

Hinchingbrooke School

Inspiring excellence Fulfilling potential Developing character

All-Party Parliamentary Group submission



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Who are we?



Mark Patterson
Principal

Hinchingbrooke is a remarkable state school, set in acres of beautiful grounds and adjoining a country park. Hinchingbrooke House was formerly the family home of the Cromwells and of the Earls of Sandwich. The school finds inspiration from its heritage and gives both staff and students a very special pride and a sense of identity.

Our mission is **to Inspire excellence Fulfil potential Develop character.**

We aim for all students to be nurtured as uniquely talented individuals, finding fulfilment through their learning and the development of their intellectual, creative, physical and emotional capabilities.

We aim for our students to develop the moral integrity to become responsible global citizens, so that they may take their place in society with confidence. We are confident that anyone associated with the Hinchingbrooke learning community, student or adult, will leave the richer for their experience.

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Principal



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Our oracy ethos



Why do we need this skill?

“Literacy is the ability to **read, write, speak** and **listen** in a way that lets us communicate effectively and make sense of the world”

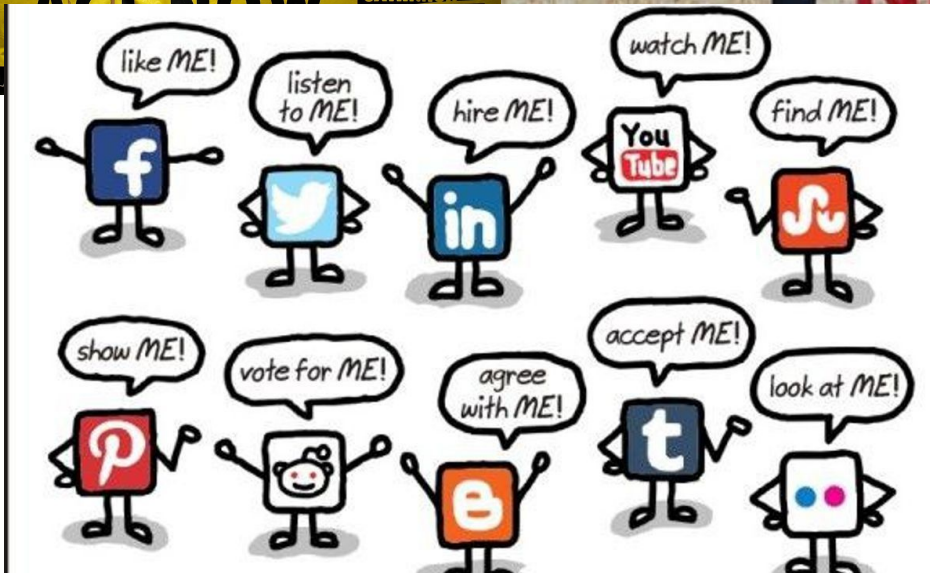
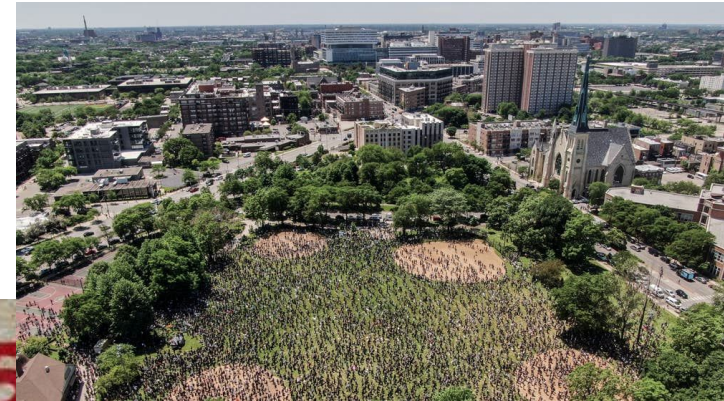


<https://literacytrust.org.uk/information/what-is-literacy/>



Why now?

Beyond the school gates...



Why now?

