

# Language teachers and subject teachers: where's the common ground?

Rod Bolitho and Richard Rossner

# Key questions

- What is the relationship between language, communication and learning?
  1. What main differences and similarities are there between the diverse kinds of language learning and teachers' use of language across school curricula?
- What are the implications for teacher education and CPD?

## **Group discussion task**

Make notes on the use of language in these contrasting samples of teaching.

What are the main similarities and differences between the two?

**MAIN SIMILARITIES****MAIN DIFFERENCES****TEACHER'S  
AIMS****TEACHER'S  
USE OF  
LANGUAGE****LEARNERS'  
USE OF  
LANGUAGE**

## Observation task

Compare three brief video clips:

- foreign language teaching: Bill - elementary from *Practice of ELT* DVD (Harmer)
- CLIL with Italian primary children : ‘trial and error’ (4.59):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFuCrxRobh0>
- Subject teaching in an English secondary school: revision questions on digestion:  
[http://www.laserlearning.tv/videoMP4/W5071001\\_350k\\_qtp.mp4](http://www.laserlearning.tv/videoMP4/W5071001_350k_qtp.mp4)

## **What purposes does language serve in learning?**

- Communication and inner use of language is essential for acquiring most new skills and knowledge, even where observation and imitation play a key role too
- In this sense language development and cognition go hand in hand – language is essential for basic communication as well as for more advanced thinking skills

# Sociocultural theory of education (Vygotsky)

- Learning precedes development
- Language is the main vehicle (tool) for thought
- **Mediation** is central to learning
- **Social interaction** is the basis of learning and development. Learning is a process of apprenticeship and internalisation in which skills and knowledge are transformed from the social into the cognitive plane.

(cited in Walqui 2006)

# Language, reflection, recoding and learning

- ‘Understanding is inventing’ (Piaget)
- “...Much of growth starts out by our turning around and recoding in new forms...what we have been doing and seeing, then going on to new modes of organisation with the new products that have been formed by these recodings” (Bruner 1966)
- “Talk and writing provide means by which children are able to reflect upon the bases upon which they are interpreting reality, and thereby change them” (Barnes 1976)



# Learning talk (Alexander 2008)

- Narrate
- Explain
- Instruct
- Ask different kinds of questions
- Receive, act and build upon answers
- Analyse and solve problems
- Speculate & imagine
- Explore & evaluate ideas
- Discuss
- Argue, reason & justify
- Negotiate

## CONTINGENTS ABILITIES/ DISPOSITIONS

- Listen
- Be receptive to alternative viewpoints
- Think about what you hear
- Give others time to think

# The responsibility of teachers

- “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)

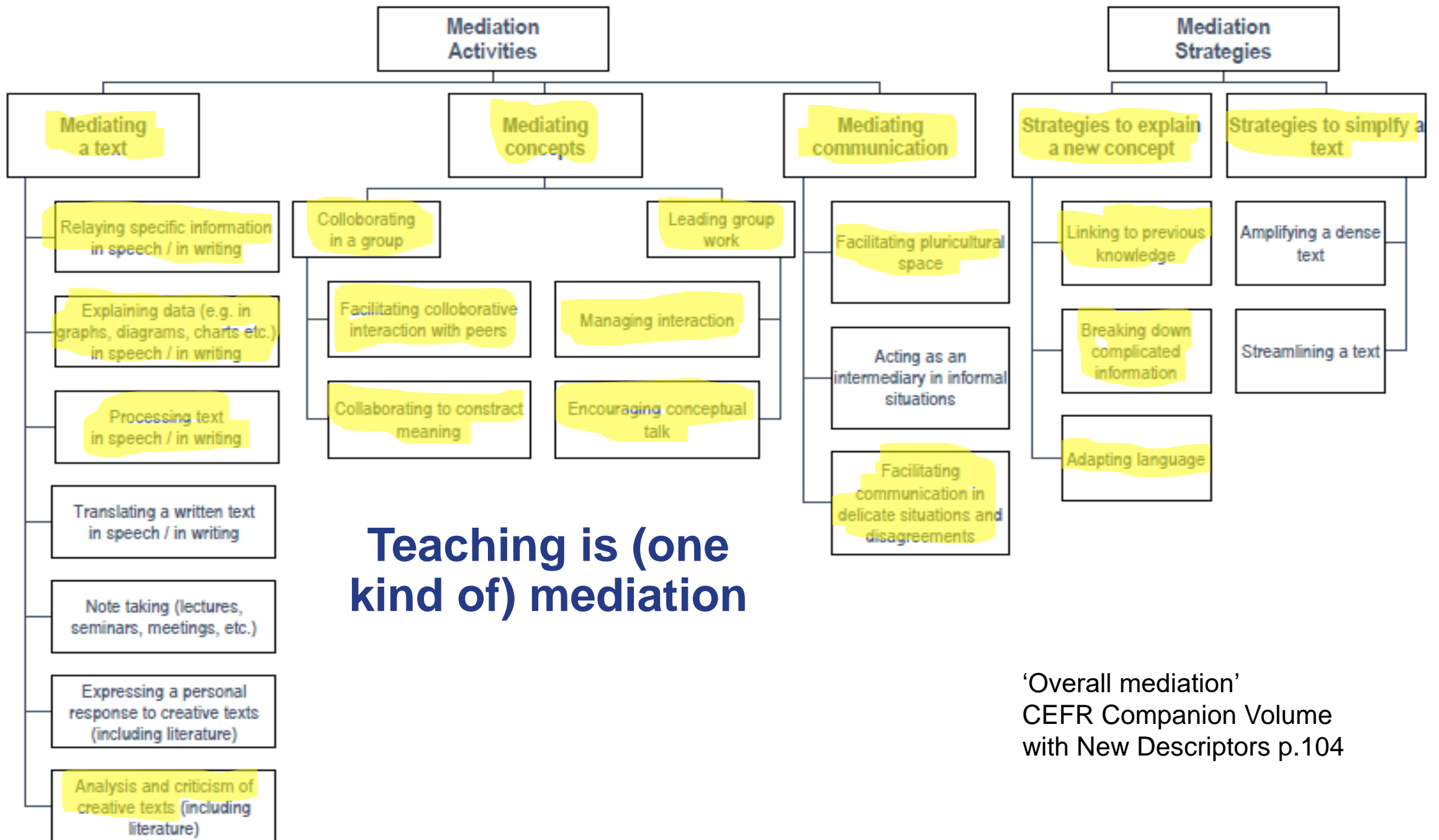
## Teaching talk - how do teachers use communication to support learning?

