

Language Strand

Unit 3: Language as Social Practice

## **Module 3.3 Language at Home and at School**



**Lecturer Support Material**

## Acknowledgements

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## Unit outline

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<b>Unit 3 Language as social practice</b>	3.1	Language as social practice (Core)
	3.2	Language development in a first and second language (Core)
	<b>3.3</b>	<b>Language at home and at school</b> (Core)

## Icons



Read or research



Write or summarise



Activity or discussion



Suggestion or comment for lecturer

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# Language at Home and at School

## Rationale

Children come to schools and classrooms from a range of differing social and cultural settings. The speech communities from which they come, may have very different patterns of language (discourse) for:

- interacting between members;
- conveying information and discussing ideas;

from those practised in classrooms.

Children whose experiences include using language and literacy in ways that are similar to classroom-based routines, have a head start in building on their knowledge and experience to do well at school. Some children's prior-to-school experience may not serve them well in the new social setting of the classroom. That is not to say that their prior lived experiences are less powerful and valid than those of other children's. Since all children have mastered their first language before the age of five, there can be little that is wrong with their language learning, thinking or reasoning processes. Rather, they need time and opportunity and a supportive, well-informed teacher to help them learn what they need to know to succeed at school. This module aims to:

- Provide students with some analytic skills to define and describe what is happening in particular speech events
- Offer students the opportunity to think through some of the important issues in children's early language and literacy learning
- Assist them to develop a sense of responsibility for developing the kinds of language programs, and building up a classroom, that is sensitive and positive about the language strengths and needs of the children who come into their classes.

## How to use this module

In this module there are several transcripts of children in different social settings talking with adults. The purpose for including them is to:

- Introduce students to actual examples of real life interactions in classrooms and elsewhere
- Provide the students with the opportunity to analyse language interactions of different kinds.

For these reasons, it is important that the students engage with the texts, using the analytical tools provided to gain insights into the language of classrooms and communities.

The case studies provide another opportunity for students to appreciate the wide-ranging skills and knowledge that children from different homes and communities come with, as school pupils. It also provides students training as teachers with the conceptual tools with which to think about and describe the different profiles of homes and communities from which children in PNG schools and classrooms come.

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## Section 1. The classroom as a sociocultural setting

### Introduction

It has been said that:

"School is not simply a **new location** where the child learns **new activities**. It is, or it may be, a **new social setting** where **unfamiliar people** are using **unfamiliar speech events** according to unknown rules in an unfamiliar dialect". (Malcolm 1882,p.168)

*What does it mean to say that the classroom school is a new social setting?*

We need to spend some time reflecting on the idea that each classroom represents a specific sociocultural setting.

- The 'culture' consists of behaviours, rules, information and *interaction* patterns including language, that members come to know and share.
- the culture of each classroom has an effect on the students, just as the students have an effect on the classroom culture.
- It is a 'social setting' because communication takes place between participants. This communication includes sharing experience, showing social solidarity, making decisions and planning for events, a system of control and carrying out orders.

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### 3.3 Activity 1

*Reflect on your college experience. Make a list of the features which you think help to establish the College class you are in as a specific 'sociocultural setting'.*

*That is,*

- *Were there unfamiliar people you had to get to know when you came into the class and College? Explain your answer.*
- *What were the unfamiliar speech events you needed to learn so that you could act like a knowledgeable member of this 'club'?*
- *What were the unknown rules for participation in this 'club'?*
- *In what ways was the language/dialect unfamiliar to you?*
- *What effect did all the new learning you had to do, have on your confidence and learning, and willingness to participate?*
- *How did you come to learn what was expected of you in this new sociocultural setting? Did 'talk' have anything to do with it? In what ways*
- *In what way does Gee's notions of 'Discourses' support the idea of the classroom as a sociocultural setting, and students as members of that sociocultural group?*

Now spend a few minutes reflecting on how much children have to learn when they come as newcomers to school, or when they move to a new grade, or from Primary to Secondary to Tertiary schooling.

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## 3.3 Activity 2

***'All children commencing formal schooling have much to learn'.***

*Can you remember your own first days at school? Do you agree with the statement?*

*List some of the learning which children coming to school for the first time have to learn. Think about:*

- *Classroom/school rules*
- *The people in the school*
- *How language is used in classrooms*
- *Activities children engage in*
- *The 'artefacts' of schooling, e.g. materials, equipment and resources*

*Compare your list with a classmate. Are there items that s/he included that you forgot about, and vice versa?*

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 Here is a comprehensive list that will help you 'fill in the gaps of the students' memories.

### **Unfamiliar people**

- Teachers - it may be the first time that children
- Administrative staff - have had to interact with people
- Fellow students - outside of their own family/group
- Students in other grades

### **Unfamiliar speech events**

- Greetings
- Calling the roll
- Morning news 'sharing time'
- Explaining why they have come to school late
- Explaining why they were absent
- Procedural language, e.g. 'May I go to the toilet, please?' 'Can I have a pencil?' 'Where do I sit?'
- Shared book reading
- Answering questions when you don't know the answers
- Recounting an event that happened on the way to school.

**Unknown rules**

- The teacher has the speaking rights and can interrupt the student at any time for any reason
- The students have to put up their hands when they want the right to speak
- Students have to ask before they leave the room, and they need to have a very good reason for leaving!
- No eating in classrooms
- Go to your classroom when the bell rings
- Stop talking when the teacher tells you to.

**Unfamiliar dialect or language**

- The teacher knows the language dialect very well
- She understands that some children don't know it very well, yet she can still expect that the children will use that language when communicating in the classroom.

## **Section 2. The classroom as the site for school learning and language learning**

### Introduction: 'Informal' and 'formal' learning

When babies are born into a social group, they have much to learn. They have to learn, for example:

- How to interact with other members of the group,
- How to interpret the world of their group
- How to think about the world in the ways of the group.

Adults use specific routines and practices to 'socialise' their junior members into the appropriate and acceptable behaviours toward other members, both older and younger. So we could say that children learn the acceptable patterns for social interaction, along with its values, beliefs and attitudes from the moment of birth.

Furthermore, the 'apprentice' members learn what to pay attention to in their environment, how to pay attention in the ways of the group, and how to show that they are paying attention. As well, they have learned how to think, act, believe and value in the ways of their group. They have learned what ' is essential information they need to know, and how to talk about that information.

