LANGUAGE AND ART ACTIVITIES AT PRIMARY LEVEL: THE EE DIMENSION

Bill Holderness, Nancy Wame Motlaha and Rob McCallum

The inter-relationships of language and art with environmental education (EE) within the Primary Education Upgrading Programme (PEUP) in Bophuthatswana is described and discussed.

INTRODUCTION

During the past six years, there has been a large-scale Primary Education Upgrading Programme (PEUP) in the schools of Bophuthatswana. After small beginnings in 1980 with seven primary schools, the programme has grown so rapidly that by 1985, over 80% of the 800 primary schools have become involved.

The main aim of the programme has been to improve the quality of primary education throughout the country. Amongst other things, this ambitious project has challenged schools to limit the teacher-pupil ratio in each class to 1:5 (and to reduce that further still), to upgrade teaching materials and methods and to change the attitudes of principals, teachers and inspectors towards child-friendliness and education. (See Box 1.)

Schools have attended in-service courses on a regular basis in order to improve the quality of primary education throughout the country. Amongst other things, this ambitious project has challenged schools to limit the teacher-pupil ratio in each class to 1:5 (and to reduce that further still), to upgrade teaching materials and methods and to change the attitudes of principals, teachers and inspectors towards child-friendliness and education. (See Box 1.)

Box 1

AIMS OF THE PRIMARY EDUCATION UPGRADING PROGRAMME

- to change the menace into a stimulating, rich environment for children;
- to divide children into ability groups in order that each child should be able to learn at his own pace, to become an active learner in the classroom (display, to label) and to engage in experimental appreciation, and conservation of the environment.

Bophuthatswana stretches for some 700 km from east to west, encompassing sparsely populated rural areas such as Ga-Metswabe and Ga-Naledi (north of Kuruman) in the west and densely populated urban areas such as Ga-Maphosane and Ga-Malotlana in the east (town of Pretoria). For this reason the PEUP helps teachers to adapt material to the children's various local environments.

In the higher classes of the primary school a greater variety of activities is practised. The various Bophuthatswana Teacher's Guides produced by the PEUP supply additional facts about the environment for the teachers' information. They also suggest related extension experiences for the classes, such as in Grade 2 visiting a furniture shop, paint store or fabric shop to help children notice different woods, metals, colour and fabrics.

Teachers who attend PEUP in-service courses are shown ways of encouraging children to:

- go through the world with open eyes,
- bring objects to the classroom for display, and to label these objects and put them on the natural history display;
- engage in experiments, appreciation and conservation of the environment.

In the higher classes of the primary school a greater variety of activities is practised. The various Bophuthatswana Teacher's Guides produced by the PEUP supply additional facts about the environment for the teachers' information. They also suggest related extension experiences for the classes, such as in Grade 2 visiting a furniture shop, paint store or fabric shop to help children notice different woods, metals, colour and fabrics.

LANGUAGE AND ART

The answers of the PEUP believe, along with most informed opinion, that language plays a central role in the learning and development of children. The PEUP training programme reflects this emphasis in its 50-minute periods to give each of the languages in junior primary classes each day. They also believe that every teacher, irrespective of the subject the teacher teaches, in fact a teacher of a language, has an important role to play in the language development of the pupils.

Teachers draw on the rich supply of pupils' observations and experiences gained in Environmental Studies and in the Setswana and English Creative Writing lessons. This is one of the ways in which the relationship between language and the environment is made manifest and mutually reinforcing. Children also draw on the environment for their own language activities. As early as Grade 1 they are encouraged to experiment with various media; this includes not only crayons, chalk and paint, but also collage and sticking, and three-dimensional constructions using boxes, cardboards, etc. This further encourages the development of language, for it leads to the critical and comparative manner which accompanies the creative activities and exploration of the media.

DEMONSTRATING THE INTER-RELATIONSHIP

At an EESA workshop held in Bophuthatswana in January 1982, it was decided on the basis of the inter-relationship of language, art and environmental studies at the junior primary level.

