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Tackling talk : teaching and assessing oral language

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By

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and

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**A project undertaken in collaboration with
ETA, ALEA and AISWA**

**Perth, Western Australia
2005**

Executive Summary

Tackling Talk was a collaborative research project sponsored by several bodies: the English Teachers Association (ETA), the Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA) through Quality Teacher Program funding and the Association of Independent Schools of WA (AISWA). A team of researchers from the Centre for Applied Language and Literacy Research (CALLR), Edith Cowan University, guided teachers from the public and independent sectors through an action research program involving on-line/electronic materials, professional development sessions and personal mentoring. Some 49 teachers from 28 schools from both metropolitan and regional districts of Western Australia were involved in the project.

The purpose of the project was to help teachers recognise and develop the communicative competence of their students, that is, to recognise and develop those skills which enable us to use oral language skilfully to interact in a wide range of situations and with a range of different audiences. The impetus for the research arose from an earlier study by Oliver, Haig and Rochecouste (2003) in this area which reported that teachers are not always confident of their expertise in developing their students' communication, in spite of these skills being fundamental to their students' future success in all working and social environments.

The action research involved four stages: a pre-contact stage (Cycle 1) in which teachers were provided with web based and CD ROM materials to begin their ethnographic study of the oral language used in their local communities. In Cycle 2, teachers presented their findings and the project team provided professional development to help participants set up the class-based element of the research, namely to identify and record the current level of communicative skill among their students. In Cycle 3, the researchers worked again with the teachers, who reported on their students' communicative skills and matched these skills with their future needs as observed in the ethnographic component of the research in Cycle 1. Teachers were then guided in using existing curriculum documentation and materials to map pathways for students to improve their communicative skills. 'Gaps' were also noted where the curriculum resources did not meet their students' needs. In Cycle 4, participants developed classroom interventions to address their students' needs and to assess, either with existing progress maps or new assessment criteria, the success of their students. Teachers were also encouraged to reflect on their newly developed understandings of oral language and communicative competence.

The Tackling Talk project shows that it is possible to move beyond the strong bias which currently exists in language teaching towards reading and text production. Moreover, it demonstrates a way that teachers can move from this focus to considering the importance of day-to-day interactions for developing their students' communicative competence in the broader community, for example, when communicating in shops, libraries, theatres, restaurants, hairdressing salons, sporting events, or other work and service environments. With the experience of involvement in the action research project, teachers became able to recognise the particular aspects of oral language required for successful communication within these environments, for example, requesting services and information, giving directions, lodging complaints, expressing agreement and disagreement, socialising, etc. They became able to observe and assess performance in small group discussions. They became aware of their students' level of metalinguistic awareness in terms of using the appropriate language for the appropriate occasions. They began to notice a lack of certain sorts of formal vocabulary among their students. They found that some students, previously assumed not to be good communicators, had effective leadership skills when working within a group. They became sensitive to observing students' behaviour when faced with expressions of personal feelings, and they were able respond with appropriate learning strategies when their students needed the right language to resolve difficulties.

Upon reflection, several teachers realised that their current practice did not address day-to-day communicative skills at all and as a result they themselves were failing to understand what their students could and could not do with oral language. Moreover, many teachers expressed strong positive sentiments about their new-found understanding of the oral language needs of their students and readily embraced the opportunities it provided for more meaningful activities for many of their students.

This research has investigated the existing communicative practices of the local communities in which students live. This provides teachers with base-line data to help prepare students to meet the communicative demands of their communities. A further outcome of the research is the provision of prototype materials for on-going use by curriculum officers in up-skilling teachers on how Western Australian students actually communicate with each other and on what their specific communicative needs will be once they enter the workforce and participate in their communities.

It is acknowledged by the researchers and authors of this report that changes in the focus in the English Learning Area have occurred during the course of this project. The notion of variation in oral language conventions with regard to purpose, context and

interlocutor has been included in the recent *Curriculum Guides*. The use of dialects, jargon and slang has been recognised as demonstrating power differentials between speakers and their audiences. In addition, there is recognition that the demands of interpersonal communication are complex and that students can be assisted to develop increasingly sophisticated understandings of and control over these. These are positive and useful developments, and are strongly supported by the findings of this research.

On the basis of this research, and taking into account current curriculum developments, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. A broader range of outcomes be expressed in curriculum frameworks

The Curriculum Framework and the Outcomes and Standards Framework/Progress Maps are dictating too narrow a range of oral competency. Some of the particular knowledge, understandings and skills which should be the outcomes of schooling, are only *implicit* in the Outcomes. Despite recent curriculum developments, many oral language needs are still not readily recognised by teachers and so are not addressed in a consistent manner in most classrooms. This includes aspects of oral language related to social interaction and outcomes that represent a broader range of language functions.

2. Speaking and listening be given more attention in teaching programs

Listening and speaking need to be of greater importance in classroom practice as they constitute two of the major strands of the English Learning Area as well as being a vital medium of instruction for all other learning areas. Too often, developing oral language skills is seen only as a means to promote written competency or support other learning rather than as an important end in itself.

3. A broader range of strategies be used to assess student outcomes in oral language

Teachers in this study reported using a narrow range of assessment strategies. This suggests that students may have competencies they are not able to demonstrate in school contexts.

4. Students' needs be the basis of the teaching program in oral language

Teachers need to work from a 'needs' basis and students' needs should be reflected in curriculum documents and support materials.

5. Teachers be provided with professional development

Teachers need more support to understand the complexity of oral language development. They also need to understand the demands of the communicative situations that students face now and will face in the future both in and out of school. This professional development should occur for practising teachers, but also needs to be built into pre-service training.

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Acknowledgements

The Tackling Talk Project

Tackling Talk was a collaborative research project involving teachers in Western Australian government and independent schools and a team of researchers from the Centre for Applied Language and Literacy Research (CALLR), Edith Cowan University. The research was sponsored by several bodies: the English Teachers Association (ETA) and the Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA) through Quality Teacher Program funding and the Association of Independent Schools of WA (AISWA) through its literacy funding. Teachers who volunteered to be involved in the project were guided in investigating the teaching and assessment of oral language based on an understanding of the oral language needs of their students in the broader community. They investigated how language is used in their local area and what language skills their students would need to participate successfully within their communities in their future endeavours. Following this investigation, teachers designed teaching and assessment strategies to meet their students' specific oral language needs and trialed these strategies.

Introduction

Broadly speaking, the research was concerned with oral language, and in particular the development of communicative competence in students. As such it focussed on the English Learning Area, and in particular on listening and speaking. The research was inspired by earlier studies by this team (Haig, Oliver, Rochecouste, 2004; Oliver, Haig & Rochecouste, 2003; 2005) which identified that teachers lacked confidence both in teaching and assessing these strands and that students expressed a lack of confidence in many day-to day communicative tasks.

Communicative Competence

Communicative competence is about the pragmatics of using language in our own cultural settings (e.g., our families, schools and communities). It is about how to use our linguistic and pragmatic resources to communicate effectively and appropriately depending on the context.

Communicative competence is more than just understanding the rules of grammar or the correct pronunciation of words. It is:

- knowing the things that people do with language.
- knowing that certain sorts of speech are used only by elders or important people and not by others.

- knowing how to talk to a person in authority or how to talk to a young child.
- about knowing how to provide the correct response to a greeting or to sense a person's need from a hint or a question.

Previous research by Oliver, Haig & Rochecouste (2003) involved a large scale study of how secondary students are currently taught and assessed on their oral language. In this project, teachers were asked how they handled the teaching and assessment of oral language. Many reported considerable concern over their abilities to do so. As a result, they resorted to assessing formal presentations or debating events, which they frequently acknowledged as inappropriate for many students. However, they felt that in this way they were at least able to conform to the requirements of the curriculum. Others reported that they did use discussion groups in their classes, but did not have the skills to assess students' proficiency in these sessions. Moreover, these discussions were frequently a 'means to an end', that is, they were used to develop ideas for a subsequent piece of writing, rather than as an opportunity to develop communicative competence.

The 2003 study also involved students who were given a range of tasks to stimulate their awareness of their use of oral language. In addition, students took part in focus group discussions about what they perceived as their current and future oral language needs. Many revealed a lack of confidence in having the appropriate language to talk to younger siblings, people in authority, strangers, and to people they did not know or did not like. They also recognised many types of communicative situations that they were likely to find themselves in once leaving school and expressed their lack of confidence in using the language that was likely to be required in these situations.

The above research demonstrated a clear need to improve teachers' recognition of the oral language needs of their students and to provide them with ways to develop and assess these needs as part of the current curriculum. The action research project described in this report was therefore implemented as a step towards improving the teaching and learning of communicative competence in our schools.

To undertake this research a guided action research model was adopted. This model was selected for two reasons. Firstly it provided a way in which teachers could be actively involved in the research. Secondly, because of the reflective practice component of the research, it was believed that it would promote curriculum improvement. In fact, the materials developed by the teachers in this project, and an earlier pilot study (Oliver, Haig, Rochecouste & McFarlane, 2002) have been used to inform a number of curriculum documents. A summary of these is provided later in this report.

Undertaking the research

Members of the English Teachers Association (ETA), Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA) and teachers who were members of the Association of Independent Schools of WA were invited to participate in this project. Participants included teachers who were from public and private, primary and secondary schools in both rural and metropolitan contexts. The schools covered a range of levels of schooling from pre-primary to senior secondary.

The teachers were supported in their research by the university research team who provided individual mentoring and support by way of a professional development program. The teachers worked through four cycles to complete their individual projects. A specially designed website:

(http://members.iinet.net.au/~lingwa/TT/)

and CD ROM[1] also guided them in the design and implementation of the first two cycles of the research project. This website can still be accessed.

The remaining two cycles saw the teachers working with curriculum documents and assessment proforma, linking their research to their pedagogic practices.

Research Design

The research design involved four cycles.

Cycle 1: Investigating oral language in a communicative environment.

Teachers began by investigating the language used in a relevant communicative environment (a communicative environment is any context in which people are communicating) within their local communities. That is, they studied authentic language use in contexts outside the classroom. Teachers were guided by the background information and instructions on the website and/or CD ROM and received assistance from the research team if required. The electronic resources provided information on the linguistic and communicative features of communities of practice. To ensure that the task was manageable, teachers were also directed to examine one very specific feature (e.g., lexical items, questioning, negotiation, etc.). Participating teachers were invited to record

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[1] The earlier pilot study (Oliver, Haig, Rochecouste & McFarlane, 2002) brought to light difficulties with access to a website because of problematic connectability in some schools. This was overcome by providing teachers with the background material for each cycle on a CD ROM.

on audio and/or video tape samples of the speech heard in the communicative environment of their choice for analysis during the next stage of the action research cycle.

The background information described the notion of a communicative environment. Information was provided on how one maps a communicative environment as a set of simple stages. For example,

- observing the way people talk to each other in the environment;
- observing who they talk to;
- observing when and how often they talk to each other;
- recording the words they use;
- noting what they talk about;
- noting the type of language they need;
- noticing how they change their language in different settings.

Next a set of simple steps captured the methodology to be used in observing the communicative environment, for example,

- drawing concept maps to show how people communicate and how often;
- recognising the types of things they use language for;
- noting or recording the situations in which they use language;
- noting the things that they most often talk about;
- noting the things that they most often say.

With this information, participating teachers were invited to choose a communicative environment outside the classroom which is familiar to one or a number of their students or, alternatively, an environment which students will need to become familiar with in the future. They then had to observe and record some of the oral language typically used by people in this environment, to consider what type of interaction their student/s would probably have within that environment now or in the future. Teachers were then provided with some sample communicative environments to stimulate their selection and analysis.

A small selection of these examples is provided below:

<u>Communicating in entertainment venues:</u>

Most of your students will have communicated with staff at an entertainment centre. They would have asked for a ticket, negotiated the choice of food with their friends and bought pop corn etc., before seeing a movie. They may have visited Time Zone and had to report that a pinball machine wasn't working to the manager. They may have been to McDonald's and placed an order with the counter hand.

In this communicative environment, the staff needs to be able to ask customers for information, tell them the prices, relay the information to other staff members, such as kitchen hands. They might have to ask people to repeat themselves because of the noise of the crowd or the kitchen, etc. Sometimes they might have to use polite language even when people are rude to them.

<u>Visiting the hairdresser:</u>

When your students visit the hairdresser they need the language skills to describe what they want done with their hair. They may even need to negotiate a particular style and whether it suits them or not.

In skilled/trade communicative environments like hairdressing, staff probably do not need to use formal speech very often in their day to day work, but they must be able to interact socially using appropriate language with a range of people of different ages. This skill will be fundamental to their success as a hairdresser. This means expressing an interest in customers' lives, speaking with one's employer and with work mates as well as with other professionals in the hairdressing industry. Other communicative environments of this type might be when one of your students wants a surf board made or fixed at a surf shop, or needs to get their bike fixed at the bike shop. People in these businesses need to discuss prospective work with their clients, to explain designs and technical difficulties, and ask questions to check understanding.

Visiting a farm:

If any of your students visit a farm they will hear people negotiating prices for goods, land or labour (employed/subcontracted), etc.

In this communicative environment speakers need to negotiate prices of land, vehicles, wool, wheat, livestock, fencing materials or feed for stock. They need to be able to hire and fire subcontractors, e.g., for shearing or haycarting. They need language to negotiate, organise, explain contractual arrangements, to organise the delivery of fertilizer or the collection of livestock to be taken to the sale yards, etc.

Going to the bank:

Many students will have bank accounts and will have already communicated with bank tellers. They would have needed specific vocabulary to do this, e.g., account, interest, withdrawal, deposit, etc.

In this communicative environment bank staff need to have special communication patterns, they need to ask you your needs, i.e., if you are depositing or withdrawing money, if you want a special account with withdrawal restrictions and special interest rates. They also need to concentrate on correctly carrying out transactions for their customers so sometimes they are silent and you have to wait for them to finish entering data on the computer. Bank tellers are also expected to maintain good relationships with staff by greeting them, etc.

Cultural participation:

Some of your students may contribute to a particular ethnic community, such as being part of an Aboriginal, Vietnamese, Irish, or Greek community. Here appropriate language may be required for interacting within the cultural group and observing respect for community elders.

In this communicative environment speakers need to know how to communicate appropriately within their cultural community (e.g., there may be restrictions on who they can speak to and when, and who owns specific knowledge and who does not). These same protocols have to be understood and observed by people joining the group.

Once teachers had collected their data, they joined the research team for the first professional development day. This involved teachers presenting and discussing their research findings, and issues emerging from these, in small groups. They were also supported in planning Cycle 2 during this session. They then returned to their schools to collect the data for the second cycle.

Cycle 2: Investigating students' current oral language skills

In this cycle, the project team worked with the teachers in a professional development context to undertake two tasks. Firstly, teachers presented their findings from the communicative environments observed in Stage 1. Next they were asked to design a class-based activity to collect data about what their students could already do in relation to a specific area of oral language. Once more there was background information provided on the website and/or CD ROM to support the teachers in undertaking their research.

Assistance was provided in investigating the students' existing skills through a range of suggested class-based research activities:

Some ideas to start with

Just Pick a Box!

	Talking and group membership	Talking and cultural participation	Talking and community involvement	Talking and small business	Talking and government departments	Talking and community services	Talking and farming	Talking and education	Talking and skilled trades
Looking at vocabulary	Project 1	Project 2	Project 3	Project 4	Project 5	Project 6	Project 7	Project 8	Project 9
Looking at language behaviours	Project 10	Project 11	Project 12	Project 13	Project 14	Project 15	Project 16	Project 17	Project 18

[BACK]

Would you like some background information on language before you make your selection?

Each selection provided teachers with a research question, access to relevant background information, and a brief methodology for implementing the activity in the classroom. Each selection drew on the data collected in Cycle 1, for example:

Project 10 - Tackling Talk in Small Groups[2]

What particular language functions are required to communicate successfully within groups?

Do you need some extra information on functions of language, language for learning or social interaction? It would also be useful to understand the pragmatics of oral language.

Research Questions:

1. What language functions are needed when participating in group discussions?
2. Do your students currently have control of these functions?
3. What additional functions do your students still need to be able to communicate successfully in this type of speech environment?

Method:

- Review the range of language functions used in the groups that you have studied (e.g., negotiating, explaining, etc.)
- Note in your DWP your students' current abilities with these language functions.
- Note how you would normally record your assessment of these functions, e.g., would you:
    o note them as anecdotes,
    o record them in a portfolio,
    o conduct a formal test,
    o note them in your DWP, or
    o not normally assess or record them.

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[2] Free clipart was used to enhance the website.

Project 7 - Tackling Talk in Farming

What sort of words do farmers need to use?

Do you need extra information on the <u>types of vocabulary</u> required for this type of communication?

Research Questions:

1. What particular vocabulary do farmers use in their day-to-day speech?
2. Do any of your students already use and understand these words?
3. Are there any other words that students need to move into this communicative environment?

You might also need to review the information on <u>functions of language</u> and <u>social interaction</u>.

Research Method:

- Choose a list of vocabulary that you have observed as frequently used in farming environments.
- Note in your DWP the students' understanding and use of these words.
- Note how you would normally record your assessment of this language feature, e.g., would you:
  - note them as anecdotes,
  - record them in a portfolio,
  - conduct a formal test,
  - note them in your DWP, or
  - not normally assess or record them.

Project 18 - Tackling Talk in the Skilled Trades

What sort of language functions are needed in the skilled trades?

You will need to review the information on <u>functions of language</u>. You will also need to consider <u>language for learning</u> and <u>social interaction</u>.

<u>Research Questions:</u>

1. What language functions are needed when speaking in skilled trade environments?
2. Do your students currently have control of these functions?
3. What additional functions do your students still need to be able to communicate successfully in this type of speech environment?

<u>Method:</u>

- Note the language functions required in the skilled trade that you have observed.
- Note in your DWP your students' current abilities with these language functions.
- Note how you would normally record your assessment of these functions, e.g., would you:
    - note them as anecdotes,
    - record them in a portfolio,
    - conduct a formal test,
    - note them in your DWP, or
    - not normally assess or record them.

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Project 15 - Tackling Talk in Community Services

What language functions help us to communicate successfully with community service providers?

You will need to review the information on <u>functions of language</u>. You will also need to consider <u>language for learning</u> and <u>social interaction</u>. Interactions with service agencies are successful because the conversants follow a set of rules for facilitating communication. These are described in the section on <u>looking at language pragmatically</u>.

<u>Research Questions:</u>

1. What language functions are needed when dealing with community services (e.g., the police, doctors, dentists, etc.)?
2. Do your students currently have control of these functions?
3. What additional functions do your students still need to be able to communicate successfully in this type of speech environment?

<u>Method:</u>

- List the language functions that you have observed in the environment you have studied.
- Note in your DWP your students' current abilities with these language functions.
- Note how you would normally record your assessment of these functions, e.g., would you:
    - note them as anecdotes,
    - record them in a portfolio,
    - conduct a formal test,
    - note them in your DWP, or
    - not normally assess or record them.

The website also included background information to help the teachers undertake their research. This included information on language development and variation:

Development versus Variation

At about 14 or 15 years of age, we see the development of more adult speech due to contacts beyond the home and school. During adolescence language use changes rapidly because of the dense social networks that teenagers form (Chambers, 1995:8). Then, in young adulthood, use of the standard form of language increases for those involved in occupations which are "language sensitive" (Chambers, 1995:159). However, another view is that children as young as four demonstrate social and stylistic variation even before they master the pronunciation and grammar of their language. (Labov 1989:96). This would suggest that variation occurs as part of the development of linguistic competence.

DID YOU KNOW?

Speech is interchangeable, that is, we can repeat anything said by another human being, regardless of gender and this is rare in the animal kingdom.

