Oral story telling as multi-dimensional language learning

We are hard-wired for story: as the oldest form of education oral storytelling has been used from time immemorial and from culture to culture as "a way of passing down…beliefs, traditions, and history to future generations" (Hamilton & Weiss, 1990; p.1). To these ends oral storytelling is connected to modes of understanding that have been recognized by theorists to be intrinsic to the way we think – we are literally hard wired for story (Bruner, 1990; Egan, 1989).

Despite this innate predisposition, in the contemporary classroom oral storytelling is not strongly utilised. The presence of complex and interdependent 'literacy events' (Street, 1988) that incorporate all forms of language are significantly less ubiquitous in the instructional environment of the classroom than they are in everyday life. Generally it is an autonomous model of literacy that underpins school curricula, pedagogy and assessment (Larson, 2006). Such narrowly defined conceptions of literacy in the classroom can be "closely aligned with a deficit model [that results] in curricular and academic disadvantage" (Larson, 2006; p.320) due to an emphasis upon decontextualized drill and practice in alphabetic decoding skills and standardized assessment procedures. This emphasis puts children from backgrounds that are less saturated in the cultural capital that literacy affords (Lambirth, 2006) at a disadvantage in the classroom.

This autonomous model contrasts with conceptions of language and literacy as multi-dimensional artefacts incorporating social, cultural, and integrated aspects that cumulatively create an "expansion of the boundaries of what counts as literacy and literate competency" (Cervetti *et al.*, 2006; p.379). Research has demonstrated that literacy acquisition is strongly dependent upon participation in authentic learning experiences within each child's

community (Heath, 1983; Ochs, 1988). Similarly, processes of identity formation – both in terms of a developing sense of self and socialization into school-based discourses – are strongly tied up with the 'vernacular languages' (Gee, 2004) and abilities that children bring from home.

Such multi-dimensional conceptions of literacy are clearly beneficial to the lives and learning of children in school. However, understanding how we can foster such an approach when all the evidence suggests that in contemporary classrooms our hands are tied by standardized policy and practice, is less than straightforward. This is particularly the case in relation to Speaking and Listening (S&L) practice in school that has generally been delegated a back seat in the literacy classroom, apart of course from the brief sojourn into the raised status of S&L represented by the work of the National Oracy Project from 1987-1993 (Johnson, 1995). Frequently what is seen in terms of S&L can be best understood as literacy-based instrumentality where there is a strong tendency to seek written outcomes from the spoken word.

Oral storytelling as multi-dimensional language learning

The basis of this exploration into literacy-based instrumentality comes from a PhD study examining the use of oral storytelling in school. A Creative Partnerships intervention, designed to teach children to orally tell traditional stories was observed over a full half term in a primary school in the North West of England, and interviews were conducted with oral storytellers, creative agents and class teachers, to get a sense of the pedagogic use of oral storytelling in school.

So what exactly does it mean to 'orally tell' a story? The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has provided a definition of oral storytelling as "relating a tale to one or more listeners through voice and gesture" (1992; online). This apparently simple definition takes into account the inherently social nature of storytelling that requires a listening audience to fulfil its definitional requirements. It also tacitly invokes the oral nature of storytelling whereby the tale is 'related' and not 'read', and the emphasis upon 'voice and gesture' implicitly denies the use of a script.

Such a simple definition belies the complexity of oral storytelling, and to get a grasp of the type of oral storytelling that is being talked about here, a considerably fuller definition is required. Unfortunately, there are no ready definitions to hand, in the scholarly literature or otherwise. Therefore it becomes important to attempt a definition that captures the complexity of oral storytelling in relation to its social, qualitative and stylistic characteristics:

Upon this basis, oral storytelling can be understood as a spoken word narrative form that involves relating a non-scripted story using the resources of the imagination:

- To an audience of one or more attentive listeners over a sustained period of time, to whom the storyteller is mutually attentive and responsive in terms of their understanding of, and their reception to, the narrative;

- In a manner that is individual and owned in terms of the idiosyncratic stylistic choices of the storyteller; and that is improvised, dynamic and in the moment in terms of the mode of production of the story;

- Through the physical qualities of the spoken word (rhythm, rhyme and repetition, accent, pitch, inflection, tempo), using the vocabulary, syntax and grammar of speech, and also the non-verbal language of the body (glance, gesture, pause and physical expression).

