



Voice 21's Journal

The Talking Point

Summer
2023

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Introduction

In 2016, Voice 21 set out on a mission to empower all children and young people to use their voice for success in school and in life.

Over the past 7 years we have had the privilege to work with thousands of teachers and hundreds of schools across the UK to develop their oracy provision, in turn building and refining our own understanding of oracy education. In 2019, we codified everything we'd learnt, both at a classroom and whole-school level, in our Oracy Benchmarks, setting the standard for oracy education nationally.

Recognising that there is no one single 'right' way to provide a high-quality oracy education, we sought to create benchmarks that schools and teachers can meet in myriad ways, consistent with their different approaches. As more teachers and school leaders decided to prioritise oracy, we hoped that they would build on these Benchmarks, starting a national conversation about effective oracy practice.

A Talking Point is a thought provoking statement which promotes discussion. We hope that the contributions to this journal, which include findings from research projects led by teachers in Voice 21 Oracy Schools as well as colleagues from within and beyond Voice 21, will serve as 'talking points', prompting conversation in your staff room about how best you can provide your students with a high-quality oracy education.

At Voice 21, we are committed to furthering understanding of oracy education. Each year, teachers in Voice 21 Oracy Schools have the opportunity to engage in classroom research to develop their expertise in a specific aspect of oracy and better understand the difference oracy education is making in their setting. These projects are entered into the Douglas Barnes Award for oracy classroom research.

Douglas Barnes was a teacher and researcher who, whilst at the University of Leeds, investigated the role of spoken language on young people's learning. Barnes' seminal work on classroom talk has shaped the field of oracy education and is fundamental to Voice 21's approach; we are honoured to have his name associated with this prize.



In this journal you can read the winning and commended entries to this prize in 2022, as well as a selection of other pieces. We hope these prompt you to consider new and interesting facets of oracy education and how these could be developed in your practice.

Colleagues at Voice 21 have also shared findings from research we have conducted over the past year, including insights from our national network of Voice 21 Oracy Schools. Finally, Rupert Knight, associate professor at the University of Nottingham has shared reflections from a series of school visits, including to Voice 21 Oracy Schools, to better understand how teachers can cultivate effective classroom talk.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this journal and especially to the innovative, reflective classroom teachers who have engaged in research to further understanding of oracy education.

Amy Gaunt, Director of Learning & Impact, Voice 21



Kathleen McBride

Developing Dialogue in Maths

This year, we have been deepening our exploration of the relationship between oracy and mathematics.

Our data tells us that maths teachers in V21 Oracy Schools are less likely to access professional development in oracy. This raises some fundamental questions for us including: Does talk really matter in maths? And, if so, what does high quality talk in maths look and sound like? To help us answer these questions, we visited Summerhill Academy, a Voice 21 Oracy School near central Bristol who has been championing oracy in maths for several years.


On our visit, teacher Lauren Curzon took us on a tour of upper and lower Key Stage 2 maths lessons in which students put their self-proclaimed “oracy powers” to work in a range of collaborative problem solving exercises. What was most noticeable about the oracy practice at Summerhill was the deliberativeness of the dialogue between teachers and students during maths lessons. These high-quality interactions led to a dynamic and exciting learning environment where teachers and students collectively used oracy to elevate learning. Seeing rich mathematical talk in action surfaced several practices that we believe encourage participation, deepen mathematical thinking and strengthen subject knowledge.

1. Connecting language to subject identity

Articulating what it means to ‘be a mathematician’ (and the roles that language plays within this construct) connects the oracy skills students develop in class to disciplinary practice, creating a shared understanding of the purpose of dialogue in mathematics. Linking language to the creativity of mathematical thinking and practices encourages students to use talk as a tool for generating new ways of approaching problems, rather than simply to internalise existing methods. Added to this, subtle shifts in teacher language use such as “talk to the *mathematician* next to you” signal to students that they are expected to think and speak in subject-specific ways.

Teachers have created posters deconstructing what it means to be a mathematician – linking maths to skills such as reasoning, collaboration, problem-solving and creative thinking. Classes return to these posters frequently during their maths lessons linking their work in the classroom to real-world mathematical skills.





“Dialogue is both a tool for learning and a product of learning.”

2. Planning opportunities for exploratory talk

To build a classroom culture where dialogue is both a *tool* for learning and a *product* of learning, it is essential to provide opportunities for students to engage in exploratory talk¹. This type of talk builds curiosity and encourages students to consider and respond to multiple perspectives. Exploratory talk is less predictable than other types of talk which are sometimes seen in maths classrooms, such as scaffolded responses to teacher questions, but offers genuine insights into students’ mathematical understanding and ways of thinking. Being explicit about *how* to engage in exploratory talk² is essential to support effective dialogue.

At Summerhill, Talk Tactics have been made into learning mats that are visible during all discussion activities. In the lessons we observed, students frequently referred to accompanying sentence stems to support their contributions.

Additionally, coaching students to attend to specific details in each other’s mathematical thinking during whole class discussion³ empowers them to think like mathematicians and makes learning a shared endeavour. The expectation that students provide extended responses (though not necessarily complete or ‘correct’ ones) makes their processing and reasoning visible to the group, allowing for increasingly dialogic exchanges in which students probe different aspects of each other’s ideas building new understanding along the way.

During our visit, we noticed how carefully students at Summerhill listen to each other during discussions. In one lesson a Year 4 student interjected during whole-class talk asking if she could return to what her classmate had said a few minutes ago to ask them to clarify something they had said.

1. Bakker, A, Smit, J, Wegerif, R (2015), *Scaffolding and dialogic teaching in mathematics education: introduction and review*. ZDM Mathematics Education. Springer.

2. Mercer, N. and Hodgkinson, S (2008) *Exploring Talk in School: Inspired by the Work of Douglas Barnes*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

3. Webb, NM, Franke ML, Ing, M, Johnson, NC, Zimmerman, J, (2019) *The details matter in mathematics classroom dialogue*. The Routledge International Handbook of Research on Dialogic Education. London: Routledge.

3. Harnessing errors as a springboard for thinking together

Building a culture where making mistakes and exploring misconceptions through talk is central to learning encourages students to see error as a necessary part of understanding and applying new mathematical concepts and methods. Through whole class discussion, refining an answer becomes a collective⁴ undertaking as the thinking that led to an error or misconception is explained, listened to and understood before being adjusted. In a classroom where mistakes are communicated, rather than hidden, answering a question becomes the instigation of ‘inter-thinking’ rather than the presentation of a final idea. This approach builds students’ confidence to offer their thinking to the group and to respond to others’ ideas without fear of ‘getting it wrong’ – for getting it wrong can be just as helpful as getting it right!

