WHY ORACY MATTERS

EVIDENCE BASE FOR POSITIONING ORACY AT THE HEART OF THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

A report commissioned by the English-Speaking Union

ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION
discovering voices

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FOREWORD TO THIS REPORT

I am delighted to write this research review on behalf of the English-Speaking Union. The review itself synthesises evidence from a number of strands – psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, neuroscience, philosophy and education – to make the case that oracy matters in our schools. It matters at all phases and must be included in the curriculum as part of an entitlement for all children.

The wealth of evidence about the value of oracy is compelling. Its contribution to teacher development and school improvement supports much-needed professional learning in education. And its impact on children's life chances and their educational and personal outcomes is undeniable – staggering, even.

The landscape around oracy is changing. On one hand, the evidence that this report presents might suggest that teachers embrace oracy without reservations. On the other, the value placed on oracy has declined in recent years, dominated by the phonics agenda in primary schools and overshadowed in many secondary schools by the written word and the focus on assessment and examination. Existing evidence of the importance of oracy in early years has tended to be largely anecdotal and practice-centred.

It is hoped that this report will be a vital lever to influence policy-makers about oracy's importance through the evidence it provides and the recommendations it makes. It is also hoped that this report provides teachers with new confidence to implement oracy teaching in their classrooms with the research evidence to justify this, and that it acts as a springboard for teachers' professional learning to provide practical strategies to promote oracy in their classrooms.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonathan has worked at three universities in initial teacher education and led extensive CPD work with teachers. He has been a school improvement advisor, a national strategies regional adviser and a co-director of an educational consultancy. He was formerly EYFS regional adviser with the government's national strategies programme and was lead advisor for gifted & talented work in the North West. He has much experience supporting school-based teacher enquiry and action research projects.

ABOUT THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION

The English-Speaking Union is an international educational charity and membership organisation that believes in the power of spoken communication. Through our educational programmes, competitions, cultural exchanges and advocacy we work to give young people the speaking and listening skills and the cross-cultural understanding they need to thrive.

SECTION A

1.1 An introduction to oracy

Being able to communicate – to pass information to others and to understand what others say to us – is one of the most important life skills of all. At its most simple, communication is 'social interaction through messages'.[1] It is a two-way process: an exchange of ideas, thoughts and emotions, that relies on language skills (vocabulary and grammar); speech and pronunciation skills; and wider non-verbal skills including eye contact, facial expressions and the ability to consider another person's perspective and intentions.[2]

Oracy – described by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'the ability to express oneself fluently and grammatically in speech' – is essentially no different, though in educational circles it has come to describe both the communication skills themselves and how they facilitate other learning.[3]

Oracy is about learning to talk and learning *through* talk. Writers Gaunt and Stott argue that it is through talk that students use collective thinking to create and revise their understanding, to negotiate complex ideas and solve problems.[4] This requires them to have the skill sets needed in interactions, otherwise talk is limited. Hence, students must be taught to talk so that they acquire and develop the requisite skills to engage in purposeful talk for learning. There is a strong relationship between the two. Oracy is an outcome of learning, whereby pupils learn to talk confidently and appropriately in a range of different contexts. It is also a process of learning, where learning through talk deepens pupils' understanding through interacting with teachers and peers.[5]

Still in relative infancy, the term 'oracy' has only been in existence since the 1960s when it was first used by researchers at the University of Birmingham in response to a lack of emphasis on speaking and listening in education.[6] Due to the contemporary focus on reading and writing and the failure to represent spoken language it was perceived that an important life skill was being neglected in the school system.[7] Sadly, a similar situation persists in many of our schools today.

Humans are not hard-wired to acquire language, but we are disposed to learn it through our experiences and through good teaching. Most children enter formal education already able to talk but are rarely taught *how* to use spoken language in the same way they are taught literacy and numeracy. While a child's innate ability may influence certain aspects of their language development, where this is potentially low, it can be improved through high-quality early education.[8]

1. Fiske, J. (1990) *Introduction to Communication Studies*, 2nd edition, London: Routledge.
2. Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (2017). ***Justice Evidence Base Consolidation***.
3. *Oxford English Dictionary*. **Definition of Oracy**. Accessed 30 November 2021.
4. Gaunt, A. & Stott, A. (2020) *Transform Teaching and Learning through Talk. The Oracy Imperative*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
5. Alexander, R. (2008) *Towards Dialogic Teaching. Rethinking Classroom Talk*. York: Dialogos UK.
6. Wilkinson, A., Davies, A. & Atkinson, A. (1965) *The Concept of Oracy. English in Education*, National Association for the Teaching of English.
7. Davies, S. (2020) *Talking about Oracy. Developing communication beyond the classroom*, Melton, Woodbridge: John Catt Educational Ltd.
8. Heckman, J. (2011) 'The Economics of Inequality: The value of early childhood education,' *Researching Law*, Vol.22, No.3.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Impact on social mobility
Children who experience persistent disadvantage are significantly less likely to develop the language needed for learning than those who never experience disadvantage. Good language skills are crucial to social mobility.

It is possible to break the link between language difficulties and disadvantage with the right support at home, in early education and in school.

School readiness and attainment
Good speech, language and communication skills are essential for doing well at school, but this is not being recognised or acted upon widely.

There is good evidence that language interventions directly improve school attainment.

Beyond school: further education and employment
The demands of the workplace rely increasingly on good communication skills.

Without these skills young people are significantly less likely to be employed and more likely to experience mental health problems and enter the criminal justice system.

There are examples of effective 'beyond school' provision for young people with speech and language needs (SLCN), but they are isolated and support is variable in schools.

Source: Gascoigne, M. & Gross, J. (2017) *Talking About a Generation. Current Policy Evidence and Practice for Speech, language and Communication.* The Communication Trust/ICAN

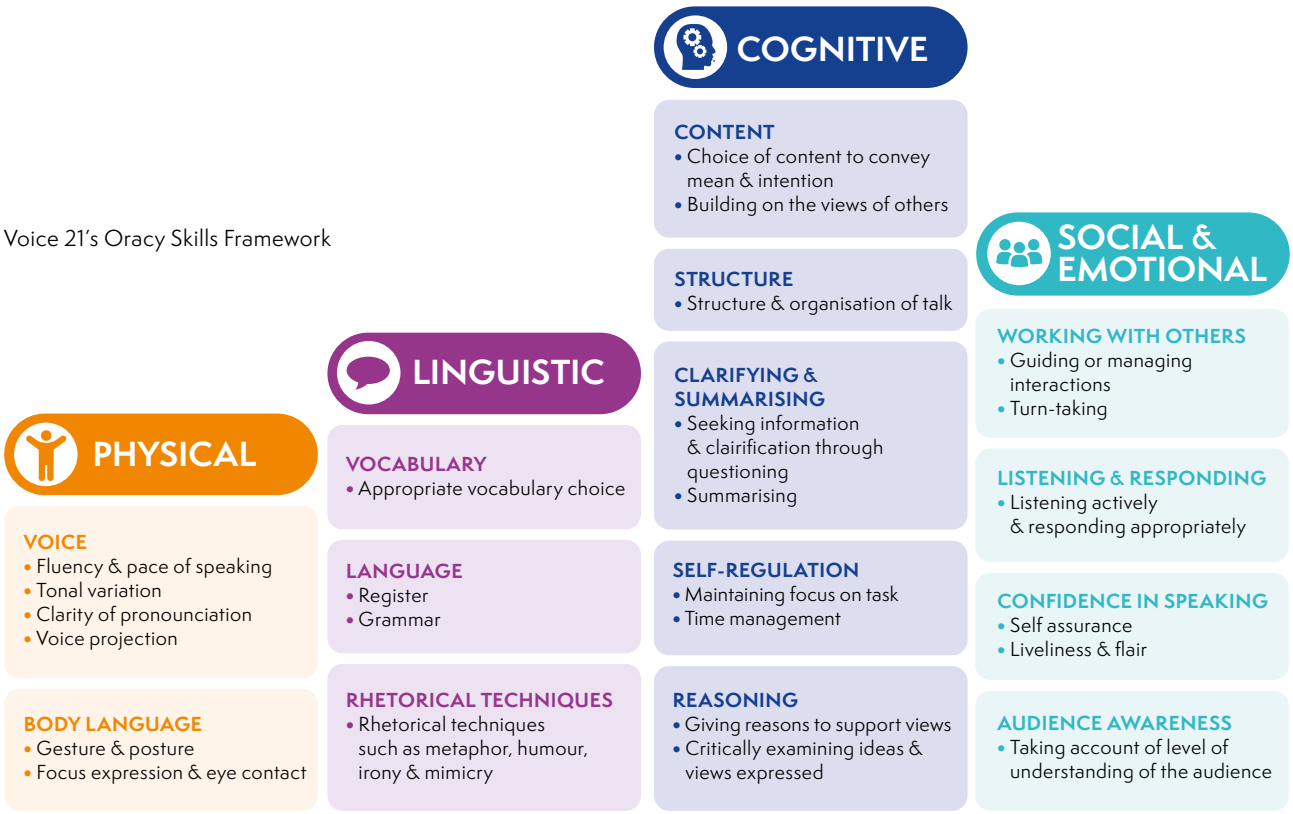
The skills of oracy

There are different approaches to the aforementioned subcomponents of oracy. In conjunction with Cambridge University, the charity Voice 21 has created an Oracy Skills Framework that is based on four essential components, as shown below.[9]

Oracy: The Four Strands

Use the oracy framework to understand the physical, linguistic, cognitive and social and emotional skills that enable successful discussion, inspiring speech and effective communication

Voice 21's Oracy Skills Framework



- **PHYSICAL SKILLS** – includes an appreciation of how the voice and body language impacts on interpretation. It asks, *'are the speakers audible?'*, and *'are they making eye contact?'*
- **LINGUISTIC SKILLS** – the way in which information is presented is as important as the intended messages. It asks, '*have the speakers used sophisticated language?*' and *'have they used rhetorical devices?'*
- **COGNITIVE SKILLS** - understanding what information is and how a response can be formulated to provide understanding. It asks, '*does the speech convey meaning?*' and *'are the ideas critically examined?'*
- **SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL SKILLS** – embedding these skills allow for a more attentive and well-rounded communicator. It asks, *'are the speakers confident?'* and '*is there an awareness of the audience?*

9. Voice 21/University of Cambridge (2019) The Oracy Skills Framework and Glossary. University of Cambridge. Available at **https://voice21.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/The-Oracy-Framework-Voice-21-2020.pdf.**

Likewise, the English-Speaking Union uses four key skill sets to codify its approach:

LISTENING AND RESPONSE

Oracy activities provide a range of opportunities for students to engage with the ideas of others. The skill set 'Listening and response' represents the extent and efficacy of this engagement.

EXPRESSION AND DELIVERY

Expression and delivery sets speaking apart from competitive essay writing. Students need to be able to convey their thoughts with their audience in mind.

ORGANISATION AND PRIORITISATION

Speaking in any format requires quick thinking and the clear articulation of ideas. The organisation and prioritisation skill set reflects students' ability to convey their ideas clearly and effectively.

REASONING AND EVIDENCE

Reasoning and evidence denotes the argumentation skills students need. It represents the ability of students to explain and justify the positions they take.

These skillsets are applicable to classroom talk as well as more formal speaking opportunities, and can be adapted for a wide range of settings and contexts, as well as across all key stages and beyond.

Listening and Response
An effective speaker:

- Demonstrates attentive listening by engaging with the ideas of others
- Responds to others with precise analysis or questioning, supporting or challenging their ideas
- Uses good judgement to select and respond to the most important arguments in the debate

Expression and Delivery
An effective speaker:

- Speaks with confidence, as indicated by voice, body language and the absence of a verbatim script (although notes for reference are encouraged)
- Engages the audience with variations in the tone and volume of their voice
- Chooses vocabulary and sentence structure carefully, to maximise their rhetorical impact

Organisation and Prioritisation
An effective speaker:

- Presents their reasons in a clear, well-structured manner. Their arguments are easy to follow, and ideas may be grouped by theme
- Gives priority to the main arguments, and spends less time on those that are not as important
- Has a structure which is clearly communicated to the audience, where necessary including an introduction and conclusion

Reasoning and Evidence
An effective speaker:

- Defends statements using clear, logical reasons
- Chooses relevant statements to defend
- Supports their arguments with well-chosen evidence, which is explained and analysed thoroughly

Dialogic talk and language development

Language is a vehicle for learning and plays a central role in connecting teaching, learning and cognitive development. It is now agreed that dialogic teaching (teaching through talk) has positive impacts on students' learning and development, with improved performance in students' content knowledge, comprehension, and reasoning.[10] An oracy curriculum that supports talk for learning should include a range of opportunities for different kinds of talk.

