1 The Crucial Role of Language in Education

We begin this first chapter with a wide-ranging overview of the vital role that language plays in education wherever the learning and teaching takes place, whatever the age of the learners and irrespective of the aims of the educators. Our purpose here is to set out aspects of language and languages in education that we consider to be of prime importance when addressing the challenges and opportunities referred to in our title.

First, we briefly consider the ground-breaking insights of Lev Vygotsky and his followers, and of others who fashioned the shape and principles of contemporary education in Europe and North America. We then look in more detail at how language works to facilitate the development of concepts and the raising of awareness in the interactions between those teaching and those learning. This leads naturally to a reflection on how language used in schools and other educational organisations links up with and prepares the way for coping with the complex multiple functions and uses of language in the real world, for example, to gain and exercise power, to sell goods and services, and in our role as citizens.

Language, Thought and Learning

'Learning, in the proper sense, is not learning things, but the *meanings* of things, and this process involves the use of signs, or language in its generic sense'. This sentence from a chapter entitled 'Language and the training of thought' in John Dewey's classic *How We Think* (Dewey, 1910: 175) is a good example of early 20th century views of education, child psychology and language. The great names in this tradition span the universities of the northern hemisphere from Vermont, where Dewey worked, to Neuchâtel, the home of Jean Piaget, and Moscow, the alma mater of Lev Vygotsky. The ways in which they presented their ideas, and in the case of Piaget and Vygotsky, their research findings, on the question of signs, language, thought and learning, are of their time, but the insights themselves remain important today and are often overlooked by

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teacher educators and teachers themselves. Broadly, they proposed that thinking and concept development are only possible with the help of language.

Vygotsky's work and ideas have had a controversial history since his untimely death from tuberculosis in 1934. This is partly due to the incompleteness, censoring and amendments of the original Russian versions and the lack of reliable translations, but also to the promotion of simplified versions of his ideas in the West in the 1970s and since. Work is still ongoing on the first ever full version of Vygotsky's complete works. The ideas reproduced here cannot, therefore, be regarded as a full or reliable representation, but they are very relevant to the purpose of this chapter. As Vygotsky put it, '[Word meaning] is a phenomenon of verbal thought, or meaningful speech – a union of word and thought' (Vygotsky, 1986: 212). After close critical analysis of the work of Piaget and many others working in the field up to the 1930s, as well as practical research with children, it was clear to Vygotsky that concept development was dependent on language, and that instruction involving language and other semiotic systems had a crucial role to play in helping children to develop new conceptual frameworks and to enrich their existing understanding. For him it became evident that the learning of new concepts, notably 'scientific' concepts, is mediated by concepts that have already been acquired and by the language and other systems of signs (gestures, diagrams, etc.) in which they are represented.

In most learning from a very early age social interaction involving spoken language is key: even parents showing the world to their babies or encouraging them to eat, sit, walk or play use language of one kind or another as a constant soundtrack. Beyond babyhood, when children's language is often an 'egocentric' accompaniment to their activities, and into adulthood, it is unusual for there to be thoughts and feelings without some kind of inner language, and it is apparent that this inner 'speech', as well as the mediation provided by others, plays its part in our ongoing, never-ending learning.

Language and Learning Objectives

Vygotsky was one of the first to describe the mediating function of language: its use as a tool to bridge the gap between what is familiar, for example known concepts, and what is not yet known or 'other'. This process of 'knowing' was the focus of the *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* developed by Benjamin Bloom and colleagues in the United States in the 1950s. The resulting model proposed six successive cognitive stages: knowledge > comprehension > application > analysis > synthesis > evaluation (Bloom, 1956). While the underlying assumptions behind the taxonomy have been disputed, the taxonomy has had considerable

