Teaching practices for developing oral language skills in Catalan schools

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Abstract: This paper describes teachers’ practices and their perceptions regarding the teaching and learning of oral language in Catalan schools. We used the Assessment Scale for Oral Language Teaching in School Settings (EVALOE) instrument, created and validated with the aim of assessing teachers’ practices for promoting the development of language skills (speaking and listening) in their classrooms, as well as their own perceptions of their classroom practices through an interview. Research participants are 111 teachers and their student’s groups from 36 schools around Catalonia. The study shows that the teachers themselves direct the communication in the classroom, that they often fail to clearly state the content of the oral language being studied, and that they do not systematically assess the learning outcomes of this content. In addition, they use few of the teaching strategies that have proved most useful in language learning. This paper stresses that these practices need to be revised so that teachers and students be aware of language teaching and to create environments that promote the development of students’ language skills.

Subjects: Educational Research; Primary/Elementary Education; Teachers & Teacher Education; Classroom Practice; Educational Psychology

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The authors are members of the research group CLOD (for “Comunicació, Llengua Oral and Diversitat” in Catalan), led by Dr. Marta Gràcia, at the Department of Cognition, Development and Educational Psychology (University of Barcelona). The research focuses on the study of communicative and linguistic interactions in family and school contexts taking into account diversity and including oral language, sign language as well as augmentative and alternative communication. In the four projects developed so far, we have been mainly interested in analyzing the methodology and strategies used by teachers to create appropriate communicative situations in the classroom in order to promote their students’ linguistic competence. We have also carried out intervention and counseling projects in school and university contexts to improve the teachers’ strategies and methodology. The EVALOE instrument, one of our main final products, has been developed to evaluate systematically teaching practice and support reflection processes.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Oral language competence is crucial in the construction of knowledge in the classroom. Empirical evidence shows that oral language is a powerful tool for consolidating conceptual knowledge, argumentative strategies, and for stimulating critical thinking. However, to achieve these objectives in the school context, it is necessary to design cross-curricular activities, so that students use oral language to learn in all areas.

This research examines the use of the Assessment Scale for Oral Language Teaching in School Settings (EVALOE) as a tool to help teachers to be more conscious of how they use language, how they teach, and how their students learn the oral language. The EVALOE-based process of self-reflection includes the planning of oral language objectives, class organization, and the strategies used to help students to reflect on, evaluate and improve upon their own conversational and argumentative abilities.
Keywords: assessment; classroom communication; oral language; elementary education; teacher education; teachers' perceptions

1. Introduction
Oral language, as a basic, cross-disciplinary skill, forms part of the curricular content of Catalan schools. Students are required to learn to communicate orally in a range of contexts, especially in the classroom setting. By the time they finish primary school, they are expected to have acquired pragmatic skills in the country's two official languages (Catalan and Spanish), as well as in a third language (English), and to have developed the ability to ask questions, request explanations and information, raise concerns, reason, challenge and reflect on language in various formal and academic situations and with diverse interlocutors (Gràcia et al., 2017). This practice is based on the evidence that placing children in a context where many languages are spoken can have a positive effect on their language abilities (Coelho et al., 2018).

Despite its importance, the acquisition and evaluation of pragmatic and conversational skills in Catalan has only rarely been addressed in recent studies. Most of the research focuses on the acquisition of specific linguistic resources, such as stance (Rosado et al., 2014), complex sentences (Aparici et al., 2016) or language abilities as a result of the Catalan immersion program (Oller & Vila, 2010; Strubell et al., 2012).

Moreover, several authors have stressed the enormous diversity observed between the levels of students' spoken Catalan (Escobar-Urmeneta & Unamuno, 2008; Oller & Vila, 2010). One of the main factors has been migration; while during the twentieth century migrants to Catalonia were almost exclusively monolingual Spanish-speakers, the early twenty-first century saw a wave of migration from around the world (see, for instance, the description by Juarros-Doussà and Lanz (2009) on the impact of migration on the linguistic situation of Catalonia since the mid-1990s). As a result, the number of foreign-born students rose from 24,787 in the academic year 2000/2001 to 155,845 in 2009/2010 (Benedictus-van Den Berg et al., 2013). According to the last survey of the population’s language use (Enquesta d'usos lingüístics de la població, EULP) conducted by the Catalan government’s Directorate General of Language Policy in 2013, Spanish is the initial or first language of 56% of the Catalan population, followed by Catalan with a figure of 31%; 11% per cent of the population have other first languages and only 2% are native Catalan-Spanish bilinguals. More than 300 languages are spoken in Catalonia today, and more than 40 language groups have at least 2,000 speakers (Cornellas et al., 2010).

According to Oller and Vila (2010), the large differences in competence in the school language, Catalan, are due to the fact that most students have contact with Catalan only at school. Since 1983, with the approval of the Law on Linguistic Normalization by the Parliament of Catalonia, Catalan was introduced as the language of teaching in an early total Linguistic Immersion Program, to guarantee competence in both languages for the children of Spanish-speaking families and foster social cohesion through a unified school system, where students are not separated according to their family language. The program was based on the Quebecois model for the preservation of French. However, since the two languages are much more similar than English and French, comprehension was not a major obstacle and much of the teaching was directed to avoid interferences in written and oral production. This model was modified with the new wave of migration in the early twenty-first century due to the presence of speakers of non-Romance languages, resulting in the creation of Catalan language specific programs targeting students issuing from immigration, such as courses where students were taught Catalan as a second language a few hours a week (reception classrooms), while attending regular classes in Catalan as the teaching language during the rest of the time (Areny et al., 2013).

