

Learning to talk

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Abbey Multi Academy Trust
Proud to be a talk-rich Trust

The project rationale

Listening walks and wider quality assurance undertaken in previous academic years have provided valuable insight into classroom dialogue and pupils' engagement in talk-based learning across the Trust. Although there is clear evidence that pupils are increasingly (and sometimes routinely) given opportunities to learn through talk, there are recurring missed opportunities to provide pupils with explicit feedback on their oracy and to explicitly scaffold talk. When feedback was given, it did not consistently reference the oracy strands (physical, linguistic, cognitive, and social), limiting pupils' ability to improve and reflect on their communication skills in a structured and developmental way.

This year's research project aimed to address this gap. Effective feedback is essential to learning and this applies as much to spoken language as it does to written work or reading. Research, such as that from Voice 21 and the Education Endowment Foundation highlight the importance of structured, formative feedback in helping pupils understand the features of success and targets for their next steps learning. When pupils receive targeted feedback against clear oracy criteria (such as the framework), they are more likely to internalise those features and apply them across a range of contexts, whether academic or beyond.

Mercer and Littleton (2007) note that for exploratory talk to support cognitive development it also requires deliberate scaffolding and modelling by teachers. Without explicit feedback, pupils are less likely to notice how their communication can be refined for clarity, persuasion, collaboration, or presentation. Furthermore, Alexander (2017) argues that dialogic teaching relies not just on encouraging talk, but on nurturing high-quality dialogue. This requires feedback that moves beyond 'vague' praise to instead address how talk is used and how it can be improved.

This year's oracy research project focused on supporting teachers to give timely, specific and oracy strand-referenced feedback on pupils' spoken language. By embedding formative oracy feedback within everyday practice, the aim was to strengthen pupils' metacognition around spoken communication and improve their ability to reflect, revise and perform as confident, articulate speakers. The final goal being to ensure that every pupil develops the tools to be an effective communicator, a skill that underpins success in school, the workplace and wider life.

The oracy framework and progression toolkit

The oracy framework, developed by Voice 21 and based on research from Cambridge University, provides a structured way to teach and assess spoken language. It breaks down oracy into four key strands, helping teachers to treat talk with the same rigour and priority as reading and writing. The strands of the framework are:

- **Physical:** How we use our voice and body when speaking (e.g. volume, clarity, eye contact, gestures).

- **Linguistic:** The vocabulary and grammar we use (e.g. sentence structure, tiered vocabulary, rhetorical devices).
- **Cognitive:** The way we structure our thinking and develop ideas in speech (e.g. giving reasons, building arguments, summarising).
- **Social and Emotional:** How we engage with others when speaking and listening (e.g. turn-taking, active listening, confidence, empathy).

This framework supports pupils in becoming effective speakers and listeners, not just in formal presentations, but in collaborative activities, classroom discussions, debates, and everyday dialogue.

The Voice 21 Oracy Progression Toolkit outlines a series of end points for each of the four strands, organised by typical expectations in Early Years, KS1, Lower KS2, Upper KS2, KS3 and KS4. These describe how pupils' talk should develop over time and is a useful tool to ensure that teachers understand what oracy should look like at each stage of learning.

Examples include:

Upper Key Stage 2

Physical: Use gesture and facial expression to aid communication.

E.g. Using hands to show size when describing an object.

Linguistic: Use formal language when required.

E.g. "I propose that we ban single-use plastic in school."

Cognitive: Plan and structure talk, e.g. in persuasive speeches.

E.g. "Firstly, plastic harms animals. Secondly, it pollutes the sea..."

Social & Emotional: Listen critically and challenge ideas respectfully.

E.g. "I see your point, but what about the cost implications?"

Key Stage 3

Physical: Sustain eye contact with a range of listeners during presentations.

Linguistic: Manipulate language for effect (e.g. rhetorical questions, metaphor).

Cognitive: Evaluate evidence and consider alternative viewpoints.

Social & Emotional: Facilitate discussion by summarising or prompting quieter peers.

As part of the project, oracy leads and champions carefully planned sequences of learning with a clear, explicit talk outcome in mind, such as a formal presentation, debate, or group discussion. They identified the specific components of the talk type (e.g. turn-taking, rhetorical structure, use of formal register) and taught these deliberately and sequentially over time (they were mapped into Medium Term Plans where possible). Throughout the sequence, pupils received targeted feedback linked to the oracy strands, helping them refine and develop their spoken communication. Before and after the unit of learning, benchmarking was carried out using student voice surveys and analysis of the quality of talk to assess impact. Where possible, a control group received no explicit oracy intervention, allowing for a clearer evaluation of the gains made through structured oracy teaching.