4. Alexander, R (2020). *A Dialogic Teaching Companion*. London: Routledge.

“Building a culture where making mistakes and exploring misconceptions through talk is central to learning encourages students to see error as a necessary part of understanding”



In a Year 4 maths lesson, the teacher addressed one student’s misunderstanding of a key term by asking other students to agree or disagree with how their classmate had used the word. Following a whole class discussion around the original error, the teacher returned to the student and asked them to articulate their understanding of where they had gone wrong. This might sound terrifying but the culture in the classroom was so supportive that students were confident to voice their misunderstandings without fear of judgement.

High-quality dialogue in maths has the capacity to support students to inter-think and co-construct knowledge and ideas that lead to deeper understanding of mathematical concepts and processes. Whilst the specific strategies teachers choose to use to promote, scaffold and harness oracy for working mathematically might differ between classrooms and contexts, we are confident that the emerging principles we have identified will transfer across settings and look forward to continuing our exploration of what constitutes high-quality talk in mathematics.

Our visit to Summerhill Academy was part of a continuing project with the Boolean Maths Hub (a DfE-funded hub coordinated by the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics) as we work together to develop both organisations’ understanding of the role and impact of oracy in secondary mathematics.

Kathleen McBride,
Learning Design Lead,
Voice 21



Rupert Knight

A Clear Sense of Purpose is Essential to Drive Oracy Education across a School

Why do schools choose oracy?

The case for oracy in schools is becoming increasingly recognised. Thanks to recent initiatives, including the work of Voice 21 and the Oracy All Party Parliamentary Group, the educational importance of explicitly learning to talk and through talk are better understood. The benefits, now evidenced over decades of research, span social, emotional and cognitive domains. Indeed, the multiple and intertwined impacts of oracy education can mean that identifying and sustaining a clear sense of direction becomes a challenge. On my recent oracy research visits to schools across England, it was striking that one of the common features shared by schools where oracy had been successfully embedded was a clear sense of purpose: a purpose rooted in each school's distinctive community, ethos and priorities.

For some schools, oracy was the key to unlocking attainment; for others, the vision was to close an equity gap, prepare students for adult life or perhaps realise a deeply rooted commitment to children as agents of change. Oracy in these schools was a response to a pressing question. While this was often a school-level question, the response was seen most vividly at classroom level. The teachers I observed used their professional judgement to develop and deploy oracy strategically to enhance specific aspects of learning. By way of illustration, let me take you into four anonymised, but genuine, classroom scenes, where oracy for a specific purpose takes centre-stage.

At Fairway School, educational outcomes are strong, but there is a desire to build students' personal confidence as they go out into the wider world. Mindful of this, Emma positions her Year 8 English students as active participants in their study of *Romeo and Juliet*. Prompted by provocative statements on the board, small groups informally but vigorously debate who was most to blame for the lovers' deaths. As arguments and disagreements



are aired, Emma gradually encourages the students to reach a group consensus, thereby raising the expectation of reasoned, persuasive language. In the subsequent whole-class discussion, Emma calls on specific groups and individuals to make an evidence-informed case and to respond to others' different interpretations. The way that Emma has tuned into the preceding small-group conversations means that she can now target students strategically, validating their ideas and helping them to adapt their register for sharing confidently with this wider audience.

At Rushton Primary, the initial impetus for oracy comes from this school's community, as almost all families have English as an additional language. A perceived priority, therefore, is to use spoken language to develop English within all lessons, particularly emphasising vocabulary and appropriate register. Today, this is evident in the school hall: a courtroom has been set up and Year 5 students are participating in a hard-fought trial concerning social media access. Anji, the teacher, has previously helped students to prepare eloquent arguments for and against the issue. Today, prosecution

“The benefits ... span social, emotional and cognitive domains”



and defence lawyers, rising from their separate tables in front of the judge, make well-reasoned, passionate cases to the assembled jury and interject with objections to their counterparts' opposing views. With content and terminology developed in preceding lessons, the focus of Anji's feedback now is chiefly the presentational aspects of talk, such as posture, projection and pace. Eventually, the jury deliberates - revisiting in the process the vocabulary and arguments put forward - and reports their verdict. With a bang of his gavel, the judge brings proceedings to a close.

Meanwhile, at Brookfield, Adam (Head of Mathematics) is wrestling with a question of social justice. There is a reluctance to set by attainment level for this age group and the department is convinced that a more dialogic approach holds the key to making mixed-attainment teaching feasible. In his lesson, Adam poses an intriguing, somewhat ambiguous, problem for his Year 9 group. Rather than getting heads down to work in individual books, students are armed only with mini whiteboards for the majority of the lesson. As well as encouraging provisional, exploratory thinking, the whiteboards are used as devices to support collaborative reasoning.

While some students arrive at a possible solution more quickly than others, there is an explicitly-stated commitment to ensuring that the whole table group understands, forcing students to articulate and visually demonstrate their ideas skilfully. As the lesson proceeds, collaboration spreads from within to between table groups, enhancing the feeling of collective enterprise. Adam's interjections at whole-class level centre less on the answers than on illuminating the problem-solving process: he gently challenges assumptions with alternative perspectives and makes students' thinking explicit to the wider group.

Underwood is a primary school where student agency is immediately visible. Vibrant displays and banners reflect awareness of campaigns for causes such as sustainability and civil rights. School leaders realise that children have been engaging with these important and complex issues but often struggle to articulate their learning. With a commitment to authentic action in mind, Steve leads his Year 1 students through a whole-class discussion on the school's use of plastics. The context is an authentic one, as seen in the playground, which is full of projects from children's recent sustainability work.

A recent campaign has resulted, for example, in the reduction of plastic waste in the dinner hall. Informal paired talk allows rehearsal of ideas before wider sharing on what the school should do next. The emphasis is on building constructively on others' contributions, an aim reinforced by a physical 'building' gesture. Appropriate sentence starters for reasoned agreement and disagreement are modelled by Steve and adapted by the students in an episode of sustained dialogue and collective thought. Based on this co-construction of ideas, students return to their seats eager to justify in writing their idea for action.