A number of models for talk have been proposed and examples of these are summarised below.

Table 1. Different genres of talk

	Summaries of different genres of talk
Accountable talk[11]	Accountable talk refers to the type of talk that moves learning forward
Dialogically organised instruction[12]	Dialogically organised instruction, such as open discussion, privileges a multiplicity of social voices over a single authoritative voice
Collaborative reasoning[13]	Collaborative reasoning discussions are intended to create a forum for children to listen to one another think out loud as they learn to engage in reasoned argumentation
Thinking Together[14]	A key element of the thinking together approach is exploratory talk, which can help children improve their critical thinking and reasoning
Dialogic inquiry[15]	Dialogic inquiry is an approach to education that employs collaborative action research on classroom interaction to improve learning and teaching

Different types of talk will be appropriate at different points in the learning cycle and in relation to different contexts. Variations in teachers' strategies for creating educational opportunities for classroom talk result in different educational experiences for many pupils. Professor Robin Alexander's framework of dialogic teaching is without doubt the most influential in current scholarship. Alexander argues,

'Students need, for both learning and life, not only to be able to provide relevant and focused answers but also to learn how to pose their own questions and how to use talk to narrate, explain, speculate, imagine, hypothesise, explore, evaluate, discuss, argue, reason and justify'.[16]

10. Resnick, L. B., Asterhan, C., & Clarke, S. (2018) *Accountable Talk: Instructional dialogue that builds the mind*. International Academy of Education (IAE) and International Bureau of Education (IBE).
11. Michaels, S., O'Connor, C., & Resnick, L. B. (2008) 'Deliberative discourse idealized and realized: Accountable talk in the classroom and in civic life.' *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 27*(4) pp. 283–297.
12. Juzwik, M., Sherry, M., Caughlan, S., Heintz, A., & Borsheim-Black, C. (2012) 'Supporting dialogically organized instruction in an English teacher preparation program: A video-based, web 2.0-mediated response and revision pedagogy'. *Teachers College Record, 114*(3), 1–42.
13. Anderson, R. C., Chinn, C., Waggoner, M., & Nguyen, K. (1998) 'Intellectually stimulating story discussions'. In J. Osborn, & F. Lehr (Eds.). *Literacy for all: Issues in teaching and learning* (pp. 170–186). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
14. Dawes, L., Mercer, N., & Wegerif, R. (2004) *Thinking together: A programme of activities for developing speaking, listening and thinking skills* (2nd ed.). Birmingham: Imaginative Minds Ltd.
15. Wells, G., & Arauz, R. M. (2006) Dialogue in the classroom. *Journal of the Learning Sciences, 15*(3), pp. 379–428.
16. Alexander, R. (2012) '*Improving oracy and classroom talk in English schools: achievements and challenges'*. DfE seminar on on 'Oracy, the National Curriculum and Educational Standards', 20 February 2012, University of Cambridge.

Alexander outlined five types of 'teaching talk':[17]

1. Rote: imparting knowledge by getting students to repeat key pieces of information to impart facts, ideas and routines.

2. Recitation: using questions to test students' knowledge and understanding, to check students' progress, and stimulate recall.

3. Instruction: telling students what to do and explaining key facts, principles or processes in order to transmit information.

4. Discussion: encouraging the exchange of ideas within a class, to share information.

5. Dialogue: using structured questions and discussion, helping students deepen understanding of key knowledge, principles and processes.

For Alexander, discussion is a free-flowing exchange of ideas for the purpose of sharing information and problem-solving, whereas dialogue is more structured and consists of guided questioning and prompting to achieve a common understanding as well as scaffolding to foster independence. Discussion and dialogue afford students greater agency in the construction of their knowledge and understanding, and are more likely to advance students' thinking on a given topic or idea.

In addition to these repertoire and principles, he listed 61 classroom indicators that describe the context and conditions needed to support dialogic teaching and the features of talk. These include:

- teacher questions that elicit extended, thoughtful responses
- student answers that are built upon and elicit further questions
- teacher-student and student-student interchanges that are linked into coherent lines of inquiry

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Alexander's Five Principles of talk are the essence of dialogic teaching:

Collective - teachers and children address learning tasks together, whether as a group or as a class, rather than in isolation

Reciprocal - teachers and children listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints

Supportive - children articulate their ideas without fear of the 'wrong' answer and help each others' understanding

Cumulative - teachers and children build on each other's ideas to create chains of inquiry

Purposeful - teachers plan with particular learning goals in mind

Source: Alexander, R. J. (2004) *Towards dialogic teaching: Rethinking classroom talk*. York, UK: Dialogos.

Dialogue between teachers and students has been found to take place infrequently in many classrooms. Instead of reciprocal and cumulative dialogues, classroom talk is dominated by teacher talk.[18] The teacher asks a question, a child answers, and the teacher provides feedback regarding the correctness of the response. This is known as initiation–response–feedback (IRF).[19] It has been shown that it is the more dialogic exchanges between teachers and students that support students' learning in diverse subjects.[20]

17. Alexander, R. (2008) *Towards Dialogic Teaching: Rethinking Classroom Talk*. York: Dialogos UK.
18. Myhill, D., Jones, S. & Wilson, A. (2016) 'Writing Conversations: Fostering Metalinguistic Discussion about Writing.' *Research Papers in Education* 31 (1), pp. 23–44.
19. Rasku-Puttonen, H., Lerkkanen, M-K. , Poikkeus, A-M. & Siekkinen, M. (2012) 'Dialogical Patterns of Interaction in Preschool Classrooms.' *International Journal of Educational Research* 53, pp. 138–149.
20. Alexander, R. J. (2018) 'Developing Dialogic Teaching: Genesis, Process, Trial.' *Research Papers in Education* 33 (5), pp. 561–598.

The Education Endowment Foundation recommends that schools provide opportunities for structured talk. This is summarised with the following points:[21]

- Talk matters: both in its own right and because of its impact on other aspects of learning
- High-quality talk is typically well-structured and guided by teachers
- 'Accountable talk' is a useful framework to ensure talk is high quality, and emphasises how talk can be subject specific
- Teachers can support pupils by modelling high-quality talk, for example including key vocabulary and promoting their skills in metacognitive reflection
- In summary, effective talk, that is to say *talk for learning*, does not merely happen. It must be planned for and specifically taught

Reflection Point

What typical types of talk have you observed in your classroom?

Was there a balance of different types of talk?

Try one of the ESU resources, such as 'Debating Human Rights', to stimulate different types of talk in your classroom

Active listening

Talk is only half of oracy, listening is its complement. Research shows that we spend 70-80% of our waking hours communicating and 45% of this is listening.[22] Other studies suggest children in school spend 50 to 75% of classroom time listening to teachers, other pupils and audio media.[23] Historically, listening has received less attention in school in favour of talk-related activities and is taught the least in classrooms. Listening is key to learning in classrooms and is the gateway to understanding.[24]

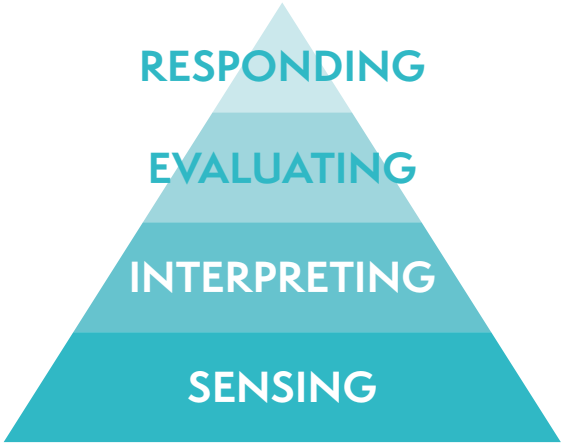
Relevant sub-skills of listening are shown below.

Attending	**Restating**	**Reflecting**
Interpreting	**Summarising**	**Giving feedback**
Checking	**Probing**	**Being silent**

Active listening is a skill that involves paying full attention to a speaker to understand the message before responding appropriately. While practising active listening, one needs to focus on the thoughts, needs, feelings and ideas of the speaker without distraction and without the intention of responding immediately. The *SIER Hierarchy of Active Listening* lays out four steps for effective active listening. Sensing what is being communicated comes first, then one must interpret it through one's knowledge of the context, after that one must evaluate it before lastly responding.

21. Education Endowment Foundation (2018) *Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools. Guidance Report.* London: EEF.
22. Lee, D. & Hatesohi, D. (1993) *Listening: Our most used communication skill.* University of Missouri.
23. Bovee, C.L., Thill, J.V. & Schatzman, B.E. (2003) *Business communication today* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
24. Dawes, (2008) *The Essential Speaking and Listening Talk for Learning at Key Stage 2.* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

(Source: The SIER Hierarchy of Active Listening: Become a Better Listener - The World of Work Project).



Listening is a skill and as such it benefits from explicit teaching and opportunities to use and practice it. The idea of macro and micro listening is a useful way to encourage active listening in classrooms. Micro listening involves playing attention to the finer details of a speaker's conversation, while macro is listening out for the bigger picture. Both have their uses in practical application and both are used regularly in conversation.[25]

The use of macro and micro listening is a useful one to apply in any classroom. Gaunt & Stott advocate this once students have mastered the fundamentals of listening. **Our resource MaMaMoo** is a great way to encourage macro listening.

Micro listening
- What specific points did the speaker raise?
- What facts did the speaker share?
- How did the speaker start and end?

Macro listening
- How is the speaker feeling?
- What is the speaker not saying?
- What do the speaker's voice tone and facial expressions convey?

ACTIVITY

Macro v Micro Listening

Students are split into groups of four. Two students are asked to have a discussion (especially good if the topic is either controversial or one both feel passionate about). Another student is assigned the role of micro listener and another the role of macro listener. After several minutes, the listeners feedback on their observations. The micro listener should recount the main points made by both speakers and the macro listener recalls the speakers' feelings and emotions.

Source: Gaunt, A. & Stott, A. (2019) *Transform Teaching and Learning Through Talk. The Oracy Imperative.* London: Rowman & Littlefield.

FURTHER IDEAS

The ESU also has a host of resources to practice and improve listening skills, as well as having listening embedded throughout our **ESU-Churchill Public Speaking Competition** and **Schools' Mace debating competition**, where listening is as important as speaking. For example, the ESU's **Socratic Discussion** resource sees a ring of students engage in debating relevant issues while a second circle listens, evaluates and then critically responds to the debate.

25. Gaunt, A. & Stott, A. (2019) *Transform Teaching and Learning Through Talk. The Oracy Imperative*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Body language and physical expressions

Body language describes the method of communicating using body movements or gestures instead of, or in addition to, verbal language. Facial expressions, gestures, posture and tone of voice are powerful communication tools too. These provide information about how people may be feeling in a given situation and enable the expression of emotions and intentions. Research tells us a great deal about brain systems involved in the perception of facial expressions, eye movements, body movement, hand gestures, and goal-directed actions, as well as those mediating affective, decision and motor responses to social stimuli. What is still missing is an understanding of how the human brain actually reads and interprets body language.[26]

Non-verbal communication can play five roles:

- **Repetition:** It repeats and often strengthens the message you're making verbally
- **Contradiction:** It can contradict the message you're trying to convey, thus indicating to your listener that you may not be telling the truth
- **Substitution**: It can substitute for a verbal message. For example, your facial expression often conveys a far more vivid message than words ever can
- **Complementing:** It may add to or complement your verbal message
- **Accenting:** It may accent or underline a verbal message, e.g. pounding the table

One study found that over 65% of communication is non verbal.[27] Another concluded that 38% takes place through tone and voice and the remaining 55% takes place through body language. Oracy is the sum of all its parts.[28]

26. Tipper, C.M., Signorini, G., Grafton, S.T. (2015) 'Body language in the brain: constructing meaning from expressive movement'. *Frontiers of Human Neuroscience.* 9: p.450.
27. Birdwhistell,R. L. (1955) Background to Kinesics, *Review of General Semantics*, Vol. 13: pp. 10-18, Autumn.
28. Mehrabian, A. (1981) *Silent messages: Implicit communication of emotions and attitudes*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Oracy for speakers with English as an additional language (EAL)

Language echoes the diversity in our schools and in society. A person fluent in two languages is bilingual, either acquiring two languages together from the start of their life (simultaneous bilingualism) or learning a second after the first has been mastered (successive bilingualism). Most recent arguments made in support of oracy education have focused on children's use of their first language, or the use of the official language most common in a particular school. Oracy skills need not be considered language-specific and can be pursued and developed in the second language classroom.[29] Children learning English as an additional language (EAL) are students who are exposed to a first language other than English during early development and who may continue to use this language in the home or community setting throughout their schooling.

