KIM ORTON

10. EVALUATING COMMUNICATIVE APPROACHES IN EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

What is education about? It involves learning about how society functions, alongside developing potential to cope with and contribute positively to our community, in line with personal needs. We do this through exchanges with others, but give little attention to this verbal and non-verbal process, with limited understanding of how it affects teaching and learning. Most classroom disruptions stem from inability to process and produce required information, so prioritising this reaps benefits in higher student personal and academic standards. Examining other education systems has led to a close scrutiny of British education, in a study evaluating interactions between FE teachers and students

INTRODUCTION: ASSESSING AND TEACHING COMMUNICATION: THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

We connect with people through words, supported by voice-tone, gestures and manner, but give this little thought, assuming the process develops naturally without formal teaching. Research indicates otherwise, with verbal and non-verbal messages often in conflict, producing confusion for listeners. It is not unusual for an adult to say to a child: *'that's nice,'* but their facial expressions and voice tone indicate the opposite! Teaching across-ages in Leicester, a city where immigrants are in the majority, has clarified the interpersonal communication problems that now exist today. When teaching in Further Education (FE), it was apparent that students had issues talking amongst themselves and with teachers, generally unaware of the nature of their difficulties. This motivated me to look at the situation, to create greater awareness and assist students with effective personal and professional development.

Despite communication being on the education research-agenda for many years, findings have not produced a curriculum with student opportunities to develop language competencies and raise achievements. Teaching approaches are inconsistent with regard to supporting communication probably because it is such an accepted part of daily-life, with no need to consider it. The importance of learning through *verbal exchanges* and extend thought from opportunities to listen, speak, write and read ideas has lost significance. Without a good command of words we have no control over thoughts. Language frees prejudices, from ability to think through

R. Sage (Ed.), Paradoxes in Education, 209–229.

experiences within oneself (*self-talk*) and through conversation with others, allowing a speaker to influence situations. Teachers tend to ignore the validity of higher-level language attainment in predicting long-term success. The independence that effective communication enables and its positive impact on relationships, education and careers has been noted by researchers over many years (Barnes, 1976; Newman, 1987; Booth & Thornley-Hall, 1991; Brigman et al., 1999; Sage 2010). Brigman (1999) presented 50 years of world studies to show how teaching communication enhanced personal well-being and achievement. Today, the curriculum still does not give students time to question and talk themselves into improved understanding.

Sage's research is consistent with this and notes: *the fact that children are struggling to write coherently is strong evidence of limited ability in narrative discourse. More speaking opportunities would help to remedy this problem* (Sage, 2000a, p. 27)

From 1970–1990, the profile of '*talk*' was heightened and accepted in education, as vital for the learning curriculum and documented in the Bullock Report, 1975; National Oracy Project,1987–1991; Chang & Wells, 1988 and the Dearing Report, 1993. However, in recent years there has been a shift from *talk* to *text* communication, resulting from technology and changing communication patterns. Speaking is a difficult aspect of communicating but given less attention in education. Students need chances to be question posers, summarisers, explainers and feedback-givers to become effective communicators. They need communicative competencies for group participation in speaking and listening and this is relevant for all ages, when academic success is measured by achievement. Brown (1982) observed students chatting effectively outside class about literal, mundane affairs not requiring analysis. When in class, where formal language requires selection and assembly of ideas for instructing, explaining and discussing, they showed problems in using this more explicit style.

Phonology, vocabulary, grammar, syntax and pragmatic (*use*) structures are considered hall-marks of academic achievement, but these surface-features often give a false performance picture. *Narrative thinking and language* are assumed intact. Although linguistic structures underpin communication competence, narrative abilities predict success. The Sage Assessment of Language & Thinking (SALT) uses story re-telling tasks, as the most reliable indicator of thinking and expression levels (Sage, 2000a).

WIDENING THE CONTEXT – FROM HIGHER/FURTHER EDUCATION TO THE WORK PLACE

Half of university graduates had limited communication twenty years ago (DFEE, 1997) and 58% of school-leavers exhibited the same problems (CBI, 1998). In 2006, CBI figures increased, with up to 63% of employees experiencing communication and relationship problems in some contexts. The recent Education and skills survey by CBI/Pearson (2017): *Helping the UK Thrive,* indicates large-scale employer dissatisfaction with the spoken and written communication standards of workers,

including university graduates. Research confirms that school-leavers have inadequate spoken/written communication to cope with life demands (Sage, 2010).

FE students also cannot cope with demands of expressing cause and effect by linking events in narrative structures to enable the most benefit from learning experiences. Problems, such as listening, understanding, requesting, describing, reporting, discussing, narrating, negotiating, are established in research literature and noted throughout the education system (Negus, 2016).

SUPPORT EVIDENCE FOR THE COGS: A STRUCTURED DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

Wood's (1999) analysis of how children think and learn has been substantiated by Sage (2000a), Hunter-Carsch (2001) and Professor Cooper's (2001) evaluation of effective learning methods. Experts link coherent talk as indicators of literary ability. Evidence recommends that students have opportunities to de-centre and de-contextualise thinking to raise written standards. Sage (2000a) suggests that for students to comprehend text, they need to have acquired higher-levels of spoken, narrative language and able to stress words correctly for meaning. Learning poems to understand how meaning is made has gone out of fashion. Those with inadequate reading find difficulties with information-giving, needing help to use written skills of analysis and objectivity gained initially from speech (Wood, 1999).

Sage's (2000a) hypothesis is that for students to write at the level at which they speak and think, a structured, developmental approach is needed, from understanding how right and left brains integrate.