Four rich learning episodes spanning age groups, school circumstances and geographical locations. In each case, of course, there is an unseen 'backstory'. This involves the nurturing and propagating of pre-requisite oracy skills for both students and staff and, in all likelihood, episodes of more directive, instructional forms of learning. What unites these classrooms, however, is not simply the groundwork underpinning each example, but also the way that talk has been used with judgement and for a clear purpose. Student confidence, proficient public speaking, high academic expectations for all and agency in society have all been targeted. While the benefits of oracy in each example are multiple and overlapping, these four teachers know their students' needs and are using oracy thoughtfully and strategically, with a distinctive contribution in mind. As the word continues to spread and schools embark on oracy journeys across the country, it is exciting to imagine the diverse purposes they might serve and the range of transformations that will ensue.

“Informal paired talk allows rehearsal of ideas before wider sharing on what the school should do next.”

Rupert Knight is the author of [‘Classroom Talk in Practice: Teachers’ Experiences of Oracy in Action’](#).



Amanda Moorghen

Oracy can be Assessed

We think we know what exams look like – a hundred or more students sat at individual desks in the cleared-out lunch hall, working in silence. Assessing oracy doesn't fit into this picture – we talk about 'sitting an exam', not speaking it!

We worry about the logistics ("we need to film them all! It'll take too long!"); we worry about the reliability of marking ("it's too subjective!"); and we might worry that the sorts of talk we care most about are the hardest to assess fairly ("I can sort of imagine assessing a single speech... but what about a group discussion?").

But we need to tackle these challenges head on:

Schools need to know what works, so they need an oracy assessment

Teachers and school leaders have neither the time nor the money to do every single thing that could be valued. The best teachers and school leaders use the available evidence, and a rich knowledge of their context, to prioritise ruthlessly. A reliable oracy assessment that is practical in an everyday school context would unlock the ability to prioritise the most effective teaching and learning approaches. It would also enable us to better understand the vital role oracy plays in supporting other outcomes, from academic achievement to student wellbeing.

We need a national picture of our strengths and weaknesses

We know that not every child currently receives the high-quality oracy education to which they are entitled. Less than a quarter of secondary teachers and less than half of primary teachers report being confident in their understanding of the 'spoken language' requirements outlined in the National Curriculum¹. An oracy assessment could enable government and national actors to deliver targeted funding and other support where it's needed most; and ensure oracy is not 'invisible' at a policy-level, in comparison to other important outcomes (e.g. literacy and numeracy) for which detailed data is available.

"A reliable oracy assessment that is practical in an everyday school context would unlock the ability to prioritise the most effective teaching and learning approaches."



1. Oracy APPG (2021). *Speak for Change*.

The challenges of assessing oracy

This isn't a new challenge², although it has gained more recent prominence following the removal of the Speaking and Listening component from GCSE English. The main issues are:

Logistics

It's harder to 'store' oracy: you need video/audio files rather than written documents. 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. As a result, it's often impractical for "oracy exams" to be as long as their written counterparts – which makes it harder to provide a reliable assessment that covers everything we want to know.

What type of talk do we assess?

There are lots of types of talk – from exploratory talk (the sort we use collaboratively to discuss or solve problems) to presentational (more 'polished' talk; "giving a speech"). Moreover, these types of talk may vary in appearance across contexts, and some genres of talk may involve additional specific skills or competencies. Any assessment needs to navigate the pitfalls this creates – the assessment might offer too narrow a conception of oracy (which depending on the use, might have knock-on effects for the oracy students are taught and have the opportunity to practise); or it might be too broad, so that some aspects feel irrelevant.

Reliability

To be useful, assessments have to give us reliable answers. The world of assessment has lots of types of reliability, but for our purposes the main concern is whether we can design an assessment that "isn't too subjective", i.e. where the same piece of work is likely to consistently receive the same grade, even if there are different people doing the marking.



“Each of these challenges can be met, but it’s hard to meet them all at the same time.”

Each of these challenges can be met, but it's hard to meet them all at the same time. This isn't unique to oracy. Consider the range of assessment methods we use for students' written work – we wouldn't want to use a formative, peer-assessment method to determine which GCSE grades to give, but nor would it be appropriate to replace every weekly spelling test with a 45-minute paper based on a centrally-defined exam specification!

2. Howe, A. (1991). Making talk work. NATE papers in education. London: National Association for the Teaching of English

Assessing oracy using comparative judgement

At Voice 21 we're working to develop an oracy assessment that can be used by schools once or twice a year to monitor the progress of their students against the Oracy Framework³. Voice 21 Oracy Schools already engage in a wide range of impact assessment activities. This includes assessing their school's oracy provision against the Oracy Benchmarks⁴ using Voice 21's Oracy Surveys; conducting classroom-based research, perhaps using tools like T-SEDA⁵ (which measures changes in the quality of students' discussion) and monitoring outcomes that their oracy provision is designed to impact, such as reading scores and behavioural incidents.

In a formative context, schools monitor individual students' progress by creating portfolios of student work to show change over time; through teacher-assessment of students against their school's oracy progression framework; and by using peer-assessment methods such as 'Talk Detectives'.

It has recently become possible to attempt to trial the use of a comparative judgement approach to assess oracy. Traditional 'absolute' judgement relies on teachers using a rubric or mark sheet to assess students – comparing each performance to a set of descriptions to allocate a mark or grade. This can be really difficult to do – the assessor may have to look for lots of different features of talk, and the descriptions might be hard to match to real life (is this student's speech 'somewhat' or 'very' well-reasoned?). Previous assessments designed in this way have suffered from poor reliability⁶.

By contrast, a comparative judgement approach asks the assessor to compare two performances, and decide which is better. Then, two more are presented for comparison. Over time, the comparative judgement system is able to use these comparisons (which may come from multiple assessors) to rank all the performances. Grades or scores can then be imposed on this ranking to communicate the results in a meaningful way. This method tends to lead to

more reliable results, particularly when assessing 'performance', where an expert may be able to consistently recognise quality, without being able to describe it easily⁷.

In Voice 21's project, 'Comparing Talk', we are using RM Compare, an adaptive comparative judgement platform, to assess students' oracy. Our initial proof-of-concept trials were promising: we found that we could generate reliable rankings of examples of student talk. Additionally, participating teachers enjoyed assessing student work on the online platform, as it gave them the opportunity to see the work of students from a range of different schools around the UK.

There's still work to be done – we are working to expand our robustly designed assessment task suite to include a wider range of types of talk, and to be appropriate for use by wider age groups. We are also working with RM to make sure that teachers have the best possible experience when they use the assessment: minimising the time needed to assess each group of students, and maximising the usefulness of the insight generated.