- Lockdown is expected to worsen social inequality

Moss, G., Allen, R., Bradbury, A., Duncan, S., Harmey, S., and Levy, R. June 2020, UCL Institute of Education

https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10103669/1/Moss_DCDT%20Report%201%20Final.pdf

The *Understanding Society COVID-19* study is a regular survey on the experiences and reactions of the UK population to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Students have mainly had a diet of projects and worksheets but they need teacher input now more than ever

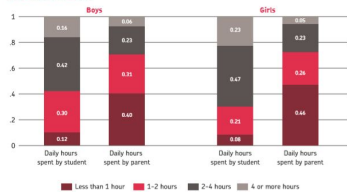


M Benzeval, M Borkowska, J Burton, TF Crossley, L Fumagalli, A Jäckle, B Rabe and B Read (2020) Understanding Society COVID-19 Survey April Briefing Note: Home schooling, Understanding Society Working Paper No 12/2020, ISER, University of Essex.

Time spent by students and parents on home schooling

The survey asks parents how much time they or other family members spend actively helping each child with school work. The figure uses one response per student.

Daily hours spent on schoolwork by students and parents by gender (proportion of students)



- 58% of boys and 70% of girls spend 2 hours or more a day doing their schoolwork.
- Parents spend slightly more time actively helping boys than girls. They help boys for very short durations (less than one hour) less often and for 1-2 hours more often than girls.

- Attainment gaps we knew existed between certain groups are set to widen- (gender and dis. in particular)



Why teachers?

Communication skills in the education sector are identified under the umbrella term **SLCN**
Speech Language and Communication Needs

Direct links to literacy

- Children with poor language and literacy development at 5 years are at substantial risk of low achievement at 7 years.
- Gaps continue to widen into secondary school
- Between 50% and 90% of children with persistent SLCN go on to have reading difficulties

To behaviour

- More than 50% of children at risk of exclusion have undiagnosed SLCN

To employability

- 47 percent of employers in England report difficulty in finding employees with an appropriate level of oral communication skills