> The visualisation (imagery) stimulation may activate one critical aspect of cognition (perhaps the right cerebral hemisphere) and verbalisation (semantic coding) stimulation may activate the other critical aspect of cognition (perhaps the left cerebral hemisphere). Thus stimulating an integration of brain activity. (Sage, 2000a, p. 30)

Inadequate brain integration *limits* – language use, ability to follow directions, cause and effect and a sense of humour. Language, thought and intelligence are related and the curriculum must concentrate on language command to produce intelligent adults. Meaningful connections for learners are not complete until there is physical, personal expression of thought. COGS participants note accelerated learning and confidence, from knowing how ideas develop and are expressed verbally and non-verbally in speaking and writing to assist success abilities.

THE BEST APPROACH

Teachers valuing student talk, for putting something of themselves into learning, give as much thought to *interactions* as lesson *content*, which Erikson and Shultz (1992) found gives back more than expected. There is need to look at the quality of

communication between teachers and students and how dialogue uses observation to reason and reach conclusions. More student talking is advocated, with emphasis and awareness of its importance. Teachers must understand class discourse, with ability to appraise student spoken-language and a plan to extend it to maximise learning. A school system developing formal language produces students with capacities to think, reason and express effectively.

COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES IN CLASSROOMS

Teachers direct, inform and question, presenting content at a pace, with students expected to keep up and respond to a specific way of talking – often without being opportunity to clarify (Michaels, 1985).

> Pupils need more opportunities than were observed in most classrooms to … find their solutions to the problems posed, to follow a sustained argument, and to discuss it afterwards, and to ask questions as well as answer them. (HMI, 1979, p. 6)

Teachers focus on objectives, correcting student responses rather than encouraging lateral, creative thinking. Edwards (1979) and Lipman (1991) suggest that school and its communication is closely structured and devoid of thinking experiences. This study suggests that schools drain students of initiative, inventiveness and reflection, so they find learning discouraging and unexciting. When encouraged to discover, instead of drilled with facts, they respond enthusiastically and inventively so can teach and think for themselves, which is more effective than receiving passive knowledge. Students often parrot others but must make judgements, to develop the person they want to be.

> Much older pupils often suffer a sharp decline in orally based lessons… teachers should therefore take care and act more often as consultants, and less often as mere transmitters of information, should recognise discussion as a proper form of real work and should encourage pupils to generate their own questions to explore alternative answer. (ILEA, 1984, p. 8)

This is also important for FE students and Wright (1998) looked at preparation of school-leavers for college life; how aware they were of language needs, culture, curricula demands and their effects on instruction. Results show that students are generally unaware and unprepared for language demands, so overestimate their skills. Student needs are not easily catered for: content delivery tends to be pitched at the mid-ability range, leaving the most-able un-stretched and the least-able confused. Knowledge is mainly represented in written texts and teacher/student notes. Emphasis is on *writing* with students needing practice and guidance in developing competent narrative, spoken skills before recording. Summarising in *talk* before translating information into written text is vital. Differences in the way educators communicate reveal their roles, social position, culture, views and attitudes and may conflict.

APPARENT DIFFICULTIES

To socialise, learners must share a communication system and norms for appropriate interaction within a particular context. Brown's (1984) studies of adolescents, highlighted differences in language use between academically successful and unsuccessful students for a range of purposes and settings. Barrow (1993) suggested that fluent, articulate students show intelligence through expressive language. Those speaking in a confused, stumbling, incoherent way, demonstrate incapacity to think effectively.

The communication system of teaching and learning can be problematic. The teacher is responsible for managing class talk, in either a negative (*controlling*) or positive (*encouraging*) way. Cazden (1988) reveals that class-talk uses a middle-class, formal, explicit style. The implicit communication of working-class students is seen as less competent, so giving them a lower-status with teachers. Students with high-status had more peer interaction to assist learning. Speaking Standard English is necessary for some careers like Law, but is seen as elitist and not taught since the 1970s. Students need exposure to many communication styles with appreciation that Standard English is vital for international exchanges as this form is taught in ESL courses.

Studies show that students are more language-fluent at home than at school or college. (Tizard & Hughes, 1984; Wells, 1986). When there are problems at home, they are explored with interest and motivation so the classroom needs the same approach. Education provides few natural incentives to thinking in the way home does and can engender decline of student engagement. Dialogue between teacher and student is effective in direct encounters. Both participants are then involved in a mutual, talk relationship, with both having the other in mind, similar to that of home.

IMAGERY AND COMMUNICATION

Nancy Bell (1991) challenges an assumption that everyone can communicate effectively and think accurately about sounds and word order, if they just attend and try hard. When there is inadequate performance, low motivation or ability is blamed. Communication involves sensory information and symbolic, linguistic connections, with sequenced interventions necessary to access auditory judgement enabling self-correction in speech, spelling, reading and visualisation for word comprehension. It has been assumed that students can create word images to produce a whole event. Sage (2000a) says:

> Gestalt imagery connects us to incoming oral and written language, links us to existing knowledge, accesses experience, establishes vocabulary and creates and stores information in memory. (p. 145)

Many children and adults have problems in creating mental images with resulting weak oral and reading comprehension, verbal skills and critical thinking.

> Language comprehension is the ability to connect to and interpret both oral and written language. It is the ability to recall facts, get the main idea, make inferences, draw a conclusion, predict, extend and evaluate. It is the ability to reason from language that is heard and language that is read….the only reason to read or listen to language – take in verbal stimuli, is to get meaning, to comprehend, to interpret, to reason. And the Gestalt is a pre-requisite to interpretation and reasoning. (Bell, 1991, p. 13)

Researchers studied the relationship of imagery to prior knowledge and thinking processes, (Paivio, 1971, 1986; Kosslyn, 1983; Denis, 1984; de Groot, 1989; Bower, 1990). They hold that if students are unable to verbalise in speech and writing, they lack visualisation ability. Clark and Paivio (1991) confirmed the importance of imagery processes for word meanings with a Dual Coding Theory:

> Human behaviour & experiences in terms of dynamic associative processes that operate a rich network of modality specific verbal & non-verbal representations. (p. 149)

Collective verbal and non-verbal mental systems are specialised for imagery and language, linked by referential connections; joining corresponding verbal imaginal codes and potentially allowing word and picture imaging. Some people use imagery easily and spontaneously, but others find it difficult. Differences in imagery abilities and habits have important consequences for education.

