

Voice 21 Insights and Impact 2021-22



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Welcome

In 2021, as we emerged from the pandemic, Voice 21 launched a new five-year strategy with four strategic goals:

- Goal 1:** To grow our annual reach to 2000 schools and 800,000 students by 2025
- Goal 2:** To consistently focus our work on those that need us most
- Goal 3:** To enable long-term, whole-school change through our Voice 21 Oracy Schools' membership network
- Goal 4:** To understand the difference we are making and use that understanding to make more of a difference

Goals one to three – supporting more schools that serve the students who can benefit most from a high-quality oracy education through sustained collaboration and partnership – are how we achieve our impact. But crucially, learning about our impact and mobilising that learning is a goal in itself.



At Voice 21, continually developing our understanding of oracy, researching and innovating new ways of developing students' speaking and listening skills, and dissecting how teachers and schools change through our work with them are essential to achieving our mission. This evidence and knowledge acts as the engine of Voice 21, driving our programme design and relationship with our member schools.

As we grow our membership network, we have more opportunities to learn and to feed that learning back into our schools. In 2021-22 we received impact data from 12,313 staff and 46,636 students in our member schools. The insights we have generated from this large dataset have enabled us to iterate and refine our approaches, honing the support we provide to our schools to better empower them to transform teaching and learning through talk.

'Evidence and knowledge acts as the engine of Voice 21, driving our programme design and relationship with our member schools.'

Assessing the impact of a complex intervention like oracy education is not straightforward. We start with our Theory of Change looking at key indicators at each "level", from teacher and student outcomes (which are captured through our Oracy Surveys) to engagement with our activities and recruitment (including retention and target population). In other words we embrace complexity by using indicators at different levels of our Theory of Change, which involve different stakeholders, as well as a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, rather than a set of simple outcomes. This gives us a wealth of data, information and insights, which in turn spark questions, areas for investigation and adaptations or innovations.

So, in the spirit of focusing on what we learn and using this to shape our future thinking, this report shares seven insights that emerged from our

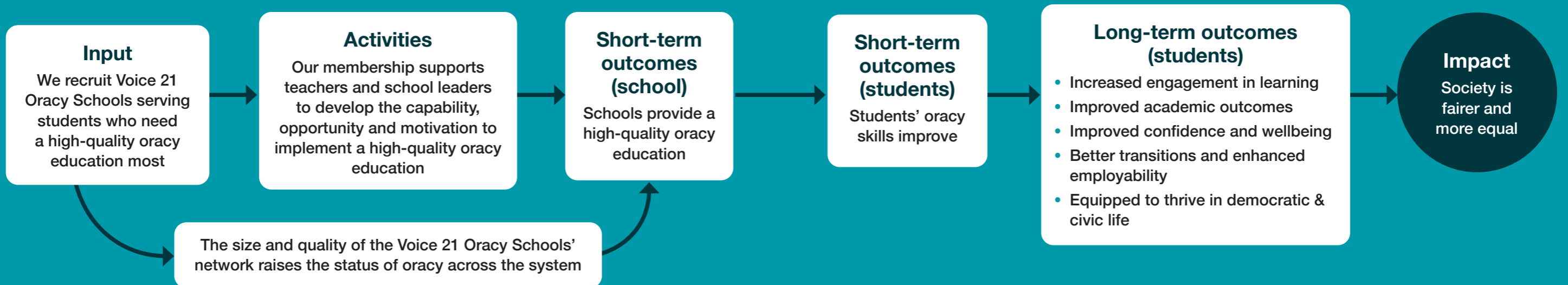


work in 2021/22 (our seventh year of operation). These will guide Voice 21's plans and activities in 2022/23 and beyond, and we hope they will also inform thinking and actions in your schools.

Thank you to all our funders and partners for the support, challenge and opportunities to learn, especially the 670 Voice 21 Oracy Schools across the country who invited us to step into their schools, connect to their classrooms and engage with their teachers and students. Our impact can only ever be as strong as their commitment to empowering every child to use their voice for success in school and life.

Beccy Earnshaw, CEO, Voice 21

Our Theory of Change



Our Impact: 2021-22

We exist to increase access to a high-quality oracy education for those children who need it most, ensuring all children, not just some, are equipped with the oracy skills they need to succeed in school and in life.



What difference do we make?

