

UNIVERSITY OF
FORT HARE

Eastern Cape Education
Department

***Distance
Education Project***

*Core Education Studies Course
Learning about Learning*

Umthamo 3

Talking and Thinking

(Pilot Edition) October 1999



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Introduction



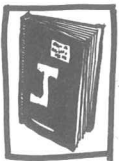
We are going to ask you to think about something we all enjoy ... something most children and adults are very good at doing - **talking**.

In the most recent Language, Literacy and Communication umthamo (Umthamo 17), you conducted a research project. One component (part) of this project was to record conversations of three very young children. Another component was to ask the learners you teach to observe young children, and then to theorise together about how we learn language.

In this umthamo, we will continue to think about **talking**. In particular we will think about the role talk plays in **thinking** and **learning**. We hope you will become much more aware of the **talk** that goes on in your classroom. We will ask you to plan, observe and reflect on **talk** and **learning**. You will also be asked to think about and articulate (express) your views on these questions.

- Why do we enjoy talking?
- What happens to talk at school?
- What comes first, talking or thinking?
- Who asks the questions in your classroom? The learners? The teachers? Or both learners and teachers?

In Umthamo 12, pages 19 & 20, we thought about different kinds of questions.

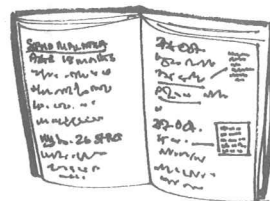


Activity 1 - The role of talk in thinking and learning (Starting a mind-map)

Open your journal to a new, left-hand page and write the date. Then write the heading, *LAL 3: Talking - How do we learn to talk? What role does talk play in thinking and learning?* Next, copy the mind-map on the opposite page into your Journal.

Now, think back to the interviews you conducted with your learners in the last Language, Literacy and Communication umthamo, Umthamo 17. Did the children talk about why they talk? What does talk allow them to do?

Spend some time recalling the conversations of the children you observed, as well as the conversations of your learners and yourself. (You may want to refresh your memory by looking at the notes you made when you listened to those children.) Write down your thoughts on this mind-map. Make sure that you leave space so that you can add more information to this mind-map. Then close your Journal.



from Umthamo 17

Jerome Bruner, a psychologist, has spent much of his life developing a deeper understanding of children's development. Bruner talks about the 'spiral curriculum'. By using the word 'spiral' he suggests that learning is a continuous process, and that each time we return to an area of knowledge we often add new ideas to what we already know.

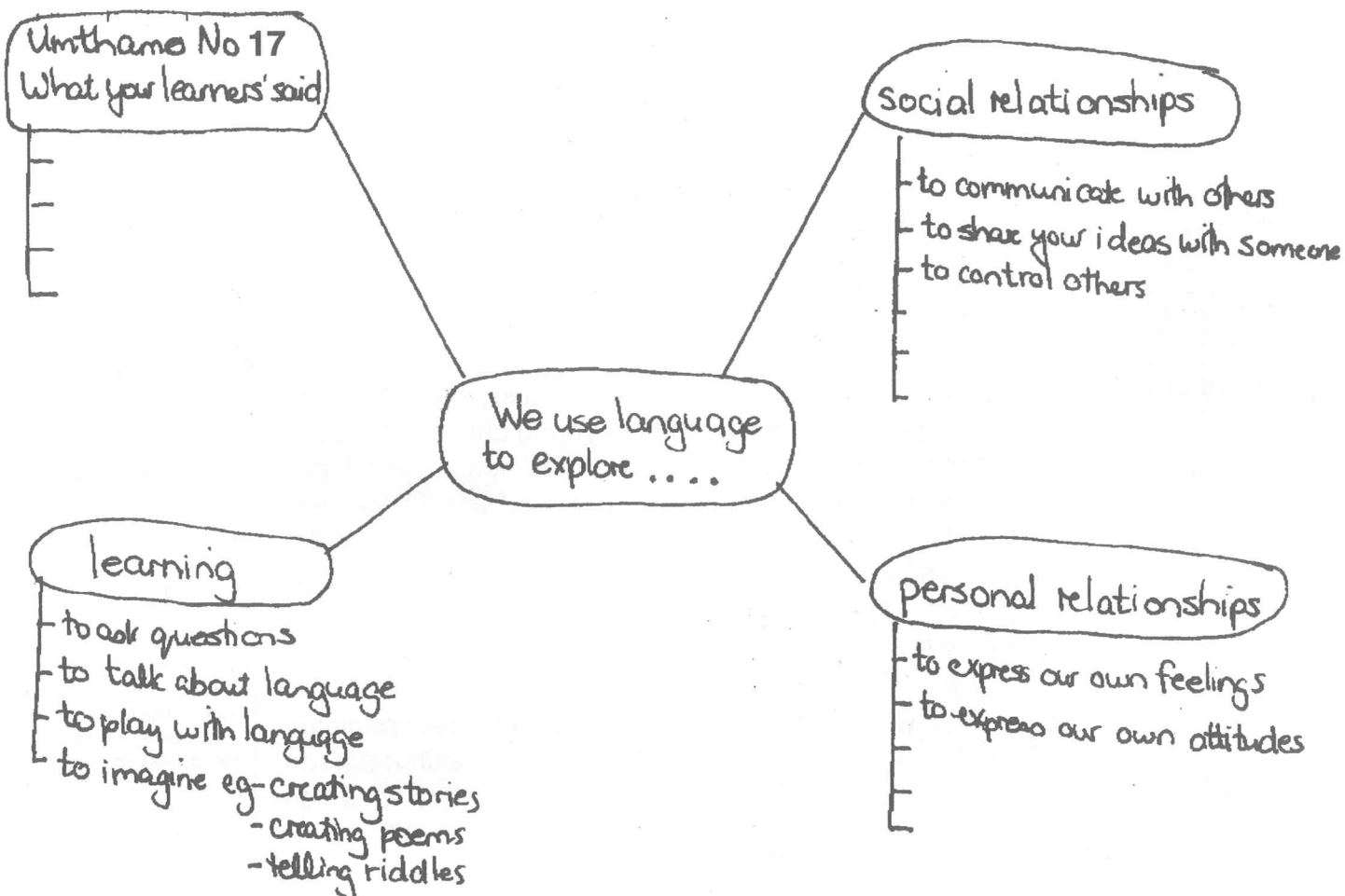
We would like you to add to this mind-map as you work through this umthamo. As new ideas and conversations take place, open your Journal to this page and add new points. But, as you add new information, write that information in a second colour (or pencil).

When you complete this umthamo you will have a mind-map in your Journal in two colours. One colour will indicate what you remember from what you learnt in the previous umthamo. The second colour will indicate what you have learnt in this umthamo.

What do you think of the 'spiral' image Jerome Bruner uses? Is it a powerful image? Is your imagination stimulated - can you see a spiral in your mind's eye? When we think in images what kind of thinking are we exercising? Children are probably better using their imaginations in such ways. Perhaps, as we get older, many of us forget how to use this powerful way of thinking.

The idea of the spiral curriculum was mentioned in Umthamo 11 on page 29.

How do we learn to talk? What role does talk play in thinking and learning?





Unit 1 - Why do we enjoy talking?

Most of us enjoy talking, especially when we are with friends, or when we are in the company of people whom we love and respect. Children are also very good at talking, and do a great deal of talking.

Surprisingly, we do not always need company to have a conversation. Although we often talk to someone - perhaps another person, or an animal - it is not unusual to talk to oneself! Mothers and pre-school teachers know that their young children also do a great deal of talking to themselves.

Sometimes you see a child playing with a toy (real or imagined) and talking out aloud: exploring, explaining, scolding, showing care etc. Have you observed how much beginner talkers talk to themselves? Even when they have an audience, someone nearby, they often continue talking to themselves. If you listen-in on these conversations, you might hear a question being asked, and then answered - by the child! Young children talk so naturally. What, do you think, is the purpose of this talk?