Some features of speech are characteristic of both language development and non-standard varieties. For example, young children may use alternative forms of the past tense that are also commonly used by mature speakers of non-standard varieties, as in "Meg done it". Teachers may, therefore, interpret the presence of these features in their student's speech in different ways. For example:

- They might see these features as indicating immaturity if the child is young or as indicating poorly developed speech if the child is older (i.e., that it is a developmental problem).
- They might see these features as characteristic of deficient language skills (i.e., as evidence of non-standardness and therefore as a linguistic problem). (Haig, 2001)

The development of language involves the development of speaking, reading and writing. But the development of specific oral language skills impacts on success in reading and writing. Specific oral skills also impact on the ability to deal with the communicative demands of the classroom and the specific requirements of classroom discourse.

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> ## DID YOU KNOW?
>
> Another characteristic of speech is total feedback, that is, we have the ability to monitor what we say and how we say it. This capacity is developmental and we get better at manipulating our language as we mature (although of course there are individual differences!!)

Language and Cognition

Some argue that language is dependent on cognition (i.e., language acquisition occurs as thought processes develop). For example, children start to name objects only after they understand object permanence, and as their cognition develops so too does their ability to use language in complex ways, such as developing the ability to describe.

Others suggest that language and thought are related but independent, because you can think without language, for example, you can think in pictures, musical notes or chords, colours or shapes.

Information on metalinguistic awareness:

What is metalinguistic awareness?

When children have *metalinguistic awareness*, they are able to *think about language* and *talk about it*. This requires them to have a *metalanguage*, or a set of words to refer to the way language is used. *Metalinguistic awareness* also helps us to be aware of how language is used around us and to describe this. It enables us to adjust our own language to fit into a group or to exclude ourselves. It enables us to respond to a particular situation with the correct language and non-verbal behaviour (body language, etc.).

As a child progresses through school, he develops an interest in language and learns how to use language to analyse and understand

language itself. Metalinguistic awareness allows children to deal with the ambiguity present in language and can be seen in their ability to play on words, to ask for meaning, or to imitate someone else's talk.

Metalinguistic awareness enables a speaker to be aware of different audiences and how they affect the use of language, such as:

- a different choice of words (e.g., with teachers and principals);
- a different choice of tone (e.g., with the police or other public figures, with visitors to your home or school);
- a different choice of speed or loudness (e.g., with grandparents or older people).

Metalinguistic awareness enables a speaker to be aware of social situations and how they affect the use of language, such as:

- what happens in assembly - who speaks and who doesn't (e.g., the principal and selected students);
- what happens in class - when to speak and when not to (e.g., when it's your turn, when the teacher or others are not also speaking);
- what happens at home - when to speak and when not to (e.g., when everyone is watching the news, when there are visitors);
- what happens at a grandparent's house - when to speak and when not to (e.g., when others are/are not speaking);
- what happens at the movies - when to speak and when not to (e.g., not during the film).

Metalinguistic awareness requires the speaker to be aware of social conventions and how they affect the use of language, such as:

- the language to thank someone;
- the language to greet someone;
- the language to introduce someone;
- the language to ask for help;
- the language to help someone else;
- the language to be polite.

Metalinguistic awareness requires the speaker to be aware of appropriate language behaviour (body language, eye contact, non-verbal communication), such as the language behaviour to show that you are interested and that you are listening (e.g., looking at the speaker, nodding, or saying "Mmm" and "Yes").

Information on conversation analysis:

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Conversation

The tools of trade for conversation analysis include:

- Turn taking
- Floor
- Adjacency pairs
- Repair
- Preference
- Feedback

<u>Turn taking</u> includes:

i) A *turn-taking constructional component* which defines the types of units a speaker can use in a conversation, [e.g., *hello*, to full sentences). Speakers predict from the type of unit where the turn will end, this called the *transition-relevant point* or the moment when a change of speaker may (but does not have to) take place. This component not only explains how a speaker knows the *floor* is available but also explains why overlaps occur, that is, when the point of possible completion, as predicted, is for some reason delayed.

ii) The *turn-allocation component* specifies how a speaker is chosen. This happens in two ways:

- *Other-selection* – where the current speaker selects who will be next.
- *Self-selection* – where the next speaker selects him/herself and keeps on/starts talking.

<u>Adjacency pairs</u> are sequences of two utterances next to each other produced by two different speakers. e.g., a greeting, or a closing *Goodbye/See you* or *ciao/ciao* or with a question and answer:

A: What's the name of that colour?
B: Blue

<u>Conversational repair</u> occurs when speakers feel the need to 'fix' what they have said:

A: Someone said that he.. she will come
At other times the need for repair may be signalled by another speaker (a *repair initiator*):
A: Well who are you working for?
B: Well I'm working through the Ferado Corporation
A: The who?
B: The Ferado Corporation. It's a holding company
A: Oh!

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Another type of repair used in teaching situations is called <u>feedback,</u> where correction (or recast) takes place and may or may not be taken up:

    Student: We finish reading now
                 Teacher: You have finished reading?
                 Student: Have finished reading.
                 (An example where the correction is taken up).

    Student: We finish reading now
                 Teacher: You have finished reading?
                 Student: Play Bingo now?
                 (An example where the correction is ignored).

Information on listening:

Listening and listening behaviours

Listening skills are closely associated with achieving outcomes in any learning area. They help the student in

- note taking,
- seeking clarification,
- confirming information, and
- negotiating meaning.

In English speaking societies we have particular listening behaviours which we depend on to provide feedback when we speak. For us, a good listener will look at the speaker, will nod and say *Mmm* to indicate that they understand. A good listener will not speak at the same time as the speaker and will not interrupt. In our culture one is expected to 'listen when spoken to'.

In many other cultures these sorts of behaviours are not required, in fact, they may even be inappropriate. For example, in Aboriginal society it is inappropriate to look older people in the face and the sort of feedback which we need is not required. In Aboriginal culture, people are not required to listen when spoken to, it is their choice. There is a lot of ongoing talk and people can tune in or out as they please.

These cultural differences can have a big impact in the classroom where children who have not learnt the listening behaviours of the Anglo-

English speaking world are still expected to demonstrate them.

We can measure listening skills with the following outcomes:

- the student responds to questions, instructions and statements
- the student follows peer discourse in group interactions
- the student obtains general information from spoken texts
- the student obtains specific information from spoken texts
- the student identifies key information in spoken texts
- the student is able to identify the main idea and supporting details in spoken texts
- the student is able to identify different points of view expressed in spoken texts

Information on the use of language for social interaction:

Language for Social Interaction

Language for social interaction requires consideration of:

a) the range of different social contexts of language:
- formal,
- informal,
- familiar,
- unfamiliar,

b) the range of cultural contexts of language:
- local,
- community,
- institutional,

c) the possible interlocutors:
- people who are known,
- people who are unknown,
- children,
- peers,
- teachers,
- adults.

Then we must consider the particular function required of the language:

- give/ask permission; greet; invite; accept/refuse; apologise; express feelings; request - something, someone to do something; request information; respond; negotiate; encourage; express needs; interrupt; give and receive messages/information; and thank.

Finally, we must include the skills to:

- interpret paralinguistic features,
- open and close conversations - face to face, on the telephone,
- manage turn taking,
- manage topic changes,
- use non-verbal listening and speaking behaviours,
- sustain conversations, and
- repair communication breakdown.

All this shows language for social interaction to be highly complex.

Cycle 3: Supporting students' oral language development

The third cycle involved a second professional development day where the research findings were discussed and planning for Cycle 4 was undertaken. In this third cycle, participants had several tasks. They were required to:

- Report on their students' current communicative skills as evident from the implemented classroom strategy;
- Match their students' current skills with their future needs, as exemplified in the observation of the chosen communicative environment;
- Map pathways to address the students' communicative needs using existing curriculum documentation and materials;
- Identify any apparent 'gaps' in the Curriculum Framework documentation, i.e., where curriculum resources do not exist to assist students achieve the communicative skills expected for their prospective involvement in social or work-related communities of practice.

At this point it was evident that a number of student needs were not encapsulated within the Framework that was available at that time. Some of this information was fed back to those responsible for the amendments made to such curriculum documentation.

The teachers were then required to:

- design a teaching and learning program to support the students in achieving the identified outcome.

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Cycle 4: Implementation

In the final cycle, the teachers implemented their teaching and learning plans and assessed the learning outcomes achieved by their students. They then reported these to the research team.

Findings of the research

A total of 49 teachers participated in the project, and a further 21 contributed to the pilot study that preceded it. As a consequence vast amounts of raw data were collected. Presented in this report is simply a summary of the findings. Clearly, this cannot reflect the depth and breadth of the teachers' research activities. Many insightful observations were made and similarly many creative and innovative ways were developed to address oral language needs of students in our schools, but unfortunately practical restraints prevent the publication of every detail. However, as a way to illustrate the flavour of the work undertaken, excerpts from individual teachers' research are shown in the text boxes interspersed throughout this document. In addition, two case studies are presented at the end of this report. These case studies encompass the complete version of the four stages of research undertaken by two teachers.

Cycle 1 Findings

In this cycle, the teachers were asked to focus on a communicative environment in their local community. A communicative environment is any context in which people are communicating. The participants were asked to choose a communicative setting that their students would be involved in, either now or in the future, and then describe one aspect of the language used in that environment.

The teachers recorded conversations between people in a range of communicative environments. These included:

- staff at a public library, a movie theatre, a hairdressing salon, a retail shop, McDonald's, a restaurant, and a family agricultural business;
- supervisors and their staff in a fast food restaurant, and a family agricultural business;
- police and members of the community;
- customers at a hairdressing salon, a shopping centre, in retail outlets, in supermarkets, at a movie theatre, in restaurants, within a family agricultural

business, a public library, a medical practice, a surf shop, a bank, and a hardware shop;

- tele-marketing conversations;
- a babysitter and client;
- buyers and sellers at garage sales;
- family members at a movie theatre, shopping centre, video shop, restaurant, kindergarten, supermarket, barbeque, meal time, or on the telephone;
- adolescents at a movie theatre, barbeque, or on the telephone;
- siblings in private and public contexts;
- children at a movie theatre, a shopping centre, taking part in formal and informal sport and games, at meal time, at a birthday party, in a student committee meeting, doing homework, and playing;
- teachers, student teachers and school-aged students;
- passengers on a train;
- disabled clients and carers in a variety of contexts;
- residents and visitors to the city;
- disputing parties;
- offenders and police about a speeding ticket.

Participants focussed on the function of language or on the vocabulary used, as well as other aspects relating to the discourse (e.g., displays of sociolinguistic competence, topics of conversation, and patterns of interaction). They collected data by audio or video recording and transcribed the conversations or prepared notes about their observations. The types of data the teachers collected are described in the following section together with a small range of examples.

Teachers' findings on the functions of language

The functions that teachers identified have been collated based on the support materials. Under each category subheading are the examples as observed by the teachers:

1. Imparting and Seeking Factual Information

Identifying things

- o products and services available/needed (fast food, shops, hairdresser, hardware, video shop)
- o significant public facilities (library, local community)
- o places (in mapping, giving directions)
- o health and safety issues in the workplace

Reporting about things using description or narrative/giving information

- o directions to a/your house
- o personal details
- o place and relay a food order
- o actions to police

Correcting factual information

- o directions on how to get to a particular place
- o items needing to be purchased
- o within the process of negotiating
- o types and conditions of payment available

Asking for factual information

- o about properties of a good (product) or service
- o related to a commercial transaction
- o related to training information in the fast food industry
- o of a coach regarding the allocation of positions and the strategies to be used in the game or part of the game

Example: Language functions in the library

> Josie, Matthew and Deidre[3] investigated the language used in a library. Some of the conversations they recorded involved imparting and seeking information. In this exchange the library user (U) was requesting assistance from the librarian (L).
>
> U: Do you have a book called ………… Don't worry if it's a problem.
>
> L: (Checking on computer) It's alright, we have other books but I can't

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[3] Pseudonyms have been used through this text.

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find this one. Just take a seat.

U: Thank you.

L: We have 'Sand and Fog'. The State Library might have the other one.

U: Do I just go down there?

L: No, I'll get it sent up.

U: I don't mind reading any of his other books.

L: Shall I reserve it? May I have your card?

U: Either of those would be fine. Thank you so much for your trouble.

---

2. Expressing and finding out intellectual attitudes (agree, disagree, asking permission)

Expressing an opinion

- o   about a movie (e.g., to family members, friends)
- o   about an idea (e.g., to members of a small group, family members, friends, hairdresser to client or apprentice)
- o   about an action (e.g., in a sports game)
- o   about the quality of something (e.g., play in sports game, goods, a service)

Expressing agreement and disagreement

- o   in commercial transactions
- o   about ideas and opinions (e.g., in a business situation, small group – educational context)
- o   about plans (e.g., workers in discussion, small group, students on camp)

Seeking, giving and denying permission to do something

- o   by supervisors and staff in hairdresser, restaurant, fast food outlets, supermarket
- o   by customers/clients and staff providing goods and services
- o   by children with parents and teachers
- o   by students/student leaders/camp managers
- o   in terms of agreement or disagreement
- o   in family contexts
- o   in commercial interactions

- o in peer interactions (formal and informal group contexts)
- o in terms of capability or incapability
- o within service transactions

Negotiating

- o in commercial transactions (e.g., costs, discounts, availability, replacement of faulty goods)
- o in work situations (e.g., availability of staff for appointments, rosters, pay and conditions, sharing work load and/or responsibilities)
- o in family contexts (e.g., preferences for activities, children with parents regarding privileges, with babysitters or others who are supervising them)
- o with friends and peers (e.g., organizing games and activities, working in small groups for specific purposes, in leadership roles)

Example: Language functions at sporting functions

Jess recorded the conversations between five pre-adolescent boys playing cricket in the backyard. B and J were brothers but the other three boys were friends. The brothers formed opposing teams with the other boys and began the game by discussing the rules and the scoring. There were many disagreements between the brothers about the application of the rules they had agreed to and the scores of their teams. This is a sample of the types of interchange that happened frequently during the game.

L hits the ball.
B: "That's four runs."
J: "No it's not, it's out!"
Another heated argument about the score and whether hitting the path is a score or out. B and J argue loudly and interrupt one another. The others remain quiet.

B: "C'mon J, stop arguing."
J: "No, yeah, that score's wrong."
B: "6 off 5. That's pretty good, L."

3. Expressing and finding out emotional attitudes

Inquiring about and expressing pleasure and displeasure, liking and disliking

- o about a movie
- o about a service received or goods purchased
- o about the play in a sport or game
- o about activities planned for groups (e.g., on school camp, group work in class)

Expressing interest or lack of interest

- o in group and meeting contexts
- o with peers (e.g., formally in small group tasks and in informal contexts)

Inquiring about and expressing satisfaction or dissatisfaction

- o with service (criticism, complaint, compliment)
- o with service staff (at a hairdresser, restaurant, fast food outlet)
- o with clients and carers (satisfaction, degree of comfort)
- o with decisions of others (e.g., parents, members of small groups, camp leaders)

Inquiring about and expressing disappointment

- o about a service or goods purchased
- o about a movie seen
- o about activities on camp
- o regarding the suggestions of others in group/family activities

Inquiring about and expressing preference

- o in family contexts
- o in commercial contexts (e.g., shop, hairdresser, fast food outlet)
- o with peers who are both known and unknown
- o between disabled person and carer

Expressing gratitude

- o for assistance

Expressing sympathy/empathy

- o to friends
- o to family members (e.g., grandmother with sore leg)
- o to customers when responding to a complaint

Inquiring about and expressing intention

- o negotiating actions-family members, adolescents and children-while shopping
- o explaining to client (at the hairdresser) what will be done
- o student leaders (in camp situation)

Inquiring about and expressing want or desire

- o in personal contexts (e.g., children to parents in a shopping centre)
- o in commercial contexts (e.g., client to hairdresser about style wanted)

Example: Language in a work situation

Cindy was interested in how one of her secondary school students used language in her after school work situation. This student was a supervisor in a local take-away restaurant. One function of language she used frequently was expressing satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the trainees and other workers' performance.

Supervisor:	Okay, I'll help you do this order if you want.
Trainee:	Yeah, hope I don't stuff it up.
(to customer)	Hi what would you like?
	Would you like a drink?
	So that's just a cheeseburger and small fries?
	Dine in or take-away?
	That's $2.30 thanks.
	Thank you – enjoy your meal.
Supervisor:	Cool, just make sure you count the change out for big notes.

4. Expressing and finding out moral attitudes

Apologising

- o to a customer (assistant)
- o to a supervisor at work
- o to a client (carer)
- o to parents (by kindergarten children)

Forgiving

- o a subordinate at work
- o a family member

Expressing approval or disapproval

- o to customers (in a restaurant, hairdresser, department store, at checkout, staff in fast food drive through window)
- o to supervisors (by staff)
- o to participants at a school camp
- o of boys (by girls at a netball game)

Asking about approval or disapproval

- o of customer in restaurant (by waiter)
- o of client in salon (by hairdresser)
- o of parents (by children)
- o of coaches (by players)

Expressing appreciation

- o customer to service provider (hairdresser, check-out person, shop assistant, waitperson, babysitter)
- o client to carer
- o coach to players
- o parents to children

Expressing regret

- o assistant to customer (when accepting a complaint, when closing a conversation so he/she can attend to the next customer)

Example: Language of apologising

> Peta observed a fifteen year old youth who worked in a family agricultural business. He had done something wrong and broken a piece of equipment. He was apologising to his supervisor and offering to make amends for his mistake.
>
> "[First name of supervisor], sorry do you want me to pay for it? It won't happen again. I'll fix it after hours."

5. Getting things done

Suggesting a course of action

- o supervisor to workers (fast food outlets, supermarket, hairdresser with apprentices)
- o student leaders to participants and to their supervisors
- o giving instructions to a child who must purchase goods at the local deli
- o social activities (e.g., members of a netball team planning activities such as sleep-overs, birthday celebrations, outings to the movies etc.)

Asking others to do something

- o customer to waitperson (ordering a meal in a restaurant)
- o supervisor to workers (fast food outlet, shop, hairdresser)
- o instructions to other players in a game
- o requests from various members within a small group

Inviting others to do something

- o a worker speaking to children at a "McDonald's Birthday Party"
- o members of a small group
- o student leaders (e.g., recruiting students, asking for participants for an activity)
- o when purchasing additional goods (e.g., in fast food outlet, hairdresser)

Advising others to do something

- o when coaching players in a game
- o when styling a client's hair (hairdresser)
- o regarding manners and appropriate behaviour in public (parents)
- o telemarketers promoting their product

Warning others

- o players or coach in a game
- o parents and teachers to children (in shopping centre, in playground)
- o babysitter to children about their behaviour/consequences
- o supervisor to workers (e.g., about meeting responsibilities, being on time etc.)

Asking others not to do something

- o asking someone to stop doing something you do not like
- o when coaching players
- o when playing a game
- o when talking in a small group

Instructing or directing others to do something

- o hairdresser to apprentices
- o members within a small group
- o supervisor to workers
- o student leaders to other students

Offering assistance, goods or service

- o apprentice to hairdresser
- o carer to client
- o student leaders to other students
- o assistant to customer in fast food restaurant or drive-through

Requesting assistance

- o customer/client of shop assistant, hairdresser, waitperson
- o assistant of supervisor when dealing with difficult customer
- o student leader of camp organisers

- o children of babysitter

Example: Types of language

> Hannah and Amy investigated the types of language used in a fast food drive-through facility. They found that the workers who communicated with customers in this setting had scripts to follow. They recorded an example of a conversation which followed this script. It shows how the worker got the customer to follow the procedure for ordering and paying for their food.
>
> "Place your order when you are ready."
>
> *Order placed by customer.*
>
> *Order repeated by attendant.*
>
> "Would you like a drink with that?"
>
> "That will be $4.95."
>
> "Please drive forward when you are able."
>
> *At service window:*
>
> "That will be $4.95, thank you."
>
> *The attendant then takes the money and closes the window.*
>
> When the order is ready the window is opened again, the order is repeated and the food is handed over with a parting comment:
>
> "Enjoy your meal."

