

The English Association Journal
for Teachers of English

THE USE OF english

Edited by Malcolm Hebron and Kayte Haselgrove

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Including

Getting Year 9s talking about *Macbeth*: Leala Amiri

Can oracy boost attainment in GCSE Science? Dr Matthew J Shaw

How does talk-focused professional development impact student talk? Sam Clark

Lessons in Oracy from the American Education System: Harriet Piercy



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EDITORIAL

Oracy in schools: development, discussion and debate

Arlene Holmes-Henderson and Tom F Wright

This special issue of *The Use of English* is dedicated to practitioner research into oracy. A term with multiple definitions, contributors to this issue describe the various ways in which they understand ‘oracy’. They paint a vibrant and dynamic picture of professional practice in primary and secondary classrooms where a focus on effective spoken communication and active listening improves outcomes and wellbeing for students and staff alike.

Since the Labour Party announced in Summer 2023 that they would include oracy at the core of their Education manifesto, oracy education has featured in news articles, tv programmes and podcasts. Beyond schools, the public has been talking about the need for a high quality oracy education. The Labour Party set out their stall thus:

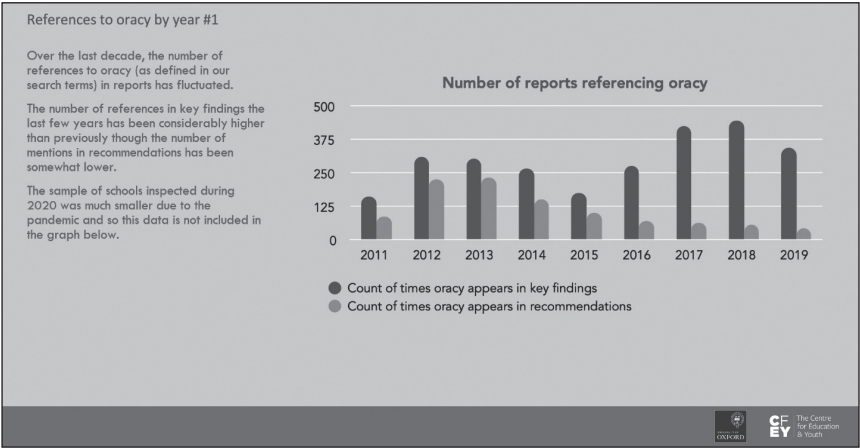
‘A significant barrier to young people getting on in life is an inability to speak up, to express their views, to ask for help, to persuade others, to collaborate successfully. These vital speaking skills are becoming even more important in the workplace and yet are not always taught in schools.

These speaking skills – known as oracy – can deepen children’s understanding, analytical skills and engagement leading to better classroom outcomes. Oracy’s contribution to accelerating academic progress has been evidenced by the Education Endowment Foundation. Drawing on this evidence, Labour’s Curriculum and Assessment Review will explore how to weave oracy into lessons throughout school. Children with poor language at age five are six times less likely to reach the expected standard in English at age 11 than those with good language at that age, and 11 times less likely to achieve the expected standard in maths.

The ability young people have to articulate themselves, justify, persuade, challenge and explain, are crucial to the world of work,

working in a team and navigating the modern world. Labour wants to help every child find their voice.’ (Labour Party 2023: 10)

The increasing interest in oracy has not been restricted to politicians. An analysis of Ofsted reports indicates that the national school inspection body has begun to comment in greater detail on the quality of speaking, spoken language, pupil talk, teacher talk and oracy during inspections (Millard, Menzies and Stewart 2021):



Against this backdrop of increasing public, political and inspectorate interest in oracy education, teachers in primary and secondary schools across England have conducted action research projects to illuminate the challenges and opportunities facing oracy in classrooms. Supported by national charities and the editors of this special issue, teachers present their findings to further develop oracy as a sub-field of educational research and to provide examples of tried-and-tested school-based strategies. The hope of all contributors is that these articles provide practitioner perspectives to contextualise political ambitions and inspectorate expectations.

The issue opens with two articles from classroom teachers based in primary schools. Kate Burton from Samarès School in Jersey shares her research into the impact of oracy lessons in developing vocabulary of Jersey Premium (economically disadvantaged) pupils. As literacy lead at Samarès, she has created a language-rich environment in her classroom and across the school, where children learn *to* talk and learn *through* talk. Kate has a keen interest in the use of oracy for vocabulary

development and believes this approach enables children to develop personally, socially and academically.

Emily Thomas from Pinner Wood School in Harrow shares her findings on the relationship between a focus on talk at Key Stage 2 and pupils' reading fluency. Emily is a National Oracy Leader whose research won a highly commended prize in Voice 21's Douglas Barnes Award (2022).

Moving to the secondary sector, Rahel Abebe explores the relationship between the spoken and written word in English lessons at City of London Academy Highgate Hill, with a particular focus on attainment.

Leila Amiri's research also focusses on the secondary English classroom. She explains how she adopted an oracy-based approach to teaching Macbeth with Year 9 pupils at Featherstone High school in London, many of whom experienced barriers to their learning.

We know that oracy is not the responsibility of English specialist colleagues alone. Dr Matthew Shaw, STEM Progress Lead at Abbey Grange Academy in Leeds answers 'Does oracy boost attainment in GCSE Science?' by focussing on the impact of using exploratory and presentational talk to improve the outcomes for lower ability Year 10 students in GCSE Science, when answering extended response examination questions.

This special issue also includes practitioner research into oracy-focussed continuing professional development (CPD). Sam Clark, a secondary English teacher and oracy champion at Willingdon Community School, Eastbourne, investigates whether talk-focused CPD impacts student talk by working closely with three teachers (at different career stages) during an intensive CPD programme.

Catherine Michica de Oliveira from Chailey School in West Sussex also evaluates the efficacy of a teacher development programme, asking whether oracy be embedded in teachers' practice within six months? In-depth interviews were conducted with a range of staff to analyse how far teaching practice had changed across faculties to provide talk-rich learning environments.

The special issue ends with a pair of articles which encourage readers to situate current oracy education policy and practice within a wider societal context. Rachel Higginson, CEO and Founder of Finding your Voice makes a compelling case that oracy isn't a teaching

tool to be utilised when appropriate, it's a culture. Based on 25 years of experience in Education, Rachel shares ten steps to creating a culture of authentic oracy.

And finally, we learn lessons in oracy from the American education system from Harriet Piercy who, as the recipient of a US-UK Fulbright Commission Distinguished Teacher Award, conducted comparative research in Nashville, Tennessee. During her residency at Vanderbilt University, Harriet worked at a metro public school in Nashville, visited and observed at a range of other schools across Tennessee, and interviewed educators and specialists in the field of oracy. Her article concludes with a set of evidence-informed recommendations regarding whole-school oracy strategy, practice and assessment.

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Labour Party (2023) Breaking Down the Barriers to Opportunity, available at <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Mission-breaking-down-barriers.pdf>

Millard, W., Menzies, L. and Stewart, G. (2021) Oracy after the pandemic: what Ofsted, teachers and young people think about oracy, https://oracy.inparliament.uk/files/oracy/2021-04/EMBARGOED%20until%2028_04_21%20CfEY%20and%20University%20of%20Oxford%20-%20Oracy%20after%20the%20pandemic%20-%20FINAL%20slides.pdf.

THE IMPACT OF ORACY LESSONS IN DEVELOPING VOCABULARY OF JERSEY PREMIUM PUPILS

Kate Burton

Introduction

Developing a robust vocabulary is crucial for a student's overall language proficiency. Quigley (2018) explained that closing the vocabulary gap between 'word poor' and 'word rich' students could prove the fundamental difference between school failure and success.

Our school is a 2-form entry primary situated in a large housing estate in Jersey with 58% Jersey Premium, 27% multilingual learners (MLL) and 22% special educational needs (SEN). The school has a high level of social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) and well-being needs. Our Year 6 students have made great progress in oracy this year through the implementation of the Voice 21 framework and structures to support active listening, collaboration, and effective communication.

Assessment using the Voice21 Oracy Framework showed that students' linguistic strand of oracy was particularly poor; students did not demonstrate a rich vocabulary in their writing either. Their writing was either repetitive and monotonous, or brief and insufficiently engaging for the reader.

Beck et al (2013) emphasise the importance of oracy in vocabulary development, stating, "Children learn words not by memorization, but through meaningful interactions and experiences with language." I therefore knew that I needed to use oracy to teach students new vocabulary in context. This contextualised learning, linked with dialogue and discussions, was the basis for my project.

I decided to focus specifically on the acquisition of tier two vocabulary. According to Beck et al (2013), the learning of tier two words removes a language barrier that may affect students' ability to

understand new concepts and provides them with vocabulary they need to actively engage with content across the curriculum. The focus group I selected for this project was made up of Jersey Premium pupils – an identified group in my class whose ‘word poor’ vocabulary negatively impacted their learning and in particular their writing.

My research question was ‘To what extent does the specific teaching of tier two vocabulary during an oracy lesson for 15 minutes per day, implemented for six weeks, improve the writing of Jersey Premium pupils in Year 6?’

Baseline data

Students’ vocabulary knowledge and word use did not support high-quality writing. During informal observations, I noticed a lack of understanding of more advanced tier two vocabulary in student discussions and an inability to use this language correctly. Previously, when students discovered new words, without meaningful interactions or contextualised learning, they simply disregarded these words and continued using more familiar vocabulary.

In addition to the observations, I also looked at a piece of writing produced by each child at the end of their last writing topic (appendix 3 and 5). There was limited use of challenging tier two words despite the use of a high-quality text driver to support and scaffold the structure and vocabulary of the writing task.

Out of the 14 Jersey Premium pupils in my class, I selected a group of five children who represented the SEN and MLL needs of the class. These five children became my focus group.

I collated a list of 30 tier two words which would specifically support our next writing topic. I asked the five focus children to inform me of any words that they heard before and to explain the meaning if they knew it. From this list of 30 words, I selected 24 words to use for my project. The focus students were familiar with between 0 to 2 of these tier two words.

In summary, children’s knowledge of selected tier two words was limited, and this impacted negatively upon their writing.

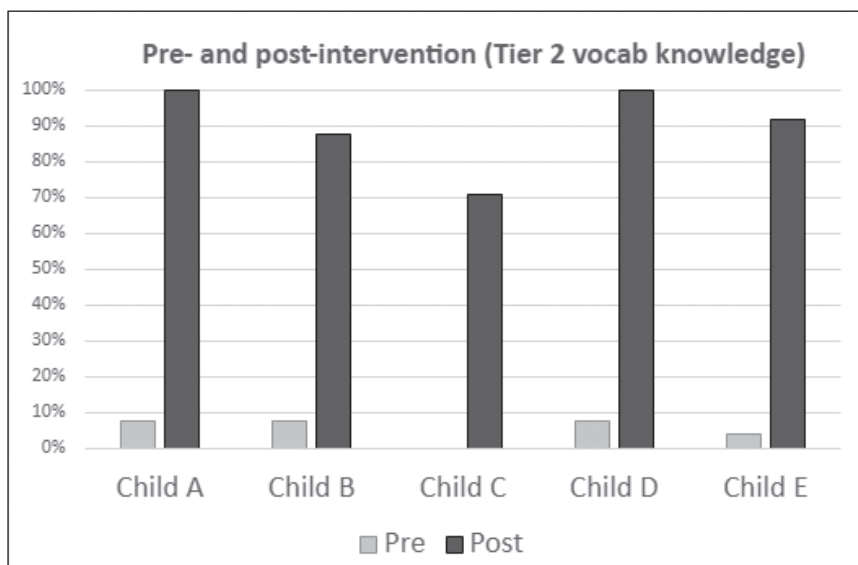
Intervention

The aim of my project was to increase the students’ knowledge of tier two words and therefore increase the range of vocabulary in their

writing. I planned to teach a specific tier two word during a 15-minute oracy lesson, four days a week, with a 15-minute consolidation lesson at the end of each week. These sessions were oracy-based to allow for maximum engagement and meaningful interactions between students.

I created a lesson format which included the following: a selection of tier two vocabulary (new focus word and words from previous lessons) to discuss; direct teaching of the focus word using repetition; and creating a physical action for each focus word. Three sentence stems were displayed, and students had to create their own sentence or story to go with them and share this with their partner. This supported Parsons and Branagan's (2018, p13) belief that "children should hear the new word in real sentences that are related to situations with which they are familiar" rather than simply learning a definition.

Finally, in each lesson I created a different oracy-based enrichment activity which allowed the students to use the focus word (and previous lesson's focus words) in their discussions. This meaningful approach to vocabulary was stated by the Education Endowment Foundation (2019) as the best way to improve spoken vocabulary. Furthermore, "having fun with words should be a key component of any vocabulary intervention" (Stahl and Nagy, 2005). See appendix 2 for an example of the PowerPoint which went alongside lesson 24: 'loquacious'.



At the end of each session, I displayed the word, with the related images, in the classroom. I also provided the students with a bookmark displaying the 24 tier two words (see appendix 2).

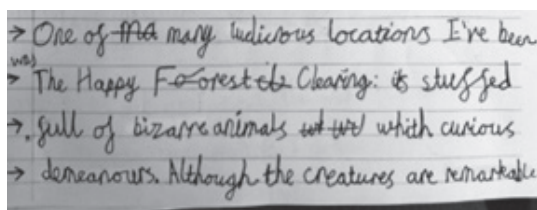
Students were encouraged to share their learning of these words with parents, teachers, and other students, and to use them in as many contexts and lessons as possible.

Impact

After the intervention, I reassessed the five Jersey Premium students, asking them again to explain the meaning of the words they knew. There was a significant increase in the number of words students were able to explain correctly: students could now on average explain the meaning of 90% of the tier two focus words (see appendix 7).

According to Beck et al (2013), learning words well enough to express them is an important learning goal, and having words in one's vocabulary is "generally viewed as a good measure of word ownership." Therefore, it was important to also see if students were able to use these new words in a variety of contexts, including writing, to demonstrate an understanding of the focus words.

Child A, who in the pre-intervention vocabulary check demonstrated knowledge of two words, did not use either of these words in their written work (see appendix 3). Whereas, in their post-intervention writing, they used focus words *ludicrous*, *demeanours* and *remarkable* in the correct context, spelt correctly (see appendix 4).



A secondary impact of this project, which I did not expect to see, and supposing this was a direct result of the project, was that students were now far more motivated to find, share and use high-quality vocabulary in their writing. This went further than just these 24 words: students were inspired by the rich vocabulary. They were determined to use more and more challenging words in everyday conversations and to use them to further improve their writing. This can be seen in Child C's writing (see appendix 5 and 6) where their choice of rich vocabulary

greatly increased. Words included *inconceivable*, *phenomenal*, *intricately-patterned*, *diminutive*, *delectable*, and *succulent* were used in the correct context and added to the overall standard of the piece.

Results from a questionnaire distributed to all Jersey Premium students at the end of the project showed that 93% of students felt that this intervention ‘improved’ or ‘greatly improved’ their vocabulary. Furthermore, 85% of students said taking part in the project ‘improved’ or ‘greatly improved’ their confidence in trying new vocabulary in their speaking and writing (see appendix 8).

Other informal feedback included staff reporting that children in the playground were discussing disputes using phrases including ‘*hostile demeanour*’ and ‘*ludicrous*’ behaviour. Children in PSHE lessons talked about feeling ‘*vulnerable*’; how they are ‘*compelled*’ to ‘*pursue*’ their dreams; and how ‘*benevolence*’ is an important trait to have. This showed that they could use these words appropriately, in a range of contexts.

Research ethics

Students were informed of the project prior to starting – it was explained to them that we would be undertaking a project which required me to assess some students’ word knowledge and that these results would be anonymised.

I discussed my research project with the head teacher who provided verbal consent. To maintain the privacy of the target group of students, I collected samples of writing from the whole class and the focus children did not receive any additional intervention or testing.

Evaluation

During this project, the main challenge was timetabling an additional 15-minute daily lesson for six weeks. To overcome this, I used the first 15 minutes of the daily writing lessons to run this intervention. Seeking opportunities to practise new vocabulary across the curriculum was an additional way of finding time in the school day to implement the project.

A key learning point from the project was the benefit of explicit teaching of tier two vocabulary across the curriculum using oracy-based activities to allow students to expand their vocabulary and deepen their understanding. Student interest in the project exceeded expectations – children wanted to continue with the intervention after the six weeks and

now regularly share new words with each other during writing lessons. They have been inspired to continue expanding their vocabulary and to improve their writing. This was a particular strength of the project.

Recommendations

Moving forward, I plan to improve the teaching of vocabulary across the school through sharing research, and specific staff training. This project has demonstrated the positive impact specific vocabulary teaching has on our students. Disseminating the principles of this project across year groups will support students who have low levels of language to develop their use of vocabulary through oracy.

This project will also contribute to a school-wide focus on using research projects to improve teaching and learning – an important part of our Jersey Premium strategy.

A further study could be undertaken in younger year groups in the school whereby teachers plan and deliver appropriate tier two vocabulary for that age group. I would be interested to compare the findings of this project with other schools with similar catchments and also compare with schools of varying MLL and SEN intake. Furthermore, upon widening the number of children who take part in this intervention, I would like to collect additional data which could then be used to compare the impact of this project on boys vs girls.

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- Quigley, A. (2018). *Closing the vocabulary gap*. Routledge, Abingdon.
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Appendices

Appendix 1 (word 24 ppt):

5

loguacious = talkative

Let's think of an action.

6

Let's practise the action.

loguacious
(adjective)

7

My turn, your turn.

loguacious
(adjective)

8

Create a story.

The loguacious girl... He is so loguacious! he always...
A benefit of being loguacious is...

1

Oracy Intervention
Year 6 Vocabulary

2

What is the word? I think it's a synonym for...

It might mean...

