Oracy

The State of Speaking in Our Schools

Will Millard and Loic Menzies

lkm^co

Voice 21

Voice 21 is working with schools across the UK to help develop the tools and resources to ensure every student is taught to communicate effectively. It believes that oracy, the ability to communicate effectively using spoken language, should have the same status as numeracy and literacy. Voice 21 is launching an inquiry led by an independent Commission to consider and make recommendations on the future of speaking within our education system. The Commission will explore the key issues impacting on young people's speaking skills and develop a set of ambitious but implementable recommendations for change. For more information, visit http://www.voice21.org/.

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Big Change is a social impact accelerator that invests in big ideas that help young people thrive in life, not just exams. Big Change has kindly funded this research and the development of the Voice 21 campaign.

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Foreword

The things we say and how we say them can inform, influence, inspire and motivate others and express our empathy, understanding and creativity. It is our ability to communicate that enables us to build positive relationships, collaborate for common purpose, deliberate and share our ideas as citizens. It is through speaking and listening that we develop our views, apply knowledge and extend our capacity to think critically. These skills are needed today more than ever before.

Yet, while schools devote hundreds of hours of teaching time and teacher expertise to the development of pupils' writing and reading skills, barely any time is spent developing the vital verbal communication skills we all need to succeed in work and life.

As founders of School 21 (a 4-18 school opened in Stratford, East London in 2012) we set out to challenge this. We started with a commitment to giving oracy the same status in the curriculum as reading and writing. So we got rid of the turgid assemblies of rows of passive students and replaced them with interactive assemblies in the round where pupils discuss, question, collaborate, engage. We wanted to see what happens if you teach oracy explicitly and create talk-rich classrooms supported by skilled teachers building high quality dialogue and thinking. We set high expectations for our students as orators and expose them to a wide variety of contexts for speaking across every aspect of the curriculum. In the words of Daniel Shindler, the teacher who has led much of the work at School 21:

> "The process is no easy option. It is tough and rigorous and has depth. It is where the cognitive – an ability to think deeply – meets the experiential - an ability to feel and empathise. That is the sweet spot. That is when you get real transformation."
>
> Daniel Shindler, Drama and Wellbeing Lead, School 21

The impact has been remarkable. Through this focus on spoken language, children and young people at School 21 learn how to express themselves and communicate clearly. They become able to explain ideas and emotions to other people, not only in a school setting but in their lives outside the classroom too. They gain the confidence, self-belief and courage to speak in public and share their thoughts, intellect and creativity with the world in ways in which people will listen. The benefits of oracy are felt every day in the learning that happens in our classrooms but the consequences for student's employability, economic success and well-being.

Through our experience, reinforced by a strong evidence base, we have become convinced of the need for the education system more widely to give greater value to oracy. But when we started investigating oracy in the planning stages of School 21, we were struck by the deficit of resources and guidance available (a view reflected in the results of our teacher polling). Working with the University of Cambridge, we have developed a framework for oracy and experimented with different approaches and ideas to see what works.

In 2014, we set up Voice 21, a movement of practitioners who share their passion, expertise, resources and techniques with schools nation-wide. We have been overwhelmed with interest from within the UK and internationally. Through these interactions a number of key themes have emerged as to schools' motivation for developing oracy, the barriers they perceive and the benefits and opportunities for teachers and students.

This report was commissioned to explore these themes, drawing together the available evidence and crucially, the views and perspectives of teachers and school leaders. The research clearly establishes the case for oracy and its unique importance for students. The polling data highlights the widespread belief in the value of oracy and the obstacles felt by schools and teachers in embracing it. The interviews and case studies illustrate the breadth and depth of what is meant by oracy and how different schools have approached it. Together the findings will inform Voice 21's work and campaign over the next five years.

We hope 'Oracy – the State of Speaking in our Schools' will help to light a spark in the minds of educators, business leaders and decision makers, and provide the inspiration and evidence to motivate more schools to get talking in class.

Peter Hyman
Executive Head Teacher & Founder of School 21

Beccy Earnshaw
Director, Voice 21

> **"I want your voice to fill this school. I want your voice to be one of the many sounds that build this community. I want you not just to talk but to listen. Listen to yourself: your breath, your heart and your true thoughts. I want you to listen to other people. I want you to discover the many voices that make up a human being. I want you to find your voice."**
>
> Daniel Shindler (School 21 teacher) message to his pupils at the start of each year.

Acknowledgments

Executive Summary

What does this report do?

This report shines a light on the current state of oracy in schools across the UK. It synthesises existing research on oracy, and explores teachers' understanding of what oracy is, why they feel it matters, how oracy is supported in classrooms and schools, and the main barriers to oracy. It then sets out recommendations for enhancing the quality and consistency of oracy in our schools.

> "[Talk is] the most powerful tool of communication in the classroom and it's fundamentally central to the acts of teaching and learning"
>
> Professor Frank Hardman[i]

It is 'very important' I help my pupils develop the following skills 👤906

Reading	75%
Numeracy	63%
Oracy	68%
Writing	73%
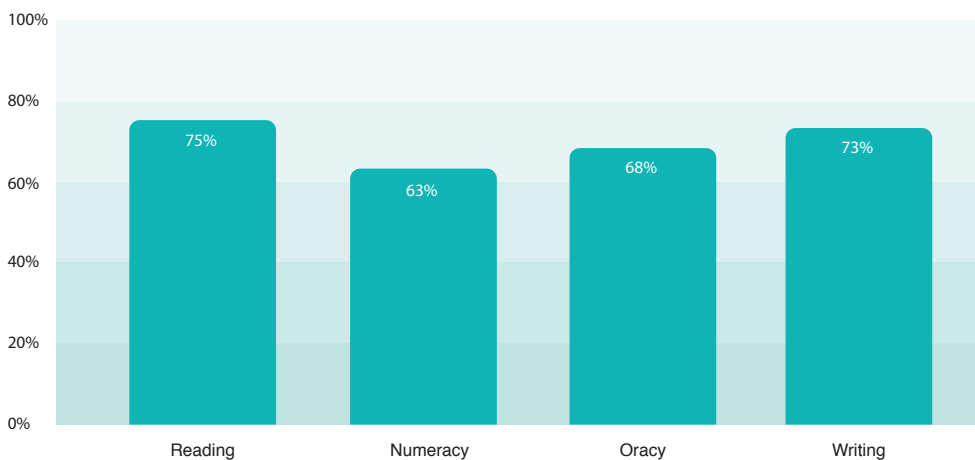
What have we found?

1. Teachers across the UK feel **oracy is critically important**, and are even more likely to say it is 'very important' they develop pupils' skills in oracy (see graph above) than in numeracy.

2. Teachers believe **oracy matters because it is the bedrock of pupils' ability to use language and communicate**. They also highlight its social and emotional benefits. Despite employers placing huge importance on oral communication, teachers are less likely to emphasise its cognitive, civic and economic potential, suggesting **oracy has untapped potential to support pupils' job prospects**.

3. Many teachers say they frequently use a range of strategies to develop pupils' oracy, but worry that **support for oracy across different lessons, classrooms and schools is currently patchy**.

4. **Schools do not consistently provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop oracy outside the classroom.** Pupils' opportunities tend to be limited to speaking in assemblies, and few schools evaluate the quality of pupils' verbal contributions in lessons, or communicate with parents about the quality of these contributions. This is concerning given high quality talk should underpin good teaching and learning.

5. **The greatest barrier standing in the way of quality and consistent oracy in all lessons is a lack of time**, but other constraints include:

   - **Teachers' anxiety that shy and under-confident pupils might struggle**, or that pupils' behaviour will get worse
   - **Teachers prioritising other tasks** and, in particular, pupils' writing
   - **Teachers' lack of confidence and expertise**, exacerbated by a **paucity of training**
   - **Teachers' perception that oracy is only occasionally relevant when teaching**, or relevant only in certain subjects such as English
   - **A lack of active support from school leadership**

[i] Professor of Education at the University of York (key Informant interview).

57%

of teachers say they have not received any training in oracy in the last three years, and 53% would not know where to look for more information if they wanted it.

32% of Maths teachers

17% of Science teachers

in our sample do not believe their subject lends itself to oracy-based activities.

What can we do?

Fundamentally what is needed is a shift in mindset so that teachers and schools believe oracy forms a integral part of teaching and learning, rather than something it is nice to do only when there is time. There are steps individual class teachers, their schools, and the wider system can take to ensure all pupils have access to (and therefore develop) excellent oracy, and we offer some ways forward in the conclusion.

1.

Introduction

Introduction

There has been a growing recognition in recent years that schools have a special role to play in helping pupils develop their skills in spoken forms of communication, and in pushing the boundaries of learning itself through talk. Oracy, which encompasses both of these processes, offers a compelling means of extending pupils' linguistic, social, emotional and cognitive development. Done well, oracy can permeate pupils' lives, both within and beyond the school gates. This has enormous potential for addressing social disadvantage.

Oracy also holds the keys to broader societal benefits. Employers need a workforce capable of communicating with clarity and sensitivity, and society needs citizens who can engage thoughtfully and actively in the democratic process. What is more, our families, friends and neighbours need to be able to talk about how they feel in a manner that encourages discussion, empathy and understanding, not conflict and division. Perhaps most importantly, we want in ourselves to feel valued and that we have a voice.

Yet there is little research and evidence available relating to how teachers think about and engage with oracy. This report is a response to that and aims to fill the void. It draws on the results of a survey involving over 900 teachers and school leaders across the UK, data from 26 interviews and focus groups with teachers, school leaders and pupils in thirteen schools, and 11 expert interviews.

This report reveals:

1.   What teachers think oracy is

2.   Whether teachers believe oracy matters and why

3.   What teachers and schools are doing to develop oracy

4.   The factors that help and hinder oracy in schools

This report is a practical resource for anyone that wants to find out more about oracy and why it matters. It also sets the scene for Voice 21's upcoming inquiry into the future of speaking. It is underpinned by the existing evidence base on oracy (and the many other terms used to describe the processes of learning to talk well, and learning well through talk), and draws links between what we already know and what our surveys, interviews and focus groups reveal. Data from interviews and focus groups is used to help unpick the survey findings, and vignettes exploring what schools are currently doing to support oracy are interspersed throughout. Combined, these are intended to give teachers and school leaders inspiration and practical ideas about how oracy could be developed within their settings. They also provide food for thought for policy and system leaders thinking about ways in which the learning process can be made more efficient and engaging, help pupils generate deeper learning and understanding, and promote more cohesive, open and supportive school environments.

2.

What is oracy?

2. What is Oracy?

Learning to talk

Oracy refers to the set of skills associated with speaking and listening.

The term 'oracy' was coined by Andrew Wilkinson and his team at the School of Education at Birmingham University in 1965 in response to their sense that the orate skills of speaking and listening were being sidelined by a focus on reading and writing ('literacy').[1,2] It can be characterised as the development and application of a set of skills associated with effective spoken communication.[3,4,5]

'[Oracy] is what the school does to support the development of children's capacity to use speech to express their thoughts and communicate with others, in education and in life.'

Alexander[6]

In line with this, the National Curriculum in England states that pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 should develop skills in 'spoken language' as part of their English lessons, including the ability to:[7]

- Articulate and justify answers, arguments and opinions

- Participate in discussions, presentations, performances, role play, improvisations and debates

- Gain, maintain and monitor the interest of the listener(s)

- Select and use appropriate registers for effective communication.

- Speak audibly and fluently with an increasing command of Standard English

"[Oracy] really represents the set of talk skills that children, that people, should develop, in the same way that we would expect people to develop reading and writing skills [...and] sums up that teachable set of competencies to do with spoken language"

Professor Neil Mercer[ii]

Shifting Terminology - oracy has been referred to in lots of different ways in research and policy, including:

- Spoken language' in England's 2014 National Curriculum[8]

- 'Oral language', in the Expert Panel's report for the National Curriculum Review[9]

- 'Communication', introduced as a key skill in the 1999 curriculum reforms[10]

- 'Communication and language', in England's Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage[11]

- 'Speaking and listening', in the preceding versions of the National Curriculum for English since 1988, and in GCSE English specifications until 2014[12]

- 'Talking and listening' in Scottish Nationals[13]

- 'Oracy' in the Curriculum for Wales[14] and the National Oracy Project, which ran from 1987 until 1993

[ii] Professor of Education at the University of Cambridge and Director of Oracy@Cambridge (key informant interview).

Learning through talk

Oracy should not be seen simply as a set of skills pupils develop, or as something only pupils can 'do', Alexander argues. He explains that oracy is also about what teachers say, and how they say it.[15] This may include talk that is subject-specific, or more generic.[16]

> "Children talk when they are prompted or invited, or enabled and encouraged to do so, therefore the teacher's role in promoting talk is absolutely critical"
>
> Professor Robin Alexander [iii]

Subject-specific oracy

Some believe that the skills associated with oracy form part of the 'tradition' of what pupils and teachers say in certain subjects, but not others. . For example, Wilkinson suggests English teachers have 'special opportunities' to help pupils practise skills in oracy,[17] but goes on to argue that all teachers across different subjects have responsibilities to develop children's oracy.[18]

Alexander suggests teachers can use different vocabulary, questions and reasoning depending on the issue being discussed.[19] Michaels et al. go a step further, suggesting classroom talk in particular subjects should be 'accountable' to rigorous standards of reasoning and knowledge in those subjects.[20]

'Generic' oracy

Alexander also highlights the 'generic content' of talk that can apply across all subjects and in all contexts, and draws into question the sorts of interactions teachers facilitate in their lessons.[21] As Professor Hardman argues, oracy can be thought of in a broader sense as an approach to teaching and learning across the board:

> "[Talk is] the most powerful tool of communication in the classroom and it's fundamentally central to the acts of teaching and learning"
>
> Professor Frank Hardman [iv]

According to this view, promoting oracy is ultimately about enhancing the quality of the spoken interactions involved in everyday learning. Oracy can therefore be thought of as a means of supporting high quality teaching and learning across the curriculum, an idea described in the literature as 'oracy for learning'[22] and 'oral pedagogy'[23] or even simply as 'talk'.[24,25]

Alexander therefore argues that oracy can provide opportunities across the board for teachers and pupils to:[26]

- Receive, act and build upon answers
- Analyse and solve problems
- Speculate and imagine
- Explore and evaluate ideas

Of course, these views of oracy – learning to talk well, and learning well through talk – need not be mutually exclusive.[28] For example, in practising their presenting or arguing skills, a pupil should also reflect on their learning and interact with peers, and with their teacher.

Teachers and pupils can achieve this through using different types of talk at different points during the learning process. Alexander proposes a repertoire of five forms of teaching talk, of which the first three provide "the familiar bedrock of teaching"[27]:

1. Rote: drilling of facts and ideas through repetition
2. Recitation: accumulation of knowledge through questions designed to stimulate recall
3. Instruction and exposition: telling pupils what to do, or explaining facts and procedures
4. Discussion: the exchange of ideas with a focus on information sharing and problem-solving
5. Dialogue: achieving common understanding through structured, cumulative exchanges

Learning to talk well and learning well through talk

Oracy underpins provision at School 21 in Newham. School 21 uses the following diagram to explain the relationship of these two 'types' of talk. Headteacher, Peter Hyman, explains staff often (but not always) aim to simultaneously help pupils in both respects:

"We explain oracy as the overlap between 'learning to talk and learning through talk', and I think that's crucial…. Learning to talk is a skill in itself. How do you learn to be a compelling speaker, to hold an audience, to interest people with how you're talking? Then learning through talk is how talk gives you better writing, better thinking, better understanding of key concepts."

Peter Hyman, Headteacher

Learning to talk   Oracy   Learning through talk
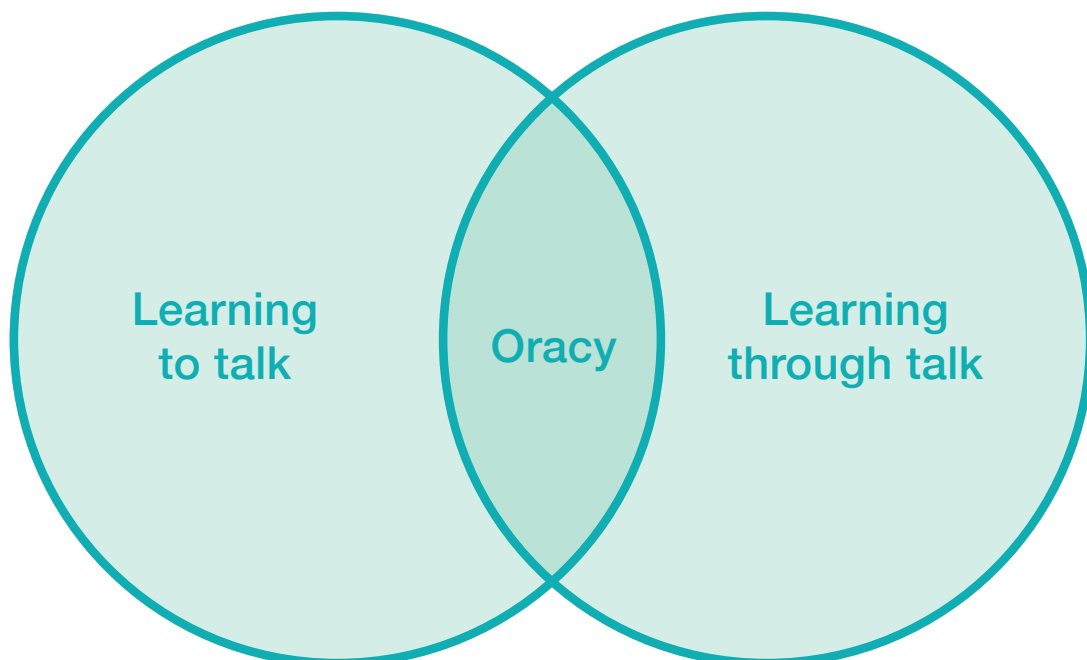
Oracy framework

School 21 uses the following framework to teach and analyse students' communication skills. The Oracy Framework isolates the key components of spoken communication, breaking them into four different areas: linguistic, physical, cognitive and social & emotional.

Physical

Voice

- Fluency & pace of speech
- Tonal variation
- Clarity of pronunciation
- Voice projection

Body language

- Gesture & posture
- Facial expression & eye contact

Cognitive

Content

- Choice of content to convey meaning & intention
- Building on the views of others

Structure

- Structure & organisation of talk

Clarifying & summarising

- Seeking information & clarification through questions/ing
- Summarising

Reasoning

- Giving reasons to support views
- Critically examining ideas & views expressed

Linguistic

Vocabulary

- Appropriate vocabulary choice

Language

- Register
- Grammar

Rhetorical techniques

- Rhetorical techniques such as metaphor, humour, irony & mimicry

Social & Emotional

Working with others

- Guiding or managing interactions
- Turn-taking

Listening & responding

- Listening actively & responding appropriately

Confidence in speaking

- Self assurance
- Liveliness & flair

Audience awareness

- Taking account of level of understanding of the audience

1980s

- English, including 'speaking and listening', is positioned as a core subject within the new National Curriculum

- DES launches the National Oracy Project (NOP) in 1987 and the Language in the National Curriculum (LINC) programme in 1989, both of which seek to raise the profile and support the implementation of speaking and listening

1825

Sir Edward Curtis stresses the importance of the 3Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic), but did not mention oracy

1990s

- The government terminates both the LINC and NOP prematurely, in 1991 and 1993 respectively

- New Labour launches its National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies (NLS and NNS), which introduce literacy and numeracy hours, intended to promote whole-class dialogue between teacher and pupils

- Revisions to the National Curriculum in 1999 see 'communication' become a key cross-curricular skill

4th Century BC

Aristotle sets forth a system for understanding and teaching rhetoric in his treatise, *The Art of Rhetoric*

1970s

The 'Bullock' report stresses the need for spoken language to be taken seriously across the curriculum

Oracy Timeline

2010s

- The new National Curriculum in England says pupils should develop their spoken language across all subjects, but particularly in English. In Scotland the 'Curriculum for Excellence' is launched in 2010 and emphasises that pupils should be given opportunities to 'think and talk together, to discuss ideas, analyse and solve problems'. In 2016, Curriculum for Wales says oracy is one of three main routes to literacy

- In England the Department for Education revises the Teachers' Standards in 2011, and specifies that all teachers should promote high standards of 'articulacy'. Ofsted revises its inspection framework, and says inspectors will consider the extent to which teaching helps pupils develop skills in communication

- School 21 opens in Newham in 2012, and begins developing its Oracy Framework with the University of Cambridge

- A 'Spoken Language' component replaces 'speaking and listening' in the new GCSE in English. Ofqual announces in 2015 that it must be assessed but will not count towards pupils' final grades. The English Language GCSE in Wales contains an 'oracy' component, and English Nationals in Scotland assess pupils' talk

- The 2014 special educational needs and disability Code of Practice outlines four broad areas of need organisations working with young people in England should plan for, including communication and interaction

2000s

- Communication, language and literacy are positioned at the heart of new curriculum guidance for the early years foundation stage in 2000 and the Statutory Framework for The Early Years Foundation Stage in 2008

- In 2001, the Key Stage 3 National Strategy places language at its heart primarily in order to support literacy

- The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Ofsted, and independent reviews by Jim Rose and the Cambridge Primary Review examine and support the important role speaking and listening plays in supporting pupils' literacy and learning more broadly

- The Communication Trust, a coalition of over 50 organisations, launches in 2007 to help support children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)

- LA-led initiatives from 2002, and government-led initiatives such as 'Every Child a Talker' and 'Talk for Writing', focus on upskilling teachers in using talk effectively in their classrooms

What do teachers believe oracy is?

There is some divergence in the type of talk teachers emphasise when defining oracy. Whereas some particularly highlight discussion and dialogue, others focus more on 'formal' presentational activities.[v] A significantly higher proportion of primary teachers feel discussing and building upon ideas in pairs or groups (61%) and sharing ideas verbally during class discussions (63%) are 'very important' in developing oracy, in comparison with secondary teachers (50% and 55% respectively).

Teaching activity	Proportion of sample who believe these activities are 'very important' in helping pupils develop good oracy skills 👤 906
Sharing ideas verbally during class discussions, with a teacher and/or fellow pupils related to learning	60%
Sharing ideas verbally with a teacher related to learning	54%
Discussing and building upon ideas in pairs or groups related to learning	52%
Delivering presentations	32%
Participating in debating	29%
Participating in drama and performance-based activities	24%

Exploratory Language

'Final Draft' Language
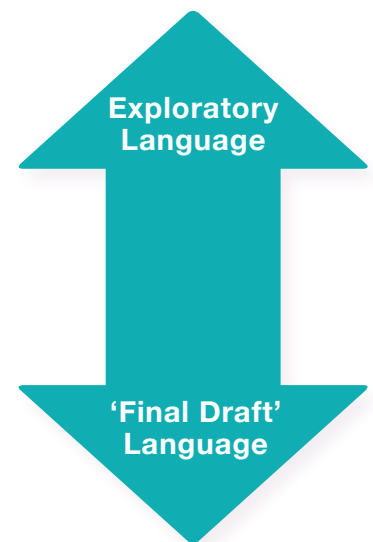
This divergence underlines the importance of what Maxwell et al. (drawing on Barnes and Todd) describe as 'exploratory talk' as opposed to 'final draft language'. For Maxwell et al., the two are best understood as:

- Exploratory talk, 'marked by frequent hesitations, rephrasings, false starts and changes of direction'[29]

- Final draft language, which in both speech and writing presents 'a finished article'[30]

Exploring this distinction during interviews, both primary and secondary school teachers emphasise the importance of the former:

> "It's not the product it's the process, [and] if you get the process right, the product will be right"
>
> Jan Carrier, Eastwood Primary School

> "You can make more mistakes in your discussion of an idea than you'd be prepared to make on a piece of paper"
>
> Rachel Forward, King Edward VI School

[v] Professor of Education at the University of Cambridge and Director of Oracy@Cambridge (key informant interview).