- Around 10% of all children have long term SLCN

SLCN is the most prevalent childhood disability



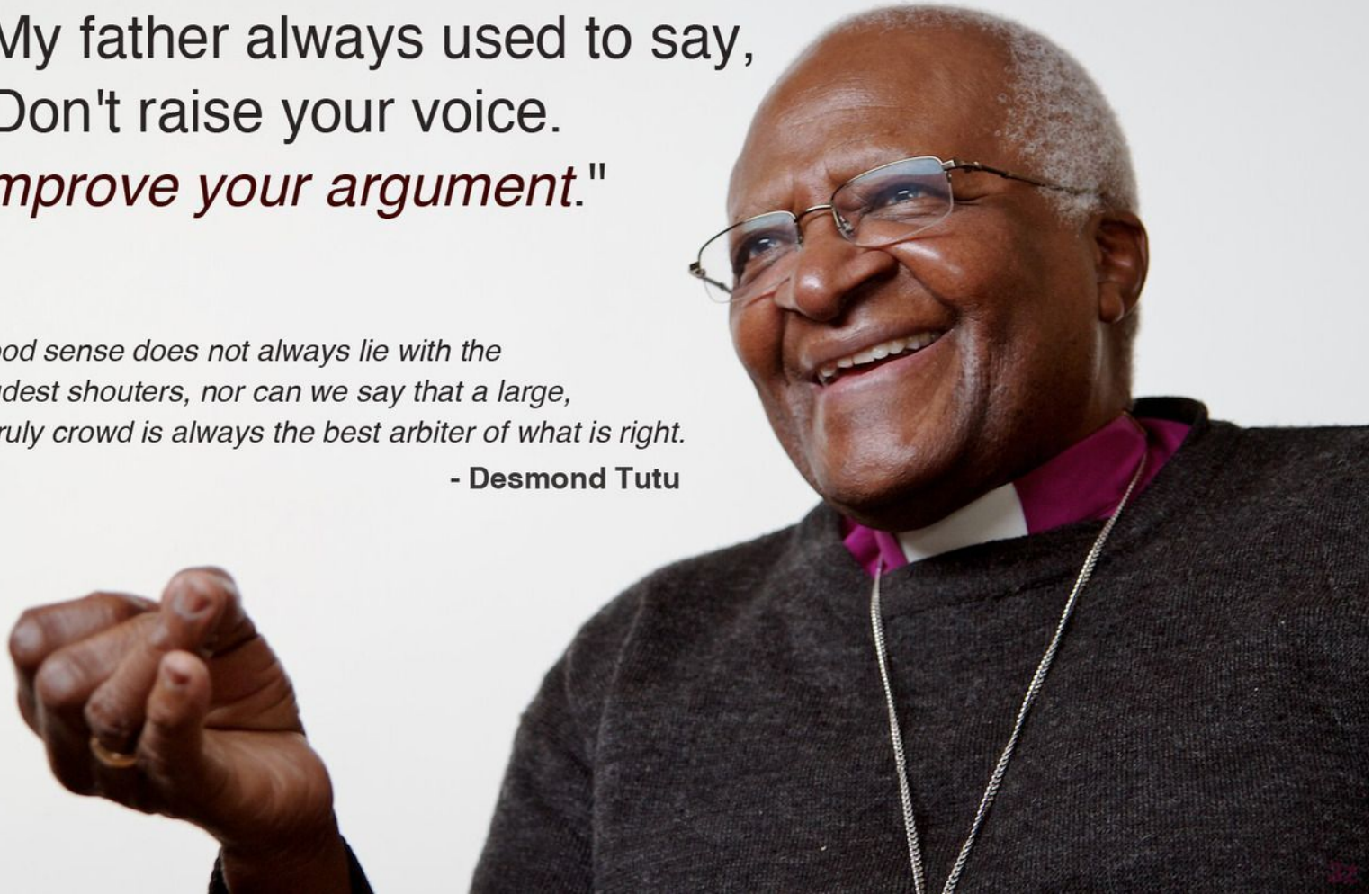
The Communication Trust



“My father always used to say,
"Don't raise your voice.
Improve your argument."

*Good sense does not always lie with the
loudest shouters, nor can we say that a large,
unruly crowd is always the best arbiter of what is right.*

- **Desmond Tutu**



Staff testimonials



“Oracy, as the embodiment of a variety of literacy skills, is one of the most important and precious skills that we cultivate in our young people. As practitioners, we see first hand the rewards, triumphs and social victories of effective oracy, and sadly the debilitating impact of the misuse, injuries and misunderstandings of poor oracy. I have never been prouder or felt part of something more worthwhile than when teaching students how to articulate themselves and watching them begin to discover their voice as global citizens curious about the world, their place in it and unafraid to question injustices. In all of my roles, whole school, curricular or classroom practitioner, oracy has permeated all of them and yet this skill can be seemingly under-acknowledged given the clear evidence linking literacy to cultural capital. We are fiercely proud of our Debating Society we have established at Hinchingsbrooke and all that it has achieved over the years, but I wonder what we might achieve if oracy was valued by examination boards as we value it, and I wonder how many more students we could impact if there were a greater spotlight on this remarkable skill, a skill that has the capacity to imbue students, parents and teachers alike with an immense joy and sense of empowerment.”

Miss Sarah Spikesley

Head of English and debate Lead

“As a teacher of languages and Principal of a school, I believe that Speaking and Listening activities are absolutely essential to young people’s development. These crucial skills fundamentally underpin our ability to understand the world and interact with it and Government and schools need to prioritise their use and their development. Speaking, in particular, obliges us to articulate our understanding and in doing so, our understanding grows – we really do learn by speaking.”

Mr Mark Patterson
Principle of Hinchingsbrooke School

“Oracy is a hugely valuable skill due to the opportunities it can open up for students in the future if they are able to express a view, sustain an argument, debate and think critically. It is important we equip students with the skills to do this as well as develop their confidence in partaking in discussions. As disadvantaged students often miss out on such conversations at home, it is important that we facilitate this in school so this does not affect them when competing against others from more affluent backgrounds for jobs. As a result, it is absolutely essential that we take our responsibility to develop oracy in the classroom seriously in all subjects across the curriculum”.

Miss Charlotte Newman

Head of RPE and associate Principle

“I think oracy is a hugely valuable skill. The ability to express your feelings and beliefs clearly and with passion can raise awareness and change perceptions on a massive range of important issues and topics. It can also dramatically improve mental health and wellbeing. From a pastoral perspective, topics where I believe oracy skills have proven essential just this term include inequality, bullying, mental health concerns and the impact of the pandemic. Speaking and listening effectively allows the sharing of views which benefits all parties. The power of being able to orate thoughts and emotions cannot and should not be underestimated for both its benefits to children within schools but also in the wider community.”

