

needed. Similarly another four year old was showing the same kind of creativity, this time with concepts, when he wanted the light put on. What he actually said was 'Switch off the dark. I don't like the dark shining.' Children also create words by analogy, or they even invent completely new words which then come into the family vocabulary.

This phenomenon is fundamental to language development. We see it in all children acquiring their mother tongue. We also know it in ourselves as adults when we are



"Possessive pronouns? Um, iPod, yourPod, theirPod?"

using another language. Sometimes, for example, we don't know the word or the grammatical structure for what we want to say. So we find other ways of conveying the meaning. Sometimes we just make up words or even just say words from our mother tongue in a foreign accent. We stretch our tasks and activities resources to the limit. In the process, we may well produce temporarily inexact and sometimes inept

language, but we usually manage to communicate. In doing so we are actually building up our grasp of the language because we are *actively recombining* and *constructing* it for ourselves.

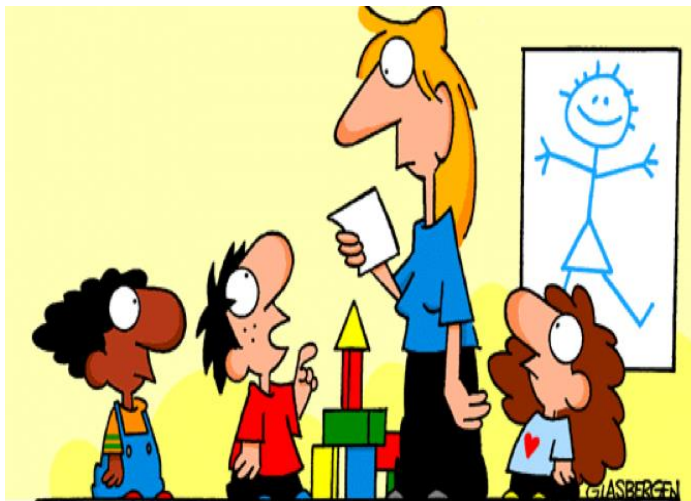
This process would appear to be a very deep-rooted human instinct. It actually occurs in the language classroom even without our help. For example, it occurs naturally when the need to communicate has been temporarily intensified by some activity which generates real interaction or calls on the imagination. In order to make the most of the creative language skill the children bring with them, we therefore have to provide them with occasions when:

1. the urge to communicate makes them find *some* way of expressing themselves;
2. the language demanded by the activity is unpredictable and isn't just asking the children to repeat set phrases, but is encouraging them to

construct language actively for themselves

That is why games are so useful and so important. It is not just because they are fun. It is partly because the fun element creates a desire to communicate and partly because games can create unpredictability.

If we acknowledge the need for unpredictability, it follows that in addition to occasions when the children practise learnt dialogues or other specific language items under close teacher guidance, there will also need to be occasions when we set up an activity and then leave the children to get on with it. This obviously raises questions about mistakes and correction but, as the next chapter shows, there are good reasons why we must allow the children opportunities to make mistakes. In fact, if children are impatient to communicate they probably will make *more* not *fewer* mistakes.



"My name was David, but that sounded old fashioned. So I shortened it to DVD!"

what they were actually supposed to be learning. At times this can be a frustrating experience for the teacher but this capacity too can be turned to our advantage in the language classroom. It is part of the rather complex phenomenon of indirect learning.

Language activities which involve children in guessing what phrase or word someone has thought of are very good examples of this phenomenon in

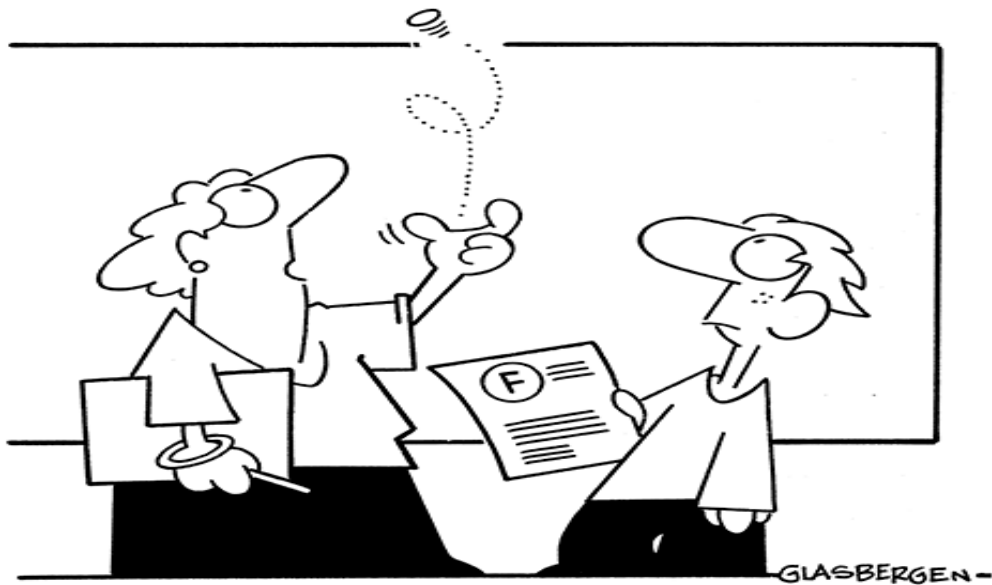
The desire to communicate also ties in with the next capacity that children bring with them to the classroom, namely their aptitude for tasks and activities. This is a form of indirect learning.

3. Children's capacity for indirect learning

Even when teachers are controlling an activity fairly closely, children sometimes seem to notice something out of the corner of their eye and to remember it better than

action. As far as the children are concerned, they are not trying to learn phrases: they are concentrating on trying to guess right. However, by the time they have finished the repeated guessing, they will have confirmed words and structures they only half knew at the beginning. They will have got the phrases firmly into their minds. They will probably even have adjusted their pronunciation. Guessing is actually a very powerful way of learning phrases and structures, but it is *indirect* because the mind is engaged with the task and is not focusing on the language. The process relates very closely to the way we develop our mother tongue. We do not

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rough tasks and activ

“Heads, you failed to learn. Tails, I failed to teach.”

consciously set out to learn it. We *acquire* it through continuous exposure and use.

Both conscious direct learning and subconscious indirect learning, or 'acquisition', are going to help someone internalise a new language.

Unconscious indirect learning, or acquisition, encourages spontaneous and therefore more fluent use. Ideally we want both accuracy and fluency to