impact on educational thinking and research, especially in the USA, and has been followed up by revised versions, such as that developed by Lorin Anderson, David Krathwohl and colleagues (2001), and a more radical 'new taxonomy' created by Robert Marzano (Marzano & Kendall, 2007). Whichever of these one considers, and whatever view one has of their validity and usefulness, it is clear how prominently language features at all levels of the taxonomy. This interdependence of language, thought and learning, linking back to Vygotsky, is nicely illustrated by a correlation of action verbs with the categories of the taxonomy as revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). As examples, 'understanding' is quite low in the hierarchy of the *Revised Taxonomy* and is associated with such verbs as 'classify', 'explain', 'interpret', 'rephrase' and so on. On the other hand, 'evaluating' is near the top, one step down from 'creating'. Some verbs that are typically associated with evaluation, according to Anderson and Krathwohl, are 'compare', 'deduct', 'explain' and 'prove'. The interrelationship between learning and using language in various ways is clear from such examples: even when learning autonomously, using words to explore what one is discovering is essential to the process.

As its original title suggests, Bloom's *Taxonomy* was designed as an aid to the formulation of educational objectives for teaching any subject. It specified categories of knowledge as well as a hierarchy of cognitive processes. In Anderson, Krathwohl *et al.*'s revised taxonomy, the knowledge and cognition dimensions are divided into two complementary dimensions in which language remains a key factor. Broadly, as Krathwohl (2002: 213) explains 'statements of objectives typically consist of a noun or noun phrase – the subject matter content – and a verb or verb phrase – the cognitive process(es). Consider, for example, the following objective: The student shall be able to remember the law of supply and demand in economics.' Here he points out that 'the student shall be able to', which is likely to be common to all objectives, can be ignored, leaving the verb 'remember', a cognitive process, and the noun phrase, 'law of supply and demand in economics', an element of knowledge.

The verbs and nouns that can be used to express desired learning outcomes, as exemplified on the *Revised Taxonomy*, reappear in lists of 'teaching and learning language' (see also Figure 1.1). In almost any secondary classroom we could expect to hear teachers giving instructions or invitations such as the following:

'Could you define "botany"'?
'Can you illustrate what is meant by a "deciduous tree", and give an example?'
'Explain why the French revolution happened when it did'.
'Compare the causes of the Mexican revolution and the French revolution', and so on.

Moreover, many of these verbs are also used in instructions in tests and textbooks and are likely to feature in talk between students when they are discussing learning tasks.

Classroom Language

> In order to learn, students must use what they already know so as to give meaning to what the teacher presents to them. Speech makes available to reflection the processes by which they relate new knowledge to old. But this possibility depends on the social relationships, the communication system, which the teacher sets up. (Barnes in National Institute of Education, 1974: 1)

It was clear to both Vygotsky and Barnes that, if language is essential for thought and concept building from an early age, teaching (or 'instruction') involving speech, written texts and the use of other systems of signs must be key to children's development and learning at later ages within the education system. A question that, we believe, is too seldom addressed in teacher education and teachers' reflection on their work is: how can language be used most effectively in the sociocultural space of the classroom – or indeed outside the classroom – to stimulate genuine development and learning?

Since the 1970s and earlier, the role of classroom talk in learning has been the object of research and discussion within a fairly restricted circle of educationalists. In his research into and discussion of what he calls 'learning by talking', described in his book *From Communication to Curriculum* (Barnes, 1976), Barnes successfully demonstrated how exploratory talk within small groups of children in the classroom, for example about a poem, stimulates the 'recoding' and enhancement of their understanding in a way that would have been much harder for them to achieve on their own, or indeed with explanations or 'telling' from a teacher. But in so doing Barnes was addressing a far bigger issue, namely the way in which instruction and the type of language and communication that was – and still is – most often used by teachers to 'transmit' knowledge and concepts reaffirms the power structures in society that militate against autonomy, reflection and equal opportunities, including children's opportunities for learning. By contrast, exploratory talk in the classroom, more recently termed 'dialogic teaching' by Robin Alexander (once a colleague of Barnes's) (e.g. Alexander, 2008), moves away from the traditional transmissive routine that involves initiation by the teacher, response by a student or more than one, and evaluation or feedback by the teacher (IRE or IRF for short), and instead encourages genuine dialogue between the teacher and students, and among students, of a kind that helps them to interpret, reshape and recode concepts and ideas in their own individual ways and on their own terms.