Shared language is inclusive. Every child has the right to an inclusive education as established by UNESCO in 2014.[30] Inclusion in oracy provides access to learning for every student, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, special education needs, sexuality, religious or cultural beliefs.

Speaking and listening are crucial parts of second-language learning and teaching. Despite their importance, for many years, teaching oral skills has been undervalued and English language teachers have continued to teach them as repetition drills or memorisation of dialogues. However, today's world requires that the goal of teaching speaking and listening is to improve students' communicative skills, so that they can express themselves effectively regardless of the situation.

29. Cambridge University Press (2018) *The Development of Oracy Skills in School-aged Learners*. Cambridge: CUP
30. UNESCO (2014) *The Right to Education: Law and Policy Review Guidelines*. Paris: UNESCO

1.2 The need for oracy education

The importance of good communication for young people has never been stronger.

As we have already seen, language is essential for learning. It is a tool for thinking both individually and with others. It allows children to solve problems, reflect, reason, share ideas, challenge each other and learn from each other.[31] Strong language and communication skills are linked to better outcomes for young people in school and beyond. Research repeatedly confirms the importance of fostering good oral language skills in educational contexts.[32] Oracy development, for example, has been linked to better outcomes for children in schools, improved mental health, employability and lifelong chances.[33] Conversely, paucity of oracy skills is associated with academic failure and diminished life chances.[34]

The words of MP and oracy advocate John Bercow, underscore the importance of oracy:

'Speech, language and communication skills are crucial to every person: for brain development in the early years and our attachment to others, for expressing ourselves and understanding others, for thinking and learning, for social interaction and emotional wellbeing, in school, as part of society and in the workplace. Yet despite their centrality, the importance of these skills continues to be widely underestimated.'[35]

In *Talking About Oracy*, author Sarah Davies[36] sums up the contribution that oracy makes and recognises that the doors the skills can open are many. Citing examples of high-performing young people articulating the skill in interviews, developing rapport through dialogue, she argues that all of these are possible when we engage with oracy and ensure it receives the attention it deserves. Oracy gives pupils an important voice. When speaking and listening, it confirms they are respected contributors and have an active and direct involvement in school matters[31]. Involving learners is meaningful when they become partners with educators. Encouraging pupil consultation and shared decision-making on school matters is common in many schools now and reflects people-centred learning communities. When learners are engaged in leading their own learning, the results bring benefits to everyone: a greater sense of ownership of learning; greater achievement; increased motivation and improved self-efficacy and self-esteem.

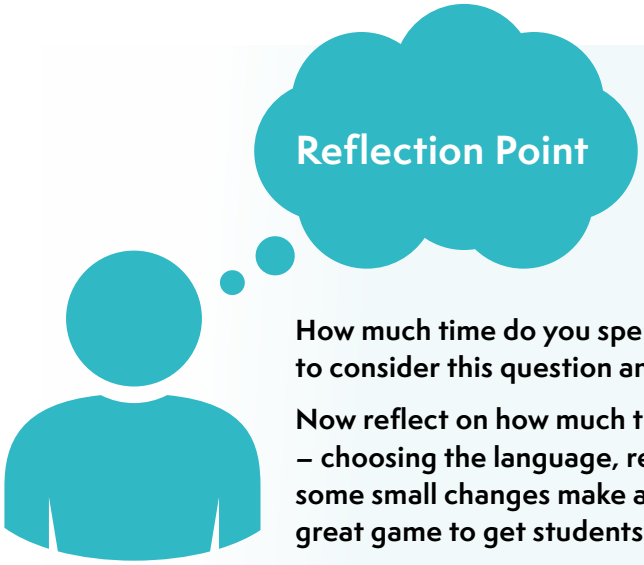
Oracy has wider implications too – allowing people to think critically about the arguments presented, to better understand one another, and to consider and empathise with other points of view. As broadcaster and former ESU governor Sir Trevor McDonald says, 'Dialogue is the key to global understanding.'

31. Allott, K. & Waugh, D. (2022) 'Talk and Communication: Couldn't they just sit down and shut up?' In C. Carden (ed) *Primary Teaching. Learning and Teaching in Primary Schools Today,* 2nd edition. London: Learning Matters.
32. Dockrell, J.,Lindsay, G. Roulstone, S. & Law, J. (2004) Research report supporting children with speech, language and communication needs: an overview of the results of the better communication research programme *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* RD, xxxx, vol. 00, No. 0, pp. 1–15.
33. Law J., Rush R., Schoon I., et al. (2009) 'Modelling developmental language difficulties from school entry into adulthood: Literacy, mental health, and employment outcomes'. *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research* 52(6): pp. 1401–1416.
34. Oxford University Press (2018) *Why Closing the Language Gap Matters,* Oxford: OUP.
35. I CAN and Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (2018) *Bercow Ten Years On: An independent review of provision for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs in England,* I CAN.
36. Davies, S. (2020) *Talking About Oracy. Developing communication beyond the classroom. Melton,* Woodbridge: John Catt Educational Ltd.
37. Flutter, J. & Rudduck, J. (2004) *Consulting Pupils: What's In It for Schools?* London: Routledge.

Teachers also communicate

The emphasis on 21st-century global competencies means more demands are being made on students to explain, justify and reason in subjects across the curriculum. But communication is also important for teachers. Successful teaching is generally considered to be composed of 50% knowledge and 50% communication skills. According to many studies, the success of students is directly related to the effective communication of their teachers. Nurturing interactive and engaging teaching in an oracy-rich environment demands regular and effective communication. How teachers communicate with their students can positively affect students' perceptions of school, their role in the classroom, themselves and their abilities, and their motivation to succeed in school.[38]

Teachers must be skilled at listening to their students as well as explaining things clearly. Teachers need clarity of thought to present the material. They must be able to break down complex ideas into simpler parts and smaller steps to transmit to their students. They must be able to adapt their methods of communication to all students regardless of ability or learning style.



Reflection Point

How much time do you spend communicating each day? Take a few minutes to consider this question and make your own evaluation.

Now reflect on how much time you spend thinking about how you will do this – choosing the language, register and body language you will use. Could some small changes make a difference? The ESU activity Emotions Party is a great game to get students practising expression and delivery.

38. Dobbs, J., & Arnold, D. H. (2009) Relationship between preschool teachers' reports of children's behavior and their behavior toward those children. School Psychology Quarterly, 24(2) pp.95–105.

The impact of Covid on communication

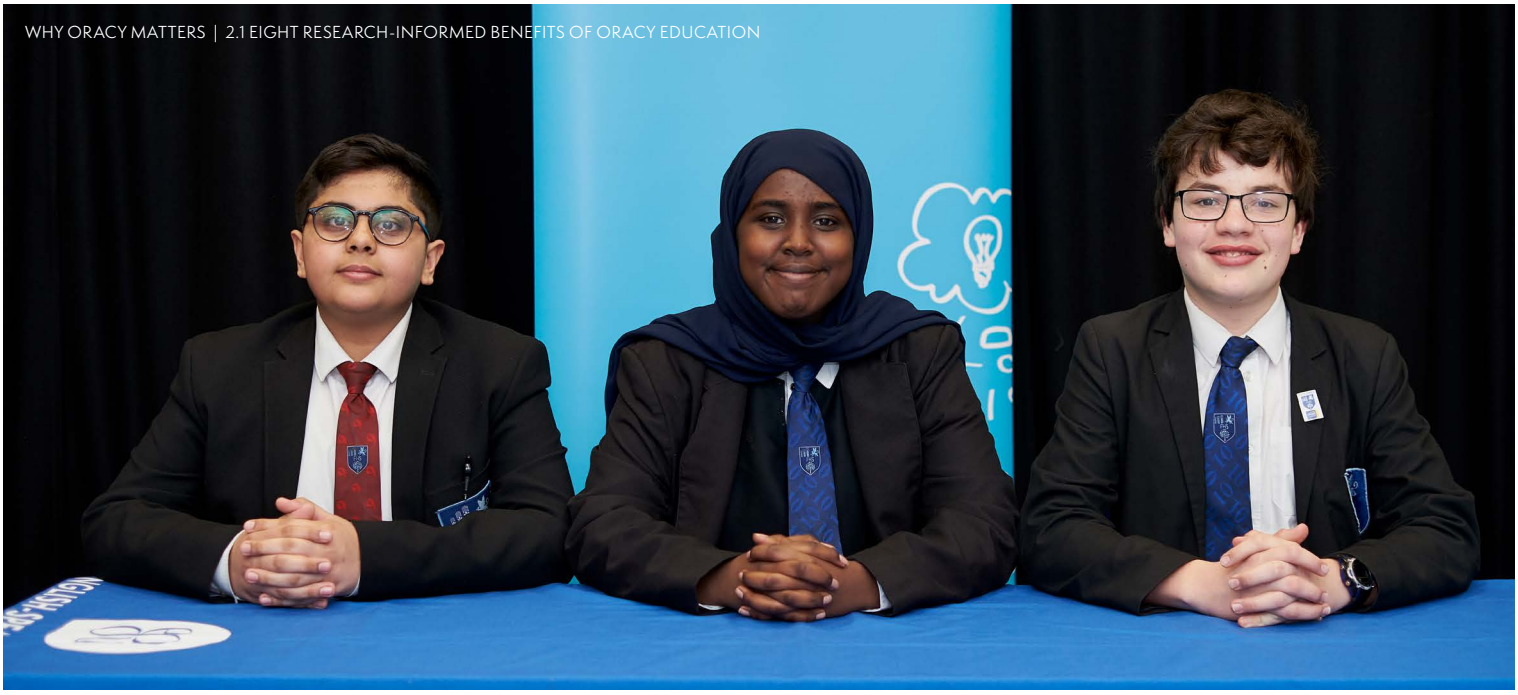
Covid-19 has been a stark reminder of the critical importance that all pupils, whatever their background, should make the progress they deserve at school. The impact of the pandemic widened the education gap even further and exacerbated previously existing inequalities. 2021 findings were that mainstream state schools in England showed substantial drops in attainment across all subjects and year groups.[39] Department for Education research showed that in summer 2021, pupils were still behind in their learning compared to where they would otherwise have been in a typical year.[40] Primary school pupils were one month behind in reading and around three months behind in maths. Secondary students were behind in their reading by around two months. Primary pupils eligible for Free School Meals were on average an additional half month further behind in reading and maths compared to their more advantaged peers.

Remote teaching during Covid changed the nature of learning. Preventive measures such as the wearing of face masks, social distancing and virtual lessons, all designed to address contagion concerns, negatively impacted on communication both in and out of school. Online tools and platforms became the predominant modes of lesson delivery. Despite tremendous efforts by teachers in all phases, regular communication and the opportunities for quality oral language became limited. Reduced contact with grandparents, social distancing and limited play opportunities have left children less exposed to conversations and everyday experiences.

Teachers are only now seeing the impact of this in their classrooms.[41]

The case for oracy to have a prime role in all classrooms has never been as strong.

39. Blainey,K. & Hannay, T. (2021) *The impact of School Closures on Spring 2021 Attainment.* RS Assessment and School Dash.
40. DfE (2021) Understanding Progress in the 2020/21 Academic Year, Findings from the summer term and summary of all previous findings. London: DfE.
41. Doherty, J. (2022) **Four ways Covid restrictions have affected leaning and development.**



SECTION B

2.1 Eight research-informed benefits of oracy education

Oracy education is vital. Communication skills are fundamental for lifelong learning and they are at the very heart of education influencing both academic and non-academic outcomes. Research clearly supports the value of oracy and in this section of the report, I draw together findings from different disciplines to affirm the importance of oracy. These can be conveniently grouped into eight categories. Each is underpinned by significant research evidence.