Dominic Kelly, the storyteller that worked with the children in this study, was strongly aligned with the working definition of oral storytelling outlined above. He deliberately avoided the use of writing the story down due to the idea that this would get in the way of the cognitive assimilation of structural aspects of the narrative. Instead, he privileged oral devices, modelling and pedagogic methods designed to familiarise children with the structure and 'world of the story'. Such techniques as 'Bean Bag Telling' where children passed a bean bag and the child it was passed to had to carry on the story from where the last child had left off to allow the story to be practiced from different and randomised points in the narrative; 'Alphabet Telling' where children changed the pitch or tone of their voices whilst reciting the alphabet to add colour and vibrancy to their storytelling through experimenting with vocal expression; 'Blind Telling' where children told their story behind a screen to convey the importance of eye contact and inter-relational aspects; 'Emotion Graphs' where children drew a graph that visually depicted the quality and quantity of the emotions throughout the story; 'Jam Loading' where children paired off and practiced telling the story to each other in a limited amount of time; and 'Story Boards' where children drew pictures of the story in a linear fashion that depicted the most important parts, were just some of the methods David used to scaffold the children's learning so they became familiar with the structure of the story without actually writing the narrative down as a literacy-based exercise. Importantly, the whole class would work on the same story in pre-determined groups to enable levels of support, learning and feedback that would be unavailable if children had chosen different stories to tell.

Instrumentality and the hegemony of literacy

The 'hegemony of literacy' in school through the instrumental use of S&L is a theoretical assertion that is worthy of closer examination. There are a number of potential reasons why this situation exists: Firstly, schools are in the business of teaching children to pick up the tools of literacy and as a result oral work becomes recruited into the enterprise of learning to read and write. In addition, there is wide acceptance by educators, and also by researchers in the fields of literacy (Heath, 1983; Street, 1985; Gee, 1988; Collins & Blot, 2003), that oral and written forms interrelate and spoken language provides children with the building blocks they require to master reading and writing. In the daily life of the classroom oral and written forms naturally merge with little thought about the implications for children's learning and language development.

Secondly, curriculum materials that explicitly link talk to writing pepper the official guidance that informs teaching practice, and engagement with spoken language is more often than not simply a precursor to written outcomes. As suggested by Dominic Kelly "some schools are very fixated on writing, and so speaking and listening work and oral storytelling work is seen very much as a precursor to getting it down on paper."

It has been suggested by Hewitt & Inghilleri (1993) that "it is primarily the instrumental role of talk that has been treated as important while little emphasis has been placed on talking skills as in themselves deserving attention" (p.308). In their observational study of orality in the classroom, Hewitt & Inghilleri (1993) describe "transactional talk" that can be defined as "spoken language where it is predominantly the content that matters; it is information-related or transactional in its functions and characteristically has a definable purpose" (Department of Education and Science 1989; In Hewlitt & Inghilleri, 1993; p.311). The authors suggest

that since the 1970's, S&L practice emphasising transactional talk has increasingly gained a purchase in the curriculum as more conservative, functional and pragmatic approaches to education and learning have become the norm. In contrast, the type of playful and 'expressive orality' that is embodied in non-instrumental initiatives that are concerned with "hearing the voice of the child" (Hewitt & Inghilleri, 1993; p.311) in a social context, have taken a backseat. Hewitt & Inhilleri (1993) suggest that such instrumentality may "rob the oral work of substantial intellectual benefits" (p.316) and that as a result the quality and purpose of S&L in school needs to be given considerably more attention. This situation was described by a study participant whose role as a Creative Agent for the Creative Partnerships organisation delivering interventions such as the oral storytelling intervention in school had allowed her to observe this instrumentality first hand:

"…because a lot of the focus I think is getting kids to write… they do want kids to speak and often to present, but I often think they want to do it as little adults rather than as kids, so I think that there is a waiting on the written word because of this desire to get kids to write."

