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# From speaking to writing: Identity texts



## Teaching focus

The following speaking and listening strategies have been selected for use with students in the early years to develop and build on their oral language structures and vocabulary in order to support them as they move towards writing (Gibbons, 2015). The strategies have been based around patterns in the book 'Hello!', published and commissioned by the National Library of Australia and illustrated by Tony Flowers (2016). This book was chosen as it introduces readers to 12 other children whose families are from a range of cultural backgrounds. Each child tells about their language and cultural practices. This can be used as a model for writing for students to tell about their own culture, language and identity. Cummins has pointed out for several years that,

'We have used the term identity texts to draw attention to essential aspects of the link between identity affirmation, societal power relations, and literacy engagement (Cummins, 2004; Cummins & Early, 2011)'

Cummins, J., Hu, S., Markus, P. & Montero K. (p556, 2015).

## Other texts as models for writing

The following books could also be used as models for writing and to explore the culture, language and identity of students.

- I'm Australian Too by Mem Fox and Ronojoy Ghosh (2018, Omnibus)
- Wide Big World by Maxine Beneba Clarke and Isobel Knowles (2020, Lothian)
- I Love Me by Sally Morgan and Ambelin Kwaymullina (2017, Fremantle Press)

## Target language for moving from speaking and writing

The following language and structures can be developed through the speaking and listening strategies and then be drawn upon as students move into writing.

My name is ...

My family comes from ...

I speak ...

I love eating ...

On special days I ...

Sometimes, I ...

## Speaking and Listening Strategies

### Floorstorm

#### Target language: vocabulary on cultural practices and language for classifying

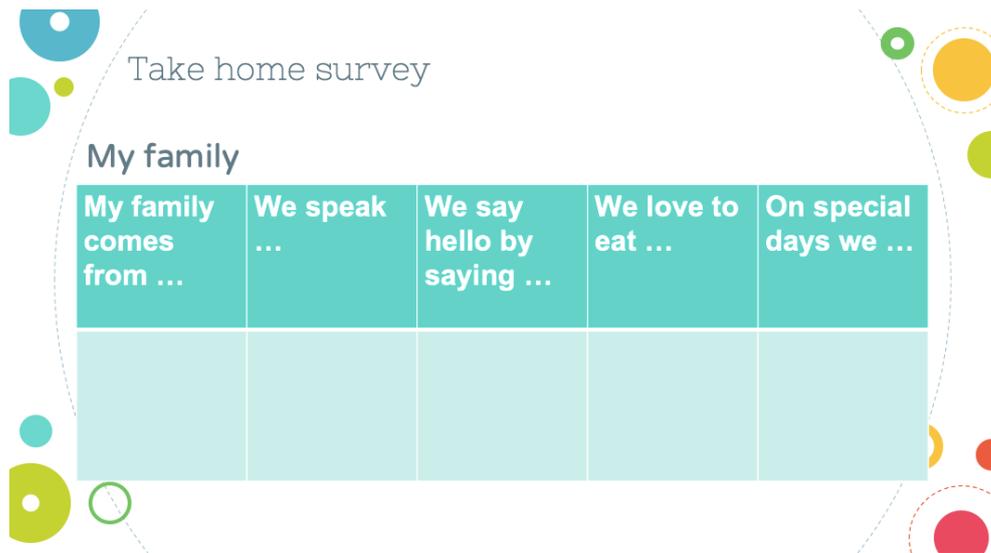
A floorstorm is like brainstorming with pictures. Groups of students can be provided with a range of images related to the topic they will eventually read and write about. IT is a way to tap in to their existing knowledge and language on a topic. They can either discuss the images or record what they see on post it notes. If recording on post its they can then classifying their vocabulary, eg food, games, activities, languages etc.