Based on analysis of teacher and learner talk during classroom research projects in the 1990s in five countries (England, France, India, Russia and the United States) and follow-up work in the UK, Alexander proposed the categories listed in Figure 1.1.

Teaching talk	Learning talk
• Drilling, repetition ('rote')	• Narrate
• Recitation (through questioning)	• Explain
• Instruction, exposition	• Instruct
• Discussion (exchange of ideas)	• Ask different kinds of questions
• Dialogue (towards common understanding)	• Receive, act and build upon answers
	• Analyse and solve problems
	• Speculate & imagine
	• Explore & evaluate ideas
	• Discuss
	• Argue, reason & justify
	• Negotiate

Figure 1.1 'Teaching talk' and 'learning talk'
Source: Adapted from Alexander (2008: 38–39)

As Alexander points out,

> Only the last two of these [kinds of teaching talk] are likely to meet the criteria of dialogic teaching … and while we are not arguing that rote should disappear (for even the most elemental form of teaching has its place) we would certainly suggest that teaching which confines itself to the first three kinds of talk … is unlikely to offer the kinds of cognitive challenge which children need. (Alexander, 2008: 31)

However, for dialogic teaching to be successful, Alexander and his colleagues believe that teachers also need to work hard on helping children to develop their repertoire of the types of learning talk identified in Figure 1.1, as well as their ability to listen, to 'be receptive to alternative viewpoints, think about what they hear, and to give others time to think' (Alexander, 2008: 40).

Questioning

An area that does not feature prominently in Alexander's list, but which others have written extensively about, is the way in which teachers use questioning. In their book aimed at the teaching profession, Norah Morgan and Juliana Saxton illustrated how different types of teacher questions at primary and secondary school level can relate to the categories proposed in the *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* discussed

earlier. These include, for example, questions that draw on knowledge, questions to test understanding, questions which require application, and questions which promote evaluation or judging (Morgan & Saxton, 1991: 12–15). However, they conclude that questions in teaching need to go beyond the *Taxonomy* because it does not in its original version deal with feelings (this is an issue which is addressed in Marzano's *New Taxonomy* by introducing the so-called 'self-system' (Marzano & Kendall, 2007: 12–13)).

Morgan and Saxton propose a classification of teacher questions into three main groups: 'questions which elicit information'; 'questions which shape understanding'; and 'questions which press for reflection' (Morgan & Saxton, 1991: 41). It is particularly in the second and third of these groups that questions can address the dimensions that have a potentially key role to play in cognitive development.

Our own experience confirms this view of the role of communication and questioning in classrooms. However, the categories of learning talk and questions described above do not feature often enough in discussion of classroom interaction. Moreover, as Barnes and others have pointed out since the 1970s, focusing on the ways in which language and communication are used across the curriculum throws the spotlight on issues which are also important for teacher educators and teachers to reflect on:

- Where does power lie in classrooms and how is it shared?
- Who does most of the talking? The quite large group of students or the teacher?
- How productive is that talk? Is it more often in the form of IRF (which has its place), or does it sometimes involve genuine questions and dialogue?
- Are students from different backgrounds expected to learn in the same way, or is there allowance for different routes to learning?
- How successful is the classroom as a sociocultural space for a learning community where language is used to co-construct ideas and make cognitive progress?

