<center>**Session 1: A framework for describing language**</center>

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Section 2:   Analysis of the types of IDEAS or meanings communicated

Aim of this section is to:
- ➤ identify the types of meaning typically communicated in language transactions by young children, and
- ➤ identify the ways in which they do this.

Discuss the values of knowing this: teachers can

- • identify the types of meanings students can comprehend and express correctly,
- • identify the types of meanings demanded by the teaching they implement, and
- • identify the types of meanings they need to teach.

Ask participants to identify various types of meaning in the classroom conversation. Collate the types of meanings detected.   They may need to be guided to develop the categorising approach we are using.   Have them identify at least two examples of each type of meaning.

There are various types of meaning in the conversation
- • individual words;
- • sentences;
- • sets of sentences; these are the 'threads' that link or connect the sentences together and allow the conversation to 'flow'; and
- • its topic or theme.

We will examine how language users comprehend and produce each type of meaning.   We will 'unpack' the I aspect in ICPALER.

This leads to the following elaboration of the chart.
To understand what a communicator knows about the **I** aspect, we need to explore the unshaded part.

		expressive	receptive
the ideas	individual meaning		
	single sentences		
	discourse		
	its topic or theme		
the conventions			
the purpose			
ability to learn			

The sequence we will follow:

| individual meanings | → | sentence meanings | → | discourse meanings | → | topic meanings |
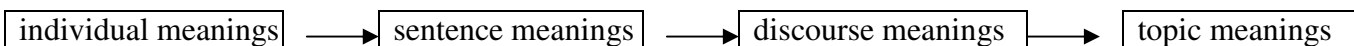
2.1.1   Words have meaning
Introduce participants to the notion that each of the children in the earlier conversation has a 'word bank' that is the store of words that they know, or their vocabulary. Each word has a meaning and a linked spoken word. For words that the children can read, they also have a linked distinctive letter pattern.

Ask participants to identify the items in the | Tom's word bank might include these items |

<center>1</center>

word bank of one of the children in the earlier conversation. The word bank will show the individual words; each meaning and how it is said.

doggie	ball	red
brown	toys	bite
hole	made	barks

In this section we 'unpack' the single word component of the **I** or idea aspect. This is the unshaded part of the model:

the ideas		E	R
the ideas	individual meaning		
	single sentences		
	discourse		
	its topic or theme		
the conventions			
the purpose			
ability to learn			

Ask the question: *What is the smallest unit of meaning in our language?* Many participants will believe that it is the word. Ask participants to decide whether the two words in each of the following spoken pairs have the same meaning:
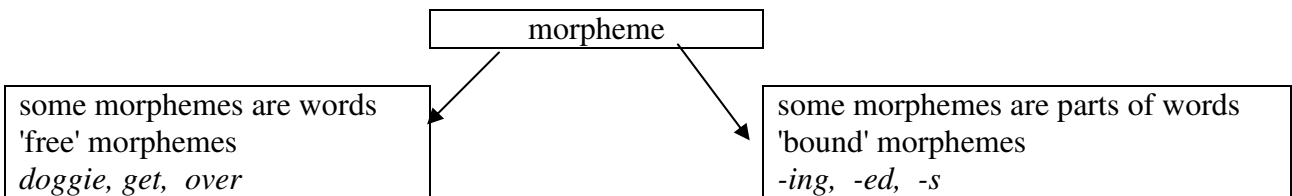
| chair and chairs | | jumped and jump | | make and maker | | act and action |

Discuss how 's', 'ed', 'er' and 'ion' change the meaning of the words to which they are added and have meaning in their own right.   Develop the awareness that words are not the only type of individual meaning and introduce the concept of the 'morpheme' as the smallest unit of meaning in a language. Have the participants suggest examples of morphemes, for example,

- The words *doggie red,* and *ball* are morphemes Tom knows.
- Kath and Will used the morpheme 'ed' and Will used 's' to indicate plurals.

| dog, stop, ball | What are key differences between the two types? | -ed, -ing, -s |

Develop the awareness that dog, 'stop' and 'ball' each have unique meanings in the sense that 'ed' or 'ing' don't. The morpheme 'ed' can be added to a variety of verbs and change the meaning of all of them in the same way; it tells you the action happened.

From this you can develop the notion of two types of morphemes:

morpheme

some morphemes are words
'free' morphemes
doggie, get, over

some morphemes are parts of words
'bound' morphemes
-ing, -ed, -s

Ask the participants to suggest other examples of each.   Collate and list their suggestions.

