ABSTRACT
         Focusing on the role of language in learning, this
paper discusses schemata and symbolic thinking that help students
learn from unfamiliar experiences. The first part of the paper
introduces the idea of symbolic thinking by comparing students
encountering new ideas with convention-goers making their way around
a new city. The section suggests that the convention-goers can do
this because they relate unfamiliar experiences to things that are
already held in the mind symbolically and adjust old ideas on the
basis of new information. The next part of the paper discusses
language use in school, and contrasts Transmission teachers, those
who see themselves as experts imparting a fixed body of knowledge,
with Interpretation teachers, those who acknowledge and work with the
ideas with which students come to school. The third part of the paper
offers a communication model of language for learning, which
encompasses individual capacities for language, language functions,
communication modes, and audiences, while the fourth section suggests
ways in which the model may be used to facilitate students'
self-expressive uses of language. (Four references, a diagram of
teaching styles, a diagram of the communication model, and a form for
mapping current curricula are included.) (JC)

Connecting: A Theoretical Basis for
Creative Self-Expression and Communication

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Session F4   3:00-4:15 PM
The Communication Connection: Creative Self-Expression through
Symbolization in the Middle Grades
1987 National Council of Teachers of English Convention
Los Angeles, CA   Sunday, November 22, 1987

Language and Learning

Our session title and titles for our respective presentations use

several key words: communication, symbolization, connecting, and creative

self-expression. In my presentation, I will explore these constructs

in relationship to language and learning in the life experiences of human

beings. As we explore these ideas, I will suggest a model of communica-

tion that can serve as a basis both for the language arts curriculum and

for uses of language across the curriculum. In order to look more

directly at the role of language in learning, it may be helpful momen-

tarily to move away from a focus on learning in schools.

For many of us the last few days have been filled with new experi-

ences. We have travelled to an unfamiliar city, reached a hotel we have

never been in before, met new people and renewed acquaintences with old

friends, eaten unfamiliar foods, and contemplated both new ideas and

familiar ideas presented in new contexts. How is it that we, as human

beings, are able to manage all of these new experiences more or less suc-

cessfully?

Jimmy Britton suggests that we are able to do this because, while we

have not encountered exactly this set of experiences before, they are not

truly new Rather, we are able to handle these experiences because we

have learned about them from similar experiences through which:

we construct a representation of the world as we experience it, and

from this representation, this cumulative record of our own past, we

generate expectations which, as moment by moment the future becomes

the present, enable us to interpret the present.

(Britton, 1970, p. 12)

In fact, Britton argues that it is the ability to represent experi-

ence symbolically that makes us truly human. He points out that language

is only one form of symbolism. He says:

But language, as we shall see, is only one way of symbolizing what is

in the universe, and we cannot explain the particular workings of

language unless we see their relations with other ways of symbolizing

and with the nature of the symbolizing process itself (or with what

is common to all ways).

(Britton, 1970, p. 13)

How does this symbolic representation occur? Think about your own

experiences this week. You arrived at new airport. When you exited the

plane how did you know where to go to find luggage, if it arrived? How

did you know how to find ground transport? When you reached the hotel

how did you know where and how to register? You went to an unfamiliar

restaurant. The menu contained descriptions of the ingredients in foods

you had not eaten before. How did you know which entree you would enjoy?

You encountered a friend you had not seen in many years. How did you

know it was the person you remembered?

One answer is that you didn't know any of these things. Another

answer is that you sort of knew each of them, because you had previously

built symbolic representations from negotiating similar experiences. You

had knowledge that you were able to use, even though you may not have

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considered it consciously. The knowledge that you used may have been in
the form of concepts stored in language. Or it may have been in visual
images, in gustatory memories, or in auditory memories. Through those
symbolic representations you were able to connect present to past and
make predictions about the future. Through prior experiences you created
your own understanding of the world--you learned how to interpret, what
to expect, and how to operate.

Further, as you drew on this intuitive knowledge to negotiate these
experiences, you were continuing to learn--you were altering or adjusting
present perceptions or were adding new knowledge to your representation
of the world based on these new events. This suggests that all learning
involves active construction of meaning through processes of representa-
tion. It is through symbolic representation that we create our under-
standings of events in the world in such a way that we can use them in
the future.