6. Socialising

Greeting/welcoming people

- o in commercial contexts e.g., assistants or waitpersons greet customers, supervisors and/or fellow workers at fast food outlet, restaurant, shopping centre, family business, deli, hairdresser, hardware store, supermarket checkout etc.
- o in work contexts and out of work contexts such as the staff's end of year function
- o public contexts e.g., librarian greets library users
- o sports contexts e.g., players greet coaches, coaches greet players and parents
- o formal and informal school contexts for a range of ages - kindergarten to upper secondary (e.g., playground, classroom, meeting) greeting peers, teachers and other adults, both familiar and unfamiliar

Meeting/introducing people

- o staff with each other, supervisors and/or customers in shops, fast food outlets, restaurants, video shops, deli, movie theatre, shopping centre
- o friends and family at sporting events, shopping centres, hairdressers, barbeques
- o friends and family in private homes (family members, guests, service providers)

Leaving taking

- o in private contexts (e.g., family, friends, visitors, service providers such as babysitters)
- o in public contexts (e.g., coach and players, teachers and students, librarians etc.)
- o in commercial settings (e.g., assistants and customers, clients and hairdressers)

Attracting attention

- o in family contexts (e.g., children of parent/s, parent/s of children, siblings of each other or friends, family members of guests or guests of family member)
- o in school contexts (adult to child, child to adult, child to child – developmental differences)
- o in work contexts (e.g., of supervisor in order to obtain assistance with a problem)

Congratulating

- o in sporting contexts (e.g., coach to players, players to each other)
- o in commercial contexts (e.g., supervisors to workers, subordinate to superordinate, workers to each other)
- o in educational contexts (e.g., teachers/camp leaders to children, adolescents or young adults)
- o in personal contexts (e.g., parents to children, siblings or peers to each other)

Example: Language for socialising

Ryan observed a family and their friends socialising at a backyard barbeque. He noticed the range of language the teenagers used and how it changed according to which of the other guests they were speaking to at the time.

Teenagers when speaking to their friend's parents and siblings
> "Hi Mrs. C. I mean Cheryl. Thanks for inviting me."
> "Do you want a hand putting some of this stuff away, Jack?"
> "Thanks for the tea, Mrs. Charles."
> "That was a beautiful steak."

Teenagers speaking to each other out of earshot of adults
> "Shit, your old man is really pissed."
> "Is that your cousin? She is really hot."

It can be seen from the findings presented above, that people are required to perform a range of functions in a multitude of roles and contexts. Moreover, they were observed to do so by the participating teachers. As a result, the following questions were asked of teachers at the first PD day:

> **Question 1: What functions do we tend to focus on in our teaching?**
>
> **Question 2: How well do we prepare students for these future communicative needs?**

Responses to these two questions suggested that our current pedagogic practices (teaching and assessment) regarding the uses of oral language are less than adequate. Although some curriculum changes have been put in place (for examples see the review of changes that appears later in this document), there is clearly a need for teachers to be more skilled in this area.

Teachers' findings on sociolinguistic competence

As part of the project, the teachers not only noted the conversations people had in a range of contexts and the functions they fulfilled in the process, but also how **sociolinguistic competence** was demonstrated in the conversation. That is, from their observations, teachers identified the strategies that people used to assist effective communication.

The teachers observed the following communicative strategies:

- o giving information in small chunks when someone was recording it (e.g., taking orders for take-away food or at a fast food restaurant);
- o repeating instructions or information for clarification (e.g., when giving directions about how to get to a particular house);
- o speaking clearly and at an appropriate speed (e.g., when talking to young children or people from non-English speaking backgrounds);
- o shifting style according to the formality of the situation (e.g., with family and friends at home compared with customers at work), the context and the relative status of those involved in the interaction;
- o listening to others and responding in appropriate ways to continue the conversation;
- o repairing the conversation when communication broke down;
- o negotiating when differences needed to be resolved;
- o seeking clarification through the use of questioning when needed;
- o seeking confirmation through repetition when required;
- o supporting their opinions or points of view with evidence or reasoned arguments;
- o anticipating the information needed in particular situations and providing it as required (e.g., location of nearest cross street to home for delivery of take-away order);
- o understanding and following directions or instructions from supervisors, coaches, teachers or parents in a range of contexts (work, home, school, sport);
- o using facial expressions, body language and gestures to enhance communication;
- o interpreting facial expressions, body language and gestures (e.g., look of displeasure from team member in basketball match);

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- carrying out a range of functions in an integrated way to achieve complex communicative goals;

- selecting the appropriate language to fulfill a diversity of needs;

- exercising tact and sensitivity;

- providing the appropriate amount and type of information (e.g., in responding to request from customer, or from police officer); and,

- organising information in a logical and accessible manner appropriate to the audience, context and purpose.

Example: Sociolinguistic competence

> Jane observed a male Year 7 student from her class in conversation about a WRX car, with peers, a student teacher and herself. She noticed that he changed the content and the structure of his language with these different audiences. With his peers he used current slang terms like 'awesome' and his turns were short with only two to four words each time he spoke. However, his turns were longer when he was speaking with the student teacher and he provided more detailed explanations of the features of the car. He provided even more detail about the car for Jane, giving a range of reasons why the car was so 'great'. With Jane as his conversation partner he used complete clauses and in some cases, several linked clauses in many of his turns. This contrasted sharply with the structure of his speech with his peers. This would seem to demonstrate considerable sociolinguistic competence.

From the teachers' observations it was apparent that to communicate successfully, particularly outside the structure of the classroom environment, it is necessary to employ a complex range of strategies and skills. It was also clear that, although some people had considerable competence, others had not. Further, it would seem that, while some individuals "pick up" these skills and strategies because of their personality or because of their home, school, social and work experiences, it is apparent that others need to be explicitly assisted to develop their sociolinguistic competence. These findings, discussed at the first PD session, led to further discussion related to the following questions:

> **Question 3: Do we work explicitly to develop our students' sociolinguistic competence?**
>
> **Question 4: Do we recognise and reward students who do demonstrate such skills in their oral language?**
>
> **Question 5: What assessment mechanisms are in place to identify need in, and acknowledge development of, sociolinguistic competence?**

Again, in response to these questions, the general consensus was that there is still much to develop in our teaching practices to address these needs. Part of the difficulty is the washback[4] effect of oral language assessment. Because these aspects are implied, rather than stated explicitly, in the Student Outcome Statements and in the Progress Maps (especially after level two), they are often neither assessed nor taught by teachers. This is in spite of the fact that many of the participants in this project recognised their students had real needs in these areas (see Cycles 2, 3 and 4).

Teachers' findings on topics of conversation

Related to both functions and sociolinguistic competence, there is a third area that teachers observed: the types of **topics** discussed in a range of contexts. The teachers noted diversity in the topics of conversations which can be categorised roughly as topics discussed at work, and those discussed on social occasions:

Topics discussed at work:

- o topics related to undertaking work (e.g., how to do particular tasks, what tasks need to be done and who will do them);
- o topics about the work conditions (e.g., health and safety issues, pay and conditions, shifts, work hours and responsibilities, line management issues and procedures);
- o topics about the transactions (e.g., pricing, product information, handling of goods, payment options and procedures, rebates, discounts, incentives, additional products available etc.);

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[4] Washback is the effect that testing has on teaching. In terms of classroom practice, instead of testing/assessing what is (or needs to be) taught, only those things that are, or can be easily be, tested/assessed are taught. That is, teachers teach to the test. This has certainly been the case in oral language, where what has traditionally been assessed is performance speech, and those superficial features that represent this mode (e.g., body language, eye contact), rather than the communicative ability of students.

- o social talk with customer (e.g., Have you got a nice weekend planned?); and,
- o personal and/or social talk among staff.

Topics discussed on social occasions:

- o topics that are discussed at dinner (e.g., the food, seating arrangements, utensils, activities, news both personal and general, TV programs, computer games, reminders about manners, directions to children about what to eat, requests for or offers of more food, beginning and finishing the meal etc.);
- o children speaking to friends (e.g., about themselves, each other, absent friends, family, what is "cool", what they are doing, what will be done next, what is fair or unfair, clothes, what they imagine, things they fear, current popular music, toys, their ideas and plans for future activities, movies, funny incidents, books, their inventions).

Therefore, at the first PD session, teachers reported how people, particularly those of school age, not only display varying degrees of comfort when discussing certain topics but they also display how this is influenced by their familiarity with the topic, interest in it and knowledge about it. This also relates to students' ability to perform particular functions and to demonstrate their sociolinguistic competence depending on the topic being discussed. Given this finding, discussion at both the first and second PD days generated the following questions:

Question 6: Do we work explicitly to develop our students' sociolinguistic competence with regard to particular topics?

Question 7: Do we recognise and reward students who do demonstrate such skills in their oral language?

Question 8: What assessment mechanisms are in place to identify need in, and acknowledge development of, sociolinguistic competence with regard to particular topics?

Question 9: Do we value students' ability to discuss a range of different topics?

Question 10: How well do our current assessment mechanisms take into account the variability that occurs in the display of oral language competence, according to topic?

Once again the participants' discussion highlighted some of the inadequacies in current practices in the oral language area. Some teachers expressed concern about the narrow focus of current school practices and felt that they were neither adequately preparing students for life outside the classroom, nor acknowledging the knowledge and abilities that some students already have. The situation is exacerbated when this expertise in oral language lies outside the oral language skills that are currently being assessed and taught.

Teachers' findings on patterns of interaction

A fourth area of observation targeted was the **patterns of interaction** that occurred in a range of oral language contexts. These patterns appeared to be affected by the speakers' individual characteristics (e.g., personality, age, background), and their sociolinguistic competence, the purpose or function of the exchange and the topic being discussed. The observations were broadly situated in two contexts; group situations and commercial transactions:

Group situations:

- o It was noted that the sharing of talk time was influenced by the relative power of those interacting, and this, in turn, was determined by how assertive they were and the degree of verbal skills each displayed;

- o The teachers also observed that some people are skilled at managing the conversation. At times they may even achieve this by stating the rules e.g., reminding others when an answer is needed or of turn taking conventions etc.

- o Those teachers who observed sporting activities also noted the consequence of different interactions: players who interacted both in a positive manner and a lot (in terms of quantity) with both the coach and with their fellow team mates, not only got more "court time", but also seemed to hold leadership positions within the team that were not commensurate with their sporting ability.

Commercial transactions

- o A number of the teachers found that the degree of formality lessened if the customer or client was known to the service provider (e.g., shop assistant, bank teller, hairdresser);

- o It was observed that transactions were often formulaic and brief in some contexts, such as at fast food outlets and banks (e.g., set phrases in a particular sequence with closed questions anticipating brief replies);
- o However, it was also found that transactions could be more protracted when there was a range of products to choose from such as in a department store, surf shop or at a garage sale. In this case, the interactions were often more open, less predictable and more personal.

Example: Language use in different contexts

Joanne looked at the language used in a range of contexts and noticed how it changed according to the attitude of the people interacting with her. It was also related to the relative power of the people involved. She described her encounter with a policeman after being stopped for speeding. Although she was very polite and apologetic, the policeman was curt.

    Policeman: "Do you realise it is an offence ...?"
    Joanne: "I'm sorry, no, oh, I didn't realise."

On the other hand, a telemarketer chatted constantly even telling her everything that he was currently doing.

    "Oh, the order SHOULD be through, hang on, I'm having trouble with this computer."
    "Sorry, I didn't catch that, you spoke so fast."
    "What school are you from?"
    "How do you spell that?"
    "I'll put you through to..."

He also made social conversation using Joanne's name constantly and his greeting and leave taking were fairly casual.

    "How was your day?"
    "You have yourself a good evening."

In discussing these observations during the first PD day, the teachers noted that when participants in a conversation contravened "normal" patterns of interactions, communication breakdown occurred, an interactant would become irritated, or the verbal behaviour would be deemed offensive. Understanding and being able to work within these patterns of interaction are, in essence, part of one's sociolinguistic competence. As noted previously, while some individuals' experiences allow them to develop such knowledge and skills, others it seems need to be taught explicitly. The

following example illustrates powerfully how a teacher's intervention with respect to patterns of interaction turned around the school outcomes for one student.

Example: How changing a pattern of interaction improved one student's educational experience

Cindy had Gary in her mentor (form) class and also in her English class. He was known to be a "difficult" student and had been placed on a behavioural contract by a number of other teachers. Cindy knew this because, as his mentor teacher, she had to sign his contract each week. On one occasion during an English class, she asked him a question. Instead of giving the reply a teacher would expect, he responded with what seemed like a typically impudent teenage grunt, "Wha?". Cindy asked again, and again she received the same reply.

Feeling slightly aggrieved and not wanting to risk a scene she asked Gary to speak with her outside. Once outside the classroom she asked him what the problem was – why did he respond with "What?". Gary was seemingly surprised by her question, but after some thought he answered by saying that he was indicating that he didn't understand her. She suggested that instead of saying "What?" in future, he should actually state that he didn't understand or didn't hear or needed clarification. She subsequently practised this with him until he responded spontaneously whenever he didn't understand something. Cindy noted that not only did their relationship improve in the English class, but that improvements were also noted on Gary's 'behaviour contract' and he was no long deemed to be so "difficult".

Again this leads us back to the questions asked previously about sociolinguistic competence, but this time more specifically:

Question 11: Do we work explicitly to develop our students' ability to interact in appropriate ways in a wide range of contexts?

Question 12: Do we recognise and reward students who do demonstrate such skills?

Question 13: What do we do to help those students who require assistance to develop these skills?

Question 14: What assessment mechanisms are in place to identify need in, and acknowledge development of, skills required for appropriate interactions in a wide range of contexts?

Once more the teachers' comments reflected feelings of inadequacy with regard to oral language. They acknowledged that in schools we rarely "teach" oral language (with the exception of "performance" speech – such as "giving a talk" or being involved in debating – which as we have argued elsewhere (Oliver et al 2003) is not really a 'spoken' form). Like participants in our previous research, the teachers in this study discussed the notion that oral language is more often used in class as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. Moreover, after participating in this research project, they were more aware of the range of things that can be and need to be done within speaking and listening. As a consequence, a number of the participants described how, on the basis of their heightened awareness, they felt more able to recognise their students' current range of communicative skills and those skills which they would need in future.

Teachers' findings on vocabulary

The final area of observation undertaken by teachers was the vocabulary needed in particular communicative settings. This included making note of:

- o vocabulary choices which were made according to the context, audience and purpose (register) of the communication;
- o jargon associated with particular sports such as basketball, netball or cricket;
- o jargon associated with interests such as BMX bike riding (e.g., slick or sticky tracks, get kissed, eight inch, doubles, berm, rock drop, bunting or full face);
- o technical language associated with work (e.g., hairdresser – perm, foils, rinse, tint, colour coding);
- o technical language associated with societal contexts such as when talking to a police officer (e.g., offence, speeding fine, licence, registration, demerit points, breathalyser).

At the first PD session the teachers noted that, as with topics of conversation, vocabulary varied a great deal, and further that an individual's own vocabulary is also variable – perhaps being more comprehensive in one area, and less so in another. Again familiarity, interest, knowledge and experience will influence this variability. Given this considerable variability, the following questions were posed:

> **Question 15:** How well do our current assessment mechanisms take into account the variability that occurs in an individual's vocabulary?
>
> **Question 16:** Do we provide opportunities in school for students to demonstrate and develop their oral language vocabulary?

These questions were discussed by some of the groups and again the teachers expressed concern about the limited nature of their current practices, which are in turn driven by "narrow" curriculum and assessment documents. However, as described later in this report, some changes have been made recently in curriculum documents.

Example: The vocabulary of sport

As part of her investigation, Kylie compared the specialist basketball vocabulary used by players to that used by the coach in a community club game. The players were senior primary aged boys and the coach a seventeen year old girl who had coached most of the boys for a number of seasons.

Players	Coach
- overhead pass - split (line) i.e., defensive position - ball i.e., player defending the player with the ball - cut i.e., movement through the keyway - shot i.e., successful basket - miss i.e., unsuccessful basket	- passes off the ball i.e., positioning in defence relative to the position of the ball - defence - offence - safety i.e., person playing in last line of defence - get across i.e., covering ball side of player - hand in passing lane i.e., most likely line ball will be passed

After collecting their initial data, the teachers looked at the demands of a communicative environment which their students would face in the broader community now or in the future. During the PD, teachers planned their next cycle by selecting an aspect of language from the context they had studied and which they thought may be difficult for their students. Students' skills with regard to this aspect of language were then investigated in Cycle 2 of the project.

Example: Planning for Cycle 2

During Cycle 1, Gina investigated the communicative environment of ordering a home delivered meal by telephone. First, she transcribed the conversation between the restaurant employee and customer.

Receptionist:	Hello?
Customer:	Oh, hello. I'd like to order a home delivery please.
Receptionist:	We you?
Customer:	I beg your pardon?
Receptionist:	Where are you?
Customer:	*Names suburb*
Receptionist:	Ah yeah. Ok, what would you like?
Customer:	I'd like one crab meat soup,
Receptionist:	Yes.
Customer:	One large fried rice,
Receptionist:	Yes.
Customer:	One pork with black bean sauce,
Receptionist:	Yes.
Customer:	And one satay prawn.
Receptionist:	Yes.
Customer:	That's all thank you.
Receptionist:	Your name is?
Customer:	*NAME.*
Receptionist:	N, A
Customer:	*M, E*
Receptionist:	Phone number?
Customer:	XXXX [*first four digits*]
Receptionist:	Yes
Customer:	XXXX [*final digits*]
Receptionist:	Address?
Customer:	Unit X, XX [*number of unit and block*]
Receptionist:	XX [*repeats number*]
Customer:	*Street Name, Suburb*. Thank you.
Receptionist:	OK then. Thank you very much.
Customer:	OK, bye.

Next, Gina identified the language functions that the customer would need, such as:

- Giving clear instructions about their name, phone number, address and order.
- Giving the information in small chunks because the other person is writing the information down.
- Possibly repeating instructions.
- Possibly giving directions about how to get to their house.
- Communicating clearly with different people including those from non-English speaking backgrounds.
- Possibly asking for descriptions of items from the menu.

Then, she identified the following language functions necessary for the restaurant employee. These included:

- Asking specific questions to gain information.
- Possibly repeating information for clarification.
- Possibly describing items on the menu.
- Possibly calculating the cost of the order.
- Giving time estimates regarding delivery.
- Maintaining good relationships with customers by communicating politely.
- Recording information to relay to the kitchen staff and delivery person.

Gina had recorded a phone conversation that she made to a restaurant with a take-away service. She then looked at the functions needed in this communicative environment and saw how important it was to give clear, concise information. She realised that for her food order to be delivered to her door as soon as possible, her information needed to be given in "small chunks". Gina also noticed that the language of direction was required and wondered if her Year 2/3 students would be able to give this type of information and to understand it. She decided she would investigate this aspect of her students' language development in the next cycle of the project.

Cycle 2 Findings

During this Cycle, teachers were to design a class-based activity to collect data about what their students could already do in relation to a specific area of oral language. That is, based on their findings from Cycle 1 where teachers had identified communicative environments that were potentially difficult for their students,

students' skills in these environments were subsequently assessed. These areas of difficulty are categorised below into functions of language, skills and understandings associated with social interaction, specific language skills used in a range of functions, patterns of speech associated with particular contexts, vocabulary issues and control of register (that is, how students alter their speech according to the context, purpose and to whom they are speaking – their audience). The following abilities and students' levels were the focus of Cycle 2:

Functions of language

- o imparting and seeking factual information to get things done [Year 6]
- o ability to express approval/disapproval for a service provided [Year 12]
- o expressing and finding out intellectual attitudes [Year 6]

Social interaction

- o language use in a social situation where some people were known and others were not e.g., a family BBQ or party at a friend's house [Year 12- SHS]
- o social language/social interaction- listening and speaking [Year 1/2; Years 5-7]
- o expressing disapproval or disagreement in school situations in ways that are socially acceptable and achieve the desired outcome [Year 9]
- o how to settle disputes appropriately [primary]
- o LS F.2- emerging awareness of conventions of social interaction, & LS F.4 -recognise that behaviour is used to communicate [disabled people at community centre]
- o social language [students with disabilities]

Specific skills

- o ask questions [pre-primary; Year 3; Year 4; distance education context – secondary level]
- o give specific, logical instructions in a variety of contexts for different audiences [secondary]
- o give an oral recount [Year 1]
- o interrupt appropriately [Year 1/2]
- o follow instructions [primary school]

Patterns of speech associated with particular contexts

- group work in classrooms [Pre-primary; Year 4; Year 4/5; middle primary; Year 6/7; Year 7; secondary; Year 10]
- customer service [upper secondary – distance education]
- instructions (language in the community) [secondary]
- basketball games [Year 6/7]

Issues to do with register

- ability to shape oral language for different purposes and audiences, adapt tone to suit context and audience, use language to empower [Year 7; Year 11]

Vocabulary

- directions [Year 1-Year 2/3]
- describe/ commentate on a basketball game [Year 6/7]
- communicate successfully in groups - socially [Year 3/4]

Some teachers transcribed their students' speech, some made general observations about their students, some used specific tasks to elicit the features they were researching and some just observed a non-specific task or playground communication. A number of teachers also had discussions with their students about the language under investigation.