3

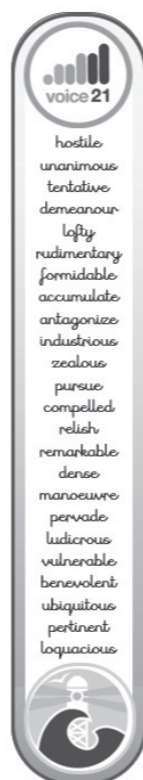
Which word is it?

remarkable dense pertinent manoeuvre ubiquitous

It could be... pursue accumulate vulnerable loguacious

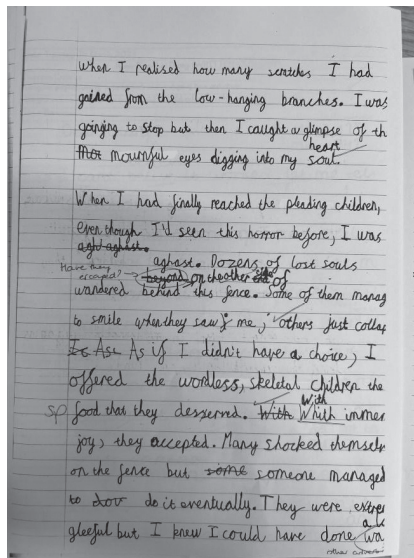
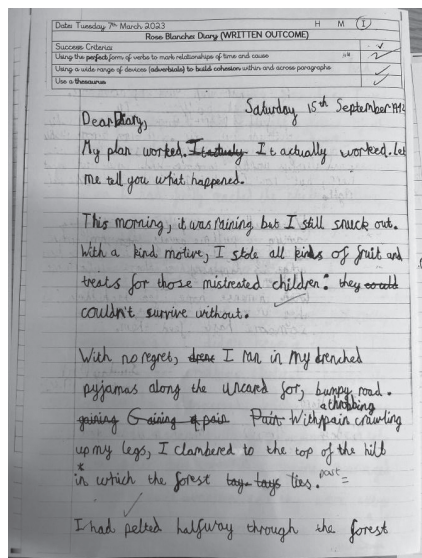
4

loguacious
(adjective)

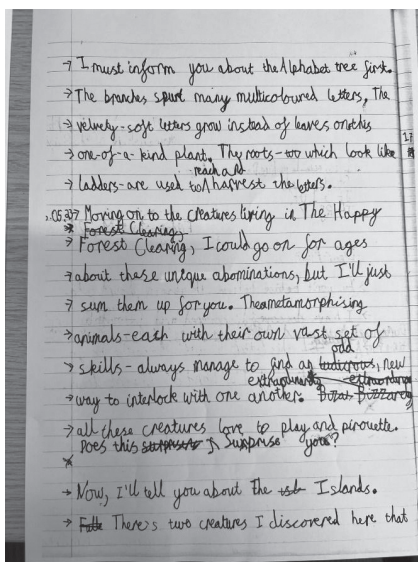
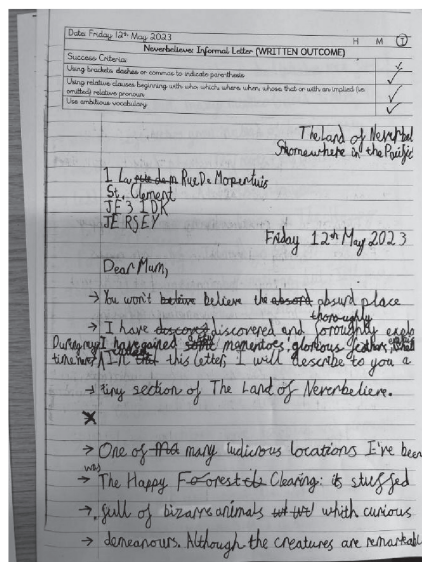


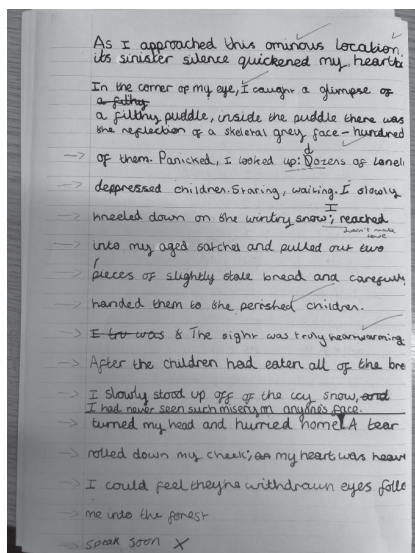
Appendix 2 (bookmark):

Appendix 3: Child A's writing in March 2023 (pre-intervention)

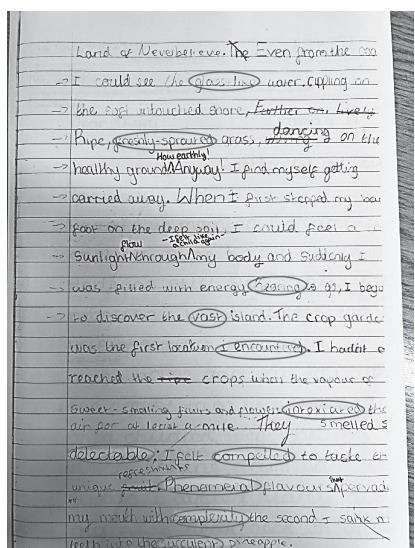


Appendix 4: Child A's writing in May 2023 (post-intervention)





Appendix 6: Child C's writing in May 2023 (post-intervention)



Appendix 7: Table to show students’ word knowledge of the 24 tier two focus words pre-intervention compared with post-intervention.

	Pre	Pre	Post	Post
Child A	2	8%	24	100%
Child B	2	8%	21	88%
Child C	0	0%	17	71%
Child D	2	8%	24	100%
Child E	1	4%	22	92%
AVERAGE	1.4	6%	21.6	90%

Appendix 8: Results from questionnaire of 14 Jersey Premium children who took part in the intervention.

How has the intervention changed your vocabulary knowledge?					
It's now worse	0				
No change	1	7%			
It's improved	3	22%			
It's greatly improved	10	71%			

How has your confidence to try new vocab changed during this project?					
It's now worse	0				
No change	2	14%			
It's improved	2	14%			
It's greatly improved	10	71%			

DOES READING IMPROVE WITH A FOCUS ON TALK AT KEY STAGE 2?

Emily Thomas

Introduction

The school explored in this piece is Pinner Wood School, a 3 form-entry outstanding Primary school of 700 children and 70 staff situated in Harrow in Greater London. Situated on the outskirts of London, the community is extremely diverse, with children from ethnic minority backgrounds being significantly higher than the national average. Similarly, the number of children with English as an additional language (EAL) is above the national average. Our student population is very diverse with a significant majority of children being on Indian heritage. It is also important to note that in terms of socio-economic context the number of children considered Pupil Premium, disadvantaged or receiving free school meals is less than the national average.



Ethnicities		
	# Pupils	% Pupils
Indian	258	41.3%
White - British	75	12.0%
Any Other White Background	57	9.1%
Any Other Asian Background	51	8.2%
Pakistani	41	6.6%
Black - African	39	6.2%
Any Other Mixed Background	22	3.5%
White and Black Caribbean	20	3.2%
Any Other Ethnic Group	19	3.0%
Bangladeshi	14	2.2%
White and Asian	14	2.2%
Black Caribbean	7	1.1%
White and Black African	3	0.5%
Chinese	2	0.3%
REFU	2	0.3%
Any Other Black Background	1	0.2%

Moving on, while observing my Year 5 class, during a discussion in a guided reading lesson, I noticed that the children were confident to build on each other’s ideas, but rarely took on any of the other talk tactics. This prompted me to investigate how, through explicitly teaching the talk tactics, I could develop the children’s skills including: active listening, reasoning and probing to improve discussions. Talk tactics are a strategy created by Voice 21 which encourages the children to take on different talking roles: instigator, builder, challenger, summariser, prober and clarifier. Talk tactics encourage students to think strategically about their contributions to group talk rather than continuing to build on ideas or instigate new lines of dialogue which is what I initially observed.

Initially, I set out to improve the children’s reading comprehension. However, after observations I realised that I needed to focus on improving discussions rather than being able to answer questions about the text. This led me to my final question which was, *‘To what extent does teaching talk tactics, implemented for six weeks, improve discussions in guided reading amongst six children at expected level?’* I chose to undertake this research with six children at expected level as they were able to understand the text well already meaning that I could focus on the Oracy skills.



Talk Tactics

Talk tactics encourage students to think strategically about their contributions to group talk





Instigate

Present an idea or open up a new line of enquiry

Start by saying:

- I would like to start by saying...
- I think...
- We haven't yet talked about...



Probe

Dig deeper, ask for evidence or justification of ideas

Start by saying:

- Why do you think...?
- What evidence do you have to support X idea?
- Could you provide an example?



Challenge

Disagree or present an alternative argument

Start by saying:

- I disagree because...
- To challenge you X, I think...
- I understand your point of view, but have you thought about...?



Clarify

Asking questions to make things clearer and check your understanding

Start by saying:

- So are you saying...?
- Does that mean...?
- Can you clarify what you mean by?



Summarise

Identify and recap the main ideas

Start by saying:

- So far we have talked about...
- The main points raised today were...
- Our discussion focused on...



Build

Develop, add to or elaborate on an idea.

Start by saying:

- Building on X's idea...
- I agree and would like to add...
- X's idea made me think...

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Baseline data

Our English curriculum has regular opportunities to discuss books. During this piece of research the children were reading *The Boy at the Back of the Class* by Onjali Q. Rauf. In one guided reading lesson a week we answer a ‘big question’ where the children discuss and debate, inspired by Dawes’ *Talking Points* (2012). This is an open-ended question which required the children to draw on their knowledge of the book and their own experiences. I observed that the children lacked the skills to sustain a conversation without adult support and did not instigate new lines of discussion. I aimed to move towards ‘dialogic’ teaching, in which ‘both teachers and students make substantial and significant contributions and through which children’s thinking on a given idea or theme is helped to move forward’ (Mercer, 2003). In my initial observation I noticed that without the skills to challenge, clarify, probe and instigate their ability to expand ideas was limited to one line of dialogue which remained underdeveloped.

Lesson 6 discussion question.

5 mins

BIG QUESTION TIME

Do you think refugees cause problems for the country they are coming into? If so, what examples can you think of?



Instigate



Probe



Challenge



Clarify

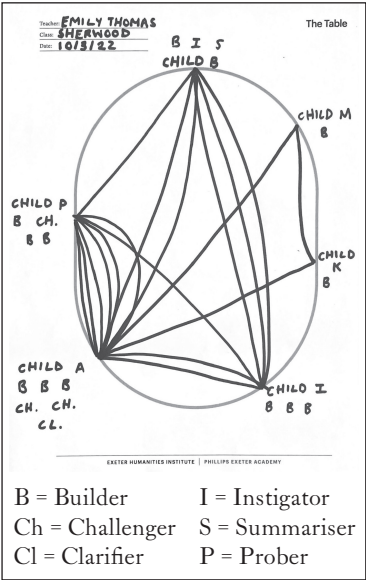


Summarise



Build

17



The Harkness Discussion is a strategy used to monitor participation. It is designed to develop students' understanding of a given topic whilst also drawing attention to who is speaking and the direction of the discussion. The students sit in a circle or oval shape so that they can all see each other. This is very important, as the teacher or observer needs to be able to monitor who has spoken. The observer then uses the template as seen here to track the conversations, including which student has spoken and what type of contribution they have made. Traditionally, the observer

does not make contributions themselves as this could influence the discussion and for this piece of baseline data I chose to adhere to this principle to ensure the credibility of the participation.

I chose to use it with the pupils because I was aware, through ongoing teacher assessment, that the discussions that were taking place were quite stagnant, with the children mostly building on each other's points. However, I wanted to use the Harkness Table as a tool to monitor and assess this assumption more closely.

I first experienced using The Harkness Table at a training led by Voice 21 in January 2020 which gave me first-hand experience using the strategy as both a participant and an observer.

The Harkness Table showed that the children were confident to participate and already had good knowledge of the discussion guidelines, in particular inviting others to contribute. However, the majority of contributions were building, meaning that the conversation was limited. I implemented my own coding system, based on T-SEDA (2018) to support

Talk tactics	Number of times used (Tally)	Total
Builder	////////	12
Challenger	///	3
Instigator	/	1
Summariser	/	1
Prober		0
Clarifier	/	1

my analysis. The tally chart below shows the number of times the children took on each tactic.

Transcript

Question: What are your first impressions of the narrator?

Student B: I would like to start by saying that I think the narrator is a kind person.

Student M: I agree with you because they have lots of friends.

Student A: Yeah, they've got three best friends so they must be nice.

Student P: I agree and to build onto your point I also think they are really welcoming.

Student K: Good point! At the beginning they were staring at the boy a lot.

Student B: I think they were staring because they wanted to get the boy's attention. Do you agree I?

Student I: Yeah, I think they want to be friends with him.

The majority of points were built on. Interestingly, none of the children took on the role of the prober. From this I knew that I had to teach the prober explicitly.

This transcript is an extract from the initial discussion. It shows that the children were able to build on points however, they did not challenge, probe or clarify and the discussion was underdeveloped. There were no new lines of discussion. However, the children were able to use evidence from the book to support their reasoning.

Intervention

<u>Success criteria for high-quality discussions</u>	<u>Check Tick</u>
A good discussion is when...	
Everyone is involved/invited to join in.	
Ideas are built upon, challenged, clarified and probed based on what is said.	
Active listening is shown by all e.g. looking at the person who is speaking.	
We reach a shared agreement or agree to disagree.	
Everyone's ideas and opinions are respected.	

I ran the intervention for five minutes once a week over a six-week period. First, I created a success criteria for what a good discussion looked like, linking to the discussion guidelines. Before each session we thought about what these would look like in the context of small group work.

I then taught the challenger, prober and clarifier tactics explicitly over three weeks and provided sentence stems. I decided to do this rather than teach them all at the same time so that the children could practise each role and understand why and how it might be used in

the context of talking about a book. In line with the teacher tactics, I modelled this explicitly. I think that this was the strategy that had the most impact because it taught the children where to use talk tactics appropriately.

Challenger sentence stems

That's true but have you considered...

I disagree with ... because...

Interesting point but what about...

I hear what you're saying but...

Clarifier sentence stems

What do you mean by...?

Can you explain a bit more about that...?

Does that mean...?

Please can you clarify what you meant by...?



Prober sentence stems

Why do you think this...?

Can you provide an example?

Can you dig a little deeper?



Moving on, I used talk detectives to monitor which roles were in use. Talk detectives, sometimes known as Oracy detectives, is a strategy in which one or two pupils are asked to observe the group's discussion, looking out for who has contributed and how they have done so. The pupils are given prompts to support their observation. This strategy can be adapted to meet the needs of the class or age group, or edited to focus on specific skills. For example, monitoring collaboration, eye contact or disagreeing politely.

I chose to use this strategy because I could adapt it to focus specifically on the different talk tactics and roles. Once I had taught each role, the talk detectives were able to identify who had built, challenged, probed, summarised and clarified, which in turn supported their own self-assessment and gave them an objective view of the discussion.

It's important to note that at Pinner Wood we have introduced this strategy from the Early Years. In Reception the children take on the talk detective role by observing effective talk partners. The children are given a sheet of paper with the faces of all the children in the class.

 **Talk detectives!**
Mystery to solve: what does good oracy look like?

	Person or group name
Invited someone else to contribute	T. [unclear] A. [unclear] B. [unclear] M. [unclear] T. [unclear]
Challenged a group member	S. [unclear]
Summarised a group member's ideas	P. [unclear]
Clarified somebody in their group's ideas	S. [unclear] M. [unclear] T. [unclear]
Built on somebody else's ideas	A. [unclear] F. [unclear] P. [unclear] K. [unclear] M. [unclear]
Changed their mind	A. [unclear] B. [unclear]
Came to a shared agreement	E. [unclear]

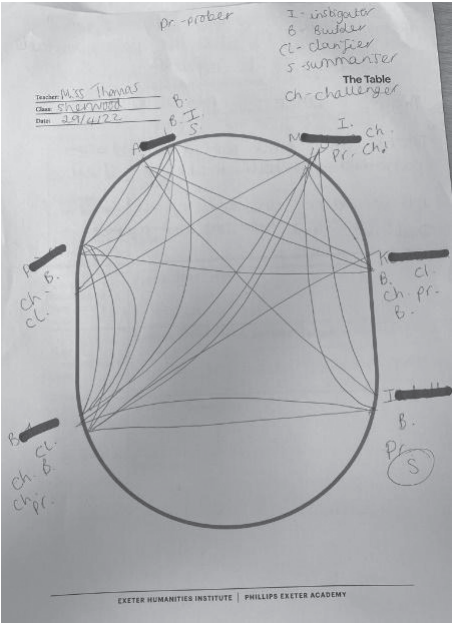
They then have to circle, using a pen, who they think has been a good partner. Specifically, who has given their partners eye contact, turned their body to face their partner and not spoken over them. In this role in the Early Years, they wear a high-visibility jacket and carry clipboards which really raises the profile of the role.

Mercer and Mannion (2018) talk about the relationship between talk, thinking and learning and I chose to use this strategy to try to develop the children's awareness of their talk and how effective it was in creating a purposeful discussion. Again, it was important to clarify the success criteria in advance to ensure that the children were aware of what the detective was looking for. This however was less effective than I had hoped as the talk was not always purposeful. I felt the children wanted to get their name written down as many times as possible. Similarly, it meant that the detective was not able to contribute to the discussion and due to the pace of the dialogue notes were missed meaning that this piece of data is not truly accurate or reliable. During this time, I was very aware of this and interfered, telling them who had taken on a role which was disruptive.

In addition to monitoring the children's talk I also examined my role. During my first observation I felt as though my role was to ensure that all voices were heard and to manoeuvre the dialogue to keep the children on task. I used the strategy of introducing a chairperson to try and tackle this. I noticed that one child was not participating as much as the other so my hope was that this strategy would help include them. I hoped that if this child had a specific role it would increase independence without the need of a teacher to guide the talk. If I were to do this again I would have made Student B the chairperson as they were confident being the instigator and did so when I collected my baseline data.

Impact data

The Harkness model results show that by the end of the six weeks the children were able to use more talk tactics to drive the discussion. The distribution of peer-to-peer dialogue had increased, which is what I expected to happen. Interestingly, I observed that when a child was not contributing, all the children invited them to speak on separate occasions. Similarly, whereas previously all the children took on the role of the builder, in this discussion not all of them did. This was interesting



as it shows progression to higher order thinking, in line with Alexander’s (2004, page 5) work on dialogic teaching in which “pupils learn to reason, discuss, argue, and explain, in order to develop their higher order thinking and articulacy”.

The distribution of talk tactics was much more even. Although the builder was still the main tactic used, this is to be expected as the aim was to come to shared agreement. In my baseline data none of the children took on the role of the prober however, during the

final discussion it was attempted by four children. This shows that the children have improved their confidence in understanding and using a range of talk tactics.

I also noticed an improvement in the students’ metacognitive understanding of what made a

Talk tactics	Number of times used (Tally)	Total
Builder	///////	7
Challenger	////	6
Instigator	//	2
Summariser	//	2
Prober	////	4
Clarifier	///	3

good discussion as they were able to identify when other children were taking on roles. Similarly, there was also evidence of students changing their minds as a result of the discussion, which indicated active rather than passive listening; something which they had not done prior to this intervention.

I did not have a record of my input on the Harkness Table model. However, from my observations, the children were able to drive the dialogue and I contributed much less. Similarly, whereas previously my role was primarily as the instigator, in the last discussion I was able to contribute using the other talk tactics including clarifier and prober. I chose to participate in the final discussion because, although the children had made a lot of progress over the six weeks, I felt that

they still needed some support in making the discussion cohesive. The children were using the sentence stems and taking on the talk tactics roles; however, the discussion was not always cohesive, and sometimes the children would move onto a new topic without fully exploring one idea, which is why my role was as a prober and clarifier as I did not want these talking points to be missed. By the end of Year 6 our aim is for the children to be able to participate in discussions that are completely managed by the students. This is why introducing a chairperson is so important in the earlier years. If I were to have continued this project I would have monitored my input to contribute less and less, eventually not contributing at all.

