A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF ORACY IN THE CLASSROOM, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE CAPE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.

THESIS

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that the whole of this Thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own original work and that it has not been submitted for any degree in any other University.

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ABSTRACT

In the past thirty years, oracy has received prominence as a means to enhance teaching styles and assist with learning. Much of what has been written in this field has been by those interested in a 'language across the curriculum' approach, such as Barnes (1969) who developed the terms 'exploratory talk' and 'final draft talk'. The linguist, M.A.K. Halliday (1989) and others have suggested that the teacher's approach should be to encourage what he terms 'heuristic talk' i.e. relatively unstructured exploratory language used by the pupils in talking towards an understanding of a concept.

It is more evident in certain school subjects that pupils may have difficulty in understanding abstract or complex concepts. In this regard, English, mathematics and physical science were selected for the purpose of this study, as each has its own metalanguage, specific to that subject. It is presumed that some pupils may find difficulty in these subjects because of the subject-specific language inherent in each. This work explores whether a programme of increased oracy alleviates some of these problems and it makes recommendations for the implementation of such a programme.

The period involved for the purpose of this study was five weeks, during which teachers of three selected classes presented lessons in such a way that oral work was stressed. At the completion of this programme, a test was written for comparison with past experiences. Pupils answered a comprehensive questionnaire and staff involved were interviewed; the results of this feedback, in conjunction with what has been written by others in this field, forms the basis for this work.

The primary recommendation emerging from this and other studies is that a shift away from a teacher-/ and textbook-dominated approach is necessary. Pupils need to contextualise knowledge in their own terms. One important way of accomplishing this is by affording them the opportunity to interact orally with each other and with the teacher.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

There has been, in recent years, an increasing realisation that group work in the classroom has tremendous potential for assisting learning. However, even with this acknowledgement, there has been a reluctance to change teaching styles sufficiently, in order to move away from an entirely teacher-centred approach to a more pupil-centred one. It is imperative that if pupils are to be made more accountable for their own knowledge acquisition, they should be given the opportunity to explore, in terms familiar to them, the work to be learned.

Work in the field of oracy has been concentrated over the past thirty years, predominantly in Britain and Canada. However, only in the most recent decade has it received any real prominence as a means of aiding learning *in all subjects.* In this regard, several projects have been established, the most notable of these in Britain, namely the Wiltshire Oracy Project and the National Oracy Project. From these have flowed a variety of ideas, some supportive of the work already done, while others have realised the problems implicit in such an approach. This has widened the debate and in so doing enhanced the programme.

In South Africa, there has been a gradual move in recent years to implement such an approach. However, this has been a largely

unstructured arrangement, based not on what has been done already in this field but more on the new trend for co-operative learning and small-group work. This thesis examines some of the work done by pioneers in this field, such as Barnes, Messenger, Halliday and Wilkinson. It then reflects on a programme run for a five week period at a secondary school in South Africa and makes recommendations for the implementation of such a programme in South African schools.

With the new educational dispensation in South Africa in its infancy it is perhaps an opportune time to consider alternative approaches in the classroom. With the realisation that class sizes will not be conducive to individual contact between teacher and pupil, only two alternatives seem probable. Firstly, there is the lecture option, in which the teacher dominates the lesson and serves as the source of knowledge which is to be absorbed by the pupils. The second option is one where self discovery, through talking in small group situations is encouraged. Not only does this shift the responsibility for knowledge acquisition from the teacher to the pupils but it allows the teacher greater freedom to move from group to group, assisting where necessary and thereby maintaining a greater degree of personal contact.

Each pupil is different and each enters the classroom with his own frame of reference, based on his past experiences. Therefore, the suggestion is that with an approach which encourages oracy he will be more able to

assimilate new information by drawing on his already established knowledge to give the new information a context. In so doing, each individual is able to work through problems in his own way, using his own experiences and thereby, ultimately, also make the newly acquired knowledge his own.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 The Primacy of Oracy

There can be little doubt that from birth, language plays a vital role in linking the individual to the world around him. Even more specifically, it is the spoken word which has the most profound influence, particularly in the early years of childhood, preceding as it does language to be written or read.

Wilkinson (1990) comments on research in this field and suggests that babies are conversationalists before they can even use language. It is from their sense of responding to cues in the language spoken to them that they learn attentiveness, turn-taking and a subjectivity which ensures an awareness of other people's intentions. In a study by Condon and Sanders (1974) it was found that babies will deliberately pick out the sound of the human voice even amidst a multitude of other sounds and will even consciously move their limbs in rhythm with human speech. This research also found that infants will search for eye contact which seems to suggest an effort to encourage dialogue.

It is not the intention of this document to go into detail about the language development of the infant, as copious research has already been conducted in this area. However, the point must be made that virtually from birth the infant is confronted with the sounds of speech. As suggested previously, he is likely to respond positively to these and, with maturity, the sounds will become words with specific associations. It follows then that these words eventually become speech and, as will be suggested further on in this document, the speech flows from thought. Mackey (1966), in an article by Morton (1979) states that "Ideas come from the mouth. Thought is contained in the voice."

With the importance of speech in infancy and early childhood thus established, it is ironic that it is not accorded the prominence it should have in formal education. It is not difficult to observe that the written or read word dominates most classrooms, with the talk that does take place being largely that of the teacher. Flanders (1962) in Barnes (1972:120), in his now well known commentary on the activities in the classrooms, stated that

> In the average classroom someone is talking for two-thirds of the time, two-thirds of the talk is teacher-talk, and two-thirds of the teacher-talk is direct influence.

It was from such a sad indictment of the situation in classrooms and from the realisation that "The spoken language in England has been shamefully neglected" (Wilkinson 1965) that a need for more emphasis on classroom talk, and as a result the term 'oracy', sprang.

2.2 Origins of 'oracy'

At the time during which Wilkinson first started his ground breaking investigations, classroom work was dominated by reading and writing i.e. 'literacy'. Although many educationists felt the need to establish a parallel approach, encompassing talking and listening, it was Wilkinson, in his book *Spoken English* (Wilkinson 1965, with Davies and Atkinson) who coined the term 'oracy'.

The characteristics of the term, as stated in Wilkinson (1990:1), are that oracy

> could not be regarded as a subject, but 'a condition of learning in all subjects'; it was not merely a 'skill' but the essential instrument in the 'humanizing of the species'; it was a fit object of education knowledge or 'awareness'; it arose as a natural response to circumstance, rather than being 'taught'; it was susceptible of evaluation.

Perhaps most telling here, particularly in the context of the 1960's, is the reference to the "condition of learning in all subjects". This was an extremely progressive view of English transcending subjects and becoming

a 'language across the curriculum'. In another milestone publication, first published in 1969, *Language, the Learner and the School* (Barnes, Britton, Rosen and L.A.T.E 1972), a strong case was made for the introduction of a Language Policy Across the Curriculum. Their proposals stemmed from testing done on oracy in the classroom in which numerous classes in different types of schools were observed in 1966 and 1967. From this they were able to make recommendations regarding increased exposure to interactive classroom talk as an aid to understanding.

So important did the debate on classroom talk become, and as a related issue that of the 'Language Across the Curriculum' approach, that an entire chapter of the influential Bullock Report (1975) is devoted to these topics. The suggestion in this report is that all teachers should be aware of the part language plays in learning and as such should be better able to understand the processes by which learning occurs in all subjects. A very strong recommendation is made that the teacher should "create in the classroom an environment which encourages a wide range of language uses". (DES 1975:178)

The Report (DES 1975:178) makes the suggestion that

> For such (exploratory) talk to flourish the context must be as informal and relaxed as possible and this is most likely to occur in small groups and in a well organised and controlled classroom. Once the practice has been established in such groups there is no reason why the exploratory talk should not succeed in due course with the whole class and the teacher together.

Writing some while after the Bullock Report, Barnes reflects on the concept of exploratory talk by commenting that "Teaching without exploratory talk and writing expects pupils to arrive without having travelled" (1981:8). This approach was adopted by several other educationists at the time, most notably Marland (1978), Messenger (1975) and Halliday (1970). More recently, the debate on oracy has been broadened substantially and the ideas first proposed in the 1960's strongly endorsed. As reported by Wilkinson, the importance of oral competency has now been strengthened by its sociological influence - "Oracy and democracy are closely related" (Wilkinson 1990). Thus the debate has now been extended beyond the classroom boundaries of learning in specific subjects to the new world of advanced telecommunications, and a more pressured working environment in which negotiation and ability to use language is paramount. The Cox Report (DES 1989:217) emphasises this need for oral competence as follows:

> A democratic society needs people who have the linguistic ability which will enable them to discuss, evaluate and make sense of what they are told, as well as to take effective action on the basis of their understanding ... Otherwise there can be no genuine participation, but only the imposition of the ideas of those who are linguistically capable.

This is, as Wilkinson (1990:6) suggests, "what oracy is about - about not being manipulated, about negotiating as equals, about standing up and speaking the truth as we see it" .

