

Strategies for Language Development¹

Some general observations on oral language teaching

- There is less of a tradition of direct teaching of oral language skills in Irish education and teachers are less confident about identifying, measuring and recording them. This has led to an overfocusing on *written* at the expense of *oral* language teaching and learning.
- Oral language competencies underpin written language learning and are therefore a more useful starting point than reading and writing for the development of general literacy .
- A greater focus on oral language teaching would be supported by the development of a syllabus for formally teaching receptive, expressive and pragmatic language skills, such as the knowledge/skills/competences
 - to give an account of a personal experience
 - to construct a detailed description of an object, event, place
 - to interview, analyse and report back accurately on others' views
 - to make a formal presentation on a theme
 - to make a case for a point of view using the arts of persuasion and argument
 - to manage an audience e.g. when telling a joke or story
 - to listen with understanding to a complex or lengthy narrative
 - to be aware of language forms, including vocabulary and style.
- People with good oral language skills can compensate for their difficulties with reading and writing and operate quite effectively in many aspects of life, unlike people with neither oral nor written language skills.
- Having oral language competence as an alternative to basic reading and writing need not (and should not) represent a reduction in the standard of language skill being measured and attested to.
- It is unfair to people with severe dyslexia to hamper them unnecessarily with a literacy requirement if they are otherwise relatively effective in their interactions with others.
- Integrating literacy is still recommended for general teaching programmes, however, as it supports oral language development and the mixed approach to *Communications* (incorporating both oral and written elements) is the most beneficial approach, as long as literacy does not dominate at the expense of effective oral communication.

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Some exercises for developing oral language skills

1. Vocabulary
 - (a) Classification: words used for things we wear, eat, etc.
 - (b) Similarity: how are needle, thread, scissors, linked?
 - (c) Opposites: what is the opposite of black?
 - (d) Past and present: what did people wear in 1950?
 - (e) Analogies: cat is to kitten as elephant is to _____?
 - (f) Families: for example, rodents.
2. Compile picture dictionary using index cards; write word, draw picture to represent word, colour picture, write short sentence (including target word) on back of index card.
3. Play word games: one person says a word and another provides a definition, a word meaning the opposite, and a synonym.
 1. Listen to stories on tape and recall the story.
 2. Design assignments that will facilitate the person to listen critically to TV programmes.
 3. Make exercises that facilitate the substitution of words in stories, and the composition, completion, and altering of stories.
 4. Use activities designed to develop skill in syntax, such as closure exercises.
 5. Use cartoon strips to sequence stories accompanied by verbal explanations.
 6. Focus on events and their causes and possible outcomes.
 7. Discuss the reasons for laws and regulations in society with the person.
 8. Review events of the previous day through discussion.
 9. Use crossword-type activities to develop verbal expression.
 10. Set drawing tasks that require the person to follow verbal instructions.
 11. Age-appropriate equivalent games as 'I spy'.
 12. Play 20 questions game in small groups.
 13. Using objects brought into the class by the students, describe these objects.
 14. Person to give descriptions of his/her place of origin, home, community, etc

15. Famous people: students ask questions so as to identify the target famous person.
16. Excuses: students have to suggest excuses for difficult situations.
17. Engage in classroom discussions.
18. Using the telephone to convey messages to others.
19. Using pictures to create and tell a story aloud to the class.