How Schools are Closing the Word Gap

Oxford Language Report 2021-22

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Introduction

Jane Harley, Policy and Partnership Director, Oxford University Press

The scale of the word gap and the impact of Covid on language developments remains a very serious issue. However, this collection of case studies serves to remind us of the brilliant work going on in schools to make a real and impactful difference to addressing the word gap. Common themes emerge, many of which have been explored in our Oxford Language reports. By taking a whole school response, drawing on CPD, putting reading and talk at the heart of the curriculum, and involving parents, these schools demonstrate what can be done to set their pupils up for a better and more confident future. We hope *How Schools are Closing the Word Gap* will inspire other schools to draw on this shared practice and the top tips from schools and experts and join us on our mission to give all children access to the language they need for future success, wellbeing and happiness.

Helen Prince, Author of Get it Right: Boost Your Vocabulary, Advisor and CEO of Chatterstars

To express ourselves, we have to know ourselves - know what we love, what is important to us, what frightens or consoles, inspires or repels us. As teachers and leaders, we strive to elicit these building blocks of expression that motivate learning and underpin daily classroom talk. This premise provides the catalyst for action in many of these case studies, inspiring colleagues to address the impact of a limited vocabulary on expression.

Throughout this report, there is a vibrancy with which schools prioritize vocabulary and value talk. From the vocabulary-rich lab coats at St Michael's Academy to creating family trees to engage whole family talk in North Liverpool Academy; from dramatic representation of new vocabulary in Heath Primary School and oracy assemblies at Tor Bridge Primary to the use of 'thought stems' in Thomas Tallis School and a formality scale in Bishop Young C of E Academy in Leeds, this report showcases the innovative, informed practice that makes a difference.

If, as Hafiz wrote over six centuries ago, 'the words you speak become the house you live in', then these schools are providing their pupils with the skills for some impressive architecture! The joy of enabling our young people to articulate their ideas, hopes and emotions surely lies at the heart of teaching – and is captured at the heart of this report.

Alex Quigley, National Content Manager, Education Endowment Fund, former teacher and author

School teachers and leaders have known for years that the language and vocabulary of our pupils will prove essential for accessing the curriculum and school success. In 2018, the influential Oxford Language Report: Why closing the Word Gap Matters, highlighted views of teachers that pupils' progress was being hampering by their limited vocabulary. Since this report, the global pandemic has likely exacerbated this challenge for many pupils, so word gap worries persist.

Though we should be vigilant about the impact of the pandemic on pupils in English schools, we should also celebrate the brilliant work of schools who are tackling the 'word gap'. This new report, How Schools are Closing the Word Gap, offers an array of excellent case studies from both primary and secondary schools. At once, it is a fillip to see best practice spreading far and wide, whilst offering schools yet more ideas and approaches to tackle the challenge faced by pupils.

Case Study 1

Trinity Church of England Primary and Nursery School, Exeter

- Opened in 2017 and still expanding, currently has pupils up to Year 3
- About 10% of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium, low level of EAL

Laura Druce, Early Years Foundation Stage Coordinator and Speech and Language Oracy Lead.

At Trinity Church of England Primary and Nursery School, Early Years teachers are noticing an increase in the number of children coming into nursery with speech and language issues. About 10 per cent qualify for government-funded language intervention, but many more have limited vocabulary and some sort of language delay or deficiency.

Laura Druce, Early Years Foundation Stage Coordinator and Speech and Language Oracy Lead, has observed a decline in children's knowledge of nursery rhymes and traditional tales when they start school. This observation has been echoed in numerous schools across the country. Some practitioners believe that this may be a result of many pre-school children spending more time playing on electronic devices, such as tablets and phones, than talking with parents and being read to.

Laura has identified social as well as academic disadvantages for children who have a limited vocabulary: "Most of the children who have very limited vocabulary in our school find it really difficult to make positive, meaningful relationships. Quite often they play on their own. There is a direct link between children who are severely lacking in words, to those who have mental health issues in the future. I can see it already with some of our children".

Laura has also noticed how a lack of language can impact on children's confidence. "They find it hard to access the curriculum with so much of the curriculum based on oracy. They find it difficult to join in and this affects how they see themselves. As they move up the school it becomes quite clear to them that they haven't got the language. They really struggle and are very aware of the gap."

> *If you don't start to plug the language gap in the early years, it just gets much, much wider as the child moves up the school.*

Action taken

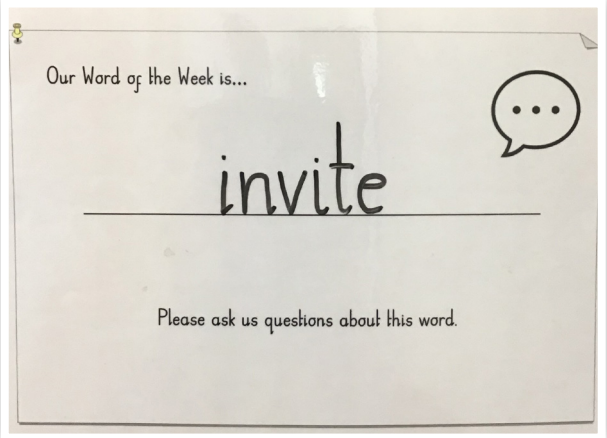
Over the last few years, Trinity Church of England School has put in place a number of strategies to address the challenges of the word gap.

1 Identifying need promptly

Need is identified at the start of school by using an early language screening tool[1] to assess and support children with language difficulties. This is then followed up with a daily intervention programme, NELI[2], for children who need support.

2 Teaching oracy explicitly

Oracy is taught explicitly as an integral part of the Foundation Stage, and children are given enough time for talk and to express themselves. Staff are also conscious of the need to model language and conversation, so children learn to recognise language structure as well as vocabulary.



The 'word of the week' is displayed prominently on classroom doors.

3 Talk-centred curriculum

The curriculum is planned so that it centres around talk. For example, investment was made in a comprehensive maths programme[3] that emphasises language and talk, and a handwriting programme[4] that clearly explains directions when forming letters.

4 More training for teachers

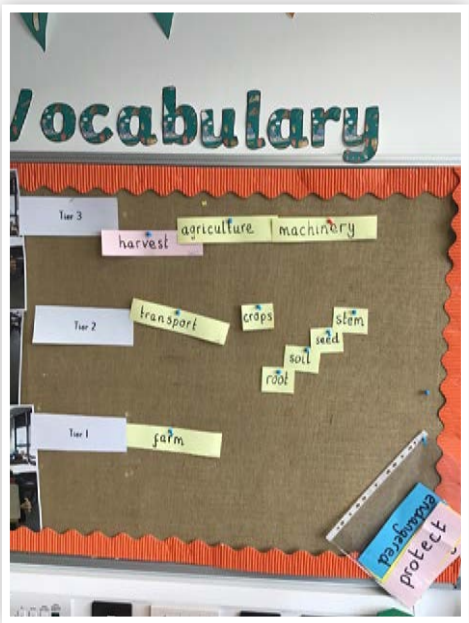
More training has been undertaken to understand communication and language in greater depth, signposting up-to-date research, knowing how to identify different types of communication delay, and learning about dialogic teaching (encouraging children to learn by questioning and discussion) across the curriculum. Some of these training resources are local and free[5]. With knowledgeable speakers, webinars and multiple resources, the skills are being cascaded down into the school.

5 Direct instruction

This means more explicit teaching of the language of direct instruction (the formal language used in class). Laura acknowledges that it's tricky to fit this into an already packed timetable, but believes it is an important area that is often overlooked.

6 Vocabulary boards

Vocabulary boards are used in each classroom, not just to display new words, but to actively integrate the teaching of vocabulary into lessons. This means including vocabulary in lesson planning, explicit teaching during the lessons and constantly revisiting words, in speech and writing, so they become fully embedded in children's minds.



Once words have been featured on the vocabulary board, they are stored in a pocket for regular revisiting.

Impact and next steps

Trinity Church of England School is now a language-rich school, not just in English but across the curriculum. Teachers feel children are more confident and skilled orally, participating in discussion, talking about what they read, and much better at storytelling themselves. The school plans to collect more data on the impact of the strategies that have been put in place, although the impact on staff is already evident.

> *All this extra training has made me a better teacher. I can see the progress in my children. I can see how their vocabulary has improved just from the way they interact with me.*

> *The biggest impact has been from staff appreciating the importance of talk and language and how it shapes our curriculum. You need to get staff on board and get that buy-in, because it all has to start with them.*

Next steps

The work on closing the word gap is set to continue in the school. Plans for next year and beyond include:

- More explicit, **direct teaching of vocabulary** in all subjects.
- **Increasing parental involvement**, giving parents more practical advice on how they can help to develop their children's language and vocabulary skills.
- **More research** to collect evidence and data on the value of investing more teaching time and resources on oracy and language development.
- Developing ways to **track data of children's vocabulary** development.
- **Liaising with other schools** to share best practice about closing the word gap.

Top Tips

Laura has three top tips for schools like Trinity Church of England School, who want to close the word gap:

1. **Get stakeholders on board**
   Look at the evidence about why closing the word gap matters, then get all stakeholders involved, including the Senior Leadership Team and all teachers, to recognise its importance.
2. **Embed vocabulary teaching**
   Embed the vocabulary teaching into all staff training, including curriculum planning.
3. **Use what's out there**
   Make use of the wealth of training, knowledge and resources available about the word gap.

> *Get clued up on it. The first document I had was the OUP report Why Closing the Word Gap Matters[6]. I sent it out to all my teachers and we discussed it. When I attended my first training, that was the document they cited. At the moment, I'm reading a book about dialogic teaching by Robin Alexander. There are loads of excellent texts out there. Your local authority is likely to have many good resources too.*

Comments from Helen Prince

The focus on talk in this school is key to their success. As Robin Alexander tells us, the essentially interactive nature of talk means "the teacher is critical in perhaps unique and uniquely powerful ways"[7]. By inspiring their whole staff to model eloquent, aspirational talk, through a curriculum that is centred around talk, this school has immersed their children in a vibrant world of words from the very start.

Training teachers in oracy skills that demand cognitively challenging talk, such as dialogic teaching, can improve children's overall thinking and learning skills across all subjects. An EEF (Education Endowment Foundation) dialogic teaching project[8] found positive effects, equivalent to about two months additional progress.

The sadly familiar observation here, that children don't know nursery rhymes and traditional tales, is a potential barrier to all literacy development. Nursery rhymes not only build vocabulary but can also help children articulate for effect, develop auditory skills and build working memory. They are also a great introduction to poetry, familiarising children with poetic device such as alliteration, onomatopoeia and assonance.

References

[1] Language Link: www.speechandlanguage.info

[2] NELI (Nuffield Early Language Intervention): www.teachneli.org/

[3] Power Maths: www.pearsonschoolsandfecolleges.co.uk/primary/subjects/mathematics/power-maths/

[4] Kinetic Letters: www.kineticletters.co.uk/

[5] The Plymouth Oracy Project (derived from Voice 21 and Oracy 21)

[6] Oxford University Press (2018) *Why Closing the Word Gap Matters: Oxford Language Report*

[7] Alexander, R. (2012) 'Improving oracy and classroom talk in English schools: Achievements and challenges', www.robinalexander.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/DfE-oracy-120220-Alexander-FINAL0.pdf

[8] EEF: www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/dialogic-teaching/

Case Study 2

Montreal Church of England Primary School, Cumbria

- About 150 pupils, almost 25% are on the SEND register
- Almost 50% of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium, low level of EAL

Leanne Long, Assistant Head and Year 6 Teacher.

At Montreal Church of England Primary School, Reception teachers are finding that a large number of children are starting school with low speaking and listening skills. This limits their interactions with each other as well as with teachers. Staff believe this low level of skills has been exacerbated by the interruption to nursery schools during Covid-19 lockdowns. They observed that lockdowns impacted younger children more, because the older children were able to access learning via technology more easily.

Action taken

Since September 2020, the school has launched a mission to up-level children's language skills. Leanne Long, Assistant Head and Year 6 Teacher, explains that this has involved a series of strategies.

1 Introducing an oracy curriculum

An oracy curriculum was introduced to reflect the priority of oracy in the school's development plan. The school used a programme[1] for guidance on how to introduce this and how to benchmark its progress. "We started off with staff leading an informal discussion with small groups of children. It didn't need to be linked to a particular part of the curriculum. Mine was about what children liked doing most during a religious festival. Then staff took a step back and observed what the children were doing. *Could they build on each other's ideas? Who could use physical gestures, such as facial expressions?* We identified areas that needed work and shared techniques we could use to support children in developing those skills. We're now developing some CPD about building a sequence of work for oracy development."