Several secondary practitioners say that, for them, oracy is more about the presentation of ideas and use of rhetorical techniques:

"Oracy is, for me, about effective communication at its base.... Whether it be speaking to instruct, or to be speaking to persuade, [oracy] should be an awareness that there is a difference between those different things, an awareness of different audiences, and the capacity to speak in different ways for those different audiences"

Andrew Fitch, Highbury Grove School

Other interviewees argue that a mixture of exploratory and more formal, presentational activities is important depending on what it is the teacher wants the pupils to achieve:

"If you're doing some sort of talk for ideas, exploratory talk, you're not going to be expecting pupils to be using fully formed sentences necessarily, you might expect hesitations and people changing their mind and going back and thinking about different things. Whereas if they're giving a presentation on something then you're going to be expecting different things out of it"

Amy Gaunt, School 21

How should oracy be taught?

Whether embedded across the curriculum or taught discretely, teachers tend to feel 'day-to-day' strategies rather than more 'one-off' activities are important for teaching oracy. Classroom teachers consistently emphasise the importance of strategies such as modelling, setting clear expectations, encouraging pupils to interact with one another, and providing regular feedback on what pupils say and how they say it for teaching oracy.[vi,vii] Of course, such views do not necessarily translate into actual classroom practice and, as Sections 4 and 5 show, although teachers believe oracy is important there are many factors that hinder its uptake in schools.

Activities' importance in teaching oracy 👤562

Activity	Very important for teaching oracy	important for teaching oracy
Modelling good oracy	44%	19%
Setting expectations for oracy	40%	24%
Initiating pair/group activities	38%	28%
Feeding back on what pupils say	35%	34%
Feeding back on how pupils talk	32%	30%
Scaffolding pupils' oracy	29%	28%
Initiating pupils presentations	26%	26%
Initiating debating activities	22%	27%
Assessing oracy as a discrete skill	21%	25%
Initiating drama-based activities	20%	20%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Very important for teaching oracy   ■ important for teaching oracy

Pupils' needs vary between phases and sectors and teachers tend to prioritise different strategies depending on their setting. Early Years and primary practitioners, as well as practitioners working in special or alternative provision (AP), or in pupil referral units (PRUs), tend to place greater emphasis on scaffolding and modelling oracy, compared to their counterparts in secondary schools and Further Education (FE) colleges.[viii] Interviewees suggest that this is driven by a belief that such approaches are the best means of equipping younger pupils and learners with special educational needs with skills for day-to-day interactions with families, teachers and friends.

"I think it's not just the spoken language. Oracy is classically seen as just spoken language but … it's about being a communicator. Some of the children here have certain conditions where they never actually speak in terms of spoken language, so it's about becoming a communicator, and that's including signing, symbols"

Alison Whitnall, The Brier School

"In nursery, it's so that they can access the rest of the nursery, because if they come in with [limited] understanding, they have a bit of a whirlwind and they can't access any of the provision, they can't take it all in"

Natalie Rhodes, Green Lane Primary School

[vi] Survey responses are based on teachers' own understanding of the term 'oracy'.

[vii] Teachers were asked to rate how important they feel each strategy in the table is for teaching oracy on a scale from 7 ('very important') to 1 ('not at all important'). The table presents the proportion that rated each strategy as 'very important' (7) and 'important' (6).

[viii] The base sizes are below 50 for Early Years teachers (n=29) and teachers working in special schools, PRUs or AP (n=33). Reference to results in relation to these groups should therefore be regarded as illustrative rather than representative. This is reiterated in the methodology, where a full overview and breakdown of survey respondents by sub-groups is provided.

Secondary school and FE teachers also recognise the importance of interactional skills, but place slightly greater emphasis on the role of developing pupils' presentational and debating skills.

> "I see a continuum of informal, colloquial stuff through to formal stuff, and I want children to have experience of all of those but particularly of the formal stuff because it's going to prepare them for outside"
>
> Geoff Barton, King Edward VI School

Attitudes to and beliefs around oracy also vary between subjects, with English teachers placing more weight than science and maths teachers on almost all of the teaching activities included, above. This suggests teachers see oracy as more the responsibility of some practitioners' than others.

The term 'oracy' is still not common currency, with interviewees explaining that they do not regularly use it. Some even feel the term is off-putting and instead use terms such as:

- Classroom talk
- Rhetoric
- Speaking and listening
- Spoken language
- Communication
- Oral language

> "I think it's an off-putting word that is a barrier in itself to what we're really talking about, which is how well students can articulate their own ideas, …and how they can use that to develop their learning"
>
> Rachel Forward, King Henry VI School

Teacher and author Martin Robinson says the term is too broad to be useful, and prefers the term 'rhetoric', which he feels links skills common to both speaking and writing.[ix]

In contrast, other schools feel that the term 'oracy' pins down an otherwise abstract set of ideas. Susannah Haygarth, a teacher from Chorlton High School explains that until her school adopted the term it was hard to discuss teachers' and pupils' talk:

> "It becomes a real thing if you give it a name, and if we're talking about changing a culture, which we are, and changing mindsets, then it needs to be a real thing…. I would say with 'oracy', because it didn't [previously] have a name [here], I think you simply wouldn't know [what] teachers were doing…. Unless it's got a name it's nebulous [and] intangible"
>
> Susannah Haygarth, Chorlton High School

> "What's missing is the coherence … across the school, that vision, that shared language that's being used in every single classroom, pulling all those threads together"
>
> Amy Gaunt, School 21

The term can also lend status to the practice:

> "'Oracy' has the virtue … of feeling like it's [equivalent to] literacy and numeracy, so feeling it's about the craft of speech, which is what we're trying to get at"
>
> Peter Hyman, School 21

ix Teacher, and author of Trivium 21c (key informant interview).

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3.

Why does oracy matter?

3. Why does oracy matter?

Do teachers value oracy?

Teachers value oracy highly and consider its importance comparable to that of reading, writing and numeracy with over two-thirds of survey respondents saying it is 'very important' their school helps pupils develop their skills in oracy.[x] Oracy is particularly highly valued among teachers in independent and special schools, PRUs and AP, with over three quarters of these teachers saying it is 'very important' their schools help pupils develop skills in oracy.

Yet, as Sections 4 and 5 of this report highlight, despite a widespread belief in the importance of oracy, a number of factors mean that it does not have the same status as literacy and numeracy.

Teachers across different phases and school types stress oracy's critical role in underpinning pupils' development in literacy, numeracy and more broadly across the curriculum as well as personally.

"It's at the heart of it all really, because if you can't communicate verbally and non-verbally, or have the vocabulary to do that, then you can't particularly access reading, writing or any other area"

Jo Marwood, Green Lane Primary School

"It does underpin absolutely everything we do. You can't access anything else, including things like self-esteem and confidence [otherwise], and that's absolutely crucial, isn't it"

Jane Townend, Eastwood Primary School
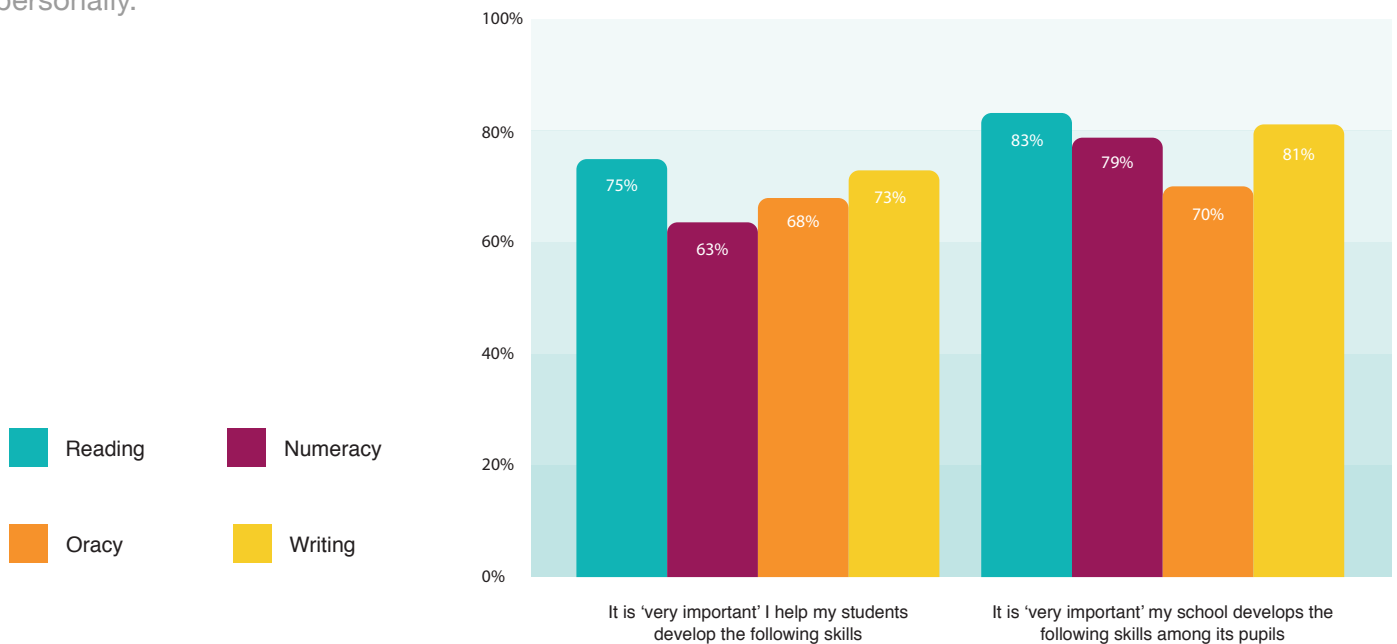
These beliefs are supported by a number of randomised control trials ('RCTs') and quasi-experimental studies that suggest oracy-based activities that encourage active participation in lessons, and which push learners to reflect upon and extend their understanding of particular ideas or concepts, improve pupils':

- Attainment scores in English, mathematics and science [31,32,33,34,35,36]
- Retention of subject-specific knowledge [37,38]
- 'Transferring' comprehension or reasoning skills into other subject areas [39,40]
- Cognitive Ability Test (CAT) scores [41,42]
- Reasoning [43]

Oracy is most highly valued lower down the age range, with Early Years and primary teachers most likely to consider developing oracy in their lessons 'very important'. Primary teachers are significantly more likely to consider it 'very important' compared to secondary or FE teachers.

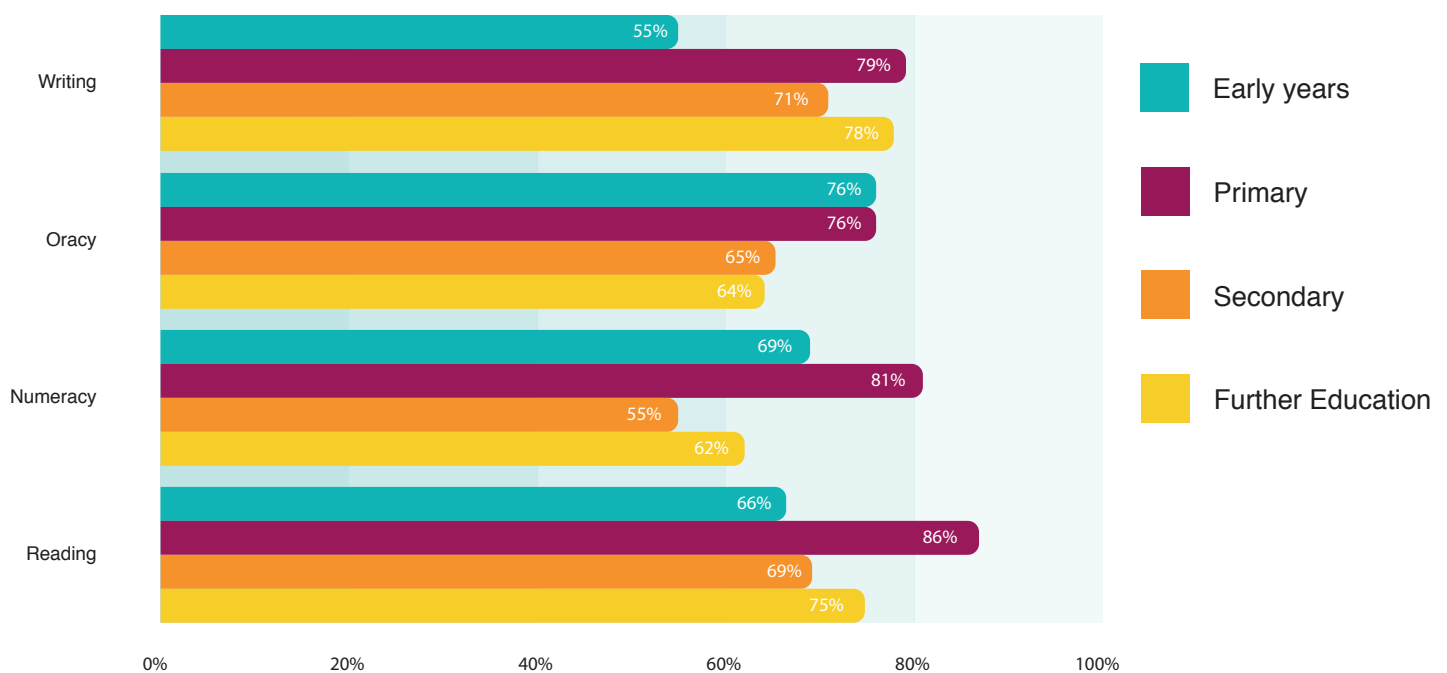22   [x] This is according to survey respondents' own definitions of 'oracy'.

Belief in the centrality of talk to learning at Eastwood Primary School in Keighley

Oracy is seen as a pre-requisite to accessing learning across the curriculum. Deputy headteacher Jan Carrier believes it underpins all learning, and gives pupils the means both to communicate and interact in day-to-day life and to use subject-specific language. Her colleague, Riz, says:

> "Without oracy you would not be able to ask the children to read, write or [access] the other areas of the curriculum. … We always ask the children to be able to speak their sentences and say them clearly before they can write them. We feel that's beneficial to all our children. Talk is the centre of learning. … Talk should be the middle focus and then all your activities should be based around that"
>
> Riz Saleem, year 6 class teacher

Proportion of teachers in different phases who feel it is 'very important' they develop pupils' skills in each area during their own lessons

- Early years
- Primary
- Secondary
- Further Education

Writing: Early years 55%, Primary 79%, Secondary 71%, Further Education 78%

Oracy: Early years 76%, Primary 76%, Secondary 65%, Further Education 64%

Numeracy: Early years 69%, Primary 81%, Secondary 55%, Further Education 62%

Reading: Early years 66%, Primary 86%, Secondary 69%, Further Education 75%

Part of the reason Early Years practitioners may see oracy as especially important is that it features as a 'prime area' of learning in the statutory framework in England, where the majority of our sample works. Yet one nursery teacher explains that her school would emphasise spoken language "regardless", as not being able to verbally communicate prevents young children from accessing any of the other provision or making progress in their learning more broadly.

A reason for the comparatively low priority given to oracy by teachers of secondary and FE students may be that these teachers will often specialise in a particular subject. For example, teachers of English and languages are significantly more likely to feel it is 'very important' they develop oracy in their classrooms than mathematics and science teachers. Secondary and FE teachers may also believe that, by the time they reach them, pupils already possess adequate skills in oracy and that it is therefore not a priority.

> "If we sit with them in an area, say the sand area, and give them the language they need for that area, it makes them a lot more efficient in their play and how they discover what's going on around them"
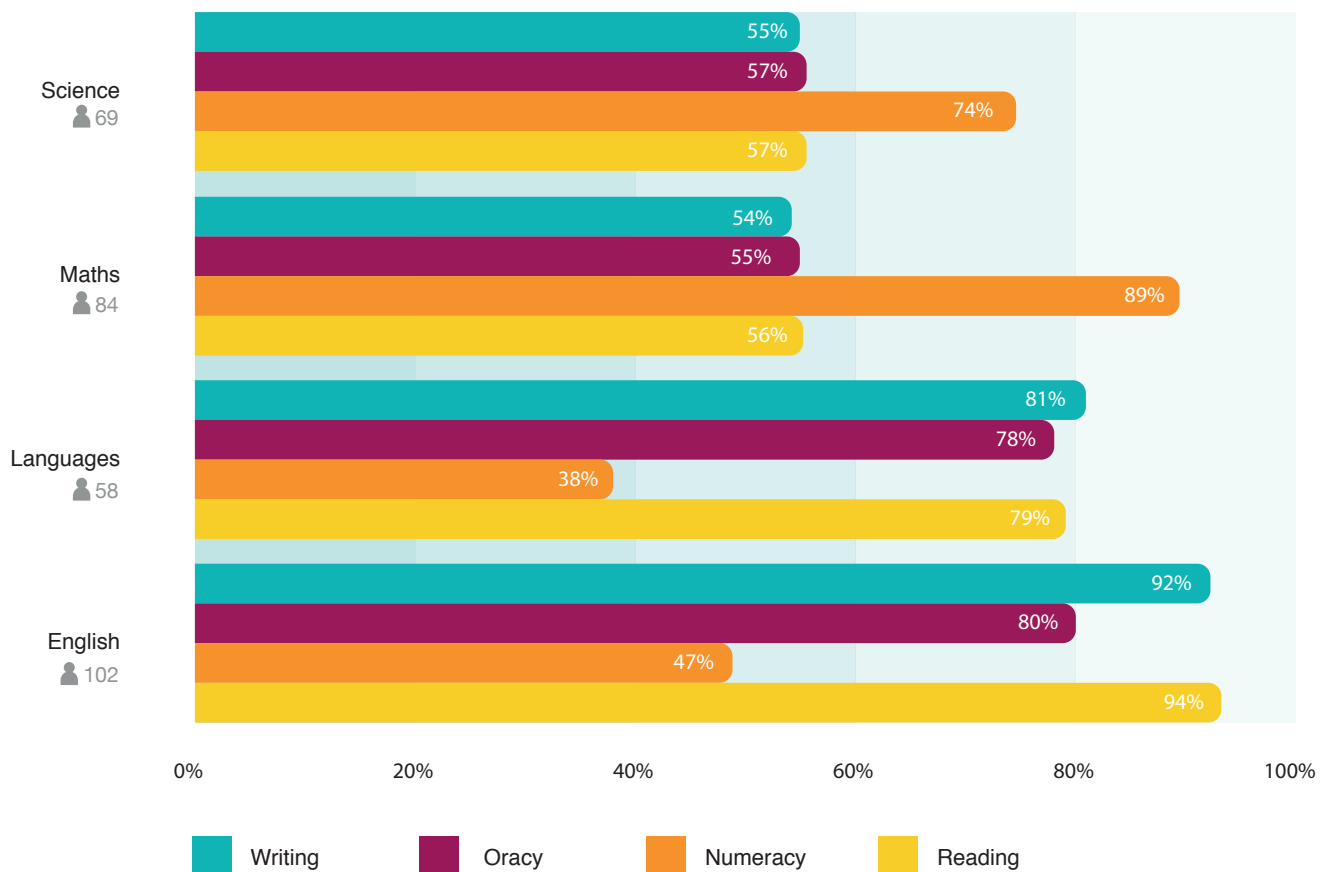>
> Natalie Rhodes, Green Lane Primary School

> "To do maths and English you need to know how to talk"
>
> Zara[xi], year 6 pupil, Eastwood Primary Schooll

Proportion of different subject teachers who believe it is 'very important' to develop particular skills among their pupils

Science 👤 69
- Writing: 55%
- Oracy: 57%
- Numeracy: 74%
- Reading: 57%

Maths 👤 84
- Writing: 54%
- Oracy: 55%
- Numeracy: 89%
- Reading: 56%

Languages 👤 58
- Writing: 81%
- Oracy: 78%
- Numeracy: 38%
- Reading: 79%

English 👤 102
- Writing: 92%
- Oracy: 80%
- Numeracy: 47%
- Reading: 94%

Legend: Writing · Oracy · Numeracy · Reading

Strikingly, headteachers (84%) are more likely than class teachers (68%) to say they feel it is 'very important' their school develops pupils' skills in oracy. One secondary headteacher says he feels, irrespective of the subject taught, "one of the undervalued aspects of being a teacher is the ability to use language effectively".

Importantly though, teachers also highlight a range of reasons why oracy fails to be given the same status or priority as literacy and numeracy. We explore these factors in greater depth in Sections 4 and 5, but key reasons why oracy is pushed down the agenda include:

- A lack of time
- Perceived negative effects of oracy, such as deteriorating pupil behaviour or putting shy or under confident pupils on the spot
- Competing priorities
- Teachers' lack of inclination, confidence or expertise to use oracy effectively
- A belief that it is not relevant to their subject

Talk as a foundation for all learning at Limpsfield Grange School

Spoken language is seen as a fundamental part of pupils' learning at Limpsfield Grange School, a boarding special school for girls aged between 11 and 16 with autism.

