

## Who talks in class?

- Some Pasifika students do not feel comfortable participating in classroom interactions.
- Conversational and literacy practices between children and adults vary widely in different English-speaking communities, as well as in communities where other languages are spoken.

Worldwide, there is a danger that minority students, or those whose home language is not the medium of instruction, will be marginalised and silenced in the classroom. This can happen in New Zealand to Pasifika learners, as well as to other students, unless teachers are very alert to the subtle processes that can make students feel excluded from what is going on at school.

Nakhid (2003) talked in depth to five New Zealand teachers and 12 students about their perceptions of schooling. The Pasifika students she interviewed talked about how:

- they felt different from the non-Pasifika students, who were confident about speaking up in the class and talked easily to the teacher (see the inquiry [Being a good learner](#))
- they felt that they were not as articulate as the non-Pasifika students, and did not feel able to respond to the teacher in the same way as the non-Pasifika students
- they felt as if the teachers and non-Pasifika students made it seem that they worked harder and were faster learners than Pasifika students. This came about because of the way their requests for further information or for clarification about the lesson were responded to.

The students Nakhid interviewed had some perceptions that were quite different from the teachers' perceptions. One example was that the teachers believed that the students valued specific individual attention and one-to-one opportunities with them. In fact, the students expressed considerable discomfort about classroom practices that singled them out and "exposed them to the class as 'less capable' students" (Nakhid, 2003, page 218).

Jones (1991) found a similar situation in research she did nearly 20 years ago. The Pasifika girls she worked with thought there was no point in engaging in talk and discussion with teachers. They also felt that there was something about the way Pākehā girls related to schooling that was different and more successful, in spite of the fact that both they and the Pākehā girls spoke English and worked hard. The teachers in Jones' study wanted to get the Pasifika students to engage in learning behaviour that would help them to be more successful in the long run. They would say, for example, "You need to work this out for yourself." Unfortunately, the teachers didn't manage to establish a successful dialogue with the students to find a common understanding.

The inquiry [What do students believe about learning?](#) explores student beliefs about learning behaviour, and you can hear some teachers' views on effective teaching relationships in the video clip [Effective teaching relationships](#).

## Patterns of interaction and discourse

How can it be that Pasifika students who have had all or most of their schooling in New Zealand don't feel comfortable with classroom interactions? One possible answer lies in the effects of a European tradition that began nearly 2500 years ago. For example, consider this exchange.

*Parent:* What's that over there?

*Child:* Dak.

*Parent:* Yes, it's a duck, isn't it? Do you think it's going to swim across the pond to eat our bread?

*Child:* Bwet.

*Parent:* Our old bread.

This common European question and answer session has links with the method of teaching that Socrates developed, of extracting knowledge from students through skillful questioning. Parents use it and, when babies are too young to speak, the parents provide the answers as well as the questions. This has been called the IRF pattern of Initiation, Response, Feedback. Sometimes the feedback is an evaluation (for example, 'Good' or 'No') and sometimes the teacher may elaborate on the student's response, as the parent does in the example above. (This is explored in more detail in the inquiry [What is academic language?](#)). It's not surprising that some children of Pākehā backgrounds feel comfortable when the teacher does the same thing that their parents and other caregivers have done. Some children are also used to interrogating adults at length. For example:

*Child:* Why isn't that train going?

*Parent:* It's waiting for the other one to go past.

*Child:* What other one? Where's the other train?

*Parent:* You can't see it. It's further up the line. The signal is red, and that tells the driver not to go yet.

*Child:* Who makes the signal red?

Pākehā children, especially those in middle-class families, are generally encouraged to ask questions like this, but in other cultural groups it may be impolite or unacceptable for anyone to question in such a direct and persistent manner, and this may apply especially to children.

If you come from a middle-class Pākehā background, you may wonder about other ways that adults and children might interact. Here are some examples of important approaches used by other social groups:

- Children are trained in different types of oral performance.
- Children are encouraged to observe quietly and to copy.
- Children are directly instructed.
- Children are talked to mainly by older children.

