

Abbey Multi Academy Trust
Oracy

Narrowing the Word Gap Project

2022-2023

The Project Rationale

The Narrowing the Word Gap project within the Trust set out to investigate the relationship between oracy and vocabulary acquisition. It also had the intent of supporting Oracy Leads and Champions to identify the hallmarks of an effective sequence of vocabulary teaching through oracy. The intended outcome was to ascertain whether learning vocabulary through talk accelerated pupils' mastery of vocabulary. The 2018 Oxford Language Report highlights the prevalence and impact of the 'word gap'. This is that gap which exists between the current vocabulary of a pupil and what words they need to know to access and 'unlock' the curriculum. It was estimated in 2018 that 40% of students were affected by the word gap and 92% of teachers consulted by OUP, said the word gap had widened as a consequence of school closures during the pandemic. This was corroborated by our Trust oracy network's feedback between 2021 and 2022, where all teachers felt the impact of school closures had a negative impact upon the communication skills of our young people. We know that ensuring pupils have a wider, increasingly sophisticated vocabulary has a positive impact upon their academic attainment, mental health and wellbeing and of course, on their wider life chances. As children progress through school, there is a greater expectation that they encounter new vocabulary through reading- but if our pupils are not confident readers and there is little explicit word teaching in the classroom- the gap will widen. As Bek et al explains:

"Written language is far less effective vehicle for learning new language than oral language. Written contexts lack many of the features of oral language that support new word meanings, such as intonation, body language and shared physical surroundings" (Bringing Words to Life, 2013).

Summary of findings

Each school within our Trust trialled using a sequence of oracy tasks (input activities, involving exploratory talk) to explicitly teach new vocabulary through talk. This resulted in an 'output task' that would gauge the 'word ownership' of our pupils. Whilst it was possible for some schools to have a control group to measure impact, many of our schools used low stakes assessment of word knowledge before and after the teaching sequence. What is clear from the findings is that there are clear gains in each school context. Feedback from all 8 oracy leads has reinforced findings from the Oxford report of 2018 showing that pupils were more confident with language through greater engagement with the teaching. They knew words and owned words by the end of the trial. There was also anecdotal evidence in all settings of the words being used by pupils outside of lessons, showing that pupils could often apply words spontaneously in new contexts. This points to true word ownership.

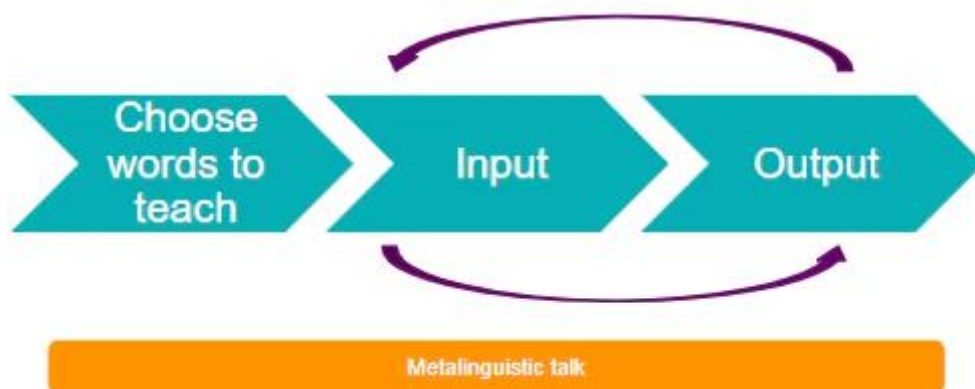
A key strategy favoured by most schools both primary and secondary has been modelling of language through explicit teaching by the teacher, e.g. through use of the Frayer model or 'I say, you say' strategies. In the most successful lessons, the exploratory talk was structured to ensure pupils were encouraged to use new words taught in a low stakes environment. Talk-tactics have been a strategy that has been successful in all schools within the Trust, particularly for PP students or EAL students. As expected, for these pupils, it gave them