The idea that there are conflicting models of orality that are embedded in educational programmes and informed by official rhetoric has been taken up by Haworth (2001). Through textual analysis of the NLS, Haworth (2001) suggests that there is cause for concern regarding "the status of talk as a dimension of literacy" (p.13):

"Whilst oracy is firmly established as a partner in the business of literacy, the slippery syntax casts it as something of a sleeping partner. The Introduction defines literacy in close relationship to oracy, yet the conjunctions suggest concession, if not quite subordination."   (Haworth, 2001; p.13)

Haworth goes on to suggest that the National Curriculum (NC) has "been both friend and foe to oracy" (p.14), with the Attainment Targets for English that were set out in the first enunciation of the NC initially securing equal status for S&L. However, subsequent political and ideological battles resulted in successive revisions that "led to a more cautious, homogenised language curriculum" (Haworth, 2001; p.14) with an emphasis upon Standard English and 'correct' usage. As a result there has been a "gradual erosion of the cross-curricular function of oracy in favour of a centralised oracy, controlled by the teacher and related, in complex but subordinate ways, to literacy" (Haworth, 2001; p.13). As suggested by Roland Morris, the Class Teacher who had hosted the oral storytelling intervention in his class:

"…where you'll find [S&L] is in the Literacy Strategy. So maybe people think I only need to do that when I'm doing literacy."

Haworth (2001) goes on to demonstrate how the erosion of S&L in official discourses plays out in the classroom talk of pupils', where learners' accounts of schooling and the activities of reading and writing are "characterised by rules" and " regulated duties" (p.18):

"It was as if the talk curriculum, which had been given status in their classroom for a year, had been silenced by more authoritative discourses. Certainly, the children were themselves pushing talk to the margins, as if in deference to the more senior partnership of reading and writing."   (Haworth, 2001; p.18)

When reading and writing are seen by pupils as 'the more senior partnership' (Haworth, 2001) in relation to orality, the degree to which pupils are likely to engage with oral work on a serious and sustained basis becomes questionable. They are considerably more likely to view oral work as a means to the more serious business of literacy and merely go through the motions of engaging in classroom talk that is required by the 'rules' and 'regulated duties' of schooling.

Here it would seem that the "abiding significance of ideas about, institutions of, and practices involving literacy in modern Western societies" (Collins and Blot, 2003; p.5) that the revisionist perspective of NLS has been unable to account for, comes into play. While "the grander claims" about the superiority of literacy over non-literacy have been "deflated and undermined" (Collins & Blot, 2003; p.5), the abiding significance of reading and writing as "the more senior partnership" (Haworth, 2001; p.18) over spoken language, reinforces the idea that at least within an educational context, the autonomous model is to some extent alive and kicking. This is a contentious issue in more contemporary conceptions of literacy that see oral and written forms – reading, writing, speaking and listening - as "communicative practices, defined in changing relation to each other, according to historically specific institutional developments and cultural concerns" (Collins & Blot, 2003; p. 31). The monoliths of oracy and literacy have been revised in ways that see communicative practices as interrelated and culturally dependent. Just as there are dialogic ways of approaching writing tasks in school (Beattie, 2007), oral forms can be tethered to the written word in constructive and educationally useful ways (Safford, O'Sullivan & Barrs, 2004). In addition, in a contemporary context technology has afforded us the ability to become more and more spontaneous and 'ephemeral' in our instant messaging capabilities. However, to what extent

this compares with the spontaneity and ephemerality characteristic of the 'moment of speech' is something that requires some serious consideration.