Teachers found that students could already do a number of things. Again these are presented according to the categories as listed above:

Students' control of functions of language

Students could <u>ask</u>:

- others not to do something [Year 3/4]
- for assistance [Year 3/4]
- others for input [Year 6/7]
- about someone's preference [Year 6/7]
- for a service [secondary]
- for directions [secondary]

Example: Language functions among pre-primary students

Alice noted that her pre-primary students could ask each other questions to get the extra information they needed. This was particularly the case when they were sharing home news with each other. Most of their questions asked for information about how things had happened. For example:

When Alicia told the group that her dad had got the family cat out of a tree, Kylie asked her how he had got it down. When Alicia reported that he had used a stick Kylie then asked her how her dad had used the stick to get the cat.

Similarly, when the story was about the family dog having puppies the children wanted to know how the dog had them.

Students could respond to:

- o requests for information [Year 4]
- o opinions, others' ideas [Year 6/7]

Example: Responding to each other in Year 7.

Sally found that her Year 7 students could respond to each other's ideas when working in groups. She asked the students to work in small groups to sort controversial statements into those they all agreed with, those they disagreed with and those they could not reach a consensus about. They then had to select the most controversial for their group. These were collected by Sally and redistributed among the groups and then the group members had to prepare a sound argument in support of that statement. The students were generally able to respond supportively to the ideas of others and to build on them.

Students could express:

- o pleasure/displeasure [Year 3/4]
- o interest or lack of interest [Year 3/4]
- o opinions [Year 6/7]
- o agreement/ disagreement [Year 6/7]
- o basic feelings [secondary]
- o a desire to do something [Year 6]
- o opinions, forcefully [Year 9]
- o how to do a task [Year 4]
- o needs, wants, choices [secondary]

Example: Functions that students could fulfil

Cindy determined that the students in her upper school TEE class were able to:

- converse with their peers
- converse with staff in the school context
- ask for help/ assistance with confidence
- voice their opinion
- express disapproval/ approval
- request what they want

Example: Unexpected communicative skills in Science

When Kathryn focussed on a small group of students completing a science experiment, she was surprised by what she found. Kathryn noted on a grid the types of functions the students performed in their interactions. She did not expect to find that one particular student, whom she had not previously seen as a leader or a competent oral communicator, was able to keep the group on task and to suggest what they needed to do to complete the task. Another student showed unexpected competence in building on the ideas of others.

Students could give/clarify, e.g.:

  o instructions on how to get somewhere related to sport (field settings, select teams and positions, set up gear, explain rules)

  o instructions or clarification for drama (as other character) [secondary]

Students' control of social interaction

In this area some teachers found that students could:

- initiate social interaction [Year 2/3]
- interact, but some miss out courtesies [Year 3/4]
- use appropriate greetings [Year 4]
- use language of social interaction (informal only) [Year 4]
- use 'connections' to make a younger child feel comfortable [Year 6]
- use well developed interaction skills [Year 7]
- respond to others appropriately [Year 7]
- use 'please' and 'thank you' and code switch [secondary]
- use salutation/closing statement on phone [SIDE]

- use appropriate language in some social situations [Year 11]

Example: Pre-primary students' expression of feelings

> Zelda noticed that some of her pre-primary students were able to express their feelings when interacting and, in doing so, could change the behaviour of the others:
>
> Candy: I'm going to dob.
> Connor: Go ahead, I don't care, don't we guys.
> Kate: I dob at home, you're not allowed to at school.
> Katy: We're just joking.
> Candy: You're not allowed to joke. I'm going to dob *(walked halfway to the other room)*. I'm not dobbing on you Kate or Janey.
> Connor: You hurt my feelings.
> Candy: I'm not going to dob but I will next time.

Students' use of specific communicative skills

In relation to specific communicative skills, some of the teachers observed that their students were able to:

- express one simple idea to the audience [Year 1]
- anticipate stages in familiar spoken text [Year 1/2]
- indicate non-verbally when something is not understood [Year 1/2]
- ask and respond to questions and make relevant comments when discussing shared experiences with teacher and peers [Year 1/2]
- listen to and follow simple, single part instructions [primary]
- confront peers about issues with teacher assistance and peer support [primary]

Example: Conflict resolution

> In Joanne's class, a group of girls complained that some of the boys did not respect them. However, when she spoke to one of the boys he denied this was the case. Joanne decided to get the two groups of students together and to assist them resolve the situation. This was done successfully, but she realised that they did not have the skills to resolve such situations independently.

Other specific communicative skills included:

- listening to and accepting others' ideas [Year 7]
- encouraging others to talk [Year 7]
- assigning roles within a group [Year 7]
- beginning a small group discussion [senior secondary]
- contributing to a small group discussion [senior secondary]
- achieving personal goals in a small group discussion [senior secondary]
- taking turns [Year 3/4; Year 6/7]
- identifying the main ideas in familiar spoken texts [Year 6/7]
- controlling the linguistic structures needed to decide, allocate, check, plan [Year 6/7]
- reflecting on individual roles within group tasks [Year 6/7]
- using language to plan self assessment and complete peer assessment of tasks [Year 6/7]
- interacting to:
    - explore challenging ideas
    - use language structures to identify point of view and influence others
    - select, apply and adjust strategies in a range of communicative contexts [Yr 6/7]
- asking questions and framing follow-up questions where necessary on the phone [SIDE]
- asking questions [pre-primary; Year 3/4; Year 4/5; Year 6; Year 7; secondary]
- answering questions [Year 11]
- presenting arguments (but without backing them up logically) [Year 9]
- expressing feelings (only when prompted by adults) [primary school]
- using some factual information to clarify [Year 6/7]
- providing an emotional response when addressing an audience [Year 6/7]
- using body language and facial expressions [Year 11]
- redirecting the interaction depending on the context [Year 6]
- modifying language to make it simpler for a younger child [Year 6]
- expressing ideas and wishes in a forceful manner [Year 4]
- logically organizing statements of feedback into a three part response:
    - acknowledgment of other person,
    - statement of own feeling/perception,
    - statement of action/response desired [Year 12]

- taking turns [pre-primary; Year 3/4; Year 6/7]
- making some requests [Special Education - primary]
- responding appropriately to tone of voice [Special Education - primary]
- indicating likes and dislikes[Special Education - primary]
- seeking attention from an adult when anxious [Special Education - primary]
- selecting appropriate people to interpret particular communications [Special Education - primary]
- using appropriate behaviours [Special Education - primary]
- using objects to indicate wants [Special Education - primary]
- retelling personal stories and/or describing situations [secondary]

Some of the specific communicative skills observed by teachers were concerned with the students' metalinguistic awareness and their ability to:

- identify the reasons for class rules on speaking and listening [Year 4/5]
- recognize different phases of conversations [Year 12]
- identify the way body language, gesture, expression and tone contribute to meaning in talk [Year 12]
- understand that business relations are a mutual exchange in which each party is invested with particular rights [Year 12]
- understand that confidence within a speaking/listening situation is enhanced by preparation and planning prior to communication [Year 12]
- recognise that power relationships reveal themselves in conversations [Year 12]
- recognise why they have more confidence in some contexts than others [Year 12]
- recognise that visual aids can be used to clarify ideas [Year 12]
- understand how to provide supportive feedback [Year 12]

Students' mastery of patterns of speech associated with particular contexts

In this area some of the teachers observed that their students could:

- communicate with friends in the playground [Year 4]
- greet a range of clients, answer questions about products, promote products, describe the work they do, direct patrons, separate the personal from work and build rapport with customers [SIDE Year 11]
- follow the language conventions (discourse) of basketball [Year 7]

Students' range of vocabulary

From their research some of the teachers noted that their students had the vocabulary:

- to describe direction (left, right, turn, to) [Year 2/3]
- to describe order or time sequence (then) [Year 2/3]
- to describe location [Year 2/3]
- to describe occupations [Year 3/4]
- specific to the task [Year 7]
- to describe/commentate on a basketball game [Year 6/7]

Example: Formal and informal vocabulary in Year 6/7

Greg and Jacquie found that their students had an extensive vocabulary suitable for casual situations but that only a few students controlled formal and work related vocabulary. They also noted that the students who used more formal and technical vocabulary in group discussions tended to hold the floor for longer and not to be interrupted.

Casual & Family Words	Formal Speech & Occupational Words
say	opportunities
let's say	negatives
so um so um um (many times!)	evidence to support
gotta	firstly
yeah (many times!)	value of human life
stingy	career
it's not that cool	disgusting
and stuff	government
like (many times!)	president
cos (many times!)	extreme
yeah like, yeah it's like	extinct
reckon	

Students' control of register

Some teachers observed that their students were able to change register to:

- use formal speech [Year 3/4]
- reflect on different types of register they use [Year 12]
- select appropriate content for purpose and audience [Year 11]
- shift style according to the audience [Year 7]

- know when and how to speak [Year 10]

Students could also:

- recognize some of the conventions of different talk situations [Year 12]

Example: Jane's Cycle 2 Findings

Jane recorded a sample of the range of functions that one of her Year 6/7 students used when socialising. She noted how the student's language changed when speaking to adults compared to how she spoke to her peers. Jane noticed that a teacher may have to wait for a gap or appropriate moment when students are talking. Also, students' speech with their peers tended to flow continuously and they interrupted each other. The language they used with their peers was more casual and that used with adults more formal.

Social Language	Name: Anna
Function	**How student does it**
give/ ask permission	Mrs. N, could we eat these?
greet	Hello Mrs. N, I had a boss weekend
invite	Dya wanna come? (to peer)
accept/ refuse	Nuh (to peer)
express feelings	Mum bought me some new shoes, $130, I'm so lucky (to peer)
request information	Mrs. N, does 'finally' have a double l?
	Is this how you do it? (to teacher)
encourage	That was really great (to peer)
interrupt	Gee, he's doing good (to peer)
exchange information	So do you know what I have to do? (to peer)
	Boss! (to peer)

On the basis of these findings about students' communicative skills, many of the teachers reflected on whether these skills were sufficiently reflected in the assessment procedures currently used in our schools. This led to the refinement of an earlier question.

Question 17: Do our current assessment mechanisms allow for acknowledgement of the wide range of oral language skills that many students bring to the classroom?

Responses to this question were somewhat mixed:

- It was clear to all that interpretation of the outcome statements and progress maps does in fact allow teachers to do this, however, because of the implied and interpretative nature of the outcomes, many of the teachers participating in this research did not feel that this occurred in practice.
- This, in turn, is exacerbated by the limited coverage that oral language generally receives in teachers' pre-service training and during in-service professional development.
- Thus it would seem that current assessment practices are inhibited, not only by the curriculum, but also by a limited awareness among educators in general.

Identifying students' needs

As evidenced above, the teachers identified many aspects of oral language that their students were already able to do well, but it was also apparent that there were many others things that they needed to learn. These areas of need are summarised here according to the categories used in previous sections:

Need for a greater repertoire of language functions

- o seek and provide information [Year 1; Year 6/7]
- o clarify others' ideas/opinions [Year 6/7]
- o seek information in formal situations [Year 6]
- o persuade others [Year 12]
- o express opinion, build on the ideas of others [Year 12]
- o inquire about and express feelings [Special Education - primary]

Need for improved social interaction skills

- o express positive attitudes in social interaction [SIDE]
- o take turns [Year 4, Year 6]; know when it is appropriate to bid for a turn [Year 4]; be able to relinquish the floor [Year 4]
- o greet people and respond to greetings appropriately [Year 3/4; SIDE; Year 11]
- o sustain conversations [Year 12]

Need for specific communicative skills

- o answer closed/ open questions [Year 4]
- o sequence instructions [Year 2/3] and give clear instructions [Year 12]
- o establish context for question [SIDE]
- o focus discussions [Year 6/7]
- o clarify through questioning [Year 6/7]
- o ask and redirect questions [Year 6]
- o negotiate meanings [Year 6/7]
- o follow peer discourse [Year 6]
- o listen actively and respond appropriately [Year 6; Year 11]
- o identify key information [Year 6]
- o be aware of tone of voice and the impact on an audience [Year 11]
- o relate body language and facial expressions to verbal language [Year 11]; read and use appropriate body language [Year 4; Year 6]
- o speak clearly [Year 6]
- o attract attention appropriately [Year 4]
- o accept situations in which ideas are rejected or not acted on [Year 4]
- o speak effectively and confidently [Year 10]
- o operate effectively in groups [Year 6; Year 11; Year 12]

Need for vocabulary expansion

- o use vocabulary of direction, order and location in context [Year 2/3]
- o use subject or context specific vocabulary [Year 6/7; SIDE]
- o express ideas and opinions clearly with appropriate vocabulary [Year 6/7]
- o select appropriate vocabulary of the functions [SIDE; Year 11]

Need for improved register repertoire

- o change register and style [Year 6/7; Year 10; Year 12]
- o use appropriate vocabulary [Year 10; Year 11]
- o adjust tone according to audience [Year 4]
- o seek feedback in ways appropriate to the context [Year 12]

Need for greater metalinguistic understanding

- o reflect on the efficacy of communication in the work place [SIDE; Year 11]
- o awareness of register changes needed for different situations [Year 12]
- o recognise the needs of different audiences [Year 11]
- o "read" audience and know how to repair interactions [Year 2/3]
- o recognise and discuss what is happening in group interactions [Year 12]
- o know which social conventions are appropriate [secondary]

As the teachers reflected upon the communicative needs of their students at the conclusion to Cycle 2, the following question, which is not unlike that raised at the end of Cycle 1, was generated:

> **Question 18: How well do our current pedagogic practices allow us to address our students' communicative needs?**

Although there were some participants who felt that oral language was being sufficiently addressed in what is becoming an increasingly crowded curriculum, many others felt that much more needs to be done. As one teacher stated, "We are currently doing our students a disservice." She expressed the sentiments of many when she described how we are failing to prepare our students for the world as it is now – one that is based as much on the spoken word (or text that is constructed in the same way as oral discourse) as it is on the written.

The following example illustrates an activity that one participant engaged in as part of Cycle 2. Matthew focussed on the language his students needed in order to interact effectively in small groups. At the time, he was teaching a Year 7 class in a metropolitan primary school. His students came from a wide range of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and some were still in the early stages of learning English as an additional language.

Example: Cycle 2 activity

Matthew looked at the language necessary for interacting in small groups. To determine the small group interaction skills that the students could already control, he prepared the following group activity and recorded their discussion on audio-tape.

Activity
Children were placed in small groups to prepare for a debate on *"The practice of making 'designer babies' is wrong and should be banned"*. This was the culmination of a unit of work on the issue, so the children were able to bring considerable background knowledge to their group discussion. The following are excerpts from the students' recorded discussion:

Excerpt One
    Student 1: Okay, what do you think about it?
    Student 4: Well, it's a difficult thing to say.
    Student 2: How would you feel if you were the woman on the front of the paper last week?
    Student 4: I'd probably do the same as her, but I wouldn't like it.
    Student 3: Yeah, say that in the debate, that's good.
    Student 1: Right, what are you going to say?
    Student 3: Well, I'm not sure.
    Student 1: You'd better think of something.
    Student 3: I might say that it's certainly okay for medical reasons but not for making babies who look a certain way or can do certain things.
    Student 4: That's a good point.
    Student 2: Yeah, and say that they'd do it if they were in the same position.

Excerpt Two
    Student 1: We should talk about rich people and it wouldn't be good if they used it just to please themselves.
    Student 3: Who's gonna say that bit?
    Student 1: You can.
    Student 3: Well, what do you mean?
    Student 1: You know, like we talked about in class.
    Student 3: Sort of.
    Student 1: I'll help you later.

Excerpt Three
    Student 4: What do you think I should say?
    Student 2: I know.
    Student 4: What?
    Student 2: Talk about how people shouldn't play God.

Student 1: Yeah, that's a good one.
Student 4: Does that mean they shouldn't do God's work?
Student 2: Der, yes.
Student 1: Now make sure that you practise your speech before the
debate so it sounds good and so you know what you're saying.

Matthew then addressed the following questions:

1. *What language is useful for ensuring successful communication within a group?*

The majority of the phrases and words used in this activity involved questioning, seeking clarification and confirming that information was understood correctly. The group leader was self-elected and then controlled the talk in an organised and workable manner. The other members accommodated this method of selection and the dominance of the leader in the talking situation. The conversations were business-like and purposeful and there was little small talk or talk that did not relate to the task.

2. *To what extent are students in the class aware of what they need to do with their language in order to interact well within a group?*

The students were aware of the protocols and correct language to use in this situation. Matthew found it interesting that the children did not use each other's names very much but seemed to control the flow of talk through body language, e.g., looking, touching.

3. *What vocabulary would a student need to learn in order to communicate well within a group?*

In this situation, the students really needed vocabulary relevant to the topic they were discussing. Those students whose vocabulary was lacking compensated by using terms such as 'you know' and 'remember what we talked about the other day'. Matthew also observed that there was not a lot of social courtesy, e.g., Please, Excuse me.

Matthew also noted his usual assessment and recording of his students' oral language outcomes:

- I note some aspects as anecdotes in my Daily Work Pad;
- I do not normally assess or record much about oral language use;
- but I do make mental notes about aspects I notice in my day to day teaching;
- I do not often use audio/audio-visual recordings.

In the example above, we can see that Matthew focussed on the language that his students commonly used when working on group tasks. He had previously taken this type of language interaction for granted and was surprised by what he now noticed. For instance, he saw that one of the students assumed a leadership role and this was accepted by all the other students. By looking really carefully at one group of students and thinking about the language needed for effective group interaction, Matthew was able to identify the knowledge, skills, understandings and values that students would need in order to work more productively in groups. He then used these as the focus to assist his planning for Cycle 3.

Cycle 3 Findings

The third cycle involved a second professional development day where teachers reported on their students' current communicative skills as evident from the implemented classroom strategy described above and matched these skills with their current and future communicative needs. They then looked for pathways to address the students' communicative needs using existing curriculum documentation and materials. In doing so, they identified apparent 'gaps' in the Curriculum Framework documentation, i.e., where curriculum resources do not exist to assist students achieve the communicative skills expected for their prospective involvement in social or work-related communities of practice.

In studying the Curriculum Framework documentation during Cycle 3, teachers either identified the outcome which expressed the students' particular needs, or, if there was no outcome, wrote one to express such needs. They then identified the skills, understandings and knowledge that the students would demonstrate to achieve the appropriate outcome/s.

