's impossible to get rid of any effects of contact between peoples. So no, you could not get rid of that problem.
Bob:	Yah, it's like if you hurt someone pretty bad, they'll always remember it. The pain hangs around.

Gil: You could try to get them to forgive you—like you could say, "I really know you hated slavery but it's gone now."

Betty: Yah, but they'd still be angry—like they'd say, "We can't forget something so bad as that."

Gil: You could try though. It never hurts to try something.

Twelve-year-olds are becoming more competent persuaders as they adapt to listeners.

- Research indicates that as children acquire persuasive skills, they are more capable of adapting messages to listeners. Clark and Delia (1977) compared second-graders through ninth-graders in ability to adapt to listeners. Gil and Betty are excellent users of controlling communication which adapts to the hypothetical listeners.

- At first, children in pleading show *awareness for the listener*; Gil tried to do this when he said that he would have told them that he realized their feelings about slavery. Next, children recognize the *possible counter-arguments* of the listener, as did Betty when she reminded her listener that people do not often forget something as bad as slavery. The third and final stage of adaptation is *focusing on the advantage of the plea's fulfillment* to the listener. While such complex adaptation may take until the ninth grade to develop, children explore using such strategies in the middle grades.

- Children in the middle grades make more complex assumptions about listeners when they adapt messages. According to Kerby Alvy (1973), younger children base assumptions on observable characteristics of listeners: For example, "Don't get mad now, but I want to ask you something." Children in the middle grades control with far less obvious cues and assumptions: For example, "You're going to like one of the ideas I have, but I want to ask you a favor, too."

Implications for instruction

Some teachers have told me that third-graders sound like the first-grade children in this booklet. Other teachers claim that sixth-graders do not approach the perspective-taking abilities of the sixth-graders pictured in any

of the communication studies. To be sure, milestones are only guideposts in children's development. For example, individual variation among children may place some at the "primary milestones" 1 or 2 years later than the ages listed. Teachers will have to *use care in framing expectations* regarding the level of development for their students.

No matter what stage of development students demonstrate, teachers must encourage them to further master the five communication functions. In this booklet, the controlling function was specifically considered in terms of developmental milestones. We consider, now, the implications for classroom practices. Basically, we must *give children experience in using communication functions* while we also serve as models of these communication skills. The classroom is an ideal place for developing some issues that might stand in the way. Considering the development of control in the elementary classroom, I find that many of us approach classes with these beliefs:

- I must retain the floor as much as possible.
- I have to insist upon complete quiet from my students to retain control.
- Students cannot gain access to the floor without first getting my invitation. (I call on them.)
- Students should not ask questions or make comments about the topic until the proper time. (Such time is rarely provided!)

Whether we like it or not, these teacher behaviors are rather like military forms of controlling. They are used to keep control of children in the classroom. Heaven forbid that the principal or district superintendent should walk into the classroom when all the children are talking at once. The military hand of control that we use looks orderly to the observer. It also invites the following passive behaviors from children:

- I must remain quiet as much as possible. I know I'm being very good when I remain quiet.
- Unless I am really lost with an assignment, it is better not to raise my hand and ask a question because the teacher will think I'm stupid or get mad at me.
- Wait until the teacher asks if we have questions before I ask—otherwise I'll get punished.

How can children gain any experience in effective controlling communication if their behaviors are squelched in these ways?

Research on communication apprehension relates to the overall concern of controlling in children and adults. Communication apprehension is considered to be an overall fear or concern about expressing oneself in a group setting. A research team studied communication apprehension (CA) in elementary school students and teachers and discovered a rather interesting relationship. While younger elementary school children had a fairly low degree of CA, the teachers of K-4 had greater degrees of CA than teachers at other grade levels. This may describe a "control trap" in which teachers in the early grades find themselves: Teachers feel that they must use military tactics to control the rather free and open communicators. In short, teachers with the greatest CA teach students with the lowest CA, and this contributes to the control trap so typical in the elementary school. While it might seem that both teachers and students are caught in a vicious circle, this is not the case. The teacher is in the position to change the demand factors of the situation to reduce the pressure on himself or herself, while increasing effective participation from students.

