Oracy Education Commission

We need to talk.

The report of the Commission on the Future of Oracy Education in England

October 2024

The Commission on the Future of Oracy Education in England is hosted by Voice 21 in partnership with Impetus

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A WORD FROM THE CHAIR

October 2024

We need to talk about oracy—what it is, why it matters, and why, in particular, it matters now.

And to do that, we first need to talk about our children and young people. We need to talk about our teachers. We need to talk about what exactly it is that we are trying to do through our education system to prepare the younger generation to take their place as the future citizens of our country.

Because, as you'll see from our report, oracy is going to play an important part in this conversation.

Ours is an increasingly fractured and fractious society, where a mixture of technological change, pervasive anxiety and self-doubt, and shifting social and cultural patterns are all placing ever heavier expectations on how our schools and colleges fulfil their core purpose—to help prepare children and young people to become citizens who can flourish, living happy and successful lives. It's quite a responsibility.

A child's journey through education

So against this backdrop, it's across our early years settings, our schools and colleges, where we're going to need to rekindle a sense of optimism, of educational mission, of joy in learning.
Now more than ever, we need our young people to be equipped to ask questions, to articulate ideas, to formulate powerful arguments, to deepen their sense of identity and belonging, to listen actively and critically, and to be well-steeped in a fundamental principle of a liberal democracy—that is, being able to disagree agreeably.

That's where investing in our young people, equipping them with the knowledge, skills, attributes, values and self-assurance, will help them to thrive in an uncertain future.

And that work starts early— in the vital early years settings where the child develops the habits of socialisation, listens to and tells stories, and develops an emerging sense of how and where they fit into the world. From there a pupil experiences a rich primary curriculum in which oracy helps them to learn more powerfully, more deeply, guided and nudged on by expert teachers. Then through their secondary and college years the student acquires more specialist knowledge and insights across a widening range of subjects, enriched by opportunities for all kinds of speaking and listening activities, both within and beyond the classroom.

These overlapping and interconnecting aspects of oracy are good for children and young people; they are an essential part of every teacher's toolkit; and they bring vital benefits to an anxious society.

And it's rarely been more urgent. In this age of the robots, we want pupils to be ready to excel as human beings. As the nature of work changes, we want our teaching profession to regain its sense of agency, of value, of moral purpose and—yes—to rediscover the joy of being in the classroom, helping children and young people to gain a love of learning that will serve them well for the rest of their lives.

Which brings us back to oracy.

What oracy is … and isn't

Our Oracy Education Commission believes that oracy plays a significant part in all of the above—in helping our young people to understand and tell the great stories of our cultures, to find their own voice, to get a deeper joy from learning.

In truth, in great classrooms oracy has been a key part of teachers' repertoires for many years. There is very strong evidence that oracy education helps children in learning **to, through** and **about** talk, listening and communication.

Hence our work as the Independent Commission on the Future of Oracy Education in England. Our report sets out more about our view of what oracy is—consistent with years of high-quality research literature which we are now reaffirming as a practical basis for renewed policy development.

We aren't aiming to recreate the magisterial Bullock Report of 1975 which made the ground-breaking case for speaking & listening across the curriculum. But we will be building upon the exceptional research work of so many teachers and academics over the intervening years who have raised the profile of oracy in education and who have provided the substantial research base that makes the case for oracy so compelling.

So we'll be talking about what oracy is, and ruling some things out. We aren't serving up a National Strategy for oracy, or proposing that an 'oracy hour' is shoe-horned into an already packed school day. We aren't wanting to raise the profile of oracy by mechanistically calling for it to be explicitly inspected by Ofsted. We aren't recommending more specific high-stakes exams or tests in speaking & listening. And we most definitely aren't wishing to trigger a flurry of oracy gimmicks or supposed quick-fixes to be marketed to schools and colleges.

Instead, we want to do something bolder—on behalf of children and young people, the teachers and other professionals who work with and support them, on behalf of employers and communities.

The fourth 'R'

We want to move oracy more centrally into the experience of all young people in their journey through education. We want to see it become a key part of every teacher's repertoire, whichever age groups they work with, or subjects they teach. We want oracy education to serve our communities and employers in helping to develop young people with the critical knowledge and skills, the sense of civic empowerment, that will prove beneficial for them and for social cohesion.

In other words, we believe that alongside reading, writing and arithmetic, oracy is the fourth 'R': an essential, foundational building block to support our young people on their journey towards living fulfilling adult lives.

We are grateful that the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Education have both acknowledged the significance of oracy skills for our young people, and that it features in the forthcoming Curriculum & Assessment Review. This makes our role and remit easier. It allows us to set out some important recommendations and practical steps.

My thanks to our Commissioners—an extraordinarily talented, diverse group of people bringing deep expertise from various backgrounds. They spoke with insight and conviction; they listened absorbedly to new ideas. They were a pleasure to work with through these short but energising few months of our Commission.

And so, with educational and social change in the air, we believe it's time to do more than talk about great oracy. On behalf of the nation's children and young people—whatever their background—we think it's time to make it happen.

Geoff Barton
Chair
Commission on the Future of Oracy Education in England

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Why oracy? Why now?

In March 2020, classrooms across England fell silent as schools closed for the Covid 19 lockdown. The children born in those first months of the pandemic have just begun their school journey in reception. What kind of educational experience will enable them to realise their potential, feel belonging, discover their identity, negotiate an increasingly complex and confusing world around them and open doors to their future?

This Commission argues that it starts with talk. Oracy is intrinsic to children's early development, to the testing of thought, to social and emotional well-being, to confidence, agency and the ability to challenge or debate important issues in civil and constructive ways. Now, with an increasingly polarised society, the demands of a global economy, the surge of artificial intelligence, the persistent and pernicious achievement gap and resulting inequity of life chances, the imperative for prioritising oracy in education has grown rather than diminished.

Our Commission found a broad coalition in support of an education in which oracy is a core concern alongside literacy and numeracy. Parents want it, the economy demands it, democracy needs it, teachers welcome it and our children deserve it.

We know that oracy education is not a panacea that can address all the challenges experienced by our children and young people or the weaknesses of our education system. It is neither a quick-fix, nor an intervention that can simply be added as an appendage to the prevailing ways of educating our children and young people.

We also know that excellent practice exists across the length and breadth of the country. It ranges from systematic attention to oral language development in early years to careful planning for elaborated exchanges within particular subjects, to whole-school initiatives providing platforms for children's voices, to substantial extra-curricular enrichment.

But despite these oases of oracy, the national picture remains patchy and inconsistent. Sustained, high-quality oracy education is not a universal aspect of our children and young people's educational experience. This means there is untapped potential in our system to unlock the opportunities of oracy education for the individual and society, that we can ill-afford to disregard.

This opportunity has not gone unnoticed politically. In June 2023, the now Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer announced that if elected he would:

'commit a Labour government to make oracy a priority at all stages of education– so that every young person leaves school with the confidence and skills to use their voice to overcome barriers and make the most of their lives.'

We welcome this commitment and the subsequent launch of a Curriculum and Assessment Review. Oracy is a golden thread through all that the review is seeking to deliver. It is explicitly mentioned in the terms of reference in relation to:

'A curriculum that ensures children and young people leave compulsory education ready for life and ready for work. This includes embedding digital, oracy and life skills in the curriculum.'

Oracy is also crucial to the review's other aims of enabling children to benefit from an excellent foundation in core subjects of reading, writing and maths, and the provision of a broad curriculum that reflects the issues and diversities of our society and ensures all children and young people are represented.

A joined-up approach is required with changes to curriculum, teacher development and expectations, assessment and accountability. A combined effort, thoughtfully implemented over time, can lead to a lasting shift in educational policy and practice.

This report hopes to make a contribution to instigating this shift and improving the education of this coming generation of pupils, by:

- sharing perspectives and evidence on oracy from a wide range of contributors—drawing out areas of consensus and debate – and from these providing an operational definition for effective policy development;
- illuminating the role of oracy, celebrating its significance, exploring its boundaries and analysing its dimensions; and
- outlining the steps towards an education system that reflects the importance of developing students' oracy in the curriculum, embraces its potency as a means of learning in all subjects and phases, and values its contribution to positive outcomes for children and wider society.

These are big claims for oracy. But if – once and for all – our education system is to narrow the achievement gap between children from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds, we are convinced that oracy has as foundational role to play as reading, writing and mathematics. It is the fourth 'R'.

ORACY ON THE AGENDA

Over the last five years, there has been a groundswell of support for a greater emphasis on oracy in our education system in reviews, inquiries and reports.

'Redesign the English Language GCSE as a matter of urgency, and include a broader definition of English skills including media and spoken language.'

STRIKING THE BALANCE OCR REVIEW OF 11-16 CURRICULUM, 2024

'The Government should publish non-statutory guidance (like the Gatsby Benchmarks or Model music curriculum) for how schools can embed the statutory spoken language requirements set out in the National Curriculum.'

SPEAK FOR CHANGE, REPORT OF THE ORACY APPG, 2021

'Primary and secondary schools should consider how to implement high-quality whole-school programmes which explicitly promote oracy and articulacy, and the essential stepping stones in reading and writing which underpin children's learning in all subjects. This could have a special spotlight on the 10–12 age range, supported by Department for Education grant funding through the national English Hubs.'

THE FORGOTTEN THIRD, ASCL, 2019

'The Department for Education should introduce new National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) for Leading Numeracy and Leading Oracy. Leading Numeracy and Leading Oracy NPQs would create a rung of strong middle leaders in foundational skills who are equipped to run whole-school foundational skills strategies and develop the knowledge of other teachers.'

CRACKS IN OUR FOUNDATIONS, CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, 2023

'To broaden the curriculum and develop a wider range of skills than those promoted by written exams, students aged 16-19 taking classroom-based courses should be required to take one additional subject in Year 12 (equivalent to an AS level) that will be examined entirely through an oral assessment.'

EXAMINING EXAMS, EDSK, 2024

'As part of a wider review of the Key Stage 3 and GCSE curricula, the Government should embed opportunities for oracy and communication skills development.'

REQUIRES IMPROVEMENT: URGENT CHANGE FOR 11-16 EDUCATION, LORDS COMMITTEE ON 11-16 EDUCATION, 2023

'Fund 500 Centres of Excellence for foundational speaking and listening skills (oracy), to model a world-class oracy education and explicitly embed it into the curriculum, on par with literacy and numeracy.'

IMPETUS MANIFESTO: SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL, WORK AND LIFE, 2024

'We recommend that there should be a renewed emphasis on vocabulary, particularly in Early Years and Key Stage 1, which can dramatically improve personal outcomes in adult life and employability. In addition to communication, teaching other broader, or 'essential' skills such as teamwork, problem-solving and resilience should be a key element of a new curriculum.'

LEARNING AND SKILLS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY, SOCIAL COHESION AND A MORE EQUAL BRITAIN, LABOUR COUNCIL OF SKILLS ADVISORS, 2022

'Schools should plan for progression in spoken language and writing with the same precision as progression in reading and literature, and teach the vocabulary, grammar and conventions of these.'

TELLING THE STORY: THE ENGLISH EDUCATION SUBJECT REPORT, OFSTED, 2024

2 WHO'S TALKING?

Our Commissioners were chosen because they represent a diversity of experience, perspectives and expertise relevant to oracy education. We intentionally invited individuals from the education sector with backgrounds in school leadership, curriculum design, sociolinguistics, and children's mental health and well-being. Beyond education, we also sought representation from the arts, citizenship, and employers to provide a broader range of insights to inform the conversation.