2 Knowledge organisers

These have been introduced for many subjects, such as Science, History and Geography. Knowledge organisers include a box featuring the vocabulary and definitions that children will come across in each topic. Children are expected to use these words in their own work too. Subject leaders monitor the use of this vocabulary to check that progress is being made.

3 Extending spelling lessons

In spelling lessons, classes follow an established programme[2], but also spend additional time looking at synonyms and antonyms for words featured in each unit. Children build up their own individual thesaurus, which they use during writing to select the best words for their text. There is also a focus on word building, where children work with prefixes and suffixes to develop a bank of knowledge that they can then apply to work out the meaning of new words which contain the same prefixes or suffixes.

> *One of our teachers does a 'definition dig' where she encourages children to find out the meaning of a word, but then asks them to write it in their own words, to make it more meaningful for them.*

4 Fun activities

Fun activities that develop oracy are used in all subject areas. For example:

- **Summary bullseye** in which children are given a variety of vocabulary at different levels and they score various points if they include that vocabulary in their work.
- **Talk tokens** are designed to encourage all children to participate in discussions, showing every voice is valued and helping teachers monitor who is participating.

- **Concept cartoons** are displayed at the start of new topics, to trigger discussion. They help to prompt talk and children begin to formulate ideas about the topic.

Impact and next steps

Staff have noticed an improvement in children's collaboration because they are better able to communicate with each other and respond to each other's ideas. Children now also have a more substantial bank of language that they can call upon to use in a range of situations.

> *We've spent a lot of time developing children's awareness of vocabulary, so they are starting to think more about their choices of words.*

Next steps:

Montreal Primary School's plan to further develop their strategies for closing the word gap, include:

- **Gathering more data** to track oracy progression and formulating suitable assessments to run alongside the oracy curriculum.
- Producing a series of **short videos for parents**, showing them the work being done on vocabulary and why it's important.
- Setting **homework that encourages discussion** with parents or other family members. This might include questions that start "Would you rather… or…?", "Which… would you choose and why?".

Top Tips

Top tips for schools with similar needs and challenges to Montreal Church of England Primary School include:

1. **Widen oracy experiences**
   Look carefully at the oracy experiences currently open to children at your school and plan how to widen those experiences.
2. **Design the scaffolding**
   Think about the scaffolds you can put in place to help children develop the skills and vocabulary that you want to see them using.
3. **Get pupils on board**
   Encourage children to engage with the development of their oracy skills. Explain why speaking and listening skills are important. Help them to understand the benefits of mastering these skills.

Comments from Helen Prince

For many children, contributing in a meaningful way to discussion is a brave step. Rewarding contributions, as Montreal Primary do here with talk tokens, can enhance a child's confidence to be heard, building their resilience, and encouraging a deeper engagement. The benefits of educationally productive talk are far-reaching. Robin Alexander suggests such talk will help children to articulate, explain, describe, imagine, speculate and hypothesize; to question, discuss, deliberate, reason and argue; to justify, defend, probe and challenge[3]. Rewarding the steps in this journey to productive talk is key.

Use of image can be a powerful catalyst for talk. The idea of 'concept cartoons' to introduce new topics is a vibrant and engaging way into productive, topic-specific talk, allowing children a safe space to consider their ideas and opinions. Elements of dialogic talk – strategies that enable pupils to reason, discuss, argue and explain rather than merely respond – pair well with the use of image to trigger aspirational, high-quality talk.

Linking strategies to boost vocabulary with the teaching of spelling is an obvious (but often missed) win. The individualised thesaurus work described allows pupils the motivational power to choose their own words, making spelling lists relevant and connected.

The 'goldmine of an opportunity' that a focus on etymology and morphology can provide, adds further depth to this school's approach to spelling lessons. Equipping their pupils with word building knowledge – working out key meanings behind prefixes and suffixes – ensures these pupils are ahead of the game when working out the meaning of new words.

References

[1] Voice 21: www.voice21.org/

[2] Read Write Inc. Phonics and Spelling

[3] Alexander, R. (2019) 'Submission to the APPG on oracy', www.robinalexander.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/APPG-Oracy-submissionB.pdf

Case Study 3

St Michael's Academy, Yeovil

- Junior school, Years 3 to 6
- 46% of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium, high level of EAL

Jess Clements, Reading and Oracy Lead and Year 6 Teacher.

At St Michael's Academy, between 35 and 40 per cent of children have a limited vocabulary that impacts on their learning in some way. This impact ranges from needing direct intervention programmes to help with their reading, to having low confidence when talking about their work. Jess Clements, Reading and Oracy Lead, has noticed that many of these children struggle to even talk about a book they have just read: "they just don't seem to have the kind of vocabulary or knowledge to express their feelings around it and explain it. They'll just give you a two-word answer – 'it's good' rather than developing a more detailed answer".

Many children at St Michael's Academy don't have books at home, and never see their parents reading, so reading for pleasure is something that the school tries to introduce and nurture. Some children have limited cultural experiences, which inevitably restricts what they can talk about and write about. Four years ago, the school recognised that children's attainment in writing and their word skills in general, were falling well below skills in other subjects, such as maths. Consequently, there has been greater focus on reading, writing, and vocabulary in particular, in recent years.

> *A Year 5 class was reading a story that had a beach setting. One boy had never been to a beach, even though it's not far away. It really limited what he could write about. It's devastating really.*

> *During home learning, a lot of children didn't read. Some didn't have access to books and many do not see their parents reading, so reading for pleasure is not something a lot of our children automatically do at home. That's why we've been trying to push it in school.*

Action taken

St Michael's Academy has adopted a range of strategies to meet the challenges of the word gap.

1 Timetabled reading for pleasure

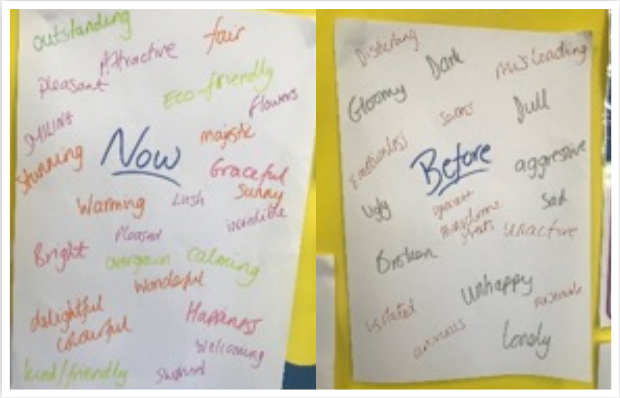
Adding an extra half-hour to the school timetable for reading for pleasure, which also includes time for children to talk about books.

2 Professional training

Providing more opportunities for professional training and development for staff, particularly during lockdown. Knowledge gained was shared through online meetings and real staff meetings once they were permitted again.

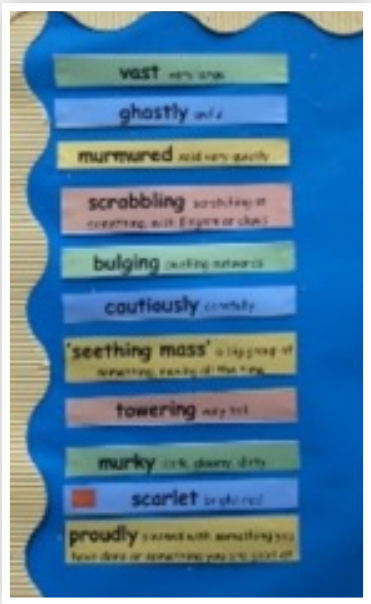
3 All lessons include discussion

All lessons, across the curriculum, now include discussion – talking with a partner, in groups, as well as whole-class discussion led by the teacher. Discussion prefaces most tasks and writing. All teachers try to use sentence stems to help children structure their responses and to answer in a full, detailed way.



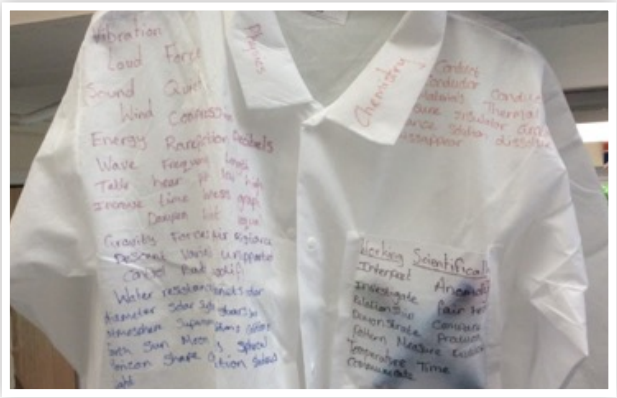
4 Vocabulary walls

These feature in each classroom with staff trained to make the most of them: consistently referring to the words and giving children activities to explore these words, then regularly revisiting the words to ensure they become really embedded.



5 Tangible learning

In science, there is a **lab coat** with scientific vocabulary written on it. The best 'scientist' in the class gets to wear the lab coat and words are added to it in every lesson.



6 Acting out vocabulary

In drama, children are encouraged to **act out or mime words**, where possible, and to think of **vocabulary that relates to specific characters**, including words that those characters are likely to use and words that are appropriate to describe them.

7 Visual prompts

In reading lessons, unfamiliar vocabulary is pre-taught, often with the use of **pictures**, for example historical terms such as an Anderson shelter, or a mackintosh are explained with photographs. In spelling lessons, teachers use **family word webs**. Some children find it much easier to learn new words when linked to visual prompts.

Impact and next steps

Jess believes that the focus on vocabulary and oracy has had a positive effect in the classroom. In particular, the replacement of guided reading with whole-class reading of a shared text seems to have engaged all pupils, despite mixed ability levels.

> *Class discussion and discussion with their peers about the same topic/subject has made children more confident about talking.*

> *You can see the impact of the work we've been doing in the children's articulation, in simple things like giving fuller answers and using correct grammar in their responses.*

> *The children have more confidence using subject specific vocabulary and we have noticed children making connections and making use of these words in other lessons.*

Next steps

With the lack of SATs for the last few years, the school hasn't been able to formally assess the impact of the new vocabulary/oracy/reading strategies, but the school has a variety of plans to build on these initiatives in the year ahead:

- Jess wants to create more opportunities for children to do **presentations and public speaking**, perhaps inviting parents in as an audience for school assemblies or short performances.

- She intends to focus on how teachers can best **assess pupils' writing**, including their use of vocabulary.
- The school is also working on ways to encourage more **parents to get involved** with their children's education generally, such as coming into school more often, and giving them advice on how to support their children's vocabulary development.

Top Tips

Jess has three top tips to give to schools who find themselves in a similar position to where St Michael's Academy was, three years ago:

1. **Whole-school approach**
   Agreeing a whole-school approach to vocabulary is essential, so that everyone is on board and working with the same aims.
2. **Be confident in including discussion**
   Have the freedom and confidence to include a lot of discussion in lessons, rather than chasing written outcomes.
3. **Keep evaluating**
   Be prepared for continual evaluation with staff about what works well and how to really embed vocabulary in the children's minds.

Comments from Helen Prince

Vibrant vocabulary on the walls can really help pupils remember key words. Beck, Kucan and McKeown's[1] and more recently Dr Jessie Rickett's research[2] both highlight the importance of the visual representation of the word. Dr Rickett's research found that capturing vocabulary in a visually engaging way helps children learn how it sounds and effectively secures new vocabulary in pupils' minds. Donning a lab coat filled with scientific vocabulary can only make this process more effective and more memorable!

The focus here on drama provides a perfect platform for living through key events of a narrative to encourage vocabulary. In his research Gudmundur B. Kristmundsson recommended using roleplay to increase children's vocabulary[3]. He found that "when teachers use stories to teach vocabulary, it is even more effective to put the children in the role of characters in those stories". By placing pupils in role, teachers at St Michael's can trigger and capture vocabulary in both a planned and visceral way, unpicking aspects of character, setting and mood.

References

[1] Beck, I.L., McKeown, M.G. and Kucan, L. (2003) *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*, Gilford Press

[2] Oxford University Press (2020) *Bridging the Word Gap at Transition: The Oxford Language Report*

[3] Kristmundsson, G.B. (2000), as referenced in Thorkelsdóttir, R.B. and Ragnarsdóttir, A.H. (2013) 'Can drama, through Icelandic tales, increase children´s vocabulary?', https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED557063.pdf

Case Study 4

Heath Primary School, Chesterfield

- Ex-mining area with low level of EAL
- 43% of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium

Mirela Brough, English Lead in school and Year 4 Teacher.