2.3 Making New Meanings

Barnes (1972) suggest that, largely, the aim of what is done with talk in the classroom is to "make new meanings". In other words, it is using the spoken language to add knowledge to an already established frame of reference. A variety of researchers since the 1960's have suggested ways in which learning is enhanced by increased attention to oracy, not only in the English classroom but in a 'Language Across the Curriculum' approach. In other words, through oracy, learning is enhanced in all educational disciplines. As will be seen, a remarkable similarity is evident in the conclusions reached by these several educationists.

Undoubtedly, the over-riding assertion is that the process of learning is likely to be far more effective if, as Messenger (1975:84) puts it:

> The language that (the child) has must be the basis for the development of his language skills... He is using footholds which are secure for him and we, accepting his need for footholds and aware of the skills he has, can use both.

This, put another way, could be that "unless pupils can articulate new information in their own language, they cannot rightly be said to understand it" (Rice: 1982:653). Rice's work is based heavily on the models suggested by linguist M.A.K. Halliday, a major proponent of this concept of working from the familiar to the more complex or abstract. Halliday's term, 'heuristic language', refers to language used in an

exploratory manner in order to grapple with and hopefully understand a new concept. The work done by both Rice and by Halliday points strongly to the connection between language and learning, in which exploratory and unstructured language is used by the pupils as they work towards understanding.

All of these suggestions are echoed most strongly in the work of Barnes, who sees two distinct types of talk. As with the above researchers, he terms the tentative, loosely structured talk, 'exploratory'. He suggests that because this type of interaction is relatively undogmatic, false starts and errors can be expected. Making mistakes is thus not a weakness but a strength, as the pupils grapple with the new information in an attempt to adapt it to an earlier established linguistic frame of reference. It is in this sense that they are 'making new meanings'. However, Barnes' suggestion is that more formal, 'final draft' talk may be necessary in certain circumstances, and the pupils should be encouraged to work their way towards this 'presentational talk'. All of the above can only happen, Barnes suggests, with active participation in dialogue. It is his assertion (1981:8) that

> a learner needs to trace the steps from the familiar to the new, from the fact or idea he possesses to that which he is to acquire. In other words, the learner has to make a journey in thought for himself.

Writing a decade earlier, as contributor to the previously mentioned *Language, the learner and the School* (1972), Britton uses slightly different terminology but with the same intentions. In describing the classroom interaction in several classes he notes a significant amount of what he terms 'expressive' speech. This type of talk is highly subjective and includes most of the characteristics of Halliday's 'heuristic' talk and Barnes' 'exploratory' talk. However, in the group environment he detects a demand from group members towards each other to be more explicit. This requires a movement from the personal 'expressive speech' to a more 'referential' mode, in which language becomes more specific and explicit. The sense of making new meanings is also implicit in this description of what occurs during the movement from 'expressive' speech to 'referential' speech. He states (1972:114) that

> the movement in words from what might *describe* a particular event to a generalization that might *explain* that event is a journey that each must be capable of taking for himself - and it is by means of taking it in speech that we learn to take it in thought.

It is through the accessibility of 'expressive' language that the pupil is likely to achieve initial comprehension and only later that a more advanced, concrete understanding of concepts is to be expected. Dixon and Stratta (1986) in Wilkinson (1990) encompass many of the statements made above when they suggest in (1990:63) that

> The kinds of process we are thinking of include raising questions heuristically, examining and critically scrutinising alternative positions, making tentative proposals, investigating and studying the grounds for generalised opinions, coming to conclusions or deciding that the issue cannot be completely resolved for the moment.

It is through the discussions that develop in dialogue that argument, collaboration, agreement and so on are likely to develop. There may be, as Wilkinson suggests, a need within groups to establish rules and appoint roles. With the recent movement towards 'Co-operative learning' in the classroom, with heavy emphasis on group work, it is likely that such structures would be established. The groups to be studied in this document are part of such a system and it is likely that this influence will be seen in the responses of those pupils examined. It may be as Wilkinson suggests, that a sense of solidarity is to be established in the groups in an attempt to reach consensus but equally so he warns against extreme rigidity, explaining that breaking rules may sometimes lead to better results. However, this is only likely to work once pupils are experienced enough in this type of interactive work and understand the mechanisms of the group. A further warning is given by Scott (1993) in *Communication in the Classroom,* who comments that it is important not to confuse plenty of student talk with learning to communicate. He too, strongly advocates the idea of specific functions, or 'roles', in communicative models (two, three or more people involved) and suggests that what the individuals say will be determined by what roles they have.

Further possible problem areas which may develop as a result of increased talk in the classroom will be commented upon later in this document.

2.4 Understanding abstractions

The pupil enters the classroom with an already established frame of reference, made up of all his cumulative experiences from within the classroom and without. The difficulty, therefore, is that because of each individual's background it can be presumed that some may be relatively deprived while others may have received far more stimulation and input in their earlier years. This is further exacerbated when it is realised that the teacher comes in with another, far more advanced frame of reference. This is explained by Barnes (1972:29) as

> The teacher teaches within his frame of reference; the pupils learn in theirs, taking in his words, which 'mean' something different to them, and struggling to incorporate this meaning into their own frames of reference. The language which is an essential instrument to him is a barrier to them.

The close relationship between language and learning has already been stressed. However, it becomes clear from the above extract that this is made more difficult because of the different 'starting points' with which the teacher and those being taught enter the classroom. It may also be that the teacher uses what Barnes terms "the language of secondary education" - a register similar to that found in textbooks and other

impersonal printed documents. Clearly, this register has little in common with the everyday language experiences of the pupils. Barnes (1972:46) also distinguishes two further registers, both of which have the potential to alienate the pupils from what is being taught. The first of these includes

> Language forms special to the teacher's subject which he is aware of as a potential barrier to his pupils' understanding, and which he therefore 'presents' to them with deliberate care.

The second refers to

> Language forms special to the subject which may not be deliberately 'presented' to pupils either (i) because they may have previously been introduced, or (ii) because the teacher is not aware that he is using them.

Both of the above present possible problems in the classroom as it is frequently this inability to 'make contact' between teacher and pupils that results in lack of understanding. This is perhaps most relevant in subjects which deal largely in abstractions and complicated concepts, held together by complex terminologies. It is for this reason that this thesis focuses on three subjects - mathematics, physical science and English. Each has its own metalanguage which makes tremendous demands on pupils still struggling to grasp the intricacies of their native language. Messenger (1975:86) quotes Quirk (1969) in this regard as he states that

> Enlarged vocabulary is a ridiculous acquisition without the corresponding knowledge of how the words we have learned are in fact used and where they serve a useful purpose.

Thus the words used in explaining a concept or in working in an abstract manner are not as important in themselves, as the associated *meanings* they carry with them. All too often, the assumption is that by acquiring terms the pupil is gaining insight and 'learning' that subject, whereas in reality it is frequently the words that serve as the major hindrance to understanding.

After examining several science classes, Wilkinson (1990) found that these science teachers tended to place too much emphasis on the technical vocabulary inherent in that subject. These findings are supported by Rosen (1972:153) who reports that

> It would appear that freedom for the child to express his experiences *in his own language* must come first. The language used may not be in itself scientific but will be used in the context of scientific experience. Out of this can grow the true language of science. Words used can become clothed with meaning and the child can move forward to effective classification of his experiences. The excitement of discovery need not be dampened by the problems of 'correct verbalization'.

Messenger (1975:87) reports on an exercise in which a scientific term, "volume", had to be defined. The range of definitions elicited was remarkable as were the kinds of language used to express them. Without

going into all the detail of this exercise, the most important feature that emerged was the evidence of a struggle in words. Also evident was the way the pupils attempted to find language structures in order to make their meanings clear and logical.

In the same way Barnes (1972:40) supports this idea of having to progress from relatively simple concepts to more abstract and complicated ones. An example he mentions is in mathematics where

> the pupils need to progress from being able to carry out a process to being able to make the process itself the subject of their perception. To find means of representing a process to oneself is to bring it under conscious control.

In a chapter from *The Practice of English Teaching* , Britton *et al* (1970), examine the importance of oracy as an aid particularly in the English class. They use the analogy of a map, in which pupils map out their experiences in life through words. From these experiences they are eventually able to create generalizations. It is the belief of these educationists (1970:8) that

> to succeed in secondary education children must move, in language and thought, into the area of abstract hierarchical ideas and handle the generalizations which have little reference to their own experience.

The concern about the manner in which this is to be achieved is that all too often the textbook language of the teacher may not allow for the movement from simple to complex ideas. However, as is clear from the requirements of any system which demands eventual evaluation in the form of examinations and tests, mastery of this impersonal information is still necessary. The crux of the matter is that ultimately this can only be achieved if this impersonal language is given personal meaning. In this regard, Britton *et al* (1970:9) suggest that '"teacher-made concepts have somehow got to be transformed into pupil-made concepts". It is only by bridging the gap between words and meaning and by linking the concepts to be learned to an already established frame of reference held by each pupil, that any progress can be made to more complex abstractions. This is expressed by Wilkinson (1990:71) as

> "we can encourage their cognitive development by stretching them from their own personal experiences to a consideration of abstract synthesis of those experiences".