1. Oracy improves cognitive development and academic achievement

There is a wealth of evidence to support improvement gains through oracy. Gains are evidenced in cognitive skills and are reported on Cognitive Ability Test (CAT) scores[42] and reasoning abilities.[43]

The quality of language experience is a powerful predictor of educational achievement across subjects, not just in those subjects most closely related to language.[44]

Indeed, measures of simply the amount of talk children are involved in is predictive of academic success.[45] Attainment gains through oracy development have been found in English, mathematics and science.[46 47 48 49 50 51]

42. Topping, K. J. & Trickey, S. (2015) 'The Role of Dialogue in Philosophy for Children', in L. B. Resnick, C. S. C. Asterhan and S. N. Clarke (eds.) *Socializing Intelligence Through Academic Talk and Dialogue*, Washington D.C.: American Educational Research Association pp. 99-110.
43. Mercer, N., Wegerif, R. & Dawes, L. (1999) 'Children's talk and the development of reasoning in the classroom', *British Educational Research Journal*, 25, pp. 95-111.
44. Goswami, U. & Bryant, P. (2007) *Children's Cognitive Development and Learning. Primary Review Research Survey*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education.
45. Hart, B. & Risley, T. (1995) *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experiences of young American Children*. Baltimore: Paul Brookes.
46. Gorard, S., Siddiqui, N. & Huat See, B. (2015) *Philosophy for Children: Evaluation Report and Executive Summary*, London: Education Endowment Foundation.
47. Wilkinson, I. A. G., Murphy, P. K. & Binici, S. (2015) 'Dialogue-Intensive Pedagogies for Promoting Reading Comprehension: What We Know, What We Need to Know', in L. B. Resnick, C. S. C. Asterhan and S. N. Clarke (eds.) *Socializing Intelligence Through Academic Talk and Dialogue*, Washington D.C.: American Educational Research Association pp.37-50.
48. O'Connor, C., Michaels, S. & Chaplin, S. (2015) '"Scaling Down" to Explore the Role of Talk in Learning: From District Intervention to Controlled Classroom Study', in L. B. Resnick, C. S. C. Asterhan and S. N. Clarke (eds.) *Socializing Intelligence Through Academic Talk and Dialogue*, Washington D.C.: American Educational Research Association pp. 111-126.
49. Adey, P. & Shayer, M. (2015) 'The Effects of Cognitive Acceleration', in L. B. Resnick, C. S. C. Asterhan and S. N. Clarke (eds.) *Socializing Intelligence Through Academic Talk and Dialogue*, Washington D.C.: American Educational Research Association pp. 127-140.
50. Hanley, P., Slavin, R. & Elliott, L. (2015) *Thinking Doing Talking Science: Evaluation Report and Executive Summary* London: Education Endowment Foundation.
51. 36 Kutnik, P. & Berdondini, L. (2009) 'Can the enhancement of group working in classrooms provide a basis for effective communication in support of school-based cognitive achievement in classrooms of young learners?', *Cambridge Journal of Education* 39 (1), pp. 71-94.

Related benefits include retention of subject-specific knowledge and are not confined to curriculum subjects in the arts and humanities, subjects traditionally associated with oracy. They are found across the whole curriculum[52] and are transferable across all subjects.[53]

Children who struggle with language at age five are six times less likely to reach the expected standard in English at age 11 than children who have had good language skills at five, and 10 times less likely to achieve the expected level in maths.[54]

In primary schools, students who participate in oral language interventions make approximately five months' additional progress over a year, rising to six months for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.[55]

In secondary schools, studies have shown how better language ability is linked with improved GCSE grades in English and maths.[56] Vocabulary skills at age 13 strongly predict GCSE results in both English and maths.[57]

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Thinking, Doing, Talking Science (TDTS) was a research programme that aimed to make science lessons in primary schools more practical and challenging. Teachers were trained in a repertoire of strategies to encourage pupils to use higher-order thinking skills. For example, pupils are posed 'Big Questions', such as 'How do you know that the earth is a sphere?' that are used to stimulate discussion about scientific topics and the principles of scientific enquiry. Rather than teaching science simply as a body of facts to be learned, the approach emphasised the principles of scientific inquiry: how to ask good questions and design simple experiments to find out the answers.

Amongst the findings were:

- On average, participating pupils achieved higher scores on a combined measure of science knowledge and understanding
- There appeared to be a slightly greater positive effect for pupils with low prior attainment (+4 months) compared to those with high prior attainment (+3 months)
- Pupils eligible for free school meals made five additional months' progress on average
- There appeared to be greater effects for girls (+4 months on average) than for boys (+2 months)
- Pupils in classes following the approach reported having more positive attitudes towards science
- Participating teachers reported using practical work, discussions and time for thinking much more often than teachers in comparison schools

Source: Hanley, P., Slavin, R., Elliott, L. (2015) *Thinking, Doing, Talking Science*. London: Education Endowment Foundation.

52. Jay T., Willis B., Thomas P., et al. (2017) *Dialogic Teaching: Evaluation report and executive summary*. Education Endowment Foundation.
53. Millard, W. & Menzies, L. (2016) *Oracy. The State of Speaking in our Schools*. Voice 21.
54. Save the Children (2016) *Early Language development and children's primary school attainment in English and maths: new research findings*. London: Save the Children.
55. The Education Endowment Foundation (2019) ***Oral Language Interventions***.
56. Spencer, S., Clegg, J., Stackhouse, J. & Rush R. (2017) 'Contribution of spoken language and socio-economic background to adolescents' educational achievement at age 16 years', *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 52(2), pp. 184–196.
57. Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group (2020) *Speak for Change:* Interim Report.

2. Oracy helps to close the social disadvantage gap

Raising the educational achievement of young people from low-income families remains a key priority in education. Links between social class and educational achievement have been well documented for many years. Educational achievement has been shown to be a good predictor of many life outcomes, such as job status, happiness, health, and even life expectancy.[58] Social disadvantage, experienced from the first years of school can have long-term educational implications. Children from disadvantaged homes begin formal education less well equipped to take advantage of the curriculum in schools than those in more affluent homes. Many lack basic skills, chiefly in language and social development, and in literacy and mathematical understanding, to be successful in an educational system that places a high value on these areas.[59] It has a negative impact on children's educational, social and health outcomes throughout the their lives.

Recent statistics show the reality of social disadvantage in the UK:

In 2019, 4.2 million children in the UK were living in poverty. That is 30% of children, or nine children in a classroom of 30.

44% of children living in lone-parent families are in poverty. Lone parents face a higher risk of poverty due to the lack of an additional earner, low rates of maintenance payments, gender inequality in employment and pay, and childcare costs.

Children from black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to be in poverty: 46% are now in poverty, compared with 26% of children in white British families.

Children in large families are at a far greater risk of living in poverty with 43% of children living in families with three or more children living in poverty.

Two thirds of primary teachers (66%) and nearly half (44%) of secondary teachers say school closures during the pandemic had a negative effect on the spoken language development of pupils eligible for free school meals.[60]

Research consistently finds that children from low-income families start school with lower language levels than their more advantaged peers: of the children who persistently experienced poverty, 75% arrive at school below average in language development. Around 50% of children in some areas of deprivation begin school with delayed language.[61]

Inequalities across society entrench young people in disadvantage and widen the gulf between rich and poor in our schools. Rafts of government initiatives to improve social mobility have been suggested, proposing more school choice, new curricula and a revised exam system in schools. It remains, however, that we have not yet created sustainable pathways within our education system for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to flourish.[62]

58. Rimfeld, K., Malanchini, M., Krapohl, E. et al. (2018) 'The stability of educational achievement across school years is largely explained by genetic factors'. *Science of Learning* 3, p.16.
59. Mortimore, P. & Whitty, G. (2000) *Can School Improvement Overcome the Effects of Disadvantage?* London: Institute of Education.
60. Oracy APPG *Speak for Change* (2021).
61. The Communications Trust (2017) *Talking about a Generation.*
62. Doherty, J. (2022) 'Boosting social mobility: Seven building blocks for schools'. *Sec Ed.* Best Practice. February.

Headlines of the Education in England 2020 report were that, *'Progress has stalled in tackling inequalities in our education system, ...any progress made since 2011 will be reversed. If current trends continue, the disadvantage gap will never close'*.[63] The report found that persistently disadvantaged children (who have been eligible for Free School Meals for more than 80% of their school life) were on average 22 months behind their more advantaged peers. There are high inequalities in attainment outcomes in two main compulsory subjects, maths and English, with a gap of 17.5 months in maths and 16.2 months in English. The disadvantage gap is also widening for the most vulnerable. By the time looked-after young people sit their GCSE exams, they are 29 months behind their peers.[64]

The language gap faced by working class white children is already apparent and the percentage failing the national phonics test is more than twice that of other children. At resits aged seven, one in five such boys still had not met expected standards. By the time socio-economically disadvantaged children (who may or may not also be white or white British) reach the end of primary school they are already nine months behind their peers.[65]

The situation continues into secondary schools with the transition between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 a particular trigger point, impacting negatively on student academic attainment and psychological outcomes for many students.[66] Findings from a recent Nuffield Foundation project tracking the trajectory of disadvantaged pupils during Key Stage 3 point very clearly to educational inequalities between disadvantaged pupils and their peers widening during the first three years of secondary school.[67] Worryingly, education policy pays less attention to this stage than the terminal phases of primary and secondary schools. Inequality in outcomes is striking in secondary schools. On average, disadvantaged pupils make two months less progress every year than their peers at secondary school in England. Comparing the progress at secondary school of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) with non-eligible pupils with the same Key Stage 2 (KS2) scores, FSM pupils make between 0.26 and 0.35 of a GCSE grade less progress in English and maths respectively.[68]

Research continues to show how oracy helps to reduce the attainment gap for the most disadvantaged learners.[69]

63. Hutchinson,J., Reader, M. & Akhal, A. (2020) ***Education in England: Annual Report 2020***. London: EPI.
64. Hutchinson,J., Reader, M. & Akhal, A. (2020) ***Education in England: Annual Report 2020***. London: EPI.
65. Hutchinson,J., Reader, M. & Akhal, A. (2020) ***Education in England: Annual Report 2020***. London: EPI.
66. Evans, D., Borriello, G.A. & Field, A.P. (2018) A Review of the Academic and Psychological Impact of the Transition to Secondary Education. *Frontiers of Psychology*. 9, p.1482.
67. Cook, W. Shaw, B. & Morris, S. (2020) *Disadvantage in early Secondary School*. Nuffield Foundation. Manchester Metropolitan University.
68. Shaw, B., Baars, S., Menzies, L. et al., (2017) ***Low income pupils' progress at Secondary school***. Social Mobility Commission.
69. Alexander, R. (2017) *Towards Dialogic Teaching: Rethinking Classroom Talk*, 5th edition. London: Dialogic.

ORACY: CLOSING THE ATTAINMENT GAP

A partnership of four primary schools in the north of England, set out to address concerns about language development with their Year 1 cohorts. All four schools were situated in areas of high deprivation, with two schools located in the highest decile of the most deprived postcodes in England.

All teachers had common concerns about the focus group pupils, who had multiple indicators of poor language development. The teachers decided to focus on enhancing vocabulary as a key building block of language comprehension. Other classroom strategies included whole-class lesson objectives taught through discussions in small groups; giving the children more time to think and using prompts to encourage children to ask questions of their peers; word studies in all lessons, where subject specific vocabulary was modelled; phonic groups and phonics interventions where specific needs were identified; pastoral intervention and family support targeted at children where language delays were detected.

All Year 1 teachers reported good gains for their Year 1 cohorts in the proportion of children reaching age-related expectations in speaking and listening, reading and writing. Progress of pupils in the focus group identified that they had grown in confidence, were more willing to contribute to whole class discussion and engaged more frequently in peer-peer interactions.

All four schools agreed that they would embed the vocabulary work in the future in their early years and Key Stage 1 classes.