Heath Primary School has a high proportion of children with limited vocabulary, possibly up to 50 per cent. Staff have noticed a wide disparity of vocabulary skills among children who start at the school, with many struggling to communicate their most basic needs.

Mirela Brough, English Lead and Year 4 teacher, believes the lack of vocabulary affects the children's confidence: "It makes them reluctant to contribute to the class. The gap between children who are confident and engage with lessons, and those that don't, widens as the children move up through the school".

Poor results about three years ago led to a big re-think and a school improvement plan. Reports about the word gap from Oxford University Press and other experts, and feedback from secondary teachers saying that pupils in Year 7 lacked vocabulary to access the secondary curriculum, all drove big changes in the school including a focus on reading as a key strategy for improving vocabulary.

> *There are children in Reception and Year 1 who lack so much language that they can't ask for basic requirements, like going to the toilet. They are not refusing to speak, but they don't say anything because they just don't have the vocabulary.*

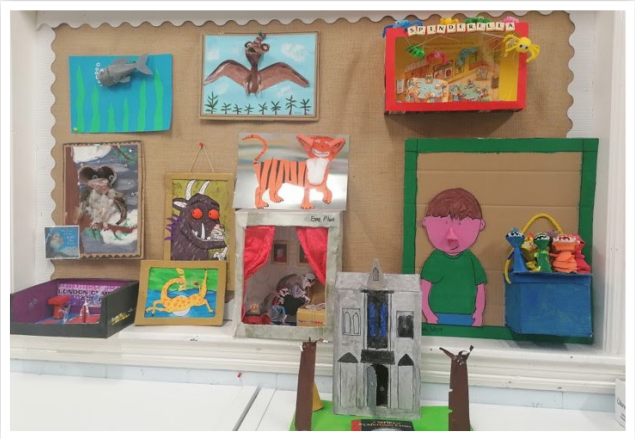
> *The research that I shared with my colleagues was a real eye-opener. We found the link between the word gap and unemployment upsetting. Although our children leave us when they are 11, we felt a sense of urgency: we need to do something about this and do it now!*

Action taken

Health Primary School has adopted a range of measures to try to close the word gap.

1 Explicit teaching of vocabulary in daily reading sessions

Each week, across the school, every class reads a carefully selected, high-quality text that is new to the pupils. The teacher models reading the text and unfamiliar vocabulary is presented in PowerPoint® and discussed. Children complete activities designed to reinforce their understanding of the new words, for example finding synonyms and antonyms of the newly acquired vocabulary, as well as using these words in a different context to ensure their meaning is embedded. Then the text is used throughout the week for information retrieval, exploring inference and authorial intent, all of which link back to vocabulary. "We notice how our pupils are becoming more confident when tackling unknown phrases and words."



Children represent their favourite books as artwork.

> *It really shocked me because I go through the vocabulary in the daily text and select the words that I think the children will find challenging, but then they ask me about other words I didn't anticipate and what they mean. I'm thinking, 'how can you not know this word?' It's very upsetting.*

2 Ensuring vocabulary is taught in all subjects

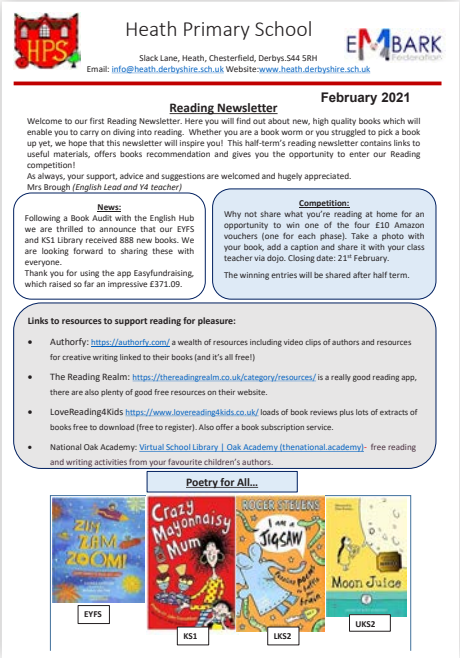
Every day, before teaching the main lesson, the vocabulary is taught or revised, then revisited and used in the lesson in discussion, reading and writing.

3 Using the mastery approach

To ensure that no child is left behind, no child misses the main classes, even if they are given additional intervention sessions. This ensures children are still getting exposure to high quality information and talk. Children often work in mixed ability pairs to support each other.

4 Engaging parents

"A major focus has been engaging our parents and carers so they can support our pupils' reading and language development. Building these relationships is crucial; immersing our parents into our school environment which promotes and fosters a love for books has contributed to changing both adult and children's attitude to reading. By exposing our reading community to a variety of genres, we are equipping our children with new vocabulary and narrowing that gap."



Heath Primary School

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February 2021

Reading Newsletter

Welcome to our first Reading Newsletter. Here you will find out about new, high quality books which will enable you to carry on diving into reading. Whether you are a book worm or you struggled to pick a book up yet, we hope that this newsletter will inspire you! This half-term's reading newsletter contains links to useful materials, offers books recommendation and gives you the opportunity to enter our Reading competition!
As always, your support, advice and suggestions are welcomed and hugely appreciated.
Mrs Brough *(English Lead and Y4 teacher)*

News:
Following a Book Audit with the English Hub we are thrilled to announce that our EYFS and KS1 Library received 888 new books. We are looking forward to sharing these with everyone.
Thank you for using the app Easyfundraising, which raised so far an impressive £371.09.

Competition:
Why not share what you're reading at home for an opportunity to win one of the four £10 Amazon vouchers (one for each phase). Take a photo with your book, add a caption and share it with your class teacher via dojo. Closing date: 21st February.
The winning entries will be shared after half term.

Links to resources to support reading for pleasure:

- Authorfy: https://authorfy.com/ a wealth of resources including video clips of authors and resources for creative writing linked to their books (and it's all free!)
- The Reading Realm: https://thereadingrealm.co.uk/category/resources/ is a really good reading app, there are also plenty of good free resources on their website.
- LoveReading4Kids https://www.lovereading4kids.co.uk/ loads of book reviews plus lots of extracts of books free to download (free to register). Also offer a book subscription service.
- National Oak Academy: Virtual School Library | Oak Academy (thenational.academy)- free reading and writing activities from your favourite children's authors.

Poetry for All...

EYFS: Zim Zam Zoom!
KS1: Crazy Mayonnaisy Mum
LKS2: I am a Jigsaw
UKS2: Moon Juice

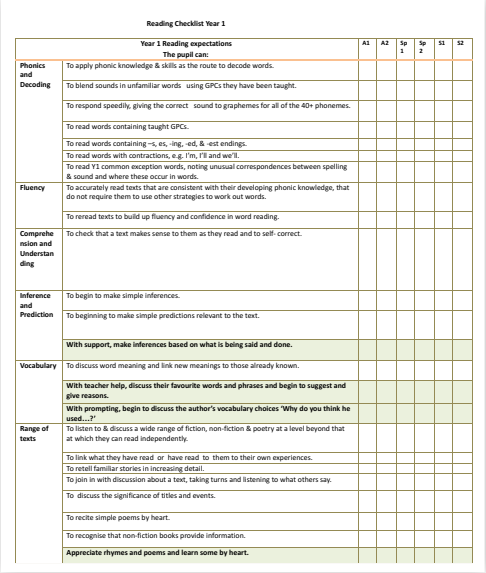
A **newsletter** has competitions where children are invited to share and discuss what they are reading at home, to win books or vouchers. Staff will also talk about their favourite books.

A **Reading Bistro** was held after school in the school's hall and classroom, selling pizza and hot dogs. Each table had a plethora of books to look at, with activities for younger children.

On **World Book Day**, every child had a free book, thanks to the office staff ringing round local companies asking for donations. Even Chesterfield Football Club gave football books for boys and girls!

5 Assessment sheets in reading books

Assessment sheets have been placed at the front of all reading books from Reception to Year 6. Based on requirements of the National Curriculum, they are a checklist of skills for teachers to assess, for example phonics and decoding, fluency, comprehension, inference, prediction, and vocabulary.



Reading Checklist Year 1

Year 1 Reading expectations The pupil can:		A1	A2	Sp 1	Sp 2	S1	S2
Phonics and Decoding	To apply phonic knowledge & skills as the route to decode words.						
	To blend sounds in unfamiliar words using GPCs they have been taught.						
	To respond speedily, giving the correct sound to graphemes for all of the 40+ phonemes.						
	To read words containing taught GPCs.						
	To read words containing –s, es, -ing, -ed, & -est endings.						
	To read words with contractions, e.g. I'm, I'll and we'll.						
	To read Y1 common exception words, noting unusual correspondences between spelling & sound and where these occur in words.						
Fluency	To accurately read texts that are consistent with their developing phonic knowledge, that do not require them to use other strategies to work out words.						
	To reread texts to build up fluency and confidence in word reading.						
Comprehension and Understanding	To check that a text makes sense to them as they read and to self- correct.						
Inference and Prediction	To begin to make simple inferences.						
	To beginning to make simple predictions relevant to the text.						
	With support, make inferences based on what is being said and done.						
Vocabulary	To discuss word meaning and link new meanings to those already known.						
	With teacher help, discuss their favourite words and phrases and begin to suggest and give reasons.						
	With prompting, begin to discuss the author's vocabulary choices 'Why do you think he used...?'						
Range of texts	To listen to & discuss a wide range of fiction, non-fiction & poetry at a level beyond that at which they can read independently.						
	To link what they have read or have read to them to their own experiences.						
	To retell familiar stories in increasing detail.						
	To join in with discussion about a text, taking turns and listening to what others say.						
	To discuss the significance of titles and events.						
	To recite simple poems by heart.						
	To recognise that non-fiction books provide information.						
	Appreciate rhymes and poems and learn some by heart.						

6 Promoting reading for pleasure

Harnessing staff enthusiasm for books and encouraging opportunities to chat about books, shows children the importance of reading for pleasure, because we know that reading widely is the best way to develop children's vocabulary. Children are also encouraged to share and recommend their favourite reads, whatever the format, including comics, graphic novels, magazines and news articles.

Impact and next steps

With the cancellation of SATs over the past couple of years, teachers have created their own assessment sheets to test pupils' vocabulary. They have identified a significant uplift in performance. "Not only are children better able to communicate their own ideas, but we have also noticed across the curriculum that pupils' writing has improved considerably, being able to independently include Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary in their written tasks."

Staff enjoy the enthusiasm that children are showing for vocabulary and reading.

> *A Year 1 teacher came up to me the other day, saying how pleased she was that children were using words correctly in different contexts, such as the word 'perched'. The children all knew what perched meant because they had to do actions for new vocabulary when they learned it.*

> *I give children free time on a Friday afternoon, where they can choose what to do. There are lots of options, including iPads and computers, but they choose to read. I love that!*

Next steps

The impact of efforts to close the word gap has been significant, but there are more plans afoot:

- Recruiting children as **reading ambassadors**, who have a passion for books and promote them to other children.
- Forming a **Book Club for children**, with them helping to run it and select books for the group to read.
- **Researching more about reading strategies** in the classroom and sharing that with colleagues, so that all practitioners continue to improve.

Top Tips

Mirela's top tips for closing the word gap include:

1. **Read, read, read**
   By reading to our pupils, we improve their understanding, language and general knowledge. Expose your pupils to a variety of genres that have been carefully selected by children and/or adults. At the end of the day, make time for that book!
2. **Keep up with the latest research**
   There are wonderful resources out there which enable professionals to connect, share practices and research and recommend tried and tested strategies aimed at narrowing the word gap. Be truthful when evaluating your own practice, set manageable goals and don't be afraid to try something new.
3. **Engage parents**
   It has a huge impact, particularly for schools that are in less affluent areas. Seeing teachers as readers is wonderful but not always sufficient to motivate our pupils to become lifelong readers. It is incredibly valuable in developing a love for books, for pupils to see their families and friends fostering a love for reading too.

Comments from Helen Prince

Harnessing the hook of a narrative is a powerful way to contextualise and embed vocabulary. Modelling the reading of a high-quality text each week allows this school to explore language and raise word consciousness through pupils' innate curiosity in story.