2.1.2 Words have meaning
What do we actually mean when we say that a person 'knows the meaning' of a word? Ask participants to brainstorm in small groups what behaviours a child would have to show for them to say that the child understood correctly what 'doggie' meant.

The participants might agree that the child could:

- say in words what features a dog might have or show. They may say features that uniquely define a dog (its conceptual meaning) or features that are usually shown by dogs (its prototype meanings).
- select pictures that show dogs and the child discriminates between pictures that showed dogs and pictures that showed other pets or items.
- say what features dogs have.
- carry out actions that show the actions that dogs do.

What do these behaviours tell us about what a word meaning might look like?	A word meaning • tells us what a thing 'is'; it has, linked to it, a list of the key characteristics of the thing . These are the criteria we use to define the thing uniquely. • allows us to distinguish the thing from other things. • may be linked with one or more 'images' that show us what the thing is 'usually like'.

The criteria an individual uses to define the meaning of a word gradually changes as the person develops. These will be described in greater depth in a later section. They are discussed here to illustrate what we mean the 'key characteristics of the thing'.

Let us return to the meaning of 'doggie'. These are some of the steps a person's understanding of the meaning of doggie go through.

Step 1: the word is a label	When children first learn the meaning of the word, they often link it with a particular dog and use the word as a label for that specific dog.

Step 2: the word is linked with perceptual features	Later they learn that dogs can be defined by the things they do, for example, dogs are good at guarding things (while cats aren't), some dogs are good at hunting and retrieving things. Children can link both words and images with the word.

Step 3: the word is linked with functions	Later still they learn there are different types of dogs and some categories of dogs include other categories.

Step 4: the word is linked with more general and more specific categories	They gradually learn that there are particular features that some animals show that indicate the animal is a dog, for example, what it looks like (it has four legs, is often hairy, follows people, etc). Sometimes they will apply 'doggie' to animals that are not a dog, for example, a tiny horse or a ferret. Other times they mightn't recognise that a particular animal is a dog.

You can see from this developmental sequence that children who understand 'doggie' in a 'step 2' type way would probably be unable to tell you how a doggie and a burglar alarm were similar. A child who used words in a 'step 1' way may have difficulty naming pictures of dogs in a story book.

You can see from this that young children will understand a word correctly in some ways but not in others. The young children in whom we are interested will probably have their word meanings across steps 1 to 3.

We need to take this developmental sequence into account when we ask children to tell us what they think a word means; do they tell us (1) what examples of the item look like, (2) what they do or are used for, (3) how they are related to other general categories. To get an insight into how a child understands words, we need to see how the child makes decisions about what the word applies to, how it is used.

Ask participants to identify various types of word meanings used in the conversation.   Collate and list their suggestions and lead to the distinction between content words and function words. Discuss the differences between them and examples of each.

function words	content words
what	*dog*
a	*name*
the	*got*
to	*new*
with	*pool*
about	*ball*

Participants can discuss

- the differences between the two types
- the value in making this distinction for understanding and analysing children's use of language, for example, which type is more likely to be misunderstood or used incorrectly
- how you could teach each type.

2.1.3 *Parts of words have meanings*
Ask participants to suggest various examples of 'bound' morphemes, how each is used and what each means.   Collate and list their suggestions.   Some examples of these are:

example	what each means	how each is used
's'	add to a verb stem, it means an action is occurring	The dog barks
'ing'	add to a verb stem, it means an action is continuing	The dog is barking
'ed'	ending on a verb to say an action occurred in the past.	hopped
's'	added to nouns to say more than one	dogs
'tion'	added to verbs to talk about objects linked with the action	describe to description act to action

Ask participants to identify in the earlier conversations where the children misused 'bound' morphemes.   Collate these and discuss the nature of these errors.

How do errors using bound morphemes disrupt the meaning intended to be conveyed? Have participants listen to the following narrative discourse that misuses bound morphemes.

Ann had stopping at the lights when the red kelpie start to crossed the roads.   The light turn to greens and the car beginned to move.   Obvious disorienting, the dogs hesitating. A largest trucks screetching to a halted.   The driver descend, sweeped up the hapless hound and place it in the cabin.

How does this misuse of 'bound' morphemes influence how the message is communicated and understood? What does it indicate about how we use them automatically or incidentally, without being aware of how we do it? Discuss how speakers of English use a knowledge of morphemes to link individual words and parts of words into sentence meanings and conversations or recountings.

