Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

ORAL LANGUAGE SUPPORTING EARLY LITERACY RESEARCH PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT
1 MAY 2010

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

Transcriptions of the twenty two interviews completed with teachers last year are currently being analysed to provide insight about the impact of the professional learning program on the teachers' classroom practices.   Of the twenty two interviews, fourteen were completed with teachers from research schools with the remaining eight involving teachers in the control schools.

A grounded theory approach is being undertaken with the initial stage being to identify specific concepts or codes evident in the responses from the teachers. To date, key concepts that have emerged are as follows:

Concept	Overview
• Assumption	• It was generally assumed students had sufficient oral language competence to cope with the demands of most teaching and learning activities
• Impact	• Enhanced awareness of impact of oral language weaknesses on literacy and learning
• Assessment	• Uncertain about how to assess oral language abilities and need to refer to external support personnel (e.g. Speech Pathologist)
• Monitoring	• Need to develop effective monitoring process to consider students development
• Underpinning	• Oral language underpins literacy if not all learning in the classroom context
• Application	• Challenge to take learning from professional development activity and apply this in the broader classroom context.

- Depth
  - Level of understanding of oral language and literacy links has been strengthened

- Student Gain
  - Successful application of the knowledge will enhance student learning

- Pre-School
  - Need to impact on student learning prior to commencing school. Ensure students are "language learning ready".

- Thinking
  - Role of language as a tool for thinking being clarified

- Listener Look
  - Importance of students understanding how to listen.

Analysis of the data is ongoing and it is planned that a summary report will be made available with the next progress report. Follow up interviews will be completed with the twenty two teachers later in 2010.

2.   DEEWR Literacy and Numeracy Pilot Projects Forum: 18 March 2010

Ms Judy Connell (OLSEL Project Manager), Ms Joan Coldwell (Principal, St Monica's PS, Kangaroo Flat) and Mr Hugh McCusker (OLSEL Project Officer) recently attended this Pilot Projects' Forum hosted by DEEWR at the National Press Club in Canberra. Presentations were given by each of the 30 funded projects which provided a comprehensive awareness of the range of research initiatives being supported through this program.

In addition, keynote presentations were given by Professor Neil Dempster (Professor of Educational Leadership, Griffith University), Mr Gary Fry (Principal, Moulden Park School and Neighbourhood Centre, Northern Territory) and Mr Simon Pampena (2009 National Maths Ambassador).

Further details on the presentations can be accessed at the DEEWR website as well as more details on the various research projects being undertaken.

http://pilots.educationau.edu.au/pilots

3.   Victorian Literacy and Numeracy Pilot Projects Forum: 22 March 2010

Ms Judy Connell (OLSEL Project Manager), Ms Brenda Dalheim (Placed Lecturer, Early Literacy Intervention, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne) and Mr Hugh McCusker (OLSEL Project Officer) attended the state based forum where three of the four projects being funded through this federal initiative provided progress reports. The following is an overview of the other projects being undertaken in Victoria:

Pilot Literacy and Numeracy Networks (Independent Schools Victoria)

The project aim is to improve the literacy and numeracy outcomes of students by focusing on training school leaders and teachers to identify each student's learning gaps through data analysis. Twenty six schools are involved in the project which has involved regular meetings between network facilitators and teachers aimed at enhancing their skills in interpreting assessment data.

Bridging the Numeracy Gap in low SES and Indigenous Communities (Catholic Education Office Ballarat; Catholic Education Office, Sale; Catholic Education Office, Sandhurst; Catholic Education Office, Western Australia)

This pilot involving the Extending Mathematical Understanding (EMU) Program aims to build teacher capacity leading to accelerated numeracy achievement for students. The EMU program focuses on math vulnerable students through improving their confidence and mathematical learning. Forty two schools are involved in the project.

Implementing a Cohesive, Multifaceted Approach to Improving Literacy and Numeracy Outcomes in Schools and Networks (Department of Education, and Early Childhood Development, Victoria)

This project which involves seventy-six schools has a focus on building instructional leadership at the network and school levels to support teachers to be able to identify and address student's specific learning needs as well as to track their progress. Multifaceted approaches being used include coaching, professional learning and student interventions.

4.   **OLSEL: School Implementation**

Following analysis of the project assessment results which identified phonemic and phonological awareness, comprehension and use of longer and more complex sentences awareness, use of story grammar and receptive vocabulary as factors having most influence on early reading outcomes, school personnel have been targeting these language components in existing work units. At the recent OLSEL Coordinators' Planning Session, the following examples of current school action were outlined:

Receptive Vocabulary

- Teaching of unknown words in Big Books;
- Developing word bank based on vocabulary from an introduced Big Book;
- Defining, visualising, acting out meanings, identifying synonyms and antonyms;
- Reviewing new vocabulary;
- Modelling new words in sentences; and,

- Using concepts of "cheap" and "expensive" words to facilitate students identification of more descriptive vocabulary.

Comprehension and use of Longer and More Complex Sentences

- Introduction of Colourful Semantics;
- Using contingent expansion questions in response to sentences used by students;
- Targeted use of conjunctions, adverbs and adjectives to expand sentences used;
- Completing sentence starters;
- Modelling and scaffolding correct grammar;
- Increasing opportunities for students to describe events, give instructions, ask questions and comment on situations;
- Increased opportunity to respond to Level 3 & 4 Questions (Blank, Rose and Berlin, 2003); and,
- Linking questions related to identifying text level structures (e.g. cause/effect, conflict and resolution).

Awareness and Use of Story Grammar

- Responding to questions related to story grammar elements;
- Facilitating story retelling containing elements of story grammar;
- Retelling of Big Books targeting presence of all story grammar elements;
- Developing graphic organisers to assist students formulate narratives;
- Completing missing narrative elements in presented story (Story Shells); and,
- Re-formulating story with differing story grammar elements.

Phonemic and Phonological Awareness

- Identifying Onsets and Rimes;
- Blending & Segmentation with words from text to be read;
- Analysing syllabic structure of multi-syllabic words;
- Indentifying initial and final sounds in words; and,
- Identifying common sound patterns across words.

5. **Parent Information Sessions**

Parent Information Sessions targeting each of the four components of oral language will be developed following discussion with School OLSEL Coordinators. It is planned that all four activities will be available for use by 21/5/2010 with individual sessions being available prior to this date.

Up to this time, the following activities have been undertaken across the schools to involve parents in supporting their students' oral language and literacy development:

- New Prep parent information sessions outlining the OLSEL initiative;
- Newsletter excerpts describing activities parents can use at home to support their children's oral language and literacy development;
- Provision of bookmarks with examples of higher level questions parents could use when discussing a book with their child;
- General information sessions on the OLSEL project; and,
- Advising parents to access the OLSEL website.

6.   Timeline: End of Project Outcome Assessments

Planning to undertake the end of project assessment has commenced. These assessments will involve Years 1, 2 & 3 students who were assessed in 2009 when they were in Prep, Year 1 and Year 2. At this time, the following timeline is proposed:

6/9/2010 – 17/9/2010   Teacher Interview
3/11/2010 – 3/12/2010   Student Assessments

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