Source. Doherty. J. & Nuttall, A. (2022) The effects of disadvantage on children's life chances and educational outcomes. In C. Hayes *et al., The Early Years Handbook for Students and Practitioners* London: Routledge.

3. Oracy promotes child development

Good teachers are experts in child development. Effective teaching is predicated on an understanding of how development affects learning. Linguistic, cognitive, emotional and social capacities are inextricably intertwined throughout the life course. Language development generally progresses through distinct but overlapping stages and the majority of children follow similar patterns here, albeit at different rates. In the first few years of life, more than a million new neural connections are formed in a child's growing brain every second. Sensory pathways such as those for basic vision and hearing are the first to develop, followed by language skills and higher cognitive functions. Evidence suggests that the rate at which children develop language is sensitive to the amount of input they receive from the adults around them.[70] Young children naturally reach out for interaction early through babbling, facial expressions and gestures, and adults respond with the same kind of vocalising and gesturing back at them.

Early language acquisition theories (e.g. Skinner's behaviourism; Bandura's social learning theory, Chomsky's nativist theories and Bruner's interactionist theories) half a century ago failed to decide conclusively how language is actually acquired. Modern learning theories, however, support the Russian psychologist Vygotsky's hypothesis that language learning and experience are linked to cognition. Vygotsky proposed that children use language to construct knowledge and develop understanding.[71] Once a child has acquired language, their thinking is transformed. Vygotsky proposed that children's language learning and experience is linked to their cognitive development in a helical continuous process through ways of thinking and ways of talking. Through it, they learn how other people make sense of the world, how language is used to reason cause and effect, how emotions are expressed and how to work together to solve problems. By listening and contributing to ambient conversation, children take up the language of their social world, influenced by and influencing those around them.

70. Law, J. et al. (2017) *Early Language Development: Needs, provision, and intervention for preschool children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.* A Report for the Education Endowment Foundation. Public Health England/EEF: Newcastle University.
71. Mercer, N. (2013) 'The Social Brain, Language, and Goal-Directed Collective Thinking: A Social Conception of Cognition and Its Implications for Understanding How We Think, Teach, and Learn'. *Educational Psychologist,* 48(3), pp. 148-168.

4. Oracy benefits debating skills, which in turn benefit oracy skills

There is much research evidence to confirm that students' spoken communication skills are enhanced by engaging in structured debate.[72] Debate can be described as a formal public discussion where two opposing sides follow a set of pre-agreed rules to engage in an oral exchange of different points of view on an issue. Formal debates are common in secondary schools or university competitions and becoming more prevalent in primary schools.

The literature reveals three types of debate:

1. Classroom debates – where the teacher sets a topic for debate and assigns contrasting positions to individuals or groups of students which are debated in class. Students may be cross-examined by their opponents, the teacher and/or other observers or judges. They might be graded for their contributions; write up their experience as an essay following the debate or be tested on the subject matter.[73] [74]

2. Argumentation and oral communication classes – classes in argumentation are most common in the US, particularly at college level. The object is not so much the learning of subject matter but the improvement of skills in argumentation and rhetoric.[75]

3. Competitive debate – there are a number of different debating competitions (including the **ESU's Schools' Mace**) which vary according to debating styles, preparation time and the number and length of speeches. All encourage confidence and critical thinking and provide opportunities for students to engage with wide-ranging and often challenging cross-curricular topics. The competitive element is motivating and helps builds links with other schools both locally and nationally.

72. ESU (2016) 'Persuasive Speech Aids Pupils' Development' (English-Speaking Union). Retrieved 25 May 2023.
73. Jensen, J. (2008) 'Developing Historical Empathy through Debate: An Action Research Study'. *Social Studies Research and Practice,* 3 (1).
74. Rao, P. (2010) 'Debates as a pedagogical learning technique: empirical research with business students'. *Multicultural Education & Technology Journal,* 4 (4): 234–250.
75. Zohar, A. & Nemet, F. (2002) 'Fostering Students' Knowledge and Argumentation Skills Through Dilemmas in Human Genetics'. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching,* 39 (1): 35–62.

International research undertaken on behalf of the Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) categorised the benefits of debate:

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS:

Academic attainment – debate preparation aids young people from diverse backgrounds and, in particular, their development of literacy skills; helps to improve subject knowledge; and supports application of learning to real-world situations.[76]

Critical thinking – Competitive debaters report better critical thinking among the top five benefits of taking part in debate.[77] [78]

Communication and argumentation skills – improvements in communication and argumentation skills, including improved English, even when it is not students' first language.[79]

Personal and social impact – increased aspirations towards higher education; boosting confidence; broadening horizons and improving cultural awareness.[80] [81]

Source: Akerman, R. & Neale, I. (2011) *Debating the evidence: an international review of current situation and perceptions.* Reading, Berkshire: CfBT Education Trust/English Speaking Union.

Other research shows that the development of skills such as giving rational, considerate opinion; supporting the validity of statements; developing collaborative skills and acknowledging others' viewpoints and perspectives in a safe environment are all benefits from engaging in debating activity.[82] With such benefits, this report echoes the CfBT's compelling evidence that debate constitutes a valuable tool and calls for debate to be embedded into every school.

The ESU has a wealth of materials on setting up a debate club and running debates of different kinds, both in and out of lessons. The ESU's Setting Up a Debate Club resource is an excellent starting point.

76. Mezuk, B., Bondarenko, I., Smith, S. and Tucker, E. (2010) *The Influence of a Policy Debate Program on Achievement in a Large Urban Public School System*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Hilton Atlanta and Atlanta Marriott Marquis, Atlanta, Georgia, August 14.
77. Fine, G. (2000) 'Games and Truths: Learning To Construct Social Problems In High School'. *Debate Sociological Quarterly,* 41 (1), pp. 103–123.
78. Musselman, E. (2004) 'Using structured debate to achieve autonomous student discussion'. *The History Teacher,* 37 (3), pp. 335–349.
79. Simonneaux , L. (2001) 'Role-play or debate to promote students' argumentation and justification on an issue in animal transgenesis'. *International Journal of Science Education,* 23 (9), pp. 903–927.
80. Jerome, L. & Algarra, B. (2005) 'Debating debating: a reflection on the place of debate within secondary schools'. *The Curriculum Journal,* 16 (4), pp. 493–508.
81. Shuster, C. (2008) *Not Making the Case: A Critical Examination of Research Supporting Urban Debate Leagues.* Paper presented at the 2nd International Conference on Argumentation, Rhetoric, Debate and the Pedagogy of Empowerment, Ljubljana, Slovenia, April 11–13.
82. Davies, S. (2020) *Talking about Oracy. Developing communication beyond the classroom*. Melton, Woodbridge: John Catt Educational Ltd.

5. Oracy benefits personal and social skills

Social and emotional skills have been rising on the education policy agenda over the last few years. These are a sub-set of an individual's abilities, attributes and characteristics important for success at school and later life and to fully participate in society as active citizens. They are also important drivers of mental health and labour market prospects. The ability of citizens to adapt, be resourceful, respect and work well with others, and to take personal and collective responsibility is becoming the hallmark of a well-functioning society.[83]

The impact of boosting social and emotional skills to improve social outcomes is considerable and is complementary to boosting cognitive skills. Enhancing specific social and emotional skills (which are fundamentally dependent on cognitive skills such as perception, memory, and reasoning) improves students' ability to improve their cognitive skills. Good social and emotional skills are strongly related to school performance.[84] A number of studies have shown that social and emotional skills can be as important as cognitive skills in health and wellness and determining employment outcomes.[85]

Oracy proficiency opens up new communication opportunities for children to interact with others in play. It enables them to enter peer play situations, to contribute to meaningful interactions, to communicate their ideas with others and be part of a team. Oracy allows them to view peers as separate to themselves, to take the lead and initiate interactions in games and shared activities.[86] Language is a powerful means for building successful relationships with others, vital in the varied contexts of school life and in later life and work. Oral communicative competence is significantly related to the degree to which children are accepted or rejected by their peers. Research shows that children who are restricted in their ability to use language effectively are at risk of being excluded from positive peer interactions.[87] [88] Children with little word knowledge are less able to interpret the intentions of others and find it harder to communicate their own ideas, needs, and emotions, so risking exclusion from friendship groups.[89] The implication of this work for teachers is that they pay specific attention to the communicative abilities of their students, above and beyond the current focus on vocabulary and phonic knowledge of language.

83. OECD (2021) *Beyond Academic Learning: First Results from the Survey of Social and Emotional Skills*, Paris: OECD Publishing.
84. OECD (2015) *Skills for Social Progress: The Power of Social and Emotional Skills*, OECD Skills Studies, Paris: OECD Publishing.
85. Macmillan, L. (2013) *The role of non-cognitive and cognitive skills, behavioural and educational outcome in accounting for the intergenerational transmission of worklessness,* DoQSS Working Papers.
86. Doherty, J. & Hughes, M. (2009) *Child Development. Theory and Practice*. 2nd Edition. Harlow: Essex: Pearson.
87. Laws, G., Bates, G., Feuerstein, M., Mason-Apps, E., & White, C. (2012) Peer acceptance of children with language and communication impairments in a mainstream primary school: Associations with type of language difficulty, problem behaviors and a change in placement organization. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 28(1), pp. 73–86.
88. **Censuswide survey commissioned by the English-Speaking Union,** Spring 2023.
89. Menting, B., van Lier, P. A. C., & Koot, H. M. (2011) Language skills, peer rejection, and the development of externalizing behaviour from kindergarten to fourth grade. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 52*(1), pp. 72–79.

6. Oracy identifies early language delays

Children who are delayed or impoverished in their language development are at risk of difficulties in learning to read and write and subsequent educational under-achievement.[90] A significant minority of children experience difficulties in acquiring oral language resulting in a variety of speech, language and communication needs. The term 'speech, language and communication need' or SLCN, has been used widely by speech and language therapists for over a decade as a collective term to describe all children and young people with needs in this area. On average, two children in every classroom have developmental language disorder (DLD), a condition where children have problems understanding and using spoken language.[91] Children and young people with SLCN ultimately have difficulties in communicating with others in a variety of situations, in and outside of school. This may be because they cannot say what they want to, have difficulty understanding what is being said to them or do not understand social rules of communication. For some this may be minor or temporary, while for others, their needs will be complex and longer term. Language disorder is one of the most common disorders of childhood, affecting nearly 10% of young people everywhere throughout their lives. In areas of social disadvantage this number can rise to 50% of all children and young people, including those with delayed language as well as children with identified SLCN. In other words, 10% of children have long-term SLCN. For a school with 1,000 pupils, that is 100 with SLC. In a small school of 200 pupils, that is 20 pupils, two to three in every class. **The SCALES study** found that 7.6% of children starting in mainstream reception classrooms have difficulties with speech, language and communication that impact on their ability to learn and which are not linked to factors such as general learning difficulties, cerebral palsy or hearing impairment.

Studies agree that early speech, language and communication difficulties predict a wide range of negative outcomes. We know that good vocabulary at 16-24 months, predicts good reading accuracy and comprehension five years later at age seven.[92] Children who struggle with language at five are six times less likely to reach the expected standard in English at age 11 than children who have had good language skills at five, and 10 times less likely to achieve the expected level in maths. Children with poor vocabulary at age five are more than twice as likely to be unemployed at age 34 as children with good vocabulary.[93] A State of Education survey found more than 1,100 senior primary school staff found 80% of teachers were worried about children having poor social skills or speech and language problems on starting school.[94] In a 2015 Save the Children poll, 80% of teachers said they were spending extra time helping children learn basic communication skills. More than 75% voiced concerns that, despite their best classroom efforts, these children may never catch up. The same number said the problem was affecting their schools' results, and that poor language development is causing problems for classroom management.