The Commission was supported by a small secretariat and hosted by Voice 21 with additional support from Impetus.

Geoff Barton (Chair)

Geoff Barton was an English teacher for 32 years. He was also Head of English, Deputy Head, and then Headteacher of a large comprehensive school for 15 years. For the past 7 years, he was General Secretary of the Association of School & College Leaders, representing 25,000 senior leaders in education across the UK.

Justine Andrew

Based in Leeds, Justine is Head of Education and Skills at KPMG and is also Head of the University Partnership Team. She leads KPMG's work with some of the largest Education providers nationally as well as being at the forefront of work in the skills space. In her University Partnership role, she is thinking differently about how providers and employers can work together across a range of areas, including embedding skills such as oracy into the curriculum. She has a particular interest in the economic development of 'place' and the role of collaboration to achieve that.

Sally Apps

Having begun her career as an English teacher in Manchester in 2003, Sally Apps achieved her first headship a decade later, becoming the Principal of Bristol Metropolitan Academy. Sally is currently Education Director at the Cabot Learning Federation, and works alongside the Department for Education to support schools' trust development in the South-West, with a particular focus on supporting Alternative and Specialised Provision.

Jeffrey Boakye

Jeffrey Boakye is an educator, author and broadcaster. He is a Senior Teaching Fellow at Manchester Institute of Education and has authored seven books including *I Heard What You Said*, which explores how we can dismantle racism in the classroom. Jeffrey was an English teacher for 15 years, first in London and then East Yorkshire. and was part of the team who, in partnership with the University of Cambridge, developed the Oracy Framework.

Stephen Coleman

Stephen Coleman is Professor of Political Communication at the University of Leeds and was co-investigator on the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)-funded Speaking Citizens research project. He presents the 'Sound of Politics' podcast and is author of several books, including *How People Talk About Politics: Brexit and After.* For the past fifteen years he has taught modules on confident self-expression to undergraduates.

Christine Counsell

Christine Counsell started her career as a history teacher and transitioned into leadership roles at John Cabot City Technology College, Bristol, and as local authority adviser for Gloucestershire, before leading the Secondary History PGCE at the University of Cambridge and later becoming the Director of Education at Inspiration Trust. A renowned expert in curriculum design, she now runs Opening Worlds, a knowledge-rich programme for teaching history, geography and religion in primary schools.

Rob Drummond

Rob Drummond is Professor of Sociolinguistics at Manchester Metropolitan University, where he researches, teaches and writes about the relationship between spoken language and identity. He recently led the community-focused Manchester Voices project, exploring the accents, dialects and identities of people in Greater Manchester, and he co-leads The Accentism Project, which strives to challenge and raise awareness of language-based prejudice. Rob does a lot of public-facing academic work and is the author of *You're All Talk: Why We Are What We Speak.*

Sarah Houghton

Sarah Houghton is Director of Mental Health Workforce Development at Place2Be, a charity that provides high-quality mental health services in schools. With over a decade in programme design and delivery, Sarah joined Place2Be in 2018 as a Programme Leader. She previously led leadership development programmes in education with the Future Leaders Trust and then Ambition School Leadership. She is also a Gestalt psychotherapist.

Rufus Norris

Rufus Norris, a multi-award-winning theatre and film director, gained critical acclaim for his West End revival of *Cabaret*, which won two Olivier Awards. His debut feature film, *Broken*, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival and received the Golden Eye Award at the Zurich Film Festival. Since 2015, Norris has served as artistic director and chief executive of the National Theatre, where he advocates for creative education and has highlighted the importance of oracy alongside factual learning.

Sonia Thompson

Sonia Thompson is Headteacher of St Matthew's C of E Primary School in Birmingham. She has led a range of initiatives to improve education, including a collaboration with Oracy Cambridge as part of a Key Stage One oracy development project. She is a trustee for both the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and Classics for All. Her book, *An Ethic of Excellence in Action*, offers practical guidance on embedding Ron Berger's educational theory into schools' everyday practices.

3
Findings

Over the course of five months (April – September 2024), the Commission met five times, received 94 submissions of written evidence, curated 58 Commission Conversations and held roundtables on the English Language GCSE, teacher training, assessment, the arts and inclusion. We considered international comparisons, case studies of practice from individual schools and listened to the advice of experts in education policy and system change.

This report cannot do justice to the breadth and depth of the conversation and thinking on and around oracy education. We have not attempted to provide original research. Instead, in the spirit of oracy, we have narrated what we heard, explained our thinking and conclusions as a Commission, and outlined what we believe is the best course of action to secure a systemic and generational shift in access to oracy education in England. These findings are a summary of the themes and areas of consensus that emerged during our deliberations and shaped and guided our recommendations.

The Commission Conversations

Because this is a commission on oracy, we wanted to root our work in conversations with people who have opinions about the topic. Over five months, Geoff Barton had one-to-one discussions with more than fifty people from across the education sector and beyond. These short podcasts explore oracy at a theoretical and practical level, illuminating what oracy is, and why it matters. This library of conversations remains available and we encourage you to listen to them to build your own understanding of oracy education. You can find a full list of contributors to these ‘Commission Conversations’ at the back of this report.

3.1 THE DEFINITION AND DIMENSIONS OF ORACY

To date, there has been no universally agreed-upon definition of oracy, nor a broad consensus on its role in education. We heard that this ambiguity makes it challenging to establish best practices or shared expectations.

During the Commission, different contributors—including teachers, academics and education leaders—highlighted the aspects of oracy they considered important. We used this to produce a definition of oracy that shapes the scope of our findings and recommendations, and which can be used in policy formation. The Commission agreed that oracy can be best defined as:

"Articulating ideas, developing understanding and engaging with others through speaking, listening and communication"*

Oracy education is therefore the intentional cultivation of the ability to articulate ideas, develop understanding and engage with others through speaking, listening and communication. It comprises three interrelated, overlapping and mutually reinforcing components:[1]

a) Learning to talk, listen and communicate: the development of children's speaking, listening and communication skills.

b) Learning through talk, listening and communication: the use of talk or dialogue to foster and deepen children's learning.

c) Learning about talk, listening and communication: building knowledge and understanding of speaking, listening and communication in its many contexts

To illuminate these different dimensions of oracy and highlight their significance, we have outlined what we have learnt about them in the section below. We have also included a detailed breakdown of each aspect of oracy education on pages 28-29 and have threaded case studies showcasing best practices throughout this report.

* We have used the term 'communication' here alongside speaking and listening to recognise other forms of related communication, such as sign-language, non-verbal and Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC).

3.1.1 Learning *through* talk

- Dialogic teaching is a 'pedagogy of the spoken word which harnesses the power of talk to stimulate and extend students' thinking, learning, knowing and understanding, and to enable them to discuss, reason and argue.'[2] This approach emphasises the importance of cognitively challenging talk which evidence suggests makes a demonstrable difference to pupil engagement, learning and attainment[3].

- Dialogic teaching approaches involve teachers extending students' thinking and understanding through talk, enabling them to expose and address misconceptions and gather real-time information on student progress and achievement. It requires skilled teachers who can balance productive dialogue, critical thinking, and respectful interaction across different contexts.

- To engage effectively in 'exploratory talk'—which involves students critically and constructively interacting with each other's ideas and making their reasoning visible through talk—students benefit from support and structures to develop understanding of what exploratory talk is like.[4]

- Other talk-based teaching approaches, such as drama pedagogy[5]—which emphasises storytelling and storymaking—and theatre-based pedagogy[6]—which employs techniques and principles from theatre—have evidence of impact on both cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes for students.

> **'Although talk is a universal feature of classroom life, talk of the quality required [for dialogic teaching] is not universal. Making it happen requires skill and training.'**
>
> PROFESSOR ROBIN ALEXANDER, WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE COMMISSION

> **'My experience is that a well-structured learning environment where teacher-talk is highly valued alongside children's responsive discussion provides high quality opportunities for every child to engage with learning.'**
>
> DAME ALISON PEACOCK, *THE CHARTERED COLLEGE OF TEACHING*, WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE COMMISSION

3.1.2 Learning *to* talk

- Oracy is also a curricular goal in its own right, referring to the intentional development of young people's skills in using spoken language, similar to the explicit teaching of algebra in maths or drawing in art.[7]
- One way of drawing together the generic skills of oracy is to group them into physical, linguistic, cognitive and social-emotional competencies. This has been the approach adopted in the Oracy Framework, developed by Voice 21 and the University of Cambridge as part of an Education Endowment Foundation funded pilot.[8]
- Identifying a set of oracy skills which transcend subjects can be helpful to support senior leaders to evaluate how well their wider curriculum supports their students to develop a rich repertoire of speaking, listening and communication skills.[9]
- The study of speech and debate (perhaps through the study of rhetoric[10]) is a key aspect of oracy education. Complementing their subject-led learning, these practices help students to explore the relationship between persuasion, argumentation and evidence. They learn how arguments can be evaluated in relation to reason; knowledge or fact; and community or audience. As such, speech and debate provide opportunities for students to develop critical thinking and reasoning skills that are of benefit across all curricular learning, and to active citizenship both at school and in later life.

> 'It is imperative, in a globalised and knowledge-driven world, that young people are effectively trained in [...] oracy skills that equip them to listen actively and communicate effectively.'
>
> *THE ENGLISH SPEAKING UNION,* WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE COMMISSION

> 'The development of effective communication and language begins as soon as the children start with us and plays a central role in our Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum. All Reception children take part in daily 'Time for Talk' sessions. These sessions give teachers the opportunity to actively teach children the language skills they need [to access the curriculum] and give children daily opportunities to put these skills into practice [...] through discussion, story-telling, role play and immersive learning. From Reception to Year 6, we explicitly teach aspects of the Oracy Framework to ensure our pupils develop the oracy skills needed to become effective speakers and listeners in different contexts.'
>
> LIZA TIMPSON-HUGHES, *SAMUEL RYDER ACADEMY*, WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE COMMISSION

CASE STUDY:
TEACHING ORACY AT ALL SAINTS CATHOLIC COLLEGE, LONDON

A few years ago leaders at All Saints Catholic College noticed that their students, who were high-performing academically, struggled to talk confidently about their passions or articulate why they should be considered for a leadership position in school. Amongst other initiatives to build on and strengthen the school's performing arts provision, leaders introduced a weekly 'oracy lesson' for students in Year 7, taught by their drama teachers. The routines and habits which students develop during discrete oracy lessons are then built on in lessons in different subject areas.

> 'The starting point was actually just [children] introducing themselves, being able to speak to another child, or to a teacher, to an adult, to a friend's parent and being able to [...] say who they are, what their name is and start off a conversation but then [...] also throughout the year, through the curriculum they [build their oracy skills...] and end the year by doing a monologue. The lesson effectively teaches them the skills they need to speak out loud, to be able to compose a speech, to be able to hold a conversation when you're really nervous about something. Really importantly, they also learn how to listen and adequately respond. It's something we then try to build into the [wider] curriculum so that learning is not lost at the end of Year 7.'
>
> ANDREW O'NEILL, HEAD TEACHER, ALL SAINTS CATHOLIC COLLEGE

While leaders at the school recognise that it is difficult to measure the impact of the school's oracy provision on young people's self-confidence and their ability to speak and listen, O'Neill notes that attendance has improved for key groups of children and more children are engaged in performing arts which he attributes to the school's work on oracy.