We have read many accounts—and know from experience—that learning in which we play an active role is more exciting for us, as compared to learning in which we just sit there. Further, research with shy and apprehensive children suggests that a communication-promoting classroom will help such children function more effectively in the learning environment (McCroskey, 1980). Pamela Cooper and Kathleen Galvin (1983) consider the variable of communication apprehension in the classroom as they outline various teacher techniques that can help to encourage the apprehensive child to contribute in a meaningful way. We must reconsider the communication climate of classrooms, moving from a communication-restrictive to a communication-promoting environment. There are several advantages in doing this:

- Children feel more involved in the learning process, like learning better, and subsequently learn more.
- The pressure of performance is reduced for the teacher, so that the demand for control is lessened and the pressure is eased to some extent.
- Because students are encouraged to respond more freely to materials and ideas presented by teachers, feedback to teachers may increase the chances that instruction will be more effective for students.

It is not easy to revise classroom management procedures. With a communication-promoting climate, two issues arise: How will I deal with my feelings of loss of control when children have the freedom to talk? What techniques can I use to create the climate for a communication-promoting classroom, while avoiding chaos and unproductive chatter? Think about the

most terrible things that might happen if we give up some degree of control in the classroom:

- A student might ask a question that we are not prepared to answer—What will we do?
- What if a student is not pleased with an activity and says so? How will we feel about his or her comments?

Chances are that teachers will be able to answer most student questions; and those that cause us to pause may simply require checking into the matter and reporting back to the class. Never have I seen people judge a speaker/teacher negatively simply because that teacher was unable to answer a question or two. In fact, honesty and the response that "I will get that answer" often produce more favorable responses from others. We may feel that students judge our learning procedures in certain ways. Consider two specific responses that I heard in a social studies unit:

- "I don't understand why we're cutting these pictures from the magazines. What is this for again?"
- "I thought this part about different families doing different things was good, but I don't like the part about putting subtitles under these pictures."

We probably would hate to hear such comments. But there are ways of hearing them in which we can tap into the feedback that we receive, and capitalize on it for our teaching.

One helpful method of getting rid of "defensiveness" is to *paraphase student comments in a supportive way:*

Student: I didn't like that assignment.

Teacher: You didn't like the project of making subtitles—well I'm sorry you didn't find it as rewarding as I planned it for you, Ben.

Student: I don't get what we're supposed to do in these groups.

Teacher: Oh, you are unclear about your group task. Is anyone else in that situation, so I need to clarify it more?

Student: This activity is too difficult to do.

Teacher: You find that writing a poem about your family is a difficult assignment. I knew it would be challenging, Clare, but I know you can do it.

In these examples, the teacher helps to create the climate helpful in children's development of controlling strategies which are effective and sensitive to the needs of others. The climate is created with these techniques:

- Paraphrasing: The teacher paraphrases the child's reaction/response, showing understanding of the child's reaction.
- Supportive response: The teacher comments on the acceptability of the reaction, reacts empathically to the child's situation, or is generally encouraging with the child.

Pamela Cooper and Kathleen Galvin offer several techniques which help to create a more open communication climate in the classroom (Cooper and Galvin, 1983). In fact, many of the materials in their booklet, *Improving Classroom Communication*, are devoted to the subject of promoting more effective oral communication in the classroom.

CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

Many classroom communication techniques afford teachers a comfortable degree of control over student behaviors. Teachers probably use them without much conscious effort, and learned them from their teachers. Following is a first-grade science discussion (based on Albruscato et al., 1980a) which will reveal how we teachers sound much of the time:

Teacher: Moving air is called wind. Wind can move things. Here is a picture of a . . .

Children: (in unison) . . . sailboat.

Teacher: Yes, a sailboat. The sailboat is moved by the wind pushing against its . . .

Children: . . . sail.

Teacher: Good. Now here's a picture of a . . .

Children: . . . fan.

Teacher: And a fan can make wind because the motor turns the . . .

Children: (The response is mixed, with children shouting different responses.)

This interchange could go on and on, and it is what I like to call "fill in the blank." Once teachers begin using the pattern, it is relatively easy to continue it; and students understand what is required of them. While it is probably an effective technique for allowing students to participate in structuring meaningful material, the "fill in the blank" technique requires little thinking from either teacher or students. Consequently, the long term effects are doubtful.