Since these students develop their conversational abilities in Catalan only in the school context, while Spanish tends to be the lingua franca among migrants (Siqués & Vila, 2007), the process of acquisition
is slow and complex (Oller & Vila, 2010). Unlike Catalan-home speakers, learners from foreign-origin families must simultaneously acquire conversational and academic language skills, to use Cummins's terms (Cummins, 1979). Certain aspects of educational discourse such as its abstractness, formality and decontextualization may already be complex for first-language speakers to grasp (McCreedy, 1998) and students from a different language background might not be aware of these aspects.

According to the linguistic interdependence hypothesis, cognitive/academic language proficiency is built on the conversational skills developed in the language of instruction (Cummins, 2003). Hence, Oller and Vila (2010) argue that the linguistic proficiency in written Catalan and Spanish of students from migrant families depends on the opportunities they have to develop conversational skills in those languages in their social context. Therefore, linguistically diverse classrooms require long-term, carefully planned activities to promote oral language and the use of strategies to contribute to its development and learning (Cummins, 2003).

The aim of promoting oral language can only be achieved if students are given the opportunity at school to use it in interactive dialogues (Fettes, 2013; Kathard et al., 2015) and in situations where they feel confident and they can ask for help: where their peers, teachers and other professionals are role models, where strategies are used to aid and promote these conversational and pragmatic abilities and the development of linguistic competence, and where they are encouraged to reflect on the language they hear and use (Hoffman, 2011; Swain & Lapkin, 2013).

The purpose of this study is to explore oral language teaching practices in Catalan schools. The first specific aim is to know how teachers in Catalan schools manage communication during class, the elements of instructional design they apply, and the strategies they use to encourage and develop their students' use of language. We also aim to explore the teachers' perceptions of how they manage classroom communication and design oral language teaching, and what teaching strategies they use to promote and improve the oral competence of their students.

2. Teaching and learning oral language in the classroom
There is a general consensus in the literature regarding the factors that contribute to language learning in the classroom and also promote curricular content learning (Alexander, 2008; Howe et al., 2019; Justice, 2004; Mercer, 2000; Mercer & Littleton, 2007). In the following pages, we review the main features that will be assessed in the study as a whole: physical and social context, communication management, instructional design, and communicative strategies. All of them are considered key factors in Conversational Methodology (Gràcia et al., 2017), the approach upon which the instrument used in the classroom observations is based.

2.1. Physical and social context
Research has shown that the physical arrangement of the classroom (i.e., the distribution of the furniture and the students' and teacher's positions (Justice, 2004; Simonsen et al., 2008) is pivotal to the types of activity carried out, the strategies used by teachers, and the development of students' language skills (Gràcia et al., 2012; Smith & Dickinson, 2002). Some studies argue that large, well-lit spaces in which the desks are arranged in circles so that the students and teacher can all see each other, and in which students can talk to each other and hold authentic conversations about the curricular content, generate a positive impact on academic performance and student learning (Barrett et al., 2017; Kallio, 2018; Parsons et al., 2016). Positioning teachers at the same level as the students has also been highlighted as an effective strategy for encouraging conversation. Different arrangements allow participants to talk to each other more comfortably and naturally, as in a network, and encourage the joint construction of knowledge (Gràcia, Vega et al., 2015; Van Lier, 1996).

2.2. Communication management
Some studies have noted that working on communication rules, especially those that contribute to self-regulated conversation, can foster an increasingly autonomous management of classroom
communication (Johnson, 2015; Ketch, 2005). The development of these skills continues past the age of five, so some authors consider that they should be taught in an age-appropriate manner throughout the entire compulsory schooling period (Evans & Fuller-Rowell, 2013; Shonkoff, 2011). Also, when teachers share conversation management with students and avoid situations in which students take the floor only when called upon to do so, the classroom becomes a place for open dialogue (Reznitskaya, 2012). In an open dialogue situation, the importance of encouraging and scaffolding students to learn to manage conversation has been stressed by educational research, since the joint construction of oral texts provides the context and, at the same time, represents a tool for learning the curricular content (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005; Hamre et al., 2013). For this purpose, researchers highlight the value of agreeing on communication rules—especially rules that help students observe their peers, listen to them, detect the appropriate moment to intervene, regulate their speaking time, and reiterate their own previous statements and those of their peers (Gràcia et al., 2017; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009). This situation, in turn, fosters a desire to speak, offer ideas, share experiences, comment on and reply to peers’ contributions, and provides an incentive to address the challenge as a group (Barnes, 2008; Gràcia et al., 2012; White et al., 2015).

2.3. Instructional design

Other authors have stated that oral language goals, content, activities and evaluation proposals should not only be included in the curriculum of each subject, but should also be clearly explained in class throughout the duration of the course and the school year (Schleppegrell, 2013; Sfard et al., 1998). As Klingelhofer and Schleppegrell (2016) argue, metalanguage is not just linguistic terminology but a semiotic tool for connecting language with meaning through talking about language choices, which raises awareness about how language means what it does. When teachers remind the students of the content and objectives that have been covered so far, they are ensuring that the students are conscious of what they have learned, thereby promoting their metalinguistic awareness.