In all of these learning processes, language plays a crucial role. As children and adults share information relevant to the group, they also learn shared views and beliefs, and shared attitudes about their world and the people in it. As they share information, they learn how to 'do things with words', i.e.

- to talk about experiences in the past, present and future
- how to persuade someone to their point of view
- how to argue, discuss, disagree, agree
- how to predict
- to inform someone of something
- how to tell stories
- how to clarify meanings
- how to compare and contrast different things
- to command someone to do something

and much more, in the ways of using talk shared by the group members.

All of this powerful learning is made possible through language, and most children by the time they reach school age, have largely mastered the interrelated systems of meaning of their first language.

Further, they have learned the particular 'world view' common to them all, how to learn about their world, and how to talk about it. They have learned powerful strategies for thinking, and have developed the higher order thinking skills, such as reasoning, weighing up evidence, inquiry etc. necessary for their survival.

They have accomplished a huge amount of learning *before they go near a classroom*, and while they are, relatively speaking, quite immature intellectually. Furthermore:

- It is likely that no-one has consciously *taught* them what they know. Rather, they have learned, without being conscious of learning, or even what it is they have learned, through *shared interaction* with the people around them.
- A large part of this learning is by observation and by being included in the ongoing activities of the adults.
- They have the rest of their lives to perfect their talents and skills. This kind of learning is 'informal' learning. It has about a 100% success rate.

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 **3.3 Activity 3**

*Think of and list a range of events in your village where children go along with the adults, and learn by observation and practising as they join in the activities*

*Can you recall what parents are likely to say to the learners at that time? Write down what the adults might say.*

*If the 'apprentices' get it wrong, what happens? What do adults say? What do the children do?*

*Do the adults set time limits on how long it takes children to learn some new skill?*

*Are there age-related skills and knowledge, i.e. is there some knowledge, and some skills, that adults think are too hard for some children? What are these? What does an adult say to a child who wants to do something that is too hard for them? What does the child say/do?*

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We turn our attention now to a discussion of 'formal' learning, of which school learning is the prime example. Formal learning, as we know it, is basically a product of Western technological society. Formal learning requires that a child will move relatively quickly through stages of learning and bodies of knowledge. The agents of formal learning (education departments etc) decide:

- Who will learn
- What will be learned (the content)
- How it will be learned (the process)
- How the learners will show that they have learned.

The whole process of formal learning, as with informal learning, is constructed and maintained through language. Further it:

- Is language of a particular kind,
- Constructs knowledge in particular ways
- Requires pupils to learn to display their knowledge in highly specialised ways
- Sets time limits on the learning to be engaged in.

Two major events in the industrialised nations, shaped the way education is today. These were the:

- Invention of the printing press
- Beginnings of mass education.

 The following section of text is presented as a cloze exercise. This will help the students think about the content of the reading as they try to reconstruct the text. The key to the missing words is as follows:

one	of	for	on	expected
material	literacy	an	came	the
knowledge	of	left	that	learning
in	literate	to	what	know
very	children	ways		

### 3.3 Activity 4

*Complete the following cloze exercise. Think about the content of the reading as you reconstruct the text.*

*Mass education meant many children in \_\_\_\_\_ class, and one teacher. The invention \_\_\_\_\_ the printing press made it possible \_\_\_\_\_ children to be set tasks that centred \_\_\_\_\_ print, and therefore less talk was \_\_\_\_\_ or wanted. This major shift to print \_\_\_\_\_, meant that pupils needed literacy and \_\_\_\_\_ skills, so teaching literacy became a major task of formal schooling. As well, the written word took on \_\_\_\_\_ authority of its own. That is, people \_\_\_\_\_ to look on printed text as \_\_\_\_\_ source of what was valued as \_\_\_\_\_, and the way to knowledge. The importance \_\_\_\_\_ developing the oral language of pupils got \_\_\_\_\_ behind somewhere, as well as the notion \_\_\_\_\_ language was behind all of the \_\_\_\_\_, anyway. Now, many of the tasks engaged \_\_\_\_\_ in classrooms, centre on helping children become \_\_\_\_\_, and centre also on showing children how \_\_\_\_\_ take information from text and how to present \_\_\_\_\_ they know as text. Showing that they \_\_\_\_\_ requires children to present their information in \_\_\_\_\_ specific ways, and it may take some \_\_\_\_\_ longer than others to learn these \_\_\_\_\_ of interaction around text.*

When a child starts their schooling, part of the purpose of that schooling is to take him/her from the personal, commonsense world they have lived in and learned from up to now, and into new worlds of 'generalised' phenomena. That is, they are to learn about general classes of things, such as plants, animals, societies, landmasses, mathematical operations, historical eras, weather patterns. What the child knows in a random way about the world needs to become organised into *disciplines* such as biology, chemistry, geography, maths, etc.

The task of the teacher is to *apprentice the child* as an apprentice biologist, apprentice chemist, apprentice historian. The teacher introduces the child to the various ways of knowing about the world, that are valued in schooling. Through the learning experiences engaged in, in the classroom, the child's learning becomes formal and systematic, following the patterns for different ways of knowing that are valued in society. Without this *apprenticeship* the society's members may not be able to fully participate in the kind of society we are trying to build.

The ability to use the language necessary for school learning is a matter of *knowing how to do it*. As we will see in what follows, teachers need to give children the experiences and opportunity to use language that will help them to know how to go about constructing the different language (discourse) patterns through which classroom knowledge, information and ideas is constructed. As we will see, there are different patterns in which language is used, in even the simplest tasks that are carried out in classrooms. These patterns are likely to be a little or a lot different from what children have come to know in the informal world of learning they have taken part in to this point.

What is clear, also, is that children need to be able to reflect on:

- what they know
- how they have learned something
- *the purpose* for which the information is valuable.

### Section 3. Classroom activities and routines

One reason why classrooms are held to be very complex social systems, is that there are many different purposes of talk in classrooms. We could identify three main types of talk, each of which has many speech acts within it, and an extra kind of informal talk. These are:

- instructional talk
- procedural talk
- managerial talk
- unofficial, personal ‘chats’ between teacher and pupils, and pupil/pupil.

The activities and routines that are done in classrooms are not just ways of passing the time (or, they shouldn’t be!)

- They are *structured and purposeful routines for getting things done* in the society of the classroom. Moreover,
- they are made up largely in and through language, and each of the routines, or tasks, requires specific kinds of language patterned in particular ways. We will examine this statement in more detail in the next section.