All these methods, and others, allow children to learn to speak, interact, and solve problems in the manner of their community. However, the middle-class Pākehā patterns of interaction described above are often the norm in New Zealand classrooms. It's easy to see why students might feel excluded if they haven't been brought up to engage in this type of interaction. Source:

<http://leap.tki.org.nz/Who-talks-in-class> accessed April 1, 2016

## Encouraging oral participation

One teacher comments:

*I think a majority of teachers teaching Pasifika children would identify oral language as a great need and focus and would be receptive to trying new approaches. Our student achievement in listening and speaking is poor.*

### Five techniques

The following techniques are good ways to encourage everyone to speak. See also [Effective language learning activities](#).

- **Taking turns around the group so that everyone speaks** This works best for topics where everyone can easily express an opinion or feeling, or contribute an experience. However, it does have the effect of putting students on the spot, and it's important to choose topics carefully so there really is no barrier to everyone having something they're willing to contribute. In addition, the atmosphere must be supportive, and the rules are that nobody mocks or contradicts anyone else. All answers are accepted with interest.
- **Preparation using the IPG (Individual Pair Group) technique** Preparation alters the way students perform tasks. IPG provides one way to help students prepare to speak publicly in the class. Begin by asking a question or setting a problem of some kind. Get your class to work in three stages. First, each individual writes down or thinks of something relating to the question. (It does not necessarily have to be an answer.) Next, pairs of students discuss what they have each prepared. Finally, the pairs join to form groups of four to six students. The groups discuss the topic further and then appoint a spokesperson to report to the whole class. This is very similar to Think, Pair, Share (TPS). Over the course of a week, each student in the class should have the same number of turns at being the spokesperson. You might have to establish a turn-taking system to ensure this. To equalise the talking roles, one teacher gives each student three 'talking chips'. Each time a student speaks, they put one chip in the centre. When their three chips are in the centre, that student has no more speaking turns until all of the students in the group have put all three of their chips in the centre.
- **Nominate a friend** The students each nominate a friend whom they know has something to contribute. This technique depends on there being good relationships in the class. If your class is a cohesive learning community, students who do not like to volunteer to speak may be happy to do so if asked to by their friends. One teacher who tried this technique made the following comments: *In one session, students were using 'I' statements when talking to others, and they were all very keen to nominate themselves and a friend to speak. The very reluctant speakers, however, were not comfortable being nominated, and one student in particular didn't like the extra attention. I think in another context this may work better. At intermediate level, it could work alongside the jigsaw activity, where each student is an 'expert' in their field (it may even be their own language or culture) and other students in the group can nominate them to share ideas/information on the subject in an open forum.*

- **Have a management role** Reciprocal teaching of reading develops students' ability to lead and take part in an exploratory discussion about a text. In this activity, the students have roles that rotate. The roles include:
  - predicting
  - questioning
  - summarising
  - clarifying.
- See [Effective language learning activities](#) and the video clip [Group work](#). Two comments from teachers: Teacher 1: *It's a well-researched fact that the approach [advocated in Effective Literacy Practice Years 1-4 and 5-8] is excellent for encouraging oral participation and higher level thinking skills. The role of the teacher empowers reluctant speakers to lead in a structured way, which is great.* Teacher 2: *I would allow a slow and purposeful integration of these [oral participation] activities. It takes five weeks to teach reciprocal teaching to a group in my class because each of the strategies (predicting, summarising, and so on) needs to be understood fully.*
- **'Be an expert'** Each student has responsibility for particular parts or aspects of the content matter the students are working with. This means the whole group depends on that person to inform them about part of what they need to know. Jigsaw learning, where students are given different pieces of information to work with, uses this approach. See the inquiry [What do students learn from interaction?](#) and the [Jigsaw Classroom](#).

Here is one teacher's example of scaffolding oral language with her Year 7 and 8 students.