Students

90% of teachers said their students' oracy skills had improved.

75% of teachers said their students were more engaged in school.

77% of teachers said oracy had boosted attainment



Why are we needed?

Students

Spoken language skills are one of the strongest predictors of a child's future life chances and yet young people from low income families miss out on opportunities to develop these vital oracy skills.

What do we do?

We empower students in Voice 21 Oracy Schools to develop the oracy skills they need for success in school and life.

We reached

155,289

students

Schools

Schools

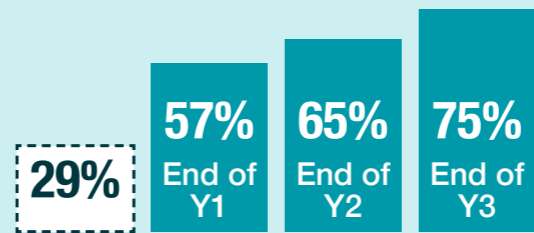
Unlike literacy and numeracy, oracy is not explicitly taught in all schools. Teachers and school leaders aren't confident about how to deliver an oracy education.

We equip teachers and leaders in Voice 21 Oracy Schools with the specialist knowledge and skills they need to provide a high-quality oracy education.

605
Voice 21 Oracy Schools*

We trained **1403** teachers

Percentage of teachers that are oracy confident



Start of membership

Teachers in Voice 21 Oracy Schools are more likely to be **confident oracy practitioners** the longer their school has been a member of Voice 21.

84% of teachers said teaching and learning had improved at their school

***71% of our schools are in the top 40% of schools with the greatest proportion of students eligible for free school meals**

System

System

The UK's education system does not reflect the value and importance of oracy to children and young people's outcomes in school and beyond.

We raise the value and profile of oracy across the education system to elevate oracy to the same status as 'literacy' and 'numeracy' and create the conditions for more schools to provide a high-quality oracy education.

We have appointed

9 Voice 21 Oracy Centres of Excellence

to drive improvement across the system



We secured **cross-party recognition** of the importance of oracy education through the Oracy APPG

7 things we've learnt in our 7th year

1 Oracy leadership requires professional development and support

2 Oracy boosts attainment in reading

3 Oracy education increases students' confidence

4 Oracy matters across subject domains

5 Oracy education is crucial at transition

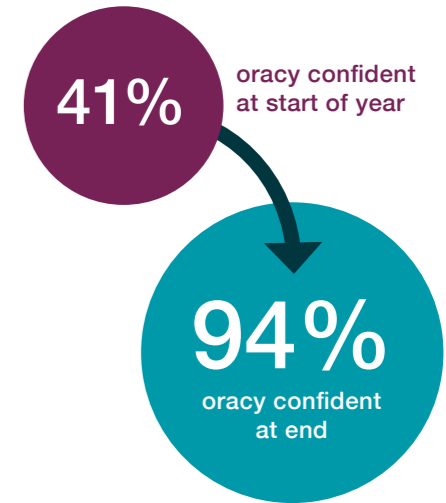
6 Oracy teaching enhances early language provision

7 Oracy can be assessed

1 Oracy leadership requires professional development and support

The more confident Oracy Leaders feel in their role, the more progress their schools make towards embedding a sustained, high-quality oracy education. Voice 21's support makes Oracy Leaders feel significantly more confident to develop oracy in their settings.

Improvement in Oracy Leaders' confidence:



Schools with a confident Oracy Leader made the most progress



Oracy Leader confidence at the end of the year (Self-assessment from 1-7. Insignificant numbers of responses below 5.)

'I can see the light at the end of the tunnel in terms of [staff] starting to get on board. And I think that's because I'm learning the different [...] strategies in terms of the leadership of [oracy].'

– Sian, Saltley Academy, Birmingham

'Spoken language is omnipresent in schools, classrooms, playgrounds and lessons, so much so that we are blinded to it by familiarity.'

– Dr Pete Dudley, Oracy Cambridge



What is dedicated and skilled leadership of oracy?

Without dedicated leadership there is a risk that oracy is “everywhere and nowhere” in a school. Most schools do not have curriculum time dedicated to oracy and Oracy Leaders don’t usually have a formal ‘team’. They need to influence practice across a school without these structures which requires specialist, domain-specific leadership skills. Our membership supports leaders to develop these skills.