> In addition to imagery, DCT states that verbal associative processes contribute substantially to the effectiveness of instruction. Evidence is generally consistent with this premise. (p. 175)

INTEGRATING A FRAMEWORK

Brigman et al. (1999), emphasised structured teaching for success abilities, embedding strategies across the curriculum to significantly increase student performance. Other studies suggest that if teachers provide outlines and related behaviours that parallel verbally connecting structures, underlying knowledge and its acquisition, then effective learning occurs. Clark (1987) and Brown and Atkins (1988) suggest that imagery and verbal associative processes provide a unifying framework. Effects of using associative organisation in lessons correlate in non-experimental studies with measures of student achievement (Frey et al., 1997) and ratings of teacher and course effectiveness (Murray, 1983).

Swift and Gooding (1983), investigated effects of increasing teacher wait-times on questioning by up to 3 seconds. This produced more student contributions, measured by answer length; frequency of voluntary contributions; number of relevant words and percentages of talk. The study concluded that instructional materials alone produce little change in teaching. Feedback, modifying wait-time for both students and teachers, increased interactions and cognitive levels. Structured

training for students to group strategies for forming and maintaining relationships, is essential for school success. Sage et al. (2006–2009) show how this is implemented effectively in Japanese schools. Skills are practised across the whole curriculum. This encourages more articulate, confident children to clarify and review their understanding of whole topics whilst helping those with learning difficulties grasp concepts and articulate current knowledge and new learning.

CURRICULAR INNOVATIONS OR PREVAILING PRACTICES

Teachers often find themselves isolated when it comes to innovative practice. Some feel that research knowledge may assist practice but are suspicious of studies generalised to all settings. Reflection on practice involves clarifying prevailing assumptions and criteria as well as consistency between principles and practices. Lipman (1991) said that it involves challenging matters and not merely clarifying them. Although there are benefits for enhancing student learning from teacher professional development, the reality is lack of time, opportunity, confidence, support and resources.

A flurry of studies on communication importance to learning began with the Oracle project, led by Professor Galton, at Leicester University, looking at teacher-student interactions in the 1970s. This heralded the Oracy project in the 1980s with research on spoken language learning issues. When the National Curriculum was implemented in the 1990s, the focus on facts for school tests, meant that literacy overtook oracy, but there are present initiatives regarding communication for learning. These need teachers who network; take responsibility for communication planning within developmental frameworks to include group-work, relationships; challenging status quo and value systems; understanding cognition and imagery, whilst working towards a whole-school approach. The study below illustrates how staff and students were made more aware of the importance of highlighting communication for learning and future professional practice.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Hitchcock and Hughes (1984) say that:

> Teacher research refers to the research that the practising teacher is able to conduct in the context of immediate professional practice. (p. 4)

Encouraging a systematic approach for data gathering, by modifying and utilising insights and procedures of research, benefits schools directly. Teachers who have undertaken research within their school note that it has improved analysis and discussion on school policies. Action research draws individuals into researching their own practice to improve decisions and actions and has been widely discussed. (Cope & Gray, 1979; Raven & Parker, 1981; Bell, 1987). Quantitative data clarifies the '*what'* of situations whilst qualitative information helps to explain the '*why.'*

STUDY PURPOSE

The study translated what is known about helping students develop success abilities, by implementing a systematic approach to using these across the curriculum, promoting narrative competencies. The design was based on research by Sage (1986, onwards) and COGS (*Communication Opportunity Group Strategy*); a developmental framework in which speaking and listening match reading and writing abilities. This has showed success in studies (Sage, 1992, 1998; Sage & Shaw, 1992; Nelson & Birchell, 1998; Sage & Whittington, 1997; EU IDIAL project, 2011–2014) looking at how to use communication in a relevant, appropriate, effective manner. Classroom observations show that narrative explaining and instructing are not bound to occur naturally, needing learner-centred tasks to free and extend language for expressing thoughts. The study developed from COGS in-service training, with a manual and video to support assessment and teaching. It involved post-16 FE students, to encourage and evaluate effective learning from opportunities to gain narrative competencies.

The aim was to analyse benefits of teaching communication in FE, within a developmental framework of narrative and paradigmatic thinking, based on COGS, developed from a Medical Research Council Project (Sage, 1986). The study involved females from 18–54 years. All participants were appraised of the aims and objectives and were willing volunteers.

THE PARTICIPANTS

The 2 groups were selected to the criteria:

- Willing to participate at a convenient time
- Needing better communication to enhance course presentations
- Interest in professional development for careers
- Awareness & abilities to transfer and develop communication in workplaces

There were 2 groups: (1) 14 part-time HND students in Early Childhood Studies (19–54 years) attended for 10 weeks (*1 hr/week*) during tutorial time (*5 had English as a second language (ESL) & 1 dyslexic*). (2) 23 full-time Diploma students in Nursery Nursing (18–22 years) attended for 2 hours over 5 weeks in arts sessions (*2 had visual impairments*). Qualitative data elicited communication perceptions, from students and tutors, along with quantitative information from pre-/post-tests.