Transcript

Question: Do you think refugees cause problems for the country they are coming to?

Student B: I would like to start by saying that I do not think that refugees cause problems for the country they are going to because they have lots of skills and from my experience they work hard in their jobs.

Student A: I agree with B's point and would like to add that the world is for everyone so we need to be kind and caring. Basically we need to be like Tom and Josie and Michael although they did go a bit far in the story.

Student M: Building onto A's point, I do think that we need to be kind and welcome people but England is quite busy already, there are lots of homeless people and I don't know whether there is enough housing.

Student P: I can see what you're saying M but that shouldn't matter, if people are running away from war we need to invite them, like Ahmet's family in the book. What do you think K?

Student K: I agree with B's point, M can you give us an example of a problem they might cause?

Student M: Yes, one problem might be that some people don't want them here and there might be fights.

Student B: So are you saying that if people respond badly to refugees then it's the refugees fault because they are the ones that came to the country?

Student M: To clarify, that is not what I am saying but I am saying that it could cause conflict by them being here. I what do you think?

Student I: From my experience I think that refugees don't cause conflict.

This transcript is an extract from the final discussion. It shows that the children were able to change their responses based on what had been said before. They were probing, challenging and clarifying whilst

referring to the book. This shows their deeper understanding of the text and its wider context, which was an outcome that I had anticipated.

Research ethics

I ensured that consent was given from all the children who participated, including using their initials and taking pictures.

Evaluation

The data shows that the intervention was successful because the children were able to take on different talk tactics to create a richer discussion. The first discussion I observed lasted for 3 minutes before I had to intervene, whereas the final discussion was over 7 minutes long and showed no signs of drawing to a close. This showed that the children were able to instigate new lines of dialogue, sustain and build on points without adult intervention.

In future projects, I would like to include a control group to provide a comparative set of data. I think that this would have supported the credibility of the impact data and supported my understanding when analysing it. The next steps for my pedagogy includes teaching disagreeing politely and using the Oracy framework for the children to evaluate their own skills.

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MIND THE GAP: CREATING LINKS BETWEEN THE SPOKEN AND WRITTEN WORD IN THE SECONDARY CLASSROOM

Rahel Abebe

Abstract

Over the course of my teaching career, I have found that many students find it easier to discuss their ideas than to write them down. That realisation inspired this research project which explores ways that teachers can mitigate the issue of students feeling as though they are less articulate on paper by using targeted talk tactics coupled with written tasks. The project was conducted in an urban state school with about 800 students, most of whom are classified as ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘pupil premium’, meaning their families are living near or below the poverty line and the students receive Free School Meals or are Looked After Children. I targeted a small group of students in my Year 10 class who are considered disadvantaged and focused on developing their writing skills through discussion in the hopes of building their confidence and improving their results.

Rationale

The disconnect between spoken language and written outcomes is a phenomenon that has long fascinated me as an English teacher. Over the years, I have often encountered students who could very clearly and sometimes even eloquently express their ideas verbally but when the time came to put pen to paper, they froze or were only able to write a fraction of what they had said just moments before. Although it is well known that “language and thought are intimately related” (Alexander, 2010, p.10), when writing is added to the equation many of my students seem to lose their ability to communicate their ideas in a developed and coherent way. As a response to this, my teaching practice has always

included strategies like “modelling and guided writing” which are intended to “[support students] to reproduce texts in a given genre” (Gibbons, 2019, p.38). However, I still had some students struggling to produce written work no matter how much scaffolding was provided.

To fully understand this issue, I had to consider the wider context of my students. My secondary school is nestled in the middle of a council estate in North London. Our catchment consists of a number of disadvantaged students. According to the school’s most recent data records, 53.1% of the student body is classified as “pupil premium”, meaning special funding is awarded for these students on the basis of them coming from a socio-economically deprived background. Research has long shown that “the scholastic yield from educational action depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.243) and although socio-economic background is not always intrinsically linked to achievement, it is difficult to ignore the impact that privilege or lack thereof can have on a child’s education. Many of my students have not been exposed to, or taught, the value of cultural capital in the broader sense, meaning the benefits of having a specialised skill set, broad general knowledge or, in some cases, formal education. The students I am targeting come from households where survival and necessity take precedent, which could have an impact on their ability to both verbally discuss, and write, their ideas down in a formal register since the depth and level of the response expected is something they have been taught to develop at home.

In an effort to understand and begin to bridge the gap between underprivileged students and their counterparts, I decided to focus my research on Year 10, which has 53.4% Pupil Premium as a whole. Of the 20 students in my English class, 15 (75%) are classified as disadvantaged or Pupil Premium. Since four chose to be removed from the project, I focused on the attainment and achievement of 11 students. To address the issue of register and depth, I created opportunities for semi-structured discussions between students using the ‘build’ and ‘challenge’ Voice 21 (2020) talk tactics, with the hope that students would be able to adopt more academically suitable language in their discussions which would help them craft more detailed written work.

Baseline data

Before beginning my interventions, I created a survey that students filled out about their perceived confidence and abilities regarding their speaking and writing skills. Students gave their opinions in relation to statements using the strongly disagree to strongly agree spectrum, with space given at the end for students to comment further on their perceptions of speaking and writing, if they wished. A common trend across the class was that students felt more confident speaking about their ideas than they did writing about them. When asked to comment on their written abilities, most students' survey responses were recorded in the strongly disagree to neither agree nor disagree half of the spectrum. The disparity here may be attributed to the fact that "spoken language, for a child, is acquired naturally as a result of being exposed to it, whereas the ability to write has to be consciously learned" (Harmer, 2004, p.3). My students' lack of confidence in their written abilities could be due to the increased demands when writing to address the assessment objectives set by GCSE exam boards in high stakes environments and the added pressure as a result, a factor which was not fully acknowledged when they were working at Key Stage 3 level.

In addition to the survey, I used students' most recent school report data as a reference point for their progress. The written work that contributed to these grades required students to analyse a variety of texts by selecting key quotations, identifying techniques used, explaining the effect of the technique and, where relevant, commenting on how the context of the text added to the overall meaning of the language used. When grading their written work, I noticed that students often lacked depth in their responses and were unable to adequately articulate why certain authorial choices impacted our perception of the texts. Grades are given based on the GCSE 9-1 grading scale and 55% of the group received between a grade 3 and a grade 1 on their autumn report while 45% received either a grade 5 or grade 4. When compared in relation to their target grades for the end of Year 10, 82% of the group was underachieving.

Considering these initial observations, I planned my lessons over the course of six weeks with the intention of creating clearer transitions between speaking and writing, while also providing students with some useful academic phrases that could be implemented in both the speaking and writing portions of the lessons.

Intervention and intended impact

In an attempt to close the gap between students' spoken and written capabilities, I took inspiration from the Voice 21 Oracy Framework (2020) and decided to focus on students' cognitive and linguistic oracy skills, creating activities that allowed them to discuss their opinions in depth and in the necessary academic register. Prior to beginning my project, I noticed a number of students seemed to disregard "talk as a learning tool" and would often use group discussions for their "social relations rather than as an aid to learning or a way of developing their language skills" (Coles, 2005, p.117). For this reason, I began the project by asking the class to create a set of discussion guidelines which meant they needed to consider what makes discussions productive. This allowed students to perceive oracy as a valuable part of elaborating on their ideas for written work. When students were having off-topic conversations or interacting in ways that did not further the learning, we referred to these rules to get the discussion back on track.

During the course of this project, our unit of work was related to GCSE Language Paper 1. This paper requires students to analyse a fiction extract with attention to language and structure, so the oracy tasks were tailored to address the exam board's assessment objectives. Initially, we focused on incorporating the 'build' element of the Oracy Framework, which relates to students "building on the ideas of others" (Voice 21 Oracy Framework, 2020). I likened this to students having to support their ideas with at least two quotations in a paragraph and ensuring that their opinion was both valid and convincing to others based on the source text. Then we transitioned to the 'challenge' talk tactic which I connected with the 'perceptive' analysis that the exam board asks for when awarding top marks since higher-level responses tend to incorporate multiple interpretations of a text. After practising those skills, students were given the option to either 'build' or 'challenge' during group discussions. During all discussions, students were given sentence stems to help them articulate their ideas. Below is an example of a discussion slide from a lesson about an extract from Daphne du Maurier's *Jamaica Inn* along with a conversation between two students:

Discuss how the writer uses language to discuss the effects of the weather.

- You are going to discuss your ideas with your partner for 5 minutes.
- You can **build on** or **challenge** each other's ideas.

Build
Develop, add to or elaborate on an idea.

“ Building on X's idea ____
“ I agree and would like to add ____
“ X's idea made me think ____

Build

• You can agree with your partner and reference similar ideas from the extract.

• You can express a counterargument to your partner's ideas or introduce alternative interpretations of the text by referencing quotations that challenge their ideas.

Challenge
Disagree or present an alternative argument

“ I disagree because ____
“ To challenge you X, I think ____
“ I understand your point of view, but have you thought about ____?

Challenge

THINK-PAIR-SHARE

ORACY

////

Student A: So we need to discuss the effects of the weather in the extract. What do you think?

Student B: I think the weather seems quite bad.

Student A: Building on your idea, I agree because it talks about the coach jumping around and the people being upset.

Student B: Not everyone is upset. The lady with the cake is smiling and winking at people.

Student A: To challenge you, I think even though she's smiling she still doesn't like the weather because she calls it "the dirtiest night she ever remembered".

Student B: Yeah, that's true. I agree and would like to add the part where the water from outside drips on them. That would be annoying.

The example above is from the latter half of the project, so students were familiar with the structure of the tasks. The sentence stems and content from the extract are clearly embedded in their discussion and although some of the comments made are fairly simple, students are still exhibiting their ability to build on and challenge each other's ideas using evidence from the text.

Students also participated in 'Harkness discussions', a dialogic teaching method during which students sit in a circle and facilitate their own discussion; every student has to speak at least once and one student charts the discussion on paper by drawing lines between students' names to follow the order of the discussion and the types of comments

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made (questions, building statements, challenging statements, etc). To further encourage full class participation, I incorporated ‘talk tokens’ at various intervals; these are little laminated tickets that I distributed at the beginning of discussions and would collect once students had participated to ensure that everyone had an opportunity to voice their opinions. I circulated the room during the discussions, listening in to the direction of arguments and guiding students by asking questions or providing additional insights. Students were also required to make note of interesting ideas during discussions and participated in whole class feedback during which everyone was expected to add to their notes based on the content of the other discussions around the room. This put the onus on students to “figure out for themselves, through critical collaborative reasoning about the available evidence, what positions could be taken (and which they will ultimately take) in their argument” (Dunn et al., 2018, p.193). Listening to myriad perspectives about a text was designed to give them more content to work with when attempting to produce written work.

Each discussion task included sentence stems for each talk tactic as suggested by Voice 21; for the written tasks, I used an adapted form of the “point-evidence-analysis” (PEA) paragraph that had already been embedded in our lessons. Depending on the focus of the question, I provided some sentence starters and guidance for content but only for the first paragraph which meant that students needed to be more independent when crafting further points of argument.

The tasks and scaffolding were all geared towards getting students to have more meaningful classroom discussions that allowed them to both expand on and challenge a variety of perspectives. By improving the quality of the talk and creating specific links between discussion and writing, I hoped that students would craft more detailed written analytical responses to texts.

Impact data

Speaking

When comparing my baseline data to the final data from the questionnaire, I noticed that there was a trend towards the upper end of the spectrum for the first half of the questions which focused on how comfortable students felt expressing their opinions and engaging with the opinions of others. Although students were already fairly confident

in themselves at the beginning, the final data comparison showed that students became even more positive about their speaking abilities. This outcome could be the result of students becoming more secure in their “capacity to communicate a point of view, to construct a coherent argument [...] and confidence to talk about work and learning” due to the structures put in place to aid their discussions (Hargreaves, 2004, p.6).

However, regarding whether they could challenge the ideas of others, students’ responses moved towards ‘somewhat disagree’. It was surprising that students became less confident in this category since the ‘challenge’ talk tactic was a specific focus of the project but when reading students’ written work, very few of them included multiple interpretations or perspectives so it is possible that is why they lacked confidence in this skill. Perhaps there is also a social element at play here since, for a teenager, it can be somewhat daunting to challenge your peers and that apprehension is compounded by the fear of being wrong.

Writing

Interestingly, when asked whether they were good writers, students’ responses moved slightly towards the ‘disagree’ end of the spectrum while responses about writing ideas down clearly had a positive trend towards ‘agree’. Students’ confidence about and enjoyment of writing showed movement in the middle of the spectrum but with a positive trend overall. In terms of their capabilities transitioning from speaking to writing, there was movement in the middle of the spectrum but the result was mixed with growth shown in both the ‘strongly agree’ and ‘somewhat disagree’ categories. There seems to be a disconnect between students’ perceived abilities and the process of writing since, despite the dip in survey data, by the end of the project: 72% of students had developed their written responses for Language Paper 1 and made progress on internal assessments; 91% of students improved their results for their spring school reports; the percentage of students receiving between a grade 3 and a grade 1 on their spring report dropped to 9%; the percentage of students receiving between a grade 5 and a grade 4 on their spring report rose to 91%; and the percentage of students underachieving in relation to their target grade reduced from 82% to 55%. It could be that the uncertainty around trying new tactics

caused students to underestimate themselves. Additionally, students are usually aspiring to a target grade determined by their Key Stage 2 data and perhaps not achieving that exact grade at the end of the project stopped them from feeling they had made adequate progress. The latter scenario speaks to a larger problem in education that defines success solely in terms of test results which can have a detrimental impact on students' self-confidence.

Research ethics

Since my interventions took place during my normal English lessons, I spoke with my students about my project and allowed them to tell me whether they would like to participate through the questionnaire task; this meant they could share their opinion discreetly without being swayed by other students or me. Although I only analysed the data from disadvantaged students, every student participated in the tasks so the target students would not feel any added pressure to perform or respond in a particular way. The classroom environment remained the same as it did for our lessons prior to my research being conducted. However, I made sure students knew any data collected would be anonymised and analysed for the purpose of better understanding what helps students make progress in English. To mitigate the issue of students feeling obliged to have their data analysed, I reminded them at regular intervals that they could opt out and it would have no impact on how the lessons were taught or the grades they received.

Evaluation

Although I stressed the importance of oracy in English lessons, students were initially reluctant to participate in the tasks. I was surprised by this since the same students who usually responded well to teacher-led discussions really struggled to sustain focused conversations with their peers. Initially, there were many awkward silences and instances that required me to facilitate discussions between small groups. Limiting discussions to between five and ten minutes and using talk tokens helped students to be more invested in the discussions though. I also included keywords and suggestions for talking points in order to stimulate dialogue.

When analysing the data, it was an unexpected outcome that students did not perceive themselves as better equipped to challenge

each other's ideas when the 'challenge' talk tactic was a focal point in my project and I observed students successfully utilising the sentence stems while having interesting discussions. Going forward, I need to spend more time cultivating that skill and students' confidence since it seems the six-week period was not adequate for developing it.

By the end of the project, most students were engaging in productive discussions with little to no intervention from me. A few of my students are naturally reserved and although they were still apprehensive about starting discussions with their peers, I noticed that they began volunteering their perspectives more frequently during lessons. It was very rewarding to see students who previously needed prompting to share their ideas starting to be more vocal and active learners. On the whole, the response to the project was positive and the majority of students, even those who seemed less invested in the oracy tasks, improved their written expression and their grades in English.

Recommendations for practitioners

Successfully continuing this project would require further exploration of strategies for elevating the importance of, and engagement in oracy. Gaunt and Scott (2019) recommend setting "oracy specific targets" that give students a chance to measure their own progress (p.144). To engage more reserved students, teachers may need to "take a more personalized approach" to "find out what [students'] barriers are and how [to] help them overcome these" (Gaunt and Scott, 2019, p.98). A reflective diary could be a useful, low stakes way for students to document their oracy progress and communicate how they are doing and what more they feel they need to be successful. To foster some excitement around dialogic learning, teachers could incorporate more games and prizes linked to oracy. For example, getting students across multiple classes to engage with oracy, perhaps in a debate-style task or an event that explicitly involves the wider school community to emphasise the need for oracy across all subjects.

Oracy could be particularly useful in Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE), where students are asked to discuss mature and sensitive topics linked to their wellbeing, their experiences as young adults and current events. There is also scope to add more oracy-based activities across the curriculum. Oracy has its place in every subject, since it allows students to develop critical thinking skills,

become more articulate and build their confidence. For students to make sustained progress, there needs to be a whole school approach focused on encouraging students to share their ideas respectfully and eloquently, equipping them with the communication skills needed to succeed post-secondary school.

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GETTING YEAR 9S TALKING ABOUT MACBETH

Laela Amiri

‘One of the many gifts that books can give is a connection to each other’

Introduction

Oracy is at the heart of all interaction and engagement in students’ learning and progress in life. Research indicates that the amount of talk that students participate in is directly connected to their achievement (Fisher Frey, 2014). Nevertheless, over the years, researchers have found that when teachers work with struggling readers, teachers talk up to 80 percent of the time. Even when working with more proficient readers, teachers often talk 55 percent of the time (Flanders, 1970). John Hattie estimates that ‘teacher talk’ in classrooms reaches as much as 80 per cent. He adds that teachers ask 200-300 questions per day, whereas students ask only 2 (Hattie 2014).

I decided to focus my research on the teaching of Shakespeare as I feel that the lessons can be delivered in a more engaging way and can be a great opportunity to build students’ oracy skills alongside their reading skills. I realise that due to the complex language and curriculum demands, the teacher can easily fall into the trap of delivering most of the lesson from the front with little opportunity for the students to discuss and share their ideas. I have deliberately targeted a low prior attainment group in year 9 and a difficult text that year 9s must cover in the summer term which is Macbeth. I have chosen a Shakespeare text to explore whether reciprocal reading helps students to annotate their notes and explain challenging and archaic terminology. One of the more important things that French pointed out was how little some of the students remember from their lessons. Their impressions of Shakespeare were slight and unimpressive. French specifically pointed out ‘...the majority remembered receiving poor instruction. Lack of adequate explanation, uninteresting presentation... were the principal criticisms.’ (<https://letsteachshakespeare.wordpress.com/posts/challenges-faced-when-teaching-shakespeare/>)

I hoped that through small group discussions students would be able to share more ideas and learn more collaboratively with less anxiety. I would like to make Shakespeare more accessible and a more positive experience for students. Unfortunate as it may be to admit, Shakespeare is a difficult topic for teachers as well as the students. The other things that can work against the instruction of Shakespeare are: Overworking a play, too much “teacher reading” rather than the students doing the work, oversimplifying the play and detracting from the original work. Therefore, I hoped that using more oracy-based activities such as shared discussion tasks when approaching the text and play-acting to enliven and help students visualise the meanings would support the students to engage with this literature more meaningfully.