The natural learning processes that we have all used this week, in
fact, use moment-by-moment our whole life long, have implications for
learning in school. In natural learning environments persons of all ages
interact with experiences and other persons to actively construct knowl-
edge of their world. In the process, they also learn ways of learning
and knowing. Gordon Wells (1986) has suggested that storying is a pri-
mary means through which human society makes sense of its experience--or
makes meaning. Sometimes these stories are public and overt, as when we
tell personal stories, gossip, or write. At other times we make meaning
by engaging in what Wells calls "inner storying" (p. 195). He says:

> Each act of recognition, whether it be of objects in the external
>
> world perceived through our senses or of a conceptual relationship
>
> "seen" through an act of the mind, involves a sort of inner storying.

This is how we make sense of it.

Rarely, if ever do we have all the necessary visual or other sensory information to decide unambiguously what it is we are seeing, hearing, or touching. Instead we draw on our mental model of the world to construct a story that would be plausible in the context and use that to check the data of sense against the predictions that the story makes possible.

(Wells, 1986, p. 195)

Language in School

As we negotiated our way through this week we drew on and modified our mental models through the use of language and other processes of symbolism for learning. As we met each new event or encountered new ideas we took an active role in processing these situations or ideas, using our present knowledge and beliefs to interpret experiences to make them part of our inner story of the world. While this form of learning is common for preschoolers in the home and in students' lives outside of school, it is often not the pattern found in school. For as Barnes points out in his book From Communication to Curriculum (1976), many teachers see themselves as transmitters of knowledge, rather than as persons who facilitate students' interpretation of knowledge. Barnes compares the Transmission and the Interpretation teacher on: (1) the teacher's view of knowledge, (2) what he values in the pupils, (3) his view of his own role, and (4) his evaluation of his pupils' participation. His comparison, as shown in Diagram 1, suggests very different views of learning and the functions of language in learning.

Insert Diagram 1 about here

Diagram 1

The Transmission teacher...	The Interpretation teacher...
(1) Believes knowledge to exist in the form of public disciplines which include content and criteria of performance	(1) Believes knowledge to exist in the knower's ability to organize thought and action
(2) Values the learners' performances insofar as they conform to the criteria of the discipline	(2) Values the learner's commitment to interpreting reality, so that criteria arise as much from the learner as from the teacher
(3) Perceives the teacher's task to be the evaluation and correction of the learner's performance, according to criteria of which he is the guardian	(3) Perceives the teacher's task to be the setting up of a dialogue in which the learner can reshape his knowledge through interaction with others
(4) Perceives the learner as an uninformed acolyte for whom access to knowledge will be difficult since he must qualify himself through tests of appropriate performance	(4) Perceives the learner as already possessing systematic and relevant knowledge, and the means of reshaping that knowledge

Source: Douglas Barnes. From Communication to Curriculum. Hammondsworth, England. Penguin Books, 1976, pp. 144-145. (Available in the US through Boynton/Cook.)

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In a Transmission classroom, the teacher controls knowledge and the language used to access it. In that classroom, teacher language is used largely to inform and to control students. The teacher gives information in bits conceived to fit the learners' capabilities and structures situations for the student to display that knowledge. The student's primary use of language is to demonstrate mastery of knowledge received, often in response to questions. This response may amount to little more than regurgitation of one word or phrasal answers.

As you can see by reflecting on your uses of language during the last week, natural learning involves a much more active role on the part of the learner and a much wider variety of functions of language. In natural learning situations human beings use language interactively to get attention, to request information, to influence or direct themselves and others, to clarify, to predict, to share feelings—that is to make meaning of their experiences by connecting present to past in a way that can affect the future. This is the language that characterizes the classroom of the Interpretation teacher. Here students use various modes of language to communicate their understanding of experiences to themselves and to others. The teacher collaborates with students to support and facilitate this active creation of meaning.

A Communication Model of Language for Learning

To bring this natural process of learning into many classrooms, will require a radical shift in our conception of learning and the type of communication that facilitates learning. Diagram 2 is a model of communication which I developed for use in A Guide to Curriculum Development in Language Arts (Iowa Department of Education, 1986). It will also be used in a guide to communication across the curriculum, K-12, that I am presently preparing for the Iowa Department of Education.

Insert Diagram 2 about here

Because it is focused on the elements involved in all natural com-
munication processes, this model can serve as a guide for teachers as
they attempt to support students´ growth in language for learning and
self-expression. In the model, the inner circle represents the basic
capacities each individual possesses. The three outer circles represent
the elements of the communication process: language functions, communica-
tion modes, and audiences. When the outer circles are rotated, they
offer the possible communication situations that persons encounter life-
long. Only the outer circle, audience, is age-level dependent. As stu-
dents mature socially and emotionally, growth in ability to communicate
with larger and more impersonal audiences can be expected to develop.