The session began with the telling of a traditional Xhosa story to a group of Bophuthatswana pupils. (The story has been translated into English for teachers who might wish to try it out. See Box 2 and also Box 3.) The children were involved in experimenting attentively to the story for they knew that they would be dramatising it in due course. Time was then spent discussing and studying the various sentences mentioned in the story: their appearance, movements, eating habits etc. In some cases it was necessary for children to go outside first in order to find, identify, observe and record information in the various places they made their visits. For example, how this Std. 1 child was able to draw a much more accurate picture and detailed picture of her insect after she had observed it through a simple, inexpensive magnifying glass. (See Figure 1.)

Because the pupils enjoyed the story so much, the teacher decided that they should have an opportunity of bringing the various insects in their insect box. The way in which this was done is described in Box 4. The children also had great fun making costumes, props (properties) and scenery from virtually nothing. While this was happening, pupils were developing not only their artistic creativity and observational powers, but also their communicative language and comprehension skills as well. The talk became so involved in the various insect boxes that the talk became when groups of children were discussing, for example, what named insects looked like and how they moved.

Pupils had to refer to available books on insects in order to find answers to the questions which arose in the course of their insect-making activity.

Once the mists had been completed, the pupils worked together in groups of five to seven for ten minutes planning and rehearsing how they would dramatise sections of the story which had been allocated to them. During this time observers were able to move from group to group listening to their discussions and rehearsals. The children then gathered together to present their dramatisations.

At each performance the teacher gave feedback on the interpretation and communication. Pupils were encouraged progressively to evaluate the dramatisations and to give reasons for their assessments.
value of this type of pupil enquiry, investigation discovery and discussion. Educational linguists and researchers refer to this as the heuristic use of language i.e. everyday exploratory language through which pupils discover, collect data and form new ideas and make new discoveries in.

Research has shown that pupils do not have these opportunities to use exploratory, everyday language because the knowledge has not been shared in their minds. Instead they have had to rely on note-taking of information which has been passed down. The teacher-derived knowledge often remains second-hand, vague and abstract instead of personal, concrete and internalised. So, by using exploratory language to look at environmental aspects, newly discovered book information can be converted into clearly understood personal knowledge.

As teacher, we should remember that pupils benefit by thinking about their own discoveries in everyday, humorous language. Pupils won't remember the details (e.g. all the changes in speech or writing) about their environmental discoveries, but if they have been made to think of them then they can be converted into clearly understood personal knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Just as language and environmental discoveries can be mutually reinforcing, so can artistic observation and environmental knowledge are closely related. By giving pupils the opportunity to look closely at the environment we are likely to increase not only their ability to depict it in art, but also their knowledge about environmental form and behaviour.

As teacher, we should remember that pupils benefit by thinking about their own discoveries in everyday, humorous language. Pupils won't remember the details (e.g. all the changes in speech or writing) about their environmental discoveries, but if they have been made to think of them then they can be converted into clearly understood personal knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Just as language and environmental discoveries can be mutually reinforcing, so can artistic observation and environmental knowledge are closely related. By giving pupils the opportunity to look closely at the environment we are likely to increase not only their ability to depict it in art, but also their knowledge about environmental form and behaviour.

As teacher, we should remember that pupils benefit by thinking about their own discoveries in everyday, humorous language. Pupils won't remember the details (e.g. all the changes in speech or writing) about their environmental discoveries, but if they have been made to think of them then they can be converted into clearly understood personal knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Just as language and environmental discoveries can be mutually reinforcing, so can artistic observation and environmental knowledge are closely related. By giving pupils the opportunity to look closely at the environment we are likely to increase not only their ability to depict it in art, but also their knowledge about environmental form and behaviour.

As teacher, we should remember that pupils benefit by thinking about their own discoveries in everyday, humorous language. Pupils won't remember the details (e.g. all the changes in speech or writing) about their environmental discoveries, but if they have been made to think of them then they can be converted into clearly understood personal knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Just as language and environmental discoveries can be mutually reinforcing, so can artistic observation and environmental knowledge are closely related. By giving pupils the opportunity to look closely at the environment we are likely to increase not only their ability to depict it in art, but also their knowledge about environmental form and behaviour.