confidence to frame opinions and the structures took away any ‘embarrassment’ or ‘insecurities’ about disagreeing and building upon other’s ideas. In schools where this has been used as an intervention in exploratory talk- discussions from pupils were sustained, shared and deepened understanding of topics being discussed (as Professor Neil Mercer notes, moving talk from cumulative to exploratory talk). Where the project had less impact on new words ‘sticking’ for pupils, it was when exploratory talk was not planned by the teacher to use the newly introduced vocabulary. There is wider evidence that when teachers explicitly praised pupil’s talk (and therefore gave feedback on talk), pupils were more likely to communicate using ambitious vocabulary. We can be confident as a Trust that explicit teaching of vocabulary using a sequence of talk has been beneficial on lots of fronts (such as improved engagement/ confidence) but in many cases, impact evidence shows a clear impact on pupil progress.

Next Steps

The next steps are for each school to now, ‘scale-up’ their research projects through exploring whole-school strategies to teach vocabulary through talk and identifying the key words across each subject/ phase that increase in sophistication.

The recommended sequence provided by Voice 21 is:



Input activities include specific oracy activities that allow for structured exploratory talk.

Output activities can range from presentations, debates, to written pieces and should be used to then give feedback on talk using the oracy framework.

Our oracy network’s aim for next year is to build upon the premise that as a result of increased vocabulary teaching, we need to explicitly provide opportunities for them to use new vocabulary in the classroom.

We will look to see the impact of Harkness on providing pupils with opportunities to learn through exploratory talk and to receive feedback at the point of the discussion on their talk.

Summary of research findings from each Academy

Bishop Young Academy

Context

- Pupils on roll: 750
- 11-16 Comprehensive
- Average reading age on entry: 10 years and 2 months

Approach

- Oracy Lead met with Humanities Lead and Teaching and Learning Lead for Maths who were briefed on the project
- Staff went back to their departments to compile a list of the key vocabulary students would need to master in order to be successful in the next assessment and next topic of learning
- Students were tested on the definition of each key word before the next teaching cycle began and staff were made aware of the results
- Oracy strategies were implemented across the 7-week period; History used the bullseye and the Frayer Model, Geography focused on dual coding and Maths used presentational talk and student modelling of listed vocabulary to enhance pupil speak in lessons
- At the end of the 7 weeks students were re-tested

Impact

- The same 84 students were tested before the project and after
- On average, for each piece of vocabulary 10 students have improved
- The majority of these students are MAPs

Maths	Maths	Geography	Geography	History	History
72	80	17	42	54	65
27	36	13	29	58	67
19	30	20	46	30	45
53	64	14	45	24	42
32	45	9	29	29	38
56	53	15	50	18	28
71	76	22	31	40	45

40	49	47	55	40	48
29	61	21	28	53	58
19	49	29	38	36	46

Take-aways

- Pre-teach vocabulary and make explicit links to this as part of the lesson- encourage choral practice and explicitly model language use as a teacher
- Use of Talk-tactics to support pupils to 'frame their opinion' and develop confidence around sustained talk using new vocabulary

Abbey Grange Academy

Context

- Pupils on roll: 1,600
- 11-18 Comprehensive
- Average reading age on entry: 12 years and 1 month
- 22% PP

Approach

- Tier 3 words taken from across the curriculum- chosen by subject leaders based on words that are commonly misunderstood or used incorrectly by pupils
- Whole staff CPD delivered which provided staff with research on teaching vocabulary through oracy and introduced/ refreshed upon current oracy strategies
- Project is being run through Oracy Champions and Oracy Lead. Two teaching groups for each, one group is a control group so that the impact of the project is measurable