Have participants discuss
- the types of errors they have observed young children make using 'bound' morphemes,
- how these are made during regular or normal language acquisition and
- when a teacher should become concerned about errors in their use.

Which types of word meaning are most difficult? Use the chart below to analyse the number of each type of error in one of the earlier conversations.

The types of morphemic errors in the conversation

Look back at the conversation and count the number of errors for each type of morpheme

	Examples of errors	Number of errors
Content word errors		
Function word errors	*at* for *in*	
Bound morpheme errors	*drownded shaked*	

In the conversation most of the individual word meanings were with 'bound' morphemes

How can this type of chart be used to:
- evaluate students' use of various types of individual meanings in their language?
- implement directed teaching?

2.1.4 Vocabulary as a network of meaning
Develop participants' awareness that the words that a person knows are linked together in a one's vocabulary. When you say or hear words in a message, you usually can't help but think of related words. The words that you hear stimulate other words that are linked to those words in your vocabulary.

To illustrate this, read the following discourse to participants. Ask them to suggest words they would expect to hear in the three sentences following what they heard.

Are you waiting for the latest trend in shoes? Then look no further than Cushioned Aerosols, a style of footwear that is sweeping Britain. The 'Cushairs' are ultra comfortable because of the moulded air space that fits between your feet and the pavement. They also offer exceptional podiatric health….

Collate and list the related words suggested by participants. It may be useful to draw a network diagram showing how the words mentioned in the text may be linked to the most frequent words suggested by participants.

Discuss how the networks of meanings that make up people's vocabularies influence how they comprehend and respond to what they hear. You may want to refer to
- the richness of individual's meaning networks, and
- the number of meaning links available to a language user.

Discuss how these networks of meanings are important in classroom activities. When children hear particular words, for example, words in a story to which they are listening, they think immediately of related words. The links help them to think ahead or to predict. They also help them to put something new 'in their own words' to make sense of it.

You can see the networks of meanings that Tom, Will and Kath showed in the earlier conversation. For Kath, 'dog' was linked with 'falling in their pool' and 'barking'. For Will, 'dog' was linked with 'having puppies'. These young children have linked up their meanings based on their earlier experiences. They are mainly based on what things look like. Falling into a pool is not a feature that is common to all dogs and can be used to define them. We noted in an earlier section, children change gradually the ways in which they link their word meanings. As they develop further, they will link their word meanings in more abstract ways, in addition to the links based on their experiences.

Have participants discuss the nature of the networks of meanings built by young children. How can teachers:
* get a sense or 'estimate' of the network of meanings available to a group of children?
* assist students to enrich or build up their networks of meanings?

2.2   Sentence ideas or sentence meanings

In this section we 'unpack' the single sentences component of the **I** or idea aspect. This is the unshaded part of the model opposite. We examine how single sentence meanings are understood and produced.

		E	R
the ideas	individual meaning		
	single sentences		
	discourse		
	its topic or theme		
the conventions			
the purpose			
ability to learn			

Introduce the notion of sentence meanings as follows:

* A second type of idea is the meaning in each sentence. *We found a little doggie* has a different meaning from *doggie.*

* Each sentence links 2 or more concepts. It is called a semantic relationship or a proposition.

* Sentence meanings differ in their complexity. Some are easier to comprehend and some are more difficult.

2.2.1   Simple sentences describe one event
Introduce the idea of sentences that describe a single event such as *Our puppie felled in our pool.*

Lead participants to see that these sentences
* mention the action in the event and
* the agent or 'doer' of the action, how, when or where it is done.

Our puppie	*felled in our pool*
the agent or doer of the action	the action : 'escaping from the house'

Discuss the following issues:

(1)   Select examples of single event descriptions in the conversation.   List and collate these examples.   Examples of these include:
- We got a new dog.
- Our doggie falled in our pool.
- Daddie got it out.
- Our dog got three puppies.

Have participants apply the agent-action analysis to each example.

(2)   Discuss how children find single event sentence meanings relatively easy to understand.

2.2.2   *Variations of the simple sentences description of an event*
Discuss how the sentence meaning for a single event can be transformed into related sentence meanings to achieve different functions, for example, to gain information by asking questions or to instruct.