Mr Dan Milner
Head of Year 7 and transition

“Speaking is the most important of the four skills we teach in MFL, because it is the one the students are most likely to use in “real life” when abroad, in lots of different ways. Speaking is the skill that the vast majority of our students were not able to work on during lockdown, as most wouldn't have had anyone at home who speaks French/German/Spanish to the same level as them. The result has been NO SPEAKING EXAMS for our Y11 this year - their grades will be solely derived from Listening, Reading and Writing. I can see that this is a logical step and a good way of helping students post-lockdown, but it is also very sad that the most important skill will not form part of their final grade. I wonder about the effect post-16 as well - they will need to be able to speak at length, in detail, using lots of complexity and in different contexts for A Level. We teach our students to speak in myriad different ways and contexts: transactional speaking, e.g in shops, chatting with others about a range of topics, giving opinions/points of view and justifying them, asking others questions, debating, taking part in interviews, role plays, describing pictures, describing films, TV, books and music, ... We hope that they end up equipped to deal with a range of scenarios they might find themselves in in a foreign country, or if they encounter non-English speakers in the UK. We also hope that these oracy skills make them more open, friendly, approachable, polite and confident, and therefore more equipped to deal with the challenges of the adult world.”

Mrs Alison Roberts
Head of MFL

“Obviously, History is about identifying, supporting, and articulating a judgement - sometimes around very controversial topics - and so oracy is key. Oracy is not just about speaking but listening, and the consideration of an opposing argument is key to justifying your own: it is a poor historian who fails to even acknowledge an alternative stance!

Also, I think there is a need to recognise the different purposes and value of oracy in History. Sometimes it is utilised to ensure substantive knowledge (say through questioning), other times to introduce a conceptual focus (examples include verbal causal chains) whilst other uses can be to focus on a counterargument (debate) etc. A popular oracy activity I've utilised many times - introduced by Kate Hammond in 'Teaching History' - is the historical 'Boxing Match' which allows students to receive feedback after every round and improve their answers, with the 'Knock Out Punches' mimicking the hit of specific knowledge in an essay.

Oracy can also be used in an Historical Empathy activity, but the importance here is about maintaining historical vigour - just like we don't want students complete anachronistic "Imagine you are..." written activities, the same quality should be assured verbally. Personally, I think Historical Empathy is an area that should be looked at again by teaching practitioners - current research is supporting this - and oracy plays a key part in this, but only if done well (research by individuals such as Ian Luff supports this).

I think oracy is essential at Key Stage 5 for preparing students for Higher Education, particularly in preparation for Seminars and Tutorials. Oracy has also been key in aiding students with Extract Analysis at A-Level, demonstrating how one can pick apart the argument of another.

We firmly believe that history should be taught as an enquiry, and this demands questioning, debate, discovery and literacy - all a key part of oracy”

Miss Rhian Fender
Head of History

School news articles



Up For Debate – preparations for the Grand Final are underway!

The last half term saw the Year 9 Debating team move from strength to strength. With relentless support from Miss Spikesley, the team worked tremendously hard to prepare for the Regional Competition which was held at Northampton University on May 9th. The intense preparation over numerous after-school sessions saw the team formulate their speeches and hone their debating skills to take on dozens of other schools at the event. Coached by last year's champions, the team managed to beat all of the other schools they were up against and, in a very tense final, succeeded in bringing home the trophy! This was no mean feat as their topics were particularly contentious, including debating a junk food tax, the banning of boxing, and university funding for low income students. Despite their challenging subjects, the students took it all in their stride and responded bravely, maturely and sensitively to, not only the subject matter, but their keen competitors. As a reward for their victory, all regional champions were invited to a two-day, all expenses paid trip to London, accompanied by Miss Spikelesy and Miss Emery; the budding finalists were put through their paces by debating experts, including the England Debating Team coach, but also got to take in the sights of the capital – including free tickets to see Aladdin on the West End stage! It was a fantastic opportunity for such wonderful, hard-working students who have done themselves, and the school, proud. Next stop – the Grand Final at Oxford University! We wish them all the very best of luck for this event at such a prestigious venue – fingers crossed that their hard work pays off against such stiff competition.



Student testimonials



Why oracy skills are needed in the curriculum

Lucy Hunt Year 10

“Oracy skills play an important part in life at any age and in a wide variety of careers. The ability to express yourself through speech is essential to formulating your own identity and opinions by enabling yourself to communicate efficiently with others and share your ideas. The advantages to having good communication skills are far from negligible. This extra skill set opens up a new level of emotional and interpersonal ability, including self-confidence and self-awareness which then assists us by allowing us to be able to create friendships easier which in turn boosts our mental health.