Headteacher Sarah Wild explains that spoken language is a "first and continual step" in the girls' learning. It is critical for their educational outcomes because:

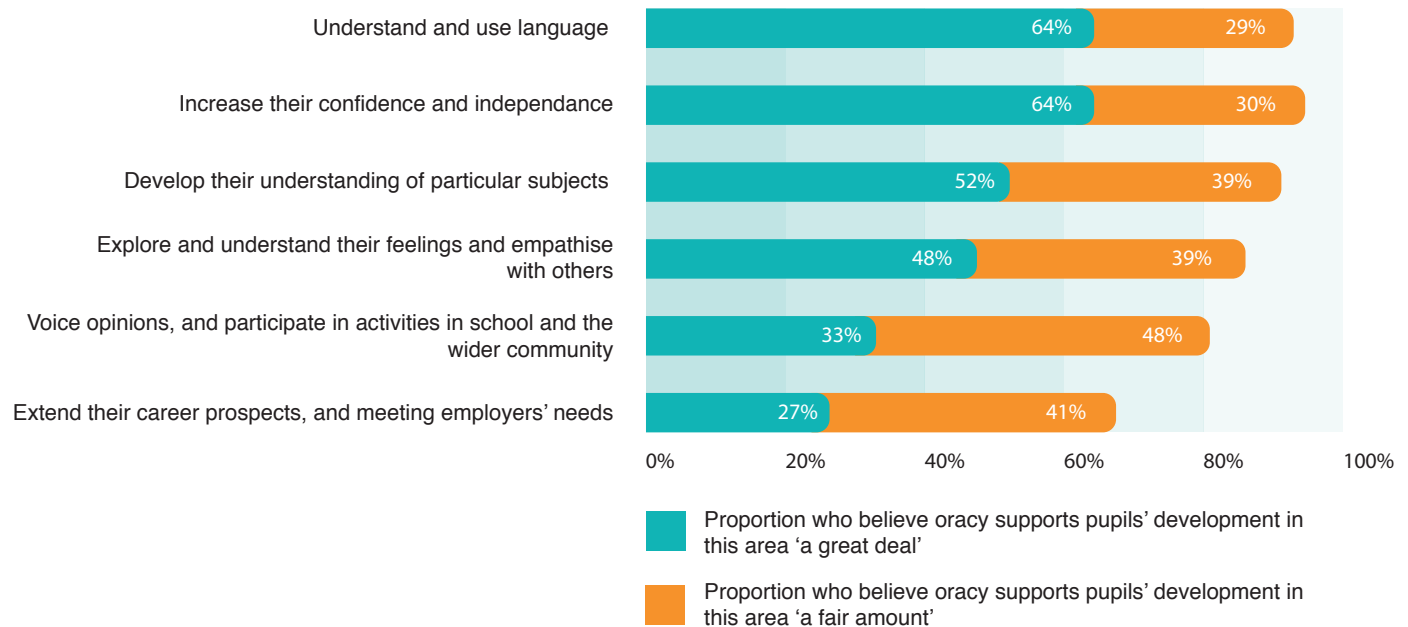"Quite often the girls are really good at decoding language, so their reading ages can be amazing… but it's not about that, it's about the understanding, so it's the layer underneath that that they can't do. You get [pupils] with really amazingly high reading ages that can't solve a maths worded problem, because they don't really understand… the meaning of the worded problem"

Sarah Wild, Headteacher, Limpsfield Grange School

Why does oracy matter?

Both the literature and teachers' views highlight a range of reasons why oracy matters.[xii] While this section explores the areas in which teachers feel oracy contributes to pupils' development, we look in Sections 4 and 5 at reasons why some teachers do not engage with oracy as systematically as they do with reading, writing and numeracy.

Oracy helps pupils... 👤906

	Great deal	Fair amount
Understand and use language	64%	29%
Increase their confidence and independance	64%	30%
Develop their understanding of particular subjects	52%	39%
Explore and understand their feelings and empathise with others	48%	39%
Voice opinions, and participate in activities in school and the wider community	33%	48%
Extend their career prospects, and meeting employers' needs	27%	41%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

■ Proportion who believe oracy supports pupils' development in this area 'a great deal'

■ Proportion who believe oracy supports pupils' development in this area 'a fair amount'

Language and communication

A number of studies suggest that focusing on oracy can enhance pupils' ability to develop spoken language and communicate effectively and appropriately. One experimental study shows that activities involving 'argumentation', learning to reason and build arguments, can improve pupils' ability to build and use arguments in lessons and transfer these skills to other subjects.[44] Qualitative research and literature reviews also point to benefits associated
with oracy in this respect, suggesting it may:

- Enhance pupils' ability to communicate with greater clarity and effectiveness,[45,46] particularly those who find self-expression through writing difficult,[47] for whom English is not a first language,[48] or who have forms of Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)[49]

- Help build vocabulary[50]

> "Oral language, 'oracy', is the most fundamental communication tool"
> Professor Frank Hardman [xiii]

Links between oral language skills and literacy, as well as broader educational outcomes, have frequently been highlighted in academic literature, [51,52,53,54,55] and in particular for younger children and those who struggle to learn to write (including those with a related form of special educational need).[56] Teachers play an important role in developing their pupils' spoken vocabulary, which in turn can boost the pupils' decoding skills [57] and reading comprehension[58,59] again particularly among younger children[60,61] and learners with additional educational needs.[62] Furthermore, a young child's ability to say words confidently can have a direct impact on their spelling which, in turn, can support their writing.[63]

[xii] Practitioners were asked how they thought oracy contributes to pupils' development in different ways, with oracy defined as 'the development of children's capacity to use speech to express their thoughts and communicate with others in education and in life, and talk through which teaching and learning is mediated' (based on Alexander, 2012: 10).

[xiii] Key informant interview.

> "We spend lots of time in schools developing a young person's ability to be able to communicate effectively in writing, and not so in spoken terms. Yet [this] is the way that we'll spend most of our time interacting and communicating with other human beings"
>
> Duncan Partridge[xiv]

> "Technically your understanding of English and the spoken word [is] critical to be able to interact with the curriculum at that level"
>
> Tricia Kelleher, Stephen Perse Foundation

> "The expectation from parents for their children is very high. I'm sure it is in any school, but particularly here … they want them to be able to articulate themselves, and to articulate themselves well and come across well"
>
> Marcelle Dobson, Stephen Perse Foundation

> "Technically your understanding of English and the spoken word [is] critical to be able to interact with the curriculum at that level"
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>
> Marcelle Dobson, Stephen Perse Foundation

64%

Most survey respondents (64%) believe that oracy is very important in helping pupils understand and use language. English and languages teachers are particularly aware of such benefits and are significantly more likely to believe oracy contributes 'a great deal' to pupils' linguistic development compared to maths teachers.

Teachers in independent schools are also significantly more likely than their colleagues in local authority and community schools to feel oracy contributes 'a great deal' to pupils' linguistic development. Interviewees in an independent school explain that there might be two reasons for this. The first is that a standard of technical verbal language is needed – and therefore actively endorsed by teachers – to access what is seen by some practitioners as a more 'traditional' curriculum in independent schools. The second is that parents expect their children to leave school with a high degree of verbal fluency and confidence.

Differences between primary and secondary schools also emerged in interviews. Primary school practitioners particularly highlight oracy's role in helping pupils to engage in learning and function as communicators whereas at secondary level, practitioners tend to emphasise oracy's importance in mastering formal communication.

Meanwhile practitioners in primary and secondary schools are significantly more likely than their FE colleagues to feel oracy supports pupils' linguistic development 'a great deal', perhaps because they feel they can have more of an impact in this area.

[xiv] Director of Education at the English Speaking Union (ESU) (key informant interview).

Using Makaton sign language to develop spoken language skills

Staff at Green Lane Primary School believe oracy plays a critical role in their pupils' language development, and that a large part of their role is to help pupils improve their spoken communication. The school works with a high proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language, and these pupils often have limited development in their first language when they arrive in nursery.

> "When they come to school, we're throwing them into a language that is new to them really, so for those children we feel it's really important we help them catch up as quickly as possible, and immerse them in the language. …But that is the majority of our children"
>
> Lorraine Lee, Pupil Progress Leader

All the teaching staff at the school use Makaton sign language with their classes alongside spoken English. Teachers say this gives pupils confidence as verbal communicators because it helps them think through and formulate their speech. Staff attend weekly training sessions in Makaton signing with the manager of the school's Designated Special Provision, Angela Catterick. Senior leaders and class teachers believe Makaton is used consistently throughout the school and that it underpins pupils' academic progress. One of the school's nursery teachers explains it can initially be intimidating to learn, but "seeing it in practice and seeing it work" in her colleagues' lessons has given her greater incentive to embed it in her own.

> "It starts with having your basic needs met. Particularly for our nursery children, we've found that since we've started using Makaton a lot more that the communication comes along a lot faster. That then builds to being able to argue, being able to make your opinion known, being able to access information"
>
> Jane Townend, Deputy Headteacher

Other classroom strategies used across the school include:

- 'Target' vocabulary in each class, each week, which class teachers then return to and embed throughout the year

- Modelling of both spoken English for the purposes of general communication, and also subject-specific language. Teachers speak in full sentences, and encourage pupils to do the same

- Scaffolding communication through, for example, Makaton, sentence starters, setting 'rules' for talk, and practising active listening in lessons

Angela says pupils' development in spoken language is frontloaded, with pupils making most progress between the nursery and year 3. After that "we're looking at much finer tuning, and developing at a more advanced level."

The 'Rhetoric Roadmap'

Staff at Highbury Grove School highlight oracy's role supporting pupils' development as communicators. This is important, because it helps pupils shape the way they come across and are perceived.

The school has developed a 'rhetoric roadmap', which forms part of the school's curriculum. The roadmap sets out every department's commitment to specific oracy-based activities. It was written because of perceived inconsistency of provision in oracy across the school.

The school's Director of Spoken Literacy explains:

> "The way that [the pupils] say things, they don't mean to be rude, they don't mean to be offensive or however they come across. They genuinely don't understand their own tone of voice…Whether it's right or wrong, you do hugely get judged on what you sound like"
>
> Vicki Barsby, English teacher

> "I worked with heads of department to identify where across the year and in each year group there would be dedicated curriculum time to a rhetoric-based activity that every teacher of that year group in that unit would do. … Reading out your answers is not the same as actively engaging with oracy activities. So that was what the roadmap was to do, to formalise that, and remove that randomness of experience"
>
> Andrew Fitch, Head of English and Director of Spoken Literacy

Activities include presentations and debates but Andrew and Vicki also stress the role of questioning, discussion, scaffolding and modelling. However they acknowledge that it is not always easy to ensure all staff value and implement these approaches.

The Colourful Semantics approach

The Brier School is an all-through special school for pupils aged between 4 and 16 with moderate and complex learning difficulties. It uses an approach called 'Colourful Semantics', a speech and language intervention that breaks down language into separate parts, and colour codes these parts depending on their grammatical function.

There are four 'levels' of language, each colour coded accordingly:
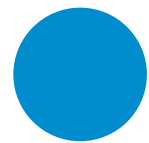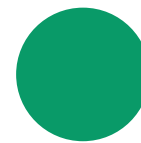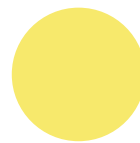
Level 1 – Who?
(dog / subject)

Level 2 – Doing what?
(playing with / verb)

Level 3 – What?
(ball / object)

Level 4 – Where?
(in the garden / location)

*taken from the Colour Semantics website, at integratedtreatmentservices.co.uk

The deputy headteacher explains:

> "When they come into the school very few children have communication skills… some don't speak at all, some find it very hard to initiate anything even with symbols, so in a way it's very easy for them not to be active participants in the process of making choices"
>
> Alison Whitnall, Deputy Headteacher

Alongside a range of other interventions including Makaton sign language, Colourful Semantics is used throughout the school to scaffold speaking, listening and communication. For example, classroom and corridor wall displays are colour coded so that the pupils can identify words more easily. Pupils progress through the levels as they move through the school.

> "The whole environment is geared for children to learn, to develop, spoken language and understanding of language"
>
> Alison Whitnall, Deputy Headteacher

Elklan Language Training

Elklan runs a range of courses for staff working with pupils of different ages and with different language and communication needs, and we spoke to interviewees in three schools who say they use the training to upskill teachers and senior leaders who, in turn, can then support their colleagues.

Sara Avenell is Head of the Early Years and Key Stage 1 at Brookside School, a special school in Tilehurst, which supports pupils aged between 2 and 19 with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties, and visual and hearing impairments. Sara leads Elklan training in her school.

The school's motivation for using the training was a desire to improve consistency and appropriateness of communication across the board.

"It is a fantastic training package for training our staff about communicating with children with additional needs. It matches theory together with practice, [looking] at the principles behind communication but also practical strategies to help staff in the classroom"

Sara Avenell, Head of Early Years and Key Stage 1

The training covers verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. At Brookside School training takes place weekly after school, throughout the year. Sara explains that while her school is adapting the training to suit its specific needs, Elklan predominantly works with mainstream schools.

Sara emphasises that the training is just one part of her school's communication provision, and that it is also reviewing its curriculum, introducing communication passports outlining pupils' needs, and school-wide vocabulary pupils can use to communicate with all staff.

Social and emotional benefits

High quality classroom talk has been shown to have a range of social and emotional benefits for pupils. In a quasi-experimental study, Trickey and Topping explore the effects of 'collaborative philosophical enquiry' on 11 and 12 year olds. This is an approach that encourages pupils to engage in discussion about philosophical ideas with the teacher and their peers.[64] The study found pupils in the treatment group experienced greater self-esteem and self-confidence, and a reduction in anxiety and dependence on others. RCTs and quasi-experimental studies have also suggested that oracy-based learning can enhance pupils' engagement[65] and on-task focus. [66,67]

Howe and Mercer suggest that collaborative verbal interactions in peer groups can promote opportunities for high quality discussion and negotiation among pupils.[68] Evidence from qualitative studies also suggests that quality classroom dialogue between pupils and their teacher, or with their peers, might help them grow in confidence and self-esteem,[69] build relationships with adults and their peers, and develop their sense of self and emotional intelligence. [70,71,72,73] Action research by Jensen highlights a possible link between debating activities in history lessons, and the development of pupils' empathy.[74] Academics and educationalists have also suggested oracy can enhance pupils' aspirations and support pupils' ability to handle stress.[75]

Teachers recognise oracy's importance in pupils' social and emotional development. 64% of survey respondents believe oracy contributes 'a great deal' to pupils' social development and 48% say the same regarding pupils' emotional development.

Primary school practitioners are significantly more likely than their secondary or FE colleagues to believe oracy contributes 'a great deal' to pupils' social and emotional development, and explain that they feel oracy underpins these processes:

> "Nothing else happens unless relationships and communication are right. The rest is kind of icing on the cake to some degree"
>
> Jane Townend, Green Lane Primary School

> "Being able to express your thoughts, your learning, your cognition, but also your emotions [means children will] have the confidence to shape their own ideas, or to ask questions, or praise each other"
>
> Sarah Theaker [xv]

Some secondary teachers also feel this, though:

> "At the heart of oracy is a child's wellbeing. If you don't feel well you don't speak well. [Sometimes] you challenge kids and actually at the heart of the problem is nothing to do with speaking, it's to do with not feeling well, maybe emotionally, maybe socially"
>
> Bec Tulloch, St Ambrose Barlow RC High School

Primary teachers and pupils particularly emphasise the role of talk in supporting quieter or less confident pupils.
One teacher for example explains that:

> "The quieter children I think benefit more. There used to be a point where if 'you get anything wrong, we're not supposed to say our answers', imagine that! We are all allowed to have an opinion if we can justify it"
>
> Riz Saleem, Eastwood Primary School

A pupil feels:

> "If you're more of a quiet student then talking to someone really builds up your confidence and helps you"
>
> Amy, year 6 pupil, Ascot Heath CE Junior School

[xv] Headteacher at Ascot Heath CE Junior School in Berkshire (key informant interview).

Oracy can help pupils gain confidence communicating their ideas, but also in the substance of the ideas themselves. One secondary sociology teacher notes that this is important in helping quieter pupils fulfil their potential, as it is "rare for very quiet children to do incredibly well." She believes:

> "Children who find discussion hard or making verbal contributions in lessons hard get a sense of achievement [when they do]"
>
> Rachel Forward, King Edward VI School

Unfortunately, there is a risk that shy pupils are simply excused from oral participation without any action being taken to help them overcome their anxiety. Yet as one teacher points out it is crucial to build pupils' confidence and ability in oracy, in the same way as it is in any other area:

> "If you had a pupil that wasn't able to write you wouldn't be like, 'oh we're just not going to do writing', and I think we should [take] the same stance with speaking as well
>
> With writing … you'd make sure … they were properly scaffolded to be able to achieve that, and that's what you can do with speaking as well"
>
> Amy Gaunt, School 21

We explore the strategies some schools use to engage shy and quiet pupils in Section 5.

Building confidence through spoken language

Pupils at Eastwood Primary School feel developing skills and confidence in speaking and listening is important both for their learning, and to interact emotionally and socially with the world.

> "Speaking and listening is important because … you need to express your feelings because you can't just stay quiet and keep it all inside"
>
> Anaya, year 6 pupil

Pupils explain that talking is important for making friends, but also for helping quieter pupils gain confidence. One year six pupil says that her quieter classmates seemed to grow in confidence when her teacher encourages them to take part in classroom discussions:

> "Sometimes she does choose people that can't speak and are really quiet and they don't really want to do it because they're really shy, but then Miss chooses [them] and they gain more confidence"
>
> Zara, year 6 pupil

Decoding the emotional and social significance of spoken language

Oracy plays a particularly important role in supporting pupils' social and emotional in some special schools.

Sarah Wild, the headteacher of a special secondary school for autistic girls, explains that for her and her staff, deconstructing social and emotional processes through spoken language takes priority over developing grammar and vocabulary.

> "It's about trying to get them to understand effectively 'what is social communication?', 'How do you do it?', 'How do you read it?'… It makes you vulnerable if you're communicating with other people but you don't really understand their intent or what you're communicating"
>
> Sarah Wild, Headteacher

This is crucial given the school's intake.

> "It's not unusual for the girls in year 7 to arrive and have no idea that they've got any emotions at all. What they understand about themselves is that they've got real peaks and troughs in their behaviours… In the moment they can't express themselves. All of their language… evaporates"
>
> Sarah Wild, Headteacher
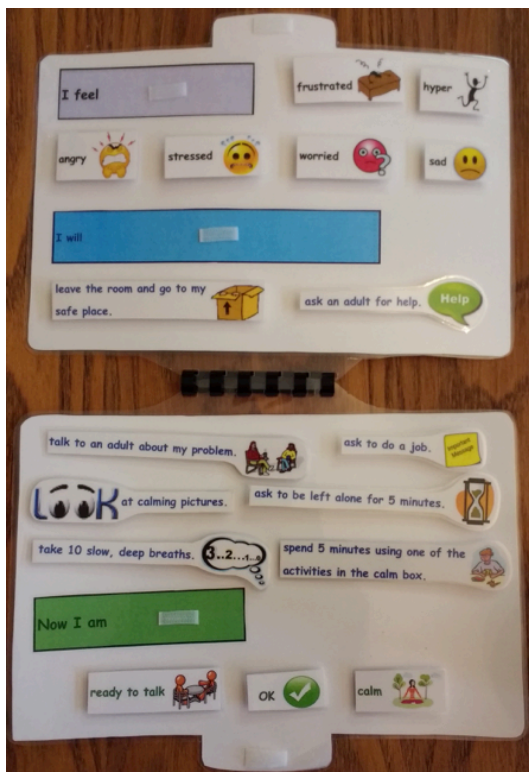
The school helps pupils explore their emotions and interactions through spoken language. Staff across the school use a common set of phrases and vocabulary to describe emotions, and scaffold pupils' communication. 'Language suitcases' are one way of doing this. They contain set phrases and help the girls reflect on their emotions during points of crisis (see image).

Sarah says:

> "When the girls leave us they are really good at understanding themselves and their triggers and the triggers of their peers"
>
> Sarah Wild, Headteacher

Cognition

Pupils' cognitive development is a social as well as a biological process, and spoken language plays a critical role in this development.[76,77,78]

Recent research in the cognitive sciences suggests that: [79]

- Knowledge is constructed and developed through social interaction

- Spoken language helps us construct meaning of the world around us, and of abstract ideas and concepts

Neuroscientific research adds to the evidence base in this area. Between infancy and adulthood the brain quadruples in size and this is largely driven by 'synaptogenesis', the process whereby new connections form in the brain.[80] Talk fuels these processes and therefore plays a crucial role both in developing pupils' ability to think, but also in building the brain itself.[81] Goswami argues that language (and particularly spoken language) plays a critical role in supporting memory development in children.[82]

A smaller proportion of teachers in our sample highlight the cognitive benefits of oracy compared to linguistic or social benefits. Many of the secondary and FE teachers we spoke to recognise oracy's importance in supporting cognition, but feel some colleagues may focus their attention on pupils' reading and writing in order to achieve this, to the detriment of their oral development.

Several teachers feel talk is fundamental to quality metacognition, which involves pupils planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning. The educational benefits of metacognition are well established, and can help pupils make on average eight additional months' progress.[83] Talk is a critical part of this process.

It is also important to 'talk about talk' specifically, as this helps teachers and pupils improve the quality of oracy in their classrooms.

> "It's the true foundation of learning" Professor Frank Hardman [xvi]

> "We learn to think through oral language, [so oracy is about] advancing individual capacity for productive, rational and reflective thinking" Professor Frank Hardman [xvii]

> "Talk allows you to construct and then reconstruct ideas, which is the major way in which we learn" Professor Maurice Galton [xix]

> "Verbalising ideas and concepts is a way to understanding them as well" Duncan Partridge [xviii]

> "The best is when we're in projects and we're in groups and one person says something and another person can maybe improve it" Zara, year 6 pupil, Eastwood Primary School

> "Particularly when you're going into the higher areas of what are traditionally seen as more sciencey subjects, I really like – particularly in areas like quantum physics or even relativity – seeing that there are no real answers, and being able to try and explain that using words rather than using figures. Because in certain areas in physics and certain areas in maths you can't explain it using real numbers, and you can't explain it using formulae, so that area of speaking and listening really excites me" Daniel, year 13 student, King Edward VI School

> "[Make] sure that the purpose of talk is really aligned with that reflection that you then do on the talk, and … that pupils are really aware of what the purpose of the talk is and how that will affect the way that they talk as well" Amy Gaunt, Head of Oracy Primary, School 21

[xvi] Key informant interview.

[xvii] Key informant interview.

[xviii] Key informant interview.

[xiv] Key informant interview.

Videoing and evaluating oracy in the classroom

Staff at Eastwood Primary School help pupils review and evaluate their interactions in lessons. Ultimately teachers feel this underpins learning across the board whilst enhancing the quality of pupils' talk and social interactions.

> "Every classroom has the talk rules. We video the children doing a talk activity, and we ask the children, 'what do you think our talk rules should be in this classroom?', and they come up with the talk rules. They say, 'Miss we don't think we made eye contact with each other, and we think we need to work on building on each other's ideas because we tend to deviate or divert off task. We feel like we need to contribute more. We feel like we need to give extended answers, and build on each other's ideas.' They come up with those"
>
> Riz Saleem, year 6 class teacher

Civic engagement and empowerment

"Talk is a fundamental prerequisite for democratic engagement"

Professor Robin Alexander[xx]

Oracy provides an opportunity for pupils to reflect on the nature of society itself. A small-scale experimental study by Green and Klug found that debating activities could help students engage with and change their mind regarding social issues.[84] Meanwhile a large body of qualitative research suggests that structured and purposeful classroom dialogue between pupils and with teachers can help broaden students' awareness of social issues and differences between social groups. [85,86,87,88]

> "Oracy is important […because] it represents a set of essential life skills which are useful both for the individual and also to the society in which they live"
>
> Professor Neil Mercer[xxi]

Teacher and author Martin Robinson explains that, to a degree, civic engagement and empowerment is woven into the history of oracy, saying:

Oracy can also help empower students to interact with society. Reflecting on over 15 years of research into 'Accountable Talk' (an approach to teaching that promotes participants' equity and rigorous academic discussion), Michaels et al. note that such practices can promote respectful and grounded discussion, partly because pupils become more equipped to build on one another's contributions.[89] In their systematic review of studies on citizenship education, Deakin Crick et al. suggest that skills such as negotiating, constructing arguments, debating, and listening to and building on the ideas of others play a fundamental role in citizenship education and, therefore, in teaching young people how to be active citizens.[90] Andrews goes further, suggesting that democracy can function only if young people learn to argue effectively.[91] Writing about intercultural education Trethewey and Menzies argue that pupils from different backgrounds must interact with one another in order to build understanding and tolerance.[92]

> "You're in the moment of actually putting yourself on the line and having to communicate with the world. You're reaching out to the world. Instead of being a private process, it's a public process…. [It's] the idea of community, to reach out to and to build for the future"
>
> Martin Robinson [xxii]

[xx] Key informant interview.