#### 3.3 Activity 5

*To test the two statements in the dot points above, go back to the list you made of unfamiliar speech events’ (see Activity 2):*

- *Role play two or three of the activities you listed*
- *Discuss the ways in which the kind of language expected of the children is different in each activity.*
- *What is the teacher’s and children’s purpose, in each of the activities?*
- *Now think about some other ways in which what is expected from the children is different in each speech event, e.g. resources, children’s position in the classroom, who the children can talk to at such times, who controls the activity, etc.*
- *Where else, outside of the classroom or school, would children need to use the kinds of language they use for these activities?*

So we could say that the classroom is a particular social setting, with its own variety of language for getting things done, and rules for how to behave that may be quite different from the child’s experiences outside of the classroom and school.

Now we are going study in some detail some of the specific language patterns and routines that are part of everyday life in school.

## Classroom routine

### *Classroom Routine 1 - Shared-book reading and the I-R-E.*

Some educators maintain that one of the main functions of schooling is to help pupils make the transition from oral face-to-face interaction with its highly specialised ways of using language, to that of 'decontextualised' learning that makes another set of language demands on pupils (see Unit 2, Module 2 for more on this).

Below is a transcript of one classroom routine. This is an example of a teacher encouraging children to interact with text. We could say that it is one of the routines teachers engage in that focus children's attention on the text as authority. It is about children learning to take meaning from the text, as well as learning literacy skills.

The strategy the teacher is using is the *Initiate -- Respond -- Evaluate* routine of teacher/student interaction. In this the:

- Teacher *initiates* the sequence by calling on a child to share
- Nominated child *responds* by giving the teacher the information wanted
- Teacher comments on, or *evaluates* the child's response.

The routine is sometimes known as the '*guess what word I am thinking of?*' teacher game.

From the transcript below, let us see if we can find out the strengths and weaknesses of this kind of routine for learning from text, and learning to display what they have learned. To do so, we need to analyse it, to see if it provides a powerful strategy for helping children learn:

- Language
- Higher-level thinking processes
- Understanding how book reading works.

This is a recording of a small group of Grade One children working with their teacher with a big book called 'Smarty Pants' that mixes written text with pictures.

#### *Transcript 1*

Teacher	What's happening here, Mary? What's he got in his mouth?
Mary	He's blowing a trumpet and the dog doesn't like it 'cause I think it's going in his ... in the dog's ear.
Teacher	Right. He's blowing a trumpet. But how can we tell that the dog doesn't like it? How can we tell, Helen, that the dog doesn't like it?
Helen	'Cause he's ... um ... looking a bit pale.
Teacher	He's looking a little bit pale, and he's got his hand up to his what? He's saying 'Oh, this is just a bit much for me'. Cindy, he's got his hand up to his ... ?

- Cindy Ears. So he can't hear it.
- Teacher Right  
What's happening here, Donna?
- Donna He's swimming in the ... he's swimming in the pool.
- Teacher Right, he's swimming in the pool! Is he enjoying that?  
Simon, is he having a lot of fun doing that?
- Simon Um, the dog doesn't like water because ... um ... because ...  
Because it's more deeper.
- Teacher Right, good boy. Good answer. The dog doesn't like the water very  
much, we can tell by the look on his face. Right. He's a little bit afraid.  
Perhaps he thinks it's just a little bit deep for him. What about Smarty  
Pants, is he frightened?  
Is he frightened of the water, Edward?

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### 3.3 Activity 6

*Follow these steps in analysing the text:*

1. *In the left hand margin of the transcript, mark out the Initiation/Response/valuation sets.*
    - *Who is doing the initiating?*
    - *Who is doing the responding?*
    - *Who is doing the evaluating?*
  2. *Number the 'turns'. Mark this information in the margin, e.g. Teacher 1, 2. Use a code, like T 1, T 2 etc. and S 1, S 2 etc.*
- Then, count up the turns of the teacher and of the students. This will tell you how many different turns the speakers each have.*

*Teacher turns*

*Student turns*

3. *Questions:*

*How many questions does the teacher ask?*

*How many questions do the children ask?*
4. *Topics*
  - *Mark out the topics in the talk*
  - *Who is setting the topics?*
  - *Who is controlling the interaction? How?*
  - *Are students getting equal opportunities to talk?*
  - *Are the students getting the opportunity to use language to explore the meanings in the text?*
  - *Are they able to 'think aloud' about the story?*

- *Is this an effective routine for helping children develop higher-level thinking processes? For developing complex school-based language?*
- *What kinds of strategies could you as teachers use to try to encourage the children to do more than just sit and listen, and speak when spoken to?*

### *Summarising*

Some researchers argue that the way that teachers and students interact in the classroom may often *get in the way of learning*.

If schools are institutions to encourage the young to be critical 'thinkers' and 'knowers' in their society, the students need to be given time and opportunity to engage in classroom activities that accomplish the learning goals of the children.

The children need to have time to practise the language necessary for thinking and learning.

When the teacher controls all the talk, and who can speak, there is little 'space' for the children's learning.

### *Routine 2 – Playing the ‘Teacher Game’*

Now study this transcript that shows a young child 'Playing the teacher game'

The child (5 years old) and a friend had been to a nature reserve where there were several large crocodiles. When she came home, she told her grandmother about the visit. This is one of the episodes in that recounting. Her first language is Torres Strait Creole, and at this stage, she is still learning English.

#### *Transcript 2*

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| E (the child) | So I this man throw a I meat for the I animal to come from the water, but you have to guess.<br>What is tha main thing grab tha meat? |
| Grandmother   | Crocodile.  |
| E             | No - o - o.<br>Crocodile eat chicken.   |
| Grandmother   | mmm?  |
| E             | That's what the favourite.<br>Yeah, but this is I another I little thing.   |
| Grandmother   | Well, I don't know.   |
| E             | It's a little thing but it not a bird.<br>Is not a kangaroo I well, but it swim like that ... (demonstrates)                          |
| Grandmother   | Turtle  |
| E             | Yes! It were a baby turtle  |

*What can we say about this interaction?*

- Grandmother had not been to the nature reserve. She did not know what the animal was that she had to name. But because of other conversations she had had with E, she thought it might be a crocodile
- E gives her grandmother some clues so that she can guess the right answer. Still, Grandmother doesn't know, so E makes hand movements that represent the movement of a turtle. Finally Grandmother guesses the right answer.