Examples are as follows.   Have participants discuss how they differ in their function, even though all are based on reference to one event.

type of function	example
describe or recount an event	*Our doggie fell in the pool.*
give an instruction, use the imperative function	*Tell me.*
ask a question, use the interrogative function	*What's its name?*
comment on a situation	*I want to see Woofa*
express possession	*We have a doggie*

Participants can

- generate other examples of each type and identify other types of sentences based on one event descriptions.
- discuss how these different sentence level meanings are used for different communicative purposes.
- discuss how an awareness of these different sentence ideas can be used in the classroom to understand students' language abilities and
- discuss their relevance for teaching.

An issue for us in a later session is how these various linguistic functions based on the one event sentences are gradually learnt and the order in which this happens.

A second issue relates to how these relationships are used correctly in a restricted set of contexts that are familiar to a child before they are used and understood more generally.   Children learn to use each one first in particular situations in which the elements are familiar to them. This observation has an implication for how you determine the functions that any child can use.

2.2.3 *More complex sentences ideas*
More complex sentence meanings usually refer to two or more events.

Discuss with participants the issue that sentences also differ in the complexity of the relationships they describe.   Have the participants listen to each of the following sentences, one at a time and decide

The sentences are:

• how it differs from a single event description	*He shouted while she was driving.* *The dog jumps the fence and chases the cat.*
• the type of sentence meaning it says, and	*He will be fined if he is caught.* *All dogs begin life as puppies.*
• what makes it more complex than a single event sentence	*He lifted it because the water was rising.* *They all had books except Ann.*

Your discussion may note the following:

Sentences that refer to two events that are related in various ways: for

	example
The two events are related in time	*He shouted while she was driving.* *We got a doggie after we moved to our house.*
One event is a cause or a consequence of the second	*He lifted it because the water was rising.*
One event has a conditional relationship with a second; it will occur only if another event occurs	*He will be fined if he is caught.*
The two events don't both occur; one event excludes the other.	*Ian comes but Ann doesn't.*
The two events have the same agent	*The dog jumps the fence and chases the cat.*

Some sentences imply a much larger set of events, such as

	example
generalizations	*All dogs begin life as puppies.*
general inclusive relationships	*Everyone with a pet stand up.*
general exclusive relationships	*They all swam well except Jill*

Have participants in small groups suggest other examples of each of these. Collate these examples and analyse them if necessary.

Have participants discuss why it is useful to:

(1)   analyse the types of sentence meanings students are required to comprehend and use,
(2)   identify where in classroom activities various types of sentence meanings arise and
(3)   examine how students learn the more complex sentence meanings from the simpler meanings.

How can participants identify the types of sentence meanings young students can say and understand?   Teachers can:

(1)   identify the types of sentence meanings the children can understand or say correctly. They can say sentences of each type, for example, *The lady holds the cat* and ask students to:
  • Act out what was said with toys.
  • Select the pictures that match what was said.
  • Say in their own words what the sentence said.
  • Talk about what a picture show, perhaps with a sentence cue; *The lady ….*

(2)   analyze the types of sentence meanings students do not understand or say correctly to see whether the child understands or can talk about (1) the main event or (2) the other event/s.

You can discuss with participants systematic procedures they can use to record students' comprehension and use of the various types of sentence meanings.   One example is the following format.   You can also use this chart to review the key ideas discussed in relation to sentence meanings in 2.2.

		expressive	receptive
simple sentences	descriptions		
	questions		
	instructions		
complex sentences	Two events linked in time or space		
	Cause -effect		
	Generalisation		

It is important that participants are aware that young children in the age range 3 to 6 years learn to use and comprehend a particular type of sentence meaning in some contexts initially. They can, for example, say correctly, "*There are more here*" in reference to some items but not others. Generally, they use a particular type of sentence meaning in reference to events with which they are familiar before they can use the sentence type more generally.   This needs to be borne in mind both when we are assessing children's use of sentence meanings and when we are teaching new meanings.

2.2.4   *Do we need to comprehend sentences before we can say them?*
It is often assumed that we need to be able to comprehend a particular type of sentence meaning before we can use it in our speech.   This is the distinction between the expressive and receptive aspects of using sentence meanings.

In fact, the research available suggests that we use expression to actually teach ourselves a new sentence meaning.   When children in the age range 3 to 6 years hear a type of sentence meaning they are ready to learn, they often say it aloud in an imitative way.   They are not saying the sentence to communicate a meaning to others, but instead to say it to themselves. Imitating it allows them to 'put it in their minds' better, that is, to encode or represent it in their thinking spaces.