Many may argue that all the above is only possible in theory while in practical terms it cannot be conducted successfully by pupils. Berrill (1988:66), in a paper on the development of oral argument in sixteen-year-olds, argues that pupils can do the following:

1. pursue a question from different points of view;
2. evaluate the personal evidence at their disposal for making their choices;
3. use these evaluations to qualify the generalisations they make; and
4. synthesize earlier generalisations into more complex abstractions, building their choice of position from a foundation of evidence.

The ability of the learner to assimilate knowledge through verbal interaction with others is therefore not only possible but probable. By progressing from an established frame of reference through a constant influx of new ideas and concepts, the individual is able to extend the understanding he has of the world.

2.5 Resolving possible problems

One possible criticism of an approach which encourages increased oracy, is that it leads to an increase in the number of mistakes made by pupils. However, as Morrow (1981) in Wilkinson *et al* (1990:26) points out, 'Mistakes are not always a mistake.' The point here is that pupils are often stifled by an excessively controlled approach to language usage, where constant attention is drawn to small grammatical or syntactical errors. As much as it is necessary, on the one hand, to encourage pupils to express themselves in appropriate language, so too is it necessary to allow them to explore in their own language and this is bound to lead to an increase in mistakes. Morrow (1981:26) again suggests:

> Niggling criticism of what (the learner) produces will ultimately destroy the learner's confidence in his ability to use the language... Problems are bound to arise; but these problems are not solved by an approach which insists on formal accuracy at the expense of use.

The second area which is likely to create problems is largely that of establishing relationships - between the teacher and pupils and between the pupils themselves. If such an approach is to succeed it demands a realisation that, as Wilkinson (1990:62) puts it, "the process is as valuable as the product". It is obvious that teachers should teach with a definite goal in mind, and equally that pupils should work towards some end; in most cases, some form of assessment. However, it is likely that this

approach will be far more successful for both parties if there is a combined emphasis on the process of learning, rather than just on the end result.

The Bullock Report (1975:191) refers to the problems faced by teachers, who are confronted by the dual roles of teacher and disciplinarian. As is suggested in the Report:

> There exists the two distinct roles of teaching and control, and the constant aim should be to develop the first to a point where it encompasses the second.

This, the Report suggests, can be done when the realisation is gained by the teacher that "his professional teaching relationship requires mutuality rather than distance" (1975:191). It is only by involving the learner in the process of learning that the teacher is likely to achieve any success. This is expressed by Morrow as, "To learn it, do it." It is his belief that as a consequence of involving the learner, the learning becomes his responsibility. It is highly likely that as a result of making the learner more a part of the process, the possible problems of discipline and control will be of less concern.

Naturally, there is still a need for a balance between exploration by the pupils and guidance by the teacher and it will take discretion by the teacher to determine when to intervene. However, it is to be expected that with time there will be less of the "pointless chatter" mentioned by the Bullock Report. As important as the pupil-teacher interaction is, so too is that among the pupils themselves. This is also mentioned in the Bullock Report which suggests that the most constructive talk is likely to take place in small groups. Once a mutuality of purpose has been established within these groups, where the pupils are made aware of their shared

responsibility, it is probable that it could be expanded to larger groups and even to the whole class situation.

Ultimately, then, the threat to the teacher of losing control through a programme of increased oracy should lessen. By extending the responsibility for learning to the pupils themselves and by encouraging their exploration, it is likely that the real purpose of learning -- discovery -- will become so important, that lack of discipline will diminish. This demands trust and sensitivity from both teacher and pupil, but if achieved, will make for a happier classroom and more successful results.

Hewitt and Inghilleri (1993) have suggested that an approach in which oracy is stressed has led to some confusion amongst teachers. It has been their experience that some teachers have set "contradictory or unrealizable objectives in at least some aspects of oral work in their classrooms" (1993:309). Because the practices of teachers with respect to oracy are not strictly determined by official policy, a certain degree of vagueness as to its aims has resulted. While the above two researchers acknowledge that many may respond, "Well, at least they're talking", as a form of justification of the *process*, rather than the *end product*, it is their belief (1993:316) that

> it is yet unknown whether or not the foregrounding of oral skills in themselves has a positive, negative, or neutral effect. The somewhat artificial oracy events we have observed may, in fact, rob the oral work of substantial intellectual benefits or alternatively, more specific guidance and attention to speaking and listening skills may enhance collaboration and intellectual progress.

This concern is echoed by Frater (1988), who found that either there was no clear idea of what approach to take when dealing with oral work or more frequently, the lessons were over-directed thus depriving the pupils of any real challenge. Oral work often only required "monosyllabic and

factual answers to questions which required no other response" (1988:43). His overwhelming impression was that while some schools promoted the idea of increased oracy in the junior years, on the whole very few other opportunities were provided for such work.

While the ideas of Hewitt and Inghilleri and those of Frater demand more emphasis on specific task orientation, Phillips (1988) suggests that any attempt to determine what is successful should not rest entirely with the end result. While the end result is important as the source for the discussion which ensues, it is Phillips' idea that success is to be found in what the language users *do* whilst 'doing talking'. He sees each discussion as an *event* in which the speakers explore the possibilities of small-group talk itself. However, here Phillips suggests a further problem. While he recognises that "schools are places where meanings about learning are constructed" (1988:75) he suggests that group work is not always successful because

> (the speakers) perceive meaning-making as a process of tabling items on an agenda for approval or disapproval ... knowledge is 'created' non-negotiable; a thing either 'is' or 'isn't' so ... children become orientated to knowledge in a way which is likely to limit their potential for creative thinking.

Phillips (1988:81) tries to resolve some of the problems mentioned above by suggesting that although the curriculum may be a constraining influence, children should be encouraged to consider

> Values and other issues for which there is no absolute answer, and to aim to identify their differences rather than point of agreement. After all, the purpose of education is not to list what is already known, but to identify what is still to be learned, and to devise strategies for becoming a knower. When children are 'doing discussion' they are learning ways of knowing: each discussion that enables them to consider related matters puts them nearer to a belief in knowledge as negotiable, ownable and exciting.

It is clear that any approach advocating an increased emphasis on oracy, particularly across the curriculum, is likely to generate problems. Largely, these are as a result of the manner in which it is implemented as well as the individual teacher/pupil groups involved in the programme. The major constraining factor is undoubtedly a lack of direction or inability to set definable and realistic goals. In this regard, the Wiltshire Oracy Project and the National Oracy Project in Britain are undoubtedly major role players as they continue the debate and seek for the most effective ways to implement such a programme successfully. What is important to recognise, therefore is that an oracy based education has gained temendous support over the past thirty years, and even with some of the above-mentioned problems associated with it, its relevance in the classroom cannot be denied. There is no doubt that it has the potential to broaden the understanding the child has of his world - it is a matter now of resolving some of the problems to make for a more effective and dynamic approach, from which there can only come success.

2.6 Conclusion

It should be clear from all of the above, that much is to be gained by extending education beyond the traditional teacher-centred writing/reading approach, to include more emphasis on oracy.

Although recommendations in this regard have been made since the 1960's, changes in the classroom have been minimal. However, the influential Kingman Report (1988) and Cox Report (1989), in Britain, do provide some hope, with an even stronger drive, to promote increased talk in the classroom. So too, as mentioned above, have bodies such as the Wiltshire Oracy Project and the National Oracy Project given insight into the most recent developments in oracy and provoked further debate on the subject. It is, as several educationists have pointed out, only by exploring alternative ways of using language and by extending the involvement of the pupils in their learning, that the classroom experience can have real meaning.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This examination of the effects of oracy on learning demands both a quantitative and qualitative perspective. In one respect, the nature of the research requires some form of quantifiable response which can be evaluated relatively easily, based on percentages, in response to certain issues.

However, as in all sociological and educational studies, human beings can hardly be rigidly quantified. As will be seen, much of the questionnaire completed by the pupils required them to give their written responses to certain issues. So too, the interviews conducted with the teachers and observer teacher also required them to give personal opinions of aspects of the programme. As a result, both groups were demonstrating highly subjective attitudes, which are virtually impossible to quantify. Even my personal attitudes and bias towards what I hoped to discover by conducting the programme must have impinged on the final results. It is clear from the above then that the approach adopted for the testing of this programme implementing a policy of oracy was to be largely qualitative. As such, comments and suggestions made by the pupils and teachers are included; from these certain assumptions and recommendations can be made.

This qualitative research, however, may have proved to be too insubstantial for the study, and as such I introduced an element of quantitative assessment into most questions. This provided a basis upon which the pupils and teachers could make comments. It also meant that in the final evaluation of the programme the qualitative data could be

assessed within a quantitative framework. What should be stressed, though, is that even this quantitative data is based on personal attitudes and responses to the programme and as such it is not 'pure' scientific data. While it was possible to work out percentages from relatively simple questions, these figures serve only as an indicator of the pupil and teacher atttudes. They are then explored more fully in the comments which were requested in the second part of most questions.