The drive to foster a love of story really stands out here. By encouraging children to share and recommend their favourite reads, teachers here place real value on all forms of story. From comics and graphic novels to song lyrics or local news, stories chosen by pupils themselves are to be cherished; celebrating all forms of reading lights the way for young readers to journey into other lands of reading. Stories help us contextualise and can be used as the catalyst for imagination – perfect for the child who says, "I can't think of anything!".

The use of graphic organisers can add depth to group talk tasks, helping pupils develop a full semantic representation of a word and all its nuances.

Using actions or dramatic representation of vocabulary – such as for the word 'perched' – provides huge potential to embed new vocabulary, strengthening memory and helping pupils internalise meaning.

Case Study 5

Tor Bridge Primary School, Plymouth

- Part of Inspire Multi-Academy Trust
- 34% of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium

Olivia Bartlett, Senior Assistant Head and Year 6 Teacher.

After the original school was put into Special Measures by Ofsted in 2018, a new team of staff was recruited to revitalise the school, including Olivia Bartlett, now Senior Assistant Head and Year 6 teacher at Tor Bridge Primary School. Olivia details the strategies used to improve vocabulary including a real emphasis on talk, reading for pleasure, and motivation to engage with books.

Olivia believes that overall, around one third of children at the school have a word gap that is affecting them in a negative way, both socially and academically.

Action taken

Tor Bridge Primary School now prides itself as having reading at the heart of the curriculum across all subject areas. However, Olivia points out that talk, oracy, and the development of– and multiple exposures to– vocabulary, underpin the planning and delivery of all areas of that curriculum. She explains the 'journey' that the school has been on, with guidance from a local project[1], and the new strategies that are in place to help close the word gap.

1 Oracy assemblies

Every Monday starts with a thought-provoking question that might be linked to a news event or an annual celebration. Then every morning that week there are linked questions on classroom boards that children explore with classmates and teachers through the week, culminating with a Friday assembly where children debate the question, drawing on the discussions they've had during the week.

The school's Playworker team (lunchtime staff) encourage children to partake in discussions linked to the Question of the Week during lunchtimes. "If children are given ample opportunity to use new vocabulary and oracy sentence stems, it is far more likely that they will then use these newly learnt words or phrases within their writing, in multiple contexts, and in their day-to-day conversations with peers and adults. This also emphasises the 'whole-school approach' to improving our pupils' vocabulary and language skills. It is not something simply left to class teachers."

2 Oracy teaching

This is used in all subjects, not just English. Olivia explains what oracy teaching looks like in a class.

The aim is to encourage plenty of **back and forth conversation** between the teacher and the children throughout the lesson.

TOR BRIDGE PRIMARY

60B Talk Agreement

	We agree to always use eye contact when talking to others.
YOU ARE INVITED	We will invite all members of our group into the conversation.
	We agree to question, challenge, and build on each other's ideas.
	We agree to always respect and value everyone's contributions.
	We never interrupt, instead we think about what we hear.
	We place our hand on our shoulder if we wish to share.
	We stand to speak because we are proud of our contribution.

The Talk Agreement which guides pupil participation at Tor Bridge.

The same **specific hand gestures** are used across the school. These originate from the Read Write Inc programme but can be used in all subjects to indicate instructions such as when to talk to a partner, when to stop. Teachers try to use their voice as little as possible.

Voice meters are recognised across the school, and children can control the volume of activities with that. For example, there is 'silence is golden', 'whisper work', 'low flow', 'playground voices'. Children might be given the option: *"What kind of voice do you think we need for this task?"* They might say, *"I really need to concentrate on this, so I want silence"*, or *"I want to talk to my partner, but I don't want others to hear, so I want whisper work"*. So, the ownership is with the children.

Children **stand up to speak**. They are encouraged to be proud of their voice and what they want to say.

There is lots of questioning and discussion in the classroom. Sometimes, children talk to their partner about their answer first, then one of the partners is asked to feed back. Children understand that everyone is expected to participate and be active. By discouraging hands-up, children become less distracted, and the teacher is not drawn only to the children with their hands up. The conversations and discussions become far more about enhancing learning as opposed to just taking feedback from the same individuals. This supports and encourages listening skills, too.

We use the Alex Quigley **ABC technique**, whereby children invite each other to Agree with, Build on or Challenge each other's contributions. This trains them to talk constructively, listening and contributing in a relevant way.

The teacher's role is to be a facilitator. The teacher may repeat something back to a child to clarify it, to tighten it or maybe to drop in a word that they'd missed or just to summarize something. So, if say Maisie's given her point, I might say, *"So just to clarify Maisie, what you're saying is you believe that…"*.

3 Whole-class reading every day

This is separate from English/Phonics/Grammar lessons. The reading lesson is 30 minutes in Key Stage 1 and 45 minutes in Key Stage 2.

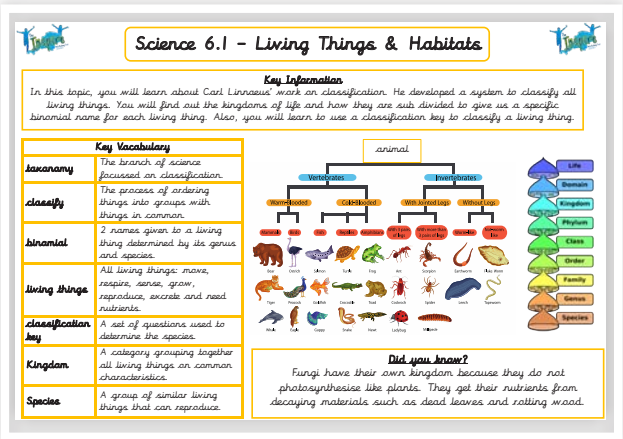
As well as being gripping reads, texts are chosen to link with other learning, for example Year 4 are reading *Secrets of a Sun King* by Emma Carroll, which links to their understanding of Ancient Egyptian civilization; Year 5 are reading *The Jamie Drake Equation* by Christopher Edge, which expands their understanding of space; Year 6 are reading *Letters from the Lighthouse* by Emma Carroll and *Once* by Morris Gleitzman, linking to the Second World War.

The books are read *after* children have covered the topic elsewhere in the curriculum, so much of the subject-specific vocabulary and understanding of context is already there. This means that the teacher can focus on the story and on exploring new, primarily Tier 2, vocabulary during the reading sessions.

Teachers and assistants pre-read the book, using sticky notes to flag words worth exploring further or an unusual turn of phrase.

Important words are given multiple exposure. For example, the word 'congealed' is used in *Skellig* by David Almond, which is read in Year 6, but children also learn about the word in science.

> *Texts are chosen based on the rich vocabulary opportunities they offer, and wider curriculum links. This supports the children's understanding of vocabulary, helping them become immersed in the language and exposing them to new words in multiple different contexts. For example, in Year 3 during History, the children develop knowledge of The Stone Age; they are exposed to new vocabulary both Tier 2 and 3 words which are shared with them via their Knowledge Organisers and through vocabulary activities during every lesson. To develop this further, when the children move into Year 4, their first novel study is* The Wild Way Home *written by Sophie Kirtley. This book is a wonderful story about courage and love but also plunges the children back into their studies of the Stone Age from Year 3. They are therefore exposed once again to key terminology that they explored the previous year during their History lessons through their reading. These strategic choices have been made throughout the school as in order for children to become confident in their use of new words, they absolutely must be exposed to them often and in a variety of contexts. It is not simply enough to have a 'word of the day' or 'word of the week'. There is a clear ethos within the school that the teaching of vocabulary should not just be left to reading or English lessons. It must be part of what we do every day, in every lesson.*


Science 6.1 – Living Things & Habitats

Key Information

In this topic, you will learn about Carl Linnaeus' work on classification. He developed a system to classify all living things. You will find out the kingdoms of life and how they are sub divided to give us a specific binomial name for each living thing. Also, you will learn to use a classification key to classify a living thing.

Key Vocabulary	
taxanomy	The branch of science focussed on classification.
classify	The process of ordering things into groups with things in common.
binomial	2 names given to a living thing determined by its genus and species.
living things	All living things: move, respire, sense, grow, reproduce, excrete and need nutrients.
classification key	A set of questions used to determine the species.
Kingdom	A category grouping together all living things on common characteristics.
Species	A group of similar living things that can reproduce.

Did you know?

Fungi have their own kingdom because they do not photosynthesise like plants. They get their nutrients from decaying materials such as dead leaves and rotting wood.

A summary sheet for Living Things and Habitats.

The whole-class reading lessons are planned and taught in the same way from Year 1 to Year 6, so there is a consistent approach throughout the school.

Every child has their own copy of the book but teachers always read the book to the class first, so they can model expression and can pause to discuss vocabulary or imagery. Children sometimes read aloud too, but only after the teacher has modelled reading first.

Teachers also model reading and vocabulary building strategies by speaking their thoughts aloud. For example, they might say, *"I wonder what that means. I'm not sure of that word. Let me read that sentence again"*. This shows children how to ensure they are understanding what they read and, if not, how to work it out.

> *The children love it [whole-class reading] and it's actually had a huge impact on behaviour here. Some of our harder to reach children, who maybe struggled with behaviour in the past, have snuck into the classroom at lunchtime, taken the book from the trolley, just to find out what happens next. So, it just shows that reading can transform far more than just a child's academic ability.*

> *Our motto here is that every child leaves us as a reader, so they can open whatever door they want to. If they haven't got that level of reading or vocabulary, it limits their choices.*

4 A book vending machine

This supports children's reading for pleasure. Children earn 'raffle tickets' as a reward for effort, commitment and achievement in their reading. Every half-term, there is a 'raffle draw' in a special assembly and the winning ticket holders can select a book from the vending machine by punching in a code. They then keep the book they choose. Children are also involved in the selection of books for the vending machine.

5 A staff library

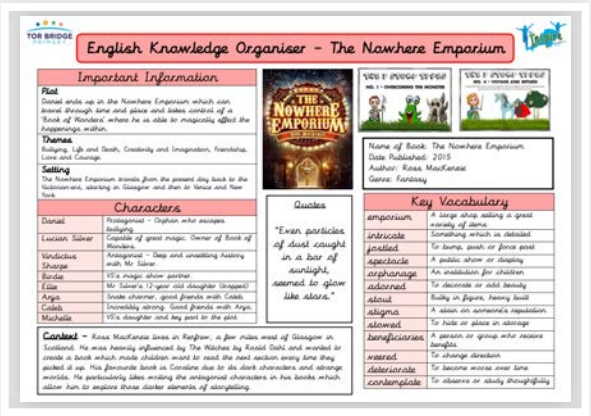
Teachers take books whenever they like but they have to leave a short review for other staff when they return them. The books are constantly updated, including new research. For example, at the moment the library features *Bringing Words to Life* by Isabel L. Beck, Margaret G. McKeown and Linda Kucan, and *Closing the Vocabulary Gap* by Alex Quigley.

6 Engaging parents and carers

This is achieved by encouraging children to take questions home to discuss, and running phonics workshops to explain how children are being taught to read. Parents are encouraged to talk to the children about what they read, and to enjoy the books, rather than just correct their children's reading. The Early Years Leader puts in a lot of work with new families that join the school in September, showing them how rich discussion at home can help their children with vocabulary and language.

7 Oracy modelling

Oracy modelling underpins all the communication with children. Even in a corridor conversation with a child, staff try to model what a good conversation looks like. They are also aware that children witness talk between teachers, so that's another opportunity to model good conversation and vocabulary. "It's dripped into just what we do every day."



English Knowledge Organiser – The Nowhere Emporium

Important Information

Plot
Daniel ends up in the Nowhere Emporium which can travel through time and place and takes control of a 'Book of Wonders' where he is able to magically affect the happenings within.

Themes
Bullying, Life and Death, Creativity and Imagination, friendship, Love and Courage.

Setting
The Nowhere Emporium travels from the present day back to the Victorian era, starting in Glasgow and then to Venice and New York.

Characters

Daniel	Protagonist – Orphan who escapes bullying.
Lucian Silver	Capable of great magic. Owner of Book of Wonders.
Vindictus Sharpe	Antagonist – Deep and unsettling history with Mr Silver.
Birdie	V's magic show partner
Ellie	Mr Silver's 12-year old daughter (Grogpel)
Anya	Snake charmer, good friends with Caleb.
Caleb	Incredibly strong. Good friends with Anya.
Michelle	V's daughter and key part to the plot.