Scaffolding

A concept that is often used when discussing teaching and learning talk, especially in subject teaching, is 'scaffolding'. To fully understand the sense of this term we need to return to Vygotsky and a key concept defined by him: the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD), which is,

> the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978: 86)

The implication of the ZPD is that a given stage in a child's development opens up the potential for a next step in development, and that this next step needs to be aided in some way, for example, by a teacher (or a parent or another student). The support of scaffolding can, if provided in the right form, aid the child or student to 'bridge the gap' between these phases of development. This does not mean that the helper does the task for the child or student, or tells her or him how to do it, but rather that various means, hints, demonstrations, etc. are used to guide their discovery and learning, gradually reducing the scaffolding along the way as the task is done more successfully. Think of the physical and verbal support given to a child on the verge of learning to ride a bicycle: once the physical scaffolding of stabilising wheels on each side is removed, you may need to run alongside and hold the saddle for a while, or tell the child to steer one way or another, but gradually you need to let go while still shouting encouragement.

An annotated example of oral scaffolding in subject teaching, taken from data collected by Walqui in the USA, is reproduced below:

S(student):	It's like everybody should get the same rights and protection, no matter, like, race, religion.
T(teacher):	Yeah. Everybody. (*The teacher acknowledges the student's response and waits)*
S:	No matter if they are a citizen or illegal, they should get the same protection. (*The teacher evaluates and approves the student's answer*)
T:	I agree with you, but why do you say that with confidence? (*The teacher is asking the student to justify or elaborate her thinking*)
S:	Because it says that.
T:	Because it says that? (*The teacher acknowledges the student's response and continues to wait for justification or elaboration*).
S:	Also because it [the 14th Amendment] says it should not deny any person of the right to life, liberty and property without due process. (*The student draws on evidence for her thinking.*)
T:	Okay, not any citizen? (*The teacher highlights a key aspect of the 14th Amendment.*)
S:	Any person. (*The student consolidates her understanding.*)
T:	Okay, so is the 14th Amendment helpful to you? (*The teacher connects the student's learning to her experience, as an immigrant.*)

(Walqui, 2006: 166)

The key skill on the part of the person providing the scaffolding, such as the teacher, is to provide the right kind and amount of support in the right way at the right time, and then gradually to reduce or remove

it. This applies just as much to adults learning to deal with complex academic tasks for the first time as to children developing basic concepts.

The term 'scaffold' in this metaphorical sense was first used in an article by Woods *et al.*, in 1976. The article describes an experiment with 30 children aged 3–5 years old who were asked to build a pyramid using purpose-made wooden blocks. They describe it as:

> a process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts. This scaffolding consists essentially of the adult 'controlling' those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity, thus enabling him to concentrate upon and complete those elements that are within his range of competence. [...] it may result, eventually, in development of task competence by the learner that would far outstrip his unassisted efforts. (Woods *et al.*, 1976: 90)

Wood *et al.* (1976) identified six key scaffolding functions:

(a) 'Recruitment', i.e. getting the learner(s) involved in the task
(b) Reduction in freedom i.e. simplifying and focusing attention on the task
(c) 'Direction maintenance' i.e. keeping the learners on the task when attention lapses
(d) Marking or accentuating critical features of the elements in the task
(e) Frustration control, i.e. maintaining motivation: the authors propose that the task should be less stressful with a tutor than without
(f) Demonstrating or modelling solutions that are possibly ideal. (Woods *et al.*, 1976: 98)

Vygotsky, who himself did not use the term 'scaffolding', also believed that this kind of external social support assists children's learning in two distinct ways: they are learning how to cope with the task or the concept, and they are also learning how to organise their learning and reasoning. In a sense, they are acquiring new concepts or awareness while, at the same time, learning how learning works and how to learn.

This dual aspect of learning and education is, in our view, too seldom highlighted: how are children and young people in the education system best helped simultaneously to develop their ability to learn and make sense of the world while also developing their knowledge, understanding and skills in traditional subject areas? And how can language and communication best be used by teachers and students to achieve this?