[xxi] Key informant interview.

[xxii] Key informant interview.

In comparison with the linguistic and social benefits of oracy, only a third of teachers believe that oracy contributes 'great deal' to pupils' civic development, helping them to contribute more meaningfully across school life and in their communities. Teachers who emphasise these benefits during interviews also highlight oracy's role both in empowering pupils to articulate their ideas, and the importance of the precedent that is set when teachers and pupils listen actively and supportively. One headteacher runs his school's debating club and says:

Pupil interviewees tend to recognise oracy-based activities' role in empowering them, arguing that such activities enhance their ability to engage with each other and collectively build upon ideas. They also highlight the social benefits of oracy and suggest that it forms the basis of pupils' ability to challenge stereotypes and engage with new or different opinions.

"When I take our students on the debating circuit … they will largely be surrounded by children from independent [schools…]. I'm on a mission to make sure that children like ours in schools like ours have access to what is essentially the language of power"

Geoff Barton, Headteacher

"There's a stereotype that needs to be broken down that teenagers are a generation who can't communicate properly and who are always glued to phones, and I think that that stereotype is broken down by improving speaking and listening skills, maintaining things like eye contact and tailoring the way you speak."

Laurence, year 13 student, King Edward VI School

"It goes towards breaking down the echo chamber that we have with social media newsfeeds where we just have our opinions played back to us, and rather than trying to challenge our own opinions and trying to take on board the opinions of other people and seeing how those fit in with us"

Daniel, year 13 student, King Edward VI School

Setting ground rules for talk democratically

One teacher says that a colleague's work to increase pupils' involvement in their own learning, including agreeing a set of ground rules for talking and learning that underpin all interactions, has produced remarkable results. Sarah Jones is Vice Principal at BSix College in Hackney, London, and says:

"It's beautiful in there because he's built a proper community and they talk about the idea that if any one of them fails they've all failed, because they should all help each other understand. And they do, genuinely. I've never seen anything like it"

Sarah Jones, Vice Principal, BSix College

Advocacy and presenting in public

Current and former pupils at Limpsfield Grange School go with the headteacher to present at conferences about what it is like to be female and have autism. A small group of two or three girls will go at a time, and have presented to audiences of up to 700 people.

> "It's about advocacy. It's about teaching these girls that they have something to say and that people will listen seriously to them, so that they don't feel marginalised"
>
> Sarah Wild, Headteacher

Employment opportunities and economic benefits

Employers place a high value on communication skills. Workforce Connections, a project funded by the United States Office of International Development (USAID), identified communication skills (including oral communication) as one of its five critical 'soft skills' young people need to succeed in the workplace.[93] Its conclusions are based on a review of literature across a broad range of disciplines, and over 40 stakeholder interviews. These conclusions were corroborated by a report funded by McDonald's, in which 'communication and interpersonal skills' topped a list of five soft skillsets 'vital for all UK workers.'[94] This same report estimates that, by 2020, 'the annual contribution of soft skills to the [UK] economy is expected to grow in real terms to £109 billion'.[95]

Yet while employers rate oral communication skills as among the most important for the workplace, a Department for Business, Innovations and Skills (BIS) literature review found employers are anxious that the incoming workforce does not possess sufficient ability to communicate effectively either orally or in writing. A report by McKinsey & Company suggests schools and colleges in countries around the world are more confident their pupils leave them with competencies in oral communication than the employers receiving them.[96,97]

- McDonald's estimates by using publicly available economic and census data that, by 2020, over half a million UK workers will be 'significantly held back by soft skills deficits' [98]

49%

- 49% of 310 employers in CBI/Pearson's education and skills survey say there is 'room for improvement in essential capabilities' such as communication skills among the workforce, and many would like schools to do more to help pupils develop communication skills [99]

91,000

- A number of the skills most lacking among applicants for jobs, as identified by 91,000 employers in the most recent UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) Employer Skills Survey, relate directly or indirectly to oral communication. These include the ability to manage one's own feelings and the feelings of others (identified as lacking by 32% of employers in the UKCES survey), persuade and influence others (31%), and make speeches or presentations (16%)[100]

In its examination of the ways in which the job market is shifting and changing, including the mechanisation and automation jobs, Goldman Sachs identifies a growth in 'adaptive occupations', which require 'the attributes machines lack.' Strong interpersonal and social skills feature strongly.[101]

'Individuals will get ahead based on their judgment, critical thinking, creativity and abilities to interpret fluid situations and interact with others. To prepare students for this world of work, education will need to stress … not just literacy and numeracy, but also adaptability, problem-solving, common sense and team-building skills. This is less a question of curriculum per se but more a question of how subjects are taught'

Strongin et al.[102]

"Having oracy skills is a condition for success ... it is a fact of life that you have to use it, [so] it is also a condition to be successful in life"

Leela Koenig[xxiii]

Given the emphasis employers place on oracy, it is perhaps surprising that only a little over a quarter of teachers feel oracy contributes 'a great deal' to pupils' employment prospects. Our survey reveals teachers across different phases feel broadly similar about this. Interviews suggest that perhaps the low emphasis teachers place specifically on employability outcomes might be a reaction to the perceived instrumental nature of such benefits. As one secondary school headteachers argues:

"Our job here is to give people a rounded academic education, that in itself gives them a broader understanding of the world, and in a way as a consequence means that they're prepared the next stage …. We don't necessarily see ourselves as educators [to] make people employable for the market place. So we don't see oracy as being something that we are developing in people as a stand-alone to make them employable"

Hywel Jones, Headteacher, West London Free School[xxiv]

Another points out that the benefits of oracy are broader than simply improving pupils' job prospects:

> "I'm not compartmentalising [oracy] as 'this is job opportunities'…. What we are doing when we give children the ability to be able to hold a conversation with an adult resonates out. It might resonate into their ability to apply for jobs, be interviewed and do well, but actually it's a social skill that will simply pervade their lives, the ability wherever they are, whoever they're with, to be able to open a conversation"
>
> Geoff Barton, King Edward VI

On the other hand, teachers working in special schools, PRUs and AP highlight the benefits of oracy in relation to employment prospects more often. This may in part be because these schools see themselves as playing a particularly important role not only in providing a rounded education but also in helping pupils to access opportunities after they leave school.

> "If you're working with a community that's quite marginalised then you have to be really clear about what it is you want for them at the end of year 11, when they're 20, when they're 25, when they're 30, 50, whatever it is. You've got to have some kind of vision about where it is that you think you want them to be able to get to…. So our focus is very much 'out of the door and into the future' … we're on a journey to these destinations"
>
> Sarah Wild, Limpsfield Grange School

Pupils see a direct link between the skills oracy helps develops, and their potential future success.

> "Later on in life if you're trying to give a presentation on a work opportunity then you would need to be good at speaking"
>
> Flora, year 6 pupil, Ascot Heath CE Junior School

> "[Oracy] helps with interview technique, so if you can hold a conversation, hold eye contact and tailor the way you're speaking to different people, that will help you in first of all job interviews, and then also later on in the world of work"
>
> Laurence, year 13 pupil, King Edward VI School

> "In the future when you need to get a job you need to pass an interview and you need to talk, you can't be quiet. They will want somebody who can talk, that's confident"
>
> Zara, year 6 pupil, Eastwood Primary School

Social disadvantage

Numerous studies show that socio-economically disadvantaged children's spoken language development in their first term of nursery school is lower on average than both that of their more advantaged peers and also in comparison with their own non-verbal cognitive abilities.[103,104,105] This is crucially important because, as Roulstone et al. explore in their systematic review of the existing research, a child's ability to use spoken language has an important effect on his or her level of educational attainment. Poor spoken language ability can therefore act as a mechanism for entrenching socio-economic inequality in education.

> 'There are now clear causal associations between a child's level of language and communication development at school entry age and how this impacts on their literacy learning and attainment'
>
> Roulstone et al.[106]

Furthermore, gaps in language development between more and less socioeconomically advantaged children tend to widen rather than narrow as children progress through school. This pattern is particularly stark for learners with SLCN.[107] Children entering school from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds are also more likely than their more advantaged peers to have a form of SLCN. Alongside worse educational outcomes, these children are on average more likely to be permanently excluded, and between 60% and 90% of young people in the justice system have a form of SLCN, often undiagnosed prior to offending.[108,109]

Oracy's links to employability (explored above) can act as another mechanism for entrenching socio-economic inequality. In its qualitative evaluation of non-educational barriers to elite professions the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission found that elite firms define 'talent' according to a number of factors including strong communication and debating skills, confidence and 'polish'.[110] The report finds:

> '[C]urrent definitions of talent can arguably be closely mapped on to socioeconomic status, including middle-class norms and behaviours. As such, …the current definition of talent may disadvantage talented students who have not benefited from similar educational advantages or been socialised in a middle-class context, no matter how great their aptitude for a professional career in all other respects'
>
> Ashley et al. [111]

Analysis by the Sutton Trust corroborates this and suggests that extroverted people – those who are more confident, sociable or assertive – have 'a 25% higher chance of being in a high-earning job,' and that personality and aspirations are strongly affected by social background.[112] The report finds:

> 'For a variety of reasons, children from more advantaged backgrounds appear more likely to develop personality characteristics and aspirations which subsequently benefit them in the labour market'
>
> de Vries and Rentfrow[113]

Whilst it would be wrong to suggest that schools should teach all pupils to be extroverted, they should support pupils' in developing the self-confidence and social skills that will enhance their life chances.[114]

Many teachers recognise oracy's role in tackling social disadvantage. As one explains:

> "I think it's of benefit to all pupils, but the teaching of it is of benefit specifically to our comprehensive cohort, because there are a lot of kids [who] get a lot of this exposure anyway. They get it through debates at the dinner table, they get it through being raised in certain ways and having certain schooling, and I think they start with such an advantage"
>
> Andrew Fitch, Highbury Grove School

Which pupils benefit from oracy?

Given the numerous benefits of oracy explored above, it is heartening that most teachers believe oracy benefits most pupils, with a large minority saying all pupils benefit.[xxv] Primary school teachers are significantly more likely to believe all pupils benefit from oracy than teachers in secondary or FE settings.

What proportion of pupils benefit from oracy being taught in school? 👤906

- 48% All
- 27% Most
- 11% An even split
- 5% A few
- 8% Don't know
- 1% None
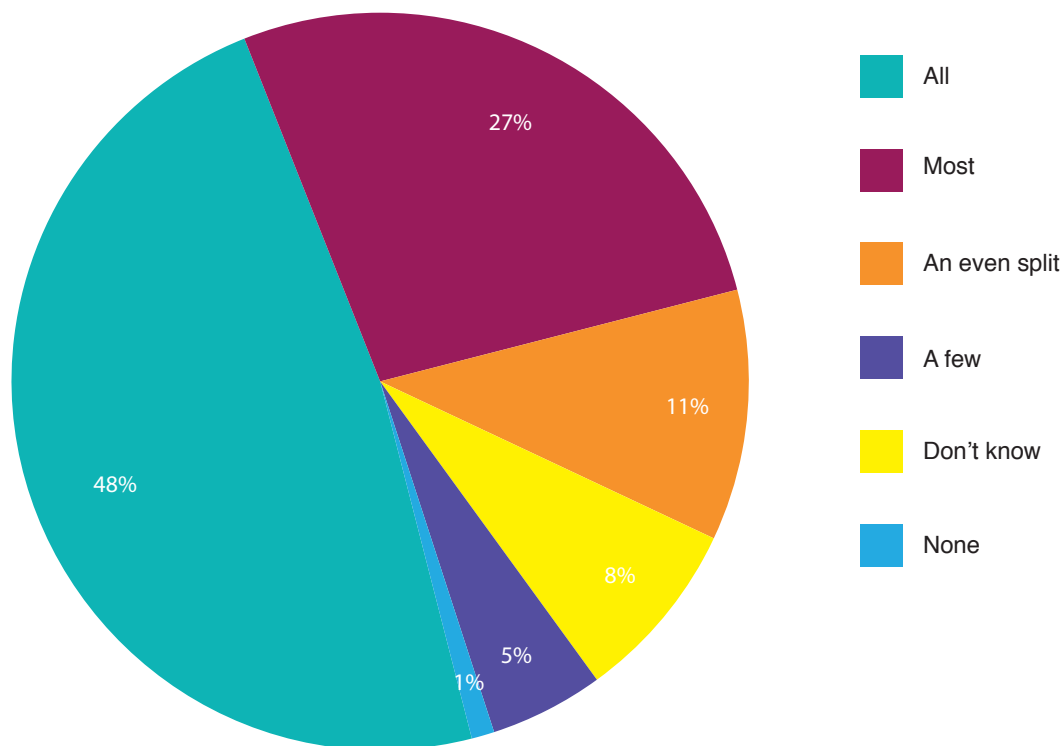
As was highlighted in Section 2, this may be because teachers in this phase see 'communication' as something pupils need in order to engage with their immediate environment, and that this is more of a focus for them than the more formal interaction teachers of older pupils emphasise. English teachers (for example) are significantly more likely than maths or science teachers to believe all pupils benefit from oracy, so the differences in phases may also be due to teachers specialising in subjects at secondary- and FE-level.

There is some geographical variation in teachers' perceptions of oracy's importance with teachers in London (58%) significantly more likely to believe all pupils benefit from oracy than teachers in the North West (39%), East Midlands (41%), East of England (42%), or South West (42%).

Survey respondents particularly highlight the benefits of oracy for socio-economically disadvantaged pupils, those with English as an additional language and those with low prior attainment.

Proportion of teachers, by region, who believe all pupils benefit from oracy. 👤906

- 39% North West
- 41% East Midlands
- 42% East of England
- 58% London
- 42% South West
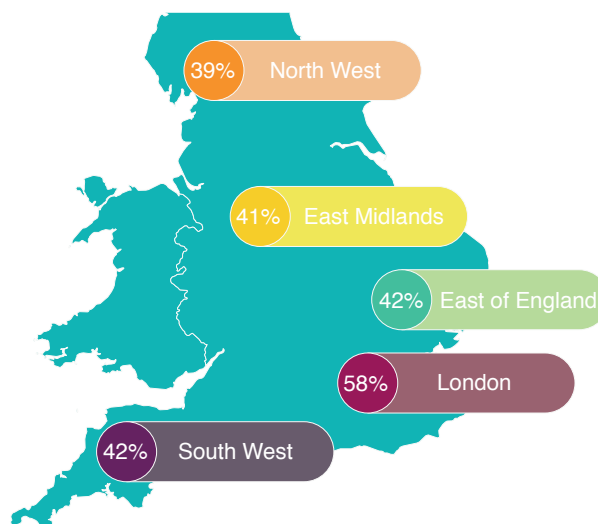
[xxv] Practitioners were asked what proportion of and which pupils in particular benefit from oracy, with oracy defined as 'the development of children's capacity to use speech to express their thoughts and communicate with others in education and in life, and talk through which teaching and learning is mediated' (based on Alexander, 2012: 10).

Which pupils in particular benefit from oracy? 906

Category	Percentage
Pupils for whom English is an additional language	73%
Pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds	71%
Pupils with low prior attainment	68%
Pupils with a form of special educational need or disability	58%
Pupils for whom English is their first language	48%
Pupils from socioeconomically advantaged backgrounds	42%
Pupils with high prior attainment	42%
Pupils without a form of special educational need or disability	40%
Not applicable - I don't think any pupils would benefit	1%

There are some significant differences in views across regions:

47%
The proportion of teachers in the South East (47%) that believes oracy particularly benefits pupils with high prior attainment is higher than that in the North West (32%)

78%
The proportion of teachers in the West Midlands (78%) that believes oracy particularly benefits pupils with low prior attainment is higher than that in the North West (65%), North East (62%), East of England (59%), London (59%) or Wales (61%)xxvi

78%
The proportion of teachers in Yorkshire and Humberside (78%) that believes oracy particularly benefits pupils with low prior attainment is higher than that in the East of England (59%) or London (59%)

78%
The proportion of teachers in Scotland (78%) that believes oracy particularly benefits pupils with low prior attainment is higher than that in the East of England (59%) or London (59%)

81%
The proportion of teachers in Yorkshire and Humberside (81%) that believes oracy particularly benefits pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds is higher than that in the East of England (62%) or London (63%)

83%
The proportion of teachers in Scotland (83%) that believes oracy particularly benefits pupils from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds is higher than that in the North West (68%), East of England (62%), London (63%), or the South East (69%)

xxvi The base sizes for the North East (n=39) and Wales (n=46) are below 50. Findings relating to these areas should therefore be regarded as indicative rather than representative.

Interviewees feel aware of oracy's benefits for their particular pupil demographic and this may play a role in explaining some of these differences. As Angela Catterick of Green Lane Primary School explains:

"Within this school [we] cover that whole range: EAL, lower ability, SEN, and children with specific speech and language difficulties. But we're also trying to pitch and gauge communication work at a much higher level as well because we're very conscious … we're competing with schools in much more affluent areas, and so really we've not only got to get a solid base of tier one vocabulary and early language skills in the new to English children, but we've also actually got to then get those children to the very top of the tree when they leave here"

Angela Catterick, Green Lane Primary School

By contrast, many children who attend Ascot Heath CE Junior School speak English as their first language, and are from socioeconomically more advantaged backgrounds. The headteacher there explains oracy's relevance in relation to these pupils in particular:

"The school has a tradition of preparing pupils for the next stage of their education, being confident thinkers, expressive speakers and good ambassadors for the school…. Our children are from, on the whole, very supportive backgrounds, [and] they recognise that there is a way to speak to other adults, or to visitors, or in the hall, but actually we still underline that lesson"

Sarah Theaker, Ascot Heath CE Junior School [xxxvii]

[xxvii] Key informant interview.

4.

How do teachers
and schools currently
develop oracy?

4. How do teachers and schools currently develop oracy?

Research into the nature of classroom interactions consistently shows that teachers tend to dominate talk situations, and that as a result talk does not support as many opportunities to stretch and challenge pupils as it could. [115,116,117,118] For example, classroom talk very often takes the form 'IRF', or 'initiation, response and feedback', in which the teacher asks a closed question, receives a short answer, and offers brief praise in return,[119] something Professor Dylan Wiliam has characterised as the 'ping pong' question.[120]
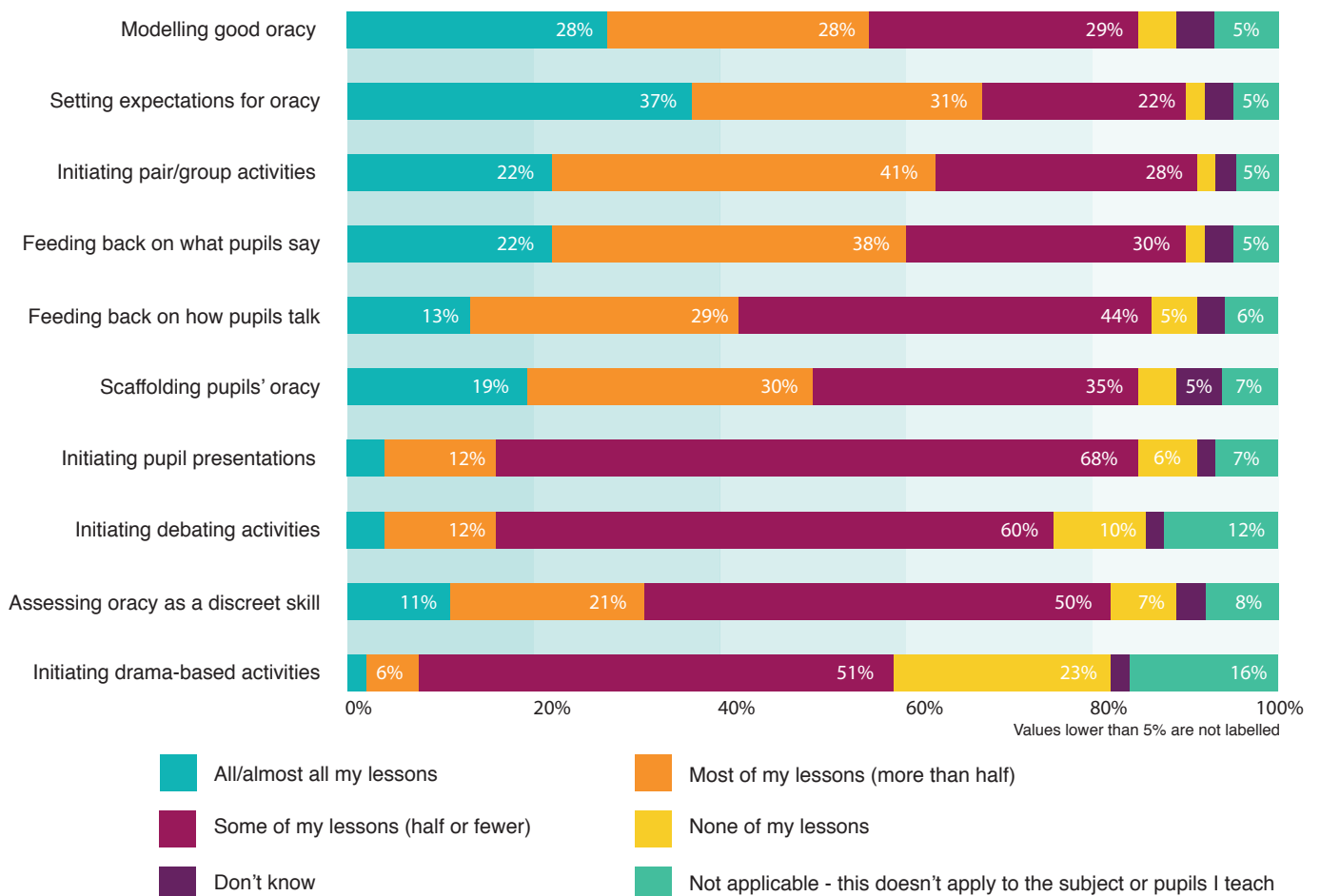
Extensive research has been undertaken to explore how talk can be used in teaching.[121,122,123,124,125,126,127] This has shown that there is no 'magic bullet' when it comes to quality. Alexander, however, emphasises the importance of certain factors in making classroom talk more effective.[128]

Improving the quality of oracy in classrooms involves integrating high quality classroom interactions across the curriculum both to build pupils' ability to speak well and extend their understanding of and interest in subject content.[129,130,131,132] High quality talk can therefore support better assessment and feedback during lessons.[133]

The oracy strategies that the class teachers in our survey (n=562) report using most were:

- Modelling, or demonstrating a skill for pupils to then put into action

- Setting expectations of pupils' oracy in lessons

- Initiating activities in which pupils talk to each other in pairs or groups

- Providing feedback on what pupils say

How often do classroom teachers report using strategies to teach oracy? 562

Strategy	All/almost all my lessons	Most of my lessons	Some of my lessons	None of my lessons	Don't know	Not applicable
Modelling good oracy	28%	28%	29%			5%
Setting expectations for oracy	37%	31%	22%			5%
Initiating pair/group activities	22%	41%	28%			5%
Feeding back on what pupils say	22%	38%	30%			5%
Feeding back on how pupils talk	13%	29%	44%	5%		6%
Scaffolding pupils' oracy	19%	30%	35%	5%		7%
Initiating pupil presentations		12%	68%	6%		7%
Initiating debating activities		12%	60%	10%		12%
Assessing oracy as a discreet skill	11%	21%	50%	7%		8%
Initiating drama-based activities		6%	51%	23%		16%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Values lower than 5% are not labelled

Legend:
- All/almost all my lessons
- Most of my lessons (more than half)
- Some of my lessons (half or fewer)
- None of my lessons
- Don't know
- Not applicable - this doesn't apply to the subject or pupils I teach

Professor Alexander believes classroom talk can be made more effective when teachers:

- Set clear 'ground rules' and expectations for talk in lessons with their pupils

- Model the talk they expect from pupils

- Use questions to prompt thoughtful answers

- Scaffold pupils' interactions and responses

- Provide pupils with feedback both on
what they say and how they say it

- Consider how pupils are physically grouped in the classroom, and whether this supports the sort of talk needed. For example, sitting pupils in groups of four will support different types of talk to seating pupils in rows

- Encourage pupils to talk 'more', while talking less, for certain activities

Teachers in different phases and school types approach teaching oracy differently

Primary teachers are significantly more likely to report using scaffolding and modelling in all or almost all of their lessons in comparison to teachers in secondary or FE settings. They are also significantly more likely to report initiating pair or group activities than secondary teachers. Primary and secondary teachers are significantly more likely to set expectations for oracy in all or almost all of their lessons than their colleagues in FE, and primary teachers are significantly more likely than their secondary or FE counterparts to provide feedback on what pupils say in more than half of their lessons.