Oracy leadership in action

Ruth Thompson, Deputy Head and Oracy Lead, Whitley Park Primary and Nursery School

As a Deputy Head with a whole school remit, Ruth has focused on implementing common approaches to learning through talk in classrooms across the school. To do this, she has mobilised the support of senior leaders, middle leaders, classroom teachers and teaching assistants, sharing data on the school’s starting point and getting them on board with plans to embed oracy across the school.

She has also invested in developing a small, expert team of colleagues to champion oracy across the school. To complement whole-school professional development, they have conducted a number of ‘oracy surgeries’ to offer bespoke support and training to staff across different key stages.

‘Leaders prioritise pupils’ oracy skills throughout subjects. They make sure that pupils learn how to talk and use spoken language skills well.’

– Ofsted Report, December 2021

Oracy leadership in action

Kate Tomkins, Head of MFL and Oracy Lead, Gosforth Central Middle School

Kate chose to build out her school’s oracy provision from a small-scale project within her direct sphere of influence, starting with an ‘Oracy Outdoors’ project for key students. Staff across the school noticed that students involved in the project were particularly vocal and engaged during lessons. By developing a bank of evidence on the benefits of oracy, specifically on students in her school, Kate secured buy-in from staff across the school which was essential as she started to roll out oracy more widely.

‘It’s really useful to have run this [project] because we are negating people’s fears. So if [...they’re] worried that “this type of pupil won’t talk or engage”. Well actually, they will, because we’ve got the evidence to prove it.’

– Kate Tomkins

What’s next?

We have developed a specialist leadership programme and launched a range of online short courses in the leadership of oracy for Voice 21 Oracy Schools.



2 Oracy boosts attainment in reading

Students’ progress in reading is accelerated through high-quality oracy education.

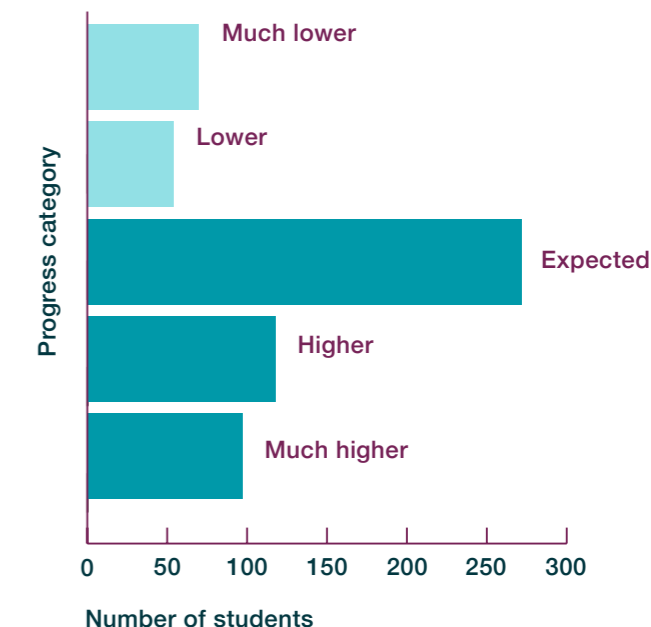
Results from standardised reading tests (New Group Reading Test) completed by Year 6 and Year 7 students in schools participating in our Voicing Vocabulary programme reveal that 80% of students met or exceeded expected progress, with one third of students exceeding expected progress.

‘My reading scores have increased dramatically due to an oracy-rich approach to comprehension lessons.’

– Teacher, Sugar Hill Primary

These preliminary findings are consistent with an EEF meta-analysis which found oral language interventions had a positive impact on attainment, particularly in reading.¹

Student progress in reading at the end of year one of Voicing Vocabulary



What’s next?

The second year of Voicing Vocabulary continues this year. Students in Year 6 and Year 7 will complete standardised reading tests again, enabling us to understand the difference an oracy-rich approach to teaching and learning, including vocabulary development, has made to attainment at transition. We will share findings from the whole project in Autumn 2023.

1. EEF, ‘Oral language interventions toolkit references’, https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Toolkit/References/EEF_Oral_Language_toolkit_references.pdf

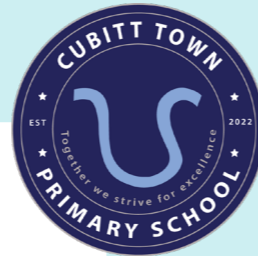
3 Oracy education increases students' confidence

As a result of a high-quality oracy education, students' academic and social emotional confidence is boosted.