Enquiry question:

To what extent does providing explicit feedback on the X strand help to develop pupils' X talk.

(E.g., To what extent does providing explicit feedback on the physical strand of oracy improve presentational talk?)

Academies within our Trust implemented this intervention with a group of pupils over a planned sequence of learning and presented their findings to the oracy network in May, 2024.

Summary of findings:

Overall themes of enquiry within schools:

To explore whether regular, explicit feedback using the oracy framework improves the quality and confidence of pupils' talk, particularly in presentational and exploratory contexts.

Common implementation strategies:

- Sequenced oracy lessons leading to a final talk outcome (e.g. presentation, group discussion).
- Teaching of talk components using the Voice 21 oracy framework strands (physical, linguistic, cognitive and social & emotional).
- Feedback strategies included peer, self, and teacher feedback, often scaffolded with sentence stems, success criteria, or feedback stickers.
- Use of pre- and post-benchmarking (pupil voice surveys, video, self-assessments) to measure change.

Control groups were used in some secondary schools (e.g. Abbey Grange and Bishop Young) to isolate the impact of explicit oracy feedback.

Impact across schools:

- **Confidence and engagement**

Pupils in intervention groups showed significant gains in confidence to speak in front of others. Pupils reported greater enjoyment and belief in their ability to improve through feedback. Increased willingness to contribute during discussions, particularly when talk roles were clearly defined.

- **Improved quality of talk**

Students became more familiar with oracy terminology and could articulate what makes effective talk (e.g. tone, structure, vocabulary).

Explicit teaching and feedback led to better-structured presentations (e.g. persuasive speeches, traditional story retellings).

Pupils in KS2 and KS3 used higher-level vocabulary and were more likely to speak in full sentences.

- **Disciplinary impact**

Teachers saw a clear improvement in writing outcomes following oracy-focused tasks, particularly in persuasive and narrative units. This was clear in some primaries and some secondaries

In Maths, exploratory talk activities supported conceptual understanding and use of mathematical vocabulary.

Cognitive strand talk tactics (e.g. building, clarifying, summarising) improved reasoning and discussion quality.

- **Culture around feedback**

Pupils became active participants in giving and receiving talk feedback.

Many schools noted increased peer critique and the embedding of oracy success criteria in lessons.

Highlights:

- At Abbey Grange, intervention groups saw average confidence gains of +1.0 to +1.4 compared to +0.2-0.3 in control groups.
- At Lightcliffe Academy the percentage of pupils able to describe oracy increased from 24% to 81%.
- Over 70% of students at Bishop Young in the intervention cohort reported improved understanding of 'good talk' and were more able to critique their peers' work
- Strong link between oracy and writing: Pupils used presentational talk to rehearse language and structure, which directly improved written outcomes in Y2 and Y4.
- Transferable skills: Gains in oracy within Maths started to appear in other subjects too.

Next Steps:

Each school will aim to extend the use of the oracy framework by embedding it into curriculum planning and assessment practices moving forward. This will ensure that oracy is not treated as a stand-alone activity but is integrated meaningfully across subjects and year groups. To build staff expertise, schools will provide CPD focused on modelling high-quality talk and delivering effective feedback using the oracy strands. This training will support staff in recognising and developing pupils' spoken language skills consistently. It is part of the Instructional Coaching bespoke curriculum for next academic year with models of strong practice included from within the Trust.

Finally, a long-term plan will be developed to support progressive oracy teaching across the school. This will outline key skills and expectations at each stage of learning, ensuring that pupils build their confidence, fluency and communication skills year on year. It will ensure all

types of talk are mapped for pupils to develop over time. Bishop Young are currently planning this next step following the project.

Leadership of oracy within each academy will be significant as each school scales up their oracy provision next academic year, with the ambition to become Oracy Centres of Excellence. As such, next year's project will address oracy benchmark 3: Has a sustained & wide-ranging curriculum for oracy and benchmark 4: Is accountable for the impact of oracy.

Summary of findings from each academy:

Christ Church Upper Armley CE Primary Academy	
Focus	Presentational talk using the Oracy Framework.
Implementation	Planned a sequence of lessons across topics with regular feedback on presentational talk.
Impact	Pupils improved in using oracy terminology (e.g. tone, clarity) and felt more confident presenting. Peer feedback using talk tactics began to embed.
Next Steps	Share videos in staff CPD, ensure oracy is visible across school, allow planning time for explicit oracy teaching.