Thirdly and lastly, both the hegemony of literacy and instrumental ways of working with S&L in school, are strongly reinforced by the fact that the linking of oral language to literacy is largely not explored or problematized in the literature. Much of the research in the field of S&L is geared towards the idea that there is disproportionate emphasis upon reading and writing in school, and correspondingly not enough engagement with spoken language in genuine and meaningful contexts (Hewitt & Inghilleri, 1993; Haworth, 2001; Carter, 2002; Alexander 2008, 2012a, 2012b). Similarly, there is general consensus that traditional teaching methods that emphasise patterns of Initiation, Response and Evaluation (IRE) with a tendency towards closed questioning, has the effect of relegating pupils' S&L skills to "limited and passive purposes" (Westgate & Hughes, 1997; p.125):

"The contribution of their talk, in all its potential diversity, is being prescriptively over-simplified, as well as caught up in misplaced anxieties about Standard English."

(Westgate & Hughes, 1997; p.126)

Such perspectives centre upon the idea that traditional forms of teaching stifle more exploratory and dialogic types of talk that extend children's thinking, affecting learning and development in deleterious ways (Mercer, 1995; Wegerif & Mercer, 1997; Mercer et al, 1999; Alexander 2001, 2008). The legitimate nature of such concerns is clear, but at the same time they focus soley on the differential status of spoken language in school.

In contrast, there are few studies that explicitly examine the interrelationships between spoken and written language on a functional basis: enquiry into the specific effects of engaging with orality as a precursor to literacy development is lacking. This creates a situation whereby the linking of oral language to literacy-based outcomes is overlooked and therefore accepted as being natural and largely unproblematic. Following on from this line of thought is the logical supposition that as long as orality is of equal status to literacy in the curriculum it matters not whether educational activity in S&L has a written outcome attached to it or not. But is there not the possibility that attaching literacy-based outcomes to oral work alters the very nature and the qualitative experience of the oral event?

The subtlety of this differentiation is worth restating for clarity: while the subordinate status of orality in school is widely accepted and criticized in the literature, there is no research that specifically addresses the effects of literacy-based instrumentality in relation to spoken language. Research has tended to focus upon qualitative differences between oral and written forms, for example research that has examined differential effects of oral story retelling as compared to story-reading (Myers, 1990; Ellis, 1997; Aina, 1999; Malo & Bullard, 2000; Isbell et al., 2004; Gallets, 2005). The impact of literacy-based instrumentality upon pupils' learning and development, upon teachers' pedagogic understanding and orientation, and upon the quality of spoken language practice has not been explored in any kind of systematic fashion. It is pertinent to suggest that that there may be subtle but observable effects when practice in S&L takes the form of educational activity geared towards oral outcomes as an end point as opposed to being largely a vehicle for the acquisition and enhancement of literacy.

Oral storytelling as non-instrumental language learning:

As already suggested, within the pedagogic context it is the frequent and unproblematic linking of spoken language to writing in process or outcome that is central to this notion of instrumentality. In many cases such linkage is a desired outcome of spoken language practice in school so that S&L can be understood as a tool that is used to get children writing: S&L is used in an instrumental way by which more important targets in reading and writing can be met. So, for example, when children are asked to write a story that they are then asked to retell, this cannot be understood in terms of non-instrumental practice in S&L. Contrastingly, the oral retelling of pre-existing stories, first modelled by a more competent adult before being retold by children, *can* be understood as non-instrumental practice in S&L. Here, the importance of minimising attempts to reproduce narrative in writing when learning the story is key. Instead, pedagogic devices that are embedded in oral practice are essential for children to scaffold their learning in a manner that bolsters the oral process.

The distinction that I have made between non-instrumental and instrumental practice in S&L is not intended to ascribe superiority to one form over another. Memorization of a script or recitation of a poem, are spoken word forms anchored to literacy that have value in their own right. Rather the aim of making such distinctions is to provide a language with which I can talk in more precise terms about qualitatively and experientially different levels of engagement with orality in school.