The active involvement of students in the assessment of their communicative output, including the review of their own interventions and contributions in conversational activities, debates, argumentative discussions or any other activity, is a key aspect that has been explored relatively infrequently in the studies reviewed (Lu & Zhang, 2013). If all of these interventions are carried out using oral language and if the students are given hints and tips to analyse the language used, this will develop their metalinguistic skills. If, in addition, teachers introduce these activities in a way that allows the students to make decisions about them, their engagement will be enhanced, and this will undoubtedly have an impact on learning outcomes (Hyson, 2008; Moore & Schleppegrell, 2004).

The concept of “ground rules” proposed by Mercer (2002) can help to stress the relevance of the instructional design. The ground rules and the instructional design of classroom interaction allow students to participate during the activities expressing their uncertainties or confusions, and to request information and explanations from others who are more knowledgeable.

2.4. Communicative strategies

A body of research has focused on how teachers use strategies to record their students’ statements and interventions at different moments and in different situations. It has stressed how they repeat their students’ statements, correct morphosyntactic aspects and respond to or clarify questions in much the same way as adults interact with small children in a family setting (Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Girolametto et al., 2003; Piasta et al., 2012; Wasik & Hindman, 2011). The results suggest that these strategies encourage the child to imitate the adult model, and thereby develop language (Casey & McWilliam, 2011; Justice, 2004; Justice & Ezell, 1999; Sheen, 2004, 2006). These strategies are fundamental in the early stages of education, and also for students at risk or with disorders and, more generally, for those who have difficulty processing the curriculum or have greater support needs (Gràcia et al., 2012; Justice et al., 2013).

In short, educational studies have shown that the characteristics of the physical and social context, communication management, the instructional design, and communicative strategies are crucial for
promoting the development of students’ communication skills in interaction. However, despite the acknowledged importance of these issues, empirical research in Catalan schools is scarce.

The first aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of EVALOE to assess how teachers in Catalan schools manage communication during class, the elements of instructional design they apply, and the strategies they use to encourage and develop their students’ use of language.

The second aim is to explore the usefulness of the instrument to determine teachers’ perceptions of the way they manage classroom communication, the way they plan oral language teaching, and the teaching strategies they believe they use to promote and improve their students’ language skills.

3. Methods

3.1. Design

This is an observational study, which might also be considered as an example of qualitative research, due to its collaborative approach with participant observation.

The observational design used (Anguera et al., 2011) is a descriptive multiple-case design, without comparison group. This type of multiple-case study is used to describe a phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurs and enables the researcher to explore differences within and across cases, contrasting them on the basis of a theory (Yin, 2003).

3.2. Participants

The general criteria for selecting participants (observers and teachers) were based on purposive or convenience sampling (Stake, 2006), so the sampling of the participants was not probabilistic. Observers and teachers were selected because they were willing, accessible and motivated to participate in the study and to provide information for the purpose of the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). According to Stake (2008), the choice of cases has a theoretical nature; the selection is not based on statistical representativeness, but on the relevance to address the subject under study. Forty-two professionals participated as observers, including one senior researcher, four research assistants from the University of Barcelona and 37 professionals from public education centres around Catalonia (21 speech-language pathologists, 8 educational psychologists and 8 teachers). Ninety percent of the participants were women. All the observers played the same role in the study, carrying out the observations and conducting the interview. The 37 professionals from education centres had at least three years’ experience.

A total of 111 teachers and their respective students were observed. The teachers were employed at 36 schools around Catalonia, 24 of which were public schools (67%) and 12 charter schools (33%); 3 of the schools were day-care centres and preschools (0–5 years of age) and 33 were kindergartens or primary schools (3–12 years of age). All the teachers had at least five years’ teaching experience and were familiar with their pupils. The rationale for establishing the figure of five years of teaching experience is based on educational research that shows that during the first five years most teachers significantly develop their teaching abilities (see, for instance, Ladd & Sorensen, 2015).

All teachers and professionals agreed to participate in the study and signed consent forms before participating.

3.3. Instruments

To analyse the interactions between teachers and students in the classroom, the EVALOE scale (Gràcia, Galván-Bovaira et al., 2015; Gràcia, Vega et al., 2015) was used. This is a validated and reliable tool designed to assess how teachers manage the classroom, propose designs, analyse objectives with the students, use teaching strategies to promote preschool and primary students’
communication skills, and to generate a process of reflection (Mena-Marcos et al., 2011) on their practices with a view to improving them.

The construction of EVALOE was based on a current review of the literature and on the results of our previous studies (del Río & Gracia, 2003; Del Río & Gracia, 1996; Galván-Bovaira & Del Río, 2009; Gracia, 2001; Gracia et al., 2012; Sánchez-Cano, 1993, 2007), which focused on the analysis and improvement of the communicative aspects of interactions among mothers, practitioners/teachers and children. When we embarked on the construction of EVALOE, we conducted a further review using similar key words and selection criteria. This allowed us to identify studies that complemented the empirical evidence-based studies reviewed previously, including studies with a diversity of designs. We also considered policy documents from the departments of education of the Catalan and Spanish governments.

On the basis of this evidence, we then developed the two parts of the tool. The first part is an observation scale, and the second a set of questions for conducting an interview. The items devised for the observation scale were subsequently reviewed to check that they represented the key aspects of our conceptualization of the methodology of spoken language teaching by five team members, who used the scale to observe videotaped classes. After discussion, decisions were taken regarding the adequacy of the items, and the three possible answers of each item. This process was repeated four times until agreement was reached on the wording of the items and the answers. The team also prepared 22 questions to be used in the semi-structured interview and a manual that includes a theoretical framework, a glossary of the most important terminology, a description of the tool, examples of the main concepts and guidelines for its use, correction, and interpretation.