DATA-COLLECTING METHODS

Data collection cross-matched many view-points as Schostak (2002) suggests, from quantitative and qualitative responses. COGS guidelines suggest that

student-screening is vital to identify narrative levels, so a story re-telling task and questionnaire were used. The Sage Assessment of Language and Thinking (SALT) uses narratives to predict academic success, receiving positive feedback when piloted in England and Scotland. The assessment developed from observations, noting that students may respond to factual questions, after hearing a passage read, but yet miss the overall meaning.

SALT 1 has 10 interview questions, scoring responses for *content* (*number of ideas expressed*); *convention* (*language forms demonstrated*) *clarity* (*quality of speaking*); *conduct* (*impression made on listener-self-esteem displayed*) (Sage, 1999). These allow the assessor to note responses and analyse them according to the criteria, in pre- and post-teaching conditions.

SALT 2 identifies narrative ability from story re-telling, which targets the thinking and communication process (1-*simple language; 2- complex forms*).

Communication Skills Rating provides information on a range of abilities regarding effective communication – including *general skills*, *conversation*, *formal presentation* (*speech/writing*) and *non-verbal communicatio*n with ratings 1–5 (*1 high competence & 5 no evidence of skills*).

A Profile of Communication was given as a self-assessment tool, consisting of 10 sections; looking at all aspects of communication with ratings 1–5 (*1-not good & 5-excellent*).

Included were informal assessments (*to support participant information*) that have been used in other studies (Sage, 2000b). Attitude statements, to record what students think about feelings and attitudes towards communication, provide reflective data to analyse positive and negative views as indicators of performance. Asking students what they find difficult about college are a way of data-gathering to see if mature students put high priority on communication difficulties. A survey of 100 secondary school students placed communication as the major issue encountered in school (Sage, 1998, 2000a, 2010).

Interviews were conducted with lecturers, centred on student communicative abilities. Questionnaires, based on Flanders Interactional Analysis Categories (of Talk) (FIAC, 1970) used different question- types to seek views on the importance of class communication. Subjects were asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of COGS, to record understanding of the process; its value to them and if they wanted to implement learning in workplaces.

DEVIATIONS FROM ORIGINAL METHODOLOGY

It was decided not to use a control group. In a report by Sage (2000b), working with 2 COGS groups, (*weekly & intensive*) and a control group receiving no specific communication teaching, the latter had a significant drop in mean scores on post-testing. Reasons given were end-of-term exhaustion and lack of interest, but this project time-scale meant controls were not feasible because of student mobility.

RESULTS

Sage (2000b) found that participants failed to make as much progress if they avoided assessment. The project confirmed that everyone achieved their stated goals.

THE SAGE ASSESSMENT OF LANGUAGE & THINKING

Table 1 summarises data from SALT pre and post-tests with mean totals. In both groups, all scores increased after completion of COGS teaching and 83% were significant at the level p = 0.05. Both groups' mean score rises were from 111.66 – 139 (*a combined difference of 27.34*). Before teaching, there was little difference between groups and similarities in test totals. Discrepancy between the extent of the mean score increase was 7.4 points (*19.67-group 1; 13.93-group 2*). This suggests implementation method has little significance, which confirms other studies (Sage, 2000a and b).

SAGE ASSESSMENT FOR LANGUAGE & THINKING (SALT 1)

Table 1. Means total scores from student groups 1 & 2.

Group 1 Results	*Test Mean totals*	*Mean differences*	*T test results 2 tail %*	*P=<0.05*	*Chances must be less than 1 in 20. (numerically above one in 20)*
Total scores SALT 1	Before 111.66 After 131.33	+19.67	0.7948	0.007948	1in 126 Statistically significant
Content & convention scores only SALT 1	Before 64.66 After 71.33	+6.67	9.2782	0.092782	1 in 11 Not statistically significant
Clarity and conduct scores only SALT 1	Before 47 After 59.33	+12.33	0.0733	0.00073	1 in 1364 Statistically significant

Group 2 Results	*Test Mean totals*	*Mean differences*	*T test results 2 tail %*	*P=<0.05*	*Chances must be less than 1 in 20. (above 1 in 20)*
Total scores SALT 1	Before 125.07 After 139	+ 13.93	1.94605	0.0194605	1 in 51 Statistically significant

Content and convention scores only SALT 1	Before 68.857 After 73.714	+ 4.857	0.000485	0.00000485	1 in 206185 Statistically significant
Clarity and conduct scores only SALT 1	Before 56.214 After 65.285	+ 9.071	2.9532	0.029532	1 in 34 Statistically Significant

Content & convention had higher pre- and post-test scores in both groups than for *clarity & conduct* which increase two-fold in the former. A description of categories are presented for evaluation:

Content is the topic of the message and organised in different ways according to purpose.
Convention is the way words are arranged in sentences for sending/receiving messages.
Clarity is the quality of the spoken response to engage listener attention & understanding.
Conduct is the impression made on the listener showing presence/absence of self-esteem.

Group 1 ratings show the mean overall difference increase is significant, although not for content and convention. Clarity and conduct scores show significant improvements, correlating with increased confidence and self-esteem. Group 2 had significantly higher mean totals both pre-and post-test, including learners with ESL. Although those with low-scores still had these on post-tests, they made significantly higher gains. Low-scorers comprised 4/6 ESOL students, but although assessment stresses correct grammar, syntax and vocabulary, this did not penalise as they were fluent in English. Assessment questions (*from their structure*) gave students chance to create *imagery* important for comprehension. Those using images when speaking showed expressive language organisation. They were concise and monitored language for relevant, sequential, logical thinking expression. Improved clarity and conduct scores may have helped content and convention, as feeling more confident frees up thoughts, so that explanations can be made without stumbling to make the message clear.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS RATING

Skill-ratings were tutor-administered, to judge the range of abilities for effective communication and any score changes. Mean differences were significantly higher following COGS teaching, showing improvements in both informal and formal interactions as well as non-verbal language, providing 93% of affective meaning (Mehrabian, 1971). Informal student interviews showed they now understood that

communication is not one-way, with listeners passive, and that voice-tone and body-language are vital for judging meaning. Verbal and non-verbal improvements gave confidence to present positively from an '*adult*' ego state (Bernes, 1964). Prior to COGS, most interactions were from a '*child*' state, eliciting '*controlling paren*t' responses from others. Tutors confirmed student improvements.