Chapter 2 from *Language and Learning* by James Britton, has examples of young children talking in this way. (You had this reading with *Unthamo* 17.) You may like to go back to that reading now and skim through it for the examples he includes. Look at pages 77 & 78, where Clare is drawing and talking to herself, and pages 82 & 83 where Karen is talking to herself before she falls asleep.

When you were doing your research project in the most recent *Language, Literacy and Communication umthamo* you might have met a lonely, or only, child, or a "laat-lammetjie" who has an imaginary friend. Although nobody else can see the imaginary "friend", the child speaks about it and it seems to live in the same home, shares in much of the life of the child, as well as in many of her/his adventures.

Several English stories for young children explore children's imaginary friends. These include:

- * *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* - Judith Kerr
- * *There's a Lion in the Meadow* - Margaret Mahy
- * *Gorilla* - Anthony Browne

In the early part of this century, Kornei Chukovsky, a Russian psychologist carried out a study of young children between the ages of two and five years. He wrote about a small boy who had an imaginary friend who was a bear. Chukovsky tells of the child telling his mother not to sit on a particular chair because his friend, the she-bear, was sitting on that very chair! The mother couldn't see the bear, but the bear was very real to the child. (Chukovsky, 1963)

Do you know of similar stories where children have imaginary friends? An older person might be a good resource person to talk to. She or he may know of traditional tales which include the imaginary friends of children.

One day when you want to do something unusual and nurturing, you might want to talk to your learners about imaginary friends. Ask your learners to write a story about an imaginary friend. The friend might be another person, an animal, a small creature, an angel. If you do this, write and tell the writers of this *umthamo*, and describe what happened.

We are so good at talking, and we do it so often, that it might seem strange to stop and think about why we enjoy this activity, and what we get from talking. If we were asked to

answer the question, "Why do we talk?", many of us would answer, without having to think for more than a moment or two,

"To be able to **communicate** with one another."

"To **share ideas** with another person."

"To **find out** what another person is thinking."

What other answers can you think of to the question, "*What do we use talk for?*"

When one of the editors was working at colleges of education, he used the example of a person who has a huge personal problem. She is very troubled, and can't stop thinking about the problem. She doesn't know what to do about it. What choice must she make? She thinks, and thinks, and thinks. How can she solve her problem? What should she do? So many questions in her head and yet no answer!

So she goes to talk to a friend of hers. Suddenly, as she starts explaining her problem to her friend, the answer to her problem becomes clear. She knows just what she wants to do. By talking to her friend, she has understood her own mind more clearly. Have you ever had such an experience?

When they heard this story, the college students invariably would all nod their heads. This is a common human experience. Somebody, somewhere has said, "*How can I know what I think, until I can hear what I say?*" By talking aloud, we can clarify what we think, even to ourselves. So this is another purpose for talking. We talk so that we are clear about what we think. Talk helps us get clear about our ideas.



Activity 2 - Using Pictures of People Talking

You might like you to do the following activity with a child, or a teenager, in your own home. We would like you to look at the pictures on the opposite page, and to talk about them together.

Before you start this activity open your Journal. Write the heading *LAL 3: Activity 1: Looking at Pictures*, and the date. Then study at the pictures below and on the opposite page. What might the people be saying to each other, in each picture? Look again at each picture, and think and talk aloud. Can you think of one (or two) words that would best describe the purpose of the communication.

Allow time for interesting words to emerge. Don't just take the first word that comes to your mind. Use that first word as a stimulus that allows your mind to think of more and more words and phrases. Let the words and phrases flow like a spiral.

For example, look at picture 1. You will see a woman holding a baby closely, talking about her own mother, and singing a lullaby. Perhaps she is singing the same song she listened to when she was a baby. The word that first comes to mind could be **love**. If you stay with the word **love**, and think about what the love is expressing, another word might be **belonging**. The woman is expressing, through her song, a deep sense of **belonging together**. Perhaps the belonging of a mother and her child. Perhaps also a cultural belonging, expressed through memories and song, by one generation to another.

Start with one picture. Give that picture a title. For example, if you look at picture 1, the title could be, *A baby and mother*. Underline the title, and then think about words that would best describe the purpose of the communication. As words come into your mind, write them down. Use each word to lead you to other words. It may be like a chain or perhaps like a spiral, widening and deepening.

Before moving on to the next one, put a circle around the word or phrase that you think best captures the purpose of the communication in the picture. Write quickly. Don't bother about neatness or spelling. What is important is to spend time thinking, to become lost in your thoughts. It isn't necessary to write carefully. This is personal writing. It is for yourself. You are not writing for an audience.

This is similar to Activity 3 in LLC 1 - Umthamo 1.

Picture

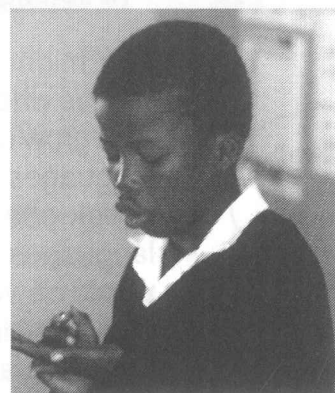
A baby and mother

Love
Belonging
Feel safe
Build Family Ties
Share memories
Belong together
Cultural Continuity

The purpose of the talk is to develop a sense of belonging.



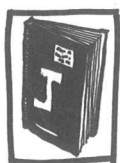
Picture 1



Preparation for doing this Activity with your Learners

In Unit 3 on page 14, you will be asked to do this same activity with your learners. But, in order to prepare for this activity, you will need to begin to collect pictures. You could ask your learners to help you collect pictures of people communicating. Magazines and newspapers are good sources.

If you have 40 learners in your class, try to collect at least 20 pictures. This will allow each pair of learners 1 picture to work with. If this is not possible, collect one picture for a group of three or four learners. You could also use the pictures you collected for the very first LLC 1 umthamo. (The best pictures will be those which really show people communicating. Try not to include pictures that show people with passive faces, or people standing passively.)



Have you gone back to the mind-map in your Journal?
Can you add to what you have already written?
(Remember to work in a different colour pen or pencil.)



Unit 2 - What are children learning as their vocabulary grows?



Almost all young children learn to talk. They are not tutored, they are not taught to talk. And yet, with immense speed, their language develops. A husband and wife team, Yetta and Kenneth Goodman, have written many books together. In their book *Language and Thinking in School* they call our attention to this achievement with these words:

"Language is the most useful and marvellous human invention and it is amazing that nearly all children achieve near mastery of at least one language by the age of five or six years. Adults tend to overlook the immensity of this achievement The studies of the vocabulary of school going beginners indicate that the average child knows at least 8000 words and may even know over 20 000 words."

(Goodman, K, Goodman Y, et al. 1987-:24).

You might know children who have grown up in bilingual homes where they learn to speak two languages. Or children who grow up in multi-lingual communities, who speak several languages. Many children in Gauteng enter school able to speak one or two home languages, as well as additional languages spoken by children in their neighbourhoods. It would be very interesting to do a study of the vocabulary of these children. If monolingual children (children who speak one language) have a vocabulary of about 8000 words, how big would the vocabularies be of bi- and multi-lingual children?

Here is a question that has many answers.

What are pre-school children learning as their vocabulary grows?

Pause and think for a while. What are young children learning as they learn to talk? Are they simply learning new words? Think of the 1-2 year old child, and the 2-3 year old child you have been observing for Umthamo 17.

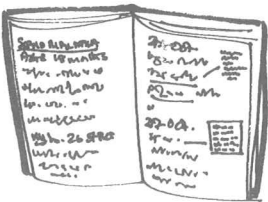
Many children first communicate in single words, and then learn to put words together. Are these children simply learning how to link words? Are they learning to become better at constructing sentences, and learning the grammar of their language?