3.1.3 Learning *about* talk (and language more widely)

- Language is a rich and dynamic area of study drawing on technical, cultural, political, historical, geographical and psychological influences. Yet, despite its centrality to how we live, learn and interrelate, students spend little time throughout their school career learning about language and talk. Since the removal of the Spoken Language Controlled Assessment in English Language GCSE, there are few opportunities for students to engage in the study of spoken language.[11] Indeed, there is widespread dissatisfaction with the content of the secondary English language curriculum and GCSE qualification which offers few opportunities for students to learn about talk.[12]

- Studying spoken language can empower students to make informed choices about their language and communication and understand the impact of these choices. It can also help them analyse and appraise the speech choices of others.[13] Children and young people should learn about listeners' perceptions and consider how race, class, and other speaker characteristics influence what we hear and why.

'Oracy education should [..include] learning about talk, particularly the sociolinguistics of code-switching, to raise awareness of the validity of effective communication in multiple spoken Englishes.'

THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION, WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE COMMISSION

3.1.4 What needs to change

A SHARED DEFINITION AND COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF ORACY

To realise the promise of oracy education, we need to adopt a shared definition and common understanding of what oracy is, and where to locate it in our education ecosystem.

This should reflect an expansive understanding of oracy and the three dimensions of oracy education outlined above— learning to talk, listen and communicate; learning through talk, listening and communication and learning about talk, listening and communication.

CASE STUDY:
INVESTIGATING SPOKEN LANGUAGE

Studying spoken language used to form part of the Controlled Assessment for GCSE English Language. Students were required to explore their own and/ or others' spoken language, including spoken language in media and in blended forms of communication such as internet messaging services.

'The GCSE Spoken Language Controlled Assessment had a fundamental impact [on teaching about talk and listening]. It was loved by teachers and students. They had to come up with their own spoken language investigation and then write it up. As a result of that, lots of English teachers learnt more about language because they were doing so much work around spoken language. It also fed really well into English Language A Level because children got enthused by it. Teachers also felt empowered [... to teach about spoken language and listening] at Key Stage 3 because they were preparing for GCSE.'

BARBARA BLEIMAN, ENGLISH & MEDIA CENTRE

Inspired by the Language in the National Curriculum (LINC) project, an in-service teacher education programme designed to improve teachers' knowledge about language, the English & Media Centre produced a resource – *Investigating Spoken Language* – to support teachers to prepare students for this component of the Controlled Assessment. It included video clips of people using spoken language in different contexts, for example the school, the workplace, in scripted drama, sports commentary and The One Show. Through the study of specific examples of talk in practice, students developed an awareness of different aspects of spoken language including 'standard English', accent and dialect and were supported to explore the relationship between language and power.

'Resources such as these produced to support the Spoken Language Controlled Assessment demonstrate how students can develop knowledge about speech through studying it and then investigating it. It also shows how putting it into the curriculum can make a really big difference both to teachers' own professional development about speech and students' knowledge and understanding about language.'

BARBARA BLEIMAN, ENGLISH & MEDIA CENTRE

3.2 ORACY THROUGHOUT A CHILD'S EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Talk is a feature of every classroom and educational setting. Harnessed effectively for learning, it enhances cognition and improves outcomes. Oracy is also a curricular object and educational end itself. It can be nurtured, taught, demonstrated and applied through explicit instruction, planned authentic learning experiences, as well as teachable moments. Our Commission found that oracy can and should be embedded throughout a child's educational experience from the earliest stage, before they enter formal education, through to their progression to further or higher education and employment.

3.2.1 Early language

- Children's early language experiences are critical to their cognitive development and act as a powerful predictor of their future educational achievement across the curriculum (in maths as much as literacy),[14] social and emotional wellbeing,[15] and future opportunities. As such, improving these early language experiences represents one of our best opportunities to ensure that background is not a barrier to a child's success in education.
- This is recognised in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, which supports children to meet two early learning goals in communication and language. One goal relates to listening, attention and understanding, and the other to speaking. The EYFS explicitly states that the development of children's spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development.[16]
- Whilst evidence-informed screening and intervention for early language in the Reception year is well-established and supported by the Department for Education,[17] some schools do not use these interventions at all and others only implement them in part.
- Ongoing and appropriate support is not consistently in place as children leave the Early Years. Despite approximately 20% of children in England not being at the expected level for communication and language by the end of the Reception year, there is no further monitoring data for their language as they progress through school.

'Approaches that emphasise spoken language and verbal interaction can support the development of communication and language [...] Focusing on language and communication is especially important for young children and will support the development of a range of early literacy skills as well as their wider knowledge and understanding.'

PREPARING FOR LITERACY: IMPROVING COMMUNICATION, LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN THE EARLY YEARS, *EDUCATION ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION (EEF)*

CASE STUDY:
DEVELOPING EARLY LANGUAGE AT CRAB LANE PRIMARY SCHOOL, MANCHESTER

At Crab Lane, speech and language needs are often children's primary barrier to learning on entry to nursery. Last year, only 14% of children joining nursery met age-related expectations for speaking. This rose to 60% by the time they joined Reception. As a result of this need, the school provides targeted support to some children, as well as universal provision to support all children's language development.

'If we get it [oracy] right in the Early Years, that will set children up for their whole time with us at Crab Lane.'

LAURA DAVIDGE, ASSISTANT HEAD-TEACHER, CRAB LANE PRIMARY SCHOOL

At Crab Lane, continuous provision in the EYFS is designed to create a language-rich environment that fosters the development of every child's oracy skills. As children move through different areas, practitioners enhance their thinking and learning through thoughtful interaction, and approaches such as Blank Levels of Questioning and Sustained Shared Thinking. For example, in the role-play area, children are encouraged to use target vocabulary in speech or speak in role, which is modelled by adults. Children also have opportunities to retell stories, recite rhymes, and sing songs, supporting their language development.

As a result, children become more confident in expressing their opinions and preferences, sharing their thoughts, and extending their reasoning. These communication skills support children's social interactions and relationships with both peers and adults, while also supporting their learning and equipping them for success as they move through school.

3.2.2 Spoken language in the National Curriculum

- The current National Curriculum includes statutory requirements for the teaching of spoken language which are outlined in the English programmes of study. Spoken language is also included within the aims statements for particular subjects, including science and maths. However, there is a gap between the ambition of the current National Curriculum and how it is enacted in schools.[18]

- While the National Curriculum does address spoken language, its role has been 'downgraded' in favour of a greater focus on 'Reading' and 'Writing.'[19] The curriculum's approach to spoken language heavily emphasises traditional models, such as presentational talk, poetry recitation, and 'standard English'.[20] Moreover, its strong focus on 'standard English' risks devaluing other 'non-standard' dialects of English.[21]

- As a result, the National Curriculum signals to schools and teachers that spoken language is less important than reading and writing and provides insufficient guidance regarding how to meet its ambition for spoken language. Polling in 2021 found that only half of primary teachers and a quarter of secondary teachers were confident in their understanding of the spoken language requirements in the National Curriculum.[22]

> **'85 pages of the current National Curriculum Framework Document are devoted to reading and writing, spoken language has just three!'**
>
> ROBIN ALEXANDER, WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE COMMISSION

3.2.3 Oracy and subjects

- When teaching pupils to reason within a particular subject, whether to shape an investigation or an argument, to compose something new or to solve a problem, subject teachers are fostering discipline-specific ways of thinking and knowing. These bring with them distinctive collections of vocabulary or idiom, differing types of dialogue and differing purposes for interactions.

- Subjects also have different methods for evaluating truth, different standards of evidence and different types of accepted discourse within which this happens. For example, in mathematics, pupils might use talk to recall and apply declarative knowledge, to model and practice thinking aloud and to justify mathematical proofs.[23] In English, high-quality dialogue supports students' comprehension and interpretation of texts (including inference, deduction and the use of evidence) as well as being a vital part of their development as writers.[24] In the chemistry classroom, knowledge of the proper scope, limits and purposes of a particular experiment enables pupils to work together productively on their practical task, making or listening to apposite observations and thereby deepening their understanding of the scientific purpose. In history, pairs of pupils might examine one another's attempts at shaping a causation argument.

- Teachers of these subjects, attentive to their subject's purposes, explain things, provide resources and set tasks which foster practice in the subject's discourse, whether that is correct use of a disciplinary vocabulary, encounter with a rich subject-specific text or an opportunity to solve a problem in a distinctive disciplinary way. All this fosters disciplinary oracy—a richly informed discourse that is attentive to a subject's purposes.

> **'A generic approach to oracy would be bad. We don't need a diktat that every lesson must include a debate or a speech. But a disciplinary approach, one that recognises the crucial role of speaking and listening in maths, could pay dividends.'**
>
> DAVID THOMAS, AXIOM MATHS[25]

3.2.4 Oracy and literacy

- Speaking and listening skills are essential building blocks for reading and writing. Evidence indicates that success in literacy relies on the secure development of language and so a focus on students' speaking and listening skills is essential to literacy development.[26] As students move through school, reading can also support language development, exposing students to a wide range of vocabulary which can support them across the curriculum.[27]

- Oracy-rich approaches to vocabulary teaching provide opportunities for children to reinforce their understanding of new words; connect new words to prior knowledge; and use new words in a variety of contexts.[28] Oracy skills, including vocabulary, determine how a child progresses in learning to read and write, and how they approach literary texts.[29]

- Well-known approaches to the teaching of writing and reading rely on talk-based pedagogies. For example, 'Talk for Writing' which supports children to internalise the language structures needed to write through 'talking a text'[30] and 'Read Write Inc. Phonics' who have pioneered the use of partner talk which, when routinised and well-planned, can engage children in high-quality dialogue and back-and-forth interactions.[31]

- In several secondary subjects, traditions of using rich, literary or disciplinary texts to introduce students to real subject-specific arguments, narratives or formal

CASE STUDY:
LEARNING TO ARGUE IN HISTORY AT ARK SOANE ACADEMY, LONDON

By Year 9, pupils at Ark Soane Academy are used to steadily shaping and testing an emergent historical argument across a sequence of lessons. Students do this in response to different kinds of historical question, each requiring a type of historical analysis or a journey of evidential reasoning. As they prepare to draw the threads into an extended answer, they test out their arguments orally, questioning and offering critique to one another in pairs or as a class. Each lesson sequence culminates in an extended response to the enquiry question, either written, oral or both. Pupils offer oral challenge to those whose turn it is to present an argument orally.

As they listen to pupils' communication, history teachers look for five things: systematic reasoning that stays close to the historical question, care in expressing degrees of certainty, plenty of connection between points so that listeners can follow, fluency in calling up factual material; and, finally, a mastery of the 'shape' that an historical argument needs, rooted in a disciplinary concept (e.g. change/continuity or causation).