Oracy skills have a major impact on how well they can achieve their desired academic goals by giving students increased interaction and conversation/debate over the material which in turn further ingrains that knowledge into the student's mind. Studies have shown that the average student contributes as little as four words per lesson, this lack of interaction could be contributed to the reduced importance of oracy skills in the curriculum that has been created over the past few years. Another study has shown that students with good communication skills are up to four times more likely to receive five A*-Cs at GCSE, which once again shows the link between oracy and academic achievement.

Oracy skills are now commonly reported by employers to be their highest priority as our world is changing to make the sharing of ideas more important than ever before. The ability to communicate and share is the calling sign of an advanced society, which can be seen more than ever in the job scene today. Oracy skills play a major role in events like interviews for a job position, in this situation being able to clearly and concisely express yourself is vital to stick out to your interviewers and show yourself as the best person for that role. Once you are in a job position the importance of oracy skills continues to take a front seat by aiding you to efficiently carry out your job.

Oracy skills are clearly vital and should be a larger part of our education rather than a smaller part. It has been proven to be detrimental to our physical and mental well-being and our success as a society, as surely we want such an important skill to be taught in schools because our education system is to aid our children, right?”

Why oracy is good and should be taught in schools:

Sophie Herbert Year 10

“Oracy significantly boosts a person’s confidence. Being able to talk and express your thoughts and opinions makes you far more confident in yourself and what you believe, which is a vital skill, particularly when it comes to applying for higher education and jobs in later life.

Oracy supports formulating and structuring your thoughts, allowing you to think critically about the all side of a topic. Oracy enables you to transform your thoughts into coherent, understandable speech that’s accessible to everyone to ensure your point has come across effectively. Formulating thoughts and opinions is also a vital life skill as it aids you in things such as voting and making decisions both big and small that ensure you can do the best thing.

Developing oracy skills encourages you to do research about topics that possibly don’t come up on the school curriculum, because you want to know more about a topic to ascertain your opinion on it and build your general knowledge. Researching is a fantastic skill to have not only for school, but for higher education, jobs and indeed, life in general. When supported by excellent talking skills, you’re able to express your research in a concise, and efficient way, which employers look for in an applicant. Research is also another approach to learning and it enables to consider not just the ‘what’ but also the ‘why’ on a subject.

Fluent and engaging public speaking is another skill enhanced by oracy. Standing in front of a group of people and talk to them about a subject is a daunting, nerve wracking prospect for many people. This is because they might not have had much experience in doing so when they were at school, making them less prepared for later life. If oracy was taught more in the classroom, it would normalise it and make it much less stressful and therefore, they would be far better equipped for any public speaking opportunities that may present themselves later on.

Therefore, oracy definitely be taught in the classroom, as it is a major help in later life and opens many doors for people that would never had been open previously. It makes people more confident, which a considerable number of people lack and would love to be able to do things such as public speaking, if they had only had the opportunity to develop their oracy skills in school. We need to ensure that everyone has the ability to have a voice as this is a luxury many people still don’t possess. Therefore, teaching oracy skills in school is vital.”

The importance of oracy-

Thomas Murphy Year 10

“The learning of oracy in schools has many benefits. Learning speaking skills makes a person more employable but many wouldn’t learn this skill unless it was honed in schools. The benefits however go beyond academic achievement and employability as there are also social benefits boosting confidence and simply making us easier to communicate with. I am adamant that teaching oracy skills is very important and that if they are not taught a whole generation of people will be lacking a vital skill.”



Time to give oracy the limelight

Joe Grimbaldeston Year 12

Regardless of what you do with your life, a scientist, astronaut, police officer, lawyer or accountant, the ability to speak is essential. Think about it. From love and relationships, to meeting and chats with colleagues be it formal or informal, speech carries it all. It was the key skill that Warren Buffet describes as “necessary” for any success in work. Franklin D. Roosevelt arguably won as many votes as he did, not only because he could speak well in public, but also because he could speak well with people. You would therefore assume that in Britain, the home of Western democracy, thought, and life, that we would teach this key skill to the children of this country. Yet we are not. In fact, classrooms in Britain are becoming ever quieter, a recent study stated the children only speak for a maximum of five minutes a day in a classroom setting. Here I hope to address a few reasons why oracy is essential, and why we should teach our children this in school.