Finally, the pupils and teachers were requested to make any other comments or suggestions they felt could enhance such a programme. These comments, together with my own recommendations try to draw together the quantitative and qualitative into a broad understanding of oracy.

3.2 Literature survey

A thorough search for literature dealing with this topic was carried out, in order to establish as broad an understanding of the topic as possible. This search entailed reading a diverse range of books, journals, theses and magazines. Most of the work done on the topic of oracy has been conducted over the past thirty years and much of this has been British, although more recently Canadian educationists have explored this approach in some depth.

This literature review was necessary to establish a basis from which the lessons and evaluation of the programme could take form. While the topic has raised considerable attention over the past three decades it has only received significant recognition in the past ten years. In South Africa, there has not been much written on the subject and as such, this programme was to serve as something of an experiment, as similar approaches to those used elsewhere were implemented.

3.3 Participants

The testing for this research was conducted in a boys' secondary school in East London, South Africa. It was decided to use three classes of Standard Seven boys as the subjects for this investigation. The reasons for this were two-fold. Firstly, it was felt that at the age of fourteen or fifteen the boys would be more likely to adapt to a different educational approach than perhaps an older age group. It was also likely that as they were aware that they were part of a research project they would apply themselves to the work to be done.

The choice of which Standard Seven classes to use was quite complicated as I wished to limit the number of teachers involved as much as possible, to make it easier to monitor and offer support where necessary. In addition, I needed teachers who were willing to assist with the programme as it would entail a significant change in approach as well as more preparation than might usually be required. As a result, the classes were selected on the basis of which teachers taught them, as well as if a teacher taught more than one class.

The three classes chosen eventually were 7C, 7F and 7R (the suffixes representing houses in the school). The distribution of classes was slightly problematic due to the constraints mentioned above regarding teacher availability. The 7C class was taught with an increased oral approach in all three subjects - English, mathematics and physical science. The 7F class was given this tuition in English and mathematics, with the same English teacher as that of the 7C class. The 7R class was only taught science in this manner, by the same teacher as for the 7C class. This managed to restrict the number of teachers used to four.

I felt it necessary to explain to the classes that they would be part of a study for the purposes of a degree and I encouraged them to become as involved as possible in the programme. It was explained to them that they would be doing more work in small-groups than had previously been the case and that I would be requesting their feedback at the programme's completion. The pupils were also informed of its duration, namely five weeks, and that they would be writing a test towards the end of that time, based on the work covered.

The teachers I initially selected were all, in my opinion, people who would be willing to apply themselves fully to the investigation. Once they agreed, I held a meeting with them during which I outlined some of the theory behind the practice I wished to investigate. We discussed various alternatives available for increasing oral activity in the classroom, as well as several problems which they felt might develop. By this time I had accumulated a substantial amount of the literature available on the topic and was able to use this as a basis from which the teachers could begin working. In addition to the four teachers involved, I requested a further teacher to act as an impartial observer. It was to be her role to visit classes taken by these teachers and evaluate the talk taking place in the classroom.

As a means of assisting the observer, I developed an evaluation sheet (See Appendix B) for use during the observation periods. This enabled the observer to make an assessment every five minutes of what talking was occurring. In addition, the sheet made provision for further details regarding group size as well as comments on the work done during the period. It was not the intention that the observer should be limited by what amounted to a highly quantitative evaluation sheet but rather that it should serve as a record of what periods had been observed and therefore also as a means of assisting the observer at the completion of the testing period. This observation sheet was adapted substantially after a trial

period as it initially demanded too much attention to the timing of different *types* of talk which became difficult to quantify. Therefore, after consultation with the observer, the necessary changes were made.

3.4 Subject choice

As is evident in the Review of literature, oracy should be a condition in *all* subjects and as such it was not easy to decide on specific subjects for the purposes of this study. However, because mathematics and physical science often pose a problem for pupils because they demand an understanding of complex and abstract ideas, these two subjects were selected. In addition, these subjects have a complicated metalanguage specific to those subjects, which it was presumed, also played a part in learning difficulties.

English, on the other hand, has a range of syllabus options, from the more precise grammar to the more subjective, personal writing and oral work. For this reason it was decided that English would provide a slightly different indication of the potential for group work.

3.5 Time period

Ideally, this programme should be run over a longer period. It is necessary when making a change of this sort that time is given for pupils and teachers to make the adaptation and also for problem areas to be resolved. For the purposes of this study, this was not possible, however, and as such a period of five weeks was decided upon. This ran from one week into the term and was completed exactly five weeks later. The teachers were encouraged to try to complete specific 'sets' of work during this time but inevitably the five week period ended with some teachers already having started a new section of work and thus having to do the tests and evaluation of the programme based on work completed some time before.

Even with the constraint of this limited period, however, several teachers were able to make relatively large changes to their approach.

3.6 Evaluation of programme

At the completion of the five-week period, those involved in the programme were requested to evaluate the work done. The pupils were asked to complete a questionnaire (see Appendix A) which was intended to be quantifiable and yet sufficiently open-ended to allow for individual comments. Thus it became a qualitative tool within a quantitative structure. The first question required the pupils to describe one particular lesson which stood out during the five-week period. This question was intended to remind the pupil of a specific lesson in order to encourage him to respond clearly to the following questions.

The questions which followed covered several central concerns dealing with oracy, namely pupil and teacher perceptions; discipline; group size effectiveness; time allocation and effectiveness of the programme. Most questions required a simple assessment of the question, followed by a more detailed comment. The pupils were given forty minutes to complete the questionnaire but those who required more time to answer the questions in more detail were allowed it.

In a similar way as the pupils answered the questionnaire, the teachers were interviewed, with the questions in these interviews being based largely on those given to the pupils. It was felt that an interview for the teachers would be more beneficial as it would allow for one question to lead on to a further issue and in so-doing allow a more thorough investigation. Naturally, the number of pupils involved in the testing precluded this from being an option in their evaluation. Here too, the teachers were asked to provide some quantitative response although largely their comments were qualitative attitudes to the programme. The

teacher interviews were taped and the responses transcribed at a later stage. In addition to the interviews with the teachers a further interview was held with the observer teacher. Initially it had been my intention to ask the observer teacher to write a journal-type response to the programme but when she suggested that she would prefer my leading a discussion on the topic, I acceded to this request. This teacher was able to refer to the evaluation sheets used during the five-week period in her responses. These provided a reminder of specific lessons and were also a quantitative indicator of the effectiveness of oral work in those lessons. The evaluation sheet divided the forty minutes in every period into five-minute sections. At the completion of each of these the observer made an assessment of how much time had been spent talking by a) the pupils; b) the teacher or c) if no talking had occurred. This was represented as a ratio out of five points where each point represented one minute. It was possible for half points to be used if necessary. The evaluation sheet also provided space to indicate where the pupils worked alone; in pairs; small groups; large groups or in any other manner. Most importantly, the observer then made comments based on the lesson as a whole; these were to be most valuable during the final evaluation interview.

Finally, all the above mentioned data was calculated, tabulated and evaluated for inclusion in this study. An analysis was made of these results and, based also on work done by others in this field, a set of recommendations was produced. These recommendations are indicative of the importance that a programme of increased oracy should have in the classroom, particularly in the South African context.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

Undoubtedly the single most important feature that emerges during an analysis of all the information collected from this investigation is one of human variance. As will become evident during this examination of the responses to the five-week programme, its application and eventual success were determined largely by the classes involved and the teachers presenting it. From the outset, it became clear that such an approach was entirely dependent on the perceptions held of it by the pupils and teachers and their willingness to make the adaptations, where necessary, for its successful implementation.

It is important at this point to make several observations about the classes and teachers involved in the programme. Naturally, it would have been ideal to have homogenous class groups, teachers equally committed to the task and a longer period over which to implement and test the programme. However, this ideal situation was not possible, and so as to provide the context within which the testing was done, I mention the following details.

While ability groupings are not rigidly applied in the school used, because of subject choices and results obtained in a Standard 5 'Creativity Test', certain classes do tend to assume a higher academic profile.

In this regard, 7C and 7R tended to have a higher percentage of academically strong pupils, while 7F did not. If such a generalisation can be made, and I wish to suggest it can, the 7F group tended to have more pupils who struggled academically and who also posed more discipline problems. Of the three classes used, the 7F group applied themselves

with the least enthusiasm. However, as will be seen from some of the responses in the class and from some of the teachers, even these weaker academic pupils gained by the experience.

Of the teachers, there were also differing attitudes to applying the principles of increased group work and increased oracy. Teacher A, who taught English to both 7C and 7F, relished the chance to try something new and committed herself entirely to the task. This is evident both in her responses and those of the classes. Teacher B, a mathematics teacher, also tried extremely hard to adapt her teaching methods to this approach but, as will be seen, found that the subject did not allow as much time for oral work as was the case in English. Teacher C, also a mathematics teacher, found the same limitations imposed by the syllabus and as a result very little oral work of a meaningful kind took place. This too should become evident in the feedback to be discussed. Finally, Teacher D, a physical science teacher, teaches in an authoritarian manner and, while he made every effort to encourage group work it is likely that his personality would have impinged to some extent on the behaviour and results obtained by the class. The observer, Teacher E, has had experience in teaching two of the three subjects used in this programme and her classroom manner was such that her presence in the room should not have been threatening. I would thus suggest that those lessons observed by Teacher E would not have changed significantly from any of the other lessons presented unobserved.