When asked 'Is there anything else you would like to say about why speaking and listening (oracy) is important to you?' 35% of students in Voice 21 Oracy Schools who responded chose to write about oracy as a source of confidence.



Boosting student confidence at Cubitt Town Primary School



'I was really just playing by myself in Year 3. I had my older brother in Year 6 and I'd only mainly talk to him really. With oracy now, I [...can] explain how I'm feeling [...]. It makes a huge difference. [...Oracy] makes me feel appreciated because even if I don't get a turn speaking, you still speak in trios and discuss your opinions.'

– Frankie, Year 6

'Oracy means that I have a voice and I use it. I feel I am more of myself now and I am not hiding my creativity, I am showing it.'

– Student, Year 6

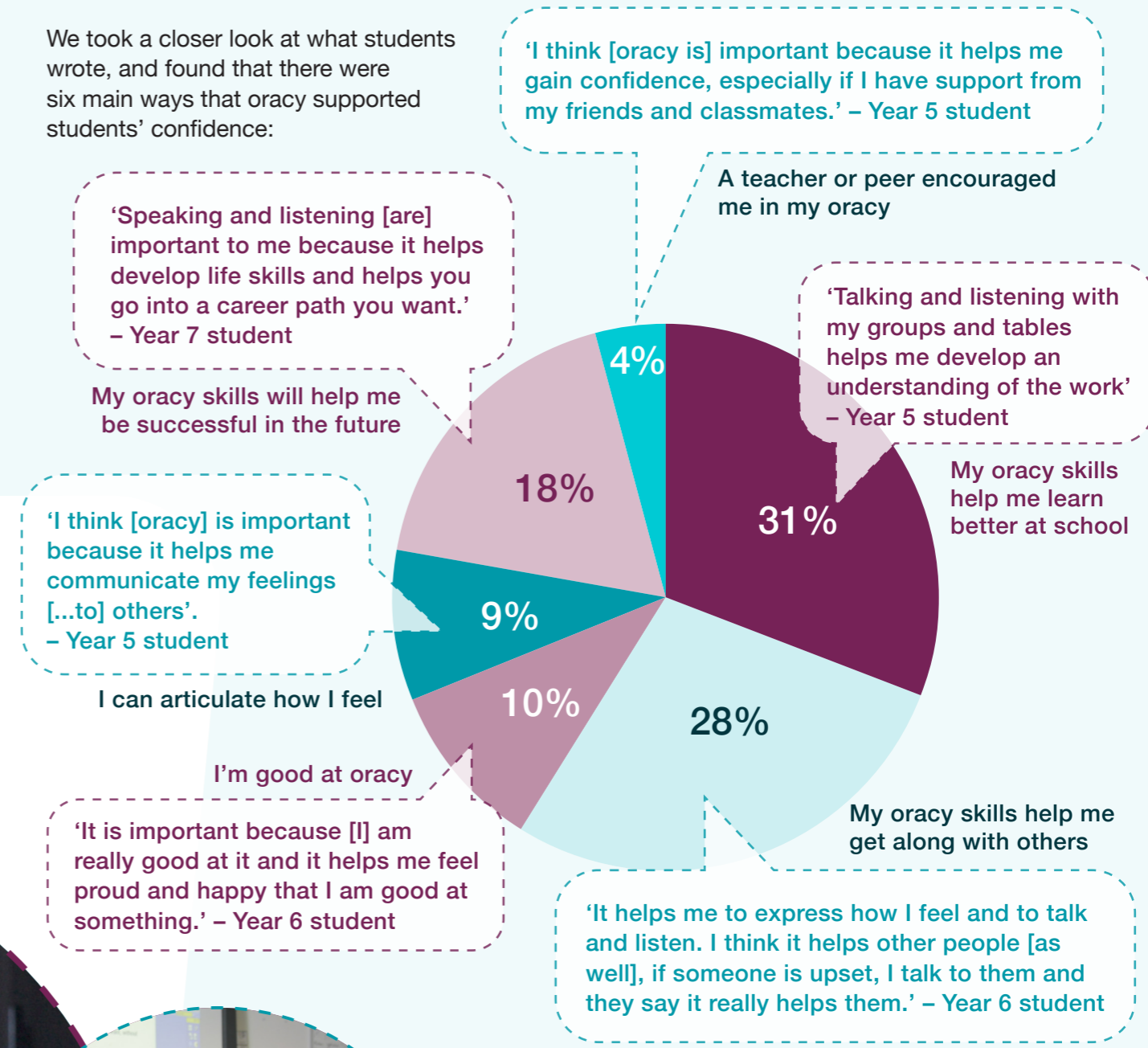
'The impact [of oracy] has been absolutely massive, it's really taken us by surprise. It's particularly beneficial for those children who maybe lack the confidence in their spoken communication skills.'