Impact

- Pupils from year 7 were selected at random and the cohort included a mix of gender and Disadvantaged and non-Disadvantaged pupils
- Pupils were confident communicators. They effectively used Talk Tactics as part of the discussion to express their opinions, e.g. 'To build upon Leo's point'
- Pupils spoke positively about the learning of new vocabulary at Abbey Grange with examples; although they had also experienced barriers to learning due to not understanding key words
- They felt that the use of images helped them to unpick meanings of words and also expressed that the activity in lesson helped them to reflect upon initial vocabulary choices and 'say it again better'
- Pupils liked the opportunity to be praised for their use of oracy and supported that this recognition grew their confidence to use new words more widely
- When asked what activities helped them to learn new vocabulary, some spoke of spelling activities. It would be useful to probe whether this strategy allows them to use the word in context also

Take-aways

- CPD for all staff to ensure the rationale for the oracy teaching is clear, drawing on the research around teaching vocabulary through a sequence of oracy
- Use student voice to evaluate the benefits of oracy teaching when evaluating the effectiveness of curriculum implementation

Lightcliffe Academy

Context

- Pupils on roll: 990
- 11-16 Comprehensive
- PP: 20.6%
- Average reading age on entry: 10 years and 11 months

Approach

- Implemented in all Personal Development lessons across the school with specific focus on years 7, 9, 10
- Per year group, 10-12 key words pertinent to the particular topic area were selected by the PD lead; words that were high utility and should be in high-frequency usage during each lesson
- Voice 21 strands were also being focused on explicitly through PSHE lessons and assessed through a Public Service Announcement at the end of the topic
- Output measures would assess whether the students can use the vocabulary confidently and correctly, along with staff and student voice on the effectiveness of implementation

Impact

- Student and staff voice will be carried out in the next three weeks to capture impact data
- The students are currently performing the public service announcement presentations and the word gap project students are becoming familiar with oracy expectations
- Anecdotally and through some listening walks, the students are developing key oracy skills along with confidence and character allowing them to express their views and opinions whilst challenging each other in a secure and respectful environment

Take-aways

- Don't just teach the word, provide opportunities for pupils to use this in conversation and encourage them to use in written work too
- Issue praise to reinforce pupil confidence when using new words in their talk

Christ Church Upper Armley

Context

- Pupils on roll:192
- PP: 48.69%
- EAL: 43.45%

Approach

- Implicit and explicit vocabulary teaching within the History Curriculum
- Use of actions and gestures linked the physical strand of the oracy framework to accompany new words for pupils in EFYS
- Development of golden threads in terms of the key concepts/ words that will be developed over time (creating a model for language progression over time)

Impact

- History wasn't taught until the Spring term. Impact is not yet measurable (although vocabulary has been a focus throughout our involvement in the Oracy project)
- Due to the work undertaken for this project we will now continue to develop the other Golden Threads strands in History as pupils are using new terminology in their talk and in their written work
- Eventually developing the same structure for other curriculum subjects (The Art lead has already started working on this)

Take-aways

- Spend time planning the key vocabulary to teach pupils so that it benefits the pupils greatest- which tier 2 language will appear most frequently for pupils in differing contexts?

Manston St James

Context

- Pupils on roll: 387
- PP: 94
- SEND pupils: 65
- LAC: 2

Approach

- We worked with Voice 21 to create an oracy curriculum within the subject History. Within this planning we implemented the narrowing the word gap project.
- This can be seen through the curriculum overview; implementation plans and through vocabulary posters created for each year group.
- Within the overview we created outcome activities where the children would be able to showcase their new and widened vocabulary in front of an audience.

Implementation

- Vocabulary slide was added to each lesson, this was then explored in different ways with the pupils
- Children learned the definition of new words in fun and memorable ways- using their voices!
- Praise used for children being able to use the words in response to questions

- Sentence stems were provided for the children to give them the structure to use the vocabulary
- Children were given opportunities to debate/ present and inform
- Children became Historians and were able to speak like specialists to their parents who came for a tour around the museum. The audience for this were the parents of year 3

Impact

- Children felt more confident and have been empowered to 'speak like a specialist' in certain subjects
- Positive feedback from teachers and parents relating to final pieces
- Created a 'buzz' around school for talk
- Vocabulary became embedded within lessons. Other staff members out of lessons noticed that specific vocabulary had improved within subject specific lessons

Take-aways

- Allow pupils to talk about new words and language. The talk-tactics really helped here!
- There is an opportunity to provide feedback to pupils on presentational talk as a result of the output activity here, the museum day!