What is the 'amazing achievement' that Yetta and Kenneth Goodman speak about? Does it go beyond the development of vocabularies, beyond constructing more complex sentences, and beyond learning grammar? What do you think?

Jim Cummins, a researcher, was interested in how schools could best go about introducing a second language as a language for learning. Two issues he looked at were,

(i) the **linguistic and cognitive** advantages associated with children fluent in two languages, and

(ii) whether skills learnt in one language are transferred to a second language. His work has had a powerful influence on educational policy decisions.



We know that babies communicate before they can talk. After some months most babies start making sounds and babbling. Then they utter words we recognise, as well as their own words. They initiate talk, and they join in the conversations of families and family friends.



Through these daily conversations young children learn about themselves, their families, their culture and the world which they are part of. Douglas Barnes, in the book *Thinking Voices*, writes about learning to talk in this way:

“Learning to talk is part of learning to be a member of a particular culture. That is learning to talk is not just a matter of learning to construct sentences, but of learning how to engage with other people, to respond to what they say, to influence what they think and do, and to make meaning. Because talk is part of social action, it is purposive ...”

(Barnes, D. 1992:64)

Yetta and Kenneth Goodman express a similar view:

“Language is necessary for the full sharing of feelings, wants, experiences and insights. Language becomes the social medium for the sharing of thoughts; it creates a social mind from individual minds and this greatly magnifies the learning ability of one person.

Through language people may link their minds, pool their experiences, learn together and from one another and form a social base for a shared life view... As children develop language, they also become participants in the culture, as they become participants in the culture, they learn language; as they learn language they learn conceptual schemas shared in society for assigning meaning to life's experiences. So language is social as well as personal. Each child personally and each generation in each society continues the creation of language.”

(Goodman, K, Goodman Y, et al. 1987:33)

Purposive means having a clear purpose. So it's done for a specific useful reason.



Conceptual schemas? I suppose that means a pattern or way of thinking about and understanding something.



When we think about language in this way we realise that **talk** is closely linked to a child's broader development. Not only does **talk** enable communication. But, just as importantly, through **talk** young children learn to **think** about their experiences. Through **talk** they become active participants in the world, in the lives of their families, in their neighbourhoods and in their schools

Go back to the quote from Kenneth and Yetta Goodman, and read the last sentence again. You will see that they put forward a very interesting idea. The Goodmans suggest that each child (and each generation) continues the creation of language. Do you agree with this point of view?



Have you gone back to the mind-map in your Journal? Can you add to what you have already written? (Remember to work in a different colour pen or pencil).

A riddle to contemplate: What comes first - talk or thought?



Over time, many philosophers have asked, and debated, the question, What comes first - talking or thinking? In other words, does **talking** help us to **think**? Or do we **think** first, and then use language to express our thoughts? What do **you** think? This is a good brain teaser to debate with friends and colleagues.

Two Russian psychologists, AR Luria and F la Yudovich studied a pair of 5 year-old twin boys. These two boys had very retarded (under-developed) speech. They had only 136 words (including sounds they used as they communicated with each other).

These two boys attended a nursery (pre-school), but they rarely played with the other children. Instead they played with each other. Their way of playing was also very limited. They liked best to play with the big blocks. But even when they played with these blocks, their play involved simply moving the blocks from one corner of the room to another.

It was decided to separate the twins, and to put them into two separate classes. This would mean that they would be unable to communicate with each other. They would need to play and communicate with their peers. Each day, one of the nursery teachers spent time talking with the boy whose language was weakest.

Gradually, both twins' speech became more comprehensible, more developed, and more complex. When Luria and Yudovich recorded their language after ten months, they

We need to think about how new words are added and how meaning changes over time. When the editors were young, the word wicked meant something bad and evil. However, at the beginning of the 1990s the word wicked used by their children to mean something really brilliant!

Take the isiXhosa word, khwezela, meaning to keep the fire going. When Tillie was growing up, she had been umkhwezeli. Her job at her home was to keep an eye on the pot and the fire. But we learned that the word khwezela became associated with activists during the struggle years. Now, in the Distance Education Project, we have taken the word to describe the people who work with you on these materials and activities!

Compare this with the 8000 to 20 000 words the Goodmans mention!

found that both boys were speaking in extended sentences. They also found that planning speech (which accompanies play) had become a natural part of the two boys' communication.

The researchers noted that both children's play had developed and become more constructive. They used the blocks to make a train, or a car, or a house. And then they planned and narrated a story which they enacted.

"All these improvements took place within a very short period, during which, of course, natural 'maturation' played only an insignificant role, but which was marked by the introduction of an important new factor in the shape of a leap forward in speech development. This permits us to deduce that improvements in the productive activity of both twins took place in close connection with the acquisition of a language system which introduced new potentialities for the organization of the child's mental life."

(Luria, AR & Yudovich, F. 1959.92)

As these two young boys' speech and language developed, so did their play. Their play became more complex, and was accompanied by planning (and thinking) talk. This research demonstrates how important speech (or **talk**) is in the development of thinking.

What does 'a culture of learning' mean in your classroom? (Making links with Umthamo 1)

Many South African newspapers write articles about needing to rebuild a culture of learning and teaching in our schools. The phrase "a culture of learning" is an interesting one. Can we also talk about a culture of learning in a classroom?

Do you remember that in Umthamo 1 we asked you to think about the behaviour you expect from your learners? Each teacher is different, and will have her, or his, ideas about the ways she/he expects learners to behave, in the classroom.

Let's think specifically about **talking**.

- When do learners talk in your classroom?
- Who asks the questions in your classroom? The teacher?
- Do you expect learners to ask questions?

In the first umthamo in this strand (LAL 1), we said that it is important for each learner to know what the teacher expects. We noted how important it is for learners to know how the teacher would like her/his learners to live in the classroom. If teachers don't make this information *explicit* (or known to the learners), the learners will find themselves having to



guess what their teacher likes and dislikes. They will have to guess, or find out through watching and listening, what 'culture of learning' their teacher supports.

In LAL 1, we asked you to discuss with your learners the values and behaviour that are important in your classroom. We suggested that you should create a poster that captured that discussion. It is likely that from that discussion you discovered that for some of your learners, the behaviour you expect might be different from what is allowed at home. This will probably mean that those learners need to learn to present themselves in new ways when they reach school.

Think of children who live in a home where they are expected to be quiet in the company of adults, or who are expected to wait until they are spoken to, or to carry out tasks without talking. They have been brought up in a culture in which it is important for youngsters to be quiet at home. Such children will need to learn new ways of behaving, if they find themselves in the class of a teacher who encourages them to talk in class. They will have to learn a new culture of **talk**, a new culture of learning.

These children will need to learn that their **talk** is considered to be important. Their teacher may expect them to ask questions, and to **talk** about their work. They will discover that while they have to keep their **thoughts** to themselves at home, in such a class, they need to talk about what they are **thinking**.

Your learners learn (if they don't already know it) that we have to behave in different ways, in different situations. Some people would argue that this is an important life skill to acquire and practice.



"Perhaps . . . or else . . . But maybe . . . because . . ."



Listening to a young child planning his picture.



"Don't you answer me back! Shut up and do what you're told!" (from Look at Kids – Leila Berg)

Unit 3 - What happens to talk at school?

Memories of your school days



If you did the activity below in your face-to-face session, go straight on to Activity 3. If you missed the face-to-face session, please do it now.

Think about your school days. When you were at school, what opportunities did you have to **talk**? Were learners encouraged to talk? Close your eyes for a few minutes and try to remember some of the classes you were part of. Can you remember the culture of learning and teaching in the classroom? Think in particular about the culture of **talk**.