– Nicky Pear, Deputy Head Teacher



How does a high-quality oracy education increase students' confidence?

We took a closer look at what students wrote, and found that there were six main ways that oracy supported students' confidence:



What's next?

Our 'Oracy Challenges' support teachers to develop their students' confidence by teaching them to speak in a range of different contexts. We provide tips and suggestions for teachers to ensure that every student benefits from these opportunities.

4 Oracy matters across subject domains

but provision is patchy (particularly in secondary schools)



Oracy improves outcomes across the curriculum. By empowering students to speak like specialists, we induct them into the unique ways of knowing, doing and communicating in different subject disciplines.

Oracy skills are both subject-specific and generic. For example, 'turn taking' is an important skill when practising oracy across a range of different subject disciplines but 'making precise language choices when discussing a hypothesis' is specific to science.

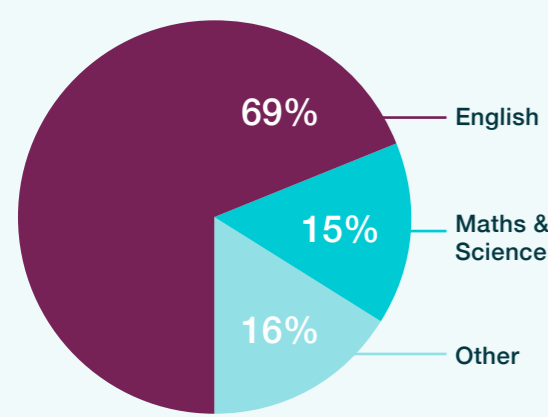
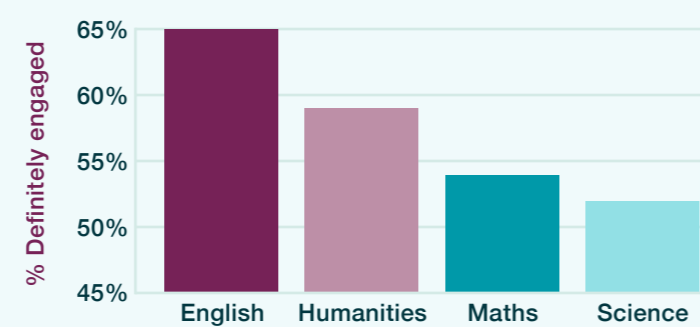
“Ways of thinking are embedded in ways of using language”

– Mercer and Littleton, 2007

How is oracy implemented across different departments in secondary schools?

In secondary schools, oracy confidence and expertise is not evenly distributed across departments. The majority of Oracy Leaders in secondary schools are from the English department.

Reported involvement in oracy, by department (secondary schools)



Across the school, English and Humanities teachers are most likely to be 'definitely' involved in the development of their school's oracy provision, whilst maths and science teachers are least likely to be 'definitely' involved.

Developing oracy in secondary mathematics



In partnership with the Boolean Maths Hub, one of 40 DfE-funded national maths hubs coordinated by the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics (NCETM), Voice 21 worked alongside a group of secondary maths teachers to explore how oracy can enable students to capture, connect and apply their mathematical understanding *through talk*.

‘Students are less afraid to make mistakes and more willing to answer questions and participate in discussions.’

– Participant, Oracy in Maths Work Group

‘My room now has a “buzz” and students are now starting to talk about problems together, rather than facing them alone.’

– Participant, Oracy in Maths Work Group

‘The change in both the students’ engagement in mathematical talk and the quality of their talk was dramatic and instant.’