Oral Storytelling as Dialogic Talk

Clearly there is an urgent need for orality to be reinstated and repositioned in school as "more than a subset of communication skills exercised by the resourceful teacher" (Haworth, 2001;

p.22). Drawing on a Bakhtinian commentary on dialogical and monologic talk, Haworth (2001) outlines how this reinstatement may begin to proceed:

> *"By way of elaboration on the theme of monologic/dialogic talk, Bakhtin suggests a comparison with two basic pedagogic modes, aligning monologic talk with 'reciting by heart' and dialogic talk with the process of 'retelling in one's own words' (Holquist, 1981, p.341). Whilst both have a place in any classroom, it seems clear that the second agenda needs to be urgently rearticulated if we are to avoid carrying a reductionist model of oracy into the next millennium."*
>
> (Haworth, 2001; p.22)

The allusion to literacy here is pertinent and illustrative of my argument. Recitation is strongly associated with the written word and memorization of a script – often someone else's. Retelling in one's own words, however, is strongly linked to the oral tradition and the conception of oral storytelling employed in this examination. It includes fundamental elements of ownership and non-instrumentality based in oral production that is fluid, spontaneous and unattached to a written script. It relies heavily on memory and the structure of narrative, over prompt, verbatim reproduction and (crucially) literacy knowledge and skill. As already suggested, it is this aspect that provides children who struggle with literacy important opportunities to develop the spoken language upon which literacy is based, and the narrative ability upon which social identity is dependent (Warin, 2010). Importantly, the process of retelling in one's own words upon which oral storytelling relies is the end-point of oral storytelling – there is no drive to then write down the story for later reproduction. Instead the story is committed to memory to be retold in perhaps a slightly different style, tone or format on another occasion for a different audience. Therefore the argument being forwarded by Haworth (2001) when viewed in the light of oral storytelling is that practice in oral

language that is allowed to remain unattached to literacy would be a valuable addition to the reinstatement of orality in school and across the curriculum.

Playful Talk

The issue at stake here is more considered and retrospective forms of literacy-based creativity over more immediate and playful forms of orally-based creativity. The conception of playfulness in relation to spoken language has been examined by Wegerif (2005) who forwards the idea that "there are educationally valuable ways of talking together that are characterised more by verbal creativity than by explicit reasoning" (p.223). Describing the notion of "playful talk" (Mercer ; 1995), Wegerif (2005) suggests that playful kinds of talk "may well be central to improving the quality of thinking and learning in classrooms" (p.227). Characterised by off-task word play and "poetic resonance between words" (Wegerif, 2005; p.234), images and metaphors, Wegerif (2005) suggests that playful talk is central to the generation of "new links and potential ideas" (p.230). During oral storytelling this kind of creative behaviour is actively encouraged rather than being viewed as a distraction to the task in hand. In the process of working up a story using the varied oral techniques employed by Dominic Kelly – Bean Bag Telling, Jam Loading, Alphabet Telling and Blind Telling - opportunities for playing around with language abound. In addition, the creative use of language that sets one storytelling performance apart from another is contingent upon this kind of playfulness that allows children to take ownership of a story retelling in distinctive and individualized ways.

In contrast the most recent propositions for spoken language in the NC are squarely upon 'polished' and considerably less playful engagement with S&L. Here, the Creative Agent's concern about children being asked to 'present as little adults' is realised, with the NC clearly

promoting a conception of orality that is aligned with the 19th and early 20th Century tradition that emphasises "the aesthetics of oral performance" through "the recitation and the performance of dramatic or poetic texts", as well as "the discursive tradition…emphasizing logic of argument and clarity of expression" (Hewitt & Inghilleri, 1993; p.319). The proclivity towards this orientation within official documentation is evident in the introduction to the NC in relation to the role of spoken language:

"Pupils should develop a capacity to explain their understanding of books and other reading, and to prepare their ideas before they write. They must be assisted in making their thinking clear to themselves as well as to others and teachers should ensure that pupils build secure foundations by using discussion to probe and remedy their misconceptions. Pupils should also be taught to understand and use the conventions for discussion and debate."