90. Law J, Charlton J, Dockrell J. et al. (2017) *Early language development: Needs, provision and intervention for pre-school children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds*. London: Education Endowment Foundation.
91. Norbury, C.F., Gooch, D., Wray, C. et al. (2016) The impact of nonverbal ability on prevalence and clinical presentation of language disorder: evidence from a population study. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry,* 57(11), pp. 1247-1257.
92. Gascoigne, M., Gross, J. (2017) ***Talking about My Generation***. London. I Can & The Communication Trust.
93. Law J, Rush R, Schoon I, Parsons S (2009) 'Modelling developmental language difficulties from school entry into adulthood'. *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research* 52 (6), pp.1401-1416.
94. The Key (2016) *State of Education.*

7. Oracy promotes citizenship skills

Studies have shown that being taught oracy skills helps young learners to think critically, listen actively and speak strategically.[95]

Typically, in debating or public speaking scenarios, the subjects under discussion also increase students' knowledge of the world, helping them to consider the pros and cons of various standpoints and boosting their critical thinking. As a result, they are more able to construct compelling arguments in support of their beliefs, equipping them to be more engaged citizens. See the article: **'How debating can make the world better'**.

8. Oracy promotes employability

Young people must learn to navigate a modern world that is changing rapidly technologically, culturally and linguistically. Modern jobs often require people who can make clear presentations, work together in teams, listen to others and solve problems collaboratively. Worryingly, a review by the Department for Business, Innovations and Skills (BIS) found employers are concerned that the incoming workforce does not possess sufficient ability to communicate effectively either orally or in writing.[96]

Being able to use their language skills to understand complex issues and communicate effectively in this changing world is crucial. Language and communication are key at every age and stage of education. The study of language acquisition by children and their later emergence as competent language users is an important aspect of the study of human growth and development in the social sciences and as a consequence of the need for quality education to service the economic aspirations of post-industrial, post-scientific and post-modern societies. Globalisation puts an emphasis on the knowledge economy, which, in turn, implicates language acquisition and the internationalisation of languages.[97] This point is echoed by a Cambridge University Press (CUP) publication in 2018.[98] This and other reports strongly argue that employers commonly seek a workforce proficient in spoken communication.[99]

Oracy is an essential skill for young people. Without oracy, schools are at risk of not fully equipping young people for modern life and the 21st-century workplace. (See also pp. 32-34).

95. Holmes-Henderson A, Zmavc J, Kaldahl A-G. (2022) 'Rhetoric, oracy and citizenship: curricular innovations from Scotland, Slovenia and Norway' *Literacy*, Volume 56, Issue 3, September. pp.253-263.
96. Department for Business, Innovations & Skills (2016) *Impact of Poor English and Maths Skills on Employers: Literature Review.* (BIS Research Paper 267), London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.
97. Evans, R. & Jones, D. (2007) 'Perspectives on oracy—towards a theory of practice'. *Early Child Development and Care* 177, pp.557-567.
98. Cambridge University Press (2018) '*The Development of Oracy Skills in School-aged learners'*. Cambridge: CUP.
99. CBI (2016) *The Right Combination: CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey.* London: Confederation of British Industries.

SECTION C

3.1 Oracy under the umbrella of literacy

Literacy is one of the key educational objectives of compulsory schooling. But definitions of literacy range from the ability to read and write to the effective use of language.[100] Whatever the interpretation, oracy is the precursor of literacy and the skills and knowledge gained through being able to understand and communicate information underpin learning in every subject and at every stage of formal education. Literacy knowledge and skills empower pupils to take their place in the world, opening doors within education and in later life.[101]

According to a UNESCO report in 2020, 14% of adults worldwide lack basic literacy skills.[102] England has the lowest teenage literacy rates in the OECD and is facing a language and literacy challenge.[103] Literacy gaps are apparent at just five years old, where our poorest children start primary school 19 months behind their better-off peers in language and vocabulary and struggle to catch up from then on. The 2018 Key Stage 2 National Curriculum Assessments (formerly SATs) revealed that one in four children, rising to two in five (40%) disadvantaged children, were not reading at the expected level by the time they left primary school.[104]

This deficit in literacy skills presents a significant cost to the UK economy each year. A recent study published by Pro Bono Economics found that improving pre-school language skills could provide a boost to the UK economy of £1.2bn.[105] This is the equivalent of cost savings of £2,800 over the lifetime of each child at risk of poor language skills, with a significant amount due to increased costs for Special Educational Needs, involvement in the criminal justice system and demand on mental health services. Other findings from the study were that 14% of three year olds in the UK (c 116,000 children) are at risk of having poor early language skills. Improving their early language skills to above the at-risk threshold could generate lifetime economic benefits of around £330 million for the UK economy.

100. Cambridge Assessment (2013) *What is literacy? An investigation into definitions of English as a subject and the relationship between English, literacy and 'being literate'*. A Research Report Commissioned by Cambridge Assessment.
101. National Literacy Trust (2019) *Words Matter: The role of literacy in combatting social exclusion*. Sutton Trust. 2022.
102. UNESCO (2020) Global education monitoring report: *Inclusion and education: all means all*. UNESCO.
103. OECD (2016) *18% of 16-24 year olds struggle with low literacy* Building Skills for All: A Review of England; Paris: OECD.
104. Department for Education (2018) *Key stage 2 and multi-academy trust performance* London: DfE.
105. Kerr, M.E. & Franklin, J. (2021) *The economic cost of early vulnerable language skills*. Pro Bono Economics.

Poor literacy skills are a cross-generational issue. Statistics from the National Literacy Trust report that 7. 1 million people in England have very poor literacy skills.[106] That is 1 in 6 or 16.4% of the adult population. Weak basic skills reduce employability prospects, damage citizenship, and are therefore profoundly implicated in challenges of equity and social exclusion. Low-skilled adults are a diverse group and intervention approaches have to address the specific learning needs of each adult learner, be this a low-skilled worker trapped in a low-skill job, a young school dropout, an unemployed person or a parent who has been inactive in the labour market. Often those concerned will have done badly at school and have a negative perception of education; they may lack awareness of their deficiencies, and even if aware, are embarrassed to admit it.[107] Parents with poor literacy skills are unable to fully support their child's learning in school.

Schools have a vital part to play in raising standards of literacy for all learners. Despite the small number of studies, increasing the knowledge of teachers of oracy is hugely important because of the effect that they have on the pupils and their settings. When teachers are supported in their own training, they gain confidence in articulating their beliefs and managing children's literacy learning. A teacher survey conducted in 2015 by the National Literacy Trust in which 2,326 teachers from 112 schools in the UK participated, found that almost all teachers said their job was to teach and promote literacy but many felt ill-equipped with the skills and knowledge to effectively deliver literacy outcomes in their subject areas.[108]

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS:

Perceptions and confidence of teaching literacy

84.5% of teachers said that developing literacy was embedded in their normal classroom practice, while 76.3% felt that they had the knowledge they need to help improve their pupils' literacy skills.

Only 42.4% said they had particular strategies for teaching literacy that they felt worked well.

There is scope to develop teachers' confidence regarding pedagogy, and improvement around teachers' confidence to support particular groups of children.

Barriers

The home environment was seen as a barrier to a child's overall literacy attainment.

45.1% of teachers said that the quality of teaching and learning was a barrier to a child's overall literacy attainment.

When asked whether there were any barriers in their school that prevent pupils from reaching their full literacy potential, 51.7% of teachers said that a lack of knowledge of how to support literacy was an issue.

Source: Clark, C. & Teravainen, A. (2015) *Teachers and Literacy: Their perceptions, understanding, confidence and awareness*. National Literacy Trust.

Other research found a link between the use of video gaming and literacy.[109] A 2019 survey of 4,626 young people aged 11 to 16 from across the UK captured changes to young people's behaviours around video game playing and literacy and found improvements to oracy through gaming. The shared cultural experience of playing video games was found to support positive communication with friends and family, both 'in real life' and online.

106. National Literacy Trust. **Adult Literacy**. (Accessed 26th October 2021).
107. Windisch ,H.C. (2015) *Adults with low literacy and numeracy skills: A literature review on policy intervention*. OECD Education Working Papers No. 123.
108. Clark, C. & Teravainen, A. (2015) *Teachers and Literacy: Their perceptions, understanding, confidence and awareness*. National Literacy Trust.
109. Picton, I., Clark, C. & Judge, T. (2020) *Video game playing and literacy: a survey of young people aged 11 to 16*. Research Report. London: National Literacy Trust.

Oracy extends vocabulary and helps with learning to read

Good oral language skills are the vital foundation stone of learning to read. When children fall behind in language, they are much more likely to struggle to learn to read when they start school. Language learning – which encompasses dialogic reading (adults and children talking about a book or story as they read/experience it), listening, shared narratives, vocabulary development and attuned adult-child interactions to build confidence and language exposure – provide a vital foundation to enable children to unlock reading. Studies show that a student's word knowledge is strongly related to how well that student understands what he or she reads.[110] Vocabulary refers to the words children need to know in order to communicate and understand print. Oral vocabulary is the words children recognise or use in listening and speaking. As learners begin reading, they map the printed vocabulary encountered in texts onto the oral language that they bring to this. Vocabulary is one of the five pre-requisites for reading proficiency as shown below.

THE FIVE KEYS TO READING PROFICIENCY

Phonemic awareness: Knowledge of, and capacity to manipulate, the smallest distinct sounds (phonemes) in spoken words.

Phonics: Learning and using the relationships between sounds and letter-symbols to sound out (decode) written words.

Fluency: The ability to read accurately, quickly and expressively. Fluent readers are able to focus on reading for meaning.

Vocabulary: The words children need to know in order to comprehend and communicate. Oral vocabulary is the words children recognise or use in listening and speaking. Reading vocabulary is the words children recognise or use in reading and writing.

Comprehension: Extracting and constructing meaning from written text using knowledge of words, concepts, facts, and ideas.

(Various sources)

Research shows that the size of a child's vocabulary is an important predictor of academic success.[111] Studies on academic language development have shown that children who hear more 'academic' vocabulary aged five have larger vocabularies which in turn positively impacts reading development and academic achievement.[112] Children with a poor vocabulary at age five are four times more likely to struggle as adult readers. A study by Oxford University Press reported that 69% of primary school teachers and 60% of secondary school teachers believe the word gap is increasing.[113]

Research is clear that the more words children know and the more opportunities they have for purposeful talk and reciprocal dialogue, the more words they can comprehend when they encounter these in their reading.[114] While the quantity of words is a strong predictor of vocabulary at age two and a half, lexical diversity (the number of different word types) and sophistication (the total number of rare words) are the strongest predictors of vocabulary by the time children reach three and a half. By age four and a half, the amount of decontextualised talk heard by a child (such as explanation, talk about pretence, story and narrative) is the strongest predictor of vocabulary.[115] Language unlocks reading. Being literate and a competent reader relies on pre-existing oral language and cognitive skills.

110. Marulis, L.M. & Neuman, S.B. (2013) 'How Vocabulary Interventions Affect Young Children at Risk: A Meta-Analytic Review', *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 6:3, pp.223-262.
111. Law, J., Charlton, J., Asmussen, K. (2017) *Language as a Child Wellbeing Indicator*. Early Intervention Foundation/Newcastle University.
112. Weizman, Z.O. & Snow, C.E, (2001) 'Lexical output as related to children's vocabulary acquisition: Effects of sophisticated exposure and support for meaning'. *Developmental Psychology* 37(2), pp. 265–279.
113. Oxford University Press (2018) *Oxford Language Thought Leadership Report*. Oxford.
114. Johns-Shepherd, L. (2022) 'What is the true power of reading?' In C. Carden (ed) *Primary Teaching. Learning and Teaching in Primary Schools Today*, 2nd edition. London: Learning Matters.
115. Rowe, M. L. (2012) 'A longitudinal investigation of the role of quantity and quality of child-directed speech in vocabulary development'. *Child Development*, 83, pp. 1762-1774.

Literacy and lifelong learning

Literacy is an integral part of the right to education and the foundation of lifelong learning. It empowers individuals, improves lives, enables greater participation in society and the labour market, benefits child and family health and nutrition, and reduces poverty.[116] Over 250 million children worldwide are failing to acquire basic literacy skills. An estimated 773 million young people and adults across the world have not achieved basic literacy skills.[117] Excellent summaries of the benefits of wider learning have come from Feinstein and colleagues[118] and later from Schuller[119] who conveniently grouped these under three headings of health, employment, and social and community. These and other writers argue that a narrow focus on academic achievement is ill-advised as it limits children's engagement with learning and their capacity to experience it in ways that encourage lifelong participation.