One method of incorporating oracy with learning to read a text is Reciprocal Reading (RR) which is a strategy that encourages cooperative learning. Reciprocal reading is a scaffolded discussion technique that uses the four strategies that good readers instinctively use to comprehend a text: predicting, clarifying, questioning and summarising. Students take turns discussing all four strategies with a given section of text, and the teacher models ways to develop their comprehension skills using the four strategies. It was first developed by Professor Annemarie Palincsar from the University of Michigan who spent her career as teacher educator and as an instructional researcher studying teaching and learning in classrooms with an age group ranging from 5 to 14 years old. Her main interest was in supporting students to learn how to engage in sense making and knowledge building with multi-modal texts. Reciprocal reading requires collaboration and group thinking while emphasis is placed on students providing instructional support for each other. As the Oracy lead in the school, I am interested in how oracy can contribute to the students’ learning repertoire. I hope that Reciprocal Reading would create a positive learning environment that encouraged more independence and engagement with the tasks in the lessons surrounding *Macbeth* and might support students to use oracy skills from RR to support one another through difficult reading tasks and provide encouragement to their group. Also, I hope that they can exchange ideas to trigger more stimulus through their group discussion and thus give each other confidence to exchange ideas and improve their self-esteem despite some students feeling that the Shakespeare text was too challenging for them. Furthermore, 84% of

pupils at our school speak English as an Additional Language (EAL), so English is not their first language, students, therefore, need more opportunities to communicate with one another in English and to vocalise their points and opinions. This research explored the extent to which reciprocal reading does encourage cooperative learning using oracy skills.

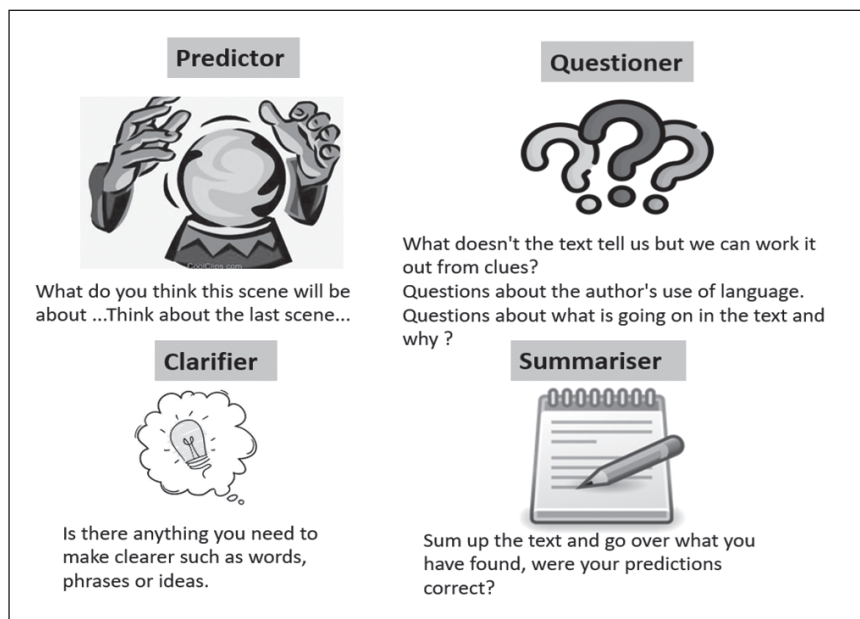
Context for the study

The setting of the study is a larger than average secondary school. In 2023, Featherstone High School was registered as a Secondary, Co-Ed school located in Greater London. It has 1758 students from age 11-18 with a student-teacher ratio of 16 : 1. At this school, 57% of pupils achieved grade 5 or more at GCSE. 99.20% of pupils completing their main study programme. This school was rated Outstanding by a recent Ofsted inspection. Most students live locally. Almost all students are of minority ethnic heritage, of which Indian, Black African and Pakistani are the largest groups. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is much higher than average (84%). The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for students in care and those known to be eligible for free school meals) is nearly double the national average. This group represents over half of the school population. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is above the national average and represents one in five students in the school.

Reciprocal Reading

With so much text bombarding students today, they desperately need a toolkit of strategies to help them learn how and when to read closely. Teachers also complain that close reading lessons can be boring as students and teachers alike dread re-reading assigned passages. In the hunt for a more lively close reading protocol, reciprocal reading – with its four distinct strategies– emerged as an engaging option (Oczkus, 2018). These four strategies are Predict, Clarify, Question and Summarise. These strategies are used subconsciously by an adult when reading. For example, when you read an article in a newspaper or other text you will first look at the visuals and skim to predict what the piece is about. Then as you read on you will clarify ideas by rereading words or phrases you are unsure about whilst asking yourself questions

or wondering about something you wish to know more about. You summarise while you are reading and predict what will come next.



Research questions

The main purpose of this research is to find out whether using more oracy-based activities with Shakespeare rather than just the acting and reading out loud will be more effective to engage and support students' learning. To gain more understanding about the students' attitudes towards learning Shakespeare I proposed the following questions in a pretask survey before starting the Reciprocal reading tasks. They were:

1. How challenging do you find Shakespeare's *Macbeth* text on a rating from 1-5 (1 is the lowest and 5 the highest)
2. How confident are you when sharing ideas about *Macbeth* in class?
3. Do you feel you have adequate opportunities to discuss your ideas about Shakespeare's text in class?
4. How confident are you about sharing your ideas through a discussion-based task?
5. Do you feel that speaking about the text in a group-based task will improve your understanding of the Shakespeare text? If so, why?

6. What obstacles do you think you may face if you had a group discussion about *Macbeth*?
7. What could you suggest that would improve a group discussion task?
8. How do you think an oracy task could benefit you as a learner of Shakespeare?

Significance of the study

This action research proposal is significant because when teaching challenging texts like Shakespeare's *Macbeth* many teachers may feel that the students may need a lot of explanation or lack confidence for the students to elicit information because it is so challenging. However, this could lead to overcompensating with too much scaffolding and teacher talk, which can disengage the students and make them feel inadequate and unable to do many tasks independently. My approach centred on selecting small bite-sized chunks, carefully chosen and managed, to support the students to build oracy skills through Reciprocal Reading. They worked collaboratively to unpick the meanings in a text and I was pleased that even this low prior attainment group elicited new insights and felt more ownership of their learning.

Oracy challenges and causes

In the first two weeks I gradually introduced the four strategies and integrated them into the lesson so that students became familiar with the terminology, but we did not use oracy at this point other than whole class feedback. Next, I asked them to discuss in pairs using one of the strategies such as clarify, question or predict. There were many constraints I had to consider, such as getting through the curriculum as we had limited time and we needed to cover the whole text by the end of term. Another constraint was that the students were not used to much talk time during the lesson and did not often value that time. This needed more time for me to get the students to value this and buy into it. As a result, I decided that after the pair talk, they would have to write a few notes as a follow-up so that they knew that the spoken activity was a prerequisite to other classwork and if they did not do it seriously, they would not be able to complete the next task.

Reciprocal Reading in action

After a few lessons of introducing each of the ‘fab four’ strategies from reciprocal reading, I then took the plunge and decided to arrange the class into groups of four around a table facing each other for a reciprocal reading lesson. This was quite a break from the norm where all the desks are arranged facing the front and the teacher. Some students were unsettled, others saw it as an opportunity to be distracted so I had to set some firm boundaries and I gave them all a worksheet with each of the four strategies and explained to them that they needed to work as a group going through each one at a time. They started with what they already knew. I used think alouds and scaffolding to start the process, then I asked them to talk together in their groups and share their ideas.

Initially there were some teething problems as this was not a seating arrangement or way of working that the students were accustomed to. It was a break from their normal routine of seating in rows facing the teacher. In addition, for the Shakespeare *Macbeth* lessons, I had previously explained a lot from the front of the class as this was a weak class and they needed a lot of scaffolding and support.

It felt like a culture shock for the class when I rearranged the table into groups of 4, so I had to circulate around a lot and I used worksheets so that they could jot down the main points from their discussion.

Methodology

I used a pre-task survey to identify students’ attitudes and approaches towards using oracy skills through the group discussions. I felt that through student voice I would be able to choose a cross section of students from backgrounds where they may find communication and discussing Shakespeare challenging. So, I deliberately chose students from the different subgroups, two were EAL (English as an additional language), two from FSM (Free school meals)(two from SEN (Special Educational needs)and two with an average reading age. I set the pre-test questionnaires on the google classroom for the selected students to complete. The first four questions were closed questions and as a way in for the students to familiarise themselves with the procedure. The last four questions were open-ended to allow the students to have an opportunity to express their own views more freely. Some students dropped out half way through which reduced the number to seven.

Research Method

The class I did the research on was a year 9 class, set 4 and had 29 students in it. The age range was 13/14 which I believe is a challenging age in Secondary school, in between key stage 3 and just before the GCSE when many teachers decide to withdraw speaking tasks and group work to get through the curriculum. All participants were sent a letter home to their parents/carers informing them of the research. Also all students were asked to give their consent through a class list with their signatures.

I chose ten students:

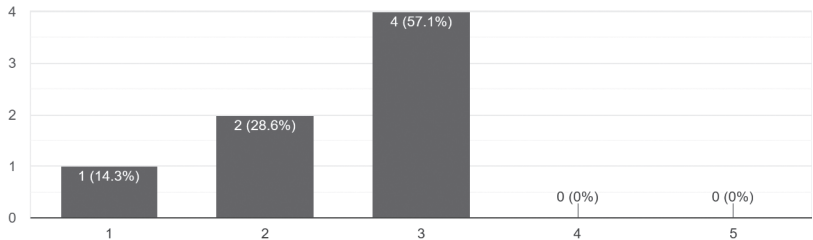
- Two with low reading age
- Two with EAL
- Two from FSM
- Two from SEN
- Two with an average reading age

The reason for this is I wanted to choose students who find reading difficult or who have other challenges which may be an obstacle in their learning. These students may also have weaker oracy skills and very little opportunity to express their points in a normal lesson.

I used a pre-study questionnaire and post-study interview using student voice feedback gathered via semi-structured interviews. The rationale in using a semi-structured interview is that I feel it allowed more scope for the students to express their opinions on their learning which I felt develop their metacognition and reflection on the process of using Reciprocal Reading.

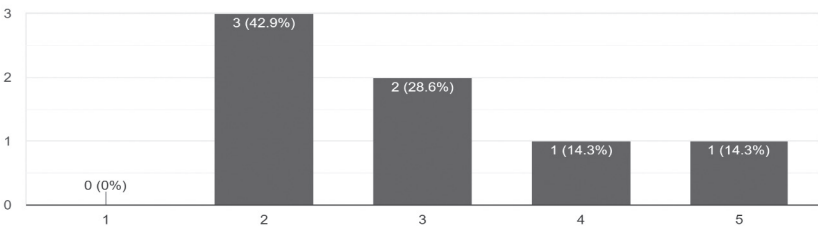
I sent out a link on google class to the chosen students from the pre-task questionnaire and asked them to complete it. From this survey data, I learned that 57.1 % rated the *Macbeth* text 3 in terms of difficulty in a rating from 1-5 where 5 is the most challenging. I believe that the students may have rated it even higher but may have felt self conscious to admit in the survey that they were really struggling, however in the class I observed that many of the students did not understand a lot of the text when questioned on it and found it challenging.

1.How challenging do you find Shakespeare's Macbeth text on a rating from 1-5 (1 is the lowest
7 responses



In the second question when asked how confident they would be to share their ideas with the rest of the class 42.9% rated themselves 2 out of 5 ((where one is the least confident and 5 is the most)).

2.How confident are you when sharing ideas about Macbeth in class
7 responses



In the pre-study survey there were also some open ended questions at the end. The responses are noted below:

Do you feel that speaking about the text in a group based task will improve your understanding of the Shakespeare text? If so why ? Here are a range of responses I received in response to this question from the quiz sent out.

Yes, because if someone has no idea of what to say or write, they can at least have an idea of what to think about.

Yes because it will help us develop our understanding in *Macbeth*. Also it is fun.

Yes because we will get to socialise

Yes because your with your friends so your comfortable

Yes because when you're around people you're close to your more likely to talk and share ideas although you might get off track and talk about something else you still do the work and be confident

What obstacles do you think you may face if you had a group discussion about *Macbeth*? Here are the responses shared from the quiz sent out:

One of the obstacles someone might face if they had a group discussion about *Macbeth* is that they might not understand some of the words in the text.

Some people might be shy and may not share excellent ideas
what happened in the text

Some people may feel shy thinking they may get the answer wrong.

Yeah, people not talking.

You might get off track but that is okay at least having the work done is important

What could you suggest would improve a group discussion task?
Here is some of the feedback using student voice in the chosen focus group:

Most of the times when you ask students to have a group discussion, some don't take it seriously and they start to talk about unnecessary things that are not related to the work. So one thing that can improve group discussion tasks is to check and make sure students are talking about the work.

Working in bigger groups picked by students.

When you are with people you know

Adding more people and working with friends

Everyone needs to discuss

Be with your friends

How do you think an oracy task could benefit you as a learner of Shakespeare?

It can help us get better in understanding and analysing the text and to identify different techniques in the text.

It could help us understand the play better.

It will work fine because it is good and makes me feel more confident.

After the Reciprocal reading research tasks were complete in the class I completed an interview using student voice to gain feedback about what was effective and what could be improved.

Interview

What were the challenges doing the oracy reciprocal reading?

Some students stated that they felt that certain students were not participating and going off the topic, when working in groups, whereas when the teacher is at the front, they are more focused.

In addition to the interview some students stated, 'We felt more confident', but some students said that one or two were 'sometimes off task.'

How did talking using RR benefit your understanding of *Macbeth*?

One student stated 'It meant that we could share one another's ideas, some students know the answer, but they don't like putting their hand up or answering in front of all the class but with their friends they are comfortable. We felt that we could discuss some of the ideas amongst ourselves and figure things out for ourselves together rather than relying on the teacher only.'

Another student stated 'Everyone has ideas about *Macbeth* but in groups they can share it rather than just take it from the teacher.'

One added that 'It also helps the students to become independent and work better in the future when they are set other tasks that require them to work more independently and to work in groups.'

How would you improve oracy activities?

One student stated that the teacher needs to rotate around the class regularly to ensure each group is on task. One student mentioned that when grouping for the Reciprocal reading speaking activity make sure there are two girls and two boys that get on with each other as when there were some clashes it made the oracy activities more challenging as there were some personality clashes. When you are in groups you are more confident but some students said that they are sometimes off task. One person said that you should be put in groups they are more comfortable with.

Conclusion:

Some students who initially felt shy to share their ideas with the whole class felt more empowered, in a smaller group, to contribute. The Reciprocal reading worksheets enabled the students to make notes on their discussions so that they also had evidence of their talk thus making their talk more accountable. Some students may have felt that if it was just a discussion then they may not be accountable but insisting that each group worked collaboratively to discuss and then complete each section of the sheet meant that they took it more seriously and could visually see an outcome to their class discussions. In addition, I believe that using oracy to share and explore 'reading' a text in a group means that reading no longer becomes a solitary experience but a shared experience helping the students to 'connect with one another' which can help overcome a poor reader's fear and difficulties when reading a text. Furthermore, it can engage low ability readers when approaching a challenging text and can help them to not just read the text but decode the meaning of a text, this should in the long-term help develop the reader's ability. Using the feedback from the student voice I was able to learn that many students felt they were able to learn through discussions with their peers and gain more independence. The main concerns from the students were personality clashes and group dynamics, also the possibility of some students being off task. Overall, I feel that this will need more research but from the student feedback and class observations demonstrate that Reciprocal Reading has a lot of scope and potential. It can contribute to more versatile and engaging lessons when approaching a Shakespeare text. However, there is still more research needed to identify optimal techniques when applying Reciprocal Reading in English literature.

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DOES ORACY BOOST ATTAINMENT IN GCSE SCIENCE?

Dr Matthew J Shaw

Abstract

Introduction

As defined by Ofqual, an extended response question is ‘...evidence generated by a learner which is of sufficient length to allow that learner to demonstrate the ability to construct and develop a sustained line of reasoning which is coherent, relevant, substantiated and logically structured’.

At Key Stage Four (a stage of secondary education in England that covers school ages of fourteen to sixteen), one of the main examination awarding bodies for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, AQA, has science assessments that include these questions in a variety of formats, including six mark extended responses. These require ‘an extended answer written in prose with a coherent and relevant sustained line of reasoning. They typically have a command word such as: evaluate, explain, calculate and compare and the questions may require linking in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills from more than one area of the specification’.

As stated by Kristy Turner, schoolteacher fellow at University of Manchester, ‘learning to answer long form questions (in science) takes time and practice’ (Turner, 2019). These specific ‘six mark’ extended response questions are marked by using levels of response, and their focus is not only on the indicative content but also on how this content is organised. As an example, for a student to attain the level three response for a practical skills question (five to six marks), they must describe a ‘coherent method with relevant detail, which demonstrates a broad understanding of the relevant scientific techniques and procedures. The steps in the method are logically ordered and the method leads to the production of valid results.’

Extended response questions in GCSE Science

The students are faced with a daunting full page of lines to fill, and various command words embedded in the question phrase. Within this same article by Kristy Turner, the word ‘dreaded’ is used to convey the attitudes of students towards these questions. This is in agreement with my own interpretation, especially with lower attaining students with a lower oracy and literacy skillset (reading age data). They often do not know how to begin answering the given question, or how to organise their ideas in a methodical manner to hit the marking criteria for each level. It has been noted on multiple occasions that these ‘grade boundary changing’ questions are not even attempted and are often left blank.

There is therefore a need to develop strategies to engage lower ability students with these extended response questions and provide them with the skillset necessary for these questions to be answered with confidence. With previous groups I have employed various teaching tools including teacher-led modelling of what a good answer looks like and getting students to critique a range of given question responses, amongst other strategies.

For this paper, I wanted to investigate the impact of using group exploratory talk, whereby each student in a group would peer support the others to develop a model answer for an extended response question, using the idea that If students are to develop scientific literacy, they need the opportunity to at first speak and then listen to each other. This mirrors the proposal that ‘high quality classroom talk raises standards in the core subjects as typically measured in national and international tests’ (Alexander, 2013). Furthermore, if the study proved successful, this would provide an evidence-informed approach to improving oracy within the school framework, by empowering subject specialist associations, an approach advocated by Holmes-Henderson and Wright (2023). As noted in this article, focusing on oracy can help students to make academic progress, with effective interventions having an average impact of six months of additional progress for the students (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021)

Baseline data

Two set four (of five), Year Ten groups (with student ages of fourteen to fifteen) were chosen for this study (n =40). A quantitative

interpretation of their baseline ability to answer these questions was given by the Year ten mock examinations, taken the week before this project commenced. A six-mark question was answered as part of their Chemistry paper (AQA Combined Science, foundation tier, June 2019, 8464/C/1F, Q7.6). It should be noted at this stage that these six-mark practical skills questions are common between both foundation and higher tier papers and are classed as standard demand (aimed at grades four to five).