The imitation students do here is not the verbatim, rote recall used typically in tests of auditory memory span or verbatim auditory recall.   Instead, the imitative process is initiated by the child

and used as a self-teaching tool. The children decide which aspects of what they hear they will imitate, and how they will do it.

Children in this age range try to teach themselves about the new sentence meaning in various ways. They may

- say the sentence slowly, or in parts.
- do relevant actions as they say the sentence; the actions seem to help them make sense of the sentence
- repeat a new sentence type several times, as if to practise it and to automatize its form.

In all of these ways, saying the sentence allows the children to build a template of its meaning and to use this later to comprehend other sentences of this type and to say instances of the sentence type in their spontaneous language.

Saying the sentence in an imitative way also allows them to get corrective feedback that they can use to modify their understanding in a more manageable way. If they didn't try to get feedback from others when they imitated the sentence form, but waited until they expressed it spontaneously, there could be too much information for them to deal with at once.

Allowing children of this age range to use expressive imitation to learn new sentence meanings is an important language learning tool.

2.2.5   Actions children can be encouraged to use to assist sentence comprehension
There are various strategies children in this age range can be encouraged to use to help them understand these types of sentence meanings better.   They can, for example, be encouraged to

1   say aloud or repeat sentences they have heard.

2   say the sentences in other ways.   When they see a picture in a story book, they can practise saying what it shows in different ways.

3   visualise or 'make a mind picture' of what they hear.

4   do the actions that they heard said and use these to assist them to recall the sentence.

The children can learn to apply these actions first in familiar contexts and practise them. They can gradually be guided to transfer them.

2.3   Discourse ideas or meanings

During language interactions, we frequently communicate in messages longer than sentences. Conversations, stories, descriptions, sets of instructions or explanations are made up of a sequence of spoken sentences.

A third type of idea in the conversations above is the meaning you get by integrating the sequence of sentence ideas into a discourse or text idea. The sequence of sentences describes a more elaborated idea than each sentence meaning in isolation.

In this section we 'unpack' the discourse component of the **I** or idea aspect. This is the unshaded part of the model.

		E	R
the ideas	individual meaning		
	single sentences		
	discourse		
	its topic or theme		
the conventions			
the purpose			
ability to learn			

We examine how discourse meanings are understood and produced.

Ask participants to suggest how they think the discourse idea of a text differs from the topic or theme. The example opposite show the discourse meaning for one of the earlier conversations.

example
It tells us about the dogs children in Miss Brown's class have. Tom has a new dog named Woofa. It is red and brown and was given a ball that it ate. Kath's dog fell in their pool and was rescued by her father.

Characteristics of the meaning of the discourse in the conversation include:

- The conversation as a whole is integrated or 'flows'. Even when Kath took it in a direction perhaps not intended by Miss Brown, the sentence ideas still seemed to be in order. The notion of a 'direction' for the conversation is relevant.

- The separate sentence meanings are linked. There is high level of predictability between most of the sentences. When Tom said *We finded a new doggie*, you might expect the next sentence to enquire about its name and the third sentence to give it.

Participants may want to provide other examples of these two features from the conversation.

To focus participants on the characteristics of discourse meanings and what communicators do to develop it, have them listen to the following discourse. Their task is to describe what it is about and to comment on its quality as a narrative.

The music had a beat that would attract the interest of any ten year old. The men they met on the path were similar. Business was good and he mixed with the elite. She put the salad on a piece of white paper towelling to allow it to drain and dry.

You can direct participants' attention to the quality of the discourse meaning by asking them:

- Does each sentence make sense? Does the discourse as a whole makes sense?

- How well do the sentence ideas follow on from each other? How predictable is each sentence meaning from the preceding one?

- How well do the sentence ideas 'flow' or 'hang together in the discourse?

To understand what students know about discourse meanings, teachers can look for these features in their comprehension and production of connected prose.

How might a poor understanding of discourse meaning influence children's use of language? Participants can discuss this in small groups. Compile and list their outcomes. Their responses might include

- a difficulty keeping the thread of a conversation, staying 'on track'.
- difficulty anticipating or predicting what might be said or heard next during speaking and listening or reading.

What would you look for in a child's narrating of a story or an experience to decide whether the child understood its discourse meaning? Participants can discuss this question and collate their responses. The child may need to make reference to:

- the main characters,
- where and when it occurs, and
- the plot of the story and the events in it.