Developing oracy requires a lifelong-learning approach across the ages that encompasses formal contexts such as schools and other non-formal contexts such as the home environment. This report highly recommends a 'cradle to grave' approach beginning in the pre-school years and continuing throughout life.

116. UNESCO. *The Global Alliance for Literacy within the framework of Lifelong learning*. UNESCO website.
117. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020) **Data Center**.
118. Feinstein, L., Budge, D., Vorhaus, J. & Duckworth, K. (2008) *The social and personal benefits of learning: A summary of key research findings*. Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning. Institute of Education.
119. Schuller,T. (2017) *What are the wider benefits of learning across the life course?* Government Office for Science/Foresight.

3.2 Literacy, oracy and the 21st-century skills gap

The UK education systems have typically emphasised the acquisition of academic skills over other generic, transferable skills and this is reflected in curricular content and in assessment modalities in schools. This carries an obvious and immediate risk of leaving many school-aged learners behind and in danger of under-achieving. Such a narrow interpretation has resulted in a 'skills gap' where young people, on leaving formal education, can be under-prepared for the transition to further study or for entry to the world of work.

Twenty-first century living and modern working requires competency in a broad range of skills: cognitive skills which include being able to solve complex problems, thinking critically about work tasks, or analytical reasoning and non-cognitive skills including being able to articulate one's thoughts and feelings and communicate effectively with different audiences.

The UK faces a range of economic challenges that raise the importance of embedding relevant skills and competencies in learning/training frameworks and in school curricula across all phases. New ways of living and working require new skills, and education systems must respond to the changes.[120] Investing in relevant 21st-century skills that combine academic with broader and more transferable skills through the lifecycle is a matter of urgency. Table 2, below, summarises the key changes in skills over previous decades with accompanying emerging skills and is put forward as a description of current thinking and classifications of skills.

Table 1. The five keys to reading proficiency

OLD-WORLD SKILLS	NEW-WORLD SKILLS
Learning one or two specific technical roles	Reasoning, logic trouble-shooting, and spatial visualisation
Physical strength and flexibility	Personal flexibility, communication, and cooperation
Ability to follow fixed, unchanging procedures	Initiative, persistence, and independence
General attention to production and safety procedures	Attention to detail, self-control, and dependability
Following orders	Making independent decisions
Operating, maintaining, designing machinery	Operating computers or computerised machinery and using computers for a wide range of critical functions

Source: Anderson, R. (2014) *Making Education Work*. A report from an Independent Advisory Group chaired by Professor Sir Roy Anderson. Pearson: London.

There are many definitions of 21st-century skills, and consequently many skills frameworks. In these 'communication', as the practice of speaking and listening and conveying ideas by a variety of methods, appears consistently. The Council of the European Union adopted a recommendation on key competencies for lifelong learning in May 2018.[121]

The recommendation identified eight key competencies essential to citizens for personal fulfilment, a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, employability, active citizenship and social inclusion:

- Literacy competence
- Multilingual competence
- Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering
- Digital competence
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence
- Citizenship competence
- Entrepreneurship competence
- Cultural awareness and expression competence

120. Binkley M. et al. (2012) 'Defining Twenty-First Century Skills'. In: Griffin P., McGaw B., Care E. (eds) *Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills*. Springer, Dordrecht.
121. European Commission (2019) *Key Competencies for Lifelong learning*. EU: Luxembourg.

The key competencies are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

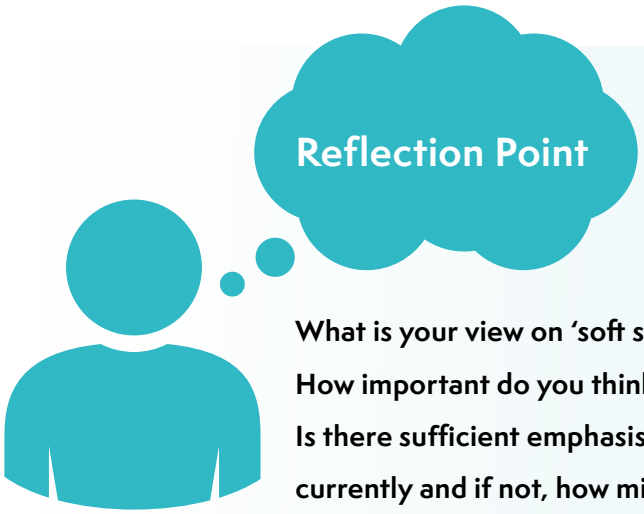
- Knowledge is composed of the concepts, facts and figures, ideas and theories which are already established, and support the understanding of a certain area or subject
- Skills are defined as the ability to carry out processes and use the existing knowledge to achieve results
- Attitudes describe the disposition and mindset to act or react to ideas, people or situations

These key competencies are developed throughout life, through formal, non-formal and informal learning in different environments, including family, school, workplace, neighbourhood and other communities. All key competencies are considered equally important and aspects essential to one domain will support competence development in another. Skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, communication, creativity, negotiation, analytical and intercultural skills are embedded throughout the key competencies.

Communication and 'soft' skills

Soft skills are a cluster of productive personality traits that characterise interpersonal relationships in social environments. These soft skills include communication, teamwork, problem solving, critical and innovative thinking, creativity, self-confidence, ethical understanding, capacity for lifelong learning, the ability to cope with uncertainty, as well as the willingness to accept responsibility.[122] Soft skills are key for a successful life, a well-functioning society and lifelong learning. Social skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, social competencies and meta-competencies refer to the 'emotional side' of being a human as opposed to components related to hard skills, traditionally dominant in training and education and in many traditional views of workplace readiness.

Communication (oracy) is a 'soft' skill high on this agenda. Active listening; adapting communication styles to support the situation; having clarity; showing confidence and assertiveness; interpreting body language; giving and receiving constructive feedback; identifying and managing personal emotions and those of others; empathy and the interpersonal skills to build rapport in social contexts – all these are the soft skills needed for success in today's workplace.



Reflection Point

What is your view on 'soft skills'?

How important do you think they are?

Is there sufficient emphasis on these skills in school curricula currently and if not, how might we change this situation?

All ESU resources and competitions build these 'soft' but vital communication skills. The ESU resource I Couldn't Disagree More is a great way to help students to develop some of these skills.

122. Moore, T. & . Morton, J. (2017) 'The Myth of Job Readiness? Written Communication, Employability, and the "Skills Gap" in Higher Education.' *Studies in Higher Education* 42 (3), pp. 1–19.

3.3 Modern skills employers want

England's education system falls short in delivering the range of skills and competencies needed to prepare young people for future work and study. A significant number of employers believe labour market entrants are not properly prepared for the workforce. The UK compares poorly against other countries. Many young people leave schools and colleges without the basic literacy capabilities required and many of those who have them are failing to further develop the specialist knowledge and employability skills demanded by employers.

The importance of general 'employability' skills is routinely reflected in the views of employers. Literacy (including oracy) proficiency is cited in most employer survey results. A survey by the Society for Human Resource Management on entry-level job applicants, found oral communication one of the 15 skills employers demanded of new entrants.[123] 63% of employers rated this skill as 'very'/'extremely' important. However, a Confederation of British Industry (CBI) survey in 2016 found around 50% of businesses were not satisfied with school and college leavers' skills in communication.[124] Employers reported less dissatisfaction with recruits' basic literacy (32%) and numeracy (29%) skills. The Federation of Small Businesses submission to the House of Lords Select Committee on Social Mobility recorded that 'small businesses say young people they encounter are often not sufficiently prepared for the workplace. This includes not understanding how to present themselves, poor communication skills.....'.[125]

Developing the oracy employers require

Many job descriptions list communication skills in the job requirements section, with adjectives like interpersonal, written, or oral, and qualifiers such as excellent, effective, or strong. This continues to be an important area of research.[126] The National Association of Colleges and Employers ranked communication skills in the top five important attributes for employees.[127] Is there consensus of agreement as to what types of communication skills exist and how they differ? One US study developed a list of 163 communication behaviours, including listening, asking questions and discussion.[128] This study found that business managers sought graduates who could build and maintain relationships through their communication; who could listen and translate information to and from clients and colleagues, and who could communicate clearly and concisely. These findings span business and are not workplace-specific. Although each employer had their own unique stance on communication skills, collectively, they compose a unified plea for communication skills and contribute to our knowledge of the specific needs of employers regarding employees' oracy that schools must seriously acknowledge.

123. SHRM/Mercer (2016) Entry-level job application skill. Survey findings. SHRM.
124. CBI (2016) *The Right Combination*: CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey 2016. London, UK: Confederation of Business and Industry.
125. Federation of Small Businesses (2015) **FSB response to the Social Mobility Committee of the House of Lords' Inquiry into the Transition from School to Work For 14-24 year olds**. (Accessed 28th October 2021).
126. Knight, M. (2020) 'The Communication Skills Employers Value'. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly* 2020, Vol. 83(4) pp. 363–364.
127. National Association of Colleges and Employers (2020) **'Key attributes employers want to see on resumes'**. (Accessed, 28th October, 2021).
128. Keyton, J., Caputo, J. M., Ford, E. A., Fu, R., Leibowitz, S. A., Liu, T., Wu, C. (2013) 'Investigating verbal workplace communication behaviors'. *International Journal of Business Communication*, pp. 50, 152-169.

Employability has become a key concept in higher education worldwide. The upsurge of interest in employability can be traced to a number of factors, including a concern that graduates are less likely to secure public-sector employment due to the growth of higher education.[129] The downsizing and re-structuring of private organisations places further strain on graduate work availability. A focus on employability is a pragmatic response to these conditions in order to strengthen the vocational mission of higher education.[130] In other words, the role of HEIs goes beyond ensuring that students are knowledgeable in an academic discipline to ensuring that they are prepared for the labour market.[131] The UK government also sees improving graduate employability as an important task for higher education institutions, taking the view that enhancing the skills needed by employers will ultimately increase the number of graduates in employment. As we have seen, a growing body of research reveals that employers are more interested in 'softer' skills and attitudes, the skills of personal and professional development, lifelong learning and career management, to enable graduates to become effective employees.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS:

This literature review explored the peer-reviewed literature on employability in higher education over the period 2016-21.

The balance between 'hard' and 'soft' skills

Much literature is concerned with revisiting the balance between 'hard' and 'soft' skills, with many studies stressing the more generic, fluid and transferable personal qualities and capacities that make for successful workplace behaviours and relationships across settings. These repeatedly show their enduring value in the dynamic context of the modern labour market.

Graduate attributes

The literature confirms the value of authentic assessment tasks showing high applicability and relevance to workplace settings in positively influencing the development of graduate attributes. Critical thinking and problem-solving, self-regulation, digital literacy, teamwork and communications skills, multicultural competence, as well as empathy and compassion were identified.

Efforts at alignment with employer perspectives and needs

Graduates are insufficiently 'work ready' and lack skills and attributes needed by employers.

Conclusions

It is clear that the relational and fluid nature of employability development is a negotiated and dynamic shared understanding between the stakeholders in the process; and that employability learning is best conceived not as a bounded set of capacities and skills but as something that is constantly developing and shifting.

Source: Dalrymple R., A Macrae., Maïa Pal, A., & Shipman, S. (2021) *Employability: a review of the literature 2016-2021*. York: Advance HE.

129. Sin, C. and Amaral, A. (2017) 'Academics' and employers' perceptions about responsibilities for employability and their initiatives towards its development', *Higher Education*, Vol. 73 No. 1, pp. 97-111.
130. Harvey, L. (2000) 'New realities: the relationship between higher education and employment', *Tertiary Education and Management*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 3-17.
131. Yorke, M. (2006) *Employability in Higher Education: What It Is-What It Is Not*, Vol. 1, Higher Education Academy, York.

SECTION D

4.1 Oracy today - practical take aways for teachers

From origins in the 1960s, oracy has been the subject of a number of important reports and reviews up to and including the present. All of these can be claimed to justify the importance of speaking and listening at every stage of our education system. The evidence across the years is substantial and yet oracy has not achieved the status in the curriculum which it merits. Following Covid-19, many schools are taking the time to reflect and review their curriculum and pastoral provision. Now is a time to re-energise and re-envision what school is, and how the curriculum is delivered. This report strongly emphasises that a central component of this is oracy.