Remarking on how the whole key stage caused this impact in Year 9, Mike Hill, head of history, said:

'We get all pupils engaging in meaningful historical reasoning not by teaching formulas but through three main methods: first, our knowledge-rich curriculum paints worlds with great thoroughness, in rich detail and story, so that pupils gain period sensitivity and avoid anachronism. Their thorough knowledge builds a repertoire of abstract, analytic vocabulary to which pupils can attach plenty of meaning. This vocabulary is strengthened through deliberate and ample rehearsal. Second, sustained reading and discussion of good historical texts in every lesson enables pupils to soak up the style and structure of argument. Finally, it is by staying with one enquiry question across a lesson sequence, recording their ideas with that question always present in their minds, that pupils learn rigour in historical reasoning. For example, Year 9 stay with "Did Stalin transform the Soviet Union?" over five lessons, incrementally refining their arguments. The enquiry question drives lessons with great purpose and thus immerses pupils in the proper style and scope of historical argument, helping them to mature as historical thinkers. This gives pupils a propensity for precision in oral argument and an expectation that sloppy, unhistorical thinking will be questioned.'

reports, feed into students' vocabulary range and grasp of idiom, and awareness of appropriate flow in building a case. Conversely, in some subject traditions, teachers use oral interaction to help pupils to use and respond to these texts. Reading rich text and gaining confidence in purposeful dialogue thus become symbiotic.[32]

3.2.5 Arts education

- Arts education offers unique conditions and contexts for pupils to engage in dialogue, express themselves and develop their oracy skills through creative processes. Opportunities to speak, listen and engage in creativity and experimentation, which can be developed through arts education, play a crucial role in children's development.[33]
- For too many young people, access to the arts has been pushed into enrichment or extracurricular time making them the preserve of a self-selecting few rather than an entitlement for all. For example, the number of students taking Drama GCSE has declined by 39.4% since 2010[34] and children in the most economically advantaged areas are twice as likely to play music or engage in Performing Arts outside of school as their least advantaged peers.[35]
- Oracy education and arts education are mutually supportive: teaching pupils to talk and listen makes an arts education accessible; and an arts education provides a distinctive vehicle for the provision of opportunities for pupils to engage in experiences that foster the development of their oracy skills and provide authentic contexts for speaking across a range of different situations and purposes.

3.2.6 Extracurricular and enrichment activities

- Whilst oracy should not be confined to extracurricular or enrichment activities, increasing the provision of and access to opportunities for oracy beyond the classroom can reinforce and extend students' spoken language and communication skills, reward achievement, inspire aspiration and offer novel contexts for communication, confidence-building and collaboration. This is true of activities primarily concerned with spoken language (e.g. debate and drama) and involvement in sports, music and youth groups.

'Debate clubs were popular in private schools (53%), but much less common in state schools (18%).'

LIFE LESSONS 2024, THE SUTTON TRUST[36]

- Participation in public speaking, debate, spoken word poetry and theatre outside of formal learning can stretch and challenge young people, allowing them to further pursue and progress in their interests, and receive recognition for their achievements. This can support progression to higher education and employment. These activities can infuse and imbue the school culture and can enrich a school's ethos.

3.2.7 What needs to change

ESTABLISH ORACY AS THE FOURTH 'R' AND INCREASE ITS PROMINENCE IN THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

The time has come for oracy to be firmly established as one of the 'four Rs'—recognised, valued, and resourced alongside reading, writing, and arithmetic as a cornerstone of education.

The National Curriculum (applicable to all schools) should therefore give more attention and intention to oracy emphasising it as an essential programme of study throughout the years and phases of statutory education and applicable across subject domains. This programme of study should act as an overview of the oracy knowledge and skills students should be taught and experiences they should have during their time at school. Schools should have freedom and flexibility in deciding how to embed this requirement into their curriculum; some skills are most appropriately taught within particular subject journeys; others could be developed as part of special experiences and aspects of school life beyond the subject curriculum.

A foundational approach to oracy education which maintains a focus on language and communication from EYFS, through KS1 and beyond will build children's dexterity in the routines of effective talk, listening and communication, and reinforce and sustain progress in language development. It will also provide energy and purpose to Key Stage 3, laying the groundwork for success in a new stage of education by equipping students with the skills they need to develop relationships, contribute in class and advocate for themselves and others.

INVEST IN EARLY LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Investment in early language through high-quality Early Years education, support to families and timely intervention and specialist provision will yield benefits throughout a child's time in education.

REVISE THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE GCSE

There appears to be consensus that the English Language GCSE is not fit for purpose—lacking distinction, breadth and a sufficient focus on the disciplinary nature of language. A revised English Language GCSE should engage students in the study of spoken language. This will empower students with greater appreciation of their own language identities and the critical awareness and agility required to navigate the complexities of language in today's world. This will, in turn, necessitate teachers to deepen their own awareness, knowledge and understanding of language and linguistics and create greater continuity between Key Stages 3, 4, and 5.

INCENTIVISE A BROAD CURRICULUM INCLUDING EXPRESSIVE ARTS

The expressive arts create unique, authentic and meaningful contexts for oracy and expression. Schools should be resourced and incentivised to ensure that all students have access to a broad curriculum which includes expressive arts as a matter of social justice.

IMPROVE PROVISION AND ACCESS TO EXTRA-CURRICULAR AND ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Access to extra-curricular activities that support and promote oracy should not be the preserve of better resourced students and communities, further exacerbating inequalities in education and opportunity. Increasing the resources and the operational capacity available to schools in less advantaged communities or facing additional barriers (such as rurality, transport availability etc.) informed by improved data on provision and take-up could help to level the playing field.

DEFINING ORACY

We have developed a clear, practical definition of oracy which is faithful to the research around the value and impact of oracy education, and which can be used to guide policymaking.

Oracy is:

articulating ideas, developing understanding and engaging with others through speaking, listening and communication.[1]

It comprises:

LEARNING **TO** TALK, LISTEN AND COMMUNICATE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S SPOKEN LANGUAGE, LISTENING AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

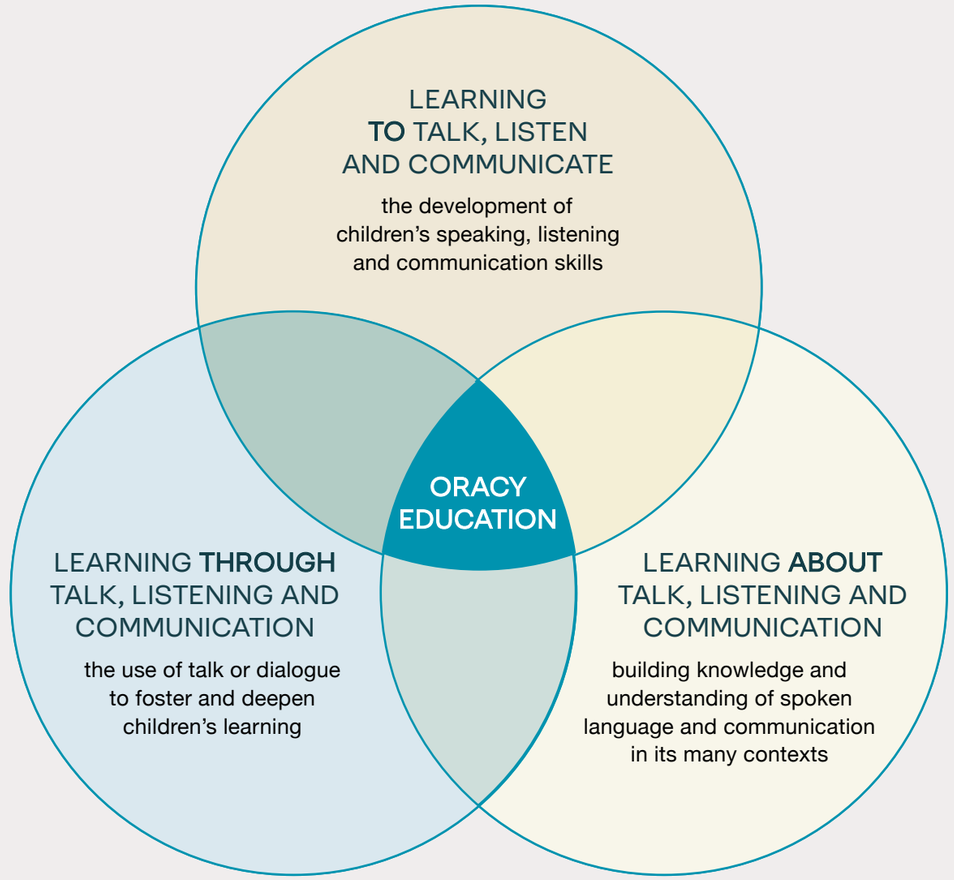
To develop their repertoire of speaking, listening and communication skills young people need to be taught to talk, listen and communicate effectively in different contexts. The Oracy Framework—a tool to support the teaching and assessment of speaking and listening—divides the oracy skills young people need to develop at school into four distinct yet interrelated strands: the physical, the linguistic, the cognitive and the social-emotional.[2] It can be used as a tool to support teachers to decide what to attend to as they teach different aspects of spoken language.[3] For example, when preparing students to perform a piece of poetry out loud, students may benefit from explicit teaching about the physical aspects of oracy such as tone, pitch and pace. Similarly, when engaging in group discussion, students may need to be reminded about the social-emotional dimensions of oracy, such as inviting contributions from those who have yet to speak and ensuring everyone has a chance to contribute. These skills require explicit teaching; however, they do not need to be taught as part of a discrete 'oracy lesson' and can be developed effectively as part of well-designed subject curricula.

LEARNING **THROUGH** TALK, LISTENING AND COMMUNICATION: THE USE OF TALK OR DIALOGUE TO FOSTER AND DEEPEN CHILDREN'S LEARNING

Oracy is also a pedagogical issue, involving choices a teacher can make in the classroom and how they deploy talk to elevate learning within their particular subject or phase. Through educationally productive talk, students share, develop and extend their thinking and engage critically yet constructively with the thinking of others, furthering their learning. This can be accomplished through skilfully guided whole-class, pair or small-group discussions, targeted questioning or one-to-one interactions. Moreover, opportunities to present and explain their learning, which require students to make decisions about how to adapt their knowledge for particular contexts or audiences, can help consolidate their understanding. The effectiveness of dialogic teaching approaches is supported by significant research; an EEF-funded trial on dialogic teaching— which aims to improve student engagement and attainment by improving the quality of talk—found that students taught by participating teachers made additional progress in English, maths and science,[4] and research conducted at the University of Cambridge found that high-quality classroom dialogue, which involves elaboration and querying of previous contributions, is positively associated with curriculum mastery.[5] In the Early Years, research has demonstrated that Sustained Shared Thinking – in which children are supported to share and extend their thinking through talk- is a key characteristic of settings where children make the most progress.[6] More broadly, using talk for learning offers teachers an efficient way to assess their students' knowledge and understanding of curriculum content and, in turn, address any misconceptions. Clearly, talk for learning is just one of many pedagogical tools available to teachers who must use their judgement to determine how and when to use this approach most effectively; nevertheless, it remains a powerful tool with significant potential to enhance learning.

LEARNING **ABOUT** TALK, LISTENING AND COMMUNICATION: BUILDING KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF SPOKEN LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION IN ITS MANY CONTEXTS

To make informed decisions about how they speak and communicate, young people must also learn about spoken language and communication in all its forms. This supports them to make informed choices about what language to use in specific contexts and enables them to understand and value their own and others' ways of using language. As part of this, students should learn that some people have communication needs or communicate differently, for example through using sign language or communication devices to express themselves. Learning about talk and listening should also equip young people to recognise and challenge language discrimination by developing their critical awareness of spoken language. When studying English Language at A Level students develop their knowledge about language through the study of sociolinguistics, engaging with debates surrounding spoken 'standard English,' developing awareness of how language is used in different regions, social groups and occupations. However, younger students can also learn about spoken language through, for example, reflecting on how their language use changes in different contexts, developing an understanding of the differences between spoken and written language and exploring why we all talk differently. Not only is this important as part of developing students' use of spoken language and communication but also because knowledge and understanding of language in use is important in its own right.