This episode is quite similar to what is known in teaching as the 'initiate Response-Evaluation' technique, used widely in classrooms, and of which one example is given above.

- List the similarities between the two episodes
- What does this child know that will help her if she goes into a classroom where routines like the I - R - E are practised?
- What kind of valued classroom text (i.e. genre) could the child develop from her experience of talking about the turtle? How would you go about helping her to move from the oral language to the written text?
- What could you say about the child's need to talk about an experience before she/he writes about it? What is one function of talk in the classroom?
- Are all children coming into classrooms for the first time likely to equally as familiar with this routine? What will be the effects of their 'knowing how to do it' or not knowing?

There are several reasons why this classroom routine is different from ordinary conversational interaction:

- The teacher *knows* the answer, and knows that the children may not know the answer
- S/he can *expect* the children to answer, even when s/he knows they may not know the answer
- In the world of school, it is an opportunity given by the teacher to the students to *display their knowledge*. Thus, in classrooms, teachers are the '*experts*', the *knowers*'. and it is the children's role to show *that they know*.
- In everyday life, questions are asked by someone who actually wants to know something, e.g.:

*Transcript 3*

Mother to son	<i>What's the time?</i>	Teacher to child	<i>What's the time?</i>
Son	<i>Half-past-three</i>	Child	<i>Half-past-three</i>
Mother	<i>Thanks</i>	Teacher	<i>Good</i>

Next is another example of the classroom as the site for literacy learning.

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 **3.3 Activity 7**

*Think about and discuss these statements:*

- *School learning focuses a lot on literacy skills*
  - *Children have to be able to read often complex written texts to succeed in school*
  - *Students have to be able to show what they know by writing in ways valued in schools*
- 

### *Routine 3: A 'Show and Tell' session*

The transcript that follows is from a Show and Tell session in a Grade 1 classroom in an Australian school. This particular classroom genre is practised in many early childhood classes in PNG, so analysing its features in the transcript below may help you to be aware of its particular features, and whether it is effective in achieving the purpose for which it is used.

The whole transcript is very long, so just two sections of it have been selected for analysis. One child, Cathy, has been invited to show and tell. She has a book about the Melbourne Zoo, with pictures and information about animals at the zoo. Cathy and her family had recently visited the Zoo, and the book acted as a 'prop' to help her recall the animals she had seen. The other children, who showed that they themselves had been to the Zoo, and/or knew about some of the animals, were very interested.

#### **Part 1**

##### *Transcript 4*

Mrs. L.	Hold (the book) up so everyone can see. (Mrs. L. starts to read a large notice printed in the book): Please do not feed, or tease or attempt to disturb" ... who can read the last line?
Joel	animals
Several children	"any of the animals"
Mrs. L.	Yes...."any of the animals" why don't you go around feeding all the animals with your ice cream and your Twisties and your lollies and your peanuts? Veronica?
Stephen	Makes 'em sick!
Veronica	Because they don't like it.
Mrs. L.	(ignores Stephen's answer) Yes, and also
Michael	they might die.

- Mrs. L. Yes, they might die, and also  
(Silence. The children appear uncertain about what the teacher is referring to)
- Mrs. L. When do animals get feed first? Remember the book I read to you yesterday?
- Child In the morning
- Mrs. L. Yes, in the morning ...

### Part 2

*(The Show and Tell has gone on for several more minutes).*

#### Transcript 5

- Mrs. L. I think there's a little bower bird down there, Cathy.  
Bowerbirds make a little bower, or a little kind of a cage thing to go into. Down the bottom ... (she points to the picture of the bower).
- Cathy We saw the seals
- Mrs. L. Did you? Did you like them?
- Joel What did they eat?
- Mrs. L. What did they eat, Cathy
- Cathy Fish
- Child Where did they eat the fish?
- Cathy They went under water and just went 'golp' (making a swallowing action and noise).
- Mrs. L. (pointing) What is that animal?
- Deborah It starts with 'p'
- Mrs. L. It's a black-tailed prairie dog.
- Geoffrey Mrs. L. ... I know how bats hang.  
(Mrs. L. ignores Geoffrey)  
Cathy points to a picture of a cockatoo.
- Mrs. L. Isn't he pretty?

### Discussion

The 'show and tell' routine is a classroom genre widely used in early childhood classes. When teachers are asked what their purpose in having these sessions is, one answer they may give is that *it fosters oral language development*. What other purposes might the teacher have in mind?

### 3.3 Activity 8

Analyse the text, 'Playing the teacher game – Transcript 2 using the same formula that is found near the beginning of this module.

To make the comparison stronger, add up the number of words that Mrs. L (the teacher) spoke, and the number of words each child spoke. Now add up the total for ALL of the children. On this evidence, who was getting all the practice? Who had the speaking rights? Whose oral language development is being fostered here?

In your opinion, does the Show and Tell genre achieve its purpose of assisting the children's oral language development? Give reasons for your answer.

What kind of text type could Cathy be encouraged to write after this oral practice, such as it is? What is the teacher's purpose for language?

There is one example of the (Look - what's that " It's a ... ) routine in the lesson. Can you identify it? Hint: The teacher uses a non-verbal strategy instead of the signal 'look'.

What behaviours might Mrs. L. be trying to encourage in her classroom? Are these behaviours similar to what the children might experience in their daily lives at home and in the community? In what settings? Are the classroom behaviours easy for the children to learn?

What 'hidden' knowledge about what is expected of them, are the children learning?

 Explore some of these ideas with the students in order to answer the question above.

- The teacher is the 'knower', she can read difficult words, they are the learners.
- The teacher has the right to accept, reject, or ignore everybody else's answers
- The teacher has the right to control the events and the children in the classroom
- The teacher has the right to ask questions, although sometimes children are permitted to ask them.
- The teacher can ask questions even when she knows some children may not know the answer

We are not making value judgments here. Rather, we are just making explicit the effect that coming into classrooms for the first time may have on young children. In this way, we are highlighting the amount of learning that any child has to do, even before trying to cope with language and content learning.

#### What are the positive aspects of this 'Show and Tell'?

- Mrs. L. acts as a *role model* helping the children to get information from a text, in this case, a picture book. This is one classroom 'literacy event' that is also found in many early childhood classes. Literacy events are the particular activities

where reading and writing have a role; the participants, the occasion when the event took place, and the interactions between participants all help to build up the 'literacy event'.