Training teachers to facilitate the language development of children through interventions is a widely used approach in the UK, but evidence to support the effectiveness of this training in terms of the impact of children's language development is limited.[132] Training programmes differ in their scope. Some focus on increasing staff knowledge of children's speech, language and communication to enable earlier and more accurate identification of speech, language and communication needs. Others focus on enabling staff to implement changes in their practice to engage in more language and communication-facilitating strategies with all children or children identified with language vulnerabilities, and/or to implement more communication-friendly environments to benefit all children. Examples of intervention programmes include:

- **Vocabulary and Narrative Enrichment Intervention Programmes,** published by Speechmark and evaluated by the Education Endowment Foundation as 'Talk for Literacy'
- **Secondary Language Link** for Key stage 3
- **TalkingPartners@Secondary** for Key Stage 3
- **Talk for Work** from ICAN for 14 to 18-year-olds with communication difficulties
- **Words for Work** from the National Literacy Trust
- **Oracy in Action** from the English-Speaking Union

Despite an increase in such programmes, practitioners report limited access to training in this area, due to budgetary and time constraints placed upon teaching professionals.[133] Other studies report trained practitioners do not easily implement strategies to facilitate children's language development into their settings.[134] While some children may require direct interventions via additional external support, this report strongly recommends that all children in classrooms require explicit instruction in oral language through a range of teaching and learning approaches across the school day as part of the curriculum entitlement.

132. Clegg, J. *et al.* (2020) 'Evaluating the Elklan Talking Matters Programme: Exploring the impact of a training programme for early years professionals on pre-school children's language development'. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy,* Vol. 36(2) pp.109–125.
133. Mroz, M. (2006) 'Providing training in speech and language for education professionals: Challenges, support and the view from the ground'. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy* 22: pp. 155–76.
134. McDonald D., Proctor P. & Gill, W. et al. (2015) 'Increasing early childhood educators' use of communication facilitating and language-modelling strategies: Brief speech and language therapy training'. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy* 3: pp. 305–22.

Research confirms 'lever points' around oracy that schools can use to make a significant difference to teaching and pupils' learning.

Early Years

In 2017, 180,000 five year olds in England started school without the communication, language and literacy skills expected for their age.[135] Early spoken language skills are the most significant predictor of literacy skills at age 11. One in four (23%) children who struggle with language at age five do not reach the expected standard in English at the end of primary school, compared with just 1 in 25 (4%) children who had good language skills at age five.[136] Only 11% of those children who have not reached the expected standard in English at the end of primary school will go on to achieve a good pass grade (Level 4 equivalent or above) in English and maths GCSEs.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS:

A recent report set out an approach for structured, targeted and explicit language learning in the home, in early years settings and at the start of school. It made recommendations on how best to support this for young children. The main findings of the report are summarised:

1. England is facing a huge language and literacy challenge which starts in the early years.
The language and vocabulary gap between wealthier and poorer children is already apparent at 18 months of age.

2. Good early language skills are crucial for children's futures.
Early spoken language skills are the most significant predictor of literacy skills at age 11.

3. The importance of early language learning has gained public and political prominence.
Government and public sector agencies have implemented a range of projects designed to support language learning in the home, in early years settings and in schools.

4. The evidence base on the link between early language skills and reading has been refreshed.
A renewed prioritisation of the importance of language development in the early years provided an opportune moment to draw out the evidence and learning from policy makers, academics, educators and health practitioners.

5. The teaching of reading through phonics should be supported with a structured and explicit approach to language learning.
Language learning which encompasses dialogic reading, listening, shared narratives, vocabulary development and attuned adult-child interactions to build confidence and language exposure provides vital foundations.

6. Language learning must be supported in the home, in schools and in the community.
To make the biggest difference to children's futures, parents, educators and local leaders must be equipped with the skills, resources and strategies to support language learning.

Source: National Literacy Trust/ Oxford University Press (2019) *Language unlocks reading. Supporting early language and reading for every child*. London: NLT.

135. Department for Education (2018) *Early Years Foundation Profile results 2017 to 2018*. London: DfE.
136. University College London on behalf of Save the Children (2016) *Early language development and children's primary school attainment in English and maths: new research findings*. London: ECL.

Improving oracy in Key Stages 1 and 2

Key Stage 1 marks a crucial stage in children's language and literacy development. It is during this phase that five- to seven year olds transition from decoders, breaking down words into individual sounds, into emerging readers who are able to recognise words on sight and simultaneously comprehend them. The gap in literacy attainment grows substantially during Key Stage 2. Teaching should focus on language development, particularly expressive language, which will also support writing.

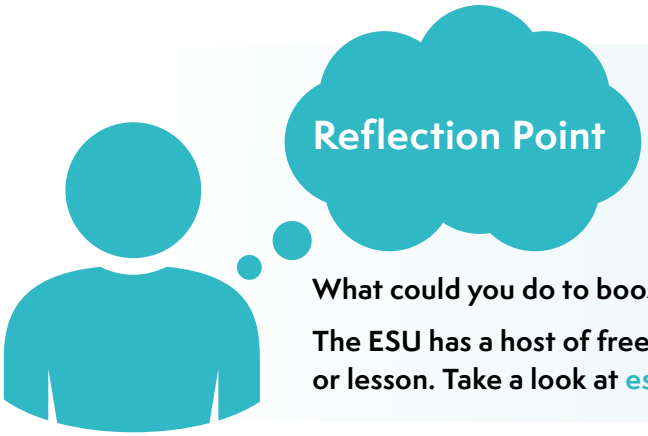
Teachers can increase the quantity and quality of classroom talk by:

- asking open questions, such as questions that require pupils to explain, reason, or argue
- probing with follow-up questions that require pupils to expand on their answers
- building on pupils' responses to move the dialogue forward
- encouraging pupils to ask their own questions
- ensuring every pupil has opportunities to articulate their ideas and be listened to
- creating a classroom culture that encourages dialogue (for example, teaching pupils to listen when others are speaking)
- incorporating opportunities for dialogue into lesson plans and classroom activities.[137]

Improving oracy in Key Stages 3 and 4

A 2018 report into literacy in secondary schools from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) had much to say about oracy in its recommendations.[138] Recommendation 2 is devoted to targeting vocabulary instruction in subjects. One of the significant challenges of secondary school is that students must develop secure knowledge of the specialised and technical vocabulary needed to access the curriculum. As they move from one subject classroom to another, they need to navigate and switch between different forms of communication and vocabulary use. Increasing the challenge still further, the subject-specific academic vocabulary differs considerably from the language students habitually use to communicate outside of the school gates. The report recommends organising vocabulary into meaningful patterns within and across subjects.

Every teacher is a teacher of literacy. The Ofsted report *Removing Barriers to Literacy* concluded that 'teachers in a secondary school need to understand that literacy [and implicitly oracy] is a key issue regardless of the subject taught'.[139]



Reflection Point

What could you do to boost oracy in your classroom?

The ESU has a host of free resources that are suitable to almost any subject or lesson. Take a look at esu.org/resources to find out more.

137. Education Endowment Foundation (2021) *Improving Literacy at Key Stage 2. Guidance Report.* London: EEF.
138. Education Endowment Foundation (2018) *Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools. Guidance Report.* London: EEF.
139. Ofsted (2011) *Removing Barriers to Literacy.* Manchester: Ofsted.

SECTION E

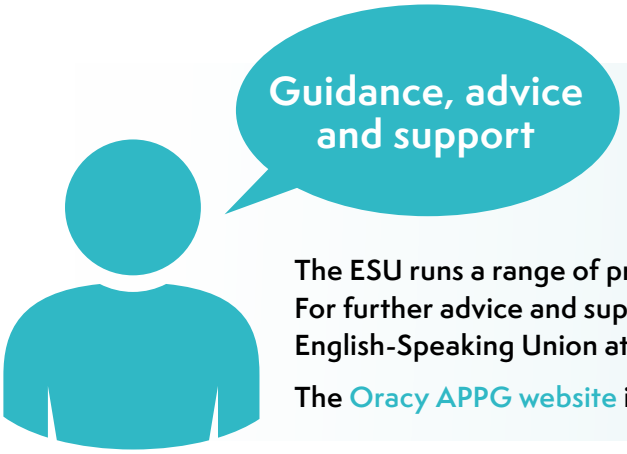
5.1 Conclusion and recommendations

Oracy education matters. Communication skills are essential for academic as well as personal development and wellbeing, and those who struggle with them are at a proven disadvantage.

Speech and communication are at the heart of good classroom practice. It is through talk that teachers instruct and support their students and it is through discussion, questioning and explanation that students learn and engage with the curriculum. Schools need to take bold steps to put more emphasis on speaking skills – and the time, as the language and attainment gaps widen in the wake of Covid, is now. The development of language is too important to be left to be 'caught' alongside the rest of the taught curriculum. We need to give it explicit attention across the curriculum, alongside subject knowledge and skills.

Drawing together the argument in this report, the final summary is:

- **Oracy, under the umbrella of literacy, is vital in the 21st century as part of a modern, diverse and equitable society**
- **Its impact on young people's life chances, personal development, place in society and future workplace is undeniable**
- **Oracy impacts significantly on educational attainment from Early Years through to post-compulsory education**
- **The UK is facing a crisis in language and literacy that begins in the early years of schooling**
- **Too many young people have not acquired the necessary oracy or literacy skills on leaving school**
- **Good oracy skills are critical to break the link between language difficulties and social disadvantage**
- **The pandemic has had a negative impact on the development of young people's oracy and literacy skills**
- **Schools are well positioned to break this cycle and improve oracy for all young people**
- **Teachers at all phases report the value they place on oracy**
- **Considerable CPD is needed to re-prioritise oracy in schools**
- **The current moment provides an opportunity to regain and reshape oracy in all schools**
- **Now is the time to give oracy its place in schools and the modern curriculum**



The ESU runs a range of programmes and competitions to help build oracy skills. For further advice and support with your schools' oracy journey, contact the English-Speaking Union at education@esu.org, or visit esu.org.

The Oracy APPG website is also an excellent source of information and guidance.

FURTHER READING

Gaunt, A. & Stott, A. (2020) *Transform Teaching and Learning through Talk. The Oracy Imperative*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.

Alexander, R. (2008) *Towards Dialogic Teaching. Rethinking Classroom Talk*. York: Dialogos UK.

Wilkinson, A., Davies, A. & Atkinson, A. (1965) *The Concept of Oracy. English in Education*, National Association for the Teaching of English.

Davies, S. (2020) *Talking about Oracy. Developing Communication beyond the Classroom*. Melton, Woodbridge: John Catt Educational Ltd.

Dawes, L., Mercer, N., & Wegerif, R. (2004). *Thinking Together: A Programme of Activities for Developing Speaking, Listening and Thinking Skills* (2nd ed.). Birmingham: Imaginative Minds Ltd.

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Millard, W. & Menzies, L. (2016). *Oracy. The State of Speaking in our Schools.*

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ORACY IN ACTION

AN ALL-IN-ONE ORACY PROGRAMME FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Develop your school's oracy culture with the trusted voice in oracy education

The ESU's Oracy in Action programme is unique. Developed by and for classroom teachers and teaching assistants, this programme is your one-stop-shop for oracy provision. Using tried-and-tested oracy games, techniques and progression measurement, Oracy in Action supports primary schools to deliver a high-quality, sequenced oracy curriculum.

Schools can engage with one to three terms' worth of lesson plans, resources and CPD to kick-start oracy development or to expand your existing provision. Using the ESU's long history as an expert in the field of oracy, and building on our knowledge of what works, this exciting programme has demonstrated enhanced engagement across the curriculum and improved student behaviour, and is fun to both deliver and engage with!

Schools signing up to Oracy in Action will be able to access unlimited downloads of all lesson plans and resources for the module(s) purchased, with further online CPD and guidance included.

FIND OUT MORE

Each module of Oracy in Action costs just £375 for 12 weeks' worth of lesson plans, teaching materials and supporting resources, with whole-school use supported from the outset.

To find out more, please visit **esu.org/oracy-in-action** or contact **education@esu.org** or scan the QR code.

'Oracy in Action is definitely worth implementing in your schools because debate and discussion is crucial for children's understanding. The tools are there, ready to be used, so the children can gain those skills and transfer them across the curriculum. I whole-heartedly recommend it'

Teacher, pilot school participant

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