These questions link up with another important topic: the role of language in the development of the so-called 'transversal competences' that are needed across the school curriculum as well as in life beyond the school or college. Whichever list of such transversal competences one refers to,

language, communication and learning how to learn are included as essential elements. The recent re-specification of transversal competences by the European Commission, for example, lists literacy competence, language competence, personal, social and learning competence, and cultural awareness and expression competence as four of eight main transversal competences (European Commission, 2018b: 38). Meanwhile, UNESCO includes reflective thinking, interpersonal skills (including communication skills and collaboration etc.), and media and information literacy, such as the ability to locate and access information as examples of transversal skills (UNESCO Asia-Pacific Policy Brief, 2015: 5).

Multiliteracies

The multiliteracies initiative has its origins in the 1990s, and grew out of a realisation that, given the universal developments taking place in language and communication, 'literacy' as it was defined and exemplified in educational principles and practice was no longer fit for purpose. The underlying rationale for the concept behind the inelegant term 'multiliteracies' is firstly that communication is increasingly multilayered and multifaceted as individuals move from context to context, domain to domain, and from one cultural environment to another. 'These differences are the consequence of any number of factors, including culture, gender, life experience, subject matter, social or subject domain and the like. Every meaning exchange is cross-cultural to a certain degree' (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015: 3). Secondly, an updated concept of literacy is needed because communication itself is multimodal in that spoken words are likely to be accompanied by body language, tone of voice, facial expressions and so on, and the written word may increasingly be mixed in with visual illustrations and symbols of one kind or another, and may be printed in a book, delivered on a screen or handwritten. In other words, diversity of one kind or another and the fast-moving evolution of modes of communication, as well as the intermingling of languages, require teachers to think of literacy more broadly and to ensure that their students learn to cope with and take advantage of its diversity. Thus multiliteracies intersect, on the one hand, with languages and culture since students need to learn to live in multicultural societies and global communities where people with different first languages are communicating with one another, and, on the other hand, with media and literacy in information and communication technology (ICT): the ability to interpret in a considered manner the content and messages distributed via the internet and through printed media, and to take advantage proactively of the opportunities offered by ICT-based communication.

We sense here the growing pressure on teachers and teacher educators: if I am a teacher of, say, history, not only am I to ensure that my students have a clear unbiased view of the history of the nations and societies

specified in the curriculum and of the way evidence is used to underpin views of history; I also need to ensure that my work in the classroom enables young people to develop transversal competences such as critical thinking, open-mindedness, teamwork and social responsibility, but also their communication skills, an understanding of how language and communication work in societies, and a multifaceted kind of literacy which will help them with their further learning. These are exciting but demanding challenges, especially given the diversity of cultures, languages and learning aptitudes that I am likely to find in my classroom owing to globalisation and migration flows. But how do I develop the range of skills and awareness that I require to do my job well and to continue doing it well as the needs of the students I work with and the sociocultural environment changes? Moreover, if I am teacher educator, how do I ensure that teachers are equipped with skills and awareness of this kind? These are questions we will suggest answers to later in the book, notably in Chapter 6.

Some UK Initiatives around Language and Education

In the 1970s, well before the advent of the internet and notion of 'transversal competences', the British government instigated an enquiry into language and literacy in education, called *A Language for Life* (Bullock Report, 1975). Notwithstanding the huge social and technological changes since those days, some of the recommendations in the final report, though mostly not or only sporadically implemented since that time, were carried forward in later work and remain as relevant today as they were then, at least in the UK and no doubt in many other national contexts, irrespective of the prevalent language of schooling.