Related to the reliability of the observation scale, qualified educational psychologists and speech and language therapists conducted an inter-rater reliability study for the first version of the observation scale. Eight classroom observations were conducted at one school. Two raters who independently scored the session observed each classroom concurrently. Inter-rater reliability for EVALOE was high, Cohen’s kappa coefficient $\kappa = .87$ (Cervera & Villarroel, 2008). Individual items with low reliability were reviewed to ensure that there were no problems with wording and no items were modified or deleted after the reliability process.

Then the questionnaire was submitted to the assessment of five experts, each with more than 20 years of experience, who judged its ability to evaluate all dimensions we want to measure. The experts were requested to express their views on: (1) specific aspects of the manual; (2) the clarity, suitability, and importance of the items; (3) the type of response (in terms of importance, frequency or other criteria); (4) the length; (5) the usefulness, clarity and length of the questions included in the interview guide. Five research team members reviewed the experts’ comments and suggestions, took notes and suggested changes. Then they met and discussed all the suggestions generated by the experts’ comments until a consensus was reached regarding changes that should be introduced in order to improve the tool. This process was considered as a test of the tools content validity jointly with the theoretical process applied to design and construct the first version from the review of empirical evidence.

The final version of the manual, observation scale items and question guide for the interview were drawn up as a result of the discussion process. Thirty items were retained in the first part (observation tool) and there were no relevant changes in the second part (interview). The first part is an Observation Scale made up of three subscales to assess three aspects of oral language teaching and learning processes in a school setting: Context and communication management (S1), which provides an overall assessment of the organization of the classroom context and communication (physical context and rules); Instructional design (S2), which evaluates these goals with respect to oral language, to see whether this information is incorporated and whether it is made explicit in the programming; and Communicative functions and strategies for oral language
teaching and learning (S3), which evaluates how teachers show the use of oral language resources for certain social purposes (to inform, to ask questions, etc.), as well as the use of diverse educational strategies to promote students’ expression.

The subscales comprise 7, 8 and 15 items respectively, with three possible responses (1, 2 or 3), based on selecting the statement that best describes the situation that is observed and assessed. A score of 3 indicates that the behaviour was desirable: that is, the frequency and quality of teachers’ and/or students’ actions as described in the item were well suited to the situation and activity and promoted oral language development. A score of 2, on the other hand, means that the behaviour was present in some cases, but less frequently and to a lesser degree, and a score of 1 means that it was observed only rarely or not at all. See Table 1 for an example of subscale 2 item.

| Table 1. Example of item 6 in subscale 2 (Instructional Design). The overall score that can be obtained in each item is 3 and the overall score in the scale is 90 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6. The teacher asks the students to self-assess their communicative behaviour during oral language activities in class |
| 1 The teacher does not ask students to self-assess their communicative behaviour |
| 2 The teacher asks students for under-developed and poorly justified self-assessments of their communicative behaviour |
| 3 The teacher asks students for well-developed and justified self-assessments of their communicative behaviour |

To obtain the overall score for the three subscales and the scale, the score for each item in each subscale is added up and then all three scores are added together. The overall score on each subscale is obtained by multiplying the number of items of each subscale per 3. The manual includes a table that breaks these scores down into ranges based on criteria that are also described in the manual.

The second part of EVALOE is an in-depth interview protocol made up of 31 questions grouped into nine areas and distributed through the subscales previously described. The objective of the interview is to obtain more information about the way teachers organize and manage their classes and to identify which aspects are consistent with the results of the observation scale. The manual includes a glossary with definitions and examples of the main concepts and the questions for this second part, as well as guidelines for processing and analysing the in-depth interview necessary for coding and extracting the results.

3.4. Procedure
The data collection procedure was carried out in three phases.

3.4.1. Phase 1. Contact with the schools
The observers taking part in the data collection (except for the researchers) were recruited from schools and education centres around Catalonia. Written and informed consent was required from the teachers and included a document with general information about the study. The observers were then given an envelope containing the EVALOE, and another envelope and an email address for returning all documents at the end of the observation.

3.4.2. Phase 2. The observation sessions and interviews
Before the class sessions, and once they had read the manual, the observers participated in two training sessions over a two-week period. In the first session, which lasted three hours, one of the
researchers described the tool to them and the criteria for its use. In the second session, which lasted four hours, the observers analysed several video-taped sessions jointly with three members of the research team in order to familiarize themselves with the tool. After the training, the observers were given instructions to ensure that all sessions were carried out under the same conditions (O'Sullivan, 2004).

A total of 111 observational sessions were carried out in public and charter preschool and primary school classrooms, at different educational levels and during different types of activity. Only 92 interviews were conducted (with 83% of the teachers), since not all the teachers were available. The sessions lasted approximately 45 minutes. Although the class contents corresponded to different subjects (maths, language, social or experimental sciences, etc.) and activities (group work, conversation, storytelling, etc.), in general, the teachers were engaged in similar oral language practices across the observations. Observers sat at the back of the classroom and did not participate in the activities. The interviews lasted around 30 minutes and were audio recorded by the interviewer.

3.4.3. Phase 3. Calculating the scores obtained for each observation session and coding the interviews
The researchers calculated the scores for each subscale and their totals as they received the envelopes; they added up the scores (1, 2 or 3) for each item, added up all the scores for each subscale, and finally added the three scores together. In addition, the recorded interviews were coded using the interview guidelines just mentioned; depending on the type of question, the codification involved the use of a binary code (0 = yes and 1 = no) or the use of ordinal variables (1 = usually, 2 = systematically, 3 = no, 4 = other and 5 = do not ask/do not answer). In both cases, the researchers introduced data from the 111 observations and the 92 interviews into two data matrices created ad hoc with the SPSS program; later, frequencies and statistics were calculated.