Conceptualising the place of oracy in a school's subject curricula

These three dimensions—learning to, learning through, and learning about talk, listening and communication—provide a conceptual framework for understanding the role of oracy in education throughout compulsory schooling. Here we provide a fuller account of these three dimensions, along with indicative examples of where they may be effectively integrated within well-designed subject curricula.

Dimensions of oracy in school curricula	Subject examples
LEARNING TO TALK, LISTEN AND COMMUNICATE	
— Use exploratory talk to develop and shape ideas or reasoning and engage critically yet constructively with others' ideas or reasoning. — Talk and listen purposefully and equitably as part of a group, for a range of purposes, including understanding diverse perspectives, problem-solving and consensus building. — Navigate diverse contexts for exploratory talk, including varieties of group composition and diverse group goals or purposes. — Take account of the physical, cognitive, linguistic and social-emotional aspects of oracy when speaking and/or listening for a range of presentational and exploratory purposes. — Understand and use a range of vocabulary and varied idiomatic phrases confidently and appositely when talking for a particular purpose.	— In geography, students develop the geographical knowledge, vocabulary, skills and practical experience to work as a team to plan and conduct fieldwork on the impact of tourism, including reaching consensus on the wording of the geographical question, planning the practical stages of the enquiry, collecting data through carefully planned interviews which take account of linguistic and ethical considerations, and constructively challenging one another on the interpretation of oral data. — In history, students present and defend a conference-style paper on a contentious issue, listening calmly and analytically to robust challenge, and engaging carefully with their challengers' reasoning. They have the historical knowledge and vocabulary, practice in modes of historical reasoning and familiarity with types of historical scholarship to do this effectively. — In English, students use group discussion to examine how a writer's choices affect the reader. They use examples from novels and poetry to support their ideas and listen attentively to others' reasoning to develop their own critical responses.

Dimensions of oracy in school curricula	Subject examples
LEARNING THROUGH TALK, LISTENING AND COMMUNICATION	
— Use talk and listening to rehearse and reflect the standards and conventions of knowledge, vocabulary and reasoning, appropriate to each subject discipline. — Answer questions using extended responses to explore and test understanding of new material. — Frame and pose exploratory questions (to peers and teachers) about new material to deepen and demonstrate their understanding of fundamental subject themes or particular subject questions. — Practise using new vocabulary and idioms confidently and appropriately in relevant contexts.	— In maths, students develop or embed mathematical reasoning through talk, for example by articulating a mathematical proof or evaluating alternative methods. — In modern foreign languages, students practise new vocabulary, constructions and idioms, building confident pronunciation, accuracy and speed. — In history, students consider a story in the light of a disciplinary question, and offer ideas to their peers on how the story sheds new light on that question. — In citizenship, students engage with emotive and/or controversial issues through dialogue, furthering their understanding and exploring diverse perspectives through talk and listening.
LEARNING ABOUT TALK, LISTENING AND COMMUNICATION	
Students need to learn about: — The physical, linguistic, cognitive and social-emotional dimensions of oracy that should be attended to when speaking and listening. — How and why forms of English differ and how to use knowledge of this. For example: 'standard English' is a dialect of English, rather than a single 'correct' way of speaking; there are many languages and dialects spoken in England, reflecting our history and identities; diversity in dialect, conventions of expression, accent and vocabulary have evolved for historical reasons; written and spoken language are not direct copies of each other. — How to develop their linguistic repertoire and exercise agency over the way they use this repertoire to express themselves. — Ways of respecting and valuing diverse forms of speaking and communication.	— In English, history, and geography, pupils explore patterns of language change over time, examining how regional diversity develops and how the relationship between language and culture shapes the unique human stories that define a place. — In English students consider how language works in society through conducting an investigation into spoken language in a specific context such as the school, home, workplace, social environments or broadcast media. — In PSHE, students learn about different ways people communicate, such as through sign language or by using communication devices, and develop an awareness of how these ways of communicating support inclusivity and accessibility.

MODES OF TALK

The table overleaf summarises the ways in which the journey towards confident and effective speaking, listening and communication can be embedded within a schools' subject curricula. However, to support school leaders to understand how well their wider curriculum supports their students to develop a rich repertoire of speaking, listening and communication skills, it is also useful to consider the modes of talk in which students should become proficient throughout their time at school.

These modes are: (i) building understanding, (ii) debating and persuading; (iii) negotiating and making change; (iv) expressing and performing. In practice, these rarely operate in isolation, but to see them conceptualised in the four-fold division, can be helpful for schools when considering the strength of their overall provision for oracy.

We recommend specifying a series of entitlements within each mode of talk (see the table below for examples in each mode). Most of these entitlements can be effectively taught within subject areas where they naturally align. Some entitlements, however, would benefit from special experiences beyond the subject curriculum, namely:

- in extra-curricular activity (such as performance in plays, participation in a debating club or in other forms of public speaking);
- in social practices which form part of the corporate life of the school (such as membership of committees, councils or working groups);
- in special events or projects (such as a cross-curricular project in which students use geographical, scientific, mathematical, design and business knowledge to craft and pitch a proposal).

Modes of talk	Indicative entitlements All pupils should have opportunity to:
BUILDING UNDERSTANDING	— solve a problem through talk — participate in discussion within a particular subject discipline — interview somebody about an experience — peer teach (explain what they know to someone else)
DEBATING AND PERSUADING	— take part in a debate — deliver a pitch — give a persuasive speech — participate in mock elections
NEGOTIATING AND MAKING CHANGE	— participate in an extended, collaborative team exercise, in which pupils must negotiate with one another and with an external agency, for a purposeful, real-world goal — take part in Model United Nations — join Student council or Pupil Parliament — participate in advocacy and local action (for example, negotiating with the local council about the roads near school)
EXPRESSING AND PERFORMING	— produce and perform poetry — perform a play — tell a story — participate in a 'show and tell'

WHAT ORACY IS NOT

Elocution lessons

There is no one 'correct' way to speak as what is considered good speech changes depending on the context in which we are speaking. Moreover, there is not just one desirable speech style; there are a variety of ways to speak effectively and impactfully. Our conception of 'good' is not, and should not be, exclusive of those who stammer, have speech, language and communication needs, or use 'non-standard' English. Oracy education is therefore not about teaching students to mimic an idealised form of spoken language. Instead, it should support all young people to build their confidence in communication, expand their linguistic repertoires and equip them to make thoughtful, informed decisions about how to communicate in different situations. It should not push them to adopt formal or standard language practices or to conform to narrow conceptions of effective speaking. Ultimately, oracy education should empower students to develop their own authentic voices.

Purely performative

Oracy education should develop young people's speaking, listening and communication skills across a range of contexts. While high-stakes, audience-focused, performative contexts for talk, such as public speaking, debating and recitation, are an important part of an oracy education, they do not represent it in its entirety. Rather, an oracy education must span the full spectrum of situations which demand skill in spoken language and communication: from listening to a peer, to negotiating a shared solution, to building understanding through discussion, to communicating ideas to an audience. To focus only on teaching the performative, 'polished' aspects of speaking, listening and communication is to neglect the messy, routine and everyday role of talk in learning and in life.

Idle chatter

Educationally productive talk is far from 'idle chatter'. When embedded in well-planned subject curricula, purposeful episodes of talk can enhance students' subject knowledge and understanding, providing them with opportunities to develop the knowledge, vocabulary and reasoning appropriate to each subject discipline. This may involve students talking about their learning to a peer or in a small group. To make the most of these opportunities and ensure talk for learning is purposeful and productive, explicit teaching about how to talk and listen well in this context is necessary. Oracy education should not require teachers to shoehorn opportunities for talk into their lessons when these do not further their specific learning objectives.

A checklist of decontextualized skills

There can be value in breaking down and teaching specific oracy skills: think, for example, of a student who needs coaching to project their voice or to be equipped with strategies to better manage turn-taking in a group. However, an oracy education cannot be viewed as a list of skills which can be isolated and taught out of context. To do so misses the clarity provided by purpose and context, the depth of content and the richness of the relational aspects of speaking, listening and communication. Effective teachers of oracy will situate their students' development of speaking, listening and communication skills within, and in complement to, their broader curricular learning goals.

1. We have used the term 'communication' here alongside speaking and listening to recognise other forms of related communication, such as sign-language, non-verbal and Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC).
2. Mercer, N., Warwick, P. and Ahmed, A. (2017). 'An Oracy Assessment Toolkit: Linking Research and Development in the Assessment of Students' Spoken Language Skills at Age 11-12', Learning and Instruction, 48, pp. 51-60
3. Ofsted. (2024). Telling the story: the English education subject report. London: Ofsted. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/subject-report-series-english/telling-the-story-the-englisheducation-subject-report
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5. Howe, C., Hennessy, S., Vrikki, M. and Wheatley, L. (2019). 'Teacher-Student Dialogue During Classroom Teaching; Does it Really Impact on Student Outcomes?', Journal of the Learning Sciences, 28(4-5), pp. 462-512.
6. Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R. and Bell, D. (2002). Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years. London: Department for Education and Skills.

3.3 THE OPPORTUNITIES OF ORACY EDUCATION BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

The promise of oracy education is far-reaching. Oral language and communication skills can enhance well-being, improve employability and foster improved civic engagement.

3.3.1 Employability and skills

- Spoken communication and interpersonal skills are highly valued and in demand by employers.[37] They consistently top the list of skills demands yet they emerge as one of the biggest skills gaps in the school leaver and graduate workforce.
- Business leaders think oracy has significant economic value, and that it enhances the promotability of employees. In an AI-disrupted labour market, they believe that spoken language and listening skills are likely to grow in value. They support increased attention to oracy in education to build young people's employability and leadership skills.[38]
- Workplace experiences, including opportunities for students to practise interview skills and engage in authentic workplace communication,[39] can play a key role in helping young people develop their speaking skills. These experiences also help students to feel more confident about entering the world of work.[40]

> **'Lack of confidence in speaking skills has a real impact on young people's career prospects. By Year 11 just 59% feel confident talking about their skills in an interview. Only 60% are aware how a speaker might exert influence through the way they speak.'**
>
> *THE CAREERS AND ENTERPRISE COMPANY*, EVIDENCE TO THE COMMISSION

CASE STUDY: LEARNING *THROUGH* TALK AT ST. MATTHEW'S C OF E PRIMARY SCHOOL, BIRMINGHAM

Leaders at St. Matthew's C of E School have implemented a pedagogical approach to oracy which supports their learners to engage with a knowledge-rich curriculum. Teachers use dialogic teaching approaches and accountable talk practices to enable students to build their knowledge and understanding within subjects across the curriculum. Talk is viewed as a means through which students interact with knowledge, supporting them to connect new knowledge to prior learning.

'We talk to the children about what their learning schemas are, [...] how we retrace over the links in our schema to really understand something and the only way we can retrace over it is through practicing and that's what talk does. [...] If they can speak it and articulate it that means that they know [...what we're learning] well.'

HYDEH FAYAZ, DEPUTY HEAD AND ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR AT ST. MATTHEW'S RESEARCH SCHOOL

In learning across the curriculum, teachers encourage children to interact with and develop each other's ideas. To do this, children are supported to use accountable talk structures to process and challenge their thinking, to agree or disagree with each other or clarify their thinking. This supports them to develop their metacognitive understanding of what they're learning. This is supported by strong routines, for example around paired and group talk, which support students to engage in educationally productive talk.