(DfE, 2013; p.14)

Here, the linking of oral language to literacy with the standards enhancing drive for written outcomes, and an emphasis upon polished and discursive engagement with spoken language, comes across particularly strongly: instrumentality abounds.

Oral Storytelling as a Living Issue

"Spoken language should be developed in a context of living issues, of critical enquiry into how the world is, not of neutralised pseudo-topics invented solely to give a semblance of content to talk for talk's sake."

(Barnes, 1988; p.52)

Oral storytelling can be understood as providing learners with the non-instrumental and contextualized opportunities for spoken language identified by Barnes (1988). During oral storytelling the aim is reflected in the "living issue" of learning how to tell a story rather than utilising a "neutralised pseudo-topic" (Barnes, 1988; p.52) that has merely been invented to provide children with something, anything, to talk about. In their study of transactional talk in the classroom, Hewitt & Inghilleri (1993) found that there was a consensus amongst pupils that within the context of such artificial oral events "talk was bracketed off from normal intercourse and treated as wholly artificial, with the clear corollary that the identities of the students in interaction and any closeness was not at stake in these performances" (p.313). Oral events in this context were described as being bland with "little personal investment in the topic" (p.312).

In contrast, ownership was central to the pedagogic approach taken by Dominic Kelly where multiple and dialogic perspectives of language came together in a complex interplay of identity and oral reproduction. Pupils were personally invested (Hewitt & Inghilleri, 1993) in the project of retelling a story in their own words, from their own perspective, and with the individuality of their own personal style. In this way "the barrier between owned and school knowledge" (Paechter, 1998; p.174) is effectively crossed through the oral stories that children reproduce in unique and idiosyncratic ways.

Conclusion

The attachment of oral storytelling to written outcomes is particularly visible in oral storytelling because narratives lend themselves so readily to being written down, as well as the fact that the writing of stories is a commonplace activity in the primary classroom: the time-honoured practice of children making up their own stories is generally tied to literacy-

based outcomes. However, while the textual reproduction of an orally told story may seem to represent a benign and useful opportunity for practicing writing skills to a teacher, to an oral storyteller as a performer who is external to the mandated pedagogic constraints of curriculum and school, it is a counterproductive activity that gets in the way of the cognitive assimilation of structural aspects of narrative.

The suggestion here is that the linking of spoken language to written aims and outcomes negatively affects both the process of oral storytelling as well as the quality of S&L practice more generally. In addition, the desire for children to present 'as little adults' in school, is indicative of a more pervasive devaluation of spoken language that results from the linking of spoken to written forms. As noted by Hewitt & Inghilleri (1993), expressive forms of orality that focus "less on the high culture existing outside of the individual student and far more on the 'voice of the child' in a social context" (p.310), have increasingly taken a backseat in education in recent decades. It is likely that the most recent conceptualisation of the NC with its highly instrumental and narrow agenda in spoken language will strongly reinforce this situation, constraining opportunities for spoken language that are playful and in which learners are personally invested. Pupils' tendency to 'push talk to the margins' (Haworth, 2001) as a result of their tacit understanding of the senior status of reading and writing in school, invites the suggestion that if literacy was more frequently removed from the equation, such perceptions may stand half a chance of being reoriented. A rebalancing of the books is required, and a central element of any agenda that desires to reposition oracy in the curriculum needs to also establish the importance of a drive for oral outcomes as an end-point.

This is not to suggest that there is no value in linking oral work to written outcomes, as evidenced by research that has found that boys writing can be productively scaffolded by classroom practice that leads to an oral performance (Safford, O'Sullivan & Barrs, 2004). Here the gratification and dialogic immediacy of the spoken word (Beattie, 2007), was put to use encouraging resistant boys to produce written work that was of a much higher standard than they would have produced without the motivation of a spoken sweetener.