4. Results
In this section, results related to teachers’ practices and their perceptions of their practices are presented. The results for teachers’ practices are based on the scores obtained in the three subscales of the first part of the EVALO and show the characteristics of the specific classes observed, while the results for teachers’ perceptions are linked to the coding of their answers during the interviews and the analysis. In this latter group of results, the reference is not a specific class, but teachers’ perceptions of all their classes in general with a group of students from the beginning of the term, taking into account the differences between classes and activities and the progress of their students over this period.

4.1. Teachers’ practices
Table 2 presents the results of the observation scale.

The relative average scores of the three subscales (%) indicate that the score for S1 is higher than those for S2 and S3. The average score of the items on the scale is 2, which represents an average or acceptable score, according to the manual. In addition, the Cronbach’s Alpha for the 111 items was .921, which represents an excellent correlation between all items across the entire instrument.

In relation to the answers of the items for each of the subscales, we can see that each item has obtained all the three different possible scores, which range from the minimum value (1), the medium value (2) and the maximum value (3). With Chi-square test, some statistically significant differences—which are not counted by chance—are obtained by the “Level: Kindergarten or Primary school” variable in only two items of the first sub-scale: Item1SUB1 “During the work session, the arrangement of the furniture and/or the students is adapted depending on the activity to be carried out” and Item5SUB1 “The teacher responds to the communicative interactions initiated
Table 2. Chi-square values, direct scores (averages) and percentages for each subscale (S1, S2 and S3) and the scale total

| Subscale                                      | Chi-square value | Sig.  | Min. score | Max. score | M    | SD   | (%)  | Total Item average |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------|-------|------------|------------|------|------|------|-------------------|
| **SUB1. Context and communication management** |                  |       |            |            |      |      |      |                   |
| Item 1 SUB1                                  | 11,300           | .004* | 10         | 24         | 17,31| 3,147| 71   | 2,13              |
| Item 2 SUB1                                  | 3,983            | .136  | 1          | 3          | 1,78 | .594 |      |                   |
| Item 3 SUB1                                  | 2,775            | .428  | 1          | 3          | 1,91 | .769 |      |                   |
| Item 4 SUB1                                  | 2,161            | .339  | 1          | 3          | 2,43 | .709 |      |                   |
| Item 5 SUB1                                  | 7,131            | .028* | 1          | 3          | 2,51 | .631 |      |                   |
| Item 6 SUB1                                  | 7,45             | .089  | 1          | 3          | 2,42 | .695 |      |                   |
| Item 7 SUB1                                  | 5,187            | .075  | 1          | 3          | 2,34 | .667 |      |                   |
| Item 8 SUB1                                  | 3,321            | .345  | 1          | 3          | 1,56 | .628 |      |                   |
| **SUB2. Instructional design**                |                  |       | 7          | 21         | 13,14| 2,932| 62   | 1,86              |
| Item 1 SUB2                                  | .836             | .658  | 1          | 3          | 1,47 | .685 |      |                   |
| Item 2 SUB2                                  | 2,141            | .343  | 1          | 3          | 1,69 | .784 |      |                   |
| Item 3 SUB2                                  | 2,587            | .274  | 1          | 3          | 2,50 | .631 |      |                   |
| Item 4 SUB2                                  | .585             | .747  | 1          | 3          | 2,44 | .628 |      |                   |
| Item 5 SUB2                                  | 5,080            | .079  | 1          | 3          | 2,10 | .632 |      |                   |
| Item 6 SUB2                                  | .868             | .833  | 1          | 3          | 1,25 | .579 |      |                   |
| Item 7 SUB2                                  | 1,814            | .404  | 1          | 3          | 1,72 | .753 |      |                   |
| **SUB3. Communicative functions and strategies** |                  |       | 15         | 44         | 29,68| 6,699| 67   |                   |

(Continued)
| Item  | chisquare value | Sig.  | Min. score | Max. score | M    | SD  | (%) | Total Item average |
|-------|-----------------|-------|------------|------------|------|-----|-----|-------------------|
| Item1 | 0.669           | 0.716 | 1          | 3          | 2.00 | 0.763 |     |                   |
| Item2 | 2.299           | 0.317 | 1          | 3          | 2.38 | 0.633 |     |                   |
| Item3 | 1.833           | 0.400 | 1          | 3          | 1.91 | 0.769 |     |                   |
| Item4 | 3.977           | 0.264 | 1          | 3          | 1.86 | 0.769 |     |                   |
| Item5 | 4.978           | 0.083 | 1          | 3          | 1.93 | 0.759 |     |                   |
| Item6 | 7.468           | 0.058 | 1          | 3          | 1.73 | 0.713 |     |                   |
| Item7 | 3.353           | 0.187 | 1          | 3          | 1.94 | 0.823 |     |                   |
| Item8 | 0.812           | 0.847 | 1          | 3          | 1.70 | 0.746 |     |                   |
| Item9 | 1.211           | 0.546 | 1          | 3          | 1.99 | 0.837 |     |                   |
| Item10| 1.770           | 0.621 | 1          | 3          | 1.50 | 0.645 |     |                   |
| Item11| 1.222           | 0.543 | 1          | 3          | 2.26 | 0.684 |     |                   |
| Item12| 1.833           | 0.400 | 1          | 3          | 1.74 | 0.628 |     |                   |
| Item13| 0.382           | 0.826 | 1          | 3          | 2.49 | 0.659 |     |                   |
| Item14| 2.964           | 0.227 | 1          | 3          | 1.82 | 0.621 |     |                   |
| Item15| 1.828           | 0.401 | 1          | 3          | 2.47 | 0.672 |     |                   |
| Total |                |       | 37         | 83         | 60.22| 11.494| 67  | 2     |
by the students”. However, no significant differences are obtained for any other item by the “Level” variable or none of the items by the “Observer” or “Class: maths, language, science…” variable.