Let us examine another favorite technique, also in a first-grade science program:

Teacher: Air can help us, can't it? Tell me one way air can help us.

Child: We dry our clothes sometimes in the air.

Teacher: Good answer. Is there another way air can help us?

Child: We breathe it. Air helps us live.

Teacher: OK, now what else can you think of?

Child: We can use it to blow up the tires on our bikes.

Teacher: That's right . . . .

I call this technique the "let's make a list" approach to teaching. It is used fervently because teachers somehow believe in the underlying assumption that the longer the list, the more they know about something. Teachers seldom ask students to go into detail about any one item. Rather, the aim is to create the longest list possible. While the list approach to learning is undoubtedly an indication of the general knowledge in a certain area (e.g., students' awareness of the functions of air is a product of knowing more than one or two functions of air), this method of classroom interaction gives no more than an index of students' collective "breadth of knowledge."

A third technique often used is related to the basic lecture-discussion for-

mat, which follows a special form. I call it the "easy-difficult question format." Consider a group of first-graders talking about water (adapted from questions and material in Albruscato, et al., 1980a, pp. 75-78):

Teacher:	Water is all around us. We need water to live. We can make water into ice cubes, or we can turn on the water faucet and get water in a stream of liquid. Water does not have its own shape—it takes the shape of the container it's in, like a glass or a dish. If it's frozen into an ice cube though, it has its own shape. But what happens to an ice cube if you leave it on a plate?
Children:	(in unison) It melts.
Teacher:	Good, will it melt slowly or quickly?
Children:	Slowly.
Teacher:	Why does the ice cube melt?
Children:	(No one answers; no one raises a hand.)

The format goes something like this: The teacher gives a minilecture; the teacher asks easy questions which the children answer (often in unison); and then the teacher asks a difficult question. It is likely that most teachers are not really interested in answers to the first, easy questions. Teachers know that the children will provide these answers, but begin with them anyway. The answer that teachers are most interested in is for the more difficult question that they simply toss to students at the peak of the exchange. And mumbling, silence, or guessing are often results of this approach. A more productive questioning technique might lead students directly to the area which teachers want to discuss.

While "fill in the blank," "let's make a list," and "easy-difficult question format" are helpful in giving teachers a sense of confidence, they also give students—even the most quiet and slow-to-learn—a sense of belonging. But the benefits of these techniques must be weighed against their ability to stimulate productive thinking in the holistic development of the child. And in this sense, they are not as effective as they might be. The following section offers several techniques which might produce a more well-rounded battery of communication techniques for teaching.

Communication-promoting techniques

Much attention is being given to classroom practices which promote holistic learning in curricular areas. One booklet in this series, *Learning Better, Learn-*

ing More: In the Home and Across the Curriculum (Christopher J. Thaiss, 1983), explores some very innovative techniques in the learning process, which is viewed holistically rather than in a skills-orientation manner. The views in Thaiss' booklet mesh well with those in this booklet. Following are several techniques which encourage holistic learning in an environment of observations, questions, and comments from children.

The first example is called "make an observation," and focuses on a discussion in a first-grade science class (Albruscato, et al., 1980a, pp. 79-81):

Teacher: Water can help us. In this picture, the firemen are using water to put out the fire. Those hoses look heavy to me; look at that large spray of water coming out of the hoses.

Child: I bet it's hard to hold one of those big hoses. That holds a lot of water. I couldn't hold it.

Teacher: But we need a lot of water to put out that big fire, don't we. A little water won't help us, so we need big people and big hoses.

Child: Once we tried to put out our campfire with a pail of water, and the fire started back up again.

Teacher: Yes, that can happen. It probably wasn't enough water to counteract the force of the fire. Fire is very forceful.

Child: My house burned once.

This discussion could go on and on, and will probably continue to be a very fruitful discussion, so long as the teacher is able to continue offering exciting, insightful, and relevant observations for the children to react to.

We use the "make an observation" technique frequently when we talk to adults. Its effectiveness with elementary school students is also easily demonstrated. It shows students what level of observation that we expect of them, and gives them a good indication that we are interested in the subject being discussed.