Open your journal and write the date and the heading, *LAL 3: Unit 3 - Talking in the school of my childhood*. Then write a paragraph about a strong memory, or the thoughts you have, about **talking** at the school of your childhood. Were you encouraged to **talk**? Comment on why you think this was so. What theory, do you think, guided the way your childhood teachers taught you? Write another two paragraphs that address these two questions.



Activity 3 - What do your learners think talking is about?

For this Activity, you will need the pictures which you have been collecting. Before you do this Activity with your learners, make sure that you have collected enough pictures (see Unit 1, page 7).

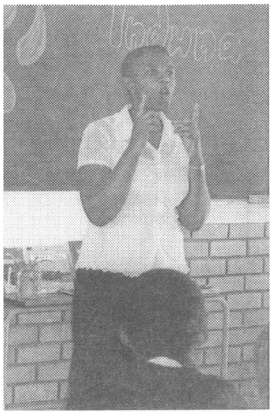
Learners should sit in groups of 4. It would be nice if each group could have 2 pictures. If not, each group could work with 1 picture. Introduce the activity - giving your learners some clues as to what they will be doing.

Introducing the activity

Explain that you are introducing something that they all do very well – talking.

An excellent way of starting is to tell your learners that you would like to first find out what they think. Ask your learners, Why do we enjoy talking? You might allow your learners to first discuss this question in pairs, or in small groups, before you ask for volunteers to share their ideas with the rest of the class. Allow some time for your learners to consider this question.

Recently you and your learners jointly conducted research into how very young children learn to speak. This time you are keen to explore their talking. Tell your learners that you will ask them to think about why we enjoy talking, and, whether we always talk in the same way. Are there different ways of talking?



Demonstrating how you want your learners to work

After this discussion, take one very large picture, and work with the whole class. Place the picture somewhere so that everyone can see it clearly. Spend a few minutes talking about the picture with your learners. You know your learners best. You will know the best way to get them to **talk** about the picture.

- Then ask your learners, "What is a suitable title for the picture?" Write down a few of their ideas on the board. Select one title and underline it.
- Next, ask them, What might the people be saying to each other? (You could spend some time on this question. You could develop the dialogue orally, or you could write down the dialogue on the board as it is being created.)
- Thirdly, ask your learners if they can think of the different ways we use **talk**? For example, we whisper, shout, laugh, moan, groan, boast, declaim, and so on. You might like to write their answers on the chalkboard.

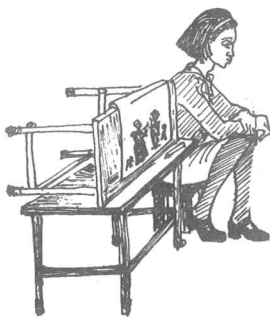
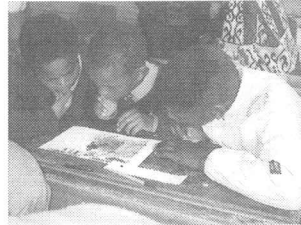
After you have modelled the way to work with this picture, ask each group to do the same activity, with their picture. Write the first two questions on the chalkboard, and ask the groups to spend time on each question. You will need to visit each of the groups to listen to their ideas, and to quietly praise their efforts.

For Grade 1 and 2 learners

After about 15 minutes of talking about the pictures, you can either bring the activity to a close, or each group could swap their picture with another group. The groups would then have a discussion about the new picture, and what they think the people might be saying to each other.

When the learners have finished discussing their picture(s) in groups, talk to the whole class. You might like to share some of the interesting discussions you heard when you were walking around and listening to them **talk**. Ask them to **think** about how their feelings change when people **talk** to them. How does the speaker's tone affect the way we feel? What tone(s) makes them feel comfortable? And happy? And scared? And angry?

End this activity by asking your learners to draw their own pictures of two (or three) people talking. Encourage them to try to show the tone that the people in their pictures are using. For example, the people could be shouting, or laughing, or whispering. They can draw speech bubbles coming from the lips of the people. Your learners will enjoy writing the words each person says.



You will remember that when you worked through the first Language, Literacy and Communication umthamo (Umthamo 1), you thought about this aspect of non-verbal communication - **accent, tone and loudness**. (see pages 28-30) "It's not what we say; it's the way that we say it."



Extending the activity for Grade 3 – 9's

The next part of this activity is to ask each group to prepare a performance. For example, if one of the pictures shows a woman holding and talking and crooning to a baby, then someone in the group needs to act the woman talking to a baby and singing a lullaby. Or, if the picture shows a group of rap artists performing to an audience, then the group must select a rap song and perform it. One learner should introduce the piece, perhaps saying why it was chosen.

Decide when the performances will happen. Ask your learners to practice their performances, perhaps outside, if the weather permits. They need to know when they will perform their work. (This could be on another day.)

After each performance, discuss what was being communicated - anger, love, creativity, etc. The children who were watching the performance will probably come up with interesting ideas. Also help your learners think about the tone of voice used in each communication - and how this helps the person express their message. Get them to think about how a speaker's tone (and body language) can affect the listener.

Grade 7 – 9 learners

Grade 7 – 9 learners will probably be able to manage the same activity that you did in Activity 2. Can your learners think of a word or phrase that best describes the purpose (reason) for the kind of communication they see in each picture? This activity encourages deep thinking, so give your learners enough time to think.

Concluding the activity – for all learners

Bring this exploration of talk to a close by discussing with your learners what they have discovered regarding,

- Why do we talk?
- What does talking allow us to do?

The answers will probably be similar to when you were thinking about words or phrases that would describe the purpose of communication. Some purposes are

- to express emotions like grief, anger, fear, etc
- to ask for something - maybe information, advice, directions, etc
- to entertain - for example, to tell stories, to sing etc
- to instruct, or to teach



Preparing to present a play



TELLING THE TEACHER WHAT THEY KNOW



- to assert power - for example, to shout at someone, to address a meeting, to preach etc
- to show belonging - for example, to pray to one's god, to perform a praise poem etc

Michael Halliday is a linguist who has studied different aspects of language for many years. He identified seven functions of language. We have listed them in the margin.

Did your learners come up with the same kinds of functions or uses of language that Halliday identified? Did they have new ideas? Tell your learners that they will return to the theme of **talking** during the next few weeks.

Halliday's 7 functions of language

instrumental - 'I want a banana';

regulatory- 'that's not allowed!';

interactional - using language to maintain social relationships;

personal - to express our identity and what is ours;

heuristic -making discoveries about people and the world;

imaginative - including poetry, story, and creative use of language; *representational* - using language to communicate ideas.

(adapted from Halliday, 1973)

Is silence golden?

When you were introduced to this umthamo, you were asked to recall your own school years. We asked you to reflect on how your teachers viewed **talking**. Was **talking** regarded as an aid to learning? What theory of learning do you think guided the way your teachers taught you? How do you think your teachers believed learning takes place?

Many of us grew up in a generation which was taught to be silent in classrooms. Perhaps it isn't a coincidence that two popular sayings in English speaking homes, during the 1950s and 1960s were,

Silence is golden, and

Children should be seen, and not heard.

These words of advice were meant for parents. But they were also taken seriously by schools. Teachers expected children to sit quietly, to listen to the teacher. They expected learners to work alone and to copy the teacher's notes from the chalkboard into notebooks.

Many of us who attended schools during those years were never given opportunities to work in pairs, or in groups. We were never encouraged to **talk** about different ways of **thinking and learning**. Teachers did the talking.

In such classrooms there was little, if any, space for learner **talk**. Students were not encouraged to have their own opinions. Instead they were expected to memorise a teacher's, or a textbook's, ideas. Many educators refer to this approach to teaching as 'chalk and talk teaching'. South African's also use an interesting phrase - 'jug and mug' teaching and learning.