Because of the differences between classes and in the teaching styles of the four teachers, as well as the apparent constraints in certain subjects, it will be necessary in most cases to examine these separately. Where generalisations can be drawn, I will do so, but it is my opinion that to do so in most cases would detract from the individual strengths of the pupils, teachers and subjects involved.

4.2 Perceptions of change

As a starting point, it was interesting to note the perceptions of both pupils and staff as to the change in approach during the five-week period when compared to the teaching styles employed prior to that. In English, it appears that the transformation was most effectively made, with both classes agreeing unanimously that there had been a marked difference. Teacher A, as mentioned earlier, felt that she had consciously attempted to encourage opportunities for discussion and reporting back to the class, by the pupils. She felt that she had "adjusted" her teaching because of the programme but even this was largely dependent on the class to be taught. With the 7C class she felt that she was more able to allow for discussion than was the case with the 7F class, which tended to need more guidance and assistance. In mathematics, however, a different picture emerges. In Teacher B's class, 23% felt that no marked difference had occurred while in Teacher C's class an even more disappointing response was given. Here 61% stated that there had been no change in teaching approach. These statistics are borne out by the statements made by the teachers involved. Teacher B felt that although she made every attempt to teach the work in such a way that it encouraged group work and pupils teaching each other, this was not always possible, firstly because of the constraints of the syllabus and also because of the nature of the work to be covered. Teacher B's comment was that

> I was aware that I talk too much and I needed to give more time to the boys to talk. I suppose, though, that my teaching style was more or less like this before I started with (the programme), where I don't just tell the boys, I try to get them to discover but because of time I can't always do this.

Teacher C had the added difficulty of trying to teach the 7F group, as mentioned earlier, a group which on the whole was weak academically,

particularly in mathematics. This teacher felt that while he had organised the physical arrangement of his classroom by moving desks into groupings and as much as he had attempted to encourage oral work, it had proved to be counter-productive. As he was constantly aware of the time constraints placed on him by the work required to be done in the syllabus he felt that he was not fully able to change his teaching style. His comment in this regard was that

> Because co-operative learning has been stressed at the school I didn't have to change my approach all that much. My desks were already turned towards each other; facing each other. My biggest problem has been that for the stronger guys this approach seemed to be working quite well. For the weaker guys there was no sense of responsibility. For this reason, the brighter guys weren't happy as they felt they had to help the others.

As mentioned previously, several pupils in these mathematics classes did not notice any marked difference in teaching styles. This may have been because both teachers were already using a similar, co-operative learning approach and as such the adjustment had not been noticeable. This became evident in some of the responses given by the pupils

> It was fairly much the same as last year. We could not really explain to each other what goes on, rather just help each other with sums (7C) .... It is very complicated to speak in a Maths group for each person has different ideas and it really muddles you up (7C) .... the only difference is that we sit in groups. We still aren't allowed to talk (7F).

Naturally, there were those who responded that the programme had changed the teaching approach significantly and had produced positive results. It is just a pity, though, that so large a group in the mathematics classes felt that the change had been minimal and its effect negligible. The type of comment that came from the more positive 7R class took the following form - "I understood the work better because it was told in the way I understood it". This rather paradoxical answer gives some indication that learning has to do with the way knowledge is presented. This idea is similar to other comments that "we got more time to figure things out ourselves. Sometimes it was a bit hard but when we figured it out it felt good." and " I think it gave us time to share our own ideas as pupils rather than using interpretations of the teachers". These responses really form the crux of the argument for an oracy based approach and more will be mentioned about this further on in this study.

It is in the two physical science classes, however, that the strangest response occurred. Although both classes were taught the same work by the same teacher, their responses could not have been more different. The response from the 7C class was that 70% felt that there had been no marked difference in the way the lessons were conducted, while in the 7R class only 17% felt this way. There can be no definite answer as to why this should be the case although I would suggest that perhaps it may have been because 7C had three subjects being taught in this manner and, relative to the English and mathematics subjects, the physical science

showed the least change. The 7R class, on the other hand, had only this one subject with a stronger oral bias and as such it may have seemed as if it had changed significantly. Whatever the reason, it is important to note the possibility of very different perceptions from both pupils and staff.

The physical science teacher, Teacher D, stated that he had not changed his approach all that much as "whenever we do practicals that is how we would teach the lesson". He felt that such an approach would be fairly normal with the Standard Seven group and with that type of work. (The work being covered at the time was on 'Electricity' and later on 'Pressure'). As the English teacher also mentioned, the physical science teacher felt that changing his approach depended largely on the class being taught. Although he had covered the same work with both classes he found that individual differences dictated his approach. His comments were that

> certain boys are more amenable to that sort of thing and can do that sort of thing and they'll go off and they're going to do the job properly. Then you're going to get the others who are going to 'jack around' and that's the only real difference. Then you're going to get a guy like (Pupil A) and he'll be the real leech and not really a very good leech either and he's going to let his partner do everything and he's just going to hang in there and he hasn't even tried to contribute so he's gained nothing.

It is clear that a change of attitude is necessary from both pupil and teacher if a new approach such as this is to occur. It is also obvious from the pupil and teacher comments mentioned above that there will always be certain pupils who will not benefit from a changed approach and equally so, certain teachers who will be unable to make a complete transformation of their teaching.

4.3 Use of time

As a means of quantifying the above trends, the pupils were asked to estimate, as a percentage, the amount of time spent talking by (a) the teacher and (b) the pupils in an average lesson. The table below lists these findings.

Table 1

Time spent talking by teacher : pupils (%)

Class	English		Mathematics		Science	
	Teacher	Pupils	Teacher	Pupils	Teacher	Pupils
7C	45	55	57	43	72	28
7F	46	54	77	23		
7R					53	47

It is clear from the above that the same tendencies as those mentioned earlier are evident. It is a sad indictment of some of the teaching taking place here that even in a situation where oracy is being encouraged, the percentages slip dangerously close to those mentioned by Flanders (1962) in the earlier Review of literature. His suggestion that two-thirds of the talk in the classroom is done by the teacher is borne out in two of the classroom situations mentioned above.

Ironically, when asked the same question, the teachers felt that they had done less talking than the pupils had done. While it can be presumed that it is natural not to realise just how much one has spoken during a teaching period, the disparity in perceptions between teachers and pupils is too large to pass over without comment. Teacher A felt that she allowed the pupils to speak for 85% of the time once she had explained what the task was. Teacher B felt that the pupils spoke for approximately 70% of the time. Teacher C's comment was that "it would depend on the level they had got to in the work. Initially I would talk for probably 80% of the time but eventually I suppose they would be talking for about 80%.". In a similar vein, Teacher D mentioned that "I did more at the beginning but by the time we were doing the practical work it could almost be a 20%/80% with the pupils talking for 80% of the time". Clearly, when evaluating these responses in relation to those of the pupils, the perceptions are alarmingly different.

These apparent contradictions are borne out by the observer teacher, who also felt that in some cases the teacher still maintained too strong a hold over the classroom activities and therefore dominated talk in the classroom. Percentages mentioned in her estimation were that the teacher spoke for roughly 60% of the time in English and physical science and 70% in mathematics. These percentages are largely supported by the evaluation sheets used by the observer. Although the intention was not to use this highly quantifiable data of time spent talking by the teacher and the pupils, it nevertheless serves as an indicator of these percentages. As mentioned in the methodology, the evaluation sheets were to be used as a means of assessing individual lessons and then of keeping a record for the final evaluation. The 'time' data was merely a rough guide as to the time spent talking in the classroom and as such serves only as an indication; however it is clearly supportive of the impressions gained by the observer teacher that the teachers still tended to dominate the lessons.

However, the most evident problem that arose, according to the observer teacher, was the 'unconstructive talk' that she observed in the groups. This raises the paradoxical questions examined in the Review of literature of where the success of oracy lies. Is it in the successful attainment of an end result or is it in the process which works towards that result but *may not* necessarily reach it? The discussion itself, therefore, is as Phillips (1988) in Maclure *et al* (1988:69) puts it - ' an event' in which the speakers explore the possibilities of small-group talk itself. Quite where

to draw the line then, between what is truly 'constructive' and 'unconstructive' becomes a difficult task. This argument, naturally, presupposes that at leat *some* of the 'loose chatter', as mentioned in the Bullock Report, is task orientated and not all just conversation regarding the individual's love life and personal activities! In this regard, the pupils were asked to estimate what percentage of the pupil talk was constructive as opposed to that which was unconstructive. The responses are contained in the table below.