[Lightcliffe Primary](#)

Context

- Pupils on roll: 411
- FSM: 6.3%

Implementation

- The EYFS team have prepared a number of tiered vocabulary posters which are positioned at various stations around the unit so that Early Years staff are able to interact with children encouraging and teacher vocabulary.
- The Voice 21 Planning Tool breaks down key oracy objectives into year groups from Reception to Year 6 and looks closely at each through the lens of the Oracy Framework
- Following on from our Voice 21 RE subject planning, we are beginning to adapt our planning documents so that planning for oracy opportunities becomes embedded – this includes planning for language acquisition (vocab) and suggesting sentence stems to develop talk
- This also aids assessment as staff can easily tell which tier of words children can independently use

Impact

- Staff are aware of the need to model talk using high-value language within the context of children's learning, allowing and encouraging pupils to do the same
- Communication is improved by using specific vocabulary and having clarity in the delivery of their speech – not just relating to classwork
- Children are more confident to speak as they have modelled sentence stems for initiating exploratory and presentational talk: sentence stems remove a barrier for pupils who need supporting with their answers

- Focusing on language acquisition has supported reading comprehension. Through games such as hangman, wordsearches and VCOP 'Synonym Circus', vocabulary is frequently being revisited and built upon to enable newly acquired words to 'stick'
- With the focus on language and vocabulary, children have been able to use subject specific vocabulary to make effective vocabulary choices within their writing. Moderation of Y6 writing shows that children are able to write effectively making appropriate vocabulary choices. Fewer children are using high-value vocabulary out of context

Take-aways

- Word Pyramids supported staff in EYFS to focus on language use when interacting with pupils. They provide a useful model for staff not just children
- Varied output activities that revisited key vocabulary gave teachers confidence about how far pupils had mastered language

St Chads

Context

- Pupils on roll: 245
- FSM: 7.8%

Implementation

- Implemented in Reception
- Discrete daily of Greg Bottrill's 'Drawing Club'
- Key vocabulary is taught daily using actions and the words within a different context. This is then revisited throughout the week
- 'My turn, your turn' so the children can practise using the word
- The story is read 3 times throughout the week and the vocabulary is reinforced throughout
- Children then draw an image relating to the text and have a go at writing a sentence about it. Simple CVC sentences for most with the expectation to use the vocabulary orally with a teacher, but Higher Attainers are encouraged to have a go at writing a sentence using the taught vocabulary. Children then receive 'gold pen' if they have used the vocabulary orally (scribed by the teacher) or in their written composition
- The powerpoint used for teaching the vocabulary is then shared electronically with parents so that they can further embed the vocabulary into the children's lexicon

Impact

- Orally: Children are using this vocabulary within their discussions. (One child asked me if she could have an orange because she was so famished!) "Forlorn" is also a well-used adjective in Reception!
- Written work in reception used language such as: "The cheetah is liberated.", "When you say 10, 17, 5 she guzzles up the porridge.", "My wolf is famished."

Take-aways

- Involving parents/ carers help to ensure that language can be used and explored outside of the classroom
- Praise using 'gold pen' had a positive impact on pupil confidence when using new vocabulary

Resources

Maths Subject 60 Words



Provision Words



Student Talk Tactics



Summary Bullseye



Talk Detectives



Teacher Talk Tactics



Further Reading:

2018 Oxford Language Report

LKMCo and Voice 21, State of the Nation report, Nov 2016

The development of Oracy skills in school-aged learners, Cambridge University press, November 2018