Example: Matthew's plan for Cycle 3

1. What the students can do now.	2. What the students need to do. (Outcome to be achieved.)	3. Gap between what the students can do now and what they need to do.
Area of language investigated: Talk in groups	Outcome to be achieved: LS 3.1 The student interacts to express opinions and perceptions, participates in problem-solving discussions	The understandings, skills and attitudes the students will need to achieve the outcome.

	with peers and gives brief reports and summaries. The student obtains specific information from informational and expressive spoken texts; follows peer discourse in group discussions, and identifies key information in an audio or visual text on familiar topics.	
What the students can currently do? • interact with each other • 'bounce' ideas around the group • use words and concepts specific to the task • ask questions of each other • respond to others' questions and comments in the group	**What the students need to be able to do (understandings, skills and attitudes)?** • more knowledge about the topic being discussed/ debated • raise an idea, clarify their ideas and develop them • use longer stretches of speech and more complex sentences • attempt the skill of persuasive argument • counter argue, rebuke and respond to others' comments	**The gap between what they can do and what they need to be able to do?** • how to be persuasive when presenting an idea or argument • how to state an idea and then expand it to give more detail • how to comment objectively on another speaker's opinion • how to appreciate and respect a well-stated opinion or idea including those different to their own

Cycle 4 Findings

Finally, in Cycle 4 the teachers designed a way to teach and assess those skills, understandings and knowledge that made up the outcome. They recorded this process using the following framework:

Area of language investigated:
Outcome to be achieved:
Year level:
Students need to be able to:
Teaching:
Task:
Assessment:

Developing the outcomes

In these final cycles, the teachers focussed on a range of outcomes (which in turn reflected the range of needs of the students). In particular, they focussed on: the language required for social interaction; for learning in mainly small group contexts; and, on issues related to register. There was also a strong emphasis on developing metalinguistic understanding, especially with older students. The following summary shows the range of outcomes addressed by the teachers.

Language of social interaction

In this area of oral language some of the teachers addressed the outcomes related to:

- o using social greetings and farewells for a range of contexts and interlocutors (people they are talking to)
- o sustaining conversations with familiar and unfamiliar people
- o meeting social obligations when working in groups
- o using language to settle disputes
- o using appropriate tone and manner with peers

Language for learning

In this area the teachers focussed on two aspects, namely questioning and group work:

- o Questioning

    - using a range of questions;
    - responding to questions appropriately;
    - selecting the most effective type of question to get the information required;
    - extending students' repertoire of question types.

- o Group work

    - reaching consensus;
    - meeting social requirements;
    - sustaining interactions in groups;
    - reviewing and summarising group discussion;
    - working creatively;
    - problem solving.

Specific Functions

With respect to functional outcomes, the teachers focussed on:

- o expressing needs;
- o expressing and finding out intellectual attitudes;
- o expressing and responding to ideas and opinions;
- o seeking and giving particular information;
- o elaborating and giving detailed recounts of experiences;
- o persuading others;
- o asserting rights.

Vocabulary

Here the teachers focussed on the specific vocabulary required for:

- o giving directions;
- o asking questions;
- o seeking information on a particular topic.

Register

The outcomes in this area focussed on:

- o   adjusting speech for a range of audiences and contexts;
- o   adjusting speech according to the degree of formality of the situation;
- o   expressing ideas in informal contexts.

Metalinguistic awareness

For assessing metalinguistic awareness, teachers focussed on outcomes that promoted:

- o   strategies to improve effectiveness of communication;
- o   group processes e.g., how to build on others' ideas; turn take; hold the floor;
- o   register – awareness and extension of students' repertoire of strategies;
- o   rehearsal or practice of more complex or unfamiliar speech.

As noted above, while many of the participants were able to locate an outcome to address their identified need in the existing curriculum documents, others had to write their own. Some teachers identified an existing outcome, but rather than defining it in terms of formal learning contexts, they adapted it to the everyday language needs of their students. The following is an example of this process.

Example: Peta's Cycle 4 findings

Peta looked at a Level 5 outcome usually associated with formal learning contexts and re-contextualised it in terms of her students' current linguistic needs. In doing this, she noted what specific knowledge, skills and understandings her students would need to develop to achieve the outcome in the context of their out-of-school, part time jobs.

LS5.2 Judges the appropriateness and effect of text form and register in relation to audience, purpose and context when listening and speaking (Curriculum Council Progress Maps).

Understandings, skills and attitudes needed
- •   select appropriate greetings and express why
- •   reflect on the efficacy of communication in work place contexts
- •   'read' the context and the audience: identify important aspects such as

> relative social rank and position at work, gender, age, class, place in the community, role etc.
> - control vocabulary associated with particular products and processes in the work place
> - select appropriate vocabulary and structures for the functions used, e.g. asserting, directing, describing, enquiring, suggesting.

Other teachers unpacked the demands implicit in the outcome in terms of the chosen communicative context. This required them to be explicit about the particular linguistic behaviours their students would need to know in order to achieve that outcome. This was a powerful way for teachers to plan effective learning programs.

Example: Gabbie's Cycle 4 findings

> Gabbie wanted to help her students work more effectively in groups. She selected the Speaking and Listening outcome Level 2 in the Progress Maps.
>
> **LS 2:** Listens and talks with peers, teachers and other adults in school activities; is aware of the need to change listening and speaking to suit different situations; experiments with ways of improving communication with others; and locates and obtains simple, discrete information from accessible spoken texts.
>
> She then contextualised it in terms of how language use could foster better collaboration in group tasks.
>
> **LS 2:** To be able to work cooperatively and positively in a group activity
>
> Gabbie then defined what the students would need to understand and do in order to achieve this outcome:
> - know when it is appropriate to bid for a turn
> - take turns
> - seek attention appropriately if others don't recognise a bid for a turn
> - hold and relinquish the floor
> - respond to and build on others' ideas
> - know the appropriate register and style to use according to audience, purpose and context
> - respond constructively to others' points of view

A number of teachers wrote their own outcomes to express what they believed their students needed to know and do better.

Joanne thought that her students needed to work more effectively together and that in order for that to happen they needed the opportunity to develop particular understandings, skills and attitudes.

Outcome to be achieved: Students interact to express opinions and perceptions and participate in problem-solving discussions.

The students need to be able to:
- listen to other's opinions
- respond specifically to peers' input
- speculate on solutions suggested
- extend others' suggestions
- justify opinions expressed

Other teachers defined an outcome to achieve in terms of their students' immediate needs. In this case, it was control over a range of functions not normally defined explicitly in classroom contexts.

Example: Developing outcomes

Jane wrote an outcome for her students to address their need to change the way they spoke to a range of people for a number of different purposes. She defined the purposes in terms of the functions of language, a model used in this project.

Outcome to be achieved: Students will be able to shift style and register according to their audience.

Understandings, skills and attitudes students need in order to speak to different people for a range of purposes, including to:
- apologise
- ask permission
- give permission
- borrow
- greet
- encourage

In addition, some of the teachers noted that the outcomes their students required were at levels incongruent with the general level at which the students were operating. For instance, some found that, although their students were operating at Level 4 or 5 in the reading and writing strands, to address their oral language needs

more accurately, teachers had to select outcomes from much lower levels, such as Level 2. This finding can be explained in a number of ways. It is quite feasible that students will have disparate abilities in different macro-skill areas or strands. At the same time, however, it is also possible that because the speaking and listening areas are the "Cinderella" of the literacy curriculum, students' levels of development are much lower than in areas that receive more attention in the classroom. Equally, it could be that the outcome statements for the oral language areas do not really represent the developmental sequence that occurs in all students. Certainly a previous review (Oliver et al 2003) indicated that this last suggestion was indeed the case.

Teaching, learning and assessing the new outcomes

Once the teachers had selected (or written) the appropriate outcome for their students, they then designed a program of work which would focus on these outcomes. They outlined the type of teaching they would do, the type of learning tasks their students would do, and how they would assess whether the outcome had been met. A wide range of teaching programs were developed – some more fully than others – but all were designed to develop oral language.

What follows are examples of the summary frameworks the teachers prepared and used to guide and report the teaching, learning and assessment processes in Cycle 4.

Example: Gina's teaching and assessment plan

Area of language investigated: The vocabulary of giving directions
Outcome: LS 2.1a (Speaking: The use of text): The student explains familiar procedures, describes or recounts events in logical sequence and sustains conversations on a familiar topic.
Year: 2/3
Students need to be able to: - Give simple instructions showing awareness of the steps required (e.g., explain how to get from A to B) - Describe real events in logical sequence
Teaching: Incursion: Investigate streets around school and home, explore map of school community, map route from home to school, describe route

from home to school, model procedural writing, develop assessment criteria, assess.
Task: Explain how to get from home to school.
Assessment: Rubric denoting demonstrated or developing skills - Count number of times children used certain vocabulary words.

This plan was prepared to address the learning needs of Gina's Year 2/3 class. In Cycle 1, Gina looked at the language required to order a take-away meal efficiently (see example p.42) and decided to focus on the language of direction. She then assessed how her well her students currently used this type of language and found gaps in their understanding and skills. The overview above shows broadly what she planned to do to address these needs. Her approach involved the children in real life tasks. It was also aimed at helping them get to know each other and their local community.

Example: Josie's teaching and assessment plan

Area of language investigated: Questioning techniques and vocabulary
Outcome: LS 2: Students listen and speak for different school purposes. They consider the ways in which listening and speaking change according to the demands of the situation. They monitor their listening and speaking in both informal and structured situations. When speaking, they show some awareness of the audience and experiment with language structures and subject-specific vocabulary.
Year: 3/4
Students need to be able to: - Use and respond to social initiation and completion - Develop active listening to be able to follow on from basic questioning - Frame questions so that information sought is provided - Be able to respond to a query with appropriate information - Clarify if necessary and seek or give confirmation
Teaching: We had a short, whole class *discussion* on the <u>reasons why questioning is so important</u> in gathering information and we discussed the value of using <u>'why, when, who, where, what and how' type questions.</u>

Task:
Activity 1:

- I <u>role played</u> with one of the children, <u>modelling</u> the use of these 6 types of questions to find out about one particular activity the child did during the holidays.
- Children then <u>worked in pairs</u>, taking it in turns to use these questions to build up a picture of what their friend did in the holidays. They made brief <u>notes</u>.
-They then <u>wrote</u> a report on their friend's holiday.
-They <u>shared</u> these with their partners and <u>edited</u> them together.

Activity 2:

- The children <u>brainstormed</u> and wrote down as much as they could think of on the theme 'natural disasters', silently and on their own. This is a new theme.
- As a group they then got into a <u>'doughnut'</u> formation- two circles facing each other. The children in the inner circle had to ask their partners in the outer circle questions about natural disasters that they needed more information on.
- Each <u>pair</u> was given a time limit and then one circle moved one person to the right. Halfway through, the outer circle changed to asking the questions.
- The children then returned to their <u>written</u> work and in another colour pen added all the new and additional information they had got from their 'doughnut' questioning strategy.
- In <u>small groups</u> the children shared their information and made a <u>mind map</u>.

Assessment:
Activity 1:

- Child assessment: The children ticked off on a check list to see if they had covered the 6 types of questions in their written work.
- Teacher assessment: I used a similar process and was pleased to see that out of a class of 24 children, 18 had included information using all 6 questions. The other 6 children used 5 of the 6 questions and all of these had missed out on the 'why'.
- *Follow up:* The children were later asked to write a report on their own holiday. The majority of the children were able to use a range of questions.

Activity 2:

- I was able to see how much additional information (written in a different colour) the children were able to gather through their 'doughnut questioning'.
- Once again using a check list the children and I were able to see if

> they had covered all 6 areas of questioning: 'why, when, who, where, what and how.

Josie designed this learning plan after finding that her Year 4 students used a restricted range of questions. In Cycle 1 she looked at interactions in a library and found that lots of questions were likely to be asked and answered. So in Cycle 2 she set up a role play for her students and noticed how they used a restricted range of questions. She then prepared the above plan to help her students extend the range of questions they could use. Her plan shows that she provided explicit teaching both of the language required and of the reasons why this type of language is useful. She also provided plenty of opportunities for students to practise the skills they were learning and to get feedback on how they were developing.

Example: Ryan's teaching and assessment plan

Area of language investigated: Students reflected on language use in a social situation where they knew some people and didn't know others e.g., a family BBQ or party at a friend's house.
Outcome: - Examines different perspectives on complex issues and ideas in an increasing range of structured and unstructured listening and speaking situations;   - Identifies the ways in which social and cultural factors and background knowledge influence the interpretation of spoken texts;   - Experiments with verbal and non-verbal language and text organisation in the construction of own spoken texts, explaining how these elements are used to achieve particular effects; and   - Controls a wide range of strategies and uses them to enhance communication (Speaking & Listening Levels 4, 5, 6)
Year: Secondary
Students need to be able to: - Reflect on sociocultural differences   - Identify ways to communicate with people they don't know   - Talk in a way that influences people   - Compare experiences of talking to different groups   - Trial a conversation they will have with someone they don't know

Teaching: Students will:
- Develop strategies for different conversations with unfamiliar people
- Become familiar with some differences between sociocultural groups in conversations
- Develop strategies for conversations they need to have with more powerful people
- Persuade a friend to go with them when the friend is reluctant to do so

Task:
- Students will plan conversations for different 'difficult' situations
- These plans will be put together for all students in a guidebook
- Students discuss cultural differences in conversations
- Students will develop a range of greetings, conversation starters, ways to change the topic, to deflect unwelcome subjects, to accept praise and to end conversations
- Students will use one of these strategies in an unfamiliar situation outside of school.
- Finally, students will report on the strategies they used and reflect on their success.

Assessment:
- Students' reflection on the strategies they used for conversation in an unfamiliar situation. This will be presented in written form and students will discuss them with the teacher
- Trial the strategies by inviting a group of unfamiliar people into the class for a morning tea, such as residents from a low care old people's home or students and staff from the IEC
- Students assigned people to host and try strategies and will reflect on the effectiveness of the strategies.

Ryan's focus on social language grew out of his earlier investigation of the language that is used in social situations, when you know some of the people but not all. He noticed that language use changed a lot when other guests included those from a range of ages and from different backgrounds. Ryan talked to his senior high school students about this situation and they said that they did not have confidence in these mixed generational social settings when they did not know everyone well. Many talked about being at a gathering like a family barbeque at a friend's house and feeling uncomfortable talking with the other guests. Interestingly, they even felt awkward talking to their friend in front of other family members and they especially found it difficult when a friend's parent asked them questions about their friend. Ryan decided to assist the students to deal with their concerns by having them research

and trial strategies to communicate more effectively and comfortably in these types of social situations. The students shared their findings and this process extended the range of strategies they could use and increased their understandings of how language works in social situations.

Example: Peta's teaching and assessment plan

Area of language investigated: Expressing disapproval or disagreement in school situations in ways that are socially acceptable and achieve the desired outcome.
Outcome: LS 3.1a-4.1a: Interacts to express opinions and perceptions, participates in problem-solving discussions. Supports opinions with some detail in a variety of classroom situations.
Year: 9
Students need to be able to: - express opinions in ways appropriate to the audience - accept or react appropriately to the ideas and opinions of others - self-monitor appropriateness of content and structure for different audiences - offer considered reasons and arguments to support a point of view - think about, plan and possibly rehearse what they are going to say
Teaching: - active listening and processing of ideas - discuss/respond to ideas, build on each piece of information - understand that each group member can offer ideas and opinions - confidence to respond, process ideas, visualise then respond
Task: 1. Modelled the *Think-Aloud* protocol as a member of a small group having a discussion that built on each person's opinion to reach a group consensus. 2. Rest of class used a *Graphic Organiser* to identify the process used. We then *blackboarded* the process during *whole class discussion.* 3. Using a topic appropriate to our term's theme, students engaged in *small group discussion* with one member acting as an Observer/Reporter and recording the process, individual opinions and the final group consensus. 4. Students recorded their reflections of the process in journals. 5. Next session students designed a personal goal for their

participation in small group work. Several realised they needed to actively listen to others' opinions and consider their points of view rather than simply foregrounding their own opinion and sticking to it.

Assessment:
- Journal entries
- Student generated checklist and their reflections of Think-Aloud.

Reflection:

Teacher: During whole class recording, students correctly identified all group members' views and opinions that were considered worthwhile. When they went to small group discussions, they found it difficult to put this into practice in all but one group who worked very hard at considering all opinions.

Students : Some students reported that they found it difficult to consider other points of view because they just didn't see the sense of some opinions. Others had no opinion to offer and felt pressured to give one but didn't really want to and so gave whatever came into their heads. Others felt there were dominant members in their group and they virtually gave up trying to provide their point of view.

What Next?: Need to continue to provide opportunities and a purpose for students to offer opinions and reach group consensus that not only allows for the expression of personal points of view but also for the provision of more factual information.

In this learning plan, Peta, like many teachers in this project, used activities that made the way language works explicit to the students. She worked with her Year 9 students to explore the language and behaviours needed to support the discussion of topics in group contexts. She especially focussed on expressing a perspective and exploring perspectives different from your own.

Thus the teachers participating in this research project were able to develop appropriate pedagogy to address their students' oral language needs. However, first they needed the opportunity to explore what these needs might be. They also required professional development to broaden their own knowledge and understanding about what is involved in successful oral communication. Finally, they needed to work with the current curriculum documents – to "unpack" them so that they could fully understand what is "embedded" within them (see the section on recent changes to the curriculum documents). Once armed with this information, the development of appropriate teaching and learning experiences was an easy

progression. In fact, the difficulty was not getting the participants to address this area in their teaching, but rather to halt them sufficiently long enough to get them to document their innovative ideas.

In Cycle 4, many of the teachers used observation as a means to collect information about the degree to which their students achieved the outcomes they planned. In some cases, they designed rubrics to guide their observation. This process helped them to be explicit about what they were looking for as evidence of learning. In the following example, the teacher noted the particular behaviours her students demonstrated when telling news. She used a rubric which rated the students' current level of achievement in terms of:

- when and how often they needed prompting
- detail provided regarding the who, where, when, how and why of the news
- sequencing of the recount
- fluency of speech
- general aspects

Other teachers developed checklists to assist them in mapping their students' progress on specific aspects of the outcomes. The example below relates to a range of skills which needed to be demonstrated in a range of contexts.

Example: Oral language assessment checklist

Students	Follows short, simple verbal instructions	Asks questions, seeking information	Answers questions from others seeking information	Describes objects	Indicates when something is not understood	Self-corrects to clarify meaning
S						
T						
F						
K						
L						

Developed √   Developing Skill ~   Beginning Skill *

Some teachers used assessment processes that involved their students evaluating their own, and in some cases their peers', learning. These teachers designed rubrics to guide their students in this process. In the sample below, the teacher had her students work together in small groups on a cooperative task. The task related to

work they were doing in the society and environment learning area and the requirements were made explicit. Following the task, the students assessed their own behaviour using the following rubric.

Example: Rubric for assessing listening and cooperative skills.

	1 point Rarely	2 points Sometimes	3 points Often	4 points Most of the time	SCORE
Assessment 1: Group assessment - Listening and Cooperative skills.					
Speaking and Listening Name_____ Date _____					
<u>**Listening Behaviours**</u>					
<u>**How well did you pay attention to what people were saying?**</u>					
I looked at the person speaking.					
I used non-verbal gestures like *nodding, smiling.*					
I used verbal gestures like saying *aha, yes, OK.*					
<u>**Cooperative Behaviours**</u>					
<u>**How well do you cooperate in a small group?**</u>					
I took turns asking questions.					
I spoke when there was a pause instead of interrupting.					
I asked appropriate questions.					
I didn't distract others in the group.					
Comment:					score /28

Many of the teachers in the study assessed their students' knowledge, skills and understanding by looking at the products that were sometimes one of the outcomes of a task. In the following example, students investigated their own language use and reported it on a grid that the teacher provided. This then provided the teacher with further evidence of the students' level of development.

Example: Rubric on using language

Name _____

How do you use language? Think of different examples and how you speak. Write down what you would say when speaking to the people listed. This is NOT a test. We are interested in the language used by 11 and 12 year olds.

GREETING	BROTHER/ SISTER	FRIEND	PARENT	GRAND-PARENT	TEACHER/ PRINCIPAL	OTHER ADULT
Apologise for something						
Ask for something						
Greet the person						
Farewell the person						

Teachers also used other tasks to measure their students' learning outcomes. For example, the use of Y charts, as in the sample below.