FE teachers in particular were significantly more likely than both primary and secondary schools to feel scaffolding, modelling, setting expectations, and giving feedback on what pupils say and how they say it is 'not applicable' to them.

Primary teachers' more frequent use of strategies such as modelling and scaffolding is consistent with the importance they attach to them (see Section 2). Interviews also suggest that some teachers get to a point where they feel so comfortable using techniques to develop pupils' interactions they no longer consider these strategies particularly distinctive:

Differences in practice between phases are closely related to the fact that FE and secondary teachers are subject specialists. English and languages teachers are significantly more likely to scaffold oracy in most of their lessons or initiate pair or group activities in all of them compared to maths teachers. These teachers are also more likely to model oracy in all their lessons compared to science teachers. To some extent, oracy-based pedagogy therefore remains the preserve of English, language and drama teachers, and has yet to consistently permeate the curriculum.

Variation in practice between subjects may reflect a belief that oracy is part of the 'tradition' of certain subjects, not others. This can be because secondary school leaders and headteachers view 'oracy' as a set of skills pupils will naturally develop in certain subjects, rather than skills and pedagogy relevant to teaching more widely. As one headteacher explains:

Use of oracy strategies also varies between school types. Practitioners working in special schools, AP and PRUs are significantly more likely than teachers in local authority schools and academies to say pair and group, presentation, and debating activities are 'not applicable' in their lessons. A special school teacher explains that while oracy is fundamentally important in helping pupils at her school develop both their verbal and non-verbal communication skills, many pupils cannot physically communicate through talk, or have an additional need that makes this difficult. Consequently, these activities are rarely if ever applicable. Instead, modelling and scaffolding are particularly valuable in her setting.

Visualisers

Several teachers report finding visualisers, technology that enables them to project pupils' work onto the whiteboard, a useful means of providing pupils with feedback on their work.

Despite the original work being in written form, visualisers help pupils engage in detailed discussion about strengths and areas for development.

"I think it happens naturally alongside everything else … It just happens all the time, and I don't even really think about it"

Pip Bailey, Green Lane Primary School

"If that is part of the tradition of the subject, and a rounded education delivers that as a consequence, then that's great. But we wouldn't necessarily see that as an end goal"

Hywel Jones, Headteacher, West London Free School [xxviii]

xxviii Key informant interview.

Developing 'real-life' oracy skills

Pip Bailey, a year 1 teacher at Green Lane Primary School, explains that with her year 1 pupils "we'll do role-plays of being in shops, having dinner, asking for food." These activities help the pupils practice 'everyday' language. Pip believes pupils improve their communication and interaction skills as a result.

Discussion and the Harkness method

Vicki Barsby teaches English in a secondary school, and regularly initiates a range of activities that involve different types of talk. She says this helps avoid an atmosphere of "guess what's in the teacher's head", something she believes can constrain pupils' ability to explore topics in depth. She explains:

> "I do a lot of discussion. I start the lesson, if not individual sections, with a question, and I'm a big fan of mind maps. So a question generates loads and loads of ideas, and then talking about which are the best ones and why"
>
> Vicki Barsby, English teacher

She also uses the Harkness method, a technique whereby pupils sit in a circle to discuss a particular issue or topic. The goal can be to reach a particular conclusion, or simply to extend pupils' depth of understanding through dialogue. Pupils question one another in order to unpick ideas.

The teacher's input during the discussion itself can be minimal, but the activity can be scaffolded by, for example:

- Allocating pupils particular positions (for or against an argument) or roles (chair, note-taker)

- Discussing ground rules for talk beforehand

- Providing discussion sentence starters

- Asking pupils to prepare their ideas in advance

Vicki said the activity has worked well with a range of groups, and "brilliantly" with a year 7 class, increasing their engagement and reducing their reliance on her for prompts

Scaffolding day-to-day and 'one-off' oracy activities

Kate Pretsell is the Head of English at Ark Burlington Danes Academy. She scaffolds pupils' talk both in her day-to-day lessons, and in 'one-off' activities.

Each pupil in Kate's class has a laminated place mat on their table outlining possible verbal sentence starters (see image). Kate says her pupils "need to be prompted to use them but they are beginning to internalise them."

Kate also carefully scaffolds debating activities. She works through the structure of the debate with the pupils, and also asks them to agree shared rules for the activity in advance. Pupils prepare their ideas in advance so that they do not need to produce their core arguments on the spot. By helping students prepare in this manner, Kate says, they are much more able to participate meaningfully during the debate itself.

How do I talk formally in class?		
When debating:	**When asking for support:**	**When answering questions:**
I disagree with your point because...	Please can you clarify what you mean when you say...?	Looking at the syntax/language/structure used, it seems that...
I agree to an extent with that idea, although...	How do I best approach this problem?	To me, the word... suggests that...
I am wholeheartedly in support of this idea as...	I am struggling to understand...	When I read this sentence, I thought the author was trying to...
In my opinion this argument is flawed because...	Could you explain the point about.....?	Another way of reading this would be...
The point you are making is fundamentally wrong as...	How is that related to......?	If we consider the fact that...
It is my firm belief that...	Could you say that last bit again please?	I can deduce that...
There is overwhelming evidence to suggest that...	What does ... mean? Is that why....?	It's fair to presume that...

WHAT NOT TO SAY: 'like', 'basically', 'literally', 'ain't' or any sort of slang!

Macbeth – debate!

L.O. To construct and present a debate

To consolidate understanding and analysis of character and theme

Do Now: can we agree, democratically, on some shared rules for a debate lesson?

Teaching is not consistent

Interviewees feel concern that the teaching of oracy can be inconsistent in their schools, and acknowledge that despite 'pockets' of high quality practice in their settings, provision is not always consistent. They believe this is because:

- Some colleagues accord less value to oracy than others

- Some teachers 'drop oracy' in favour of other, more short term priorities despite recognising oracy's importance

Interviewees also highlight variability in how teachers understand terms such 'scaffolding' and 'modelling', and consequently how ambitious their expectations are of pupils' oracy. A teacher at a school that has recently begun engaging with oracy explains that with regards to modelling and setting expectations:

> "We aimed quite low to start with and said look the first thing is that we always say hello to everyone in the corridor, [that] you look for eye contact, that you look for affirmation"
>
> Bec Tulloch, Drama Teacher,
> St Ambrose Barlow RC High School

Several other interviewees also feel that modelling talk and setting expectations, for example asking pupils to speak in full sentences and avoid using words such as 'like', are important in developing the quality of pupils' oracy. Ultimately, schools need to start somewhere, and all our interviewees agree that 'easy wins' are needed at first in order to build consistency. These 'easy wins' should not represent the totality of oracy, though:

> "As a minimum … [some schools] pick up on students who aren't speaking in full sentences, they will pick up on students who are saying 'like' every second word, so they'll sort of take away the rough edges of someone … and the question is whether we can go beyond that. And I think that is having the mindset for the intervention on 'weak speak' as you would on weak reading and writing"
>
> Peter Hyman, Executive Headteacher, School 21

Building consistency across the curriculum

St Ambrose Barlow RC High School is keen to increase the consistency of oracy in lessons and throughout the school, and has introduced a five-step oracy challenge for all teachers.

1. Everybody is heard every lesson
2. Everybody makes eye contact and engages in talk positively
3. Everybody engages in active listening in lessons
4. Everybody speaks in full sentences, using an appropriate register
5. Everybody extends their answers

This is a starting point, and the school anticipates building more sophisticated strategies as teachers' confidence and expertise increases.

Already Bec Tulloch, a class teacher, feels these steps have had a positive impact:
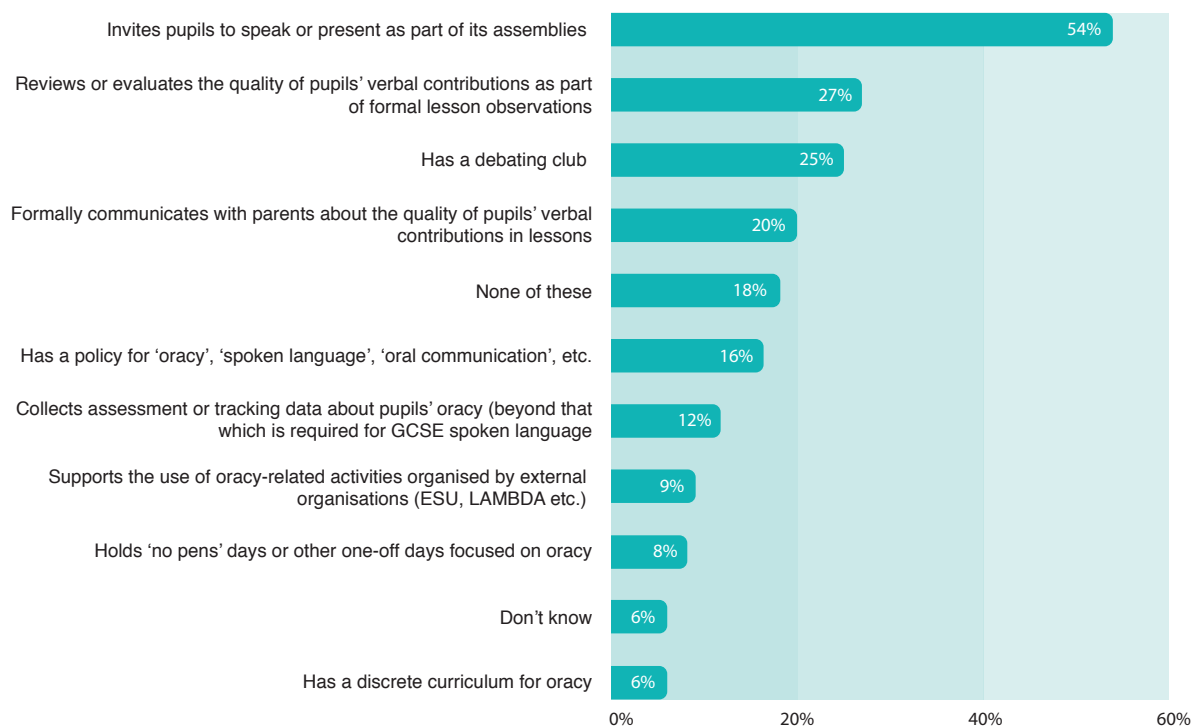
> "Kids said 'morning' to me [and] I'd said 'morning' to them, they expected it, they were ready and smiling. In terms of our whole school that's just such a massive step forward"
>
> Bec Tulloch, Drama Teacher,
> St Ambrose Barlow RC High School

Whole-school practices

Schools do not consistently provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop oracy outside the classroom. Apart from inviting pupils to speak or present as part of assemblies, only a small proportion of schools engage in practices such as reviewing the quality of teachers' and pupils' verbal contributions during lesson observations, or communicating with parents about their children's spoken communication in school.[xxix] Whole school approaches to oracy are particularly rare in FE colleges. The relative paucity of whole-school practices is surprising given teachers' overwhelming recognition of oracy's importance.

What strategies does your school use to support oracy? 👤 906

Strategy	%
Invites pupils to speak or present as part of its assemblies	54%
Reviews or evaluates the quality of pupils' verbal contributions as part of formal lesson observations	27%
Has a debating club	25%
Formally communicates with parents about the quality of pupils' verbal contributions in lessons	20%
None of these	18%
Has a policy for 'oracy', 'spoken language', 'oral communication', etc.	16%
Collects assessment or tracking data about pupils' oracy (beyond that which is required for GCSE spoken language	12%
Supports the use of oracy-related activities organised by external organisations (ESU, LAMBDA etc.)	9%
Holds 'no pens' days or other one-off days focused on oracy	8%
Don't know	6%
Has a discrete curriculum for oracy	6%

Teachers from independent (46%) and grammar schools[xxx] (69%) highlight they are more likely than those in local authority schools or academies to have debating clubs. Such clubs are more common in secondary schools (38%) than primary schools (8%). Independent schools are also significantly more likely than state schools to use external organisations such as the English Speaking Union (ESU) or London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMBDA) to deliver some form of oracy-based activity, and to communicate formally with parents about the quality of pupils' contributions in lessons perhaps, suggesting that independent schools place greater emphasis on pupils' ability to publicly express their ideas and opinions.

Formal assessment of oracy is unusual and in interviews teachers tend to describe their colleagues as sceptical about both the possibility and desirability of assessing oracy formally. This does not mean schools do not communicate about oracy, particularly at primary and Early Years level, where 30% and 38% of respondents respectively say they formally communicated with parents about pupils' verbal contributions in lessons. On the other hand, such practices are far less common in secondary schools.

Interviewees feel some 'school-level' strategies do not build on or relate to the activities taking place in lessons, either directly or indirectly. Furthermore, a number of interviewees in different phases and school types feel strongly that school-level strategies set the tone for a school's culture and ethos, but feel some schools miss out on opportunities to bring pupils and staff together through these more high-profile public activities. Such schools are potentially missing out on 'easy wins' to raise the profile and status of oracy, and providing pupils with novel opportunities to develop their skills as public speakers.

[xxix] Practitioners were asked about their school's practices, with oracy defined as 'the development of children's capacity to use speech to express their thoughts and communicate with others in education and in life, and talk through which teaching and learning is mediated' (based on Alexander, 2012: 10).

[xxx] The base sizes are below 50 for grammar schools (n=29). Reference to results in relation to grammar schools should therefore be regarded as illustrative rather than representative.

Giving all pupils opportunities to participate in debating

King Edward VI School has a debating club, run by the headteacher. Pupils from across the school can attend the debating sessions, and can also attend simply to listen. Up to 80 pupils attend the sessions, and they come from a range of backgrounds. Teams from the club have competed in competitions around the country.

According to pupils, debating presents an opportunity to develop public speaking skills as well as their ability to think on their feet, analyse an argument, and synthesise and present information quickly. They also report that it increases their confidence and their ability to present ideas clearly during lessons.

Several pupils feel that the club is more suited to students who are already academically able, and are hesitant with regard to whether it would be of universal benefit.

> "I'd say it's normally the more academically able, … because I think they find it easier to adapt to the 15 minutes to prepare"
>
> Alex, year 13 pupil

Once a half term a debate is held during a whole school assembly and Geoff argues that this "sends out incredibly powerful messages about the status of spoken language in the school, but also the ability of some students to use that spoken language".

Delivering Parents' Evening presentations

Year 6 pupils at Ascot Heath CE Junior School gave presentations during Parents' Evening about their strengths and areas for development. Class teachers helped their pupils prepare. Katie Brown is a year 6 class teacher, and believes presentations helped the pupils reflect on their learning, and that the areas of strength and weakness they identified were perceptive and thoughtful.

Taking additional speech lessons

From years 4 to 11, pupils attending Stephen Perse Foundation schools can opt to take part in weekly speech lessons in which they practise skills that build towards LAMDA qualifications in poetry recitation and public speaking. Generally, parents pay to cover the costs associated with this additional tuition.

Both teachers and pupils at the school feel the students likely to sign up either have a particular interest in acting, or wish to develop confidence speaking publicly.

While the courses boost pupils' confidence, teachers and pupils feel the impact in class can be limited because the schools are selective and students can generally verbally articulate themselves confidently in any case. One pupil explains:

> "I think it does [transfer into the classroom], but people who don't do the speech lessons also are really good at speaking in class, and people who do sometimes are more quiet but it doesn't really make a difference that much"
>
> Cynthia, year 9 pupil

The 'Woolsack Debating Society'

30 primary schools from across Bradford compete in the annual Woolsack Debating Society competition. Schools join in triads and, each term, mixed age and ability teams from each school debate against teams from the other two schools. Each triad then selects six pupils to participate in an annual competition.

Staff from Eastwood Primary School and Green Lane Primary School say it is an excellent opportunity for pupils to develop their debating and presenting skills, and that it helps improve pupils' confidence. An additional benefit is that participants are able to meet pupils from different schools and areas across Bradford.

Sharing Assemblies

Once a year, pupils at Ascot Heath CE Junior School take part in Sharing Assemblies. Pupils individually present for between 3 and 5 minutes on a topic of their choice. Their class teacher helps them prepare the presentation, which is delivered to the whole school of 240 pupils, staff, and parents.

Katie Browne, a class teacher, explains that the assemblies complement what is happening in the classroom:

Pupils feel the Sharing Assemblies are valuable, increasing their and their peers' confidence:

"I think it does help because they've had that experience of speaking in front of the whole school, … and so speaking in front of their class doesn't seem like such a big thing"

Katie Browne, year 6 class teacher

"I was really nervous and stuff, but once you just sit down and it's over and done with you feel really proud of yourself"

Ella, year 6 pupil

"It makes [quiet pupils] more confident. …They speak out more in class, they use it in the assembly, and start using it out in the playground. … They do [it], and they gain confidence and then they can do other things"

George, year 6 pupil

Helping all pupils become public speakers

School 21 works with all its secondary pupils as part of its Ignite programme, in which pupils work towards and then deliver five minute presentations without notes. Year 7s build up their knowledge, confidence and skills for this as part of their work in oracy lessons, and pupils in years 8 to 11 work towards it in coaching groups of around ten pupils.

The focus for each year group is different, and cumulatively builds pupils' skills as public speakers. For example, year 7s deliver presentations on a topic about which they feel passionate, year 8s give presentations about a topic in which they have special expertise, and year 9s debate an issue of political significance.

"In year 7 children come in and everyone's got different levels of speaking, and by the end of the year every single pupil has delivered a five minutes, no notes speech. … Pupils don't [always] think at the beginning of the year that they're going to be able to do, so … it has a massive effect on their confidence, and that then supports them as they move up through the school"
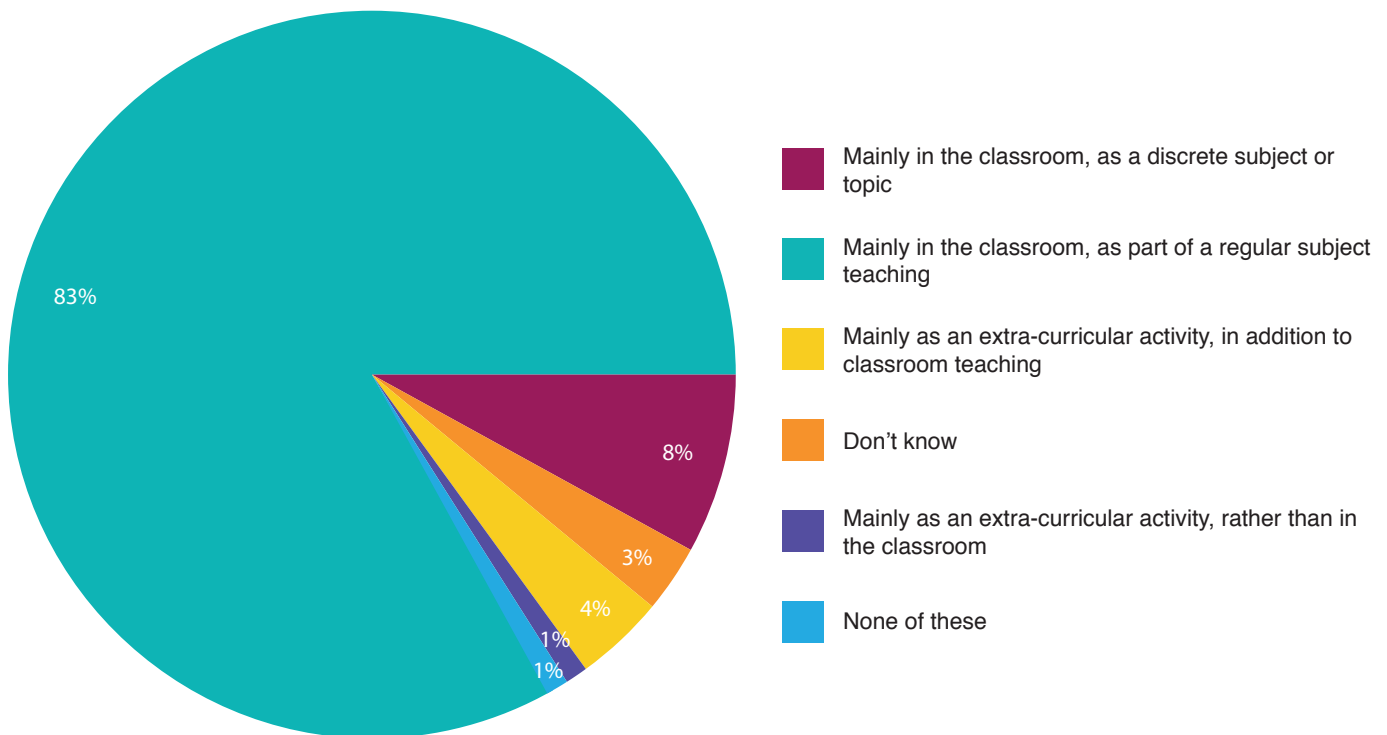
Amy Gaunt, Head of Oracy Primary

"In different year groups it's taught by different teachers, and in that way every teacher has to become a teacher of oracy. There are certain things they can take away for their lessons, and they can see the importance of oracy"

Amy Gaunt, Head of Oracy Primary

Should oracy be embedded across the curriculum or taught discretely?