Table 2

Constructive : Unconstructive talk (%)

Class	English		Mathematics		Science	
	Constr.	Uncon.	Constr.	Uncon.	Constr.	Uncon.
7C	54	46	72	28	71	29
7F	47	53	47	53		
7R					61	39

These results make for an interesting discussion. While in the previous table the English classes were noted to have more time for pupil talk, the amount of time spent *constructively* talking during that time is not particularly high, specifically in the 7F class. I would suggest that perhaps this is as a result of the tendency in English classes for there to be more freedom to express ideas and occasionally this may lead to increased unconstructive talk. Certainly in this case, Teacher A is not a strict

disciplinarian and as such it is quite possible that more unconstructive talk would have occurred. This perception is substantiated by the response of Teacher A who felt that the 7C class had been more constructive in their talking than had the 7F class. On the other hand, with the exception of the 7F mathematics class, there is a remarkably high percentage of constructive, task oriented talk. Again, the teacher in these two cases may have been the dominant factor as both have strongly established discipline codes in their classes and the pupils would probably have responded to this.

Teacher responses to this constructive/unconstructive question showed remarkable similarity in that all emphasised the need for this approach to be implemented in <u>all</u> subjects and for time to be allowed for pupils and teachers to adapt to it. This is in the line with suggestions made in the Review of literature where it is suggested that a programme of oracy be conducted from a 'Language Across the Curriculum' approach. Teacher B's comment was that "things did get better but I think it needs to be done in all subjects so that the boys can get used to it". Teacher D's sentiments echo those of Teacher B as he suggests that

> It's natural with these kids. As soon as they know what they're doing then it's alright. But you know, everything that they did, they did correctly, so there must have been some constructive talk there. It may be that of lot of it is for <u>my</u> benefit. When I arrive (at the group) then the boys switch on. But the work was done properly. And by the way, it's been borne out in their exams. That section of work they have done very well.

These positive sentiments indicate the benefits that are to be gained if such an approach can be successfully implemented. Teacher C, on the other hand made a distinction of how much constructive talk took place based on the individual differences between pupils. His statement was that

> maybe a weak guy wouldn't be as effective as someone who wanted to do the work. The strong guys come through very strongly, the guys in between I think are OK but the bottom guys constantly need to be pulled back to the topic.

In each of the teacher responses there is a clear indication that there are benefits to oracy and that unconstructive talk is largely as a result of whether the pupils can be assisted to use the new approach effectively or not. If the incidence of unconstructive talk can be reduced there is no doubt that the effectiveness of the exercise can be dramatically improved.

Some illuminating reasons were given by the pupils when asked why unconstructive talk had occurred. These ranged from statements that some groups had completed the work before others; too much time had been given for the task or the fact that the pupils had not yet grown accustomed to working in groups. Most telling though, were several comments that the pupils were bored or that they wanted "more exciting lessons". Clearly, if teachers are to succeed with an oracy based style of teaching they will need to challenge the pupils far more and be more

aware of their work rate. This will demand more preparation time, both for the teacher and the pupils. As Teacher A put it, "It's a bit more work to prepare but I've really enjoyed the lessons - it gives me more time to give individual attention to those who need it."

The pupils were also asked to suggest possible solutions to the problem of unconstructive talk during group work. Some of these have already been discussed, particularly the suggestion that with interesting lessons there will be less tendency to talk unconstructively. In addition, the pupils felt that with more group work, they would grow accustomed to the type of talk expected of them and the purpose of such work and as a result it would be more effective. Several felt that the teacher needed to be more aware of what was happening within the groups: specifically, how far they had progressed; whether assistance was required or whether discipline problems had to be resolved. The prerequisite of maintaining order was seen to be important and the pupils felt that without the teacher's presence, the talk would deteriorate into unconstructive chatter. The challenge for the teacher, therefore, is to maintain cohesion and a work ethic without dominating the exercise to the detriment of the pupil talk. As the Bullock Report (1975:191) puts it:

> There exists the two distinct roles of teaching and control, and the constant aim should be to develop the first to a point where it encompasses the second.

4.4 Discipline

From the above issue sprung the question of whether a programme encouraging increased talk in the classroom resulted in a deterioration of discipline. Every teacher felt that although the novelty of an increase in talking time had taken some adjustment from the pupils, there had, by the end of the programme, been no marked deterioration in discipline standards. This was substantiated by the observer teacher, who saw no classes where discipline was of major concern, even though, as mentioned earlier, there might have been more attention given to what was happening *within* the groups.

Teacher C saw the problem not to lie with discipline as such but rather in "encouraging them to establish an atmosphere of learning". In one of his earlier responses he had mentioned that because the school had tried to implement a programme of co-operative learning he had already begun to teach in this manner. This relies on more specific roles being assigned to each group member, an aspect which is mentioned in his statement that

> It needs to be a uniform approach in all subjects in the school, otherwise the guy who is enforcing discipline is doing it in isolation .... There needs to be more structure in the group and there should be specific roles given to the guys but this should be taught to them in all subjects.

Perhaps it is therefore in providing more structure to the group that the talk in the group will be more task-oriented and constructive. Undoubtedly the discipline will improve if the pupils are all actively involved in the discussion. The physical science teacher, Teacher D, had a different approach to discipline, which was particularly relevant to his subject. He commented that

> Any schoolkid enjoys it when he is given freedom - this lends itself to a little bit of a lack of discipline but I say to them in a Practical situation, "Listen guys, it can be dangerous, it can be costly, don't jack around". So I didn't find a problem with discipline. It's a more loose arrangement but it didn't create chaos.

The important element in the above statement is not the threat implicit in the teacher's comment but rather that the pupils have been given direction and a clear instruction to work in a specific way. Therein, it seems to me, is the solution to any discipline problems which may occur. Pupils must be given clear instructions, must be stimulated by the work they are doing and a constant assessment of how the discussions are progressing must be made.

Pupils' perceptions of discipline seem also to endorse what has been mentioned above with the exception of 7F, where a significant group felt that discipline had deteriorated. The table below indicates the percentages within each class who felt that discipline had improved, remained the same or become worse.

Table 3

Discipline patterns (%)

Class	Improved	Remained the same	Became worse
7C	23	64	13
7F	11	50	39
7R	35	41	24

From this perspective, the prevalent idea that increasing the amount of talk in the classroom will lead to a decline in standards of behaviour is largely refuted.

Of the whole group tested, almost 75% felt that the discipline had either remained the same or had actually improved during the programme. However, it would appear that discipline initially had to be enforced until pupils became more familiar with the new approach.

When requested to respond to whether a different style of discipline might be more effective, the pupils suggested several alternatives. There appeared to be a dichotomy in the views held regarding the role of the teacher. Some felt that a more rigid approach was necessary in which the teacher was less accommodating with any talk not task-oriented. Any behaviour by members of the group which decreased the group's effectiveness should, they felt, be remedied by intervention from the teacher. Comments in this regard ranged from the more extreme, "Hidings

should come in place or any other discipline that is necessary" to "The teachers should be stricter, so we can get more work done and understand the subject". All of these suggestions would entail a greater awareness on the teacher's part which could only be achieved by constantly moving from group to group and monitoring what was being discussed. This sense of constant teacher intervention is, I would suggest, not entirely advantageous to the process and should no longer be as necessary as the group work becomes more established. Indeed, once the pupils have become more familiar with the programme, the teacher's role should be more *advisory* than *supervisory* . Several pupils did point out in

their response to this question that by constant teacher intervention the effectiveness of the discussions could be limited. The comment from one was that "stricter discipline would not enable pupils to discuss work". The replies seem to indicate that even in the short five-week period that the programme was run, there was a growing awareness of the role of the participants in the group work discussion in terms of generating their own knowledge. One pupil's comment encapsulates this idea as he states that, "before doing this project, working in groups was a privilege, so we talked at every possible opportunity. After a while we became used to working together so we did not talk as much". The point has been made that initially a more rigid approach may be necessary from the teacher to establish the programme and in this regard it is interesting to note the response of one pupil who suggested that, "the teachers got stricter when

the group system came in but they are getting used to it". Certainly it begs the question of who has to adapt the most!

A further point mentioned by the pupils in connection with alternative forms of discipline was self-discipline. It was felt by a large number that as the programme progressed the members of the groups developed more self- discipline. It may be that during this process they came to realise that their attitude towards the work to be discussed was now vital as it would no longer be forced upon them by the teacher. Several pupils commented on the fact that allied to the tendency for better self-discipline came the ability to listen. To make this possible, it was felt by many that certain 'rules' were necessary within the groups to ensure their successful operation. Some of these included not making too much noise so that each person's view could be considered; no talking *between* one group and another and participation by all in the group. One pupil, obviously still more affected by external controlling forces, made the comment, when replying to this question about specific rules necessary, that Teacher D, the strict disciplinarian, had "unwritten rules"! Clearly, these would seem to encompass any other rules necessary for the successful operation of the groups!

In all four cases, the teachers commented that they did not require any additional rules for group-work. This was to allow as much interaction within the group as possible without restricting each person's

involvement. Teacher B's statement was that, "the whole time I was going around so I could help them; so I didn't really need strict rules". This undoubtedly appears to be the most important element of successful group-work - a constant awareness of what is happening in the groups and an availability to assist if so required.