A second technique which encourages a communication-promoting climate is based on a question-and-answer procedure, but places the burden on the students to phrase the questions for discussion. The "student question" approach is illustrated in this science discussion (Albruscato et al., 1980a, pp. 85-89):

Teacher: In some places our air and water are dirty. Dirty air and water are bad for people, plants, and animals. We can help clean up our air and water, right? What would you want to know about cleaning up our air and water, Karen?

Karen: I know air smells sometimes. But I can't figure out how you get the smell out of smelly air? (Students giggle.)

Teacher: Who has an idea for Karen?

Fred: Sometimes a smoke stack in a factory smells up the air. You could close up the smoke stack.

Bill: Or like when buses smell up the air with their fumes, you could keep them in the garage and not let them go out.

Teacher: Both of your answers are excellent ways of stopping air pollution by closing down the operation of the machine that's causing the trouble. Another way of approaching air pollution is to repair or fix the machine which is polluting. What would you like to know about repairing to stop pollution?

Bill: I can think of ways to repair a bus. But I'd like to know what you could do to repair a smoke stack in a factory?

Fred: You don't repair the smoke stack, you repair the machine that uses the smoke stack.

The advantage of this approach is that the questions which serve as fuel for the discussion come from the learners, themselves. Rather than assuming that a teacher's perspective is the most productive starting point for discussion, this approach begins quite simply from *what the child wants to know.*

A third technique may create a communication-promoting climate in the classroom. It requires a lot of imagination on the part of both the children and the teacher. Students are asked to play the roles—put themselves in the place of—of persons, things, or concepts being discussed. (Albruscato et al., 1980a, pp. 82-84):

Teacher: Plants and animals need air to live. They need water to live, too. Here's a picture of plants and animals under water. How would it be if you were this fish, swimming around in the water?

Child: I like to swim. I'd swim around real smooth if I was a fish. I'd swim around everywhere.

Teacher: And how would you feel if someone scooped you out of the water and put you on shore?

Child: I'd thrash around and flop around a lot. I've seen fish flop around a lot when they're pulled out of water.

Child: Yah, it's like the fish is choking for air, but it's not—it really wants water, right?

Teacher: Yes, the fish needs water, not air. And you're right—it does seem like the little fish is choking for air, doesn't it?

Many interesting and productive discussions can come from inviting the students to role-play subjects of study. While young children will have difficulty in taking the perspective of inanimate objects, and may struggle with perspective-taking of any type, they enjoy trying it when we encourage them to try. While a group of first-graders will have difficulty (note previous classroom discussion), older children will find it easier and quite effective in stimulating their thinking.

A fourth communication-promoting technique—using groups—deserves a special section of its own. Students are more intensely involved in learning because their chances of participation are increased as a function of the number of groups used. The next section explores some techniques for using groups effectively in the elementary school classroom.

USING STUDENT GROUPS IN THE CLASSROOM

Teachers try different arrangements of students' desks to alter the learning environment. These arrangements, however, tend to keep children working quietly on projects. The small-group approach to student learning is frequently used on the high school and college level, and with much success. Its use in the elementary school is recent, and has met with a fair number

of predictable obstacles. Young children do not take the responsibility for managing peer groups as well as teenagers. Younger children's development of the control function of communication places them at a more fragile stage of effectively managing themselves and others in group work.

Children in groups

The ability to work effectively in a group is slow to develop in children. They have difficulties in many of the skills underlying effective group work: staying on the topic, reaching a cooperative goal, managing distractions, and making effective contributions. Until skills in these areas develop, student groups may seem chaotic, and results may sometimes appear rather haphazard. For example, children may want to participate "in unison" rather than in some shared or cooperative manner. If the task is trying a scientific experiment, as with the ice cube on the plate, all children may wish to touch the ice cube at the same time. The activity level is high, and the noise and pushing may be more than the teacher can bear. Groups with young children get sidetracked very easily. And group members are not so likely to remind their peers that they are getting off the track, a skill that older children do seem to have. The teacher cannot attend to the needs of each group simultaneously, so that while he or she works with one group, another may experience difficulties. If the teacher moves to that group, still another may require the teacher's attention. No wonder teachers feel drained after group work: It seems that all students need the teacher's help at once.