“Reading and writing float on a sea of talk.”

So why is oracy, apart from the obvious of being able to communicate with others, so important? In my opinion its best to see the importance of oracy by understanding what happens if its development is stifled and the impacts it has. According to The Communication Trust’s report, ‘Talking About a Generation’, found that children that struggle with oracy at five: are 6 times less likely to reach the expected standard in English at 11; ten times less likely to achieve the expected level in maths; more than twice as likely to be unemployed at 34; and are twice as likely to have mental health struggles even when a range of other factors are considered. This quite clearly reveals how vital good oracy skills are, not only in schools, but also in work and your own livelihood and wellbeing.

To put it simply, children are no longer going out and playing, instead they dwell inside watching their favourite content creator on YouTube, or playing the latest game, be it 'Among Us', 'Fortnite' or 'Minecraft'. While gaming in some studies has been seen to help people with eyesight and brain engagement among other things, in some studies, however they aren't particularly good for developing oracy skills. Furthermore, children, through no fault of their own, are lacking the essential skills with people that they once had from playing outside with friends, and if they aren't going to learn these skills outside of school, the responsibility now falls onto the teachers of this country.

The benefits that oracy can provide us are evident in our daily lives and from school and work to happiness; the skill of oracy is essential, and we are losing it. We must ensure that we act quickly in order to that we can help as many students as we can. Russel Group Universities, the Oxbridge group, and Parliament are almost entirely populated by people who went to a public or private school, where they learn from a very young age that their voice matters. They've learnt to find their voice and they've also learnt to use it affectively. Its time we taught all students up and down the country, to learn the same thing.



Prepared questions for our meeting with MPs



Aleksandra Saja

1. Why do you think it's important to learn how to speak well and share your thoughts confidently?

As human beings we are all individuals, we all have our own opinions and views about the world, in order to express them we need to have the vocabulary and the ability to communicate with one another. For instance, if we want to address an issue or simply wish to state what we think, we are restricted to what we had been taught. As we have freedom of speech, we should know how to use this privilege in a manner to improve the society we live in. So, people like me can use their voice to enunciate what we feel and think to shape our future society.

From an early age we are told that we live in a meritocracy; we are told that to succeed we need to work hard. As we grow, we realize that some people are more privileged than others. One way of changing that is helping the future generations develop skills which enable them to express themselves irrespective of background.

2. Why are speaking skills important for future success? How has the COVID-19 pandemic made oracy skills more important for young people's future?

Oracy is a basic skill which is quintessential in every workplace. No matter in which direction a person decides to pursue, the ability to elaborate on an idea and the ability to communicate our thoughts and opinions in a sophisticated and organized manner is extremely powerful.

This pandemic has created many disruptions in various aspects of our lives, including education. Specifically, in lockdown it was clearly demonstrated just how substantial effective communication skills are. An example of this is zoom class meetings, this highlighted the fact that being able to proclaim your concerns and present your ideas verbally is indeed significant. This pandemic highlighted the importance of oracy skills which are and always will be applicable in the future, no matter what career a student chooses.

. 4) Do students need to be explicitly taught oracy? How is it part of your lessons and what skills do you learn?

I believe that oracy should indeed be explicitly taught in order to prepare the next generation for work life and allow them to have a more equal chance of succeeding in the future. This is easily done by more active lessons, focusing on enabling everyone to have a chance to practice voicing their point of view and gradually improving their confidence. Discussing motions relevant to today's society can help shape a generation which can take an active part in striving towards a more equal society. Through adjusting the way lessons are conducted, students will develop their skill of reasoning, evaluating and will learn to listen and think in a different way.

4. How has developing your speaking and listening skills helped you personally (e.g with your studies, confidence socially)

Personally, the debating sessions which I participated in improved my confidence, which then projected itself in the lessons. I contribute more often and engage in conversations about the world that we live in, I openly express my opinion in a more organized way. I also recognized that through listening to other perspectives I can now form arguments which consider more than just my opinion. I think that my ability to evaluate has significantly improved once I started developing my speaking and listening skills.

5. Why is learning to express your views and feelings even more important following the challenges of lock down and ongoing uncertainty and disruption, has the ability to express yourself and talk about concerns helped in recent months?