Example: Y Chart on the qualities of encouragement of others

Sounds Like

- getting along
- positive words
- occasionally laughs
- nice try
- anytime
- no worries

Looks Like

- smiles
- manners
- cooperation
- everyone happily talking and
        lots of expressions
- happy expressions

Feels Like

- wanted
- happy
- proud
- good like you want to
        smile
- happy with what
        you've done
- included
- involved
- joyful
- strong
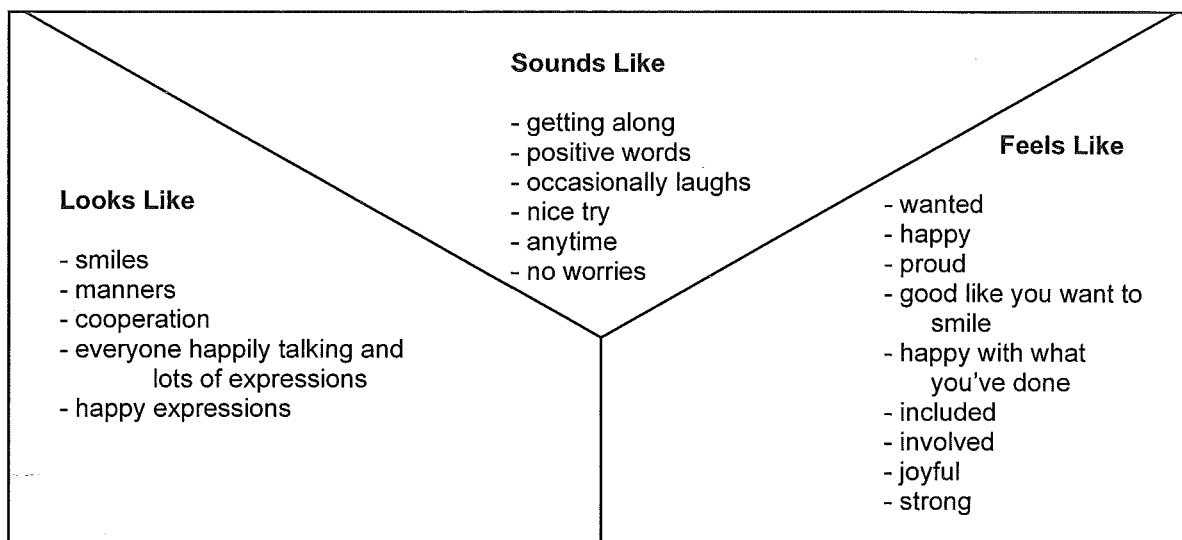
In the following example, the students did a task after a unit of work on using language to persuade. This task allowed the teacher to assess the extent of her students' metalinguistic understanding of persuasion and some of the specific linguistic features that were needed in its use.

Example: Assessing the language of persuasion

THE POWER OF LANGUAGE IN THE "REAL WORLD"		
Have you ever thought that some people are very clever in getting you to agree with them? Below are some positions which require sophisticated communication skills which are quite often very persuasive. In the table, identify some of the techniques of persuasion these people would use, examples of vocabulary and the audience with which it would be used.		
Career/Industry/Position	**Persuasive Techniques**	**Vocabulary/Audience**
Sales person		
Lawyer		
Financial Advisor		
Teacher		
Advertising Executive		
Hospitality Worker		
Promotions Manager		
Sports Coach		
*Other		

Overall, although teachers reported that they were able to use a wider range of assessment strategies as a result of their involvement in the project, it remained an issue for many of them. It would seem that this remains an area of oral language pedagogy that needs development.

So far in this report we have provided examples of individual participant's approaches to the different cycles of the action research. Next (pages 76 - 109) we present two case studies (done by Annette and Ryan) that detail their full action research projects, including all the cycles of their research.

Following these case studies is a report on recent changes to the related curriculum documents, the recommendations from our research and our conclusions.

Case Study One - Annette

Annette's Cycle 1

Annette chose to investigate the communicative environment of the hairdressing salon because of the relevance this context had to students' lives. She surmised that students had not only gone to hairdressers regularly for many years, but were currently very focussed on issues to do with hairstyles as they prepared for the annual Year 12 School Ball. Annette had also taught a number of students who had anticipated a career in hairdressing only to discover at the end of Year 10 that they did not have sufficiently high grades to gain an apprenticeship. She felt that there had been some miscommunication in the situation and that students underestimated the demands of hairdressing. She also noted that some students had difficulty understanding what seemed like the simple instructional language associated with hairdressing.

The following is an excerpt from the transcription Annette made of a conversation between an apprentice (H) and a young client (C) at the hairdresser:

H: So, how old are you?
C: Four.
H: What are you doing today? Going to John's house?
C: Yes.
H: How old is John?

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C: Five.
H: Five? He's older than you?
C: Yes.
H: Oh, are you getting new shoes today?
C: Yes.

This type of exchange continued for the duration of the haircut except for one brief instruction to the child where the hairdresser said,
H: "...you've got to tip your head right down otherwise you'll get a crooked haircut".

Annette noted other language functions used at the hairdresser and categorised them as follows:

Within the work setting:

- use of technical language- specialist vocabulary, i.e. perm, foils, rinse, tint, chemical mixtures (1 part & 3 parts), blow wave, set, etc.;
- concepts, i.e. chemical mixtures;
- occupational health and safety issues;
- booking or changing appointments and cancelling these where necessary, i.e. liaising with other personnel to confirm availability, negotiating times, etc.;
- following instructions and clarifying specifics where necessary with other staff;
- relating to staff, recognising the positions of power or hierarchies in the workplace.

With the client:
- clarifying information;
- requesting information;
- clarifying requirements;
- providing instructions- where to sit, how to move head;
- providing advice- why one style suits more than another;
- initiating and sustaining conversations;
- 'Reading' the customer: age, sex, social status, interests, etc. and adjusting interaction accordingly;
- showing awareness of others' interests according to age, gender, etc.- and asking questions, e.g., "Do you have children?";
- sharing information with others as part of social conversation.

After looking at the communicative environment of the hairdresser, Annette decided to focus on her students' ability to express their approval or disappointment with a service that they had received. In doing so, she was most interested in the level of empowerment that students felt within environments such as a hairdressing salon, where they pay for a service.

Annette's Cycle 2

From her investigations in Cycle 1, Annette decided to focus on the students' ability to express their approval or disappointment with a service that they have received. In order to determine what the students could already do, Annette wanted to simulate a service environment but found there were too many obstacles. So she made anecdotal records of "this very specific aspect of talk", i.e., expressing approval or disappointment with a service received. After that, she held a class discussion on the topic. The anecdotal records are listed first and then the results of the class discussion.

Example: Annette's anecdotal records

For one lesson I had prepared a handout for students breaking down the kinds of elements that could be examined within stage drama. To my amazement, one of my students, Melinda just out of the blue said,

'You know these guides that you give us, they are really good, it really worked for me last time. I found it helped a lot when I was doing my last assignment.'
I was quite stunned at this- it was an unexpected response to what I perceived to be 'standard' lesson delivery. In particular, I was amazed at Melinda's ability to state how much she appreciated the material and how she was finding it beneficial. Besides being flattered, I was given very specific feedback on the kinds of supports she was finding useful for study. It seemed to me that Melinda was actually enacting the kind of thing I was looking for - she was expressing her approval of a service that was being delivered to her.

Once I got over my initial surprise, I then said, "Oh thank-you Melinda, I'm glad it helps, when I'm making up these sheets I really am trying to think of ways that will help you understand the kinds of things you need to look at to analyse - it's not always easy trying to explain the kind of thinking we need to do and knowing exactly what you need." This initiated a conversation that all the students then became part of - they explained the kinds of material they had been given in the past, what they felt they had

been lacking and what they wanted more of. Some of these reactions I observed:

> Sarah: This is great! I didn't get any of this before.

> Katharine: Yeah- I didn't know what I was supposed to be looking for.

> Lauren: Yeah this is good, I've picked up that this is what we're supposed to be doing from before but last year we were doing a terminology test every Friday - it seemed a bit much because I know Lit is more than that. I know we do need to know these terms and I am using them in the essays, it's just that I don't know that they are always being used 'right' in the discussion and what kinds of things we are supposed to be talking about with the text - this helps make that clearer to me.

Interestingly, whilst none of the other students had ever initiated such a discussion before, they were all very active participants once it was taking place. I included Sarah and Katharine's responses because these are the two students that I feel are most lacking in confidence in their talk and who participate least in the class discussions. They are both very self-conscious and do not like taking public 'risks'. After a class discussion in which I refused to participate, I had asked Sarah whether she had found it useful listening to other students (she did not talk) and she had said, 'Yes, I found that most of the people in the class were thinking the same things I was so I wasn't wrong after all.' This was revealing as it showed that she wasn't prepared to talk within the classroom because she felt she wasn't 'expert' enough - even when it was with other students. In the scenario that follows, however, I found this kind of response from Sarah is not limited to the classroom.

The following is Annette's account of how she established what her students could already do with regards to expressing approval or disappointment with a service received.

Example: Annette's Class Discussion

In class the other day- because I was feeling rather pressured about not having done my job with this 'assignment' and I had run out of ideas on how best to deal with it - I just tackled it 'head-on'. I interrupted the lesson to tell the students I needed them to help me with a research assignment I was doing and, as much as I hated to initiate a 'Ball' discussion, I wanted to ask them a question. Having thrown out the carrot and gained their attention, I said, "I'm going to ask each one of you, If, come the day of the Ball, you had gone to the hairdresser and you didn't like the way she had done it, what would you say?" I then recorded students' responses in quick note form:

Valerie: I would tell them: 'I'm not happy with this, please fix it. I'm not paying for it like this'.

Antonelle: If it was almost the way I wanted it, I would tell them it was okay and then go home and change it. If it was completely wrong, I'd ask them to do it again.

Melinda: I don't know. It's not a place I go to, I'm not into hairdressers (after jokes from other students). Yeah, I'd probably just chuck a sad and go elsewhere.

Lauren: I'd say 'Excuse me please could you change this- I won't pay for this.'

Sarah: I'd probably say 'Yeah, it's okay' and then go home and change it. (After comments from other students). Yeah I'd say 'That's really good thank-you' and then I'd get in the car and cry.

Katharine: I don't like talking to hairdressers... (After prompting further) I'd probably say 'Er, er, can you change this bit.' I don't know I just probably wouldn't say anything, I don't like talking at hairdressers, I never talk - they always seem to want you to talk but I don't like that.

Katharine's response prompted plenty of discussion about the 'talkativeness' of hairdressers from the students and the extent to which they do/do not like it but we did redirect into the 'task at hand' again, i.e., what makes them feel empowered or not?

Teacher: Valerie, you were pretty certain about what you would say, what makes you feel so confident in speaking this way

to the hairdresser?

Valerie: Well I think they are privileged to have someone like me - oh God! I know I sound so up myself here, but what I'm saying is I know how I like my hair, I do a lot with it myself and I think they are privileged to have someone like me who knows what they are doing. So if I'm letting them 'do my hair'- I'm saying that I expect them to do it well. I can tell them exactly what I want, so they should be able to do it. I'm paying them to do it.

Kirsty: Yes, if you are paying for it, you have a right to expect it to be done properly. In my job, I expect people to tell me if they don't like their meal- otherwise they are paying for something they don't like and that's not right.

Teacher (to Sarah): Okay, so tell us why you don't feel so confident?

Sarah: Oh I know I'm paying for it but I just don't want them to get mad with me if I say I don't like it. I guess I could say something like 'I really like this bit' first- you know suck up to them so they feel good and won't get mad at me.

Kirsty: That sounds so manipulative.

Teacher: Do you think so? I think you sound disempowered Sarah.

Sarah: Oh thanks. Yeah I know but I think if they get mad they might be mean to me or something. I know that sounds crazy and I know I've paid for it.

Lauren: They shouldn't get mean but I know what you are saying, it is important that you say something nice to them but only to acknowledge that they have put in the time for what they have done.

Kirsty: Yes that's right, like at my work, we have gone to a lot of trouble to get a meal ready so if a customer doesn't like their meal, they should say so, but it is much better if they acknowledge that you have gone to that effort. It's not fair if they don't.

Lauren: Yeah, so you should say something like 'I really appreciate that you have put a lot of effort into doing this, but I just don't like it this way, I need you to change it.'

Antonelle: And if they don't?

Lauren: Well then they should either give the time for free or offer a voucher for another session.

As part of this conversation- somewhere in the middle, we did concentrate on Katharine's dilemma for a while too. Earlier I had asked Valerie whether her confidence had come from 'knowing the language of the hairdresser' i.e. being able to talk about the kinds of things you can do with hair. She said that she didn't know a lot of the technical language but she did know how to talk specifically about what she expected done. I was then able to re-direct to Katharine who had said she just didn't like talking to hairdressers. I asked her 'So what do you say when you are asking for your hair done.' Responses to this were as follows:

Katharine: You know I just don't know what to say usually, I just tell them to give me a trim. For the Ball I guess I'll get some magazine pictures and show them the style I want. But you know I still won't know what to say. I guess I'll have to talk to them and I'll have to have a definite style in mind- a picture will help. But if I don't like it I'd still feel bad about not liking it- I know I'm paying for it. I'll probably take my sister with me to explain it to them too if I can't get it out right. Yeah - I'll have my sister go with me, she can explain it.

Based on this discussion with the students, Annette devised the following table to determine how well the students were able to express approval/disapproval for a service provided.

Name	Progress	Comments
Kirsty	✓	
Antonelle	↔	Unable to accurately assess at present, Antonelle appears able to express some disapproval and state what she would like achieved but admits that she probably does not articulate exactly what she wants very well and so lacks confidence to express approval or disapproval. Solid understanding of the context and what is required.
Valerie	✓	
Lauren	✓	
Sarah	X	
Katharine	X	
Melinda	↔	Would require further observation. Able to express approval in a genuine context. However, in the scenario provided she said "I don't go to a hairdresser very often - when I do, which isn't very often, I usually go for the cheapest one I can find- so I don't expect much from it and don't care about the money." Scenario was not a 'valid' one for her. Her comment about 'cracking a sad' was probably accurate though - I have observed in the past that she tends to withdraw or make blunt and hostile comments when unhappy with situations within the classroom.

✓ = demonstrated
↔ = would require further observation/ assessment in different context
X = requires assistance to develop

Annette's Cycle 3

In this cycle, Annette recorded those things she had found in Cycle 1 that her students could already do. She then identified the outcomes they needed to achieve and which of these they did not currently demonstrate. A summary of this information is provided in the chart below.

Annette's summary chart

What they can do now	What they need to do Outcome to be achieved	Gap between what the students can do now and what they need to do.

What the students can currently do:
 	
• Understand that business relations are a mutual exchange in which each party is invested with particular rights.
• Understand that confidence within a speaking/listening situation is enhanced with preparation and planning prior to communication.
• Recognise that visual aids can be used to clarify ideas and details within a spoken context.
• Understand that a positive acknowledgement of the other person, when providing feedback, facilitates more open and honest communication of feelings/perceptions.
• Logically organize statements of feedback into a three part response
	What the students need to be able to do:
	• Explain the specific expectations and rights of each party within a particular context.
	• Plan for communication with a particular audience in mind, identifying the expectations of that audience in terms of:
	   – the kind of information that they require to achieve a particular outcome
	   – appropriate structure and organization of ideas and details to achieve a particular outcome
	   – appropriate attitude required to achieve a particular outcome (i.e., adopting a 'role' within the communication context).
	• Explore alternative ways of
		The understandings, skills and attitudes the students will need to achieve the outcome.
		
		Understand that, within particular contexts, audiences will have particular expectations of:
		• the specific language and style of presentation that is appropriate to this context,
		• the specific ideas and details that are required for a particular course of action to be taken,
		• their own role within this context and the kinds of responses and actions that are considered appropriate.
		
		Understand that they are able to control and adjust to a particular context and audience by:
		• using specific language and style of

– acknowledgments of other person, statements of own feeling/perception, statement of action/response desired. • Articulate perceptions of a particular speaking/listening context and explain the reasons for level of confidence within it.	presenting ideas/details and determine the most suitable and appropriate for a particular context/ audience. • Identify particular 'cues' offered within a communication context for providing feedback and response. • Use visual aids (where necessary) to enhance communication of particular ideas/details and be able to explain how these are likely to be interpreted by the audience. • Understand that confidence within a particular communication context is enhanced with knowledge and control of their own ability to convey information/ideas with clarity; provide appropriate details to support explanations and use an appropriate tone and register within the communication context. • Reflect upon the above to determine most appropriate response to offer an expression of approval/disapproval. • Structure a response of	presentation that is appropriate to the audience, • conveying specific ideas and details that will bring about a particular course of action, • identifying their own role within this context and the kinds of responses and actions that are considered appropriate **Uses the above understandings to plan, rehearse and implement spoken texts:** • Clearly identifies intended goals of a spoken text in terms of audience response/action. • Structures and organizes details of a spoken text with a clear outcome for the audience in mind. • Experiments with alternative methods of presenting ideas/details to determine the most appropriate for the particular audience. • When using visual aids is able to explain the specific ideas that are being conveyed through its use; how it is enhancing communication of particular

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	approval/disapproval that provides: a clear acknowledgement of the other party in terms of specific effort/actions; states own perceptions/response; explains a desired action that is appropriate and achievable for the audience.	ideas; how it will be received by the audience.
		• Understands the kinds of verbal cues that are offered in particular contexts to facilitate feedback responses e.g., 'How was your meal?', 'Is this what you were looking for?' 'Would you like to see what this looks like from behind?', 'There, are you happy with that?' 'Did you enjoy..?' and is able to respond in ways that are consistent with expectations of the audience and self.
		• Understands the kinds of non-verbal cues that are offered in particular contexts to facilitate feedback responses i.e., pausing, facial expressions, and is able to respond in ways that are consistent with expectations of the audience and self.
		• Evaluates the effectiveness of own communication to determine suitable feedback responses.
		• Able to provide statements acknowledging context specific actions/behaviours of others to initiate more open and honest communication.

		- Able to provide statements of opinion/perception as honest feedback by using 'I' statements and supporting with relevant detail to demonstrate perception/opinion. - Able to provide a direct statement of desired action/ response in the audience that is appropriate and achievable within the context.

Annette then planned a teaching and learning program based on the needs identified in Cycle 3. She also identified the assessment strategies she would use to determine whether her students had achieved the outcomes she planned. A summary of this planning follows.

What I will teach (skills/knowledge, understandings) in order for students to achieve the outcome:	How will I do it?	How will I know it is learnt?

The understandings, skills and attitudes:
    Understands that, within particular contexts, audiences will have particular expectations of:
  – the specific language and style of presentation that is appropriate to this context,
  – the specific ideas and details
	Experience (exposing students to skills/understandings etc. – immersions):
	   - Drama texts - Role plays - Comedy skits e.g., Monty Python, Skithouse, The Skit Show - Training tapes on service relations - Teacher modelling within
		Short Term: Task Specific Processes and Products:
		    Articulation of the audience's expectations within a particular context i.e., able to list and explain the specific expectations of an audience in terms of vocabulary, word choice, detail within ideas, tone and register for implementing a particular course of

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that are required for a particular course of action to be taken,

– their own role within this context and the kinds of responses and actions that are considered appropriate.

• Understands that they are able to control and adjust to a particular context and audience by:

– using specific language and style of presentation that is appropriate to the audience,

– conveying specific ideas and details that will bring about a particular course of action,

– identifying their own role within this context and the kinds of responses and actions that are considered appropriate.

• Uses the above understandings to plan, rehearse and implement spoken texts.

– Clearly identifies intended

appropriate contexts i.e., feedback on student work etc.

• Teacher demonstration of processes

Explore (opportunities for students to identify and explore particular skills/ understanding of contexts etc.). Examination of specific texts with:

• Various alert strategies that focus on identification of particular skills i.e., a feedback response that is an acknowledgement of the efforts of another, a cue for providing feedback etc.

• Discussion of student's own experiences within particular contexts offered, or similar, to compare/contrast the kinds of planning undertaken, the expectations/assumptions made of audience, the assumptions made about rights/entitlements within the situation.

• Role plays of particular contexts to demonstrate specific, identified

action; able to explain the kinds of attitudes that the audience will hold i.e., as the 'expert', as the 'learner' etc.