If we analyse the seven items of subscale 1, we see that the item scored with a higher average score is item5SUB1, “The teacher responds to communicative interactions initiated by students”, while the score with a lower average score is item8SUB1, “During class conversation, discussion and/or debate activities, teacher and students sit in a circle”. In relation to the eight items of the subscale2, the highest rated item is item3SUB2, “The teacher proposes activities that allow to work objectives in oral language”, while the lowest is item6SUB2, “The teacher asks for self-assessments of the students’ communicative behaviour during oral language activities in the classroom”. In fact, item6SUB2 is the item with the lowest average of all items on the scale for the analysed sample (X = 1.25). Finally, and related to fifteen items of the subscale3, the best valued item by the 111 teachers was item13sub3, “The teacher tries to clarify, the unintelligible statements of the students”, while the worst scored was item10SUB3, “Students synthesize and/or draw conclusions”. So, “item8SUB1”, “item6SUB2” and “item10SUB3” seem items in which, hardly, the teachers could score with medium (2) or maximum (3) score and, consequently, they are items that require specific and additional work to be done if teachers are to achieve them.

4.2. Teachers’ perceptions of their practices
The responses to the interview questions related to Context and communication management are shown first. See Figure 1 for the results concerning the position of students.

With respect to the conversation rules, 59% of the teachers reported that they systematically explain the conversation rules in the classroom, 39% responded that they do not explain the rules systematically and 2% stated that they do not explain them at all. See Figure 2 regarding the types of rules taught by teachers who systematically explain the conversation rules.

Thirty-seven per cent of teachers reported that they regularly manage communication in the classroom.

Regarding Instructional design, and specifically the Inclusion of OL objectives and content in the program, the data showed that 45% of the teachers normally do not explain the OL objectives and content; of those who explain them, 34% only do so superficially and 21% do so explicitly. The characteristics of the OL objectives are shown in Figure 3.

The answers relating to Assessment show that 84% of the teachers evaluate aspects related to OL while 16% admitted that they do not take OL into account in their assessments. Among the
former group, 64% of the teachers that evaluate OL stated that they assess OL in a general, informal manner and only 36% do so in a specific manner. With respect to the timing of OL assessments, 67% do their assessment at the end of the trimester and only 33% at the end of each activity in the classroom.

In terms of the frequency of use of the other assessment types, for instance, self-assessment (i.e., the teacher asks the learners to evaluate their communicative behaviour) and peer assessment (i.e., the teacher asks the learners to evaluate the communicative behaviour of their peers), the responses indicated that 28% of the teachers ask students to carry out self-assessment or peer assessment, 57% do not ask and 15% have sometimes asked them to do so through an innovative activity. Sixty per cent of the teachers who stated that they consider OL assessment also said that it is done through subjects linked to language, while the remainder assess OL in other areas where OL plays an important role (science classes, assemblies, tutorials, ethics classes, etc.).

Finally, 69% of the teachers reported that they work on communicative functions in the classroom. Regarding the way in which these functions are addressed, 59% said that they are taught systematically by taking advantage of informal, natural situations and only 10% indicated that they are taught through programs of systematic, structured activities explicitly designed for that purpose. Thirty-one percent of teachers stated that they do not teach their students these functions or that they do so only occasionally and not in a particularly systematic way. There was also a wide range of responses with respect to the assessment of students’ learning of the functions: half of the teachers stated that students’ learning of these functions is assessed, while the other half indicated that it is not.
With respect to the assessment methods, 87% stated that they conduct assessments through natural observation of the students in daily classroom activities, and the other 13% through the creation of specific situations or activities to assess learning. In general, this suggests that they do not plan specific activities or instruments to assess OL, but, according to their answers, try to retain information during the classes related with the OL competences of the students. It is not clear, in general, whether they take notes or reflect about this information. In other words, teachers use ongoing formative assessment via direct observation during class that allow them to adjust instruction. Finally, 93% of the responses indicated that the assessment is done only at the end of the trimester and just 7% reported that the assessment is done at the end of each activity in the classroom.

With respect to teaching strategies, 63% of the teachers stated that they regularly use strategies that promote the development of oral language skills in their students, 36% said that they sometimes use them, and only 1% said that they do not use them.

5. Discussion
This article presents the results of the analysis of classroom observations while teachers and students carried out learning activities, as well as the results regarding teachers’ perception of their own oral language (OL) teaching practices in Catalan schools.

5.1. Who manages the interaction in the classroom?
The overall score obtained in Context and communication management (S1) was 17 (71%), a score in the average range (17–20). This means that, in the observers’ opinion, there is room for improvement in the way teachers manage their classrooms as environments that promote students’ language skills.