Teachers overwhelmingly feel oracy should form part of regular teaching, rather than be taught as a separate topic or extra-curricular activity.[xxxi] This view was significantly more common amongst primary and secondary teachers than post-16 of FE teachers although over three quarters of post-16 and FE teachers also believe this.

How should oracy be taught? 👤906

Legend:
- Mainly in the classroom, as a discrete subject or topic
- Mainly in the classroom, as part of a regular subject teaching
- Mainly as an extra-curricular activity, in addition to classroom teaching
- Don't know
- Mainly as an extra-curricular activity, rather than in the classroom
- None of these

Chart values: 83%, 8%, 3%, 4%, 1%, 1%

Teachers' rationale for this approach is that oracy is both a 'generic' process that underpins good teaching and learning, but also because specific spoken language matters in different subjects in different ways:

Some schools, though, feel that teaching oracy discretely helps meet the needs of their pupils more effectively. St Ambrose Barlow RC High School began trialling a discrete oracy curriculum with its 2016/17 year 7 cohort as part of an Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) funded trial of the Voice 21 and University of Cambridge Oracy Framework.[134] Bec Tulloch who teaches there feels that:

> "I don't know I would want to send them to classes in [oracy]. I would prefer it's in every lesson. So if you're doing a science lesson now, what the science teacher is doing is [saying] 'I want you to talk like a scientist'. Oracy is then underpinning my responsibility as a science teacher [to make] you speak like a scientist, read like a scientist, and write like a scientist"
>
> Geoff Barton, King Edward VI School

> "The kids that we're picking up in Salford, they need us to do that, they need to have that space and time where we make it part of the culture of the school. If you ask me in ten years … 'does this school need that?' then maybe we'll be in a different place … but from the point we're starting at where our students have such a weakness that we have noticed and acknowledged, we have to do something about that"
>
> Bec Tulloch, St Ambrose Barlow RC High School

xxxi Practitioners were asked how they thought oracy should be taught, with oracy defined as 'the development of children's capacity to use speech to express their thoughts and communicate with others in education and in life, and talk through which teaching and learning is mediated' (based on Alexander, 2012: 10).

Embedding oracy into learning

The headteacher of Ascot Heath CE Junior School in Berkshire sees oracy as part of the 'tradition' of the school, and she, her staff and her pupils feel it is something that underpins learning across the board.

"The idea that you would articulate your learning and … find out whether you were on the right lines, that's across the board"

Sarah Theaker, Headteacher

"It's probably a really important part of everything I would say, because in every subject you have to do some kind of speaking and whether it's art or science or maths or English, you always have to do some kind of speaking"

Lucy, year 6 pupil

"I would say it's embedded across the curriculum. I don't see it as a separate thing particularly, although sometimes we might identify strengths or difficulties in that area in particular separately to other things"

Katie Browne, year 6 class teacher

Developing a discrete curriculum for oracy

School 21 has devised an oracy curriculum for its year 7 pupils. Each week pupils take part in a discrete lesson focused on building their skills around the 'four strands' of oracy. These are:

The **physical**, including voice and body language

The **linguistic**, including vocabulary, language variety, structure, and rhetorical techniques

The **cognitive**, including content, clarifying and summarising, self-regulation, reasoning, and awareness of one's audience

The **social and emotional**, including working with others, listening and responding, and speaking with confidence

A class teacher explains that one of its benefits is to help 'level the playing field':

"There are discrete oracy sessions because everyone's coming from different schools, they've got different starting points, so [we're] making sure we're introducing some core elements of oracy and speaking to make sure all the pupils are on the same level…. And obviously that then feeds into other lessons as well"

Amy Gaunt, Head of Oracy Primary

Yet the school does not believe oracy always needs to be taught discretely. After year 7 it is embedded throughout the curriculum and at primary level, since class teachers work with the same pupils everyday, it is seen simply part of day-to-day practice:

Peter Hyman, the headteacher does not believe that teaching oracy discretely and embedding it throughout the curriculum are mutually exclusive. He explains, though, that teaching oracy separately can help it spread throughout a school:

"In terms of creating a culture of talk in the classroom it's a lot easier for a primary school teacher because you've got the same pupils all day so you can set up certain routines and practices that you can use across every single lesson"

Amy Gaunt, Head of Oracy Primary

"One of the challenges for oracy … is that people think that because we speak we're doing it anyway, and the thinking behind having a separate curriculum is that you do need structures that give it a boost and make teachers focus on it explicitly, and make students think … we are treating with the same status and recognition that you would with reading and writing"

"We're quite aware that as soon as anything is discrete the danger is that it doesn't then transfer. People think, 'I've done my speaking, I don't need to use those same skills elsewhere', but of course if you do it skilfully then they do transfer…. The single biggest way of doing that is using common language, so we're using the four strands of oracy and every teacher's aware of them, so every teacher can then be referring to them"

"A discrete curriculum should be seen as a sort of pump priming…. If you had a discrete grammar lesson in English where you're teaching systematically how to use an apostrophe you'd expect that to be seen in a history lesson"

Peter Hyman, Executive Headteacher, School 21

Introducing a discrete curriculum for oracy

Chorlton High School in Manchester has introduced a discrete oracy curriculum for its year 7 cohort at the start of the 2016/17 academic year as part of its involvement with the EEF-funded trial of the Voice 21 and University of Cambridge Oracy Framework. The Oracy Framework contains four elements, of which the discrete curriculum is one part. The four elements are:

- An oracy curriculum, which includes dedicated oracy lessonsand body language

- Strategies for building oracy into every lesson

- Strategies for nurturing a whole school oracy culture, including building oracy into assemblies and parents' evenings

- An oracy assessment tool, which was developed in collaboration with Cambridge University and helps teachers to identify specific speaking and listening skills that pupils need to develop and monitor their progress.

New year 7s receive one lesson in oracy a week and this is timetabled as part of their English lessons. Literacy and Language Coordinator Susannah Haygarth believes that the discrete curriculum will help raise the status of oracy throughout the school, and enhance pupils' skills:

"Because [oracy was] not embedded in the curriculum … it was something that people could forget to do, and [say], 'oh yeah, I could have done that, I just didn't because I got so bogged down in everything else'"

"We're training the teachers starting with English, [and] because we teach every single child between us … we're hoping that … we will impact on every student eventually [because] our own knowledge of oracy seeping through into different lessons, that's the idea"

"Our target year is year 7…. We're finding with year 7, because we've caught them straight away, they are just blossoming"

Susannah Haygarth, Literacy and Language Coordinator

5.

What helps and
hinders oracy in
schools?

5. What helps and hinders oracy in schools?

Research indicates teachers' engagement with oracy-based activities can be limited due to:
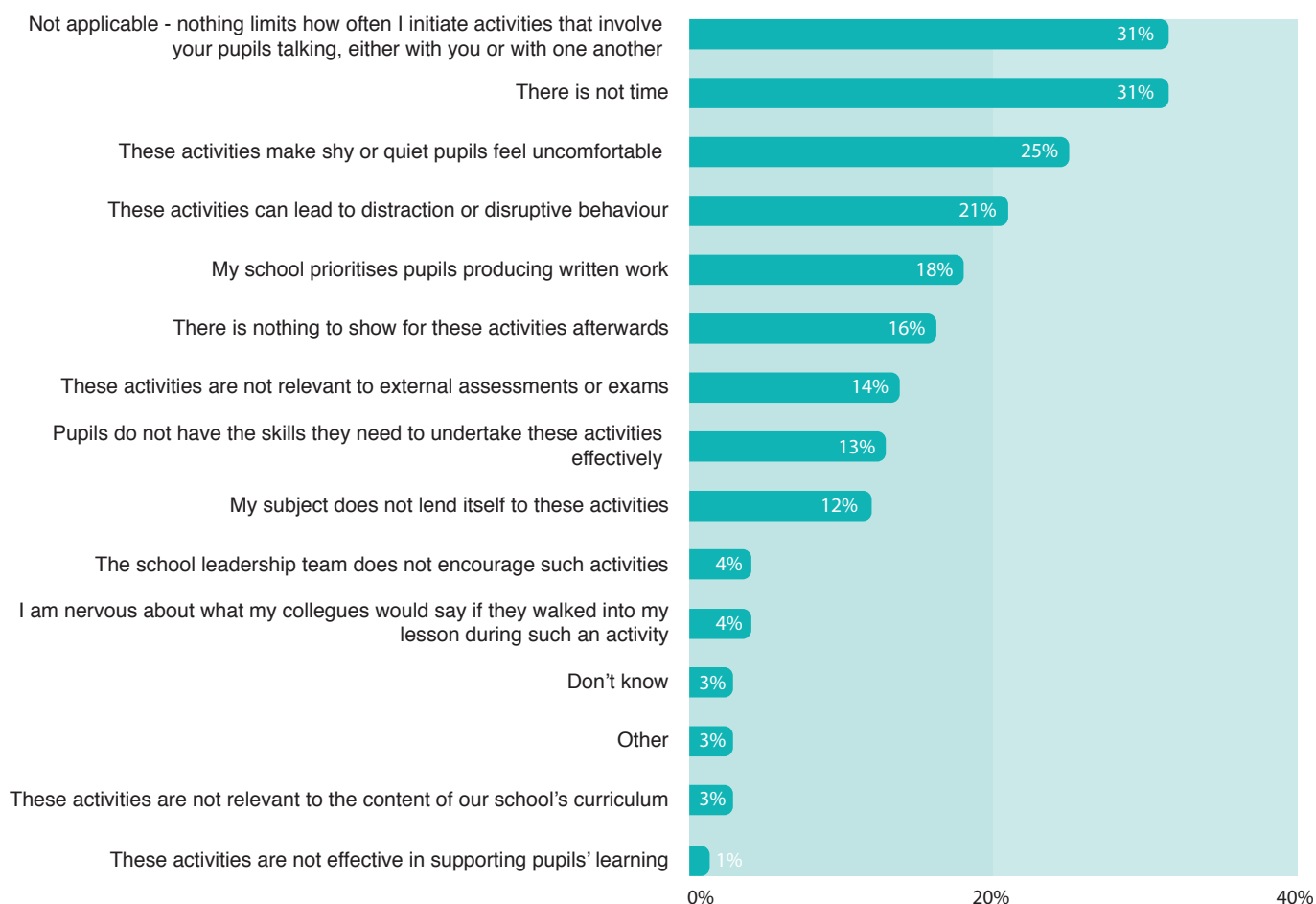
- Pressure to maintain a fast pace to deliver other outcomes[135]

- Insufficient knowledge to confidently model and discuss language with their pupil[136]

- Anxiety about handing control over to pupils, which talk-based activities can entail[137]

Nearly a third of class teachers believe that nothing limits how often they initiate activities involving talk and only a very small proportion overall feel oracy-based activities are not effective in supporting pupils' learning (1%).[xxxii] On the other hand, lack of time and fears about how pupils might respond are important barriers to more widespread use of such activities. These factors are far greater barriers than a lack of willingness on teachers' and schools' part.

Top three factors that can limit secondary school teachers' use of talk (n=409):

- There is not time (32%)

- These activities make shy or quiet pupils feel uncomfortable (32%)

- These activities can lead to distraction or disruptive behaviour (29%)

What limits whether you initiate activities that involve your pupils talking? 👤562

Barrier	%
Not applicable - nothing limits how often I initiate activities that involve your pupils talking, either with you or with one another	31%
There is not time	31%
These activities make shy or quiet pupils feel uncomfortable	25%
These activities can lead to distraction or disruptive behaviour	21%
My school prioritises pupils producing written work	18%
There is nothing to show for these activities afterwards	16%
These activities are not relevant to external assessments or exams	14%
Pupils do not have the skills they need to undertake these activities effectively	13%
My subject does not lend itself to these activities	12%
The school leadership team does not encourage such activities	4%
I am nervous about what my colleagues would say if they walked into my lesson during such an activity	4%
Don't know	3%
Other	3%
These activities are not relevant to the content of our school's curriculum	3%
These activities are not effective in supporting pupils' learning	1%

There are fewer barriers to initiating talk-based activities in independent schools. 39% of those working in independent schools say nothing limits how often they initiate such activities, whereas this is only true of 29% of respondents in local authority schools and 27% in academies or free schools. Interviewees suggest this may be because of the expectations the parents of independent school pupils have that their children will leave school able to speak well, which in turn legitimises teachers' use of talk in lessons.

The prevalence of barriers to talk-based activities also varies between phases. 35% primary school teachers say nothing inhibits how often they initiate talk-based activities, significantly more than the 27% of their secondary counterparts. Over half (55%) of Early Years practitioners say nothing limits the number of talk activities they initiate.

xxxii Practitioners were asked what limits their engagement with oracy, defined as 'the development of children's capacity to use speech to express their thoughts and communicate with others in education and in life, and talk through which teaching and learning is mediated' (based on Alexander, 2012: 10).

Lack of time

Proportion of teachers who feel time is a barrier to initiating oracy-based activities:

10%
Early Years 👤29

30%
Primary 👤251

32%
Secondary 👤409

22%
FE 👤89

Teachers in both primary and secondary settings feel that oracy-based activities can be challenging to manage and are therefore not always time-efficient. Furthermore, several English teachers say the pressures of getting through exam content at Key Stage 4 can inhibit use of talk:

> "We're so pressured for time if I do anything to do with oracy it has to be so rigorous, so tight and I, myself, … feel more tense in those lessons because I can't have a second wasted"
>
> Kate Pretsell[xxxiii]

> "I don't think we have the same problem in the 3 to 11 part of the school, because they don't have that pressure"
>
> Tricia Kelleher, Stephen Perse Foundation

> "We're not as able to [engage in oracy] at Key Stage 4 because of the dictates of the syllabus, there's less time for speaking and listening. Key Stage 4 classes are much more teacher-centred…. You just can't do it. Of course we build in free discussion, but there almost seems to be a, 'phew, we've done what we need to, now let's just have a chat about this'"
>
> Helen Kedie, Stephen Perse Foundation

Some solutions

Jan Carrier is deputy headteacher at Eastwood Primary School. She has worked with teachers who were concerned they did not have time for talk-based activities "because we've got to get them writing."

Eastwood has done several things to overcome these concerns:

- Demonstrating the connection between high quality talk and academic rigour and, consequently, the potential efficiency gains to be secured through talk-based strategies

- Ensuring less confident teachers work with more experienced and adept teachers to plan opportunities for talk

- At primary school level, not formally timetabling subjects so teachers can "take the time they need"

Amy Gaunt is a year 4 teacher at School 21. She believes that scaffolding can play an important role in giving teachers more time, by providing structures to support and embed quality talk:

> "If teachers think 'we're wasting time' or 'we're spending too long talking' [then] maybe that means that the talk hasn't been scaffolded correctly. If you're doing really good talk and they're working really well, then it really will support thinking about those [learning] outcomes"
>
> Amy Gaunt, Head of Oracy Primary

xxxiii Head of English at Ark Burlington Danes Academy in Hammersmith and Fulham (key informant interview).

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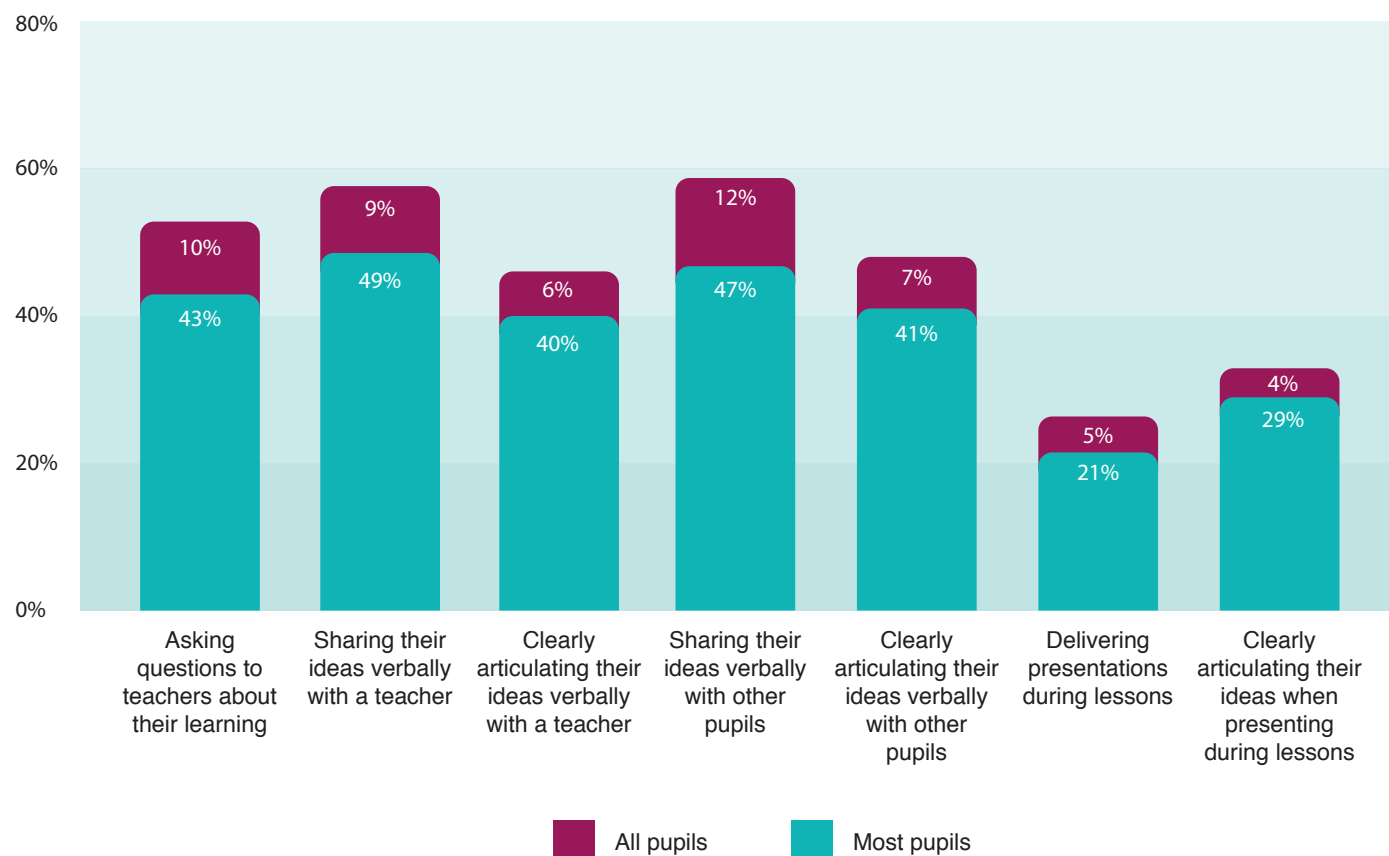# Fear of negative effects for pupils

Pupils' confidence

There is a worrying tendency for pupils' low confidence and ability in oracy to result in teachers avoiding oracy-based activities. Yet this does nothing but further exacerbate the problem resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Secondary school practitioners are particularly concerned about talk-based activities negatively impacting on certain groups of pupils. Nearly a third (32%) fear that such activities might make shy or quiet pupils feel uncomfortable, and a similar proportion (29%) fear that they might lead to distraction or disruptive behaviour. These are both significantly higher proportions than in primary.

> "We just haven't forced the kids to talk before. Kids who didn't want to said, 'I don't know' or 'I'm shy' and just didn't ever have to do it, and suddenly they're finding themselves being told, 'no no, you're going to do it', 'no no that's not good enough, do it again', and both students are reluctant to do that, but also teachers are a bit reluctant to go down that route of saying 'no no, that's not good enough, do it again'
>
> Andrew Fitch, Highbury Grove School

Low confidence in oracy is a particular problem in secondary schools where teachers are significantly more likely than primary practitioners to say fewer than half of their pupils are confident sharing and articulating ideas with the teacher, other pupils, or presenting during lessons. Several teachers we spoke to suggest a reason for this may be that, at secondary, pupils are more likely to feel socially anxious. Unfortunately, while oracy presents opportunities to help these pupils overcome social anxiety, this anxiety can hamper pupils' and teachers' willingness to engage with such activities in the first place.

What proportion of pupils do teachers believe are confident in the following areas? 👤906

Area	Most pupils	All pupils
Asking questions to teachers about their learning	43%	10%
Sharing their ideas verbally with a teacher	49%	9%
Clearly articulating their ideas verbally with a teacher	40%	6%
Sharing their ideas verbally with other pupils	47%	12%
Clearly articulating their ideas verbally with other pupils	41%	7%
Delivering presentations during lessons	21%	5%
Clearly articulating their ideas when presenting during lessons	29%	4%

Legend: ■ All pupils ■ Most pupils

In contrast, teachers working in independent schools are significantly more likely than their colleagues in the state sector to feel all their pupils are confident asking questions or articulating their ideas with a teacher. They are also more likely to say most of their pupils are confident articulating ideas with other pupils, and giving presentations during lessons. Interviewees in one independent school highlight the contribution to this made by pupils' high cultural capital and independent schools' often selective admissions processes:

> "They've been encouraged since babyhood to be communicators, and therefore I think we're working with children who are very accustomed to communicating extremely comfortably in a way that comes naturally to them. We're a selective school, so by the time they've joined us they're able to read and write, and as part of the entrance assessment we would be talking to them"
>
> Katie Milne,
> Stephen Perse Foundation

Anxiety around talk

Pupils' feelings about talk and speaking out publicly can vary with age as Mark Crossley, an English teacher at King Edward VI School, explains.

> "We've just taken on years 7 and 8s, and they come with a certain willingness to stand and talk about themselves…. They haven't got to the really awkward stage yet where they suddenly lose the confidence to do that because they're worried about how they are perceived. [In contrast] Year 9 can be more awkward about it…. One of their first responses can be, 'we're not going to have to talk about this in front of people are we?'"
>
> Mark Crossley, English teacher

Mark highlights particular strategies that can help reduce pupils' social anxiety pupils around public speaking. He argues that encouraging pupils to work and present in pairs or groups can help build confidence and that giving pupils time to consider their response before answering a question can increase the depth of verbal dialogue in lessons. Encouraging pupils to deliver presentations, however, can still be particularly difficult:

> "I think they're a lot happier in groups. We don't do a lot of standing up and making speeches – they're much less happy about that"
>
> Mark Crossley, English teacher

Pupils agree that class-based talk can make them feel embarrassed. Comparing debating outside the classroom with talk-based activities in the classroom, one pupil says:

> "Debating helps more than it does in the classroom…. I find it much harder if a teacher calls on you to speak in a classroom…. In a classroom almost if you express an opinion, it's not the coolest thing to do, so it's a completely different atmosphere in terms of speaking and listening. Teachers help it, but I don't always think it's the best for the under confident kids in the class"
>
> Olivia, year 13 pupil

Behaviour

Teachers can worry that oracy-based activities will negatively impact on noise and behaviour. A number of interviewees feel they or their colleagues limit the extent to which they initiate such activities, fearing they will 'undo' work to reduce low-level disruption in their lessons.