- Mrs. L. encourages the children to recall information from a previous event (the previous day's book reading) and apply its meaning to the current learning experience.
- Mrs. L. helps the children learn labels for new creatures: 'black-tailed prairie dogs' and 'bower birds' in their 'bowers' (nests).
- Mrs. L.'s questions gave the speaker the chance to elaborate on the information she was constructing.

*Now think about some answers to these questions:*

Does the Show and Tell/Newstime/Morning Talk classroom genre offer to the children in the class the opportunity to learn/practise to become more effective speakers? Give reasons for your answer.

What strategies might a teacher use to encourage more children to take part in meaningful oral language interaction in the classroom?



Talk with students about an alternative style for Morning Talk, e.g.:

- Group the children in 'morning talk' groups of 5 - 6, and keep the children in those groups for, e.g. a term, or five weeks - long enough for them to feel comfortable with one another.
- Each child in the group takes it in turn to tell the rest of the group their news for the day
- Each group then selects one child each day to tell their news to the whole class (up to five children per day)
- The whole class chooses one child's news for the teacher to write on the board, or a large sheet of paper. This step helps children to learn the difference between spoken and written language.
- Program this learning experience into the timetable up to three times a week, allowing enough time for all the steps above.
- Include in your classroom programming and planning, other opportunities for children to use oral language for purposeful learning of classroom genres. Some useful strategies for encouraging children's oral language development are discussed in Unit 4, Module 1 'Oral Language Development'.

## Section 4. Questions at home and at school

You saw, in the text following Routine 2 *Playing the Teachers Game*, that questions outside of the classroom setting are often very different from the kinds of questions teachers use. One issue is, as we have seen, is that when someone asks questions anywhere else but the classroom it is generally because they genuinely want to know something.

Questioning is one of the most difficult tasks for teachers to do well. In classrooms, questions are used in different ways for different curriculum purposes. Some of these ways may be new to pupils. Therefore, they may have difficulty in performing, or in giving the information the teacher expects in the way s/he expects it.

A lot of the questions teachers ask are to:

- Shape the lesson
- Control the lesson
- Focus the lesson more closely on the topic

Question types commonly used by teachers include

- *Closed* questions – these have only one acceptable answer. They are sometimes referred to as *display* questions, asked to test whether pupils have learned something that the teacher thinks has been taught.
- *Open* questions – where a number of answers are possible and acceptable, e.g. *What did you have for lunch today?* and where the teacher asks for a pupil's reasoning, or an opinion or evaluation, e.g. *What is the most dangerous animal, and why?*
- *Diagnostic* questions – that can be either *open or closed*. Their purpose is to:
  - Find out what pupils know
  - Check that pupils are on the 'right track' that the teacher has in mind
  - Find out if learning is happening.
- *I – R – E* questions – where the teacher initiates and guides the exchange
  - The rights of the speakers are unevenly balanced, i.e. teachers have many more turns than pupils
  - Teachers have the control over who speaks, when they have a turn, and evaluates the pupils' answers.
  - The research that has been done shows that most of the questions in the I-R-E exchange are closed – that is, teachers are looking for one 'right' answer that she/he has in mind.
- *Pseudo-questions* (Look up the meaning of 'pseudo' in the dictionary before reading on). Teachers use many pseudo questions, often for very good educational reasons. The reason these questions are difficult for pupils is that the teacher is playing a game known as "guess what's in my head?". There is only one right answer, the one that is in the teacher's head. Sometimes answers can be equally right, but if it is not the answer the teacher wants, it is not allowed

Sometimes a question may seem like an *open* question, but it is in fact closed, as in the example below. The answers are all in the teacher's mind.

*Transcript 6*

- Teacher            What can you tell me about a Bunsen burner, Joe?
- Pupil 1            A luminous and non-luminous flame
- Teacher            A luminous and non-luminous flame... When do you have a luminous flame?
- Pupil 1            When there's oxygen.
- Teacher            When the air-hole is closed... when is it a non-luminous flame, Kila?
- Pupil 2            When... when the air-hole is open.
- Teacher            Right... good...

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 **3.3 Activity 9**

*Lecturer:*

- *Record one Language Strand lecture with your students.*
- *Play it back to the students in the next lecture.*
- *Analyse it for the different kinds of questions you asked during the lecture.*
- *Use a check sheet to assist classification. Students draw up a table like the one below, and fill it in as they listen to the tape.*
- *PAUSE the tape at each question you ask, and determine its type.*
- *Enter it into the table, along with the actual example.*

<i>Closed Q's</i>	<i>Open Q's</i>	<i>Diagnostic Q's</i>	<i>I – R – E Q's</i>	<i>Pseudo-Q's</i>

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### Questions and pedagogy

It is hard to imagine how we could do without questions in teaching. However, it may be possible to encourage pupils to exercise their own higher-level thinking skills, and trying to put their thoughts into words, by consciously making an effort to use fewer questions in lessons.

Some further suggestions that may improve the quality of interaction between teacher and pupils are made below.

Wait for several seconds so that pupils have time to think, and evaluate the question and the range of possible answers

Research indicates that when a teacher adopts this strategy:

- The pupils have more to say in their answers
- The pupils answer the questions with greater confidence
- Pupils themselves ask more questions about the topic
- ‘Slow ‘ pupils are more willing to take risks and answer the questions,
- Discipline improves

Get each pupil in the class to write down their answer. Then discuss the range of answers

This provides pupils with examples of the reasoning processes that other pupils engage in when figuring out answers to questions.

Get pupils to discuss possible answers in pairs. The teacher asks one or several pairs for their answers; other pairs contribute comment.

 Lecturer:

- Pre-record another lecture.
- In this lecture, give demonstrations of the three strategies above when you are questioning the students.
- Then re-play and analyse the questions. See if the results are similar to those given in the information above.
- What other observations could
  - a) you, the lecturer,
  - b) the studentsmake about the strategies?

## Section 5. Children's home-based language and literacy learning

### Some interaction routines in highly literate homes: - picture books and story reading

We turn now to some research that sets out clearly for us the different ways in which adults socialise their young members into language and literacy in their out-of-school experiences. As you read the case studies, think about how children from these different backgrounds will adapt to the schooling process, or not, as the case may be.