*I introduced a problem-solving game I wanted my lower groups to use during reading time and other students in their spare time. This was a great time to do the IPG activity.*

*This was done a little differently than outlined in the example but the objective was still the same - to scaffold children's oral language so they feel confident to speak aloud in a whole-class situation.*

*With the problem-solving game, each group has scenario and equipment cards. Firstly, each person chooses one piece of equipment (such as a spade) and thinks of all the different things the item can be used for (digging, limbo stick, and so on). Then, in pairs, they share their ideas together, and then with the group. The group then chooses one scenario (for example, a cat is stuck in a high tree and you need to get it down), and the group then pools their resources and talks together about how to solve the problem.*

*My ESOL students found it easier to talk about their ideas with their pairs, which gave them the confidence to share their ideas with the whole group. It's a useful approach because it gives all students time to articulate ideas and seek confirmation before being confronted in a whole group/class situation.*

Source: <http://leap.tki.org.nz/Encouraging-oral-participation> accessed April 1, 2016

## What is academic language?

- The language used in classrooms - termed 'academic language' - is different from everyday language and takes significantly longer to learn.
- Academic language is more abstract, more formal, and has more specific vocabulary than everyday language. It is also much less common.
- All students need to learn academic language, but bilingual students face particular challenges when learning it in their second language.
- Particular patterns of classroom talk (for example, the way to ask questions in class) may also be relatively unfamiliar to bilingual Pasifika (and other bilingual) students.
- Teachers need to be aware of these language differences and teach them explicitly to bilingual students (indeed, to all students), rather than just assuming they will 'naturally' pick them up.

### Characteristics of language

Our knowledge and use of language, or languages, continues to grow throughout our lives. This is particularly evident when we encounter different contexts, or [language domains](#), and must learn to use our language(s) appropriately in these varied contexts.

The nature of the context will determine the particular [language register](#) required to function effectively within that context. For example, business contexts generally require a more formal language register in a variety of [language modes](#) such as public presentations and written reports. Specialist areas of interest usually require knowledge of the technical terms, or [jargon](#), associated with them. Education is obviously a key language context, requiring students to develop an understanding of the specific language registers and specialist vocabulary associated with each subject, as well as a wide variety of related ways of using the language modes (for example, for transactional writing, descriptive writing, reading, and public speaking).

In the late 1970s, the researcher Jim Cummins coined the term Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) as the language of conversation, and it takes much longer to learn - particularly for bilingual or L2 learners.

It normally takes about 2 years for a child's conversational ability or surface fluency in an L2 to develop, yet it takes between 5 and 8 years or even longer for the academic skills required to cope with classroom language and curriculum content to develop fully. (See Cummins, 2000, for a summary of the research that supports this statement.) This is called the [second language learning delay](#). (See May, 2002 for further discussion.) Bilingual Pasifika students can have highly developed conversational skills in English, yet still perform poorly in school if their academic language skills remain underdeveloped.

Not all teachers are aware of this phenomenon. Some may assume that if a bilingual student has good conversational English, they will also be able to easily handle the curriculum content in mainstream classrooms in New Zealand. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. If these students do not succeed in acquiring academic English, they find it much harder to achieve well at school. This has been the pattern for many bilingual Pasifika students in mainstream New Zealand schools, and perhaps explains why Pasifika and other bilingual students are disproportionately represented in New Zealand's 'literacy tail'. (See the inquiry [Why are Pasifika languages keys to learning?](#) for further discussion.)

The reasons why it takes so long to learn the academic register of a language such as English, and why is it particularly difficult for bilingual or L2 students are because academic language:

- is more formal than conversational language
- tends to use more passive constructions than conversational language (for example, "It has been argued by X ..." rather than "X argues that ...")
- is often less contextualised and so provides fewer supports (such as illustrations) to help the listener understand or interpret messages
- is more abstract - that is, it has significantly more words that refer to abstract ideas than conversational language, which tends to be more concrete (see the box below)
- has more difficult (and less common) vocabulary than conversational language (see the box).

We can see the differences between everyday language and academic language clearly by looking at vocabulary. Using English as an example, the words on the left are widely known and frequently used. They tend to refer to concrete things rather than abstract ideas. The words on the right are commonly used in classrooms, and while they are not jargon that is specific to certain subjects, they are much less commonly known or used outside of the classroom. Therefore, we cannot assume that students will necessarily know the words on the right, or be able to use them appropriately.

Time	Chapter
People	Component
Years	Text
Work	Criterion
Something	Data
World	Design
Children	Focus
Life	Hypothesis

(Adapted from Corson, 2000.)

Source : <http://leap.tki.org.nz/What-is-academic-language> accessed April 1, 2016