The mean score achieved by the students was 1.10, with a range of zero to four out of six. Forty percent of the students got a zero mark. These students are of lower ability in science, with mock grades in the range of three to five being achieved (AQA combined science).

A qualitative analysis of the students' pre-existing attitudes towards using oracy in lessons, and their thoughts about six-mark questions, was achieved using an anonymous online survey (Microsoft Forms).

The questions asked were as follows:

1. When writing six-mark questions, what do you find hard? (Variables, equipment, method, results)
2. When writing six-mark questions, I prefer to work on my own (yes, no)
3. When writing six-mark questions, I need lots of support from my teacher (yes, no)
4. When completing longer answers in other subjects, I prefer it when we get the chance to discuss in pairs or groups first (yes, no)
5. When doing six-mark questions, I would rate myself out of five as?

The students identified that writing the method and being able to identify the variables were the most challenging tasks to complete (twenty nine of forty responses). This would explain why sixteen students got zero marks on the exam question, as without an understanding of what the variables are (for example, what is being changed, measured, and controlled in an experiment), and how the investigation data is to be collected (the method), it can be difficult to know where to begin when writing a response to these questions.

Fifty five percent of the students would prefer to work in a group, with forty two percent admitting that they need teacher support. Seventy five percent stated that they prefer to use exploratory talk in

other subjects, with students rating themselves with an average 2.82 out of five in answering these extended response questions.

The Intervention

The intervention ran over a four-week period, during the second term of the academic year.

A Kagan (2015) styled peer supportive cooperative learning approach based upon mixing the ability of the students within a group, was used to create the groups (of four), for the purposes of the exploratory talk.

A six-mark practical skills experiment was performed in week one, with each group collecting data. The task chosen was ‘measuring temperature changes’, which is the required practical task for unit C5 energy changes, in Chemistry.

In week two, the exploratory talk tasks were undertaken. This included the use of a concept map (Figure 1) as guiding questions to scaffold students’ analysis of the practical task, and the use of each student having a different coloured pen to facilitate all to participate with the opportunity to reflect on, and apply, to the feedback they had been given by their peers. Each group used a sheet of A3 paper to formulate their ideas after the discussions, for example on the equipment needed, and the method detail needed to allow the experiment to be followed by someone else. Each group then peer-reviewed each other’s notes and made revisions as necessary in dialogue with each other. Presentational talk was then developed, with a spokesperson from each group feeding back to the others within the classroom, allowing for peer feedback and discussion.

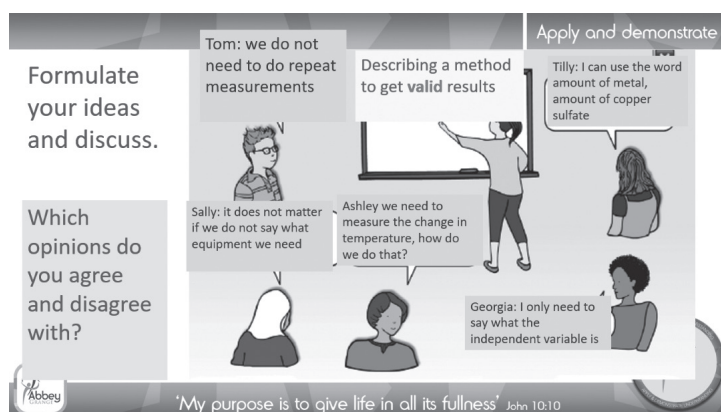


Figure 1. The concept cartoon used to scaffold the student’s analysis of their exploratory talk.

In week three, the writing tasks were undertaken, with students collectively, then individually writing up a method based upon their feedback sheet, then under exam conditions, each student completed the same mock exam six-mark question (in the interim they had received no feedback on their mocks, and had not seen the paper, or their score for this question). Interestingly, none of the students realised it was the very same question they had completed during the mock examination.

In week four, a follow up experiment, together with the corresponding exploratory talk, peer feedback and a subsequent different six-mark question analysis was undertaken to investigate the impact of repeating these skills to embed them into good practice over time.

Impact

When answering the extended response question for a second time, the mean mark increased from 1.10 to 2.15, out of six, with a range of zero to five. This might seem like a marginal gain but based upon how demanding low ability students find these questions, I would evaluate this as a success. More significantly, only nine percent of students gained a zero mark, down from forty percent previously. Also, it was noted that some students made significant progress, with one student moving from two to five out of six.

The same qualitative analysis was also undertaken again, with two additional questions included.

1. I found the concept cartoon helpful to prepare me to write a six-mark question.
2. I found the group talk activity helpful to prepare me to write a six-mark question.

Significant finds were that sixty three percent would now prefer to work in a group, with only thirty percent now stating that they need teacher support. Interestingly, the students still rated themselves at 2.83 out of five for answering these questions.

The usefulness of the concept cartoon (three out of five), and the exploratory talk (four out of five) is also an interesting result. The students completed this questionnaire before they received any feedback upon their improvements in answering these questions.

The higher rating for the impact of exploratory talk, as given by the student voice, exemplifies to impact of effective oracy within the classroom.

With the follow up six-mark question completed in week four, the mean mark was further improved to 3.10, with a range of two to four. This further exemplifies the successes of this oracy approach to answering these extended response questions. Figure two illustrates the improvements over time in answering these extended response questions.

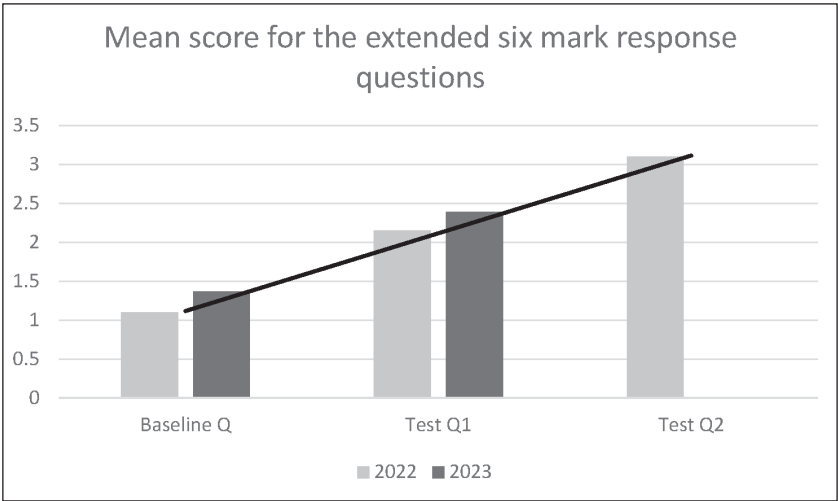


Figure 2 Student mean score (2022 and 2023 cohort) for the extended response six-mark questions (with trendline)

A follow up question level analysis was made of student responses to these six-mark questions in their summer examinations, looking at both papers one and two in Chemistry (AQA Combined Science, foundation tier, June 2023, 8464/C/1F, Q6.6 and AQA Combined Science, foundation tier, June 2023, 8464/C/2F, Q6.5). The oracy test group scores (n=40) were compared against a control group who had not had the intervention and sat the same papers (n=36, a comparable dataset).

The results are shown as table one.

	Paper 1 score (mean)	Paper 1 score (range)	Paper 2 score (mean)	Paper 2 score (range)
Oracy intervention group	2.34	0 to 6	2.20	0 to 5
Control group	1.36	0 to 6	1.85	0 to 5

Table 1. Comparison of Year Eleven exam data (extended response question)

Answering the Paper One six-mark question, eight students gained zero marks (nineteen percent) compared against the fourteen students (thirty nine percent) in the control group. Forty six percent of the oracy group achieved a level two to three response (three to six marks), compared with twenty five percent in the control group.

On Paper Two, four students gained zero marks (ten percent) compared against ten students (twenty nine percent) in the control group. Forty four percent of the oracy group achieved a level two to three response on this paper in comparison with thirty five percent in the control group.

A further short study into the effectiveness and robust nature of this oracy intervention was made with two further set four classes in the following school year (n=43). The same process was followed, albeit a second follow up test Q2 had not been completed.

The extended response question student mean score increased from 1.37 to 2.39 after the oracy intervention. Twenty-one (forty nine percent) of students achieved a level two to three response after the intervention. Five students (twelve percent) got a zero mark on the baseline question in comparison to one student (two percent) after the intervention.

Bias was removed from this study by using moderation of a random sample of answer scripts. Scores were within the accepted tolerance (ten percent).

Evaluation

I was wary at the start of this study, to allow the students freedom to discuss their ideas using exploratory talk. I was concerned about off-task behaviours and disruption. This was not the case. By using the Kagan approach to grouping, each member contributed fully to the discussions, giving quality peer feedback and summarising. Quieter ‘invisible’ students were engaged by their roles within the group, and

it was great to hear the students challenging each other's ideas and building upon them to get to a cohesive end point. It is a key strategy at the school to engage these 'invisible' quiet students and improve their performance, and it appears from this preliminary study that exploratory talk within a safe group setting is effective. Presentational talk was also developed and used effectively to consolidate the key ideas within the class.

The quantitative data collected during this study exemplifies the successes of this project, with the lower ability students on average moving from a mark of one out of six to a mark of three. This is a significant achievement, especially if you factor in link between literacy skills and poverty, with lower ability students in the school typically coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Kellett, 2009, Dunne *et al*, 2011).

Using real exam data (2023 summer series) for this cohort (question level analysis), those who had the intervention scored on average 2.34/6 in comparison with the control group score of 1.36/6. This might appear to be a marginal gain but is a sixteen percent improvement. On paper two, a six percent improvement was seen, thus I believe this intervention has improved the life chances for these students. It is noted however, that under exam conditions, some students are still not able to access these questions and gained no marks. Further strategies to impact these students are needed, and I believe that oracy will play an important role in achieving this goal.

It is thus envisaged that moving forward, a multi-step approach to teaching the skills (quality peer and teacher feedback, critical analysis of written responses, imparting a teacher's in-depth knowledge of the skills needed to hit each marking level etc) required to answer these extended response questions will hopefully lead to a further increase in their achievements with these questions, with oracy playing this pivotal role.

The qualitative data collected during this study further identifies the successes of oracy, for example the increasing confidence of the students to tackle these questions independently (a drop of twelve percent of students stating they would require teacher support over the four-week study period as an example). Improving the resilience and independence of students to tackle these challenging extended response questions will impact upon exam performance.

Anecdotally, the confidence the students felt they had in answering these questions, with their response to writing extended questions remaining static at 2.8 out of five, before and after the intervention, illustrates the importance of giving timely feedback to celebrate their successes. I will trial this in the future and compare the impact of this 'confidence boost' upon performance.

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DOES TALK-FOCUSED CONTINUED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IMPACT STUDENT TALK?

Sam Clark

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted students' speech development. In order to address this, many schools are aiming to increase the amount of time students spend talking productively in lessons. This article discusses how effective providing talk-focused continued professional development (henceforth CPD) to teachers is in promoting student talk in lessons. It considers how effective said CPD may be for teachers of different levels of experience and concludes with suggestions on how this research could lead to further development in this area.

Context

This research project took place at a secondary community school that serves a seaside town and surrounding areas. At the time of conducting the study, the school had 1006 eleven to sixteen year old students on roll. At the start of the 2022-2023 academic year, the school aimed to develop a consistent approach to oracy across the curriculum as a response to the perceived impact caused on students' communication skills by COVID-19 over the previous two years. It was felt that students, and particularly students who recently transitioned from primary to secondary education, were less able to communicate in an effective and structured way than previous year groups whose education and social development had not been affected by COVID-19. The priority was, at this stage of implementation, to increase students' opportunities to talk constructively in the classroom in an attempt to close the 'speech deficit' created by COVID-19 disruption.

When beginning to implement oracy strategies across the school curriculum, it became apparent that teachers had also been affected

by COVID-19. Policies put in place to reduce the risk of spreading the virus meant that teachers delivered lessons in a far more didactic style and, when surveyed, many teachers felt it difficult to return to a more communal classroom teaching style. Many teachers also highlighted concerns that, due to increased instances of disruptive behaviour in the classroom, they felt uneasy implementing strategies that placed the focus of learning on student talk as this made it harder to manage behaviour than independent tasks. Finally, teachers also felt that they needed more explicit instruction on how to structure lessons around effective talk to ensure that learning outcomes were met.

With this context in mind, we decided to research what impact the explicit teaching of oracy strategies through small group CPD to teachers would have on the percentage of teacher and student talk in lessons. We expected to find that, when given clear guidance on how to implement oracy strategies in the classroom, teachers would be more willing to take ‘risks’ in their teaching and this would be reflected in a reduction in the amount of time they spent talking didactically to students and an increase in student contributions to lessons.

We did not aim to measure the effectiveness or quality of this student talk as this was beyond the scope of this study. Similarly, we did not aim to establish whether there was a ‘correct’ ratio of teacher-to-student talk or to suggest that a higher percentage of student talk is inherently better or more desirable in the classroom. We were rather interested in the quantity of student talk in lessons and measuring how engagement with a programme of oracy CPD affected this.

Literature Review

John Hattie’s work in *Visible Learning for Teachers* (2012) served as a useful benchmark for the level of teacher talk we should expect to see in an average lesson. He identified that teacher talk accounted for “between 70 and 80 percent of class time on average” (Hattie, 2012, 72). Interestingly, he also notes that this percentage increases “as the year level rises and as the class size decreases” (Hattie, 2012, 72). This indicates that, when compiling our data, we needed to be mindful that classes in lower years or with higher numbers of students should start at a lower percentage of teacher talk. As we were primarily concerned about the difference in teacher talk percentage from one lesson to the next, this should not have a significant impact on our findings but

it may help explain any potential discrepancies between classes in the early stages of this research. It is also worth noting that Hattie's research was published years prior to the COVID-19 outbreak and, as such, we expected our initial teacher talk percentages to potentially exceed Hattie's figures. If this were the case, it may also imply a correlation between COVID measures and the effect on student talk identified earlier. Obviously, more in-depth research would be required to confirm this.

In order for this research to be as informative as possible, we would need to ensure that the CPD offered was effective and impactful otherwise any recorded changes to levels of teacher talk may be purely coincidental. Francesca Caena established the five key aspects of effective CPD as, "content focus; active learning; coherence; duration; collective participation" (Caena, 2011, 11). In addition, John Harland and Kay Kinder found that "where the values of the curriculum coordinators attending the course were compatible with those of the course leaders, there was an increased likelihood of impact on classroom practice" (Harland & Kinder, 1997, 74). For our CPD delivery to be effective, we needed to structure it to allow for collaborative practice between participants who agreed on a shared value, in this case, that students should be given greater opportunity to contribute verbally in lessons. Once we had achieved this, then we then focused on creating sessions on specific oracy strategies, allowing participants to actively practise these strategies prior to implementing them in their own classrooms. Only one of Caena's five aspects identified were we unable to significantly impact: duration. This was a limiting factor which we discuss in more detail later in this article. Given these time constraints, it was important that we identified oracy strategies that were proven to be effective in increasing student talk whilst simultaneously being able to be modelled in a clear and concise manner. Based on the APPG's finding that 'CPD on oracy needs to be sustained and embedded as opposed to one-off training days' (APPG, 2021, 45), it was clear that it would be more effective to focus on multiple, short CPD sessions rather than a single longer session. Whilst our research did not aim to measure students' development with oracy skills, we felt it was important for both the students and teachers that the oracy strategies we introduced through CPD had a proven record for improving outcomes in both talk and non-talk-focused tasks where feasible.

The Education Endowment Fund (henceforth EEF) identified that effective oral language interventions were, on average, effective in improving student outcomes, having ‘a high impact on pupil outcomes of 6 months’ additional progress’ (EEF, 2021). This research identified the following strategies as the most impactful to students progress:

- encouraging pupils to read aloud and then have conversations about book content with teachers and peers
- modelling inference through the use of structured questioning
- group or paired work that allow pupils to share thought processes implicit and explicit activities that extend pupils’ thinking.

(EEF, 2021)

As such, we aimed to identify a range of strategies and activities that would meet these criteria, referencing sources such as Voice 21, Oracy Cambridge and The Noisy Classroom. Evidence for the efficacy of individual talk activities is far more anecdotal than the evidence for the efficacy of introducing oracy strategies in general and, as such, we had to make value judgements on which strategies we felt would work best in our given context. As much as possible, we cross-referenced approaches to teaching these strategies across the existing evidence base to ensure we could clearly and efficiently model these examples in our CPD sessions.

Methodology

To ensure that we were able to obtain as large a dataset as possible within the time constraints we had to work within, we limited the research to three teacher participants though we kept the CPD sessions open to any teacher who wished to join, in order to ensure that we were able to provide collaborative learning opportunities for all. We offered six CPD sessions that all participant teachers were required to attend, each focusing on a different strategy to introduce oracy into the classroom. These sessions were offered once a fortnight to ensure enough time for teachers to plan lessons and effectively embed this strategy in their teaching. We would then observe one lesson taught by each participant teacher prior to the next CPD session. For clarity, we will divide the methodology for this research into three sections: selecting the participants, the CPD phase and the observation phase.

Selecting the participants

From the pool of eleven volunteers, we selected three teachers. We felt that a sample size of eighteen lessons, six for each teacher, was the largest manageable number for two researchers to observe without impacting on the workload and well-being of either the researchers or the participants who were to be observed. The three teachers (henceforth Teacher A, B and C, respectively) represented a range of subjects and experiences. We felt this was important to ensure that our hypothesis could be tested on as broad a range of teachers as possible within the aforementioned time constraints. While this does add more variables to the research, it also prevents the research from becoming overly specific. As the main goal of the research was to indicate whether the introduction of a series of short oracy-focused CPD sessions has promise as a strategy to increase the percentage of student talk in lessons, we did not wish to limit the research by only being able to test the hypothesis for inexperienced maths teachers or art teachers with over 20 years of experience, for example. Teacher A is an Early Career Science teacher. Teacher B is a Maths teacher with six years of teaching experience. Teacher C is a Computing teacher with over 15 years of experience teaching.

CPD Phase

For clarity, we have divided each of the six sessions to briefly explain the implementation of each.

1. The first session focused primarily on introducing the research project to potential participants. We did not introduce a specific oracy strategy in this session so our first observation with each teacher could act as a control to judge potential change against. Instead, we discussed the purpose and benefits of student talk in the classroom to help ensure we achieved the shared values that, as Halland and Kinder identified, improved the chances of CPD being successfully implemented.
2. From the second session onwards, we introduced a different strategy teachers could use in their lessons to encourage student talk. For this session, we focused on the talk strategy ‘think-pair-share’. We had identified in the first session that each of the teachers were familiar with the strategy and had implemented it in their teaching

previously but had not included the strategy in their lesson planning in the past academic year. We felt this would provide a good starting point for the participants as we hypothesised familiarity with a strategy would boost teacher confidence early in the programme.