• Articulation of responsibilities within a particular context i.e., able to list and explain the specific expectations of an audience in terms of vocabulary, word choice, detail within ideas, tone and register for implementing a particular course of action; able to explain the kinds of attitudes that the audience will hold i.e., as the 'expert', as the 'learner' etc. and the importance of adjusting their spoken text to meet these expectations. Able to explain consequences of not doing so.

• Provides evidence of planning spoken text for a specific audience

– Reworking, simplifying and turning details into statements with a clear sense of articulating a specific purpose/course of action i.e., I want them to understand … accompanied by a list of do's and don'ts that appear to be directed at the audience.

goals of a spoken text in terms of audience response/action.
- Structures and organizes details of a spoken text with a clear outcome for the audience in mind.
- Experiments with alternative methods of presenting ideas/details to determine the most appropriate for the particular audience
- When using visual aids is able to explain the specific ideas that are being conveyed through its use; how it is enhancing communication of particular ideas; how it will be received by the audience.
- Understands the kinds of verbal cues that are offered in particular contexts to facilitate feedback responses e.g., 'How was your meal?', 'Is this what you were looking for?' 'Would you like to see what this looks like from behind?', 'There, are you happy with that?' 'Did you enjoy..?' and is able to

skill/s or understandings i.e., shop service scenario similar to one presented in a text to explore aspects of tone etc.; reflection and discussion of 'role' adopted and the attitudes that accompanied this role.
- Comparison of 'non-examples' with good examples to explore the aspects of successful communication.
- Guided planning i.e., teacher modelling of planning process with some student input.

Experiment – (opportunities for students to experiment with and practise particular skills and understandings):
- Use a checklist of skills/understandings to plan and script a particular scenario.
- Role plays based upon particular scenarios and reflection upon the particular skills employed and their suitability for the specific audience.

- Drafting of notes that shows ordering and organizations of details, structuring for clarity with a specific audience in mind i.e., annotations on context and expected responses.
- Rehearsal of tone and spoken text with attention to word choice etc. – often followed by statements of perception of the audience – 'no, they would expect me to show them'; 'I need them to know'; 'now what is it I am trying to get across to them here?', 'Yes, they sound like ... what they would expect, they will get the idea that I want them to....if I ...'
- When planning to use a visual aid can explain why it will enhance the communication of particular ideas; how it will be interpreted by the audience and how they will deliver it to bring about the intended outcome.
- When using a visual aid, accompanies this with appropriate verbal and non-verbal details that clarify its

respond in ways that are consistent with expectations of the audience and self.
- Understands the kinds of non-verbal cues that are offered in particular contexts to facilitate feedback responses i.e., pausing, facial expressions; and is able to respond in ways that are consistent with expectations of the audience and self.
- Evaluates the effectiveness of own communication to determine suitable feedback responses.
- Able to provide statements acknowledging context specific actions/behaviours of others to initiate more open and honest communication and can explain the impact they will have on a particular audience.
- Able to provide statements of opinion/perception as honest feedback by using 'I' statements and supporting with relevant detail to demonstrate perception/opinion

- Transformation of 'non-example' to 'model example' or visa versa i.e., take a skit and identify the kinds of inappropriate responses, unexpected understandings that were present within a particular character, inappropriate use of language, recognition of cues etc. and transform these to appropriate ones. Explain the changes.

Expression – opportunities for students to demonstrate particular skills/understandings in a realistic and purposeful context:
- Construction of a 'training video' to demonstrate how to express approval/disapproval within a service context.
- Construction and enactment of a drama script/scenario based upon a specific context.
- Case study and report on a specific context identified by students i.e., preparation and enactment of hiring a suit for the ball, going to the

significance to the audience i.e., focuses audience on specific, relevant details and explains what they are expected to understand by these.
- When provided with specific scenarios/ spoken texts is able to identify and explain the feedback cues that were given and the expectations that the person held when 'eliciting feedback response'; uses these to assess the appropriateness of the response by the listener.
- When provided with statements of approval and disapproval is able to:
- Evaluate the function and impact on the audience of the statement acknowledging the actions/behaviours of others.
- Evaluate the function and impact of the statement of perception/opinion with supporting reasons.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of statements of desired course of action in context of the audience and the specific situation.
- Is able to develop appropriate three-

and can explain the impact they will have on a particular audience.

- Able to provide a direct statement of desired action/response in the audience that is appropriate and achievable within the context and can justify belief with appropriate reasons.

hairdresser, purchasing a specific item – could be formalized as a kind of 'Shopper Anonymous' Report.

- Construction of skit for a comedy show that highlights poor planning and implementation within a service context and inappropriate responses for expressing approval/disapproval.

Evaluation – opportunities for student reflection upon what they have learned and how:

- Student self-evaluation on explicit skills/understandings that they have learned and the extent to which they felt they demonstrated them in the final product + the kinds of strategies and processes that most assisted them in developing these skills/understandings.
- Peer evaluation of product based upon a checklist of skills i.e., recognition and response to 'cues' for providing feedback; organization

part statements of approval/disapproval based on specific scenarios and explain the significance and appropriateness of the various parts of the statements in terms of their impact upon the audience.

Long term - Task Specific Processes and Products:

Evidence of student providing feedback to express approval/disapproval. Do they:

- Offer positive acknowledgements of others that is context related?
- Offer own opinions and perceptions in the form of "I" statements and support these with reasons/ details?
- Clearly explain desired courses of action that are achievable and appropriate to the specific audience?

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	and structure of details when providing explanations / requirements to the audience; appropriate use of visual aid i.e., pointing out specific aspects of the aid that are relevant to the task at hand and explaining these appropriately etc.	

As shown in this case study, Annette was able to use an everyday communicative environment like a hairdresser's salon as a way to contextualise intellectually challenging learning and to engage students deeply. Annette extended her students' interest in how to express dissatisfaction with a service to an exploration of expressions of power through language, an issue also relevant to studies of literature in upper school. In addition, she demonstrated the effectiveness of explicitly teaching the knowledge, skills and understandings implicit in learning outcomes. This approach had the added benefit of improving the students' metalinguistic awareness. Finally, the learning outcomes her students achieved not only had relevance for school, but could be applied in their everyday lives.

Case Study Two - Ryan

Ryan looked at social interaction with his upper school students. He felt that this was an area of concern for his students, and one that was generally not addressed in the school curriculum.

Ryan's Cycle 1

Ryan chose to investigate the communicative environment of the "homes of friends, staying for a BBQ or meal at a friend's house, not an old family friend but perhaps the family of a newish girlfriend or boyfriend". His reasoning was that "this is an environment that many students face and it should be one that they feel comfortable in, but many feel awkward about the range of language situations they face."

He collected information about this communicative environment by looking at five different situations depending on the people involved and noted examples of the different types of language used in these situations.

Ryan's findings are presented in the following table:

Situation	People involved	Potential Difficulties	Types of language used
Greetings and conversations with the parents of your friends	Parents and siblings This could include wider family such as family friends, aunts, uncles	Engaging in conversations with unfamiliar people can be difficult. Sometimes it is hard to decide what to call parents and grandparents of friends. It can seem strange to call them by their first name even if they ask you to and yet 'Mr' and 'Mrs' seems formal. What do you call grandparents?	Much more formal language than usual: "Hi Mrs. C. I mean Cheryl. Thanks for inviting me." "Do you want a hand putting some of this stuff away, Jack?" "Thanks for the tea, Mrs. Charles." "That was a beautiful steak."

Public conversations with a friend when others are around	A teenager and his/her friend or group of friends	The language commonly used to communicate with the friend may no longer be appropriate. The swearing, jokes, and put downs usually associated with conversations may be totally inappropriate in this situation so the student has to talk to their friend in a different way.	In this situation, people tend to ask questions to allow the person who is more familiar with the environment to set the boundaries, conversation rules and tone that are appropriate. "How did you go at the basketball last night?" "Did you get that stuff done for S&E?" "I got the new CD. It is pretty awesome really."
Private conversations with the friend		You may be concerned about others hearing. It may be hard to switch register.	"Shit, your old man is really pissed." "Is that your cousin? She is really hot."
Conversations between the friend and his/her nanna	Your friend's nanna	It might seem funny or strange hearing a friend using a completely different register. They could be treated like a baby or be really servile and it could seem out of character.	"Yeah, I have grown up a bit since last time you saw me, Pop." "Can I have some of that trifle, Nan? You know it's my favourite."
More serious conversations with the friend's Mum	Your friend's mum	This might involve conversations of a private nature. They might want you to tell them things about your friend.	"I am really concerned about the way Terri is going at the moment. Do you think she is happy?" "How is Terri settling with Mr. Davis at school? You know about the problems from last term."

Ryan's Cycle 2

Thus in Cycle 1, Ryan identified the real world needs of students in the particular communicative environment of a barbecue. Next, in Cycle 2, he identified the gap between what the students already know and can do and what they need to know and do in such an environment. He wrote:

My concern is that many of these (functions found in Cycle 1) were not part of what is done in the English classroom. My teaching program does not really prepare students for these language needs in any planned way. Informal talk in my class is either incidental (often with me trying to stop it!) or in structured class or group discussions. The group becomes a familiar group, although it was fascinating getting some insights from students new to the school. They felt that the situation they faced in entering new classes was similar to the language situation we were investigating. The formal talk we do in class is planned and not social in function. Its purpose is generally to express ideas and it ends up more like essays being read out. So the point is that this kind of talk is not valued in my classroom. The skills are not taught, the students who have a capacity in this area are not recognised and it does not inform the decisions I make about my students' S&L (Speaking and Listening) outcomes. This is not acceptable.

Ryan reported attempting to incorporate these skills in a structured way into his teaching/ learning program. This included:

1. Setting aside time to talk about the language skills students need in social situations. Getting students to reflect on the way conversation works.
2. Structured activities in class asking students to reflect on language situations.
3. Teaching students the critical skills and concepts to reflect on language skills.
4. Modelling an approach by focussing on transcripts of conversations and analysing the way they work.
5. Asking students to investigate a language situation they find themselves in and submit it for assessment. This assignment will reflect the outcome statements for Speaking and Listening.

First, Ryan looked at the language functions needed when participating in cultural activities, specifically a family barbeque. This was the communicative environment he investigated in Cycle 1. He identified the following functions that his students would need in this context:

- to greet people
- to navigate their way through the early part of conversations with someone they don't know
- to be able to end conversations that are going nowhere or in order to 'mingle'
- a focus to overcome their fear of "getting noticed"
- to express their own needs and wants (toilet, drinks, food, etc.)
- to understand that a lot of the conversation will be used to identify where they fit in with regard to the other people in the group
- to accept compliments
- to answer questions about their lives.

Ryan then had to identify whether his students currently had control of the functions he identified as needs. He reported:

> "There is a wide range in students' skills in this area. In conversation with my class (this is a very social, perceptive and articulate group) they all agreed that these situations were very difficult. Many of them told 'horror stories' where they were totally embarrassed because they found themselves in situations where they were unsure of what to do. A lot of this involved times when they felt adults behaved 'inappropriately' by talking about things that teenagers don't talk about, trying to be cool, or drawing attention to the teenagers when they want to be invisible. Many of the students did not have the skills or confidence to maintain conversations in these situations."

Ryan then went on to discuss what additional functions his students still needed to communicate successfully in this type of speech environment. He noted:

> "My students needed strategies to 'cope' with some of these situations. It was amazing how productive the class conversation was in this area. Students all wanted to contribute ideas and hearing what other students did was very useful. Students need to be aware of the 'patterns' of conversation that occur. Understanding of the conventions of this kind of talk would help them deal with new situations. Some students need to be helped with conversations with teenagers they don't know so that these strategies can be used to 'belong' to a group at a party."

Ryan identified that the "students need the skills set out in the Tackling Talk document". He then noted those oral language contexts in which his students were lacking. These included:

a) the range of different social contexts of language:

- o formal
- o informal
- o familiar
- o unfamiliar

b) the range of cultural contexts of language

- o local
- o community

c) the possible interlocutors

- o people who are known
- o people who are unknown
- o children
- o peers
- o adults

These contexts required particular functions of language:

Give/ask permission; greet; invite; accept/ refuse; apologise; accept compliments; express feelings; request something; request someone to do something; request information; respond; negotiate; encourage; express needs; interrupt; give and receive messages/ information; and thank.

These contexts also required the skills to:

- Interpret paralinguistic features
- Open and close conversations- face to face, on the telephone
- Manage turn taking
- Manage topic changes
- Use non-verbal listening and speaking behaviours
- Sustain conversations
- Repair communication breakdown

Having decided what aspects of oral language he would explore, Ryan had his students complete the following matrix to record their language use and then he

discussed this information with his students. In this way, he was able to determine his students' current competency in relation to social interaction in an informal intergenerational setting like a family barbeque.

Example: Ryan's student activity

Appropriate Language: Think about the way you change your language depending on the situation. Complete all columns for three of the situations listed here.				
Situation Purpose Audience	What would you say to start the conversation?	What would you say if there was something you didn't understand?	What kinds of language would you avoid using?	How would you end the conversation?
Asking directions from an older stranger you do not know	Good morning… Excuse me…	I'm sorry I didn't hear that.	Swearing. Too much slang or teenage words.	Thanks for your help. Goodbye.
A sporting coach to know where you are playing				
A close friend who needs comforting				
Receiving a citizenship award from the Premier				
A relation is telling a boring story you have heard before				
In conversation				

letting someone know that you don't like what they have said				
You are in a group and you are being ignored				

Ryan used the information he had collected from this activity to identify the specific needs of his students in Cycle 3.

Ryan's Cycle 3

In Cycle 3, he identified what his students could do currently and what they would need to be able to do and then the gap between these.

1. What can they do now?	2. What do they need to do? (Outcome to be achieved)	3. Gap between what the students can do now and what they need to do.
Area of language investigated Students reflected on language use in a social situation where they knew some people and didn't know others, e.g., a family BBQ or party at a friend's house **What the students can do currently:** - Reflect on language situations and the different types of register they use, e.g., when to swear - Identify different	Outcomes to be achieved Contextual Understanding Level 5 & 6: Examines different perspectives on complex issues and ideas in an increasing range of structured and unstructured listening and speaking situations; identifies the ways in which social and cultural factors and background knowledge influence the interpretation of spoken texts; experiments with verbal and non-verbal language and text organisation in the construction of own spoken texts, explaining how these	The understandings, skills and attitudes the student will need in order to achieve the outcome - Identify questions, comments and positive signals they can use to keep conversation going - Identify the patterns of conversation and use this knowledge to 'read' where a conversation is going - Use understanding

language contexts where they need to change the way they talk - Recognize some of the conventions of different talk situations - Discuss the way power relationships reveal themselves in conversations - Recognize different phases of conversations - Identify the way body language, gesture, expression and tone contribute to meaning in talk	elements are used to achieve particular effects; and controls a wide range of strategies and uses them to enhance communication [Speaking & Listening Levels 4,5,6]	of sociocultural differences in conversations - Use language to persuade people to accept their point of view on something
	What the student needs to be able to do to move to the next level - Reflect on sociocultural differences - Identify ways they can be more effective in the way they communicate with people they don't know - Talk so as to influence people - Compare experiences of talking to different groups - Trial a conversation with someone they don't know	

Ryan's Cycle 4

Ryan was able to identify his students' oral language needs by looking at the knowledge, understandings and skills that he had noted as the gap between what his students already knew and what they needed to know (as recorded in the third column of the chart above). He was then able to plan a teaching and learning program to address those needs and to design an assessment instrument to measure the students' learning outcomes.

1. What will I teach?	2. How will I do it? What teaching and learning strategies will I use?	3. How do I know it has been learnt? What assessment tools will I use?
- Students will develop strategies for different conversations in unfamiliar places - Students will become familiar with some differences between sociocultural groups in conversations - They will develop strategies for conversations they need to have with more powerful people to get what they want e.g., with parents about going to a party - Students will know how to ask a friend to accompany them to a place they don't want to go	- They will use a form to plan conversations for different 'difficult' situations - These plans will be put together for all students in a guidebook - We will invite students from different cultural groups to talk about the changes they make when they are with their own people - Students will develop formats for greeting, conversation starters, change of topic, deflecting unwelcome subjects, accepting praise, ending conversations etc. - Students will be requested to use one of these strategies in an unfamiliar situation outside of school. They will write up the strategies they used and reflect on their success.	Students' reflection on the strategies for conversation they used in an unfamiliar situation. This will be presented in written form and students will discuss it with the teacher. It may be possible that we can try the strategies by inviting a group of unfamiliar people into the class for a morning tea e.g., - Residents from a low care old people's home - Students and staff from the IEC Students will be assigned people to host and can try their strategies. Other students will observe and reflect on the student's performance.

Ryan designed a number of tasks to provide his students with the opportunity to achieve the oral language outcomes that were the focus of his planning. In the Speech Situation Investigation described below his students investigated and reflected on the strategies for conversation they used in an unfamiliar situation. Ryan used a speech pyramid (from Oliver et al 2003), and a sample transcript to assist the students with their investigation.

Example: Ryan's Speech Situation Investigation

As students you are asked to write a range of text forms in your schooling and you are taught the way these are put together. This is an important part of your education because many jobs require people to be able to use a variety of forms of writing such as emails, reports, instructions, letters, etc. But have you ever thought about the range of spoken contexts in which you are required to be competent in your life outside school? Young people are required to talk to a range of people in a range of social, professional and educational situations. Your ability to handle these situations comfortably and talk effectively to many people can determine your success in many parts of your life. The successful employee in the company must have the ability to talk with clients, managers, fellow workers, apprentices, union officials, government agencies and sometimes the police and the media. This is without even considering the many times we are asked to talk in the multiple social situations we find ourselves in through family, friendship groups, sporting clubs, churches and cultural groups. All of these situations have their own conventions or rules about how you talk, when you talk and the kinds of talk that happen. Knowledge of these rules has to be learnt from experience. We all know how difficult it is to talk to unfamiliar people in a strange environment.

Your Task
Your task is to investigate a speech situation (a place where lots of different types of talking goes on) that you find yourself in. The speaking situation is when you go to a friend's when they are having a significant social event. This could be a family barbecue, a family member's birthday party or some sort of celebration. You know your friend and may have some acquaintance with their mum, dad and siblings but you don't know most of the people. They are a friendly lot and they want to talk to you. You need to record the range of talking that goes on, how the conversations work and the kind of language that is used in various situations.