What do you think about 'chalk and talk' teaching? Is it a good approach for teaching in primary schools? What about secondary schools? Are there situations when 'chalk and



talk' teaching is useful? If you were asked to address the parents of the children who attend your school, what would you say to them about 'chalk and talk' teaching? (Remember that they are probably familiar with this method, or theory, of learning. They were probably taught in this way when they were at school.)

Two popular learning theories of the 1950s and 1960s were known as Behaviourism and Audio-lingualism. They fitted together like a hand in a glove. The teacher was regarded as the 'expert', and as the source of all knowledge. A teacher's role was to provide carefully controlled stimuli (lessons). The role of the learner was to copy this behaviour. Behaviourism reduced learning to a matter of stimulus (provided by the teacher) and response (habit formation by the learner).

Behavioural scientists used animals (dogs, rats and small animals) in their research. They designed experiments to investigate how animals could be trained to perform specific sequences of behaviour. The findings of these experiments were then used as a basis for making claims about how children and adults learn.

The only criteria for deciding whether learning had taken place was whether it could be observed, and measured. As we cannot see the mind, or see a person's 'consciousness', behaviourists did not believe these existed.

In an audio-lingual approach, students were encouraged to listen and repeat (memorise) the new behaviour to be learned. Understanding was not necessary, and errors were avoided. Statements like the following were common in the literature which supported this approach.

'It is entirely possible to teach a second language without letting the student know what he is saying.'

Politzer (1961:19)

And,

'Like sin, error is to be avoided and its influence overcome, but its presence to be expected.'

Brooks (1960:5)

What was missing from both these theories was an understanding that learning is a developmental process for each learner; and that the learner plays an active role, not a passive one, in any learning situation.

Students were permitted to talk when questioned by a teacher. But talking in class, especially talking for learning, was seldom encouraged. Students who broke this rule were often punished.

Perhaps you have an older family member who remembers being punished as a student when a teacher overheard students speaking in their home language, during break-time. The language policy in many schools allowed Xhosa to be spoken in Xhosa periods. In all other classes, English was the language of communication and the language of learning. Do you think a language policy like this has positive and negative outcomes? Why?

Why did recording children's conversations shake up educators?



During the 1970s and 1980s many ideas about understanding and caring for children changed. Education departments at universities undertook new, exciting research inside classrooms, and in children's own homes. Technology too was changing. Researchers were able to give children tiny recording devices to wear on their clothing. In this way conversations at home could be recorded and monitored.

Many researchers were very interested in the tremendous accomplishment of children. They were curious about how young children acquire language with little, or no direct instruction. They asked the question, "*How do children learn?*" Often researchers carried out similar research to the kind of research that you have been doing in Umthamo 17.

One important finding during this time was that children are not passive learners, as many educators at that time believed. Evidence showed that children are very active learners. When researchers listened to recordings of children talking, they were often surprised. Children did not learn language by listening quietly, by memorising and then repeating what they heard, as the behaviourists believed.

Instead, they discovered that children go about learning using a variety of strategies. They seldom sit quietly, by themselves, when they are learning. Instead children enjoy company. They enjoy playing with language. They enjoy the sounds of words. They enjoy making up nonsense words. They enjoy making up their own rhymes. As you know, young children ask endless questions. They test out rules of grammar. Their language mistakes often show which rules they are testing out and learning. And so the list goes on and on.

Researchers also started to record conversations at school. Research showed how active children are at home, and how they have a natural ability to learn. When researchers observed and listened to children, they were often surprised to discover how interested in and willing to learn children are. What happened to these children at school?

Another significant technological invention was making an appearance in the world – computers. The first ones were the size of a room. But they soon became affordable, and small enough to place on a desk. Computers were valuable tools for storing and analysing data.

Children at school have the benefit of teachers who are 'specialists' in teaching. But does this help children to learn at a quicker pace? Who listens to children at school?

Researchers recorded children and teachers talking at school. The researchers had certain questions for which they wanted to find some answers.

- What role does **talk** play in learning?
- Are there similarities in the way children use language at **home**, and the way they use language at **school**?
- What are the **differences** in the ways children use language, at home, and at school?
- Do parents and teachers use language in the **same ways**?

Gordon Wells, a researcher, spent many years observing, recording, transcribing and analysing children's talk. After studying one group of children over a seven year period, he wrote,

"From all this analysis came a clear picture, which showed that children's' experience of language in the classroom did differ significantly from their experiences at home. Table 5.1 shows some of the important differences."

Children's Experience of Language Use at Home and at School

Feature of Language Use	Home	School
Absolute Values		
No. of child utterances to an adult	122.0	45.0
No. of adult utterances to the child	153.0	129.0
Proportions: no. of times a child	%	%
starts a conversation	63.6	23.0
asks questions	12.7	4.0
makes requests	14.3	10.4
uses fragments of speech, instead of longer sentences	29.4	49.4
Proportions: no of times an adult	%	%
asks questions	14.3	20.2
extends child's meaning	33.5	17.1
develops adults meaning	19.1	38.6

(adapted from Wells, G. 1986:86)

Do you remember Margaret Donaldson's research in LAL 2?. Her team of researchers was very interested in why bright (sharp) and active children often seem to struggle at school. The researchers were interested in finding out if children at school need to learn new ways of talking. How do teachers help children learn in their new environment?



Do schools encourage passive learning?

Please read the table from Gordon Wells' research carefully. It might help to discuss it with a colleague. Does the information in this table startle you? Perhaps the one aspect that does not surprise is that at home children start conversations with adults often. At school, there are many children, but there is usually only one adult in a classroom. Children, therefore, get little chance to initiate (start) conversations.

What did surprise, and even shock many people was that,

At school

- children seldom talk to adults - some children will not speak to a teacher in days or weeks
- children seldom have an opportunity to talk to other children when they are busy learning
- children initiate (begin) fewer conversations
- children express a narrower range of meanings
- children seldom speak in full or long sentences
- children speak in phrases or in simple sentences
- children ask fewer questions at school
- children make fewer requests.

Teachers, on the other hand,

- do the talking - they initiate a much higher number of conversations than parents do
- choose the topic of conversation
- ask the most questions
- do not extend the child's meaning as well as parents.

If we study the research findings presented in this table, it is clear that these children found themselves in a passive role at school. They had few opportunities to talk. At home they **asked** many questions. At school they **answered** questions. It appeared that children at school are silenced.

Think of your school. Have you spoken to parents who show deep surprise when they find that their children are regarded as 'quiet somebodies' in the classroom? What startles these parents is that they know their children are talkative and active at home.

What influence does this 'silencing' have on children's thinking and learning? Increasing numbers of research teams produced research with findings very similar to that of Gordon Wells and his research team.

Schools should encourage learning, and not make learning more difficult. Research like this forced educators to ask and find answers to a key question: *How could they break the passivity shown by the above findings?*

What was to be done?

We believe that the most significant research finding of this period was that **learning is an active and natural process**. This research finding was to change the way many people thought about learning. It suggested that we do not need to

'teach' children how to learn. They are **active** learners long before they even start **talking**. What makes us, as human beings, different from our closest (?) is the relative largeness of our brains and our ability to **think**.

The research also suggested that if learners are not discouraged, they enjoy working out and trying to understand how the world works. They construct their own personal meanings. Sometimes these meanings are similar to those of the people close to a child. Sometimes they are different.

Behaviourists believe children learn through imitation, and through habits becoming automatic. But, according to the constructivists, learners try out new ideas. **Constructivists** believe that learners internalise (take in) ideas that make sense, and discard (drop) ideas that are not understood, or are not useful.

The constructivist view of how learning happens is very different to the belief that memorisation is more important than understanding. If you have a quiet moment later in the day, it would be useful to think of other ways in which these two theories differ.

Constructivism is a name given to the learning theory which suggests that learners construct their own meanings. You have already met this theory in other imithamo.