Conclusion

Comparative judgement has the potential to change the game for oracy assessment. We're able to bring new technology to bear on an old problem, with the hope of creating something of great value to teachers in Voice 21 Oracy Schools and beyond. Initial proof-of-concept investigations leave us quietly confident in this approach, and with lots to think about as we try to turn our thinking and theorising into an assessment that, for teachers, offers game-changing insight via a simple, easy to use platform.

7. Ahmed, A (2017). *Should we assess oracy, and can comparative judgement help?* <https://oracycambridge.org/should-we-assess-oracy-and-can-comparative-judgement-help/>

3. Voice 21 (2019). *The Oracy Framework*.

4. Voice 21 (2019). *The Oracy Benchmarks*.

5. Vrikk et al (2018). *The Teacher Scheme for Educational Dialogue Analysis (T-SEDA): Developing a research-based observation tool for supporting teacher inquiry into pupils' participation in classroom dialogue*. International Journal of Research and Methods in Education. London: Routledge.

6. EEF (2014) *Voice 21: Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit*.

Amanda Moorghen,
Head of Impact and Research,
Voice 21



Rebekah Simon

Oracy Education Can Mitigate the Challenge of the Transition from Primary to Secondary School

Introduction

The transition from primary to secondary school is a pivotal time for children's learning and development. It involves navigating new social structures and academic challenges, and happens during an often turbulent time in a child's development¹.

For many students, the transition from primary to secondary school is a positive event that they are able to successfully navigate; however, some children experience a decline in their academic achievement and a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing².

One challenge that children face when moving into secondary school is a shift in expectations around the amount of work that they will be able to do, and the way in which they engage both with their classmates and with their learning materials. There is also a change in the type and quantity of new vocabulary that they encounter³. At secondary school, students are required to use and understand specialised, subject-specific language: academic vocabulary that is rarely used in everyday speech.

Students also experience an increase in anxiety in relation to oracy around the transition from primary to secondary school, which could stem in part from the new academic vocabulary.

“...anxiety and nervousness in relation to speaking increase dramatically in Year 7”

1. Harris, J & Nowland, R (2020). *Primary-Secondary School Transition: Impacts and Opportunities for Adjustment*. Journal of Education & Social Sciences.

2. Ibid.

3. Deignan, A, Candarli, D & Oxley, F (2023). *The Linguistic Challenge of the Transition to Secondary School: A Corpus Study of Academic Language*. London: Routledge.

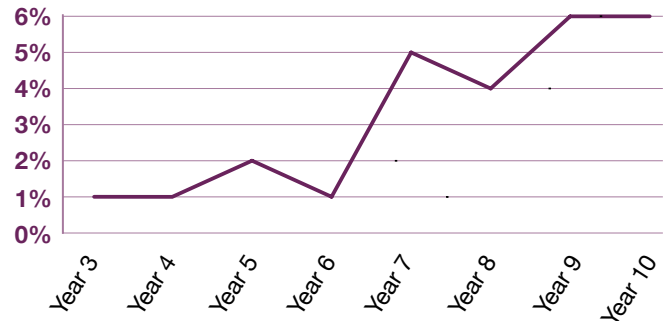


Confidence at the transition from primary to secondary school

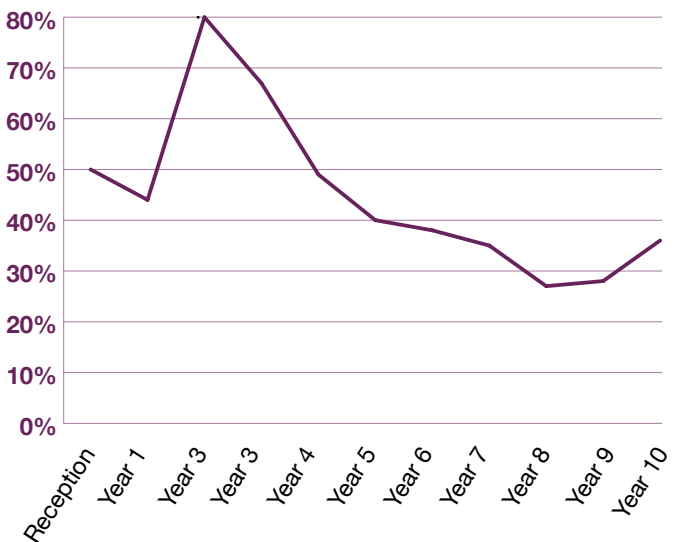
Each year Voice 21 surveys students in Voice 21 Oracy Schools to understand their self-perceptions of oracy and their experience of oracy education. These surveys reveal that anxiety and nervousness in relation to speaking increase dramatically in Year 7 and rise steadily throughout secondary school. They also indicate that primary school students are more likely to perceive that oracy education has benefited their academic performance ('It is important to me because it has helped me to progress in school') than their secondary counterparts. However, as students move into secondary school, they are less likely to report that oracy education supports their academic confidence. This shift is indicative of the challenge of moving into a new environment.

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, they can better prepare students to speak in a new, unfamiliar context and boost their confidence.

Reported anxiety by year group



Reported academic confidence by year group



“Teachers and school leaders should be aware of this increased nervousness or anxiety when planning for oracy in their settings.”

Findings from ‘Voicing Vocabulary’

Adopting an oracy-rich approach to teaching vocabulary could help to mitigate issues that students face around vocabulary acquisition and expectations of specialised, academic vocabulary. In secondary school, vocabulary tends to be taught via written rather than spoken contexts, which is less effective⁴. Relying solely on written communication can exacerbate existing differences in academic language skills, as vocabulary size can be a barrier to students’ ability to derive meaning (and thus learn) from texts. When students get to hear and practise new vocabulary in context, it becomes part of their productive vocabularies and can help encourage students to be playful with words and language.

With these considerations in mind, for the past two years, Voice 21 has been running a project which is aimed at developing Key Stage 2 and 3 students’ vocabulary skills by establishing an oracy-rich, cross-phase approach to vocabulary development. The project has also focused on enabling students to learn through talk, empowering them to use talk as a means to improve their thinking and understanding, as well as their vocabularies.

The project developed a cross-phase approach to vocabulary development where teachers from secondary schools and their primary feeder schools worked together on transition projects which aimed to help Year 6 students acquire the language skills and vocabulary that they require in secondary school. Through these projects primary and secondary colleagues have developed shared oracy-rich teaching approaches which drive word ownership in their classrooms and across their schools.