We have found that the way work is organized is significantly different in kindergarten and primary school. Semicircle or small group activities are more likely to be used in kindergarten. The more advanced the grade in primary school, the stronger is the tendency to let the pupils work individually. Another significatively different item is the frequency of teachers’ responses to communicative interactions started by pupils. We argue that these data show that kindergarten caretakers are more responsive to children because they are more conscious of the importance of this kind of interaction, as well as of its positive effect on sustaining their attention about the topics they propose. Also, it is easier to do it, since topics are more open, and proposals made by pupils are highly encouraged. On the other hand, starting with the middle and final years of primary school, teachers value more self-regulation and they intervene more to limit discussions to the topics connected with the teaching objectives.

The results of interviews to the teachers regarding their management and assessment of communication seem to be consistent with the findings of the class sessions. Although it is true that in many cases students are seated in circles or small groups (both of which favour conversation and interaction), the rules used put teachers in control of the conversation. These results are in line with other observational studies that stress that teacher talk is twice as prevalent as child talk in kindergarten (Bustamante et al., 2018). This confirms that many elements that are thought to be essential to enable students to develop the skills necessary to participate in and manage conversations are not currently fostered in the classroom observed in this study; students need to be encouraged to consider their peers as fellow participants rather than seeing teachers as the only people responsible for stimulating the interaction (Kathard et al., 2015).

One of the main objectives for teachers is the promotion of ongoing learning. To achieve this, it is crucial to provide students with opportunities to use and practise cognitive strategies. One of the activities which promotes this ability the most is conversation; indeed, successful learning communities encourage students to experiment with their ideas through this means. We believe that classrooms should be places where students think out loud and are asked by teachers to explain why and how they came to their beliefs (Ketch, 2005). Striking a balance between focused,
student-led conversation and time for reflection provides an environment that facilitates students' content comprehension, and, thus, contributes to the acquisition of oral communication skills. Our results for communication management show that the perception of teachers in Catalan schools is that students already have strategies to manage the conversations, because only 37% of respondents reported that they manage the communication themselves.

5.2. Where is the metalinguistic reflection?

The score obtained by the teachers in Instructional design (S2) was 13 (62%), which is considered to be low in the manual (7–13). This suggests that they struggle to ensure that their practices include activities that involve helping students to be aware of language, explaining them the OL objectives they are going to work towards achieving, their existing OL knowledge, and the importance of assessing the OL content covered; these areas are related to metalinguistic skills (Hammond, 2016; Reznitskaya, 2012).

The teachers' responses relating to S2 are also consistent with the findings from the sessions. Most of the content teachers report explaining in class refers to the silence concept. Although some authors consider that knowing how to listen is almost more important than knowing how to speak (Adelmann, 2012), they are referring to active listening. However, when the teachers refer to knowing how to listen or respecting others' speaking time, they often mean being silent and not disturbing other students (Linell, 2009). This is certainly important, but the active role goes far beyond merely not interrupting or staying silent. Listening does not mean disconnecting; students often switch off when teachers speak for a long period of time, interpret questions as interruptions, and fail to allow them to take control of the communication or contribute something that they have omitted (contributions that should be welcomed and not seen as challenges to teachers' authority as the source of knowledge [Malmgren et al., 2005; Ritter & Hancock, 2007]). In other words, our findings suggest that teachers distinguish between silence as an active attitude (or active listening), when they or other students are speaking (and the silent person is looking in the direction of the person speaking) and silence as a passive attitude, close to disconnection from the classroom activities. Clearly, teachers need to help students to reflect on active silence as an indicator of engagement (Majors, 2017) and to be aware of the importance of silence as a rule for managing the interaction in class, and a way to encourage classroom participation (Vassilopoulos & Konstantinidis, 2012). Moreover, silence can be viewed differently depending on the student and teacher cultural background (Hamilton, 2013). Thus, teachers should make explicit to the students both the value of active silence -not interpreted as disengagement- and the value of vocal participation by applying the concept of engagement (Sedláček & Šed’ova, 2020).

Also, with regard to the metalinguistic dimension, the results for assessment deserve attention. Even though the items related to assessment and self-assessment on the observation scale obtained very low scores, in the interviews, 84% of the teachers stated that they assess OL-related aspects; 64% of these do so in a general and informal manner and only 36% said that they do so in a specific manner. The teachers were referring specifically to making the students wait their turn or stay silent, since this is the content (conversation rules) that the teachers were aware of. Teachers will not assess something if they are not aware of teaching it, which explains why 60% of the ones who claimed to assess OL reported that they do so in subjects related to language, while 40% say that they do so in other subjects. This assessment is most likely linked to specific activities which are suggested in the students' language textbooks and involve a fraction of the content that was actually covered or may be covered over the course of the school day (Reznitskaya, 2012). The data suggest that teachers conceptualized oral assessment to some extent as a dynamic process, as a part of certain activities, rather than as a formally structured, codified approach. The data obtained through the EVALOE tool (both parts, scale and interview) show a shortage of oral language self-assessment, as it is shown by the item of the scale that obtained the lowest score for the analyzed sample (X = 1.25), the item6SUB2: “The teacher asks for self-assessments of the students’ communicative behaviour during oral language activities in the classroom". A shortage of oral language assessment and self-assessment on a variety of oral
language skills, other than conversational rules (i.e. remaining silent and turn-taking procedures) may result in students not being aware of skills needed to be developed, as for example, communicative strategies for effective communication, such as giving information in small chunks, speaking clearly and at an appropriated speed, shifting style according to the formality of the situation, repairing the conversation when communication breaks down, negotiating when differences need to be resolved, among other issues (Oliver et al., 2005).