Others acknowledge that the uncertainty talk-based tasks involve can also be off-putting:

> "Half the battle for teachers here is stopping [the pupils] talking, so why would we want them to make them do more of it, and why is that a thing and why does it matter? It doesn't have that status, it never has done before, because of that fear and reluctance"
>
> Andrew Fitch, Highbury Grove School

> "Getting children to discuss things is uncomfortable. You don't know what they're going to say, they make a noise, you might not feel comfortable, you might think that a noisy classroom is a sign of the teacher not being in control of what's happening"
>
> Rachel Forward, King Edward VI School

Some solutions

There are a range of strategies that can help combat teachers' and pupils' fears about these negative effects.

- Susannah Haygarth (Literacy and Language Coordinator at Chorlton High School) believes it is important to 'keep up the momentum' as pupils enter year 7, and set an expectation immediately that talk is part of the learning ethos of the school

- Vicki Barsby (an English teacher at Highbury Grove School) suggests celebrating what high quality talk can do for teachers' relationships with their pupils, both in terms of teaching, learning and assessment, but also in terms of forming closer and more trusting ties with pupils

- Bec Tulloch (a drama teacher and SLE at St Ambrose Barlow RC High School) says a critical first step for her school has been setting ground rules for talk that include discussing explicitly how pupils will react to one another's contributions. This includes discussing listening skills and eye contact

- Mark Crossley, (an English teacher at King Edward VI School) and Peter Hyman (headteacher at School 21) believe that giving pupils an opportunity to discuss ideas in pairs or groups can take the pressure off them, giving them time to formulate and vet their responses before talking in front of the class

Amy Gaunt (Head of Oracy Primary, School 21) suggests using:

- Sentence stems, which can free pupils up to think about what they are saying rather than how they are saying it

- Discussion guidelines, making sure pupils invite their quieter peers to contribute

- 'Call and repeat' to introduce new sentence stems, vocabulary or phrases. The teacher says it and the class respond. Pupils can also practice in groups or pairs. This means the teacher does not need to single out individual pupils when introducing new vocabulary or sentences

- Individualised targets for quiet or shy pupils, with a teacher saying, for example, 'I really want you to offer one reflection this lesson'

- Discussion counters, which pupils can 'spend' in order to make contributions during lessons. Teachers might, for example, ask quiet pupils to 'spend' two counters in a day

- Tallies to count each pupil's contributions. The teacher can then use questioning to target quieter or withdrawn pupils as appropriate

Prioritisation

Almost one in five teachers state that the frequency with which they initiate talk-based activities is sometimes limited by the fact that their school prioritises pupils producing written work.

In England one reason for teachers' concerns around prioritisation might be the relative weight given to different skills by the curriculum and exam specifications. One teacher describes changes to the primary curriculum as "dramatic" and believes that some class teachers may have been left with the impression pupils can only develop academically by writing. Two secondary English teachers particularly point to revisions to the GCSE framework, which now includes a spoken language component that has to be assessed but which does not count towards pupils' final grades. They argue that this can lead teachers to prioritise writing above all else.

Several interviewees in primary and secondary schools say that anxiety over what Ofsted wants to see in lessons might inhibit some teachers from using talk more often. Specifically, they feel some teachers might be concerned if pupils do not write enough in their books.

This can mean teachers who value oracy 'drop it' in order to prioritise the development of other skills, or simply to get through other content.

The perceived need for a tangible 'output' from an activity can exacerbate the prioritisation of writing over oracy.

> "I get the impression some teachers are scared of spending time doing [talk-based tasks], just having people talking in a class, and they think that if somebody comes in it looks like nobody's doing anything, and they've got nothing to show for it at the end of the lesson"
>
> Mark Crossley, King Edward VI School

Raising the status of GCSE Spoken Language

Mark Crossley is Key Stage 4 Coordinator at King Edward VI School. He says that teachers and pupils may prioritise other areas of GCSE English now the spoken language component does not count towards final grades. Despite his belief in the importance of spoken language, he says:

> "It's now a box you have to tick, but it doesn't actually count towards anything"
>
> Mark Crossley,
> English Teacher and Key Stage 4 Coordinator

To counteract this he says the school is 'formalising' the process of assessment so that it has status. He says the approach will be comparable to what would happen for an oral assessment in a language exam:

• Pupils will be taken off-timetable to give their presentations

• They will present to an English teacher in a separate and quiet space, but not their regular subject teacher

• Pupils will prepare and practise set presentations throughout the year

• Presentations will be filmed

Some solutions

Riz Saleem is a year 6 teacher at Eastwood Primary School. She says that when she began using talk-based activities in her lessons she felt anxious about not having anything to show for them:

> "When I started using talk, I thought, 'the children aren't writing anything down…. I've done a talk activity all lesson, what do I place in their books as evidence?'"
>
> Riz Saleem, year 6 class teacher

She was also concerned that this would mean the pupils would "think they're not working when they're talking."

Riz says three things helped her move beyond this:

- A supportive school ethos that values and endorses talking in lessons
- Gathering different forms of evidence from video footage, photographs, and diary logs
- Setting ground rules for talk with her pupils, and explaining why talk-based activities are important

Interviewees all feel that, ultimately, embedding oracy is about mindset. School leaders should be vocal and consistent in their support of oracy in order to give classroom teachers the confidence to move it up their agenda. Amy Gaunt, a class teacher at School 21, suggests:

> "I think a lot of it is about a mentality shift [so that] it's seen that it's not an addition to the curriculum, it's how you deliver the curriculum"
>
> Amy Gaunt, Head of Oracy Primary, School 21

Lack of confidence and expertise

Despite emphasising oracy's importance in supporting pupils' development in a range of areas and even though they report frequently using strategies to support oracy, over half of all teachers (57%) say they have not received any training in oracy in the last three years (n=906). Furthermore, more than half (53%) would not know where to go if they needed information about oracy. This is a particular problem for secondary teachers, who are significantly less likely to know where to go for further information about oracy than their primary or FE counterparts.

Secondary and FE teachers are significantly more likely to say they have not received any training in the last three years. Again, this may be linked to subject specialism given that 68% of maths teachers and 71% of science teachers said they have not received any training in oracy over the last three years.

"My school has not provided or arranged any training for me on oracy in the last 3 years"

| 45%	42%	61%	65%
Early Years 👤 29	Primary 👤 251	Secondary 👤 409	FE 👤 89

Worryingly, fewer than half of teachers consider themselves 'very confident' when it comes to:

- Explaining the technicalities of language to pupils
- Creating an environment in their classrooms in which oracy is valued

Teachers particularly lack confidence in relation to 'explaining the technicalities of language', with one in ten saying they lack in confidence in this area. [xxxiv] On the other hand, most teachers are 'very confident' about modelling the spoken language they expect their pupils to use during lessons. As we have explored, though, 'modelling' can mean different things to different teachers, so teachers' confidence in this area may conceal a variety of classroom practices.

Teachers' confidence in different aspects of oracy 👤 906
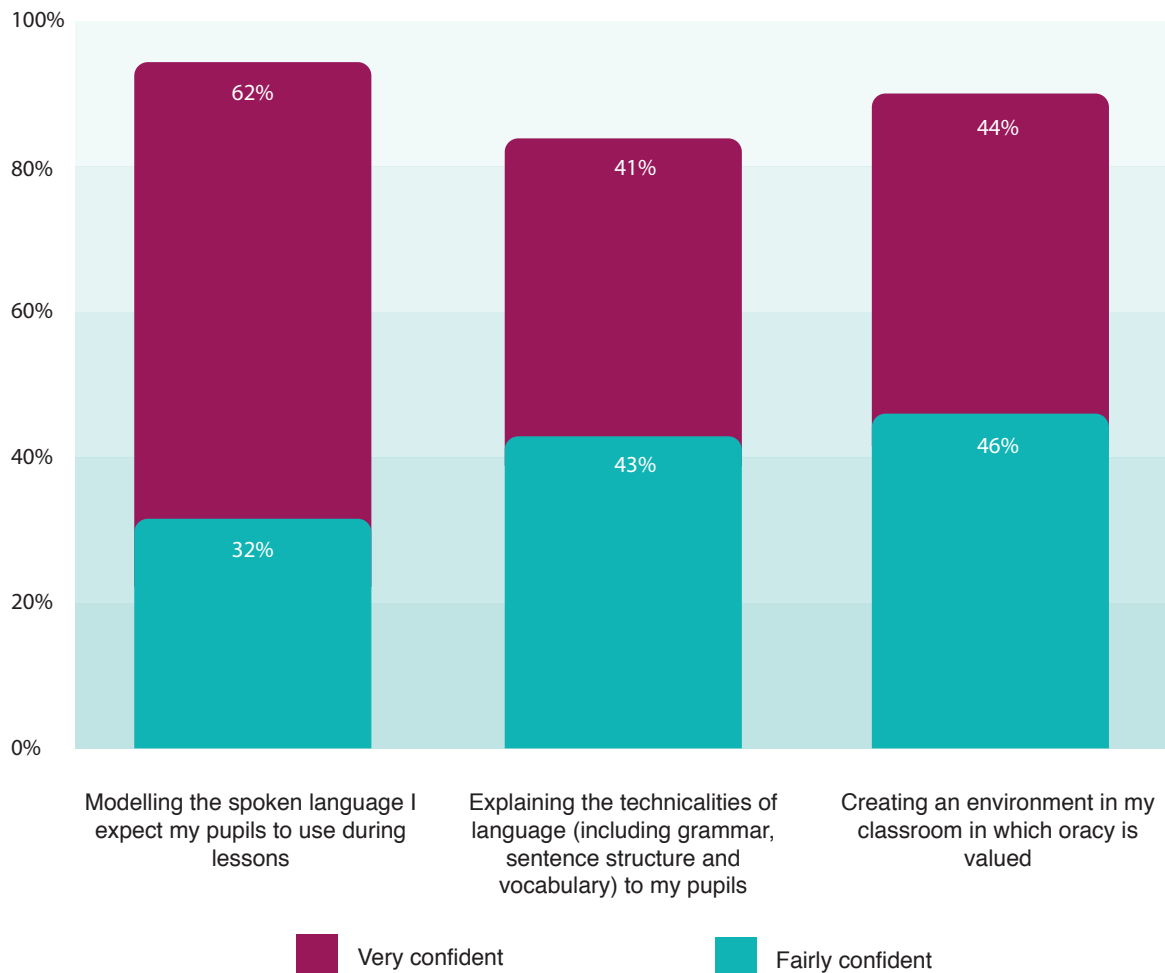
These findings have parallels with previous research suggesting that teachers' lack of knowledge about language can be a barrier to quality talk in the classroom.[138,139]
Confidence deficits in this area may be due to:

• Teachers' limited knowledge of language, and their ability to use this to advance pupils' understanding, or;

• Teachers' perception of their own knowledge of language, and subsequent willingness to talk about language in lessons and engage in talk-based practice

Professor Maurice Galton believes teachers' anxiety about their own subject knowledge, or their belief in how knowledge should be acquired, can also play a part. Namely if teachers feel in principle it is their role and not their pupils' to contribute to knowledge and understanding in the classroom they may feel reluctant to engage in oracy-based activities. Related, teachers may feel concern that oracy might 'open a can of worms' by taking learning in unexpected or unplanned directions.

Furthermore, he feels, "teaching is by large a conservative profession and they find it very hard to change."[xxxv] This is something several interviewees in our case studies also feel. The most common sources of advice that teachers would turn to in order to address any confidence deficits are the internet or a colleague at school, and two interviewees described the particular role that a single colleague can play in mobilising knowledge in relation to oracy.

Some solutions

Every other Wednesday at Highbury Grove School teaching finishes at 2pm, and staff receive two hours of training. Staff can join a 'rhetoric and oracy' stream that explores the theory and rationale for oracy-based teaching methods as well as practical ways in which teachers of different subjects could improve their practice. Andrew Fitch explains:

> "The idea is that those teachers then go back to their departments, and during their department training they will feed in some of that, and over several years … as teachers don't do the same stream, we'll create enough of a body of teachers who feel at least more confident to … start trying to lay that foundation"
>
> Andrew Fitch, Head of English and Director for Spoken Literacy

Vicki Barsby took part in the CPD stream, and says:

> "What was useful was talking to other staff about what they do […and hearing about] actual things that I can physically do in the classroom, …and coming back together, and talking through how it went"
>
> Vicki Barsby, English teacher

According to Vicki, the training helped teachers learn about talk's relevance and importance and gave them a chance to discuss how it could be applied in their classes.

Riz Saleem says training can send a signal to staff that a school is serious about supporting a particular approach to teaching and learning. Opportunities to share and evaluate ideas with colleagues are also critical:

> "The reason I feel confident is because we have enough training in school, and we have staff meetings and all teachers come and share ideas, we have joint planning sessions…. If we do ever feel that an activity isn't working for our own group we always re-evaluate and ask somebody else for an idea"
>
> Riz Saleem, year 6 class teacher

Jan Carrier explains that even where teachers do not receive 'formal' training, the school expects its more experienced teachers to plan with less experienced staff as part of their development.

School 21 believes that staff should not have to sit through training unless it is of a quality comparable to what it would offer its pupils. In addition to receiving two hours of training each week, the school uses experiential CPD to encourage the spread of ideas and skills. Amy Gaunt and Peter Hyman both explain assemblies are a good opportunity for staff and pupils alike to model great oracy. Assemblies help reinforce a school culture that values and encourages active talking and listening, but also provide an opportunity for staff to see how other teachers develop oracy.

Subject relevance

A number of interviewees argue that achieving consistency of approach across subjects can be a challenge to effective practice, particularly at secondary and FE level.

> "[Staff] know that it ought to be a priority…. They've heard me talking endlessly about all this, and therefore I think they would know that it's important, but the reality is that I don't see [it] as much as I ought to"
>
> Geoff Barton, King Edward VI School

This is partly because of the differences between subjects. Interviewees feel that some teachers do not believe oracy is relevant or important in their subject, and some do not believe it is an effective way to teach. As one English teacher put it, "I know individual teachers who just make it difficult, who say, 'you can't do that in science'."

The applicability of oracy-based activities is more obvious to teachers of some subjects than others. Maths and science teachers, for example, are significantly more likely to feel oracy-based activities are not relevant in their subject than English or history teachers.[xxxvi]

"My subject does not lend itself to these activities"
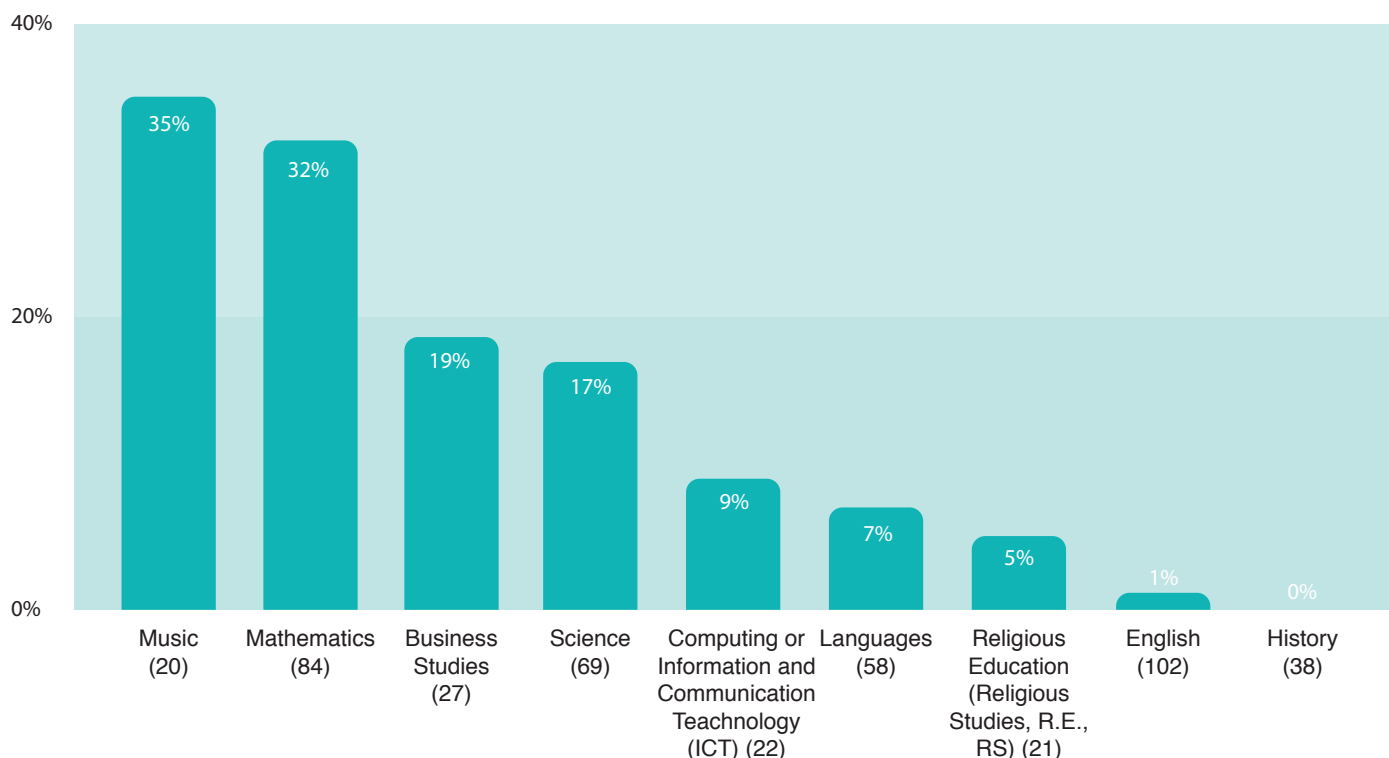
"We have some drama teachers who teach English and when you go into their classroom nobody's ever sitting there writing, they're always talking and acting and doing much more active things, so it depends very much on your teacher"

Mark Crossley, King Edward VI School

Difficulties in seeing links between oracy and certain subjects are not limited to secondary school teachers, however. Primary teachers can also find it challenging to embed oracy across the full range of subjects as Pip Bailey, a Year 1 teacher at Green Lane Primary School, explains:

"We do a lot of art, but do I really sit and discuss what they've done and how they've created it? I guess maybe not! We do a lot of discussion in science, we do loads of predicting work and speaking in full sentences then, but maybe [not in] art in terms of the discussion"

Pip Bailey, Green Lane Primary School

Some solutions

The teachers we spoke to acknowledge that encouraging teachers across all subjects to give oracy the same status can be challenging. Indeed, most feel that natural opportunities present themselves in some subjects or topics more than others.

Andrew Fitch at Highbury Grove School and Rachel Forward at King Edward VI School suggest encouraging departments to explore how oracy-based strategies can complement and extend what is already happening in their areas. This might include finding opportunities for:

- Open-ended questioning in maths
- Discussing complex topics in science
- Evaluating designs and projects verbally in design and technology

xxxvi The graph does not include subjects with sample sizes below 20.

School leaders

Support from senior leaders plays a critical role in increasing the status and uptake of oracy-based teaching strategies across a school. Several interviewees argue that it would be near impossible to embed such approaches without support from leadership.

Linking oracy to Ofsted

Susannah Haygarth is Literacy and Language Coordinator at Chorlton High School in Manchester. She explains that leaders in her school feel oracy will help her school improve its Ofsted rating in light of recent inspection feedback that suggests pupils should be invited to contribute more in class discussions:

"We had Ofsted at the end of July in the last week before we broke up, and we got 'Good' and we felt that we nearly got 'Outstanding', …and now what we feel is needed to push up to 'Outstanding' as a school is almost like reaching for the next level, the next level of learning, and we think that oracy is really going to elevate us and our kids to be able to do things that they couldn't do before"

Susannah Haygarth, Chorlton High School

Given school leadership's enthusiasm, the challenge at Chorlton High School is now one of delivery rather than mindset:

"At the very top our school leaders one hundred per cent believe that talk is the precursor to good learning … but I think for a lot of schools nowadays that is a complete shift [in thinking…]. What we have to do now is, it's not teachers taking it seriously, it's us as leaders within the school making [oracy] a reality. It's that culture shift"

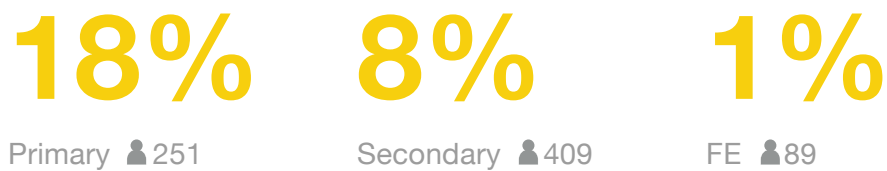Susannah Haygarth, Language and Literacy Coordinator, Chorlton High School

Furthermore, while our survey indicates few school leaders actively discourage oracy, many interviewees feel that school leaders rarely actively endorse it or, more importantly, make it a priority in their school. This can be because they have other priorities, believe oracy happens 'anyway', or do not think it is relevant.

Interviewees suggest that one way to 'deliver' oracy is to have a named person take responsibility for it, helping raise its status and improving classroom practice. Yet this approach remains rare, with just over a tenth of survey respondents aware of someone in their school holding such a role.[xxxvii]

xxxvii Practitioners were asked about who at their school is responsible for oracy, with oracy defined as 'the development of children's capacity to use speech to express their thoughts and communicate with others in education and in life, and talk through which teaching and learning is mediated' (based on Alexander, 2012: 10).