The emerging findings from this project suggest that learning new vocabulary through talk can help students to feel more confident about their ability to succeed in secondary school. Participating teachers have reported that their vocabulary teaching has improved and that their students have started to use more complex academic vocabulary in their speech and writing.



Conclusion

Oracy education can help students gain the confidence that they need to succeed at secondary school, empowering them to become confident speakers who can use their voices to speak up in academic contexts, as well as to advocate for themselves and others. In order to help students have a smoother transition from primary to secondary school, it is important that primary and secondary teachers work together to help students acquire the oracy and vocabulary skills that they need to successfully navigate the changing expectations.

“Oracy education can help students gain the confidence that they need to succeed at secondary school”

Rebekah Simon,
Research and Policy Officer,
Voice 21



4. Beck et al (2002). *Bringing Words to Life*.

Classroom Research:

To what extent does the explicit teaching of Talk Tactics improve year two children's capability to build upon ideas?

By Tom Dwelly

Introduction

My class needed support with both the cognitive and social and emotional strands of the Oracy Framework – specifically with their ability to “*build upon others' ideas*” and “*listen actively and respond appropriately*”¹. As a result, I chose to focus my research on a group of six low prior-attaining students who were able to access the Year Two curriculum but would either disengage from or dominate group discussion. As part of my intervention, I taught oracy explicitly over a six week period, including how to use Talk Tactics and sentence stems with a particular emphasis on building on others' ideas and listening actively and responding.

Method

At the start and end of the intervention, I recorded an exploratory discussion-based activity in order to baseline the students' oracy skills. This activity required children to look at a collection of photos and determine which was the oldest. I analysed these discussions using the T-SEDA coding framework² which counts the number of times that students use different conversational elements and allows for a side-by-side comparison of two different discussions. I also created a visual representation of the conversation to track who was speaking and how much.

1. Millard, W. and Menzies, L., (2017). *The State of Speaking in our Schools*.

2. Hennessey, S and Rojas-Drummond, S. Scheme for Educational Dialogue Analysis (SEDA). Available at: <https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/analysingdialogue> (Accessed April 2022)

Findings

During the initial conversation, students didn't develop each other's ideas, instead waiting for their turn to speak and share their opinion. It was not a free flowing, natural conversation and children were reluctant to develop their ideas collaboratively.

Following the six-week oracy intervention, students were much more confident engaging in exploratory talk. Students interacted more with each other's ideas, inviting others to share their thinking and making their reasoning explicit. They were able to use sentence stems to structure their ideas and actively enjoyed building upon each other's ideas in the final discussion.

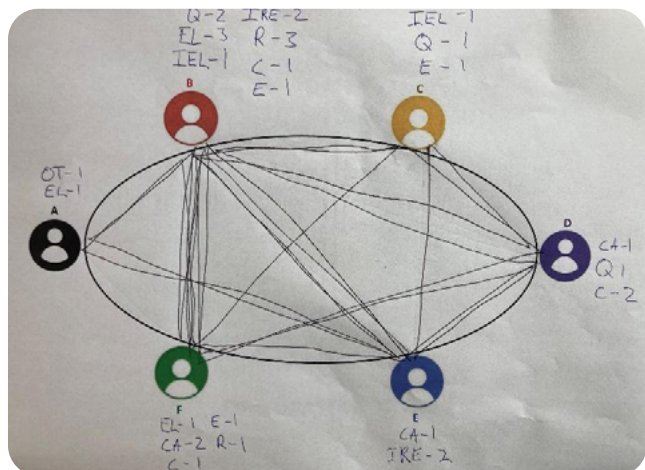
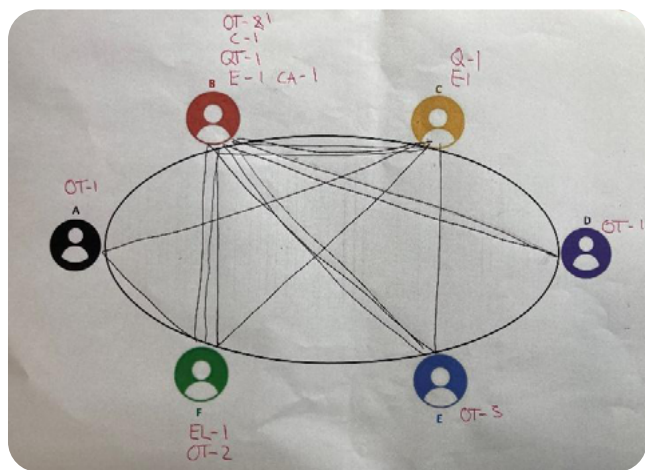
Improvements in the quality of group dialogue can be seen in the T-SEDA data: overall, there were a greater number of contributions, and these contributions were much more exploratory in nature. The number of times that students used positive components of the dialogue categories doubled, while the number of off topic interactions decreased from eight to one.

The Harkness tracker also showed that there were more interactions between students overall, and the spread was more evenly distributed, meaning that more students were contributing actively to the discussion.

Baseline and impact data: T-SEDA framework

Dialogue Categories		Baseline	Post-intervention
IEL	Invite elaboration, building on or clarifying ideas	0	2
EL	Elaborate ideas	1	5
Q	Querying, questioning, disagreeing with or challenging an idea	1	4
IRE	Invite reasoning	0	2
R	Make reasoning explicit	1	4
CA	Co-ordination of ideas and agreement	1	4
RD	Reflect on dialogue or activity	0	0
C	Connect	1	4
E	Express or invite ideas	2	3
OT	Off-topic	8	1
Total interaction		15	29

Harkness Tracker: pre- and post-intervention



Conclusion

Explicitly teaching oracy has had an impact both on students' confidence to contribute to class discussions and their ability to reason together. Overall, explicitly teaching oracy has helped students to better express themselves and their ideas, and to work together to come to shared understanding through critical engagement and collaboration.

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Classroom Research:

The impact of exploratory talk on the attainment of low prior-attaining KS4 science students

By Matt Shaw

Introduction

For this project, I wanted to investigate the impact of using group exploratory talk on my KS4 science students' ability to answer extended response questions.

I noticed that some of my students did not know where to begin with creating an answer to the given question, and were also having difficulties organising their ideas in a methodical manner.

I decided to put students into mixed attainment groups where students would support each other to develop a model answer to an extended response question.

Method

Two low prior-attaining Year 10 groups were chosen for this study, a total of 40 students. The students were baselined at the beginning of the project by answering a six-mark question as part of their chemistry paper. They were then given another six-mark question halfway through the project, and a final question at the end.