PROFILE OF COMMUNICATION

Table 2 summarises data giving mean totals from tests. All scores increased after completion of COGS teaching from 5% -36% for both groups. As a self-assessment exercise, increase in scores suggests that both groups have acknowledged a positive difference in ability to communicate.

Table 2. Profile of communication summarising data with mean totals

		Spoken communication	*Body language*	*Conversation skills*	*Formal presentation (speaking)*	*Formal presentation (writing)*	*Negotiation skills*	*Personal skills*	*Group skills*	*Thinking skills*	*Information gathering*
Group 1		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Mean totals	Pre t	10.66	19.66	35.66	22.66	25.66	16	25	19	20.33	15.66
	Post t	19.66	21.66	41	25.66	28.66	22.33	28.33	20.33	25	17.66
Mean difference		9	2	5.34	3	3	6.33	3.33	1.33	4.67	2
as percentage increase		36	6.66	9.71	8.57	8.57	21.1	9.51	5.32	13.34	8

The highest 36% increase is for spoken communication, showing students felt positive about performances. The lowest increase, for group skills, is explained by less self-beliefs. Self-image develops from experience and group-work was not previously positive. Often self-image inhibits willingness to believe that certain things can be achieved. Body language scoring is lower and indicates that 2 of 3 students with visual impairments may not have picked up on cues to give clear eye-

contact with people. Appropriate movements to support meaning may be lost and reading body language often difficult. However, improvements were acknowledged, possibly because specific traits were highlighted and discussed. Negotiation showed a dramatic increase of 21%, along with self-esteem and positive image to join in group-work. Taking ownership to complete tasks, rather than letting others do this, has developed more inclusive group behaviour.

Table 3. Profile of communication summary of data with mean totals

Group 2		*A*	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	*J*
Mean totals	Pre	14.43	18.43	33.07	19.07	20.57	16.86	20.86	17.86	20.78	16.78
	Post	19.43	24.71	43.43	27.86	26.93	24.14	27.78	21.86	26.78	21.07
Mean difference		5	6.28	10.36	8.79	6.36	7.28	6.92	4	6	4.29
as percentage increase		20	20.93	18.84	25.11	18.17	24.27	19.77	16	17.14	17.16

Group 2 has more consistent scoring with an average increase of 20%. Positive feedback, from the tutor in another module, may have made them more receptive and open to comments. The process has been valued by the mature students who have taken responsibility for assessing their own competencies – they are best placed to look at strengths and weaknesses and find solutions, as long as motivation to succeed remains high. The COGS gives balanced support, encouraging those with low self-horizons and keeping the more self-reliant satisfied with progress. Reflecting on experiences forms the basis of personal and professional development.

SUMMARY OF COMMUNICATION PROFILE

The profile provides detailed insights into student abilities, acknowledging their strongest skills, those needing development and ways for this to happen. *Group 1* places initiative, listening, writing and organisational skills as their strongest skills, pre-COGS teaching. This reflects school experiences where literacy is favoured in assessment and seen as more important than oracy. Strongest skills post-test include thinking about listeners and imparting information in interesting ways. Developing skills include confidence-building, body-language, understanding and questioning. Post-teaching saw acknowledgement of abilities for success and confidence and motivation to achieve this. *Group 2* showed greater awareness of differences pre-and post-teaching, discriminating between social-chat and language to transmit clear, relevant information. A deeper understanding of skills needing development was evident, with ways to achieve these more specific, like

'*communicating with people confidently' to 'asking & answering questions & requesting clarification if not understanding.'* Reflecting gave chances to search for the meaning in experiences which is the basis of all learning.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOURSELF AND THE WAY YOU COMMUNICATE? SELF-RATING

Ratings, post-teaching, showed a strong, positive improvement for both groups. Self-assessment is based on belief that improvements are likely to happen, when focusing on a goal, and this is a positive aspect of COGS. Knowledge of self and others comes from social-interaction and language is the means by which this occurs. Those with low-esteem are self-conscious, over sensitive to criticism, consistently under-rating themselves, pre-occupied with problems and underachievement. High-esteem students are confident about perceptions and judgements; expect to succeed at tasks; express opinions and influence others. They have a realistic view of themselves and abilities; are not unduly worried about criticism and enjoy participating in teaching and learning.

DIFFICULTIES IN COLLEGE

Noting student responses to what they find difficult about college, furthers understanding of how communication is an issue for FE adults-learners. This validated a report by Sage (2000a and b), who surveyed 100, 12–15 year-olds who put communication at the top of their list of problems encountered in school. This survey reported 46 problems in College, which were all communication based, such as *difficulty making eye-contact; organising content for presentations; giving instructions*; *asking and answering questions; speaking in front of others,* as examples. It is evident that when given opportunity to express difficulties, students do this clearly and with feeling. It highlights an area needing to be placed firmly within teaching and learning experiences.

FOCUSED INTERVIEW WITH TUTORS

Responses from focused interviews with 2 colleagues, after COGS teaching, indicated that a change in learning behaviour was noted in all students. Examples include participants taking on a leading role within sessions outside COGS. Differences after COGS teaching were substantial enough for them to comment upon and the collective effect of the process was beneficial to all students and their tutors.