Young children who understand the idea of a discourse are able to show an emerging awareness of a 'narrative genre' or a 'story schema'. They can recount events or tell stories that 'hang together'.

Discuss how participants can use this to assess students' discourse comprehension of narratives, retelling of earlier events and experiences and creative stories.

What might a spoken communication 'look like' if the sentence ideas have flow and predictability?	Responses follow from what has been said earlier. They may - extend or elaborate what has been said earlier, - support it, - provide examples, - argue against it.

Each sentence can show indicators of an ability to comprehend the discourse meaning. These link individual ideas across sentences. Participants can discuss how they are shown in the earlier conversation.	In the earlier conversation: (1) 'it' was used to refer to earlier ideas. (2) ideas in later sentence ideas were linked with relevant earlier ideas, for example, *Woofa* and *white with a black tail* are linked with Tom's new kitten.

To review participants' understanding of discourse meanings and their ability to identify and monitor how students use them, discuss procedures they can use to record systematically students' comprehension and use of it. One example is the following format.

	Aspect	Indicator in expressive language	Indicator in receptive language
Discourse meaning	Sequence of sentence ideas	Say the sentence ideas in order	Comprehend the order of sentence ideas
	Continue a key idea across the sentence meanings		

2.4   *Topic ideas or meanings*

A fourth type of idea in the earlier conversation is its topic or its theme.   The topic could be 'the dogs Miss Brown's students have as pets'.   The topic is often a summary of the discourse. Spoken messages such as a conversation, a story, a description, a set of instructions or an explanation usually have a topic or theme.

In this section we 'unpack' the topic component of the **I** or idea aspect.   This is the unshaded part of the model.

We examine how topic meanings are understood and produced.

		E	R
the ideas	individual meaning		
	single sentences		
	discourse		
	its topic or theme		
the conventions			
the purpose			
ability to learn			

What is the value of knowing the topic of a message?   How do listeners work it out?   Listen to this message and work out its topic. Suggest two sentences that might continue it and be consistent with the topic.

Dripping from the shower, Jan took the call. It was Gina, sounding as joyful as a student who had just been told she had passed with flying colours.   "Just one more week and I'm finished here", she said, "a whole new life".   "So things are going slowly," commented Jan. "I've seen more activity at a funeral", replied Gina.

The text comes from a novel entitled "Gina's adventures on Venus".   Suggest two sentences that might continue the discourse and would be consistent with the topic.

Discuss with participants how knowing the topic helps speakers to stay 'on the topic' and say things that are 'relevant'.

What do listeners do to work out the topic? Discuss and collate participants' reports.

They may mention needing to
- make 'informed guesses' about the possible topic.
- test their guesses and modify these if necessary.
- retain in their short term memory enough knowledge about what is said to make a judgment.

2.5   *Review of the types of ideas in a spoken communication and their implications for Literacy learning*

The purpose of this section is to review how some of the types of ideas you find in language use are comprehended and said. These ideas are called the semantics of the language. They are all important for understanding early language development, the language profiles of individual children and for monitoring early language progress.

Ask participants to suggest examples of each type of idea in the language use of students who they have taught. They can use the following chart to record the language ability of students and to compile their language profiles.

Type ideas being communicated	Receptive language	Expressive language
Words and parts of words		
single sentences		
discourse		
topic or theme		

What is the relevance of an examination of the ideas used in language for literacy learning? Ask participants to reflect on this link.   We noted in the introductory section that this link is indicated in many research studies. Participants can reflect on

- earlier experiences in which they have observed links between the various types of ideas, for example, individual students' knowledge of vocabulary and their reading comprehension.

- how they might identify sentence and discourse ideas in the written texts they expect students to read and texts they expect students to write.

- how they might investigate directly these links in their teaching, for example, for a topic they were teaching, whether teaching explicitly the relevant vocabulary assisted their students to comprehend text or to write about the ideas.   Do directed oral language activities prior to reading a text assist their students to comprehend it? Similarly, does a consolidation –review discussion following the reading of a text, assist students to recall the key ideas on the next occasion they are recalled?

  Similar links can be investigated for students engaging in writing activities. Do directed oral language activities prior to writing a text assist their students to write it? Similarly, does a consolidation –review discussion following the reading of a text, assist students to edit their text?

In section 3 we will examine the conventions of language.