As I previously mentioned, knowing how to convey your views and feelings is exemplary in every situation, especially in a global crisis like a pandemic. If we focus on the mental health aspect of lockdown, people were/are enveloped with many thoughts, and the ability to find the words to talk about those concerns is critical. I do think that this ability did help me to eloquently emphasize my views/thoughts to my friends and family.

6. Did opportunities to develop your speaking skills lessen during lockdown and does their current disruption and new rules make this more difficult, how do you overcome these barriers in the classroom?

During lockdown most people my age stayed in contact by texting each other, minimalizing the use of verbally announcing thoughts. I like to say that technology used to be the medicine of society, connecting people from across the globe, however as society evolves this cure is slowly becoming the disease. I would say that lockdown did lessen the development of speaking skills, as speech was restricted to either text or colloquial language between friends and family.

The current situation does slightly obstruct the development of formal oracy as students are restricted to maintain in their social bubble: meaning no competitions, clubs and change of partners for discussion in classrooms can happen. However, this is overcome by still engaging participants to contribute to the lesson, which is a way of attempting to improve students confidence.

7. Is the ability to speak up and express your views important to engage with democracy and politics?

When people know how to express themselves, they feel more confident and are more likely to speak up. Therefore, actively take part in political situations. As students learn how to formulate their opinion in an organized manner they will be more likely to engage with politics and contribute to shaping society, which I believe is indeed important. More people will use their voice to engage with democracy and that way be active participants of society.

Aaliya Dipu Year 12

Q1) Why do you think it's important to learn how to speak well and share your thoughts confidently?

A statistic shared around when talking about the future and careers is that 40% of job applicants aren't accepted into the job, purely owing to the way we talk. To be formally, directly and confidently communicating with our peers is crucially important if we want to express ourselves. Over the course of five years in secondary education, my generation and future generations shouldn't have to add oracy as a skill deficit, ideally oracy can become a student's most important tool in pioneering their lives in clarity and resilience.

Q2) Why are speaking skills important for future success? How has the covid-19 pandemic made oracy more important for young people's futures?

Before and during lockdown my family were my main form of communication. News stories and media have really opened our eyes to see the reality of the crisis we're in, not just covid-19 but from systematic oppression and faults hidden away for too long simply because our voices weren't being heard enough. It's humbling to see the beginning of a social change, from the comfort of home there's only so much we could do, but to start a change we must constructively speak. Oracy can provide the space for each individual to learn as well as teach others. If we have a lack of awareness within the school community and outer world, if you can't solve inequality from the stem are you able to say that we as adults in the future society will be able to push the world forward? Oracy is imperative to stimulate this change.

Q3) Do students need to be explicitly taught oracy? How is it part of your lessons and what skills do you need to learn?

Oracy is pivotal to equip the next generations with the transferable skills needed to keep society progressive and malleable. Evaluation, reflection and confidence are the key elements students need to learn which can lead to improved decision-making and acceptance of ourselves. I wish to see every student in class actively feeling engaged in lessons and not feel as though they can't or shouldn't be able to speak in front of their peers. The classroom is our first and best environment to start owning our accessible strengths.

Q4) How has developing your speaking and listening skills helped you personally? Personally, as an introvert who found communication difficult, I felt as though people like myself were stuck in a stigma that only the extroverted could voice their opinions, thus as a self-study, I took up the challenge to try out after-school debating. I would never have expected to be delivering a speech in front of lectures in Oxford or teaching younger children oracy, but it's taught me plenty about its importance and influence in your persona. The most significant change discovered was the feeling of being more free. There's a real difference in advocating a statement in a lacklustre fashion to fuelling your delivery with passion. Although my career intentions are heading towards science and medicine, my oracy skills will significantly determine how I display myself in front of patients and colleagues, my interest in my career intentions and how much people will want to identify me as someone who has the skillset for my desired job all depend on my presentation. Such skills should be the decider on who's worth the investment. My development in character truly stemmed from being given the mic and creative space to communicate with my peers and society, it's something I'm grateful for, yet luck shouldn't be what I feel. Rather, every child deserves to have oracy integrated into the school curriculum providing equal grounds for all students like myself to explore and gain the necessary confidence to communicate directly and formally to others. Despite being in a traditionally extroverted society, ambiverts and introverts have just as much right to shape the future once we're provided with the support.