3.3.2 Well-being and belonging

- The interpersonal and collective nature of talk can help counter feelings of detachment and isolation in school and proficiency in oracy supports children and young people in building and sustaining relationships. This is particularly important given that social anxiety and the prevalence of child and adolescent mental health issues have risen significantly in recent years, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic.[41]
- Spoken communication skills are associated with self-confidence, self-esteem[42] and emotional literacy,[43] enabling children to regulate and express their thoughts and behaviour. Oracy education can support mental health and well-being by giving students the tools and opportunities to share their feelings, ask for help, engage positively with others and feel understood and valued.[44]

‘59% of children say strong communication skills make them feel happier.’

PEARSON SCHOOL REPORT, SHARED AS WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE COMMISSION

52% of parents say their children (aged 5-9 years old) are struggling to make friends because they lack self-confidence in speaking to others.’

ESU POLLING, SHARED AS WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE COMMISSION

‘Spoken language is crucial for successfully navigating social interactions and different cultural contexts. Strong oracy skills enable children and young people to express their feelings, advocate for their beliefs, and build and maintain healthy relationships.’

THE NATIONAL LITERACY TRUST[45]

3.3.3 Civic education

- Opportunities to express their ideas and critically engage with their peers in dialogue, deliberation and debate prepare young people as active, engaged, and reflective citizens. Oracy education can support young people to develop the confidence and agency to advocate for themselves and others and open the minds of young people to a diversity of ideas and perspectives.[46]
- Engaging in discussion, debate, negotiation, deliberation and persuasion foster critical thinking, empathy, and argumentation skills, all of which are crucial in addressing misinformation and polarisation.[47]

‘[Young people] need the confidence to speak up and to speak out, the wise scepticism about the things they see and read, the belief in the social bonds that hold us together, the humanity of each of us and all of us.’

BRIDGET PHILLIPSON MP[48]

‘For a democratic society to function effectively, the population needs to be educated and to feel confident and able to assert its voice [...] To achieve this, all members of the public need to have developed the confidence and the talk skills to listen carefully, to ask questions to clarify their understanding, and to assert their views.’

JAMES MANNION, *ORACY CAMBRIDGE*, WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE COMMISSION

3.3.4 What needs to change

RECOGNISE THE WIDER BENEFITS OF ORACY EDUCATION THROUGH SCHOOL CULTURE AND PRACTICES

Oracy should be a whole school consideration embraced and embedded in the school’s pastoral, personal development, creative and extracurricular provision and imbuing its routines, ethos and culture. The opportunity of oracy extends beyond the tangible benefits to academic outcomes and functional skills. Intentionally valuing students’ voices and nurturing a culture of agency, attentiveness and collaboration supports children to flourish creatively, civically and in their social and emotional well-being and belonging. This improves their educational experience and their chances of thriving as friends, citizens and workers when they leave school.

AMPLIFY ORACY TO BUILD CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, CIVILITY AND CRITICAL THINKING

For most children and young people, school offers their first civic experience—participating in a community beyond their home and family. Schools should act as a civic space, nurturing civic values, promoting a democratic culture, empowering student voice and fostering civic literacy.

3.4 IMPLEMENTING ORACY EDUCATION

Oracy must be embedded in the statutory requirements for schools through the National Curriculum, but children do not experience learning through National Curriculum purpose statements. It is the decisions made by leaders in schools and teachers in classrooms which will make the biggest difference to the impact and effectiveness of oracy education. Teachers and leaders must be empowered to make good decisions and not misdirected with perverse incentives or unnuanced accountability.

3.4.1 Oracy and teacher development

- Oracy has been included in the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF).[49] However, a trend towards more generic teacher training is problematical for oracy. First, it may not support teachers to grapple with approaches to oracy that are appropriate and effective within their subject context (see page 22 on oracy and subjects). Second, it may not provide the time, space and expertise required for teachers to develop their broader subject expertise, or the capacity to exercise their professional autonomy individually or as part of an intellectual community of practitioners. Without this, teachers will not be well placed to develop as practitioners of and through oracy.[50]

- Many of those learning to teach in England do not currently receive any training about spoken language and there is very little provision for teachers, especially those who do not teach English, to develop knowledge about language in continued professional development. In the past, Language in the National Curriculum (LINC)[51]—an in-service teacher education programme aimed at enhancing teachers' understanding of and knowledge about language—served as a valuable model. Reflecting on LINC offers insight into how future teacher education programmes could support the development of critical language awareness.[52]

- A significant proportion of children have Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN).[53] Teaching staff who understand how speech, language and communication skills typically develop, and know which strategies effectively support language and communication development, will be better able to identify and support those children who need additional help in the classroom.[54] However, current training is inadequate; 53% of teachers do not feel that they have had sufficient training to support their students' speech and language in the classroom.[55] To ensure a focus on speech, language and communication as part of oracy education benefits children with SLCN, teachers need access to better training and support.[56]

- Talk and language-rich classrooms can be particularly beneficial for students who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL).[57] However, research demonstrates that early career teachers do not feel prepared to teach in multilingual classrooms[58] and that supporting students using EAL is a key area where teachers report a need for professional development.[59]

CASE STUDY:
LEARNING *THROUGH* TALK IN MATHS AT SUMMERHILL PRIMARY ACADEMY, BRISTOL

Teachers and leaders at Summerhill Academy have been working to develop their students' mathematical reasoning and confidence through a focus on educationally productive talk. They use a structured lesson format in which students are introduced to an idea or concept through teacher exemplification. Supported by mathematical talk frames, students then verbalise their reasoning and apply their understanding through opportunities to talk through example problems in pairs or small groups. Students' understanding is then drawn out through extended sequences of whole-class dialogue in which students justify their reasoning and critically evaluate each other's methods.

'An oracy-rich approach has developed our children's mathematical confidence by enabling them to talk through and build their understanding of key concepts, focusing on process and efficiency rather than just getting the right answer. It's also helped our teachers identify misconceptions much earlier. By the time children get to year six, they look forward to maths tests and just inhale the questions on the reasoning paper, which they never did before.'

CHRIS BARRATT, HEAD TEACHER

The impact has been clear: in 2023, 95% of students achieved or exceeded the expected standard in mathematics in their Key Stage 2 SATs, an increase of 25 percentage points on the previous year. Moreover, the number of students eligible for Pupil Premium achieving or exceeding the expected standard increased by 46 percentage points to 94%. In 2024, 97% of students achieved or exceeded the expected standard in mathematics, including 65% of children eligible for Pupil Premium funding achieving the higher standard, compared with 20% of children eligible for Pupil Premium funding who achieved the higher standard nationally.

3.4.2 Oracy and assessment

- Oracy has had no direct currency in our examination and accountability system (outside of Modern Foreign Languages) since the Spoken Language component of English Language GCSE was changed to an endorsement in 2014.

- Most teachers lack tools for the diagnostic, supportive and formative assessment of oracy. Teachers are not resourced to appraise progress in oracy and use this understanding to adapt and inform planning. Tracking children's progress in spoken language and consistent monitoring for the identification of those who need support also stalls beyond the Early Years. This contrasts with approaches for reading (phonics test) and mathematics (multiplication check); and despite the existence of robust tests (WellComm, CAT4, CELF-5, for example) that are used internationally. This lack of testing disproportionately impacts children with undiagnosed speech, language and communication needs.[60]

- **Assessment *of* oracy:** standardising conditions for testing, the interactive and interdependent nature of spoken language, separating content knowledge from performance skills, practicalities of moderation of teacher-assigned marks/grades and the risk of a reductive effect with students practising the end-goal (rather than the curriculum elements required to achieve the composite at a high standard) all make assessing oracy challenging.[61] However, new forms of assessment using digital tools offer the potential to improve the practicality and consistency of oracy assessment in the future.[62]

- **Assessment *through* oracy:** oral assessment is not generally used in the assessment of subjects in school-based qualifications. They are a component of the International Baccalaureate and are used in some apprenticeship assessments. There are also international examples of oral assessments such as Le Grand Oral recently introduced in France.[63] However, with growing concerns about the impact of AI on assessment, calls have been made to explore the potential for using oral exams to assess aspects of different subjects.[64] Any shift toward more oral exams would need to take into account necessary adjustments for students with communication differences, such as those who stammer, to ensure fairness and inclusion.[65]

> **'If the construct of oracy is now seen as very broad and deep, then assessing speaking and listening may run the real danger of 'construct underrepresentation' – assessing limited dimensions of oracy, and thus lacking validity.'**
>
> TIM OATES CBE, GROUP DIRECTOR OF ASSESSMENT RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT AT CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS & ASSESSMENT

3.4.3 Oracy and accountability

- Oracy (including related terms such as speaking and listening and spoken language) is rarely mentioned within Ofsted's inspection reports.[66] When spoken language is mentioned, it is often to celebrate students' use of 'standard English' or criticise their use of non-standard forms of English which are deemed by the inspectorate as unsuitable for the classroom.[67]

3.4.4 What needs to change

EQUIP AND BUILD TEACHERS' REPERTOIRE THROUGH TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The quality of oracy education can only be as good as the skill and expertise of our teachers. Teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge and skill required to support all students to learn to, through and about talk, listening and communication through professional learning from initial teacher training to leadership development. This cannot be confined to a one-off course or inset day for teachers with a particular interest in oracy. And it must also go beyond inserting general approaches to speaking and listening into teacher development frameworks. All teachers should learn to be language-aware and confident in teaching, monitoring and assessing spoken language but they also need to understand and grapple with oracy as it relates to the specific intellectual goods of their phase and subject.

SUPPORT TEACHERS AND LEADERS TO MAKE GOOD DECISIONS ABOUT ORACY

To avoid a proliferation of tokenistic practice and ill-informed advice and training, teachers and leaders need to be empowered to make good decisions about how best to implement oracy education. This requires building, curating and disseminating a foundational body of evidence resulting in insights, training opportunities and resources across all subjects and phases. To do this, research bodies should work in partnership with expert teachers and subject associations to identify the features and active ingredients of high-quality oracy education, synthesise existing evidence and prioritise further evidence generation to address gaps and provide explainers and exemplars of different approaches to effective implementation in diverse settings. We would particularly welcome research exploring the efficacy of different approaches to improving students' speaking, listening and communications skills in their own right as much of the current evidence base relates to how oracy improves outcomes in reading and writing.

HELP SCHOOLS TO FORMATIVELY ASSESS AND TRACK PROGRESS IN ORACY

To track progress, identify when and how individual students might need support, plan and sequence provision and give specific, informative, useful feedback to students, teachers need the understanding and tools to undertake regular, formative assessment of oracy. In light of the rise of AI, schools should also introduce regular opportunities to evaluate students' understanding and command of a discipline through oral assessment methods such as vivas, tracked discussion (for example Harkness[68]), articulation of approaches to problems and verbal analysis and accounts of events.

EXPLORE NEW FORMS OF ASSESSMENT

The lure of assessment and accountability as a lever for change is strong especially in a system that has prized measurement and accountability. Without formal assessment, currency and reporting there is a risk that oracy remains sidelined and fails to cut through the competing priorities and pressures schools aim to address. However, this risk has to be balanced with evidence as to how high-stakes assessment and accountability could pervert the purpose of oracy education and detract from an expansive understanding of oracy—narrowing the scope to what is most easily or reliably testable. After much deliberation, the Commission concluded that investment in curriculum guidance and exemplification, teacher development, evidence and research, and the mobilisation of existing high-quality practice should precede any attempts to introduce new high stakes testing of oracy.