3. Participants were asked to read Nicola Spencer's article on overcoming barriers to oracy in the classroom before reflecting in a short conversation with the researchers what barriers exist in their own classrooms and to collaboratively devise strategies to overcome them.
4. Based on participant feedback, this session focused on the implementation of targeted praise for oracy. An option was added to reward points for oracy on the school's behaviour system and teachers were coached in explicit language to use when praising successful student talk.
5. In this session, researchers modelled using basketball questioning or pose– pause– pounce– bounce questioning (McGill, 2011) and discussed its potential advantages and disadvantages when compared to more a traditional back and forth between the teacher and one student. We also encouraged teachers to observe other teachers use this method successfully in different departments to their own.
6. Participants were asked to complete an independent self-reflection task focusing on each week of the process and identifying where they felt they made most progress, what support they felt they still needed and their view on whether student talk had increased in their lessons.

Observation Phase

To address the fact that, as Hattie identified, different year groups and class sizes have different average teacher talk percentages, we ensured that all observations for each teacher were conducted with the same class. Equally, in an attempt to reduce potential variables, we tried to ensure that, as much as possible, these classes were seen on the same day and time.

A timer was used to record the percentages of teacher talk to student talk. The timer was started at the start of the lesson and paused whenever the teacher stopped talking. This time was compared to the lesson length to find the teacher talk percentage. This method was imperfect as it relied on accurate recording from the researcher. To avoid independent silent working tasks being recorded as student talk,

these activities were recorded and removed from the lesson length. As such, the final percentage of teacher and student talk is taken as a percentage of talk time in the lesson rather than a percentage of lesson time. Finally, it was often difficult to decide what should qualify as teacher talk, there were plenty of occasions where teachers and students were talking simultaneously. To resolve this, we decided that any occasion where the teacher was talking would count unless the teacher was talking to an individual student while the rest of the class was working on a group talk activity. As we were primarily focused on the difference between teacher talk percentages across several lessons, we believed that the potential inaccuracies with this method would not be statistically significant.

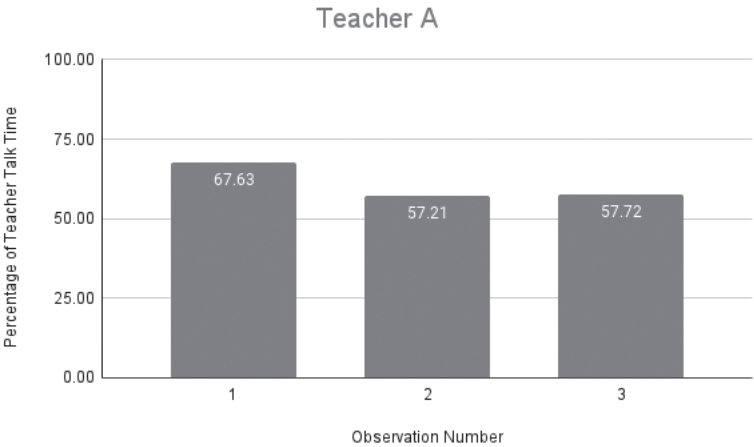
Unforeseen challenges

At the beginning of this process, we identified several factors that may impact the most scarce resource we needed to make use of in this research: time. In an effort to minimise risks, we allotted twice as much time as we needed to complete the CPD and observation phases of our research. However, some issues we predicted such as illness, the potential impacts of strikes and an Ofsted inspection were more impactful than we estimated. We also lost time due to entirely unforeseen circumstances such as the school having to close due to a burst water pipe in the local area.

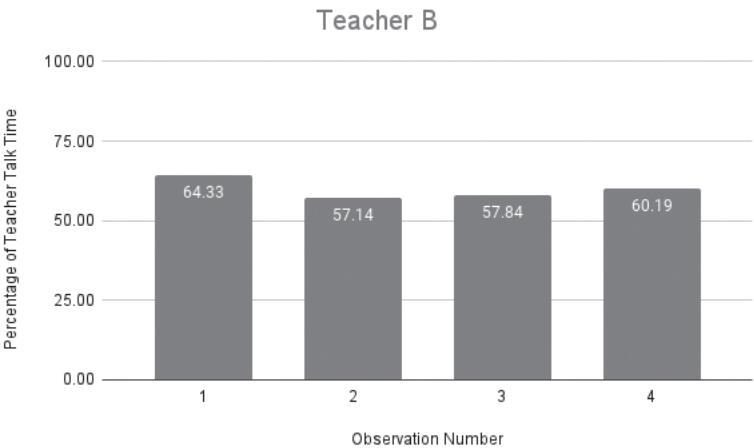
Essentially, we had not foreseen how much of a cascading effect would be caused by these interruptions. As each observation was reliant on all participants being able to attend the CPD and then be seen at the same time with the same class, any minor disruption could cause us to lose an entire week of research. As such, the findings listed below are incomplete and do not represent what could potentially have been achieved with this research. These findings will still be presented with suggestions for potential future research but it is regrettable that we were unable to truly investigate the full intended scope of this project.

Study results and discussion

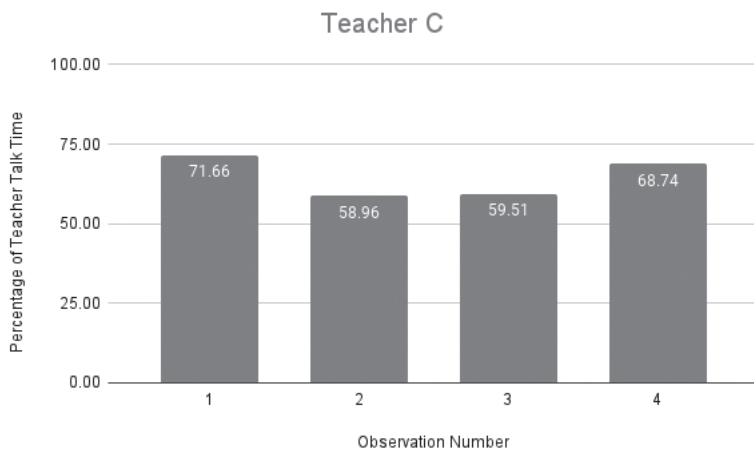
Due to the challenges listed above, we were only able to observe Teacher A on three occasions, while we observed Teachers B and C four times each. The progression of percentage teacher talk for each of the three teachers is illustrated below.



(Fig. 1– Teacher A’s Teacher Talk Percentage Progression – Year 8 – Thirty-two students)



(Fig. 2– Teacher B’s Teacher Talk Percentage Progression – Y10 – Thirty-one students)



(Fig. 3– Teacher C’s Teacher Talk Percentage Progression – Y10 – Twenty-six students)

One point of interest provided by these results is the percentage of teacher talk for each teachers’ first observation is either at the lower end of Hattie’s 70% to 80% figure quoted earlier, in the case of teacher C (71.66%), or below it in the cases of Teachers A and B (67.63% and 64.33% respectively). There are a few factors that may be influencing these starting points to be lower than expected. Firstly, each of the teachers are working in an environment that was already encouraging teachers to include more opportunities for student talk in lessons and this may have affected the ‘base level’ of teacher talk in the average lesson at the school. Secondly, the participating teachers were aware throughout that the purpose of this research was to measure teacher talk percentage and, despite assurances that no judgement would be made regarding the results of these tests, the participants may have included more instances of student talk in their ‘control’ lessons than they otherwise might have if they were not being observed. Finally, Teachers A and B trained after Hattie’s research was published and, in our initial CPD sessions, both teachers stated that they had seen the statistic during their teacher training. However, Teacher C, whose initial observation fell within the boundaries set by Hattie stated that they had not seen this statistic before. Similarly, both Teachers A and B stated that they were familiar with several talk strategies we covered during our CPD sessions and that they had practised these

skills during their teacher training. Teacher C stated that they were less familiar with the strategies. While this is too small a sample size to draw too many conclusions from, it is possible that changes to the teacher training programme in the UK in the past decade since Hattie's research has been published has influenced the 'base level' of teacher talk in the average lesson.

The most significant change in each teachers' teacher talk percentage took place during the second observation lesson with each an average of a 10% decline in teacher talk. Interestingly, each teachers' percentage fell to between 57%– 59% regardless of their starting teacher talk percentage. This may suggest that the CPD delivered at this time was particularly effective. However, given that the following observations for each teacher produced results within a similar range, it may be more likely that this was simply the effect of starting the CPD/observation cycle and any of the other CPD sessions may have elicited a similar result. This observation also resulted in the largest change for any individual teacher with Teacher C's teacher talk percentage dropping by 12.7%. It may be that the impact of this CPD was more significant with Teacher C as they had experienced less talk focused CPD in the past.

The following observations suggest a pattern of diminishing returns within the study. In each case, the percentage of teacher talk increased an average of 0.59%, between observation two and three. Due to the disruptions mentioned earlier, we were unable to observe Teacher A any further and were only able to observe Teachers B and C on one further occasion. Both Teacher B and C saw their teacher talk percentage increase in this final observation with Teacher B seeing a 2.35% increase and Teacher C recording a 9.23% increase. We suspect this increase was due, at least in part, to the disruptions to our study with observations three and four taking place several weeks apart. As such, these observations also had a significant time delay between delivering the CPD and observing the effects of it. Arguably, this could have led to a greater decrease in teacher talk as the participants would have had more time to embed the strategies into their teaching.

Conclusions

Our findings, while limited, do allow us to draw some initial conclusions. Firstly, it would appear that this research did increase the level of student talk in lessons. However, it does also seem that this impact suffers from diminishing returns as the progress made slowed significantly, and in some cases reversed, as the project progressed. Interestingly, the programme seemed to have a more significant effect on more experienced teachers though, on balance, those lessons started with a greater level of teacher talk so there was potentially more room for progress at the beginning of the project. While teacher talk did increase as the study went on, it did not return to the highest point observed at the beginning of the study.

Suggestions for further research

- Repeat this research without disruption to provide a more reliable basis for any potential conclusions.
- Ideally, this research would also be performed on a larger scale to provide a more robust set of results. This could suggest what an optimal ratio of student to teacher talk in a lesson may be.
- Devise multiple sequences of CPD and compare which is the most effective in increasing student talk.
- It would be interesting to return to this study with the same participants after a significant period of time and see to what extent the improvements made had persisted as, currently, this research can only provide evidence of the short term effects of such interventions.

Ultimately, this is research that hints at promise and potential that realistically requires far more time to produce results that are statistically robust and reliable.

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“BECOMING TALK RICH” CAN ORACY BE EMBEDDED IN TEACHERS’ PRACTICE WITHIN SIX MONTHS?

Catherine Michica de Oliveira

Introduction

1.1 The school context

The school examined in this piece is a smaller than average mainstream secondary school (11-16) in East Sussex with 853 students currently on roll. It is in a rural location. The school has a lower than average proportion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and with special educational needs and disabilities but a higher than average proportion of students with an education, health and care plan (EHCP). Students with an identified learning need achieved better outcomes in their 2023 GCSE examinations than students with identified learning needs locally and nationally. The school’s attainment 8 score in 2023 was 48.3 compared to 46.2 nationally and 71% of students achieved a grade 9-4 in English and Maths GCSE, furthermore 46.3% of students achieved their English Baccalaureate suite of qualifications (Chailey School, 2023). The school underwent an Ofsted Inspection in 2022, it was rated as a good school. The inspectors described the school as “kind...happy and harmonious” (Ofsted, 2022). The school’s strategic goals for the academic year 2022-23 were to develop oracy across the school, improve the attainment of the lowest attaining 25% of learners in all year groups and ensure our curriculum is coherent and embedded.

1.2 Rationale

One of the school’s priorities for the academic year 2022-2023 was to develop oracy across the school, and the professional learning programme was designed in order to achieve this aim. The intention of this research was to evaluate how far teachers within the school

perceived the professional learning led to sustained change in their teaching practice and imbed oracy into their lessons. The project also identified barriers to the successful implementation of the oracy strategy in classrooms. The research in this project was iterative in nature and therefore a hypothesis emerged during the course of research and conclusions were reached dependent on the findings from the research, and determined how far teaching practice changed across faculties to become talk-rich.

What we know so far

2.1 Oracy as an issue of social equity

All pupils should have the opportunity to find their voice: oracy should be sustained across their entire education, within every subject and phase, to ensure they learn how to articulate their ideas effectively. There are strong links between spoken language proficiency and wider outcomes in formal education and afterwards (APPG Oracy, 2021). Good oral communication skills are considered a vital component of work-readiness and eloquence is a skill which can assist social mobility (Knight, 2022). Oracy is beneficial for all learners; however, effective teaching of oracy has the biggest impact on disadvantaged pupils: 'If pupils do not acquire this language at home, school is their second chance. If they are not getting it in school, they are not getting it. Oracy, therefore, is not just an educational choice but a moral imperative.' (APPG Oracy, 2021). Furthermore, a robust oracy education promotes social equity for all pupils because: oracy has the potential to empower young people to advocate for themselves, oracy helps young people negotiate difficult conversations and empathise with alternative perspectives, oracy can strengthen democratic participation and political literacy (APPG Oracy, 2021).

Speech, Language and Communication Needs tend to be more prominent in children who are economically disadvantaged. Early problems with speech and language are strongly associated with poorer academic attainment, mental health difficulties and contact with the criminal justice system (Howe and Abedin, 2013). An effective oracy education is vital for students with SEND. For example, Developmental Language Disorder affects around 7% of pupils and around 85% of these children are not identified. In order for these pupils to learn effectively, teachers must make classroom dialogue accessible to them. Oracy

approaches are important here because they explicitly teach pupils how to speak and engage in a conversation (Parsons, 2023).

2.2 Oracy as a tool for academic progress

Spoken language is too often seen as something that will develop naturally and the oracy curriculum is therefore not sufficiently planned or prioritised. There is a perception that oracy is only occasionally relevant and the production of written outcomes is allowed to dominate (Gaunt and Stott, 2019). This may be partly due to the apparent challenge of demonstrating progress in oracy, alongside the fact that it is not valued in the assessment frameworks at the end of key stage 2 or at GCSE.

In fact, the cognitive benefits of oracy are reflected in the robust evidence that quality classroom talk has a measurable impact on academic attainment (Education Endowment Fund, 2021). These benefits include greater retention of subject-specific knowledge, vocabulary acquisition, and reasoning skills. They are not confined to subjects traditionally associated with discussion and dialogue, such as the arts and humanities: the benefits of talk-rich teaching and learning can be found across the curriculum, in mathematics and science (Education Endowment Fund, 2021). There is strong evidence that oracy improves literacy, including reading comprehension, spelling and writing as well as children’s cognitive development and ability to interpret the world around them (Millard and Menzies, 2016).

2.3 Professional learning for oracy

Good practice in oracy is risky and messy. It does not always go to plan. It is teacher-guided but student-led. Schools and teachers need to feel empowered to embrace the ‘messiness’ of exploratory talk. *Speak for Change* found that school policies that insist on evidence of learning in books can be counterproductive and a particular barrier to oracy education (APPG Oracy, 2021). Best practice in oracy will emerge when teachers and pupils understand that the talk is the work and not just an added extra to prepare pupils to write.

A lack of confidence and expertise in oracy teaching, exacerbated by an absence of high-quality training, resources and guidance, means that some teachers do not have a clear idea of what ‘good talk’ looks like or how talk can be used to support teaching and learning. Teachers don’t even agree on the types of talk that promote good oracy skills (Millard

and Menzies, 2016). In this context, schools should devise strategic plans for oracy development, outlining a clear rationale for oracy whilst recognising that oracy looks different in different contexts.

In order to overcome the barriers to providing a good oracy education, schools need to invest time and resources in creating and implementing an oracy strategy which firstly defines good talk and secondly guarantees pupils have ample and consistent opportunity for speaking and listening in all subjects across all phases. A school-wide vision based on clear principles is vital but school leaders must guarantee that their vision is implemented in all areas of the school and educational change is sustained. This is more likely to occur if teachers feel a sense of collective autonomy. This means that individual teachers are working autonomously in their classrooms because they share a collective responsibility to achieve a common vision (Hargreaves, 2016). Once teachers have been convinced of their collective responsibility, the Education Endowment Fund's Implementation Guide provides a clear and effective framework for bringing about sustained change in classroom practice.

Research Design and Ethics

3.1 Methodological choices and research strategies

This research project used qualitative research methods to collect data. This method suits the interpretivist, inductive approach and is frequently used in social-science and education research. The benefits of collecting qualitative data for this research project are that the data were abstract and helped the researcher to answer the subjective questions of how far the professional learning programme caused sustained change in teaching and learning across the school. Conducting qualitative research allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the context of the research from different perspectives before generating a theory based on the multiple perspectives.

The data collection method used in this research project is in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews with key stakeholders. Qualitative interviews were vital for this project because it enabled the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the context of the research as well as a thorough insight into key stakeholders' different perspectives on the same context. Gathering several in-depth insights helped the

researcher to triangulate the data and generate a theory which made sense from different points of view (Mears, 2021).

The interviews were conducted one-to-one and the interviews were in-depth and so an open format of questioning was deployed. The researcher created a list of primary areas of exploration and used these general focal points to loosely structure each interview. Each interviewee was asked to comment on their experiences regarding professional learning on oracy. The investigator framed questions in a way that first set the context and then invited an open response. The interview guide defined the areas being investigated. This was the same for each interviewee; however, the semi-structured, open-ended questioning style meant that the investigator did not know where the interviewees' responses would lead and therefore follow up questions or clarification were needed at times

This research project used a reflexive thematic approach to data analysis which suited the inductive and qualitative nature of research. This approach has been developed by Brawn and Clarke (2006). They encouraged the use of reflexive thematic analysis as a way of describing and acknowledging the interaction between the data, and the researcher over the course of the thematic analysis (Brawn and Clarke, 2006). Firstly, the investigator familiarised themselves with the dataset, followed by coding for features which are relevant to the research question. Once the features were identified, initial themes emerged, further coding took place to review the viability of the candidate themes. These themes were then reviewed in order to eliminate unconvincing themes and identify the main story of the data before situating the story in the existing literature which enabled the investigator to answer the research question and make recommendations for the context (Brawn and Clarke, 2022)

3.3 Sampling

In order to meaningfully triangulate the data, the investigator selected interviewees who were able to provide information-rich and deep insights into how far oracy has been imbedded in their classroom practice. It was also important to select teachers with varied levels of experience in the profession and from different faculties to gain a thorough overview of teachers at different points in their career. The selection of interviewees was, therefore, not random but carefully chosen for their insight experience. Due to the time-consuming nature

of in-depth interviews it was not possible to conduct a large number of interviews. The aim of conducting qualitative interviews in this study was not a breadth of understanding but rather a depth of insight. (Mears, 2021). The interviewees were as follows:

- Early Career teacher- Science
- Head of Year 7 – English
- Head of Literacy and Dyslexia Lead – English
- Professional Tutor – Design Technology
- Head of Physical Education

Findings and Discussion

4.1 Data familiarisation

The first phase of the reflexive thematic analysis was data familiarisation. This took place during the transcription process. Brawn and Clarke suggest the researcher considers the following questions whilst going through the process of familiarisation; “How does this participant make sense of their experience?” and “What assumptions does the participant make in interpreting their experience?” (Brawn, Virginia and Clarke, Victoria, 2021). The initial phase of familiarisation, therefore, involved the researcher noting down brief answers to these two questions in order to begin to understand the view and mind-set of each participant regarding the focus of the research.