In many homes in highly literate societies, children are introduced to picture books as quite young infants. This has come to be known as the 'bed-time story' routine. A parent reads to young children at night from children's books chosen by the parent, or chosen by the child. When the child is quite young, say 18 months to 2 years, there is a particular discourse pattern most commonly used in this event. It goes something like this:

An attention getting vocative	Look
A question	What's that?
A label	It's a ... dog, plane, cup etc)
A feedback utterance	Yes, it's a ... (etc.)

As the young child develops more language, the adult encourages the child to take on the role of responder, and expands on the information given to the child, such as commenting on colour, size, attributes, participants etc. In this way, the child is:

- Learning behaviours that are valued in schooling
- Learning how to talk about personal experiences in particular ways, what we might call 'topic-centred' ways
- Being introduced to routines that will later be part of book reading episodes in classrooms, so s/he will already have been 'apprenticed to these ways of using language
- Learning routines by which s/he will be able to display what s/he knows in ways that are appropriate in classrooms.

Now study the transcript below.

#### *Transcript 7*

Mother (to child, 18 months)	Tell Daddy what you saw when we went to the park today
Child	tik / ton / cockadoo / ten / tea (sticks, stones, a rooster, etc.)

Already, from a very young age, the adult was providing a frame for the child's language, and shaping it into the language of a recount genre that features largely in classroom life -the Morning News/Sharing Time routine.

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 **3.3 Activity 10**

*Ask yourself:*

- *In my community of speakers, is there an interaction routine like this one?*
- *Is there a time when adults ask children to retell something that happened that one of the adults does not know about?*
- *Are there any rules about what can be retold, and what is not to be talked about?*
- *How well will a child whose language group has no equivalent of retelling an event, or certain rules that have to be observed when retelling, cope in a language classroom where a teacher includes Morning Talk in his/her programming?*

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## Home based language and literacy experiences of children from different communities

*(You will be asked to complete an activity at the end of the text - read carefully.)*

Now let us look at some research carried out by Heath in America. In her work, Heath looked at speech and literacy events in the communities and then related these to the speech and literacy events of the classroom, predicting the measure of success each group might have in their schooling.

### Case study No. 1

One community was called Roadville', a white working-class community whose members, both men and women, had for decades worked in the local textile mill. In Roadville, parents had certain beliefs (*ideologies*) about and expectations for their children, which shaped the ways in which they socialised their children into language and literacy. For example, parents were very aware that teachers asked a lot of questions, and expected answers from the children, as a way of showing what they knew. For that reason, adults encouraged children to 'pay attention, listen and behave' so they would come to know what they needed to know. They learned, for example, to give answers to the 'what' -questions we have described above. However, they were never asked 'How...' and 'why...' questions, demanding explanations and reasons.

'Stories' in Roadville were a particular kind. When families met socially, the adults often told stories 'on themselves' i.e. something that had actually happened to them or

someone else, and felt to be a 'good story' Stories were only to be 'something you tell on *yourself*, a close friend or relative, and told in good fun, with no malice. Stories had to be based on fact, and end with a moral or summary based on a weakness of the character about whom the story was told. No-one could tell a story about someone else in their absence. This was not done. No gossip was allowed.

As we might expect, these rules were taught to their children, too. Children were not to tell stories unless asked to do so by an adult. These stories had to be real life experiences - what we would call '*personal* narrative' with a moral to finish up. The adults made very sure the children stuck to the actual facts and time when the event happened. The adult helped the child in the retelling by means of many questions asked during the retelling, questions for which *the* adult *knew the* answer.

In Roadville, adults did not read fictive *stories* to their children. Stories that were exaggerations of real-life events, with imaginary characters and plots such as those read as fiction in many homes and classrooms, were not accepted as stories, but were considered to be 'lies without a piece of truth'. If Roadville children attempted to fictionalise events or characters, they were accused of 'telling a story', which meant 'don't tell me a lie'.

When children and adults interacted over a book, exchanges similar to the following were likely to occur:

#### *Transcript 8*

Mother (pointing to a picture of the child's dog in the picture album)

Who's that?

Child

Nuf (the dog's name was Snuffy)

Mother

Let's see if we can find another picture of Nuffle. Here he is, he's had a bath with Daddy.

*There he is, there's Nuffle*

In Roadville, adults helped children to focus their attention on the names and features of particular items and events. They believed that children had to be *taught*, so it was the responsibility of adults to teach children to 'pay attention, listen and behave'. Children learned from their caregivers both how to talk and how to learn, in ways that supported the community's beliefs about children and their place in the community.

Book reading time for these children helped the children to focus on the written word. For example, letters of the alphabet, numbers, names of items pictured in books, and simplified retellings of Bible stories. If the story plot was too complicated for the child, the adult retold the story in short, simple sentences. During the retelling, the parent often asked the child to give answers to 'what' questions. As children got older, they were encouraged to sit still and listen to stories read to them, without interrupting the story reader, and were not encouraged to ask questions.

## Case study No. 2

The second community was called 'Trackton'. This was a black working-class community, whose members also worked at the mill. This community also had clear

*ideologies* about children and their socialisation into the norms of their group. For example, adults believed that they could not make a child talk; when the child had something to say and wanted to say it urgently enough, s/he would say it, in the act of 'coming up' as a talker. As a result of this belief, adults did not simplify their speech for the child, and young children were not expected to be 'information-givers'. They were, instead, expected to become '*information-knowers*' by 'being keen' and by taking notice of the many lessons that were embedded in conversations they heard in their homes and community. When they were ready, they could stand up for themselves and enter into the flow of talk. Then they had to defend themselves against other speakers who wanted to 'take the floor', usually by being able to defend themselves against the insults of older children or adults.

Children from Trackton had no experience in answering the 'known-answer' questions that are used to give children the opportunity to position themselves as 'knowers'. They expected questions for which they had the answer, and questions such as 'what's that like?' or 'where did that come from?'. They were not asked 'why' and 'how' questions like those asked in classrooms.