## Take home survey

### Target language: asking questions and vocabulary

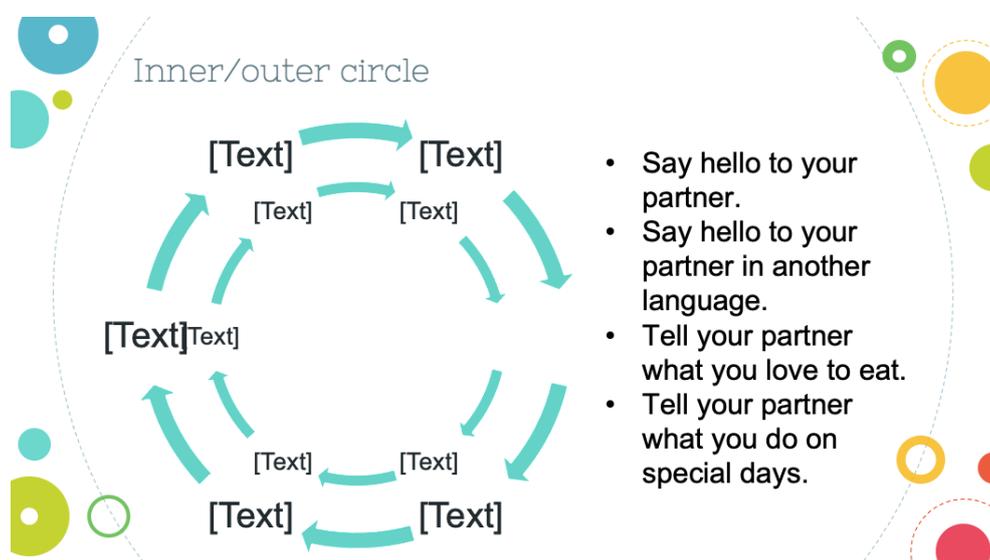
By designing a survey to take home, students can discuss their schooling at home and also bring their own culture and language into the classroom. Students practice asking the questions in class before taking the survey home and asking family members. The questions target the structures and vocabulary needed for additional speaking and listening tasks as well as the structures for writing.



## Inner/outer circle

### Target language: asking questions, answering questions and vocabulary

Students can be placed into two concentric circles with each facing a partner. As a follow up to the survey they ask questions and provide answers to a partner. For example, 'What language do you speak?' and 'What do you do on special days?' Students can be instructed to move so that they speak to a range of other students with the instructions such as, 'if you are in the outer circle move to steps to the left'.



## Enquiry and elimination

### Target language: asking questions, answering questions and vocabulary

A range of images related to the topic can be displayed for all students to see and the same images placed on cards for a particular student to select but not show. Other students ask questions in order to guess which picture the student has as the student gives yes or no answers. For example, 'Is it a dessert?', 'Is it made from rice?' and 'Is it eaten during Chinese New Year' etc.



## Draw and describe

### Target language: giving instructions, asking questions clarify, descriptive / positional language and vocabulary

On a mini whiteboard students draw a cultural practice such as something they eat, something special they do with their family or something they like to learn about their family. After drawing they describe their drawing to a partner who draws their picture on another mini whiteboard. The other student may ask questions to clarify. After completing, students share their drawings and make comparisons. This is a barrier game so students need to be positioned so that they can't see the whiteboard of their partner. This could involve placing a barrier between students or students sitting back to back.

## Draw and describe

- ⦿ Draw something special you like to
  - ⦿ eat
  - ⦿ do with your family
  - ⦿ do in your spare time
  - ⦿ learn.
- ⦿ Describe your drawing to a friend.
- ⦿ Get your friend to listen and draw your picture without showing them your picture.



## Tap in

### Target language: asking questions, answering questions and vocabulary

One student walks around the classroom while others tap them on the shoulder to ask a question about their family, language, culture and identity. Students might ask, 'How do you say hello in your home language?' or 'What do you love to eat with your family?'.

## Tap in

- ⦿ Choose one student to walk around the classroom.
- ⦿ Other students tap them on the shoulder to ask a question?

Where does your family come from?

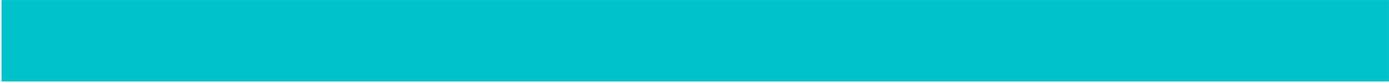
What language/s do you speak?

How do you say hello in your language/s?

What do you do on special days?

What do you love to eat?





## References and further reading

Cummins, J., Hu, S., Markus, P. & Montero, M.K. (2015). Identity texts and academic achievement: Connecting the dots in multilingual school contexts. *TESOL Quarterly* 49,3, Sept 2015, 555–581.

Dutton, J., D'Warte, J., Rossbridge, J., & Rushton, K. (2018). *Tell me your story: confirming identity and engaging writers in the middle years*. Newtown, NSW: Primary English Teachers' Association (PETAA).

Dutton, J., & Rushton, K. (2018). Poets in the making: Confirming identity in English. *Scan*, 37(3), 1-12.

Gibbons, P. (2015) *Scaffolding language, scaffolding learning: Teaching English language learners in the mainstream classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.