Context – Rose MacKenzie lives in Renfrew, a few miles west of Glasgow in Scotland. He was heavily influenced by The Witches by Roald Dahl and wanted to create a book which made children want to read the next section every time they picked it up. His favourite book is Coraline due to its dark characters and strange worlds. He particularly likes writing the antagonist characters in his books which allow him to explore those darker elements of storytelling.

Quotes

"Even particles of dust caught in a bar of sunlight, seemed to glow like stars."

Name of Book: The Nowhere Emporium
Date Published: 2015
Author: Rose MacKenzie
Genre: Fantasy

Key Vocabulary

emporium	A large shop selling a great variety of items.
intricate	Something which is detailed
jostled	To bump, push or force past
spectacle	A public show or display
orphanage	An institution for children
adorned	To decorate or add beauty
stout	Bulky in figure, having bulk
stigma	A stain on someone's reputation
stowed	To hide or place in storage
beneficiaries	A person or group who receive benefits
veered	To change direction
deteriorate	To become worse over time
contemplate	To observe or study thoughtfully

Extract from Home Learning Booklet sharing information and vocabulary expectations with parents and carers.

Impact

Although SATs haven't been possible the last few years due to Covid-19, teachers at Tor Bridge have witnessed a huge increase in oracy confidence in their children, both in their conversations with teachers and with each other. They believe there has been a dramatic improvement in children's reading too. Year 7 teachers are impressed with the level of reading and writing of Tor Bridge children when they go into secondary school.

Feedback from parents is excellent. They know what's being covered at school because their children have been talking about it at home.

Staff receive regular CPD on how we can support children with any vocabulary or language barriers. It is a fixed agenda item on our regular weekly team meetings whereby staff get the opportunity to share good practice and ideas with each other.

We're a really boy-heavy school so you'd think that we'd have to do a lot more work in engaging reluctant boys in their reading and writing, but they love it because they are confident in it. That's the difference – if you are confident in something you want to do well in it and you enjoy it more.

Top Tips

Olivia offers three top tips for schools wanting to close the word gap:

1. **Whole-class reading strategy**
   If you don't do it already, look into adopting a whole-class reading strategy for your school and carefully plan in opportunities to develop children's vocabulary as part of these sessions.
2. **Have high expectations of all pupils**
   Even if children struggle with reading words themselves, they should still be exposed to a high level of vocabulary orally. Have really high expectations of all children in their vocabulary. Children can score really highly in comprehension of class reads, even if they struggle with reading individually.
3. **Make talk a priority**
   Make talk a priority across your entire curriculum, and also in what you do, day to day.

Comments from Helen Prince

From the moment a child steps into school, it is important to value their voice and encourage them to value the voices of others. Ensuring children have a voice promotes self-esteem and the sense that they are important; feeling valued plays a vital part in a child's well-being, creating the climate where they are ready to learn. As a marker of the value placed on voice, this school's 'voice meters' implicitly recognise the importance of a responsible, empathetic voice that values others. The light and shade of 'silence is golden', 'whisper work', 'low flow', 'playground voices' – particularly when chosen by the pupils – suggests a respectful, responsible and productive use of voice, both metaphorically and literally.

The use of an oracy assembly[2] every week is an authentic way to support the development of oracy and promote vocabulary. As a forum for enquiry, curiosity, and questioning, an assembly is well placed to trigger talk, as is the case here, where a thought-provoking question helps pupils explore their thinking, listen to others and respond with growing confidence.

References

[1] The Plymouth Oracy Project (derived from Voice 21 and Oracy 21)

[2] The School 21 website has useful ideas for oracy assemblies: www.school21.org.uk/voice21

Case Study 6

Bolder Academy, London

- New secondary school opened in 2018, currently in Years 7 to 10, but growing with each yearly intake. Potential capacity for 1,250 students
- 34% of students eligible for Pupil Premium, 45% EAL

Eve Richardson, Lead Practitioner for Literacy across the curriculum.

When the school first opened in 2018, closing the word gap was identified as a high priority, particularly as the school has a high proportion of EAL and Pupil Premium children. The school uses reading tests[1] at the start and end of every school year, plus some termly tests, to gather data about the students' reading levels. The data shows that over 20 per cent of students have very low levels of literacy and are put into additional literacy interventions to support this. Within that percentage, there are different layers of need, ranging from students who have missed a significant amount of primary education and therefore need help with basic phonics[2], to students who are a year or so below the expected reading level for their age.

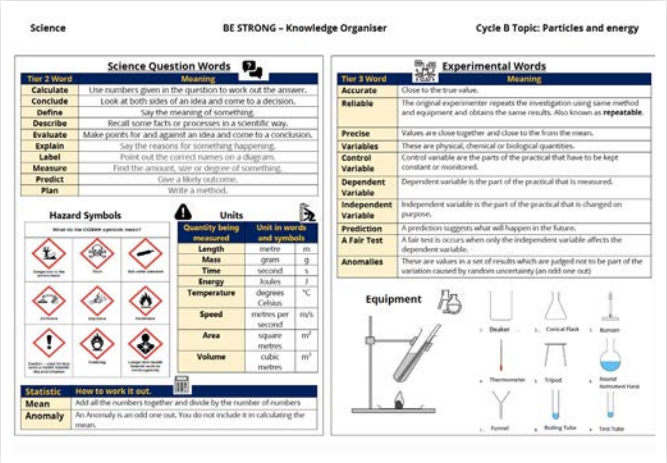
Eve Richardson, Lead Practitioner for Literacy, recognises how a limited vocabulary impacts on the students: "It massively affects their confidence. If they don't have confidence in the classroom, they won't speak, they won't engage, they won't be involved in activities and that creates a whole spiral of issues". Eve hopes that with robust literacy intervention, by the time students reach GCSEs, they will be sufficiently confident to perform well in their exams and beyond.

Action taken

Bolder Academy has put in place a series of whole-school strategies for closing the word gap. Eve explains why the school chose to focus on vocabulary from the start: "In a new school, you can't focus on everything at once. We know that vocabulary is at the heart of every subject, so by starting with vocabulary, it means that every department is on board. Every department is part of vocabulary learning and literacy in this school".

1 Knowledge organizers

These are used in all departments, in all year groups, for every cycle or term of teaching. The knowledge organizers always include Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary lists. All staff are trained in using them, and the organizers go home with students, so parents can also see what they are working on, and how expanding students' vocabulary is a priority.



Science — BE STRONG – Knowledge Organiser — Cycle B Topic: Particles and energy

Science Question Words

Tier 2 Word	Meaning
Calculate	Use numbers given in the question to work out the answer.
Conclude	Look at both sides of an idea and come to a decision.
Define	Say the meaning of something.
Describe	Recall some facts or processes in a scientific way.
Evaluate	Make points for and against an idea and come to a conclusion.
Explain	Say the reasons for something happening.
Label	Point out the correct names on a diagram.
Measure	Find the amount, size or degree of something.
Predict	Give a likely outcome.
Plan	Write a method.

Hazard Symbols

What do the CLEAPSS symbols mean?

Units

Quantity being measured	Unit in words and symbols	
Length	metre	m
Mass	gram	g
Time	second	s
Energy	Joules	J
Temperature	degrees Celsius	°C
Speed	metres per second	m/s
Area	square metres	m^2
Volume	cubic metres	m^3

Statistic	How to work it out.
Mean	Add all the numbers together and divide by the number of numbers
Anomaly	An Anomaly is an odd one out. You do not include it in calculating the mean.

Experimental Words

Tier 3 Word	Meaning
Accurate	Close to the true value.
Reliable	The original experimenter repeats the investigation using same method and equipment and obtains the same results. Also known as **repeatable**.
Precise	Values are close together and close to the from the mean.
Variables	These are physical, chemical or biological quantities.
Control Variable	Control variable are the parts of the practical that have to be kept constant or monitored.
Dependent Variable	Dependent variable is the part of the practical that is measured.
Independent Variable	Independent variable is the part of the practical that is changed on purpose.
Prediction	A prediction suggests what will happen in the future.
A Fair Test	A fair test is occurs when only the independent variable affects the dependent variable.
Anomalies	These are values in a set of results which are judged not to be part of the variation caused by random uncertainty (an odd one out)

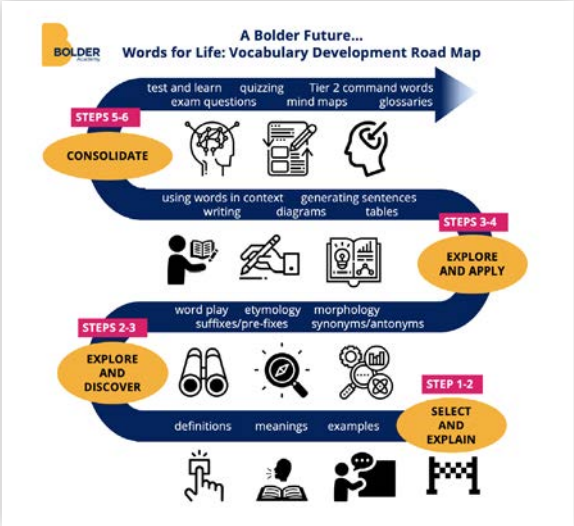
Equipment

2 Vocabulary acquisition strategies

A set of strategies for vocabulary acquisition has been developed, based on various research models[3]. A road map breaks down the process of vocabulary acquisition, using a variety of strategies to teach vocabulary to ensure new words are properly understood and embedded. All subject teachers are encouraged to use a mix of strategies. The road map covers different stages:

- **Select and explain**. Identifying words that students need to access for all areas of the curriculum, giving definitions, finding examples.
- **Explore and discover**. Looking at suffixes and prefixes, word play, word webs, etymology, morphology, synonyms and antonyms.

- **Explore and apply**. Reading and writing the words in context, generating sentences or paragraphs using the words, completing tables that describe the words, or using them in diagrams.
- **Consolidate**. Looking at words in exam questions, quizzes and tests.



3 Staff training

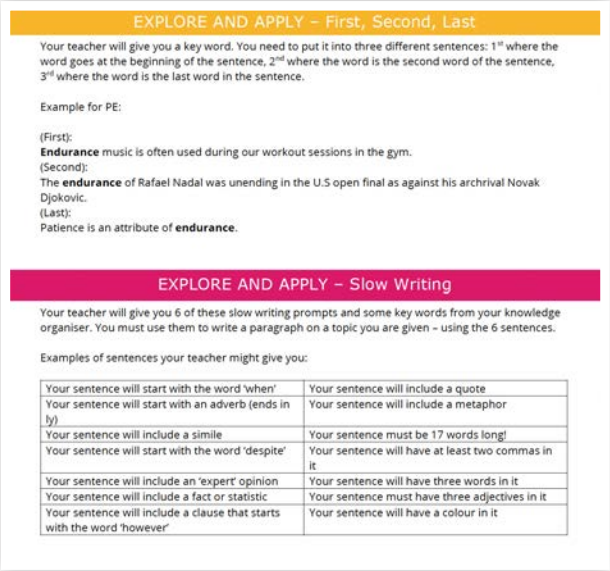
Training is ongoing in terms of finding the best ways of teaching vocabulary. As well as specific training on the use of knowledge organisers, strategies for teaching vocabulary, and building vocabulary into curriculum planning, there are also opportunities for staff to regularly share best practice, and to improve the strategies that are in place. For example, the vocabulary in the knowledge organisers has been tweaked recently by introducing symbols next to words, showing their word class. This has been particularly helpful for EAL and SEN students.

4 Lesson – Homework – Assessment

Vocabulary is included in every lesson, every homework, and every assessment for every subject. At the start of lessons, teachers often use 'quizzets', which are short activities that explicitly focus on vocabulary.

Eve has created booklets for each subject area, showing different strategies and activities for teaching vocabulary for homework. They are designed to encourage staff to use a variety of strategies when setting homework, rather than repeat the same ones.

Teachers include vocabulary in assessments, in short-answer tests, and after main assessments, when a 'fix it' session focuses on vocabulary.



EXPLORE AND APPLY – First, Second, Last

Your teacher will give you a key word. You need to put it into three different sentences: 1st where the word goes at the beginning of the sentence, 2nd where the word is the second word of the sentence, 3rd where the word is the last word in the sentence.

Example for PE:

(First):
Endurance music is often used during our workout sessions in the gym.
(Second):
The **endurance** of Rafael Nadal was unending in the U.S open final as against his archrival Novak Djokovic.
(Last):
Patience is an attribute of **endurance**.