TUTOR QUESTIONNAIRE

All 12 tutors questioned feel that communication competencies for students are vital. Importance of teaching these has been lost by half of the respondents,

who are unable to devote time to developing them within sessions because of pressure to meet learning objectives. This equates with results that 7 tutors did not identify communication ability as most predictive of academic success. They feel it necessary to schedule their own talk for over 2/3rds of a session. This reflects Flanders' 1970s studies, with no change in teaching style. Teachers think they offer students chances to talk, but this is not supported by evidence. There are limited language experiences offered to students. Time constraints on teachers mean they have less time for interaction with each student. Understanding what tutors feel students expectation should be (*eg.*'*sit there and not do anything or speak,' 'they want to be entertained' & 'dish it out to them*.) are disheartening and assumptions to be challenged. Low or negative expectations from tutors (*8 out of 12*) does not stimulate successful interactions for improving learning. Accountability to the curriculum over-rides notions of developing real learning abilities. The curriculum does not provide sufficient student speaking experience and feedback on this. It is evident that tutors do not have information to judge student progress and discover abilities that are lacking.

RESPONSES FROM STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES

Without COGS teaching, assessments and evaluations, student needs would not be identified. Learning styles, teaching methods and tracking domains have emphasis without considering communication ability and its implications for success. Encouraging students to examine strengths and weaknesses from practice, engendered interest and motivation. Students valued understanding the process of effective communication and benefits were easily achieved within a comprehensible framework like COGS. Lack of confidence, embarrassment, awkwardness, hoping not to be asked and feeling nervous to talk to people, were all removed by the COGs programme. A positive, relaxed attitude to talking successfully was the result, with communication becoming a pleasure rather than a pain.

It was encouraging that abilities learnt transferred to workplaces – to help children's development. Comments such as '*It wouldn't hurt all employees to have these sessions'* and *'activities create team bonding and building'* show the validity of training. Suggested improvements were more time to work on particular weaknesses, such as presentation skills. Everyone found sessions positive '*the practical tasks really make you think how other people may feel or respond to situations.*' '*By speaking out in sessions & listening to others, I realised it wasn't only me with problems'; 'good confidence-building activities'; 'I laughed at lots of things but still learnt a lot.'* There was a sense of achievement from the programme and students support the view that the design of COGS helped to create a sense of ownership and trust within groups.

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Gaining communication competencies enhances the learning potential of all students. Marked effects were noted and a systematic, developmentally structured approach to thinking and communication is beneficial to learners of any age and subject. Results are consistent with the work of Brown (1984), Hannaford (1995), Locke (2000), Sage (2000a and b, 2010, 2014) and many others, highlighting a need to integrate such provision into all classrooms. A report by Trotman (2002), who surveyed 200 diverse employers, put verbal communication at the top of qualities they most sought, followed by enthusiasm and written ability. Companies complain about the quality of graduates and there is a mismatch between what they want and get from recruits. Graduates acknowledge that their degrees leave them short of skills (THES, 2002, 2017) and students all felt that they lacked 3 of the skills they judge to be the most useful in the work force – *verbal communication, time management* and *task juggling*.

Educators are still not grasping the concept that speaking comprehension and expression of thinking, needs to be taught prior to writing (Bell, 1991; Sage, 2000a) as it is not automatically learned. Attention must focus on ability to transfer information clearly through talk, as it is not only relevant for speaking but also for writing and so central to making sense of everything.

Repeated attempts to boost speaking and listening skills in class have had limited success and could be explained as teachers feel that allowing time for students to contribute to discussions is neither productive or valuable, when there is so much to get through in the curriculum.

> A complex thought system requires a great deal of shared experience and conversation. It is in talking about what we have done and observed and in arguing about what we make of our experiences, that ideas multiply, become refined and finally produce new questions and further explanations. (Rowes, 1986, p. 43)

The notion that narratives can exemplify general ideas to aid comprehension may be unrecognised.

Teacher questions and answers can often be mechanical and contrived. Lipman (1991) suggests the prescriptive curriculum can paralyse thoughts. Traditional practice has been for the teacher to transmit knowledge in an authoritative style; the student absorbs the information and is asked questions. In a community of inquiry, students are given skills to be thoughtful and reflective, with teacher and students questioning each other. In standard mode, students are considered to be thinking if they learn what is taught, but in the reflective one they participate in the search for knowledge and move into higher-order thinking of coherence, richness and inquisitiveness.

REFLECTIONS

The positive effects of this study cannot be overestimated. Collecting data, conceptualising issues and problems and generating ideas for future actions has

promoted greater understanding and improved class performance. It highlighted the importance of developing teachers who are aware of their own communication and their values, attitudes, prejudice and bias that might affect interactions with students. A strong emphasis on talk between teachers and students reaps rewards for both personal and academic progress. For example, reflecting on skills and concepts needed for later learning has given opportunities to teach these before they are needed. During the research period and after, it has been possible to structure learning activities to promote the use of language rather than hoping it would develop naturally. The curriculum is geared towards linear thinking and needs to expand laterally. This explains why the COGS teaching model is successful.

At the start of any Teacher Education course and during induction, positive effects of teaching communication must be encouraged:

- Sharing feelings and describing experiences
- Using solid images to encourage communication, rather than relying on abstract words as students with language problems have the information-carrying load of words reduced
- Confidence building
- Narrating – describing, explaining and reporting
- Using tree diagrams to promote integrative imagery to facilitate cued retrieval, especially to illustrate a lesson structure (*aims & objectives*)
- Problem solving through talk
- Effective induction as an ongoing process in all sessions
- Tasks in ascending order of difficulty (narratives before summaries)
- Reflection by talking through ideas and experiences as a process that draws similarities and differences between different communication contexts
- Transference of skills
- Student achievement
- Self esteem
- Valuing skills and abilities
- Visualising full potential
- Negotiation skills

If this communicative model was fully promoted, teachers would feel more confident in their role and less inclined to leave the profession in high numbers as at present. Feedback from COGS has shown that teachers find their classes easier to teach, with students more engaged and exhibiting less low-level disruption, which happens because they cannot comprehend what goes on and so seek to divert activities. Research cannot tell how to teach, but it can alert teachers to the subtle, complex processes of interaction that directly shape and influence learning. Being involved in this research has given confidence to make recommendations, as they are based on studies which combine to provide a firm base for action. As an Advanced Practitioner, there has been opportunity to demonstrate by example, putting into practice key aspects of this work to allow others to understand the process.