4.5 Group size

One aspect which plays an important role in the effective functioning of a programme of increased oracy is the size of the groups. It is important to strike a balance between a group which is large enough to include sufficient points of view for discussion and yet small enough to avoid certain group members excluding themselves and thereby becoming passive observers. In this regard, there appeared to be no unanimity among the teachers as each felt differently about the effectiveness of pairs or groups of three and four. No teacher used groups larger than four and I would suggest that probably this was wise as beyond that pupils tend to become lost in the group. Teacher D felt strongly that pairs were most effective in physical science as they offered the greatest possibility for talk. His comment in this regard was that

> larger groups created too many passengers, particularly in Science where if a guy doesn't understand something, the easier it is for him to take a back seat and say, "No, I don't want to be labelled as a 'doffie' (struggler) so I'll let the clever guys like Pupil B do the work and I'll put down the same results". The smaller you make the group, the more committed they will be.

Teacher B, too, felt that in mathematics this method was most effective. Teacher A, on the other hand, found that in English classes, perhaps where more diverse views could be generated, groups of four had worked best. When questioned on the same topic, the pupils responded in an interesting way. The 7C class, taught in all three subjects, felt that groups of four worked most effectively, with 70% supporting this view. I have no doubt that this is as a result of their judgement of the relative effectiveness felt in all three subjects. Of the three subjects, the only one which used these large groups consistently was English and I would suggest that the success here elicited this response. The 7F class, probably more dependent on a stricter code of control, felt overwhelmingly that working in pairs was more effective, with 67% supporting this approach. This too, is understandable, given the already mentioned characteristics of the class. The 7R class, as to be expected, responded that pairs were most suitable, as this was the dominant group size used in their physical science classes.

One boy in the 7F class tried to justify using groups of four by suggesting that "two people in a group might not understand the work. In a group of four there is more of a chance of someone understanding the work". While this is rather a pessimistic view of group work, other pupils made some more positive observations. One was that "the pupils can compare more answers in the search for the correct answer", while another pupil made the assumption that the groups may be of mixed ability. His

comment was that "in a group one usually has a clever person, semi-clever, mediocre and below. The clever person can help explain to the other persons in the group the problem they are asked to solve". It is clear then that these pupils perceived groups of four to be the ideal size as this size allowed for different perspectives of the work being done. From these, they felt, they could extract the most suitable answers.

On the other hand, the boys who felt that working in pairs was most advantageous, had equally convincing arguments. One saw the pair option as having less potential for conflict. His contradiction of the view discussed above was that "not so many opinions to choose from; less arguing". Another stated that "we could listen to each other and there wasn't a lot of noise" while this idea was carried further by a boy who suggested that "in a bigger group lazy people would tag along and not contribute". One boy in 7F who clearly was not intended for group work felt that "other people in a big group will confuse you with their problems"! Clearly there is a need for the teacher to experiment with group size and in so doing utilize the most effective number in the group.

4.6 Time allocation

When discussing discipline earlier, mention was made of correct time allocation for tasks given to the groups for discussion. If the teacher is to maintain adequate control in the classroom, while at the same time

provide stimulating material for discussion, it is important that careful consideration be given to the time allocated for the task. The teachers involved in this programme all felt that it took a while to ascertain just how much time the groups needed for discussion. However, it was their belief that with sufficient awareness of what was happening in the groups and of how their discussions were progressing, time allocation should not be problematic. Again, this demanded movement around the classroom by the teacher in order to assess the work being conducted in the groups and offer assistance where necessary. The pupils' response, on the other hand, showed remarkable diversity of opinions, dependent on subject and teacher. These findings, based on how much time they felt they had to complete a task, are tabled below.

Table 4

Time Allocation

Class	English			Mathematics			Science		
	E.	N.E.	T.M.	E.	N.E.	T.M.	E.	N.E.	T.M.
7C	59	18	23	57	33	10	43	57	-
7F	61	22	17	17	83	-			
7R							81	19	-

Key E. - Enough time

N.E. - Not enough time

T.M. - Too much time

Several observations can be made based on the results tabled above. Firstly, and probably most obviously, is that with the exception of English, it would seem that very little time was wasted as a result of an over generous time allocation. Indeed, in the case of 7F's mathematics class it would seem that this was applied particularly stringently, with 83% of the class indicating that they had been given insufficient time to complete the task. The 7C science class' responses also indicate a similar tendency, although not with the same severity. Perhaps the most balanced grouping is to be found in the two English classes where, on average, 60% of the pupils felt that sufficient time had been allocated for the completion of the work. Balanced on either side of this are two smaller groups representing those pupils who considered the time allocation insufficient or too much. While it could be argued that one should avoid a situation where *any* pupils have too much time for the task, I would suggest that this position is the most desirable as it allows sufficient time for the majority while maintaining a relatively small group who could become restless, having completed the task.

4.7 Programme evaluation

As a means of assessing some of the advantages and disadvantages of this programme, the classes each wrote a test on the work covered during the five-week period. It is perhaps here that the most pleasing trends are to be noticed, as is evident in the following table. The responses of the

pupils are based on whether they found it easier to study for this test having worked through that portion of the syllabus in the manner described. The comparisons were balanced against their experiences in learning for tests earlier during the year.

Table 5

Levels of difficulty : Learning for test (%)

Class	English			Mathematics			Science		
	MD	S	E	MD	S	E	MD	S	E
7C	10	40	50	10	55	35	-	80	20
7F	17	44	39	33	33	34			
7R							13	13	74

Key: MD - more difficult to learn

S - same level of difficulty to learn

E - easier to learn

With the exception of the 7F class' response to mathematics, it is evident that an overwhelming majority of pupils found studying for the test easier after the five-week programme. At the very least, a large group felt that it had not been more difficult but had remained the same as before. As such, even though the oral approach had been implemented for an extremely limited period, there is a strong indication that there is

justification for a more prolonged and concerted programme in which, it is hoped, the results would be even more emphatic.

Some of the pupil comments bear repeating as they indicate clearly that studying for the test was easier after the programme. One boy mentioned that it was easier to remember the work because "we heard other people tell us how they understood the work" and another found the support structures in the group of assistance as he stated that "I did well in the last test because if I didn't understand something I asked someone in the group". However, two other comments delve even further by referring to the relationships present in the groups, namely that most of the pupils regarded the members of their group as 'friends'. This is evident in the responses:

> We remembered what was said by our friends and it made it a little bit easier ... we were helping our friends, which was improving <u>our</u> understanding ... if we teach each other we will learn it easier.

While most pupils found learning for the test easier after the programme, there were, as mentioned earlier, several who found it more difficult. Two comments give some indication of why this occurred. The first relates specifically to one subject but could quite easily be true in any other. This was that "the group work didn't really help in maths because we really confused each other rather than helped". In the same way the insecurity can be understood in the other comment that "trusting your info was

hard".

It should be the constant aim of the teacher to re-assure the pupils of their own abilities to generate knowledge but equally so there should be a continual awareness of whether they are coping. It is true that assessment through examinations and tests still dominates our educational approach and as such the teacher should ensure that the pupils have covered the work adequately. Working in groups cannot be an excuse for the teacher to neglect his responsibility to provide direction and advice to his pupils.

Feedback from the teachers in this regard was no less favourable as they all mentioned that there had been some improvement in the test results. This was particularly marked in the pupils who usually struggled, which seems to suggest that such an oral programme is particularly useful for those struggling to understand the continual bombardment of information passed on to them in the classroom. Undoubtedly the most emphatic support for the oracy programme and its effect in assisting retention came from Teacher A, in English, who noticed a remarkable improvement in test results and an indication that pupils were *understanding* the work, rather than merely regurgitating facts. The comment that came from her was that the response from the class had been "wonderful". She also mentioned that the pupils had become more confident and this had undoubtedly assisted in learning for the test. Thiis seems also to be the

case in the science classes where it was noted that after grappling with several problems dealing with 'Electricity' and then applying these to their theoretical basis, the pupils seemed to comprehend the principles in a more concrete way. Teacher D's comment in this regard was that

> Through trial and error he's learning and he'll never forget that and it's going to sit on his mind, "exactly how did I connect this and what happened when I put this next to this other one?" and that's why I feel it's better for the (the pupil) to discover. The test results were very good and I have no doubt that this was the reason.

While it could be argued that only one test could give a slanted view of the programme's effectiveness it still serves as an indication that there is merit in pursuing such an approach. I would suggest that, if implemented over a longer period, and if evaluated on several occasions during that time, it is likely that a positive trend in academic attainment would be noticed. In addition, it is probable that the pupils will find it relatively easier to apply this knowledge for which they themselves have created meanings.