EXPLORE AND APPLY – Slow Writing

Your teacher will give you 6 of these slow writing prompts and some key words from your knowledge organiser. You must use them to write a paragraph on a topic you are given – using the 6 sentences.

Examples of sentences your teacher might give you:

Your sentence will start with the word 'when'	Your sentence will include a quote
Your sentence will start with an adverb (ends in ly)	Your sentence will include a metaphor
Your sentence will include a simile	Your sentence must be 17 words long!
Your sentence will start with the word 'despite'	Your sentence will have at least two commas in it
Your sentence will include an 'expert' opinion	Your sentence will have three words in it
Your sentence will include a fact or statistic	Your sentence must have three adjectives in it
Your sentence will include a clause that starts with the word 'however'	Your sentence will have a colour in it

Activities which encourage students to explore and apply.

Impact and next steps

The whole-school focus on vocabulary has had an impact in terms of student engagement, motivation and confidence. Teachers have noticed a boost in the level of classroom talk: "Students are spending more time independently learning vocabulary at home [for homework], so they are coming to lessons more prepared and more confident. They want to talk about the vocabulary they've learned. They want to impress the teacher".

> *At first students didn't really see vocabulary as important or part of the lesson. Now students love being rewarded when they use good vocabulary. They really make an effort to use it in their answers… They're proud when they know difficult words.*

> *Everyone is talking about vocabulary. Everyone is teaching vocabulary. Every department focuses on it, so I think it has had an impact on the whole school. It's been fantastic. In terms of the students, they are aware of how important vocabulary is to their development, so they try harder to learn more words and understand their meaning.*

The use of knowledge organizers has meant that parents can see more clearly what their child needs to know. It's a tool for shared learning that staff want to capitalize on more in the future.

The level of interest in vocabulary and literacy has risen across all subject areas at Bolder Academy and beyond. One network of local science teachers ran a CPD literacy day, inviting Eve to speak at it.

Awareness of the word gap has been heightened in recent years because of the publication of research and data, showing how severely it disadvantages some students.The work of writers such as Alex Quigley and David Didau[4] has helped teachers to understand the importance of explicit teaching of vocabulary to students.

Next steps

Looking ahead, Bolder Academy has many plans for building on the success they already see in closing the word gap:

- More research will be undertaken to find out how to **assess vocabulary development** more precisely. Although there are numerous assessments for reading, capturing data specifically about vocabulary acquisition is more difficult.
- There are plans to create a **whole-school writing process**, like for the vocabulary process, giving teachers a model and structure for how to teach writing. That will include how to encourage students to embed appropriate vocabulary into their writing. This is seen as a logical step for Key Stage 4, after the focus on vocabulary at Key Stage 3.
- The **training of new staff** with strategies for teaching vocabulary and embedding it into all areas of the curriculum will continue.

Top Tips

Eve offers the following top tips for schools similar to Bolder Academy, that are wanting to reduce the word gap among their students:

1. **Explicit strategies taught to all**
   Have explicit, robust strategies for learning vocabulary, and teach these strategies to students as well as teachers.
2. **Understand Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary**
   Make sure teachers and students understand the difference between Tier 2 and Tier 3 words, and the importance of teaching both. (Tier 2 words include the language of instruction; Tier 3 words are subject specialist words.)
3. **Complete integration**
   Constantly look out for opportunities to teach vocabulary, so it is integrated into all planning, lessons and homework.

Comments from Helen Prince

To fully explore nuance, words cannot be considered in isolation. The use of word webs here, to explore synonym and antonym, enable students to consider the shades of meaning behind a word and the inherent subtleties of connotation

The repeated and creative focus of vocabulary activities in every lesson, every homework, and every assessment that are described here provides the multiple opportunities needed for students to hear, see and use new words, as advocated in the EEF *Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools* guidance report[5]. A 'little and often' approach supports students' ability to develop their understanding of the relationships between words and the contexts in which words are used.

References

[1] NGRT reading tests (New Group Reading Test, GL Education) and Star reading tests (part of Accelerated Reader)

[2] For phonics catch-up, the school uses Read Write Inc. Fresh Start

[3] The SEEC model, referenced in Quigley, A. (2018) *Closing the Vocabulary Gap*, Routledge

[4] Didau, D. (2014) *The Secret of Literacy: Making the implicit explicit*, Independent Thinking Press

[5] Education Endowment Foundation (2019) *Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools* guidance report, www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/improving-literacy-in-secondary-schools/

Case Study 7

Bishop Young Church of England Academy, Seacroft, Leeds

- Secondary school, Years 7 to 11, 706 students
- 60% of students eligible for Pupil Premium, up to 40% EAL

Mel Carlin, Vice Principal for the MAT leading on Quality of Education and Oracy, and History Teacher.

Mel Carlin, Vice Principal at Bishop Young Academy, estimates that up to two thirds of students have a vocabulary lower than expected for their age, which hinders their academic progress and also impacts their wellbeing in a negative way.

> *A large proportion of our disadvantaged learners find it difficult to listen and then talk about their learning. They have very low confidence levels, which we have to build up for them.*

Some parents of the most disadvantaged students have very low literacy levels, or it may be that the family does not speak English as a first language. A recent survey showed just one in eight disadvantaged students had a book at home. "That has a huge impact on students' language and vocabulary."

A high proportion of students have limited access to experiences that can enrich their language. "A lot of our students seem to rarely leave their locality, for instance to go into Leeds city centre or Roundhay Park, both of which are just a few miles away. They just don't have those wider cultural experiences."

> *One of our English teachers was telling me last week that her class were reading a description of a garden in a book. She was asking 'What impression is the author trying to give of this garden?' It was describing thistles and nettles but the students had no idea what these were. Some of them don't have gardens.*

The high levels of deprivation and associated mental and physical health issues in the community mean that many students have multiple challenges to overcome. "We need to support students before we can begin teaching them. Limited vocabularies have a huge impact on their wellbeing."

Seven years ago, the school (then under a different name and Trust) was put into Special Measures. Mel was part of a new team appointed to turn the school around. The Principal's first action was to "present our community to us", which ensured the new staff (which were the majority) knew they could take nothing for granted about the lives of their students. Among many problems, it was pointed out that many students had no privacy or quiet space to work in, and not even access to a table to work on. This talk ensured staff buy-in for completely new strategies and policies.

> *I'm really passionate that as a school, everything we do has to look at narrowing that word gap and building the vocabulary of our students. If they don't get this help in school, that gap will never close.*

Action taken

Mel explains that turning the school around took a "root and branch approach from the beginning". The attitude of students, with their reluctance to talk and lack of respect for adults and their peers, meant that the first priority was clear: "It was just so obvious that the issue here was talk, it was oracy. With talk comes confidence, resilience and everything you need for students to be able to make progress on lots of levels".

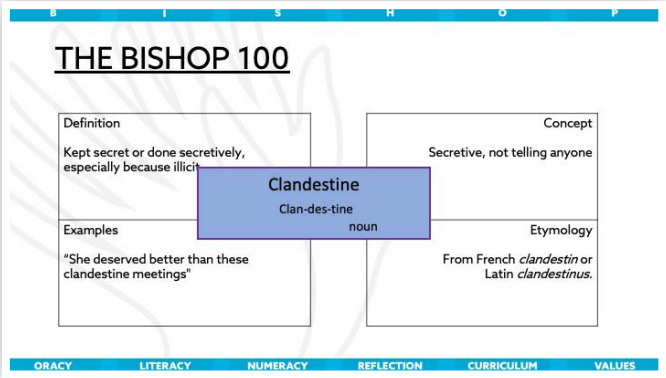
A new learning model was introduced and with the guidance of Voice 21 (a national oracy education charity), the school has become an oracy-focused school. This has involved multiple new initiatives and strategies.

1 Bishop 100

Staff compiled a list of 100 words that they felt were the most essential Tier 2 words for students to access lessons, across the curriculum.

Every week, three of these words are chosen and displayed in every classroom. Every teacher uses these words in their lessons so students are immersed in rich, instructional language.

Each word is explored in detail during the form period. For example, students create a Frayer Model to analyse the meaning and origins of each word, and suitable contexts in which to use that word.

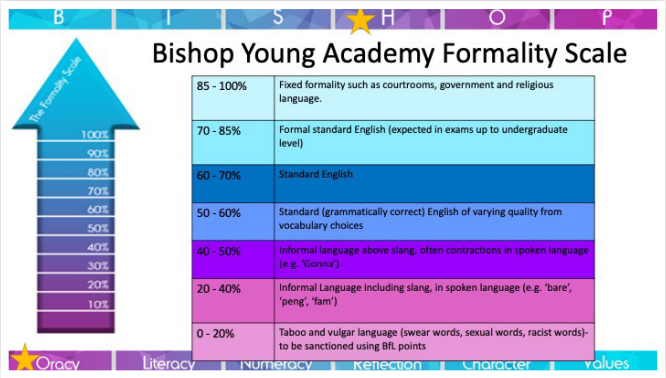


Using the Frayer model to analyse the word 'clandestine'.

When students spontaneously use the word themselves in lessons, they are rewarded with three positive points. When students gather sufficient points, they can use them to buy things from the school's pop-up shop.

2 The formality scale

This is an integral part of school life and is non-negotiable. It is displayed in every classroom and used throughout the school. This formality scale is about code-switching of language: learning what vocabulary, register, tone and language structures are appropriate at different times. Mel explains: "We didn't want to come across as telling students the right and wrong way to speak, as it's not really about that. We wanted to teach them how to know when to code switch, when it's appropriate to use different terminology and dialect words and so on. It's been really successful in supporting our students, to empower them with their use of language".



3 Forensic reading

This is a discrete lesson in Key Stage 3 (although there are plans to roll it out further) which aims to give students a love for reading. It is teacher-led and focuses on a wide variety of texts: fiction, non-fiction, excerpts from magazines and newspapers. Students read the text as a whole class, look at the language and talk about what the author is trying to convey. There are also themed booklets that the class share, which address some big social issues, such as misogyny and Black Lives Matter. "Already the impact is massive in terms of exposing our students to that language and to books and literature in general."

4 Oracy-rich lessons

All lessons, across the curriculum, aim to be oracy rich. This means that a significant proportion of lessons are about talk, with no pens attached. There is often an explicit oracy outcome attached to each lesson. So, for example, in a history lesson one learning outcome might be understanding why William won the Battle of Hasting. A linked oracy outcome might be understanding how to present views in a debate about the reasons.

In an oracy-rich lesson there are plenty of opportunities for students to talk to one another. This might be in the form of a structured debate or sharing ideas with a partner or collaborating with a small group. As teachers listen to students talk, they can pick up on any misconceptions or give more detailed explanations where necessary.

Learning aims are shared with parents, suggesting conversation openers to use at home.

5 Investing in CPD for staff

The importance of staff being confident with their own literacy and oracy is evident from the high investment in training. Staff need to model the use of appropriate vocabulary in the classroom, explain things in detail using a high level of language so that students are immersed in it at every opportunity. Teachers interject if language being used in the classroom isn't appropriate in a formal setting. It's their responsibility to say, *"Can you rephrase that? Say it again better. Think about your audience"*.

Behind all new CPD training is solid research, which gives teachers the evidence that certain strategies will work. Staff also conduct their own research. Subject teachers see that oracy can make a real difference in their area – it's not limited to just English or Humanities.

> *To me, the answer's simple. It's the quality of what you do in the classroom and if everything in the classroom is based around supporting our students to learn to talk and to learn through talk, that is the answer. That's going to close the gap.*

Impact and next steps

Over the last few years, outcomes have improved by 0.5 of a grade, based on GCSE results in 2019. The school achieved the most improved score for progress in Leeds. Attendance has improved by 6 per cent and fixed-term exclusions have decreased by 65 per cent. The external formal results have been lacking for the last few years, due to Covid -19, but robust internal data collection indicates that outcomes are all moving in the right direction.

> *I think the magic of oracy and everything we do linked to that has meant that our students listen more, they know how to discuss their emotions and feelings more, and we're more likely to get them into lessons and to learn when they're in lessons.*

Mel recalls how when the new cohort of staff arrived, it wasn't unusual to be sworn at in the corridor and there was very little respect and trust for adults. Students would be reluctant to participate in any discussion in the classroom and "there was a complete mistrust of teachers". But as an example of how things have changed, she recalls how a few days ago "the Head and I were walking down the corridor together and one student just said, 'Excuse me, I'm really sorry to interrupt you, but would it be possible to tell me where to go for…'. The Head and I just looked at each other amazed – and delighted. It just shows how far we've come in terms of our students' understanding of register and code switching, how to be polite and show respect".