The intervention ran over a four-week period, during the second term of the academic year. A Kagan styled peer supportive cooperative learning approach based upon mixing the ability of the students within a group, was used to create the groups (of four), for the purposes of the exploratory talk. A six-mark practical skills experiment was performed in week one, with each group collecting data.

In week two, the exploratory talk tasks were undertaken. This included the use of a concept map to scaffold students' analysis of the practical task. Each group used a sheet of A3 paper to formulate their ideas after the discussions, for example on the equipment needed, and the method detail needed to allow the experiment to be followed by someone else. Each group then peer reviewed each other's notes and made revisions as necessary in dialogue with each other.

In week 3, the writing tasks were undertaken, with students collectively, then individually writing up a method based upon their feedback sheet, then under exam conditions, each student completed the same mock exam six-mark question (in the interim they had received no feedback on their mocks, and had not seen the paper, or their score for this question).

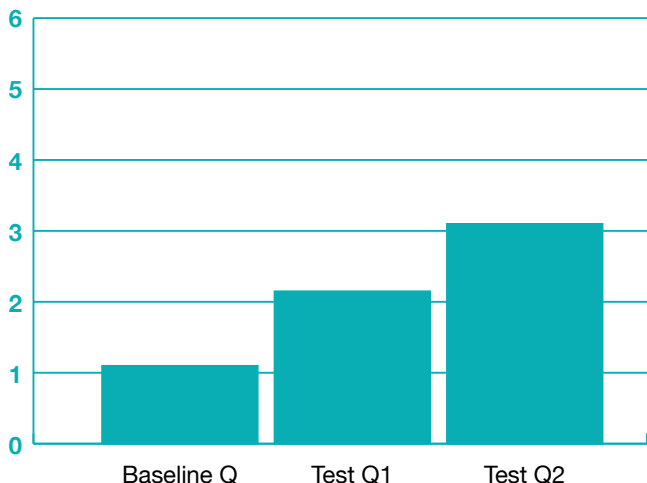
In week four, a follow up experiment, together with the corresponding exploratory talk, peer feedback and a subsequent different six-mark question analysis was undertaken to investigate the impact of repeating these skills to embed them into good practice over time.



Findings

The mean score achieved by the students on the first question (Baseline Q) was 1.10/6, with a range of zero to four out of six. 40% of the students got a zero.

Mean marks scored for the extended six-mark response questions



When answering the extended response question for a second time (Test Q1), the mean mark increased from 1.10 to 2.15, out of six, with a range of zero to five. Only 9% of students gained a zero mark, down from 40% previously.

The final mark was further improved to 3.1, with a range of 2/6 to 4/6. The improvement in scores indicates that an oracy approach is a highly effective method of scaffolding students' learning around written science questions.

Conclusion

Throughout the project, each member contributed fully to the discussions, giving quality peer feedback and summarising. Quieter students were engaged with their roles within the group, and the students were challenging each other's ideas and building upon them to get to a cohesive end point.

The data collected during this study exemplifies the successes of this project, with the low prior-attaining students on average moving from a 1/6 to a 3/6.

The oracy intervention helped students to better understand how to answer the questions, and also to create more organised and methodical responses that better captured the marking criteria. The students became more engaged with the group, and were also able to use talk to challenge and build upon each other's ideas, and, as a result of the explicit teaching of oracy, substantially improved their success at answering six-mark chemistry questions.

“The students became more engaged with the group”



School-based Research:

To what extent does an oracy-based restorative justice approach, implemented for six weeks, enable lunchtime staff to support Year 3 children in managing conflict?

By Holly Dyson

The Oracy Intervention

In my school, students needed support with behaviour outside of the classroom. It was evident that, although children were speaking confidently in the classroom, they weren't confident expressing their opinions constructively outside of their lessons. Instead, children would resort to physical responses or non-verbal expressions of anger or frustration. This was especially evident during lunchtime play.

In order to address this, I decided to focus on the use of talk to resolve and manage conflict during lunchtime play. I developed two key resources for use by lunchtime staff that built on the oracy approaches that were already being used elsewhere in the school. Lunchtime staff were given a 30-second script to promote restorative justice when dealing with behaviour incidents, as well as a series of oracy games to stimulate talk on the playground¹.

Method

I monitored the number of 'strikes' given to Year 3 students for lunchtime behavioural issues, to see if these decreased following the intervention. I conducted interviews and surveys of lunchtime staff to gain their perspective on the success of the oracy intervention.

1. Dix, P. (2017). *When the Adults Change, Everything Changes: Seismic Shifts in School Behaviour*. 1st ed. Bancyfelin: Independent Thinking Press.

“Students needed support with behaviour outside of the classroom”



Findings

The chart below shows the number of strikes given before and after the intervention:

Term	Year Group	# of strikes
Autumn 1	3	19
Autumn 2	3	21
Spring 1	3	11
After Intervention		
Spring 2	3	2

As shown in the table, the strike numbers have decreased dramatically to '2' for the Spring 2 term and this has remained a constant as we move towards the end of Summer 1 term as well.

Lunchtime staff were also surveyed at the beginning and end of the intervention. Initially, they collectively rated behaviour a 3.25/5, and by the end this improved to a 4.75/5.

Conclusion

Through this project I have focused on nurturing a culture of oracy that goes beyond the classroom walls and into our wider staff community. The impact of this on students and the wider school community has been substantial. Staff have embraced the challenge of further embedding the oracy-based restorative justice approach around school, which has had a further positive impact on the working relationships between both staff and students at all levels.

The project has significantly improved the behaviour of students who took part in the intervention and has also made a positive impact on students' wellbeing, as well as on their social and emotional health.

“The impact of this on students and the wider school community has been substantial”



Classroom Research:

To what extent does teaching Talk Tactics improve discussions in guided reading amongst Year 5 children working at expected level for reading?

By Emily Thomas

Introduction

While observing my Year 5 class during a discussion in a guided reading lesson, I noticed that the children were confident to build on each other's ideas, but rarely took on any other roles within the discussion. In order to address this, I chose to undertake a research project with six children at expected level looking at improving their discussion through the explicit teaching of Talk Tactics, which encourages students to think critically about their contributions to group discussion. These include presenting new ideas, digging deeper, and asking clarifying questions.

Method

The data that I used included a Harkness Tracker and a coding system that I created based on T-SEDA (2018)¹ in order to support my analysis.

For the coding system, I counted how many times each Talk Tactic was used by the students. The Harkness tracker allowed me to see the distribution of the children's conversation.