When it came to storying, Trackton children's experiences were vastly different from those of Roadville children. In their group, storytelling was not merely a recounting of set events, but a creative interaction between performer and audience. Stories were based only remotely on 'fact', and were embellished in the telling, with no formulaic beginning or ending, and no plot as such. Children learned in competition with others how to win rights for taking the floor for storytelling and winning the attention of an audience. The praise and enthusiasm for the story was all the children needed. There were no questions directed to the children about the story, and no expectation that storytellers should stick to a time line of events. Thus, in their community they were encouraged to 'talk junk', highly embellished stories of what might have started out as a real-life event, but which was exaggerated into something that bore little relationship to the original event being talked about. Other speech styles they were encouraged to learn included ritualised insults, word games, sounding and riddling, which were all examples of verbal play in this community. Thus the children learned highly creative oral performances that were prized in their community. But they did not hear stories similar to the fictive narratives expected of them in school, nor did they have experience of the kinds of questions that teachers ask about such stories.

In Trackton, adults read and wrote for a range of purposes and considered themselves literate. Their children came to school with certain expectancies about print, and a keen sense that reading was something one did to learn something one needed to know. When children commenced schooling, they could already read functional print such as labels, signs, price tags, logos and brand names on packages and brochures, street signs, and the names on cars, motorbikes and bicycles. Yet, their ability to read was not the result of explicit teaching from their parents, because adults believed that it was not possible to teach a child, but the learning would come when the child was ready. The children read to find out information in their world, and to make sense of that world.

Adults did not read to children at all. Nor did parents write anything for children. There were no children's books in the homes, no bedtime story-reading, nor reading at other times. This was in keeping with the adults' beliefs that learning depended on the child's readiness to know. On some occasions, adults responded with answers to children's questions about print in the environment, such as t-shirt slogans, street numbers, product labels etc. What is really interesting from an educationist's point of view, is that some of these children came to school already able to read!

### Case study No. 3

Research was conducted by Schieffelin among the Kaluli people of the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. The Kaluli are a small, preliterate, egalitarian society living in the tropical rain forest of the Great Papuan Plateau. Most Kaluli speak only one language, a non-Austronesian language. Some community members can speak and read Tok Pisin because of their affiliation with a mission that has worked in the area.

The Kaluli maintain large gardens and hunt and fish. Traditionally, all of the people of one village (between 60 - 90) lived in one longhouse. Currently, many families live in smaller dwellings that provide accommodation for two or more extended families. This study is of interest to us, because it refers to the lifestyle of children in communities in the very remote areas of PNG. By studying the particular language and literacy practices of these children, we can add to our expertise as competent teachers of such children.

At the time Scheffelin was conducting her research, only a very few men and women had any experience of literacy and this was through participation in literacy classes run by the local Mission. Although a school had been started, Kaluli children did not achieve high levels of literacy, nor were there purposes and occasions for them to use their reading and writing competence in village life. Nor did their parents at that time consider that literacy was of any value to their children.

However, "book reading" activities did take place in one family where both parents were achieving literacy with Biblical-type materials through attending the Mission literacy classes. At times of book-reading, the mother would take her primer from her book bag and practice reading aloud. She shared her booklet with her 2-year-old child. When the child heard her mother begin to practise her reading, she would ask to look at the pages with her. The mother wanted to read for herself, but did interact with her daughter, by pointing to the pictures and naming the objects, animals or people, introducing conversational topics related to real-life experiences. For example, when the child pointed to a picture of a banana and said the Kaluli word for banana, her mother would ask her, "do you eat bananas" in a conversational tone of voice. However, her mother never referred to the actual print word, or drew her daughter's attention to the print in any way, even though she herself was taking meaning from the print as well as the pictures.

When the child did not name an object correctly, her mother corrected her and asked her to make clear what she meant. If the child showed that she did not know the verbal label for the object, her mother supplied it for her, and asked her to repeat it. The language mother and daughter used during these 'book-looking' episodes, was in the conversational style of everyday Kaluli interaction. And for this child, her mother considered her interaction with text to have 'no purpose'; it was neither for instruction nor entertainment.

It is interesting to note that Kaluli adults do not encourage their children to name or label things and people when they are learning to speak, or even at later stages of their language learning. So this example was unusual. In fact, a child who simply named objects, from the adults' point of view, had not begun to use language at all. That point occurs when the child is able to say 'mother' and 'breast'. When those words are heard, adults consider the child has started to learn to talk. Then the mother engages the child in extensive verbal interaction of a particular kind.

Once a Kaluli child has begun to talk, s/he must be 'shown how to speak'. Adults use a teaching strategy of direct instruction. What the adult says, provides a model for what the child is to say, and is followed by an instruction to 'say like that'.

As well as instructing their children by telling them what to say, Kaluli mothers pay attention to the form of their children's utterances. Kaluli speakers correct the sounds, the words and the grammar of their children's speech. The process of language development is thought of as a 'hardening' process.

Kaluli people do not like to say what another person might be thinking or feeling. When a child speaks, the responsibility for clear expression rests with him or her. Parents do not rephrase what they think the child is saying; instead they expect the child to make himself/herself clear. What would a Kaluli child make of a teacher who corrects him/her while s/he is speaking? Kaluli speakers do not use indirect speech, but are always careful to say who the speaker of an utterance is.

## Case study No. 4

The fourth case study we will study centres on an Australian Torres Strait Islander child and her grandmother, who lived in an urban area of North Queensland. The grandmother and child (who was about five years of age) were fluent speakers of Torres Strait Creole, but both also were able to speak some English. Grandmother wrote very little in either of her languages, and it was sometimes difficult to even find a pencil or pen to write notes and phone numbers.

Grandmother and child shared a small two-bedroomed flat in an urban community. Without other live-in school-aged children to go with Elsey to school, Grandmother decided to place Elsey in a nearby preschool. Each morning she went out to the bus, her backpack containing a lunch prepared by her grandmother. She called this backpack her 'letterbox' because it so often held activity sheets, notes and forms from preschool that she brought home to grandmother.

At home, Elsey and her grandmother spoke mainly Torres Strait Creole (TSC). Elsey chose to use the English she was learning at preschool when she talked with people outside the family circle. She was already as competent in TSC as other children of the same age, and she had learned how to 'do things with words' in the speech events of her culture. This included knowing how to break into a conversation, when not to interrupt, what was 'talking cheeky', when she was expected to 'tok praply' in more formal settings with other TSC speakers, and when pertness and humour would be rewarded. An example of this was one day when Elsey and others were travelling along in the car; they decided to have Kentucky Fried chicken for lunch. One person spoke up: "who's got the money to buy it? Elsey -have you got the money to buy it? Your turn to buy !" said as a joke. Elsey responded very quickly with. "ai go seke tha mani tri" (I'll go and check the money tree). If we were to summarise Elsey's knowledge about using oral language, we could say she could do various things with words: expressing opinions, giving reasons, explaining, challenging, accusing, praising and joking were just some of the social actions she used language for.