Many educators interested in constructivism asked new questions.

- If we believe the children in our care already have their own ideas, how can we find out what these children already know?
- Is their understanding correct?
- How do we construct learning situations that allow learners to express their different meanings. What can educators (parents and teachers) do to encourage learning?



"You know a lot of things, but you don't know what you know until you say it."

Yetta and Kenneth Goodman said,

"It is not enough for children to hear their teacher use language to describe a new concept; or for children to read a text in a text book; they must be able to communicate their observations and thoughts to others in their own words."

Goodman, K, Goodman, Y, et al. (1987:55)

Douglas Barnes suggests the same view in a different way.

"Whatever teaching method the teacher uses: whether it be question and answer, demonstration, or another method - it is the pupil who has to do the learning. He or she will make sense of the new ideas, experiences or

ways of thinking, in order to reorganise his/her existing pictures of the world, and how they can be acted upon.”

(Barnes, D. 1992:124)

The above quotes (as well as that of the 9 year old boy on the cover of this umthamo) express the view that there is a very close relationship between **thinking** and **language**. Learners need to express their thoughts and ideas when they are busy thinking and learning.

It is important to remember that not all educators accept this view. As you have been working through this Unit, you have probably discovered that many South African teachers have not been exposed to this view of learning. This was not the fault of teachers. During the apartheid era, South Africa was isolated from much of the world, and so was not part of the wider community of research.

Today we still find South African schools expecting learners to memorise and copy notes from the chalkboard and the textbook. These learners are seldom encouraged to develop their own ideas. Instead they are taught to regard other peoples' ideas as of more importance.

Lynn Hewlett, works with students at the University of the Witwatersrand, in Gauteng. She published an article about the difficulty of university students who are not accustomed to expressing their own opinions. Often these students have been taught to regard textbooks and teachers as 'the dominant knowledge authority'.

Lynn Hewlett quotes a University of the Witwatersrand student who spoke about her learning experience in this way.

“When we started (studying at university) we used to copy a lot. We thought we were doing the right thing.”

Another student added:

“Taking facts from different books ... the views are often contradictory. I did not expect this”.

(Hewlett, L. 1996:92)

When you started studying through the Distance Education Project, perhaps you were surprised to find that your opinions and ideas were respected. Perhaps you were surprised that teachers were expected to have different opinions and understandings. Remember, you always have the right to think differently; especially to challenge the views you find in the imithamo.

This unit has focused on the relationship between **talk** and **thinking**. We have also tried to introduce some of the theoretical debates that took place from the 1950s to the 1980's.

You have been asked to reflect on the theories that probably influenced the way your teachers taught you. We hope this has helped you think more carefully about learning. And perhaps to reflect on and review your own practice.

If possible, spend some time thinking about your views on learning. You might be able to do this on your way home from school, in the evening, or when you have the opportunity to talk to a friend.

After you have had an opportunity to think, open your journal and write the heading, *LAL 3: Unit 3 – My New ideas and thoughts*. Spend a few minutes looking back through Unit 3. What idea, or ideas, did you find particularly interesting? Did you have any new thoughts about learning and talking? Spend some time thinking about and reflecting on these questions, and writing your responses.

Have you read the quotes on the back cover of this umthamo, especially the wisdom of the two children?



Teacher-Learners at Sterkspruit thinking and talking.

*Teacher-Learners giving their
opinions and sharing their
ideas at All Saints' Centre.*





Unit 4 - How does your classroom practice reflect your theory of learning?



You will remember that in the first Learning about Learning umthamo we spoke about how important it is for learners to express what they already know before they are asked to work with new ideas, or new information. Go back and look at this section on pages 28 and 29 of that umthamo. You will also remember that in the Science imithamo, the Activities always start with finding out what the children know.

Do you agree with this approach? How strongly do you feel about the importance of finding out what your learners already know? Does it influence the way you teach? Does it influence the way you organise learning experiences in your classroom? You will be asked to think more carefully about these questions soon.

We believe that learners need opportunities to reveal what they think. When they do this, they will become more aware of what they already know. They will see themselves as 'knowers'.

If learners are not given opportunities to express what they know, in their own words, they are unlikely to know what knowledge they possess. And if they do not know what they know, it becomes more difficult for them to connect previous knowledge with new information. Such learners are likely to struggle.

When we stop and think about this, we know this is true. Most of us have heard a colleague say:

"I cannot believe it. I taught this lesson yesterday, but today they know nothing! I asked them some questions today. But it's as if they have never heard any of this before!"

But if a learner sees herself as a 'knower', she can also begin to see herself as a 'constructor (or builder) of knowledge'. Then when new things are presented, met, or found, she will actively try to build this on to the knowledge which she already has.

There are many different strategies for encouraging learners to find out what they already know. Think of your classroom? What are the different ways you organise talk activities in your classroom? We have listed some ideas below. Please add your own ideas to the list.

- Learners can work in groups, and talk together about what they know. They can record their talk and discussions in the form of mind-maps.
- Learners can be asked to make a list of the questions they would like to find the answers to before they begin exploring a new topic.
- Learners can work in pairs, or groups, and talk and make rough notes to show their group's knowledge.

What other strategies can learners use? Perhaps they can use drama, a poem, a presentation, or a poster. If your learners enjoy competitions, you could see which group can think of the most, or 10, facts or ideas first.

One of the editors remembers 9 and 10 year-old children in London acting out the working of the human ear. Their enactment gave very dramatic evidence that they knew all the parts of the ear, and exactly how hearing worked. You will find a reflective description on page 31.

Working on understanding

Douglas Barnes argues that when learners are presented with new information, they consider what they will do with this new information. Sometimes the new information is accepted. Sometimes the new information is rejected if it doesn't fit comfortably with what the learner already believes. And sometimes only part of the new information is accepted.

Barnes uses an interesting phrase when he talks about what learners do when they are presented with new ideas. Barnes says they are '*working on their understanding*'.

Piaget talked about the processes of **assimilation** and **accommodation**. We **assimilate** new experiences when we learn. But sometimes, if there is a conflict or clash with what we already know and think, we have to **accommodate** (make an adjustment to our thinking) so that everything still makes sense.

He goes on to suggest that we can '*work on our understanding*' in different ways. Students can write, draw, talk, think silently, or manipulate objects. But often the easiest way of doing this is to talk.

Maybe the following will help you in your thinking about talk. After many years of listening to learners speak, Douglas Barnes suggested that there are two different ways we talk - **presentational talk**, and **exploratory talk**.

When we are presenting our ideas to someone, we use one way of talking. Barnes calls this **presentational talk**. This can happen when we are busy communicating. For example, asking or answering questions, or giving information to someone, or perhaps trying to persuade someone to think in a particular way. We normally know what we think, and know what we are going to say. Often our sentences are complete. Here are three examples.

- (A mother talking to her child) "Thank you for helping me carry this heavy box."
- (A learner answering another learner's question about where the scissors are kept) "Look in the cupboard next to the door, or look on the window sill."

- (A politician talking to a reporter) "Surely you agree with me. We know that politicians lie. Therefore we cannot always expect them to tell the truth."