The following are some examples of recommendations from the Bullock Report (1975):

> (4) 'Each school should have an organised policy for language across the curriculum, establishing every teacher's involvement in language and reading development throughout the years of schooling';
>
> (5) 'Every school should have a suitably qualified teacher with responsibility for advising and supporting his colleagues in language and the teaching of reading'
>
> (15) a substantial course on language in education [...] should be part of every primary and secondary school teacher's initial training, whatever the teacher's subject or the age of the children with whom he or she will be working.'
>
> (17) 'there should be a national centre for language in education concerned with the teaching of English in all its aspects.'. (Bullock Report, 1975: 514–515)

If we interpret 'reading' here more broadly as what we now call 'literacy', there seems to us to be much food for thought in these recommendations. Like many good recommendations, however, they do imply concerted effort, in the case of the UK across authorities and entities that had and still have considerable independence, as well as investment of funding and time, and efforts and expertise at school level that meet local requirements.

The Bullock Report was followed in the 1980s by two further reports, namely the Kingman Report (1988) on an enquiry into 'the Teaching of the English Language' and the Cox Report (1989) on 'English for Ages 5 to 16'. In different ways, the proposals that the two reports summarise pick up where the Bullock Report left off. For example, the Kingman Report proposed that subject departments concerned with the teaching of language in secondary schools should develop a 'co-ordinated policy for language teaching' (p. 69) and that teacher education courses and teacher training courses should 'contain a substantial component of tuition in language study' (p. 70). Meanwhile, the Cox Report advocated that the curriculum for children between the ages of 5 and 16 should include the 'development of pupils' understanding of the spoken word and the capacity to express themselves effectively in a variety of speaking and listening activities, matching style and response to audience and purpose' (Cox Report, 1989: 11), and laid down a series of 'attainment targets' to be focused on in the curriculum.

These reports gave rise to the Language in the National Curriculum (LINC) project coordinated by Professor Ron Carter. The project developed materials for the professional development of teachers aimed at raising their awareness of and knowledge about key aspects of language, with specific reference to English. The introduction to the project report includes a brief summary of a functional model of language derived from applied linguistics, which underpins the materials themselves:

- The making of meaning is the reason for the invention, existence and development of language.
- All meanings exist within the context of culture. Cultural values and beliefs determine the purposes, audiences, settings and topics of language.
- Texts, spoken and written, are created and interpreted by making appropriate choices from the language system according to specific purposes, audiences, settings and topics. (Carter, 1989: 2)

This brief summary is a very useful as a reminder to teachers – and indeed everyone – of the complex and dynamic nature of language and the need for these dimensions of language to underpin language in education. The materials themselves covered all key aspects of language in the curriculum as recommended by the reports referred to above and a range of media was used, including audio-recordings and television. According to a note below the title, the materials were used with teachers at all schools in England and Wales over a three-year period from 1989 to 1992. Further small-scale rather than national initiatives have followed and continue to the present day.

This series of examples is a clear demonstration of what can be done when concerted and enlightened attention is paid to an educational initiative. Unfortunately, in this case, as in many others, political changes meant that the impetus for continuing this overdue work and integrating language fully into teacher education did not last.

Language Repertoire

Every individual has a 'language repertoire', the capacity to use a range of language and potentially of different languages, for communication. Some areas of the repertoire may be much more developed than others. For example, children up to the age of 6 years may be able to use the language of the home and of interaction with friends fluently, but not yet be able to express themselves confidently in formal language. Some adults may feel quite confident about writing e-mails to work colleagues, but are intimidated when writing a report or formal letter. The internet, (e.g. see http://ilanguages.org/bilingual.php) tells us that at least 60% of the world's population is able to communicate in more than one language and many of them are bi- or trilingual. Many more of us have some knowledge of other languages, however modest, in our repertoires.