Who is responsible for oracy in your school? 👤 906

Legend:
- **A colleague at another school**
- **A university (i.e. resources provided by a certain institution)**
- **Social media (e.g. blogs, Twitter etc.)**
- **Other**

Pie chart values: 33%, 30%, 26%, 11%
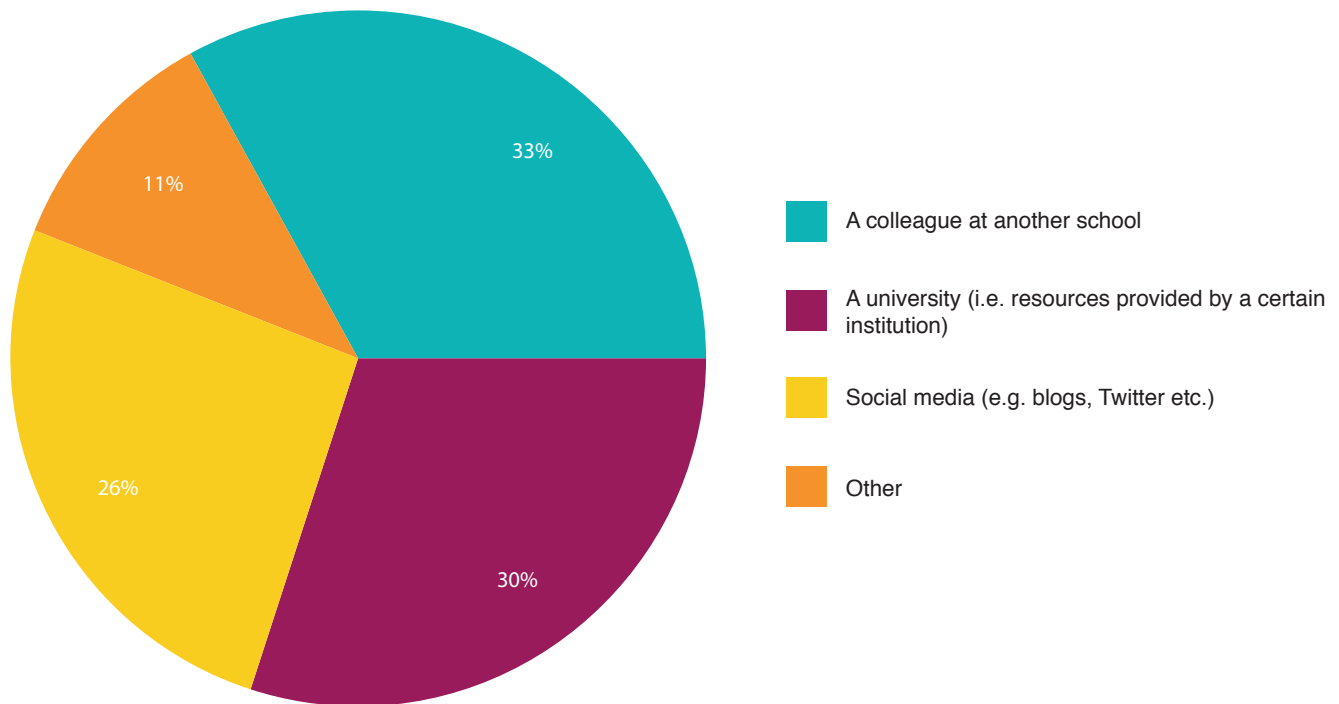
% teachers by phase who say one person has responsibility for oracy in their school:

18%
Primary 👤 251

8%
Secondary 👤 409

1%
FE 👤 89

% teachers by school type who say more than one person has responsibility for oracy in their school:

32%
Independent 👤 109

42%
Special / AP / PRU 👤 33

18%
Academy/free school 👤 205
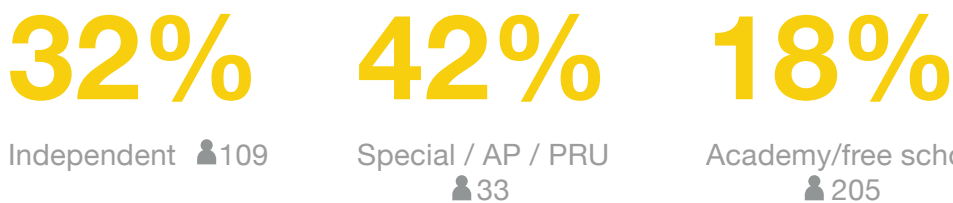
% subject teachers who don't know who is responsible for oracy in their school:

30%
Maths 👤 84

16%
English 👤 102

In special schools this may be because multiple members of staff have responsibility for different specialist areas of speech, language and communication provision. Equally, it may be that staff in these settings are more likely to see oracy as everyone's responsibility. One special school teacher says she thinks that having one person take responsibility might be useful in initially raising the profile of oracy but that, ultimately ,"I don't think it should lodge with one person."

Independent school leaders and teachers, equally, say that having a single person responsible for oracy might lead to oracy's implementation in silos rather than across the school.

> "A lot of it happens in the everyday engagement with the teacher. For us it's not a bolt on, it's just there, and it's what's expected….
> It's part of the DNA of the school"
>
> Tricia Kelleher, Stephen Perse Foundation

Teachers are ambivalent about whether or not one person should be responsible for oracy, with a third (37%) saying they feel one person should be and a little under a third (29%) saying they should not. (n=906)

Establishing oracy as a whole-school priority

Bec Tulloch is a class teacher at St Ambrose Barlow RC High School in Salford, and leads the school's involvement with an EEF-funded trial of the Voice 21 and University of Cambridge Oracy Framework. She explains that while the school has been rated 'Outstanding' for many years, the headteacher and many of the staff believed oracy would enable the school to enhance its provision. Two strategies paved a way forward:

- Bec 'championed' oracy, instigating the school's involvement with the EEF trial and raising oracy's profile among teachers

- The school conducted a full audit, taking into account pupils', parents', and teachers' opinions. The school's ability to support pupils' spoken communication emerged as a key shortfall in its provision

Bec says:

> "It's come from the parents, it's come from the students, it's come from the teachers, so there's a real sense of us all agreeing that this is something we want to resolve, and that we as a school community need to think about and look at.
>
> We were floundering … we haven't got a strong tradition of oral speaking. We had a strong tradition at our old school of quiet, courteous behaviour … but within that a sense that the kids were constricted…. Staff are frustrated, I think, [and saying] to me 'I want them to talk … I need them to talk to each other, I really need them to debate these ideas, and they just don't want to, and so it's that sense that it's a skill that we dropped"
>
> Bec Tulloch, Drama Teacher and SLE

Bec feels that the Oracy Framework will help embed oracy across the school. The school would not be part of the trial without the support of senior leaders in the first instance. Bec therefore believes that securing senior support is a crucial first step for schools looking to develop oracy practice.

Championing oracy from the top

Jan Carrier is deputy headteacher at Eastwood Primary School, and believes a 'top-down' approach is exactly what is needed if oracy is to gain traction and sustainability across a school. Jan explains that at her school, senior level support means a consistent case for oracy can be made. Her colleague Riz agrees:

> "That's the reason why we move forward, and that's the reason why each year we do not have to teach the same basic talk skills and oracy skills, because it's already embedded"
>
> Riz Saleem, year 6 class teacher

Headteacher Sarah Theaker takes her role in championing oracy seriously, continuously encouraging her team at Ascot Heath CE Junior School to think about opportunities to use oracy as part of the day-to-day process of classroom teaching:

> "When they're planning, teachers are asked to give careful consideration to a mix of thinking tasks, to spoken tasks, to opportunities for independent work, paired work, collaborative work, verbal feedback and peer feedback. Some lessons we have talk partners, [in which you] turn to the person next to you, explain your idea, refine it, and report back…. So teachers are asked to consider when it will be more appropriate to have a verbal task or recorded task"
>
> Sarah Theaker, Headteacher

On the other hand, even where the headteacher and senior team believe oracy is important, gaining traction can still be tricky as Andrew Fitch explains:

> "I think still there's an element of top-down about the oracy agenda here. I think it's still Tom (the head), leadership and me, trying to get people down and doing it"
>
> Andrew Fitch,
> Head of English and Director of Spoken Literacy

Peter Hyman, headteacher at School 21, explains that any initiative being introduced needs careful thought and delivery, but that it stands greater likelihood of success if motivated teachers take charge:

> "I don't think this is any different to any other initiative in school. If you're doing it so that it's got the most impact, and we think a lot about it here, you have to make it peer led, …you get a group of teachers together who want to do it and can shape it in their own way, it's not me as a headteacher saying 'now we need to do it in a particular way', so you're providing them with the framework within which brilliant teachers can populate it with [ideas that will] work for those students"
>
> Peter Hyman, Executive Headteacher, School 21

Some solutions

The senior teams at both Eastwood and Green Lane primary schools say they have taken steps to formalise their schools' commitment to oracy. Both encourage pupils to contribute to assemblies on a weekly basis, but in addition they:

- Specifically reference pupils' spoken language and communication in their school development plans

- Encourage pupils to participate in debating clubs

- Feedback to parents on the quality of pupils' contributions in lessons during reporting cycles

- Feedback to teachers after lesson observations and learning walks on the quality of verbal interactions that have been observed

These systems reinforce and build on what happens in individual classrooms, ensuring the quality of pupils' spoken language remains a priority for all staff.

A number of schools say they nominate oracy 'champions' to help push the issue up the agenda.

School leaders really buy into the importance of oracy if it links fundamentally to their ability to extend their school's capacity and provision. This may happen through school inspection feedback, but can also (and perhaps more straightforwardly) be achieved by conducting an audit of teachers', parents' and pupils' opinions.

6.

Conclusions

Conclusions

This report finds that while teachers say oracy matters hugely, they are concerned that quality in classrooms varies greatly. Furthermore, few schools do more than ask pupils to speak in assemblies, and a minority provide training for teachers in oracy. In the longer-term a change of mindset so that teachers and schools recognise that oracy is as critical for pupils' development as literacy and numeracy will mean more pupils both gain access to and develop their oracy. We suggest below a number of practical steps would help set this in motion.

Key findings

This report set out to answer four questions:

What is oracy?

- Oracy can be defined as the development of children's capacity to use speech to express their thoughts and communicate with others in education and in life, and talk through which teaching and learning is mediated.[xxxviii]
- Teachers recognise that oracy can represent both learning to talk and learning through talk.
- Primary teachers are more likely to emphasise 'exploratory' talk compared to their secondary colleagues, who in turn stress the importance of 'final draft' language used in presentations and debates.

Does oracy matter?

- Our synthesis of existing research, and our survey findings, case studies, and interviews with key informants show that oracy possesses a broad range of educational and personal benefits.
- Teachers across the country feel oracy is critically important, and are more likely to say it is 'very important' they develop pupils' skills in oracy than in numeracy (although in practice this does not always play out, with factors including a lack of time limiting the quality and consistency of oracy in lessons).
- Teachers feel oracy is valuable because it can underpin pupils' development linguistically, socially and emotionally. Given the importance placed by employers on the ability to communicate, though, teachers surprisingly do not tend to link oracy with pupils' economic and employment prospects.
- Teachers primarily view the benefits of oracy in terms of their own pupils' needs. Teachers working with more disadvantaged pupils feel strongly that oracy will help their pupils develop the skills they need to succeed in school, and later in life.

How do teachers and schools develop oracy?

- While teachers report regularly using pedagogy that supports oracy, interviewees express concern that classroom provision is patchy.
- In general schools do little to support and extend opportunities for oracy, with a minority doing more than asking pupils to present occasionally in assemblies. Few schools evaluate the quality of pupils' verbal contributions in lessons or communicate with parents about their children's oracy.
- Teachers in our survey overwhelmingly feel oracy is best incorporated into regular classroom teaching, but a number of interviewees say that teaching oracy discretely can both increase its status and ensure pupils from all backgrounds develop confidence and ability as spoken communicators.

What helps and hinders oracy in schools?

- Despite the fact that teachers believe oracy underpins pupils' academic and personal development, many seem to see oracy as a 'nice to have' rather than something essential.
- Six key things stand in the way of more consistent and better quality oracy: a lack of time, confidence and expertise, and support from school leadership; a fear about possible negative effects; prioritising other skills and tasks, and; believing that oracy is not relevant in a particular subject.
- Strikingly while a majority of teachers in our sample say they believe oracy is 'very important' and that it should generally be incorporated into regular classroom teaching, less than half say they have received training in oracy in the last three years. On top of this 53% would not know where to look for further information about oracy if they needed it.

Ways forward

1. School leaders should ensure adequate time is set aside for the preparation and assessment of pupils' GCSE spoken language to give it the status it deserves.

2. School leaders should ensure all teachers receive timely and relevant training to help them strengthen and widen their pedagogic repertoires.

3. School leaders should write oracy into their school's development plan, curriculum, or teaching and learning policy to position oracy at the heart of their school's practice.

4. School leaders should adopt a common name for oracy in their settings, and ensure teachers are familiar with this and use it consistently. This would help improve awareness of and engagement with oracy, and in turn the quality and consistency of classroom practice.

5. School leaders should appoint an oracy champion or ask each year group or subject department to plan opportunities for pupils to develop skills in oracy, to increase engagement with oracy across the curriculum.

6. School leaders and class teachers should champion the role oracy can play in supporting pupils' cognitive, civic and economic development, as well its linguistic, social and emotional benefits. This would increase oracy's relevance as part of everyday teaching and learning.

7. School leaders and class teachers should use approaches to formative assessment such as skilful questioning and giving feedback to learners on the form and content of their verbal contributions to boost pupils' skills in oracy.

8. School leaders and class teachers should receive regular feedback on theirs and their pupils' oracy as part of formal and informal lesson observation feedback, and reflect on the purpose of talk in their lessons.

9. School leaders and class teachers should adopt a 'no excuses' attitude towards oracy, making it clear that all pupils will develop strong spoken language, and that support will be in place to help pupils who are under skilled or under confident. This will put oracy on a par with literacy and numeracy, and help all pupils develop excellent speaking, listening and thinking skills.

10. School leaders and class teachers should provide a mix of activities that enable pupils to practice and develop different types of talk in lessons and across the school, ensuring pupils are exposed to a range of opportunities and contexts for meaningful talk.

11. Organisations such as Voice 21, universities, multi-academy trusts and local authorities should create and share a range of resources that will help school leaders and class teachers develop their pupils' oracy. These resources should include written and videoed examples of best practice, and pointers for practitioners with different levels of experience and confidence, enhancing the consistency and quality of oracy across the sector.

12. Organisations such as Voice 21 and universities should continue to develop and promote a common language for and shared understanding of what is meant by 'oracy'. This could involve sharing frameworks that help teachers understand what oracy is and its benefits, improving the consistency of oracy across the sector.

13. Policymakers, organisations such as Voice 21, universities, multi-academy trusts (MATs) and local authorities, and school leaders should promote oracy as a comprehensive entitlement for all pupils, but particularly for those attending schools in areas of high deprivation.

7.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Methodology

'Key Informant' Interviews

11 interviews with 'key informants', people with extensive experience of working with oracy in different ways and contexts, were conducted alongside a review of the literature to help shape the report's key areas of focus.

Interviews were based around a loose script and recorded and transcribed with the interviewees' consent. References to content from these interviews are footnoted throughout the report, in order to demarcate this material from case study findings.

Key Informant name/s	Role/s and organisation
Andy Buck	Managing Director of Leadership Matters
Duncan Partridge and Leela Koenig	Director of Education at the English Speaking Union (ESU) Head of Oracy at the ESU
Professor Frank Hardman	Professor of Education at the University of York
Hywel Jones	Headteacher at the West London Free School in Hammersmith and Fulham, London
Kate Pretsell	Head of English at Ark Burlington Danes Academy in Hammersmith and Fulham, London
Martin Robinson	Teacher, and author of Trivium 21
Professor Maurice Galton	Associate Director of Research and subsequently Emeritus Professor at the University of Cambridge until 31 December 2015
Professor Neil Mercer	Professor of Education at the University of Cambridge and Director of Oracy@Cambridge
Professor Robin Alexander	Fellow of Wolfson College at the University of Cambridge, Honorary Professor of Education at the University of York, Professor of Education Emeritus at the University of Warwick and Chair of the Cambridge Primary Review Trust
Sarah Jones	Vice Principal and politics and philosophy teacher at BSix College in Hackney, London
Sarah Theaker	Headteacher at Ascot Heath CE Junior School in Berkshire

The Survey

Pretesting

The survey was designed around the key themes that emerged from interviews with key informants and the literature review.

Questions were cognitively pretested with six teachers.

These were:

- What is oracy?
- Does oracy matter?
- Why does oracy matter?
- In what ways do teachers and schools currently engage with oracy?
- What helps and hinders oracy in schools?

Polling

The survey was conducted online and administered by YouGov. YouGov panel members working in schools were selected by YouGov and asked to participate in the oracy survey by email. The survey was offered to teachers working across the UK in any sector, and from the Early Years through to FE.

Respondents were asked a series of predominantly multiple-choice questions, in order to make the survey as accessible and simple to complete as possible.

The survey was 'live' for two weeks from 16th August to 28th August 2016. Of the 906 people who completed the survey, 125 are based in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales. The analysis throughout the report makes clear whether it is applicable to a particular region in the UK.

Analysis

The analysis throughout this report is based on the largest-possible set of relevant survey responses, and states the number of responses on which analysis has been based. Analysis based on fewer than 50 survey responses is less robust and is intended to be illustrative rather than representative, and we highlight throughout the categories of response for which this is the case. We also outline, below, the number of responses we received across different sub-groups.

YouGov supplied LKMco with the cross-tabulated survey responses, and flagged where responses across different 'categories' (such as job role or school type) are statistically significant.

Respondents answered the initial questions in the survey using their own definition of oracy. This was so that their responses were not given with any particular definition used in this report in mind. The second half of the survey defined oracy as 'the development of children's capacity to use speech to express their thoughts and communicate with others in education and in life, and talk through which teaching and learning is mediated' (based on Alexander, 2012: 10). The report makes clear throughout its analysis whether or not respondents' answers are based on their own or the report's definition of oracy.

Case Studies

Case studies were conducted to explore variation in survey responses. Effort was made to approach staff working in a variety of schools across the country, including in different phases, regions and school types (state-maintained and independent), and in schools with varying degrees of experience and confidence in developing oracy. For convenience, schools in England were approached, and the analysis in the report makes clear whether the content of interviews is applicable to schools in England only.

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted in these schools with teachers and pupils. These were recorded, before then being transcribed. Teachers and pupils gave informed consent before participating, and teachers could choose whether they wished to be named in the report or not.

Any pupils interviewed and quoted in the report have been given pseudonyms.

School name	Location	Phase / School type	Data collected	Teachers and their roles
Ascot Heath CE Junior School	Ascot, Bracknell Forest	Primary (Junior) / Mainstream	One focus group including the headteacher, one class teacher, and seven year 6 pupils	Sarah Theaker, Headteacher Katie Browne, class teacher
Brookfields School	Tilehurst, West Berkshire	All-through / Special	One interview with a senior leader	Sara Avenell, Head of Early Years and Key Stage 1
Chorlton High School	Manchester	Secondary / Mainstream	One interview with a class teacher	Susannah Haygarth, Literacy and Language Coordinator and English teacher
Eastwood Primary School	Keighley, Bradford	Primary / Mainstream	One interview with a senior leader One interview with a year 6 class teacher One focus group with three year 6 pupils	Jan Carrier, Deputy Headteacher Rizwana (Riz) Saleem, year 6 class teacher
Green Lane Primary School	Bradford (city)	Primary / Mainstream (with Designated Special Provision)	One focus group with four senior leaders One interview with a class teacher One interview with a class teacher	Jane Townend, Deputy Headteacher Lorraine Lee, Pupil Progress Leader for Year 6 Joanne (Jo) Marwood, Pupil Progress Leader for Year 4 Angela Catterick, Manager of the Designated Special Provision Natalie Rhodes, nursery teacher Pip Bailey, year 1 teacher

School name	Location	Phase / School type	Data collected	Teachers and their roles
Highbury Grove School	Islington, London	Secondary / Mainstream	One interview with a senior leader One interview with a class teacher	Andrew Fitch, Head of English and Director of Spoken Literacy Victoria (Vicki) Barsby, English teacher
King Edward VI School	Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk	Secondary / Mainstream	One interview with a senior leader One interview with a senior leader One interview with a class teacher One focus group containing eight pupils in years 10 to 13	Geoff Barton, Headteacher Rachel Forward, Assistant Headteacher Mark Crossley, English teacher and Key Stage 4 Coordinator
Limpsfield Grange School	Oxted, Surrey	Secondary / Special	One interview with a senior leader	Sarah Wild, Headteacher
Medina House School	Isle of Wight	Primary / Special	One interview with a class teacher	Lisa Needs, class teacher and communication specialist
School 21	Newham, London	All-through / Mainstream	One interview with a senior leader One interview with a class teacher	Peter Hyman, Headteacher Amy Gaunt, Head of Oracy Primary
St Ambrose Barlow RC High School	Salford	Secondary / Mainstream	One interview with a class teacher	Rebecca (Bec) Tulloch, drama teacher and Specialist Leader of Education (SLE)
Stephen Perse Foundation	Cambridge	All-through / Mainstream (Independent)	One interview with a senior leader One interview with a senior leader One interview with a class teacher One interview with a year 4 pupil One focus group with a senior leader, one class teacher and a year 9 pupil	Tricia Kelleher, Executive Principal Katie Milne, Head of Junior School Marcelle Dobson, year 3 teacher Helen Kedie, Head of English Tom Williams, English teacher
The Brier School	Kingswinford, Dudley	All-through / Special	One interview with a senior leader	Alison Whitnall, Deputy Headteacher

Appendix 2:
Number of survey respondents by category – summary

Region / Country

North East	39
North West	85
Yorkshire and the Humber	67
East Midlands	63
West Midlands	93
East of England	111
London	113
South East	137
South West	73
England (NET)	781
Wales	46
Scotland	71

School type

Local authority/ Community school	353
Academy/ Free school/ City Technology college	205
Faith school	64
Independent school	109
Grammar school	29
Special school/Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)/ Alternative Provision (AP)	33
Sixth form/ FE college	66
Other	106

Phase in which respondent teachers

Infant	12
Early years	29
Primary	251
Middle	13
Secondary	409
All through	53
Post-16	50
Further Education (FE)	89

Job Role

Headteacher/ Principal	32
Deputy or Assistant Headteacher	70
Head of Department	161
Head of Year	35
Classroom teacher	562
Other leadership responsibility	255

Main subject taught, if any

Art	12
Business Studies	27
Citizenship	4
Computing or Information and Communication Technology (ICT)	22
Design and Technology	19
Drama	11
English	102
Geography	18
History	38
Languages	58
Mathematics	84
Media studies	3
Music	20
Psychology	9
Physical Education (PE)	16
Physical, Social, and Health Education (PSHE)	4
Religious Education (Religious Studies, R.E., RS)	21
Science	69
Sociology	4
Other	73

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The findings of this research will inform Voice 21's five-year campaign to get talking in class:

Our aims for 2021

1. Build a movement of educators committed to improving the speaking and listening skills of students, throughout state schools across the UK.

Next step: Work with partners including the English Speaking Union to develop a network of teachers committed to teaching oracy.

2. Create an infrastructure of oracy hub schools to develop good practice in oracy teaching and share this with other schools in their localities.

Next step: Identify 21 pioneer schools across England with the expertise and capacity to be the first wave of Voice 21 hubs.

3. Dramatically boost the body of resources, materials, guidance and support on the teaching of oracy.

Next step: Launch our new Voice 21 resource bank with free to download materials and professional development programme for teachers and school leaders.

4. Devise national standards and expectations for oracy and the means and methods for measuring progress in speaking and listening.

Next step: Work with the Education Endowment Fund to learn the lessons from our current pilot of our oracy curriculum and assessment.

5. Influence decision makers to leverage their power to create the conditions that will encourage all state schools to teach oracy as part of their standard practice and curriculum.

Next step: Launch a Commission on the Future of Speaking Skills in schools.

If you would like to find out more about how you can get involved in our work and join our campaign contact **hello@voice21.org**

"I want your voice to fill this school. I want your voice to be one of the many sounds that build this community. I want you not just to talk but to listen. Listen to yourself: your breath, your heart and your true thoughts. I want you to listen to other people. I want you to discover the many voices that make up a human being. I want you to find your voice."

Daniel Shindler, Drama and Wellbeing Lead, School 21