The other kind of talk Barnes identifies is what he calls **exploratory talk**. This talk is often slower, is full of hesitations, and the speaker seldom speaks in full sentences. We may talk in this way when we are working something out. Or perhaps we will talk in this way when we are trying out ideas, or even changing our minds from one minute to the next. An example of this way of talking is,

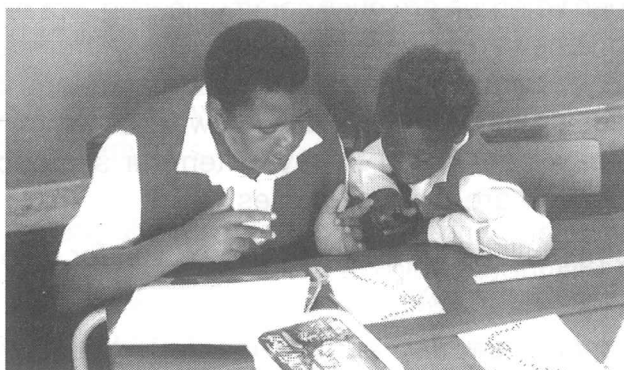
"I think that probably, mmm, . . . I'll go and speak to my father and ask him . . . (hesitation) . . . no, maybe it's better to talk to mum . . . (hesitation) . . . No, not a good idea - she will tell my dad . . . (hesitation) . . . mmm, . . . my eldest sister? Yes, that's better . . . she'll advise me what I should do. Then I'll go and talk to mum and dad."

Have you had conversations like this before? We often talk like this even when we are alone. Or, if we trust our audience, we will trust them to listen to our ideas. Often we ask them what they think.

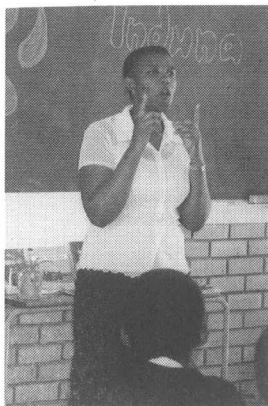
Most, if not all of us, are familiar with this kind of talk. We use exploratory talk when we think about something new. Sometimes we use this kind of talk when we think about what needs to be done, or when we are trying to understand a difficult situation. Do you ever find yourself talking in this way when you are working on your imithamo, trying to understand new ideas?

Barnes argues that this kind of talk is very important, as this is the kind of talk we use when we are thinking and working with new ideas. He suggests that teachers should look for, identify and encourage this kind of talk in the classroom. He also suggests that teachers should act as a model and talk in this way, in front of their learners, so that the learners themselves feel safe and comfortable in talking like this to their classmates.

Jerome Bruner also believes that it is important for learners to hear their teachers express doubt, uncertainty, and puzzlement. When teachers do this their learners will realise that expressing uncertainty, and asking questions that we do not know the answer to, is an important part of learning. When we express uncertainly, ideas are opened wide to speculation and negotiation.



"Perhaps . . . or else . . . But maybe . . . because . . ."



Activity 4 - Key Activity - Thinking and talking about talking

Talk about these ideas with your learners. You will probably find that you can keep this conversation going for several days.

Introduce this discussion in the way you think best. You might introduce the discussion by asking your learners if they have ever stopped to think about, and listen carefully, to how we speak when we speak with confidence. Do we speak the same way when we are thinking about something.

You could talk to your learners about Douglas Barnes and the two kinds of talking he has noticed. What do they think of his ideas? Or you might want to ask questions that will help them think about talking. For example,

- Do we always need to think before we speak?
- Can they think of situations when we find we can speak without needing to think?
- What happens when someone asks you your name, or your age, or who your best friend is, or the colour of the moon?
- Can you think of situations when you need to think and prepare before you start to speak?
- What happens in your head when you are asked to add the sum: $30 + 15 + 3$?

Another example is when we answer questions like this one: "If you look into any flowering plant, you will see some parts with tiny grains of pollen. Can you think of different ways the pollen grains can be moved from the plant?" (bees, birds, wind, bats)

Can you think of situations where you think and talk at the same time?

We know that plants need energy from the sunlight to grow. What do you think will happen if we slide a card over a leaf, and leave it on the leaf for a week? If we take off the paper, what do you think we will see? (Is this the kind of exploratory talk Barnes talks about?)

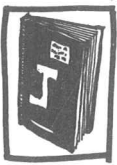
- Do we always think in full sentences? Can they think of examples of when they think in full sentences?
- When do we think in bits of sentences?
- Can friends help us think? Can they think of examples?
- Do we always know what we are going to say before we say it?

We hope you and your learners have fun thinking about thinking and talking!

Extending this activity

If you and your learners find yourselves enjoying this activity you might like to extend it. Here are some suggestions as to how you could do this.

1. Ask your learners if they would like to record what they have found interesting. Learners who enjoy drawing could draw a picture, or a cartoon to show what happens when they think. Then they can write notes under the picture saying why they drew the picture.
2. Some learners might enjoy writing a poem, or a song about thinking and talking.
3. Others could write a dialogue between themselves and another person, in which they talk and question one another.
4. Intermediate or Senior Phase learners might even enjoy producing a talk on a tape recorder, in which they talk about talk.



Open your journal and write the heading, *LAL 3: Key Activity - Thinking hard and talking about talking*, and the date. Write a one to two page entry about the Key Activity.

Describe briefly how you introduced the activity, and then reflect on what happened in your classroom. What, if anything, surprised you? How did your learners relate to the activity? Please ask your abakhwezeli to sign her or his name under your journal entry at the next face-to-face session.

If your learners recorded their discussions (through writing or drawing) ask them if they would make a copy for you to show your colleagues in your next face-to-face session. Remember to ask your learners to write their names on the page, as well as the date. You then need to write the following on the back of each piece of work: *LAL 3: Unit 4 - Thinking hard about talking and thinking*. Make a small selection of this work for your portfolio. Store the pages in an envelope or a plastic bag. Again, it will be useful to write the same heading on the cover. (This will impress anyone who sees how well organised you are!)

Learners use Drama to Show what they Know

In 1973 I was team teaching a large multi-grade class of children in a North London Primary School. We were busy with a class project on "Parts of the Human Body."

A small group of mostly 8 and 9 year old girls had chosen "The Ear." They did research in the library, they interviewed the school nurse, they wrote notes and they copied drawings. They also did some 'experiments', and tested their own hearing. When it was time for them to present their part of the work to the class, they spent some time talking about what they could do. I remember that they decided to present their understanding of the working of the Human Ear as a short drama with the help of a visiting student-teacher from a near-by college of education.

They rehearsed and planned their presentation collectively. They borrowed learners from other groups to make up the numbers of the cast. After a few days of getting ready they presented their show.

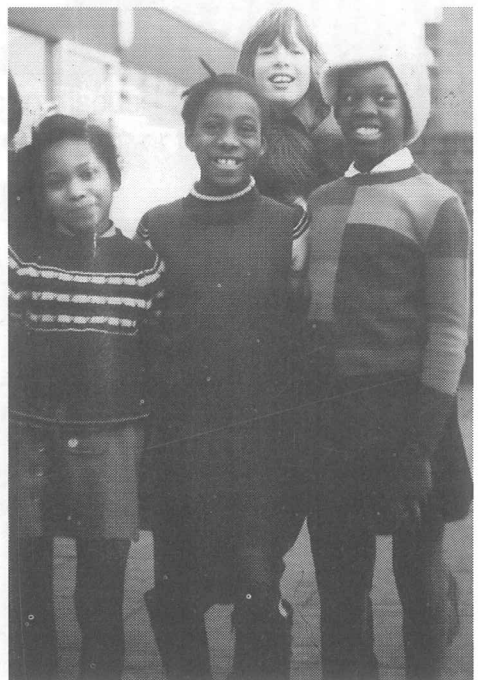
The show made quite an impact. They had a narrator who started the show by announcing the cast. They also wrote large labels to say what part of the ear they represented. There was... The Air, the Outer Ear, the Ear Canal (a group of 4), the Ear Drum, the 3 Ear Bones, the Cochlea and finally there was the Brain.



The narrator started the story of how the ear works by striking the Tuning Fork. "Ping!" he shouted as he vibrated his legs in the air. The Air rushed up and carried 'the Sound' to the Outer Ear. The Outer Ear caught the sound and passed it along his Ear Canal. It bounced against the Ear Drum and made her vibrate back and forth so that the 3 Ossicles jiggled and passed the message to the Cochlea. Finally the Cochlea phoned through to the Brain. "The Brain, we have just recieved news of a Ping sound."