Whilst not proposing an assessment and accountability-led approach to embedding oracy, we support the instigation of work to explore the development of qualifications to recognise student achievement in oracy as part of the review of assessment. New technologies and innovations in assessment offer alternative methods and formats that could address the challenges of assessing oracy.

TRAIN OFSTED INSPECTORS TO UNDERSTAND ORACY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Oracy education should also be considered a contributing factor to the quality of education a school provides within the proposed accountability dashboard/ scorecard.[69] Inspectors will need training and guidance to understand the dimensions and attributes of high-quality oracy education and the variety of ways these can (and cannot) be demonstrated in schools.

3.5 CONSIDERATIONS

Whilst the aim of oracy education is to benefit all children, there are some concerns that it could fail to do so, if not all voices are equally valued. Non-standard dialects, spoken by many in marginalised communities, are often undervalued in schools, and there is a concern that placing greater emphasis on oral communication could disadvantage children with Speech, Language, and Communication Needs (SLCN) or those who use alternative forms of communication. We must ensure that the definition, intent and practices of oracy education are not only inclusive but also work to dismantle existing inequalities.

3.5.1 Inclusion

- The very term 'oracy' is considered by some to be non-inclusive, giving primacy to spoken language over other forms of communication. Children whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language (BSL) or who are non-verbal and communicate through written language or using alternative and augmentative (AAC) devices should not be excluded by a focus on oracy in education. Indeed, oracy education should affirm and celebrate these differences in communication.[70] We heard examples of schools that have done just this, such as West Lea School in Enfield, a special school serving students aged 4-25, which has integrated oracy into its ongoing work on communication. You can read more about this on page 46.

- Oracy education should support all children to maximise their communication potential. In 2023-24, almost 370,000 children had a primary need of SLCN. Within this group, many have Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) – a lifelong condition which affects approximately 7.6% of children. Children with many of the other categories of special educational need may also communicate differently or require some additional support, such as autistic children, deaf children, and those with learning disabilities.[71] Many children with SLCN attend mainstream schools. In these settings, a framework of universal, targeted and specialist provision for language development could be used to develop an inclusive approach to oracy education which supports children with SLCN effectively.[72]

- The oral elements of education can be particularly challenging for some students. For example, students who stammer may find answering questions or contributing to class discussions or debate difficult and, in some cases, traumatic.[73] Concerns have already been raised about the lack of support for and understanding of children who stammer in education and there is a risk that this could be exacerbated by a growing

focus on oracy. In particular, any conceptions of effective oracy which conflate 'fluency' and 'good communication' risk disadvantaging children who stammer.[74] 'Fluency' is not a marker of communicative skill or competence and so it should not be a standard by which we discuss or evaluate effective oral communication.[75] To facilitate positive speaking experiences for students who stammer, oracy education should have as much emphasis on listening as speaking and any oracy curriculum should help to normalise speech differences.[76]

3.5.2 English as an additional language

- There are 1.7 million children in state-funded primary and secondary schools in England who use English as an Additional Language (EAL).[77] There is strong evidence that a carefully implemented, inclusive, oracy-rich curriculum can support learners who use EAL to build solid foundations in both their home or preferred languages and in English.[78] However, approaches to oracy that assume all learners are already competent speakers of English and that measure oracy skills development according to age-related expectations only may not be effective for learners using EAL who are new-to-English. Instead, approaches to oracy for EAL learners should: ensure sustained and systematic exposure to English in different contexts; provide opportunities for new-to-English learners to practise everyday language and build new knowledge and understanding of key concepts orally; ensure children using EAL benefit from adapted teaching, support from teachers, teaching assistants, peers in mixed language groups and EAL specialists if required; not require extensive withdrawal from mainstream classes.[79]

3.5.3 Language diversity and discrimination

- Not all voices are valued equally. The forms of language and expression used by historically powerful social groups have traditionally been elevated by the education system, subjugating language and forms of expression that do not conform. Critics of oracy education argue that these biases were embedded in the concept of oracy from its very inception in the 1960s, when distinctions between 'articulate' and 'inarticulate' speakers were defined by social class, positioning the language practices of marginalised children as linguistically inferior to their middle-class counterparts.[80] However, recent advocates of oracy do not emphasise 'standard English,' focusing instead on fostering students' confidence and pride in their authentic voices, regardless of linguistic background.[81]

- Sociolinguists have repeatedly demonstrated that 'non-standard' dialects of English, which have their own consistent grammatical structures and linguistic patterns, are not linguistically inferior to 'standard English.'[82] However, these 'non-standard' dialects, spoken by many in marginalised communities are sometimes devalued by efforts to promote the use of 'standard English' in schools.[83] In some cases, students' authentic ways of speaking are actively denigrated, with encouragement to 'lose' their local accents or through derogatory 'bans' on elements of particular dialects such as Black British English.[84] This impacts expectations for spoken language in the classroom, with evidence suggesting that teachers often correct students' oral use of 'non-standard English,' even during exploratory episodes of talk. Such practices can negatively affect children's self-esteem and motivation, making them less likely to contribute to class discussions and closing down opportunities for them to develop their thinking and understanding through educationally productive dialogue, thereby undermining the potential benefits of oracy education.[85]

- Developing students' command of written 'standard English' is an important educational objective[86] and teachers may use oral rehearsal of sentence structures as means of developing this. However, evidence does not suggest that policing students' spontaneous use of oral language will support them to conform to the conventions of written 'standard English.'[87]

- All students can benefit from opportunities to expand their repertoire of speaking, listening and communication skills and to develop their thinking and understanding through educationally productive classroom talk. Oracy education should not be framed as a targeted intervention to support working-class or marginalised students to adopt the language practices of a privileged group of people.[88]

> **'Any examination of 'oracy' must [...]challenge and question how dichotomies and categories in language come to produce the idea that there are some ways of speaking which are inherently better or worse than others.'**
>
> IAN CUSHING, WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE COMMISSION

> **'Oracy education should be about developing awareness and understanding of spoken language use, not just skills. This should include becoming aware of how language variation relates to sociological and political issues. It should help students understand why they, as a speaker, may experience or exercise prejudice when they interact with someone who speaks differently.'**
>
> NEIL MERCER[89]

CASE STUDY:
LEARNING TO TALK, LISTEN AND COMMUNICATE AT WEST LEA SCHOOL, ENFIELD

West Lea School, a special school in Enfield serving students aged 4-25, across four campuses, has been focusing on oracy as part of their existing work on communication. Teachers support students' communication and talk for learning through explicit teaching and opportunities to engage in classroom talk.

'We don't just want compliant children sitting behind desks and just doing the work. We want them to be able to share their voice, discuss things, learn from others.'

TANVEELA HAIDER, ORACY LEAD AT WEST LEA

The leadership team at West Lea has invested in professional development for staff across the four campuses, ensuring that teachers are well-equipped to support all learners to participate in and benefit from classroom talk.

'For some young people, who use laptops to communicate... we wouldn't focus on the physical strand, which is about your own voice, and how you use that – we want it to be inclusive. We might focus on the social-emotional strand – a goal around turn-taking for example. That doesn't mean that for children who are able to access, for example, the physical aspects of oracy, that we ignore that.'

TANVEELA HAIDER, ORACY LEAD AT WEST LEA

3.5.4 What needs to change

RECOGNISE AND VALUE DIFFERENT FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

The definition of oracy should recognise other forms of communication which children and young people use to articulate ideas, develop understanding and engage with others to avoid excluding children who communicate through means other than spoken language.

TRAIN TEACHERS IN LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

To ensure oracy education is truly inclusive of students with communication needs or who communicate differently, training for teachers on typical language development, strategies to support students to develop their speech, language and communications skills and support to tailor their teaching approaches to the needs of these students is vital. This will enable teachers to better identify students with SLCN and more effectively support them in the classroom.

TEACH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE DIVERSITY

A focus on learning *about* talk, listening and communication as part of oracy education should also provide opportunities for all young people to learn about different forms of communication and develop awareness of how these ways of communicating support inclusivity and accessibility for individuals who communicate differently. This should be included as part of an oracy programme of study in a revised National Curriculum.

Children should be taught to explore their language choices and make conscious, informed decisions about how to communicate effectively in different contexts. As a result, the oracy components of a revised National Curriculum should emphasise the value of different dialects and ways of communicating and avoid placing undue emphasis on 'standard English' or 'fluency.' The aim of learning *to* talk, listen and communicate should be to support all young people to increase their repertoire of speaking, listening and communication skills, rather than to adopt one particular form of spoken language.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Oracy as the fourth 'R'

We believe that oracy is as foundational in learning as reading, writing and arithmetic. It should be an entitlement in every child's education to prepare them as future citizens. Here is how that could be achieved.

MAKE ORACY A CORE ASPECT OF EDUCATION FROM EARLY YEARS TO POST 16 BY...

a. Adopting a broad and expansive definition of oracy that encompasses learning to, through and about speaking, listening and communication and embed this throughout the detailed curriculum requirements, rather than just in the overarching aims at every phase.

b. Introducing an oracy entitlement throughout the primary and secondary National Curriculum outlining the experiences, skills and knowledge all students should access and engage with to build their repertoire of oracy skills.

c. Investing in early language development to reduce language inequities at the earliest opportunity.

d. Incentivising schools to provide a broad curriculum that enables children to access the value of the expressive arts and citizenship as contexts for oracy.

e. Integrating the study of spoken language into the secondary English curriculum, enabling young people to develop critical language awareness.

BUILD ORACY INTO TEACHER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT BY...

a. Ensuring that all teachers are skilled in using dialogue and discussion to enhance learning in educational phases and in subject disciplines as part of initial teacher training and ongoing teacher development.

b. Requiring teacher training and development includes understanding of Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) and strategies to support children with these needs throughout their education.

c. Making the role of oracy a key component of leadership development in securing quality of education and shaping school culture.

d. Providing a programme of professional development to support an oracy entitlement showing how this can be achieved through subjects, PSHE and as part of the school day in activities such as assemblies and tutorials.

PROMOTE EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES TO ORACY BY...

a. Publishing non-statutory guidance to support school leaders and teachers in making informed decisions about how to implement high-quality oracy education.

b. Supporting subject associations in providing training opportunities and resources to help teachers across all subjects to develop disciplinary approaches to oracy.

c. Establishing a foundational body and evidence-based source of expertise that outlines the key elements and components of high-quality oracy education.

REFLECT THE SCOPE AND VALUE OF ORACY IN ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY BY...

a. Reforming GCSE English Language to develop a qualification which teaches all young people about the history of the English language, its influence and influences, and celebrates its richness and diversity

b. Increasing the emphasis on assessment to enhance learning, rather than for high-stakes reporting, through the provision of diagnostic and formative assessment tools and strategies to support teachers in understanding student progress in oracy and identifying areas of need and improvement.

c. Investigating the feasibility of formal assessment of speaking & listening to recognise a young person's proficiency in spoken language and communication. This could be as part of a functional skills passport at 14 or a new GCSE English Language qualification.

d. Acknowledging the role of oracy in delivering quality of education and personal development as part of a new school 'accountability dashboard'.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all of the individuals and organisations who responded to our call for evidence, participated in 'Commission Conversations', shared their perspectives through roundtable discussions or contributed exploratory papers to our 'Speaking Volumes' publication. The content of this report is not a consensus of all the views we heard but each contribution provided new insight and informed the Commission's deliberations.