Let´s consider how the model works by using a simple communication
act that most of us have engaged in this week--asking for directions.
Individual capacities worked in concert to prompt us to feel the need to
ask, to perceive an individual as a likely respondent, and to use
thought, language, and movement to create and express our request. In
requesting directions we integrated several functions of language, we
used rituals of seeking attention from a stranger, used informing and
controlling functions to indicate what help we needed, and probably con-
veyed our feelings of uncertainty, frustration, or panic. As we
attempted to comprehend the directions, we utilized informing, control-
ling, and imagining functions as we mentally pictured the steps to be
followed. The rituals of seeking clarification or thanking were no doubt
used, as was expression of feeling--whether relief and assurance or con-
tinued confusion and uncertainty. Such a situation surely utilized the
oral and visual/nonverbal modes of communication, as we spoke, listened,

MODEL OF COMMUNICATION

Interaction of Individual Capacities, Language Function, Communication Mode, and Audience
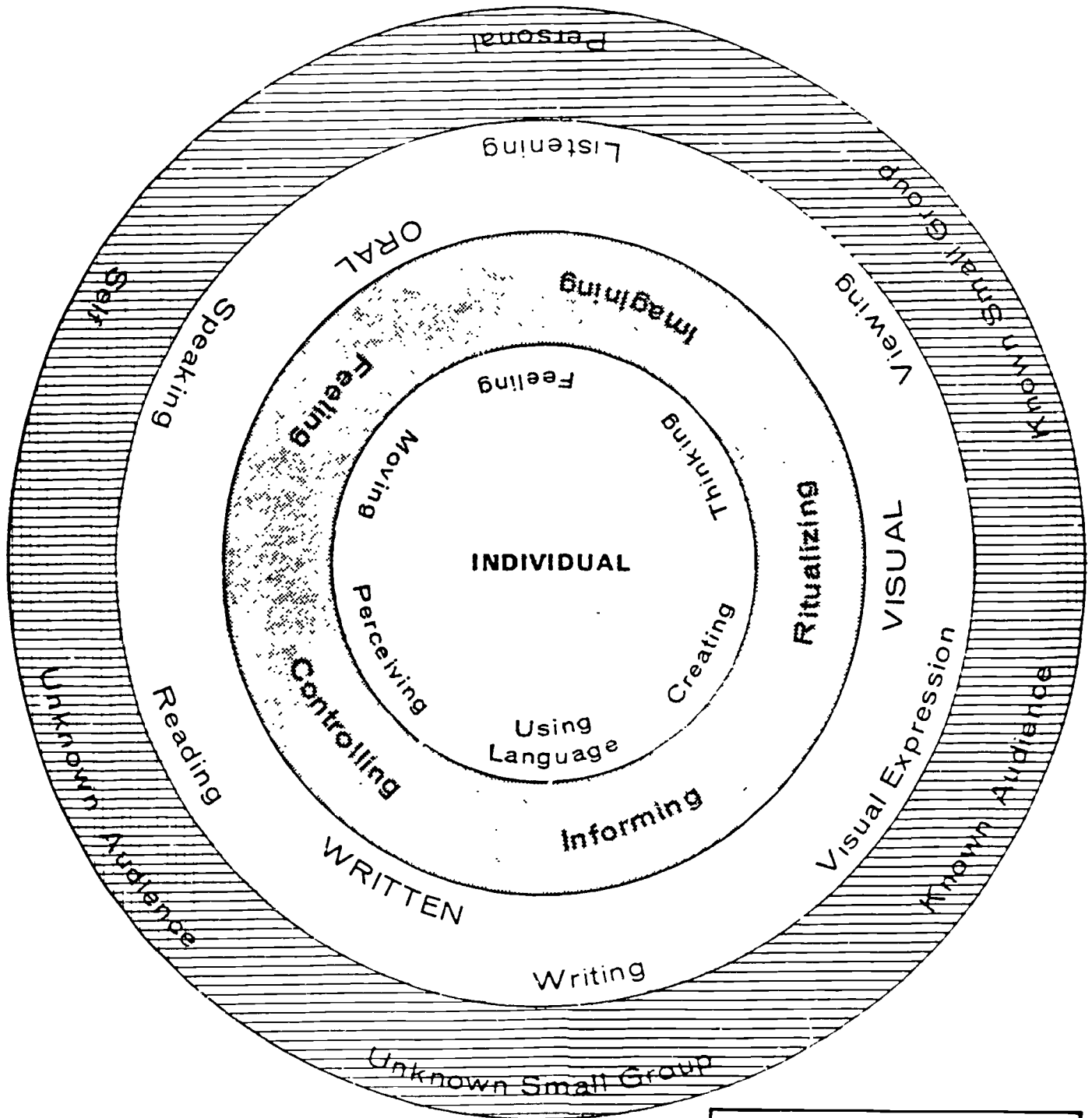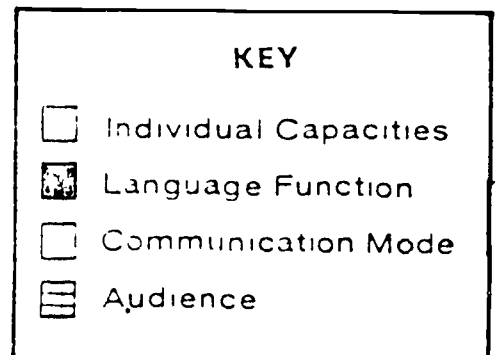
Personal