MAIN POINTS

- Experience demonstrates that all levels of Education have problems with communication between students themselves and with their teachers
- Using the Sage model of communication, that considers both context and the message transmission process, it was possible to improve the competencies of Further Education students
- Results suggest the importance of focusing on this aspect of learning for improved standards
- Teacher training must give attention to the communicative processes that operate in classrooms if academic and personal achievements are to match employment requirements

REFERENCES

Ainscow, M., & Tweddle, D. (1988). *Preventing classroom failure: An objective approach*. London: Fulton Publishers.

Amidon, E. J., & Flanders, N. A. (1967). Interaction analysis as a feedback system. In E. J. Amidon & J. B. Hough (Eds.), *Interaction analysis: Theory, research & application.* London: Addison-Wesley Publications.

Amidon, E., & Hunter, E. (1967). *Improving teaching: The analysis of classroom verbal interaction*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Anderson, R. (1974). Concretization and sentence learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 66*(2), 179–183.

Anderson, R. (1977). The notion of schema and the educational enterprise: General discussion of the conference. In R. Anderson, R. Spiro, & W. Montagues (Eds.), *Schooling and the acquisition of knowledge.* Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Barnes, D. (1976). *From communication to curriculum*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Barrow, R. (1993). *Language, intelligence and thought*. Hants: Edward Elgar Publishing Company.

Bell, J. (1989). *Doing your research project: A guide for first-time researchers in educational and social science*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Bell, N. (1991). *Visualizing and verbalizing for language comprehension and thinking*. San Luis Obispo, CA: Gander Educational Publishing.

Bernes, E. (1964). *Games people play*. London: Penguin Books.

Booth, D., & Thornley Hall, C. (1991). *The talk curriculum.* Ontario: Pembroke Publishers Ltd.

Brigman, G., Lane, D., Switzer, *D*., *Lane*, R., & Lawrence, R. (1999). Teaching children success skills. *The Journal of Educational Research, 92*(6), 323–329.

Brooks, W., & Friedrich, G. (1973). *Teaching speech communication in the secondary classroom*. Boston, MA: H. Mifflin Co.

Brown, G., & Atkins, M. (1988). *Effective teaching in higher education*. London: Methuen.

Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Teaching spoken language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, G., Anderson, A., Shillcock, R., & Yule, G. (1984). *Teaching talk: Strategies for production and assessment.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bruner, J. (1983). *Child's talk*. New York, NY: Norton.

Bullock, A. (1975). *A language for life*. London: HMSO.

Carnegie Foundation. (1992). *Ready to learn: A mandate for the nation*. New York, NY: Carnegie Corporation.

CBI/Pearson. (2017). *Education and skills survey: Helping the UK thrive.* Retrieved June 30, 2017, from www.cbi.com

Cazden, C. (1988). *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books Inc.