– Participant, Oracy in Maths Work Group



The work group had a specific focus on improving outcomes for students eligible for Pupil Premium. At the end of the project, 100% of participants agreed that economically disadvantaged students demonstrated an increased, positive attitude to maths, as a result of an oracy-rich approach to teaching mathematics. One participant remarked that test scores of students eligible for Pupil Premium had increased from 40-50% to 75%+.

Moving forwards, we are continuing our work with NCETM to better understand and articulate the unique role of oracy in maths teaching and learning.

What's next?

We have launched maths and science 'learning communities' to bring together specialist teachers with a focus on developing disciplinary approaches to oracy in their subjects.

'Speak Like a Specialist' was also the theme for Oracy October, our annual month-long celebration of oracy. Throughout October 2022, 907 teachers attended specialist webinars to explore what high-quality talk looks like in different subject disciplines.

5 Oracy education is crucial at transition

Students' anxiety and nervousness about speaking in class increases significantly as they move to secondary school. However, our research reveals that an explicit focus on oracy fosters confidence, academically and socially and emotionally. This suggests that oracy education is particularly important at transition when students are adapting to a new social environment and academic challenge.

'I think it is important to have a chance to speak and let people understand [...] how you feel.'

– Year 6 student



Can oracy-rich teaching approaches equip students with the academic language they need to thrive at secondary school?

Recent research suggests that there is a 'quantitative and qualitative step change in language'² at secondary school, when compared to primary school, which may partly explain the 'academic dip' reported by many teachers at transition.

The first year of our project has shown promising results with teachers reporting greater understanding and awareness of the demands for vocabulary teaching across key stages, as well as a better understanding of how oracy supports vocabulary acquisition.

Through our Voicing Vocabulary project, which brings together three secondary schools and their feeder primaries, we are pioneering an innovative oracy-rich approach to vocabulary development which upskills students with the academic language they need to be successful in secondary school.

'We're going to teach two lessons on vocabulary related to biology and chemistry. And then we're going to visit [secondary school] so that [pupils] can work on presenting their understanding of biology and chemistry.'

– Year 6 teacher

2. Deignan, A., Candarli, D., Oxley, F. 2023. *The Linguistic Challenge of the Transition to Secondary School: A Corpus Study of Academic Language*. Routledge: London. P. 12.

How do student perceptions of speaking change at secondary school?

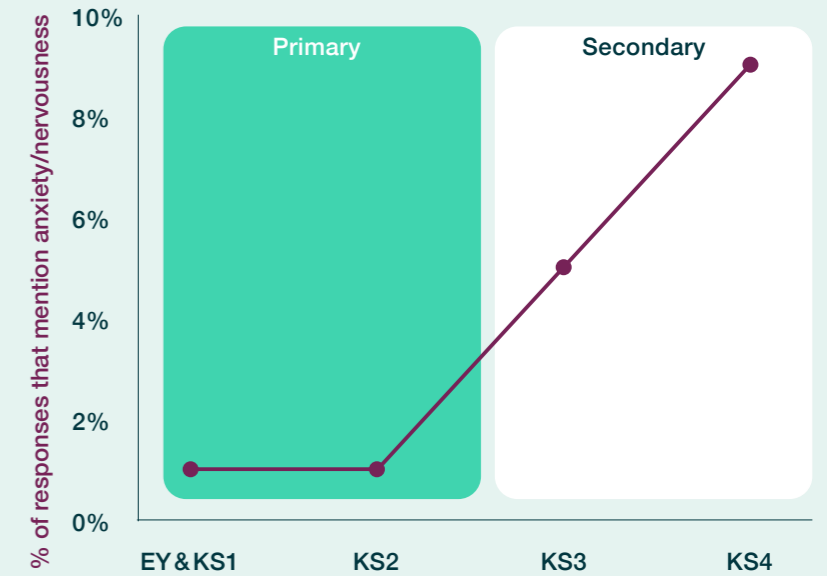
Our student oracy surveys show that anxiety and nervousness in relation to speaking increase dramatically in Year 7 and rise steadily throughout secondary school.

'I do not like talking in large crowds because it makes me feel uneasy and shy.'

– Year 7 student



Anxiety/nervousness by key stage



Teachers and school leaders should be aware of this increased nervousness or anxiety when planning for oracy in their settings. By teaching students the oracy skills they need to be effective speakers in different contexts (rather than simply expecting them to have these) and fostering supportive classroom cultures in which every voice is valued, we can better prepare students to speak in class and to different audiences and boost their confidence.