But often, home speech events took on very different rules and patterns from those used in highly literate, English speaking homes, and classrooms attended by many children and teachers from a similar background.

For example, in this home, the child was allowed to talk, but was not actively encouraged to retell events that happened during the day. Further, when asked to tell a third person something that happened to her, she was very reluctant to do so. On one occasion she went with a friend to a nature reserve. It was a very hot day, and she had not worn a hat. On the way home she was feeling sick from the sun's heat. Later, at home, she told her grandmother (whom she called 'Mam') about this:

## Transcript 9

- E                    ai bi sik lai bin sik mama                    A i bin lilbit sik, ye  
*I got sick, I got sick, Mum                    I was a little sick*
- GM                    Prom wat?  
*What from?*
- E                    er w/I was headache an' I was feel 'ot
- GM                    wis dei? (when?)
- E                    ap dhe we Billybong Sanchuri  
*(The day we went to) the Nature Reserve*
- GM                    Poor thing. Do you scared from that thing?  
*(i.e. all the wild animals E had seen)*
- E                    no, I was jus'like to / feel like to vomit
- GM                    true? did/ you I tell I tell I Mam Joan?
- E                    yeah. She said like dhis, 'sleep in dha car'  
 So I was sleepin' in dha car.

Spontaneous recounts were part of her language routines in the home, but not retelling for another person.

Sometimes Grandmother told her stories of the culture heroes of the Torres Strait, or histories about family members. She also recounted stories about her days as a diver for pearl shell in the Strait when she was young. The storytelling events have two distinctive features. When Grandmother retold traditional narratives, she did not ask questions to check the child's understanding. Nor did she tolerate questions from her young listeners. The retelling was a sustained oral performance and the storyteller had the 'speaking rights' until she relinquished them. At storytelling times, Grandmother never told fictive narratives like the ones told in school. Often, listeners kept on doing daily chores while they listened. And when Elsey was retelling events of her day, Grandmother kept on with the tasks she had to do in the home.

Elsey had some experience with fictive narrative, since she did watch children's programs on TV and listened to some stories then. The little girl also listened sometimes to the radio, to one station that Torres Strait Islander people preferred. Most of the talk together in the home, however, was talk for getting things done - cooking, cleaning, getting ready for outings, washing clothes and having baths.

There was a range of functional texts in the home: calendars, lists of phone numbers above the phone, letters and accounts from agencies and service industries, letters and notes from family members, and 'junk mail'- the advertising leaflets that supermarkets and stores distributed through the mail boxes weekly. The two of them would sometimes sit and look at the junk mail, talking about the things they would like to buy if they had the money. There was a telephone directory and a Bible on the bookshelf. There were no books bought especially for the child, nor read to her. She sometimes asked her grandmother for pencil and paper so she could 'write' a letter to relatives; sometimes she asked grandmother to write the words of a song, and then copied them.

As well, Elsey engaged with print, often enthusiastically, as part of her daily routines. One of her duties at home was to clear the mailbox, a responsibility she jealously guarded, sometimes fighting with Grandmother for the right to collect the mail. She

learned to recognise the addressee's name on envelopes and she could sometimes identify the logos and acronyms of familiar service agencies (e.g. Telikom, PAWA). One day as she collected a letter, she glanced at the envelope and exclaimed, 'Oh shit, Telecom! - a signal of the significance such bills had in the household where there was rarely enough money to last from one Pension day to the next.;

Thus, as an avid emerging literate, Elsey was learning to use writing and reading for a range of instrumental, recreational, informational and social interactional purposes. She wrote her 'name' (usually the first letter of her first name and surname- E W) for Grandmother and herself on scraps of paper, letters and cards. For play, she sometimes asked for names and words to be written for her to copy and illustrate.

Elsey saw reading and writing as having definite purposes. On one occasion when she was being entertained by a visitor, she was asked: '*Are you gonna read the paper?*' She replied '*read the paper for what?*' Her grandmother got the paper once a week to check out the horses she was going to back. Elsey was sent to the newsagent to get the paper, and she knew by the logo which newspaper was the correct one, and the reason why Grandmother wanted it.

It is worth noting that most of the kinds of text and literacy mentioned so far, and used in Elsey's home do not figure largely in many classrooms. The kinds of texts that are considered worthy of study and interaction in classrooms were mostly fictive narrative texts, songs and rhymes. This could be the cause of some difficulty for Elsey when she started school.

From the information in each of the Case Studies, we can see that each community of speakers prepares their children for social life as members of their communities in different ways. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way of interacting with children; there is only 'difference'. However, some of the ways with words of these children, and ways of learning about their world, will present them with learning difficulties when they come into classrooms. In a perfect world, teachers would understand where the children were coming from, and would be able to program for them in a way that took advantage of what they did know and could do, and build a bridge for them into the school's language and literacy practices.

### 3.3 Activity 11

*To give you some practice in analysing children's home-based language in relation to school based language and learning, there are several questions for which you will find the answer in each of the Case Studies.*

*This exercise will assist you in identifying the children who come into your classes from a range of backgrounds, with their own different language and literacy practices, knowledge and skills. Remember, these are neither strengths nor weaknesses. They are just differences in the social practices of different language communities.*

Will the child be able to:	Yes	No	Reasons/Comments
1. Tell fictive narrative (pretend stories)			
2. Read/write fictive narrative (pretend stories)			
3. Give a recount to the teacher/class			
4. Read extended text			
5. Use books for information			
6. Use books for entertainment			
7. Answer a teacher's questions about how something works			
8. Give a reason when the teacher asks why something happens			
9. Take part in sharing time/news time'			
10. Take part in shared-book reading?			

*Draw up a Table like the one above for each of the Case Studies. Name them, then answer the questions in the right-hand column.*

*From the Tables, write a summary showing what a child from each community is able to do with language and literacy at the time they commence schooling.*

*Write an observation (of about one/two paragraphs in length) about what this information explains to you that will be useful to you in your teaching.*

*As your final task, ask and answer the same questions about your own cultural group. Compare your findings with a classmate.*