Chang, G., & Wells, G. (1988). The literate potential of collaborative talk. In M. Maclure, T. Phillips, & A. Wilkinson (Eds.), *Oracy matters*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
Clark, J. M. (1987). Understanding pictures and words: Comments on Potter, Kroll, Yachzel, Carpenter, & Sherman (1986). *Journal of Educational Psychology, 116*(3), 307–309.
Clark, J., & Paivio, A. (1991). Dual coding theory and education. *Education Psychology Review, 3*(3), 149–210.
Cohen, E. (1986). *Designing group work strategies for the heterogeneous classroom*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
Cohen, L., & Manion, L. (1996). *Research methods in education*. London: Routledge.
Cooper, P. (2001). *What works in Educating pupils with emotional & behaviour difficulties.* London: Barnardos Publishing.
Coopersmith, S. (1967). *Antecedents of self-esteem*. San Francisco, CA: W. H. Freeman.
Craik, F., & Lockhart, R. (1972). Levels of processing: A framework for memory research. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behaviour, 11*(6), 671–684.
Dearing, R. (1993). *Higher education in the learning society*. London: HMSO.
De Cecco, J. (1967). *The psychology of language, thought and instruction*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc.
De Groot, A. (1989). Representational aspects of word image-ability and word frequency as assessed through word association. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory and Cognition, 15*(5), 824–845.
Denis, M. (1984). Imagery and prose: A critical review of research on adults and children. *Text, 4,* 381–401.
Dyson, A., & Clarke, C. (1995). *Innovatory practice in main stream schools*. London: HMSO.
Edwards, J. (1979). *Language and disadvantage*. London: Edward Arnold.
Frey, D., Leonard, D., & Beatty, W. (1975). Student ratings of instruction: Validation research. *American Educational Research Journal*, *12*(4), 435–447.
Flanders, N. (1970). *Analysing teaching behaviour*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
Goodlad, S., & Hurst, B. (1990). *Explorations in real tutoring*. London: Blackwell Education.
Grittin, P., & Shuy, R. (1978). *Final report to Carnegie corporation of New York: Children's functional language and education in the early years*. Washington, DC: Centre for Applied Linguistics.
Gross, J. (1993). *Special educational needs in the primary school*: *A practical guide*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
Hicks, D. (1996). *Contextual inquiries: A discourse-oriented study of classroom living*. In D. Hicks (Ed.), *Discourse, learning, and schooling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Hunter-Carsch, M., & Herrington, M. (2001). *Dyslexia and effective learning*. London: Whurr.
Johnson, D. (1994). *Research methods in educational management*. Essex: Longman Information & Reference.
Knapp, M. (1998). How shall we study comprehensive collaborative services for children and families? *Educational Researcher, 24*(4), 5–16.
Lee, J., & Van Patten, B. (1995). *Making communicative language teaching happen*. New York, NY: Mc Graw Hill.
Lewis, A. (1991/1995). *Primary special needs and the national curriculum.* London: Routledge.
Lipman, M. (1991). *Thinking in education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Locke, A. (2000). *Let's talk project*. Sheffield: NHS.
Loughran, J., & Gunstone, R. (1997). Professional development in residence: Developing reflection on science teaching and learning. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 23*(2), 159–178.
Maclure, M., Phillips, T., & Wilkinson, A. (Eds.). (1988). *Oracy matters: The development of talking and listening in education.* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
McNamara, S., & Moreton, G. (1993). *Teaching special needs*. London: David Fulton Publishers.
McNiff, J. (2000). *Action research in organisations*. London: Routledge.
Mehrabian, A. (1971). *Silent messages.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
Merrett, F. (1994). *Improving reading: A teachers guide to peer tutoring*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Michaels, S. (1985). Hearing the connections in children's oral and written discourse. *Journal of Education, 167*(1), 36–56.
Murray, H. (1983). Low inference classroom teaching behaviours and student ratings of college teaching effectiveness. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 75*(1), 138–149.
Nelson, D., & Burchell, K. (1998). *Evaluation of the communication opportunity group scheme.* Warwick: South Warwickshire NHS Trust.
Olson, D., & Torrance, N. (1996). *The handbook of education and human development: New models of learning, teaching, and schooling*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
Paivio, A. (1971). *Imagery and verbal processes*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.
Phillips, G., Dunham, R., Brubaker, R., & Butt, B. (1970). *The development of oral communication in the classroom*. New York, NY: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Incorporated.
Phillips, E., & Pugh, D. (2000). *How to get a PhD*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
Phillips, S. (1972). Participant structures and communication competence. In C. Cazden, D. Hymes, & V. John (Eds.), *The functions of language in the classroom* (pp. 370–394). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
Reynolds, D., & Farrell, S. (1996). *Worlds apart? An OFSTED review of internal surveys of educational achievement involving England.* London: HMSO.
Rosen, C., & Rosen, H. (1973). *The language of primary school children*. London: Penguin Education.
Rowe, M. (1974). Wait times and rewards as instructional variables: Their influence on language, logic and fate control, i wait time. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 11*(2), 81–94.
Rudder, M. (1999, April/June). Eliciting student talk. *English Teaching Forum, 37*(2), 24–25.
Sage, R. (1986). *A question of language disorder*. Sheffield: MRC Trent Research Report.
Sage, R. (1992). *Communication in the classroom*. PhD Thesis. Leicester: University of Leicester.
Sage, R. (1998). *Communication support for students in senior school*. Leicester: University of Leicester. (Report for Leicester Action Zone)
Sage, R. (2000a). *Class talk.* London: Network Continuum.
Sage, R. (2000b). *The communication opportunity group scheme.* Leicester: University of Leicester.
Sage, R. (2010). *Meeting the needs of students with diverse backgrounds.* Network Continuum.
Sage, R. (Ed.). (2011/2014). *A European study of Inter-competency and Dialogue through Literature (IDIAL). Investigating the development of transversal abilities in school children*. Life Long Learning Programme: Commenius.
Sage, R., & Shaw, P. (1992). *Collaborative teaching and learning*. London: CSSD Publication.
Sage, R., & Whittingham, J. (1997). *Using the communication opportunity group scheme in senior schools: A speech and language therapy and teaching initiative*. Warwickshire: LEA/AHA.
SED. (1977a). *Assessment for all*: *A report of the committee to review assessment in the third and fourth years of secondary education in Scotland* (The Dunning Report). Edinburgh: HMSO.
SED. (1977b). *The structure of the curriculum in the third and fourth years of the Scottish secondary school* (The Munn Report). Edinburgh: HMSO.
Sharpe, K. (1997). Mr Gradgrind and Miss Beale: Old dichotomies, inexorable choices and what shall we tell the students about primary teaching methods? *Journal for Education for Teaching, 23*(1), 69–83.
Swift, J., & Gooding, C. (1983). Interactive wait time, feedback and questioning instruction in middle school science teaching. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 20*(8), 721–730.
Tizard, B., & Hughes, M. (1984). *Young children learning*. London: Fontana.
Topping, K. (1988). *The peer tutoring handbook*. London: Croom Helm.
Van Oers, B., & Hannikainen, M. (2001). Some thoughts about togetherness: An introduction. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 9*(2), 101–108.
Vermunt, J., & Verloop, N. (1999). Congruence and friction between learning and teaching. *Learning & Instruction, 9*(3), 257–280.
Wallach, G., & Miller, L. (1988). *Language intervention and academic success*. New York, NY: College-Hill.
Wang, M., Haertel, G., & Walberg, H. (1994). What helps students learn? *Educational Leadership, 51*(4), 74–79.

Walkin, L. (1990). *Teaching and learning in further and adult education*. Cheltenham: Stanley Thornes Publishers Ltd.

Wardhaugh, R. (1985). *How conversation works*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Wells, G. (1986). *The hearing makers*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Wells, G. (1999). *Dialogic inquiry: Towards a sociocultural practice and theory of education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Westby, C. (1984). Development of narrative language abilities. In G. Wallach & K. Butler (Eds.), *Language learning disabilities in school age children*. Baltimore, MD: Williams & Williams.