Listening

Self

ORAL

Speaking

Imagining

Feeling

Viewing

Known Small Group

Feeling

Moving

Thinking

Controlling

Perceiving

INDIVIDUAL

Creating

Ritualizing

VISUAL

Reading

Unknown Audience

Using Language

Visual Expression

Informing

Known Audience

WRITTEN

Writing

Unknown Small Group

Diagram 2

KEY	
☐	Individual Capacities
▦	Language Function
☐	Communication Mode
⊟	Audience

Source: Iowa Department of Education.   _A Guide to Curriculum
Development in Language Arts_, (Des Moines, IA:
Iowa Department of Education, 1986), 12.

and used and interpreted facial and gestural signs. It would be very
common for written communication to be involved, as well, perhaps in the
form of a map or of street signs or landmarks. Audience might have been
a person or small group--known or unknown.

Concentric circles are used in this model rather than the traditional
scope and sequence grid for three reasons: (1) to show the integration of
the components within each element; (2) to show the integration of the
three elements within any communication act; and (3) to show that growth
in individual capacities and in elements of the communication process are
global, not linear and sequential. Students enter school able to use
communication for all of its functions and in varying modes with diverse
audiences. As they mature, they grow in the range of strategies which
they are able to use to create and communicate meaning.
Use of the Communication Model to Facilitate the Communication Connection

The teacher who wishes to facilitate students' self-expressive uses
of language to connect their personal knowledge to new experiences can
use the model as a planning tool. By assessing the learning experience
that they use, teachers can identify the personal capacities, language
functions, modes, and audiences involved. A simple mapping form (Diagram
3) can permit a teacher (1) to monitor uses to assure diversity of expe-
riences, (2) to consider ways in which further integration can enhance
learning for students, and, (3) to anticipate students' needs in order to
better serve the facilitative role of an Interpretation model teacher.

Insert Diagram 3 about here

Wells summarizes this collaborative role of the teacher when he says:
We are meaning makers--every one of us: children, parents, and
teachers. To try to make sense, to construct stories, and to share

FORM FOR MAPPING PRESENT CURRICULUM

Teacher_____   Course or Area_____

Level_____   Dates or Time Span_____

Directions: Briefly describe learning experiences in 'our current program. List present focus in individual capa-
cities, function, mode, and/or audience, as appropriate. Use Diagram 2 to identify extensions to enhance integration.

Brief Description of Present Learning Experience	Individual Capacities, Language Function(s), Communication Mode(s), and Audience(s)	Extensions of Focus to Enhance Integration

Diagram 3

Source: Iowa Department of Education. A Guide to Curriculum Development

in Language Arts, (Des Moines, IA: Iowa Department of Education,

1986), 73.

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them with others in speech and in writing is an essential part of being human. For those of us who are more knowledgeable and more mature--parents and teachers--the responsibility is clear: to interact with those in our care in such a way as to foster and enrich <u>their</u> meaning making.

(Wells, 1986, p. 222)

Conclusion

The next presentation will exemplify the facilitative role of a teacher who believes in students' abilities to make meaning by making connections through processes of communication. As you share this experience, be aware of the processes of symbolism, including language, that the students use. Also notice the integration of language functions; of oral, written, and visual modes of communication; and of varied audiences as students use communication processes to construct meaning.

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