

# The StoryTalk research project

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# StoryTalk

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The starting points for the research.....

- the importance of the individual having well-developed spoken language
- success in the educational system and language competence are positively correlated
- the close relationship between language development and intellectual development

- concern about the level of children's language at school entry
- the close relationship between spoken and written language
- language, literacy and children for whom English is an additional language
- the development of language and deprivation

Spoken language is not a unitary competence, it is multi-dimensional.....

Many primary teachers have not had the type of training that makes them aware of this complexity...

Some of these dimensions are....

- speech production
- comprehension of words and their use in a variety of contexts
- ability to express ideas in appropriate grammatical structures
- acquisition of vocabulary
- ability to respond to directions

# Aims of the project were to:

- establish the levels of spoken language at school entry of reception children
- monitor the children's language progress over a year of school
- in the intervention group.....i]raise awareness of the classteachers, support staff and volunteers about how to support language development...ii] develop an enrichment programme

- to establish..... whether the children in the intervention programme made more language progress than the children in the comparison group.

The main assessment tool:

CELF-R

(Clinical Evaluation of Language  
Fundamentals-revised test, Semel,  
Wig and Secord, 1987)

# Six sub-tests

## Receptive Language Score

Linguistic concepts

Basic concepts

Sentence Structure

## Expressive Language Score

Recalling sentences in context

Formulating sentences

Word structure

The Story Telling Assessment  
Task  
from the New Zealand School  
Entry Assessment

Research design:

113 reception children in 4 primary schools were assessed on the CELF-R in January 2004-2005

3 reception classes were part of the intervention project and 3 reception classes were part of the comparison group

- the schools all served deprived, multi-cultural communities.
- 89 (78%) of the 113 children had English as an additional language.
- there were no statistically significant differences in the language development between intervention and comparison groups at the start of the project

- the teachers in the intervention project attended 5 inservice study days .....developed the resources and materials
- teachers conducted training for the volunteers in preparation for.....
- 3 intervention projects were run over the year

# The teachers' study days at the Institute of Education

- professional development
- discussion
- feedback on the results of the language assessment
- planning the projects, making resources
- planning the training of the volunteers

# Brief summary of results....

- across the whole sample the children were scoring significantly below the norm for their age on the CELF-R in January 2004.....

School A...comp.gp. mean score=64

School A....int.gp. mean score=75

School B...comp.gp.mean score=68

School C...int,gp. Mean score=68

School D....comp.gp.mean score = 82

School E....comp.gp. = 74

School E.....int.gp. = 73

On the CELF-R test manual.....

85-100 is cited as being in the  
normal range.....

The children scored less well on the expressive language sub-tests....those tackled least successfully were the sub-tests 5 and 6...Formulating sentences and Word structure.

The expressive language sub-tests indicated that the children struggled with formulating complete sentences e.g. answers to questions such as 'What is the girl doing?', casting sentences in the past and future tense, prepositions, possessive pronouns and participles and they had a poor vocabulary.

Care was taken that children should have the opportunity to practise the sentence structures the CELF-R indicated that they found most challenging

# Example of a project....

## Fruit

- visited a market with 50p to buy some fruit to make a fruit salad
- prior discussion with children on the visit
- practised how to ask a stall keeper for particular fruit
- back in school the children told the class where they had been and why
- made the fruit salad
- talking about the different fruits and the process of the making of the salad

- share the fruit salad
- read the story 'Handa's Surprise'
- each child had the opportunity to re-tell the story
- draw and write the names of the different fruits
- made a book of the visit to the market

Progress was made across the whole sample over the year and more progress was seen in expressive language

Did the intervention groups  
make more progress than the  
comparison groups?

.....yes in 2 schools!

In the 3rd school (School A) had a very effective reception teacher and her children started out as the lowest in the whole sample and they made impressive progress.

What are the lessons of the  
StoryTalk project?

# The value of the SEA Story Telling Task

This test gave the teachers a chance to estimate their pupils abilities and assess progress in a very detailed way.

# Other lessons from StoryTalk...

- the value of raising the professional understanding of teachers
- the value of offering children extended and scaffolded opportunities to narrate orally

.....postscript...other evidence  
based lessons on developing  
children's language abilities  
through conversations

‘Sustained Shared  
Thinking’

The EPPE project  
1997.....till now

**‘The limits of my language  
mean the limits of my world’**

**Ludwig Wittgenstein**