Enhancing Oral Language skills using Technologies in the Early Years.

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Grovedale West Primary School

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I am no expert on oral language, I have worked with in the early years now for 7 years, both here and in the uk working with children aged 4-8.

What I have learnt in this time as both a teacher and a parent of two young boys is that the value of rich and purposeful oral language is crucial to children developing confidence and sound literacy, numeracy, social , emotional and life skills. Children need to be able to communicate with a rich and articulate vocabulary, it helps them if they have have good phonological awareness of the sounds in language and are able to able to listen and respond effectively to others and articulate their thinking and emotionally express their feelings.

What we hope to share with you today.

Is how we are using a range of technologies to support not just the oral language within our prep program but also to support many other aspects of our children's learning, their natural Inquiry about the world and their understanding of the digital and global literacy age that we live in.

We will show you the technologies, highlight some of the ways we are using them.

Why Oral Language?

As I have attended many clusters meeting this year, including our early years network, oral language development seems to be a common issue for many children starting prep. The need for improvement in this area arose following analysis of Data provided to the school following pre-prep screening by the region's speech pathologists, which highlighted a large percentage of prep

children with below average oral language development. This initial data was subsequently verified by school EOL data, letters and sounds assessments and teacher observations.

We have been lucky to be part of a Department funded project looking at digital literacy's in the early years. We had $2000 which we used to purchase

The prep unit has purchased a range of technologies, including

Hovercam Visualiser Camera

25 Talking tin lids (inexpensive voice recording devices),

8 Flip camera's,

3 i-pod touches

phonic sound button tiles,

12 whispa-phones,

Ipod docking station

quality headphones

wireless usb microscope

These complimented the excellent technology we already had in our room and school generally, digital camera's, 2 ipads, ipod nanos, IWB , computers and notebooks, cd players and an old guitar amp and microphone.

These technologies support an already rich oral language program with the technology being integrated to provide an increased level of oral language work.

Our initial idea was to integrate these extra technologies into our existing program, put them into the hands of our children and to see where, with some support and guidance, the children could take things. We set up a technology table, made the tin lids accessible, put out the USB wireless microscope and allowed the children access to it, on the basis that they could explain and justify how and why the technology would support their learning.

We team-teach in an open plan and flexible environment.

At GWPS for at least 6 hours a week our children are engaged in entirely student led "investigations'. On a topic of their choosing, not a predetermined theme…the only exception being occasions when the whole class has clearly shared a common interest, such as our box world exhibition.

We also have daily letters and sounds and THRASS, writing, numeracy and every child has guided reading twice a week. During Investigations time the students have an opportunity to pursue their genuine interests from home, or based on stimulus within our 10 learning areas, to think for themselves, plan, create, evaluate and importantly to apply practically the literacy and numeracy skills that they are being explicitly taught at other times of the day.

An example:

Just at the moment in one classroom we have students Investigating:

2 or 3 boys finding how to make and rubber band design paddle steamers

A child finding out how a motorbike work

2 children making and researching Quad bikes using an i-pad, and u-tube.

2 children using the usb microscope and a digital camera to make matching card games

One child composing and writing a song.

Another child using the computer to find out about python snakes and making a poster .

Two children who made playdoh tiger models, are now using books from the library to find out about Tigers and making a tiger story book

One child finding out what life is like on a cruise ship.

Another student pursuing his passion for cars.

2 students using google images to make information books about Transformers3.

This diverse range of Investigations is replicated throughout the year and we invite the children to communicate with us by messages board when they need extra resources or additional help with their learning.

At the same time as purchasing these additional technologies, we decided to start a prep unit blog to share what we were doing and provide an all-important link to the parents , home and the wider community.

There are many examples highlighted on the prep blog at http://gwpsprep.global2.vic.edu.au/.

Briefly take each piece of technology and show you what it does?

Hovercam Visualiser Camera

Great teaching tool, feedback, review work

Make live recordings with sound, allows easy sharing of work and increased sense of audience.

IPADS/ IPOD touch

Very similar applications, Ipad 2 both can be used as camera, video and voice recorder. Great for apps which help develop oral language..

eg ABC Wildlife

Space planets

Toontastic

Reference with Utube favourites and books.

Also Literacy and numeracy apps which can be used to support classroom learning

Although they can be used with headphones, usually in a collaborative environment, so further opportunities for oral language.

Talking tin lids

So many uses

Using talking tin lids to encourage children to develop accurate oral language when retelling stories or to use the tin lids before writing recounts or instructions, to support sequencing of ideas and the idea that we need to 'say before we write'

Recording learning goals.

Recording reflections about learning.

Developing vocabulary

Grammar sentence structure and tenses

Flip camera's

For example, using flip camera's for children to record feedback about their learning, learning goals and to record other children's learning during Investigations.

Using flip camera's to support 'talk partner' activities, for example making oral predictions about a story.

Phonic Sound Buttons

Have made THRASS interactive and given independence and immediate feedback

Letters and sounds program

Whispa-phones

Reading and writing tool to allow for clear articulation of sounds and speech and reduce levels of reading during guided reading and concentration and focus for some in writing.

Ipod nano, voice recorder and docking station

Great combination, for quick circle discussions, listening back to oral language and developing it

Digital Cameras

When children photograph their work and print pictures they then have a further opportunity to use language to talk about them or to compose writing to match, if they are making a book or poster.

Quality headphones

Important asset when needed in a classroom.

What has been the impact of this initiative on literacy/numeracy? What evidence has been collected that demonstrates this impact?

The initiative has put oral language at the centre of the prep unit's Literacy and Investigations programs. The students have increased opportunities for using oral language in the classroom and this has led to an improvement in their ability to speak clearly and to articulate their thinking in clear and sequenced way.

The students in the classroom have developed increased confidence with their oral skills, the quality of oral responses in the classroom has improved and during Investigations the 'student to student' conversations have become more

purposeful with students beginning to use the technologies independently to record these exchanges.

It is interesting to note that we are observing that the simple act of recording what the children are saying, either with a talking tin lids or a flip camera, appears to improve the quality of the communication, perhaps because the students have an inbuilt accountability that what they are saying is being recorded. Also if the oral language used is not clear, the student can listen back, self reflect and with support improve the quality of their oral language.

We also use a microphone and amp to help develop oral language during show and tell and reflection time which encourages students to speak clearly and helps the audience to clearly hear the speaker creating a more attentive audience.

These impacts are evidenced by the video footage collected, many teacher anecdotal records, posts onto our prep unit blog and student learning reflections uploaded to the students Express spaces on the Ultranet.

The prep unit has also received much positive feedback from parents, via the comments posted on the blog, and also feedback from other independent teaching professionals who have visited the unit and spoken to the children, noting their enhanced level of articulation about their learning. It is also notable that these improvements in oral language are having a positive impact on the students VELS levels in speaking and listening and writing.

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James Ramage