We would also like to thank the many experts who provided advice throughout this process and gave constructive feedback on this report. Your knowledge and guidance has been invaluable.

We are grateful to colleagues from Voice 21, ImpactEd and Impetus for keeping the Commission train in motion. Special thanks to Beccy Earnshaw and Amy Gaunt for their unstinting time in planning, drafting and redrafting this report.

This Commission would not have existed without the leadership and support of Voice 21—the dedication and drive of the team and the vision of their Board of Trustees.

Finally, the biggest thanks must go to our Commissioners who were all so committed to the endeavour and generous with their time and expertise. Commission meetings were wonderfully dialogic and deliberative spaces full of exploration, critical thinking and learning. And of course, our Chair, Geoff Barton who orchestrated this inquiry with dedication, experience, wit and more than a dash of flair! His openness to talking to as many people as possible and thinking deeply about every idea encountered has been the beating heart of the Commission.

The 'Commission Conversations'

Geoff Barton held 58 conversations with a range of people to explore the concept of oracy at a theoretical and practical level.

Christine Counsell, *Opening Worlds,* April 3, 2024
Professor Rob Drummond, *Manchester Metropolitan University,* April 5, 2024
Professor Stephen Coleman, *University of Leeds,* April 9, 2024
Sally Apps, *Cabot Learning Federation,* April 11, 2024
Rufus Norris, *National Theatre,* April 12, 2024
Jeffrey Boakye, April 13, 2024
Sonia Thompson, *St Matthews C.E. School,* April 14, 2024
Sarah Houghton, *Place 2 Be,* April 18, 2024
David Thomas, *Axiom Maths,* April 22, 2024
Barbara Bleiman, *English and Media Centre,* April 25, 2024
Justine Andrew, *KPMG,* April 26, 2024
Amy Gaunt, *Voice 21,* April 28, 2024
Tim Oates CBE, *Cambridge University Press & Assessment,* April 30, 2024
Martin Robinson, May 2, 2024
Louisa Reeves, *Speech and Language UK,* May 8, 2024
Professor Neil Mercer, *Oracy Cambridge,* May 10, 2024
Dr Tom F Wright, *University of Sussex,* May 12, 2024
Michael Rosen, May 14, 2024
Professor Julia Snell, *University of Leeds,* May 16, 2024
Professor Arlene Holmes-Henderson, *University of Durham,* May 19, 2024
Kirsten Howells, *STAMMA,* May 22, 2024
Wardah Farah, *University of Greenwich,* May 28, 2024
Pie Corbett, *Talk for Writing,* May 30, 2024
Professor Deborah Cameron, *University of Oxford,* June 3, 2024
Dr Ian Cushing, *Manchester Metropolitan University,* June 6, 2024
Professor Jessie Ricketts, *Royal Holloway, University of London,* June 10, 2024
Professor Bill Lucas, *University of Winchester,* June 13, 2024
Professor Robin Alexander, *University of Cambridge,* June 17, 2024
Esther O'Connor, *British School of Brussels,* June 20, 2024
Dr Rupert Knight, *University of Nottingham,* June 24, 2024
Carol Atherton, *Spalding Grammar School* June 27, 2024
Jean Gross, July 1, 2024
Hywel Roberts, *Create, Learn, Inspire* July 4, 2024
Leigh Wolmarans, *Silhouette Youth Theatre,* July 8, 2024
Oli de Botton, *The Careers and Enterprise Company* July 10, 2024
Dr Darren Chetty, *University College London,* July 12, 2024
Melanie Cross, July 15, 2024
Ros Wilson, *Ros Wilson Education,* July 17, 2024
Dr James Mannion, July 19, 2024
Dr Lisa Stephenson, *Leeds Beckett University,* July 22, 2024
Dr Elaine Allen, *St John Vianney English Hub,* July 24, 2024
Andrew O'Neill, *All Saints Catholic College,* July 26, 2024
Grace Lockrobin and Emma Swinn, *SAPERE,* July 29, 2024
Daisy Christodoulou, *No More Marking,* August 1, 2024
Topsy Page, *Oracy Cambridge,* August 2, 2024
Adam Power-Annand, *Speech Bubbles,* August 9, 2024
Wendy Lee, *LINGO,* August 12, 2024
Brian Jenner, *The Speechwriter,* August 15, 2024
Sammy Wright, *Southmoor Academy,* August 27, 2024
Lewis Iwu, *Purpose Union,* August 29, 2024
Clare Sealy, *Education Improvement, States of Guernsey*, September 2, 2024
John Claughton, *WoLLoW,* September 5, 2024
Rachel Higgingson, *Find Your Voice,* September 9, 2024
Jacqui O'Hanlon, *Royal Shakespeare Company,* September 17, 2024
Rebecca Montacute, *The Sutton Trust,* September 19, 2024
Dame Alison Peacock, *The Chartered College of Teaching,* October 3, 2024
Professor Teresa Cremin and Dr Helen Hendry, *Open University*, October 7, 2024
Frank Cottrell-Boyce, *UK Children's Laureate,* October 14, 2024

Roundtable participants

The following individuals or organisations contributed to roundtable discussions which informed this report.

Alice King-Farlow, *National Theatre*
Amy Druce, *School 21*
Andrew McCallum, *English and Media Centre*
Barbara Bleiman, *English and Media Centre*
Carol Atherton, *Spalding Grammar School*
Caroline Wright, *Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists*
Catherine Sutton, *Paul Hamlyn Foundation*
Clare Sealy, *Education Improvement, States of Guernsey*
Dr. James Mannion
Elizabeth Draper, *The English Association*
Emma Fraser, *National Deaf Children's Society*
Gary Snapper, *University of Oxford*
Dr Geoff Readman, *National Drama*
Glyndwr Jones, *Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre*
Jacqui O'Hanlon, *Royal Shakespeare Company*
Jane Harris, *Speech and Language UK*
Jim Carroll, *University of Oxford*
Jolanta Lasota, *Ambitious about Autism*
Jonathan Morgan, *NATE*
Professor Julia Snell, *University of Leeds*
Linda Lascelles, *Afasic*
Loic Menzies, *Centre for Education Systems*
Marie Vickers, *London Bubble Theatre Company*
Mary Jo Spearey, *NAPLIC*
Meg Kelly, *Patchwork Foundation*
Michelle Meadows, *University of Oxford*
Neil Thompson, *Commtap*
Nia Richards, *Creativity, Culture and Education*
Niamh Mac Namee, *Patchwork Foundation*
Rachel Foster, *University of Cambridge*
Rachel Laverack, *NATE*
Professor Robert Eaglestone, *Royal Holloway, University of London*
Dr Rupert Knight, *University of Nottingham*
Sally Bacon
Stephen Kingdom, *Disabled Children's Partnership*
Summer Turner, *Jane Austen College*
Tim Oates CBE, *Cambridge University Press & Assessment*
Tom Middlehurst, *ASCL*
Trina Mitra, GROW Mentoring

Evidence submissions

The following people and organisations responded to our call for evidence which has informed the Commission's thinking.

Adam Power-Annand, *Speech Bubbles*
Professor Alan Finlayson, *University of East Anglia*
Alastair Daniel, *Society for Storytelling*
Dame Alison Peacock, *The Chartered College of Teaching*
Amy Gallacher, *York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals*
Andy Griffith, *Malit Limited*

Arlene Holmes-Henderson, *University of Durham*
Avnee Morjaria, *Oxford University Press*
Barbara Bleiman, *English and Media Centre*
Bec Tulloch, *St Ambrose Barlow RC High School*
Becky Layfield, *Robert Arkenstall Primary School and East Cambs & Fenland Evidence Network for Schools*
Carol Everingham, *Afasic and GLF Schools Academy Trust*
Chris Smith, *Storytelling Schools*
Clare Feeney, *St Thomas More Catholic High School*
Danielle Matthews, *University of Sheffield*
David Ingledew, *Astra SCITT*
Diane Swift, *Keele and North Staffordshire Teacher Education*
Eliza Hilton, *Fischer Family Foundation*
Emma Lennox, *Association of Graduate Careers Advisors*
Fliss Gush, *Eastside*
Fufy Demissie, *Sheffield Hallam University*
Dr Geoff Readman, *Drama Connects*
George Allison, *NCS Trust*
Grace Lockrobin, *SAPERE*
Greg Sanderson, *Smart School Councils*
Hannah Cook, *Verbo*
Dr Hannah Yelin, *Oxford Brookes University*
Harriet Marshall, *Lyfta*
Professor Henriette van der Blom, *University of Birmingham*
Dr Ian Cushing, *Manchester Metropolitan University*
Dr Ioanna Bakopoulou, *University of Bristol*
Dr James Mannion
Jason Buckley, *The Philosophy Man*
Jeremy Waxman
Professor Jessie Ricketts, *Royal Holloway, University of London*
Josephine Burton, *Dash Arts*
Julia Strong, *Talk for Writing*
Julie McCulloch, *ASCL*
Dr Kate Etheridge, *South Hampstead High School*
Katy Farrow, *King Edwards VI School*
Kirsten Howells, *STAMMA*
Kristina Lewis, *Blackheath High School*
Laura Coryton, *Sex Ed Mattes*
Lee Jerome, *Middlesex University*
Lisa Kester-Dodgson, *Oracy Italy*
Dr Lisa Stephenson, *Leeds Beckett University*
Liz Moorse, *Association for Citizenship Teaching*
Liza Timpson-Hughes, *Samuel Ryder Academy*
Louise Coigley, *Lis'n Tell*
Louissa Osorio-Denney, *ESU*
Madeleine Holt
Martin Robinson
Mel Carlin, Abbey Multi Academy Trust
Melanie Bowman, *Hazelbury Primary*
Michael Hepburn, *Debate Hub*
Michael Walsh, *Let'sThink in English*
Dr Michelle Paule, *Oxford Brookes University*
Mike Tucker, *Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation*
Moira Middleton, *Impington Village College*
Nanette Wragg, *Chilwell Croft Academy*
NALDIC
NAPLIC
Naomi Flynn, *University of Reading*
Naomi Hennah, *Northampton School for Boys*
Nick Worsley, *EEF*
Oak National Academy
Patricia Thompson, *University of Nottingham*
Paul Drechsler
Paul Guille, *The Guardian Foundation*
Paul Steer, *OCR*
Pearson
Penny Lamb, *Votes for Schools*
PSHE Association
Rachel Higgingson, *Find Your Voice*
Rebecca Fisher, *English Association*
Rebecca Martin, *NCS Trust*
Richard Billington
Ricky Jeffrey, *University of Nottingham*
Rob Pollard, *One Sixth Form*
Robin Alexander, *University of Cambridge*
Robin Street, *North London Collegiate School*
Roger Sutcliffe, *Dialogue Works*
Royal Shakespeare Company
Safeena Ahmad
Sally Bacon
Sally Harper, *Coastal Learning Partnership*
Sandra Berkowitz, *The Blake School*
Sarah Davies, *E-Act Royton and Crompton*
Sarah Green, *Prospere Learning Trust*
Sarah Howell, *Oracy Italy*
Simon James, *University of Durham*
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Speech and Language UK
Suzanne Graham, *University of Reading*
The Careers and Enterprise Company
The National Literacy Trust
Theresa Nimoh
Tina Renshaw, *ESB*
Topsy Page, *Oracy Cambridge*
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Dr Victoria Cook, *Chartered College of Teaching*
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