**Australian Government**

**Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations**

**CeCV** _catholic education commission of victoria ltd_          **MONASH** University

**ORAL LANGUAGE SUPPORTING EARLY LITERACY RESEARCH PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT
1 JUNE 2010**

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1.      **Teacher Perceptions & Opinions: Qualitative Analysis of Interviews**

Initial analysis of the qualitative information obtained from interviews with teachers in both the research and control schools has been completed.  Twenty two teachers were involved in this activity, fourteen from the research schools and eight from the control schools.  While it was initially proposed to select teachers randomly, it was necessary in a number of cases to identify specific teachers to ensure an appropriate sample of classroom–based personnel as well as school literacy leaders.  A grounded theory approach is being undertaken with the initial stage focused on identifying specific concepts or codes evident in the responses from the teachers.

Some of the key concepts that have been highlighted by teachers in the research schools are as follows:


| Concept | Overview |
|---|---|
| <u>Assumption</u> | • It was generally assumed students had sufficient oral language competence to cope with the demands of most teaching and learning activities. |
| | • Teachers have increasingly become aware of gaps between students presumed and actual knowledge, e.g.  _they can appear to be that way but their skills are not as good as what they are giving out._ |
| | • An additional assumption raised by some teachers was the view that oral language development was simply facilitated from the interactions that occurred without the need for targeted and explicit teaching, e.g. _oral language probably didn't  take a big focus; in a sense, it just happened / with the preps, you expected most of them or the majority to follow / you didn't really take it right back and untangle it._ |

| Concept | Overview |
|---|---|

**Assessment**

- Teachers generally remained uncertain about how to assess oral language abilities, e.g. ..*I probably need to have some basis of what I'm actually looking for or I'm trying to achieve but I haven't got to that point.*
- There remained a strong view that referral and then direction from external support staff (e.g. speech pathologist/ special education consultant) was required to adequately meet student needs.

**Monitoring**

- Teachers highlighted the importance of being able to monitor student progress.  Comments were focussed on enhancing the interpretation of existing assessment tasks.
- There continued to be some reservation about the use of informal observation approaches as being sufficient to determine adequate student progress.
- While teachers in the research schools reported increased confidence in being able to better observe student's language interactions,  the need to use some formal measure to confirm observations was preferred.

**Underpinning**

- Across teachers in both the research and control schools, oral language was seen as an ability that underpins literacy learning.
- Teachers in the research schools spoke to its role in all classroom learning which appeared to be an impact of the professional development program, e.g. *...you come away from college and you know there's the reading part and the writing part and there's oral language ... here's our oral language timetabled in our week but maybe that show and tell session is where we did our conscious assessment and observations.  I think now it's just gone; it's all day every day/ all the teachers are much more aware of how important it is and they have also become more aware of how much we took for granted.*

**Application**

- Teachers from the research schools commented on the challenge of taking strategies and activities learned in the OLSEL program and adapting them for use in the classroom. Prioritising which ones to initially introduce was at the base of school-based discussion.  In part, one of the issues about selecting which strategies/activities related to attempting to identify which would have the greatest impact on student learning.

| Concept | Overview |
|---|---|

Concept | Overview

Depth

- A significant reflection of many research school teachers was that their teaching had greater depth with the focused oral language interactions, e.g. *they have to be able to think it and say it in order to write it / I'm much more aware of how to say things and the level of questioning has been different as well. I am getting a lot more use out of the big book / we did kind of cover some aspects of the OLSEL program in a roundabout way but I would say it was raking it over rather than getting the shovel out, if that makes sense.*

Pre-School

- Teachers in both the research and control schools highlighted a view that students attending school were presenting with weaker oral language skills. There were no comments in the sample that indicated action to implement specific activities to address strengthening students' oral language competence in the pre-school years.
- This need to impact on student learning prior to commencing school was seen as important, e.g. *students need to be "language learning ready".*

Thinking

- A number of teachers in the research schools commented on the role oral language plays in enhancing student approaches to thinking. This reflected the importance of developing student self-talk which was a component of the OLSEL Professional Development Program.
- Teachers in the research schools described a broader role for oral language competence beyond conversational interaction. They highlighted it as a critical tool used by effective learners.