- Recapitulation, repetition, reformulation, exhortation
- Questioning, elicitation, framing, presenting, explaining, refocusing, providing feedback
- Using body language, images, media, real objects...

### > Scaffolding

Classroom management language:

- Greeting, Instructing, getting attention, reprimanding...



‘Overall mediation’  
 CEFR Companion Volume  
 with New Descriptors p.104

## EXAMPLE: ENCOURAGING CONCEPTUAL TALK

C2	Can effectively lead the development of ideas in a discussion of complex abstract topics, guiding the direction of the talk by targeting questions and encouraging others to elaborate on their reasoning
C1	Can ask a series of open questions that build on different contributions in order to stimulate logical reasoning (e.g. hypothesising, inferring, analysing, justifying, and predicting).
B2	Can encourage members of a group to describe and elaborate on their thinking. Can encourage members of a group to build upon one another's information and ideas to come up with a concept or solution.
B1	Can formulate questions and feedback to encourage people to expand on their thinking and justify or clarify their opinions. Can build on people's ideas and link them into coherent lines of thinking. Can ask people to explain how an idea fits with the main topic under discussion.

From CEFR Companion Volume p.121

# Scaffolding

In early work on scaffolding several elements were identified:

- getting the learner interested in the task and topic
- simplifying or ‘reducing’ the scope of the task
- keeping the learners focused on the task so they are not distracted
- highlighting the most important points or steps
- limiting learners’ frustration, especially when they are having difficulty
- if necessary, demonstrating or modelling what needs to be done so that learners can imitate it. (Woods et al. 1976:98).

Additionally, 'language support' before and during tasks

## **Summarising: what is the core of any teacher's job, whatever the subject?**

- Refer back - engage, orientate, set up, give instructions
  - Stimulate, motivate...
  - Mediate: explain, guide, support, scaffold...
  - Review, assess, give feedback, encourage – point forward...
- > Help students develop their repertoires of knowledge, cognition, subject-related skills, language, life-skills...

# In terms of developing students' language repertoires

Some key principles for language across the curriculum:

- Respect and work with students' existing language repertoires; encourage pluralistic approaches
- Use a range of different styles of teaching talk and questioning
- Work on both literacy and oracy
- Encourage students to experiment with various ways of speaking and writing



## Possible implications for teacher education

- **Teachers in general:**
  - Greater awareness of the various roles communication should play in teaching/mediation
  - More training in the actual use of communication in different ways for different purposes in the classroom or online
  - Training in self-awareness, and classroom-based research
- **Additionally for language teachers:**
  - Clearer understanding of whether/how their work should go beyond the foreign language – e.g. specific purposes, academic skills, general competences etc.
  - More training in how to balance the language and content focus of their teaching for optimal learning

## Some possible implications for Eaquals members

- foreign language teaching and learning should not take place in a self-contained bubble. Language schools may have a more productive and self-sustaining future if they reach out beyond their boundaries into wider educational and employment fields.
- In an increasingly plurilingual Europe, that probably means
  - a. embracing CLIL and providing courses in key curriculum subjects taught in the target language, and
  - b. offering courses for teachers of subjects across the curriculum to help them towards the language proficiency level and language related competences they need to teach through another language.

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## Videos

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- CLIL 'trial and error' from :  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFuCrXRobh0>

# Thank you

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