We worry about using groups because we fear the loss of control and the lack of effective instruction. But my experience with inservice workshops indicates that teachers can acquire critical skills in using groups if they begin with a training period in which skills in group work are communicated overtly to students. These skills are related to four main concerns: dealing with disruptions, understanding misinterpreted assignments, coping with the troublemaker, and including the outsider.

Group training time

Students and teachers need to be trained together in using groups. Just as children need guidance and careful initiation to the use of groups for classroom work, teachers need the same slow and careful introduction with students. Teachers need to obtain assurance from successful use that it can work without total confusion and extreme disorder. First attempts at group work can be limited to shorter periods followed by a period of discussion for "how it worked." This training period might last 2 weeks. From my experience, its success depends on open communication between teacher and students about how it is working and what to do when problems arise.

In the training period, we must be ready to handle the following obstacles and difficulties:

- A group may become noisy and disruptive as they try to tackle the assignment.

- A group may misinterpret the assignment and do the wrong thing.
- A student may choose not to participate in a group and become an "outsider."
- A student can be a "troublemaker."

Disruption. The teacher can spot a group which is having trouble working together. The first reaction to a disruptive group might be to reprimand group members for their behavior. While this reaction seems to make sense, it will not necessarily get to the heart of the problem. The best first step is to ask the children to define the source of the problem, argument, or disagreement. Let them talk about it aloud. They may have one or more explanations, and each can be considered in the group—with the teacher and students talking freely. As teachers, our best tactic is to agree that any one of their "problem statements" would be *correct* and difficult to deal with as a group member. Rather than take sides or try to settle on which reason explains why things failed, support each explanation. Step two is also rather straightforward: Ask the children to come up with a solution to their problem(s). Each solution can be discussed, with the teacher serving as a moderator for that discussion. The discussion gets students back on the track so that they can then begin working effectively together.

Misinterpreted assignment. A teacher has asked the groups to select pictures from magazines showing possible sources of air and water pollution. The groups were given 30 minutes to select three pictures, mount them onto construction paper, and then present them to the entire class for discussion. The teacher's initial observations indicated that all groups seemed to be working harmoniously. After 30 minutes, the teacher called everyone back into the classroom setting to discuss the pictures. The first group to present pictures has done the assignment wrong. They show pictures of dirty air and water but without considering the sources of pollution.

Again, consider a child-centered approach to solve the problem. Just as the disruption problem was solved by asking the children to label the problem and possible solutions, the misinterpreted assignment-problem can be solved by asking children to think about what went wrong. Assuming that other groups did not "misinterpret" the assignment (for if they did, it would be very likely that the instructions were unclear), then some discussion of why the group got off the track might be helpful. However, a more productive discussion centers on the group's failure by considering students' concerns:

- **How does it feel to be in a group that does the wrong thing?**
- **What did we do in our group that *was* related to the assignment?**

Answers to both questions provide productive interaction for the entire class, not just the group which encountered the problem.

The "outsider." By observing the groups in progress, a teacher may notice one or two members not participating. The inclination may be to approach the group, asking why the "outsiders" are not participating or why the others are not including them. While this approach seems sensible, it may not do much to change the situation. A more productive approach asks questions related to the learning process:

- **"Do you feel you are getting something out of this group?" (Question given to "outsider.")**
- **"Do you think Jennifer (an "outsider") might have some ideas to add to your discussion?" (Question delivered to other group member.) "I bet she does if you just ask her."**
- **"What do you like best about what is going on in your group?" (Question directed at an "outsider.")**

We need not make the assumption that "outsiders" are not learning anything from the group, but we can check that assumption with students.

The "troublemaker." Because of the decentralized class structure in using groups, the "troublemaker" is particularly difficult to deal with. As soon as we notice a child acting inappropriately, we can approach the group and ask some questions:

- **"Something is not working here. What seems to be the problem?"**
- **"How is this problem affecting the work in your group?"**
- **"How does it feel being in a group having this problem?"**
- **"How does it feel, Alan, being the one everyone is blaming for the trouble?"**

In the process of talking about the "group problem," the "troublemaker" may be able to adopt a more cooperative manner. Attention is given to the disruptive child, but fingers are not pointed in a way that will increase the problem or cause further unhappiness. Again, Cooper and Galvin's booklet, *Improving Classroom Communication* (1983), contains other techniques for this type of classroom management.

DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION FUNCTIONS

Our goal is to achieve a holistic learning in which the child grows in all areas at once, and all areas of learning (reading, writing, oral communica-

tion, science, math, social studies) are integrated in the child's learning. Instruction in curricular subjects can be enhanced by using more effective techniques of classroom discussion in which children participate more actively in the learning process. Further, development of oral communication skills can occur if the instruction climate is shifted from using communication-restrictive techniques (e.g., "fill in the blank") to communication-promoting techniques ("making an observation" or group work).

To accomplish these objectives, elementary school teachers should expand their repertoire of classroom communication skills. We have already discussed four techniques which would encourage developing oral communication competencies in children: ("make an observation"—informing/responding; the "student question" technique—informing/responding; "How would it be?"—imagining; and group work—serves all functions). The final section of this booklet suggests a type of classroom activity in science related to each of the communication functions.The ideas presented can be considered along with those discussed in R.R. Allen and Robert Kellner's booklet, *Putting Humpty Dumpty Together Again: Integrating the Language Arts* (1983). The booklet considers the integration of language arts in the curricular areas, and the functional communication approach is considered as one model of integration. Explanation of the functional approach is also given in booklets edited by this author (Wood, 1977a; 1977b).

Controlling activities

Most discussion questions within or at the end of a science unit require students' responses along the informing/responding dimension. Seldom are questions found that develop oral communication competencies in any of the other functional areas. It is possible to transform questions and materials into activities that develop controlling communication skills. Consider the following questions in a third-grade science unit:

> Where does the energy come from to cause each of these changes?
>
> 1. Wet clothes drying in the backyard.
> 2. Wet clothes drying in a dryer at the laundromat.
> 3. Coffee boils.
> 4. Clouds form in the atmosphere. (Brandwein et al., 1966, p. 116).

Students' answers to such questions often contain more than one answer. (For example, wet clothes dry as a result of wind *and* heat.) The key to developing controlling communication skills is to capitalize on the phenomenon of multiple explanations of scientific concepts. Teachers can phrase classroom science activities in terms of a persuasive communication on "the one component most significant" in explaining a scientific process. In the case of the example, students can hear arguments for the action of heat versus wind in drying clothes on the clothes line, or the action of the tumbling motion of the dryer versus the heat in drying clothes in the dryer. The object of the activity is to prompt children to think clearly about

the factors operating in the particular scientific situation. This technique can be applied to discussions in social sciences and other subjects.

Sharing feelings

It is a hard task to think about how we can develop children's competencies in sharing feelings in a unit dealing with scientific concepts. It might be easier to integrate this function into discussions of social studies or health, but science seems nonemotional, right? The idea is to capitalize on those units and topics where sharing feelings is an appropriate focus of instruction. An example of this illustrated with certain techniques, follows.

After the unit on changing water to water vapor, (drying clothes on a clothes line and in a dryer), there is a unit on mixing liquids with air. In particular, perfume gases that escape from the perfume liquid reach our noses through the air (Brandwein et al., 1966, p. 119). A discussion of this rather complex scientific process can be combined with an exercise in sharing feelings. We can preface the discussion with a basic "human factor" (assuming our noses operate pretty much alike and we do not have colds or medical complications): that we will all smell the same gas in the air. However, since human beings react differently to different aspects of their environment through the senses, feelings and reactions to different smells may vary. Consider questions such as these:

- Talk about your feelings when you smell this particular perfume. What does it remind you of? How do you feel when you smell this?
- If we substituted mothballs for the perfume, how would you feel? How are the mothballs like the perfume? How do they differ?

Essentially, where human reactions enter the scientific picture, try to integrate sharing feelings into the discussion. Lessons tied to the study of people are more easily linked to techniques developing sharing of feelings.