In the journey to close the word gap (which is ongoing) staff believe that the students are more confident and happier: "They've got more resilience in their learning, they're more confident about discussing their learning. If there are misconceptions, they don't shout at you and leave the classroom – they're willing to explore things with you in a really constructive way".

> *We'd never think we've cracked it with oracy. As soon as students come to us in Year 7, we start again. We're making them into confident talkers. It's an ongoing task but by the time they work their way through the school students are definitely much more confident with their use of language.*

Next steps:

Bishop Young Academy's plan to further develop their strategies for closing the word gap, include:

- Continuing to b**uild oracy explicitly into the curriculum**, with clear outcomes at the end of each unit of work and at the end of each Key Stage.
- Ensuring students have the **opportunity to engage in as many different types of talk** as possible, such as contributing to debates, and giving presentations.
- Ongoing, **high-level CPD for staff**, so their confidence with literacy maximises their impact in the classroom.
- **Improving engagement of parents and carers**, many of whom have been more communicative digitally over lockdown, but who are reluctant to come into school or have practical difficulties in doing so.

Top Tips

Mel offers some top tips for schools in a similar situation to Bishop Young Academy:

1. **Expose pupils to Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary and model this to them**
   Consider different strategies to pre-teach key vocabulary. The Frayer Model is really useful to achieve this and can be used as a bell task in lessons.
2. **Empower pupils to use language appropriately and to code switch**
   A formality scale displayed in all classrooms and communal areas is a highly effective strategy to allow pupils to self regulate their use of language.
3. **Nurture a love for reading within all subject areas and ensure that every practitioner sees themselves as a teacher of reading and oracy**

Comments from Helen Prince

The use of a formality scale here is an effective way to reinforce the need for confident code-switching (the process of shifting from one linguistic code to another, depending on the social context or conversational setting). A focus on code-switching allows students to confidently use both their peer group language and the more formal language of instruction. Code-switching should be talked about. Unless students become adept at code-switching, Professor Maggie Snowling tells us it can lead to "disproportionately disadvantaging pupils whose peer group and family have language furthest from the forms expected"[1].

In efforts to boost vocabulary, be mindful of the value of the simple noun. Creative and appropriate noun choice can build eloquence in written and spoken expression; there is beauty in the specificity of our descriptions. This is perhaps especially so in our descriptions of the natural world – think sycamore, minnow, peony, falcon. Creative curriculum planning to explore noun choice may well be one of the most valuable aspects of building vocabulary, and cultural capital, for our digitally native students.

Listening skills can be the neglected ally of the focus on productive talk. Suzanne Graham explains that students with effective listening skills not only retain more information but are also less likely to feel unprepared or frustrated, having a greater belief that they can succeed in class[2]. The investment made in CPD at this school, along with their work to understand their community and disadvantaged learners, informs their oracy-rich curriculum and teacher modelling, vital in securing both educationally productive talk and listening skills.

References

[1] Oxford University Press (2020) *Bridging the Word Gap at Transition: The Oxford Language Report*

[2] Graham, S. (2011) 'Self-efficacy and academic listening', Journal of English for Academic Purposes, June, 10(2), pp. 113–117

Case Study 8

North Liverpool Academy, Merseyside

- Secondary school including sixth form, over 1,300 students
- Almost 51% students eligible for Pupil Premium, high level of EAL

Ian Mooney, Strategic Lead on Assessment.

The data on students entering North Liverpool Academy shows that their literacy skills consistently lag behind their numeracy skills. Among students with English as a first language, up to 30 per cent of each Year 7 cohort have a vocabulary gap of three to four years lower than their chronological age.

The statistics are similar for EAL students, but many are fluent in their own language, and make fast progress, particularly those from refugee families who are keen for their children to learn English and make good academic progress. However, staff are aware that it can be difficult to identify more deep-seated language difficulties and additional needs among EAL students, so they are careful not to make assumptions.

> *Years ago, large numbers of Somalian refugees came into the school I was working with. Some of them were from affluent, professional families, they spoke French and made rapid progress in English and across the curriculum. Others came from rural areas. They were illiterate in their own language and it was more difficult for these students to make any progress.*

Action taken

In recognition of the limitations of poor language skills and lack of vocabulary in particular, North Liverpool Academy has put in place a range of strategies to try to elevate students' oracy skills.

North Liverpool Academy, Merseyside.

1 Summer school

The summer school runs courses in various subject areas, but one of these is for students identified with language deficit. These students work on a project that is chosen to stimulate talk. The last project was family trees: a subject that everyone has a personal interest in, and can stimulate talk at home, as well as in school.

Parents were asked to give their child a rough outline of family history before they came to the summer school. On arrival, the teacher explained some of his own family history, using photographs and family memorabilia, then asked students to share information about their own families.

Working in groups, the students talked, then the teacher guided them through some research into their ancestry and showed them how to draw up a family tree. Even the most reluctant students became engaged and talked, enjoying investigating family claims about their ancestors.

> *Everyone wanted to do their family trees and it got them talking – to me, to the rest of the group, and to their families. The next day they were all coming in with more stories to tell me. One boy had even phoned his grandparents in Pakistan to ask them questions. What was really lovely, and important, is that the rest of the group listened and respected what was being said and waited their turn.*

2 Tailored twice-weekly intervention

Tailored twice-weekly intervention with specialist support staff is provided as needed. Some students are given additional support outside the main class. Depending on the level of the students' needs, this support might range from phonics and basic word recognition, to guided reading for students who are slightly below the ability of their peers, who need their confidence building up.

3 Staff training on the importance of oracy

The school recognises that oracy underpins all subjects. It has designated 'oracy champions' among staff to look for opportunities to promote oracy. All staff are encouraged to teach oracy overtly and not just in the classroom.

> *Yesterday there was a boy running amok in the corridor. I took him to the classroom he thought he should have been in, but it turns out it was the wrong lesson. I said to the teacher, 'I'm sorry for bringing an interloper to your lesson'. As we walked out the boy said to me, 'What's an interloper?' I explained and that led on to a chat about whether it really applied to him. I could have just told him off and marched him off to the correct place, but if you engage with the children, show them some respect, their natural inquisitiveness comes to the fore and you can usually get them talking.*

> *We have great staff who all talk to the children. The catering team know all the children's names and are happy to chat. It's important, and that's the way it should be. The more we talk, the more exposure students get to some sort of formal language.*

4 Celebration of progress

Regular celebrations are held to showcase students' achievements, particularly with language and vocabulary. For example, banners around the school contain hundreds of words that staff have compiled as essential for accessing their areas of the curriculum. Competitions are held to challenge students to use these words in context, orally and in written work. Celebrations are held, with awards given to students showing the most progress in their language skills.

Impact and next steps

Data shows that Year 7 students have particularly benefitted from the implementation of these new strategies. Some have increased their reading-age level by about two years in a seven-month period, so they are catching up with their peers. Reading levels are constantly monitored, and there are positive results for all interventions. The school tests all ability ranges, ensuring the students who start school as high-fliers, maintain their momentum.

Next steps:

Future plans involve consolidating the work done on closing the word gap and improving students' language generally. Regular assessment means that staff constantly review evidence about which strategies are working best and which need reconsidering.

> *The main issue with reading and talking is about access. I want all our students to hit Key Stage 4 with no language barrier, so they can make a proper choice from all the options open to them.*

Top Tips

Ian Mooney offers three top tips to schools like North Liverpool Academy who are working towards closing the word gap among students:

1. **Test comprehension**
   Identify the problem with a reading test that looks at students' level of comprehension and not just their recognition of words. Also measure students' receptive vocabulary (their understanding of the spoken word). Then tailor any support accordingly.
2. **Encourage talk beyond the classroom**
   Encourage talk both inside and outside lessons. Staff should mix with students, find out what interests them and try to engage with them.
3. **Encourage all reading**
   Encourage all reading – whatever it is. It might be recipes, comics, football programmes, and popular authors like David Walliams, who are fantastic at engaging reluctant students, even at secondary level.

Comments from Helen Prince

Supporting parents and carers to provide enriched opportunities for vocabulary development at home is a key recommendation for boosting vocabulary for our young people. The summer school project described here exploring the family tree has enormous potential to spark engagement from whole families, who can really get on board with research into their ancestry. As a trigger for talk, what a wonderful way to learn about your students and engage with families, sharing memories and stories that underpin the lives we share.

The focus here on Key Stage 3 – and Year 7 in particular – is critical to building the confident, convincing and compelling voice required by Year 11. Mentalhealth.org tell us that 11–14 year olds can have "ability for complex thought, oscillate between high expectations of themselves and lack of confidence, be influenced by peer group, and feel a lot of sadness or depression". Oracy is the "golden thread" (Emma Hardy, Chair Oracy APPG[1]) that enables young people to have a safe and structured space to justify their ideas, enhance expression and build their skills of collaboration.

Oracy champions are a great way to raise the profile of oracy across the whole school community. Engaging all stakeholders in opportunities to promote oracy can only widen the horizon for us all.

References

[1] Oracy APPG (2021) *Speak for Change: Final report and recommendations from the Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry,* https://oracy.inparliament.uk/speak-for-change-inquiry

Case Study 9

Thomas Tallis School, London

- Secondary school including sixth form, just under 2,000 students
- 21% of students eligible for Pupil Premium

Lizzie Church, Whole-School Literacy Coordinator.

Lizzie Church, Whole-School Literacy Coordinator, estimates that between 30 and 40 per cent of students arrive at Tallis with a limited vocabulary that impacts their learning. She believes that a limited vocabulary also affects behaviour because students who struggle to explain their thinking and feelings get frustrated and angry, which can turn into difficult behaviour. The school tries to focus those students on developing emotional vocabulary, so they can communicate more easily and consequently diffuse aggressive tendencies.

The wider implications of the word gap once students leave school are also recognised: "The more formal professional interactions, like with employers or the bank, can be affected if there's a word gap. It's not just about understanding words, but also about appreciating their nuances, the effect of different contexts and possible misinterpretations of words".

A lack of data from Key Stage 2 SATs in 2020 meant that staff at Thomas Tallis School relied on other assessment methods[1] for the new Year 7 intake in September 2020. Some teachers felt there were advantages to not having as much data from primary feeder schools, as they were keen to formulate their own judgements about students.

Action taken

About four years ago, staff noticed that Year 11 students were really struggling to write in an academic way, and GCSE results had gone down, particularly after the move to linear exams rather than controlled assessment. More research was emerging about the word gap, so the school decided to focus on developing students' vocabulary and academic writing.

There was a whole-school approach to this new focus and different strategies were researched and implemented, as explained by Lizzie.

1 Explicit teaching of vocabulary

Explicit teaching of vocabulary was implemented in all subjects, particularly Tier 2 words. Many departments, including Science, Geography and RE use the Frayer Model (see page 22, Case Study 7 for an example) to explore words. The History department uses a Red/Amber/Green rating system to check students' understanding of Tier 2 and Tier 3 words in each topic. The RAG coding is used at the start and end of each topic.

Key Word Glossary

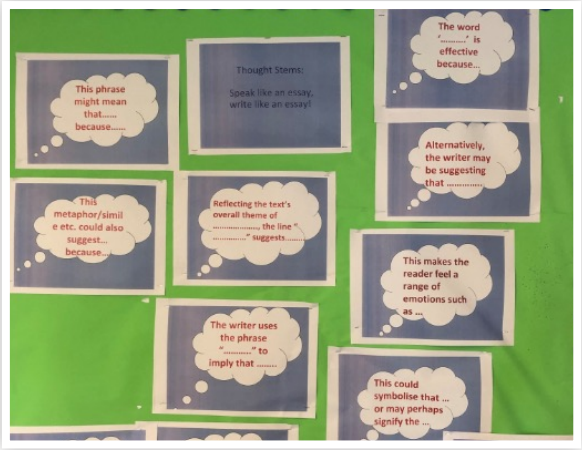
Rate the words either Red (don't know it), Amber (heard it but not confident about its meaning), and Green (know it). Repeat this at the end of term, once you have finished the booklet!