1. Vrikk et al (2018). *The Teacher Scheme for Educational Dialogue Analysis (T-SEDA): Developing a research-based observation tool for supporting teacher inquiry into pupils' participation in classroom dialogue*. *International Journal of Research and Methods in Education*. London: Routledge.

Findings

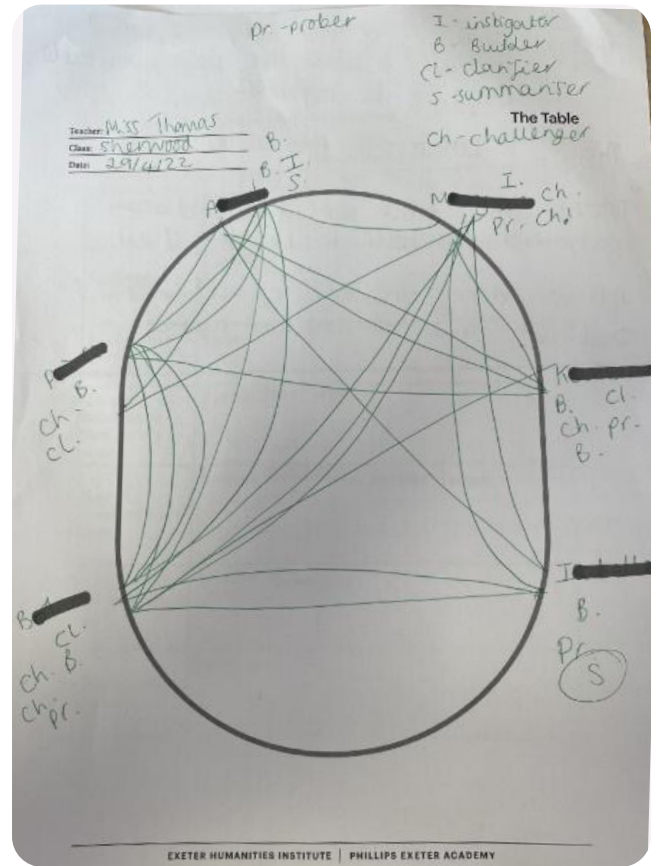
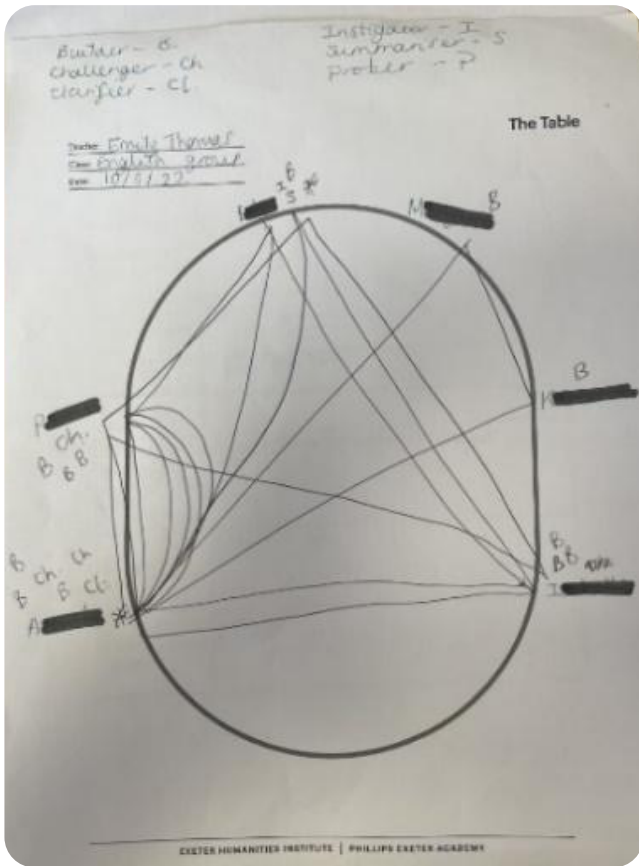
Talk Tactic tally: pre-intervention

Talk Tactics	# of times used (tally)	Total
Builder	### ### //	12
Challenger	///	3
Instigator	/	1
Summariser	/	1
Prober		0
Clarifier	/	1

Talk Tactic tally: post-intervention

Talk Tactics	# of times used (tally)	Total
Builder	### //	7
Challenger	### /	6
Instigator	//	2
Summariser	//	2
Prober	////	4
Clarifier	///	3

The post-intervention tally shows that, while the builder tactic was still the most regularly used, the others were used more frequently and overall, the types of contribution were more evenly spread. In my baseline data none of the children took on the role of the prober, however during the final discussion it was attempted by multiple children. This shows that the children have developed confidence using a range of Talk Tactics.



The Harkness tracker results show that the distribution of peer-to-peer dialogue was more even. Additionally, I observed that when a child was not contributing, all the children invited them to speak on a number of occasions.

I also noticed an improvement in the students' understanding of what made a good discussion as they were able to identify which tactics other children were using. There were also examples of students changing their minds as a result of the discussion, which indicated active rather than passive listening.

Finally, the first discussion I observed lasted for three minutes before I had to intervene, whereas the final discussion was over seven minutes long. This showed that the children were able to instigate new lines of dialogue, sustain and build on points without adult intervention.

Conclusion

The results of this project indicate that teaching students to use Talk Tactics supports productive, insightful discussion; enabling students to learn through talk. Following the intervention, the students were more confident and capable to engage with each other in a productive discussion. The project also indicated that children moved from passive to active listening, and were more able to respond to each other in an on-topic and collaborative manner.



Classroom Research:

To what extent can the explicit teaching of the language of play develop exploratory talk in the small world area in EYFS?

By Fran Heritage

Introduction

It is widely recognised that children acquire communication and collaboration skills primarily through play¹. However, we noticed that following the COVID-19 lockdowns, the children we taught were not communicating as confidently as the children we taught prior to the pandemic.

For the intervention, I chose to look at small world play, a form of imaginative play in which children use props or toys. In my experience in Reception, this tended to be an area in which children were most able to try out new vocabulary and build understanding in context, developing their expressive language whilst narrating their play.

Method

I selected a representative sample of five boys, and picked an area that the boys were interested in to focus on when setting up the small world play area –play with vehicles.

The strategies that I used with them included recasting phrases (rephrasing to adult language), extending students' comments (rephrasing and then adding an additional related comment), probing, and introducing new vocabulary².