Informing/responding

The informing function is most often the focus of classroom communication activities. Questions for students are most always based on the informing/responding function. Rarely do these exercises and questions stimulate development in other functions, such as ritualizing, sharing feelings or imagining. Most exercises and questions have a narrow focus, and require a few words or a sentence to satisfy the task. Consider these rather unimaginative questions for students in a sixth-grade science unit (Abruscato et al., 1980b, p. 129):

1. What is the name for the smallest particle of many substances that is still that substance?

2. What determines whether something is gas, liquid, or solid?

Neither question was designed to stimulate class discussion, and neither would work to accomplish that, either. If the goal is an interesting class discussion, rather than papers-to-be-graded, consider these:

- Look around this room and try to find at least five different types of molecules that you can "see." Tell us about these five molecules in a special order—from the one that moves the fastest to the one that moves the slowest. Let's draw a continuum of these molecules on the blackboard.

- Let's go inside our mouths for a minute, and think about the molecules we have there. Are there gases, liquids, and solids? Let's talk about the molecules in our mouths.

Both sets of discussion probes elicit informing/responding communication that is likely to be more elaborated and complex than the one-word responses which textbook questions typically evoke.

Ritualizing

While informing/responding communication skills are easily integrated into topics in any curricular area, ritualizing is probably the most difficult function to integrate. This is because ritualizing primarily serves a social function in human interaction and ties only indirectly to actual topics of communication. Again, the primary role of ritualizing communication acts (e.g., greeting, introducing, taking turns talking, engaging in small talk) is to initiate and maintain social contact with others. This does not seem related to science units, but relationships with social studies topics can be more easily visualized (e.g., family dinner table rituals, cultural differences in communication rituals).

One instance of integration which I observed in a fourth-grade science class was extremely inventive and successful: The purpose of the lesson was to develop children's skills of verbally demonstrating a science experiment to others. It was this teacher's view that the ritualistic skills essential to a good scientific demonstration required careful study and practice. First, the scientific experiment needs a brief, clear, and interesting *introduction*. The introduction must capture the *attention* of the listener. Each experiment must be segmented into its *key steps* by the student. Each step must be *introduced*, *demonstrated*, and then *commented upon*. Finally, the *closing* of the demonstration must be brief, clear, and interesting. I felt that the format used in presenting the scientific information was almost as critical to its success as the content of the demonstration.

Imagining

A most interesting application of the imagining function in science is in the area of *speculating*. Here, children can be encouraged to master basic scientific concepts inductively. Consider the topic, changing water into water vapor. Children can be divided into groups and given a project or question and asked to speculate about "what would happen if?" The following are some speculative topics (questions) related to water and water vapor:

- Humidity is really water vapor in our air. Is there any way we can increase the humidity in our air at home? How can we do it right here in this room?
- What would happen if you were drying clothes on your backyard clothes line and the temperature in the air went from 35 degrees to 23 degrees? What would happen to the water vapor coming into the air from the clothes?
- Since water constantly changes to water vapor, why haven't our lakes and rivers dried up much more than they have?
- Can you think of some reasons why air is usually drier (lower humidity) in the winter as compared to the summer?

Let students speculate. Encourage all speculation which is based in some scientific fact. The goal is not so much to scrutinize all aspects of children's speculations as it is to get them to use their imaginations.

CONCLUSIONS

In a communication-promoting environment, teachers and students participate actively in the learning process. While children are learning concepts in science, mathematics, or social studies, for example, they are developing critical skills in oral and written communication. The holistic view in oral communication development outlined in this booklet focuses on the five communication functions and their integration within subjects like science and social studies, as well as the more traditional language arts program.

The methods and techniques that I have outlined apply to instruction at all grade levels. With a basic understanding of the communication milestones for the functions like controlling, sharing feelings, and informing/responding, teachers can better gear their instructional techniques to the total development of the child. At the same time, developing the five communication functions is relevant to children from Hispanic, Chinese, and other bilingual backgrounds. All children must develop a repertoire of communication skills in a variety of situations, and developing communication functions can most effectively be launched in everyday teaching practices.

We must give some careful thought to classroom communication prac-

tices so that students can develop into stronger learners. This is a hard task—managing a classroom filled with 30 or 35 children. Not only is it expected of us, but we are expected to manage *well* so that the children will learn basic skills, *including* effective oral communication. It takes a special person to pursue an elementary school teaching career. This booklet was written with that special person in mind.

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