What's next?

We will analyse student-level impact data across our primary and secondary schools and use these insights to shape new strategies to improve transition through talk.



6 Oracy teaching enhances early language provision

Planned, purposeful and productive oracy can elevate early language development. Communication and language skills are crucial to the development of later literacy skills and so explicitly teaching oracy in the Early Years sets students up for success as they progress through school.

This year, in partnership with Speech and Language UK (formerly I CAN), Voice 21 delivered DfE funded training on early language to the English Hub network.

To develop this training, we filmed oracy practice in a number of Early Years settings and produced bespoke resources to support early years practitioners to explicitly teach oracy. We've learnt that the same approaches we advocate for older students, including modelling and scaffolding talk, embedding 'talk routines' and eliciting purposeful dialogue, are just as important for our youngest students.

'[...] the development of quality first teaching and exploring different types of talk, how we set these up for success and how we can enhance our conversations with children, will really support early language development. Not only within our own schools, but [...also in] Partner Schools and across our MAT.'

- Participant, early language training for DfE's English Hubs



Teacher Talk Tactics for early language development

Instigate Present an idea or open up a new line of inquiry "I think..." "Let's begin with..." "I have a great idea, it's got to..." "I would like you to..."	Build Develop, add to or elaborate on an idea "Yes, and..." "I like to know more about..." "So, what you're saying is..." "Yes, and..."	Clarify Ask questions to clarify, challenge and check your understanding "Do you mean that...?" "I think you are saying..." "So, what you're saying is..." "Do you have any questions about it?"	Challenge Disagree or present an alternative argument "I don't think..." "You said... but what about...?" "I disagree with..."
Stretch Push for detail, language or other skills to extend the conversation "Yes, it's... you could even say it's..." "That's right, it's..." "Yes, it's a..."	Speculate Encourage speculation or problem-solving "Wonder what would happen if...?" "Perhaps..." "How do you think about...?" "Let's give... a try"	Suggest Encourage problem-solving and trying different approaches "What if we tried... next?" "Have you thought about...?" "Let's give... a try"	Encourage Offer praise, encouragement and feedback "You did such a good job of... how let's think about..." "You really made me..." "Your use of... was..."

Student Talk Tactics for early language development

Instigate Present an idea or open up a new line of inquiry "I think..."	Build Develop, add to or elaborate on an idea "Yes, and..."	Challenge Disagree or present an alternative argument "I disagree because..."
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What's next?

We have introduced a short course specifically for Early Years practitioners to support them to embed approaches which develop talking and thinking in the early years and KS1 classroom.

7 Oracy can be assessed

Our pilot, 'Comparing Talk', established that Comparative Judgement (a new approach to assessment) is a reliable way to assess oracy.

Currently, there is no peer-reviewed, standardised assessment for oracy which means it is difficult to reliably measure students' oracy skills. We are set to change this.



What did we do?

We worked with 23 schools around the UK, and 166 examples of student talk, to find out whether cutting edge Comparative Judgement software can help us to assess oracy. This method of assessment relies on assessors making lots of quick comparisons between videos of student talk, rather than 'marking' each video in a traditional way, against a mark scheme or rubric.

What did we learn?

Comparative Judgement allows us to assess oracy much more reliably than traditional methods. It has the potential to enable us to compare the performance and progress of students around the country, and be much more confident that we're able to do this accurately and fairly.

Why is assessing oracy so difficult?

Logistics:

It's trickier to store a 'piece of oracy' than it is a piece of writing. It can also be harder to gather – it's not as simple as sitting the class down in one room to complete a written paper.

Task selection:

Raising the stakes by telling children they're going to be assessed, for example, sometimes ruins the task – this is especially true for exploratory talk, where it's hard to really commit yourself to collective problem-solving and 'thinking together' if you're also trying to work out how to get a good grade.

Reliability:

Concerns that the judgement (of the 'examiner') is too subjective – how reliably can we determine that one child's performance is 'better' than another's?



What's next?

There's still work to do before this assessment is ready to hit the classroom! We are refining our assessment tasks, so that they're perfectly suited to this way of assessing performance, and offer the best possible coverage of the Oracy Framework and hope to have a viable tool in 2023.