1. Siraj, I. & Asani, R. (2015). *The role of sustained shared thinking, play and metacognition in young children's learning*. Handbook of Young Children's Thinking and Understanding (pp. 403-415). London: Routledge.

2. Alexander R. (2004). *Towards Dialogic Teaching: Rethinking Classroom Talk*. Cambridge University Press.

Findings

This table shows how many words were used by each member of the group in the space of five minutes at the start and end of the project.

Child	Number of words used pre-intervention	Number of words used post-intervention
Child 1	37	34
Child 2	15	14
Child 3	10	27
Child 4	7	34
Child 5	10	38

Initially, not only was talk very limited, but the children mainly focused on “physical play,” including crashing or pushing cars on the track. The result was that the nature of what was verbalised in the group was the boys trying to establish their own territory for play.



Following the intervention, the data shows a much more even spread in the number of words spoken, with no one child dominating the talk. The content of the talk also improved; the children linked their own experiences to what they were doing with their vehicles, and the children were also able to use the conversational strategies that had been taught to them.

The students' use of exploratory talk also improved; there was more engagement and talk between the children, and they moved towards co-constructing play rather than playing in isolation.

“There was more engagement and talk between the children, and they moved towards co-constructing play”

Conclusion

By using and embedding oracy strategies in a nursery class, my students were able to have more collaborative and balanced conversations, able to use a more rich and varied vocabulary and were better able to narrate their play, developing their use of exploratory talk when playing with their peers.



Classroom Research:

To what extent does the use of differentiated Talk Tactics, implemented for six weeks, improve the quality of exploratory talk among a group of Year 2 high prior-attaining students?

By Louise Groves

Introduction

The majority of my students were keen and confident enough to take part in small group discussions, but they were predominantly using procedural and cumulative talk. It was obvious that more scaffolding and support was needed to facilitate learning through exploratory talk.

To support students' exploratory talk, I introduced Talk Tactic roles, and decided to focus on the roles of instigator, builder and challenger initially. These offered students three productive roles that they can take in an exploratory discussion, with suggested sentence starters and phrases to help scaffold this talk.

More scaffolding and support was needed to facilitate learning through exploratory talk

Method

I chose to focus on a group of six high prior-attaining students. I used 'Would you rather....' questions to initiate the conversations and to alleviate any knowledge-based anxieties.

I carried out an assessment where I tallied the number of times particular tactics were used during a group discussion. I completed the same assessment at the end of the intervention and compared the results. I also administered a survey asking students about their perceptions of their own oracy skills, which was also given to the students at the beginning and end of the intervention.



Findings

Self-perception survey before intervention:

Please answer the following questions by ticking the smiley face of your choice.

= I agree = Sometimes I agree and sometimes I do not = I do not agree

1.	I like learning through talking.	5	1	
2.	I would like to do more learning through talking.	5	1	
3.	I listen to what other people say.	4	2	
4.	I think about what other people have said.	4	2	
5.	I feel confident enough to say what I think.	4	2	
6.	I know the words I need to use to say what I think.	3	3	
7.	I know the words to use to agree with someone.	4	2	
8.	I know the words to use to disagree with someone.		2	4
9.	I feel confident enough to disagree with someone.		2	4
10.	Listening to what other people have to say can help my learning.	5	1	

Self-perception survey after intervention:

Please answer the following questions by ticking the smiley face of your choice.

= I agree = Sometimes I agree and sometimes I do not = I do not agree

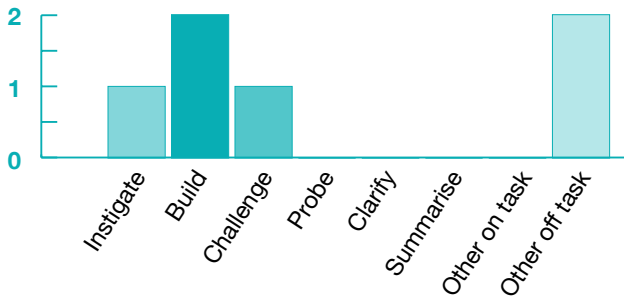
1.	I like learning through talking.	6		
2.	I would like to do more learning through talking.	6		
3.	I listen to what other people say.	5	1	
4.	I think about what other people have said.	6		
5.	I feel confident enough to say what I think.	5	1	
6.	I know the words I need to use to say what I think.	5	1	
7.	I know the words to use to agree with someone.	5	1	
8.	I know the words to use to disagree with someone.	4	2	
9.	I feel confident enough to disagree with someone.	4	2	
10.	Listening to what other people have to say can help my learning.	6		

The survey results showed that the explicit teaching of differentiated Talk Tactics increased students' perceptions of their own oracy skills.

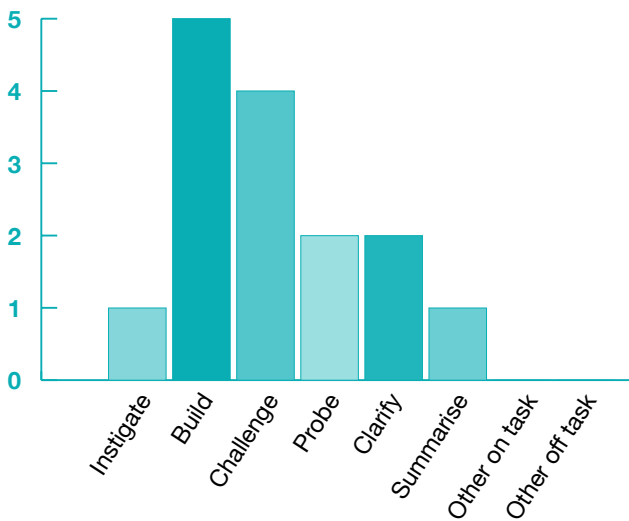
“The ability of my students to engage in exploratory talk has improved significantly”

Tracking use of Talk Tactics

Talk Tactic type sentences used prior to intervention



Talk Tactic type sentences used after intervention



The intervention improved students' ability to use Talk Tactics, which resulted in more productive and meaningful conversation. Students engaged more with each other, and were more able to interact constructively but also critically with each other's ideas.

Even though probe, clarify, and summarise tactics had not been taught explicitly, the capability and confidence of the students had progressed to a stage where they were beginning to ask for further clarification on an opinion and also further back up their own opinions when challenged.

Conclusion

The ability of my students to engage in exploratory talk has improved significantly because of the explicit teaching of Talk Tactics. Their confidence and self-perceptions improved as a result of the intervention, as did their ability to critically engage and have productive, collaborative discussions.



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