The importance of language in education centres on the need for children and older students to gradually develop the breadth and depth of their ability to understand and use the language of schooling effectively, that is, the language in which most subjects are taught. Our ability to progress in our education and to reach our individual potential, whatever the subjects, hinges on our awareness of how language operates and is used in different contexts for different purposes. It also involves gradually becoming familiar with and able to use different types of oral and written language for different academic and other purposes. For example, the language used for explaining or asking about scientific or historical information is different from the language used to complete tasks such as writing about a topic, making oral presentations about concepts or discussing contentious ideas. The gradual broadening of literacy and oracy to encompass a range of varieties and registers of language is an essential aim of education internationally and should be the responsibility of all teachers, whatever their subject specialism.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has spelt out some key aspects of the role of language in learning and education more generally. Important early explorations of the relationship between language, thinking and learning fed into detailed thinking about how educational objectives should be framed linguistically, and the ways in which language, especially talk, questioning and

scaffolding, can most effectively be used in the classroom. As Neil Mercer pointed out in words that neatly summarise points made in this chapter,

> Teachers have a professional responsibility for helping their students to build new understandings upon the foundations of their previous learning, and language is the main tool available to the teaching profession for doing this … teachers can also help students to learn how language can be used as a tool for making joint, coherent sense of experience. (Mercer, 2000: 52)

But to do this well, teachers need to be well prepared for their work through initial teacher education and then to engage in continuing professional development of their own. The UK examples above show how intensive focus on language in education can lead to potentially far-reaching policy proposals while demonstrating that ongoing concerted and comprehensive programmes of action in schools and in teacher education do not necessarily follow. Language and communication are so central to education that it seems only common sense that 'language across the curriculum' should form a main part of initial teacher education, that there should be a clearly focused language policy in each school, or at least each school authority, which teachers feel they own, and that at least one teacher in each school should have expertise and responsibility in the area of language across the curriculum, and can provide focused mentoring for colleagues when required. Unless some sort of provision along these lines is available, the risk is that the necessary development of teachers' reflection on the role of language and communication in their work, and of their competence in this area, will be haphazard and, given the pressures that teachers are usually under, pushed down the list of day-to-day professional concerns.

It is important to add some caveats at this point. The first is that the sociocultural characteristics of school education vary considerably from country to country and are determined by numerous factors relating to the types of classroom environment and traditions of education that have developed in the national or local context. What is more, the role of the teacher may be seen by students and their parents as very different in one cultural context as compared to another. For example, exploratory talk and dialogic teaching in a classroom in India with 100 students poses different challenges from those faced in a class of 30 in the UK. Secondly, it is hard to prove that students 'learn better' by one means rather than another. In most contexts, much assessment of learning is still geared to the learning of facts and information rather than the cognitive and cultural development of children. This means that the formal evidence available does not provide very reliable information about the quality or even the extent of learning. Thirdly, the kind of exploratory teaching that will 'work well' is itself subject to environmental

constraints, such as class size or heterogeneity within the class, and the pedagogic competences that teachers have at their disposal. These constraints may, of course, affect any educational innovation, but this seems often to be forgotten by policy makers. The general idea behind an innovation in approach to classroom teaching such as exploratory talk may be clear to teachers, and, they may even have had some training in procedures for setting it up in the classroom. However, if they are not systematically helped to master the skills needed to set the scene, give instructions clearly, provide scaffolding and maintain order, or if suitable learning resources are not available, their success will be limited and there will be a temptation to revert to relying most of the time on the 'tried and tested' IRF formula referred to earlier in the chapter.

We will return to several of the issues raised in this chapter in our discussion of teacher education and professional development in Part 2. Meanwhile our focus in the second chapter moves from the role of language in learning and teaching across the curriculum to the teaching and learning of second and foreign languages. We will consider how foreign and second language teaching has evolved over recent decades, the place it has in educational curricula, and the links or potential links between the learning of other languages and the development of transversal language and intercultural competences.

Questions for reflection and discussion

(1) In your experience of education (all subjects) how important for your own learning were the ways in which your teachers used language and encouraged students to use it in their classrooms?
(2) In the school environments in your country, how feasible and useful would it be to implement the Bullock Report recommendation that every school should have a suitably qualified teacher with responsibility for advising and supporting all colleagues in language and literacy?
(3) In your opinion, how relevant for teachers is the concept of multiliteracies, and how important is experience and awareness of it for their students' educational careers?