Figure 1: Sense Making

Interview	Sense-Making	Assumptions
1	Oracy is valuable educationally and professional development is vital to progress your career	Oracy can be challenging for classroom management and doesn't always fit in the curriculum
2	Oracy is already a major part of the curriculum, professional development is important if it is done well	Aimed to refine practice rather than change it
3	Oracy is already central to lessons but needs more careful planning to ensure it is inclusive	Oracy helps all students make progress but can be challenging to differentiate
4	Oracy is valuable but difficult to make time for in a practical subject	Oracy must be linked to key-words and vocabulary in order to be useful
5	Oracy is useful in a classroom setting but it is difficult to plan for it in sport.	Oracy is linked to preparing students to write.

4.2 Identifying candidate themes

The second phase in the reflexive thematic analysis is coding the data set in order to identify emergent themes. The coding in this investigation was inductive and therefore driven by the content of the data and not by an existing hypothesis. The coding was semantic: the researcher used codes which were explicit and close to the language used by participants. This semantic coding helped the researcher identify common themes subjectively. A more latent approach would have risked introducing potential increased researcher bias to the analysis. Once coding had been completed, the investigator identified 94 codes. These codes were then sorted into an affinity diagram. The categorisation of codes according to their meaning led to the emergence of thirty themes. A summary of the thirty candidate themes identified by this initial analysis can be seen in figure 2.

Figure 2: Candidate Themes

Singular focus for professional learning is good	Useful and practical take-aways is good CPD
CPD should aim for sustained and consistent change	Finding time for oracy in lessons is challenging
Oracy was already well-embedded	CPD is good when it is building on previous learning
Collaborative and cross-curricular opportunities are valuable	Clear and timely goals hold teachers to account
Cyclical approach to CPD makes sense	CPD had provoked and encouraged Intentional and thoughtful planning for oracy
Explicitly teaching talking skills is vital	Moral Imperative for oracy was convincing
Teachers aiming for student led talk	CPD must be considerate of workload
Oracy is valuable as talk for writing	Needs controversy for debate
Time for faculty development Is important	CPD is important for teachers
Differentiation for mixed ability classes is essential for oracy to be inclusive	Classroom management is challenging when students are talking.

4.3 Revising and defining themes

The next step in reflexive thematic analysis was to analyse the candidate themes in order to gain an understanding of the story the data is telling. The codes on the affinity diagram were colour-coded according to the interviewee to enable the identification of the themes which were frequently mentioned by different participants. Any themes which were not mentioned by more than one participant were rejected. Furthermore, the themes which were similar in nature with another theme were combined. As a result of revising and defining the themes, eight main themes emerged from the data. Four themes relate to comments about what makes professional development valuable and successful and four themes relate to the extent to which their classroom practice has changed as a result of professional learning on oracy.

Figure 3: Revised themes

CPD is best when the focus is clear and singular and aims for sustained and consistent change	Finding time for oracy in lessons is challenging
Useful and practical teaching strategies make CPD more relevant and engaging	Differentiation for mixed ability classes is essential for oracy to be inclusive
Collaborative and cross-curricular opportunities are valuable for teachers	CPD had provoked and encouraged Intentional and thoughtful planning for oracy, explicitly teaching talking skills is vital
CPD is important for teachers	Classroom management is challenging when students are talking.

Finally, the themes were combined together and reduced further to a final four themes which emerged as a result of the analysis. They can be found in figure 4.

Figure 4: Defined themes

1. Professional development is important for teachers but is must be focussed on a consistent aim for sustained change in order to be perceived as such	3. Oracy is time consuming both in terms of teacher planning and lesson time. This is a barrier for many teachers
2. Professional development must have ideas which are immediately applicable in a classroom setting and shown to be successful for teaching and learning	4. Classroom management can be more challenging during oracy tasks, activities must be engaging and accessible to all learners in order to be successful

4.4 Situating the themes within literature

1. Professional development is important for teachers but it must be focussed on a consistent aim for sustained change in order to be perceived as such.

This theme is consistent with the idea of “collective autonomy” (Hargreaves, 2016). School leaders must ensure that their strategic vision is clear for educational change and must create a sense of collective responsibility amongst teachers to achieve this vision by working autonomously towards it in each individual curriculum area and classroom. Furthermore, the EEF implementation guide emphasises the importance of identifying a “tight” area for improvement chosen with robust diagnostic tools which is implemented via a carefully planned process which aims for sustained change over time (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021).

2. Professional development must have ideas which are immediately applicable in a classroom setting and shown to be successful for teaching and learning.

The 2015 report by the Teacher Development Trust *Developing Great Teaching* indicated that subject-specific CPD was more effective than generic CPD in terms of its impact on pupil outcomes (Cordingley, et al, 2015). The same report also recommended that effective CPD should be explicitly shown to have a clear impact on pupil outcomes in order to generate sustained change in teaching practice in classrooms. Furthermore, 70% of participants in a YouGov survey performed on behalf of Ofsted cited improving their teaching and 48% cited “enriching my thinking in an area of my professional interest” as reasons for engaging in CPD (Ofsted, 2023). This suggests that teacher value CPD which is personalised to their own subject-areas and individual priorities. These factors support the findings from the research and indicate that teachers value CPD which is practical and easily applicable in classrooms without adding to workload.

3. Oracy is time consuming both in terms of teacher planning and lesson time. This is a barrier for many teachers.

In the YouGov survey on behalf of Ofsted cited above, 87% of participants cited workload pressures as a barrier to engaging in CPD (Ofsted, 2023). The designing and rehearsing of unfamiliar teaching techniques is time consuming and teachers often cite that CPD is ineffective because not enough time is dedicated to autonomous implementation

of improvements to teaching. Teachers need time to reflect on their practice and embed new habits in order for change in classrooms to be authentic and sustained (William, 2016). Furthermore, as emphasised in the Speak for Change Inquiry, oracy is considered by many teachers, school leaders and policy makers as peripheral in the curriculum due to the emphasis on pupils’ written output in assessment (APPG Oracy, 2021). In fact, oracy requires careful and intentional planning in order to produce positive educational outcomes for all learners but teachers and school leaders are not always willing to dedicate time to planning and delivering effective oracy provision due to the more pressing demands of literacy and numeracy (APPG Oracy, 2021). The literature tends to support the findings of the research that indicate that the perception of increased workload along with competing curriculum demands mean that planning for oracy is not prioritised by teachers.

4. Classroom management can be more challenging during oracy tasks, activities must be engaging and accessible to all learners in order to be successful.

A noisy classroom where students are engaged in exploratory talk with their peers can be challenging for teachers to manage. The messiness of exploratory talk can be daunting in the context of an education system with high levels of accountability which discourages risk-taking by teachers in their classrooms (APPG Oracy, 2021). Furthermore, students’ social and communication skills have been negatively impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic (Centre for Social Justice, 2023) which makes managing student-talk more difficult in the classroom. Students with SEND, or difficulties with social, emotional or mental health can struggle with classroom talk and therefore oracy activities must be considerate and adaptive in order to allow all students to benefit from oracy provision (Gaunt and Stott, 2019). There is also strong evidence to suggest that talk-rich teaching can improve student attitudes and behaviour making them more likely to engage effectively with learning (Alexander, 2020).

Conclusion

Teachers at the school have been convinced that oracy is an important feature of teaching and learning because of the moral imperative to help students of all abilities and backgrounds find and use their voices. Teachers now have a better understanding that speaking and listening are skills which need to be taught rather than simply assuming that these skills will develop naturally during student discussions. However, oracy has not been fully embedded across the school because of the perception that oracy activities are time-consuming to plan and deliver and this investment of time is not always valuable because oracy does not raise attainment. Some teachers still think of oracy as an added extra in lessons rather than the main vehicle for learning.

There is also a barrier for teachers concerning the management of oracy in the classroom and the accessibility for students who are reluctant speakers. In order to address these barriers to a high quality oracy education in all areas of the curriculum the school has designed a professional learning strategy for the year 2023-24 called “the inclusive classroom” focused on SEND, oracy and metacognition. This strategy has been created in order to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge they need to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of all learners, particularly the expectation that all students are developing their speaking and listening skills in all lessons. The professional learning will also make the link between oracy and metacognition explicit and highlight the benefits of oracy in terms of progress and attainment for all learners.

In order to maximise the potential success of an oracy strategy in a secondary school, the research indicates that the main priorities for school leaders are

- to maintain a strong and singular focus on oracy as a vehicle for school improvement.
- Convince teachers of the social and educational value of oracy, particularly for disengaged, disadvantaged learners and students with SEND.
- Differentiate support and challenge for teachers depending on levels of skill and experience so that all staff are able to integrate some oracy in their classrooms

To continue to learn about the impact of oracy on learners’ progress both socially and educationally, it would be interesting to conduct research into the impact of oracy based teaching on children with developmental language delay in a mainstream secondary school.

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AUTHENTIC ORACY – A TONIC FOR THE MODERN WORLD

Rachel Higginson

Finding My Voice

Oracy is more than a formal communication technique, it is the living vehicle through which I express myself, my values, my thoughts and how I connect with others. As the world of communication grows increasingly complex, developing confidence and competence in authentic communication is of paramount importance. But what do we mean by ‘authentic communication’ and what role should speaking and listening play?

The Reality

It's 1am and after hours of scrolling depression and weight loss capcuts on TikTok, she finishes the midnight 'chill-time' in the same self-deprecating manner scrolling the 'real' world on Instagram. As she drifts into sleep, she feels empty...

It's time to read the room. Our young people need more.

The internet came at us fast. We were consumed by the bright lights of connection. However, the silent veil of curiosity soon enveloped us and the desire to see and to be seen created a distorted realm to our existence.

Online you create your own story based on the reality you want to project. The reality that you believe others want to see. And when it all becomes too much, where do we turn? The world wide web. Searching again to find connection, to feed curiosity. Yet algorithms take us beyond our intent. We form new views about ourselves, others, and the world.

The impact on knowledge acquisition and learning is yet to be fully realised but what we can confidently predict is that the world our young people are heading into is vastly different to anything that has gone before.

Klaus Schwab, the founder of the World Economic Forum predicted the ‘Fourth industrial Revolution’¹ was coming. He stated that it would either be a time of ‘great promise or great peril’. Technological progress and particularly the capabilities of Artificial Intelligence (AI) have both positive and frightening implications for our society. Schwab explained that this era is different than other historical changes we have previously experienced,

‘It is characterized by a range of new technologies that are fusing the physical, digital and biological worlds, impacting all disciplines, economies and industries, and even challenging ideas about what it means to be human.’

In light of this he warned that education should rapidly adapt to ensure that young people develop self-awareness, adaptability, agency, empathy and purpose.

Our young people need to experience an education where they are better equipped to navigate the changing world. They need to be empowered to be *authentic* both as a collective and as individuals in the real world and in their virtual space.

How do we do that?

We invite them physically and metaphorically to be front and centre of their education, via authentic oracy and powerful personal development.

Oracy as a term was originally coined in 1965 by Andrew Wilkinson to give speaking authority in line with Literacy and Numeracy. However, its translation can be anything from ensuring polite classroom threshold greetings and retrieval questioning, to a highly dialogic culture where talk is the principle method of learning.

The definitions and approaches whilst of course important, can be a distraction. What is most pertinent to consider is the *purpose*.

This generation need to grow to be knowledgeable, sophisticated, authentic communicators, able to adapt and flex as a collective with strong open communication. They need agency to express their ideas, to grow greater empathy for one another and to evolve a sense of personal purpose. These competencies will not only support better academic outcomes but give essential skills for life. *The English Speaking Union* research found,

1 <https://www.weforum.org/pages/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-by-klaus-schwab>

‘Almost nine out of ten (85%) of respondents in the 16-24 year old age group think receiving specific support at school for speaking and listening (oracy), would have helped them progress better in their career and life generally.’²

If we are truly going to narrow the gap and challenge social inequity, we need to put developing powerful and *authentic* communication at the core of our curriculum and pedagogy.

Authentic Speaking

First and foremost, to be authentic speakers we need to be able to express ourselves in the fullest sense. Young people who evolve a powerful, emotional vocabulary, able to articulate the most complex of feelings are better able to meet their own needs and the needs of others. This is the very basis of what will support ‘success’ in adulthood. In the journal article, *‘What Predicts a Successful Life? A Life Course Model of Well-Being’* by Economists Richard Layard, Andrew E. Clark, Francesca Cornaglia, Nattavudh Powdthavee, and James Vernoit the research findings were,

‘By far the most important predictor of adult life-satisfaction is emotional health, both in childhood and subsequently. Pro-social behaviour in childhood is the next most important childhood predictor.’

Beyond the emotional, developing a rich and powerful vocabulary enables one to express points of view across multiple social scripts throughout the day. We develop this in many ways but most powerfully through, story, narrative and books. Speaking then becomes an extension of my mind enabling me to be a poet, a mathematician, a philosopher, a historian and an empathetic friend.

Yet words are not enough.

To be truly self-aware we have to learn speaking out loud is much more than the words we say. Our register, tone, pace, body language and gesture all have a significant impact on the meaning we portray.

As we teach our young people, we begin to embed the concept that oracy is an art.

2 ESU Trust <https://www.esu.org/oracy/>

Authentic Listening

We cannot be authentic speakers without authentic listening. Listening to understand in preference to waiting for my turn to speak. Listening is a sophisticated, intentional act, in reality mastered by few,

‘When people talk, listen completely... Most people never listen.’

Ernest Hemingway, *Esquire Magazine* 1935

As humans we are innately idiosyncratic, making sense of the world based on our prior experience. To truly listen we must habitually change. Carl Rogers and Richard E. Farson proposed the intentional act of active listening,

‘When people are listened to sensitively, they tend to listen to themselves with more care and to make clear exactly what they are feeling and thinking. Group members tend to listen more to each other, to become less argumentative, more ready to incorporate other points of view. Because listening reduces the threat of having one’s ideas criticized, the person is better able to see them for what they are and is more likely to feel that his contributions are worthwhile.’³

When you learn to listen with a deep desire to understand, you develop empathy. When you have empathy and understanding of how to communicate sensitively, you can respond appropriately. From a learning point of view the ability to listen-to understand is the very premise on which our education system is built,

‘Learning to listen is important. Learning depends on children’s capacity to attend, listen and think. These skills are more subtle than simply hearing what is going on without responding to it.’ *Learning to Listen* Dr Lyn Dawes.

Collaboration-The fine art of conversation

Bringing authentic speaking and listening together is a skill which needs to be explicitly developed. Learning how to listen and respond, to build a conversation, to question, to include all participants, doesn’t evolve naturally-it has to be taught. When embedded this act of collaboration nurtures a strong sense of belonging. Young people learn and experience the importance of listening and valuing points of view, taking turns and how talk can build and grow understanding.

3 Rogers, Carl.R and Farson Richard *Active Listening -Communicating in Business Today* R.G. Newman, M.A. Danzinger, M. Cohen (eds) D.C. Heath & Company, 1987

Exploration-minds evolving together

There is a sweet spot in classroom talk. This is when pupils have learnt the conventions of conversation and they begin to function as a collective organism, learning together, out loud, without needing a great deal of teacher direction. In *Talk Rules* by James Manion reflects,

‘In exploratory talk, the thinking, reasoning and critical engagement is tangible. The group interacts as a well-oiled unit, engaging in collaborative group discussion that is greater than the sum of its parts – like a ‘hive mind’.’

This inclusive and powerful class culture places young people as agents in their learning. They adapt to the changing tides of the conversation and take their minds to new places, as authentic learners.

Presentation-the art of rhetoric

Presenting is not just a skill, it’s a transformative experience. When young people take risks, they grow. Providing these ‘risky’ elements to our curriculum is essential. If I can present in front of my class, I can one day confidently walk into an interview or present to my colleagues.

It is not purely the act of presenting, which is the skill here, it’s how you structure your content and plan your delivery with the knowledge of your audience,

‘Rhetoric is more than the simple act of persuasion: it is the use of language in its most sophisticated dinner jacket of choice.’⁴

As Kat Howard (Executive Director of School Improvement, CORE Education Trust) beautifully expresses, rhetoric is not simply the ‘art of persuasion’ some of our less savoury politicians would have us believe. It’s a culmination of your skills, learning, interests and passions coming together for purposeful communication.

Presentations should not be narrowed to talking to a PowerPoint slide. Whilst performative presentations such as TED talks are a great way to frame understanding, rhetoric can be used far more broadly than this. Understanding of rhetoric provides a theoretical and behavioural framework to intentionally communicate in a powerful way but also to understand others more deeply. Professor Arlene Holmes Henderson asserts,

‘Rhetoric cultivates critical literacy skills-the ability to read between

4 Howard, Kat <https://speakingcitizens.org/blog/kat-howard-the-revival-of-rhetoric-and-why-we-must-teach-it/>

the lines of others' communication...students have the lightbulb moment when they realise that politicians, advertisers and broadcasters are still using these techniques today.'⁵

Changing tides

In education there is a drive to solve social inequity with a knowledge rich education. Whilst of course vital, the painful truth is that the pedagogy which is often being used to reach this goal is having an unintended impact.

Our young people need to be brought back into the room...

Ten steps to creating a culture of authentic oracy

Oracy isn't a teaching tool to be utilised when appropriate, it's a culture...

1. Pupil voice

Looking under the bonnet. What level of 'voice' do pupils feel they have in school? Having purposeful but open conversations with students always provides powerful information.

2. Context-dive in

Understanding the context specific challenges for your pupils is vital but also time on socials is interesting. Cheating the algorithms by searching certain teen topics is insightful and sobering.

3. Pupil shadowing

Spending time shadowing pupils for a day is a day well spent. How often do pupils speak? What is the quality of this? Is it dialogue or question and answer? Who talks? Who doesn't talk.

4. Pupil Speech and Language needs

Under resourced children start on the back foot, 'Of the children who persistently experienced poverty, 75 % arrive at school below average in language development.'⁶ Of course, these pupils have not

5 Holmes-Henderson Arlene <https://aceclassics.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Teaching-citizenship-article.pdf>

6 APPG Oracy Report <https://oracy.inparliament.uk/files/oracy/2023-07/Executive%20Summary-Oracy%20APPG%20final%20report%20%281%29.pdf>

magically ‘caught up’ by Key stage 3. This is why Year 7 screening and speech and language specialists have become the norm in many parts of the country. Knowledge really is power.