5.3. What strategies do teachers use to encourage students to use language for different purposes?

The average score obtained on Communicative functions and strategies for oral language teaching and learning (53) was 30 (67%), which the manual considers to be average (23–35). This means that teachers use strategies to help students improve their language production, such as expansions, recasts and clarifications (Gràcia, Vega, et al., 2015; Nicholas et al., 2001; Rojas-Drummond et al., 2013; Snow, 1987). It may also indicate that teachers teach their students to use language with different functions and that students use it to provide or ask for information, regulate the activity, and so on.

When asked about assessment, the teachers responded that they assess students’ language use 50% of the time and that, when they do so, they do not assess it systematically, i.e. they conduct informal formative assessment. These results are consistent with the observations made and confirm our findings so far: that asking and responding to questions are practices that are used on a daily basis. However, the question is this: to what degree do teachers stray from the classic classroom formula of “the teacher asks, the student responds, and the teacher assesses the response”, or “the student asks, the teacher answers and the student nods to indicate comprehension”? (Cazden, 1988; Edwards & Mercer, 1994; Mercer, 2010). The perception of the teachers seems to be that assessment is important, because they carry it out frequently, but often they are not sure whether the contents they are assessing include all the relevant aspects of OL development, or whether the tools at their disposal can help them to improve their practice in the light of the results of the assessment. Moreover, peers’ assessments may lead to other benefits. For example, according to Lynett (2019), student-initiated assessments can contribute to an affiliative, collaborative classroom environment, and can invite second assessments that result in a multi-party interaction, that in turn can facilitate learning.

Overall, the results confirm the idea that teachers are less aware of language teaching and learning than to other curricular areas at school. This is because they often apply theories about teaching and learning processes that are far removed from a social interactionist perspective, which stresses the importance of the adult’s role in communication and language development, and which acknowledges the need to create zones of proximal development between the teacher and the student through oral language interaction (Gerakopoulou, 2016; Hammond & Gibbons, 2005; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Evidence of this non-socioconstructivist approach can be found in what Bustamante et al. (2018) show in their analysis of circle time in kindergarten: interactions in classrooms rarely feature multiple-turn, back-and-forth exchanges between peers or child and teacher.

The teachers’ responses concerning the teaching strategies used in class also confirmed the findings from the observed sessions. The strategy used most frequently by teachers was positive reinforcement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Van den Bergh et al., 2013), often referring to tasks that are not exclusively linked to language output. Once again, although expansion (also referred as sentence recast) is one of the strategies that contributes most to language development (Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002; Gracia, Galvan-Bovaia et al., 2015; Rojas-Drummond et al., 2013; Snow, 1987) it is not used as often as expected, as previous research shows. Probably teachers are unaware of its contribution because it is not an explicit strategy (like, for instance, positive feedback or explicit correction) and was not included in their initial training. In a metanalysis study on the efficacy of recast, Cleave et al. (2015) found evidence for it benefits. Indeed, Loewen and Philp (2006, p. 537) argue that this strategy is pedagogically adequate since
“a recast is time-saving, less threatening to student confidence, and less disruptive of the flow of interaction than, for example, elicitation of self-repair”.

6. Conclusions
All-inclusive, our results reflect the profile of a teacher who manages the class but provides few opportunities for students to be language aware, that is, to discuss the conversation rules, to manage conversations themselves, to reflect on their OL knowledge and objectives and to share them with their teacher and peers. These classrooms do not feature frequent and explicit assessment of students’ OL development, whether concerning sentence structure, conversation rules, forms of asking a peer to clarify a procedure, or forms of expressing agreement.

This study provides some support that teacher training as well as in professional development programs in linguistically diverse societies (as in the case of Catalonia) must foster the educators' awareness of their responsibility as far as language development is concerned. More work is needed so that teachers can attain a better understanding of the fact that the quality of the interactions and the active participation of students in conversation management in classrooms are the most effective and direct avenues to improve the outcomes in language development of children whose family language (or languages) are different from the language of instruction.

Moreover, going beyond the studies that describe teachers being underprepared to support children's oral language because of a lack of attention to oral language in teacher education programs and a dearth of resources available to teachers (Malec et al., 2017; Peterson et al., 2016), this paper stresses the importance of developing and implementing instruments such as EVALOE to help them self-reflect on their teaching practices, be language aware and thus to improve them.

EVALOE has revealed its usefulness and user-friendliness, since there are no significant differences in its use despite the diversity of observers (researchers, speech pathologists, educational psychologists, etc.). The items with a lower mean qualification indicate where intervention is necessary. Therefore, it is a useful instrument to find information about the direction to take in future interventions.

Crucially, the process of self-reflection has to include all the factors related to teaching OL such as the planning of objectives, the methods and strategies used to teach them (and to assess them before, during and after the teaching activity), and to self-reflect at the end on the changes that might be introduced. In this regard, OL objectives must include formal aspects (phonetics, grammar, and text constructions), content (vocabulary) and, especially, pragmatics. Conversational strategies, language use with different purposes in different contexts, language awareness, and self-assessment and co-assessment by the students are crucial to allow students to develop real oral language abilities. These are skills that they will need to master in order to cope with new learning proposals, academic language, and real-life activities as they pursue their studies in secondary school and beyond.

Finally, we are aware of some limitations of this study. The number of participants (111 teachers and their students) was adequate considering the exploratory character of the research. However, the findings cannot be generalized since the sample was a convenient one. Future research could study the use of EVALOE in a wider, statistically more significant sample of teachers. It would be interesting to increase the sample including teachers working at different levels in order to conduct some statistical analysis. Also, participants should be recruited among secondary teachers and their students' groups.

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