Word	Definition	RAG 1	RAG 2
Bedouin	One of the tribes who lived in the desert.		
Caesarean	The surgical removal of a baby, when a mother can't give birth.		
caliph	A Muslim leader.		
caravan	A group of travellers and traders on camels.		
cause	Something that leads to something else.		
chronology	The order of which things happened – time order.		
Church	The organisation of the Catholic Church, which was very powerful.		
clan	A group of up to 100 families who were very loyal to each other.		
civilisation	A complex human society.		
consequence	Something that happens as a result of something else.		
crusade	A religious war.		
herbal remedy	A mixture of herbs and plants used to cure or treat illness or injury.		
jinn	Supernatural spirits or beings.		
Kaaba	A shrine in Arabia.		
labourer	A manual worker – someone who did a physical job like building/farming		
Medieval	Also known as the Middle Ages, roughly from 1000-1500 AD.		

A selection of vocabulary from a History RAG key word glossary.

2 Teaching *how* to write answers

Students look at **exemplar answers** and deconstruct them not just for content, but also to examine the structure, exploring how answers are written. In many subjects, teachers display **'thought stems'** on classroom walls to support students' writing. This gives students confidence in how to present their ideas.



Thought stems in an English classroom are used by students to develop their academic responses.

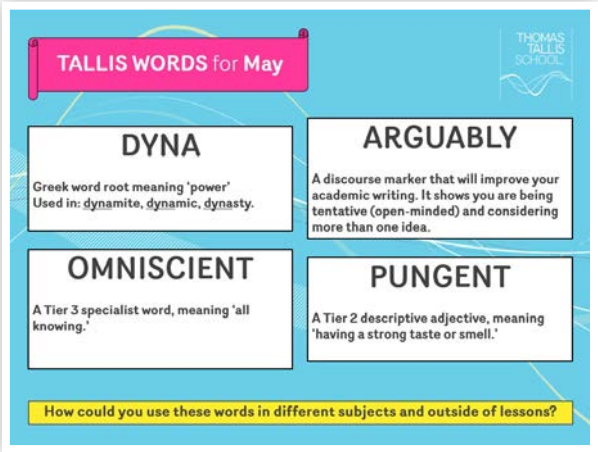
3 Regular staff training

This means that all staff know about the word gap, and the importance of closing that gap. All staff know what Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary is; they know some of the barriers to students being able to access a text; they know what it means to write in a formal academic style. Lizzie believes that this whole-school approach only works if subject teachers take ownership of the drive.

> *Every teacher is a teacher of literacy. Every subject has a literacy demand.*

4 Words of the Month

These are four words that are promoted across the school that can be used in lots of subject areas. They might include discourse markers, descriptive words, root words and Tier 3 specialist words. These words are agreed following whole staff CPD and displayed across the school for a month.



Words of the Month can be applied across many subject areas.

5 Tallis Reads

This is a whole-school reading initiative. Different teachers from a range of subject areas read a short story or poem of their choice. This originated during lockdown on Teams, but now continues in tutor groups. Some staff choose to read quite simple, traditional stories such as *Winnie-the Pooh* by A.A. Milne, but others choose more sophisticated texts, such as work by Gabriel García Márquez. Research has shown[2] that hearing words spoken can have as much impact as reading them.

Impact and next steps

Without GCSE exams it can be hard to formally quantify the impact these strategies have had; however, teachers have been regularly marking exam scripts and formal assessments which demonstrate in many cases the impact of explicit vocabulary teaching. Lizzie says that from talking to students and teachers, the outcomes have been very positive. Colleagues feel that the focus on academic vocabulary and the explicit teaching of vocabulary has definitely improved students' speaking and writing skills.

Next steps

There are already plans in the pipeline for further work on closing the word gap:

- Closer **monitoring of the progress students make in their reading**, acquiring more data to track development throughout the school.
- Running a **writing project** with disadvantaged students, as they suffer most from the word gap.
- Organising more **mentoring between older students and Year 7**. Encouraging rich talk between students and discussing books and reading together.

Top Tips

Lizzie offers three top tips for closing the word gap in schools similar to Thomas Tallis:

1. **Research!**
   Do as much research about the word gap as you can as a literacy coordinator, and ask for plenty of time. Many resources are free and of high quality.
2. **Get buy-in from staff**
   Work to get buy-in from staff. Explain what you are doing and the value of it, so you all share a common goal.
3. **Keep it accessible**
   Make explicit vocabulary teaching an everyday part of all teaching. Keep it accessible. I would recommend little and often rather than doing one big project every so often.

Comments from Helen Prince

The link between a limited vocabulary and poor behaviours observed by this school is a familiar one. The OUP report *Why Closing the Word Gap Matters*[3] found that a limited vocabulary affects not only a child's potential academic success but also their behaviour and self-esteem. Our vocabulary allows us to share something of ourselves – our feelings, our ideas, our experiences; a limited vocabulary limits the nuance of our expression, socially, creatively, and emotionally. The focus here on building an expansive emotional vocabulary equips students with the layers of meaning needed to articulate their layers of emotion.

Unpicking exemplar answers is a metacognitive process that encourages students to explore how successful answers are constructed, making the implicit explicit. EEF research[4] has found metacognition and self-regulation approaches to have consistently high levels of impact, leading to an average of seven months' additional progress. The display of 'thought stems' to support students' writing allows learners to support each other and make their thinking explicit through discussion.

Secondary school students are exposed to three or four times as much academic vocabulary as in primary school. Alice Deignan in *Bridging the Word Gap at Transition: The Oxford Language Report 2020* This school's focus on academic vocabulary is key to supporting working memory and making sure that students' cognitive load can cope with the avalanche of both academic vocabulary and the number of unknown words fired from every curriculum area.

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Conclusion

Andrea Quincey, Director of Primary Literacy, Oxford University Press

It is not difficult to predict the impact of a word gap on children's literacy skills and their performance in reading and writing assessments at the end of primary school. If the number and range of words that you know and understand is limited, then answering vocabulary and comprehension questions on a reading paper or articulating and organising your thoughts in an extended writing piece is going to be tough. And all the evidence shows that children who struggle with language and literacy in primary school face an even bigger challenge when they meet a more academic curriculum – and a more academic discourse – at secondary school.

But what leaps out from the case studies on these pages is the significant impact of the word gap on children's mental health – on their confidence, their social skills, their ability to form relationships and engage in even very basic conversation. These impacts of the word gap will have been exacerbated for many children over the last 18 months and it is vital that we act to help these children acquire the words they need to thrive within and beyond school.

Perhaps more importantly, these case studies show that there are solutions – and that most of these solutions don't require a school to do anything 'extra'. Rather, these schools are focusing on engaging all staff – and reaching out to parents – and integrating some often very simple but powerful strategies. There is an inevitable focus on reading and talking about books, but it's exciting to see the role of discussion and developing children's 'word curiosity' across the curriculum. Although a serious issue, it's so important that we make acquiring and using language fun!

Lionel Bolton, Head of Secondary English, Languages and Humanities, Oxford University Press

In 2018 our first Word Gap report, *Why Closing the Word Gap Matters*, revealed the extent of the word gap and its consequences, which goes well beyond just affecting academic achievement. This latest report underlines not only how important vocabulary is, but how it is possible, indeed imperative, to help develop and improve children's vocabulary. The benefits of so doing, as can be seen so clearly in these case studies, include improved consideration of others, understanding of context and increased confidence. And from this the door is then opened to improved learning, higher attainment and greater self-esteem. Knowing when and how to use the right words is key in life, not just in school. Whether rightly or wrongly, your spoken and written vocabulary defines you, shapes you, even controls you. Every exam, every social interaction, every job interview, every life chance comes down to word choice. And as these case studies show, vocabulary cannot be something 'other' in schools, it's not a nice to have, as it isn't in life beyond school. And as these case studies outline, helping students develop their vocabulary, whether spoken or written, requires a whole-school approach. No longer is vocabulary left solely to the English department; no longer is vocabulary left to simply magically "accrue" (as my English teacher once told me my vocabulary would). Instead positive and successful action is being taken in these case study schools and many more around the country, to try to help ensure all children have all the words, and the understanding of context, that they need to succeed.

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Recommended Reading

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- *Closing the Vocabulary Gap* by Alex Quigley (2018)
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- Read Write Inc. Phonics and Spelling: www.global.oup.com/education/content/primary/series/rwi/
- Ricketts, J. Reader, Department of Psychology, Royal Holloway, University of London.
- School 21: www.school21.org.uk/voice21
- Star reading tests (part of Accelerated Reader): www.renlearn.co.uk/star-reading/
- The National Literacy Trust: www.literacytrust.org.uk/
- The Plymouth Oracy Project (derived from Voice 21 and Oracy 21)
- The SEEC model, referenced in Quigley, A. (2018) *Closing the Vocabulary Gap*, Routledge
- Voice 21: www.voice21.org/
- www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/dialogic-teaching/

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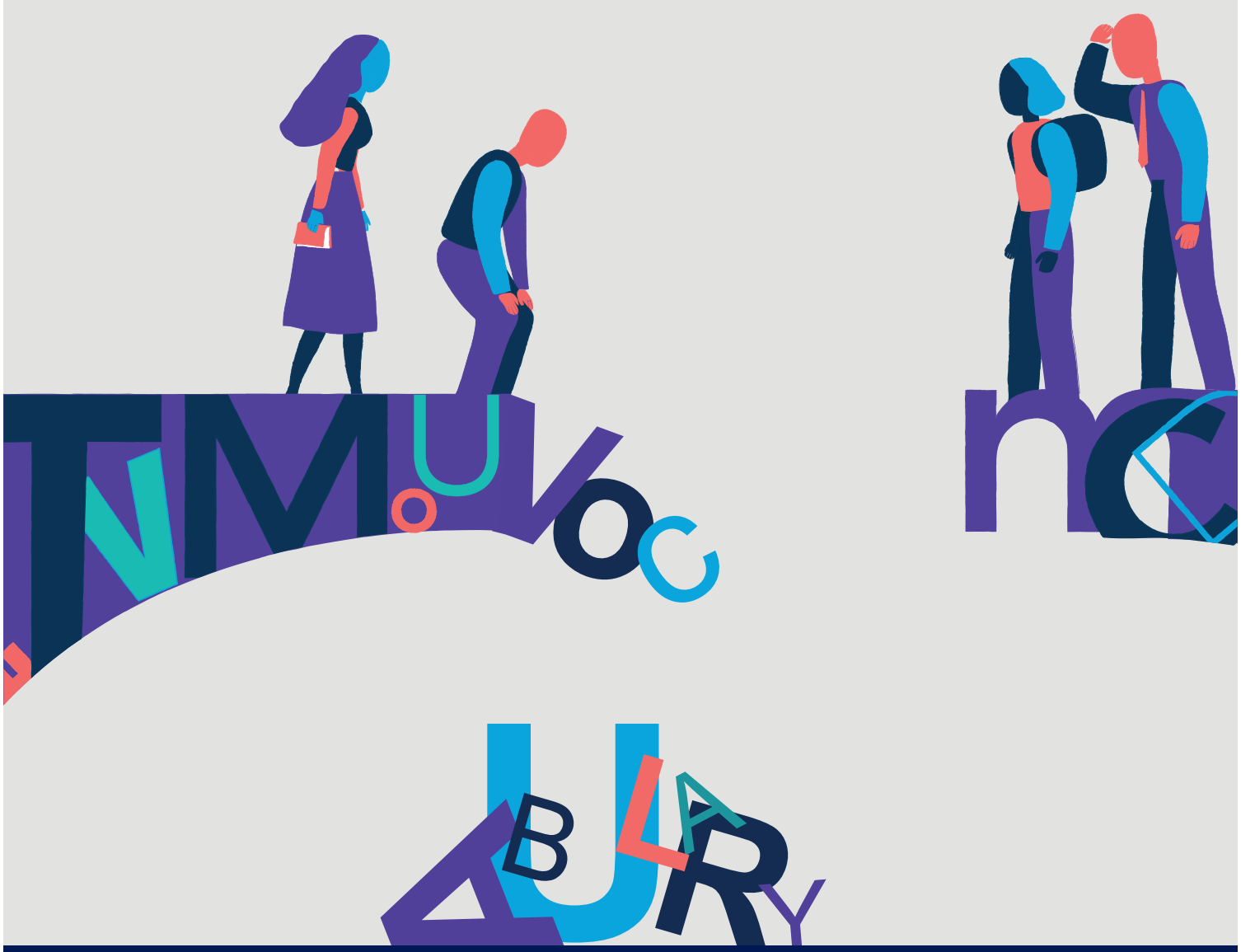

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