Lightcliffe CofE Primary School	
Focus	Linking oracy with improved writing outcomes.
Implementation	Planned presentational tasks (e.g. Y2 traditional tales, Y4 persuasive leaflets) with feedback cycles feeding into written work.
Impact	Pupils' confidence and structure in talk improved; better writing outcomes than previous cohorts; increased pupil understanding of the oracy strands.
Next Steps	Expand the approach to Y3, Y5, and transition units with focus on presentational talk.

Bishop Young CofE Academy	
Focus	Improving presentational talk in KS3 subjects (English, Geography, RE).
Implementation	Used feedback stickers and explicit oracy tasks in half of classes; control groups received no structured oracy feedback.
Impact	Intervention groups showed better presentation quality, vocabulary use, and confidence. More students saw the value of oracy in their learning.
Next Steps	Middle leaders reviewing curriculum to embed oracy assessments across KS3.

Holy Trinity CofE Primary Academy	
Focus	Exploratory talk in mathematics using feedback on different strands over time.
Implementation	Focused on SEMH, linguistic, and cognitive strands through talk trios, success criteria, and pupil-led reflection.
Impact	Improved engagement, stronger use of mathematical vocabulary, better reasoning outcomes. SEMH strategies transferred across subjects.
Next Steps	Extend across curriculum; Y4 and Y2 to deepen oracy implementation; staff CPD planned.

Lightcliffe Academy	
Focus	Improving exploratory and linguistic oracy through structured tasks in SHARED curriculum.
Implementation	3-lesson intervention with pre/post surveys, talk roles, coaching support, and explicit vocabulary modelling.
Impact	Marked increases in understanding of oracy (e.g. 24% to 81% knew what oracy meant); students showed greater care and structure in talk.
Next Steps	Roll out to other year groups and embed across SHARED curriculum to build an oracy-rich culture.

Abbey Grange CofE Academy	
Focus	Boosting confidence and skill in presentational talk via structured feedback.
Implementation	Intervention and control groups across Y7-9. Used surveys and feedback cycles during weekly lessons.
Impact	Intervention groups showed larger gains in confidence, enjoyment, and perceived skill; feedback seen as highly helpful.
Next Steps	Embed talk feedback strategies into routine planning; share findings via CPD.

Manston St James CofE Primary Academy	
Focus	Improving exploratory talk in maths using teacher feedback.
Implementation	Implemented talk tasks with manipulatives and structured talk time in Y2, Y3, and Y6.
Impact	Increased use of talk tactics, better vocabulary use, stronger reasoning and understanding, especially in maths. Transferable impact seen in other subjects.
Next Steps	Expand talk tasks to other subjects and classes; embed into long-term planning.

St Chad's CofE Primary School	
Focus	Developing purposeful exploratory talk using the cognitive strand.
Implementation	Discrete teaching of talk tactics during RE lessons in Y3/4 with visuals, modelling, and planned discussion.
Impact	Improved structure and purpose of talk; clearer understanding of tactics like building/challenging; weaker in summarising/probing – identified as future focus.
Next Steps	Strengthen teacher modelling and visual prompts; create an oracy long-term plan; use coaching to share best practice.

Collective 'top tips' for implementing feedback on talk within classrooms:

- ✓ To focus only on one or two strands at a time
- ✓ Model 'poor' talk and have students give feedback on a particular strand
- ✓ Use easy bullet points/questions as the criteria- put it into pupil talk
- ✓ Be prepared with oracy resources to support pupils' cognitive load (such as the framework or talk tactics)

- ✓ Discrete teaching alongside the oracy framework so pupils understand the reasoning behind feedback on talk
- ✓ Explain why talk is important- share the intent with pupils
- ✓ Practise in small groups. Try filming this and feedback to pupils
- ✓ Mixed ability pairs to help with peer feedback
- ✓ Teacher/ T.A. support to scaffold for lower prior attainers and SEND in the first instance, then allow pupils to work in mixed ability pairs when confidence has increased
- ✓ Use visuals to support peer feedback; make a poster together to show the success criteria

Resources:

Oracy Framework
 Oracy progression toolkit
 Peer assessment stickers
 Medium Term Plan proforma

Further Reading:

Voice 21. (n.d.). The Oracy Framework and Progression Toolkit. [online] Available at: <https://voice21.org> [Accessed 4 June 2025].

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