Getting Started
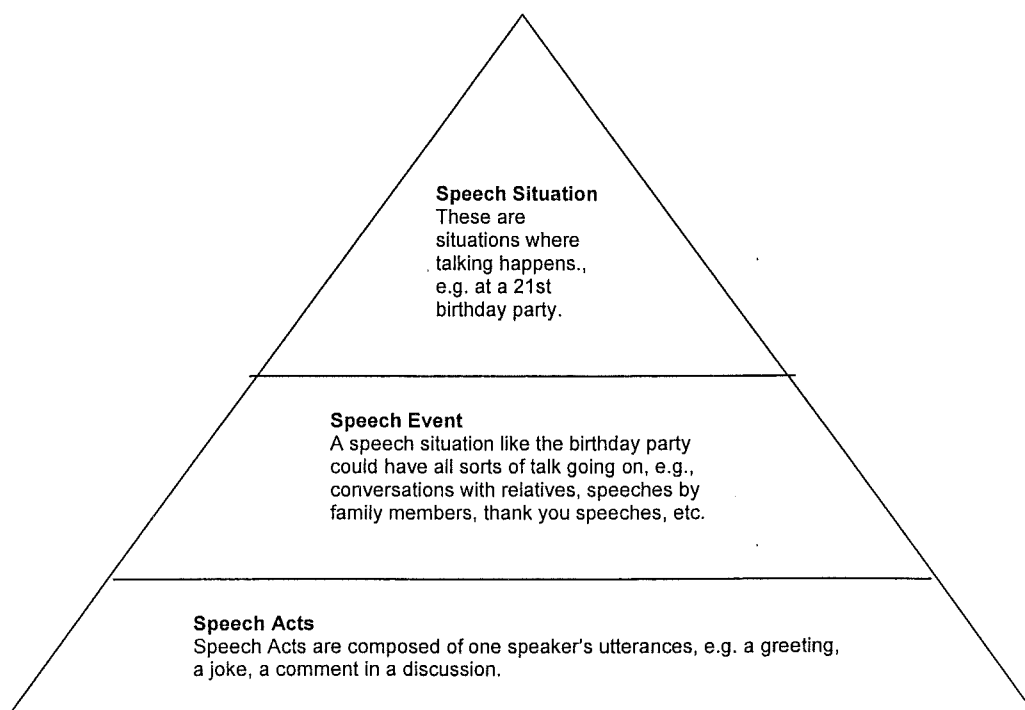You may use the speech pyramid provided to:
1. Identify the speech situation you have attended. Describe where it was, who was there and the purpose of the event. Explain how you ended up

being there and any problems, difficulties or aspects of the event that need to be explained.
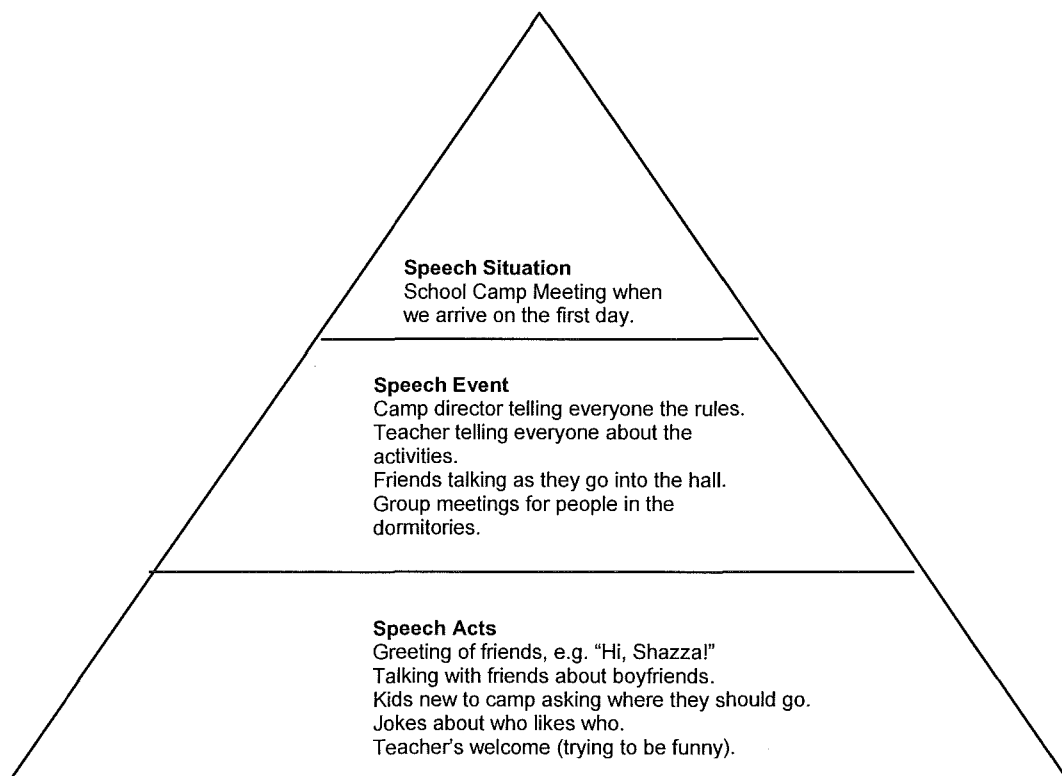
2. Make a list of a range of speech events that occurred. Note the kinds of conversations between people and the way conversation topics and language can change depending on who is talking.

3. Divide up these speech events into speech acts, e.g. a greeting, a joke, etc.

4. Decide who was the person with the power in these speech events, who asked the questions, what the body language was between the people.

5. Write a transcript of a specific speech act. Write annotations about what is happening in the conversation. You may note body language, change of tones, different sections of the conversation, and how you (or other people) may be feeling.

6. A reflection on what you have learnt about the way talking and listening works in this environment.

[Example: Speech Pyramid
(from Oliver et al, 2003).]

This activity asks you to examine the range of speech used in particular situations. We call these 'speech situations' and a range of talk goes on in speech situations.

Speech Situation
These are situations where talking happens., e.g. at a 21st birthday party.

Speech Event
A speech situation like the birthday party could have all sorts of talk going on, e.g., conversations with relatives, speeches by family members, thank you speeches, etc.

Speech Acts
Speech Acts are composed of one speaker's utterances, e.g. a greeting, a joke, a comment in a discussion.

Example: A completed speech pyramid

Speech Situation
School Camp Meeting when
we arrive on the first day.

Speech Event
Camp director telling everyone the rules.
Teacher telling everyone about the
activities.
Friends talking as they go into the hall.
Group meetings for people in the
dormitories.

Speech Acts
Greeting of friends, e.g. "Hi, Shazza!"
Talking with friends about boyfriends.
Kids new to camp asking where they should go.
Jokes about who likes who.
Teacher's welcome (trying to be funny).

In the second activity, the students read a transcript of a conversation and analysed it to identify the conventions that were used by the speakers.

Example: Ryan's second activity - The Conventions of Conversation

Read through the conversation between Helen and Tracy. Apart from the fact that it is a telephone conversation, there are other unwritten rules or conventions that Helen and Tracy understand. Many of these are very obvious and we take them for granted but we learn them through practice. By knowing the rules we can use them when we are in unfamiliar territory. When we are having a conversation with someone we don't know or in a difficult situation we can use the conventions to help show us what to do.

(Phone ringing)
Helen: Hi ya.
Tracy: Hi Hel whatcha doin?
Helen: Nothin much. Just watching TV. There's nothing on. I hate it.
Tracy: Me too. It is just rubbish at the moment. I am so bored. There is nothing to do.
Helen: Tell me about it.
Tracy: At least you have a sister. I've got two brothers. They are such

pains.

Helen: Miranda is not much better.

Tracy: At least you can talk. Those two creeps just can't even do that. They just yell and throw things. I swear ten year old boys regress into some primitive state.

Helen: Like slime.

Tracy: Yeah slime.

Helen: Got any homework?

Tracy: Nope.

Helen: Did you get the Science finished?

Tracy: What Science homework?

Helen: You know the one on insects. Have you finished it? We've had it for ages.

Tracy: Oh my God. I forgot. When is it due in? Wednesday?

Helen: Ahuh!

Tracy: This Wednesday? Like the day after tomorrow Wednesday?

Helen: Ahuh.

Tracy: Please tell me it isn't true. It can't be this Wednesday. Are you sure? Tell me you are making this up. Oh my God I am dead. I am so dead.

Helen: But you must have started it. What about the stuff you did in class?

Tracy: You know I changed my mind about what I was going to do. That stuff is all useless. I can't do anything with it at all. Dad will be so mad if I don't do well on this one. I promised I was going to really improve. What am I going to do? Help Helen.

Helen: Well did you start the new one?

Tracy: Not really. I just got some stuff off the net.

Ryan then designed an assessment instrument so that he could work out what learning outcomes individual students had achieved. The following rubric made the criteria for the assessment task explicit to the students.

Example: Ryan's assessment instrument

Strand: Speaking and Listening	Name:		
Task Description: The task involves investigating a real life speaking situation that you can find yourself in. You will record: • the kinds of talking that goes on • the patterns of that language • the kind of language used in that situation You will be required to reflect on what you have found out about talk in a social situation			
Sub Strand	**Level 4**	**Level 5**	**Level 6**

Use of texts	The student develops and presents familiar ideas and information and supports opinions with some detail in a variety of classroom situations. The student identifies the main ideas and explicit supporting details of clearly-structured spoken informational and expressive texts and identifies alternative viewpoints in spoken, audio and video texts on an issue relating to a familiar topic.
	
	I can:
	   *present accurate summaries of discussions
		The student interacts with peers in structured situations to discuss familiar or accessible subjects involving challenging ideas and issues. The student processes ideas and information from a range of classroom texts dealing with challenging ideas and issues, including sustained teacher and peer discourse and audio and video texts.
		
		I can:
		   *give succinct accounts of important personal experiences;
		   *listen to
			The student conveys detailed information and explores different perspectives on complex issues when interacting with known social groups in formal and informal situations. The student processes ideas and information and identifies different perspectives on complex issues in spoken texts, including sustaining an unstructured discourse, in a variety of media and situations.
			
			I can:
			   *identify a range of opinions in

		sustained spoken texts noting key ideas	discussions
Contextual Understanding	The student considers the appropriateness of text form and register and the conventions of non- verbal communication in relation to audience when speaking and listening in familiar situations. I can: *recognise and discuss ways that different gestures and physical language is used and understood depending on the cultural context. *discuss situations where slang and colloquial language might be considered suitable or unsuitable. *recognise and discuss some indicators of sociocultural bias or prejudice, e.g., a	The student judges the appropriateness and effect of text form and register in relation to audience, purpose and context when speaking and listening. I can: *compare the experiences of talking with different groups of people *recognise the way individuals will completely change their register in different situations	The student identifies ways in which sociocultural background, knowledge and opinion influence the meanings that the speakers and listeners convey and receive. I can: *explore the way different people interpret specialist vocabulary and language construction *discuss the way vocabulary, accent and other aspects of speech are interpreted in terms of power relationships

	speaker's use of discriminatory language.		

Conventions	The student controls most linguistic structures and features of spoken language appropriately for expressing and interpreting meaning and developing and presenting ideas and information in familiar situations.
	
	I can:
	    *recognise the way body movement, facial expressions and gestures enhance meaning
	    *recognise different phases of conversations and talks such as greetings, question asking, etc.
		The student discusses and experiments with some linguistic structures and features that enable speakers to influence audiences.
		
		I can:
		    *observe and discuss the way voice and body language affect audiences
		    *discuss the impact of colloquial language and jargon on listeners
		    *identify the way conversations work
			The student explains how speakers use linguistic structures and features to influence audiences; and experiments with these to achieve particular effects in the construction of own spoken texts.
			
			I can:
			    *detect the way speakers use a range of techniques to persuade their audience
			    *recognise the way non-verbal language can contradict verbal messages

Processes and Strategies	The student draws on a range of strategies and deliberately adjusts speaking and listening to meet the needs of the task.	The student selects and applies appropriate strategies for monitoring and adjusting communication in a range of contexts.	The student controls a wide range of strategies and uses them to enhance communication about complex

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	I can: *review and reflect on body language, facial expressions and gestures *use questions to facilitate conversations and clarify others' viewpoints	I can: *monitor and reflect on spoken texts *note relevant features of spoken texts	issues. I can: *recognise the way speakers engage listeners *identify the sociocultural influences that affect the meaning of spoken texts

Thus, Ryan assessed the students' knowledge and understandings through the written records of the oral tasks they had done.

Like Annette, Ryan not only addressed his students' immediate oral language needs but also helped them to develop complex understandings about how language works. He did this in innovative ways such as by involving his students in the investigation of their own and others' use of language, by developing a metalanguage with which they could explore those issues of interest to them and by helping them to critically analyse the language conventions that apply in a range of contexts. The knowledge, skills and understandings, including metalinguistic awareness, which students developed in this program could be applied in many everyday and school contexts and to other strands of the English Learning Area.

Recent changes to the curriculum documents

This action research project was undertaken in 2003 and 2004. It evolved in response to previous research which commenced as early as the mid 1990s. As a result of this long commitment to the concern about oral language in the classroom, and because of the close relationship between the project team members, professional associations, education and curriculum authorities, there has been ongoing dialogue about this topic. Perhaps because of this, recent changes in curriculum documents in Western Australia reflect some of the understandings explored in this (and related previous) research. This is particularly the case with the *Curriculum Guides* (Curriculum Council, 2005). These guides provide advice on key content to be taught at each phase of schooling which enables students to achieve the outcomes mandated by the Curriculum Framework. In the *Curriculum Guides* the knowledge, skills, understandings and values related to a wide range of oral language functions are foregrounded – a development that we applaud. For example, within the content organiser of *Context, Purpose and Audience* in the early childhood phase of schooling, the following learning is noted as an example of what the students need to understand and be able to do:

- **listening and speaking conventions change according to the purpose and the context of the communication (eg socialising, informing, clarifying, seeking information)**

This control over the conventions associated with particular purposes, contexts and audiences when speaking and listening is further developed in later phases. For example, in the middle childhood phase the content increases in complexity with attention to the different ways people interact and how that can indicate differences in power or in the nature of their relationships:

- **speakers can adjust language to show or acknowledge power and to indicate closeness or distance in relationships**

In early adolescence these understandings about the relationship between oral language use and power are further explored. There is also a shift from the exercise of power in familiar interpersonal contexts to examine how it operates in broader, less familiar societal contexts:

- the relationship between language and power in society (eg the use of code, dialect; vocabulary such as technical terms, slang, and jargon to exclude others)

In late adolescence the students further develop their understanding through learning about the way perception of relative power influences oral communication. They also examine this relationship in contexts related to their present experiences and to those in the community, in institutions and in the world of work:

- there is a relationship between oral language and power in society and people communicate according to their perceived power in a relationship (eg student-teacher, student-student, student-police, student-employer)

Another area of oral communication that was only implicit in earlier outcomes-based curriculum materials was that of social interaction. In the *Student Outcome Statements* (Education Department of WA, 1998) this area of language development was only explicit at Level 1 and 2 of the outcomes. Similarly, in the *Outcomes and Standards Framework* (Department of Education and Training, 2005) it is not referred to specifically after Level 3. However, it is made explicit in the *Curriculum Guides* where there is recognition that the demands of interpersonal communication are complex and students can be assisted to develop increasingly sophisticated understandings of, and control over, these. Again this is a positive and useful development – one that is clearly supported by the current research.

The complexity of social interaction is apparent in this new document when specific content is tracked from the early childhood phase through to the late adolescent phase. In the early childhood phase the content relates to speaking and listening for a range of purposes and audiences.

- purposes and related conventions of listening and speaking

In middle childhood the focus extends to include language requirements beyond conventions and there is explicit mention of informal contexts. This is appropriate for this phase of schooling as while the importance of informal contexts may be assumed in the early years of schooling, this is not always the case in later phases.

- recognising the purpose, audience and language required for formal and informal situations

By early adolescence the content includes knowledge, skills, understandings and values related to communicative competence in formal and informal contexts within and beyond school.

- **communication with others in formal and informal situations within and beyond the school context**

In late adolescence the personal, social, academic and workplace contexts are seen to be important and to demand different types of discourse. When students move into society beyond their family and local community, there is recognition that the personal and social contexts are as demanding as the academic and workplace contexts.

- **using personal, social, academic and workplace discourses**

Changes such as these are also evident in the recently published *Indicators of Level of Achievement* (Department of Education and Training, 2005) which are used by teachers to help them make judgements about their students' achievement of the learning outcomes. The indicators reflect recognition of the complexity of interpersonal communication with higher level skills related to different contexts and purposes and to both dialogues and monologues.

These new documents make some of the knowledge, skills, understandings and values related to listening and speaking explicit and therefore available to guide teachers' planning, teaching and assessment processes. This goes some way to redressing the imbalance in the curriculum – between the language required for formal learning and that for social interaction on one hand and between spoken and written language on the other. As already noted these are positive and useful developments, and are clearly supported by the findings of the current research. However, as with any curriculum innovation we hope that such developments are the beginning of the development – there are clearly still areas of need to be addressed.

Recommendations

On the basis of this research, and taking into account current curriculum developments, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. A broader range of outcomes be expressed in curriculum frameworks

The Curriculum Framework and the Outcomes and Standards Framework/Progress Maps are dictating too narrow a range of oral competency. Some of the particular knowledge, understandings and skills which should be the outcomes of schooling, are only *implicit* in the Outcomes. Despite recent curriculum developments, many oral language needs are still not readily recognised by teachers and so are not addressed in a consistent manner in most classrooms. This includes aspects of oral language related to social interaction and outcomes that represent a broader range of language functions.

2. Speaking and listening be given more attention in teaching programs

Listening and speaking need to be of greater importance in classroom practice as they constitute two of the major strands of the English Learning Area as well as being a vital medium of instruction for all other learning areas. Too often, developing oral language skills is seen only as a means to promote written competency or support other learning rather than as an important end in itself.

3. A broader range of strategies be used to assess student outcomes in oral language

Teachers in this study reported using a narrow range of assessment strategies. This suggests that students may have competencies they are not able to demonstrate in school contexts.

4. Students' needs be the basis of the teaching program in oral language

Teachers need to work from a 'needs' basis and students' needs should be reflected in curriculum documents and support materials.

5. Teachers be provided with professional development

Teachers need more support to understand the complexity of oral language development. They also need to understand the demands of the communicative situations that students face now and will face in the future both in and out of school. This professional development should occur for practising teachers, but also needs to be built into pre-service training.

Conclusion

The Tackling Talk project has been an extensive endeavour involving materials development, professional development, mentoring and four cycles of action research. As a result, this project generated considerable data, a great deal of which could not be detailed in this report. Nonetheless, the research team is extremely grateful for the valuable contributions of all the participants, regardless of whether their research has been specifically described in this report.

The Tackling Talk project has demonstrated the educational and communication needs of students. By using an action research model the teachers were able to look beyond the strong bias in current language teaching which is towards reading and text production. This bias exists within both the classroom and the curriculum. The Tackling Talk research experience raised teachers' awareness of the importance of day-to-day interactions for developing their students' communicative competence. As a result, many teachers expressed strong positive sentiments at their new-found understanding of the oral language needs of their students and the opportunities it provided them to develop more meaningful activities for many of their students.

In this report, we have been able to demonstrate that, with appropriate guidance by way of professional development and on-line/electronic materials, the teachers involved in the project have enhanced their awareness of the types of oral language required by their students both in the immediate community context and in their possible future employment contexts.

The Tackling Talk project required a considerable time commitment on the part of the teachers in order for them to look at language use *in situ*, to apply this knowledge in their classrooms and to reflect on this experience. With the on-line materials and the professional development, they were alerted to functions of language reaching far beyond those embodied in either a Genre-based approach to language instruction, or

those of a Systemic Functional Linguistic approach to language. This research trained teachers to be ethnographers of communication and in doing so, enabled them to observe and analyse the communicative environments that their students would participate in, for example, in shops, libraries, theatres, restaurants, hairdressing salons, sporting events, or other services. With appropriate training they were also able to recognise those aspects of language required for successful communication within these environments, for example, requesting services and information, giving directions, lodging complaints, expressing agreement and disagreement, socialising, etc.

Once teachers had raised their own awareness of the importance of oral communication in day-to-day contexts, they assessed their students' current skills and needs, and then developed strategies to teach and assess the subsequent outcomes. This provided the opportunity for teachers to work into their classroom practice those oral language skills that they had observed as important for successful communication. This included, for example, the careful observation and assessment of performance in small group discussions, and the development of students' metalinguistic awareness in terms of using the appropriate language for different occasions.

Action research incorporating a high level of mentoring by way of specific materials and professional development can be seen in this instance to have had a considerable effect on promoting teachers' reflective practice. Some realised that their current practice did not address day-to-day communicative skills at all and as a result they themselves had failed to find out what their students could and could not do with oral language. For example, one teacher found that his/her class was lacking in formal vocabulary, and another discovered that the students previously assumed not to be good communicators could actually lead a group to completion of a task. Another teacher observed that her students' responded with appropriate behaviour when their interactants expressed personal feelings, and yet another teacher observed that some students in the class did not have the oral language skills to resolve difficult situations.

This research therefore has demonstrated two important outcomes. Firstly it provides evidence that action research involving teachers in ethnographic tasks can contribute robust findings to support changes in the curriculum. Secondly the research has shown that oral language, and particularly communicative competence, having suffered the "Cinderella" role of the literacy area, is indeed an important linguistic skill that can be successfully taught, developed and assessed within the current English Learning Area in our educational system.

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