Student Gain

- Research school teachers commented on initial gains in the students' listening behaviours and their oral language use. In part, this was felt by some to reflect more informed observations of student oral language interactions, e.g. *I suppose the big thing that has struck me in the last couple of weeks is that the children are starting to use the language that I've been giving them / … even some children who wouldn't normally respond are now responding a bit more / the students are a lot more interested in the book. When it's their own reading time they will get the book and they might have a little chat about it so it's generating a lot more interest in the kids and they probably have a greater appreciation of the big books.*

| Concept | Overview |
|---|---|

Concept              Overview

Change in Teaching

- Teachers in the research schools commented on changes to the nature of the teaching and learning interactions with students.   They were more focused on taking opportunities to expand oral language use rather than accept students' responses.  This was felt to reflect the teachers being increasingly confident about being able to allocate more time to oral discussion, e.g. *I didn't do it explicitly; I knew it was part of what we had to record on but I didn't plan for it / it's funny how when you do something in a new way it's hard to remember the old way that you did it and I know now what I'm doing well in terms of getting the students to give me what I'm saying and tuning in better at the start of my lessons.*

Team Development

- Attendance at the OLSEL Professional Development program and the subsequent expectation of school-based implementation was seen as a positive influence on team planning and development, e.g. *I didn't mention our planning, our inner planning .. it's a lot more purposeful.*

Knowledge Gain

- Teachers who attended the OLSEL Professional Development Program commented positively about the learning they had gained from the program.  The amount of information presented was acknowledged as being significant which was creating some difficulty with the initial implementation, e.g. *we came away from it thinking "wow, now what do we do." So we have just taken one thing and we are just working on one thing.*
- One key learning highlighted by a few of the teachers was the need to consider oral language within the teaching and learning interaction which was not a component of their undergraduate training experiences, e.g. *It didn't exist. It really wasn't part of learning and there was not much emphasis put on it all.  Now, I'm turning the corner. I can see the real value of it now.*

Impact

- Teachers in the research schools commented on the increased time involved in specific activities with the focused oral language discussion.  Literacy activities (e.g. Big Book use) were now taking two or three more days to complete. While there was an acceptance of this due to the perception that enhanced learning would be achieved,  there remained an element of concern about this impact on work unit planning, e.g. *Now on top of that, if I am taking longer to do things through my oral language development, I think that is a real issue.*

2. **Analysis of Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) Literacy Data: 2009**

A preliminary analysis of the CECV Literacy Data has been undertaken to identify the presence of trend figures indicative of the impact of the OLSEL initiative. As can be seen in the tables below, positive trends in research school literacy outcomes are evident when compared with the control school student literacy outcomes.

In Prep, student achievement in the research schools for both Text Level and Burt Word Reading Test scores were significantly greater than students in the control schools. In both instances, the abilities as measured at the start of the school year were not significantly different which would suggest that students in the research schools experienced subsequent accelerative gains.

| 2009: Prep | t-Score | Significance | Effect Size |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pre Text Level | -.557 | .578 | .07 |
| Pre Burt Word Reading | .158 | .875 | .02 |
| Pre Record of Oral Language | .029 | .977 | .004 |
| | | | |
| Post Text Level | 3.568 | .000 | .46 |
| Post Burt Word Reading | 2.785 | .006 | .36 |
| Post Record of Oral Language | .247 | .805 | .03 |

Analysis of the Year 1 outcomes indicated that research school students made greater gains on the Burt Word Reading Test than their control school peers. With regard to Text Level achievement, there was no statistically significant difference between the research and control schools. Consideration of the effect sizes does however point to improvement in the research school student group (increase from pre- to post- assessment times ... $d = .22$ as against $d = .34$).

| 2009: Year 1 | t-Score | Significance | Effect Size |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pre Text Level | 2.063 | .040 | .22 |
| Pre Burt Word Reading | 1.905 | .058 | .20 |
| Pre Record of Oral Language | 4.603 | .000 | .52 |
| | | | |
| Post Text Level | 3.100 | .002 | .34 |
| Post Burt Word Reading | 2.302 | .022 | .25 |
| Post Record of Oral Language | 8.902 | .000 | 1.16 |

In Year 2, small effect gains were evident in the Text Level outcomes of research school students while a similar decreased effect was evident with the outcomes on the Burt Word Reading Test. While the difference in Text Level outcomes was significant ($t = 3.512$, p =

.001), the difference on the Burt Word Reading test was not ($t$ = 0.585, p = .559). Students in the control schools had significantly stronger performances on the Record of Oral Language at the start of the year with this difference g=increasing during the course of the year.

| 2009: Year 2 | t-Score | Significance | Effect Size |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pre Text Level | 2.688 | .008 | .31 |
| Pre Burt Word Reading | 1.843 | .066 | .22 |
| Pre Record of Oral Language | -4.115 | .000 | .81 |
| | | | |
| Post Text Level | 3.512 | .001 | .44 |
| Post Burt Word Reading | .585 | .559 | .07 |
| Post Record of Oral Language | -3.307 | .003 | 1.16 |

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