However, there may be a legitimate concern in attaching literacy-based outcomes to oral work in school due to the idea that such instrumental action may alter the very nature and the qualitative experience of the oral event. The danger of casting oracy and literacy in this light is that it opens up old, autonomous conceptions of monolithic and contrasting modalities. However, is it not possible to make a qualitative distinction between oral and written forms, without falling into the trap of viewing these two related modes of communication as binary opposites? Which they very clearly aren't. But they *are* different – why else would boys struggle to write and yet relish in the immediacy and gratification (Beattie, 2007) of the oral task? Why else would standing up and speaking in front of a roomful of people *feel* like a qualitatively different experience to more immediate literacy events such as texting and instant messaging? As suggested by Ben Haggarty, a professional storyteller interviewed as part of this examination, there is a 'rapid run to lexicon' that uniquely characterises the oral form:

"… {oral storytelling} is creating this thing which I believe is right at the heart of speaking, which is this rapid access to the vocabulary, this rapid editing of information, this rapid shaping, this rapid construction which we have, which we do when we speak our language – it's all in there, and you can see the story, and you just tell what's happening. But it's really

working on accelerating that... And the whole joy of the written word – of course, I'm totally literate and admiring of literacy, but it's just different – you can craft your language and you've put all that time into the crafting of the thing you're going to recite, or learn, and repeat."

The pendulum has swung from old and outdated autonomous conceptions of literacy and oracy, to a New Literacies thesis of interrelated, culturally connected and co-dependent communicative forms. However, the suggestion being made here is that a nuanced middle ground that views a continuum of spontaneity from oral to literate forms is perhaps overdue. This is not to suggest that we cast aside the educationally useful and inclusive notions of literacy as multi-dimensional language use that have been forwarded by New Literacy Studies in recent times (Street, 1985; Gee, 1988; Collins & Blot, 2003). But it might also be worthwhile to consider the interrelationship between the spoken and written word on a qualitative and experiential basis so that we can better understand how we can both raise the status of S&L and provide educationally sensitive ways of engaging with the spoken word in school. Safford et al (2004) have suggested that S&L in school is undervalued, and talk *is* ephemeral, which may explain some of the desire to conjoin oral work with literacy, which can be more easily assessed:

"Speaking and Listening has been the Cinderella of the English curriculum. Primary school performance tables show attainment for "English", and individual schools and LEAs may show separate attainment scores for Reading and for Writing, but the third statutory section of the National Curriculum for English is virtually never shown – perhaps because it is teacher assessed. There are no standardized tests of speaking and listening, yet successive governments have viewed teacher assessment as unreliable…In light of the latest QCA (2003)

materials, Speaking, Listening, Learning, there needs to be a robust discussion about how something as ephemeral as talk may be reliably assessed."

The suggestion being made through this examination is that oral work that is allowed to remain unattached to literacy-based outcomes for the purposes of personal growth, cultural transformation and learning (Stierer & Maybin, 1994) should be encouraged in school. In the past this has been achieved through the work of the National Oracy Project (1987-93), when playful and dialogic forms of talk in which pupils were personally invested were, for a short time, afforded a much higher status in the curriculum and standards in S&L briefly rose (Johnson, 1995). It is not beyond our capabilities as educators, educational researchers and curriculum planners to ensure that the lessons of such positive and educationally meaningful curriculum initiatives are not lost. As long as the National Curriculum continues to privilege literacy over orality, all young learners will be subject to narrow and instrumental pedagogic approaches that emphasise functional competence (Stierer & Maybin, 1994) and teach children what to think, and not how.

Furthermore, research is needed to determine whether the quality of spoken language is affected by writing in working up to a spoken event. If children are asked to write down their ideas down before speaking them, their focus may well be upon memorization rather than spoken delivery. It is important to understand whether the attachment of a written outcome affects the way that spoken language practice is engaged with on a pedagogic basis. If a teacher ultimately requires a piece of writing from a S&L activity, a considerably different pedagogic process may unfold in contrast to a situation where the spoken event is the end point. Research into such specificities is essential if we are to fully understand the

implications of literacy-based instrumentality upon the quality of children's spoken language,

as well as their education more generally.