5. **An Authentic endeavour**

‘Curriculum is first and foremost for the teacher’⁷ Jerome Bruner. Teachers who deeply engage with the purpose and process of curriculum grow a swell of energy which takes on a life of its own. For impactful, authentic oracy, staff training is vital but knowing the needs, articulating the purpose and contributing to the intellectual growth of the work is the super-power.

6. **A culture of belonging**

Authentic Oracy is a space curated where all voices have value and combine to create an environment of authentic interactions. This is not a tokenistic process but a conscious act. How do we physically and metaphorically communicate mutual value? We build a ‘fingerprint culture’ where everyone is listened to, everyone knows the value they bring and everyone is reflected and invested in the very fabric of school life.

7. **Establish social norms**

If we are seeking to meet not only our own needs but the needs of others, we feel a greater sense of belonging. Creating social norms serve to articulate mutual expectations, built on collective needs. These should be created by the whole community on macro and micro levels. The social norms in Art or Drama may be different to PE or Science and that’s ok. The crucial aspect is its collegiate and a social code created by the community, for the community.

8. **Emotionally honest Spaces**

In British society we are in a mental health crisis. We need to tackle this with purposeful precision, growing a generation who are skilled in expressing emotions and who see strength in vulnerability. This needs direct teaching but also benefits from modelling.

7 Bruner, J (1960) *The Process of Education*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University

An appropriate level of emotional honesty from role models can support an ‘human first’ culture to flourish.

9. Maximising metacognition

Developing a culture where talk is at the centre of learning makes the entire process more authentic and student centric. At times, the pressure to cover content can make education feel ironically external to the pupils themselves. Supporting pupils to talk about their learning and to acknowledge both the cognitive and emotional elements to this are transformative.

10. Holding Stories

Every child deserves to have their story held. Create a system whereby all young people have someone who knows their story. Knows that they like skateboarding, understands they find maths hard, knows their parents are recently divorced and they are incredible at drawing Manga...

Richard Huish College in Taunton have created a powerful pupil progress program. Once a term the curriculum is collapsed, the subject leads meet to discuss the pupils’ learning and all these conversations are collated to be brought together by the tutor and are then viewed holistically from a ‘whole student’ perspective.

This is authentic oracy, supporting metacognition *and* developing skills for life.

Our world is changing fast, and this generation need us to respond. Authentic oracy isn’t an aspiration, it’s a necessity.

LESSONS IN ORACY FROM THE AMERICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Harriet Piercy

'talk is essential to children's thinking and learning and to their productive engagement in classroom life' (Robin Alexander, 2012)

As an English secondary school teacher in London I have experienced the challenges involved in promoting spoken language in my classroom. Prior to undertaking the research discussed in this article, I always sensed the importance of developing students' speaking skills to support confidence and understanding. However, time pressure frequently inhibited the space I felt able to dedicate to oracy teaching, particularly with under-attaining students. Primarily, I used talk as a bridge to writing – which was seen as the 'real' work – rather than explicitly teaching oracy as a discrete skill-set (Alexander, 20010, p.19). Surveys indicate that my experiences echo those of many secondary school teachers for whom lack of time, in a context of a high-stakes exam culture, is a key reason why opportunities for oracy are squeezed in the curriculum (Millard & Menzies, 2016). This tension in English classrooms motivated the research on oracy practice I undertook as a Fulbright scholar in the United States in 2023.

There is now a growing international, cross-sector recognition of the need to develop children's oral language skills to promote their long-term opportunities (ESU, 2017). The World Economic Forum recently identified oracy as a global education priority (WEF, 2017). Likewise, the UN Rights of the Child Article 12 stipulates that children should have agency to articulate their needs within their own lives (OHCHR, 1990). Against this backdrop, concerns have been raised that England's education policy around oracy teaching lacks sufficient prioritisation, and the quality and consistency of provision in many state schools varies significantly (Oracy APPG, 2021). However, with oracy recently brought to the fore of the national discussion following commitments

by the UK Labour party in July 2023 to raise the status of speaking in classrooms, there is an opportunity for schools to rethink its place across the curriculum and how to develop effective teaching practices.

As a recent participant in the Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching programme, I was placed at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee where I explored the issue of oracy, its challenges and opportunities, in an American context. By stepping outside of the English education system and learning from an international comparator – one which shares many cultural and socio-economic similarities with the UK – I was able to re-evaluate our pedagogical approaches and challenges through a new lens. My experiences working across a range of public and private schools in the hugely varied education landscape of Tennessee provided an insight into aspects of oracy teaching, which are more evolved in the US than in England, to share with my school community in England. I gained fresh insights into the ways in which policy – particularly assessment policy – influences classroom practices. This article considers some of the lessons about curriculum, classroom culture and assessment in the US that teachers and policy-makers in England can learn from as spoken language moves up the agenda.

1. How can education policy support teachers?

Recently, the US has reflected the direction of other national governments in recognising the importance of oracy in its national education guidelines (ESU, 2017). In contrast to the ill-defined policy for spoken language in the National Curriculum in England (Oracy APPG, 2021, p.36), the US Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts set out clear specifications



and a striking level of commitment to developing students’ speaking and listening skills as part of ‘argument literacy’ (Alexander, 2020, p.70). This difference is also demonstrated by the comparative prominence given to speaking and listening in the Tennessee Standards for English Language Arts (TSELA) (a state version of the Common Core). Whereas the current National Curriculum in England affords just five bullet points – less than half that of reading and writing – to spoken language, the TSELA devotes ten pages to guidance on speaking and listening. The intention of the TSELA is clear: to give equal place to

talk as to reading and writing, and to recognise it as an essential strand of literacy instruction.

One of the most important features of the TSELA is its useful distinction between speaking and listening as a pedagogy and as an outcome; this is a significant point of comparison with England where a lack of clarity around the purpose of oracy has been identified as a key issue by Ofsted (Oracy APPG, 2020). In terms of pedagogy, the TSELA articulates speaking and listening as a method ‘to aid reading comprehension’ and support students to ‘initiate’, ‘engage’, ‘participate’ and ‘prepare for collaborative discussions’; in terms of outcome, it sets out objectives around the ‘Presentation and Knowledge of Ideas’ which focuses on students’ confident use of Standard English and non-verbal communication (TSELA, 2017). While anecdotal, it was interesting to me that the teachers I spoke to in Tennessee schools and the professional development sessions I attended shared a consistent language for speaking and listening, and articulated the dual purpose of oracy as both a learning process and an outcome. In contrast, in a recent national survey, only a quarter of secondary school teachers in England said they felt ‘confident in their understanding of the statutory ‘spoken language’ requirements outlined in the National Curriculum’ (Oracy APPG, 2020, p.35).

Another feature of the TSELA which supports good teaching instruction is that it provides real world context and purpose for teaching speaking and listening, which is linked to career and college level competencies (CCSS, 2022). Unlike the specifications in the National Curriculum in England which are ‘largely confined to technical understanding and skill’ (Alexander, 2020, p.70), the US standards promote a broader notion of a ‘citizenship-oriented literacy’ (Murphy, 2023), which are reflected in the prominent references to ‘collaboration’ and ‘participation’ for speaking and listening. There are also connections to articles and surveys from industry and training providers which help to build the case that ‘young people must have strong and effective communication and collaboration skills to be considered employable’. Communicating these implications for oracy on students’ long-term opportunities could be an effective way to get buy-in from teachers.

Overall, the TSELA and Common Core not only provide teachers and students with an overarching purpose for speaking and listening

in the curriculum, but also leaves a strong impression ‘that the tools of effective communication and argumentation can be taught and learnt’ (Murphy, 2023). In comparison, there is still a prevailing attitude in many schools in England that oracy develops ‘naturally’ rather than through effective teaching (Oracy APPG, 2021). The US model is useful for policy makers in thinking about the importance of creating a shared language and understanding of oracy across the education community.

2. How does policy translate to classroom practice?

In practice, policy implementation is never straightforward – policy is mediated through school culture and management, classroom practices and individual teaching styles. During my time in Tennessee I had the opportunity to explore how the state’s speaking and listening standards translated into classroom practice. My key takeaway from my diverse field experiences was that policy must be supported by strong professional development practices and clear pedagogical approaches in schools.

Across the classrooms I visited in Tennessee, I observed significant variation in the quality of, and focus given to, oracy teaching, despite the emphasis from national and state guidelines on speaking and listening. This may be because ‘deep structure pedagogical change is extremely slow, and basic interactive habits are highly resilient’ (Alexander, 2020, p.19) and the Common Core, introduced in 2010, is still a relatively recent initiative. Research suggests that British and American classrooms share a similar culture of talk where discourse is ‘overwhelmingly monologic’ and ‘the dominant mode of instruction is recitation’ (Nystrand, 1997, pp.33 & 12-13); additionally, student talk is characterised by an ‘all-purpose informal or ‘conversational’ style’, unlike the distinctive subject-specific registers developed in some European classroom discourses (Alexander, 2010, pp.20-21). These tendencies, prevalent in many American classrooms, do not support the kind of collaborative and context-specific talk promoted in the Common Core and TSELA, but they are difficult to change without significant and sustained investment in professional development.

One pattern I observed in classrooms was that curriculum guidance and materials provided a useful starting point, but required skilled teachers to shape them into effective oracy practices. A good illustration of this is the Tennessee state recommended textbook for Grade 10

English Language Arts, which outlines a range of speaking and listening opportunities for students, but little in the way of explicit teaching of oracy skills such as tone, vocabulary, syntax and structure. Many of the oral presentation activities focus on developing a confident speaking style when presenting textual information to classmates – ‘Speak clearly and naturally, and avoid rushing’, ‘make eye contact with your listener’ (TSBE, 2021) – demonstrating the default in American (and British) classroom culture that ‘talk tends to be seen as primarily social and affective...rather than [developing students’] thinking’ (Alexander, 2010, p.19). Indeed, exercises like these seem primarily concerned with building social confidence through speaking as performance rather than developing subject-specific vocabulary or deeper thinking. However, in classrooms where teachers had received effective training in speaking and listening from oracy organisations such as R.E.A.L. Discussion and the National Paideia Center, they had established routines with their classes, taught explicit oracy skills, and interpreted the textbook activities flexibly as part of a wider oracy strategy.

Another feature of Tennessee classrooms which often demonstrated a gap between intention and practice in oracy teaching was the use of classroom layout. Unlike the uniform rows of front-facing desks common in English secondary schools, in Tennessee the desks were frequently arranged in clusters for group work, or in horseshoes around the front of the room, or a combination of the two. These different layouts speak volumes about whose voices are intended to be centred in the classroom. In comparison to our more didactic, teacher-centred instruction in England, the layout of many American classrooms indicates a more democratic and collaborative learning environment.

However, in practice, teachers’ use of classroom layout only meaningfully supported student oracy where it was aligned to their pedagogy. In schools where there was not a strong culture of speaking and listening, I often observed that while the layout was set up for interactive group work, the activities that students were undertaking did not facilitate dialogue which ‘generate[d] some knowledge beyond what was presented in the original learning materials and beyond what the partner has said’ (Chi & Wylie, 2014). Nystrand terms this ‘collaborative seatwork’, where students are completing highly prescribed activities, such as worksheets, which do not benefit from small group dialogue (Nystrand, 1994, p.64). By comparison, in schools with strong oracy

practices, I observed how teachers planned and altered their classroom layout to reflect and enhance their pedagogy in line with evidence on best practice (Poole, Evertson & IRIS, 2020).

These experiences reinforced to me that policy must be supported by strong professional development in schools and buy-in from classroom teachers for positive change to take place. With a similarly monologic, recitation-based classroom culture in England, it will take sustained commitment at both policy and school levels to develop consistently strong practices across classrooms.

3. What role does assessment play in developing oracy practices?

So why, despite evident policy intention to promote speaking and listening, is there so much variation between classroom practices in Tennessee? A look at the types of assessments undertaken by high and middle school students provides some explanation for the divergence I observed in Tennessee schools.

Although in the TSELA and Common Core, speaking and listening constitute one of the essential pillars of literacy, within the assessment system, there is no state assessment for speaking and listening beyond elementary school. The standardised tests for English are entirely reading and writing-based, and the majority of these are heavily weighted towards multiple-choice tests (MCT) which lead to closed, informational approaches to reading texts. For example, two out of three of the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program End of Course tests, (mandatory for state-funded public schools) consist of multiple-choice and multiple-select questions requiring students to make inferences and identify literary features from a ‘cold’ read. Similarly, the reading section for the Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition Exam, a college-level course which enables senior high school students to earn university credits early, consists of a multiple choice reading section in response to several ‘cold’ reads. This is not a criticism of MCT per se, which can serve as an efficient and accessible way to assess reading skills (Korsunsky), but rather to draw attention to the profound effect that assessment objectives and modes have on teaching approaches. These MCTs, by which schools and teachers are held to account, promote feature-spotting and informational rather than aesthetic readings of literary texts. Consequently, the pressure for many

schools to focus on test scores could lead to singular, closed readings rather than open up multiple interpretations aided by exploratory talk.

There are two important conclusions to draw here, for policy makers to be aware of in particular:

First, a narrow assessment criteria risks encouraging narrow readings of texts which discourage classroom dialogue beyond ‘initiation-response-feedback’, or what Dylan Williams calls ‘ping-pong’ talk;

Second, without the accountability of an assessment for speaking and listening, schools and teachers will focus their energy on preparing for high stakes exams. Time pressure was cited by teachers as one of the major factors inhibiting oracy in classrooms (Millard & Menzies, 2016, pp.18 & 56) – as one school leader put it, ‘It’s a brave secondary school that does anything in its mainstream curriculum that does not contribute directly to its examination ‘bottom line’ (Oracy APPG, 2021, p.37). While the challenges of assessing talk are widely acknowledged in the education community, many also recognise that having a summatively assessed Speaking and Listening component in previous English language GCSE specifications helped to ‘embed this strand more strongly in schemes of work at Key Stage 4 than at any other stage of pupils’ learning’ (Coultais, 2006). In light of this, formal oracy assessments should be considered as a lever to ensure that there is adequate investment in developing students’ oracy.

4. Making oracy inclusive

A common issue in both England and Tennessee is that oracy practices are not consistently or equitably shared across schools. While exemplary speaking and listening practices are found in both contexts, it is more often selective schools or those which serve student populations with higher socio-economic status which prioritise oracy (Millard & Menzies, 2016).

In Tennessee, the significant in-state variation may be the result of a hugely varied education landscape. Tennessee’s school provision comprises private, charter (publicly-funded but with private oversight – like free schools in the UK), and public schools, which themselves are a mixture of magnet schools (offering specialised curricula and operating outside of zoned school boundaries) and traditional neighbourhood zoned schools. Of all these types of schools, only traditional public schools are bound to follow the district curriculum;

the others have, to varying degrees, the freedom to translate the TS as they see fit. This may contribute to speaking and listening practices looking very different between neighbouring schools. There is a useful lesson for England here: like the US, we have an increasingly disjointed education system with 80% of state secondaries not required to follow the National Curriculum, which might make top down change more difficult to implement (Education Hub, 2022).

During my field work, I observed the most effective oracy practices in private and non-traditional ‘magnet’ public schools, both of which have access to additional funding and some degree of academic selection in their student intake. Similar trends have been identified in England, where a national survey reported that ‘Teachers in independent schools [were] significantly more likely than their colleagues in local authority and community schools to feel oracy contributes ‘a great deal’ to pupils’ linguistic development’. It is currently the case that UK independent and grammar schools are more likely to have debating clubs and to enter their pupils into debating competitions run by the national charity the English Speaking Union (Millard & Menzies, 2016, pp.28 & 49).

Evidence shows that in the UK over 20% of children growing up in low-income households experience early language difficulties compared to a prevalence of between 5% and 7% for non-disadvantaged students (EIF, 2017). Given that oral language interventions can support students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to catch up with their peers (EEF, 2021), there is an onus on comprehensive schools to ensure that they are equipped to develop strong oracy skills. At a time of mounting concern over the links between disadvantage and educational outcomes, ensuring that the best oracy practices reach all students regardless of background is a priority for national government and schools alike.

5. Conclusions: what can we learn from Tennessee?

As TSELA illustrates, policy can be instrumental in establishing a shared understanding of oracy. However, policy is not a panacea and curriculum aims need to be supported by sustained investment of time and funding to ensure classroom teachers feel equipped with the skills to embed strong oracy practices. It is also essential that good oracy practices are incentivised through making them a part of assessment frameworks.

Key Takeaways for Teachers and School Leaders

Whatever the changes to policy in the future at a national level, the lessons from my study show there are actions school leaders can take now to facilitate good oracy practice in the classroom.

1. A whole school approach

A shared understanding of oracy is vital both within and between schools in order for there to be shared best practice across curricula. Although they ‘need not be mutually exclusive’, schools should make a distinction between oracy teaching as pedagogy and the skilled use of spoken language by students as a curriculum objective (Millard & Menzies, 2016, p.11).

A shared language across curricula and between subject areas is necessary to provide pupils with consistent feedback ‘both on *what* they say and *how* they say it’, on their conceptual thinking and their oral presentation skills (Millard & Menzies, 2016).

2. Practices

- Oracy teaching practices should be shared and implemented across the curriculum so that a) the right kind of talk is used for the right learning event, and b) schools ensure that students are getting a varied diet of different types of talk.
- Generic and subject-specific oracy skills including syntax and vocabulary should be identified and mapped out across the curriculum.
- Where possible, teachers should take a flexible approach to classroom layout so that they can intentionally align it to their pedagogy in a given lesson.

3. Assessment

- Regular formative feedback should form an essential part of oracy teaching, both to foster deep thinking and to develop oracy skills. This should include opportunities for self and peer, as well as teacher-to-student feedback.
- Schools should create (or borrow from an existing) assessment framework to provide students with specific, actionable feedback on both *what* they say (their contribution to class dialogue) and how they say it (their oracy skills).

- The idea of summative speaking assessments is the subject of an ongoing debate, but there is a strong argument in favour of formal assessments at KS3 and KS4 in order to raise the status of oracy in the curriculum. At KS3, one solution might be to replace a traditional writing assessment with a project-based research presentation which assesses speaking and writing together.
- In line with the recommendation by some school curriculum leaders, an effective way to formalise oracy assessments might be to conduct the GCSE Spoken Language endorsement for English language GCSE in a similar manner to the oral exam for modern foreign language GCSEs¹.

My US experience broadened my understanding of education systems and teaching practices. The opportunity to collaborate with educators from around the world and learn from international best practice helped me to widen my reference points for what outstanding teaching looks like. In particular, the knowledge and expertise I gained around oracy impacted my professional practice in a number of ways. I now incorporate oracy teaching into my long term curriculum planning and am developing an assessment criteria to ensure that students develop effective speaking skills over time. I also explicitly teach, model and allow lesson time for the deliberate practice of and feedback on discrete oracy skills. Within my education community I will find avenues to collaborate with teachers across school networks to advocate for better access and opportunities for oracy.

1 Ibid. p.61

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