The rest of the school talked about the show for quite some time. And most of them had a reasonably sound understanding of the workings of the Human Ear.

ABK '99



Danette, Charmaine, Hani and Stephen.

Conclusion

In this umthamo, and in Umthamo 17, we have explored **talk** and **thinking**. **Talking** (and **thinking**) is something most of us enjoy doing. We **talk** (and **think**) at home, at school, to ourselves and to others. Children also **talk** (and **think**) a lot. They **talk** (and **think**) at home, in the school grounds, to themselves and to others. What happens in your classroom?

How much of any school day are you busy talking and thinking? Are you a teacher who talks a great deal in your classroom? Are you a teacher who encourages your learners to talk and explore their ideas? } Q

There are many theories about childhood development. And there are just as many ways of teaching. Whatever your teaching style is, we would like you to be able to motivate (give reasons to explain) why you teach the way you do. You should be able to talk about your theory of how learners learn, and how your teaching style promotes learning.



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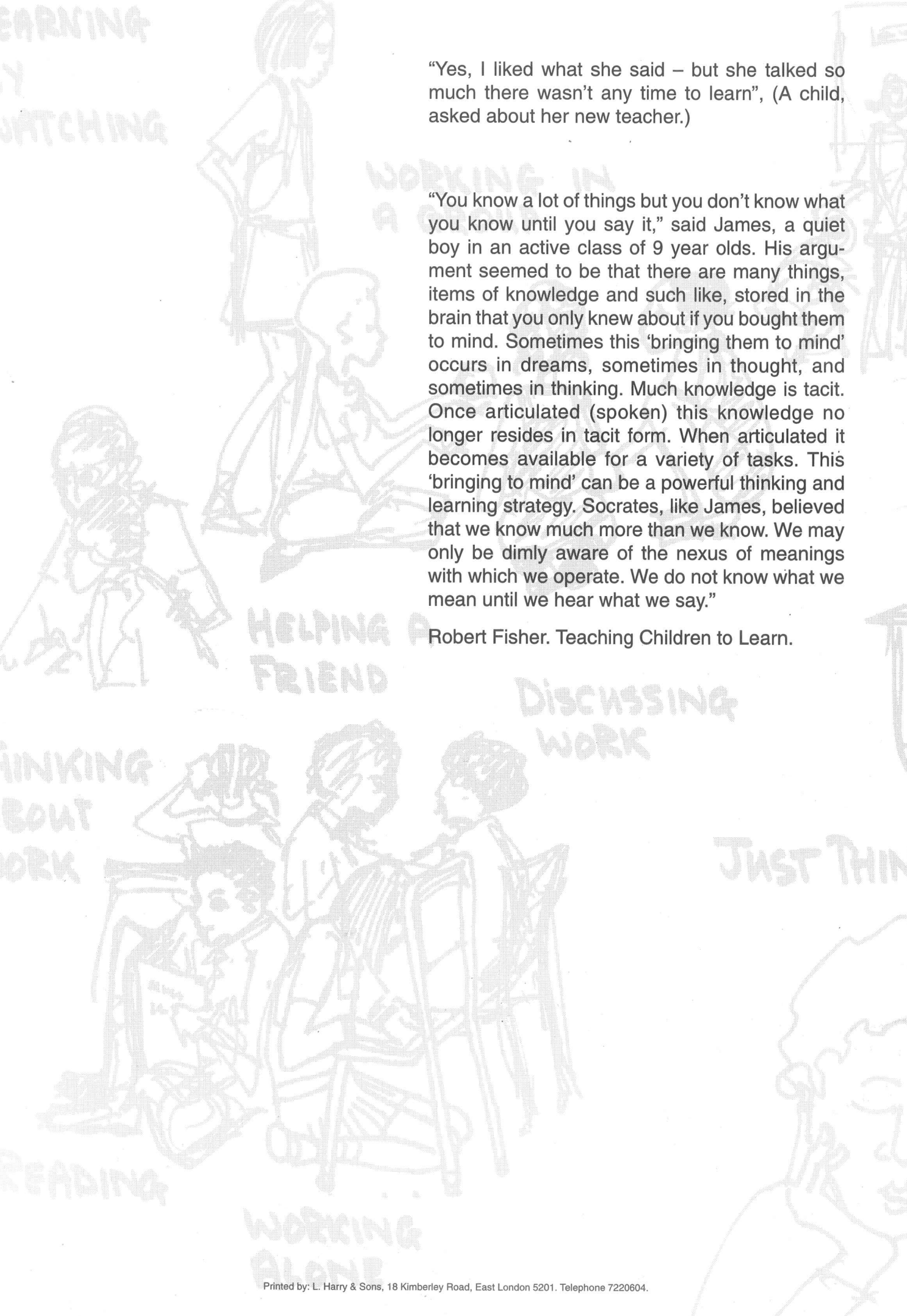
"Every available opportunity to use language in school should be exploited. Whenever there is time for natural conversation it should be utilised. When children arrive in the morning they have things to tell one another and their teacher. It is natural for friends to talk over what has happened since they last saw each other. This informal spontaneous conversation is very valuable and is a particularly good time for the teacher to become aware of any interesting events or experiences children have had that they would like to share.

Children also need opportunities to talk about new concepts and ideas they encounter in their school work. Class discussions meet the need to some extent, but also at times it is beneficial for two or three children to discuss the Maths they are doing, to compare notes on something they are researching, or to share reactions to a Science demonstration.

It is not enough that children have heard their teacher use language to describe a new concept, or that they have read in a textbook; they must be able to communicate it to others and get immediate feedback whether or not they have been successful.

Schools must be places where children know they are listened to. The curriculum, the weekly lesson plan and daily sequence of lessons should be constructed to make it possible for children to use language in many ways. Throughout these language opportunities, children must be encouraged to feel pride in a choice of idiom, perhaps a regional dialect that expresses an idea or emotion really well."

Kenneth Goodman, Yetta Goodman, E Brooke-Smith, Robert Merredith. 1987. *Language and Thinking in School*.

The background of the page features a series of faint, sketchy line drawings of children engaged in different learning activities. These include a child standing with hands on hips, a child sitting and writing, a child reading a book, and a group of children sitting together. Interspersed among these drawings are several text labels in a hand-drawn, blocky font: 'LEARNING BY WATCHING' at the top left, 'WORKING IN A GROUP' in the upper middle, 'HELPING A FRIEND' in the middle left, 'DISCUSSING WORK' in the middle right, 'THINKING ABOUT WORK' on the lower left, 'JUST THINKING' on the lower right, 'READING' at the bottom left, and 'WORKING ALONE' at the bottom center.

“Yes, I liked what she said – but she talked so much there wasn’t any time to learn”, (A child, asked about her new teacher.)

“You know a lot of things but you don’t know what you know until you say it,” said James, a quiet boy in an active class of 9 year olds. His argument seemed to be that there are many things, items of knowledge and such like, stored in the brain that you only knew about if you brought them to mind. Sometimes this ‘bringing them to mind’ occurs in dreams, sometimes in thought, and sometimes in thinking. Much knowledge is tacit. Once articulated (spoken) this knowledge no longer resides in tacit form. When articulated it becomes available for a variety of tasks. This ‘bringing to mind’ can be a powerful thinking and learning strategy. Socrates, like James, believed that we know much more than we know. We may only be dimly aware of the nexus of meanings with which we operate. We do not know what we mean until we hear what we say.”

Robert Fisher. Teaching Children to Learn.

**UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE
DISTANCE EDUCATION PROJECT**

**CORE EDUCATION STUDIES COURSE
Learning about Learning**

Umthamo 3 - Talking and Thinking

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Marlene Rousseau

Co-ordinated, illustrated and edited by
Alan & Viv Kenyon

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