Together with the question posed above, the pupils were also asked whether they felt the five-week period had been beneficial. Here too, the response was most pleasing. In 7C, 91% felt that the programme had been helpful, while in 7F and 7R the figure was 78% and 94% respectively. Substantiation of these figures is to be found in the pupil comments such as:

> Working in groups widens the variety of ideas and answers ... a person learns different ways of doing problems from the group members (not only the teacher's way) ... if someone is too shy to ask the teacher he can just ask his friend ... if we were more interactive in our other subjects we would receive better marks.

This support is an emphatic indicator of the benefits that are to be gained, particularly if a concerted, uniform approach is implemented in *all* classes and in *all* subjects in the school. While some of the teachers had reservations about its applicability in certain areas of the syllabus, none denied that it could serve as an important tool in discovery and learning. Naturally, there are parts of the syllabus which demand more teacher guidance, and this idea was emphasised by those teachers involved; and yet there are many other occasions where the increased oral approach could provide the breakthrough to understanding so often not attained.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS

Undoubtedly the most important recommendation that emerges from a study of work done in this area is that a change of approach in the classroom is necessary. It is vital that a movement occurs from a highly teacher-centred approach, where the teacher is seen as the source of knowledge to be passively acquired, to a more pupil-centred approach. It is extremely important that the pupil be encouraged to become more involved in his own knowledge acquisition and this implies a definite change in attitude. This alternative approach requires the pupil to confront new ideas, work through these and at the same time relate them to his past experiences and then finally make the 'new' knowledge part of his cumulative understanding of the world. This cannot be done passively; it requires the active participation of every pupil in the class.

Equally, such an approach cannot effectively be conducted in isolation in one or two classes. It was clear from the responses from both pupils and teachers that they felt that oracy could be beneficial in all subjects. Thus it should become a common approach in *all* subjects so that the pupils see their involvement across a broad range of ideas. While it is recognised that not *all* subjects will demand this approach *all* of the time, it is highly likely that once it is implemented, an oracy based programme will be used

whenever a specific part of the syllabus demands. It will be the teacher's, and ultimately the pupil's, responsibility to determine what approach will work most successfully in a specific subject area.

The attitudes held by teachers and pupils will ultimately determine how successful the implementation of such a programme could be. For this reason it is important to provide both groups involved with some theoretical justification based on work done in this field, as well as with suggestions regarding its application. It is never easy to promote change for change's sake but if sufficient justification can be given, and once the teachers and pupils recognise the benefits of such an approach, it is likely that the changes will be seen to be of enormous benefit to both groups.

The reluctance to change to such an approach which may be expected from teachers, could be based on several concerns. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, there is a common perception that increased talking by pupils leads to increased discipline problems. As suggested by the results in this study, this is not as problematic as some would believe and it is highly likely that if a firm discipline structure is in place initially, there should be few problems in dealing with discipline later. If a mutual respect can be fostered between learner and teacher and if the pupil is able to perceive himself as responsible for his own knowledge acquisition, it is highly likely that an atmosphere conducive to learning will be established. A second concern likely to be raised by teachers is that of the increased effort

required in the preparation of work. There is no doubt that a programme of increased oracy demands a more thorough preparation, as the teacher is no longer regarded as the single source of knowledge but rather the pupils are now encouraged to discover their own knowledge by working through problems or new ideas presented to them. In this regard, there is no escaping the fact that in order to keep the pupils interested and motivated, teachers will have to spend more time preparing work for interactive learning. However, as pointed out by one of the teachers in this study, this allows for more freedom in the class for the teacher, as more time can be spent assisting individual pupils or small groups as they work through new concepts. A change in attitude of what teachers and pupils perceive knowledge to be is thus fundamental to the successful implementation of such a programme.

However, what is also important is the time needed and the changes in approach that time might demand. While this study took place over an extremely short period - five weeks - any implementation of a long term programme will require time to discover which approaches work best and which need change. For this reason, it is important to be sufficiently flexible to try new ways of teaching which may be more effective than those initially used and also to allow time for the teachers and pupils to adapt to the new approach. It may well be that initial results do not indicate any dramatic improvement; however it is likely that with time this will change as the pupils begin to generate their own understanding.

It is important too, to recognise that while time will be needed, this should not be wasted time. Within each subject area, clear aims should still be set and both teachers and pupils should know what these are. It has been a criticism of a programme of increased talk that too much of it becomes meaningless and without direction. For this reason it is imperative that discussions be focused and with intent. It is not to say that the end product is the most important factor in learning; indeed it is the opposite. The process of talking through a concept is, as some researchers have suggested, to be seen as an 'event' in itself. However, equally so, the participants in this discussion should be clear as to their aims.

As is evident in a review of literature in this field, as well as from the positive trends generated in this experimental programme, oracy should find an important place in the teaching styles of every teacher, in every subject. It offers pupils the opportunity to interact with each other and with the teacher, in the pursuit of knowledge, by talking through often complex and abstract concepts. If the possibility exists that pupils can be assisted in the learning process, then it is imperative that we, as educators, embrace this innovative approach. There is no doubt that oracy offers a gateway to discovery, if we are only willing to make the change and apply ourselves fully to its aims.

APPENDIX A

(COPY OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE USED IN THIS STUDY)

NAME: ..... **CLASS**:

.....

Based on the work done during the past 5 weeks in your English, mathematics and science classes, please complete the following questionnaire. It would be appreciated if you could respond as accurately as possible and in what ever detail you feel necessary.

1. Describe briefly, in point form if you wish, one lesson you remember in each of English, mathematics and science in which the class was required to do more talking than usually might be the case. This could have involved working in pairs/group work/teaching the class/reporting back and so on.

2. Did you notice any marked difference in the way the lessons were conducted as compared to earlier in the year? Place a cross through your response below and add comments where necessary.

ENGLISH YES NO	MATHS YES NO	SCIENCE YES NO
Comments	Comments	Comments

3. In any average lesson during the past 5 weeks, what percentage of time do you feel was spent talking by the teacher as compared to that time spent talking by the pupils. (The pupil talk should include group work, explaining to the class, reporting back etc).
An example has been done for you below.

	ENGLISH		MATHS		SCIENCE	
	Teacher	Pupils	Teacher	Pupils	Teacher	Pupils
Example	60%	40%	75%	25%	50%	50%
Your response						

4. Of the pupil talk, what percentage do you feel was constructive talk (i.e. work being done) and what percentage was unconstructive (social chatting)?

ENGLISH		MATHEMATICS		SCIENCE	
Construct.	Unconstruc	Construct	Unconstruc	Construct	Unconstruc

5. What do you feel the reasons were that some unconstructive talk may have taken place?

_____

_____

_____

6. How would you suggest this could be improved?

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. Did the discipline during class in which there was more talking:

a.	Improve	b.	Stay the same	c.	Become worse

during the 5 week period? (Compare from beginning to end of the 5 week period)

Comment:_____

_____

_____

_____

8. Do you feel a different type of discipline (from the teacher or from pupils) may have made a difference?

Yes	No

Comment:_____

_____

_____

_____

9. When working in pairs/groups, what size groups seemed to work best?

Size: _____

Reason:_____

_____

_____

_____

10. How much time was generally given to groups to do the required work?

ENGLISH			MATHS			SCIENCE		
Enough	Not enough	Too Much	Enough	Not Enough	Too Much	Enough	Not Enough	Too Much

11. When working in groups, was work done <u>within each group</u> reasonably well spread/balanced among the people in the group? (As opposed to one person doing all the work).

Yes	No

Comment: _____

_____

_____

_____

12. Were "rules" necessary when working in groups?

Yes	No

Comment: _____

_____

_____

_____

13. During studying for the test on the work covered during the 5 week period, did you find it:

ENGLISH			MATHS			SCIENCE		
More Difficult	The Same	Easier	More Difficult	The Same	Easier	More Difficult	The Same	Easier

to remember the work? (Compared to other tests earlier this year/previous years).

Comment:_____

_____

_____

_____

14. Having completed this 5 week period and the test, would you say that you find the experience could be:

a.	Helpful	b.	Not Helpful

for other classes and in other subjects?

Comment:_____

_____

_____

_____

15. Do you feel some subjects are better suited to more talking in groups/reporting back/explaining by pupils?

Comment:_____

_____

_____

_____

16. If you have any further positive or negative comments which you feel may assist this research, kindly give these below:

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX B.
EVALUATION SHEET : ORACY IN THE CLASSROOM

DATE: ..... CLASS ..... SUBJECT
TOPIC
.....
.....

Instructions: At the beginning of the class start stopwatch. At the conclusion of each five minute period list your observations on the table provided below using these guidelines: allocate a total of 5 points for each 5 minutes, with each point representing the proportion of time spent talking by a) the pupils; b) the teacher or c) no talking. An example is given below.

	TIME	TALK		
Example	0-5	PUPILS	TEACHER	NO TALK
		3	1	1
	0-5			
	5-10			
	10-15			
	15-20			
	20-25			
	25-30			
	30-35			
	35-40			
TOTAL				
%				

During the lesson, did pupils work:

a. Alone		b. In pairs		c. Small Groups		d. Large Groups		e. Other	

If 'other', specify

_____

If you have indicated more than one of the above, what percentage of time was spent on each

_____

_____

Comments:

_____

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