7 ways to realise the benefits of oracy education in every school

1 Appoint an Oracy Leader in every school (and invest in their development)

Dedicated and skilled leadership ensures oracy is prioritised and planned for and is essential to embed and sustain a high-quality oracy education.

2 Harness the power of discussion to boost vocabulary and improve reading

A good vocabulary is key to reading comprehension. Well-planned and structured discussion provides an opportunity for students to both hear and use new language in context, improving their vocabularies.

3 Teach oracy to build student confidence across a range of contexts

By teaching students the oracy skills they need to be compelling speakers in different contexts (rather than simply expecting them to have these), we can better prepare students to speak in front of different audiences and boost their confidence.

4 Embrace oracy in all subjects

Oracy isn't just for English teachers; structured talk across the curriculum can induct students into the unique ways of knowing, doing and communicating in different subjects.



5 Don't forget oracy in Year 6 and lean into oracy in Year 7

Oracy is key at transition, equipping students with the confidence and academic language they need to be successful in secondary school.

6 Prioritise oracy in early years

The explicit teaching of oracy in the early years lays the foundation for the development of later literacy skills.

7 Evaluate student progress in oracy

It's important for teachers to regularly appraise whether their students have mastered the oracy skills they have taught, both to inform what they teach next and monitor progress.

How we'll build on what we've learnt this year



We're really proud of the difference we've made this year in Voice 21 Oracy schools who have embedded a high-quality oracy education which will benefit their current and future cohorts of students.

Over the next year, we will continue to learn from our network of Voice 21 Oracy Schools, undertaking innovation projects such as our maths and science 'learning communities', partnering with subject specialists in our network to define good oracy practice in these disciplines and researching how oracy can be most effectively implemented in schools.

To ensure that all voices are valued in our classrooms, we will collaborate with experts in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to produce recommendations and resources to ensure all students are supported to participate in and benefit from oracy in the classroom. And we will strengthen our focus on linguistic diversity, developing guidance for schools to celebrate the richness of language in their classrooms, including the range of accents and dialects.

We'll also be furthering our understanding of the impact of oracy on students, diving into the challenge of assessing oracy in the second phase of our pilot, 'Comparing Talk'. In autumn, we will share findings from the final year of our Voicing Vocabulary project to understand the impact of oracy education on attainment at transition. And we'll continue to surface insights from our annual student surveys to better understand student perceptions of oracy education.

I look forward to sharing more about what we're learning and the impact we're having this year and beyond.

Amy Gaunt, Director of Learning and Impact, Voice 21





Final word

'[...We] should have the right to speak about our opinions and what we believe in'

–Year 6 Student, Colmers Farm Primary School

'Oracy has made a massive difference to our pupils'

–Teacher, Pendle Primary Academy

'Oracy learning this year [...has] helped me to become more confident and proud of talking to others'

–Year 6 student, Longthorpe Primary Academy

'Voice 21 has had a monumental impact across the school this year'

– Senior Leader, Parish CofE Primary School

'Oracy has transformed my classroom!'

– Senior Leader, Brooklands Farm primary School

'If you want Oracy to be at the heart of your school, then definitely join [...] Voice 21'

–Richard Sangotade, Hazelbury Primary School

'Oracy is now living and breathing within our school, you can walk into any classroom and see it!'

– Krystyna Stokes, Newsome Academy

'[...Our] children have found their voice and have a safe place to share their views'

–Chloe Bonner, Green Meadow Primary School

'Oracy has become part of our everyday practice across the school'

–Teacher, Ringland Primary School

'Children's learning has developed immensely and their self confidence has improved'

– Teaching Assistant, Foxborough Primary School

'I feel respected'

– Year 7 Student, Saltley Academy

'[Oracy] is making students more confident and driving progress'


–Middle Leader, Bishop Young Church of England Academy

Thank you

As ever, we are grateful for the continued support of the Voice 21 community whose dedication, commitment and ambition enables more students than ever to benefit from a high-quality oracy education.

We would also like to thank all of our supporters who have made our work this year possible.

- Allan and Gill Gray Philanthropy
- Allen and Overy Foundation
- Fidelity
- Impetus
- John Horseman Trust
- Minton Charitable Trust
- The Big Ask
- The Dulverton Trust
- The Isla Foundation
- The Mohn Westlake Foundation

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