Q5) Why is learning to express your views and feelings even more important following the challenges of lockdown and ongoing uncertainty and disruption? Has the ability to express yourself and talk about concerns helped in recent months? Lockdown unfortunately led to many isolating alone mentally and even physically. I felt some responsibility to educate my peers to understand that in order to be happy in the world we're about to inherit, in order to not feel fear from being yourself, we must let all sides talk. As an example, most evenings me and my father would discuss political and social issues after every news article we see, sometimes things may get heated and I'd be surprised. As we didn't know to patiently communicate with each other it helped me to reflect upon how this would be at school or other places. We need these skills taught to us because it's vital to understand our peers in order to compromise and agree with each other. Collectively as a society, we are more open to discuss immediate and long-term issues, implementing oracy can create safe, powerful discussions with the support of the school community keeping students afloat and comfortable to speak and express concerns needing to be addressed.

Q6) Did opportunities to develop your speaking skills lessen during lockdown, and does the current disruption and new rules make this more difficult? How do you overcome these barriers in the classroom?

After ploughing through the first lockdown, school was certainly a place that many of us were missing, not just for the social or academic aspect but the support network and overall structure and routine that helped us as students to keep grounded on the paths we were walking along. Without school, our speaking skills had mostly reduced to conversations between those close to us and being politically active online raising awareness about protests and struggles globally. With this being in mind, I believe now is the best moment to introduce oracy back into the school curriculum and allow students to really build self-awareness and resilience. It's these skills as well as confidence, drive and determination that make us stand out as individuals; schools should be supplied with the time to host classroom debates and a range of themes that we can utilize. As well as encouraging confidence, oracy should mean that every student feels inclusive and can participate comfortably, the best place for us to nurture this is within the classroom listening to our teachers, taking in their way of speech and manners, listening to the vocabulary and questions asked and answered to give us a platform of developing our own effective speeches.

Q7) Is the ability to speak up and express your views important to engage with democracy and politics?

We live in a society that strives to be an upstanding meritocracy and therefore, allowing our generation and future children to develop themselves as global citizens is pivotal; we must provide them the microphones to stand on the world stage and be active advocates for change. Democracy can only be upheld from continuously re-evaluating the concepts we're taught over time. Politics has never been more relevant and we need to be talking about it with assertiveness. Over time with oracy students are able to build up a portfolio of transferable skills, helping us to successfully get our points across with sincerity and emotionally create bridges between people and communities. I'm proud to have had the chance to start speaking and the public achievements it's led me to along my journey of figuring out my life and its adventures. Surely, we all deserve to learn the skills to successfully maximise our rightful opportunity for freedom of speech.

‘MPs and Students Speak for Change: Why oracy matters now and in the future.’

Jess Balls

1) Why do you think it is important to learn how to speak well and share your thoughts confidently?

The ability to speak well is an essential skill that enables students to express themselves appropriately and concisely, skills of which are highly valued and incredibly important throughout life. For students particularly, these skills allow them to communicate effectively during interviews, strengthening their candidacy and increasing their overall job prospects. As well as opening doors in respect to job prospects, oracy also allows an individual to advocate for change and fight against injustices. Being able to share your thoughts confidently is being able to discuss what you believe to be right. It is being able to form educated opinions and express thoughts and ideas to others, whilst simultaneously listening to the thoughts and ideas of others. Speaking well gives individuals a voice, and having a voice is arguably one of the most critical skills an individual can have.

2) Why are speaking skills important for future success? How has the Covid-19 pandemic made oracy skills more important for young people’s future?

Speaking skills aid people throughout life. They are vital skills that can benefit individuals academically, socially, mentally, and politically. A high level of oracy increases a student’s chance of success in written applications and interviews, which is essential for being accepted into universities, apprenticeships, and jobs. For students, learning to speak well increases their chance of being able to study their first choice at top universities, setting them up for a future career in a field that they are enthusiastic about.

Alongside the academic advantages, speaking skills ensures students can communicate with those around them concerning their mental wellbeing. For students, applying to further education or jobs after compulsory education can be an especially taxing time. Deciding a direction and career to pursue in life is an incredibly daunting thought. Some students do not have a career they aspire to, or similarly, a direction they are passionate about following. Future success requires motivation, devotion and passion, qualities of which students may find difficult to possess if they are struggling with anxiety and uncertainty. During the Covid-19 pandemic especially, students may have felt unable to access help and advice. Particularly in times where students could not talk to people in person, oracy can aid students in feeling confident in reaching out to people who can support them. Developing speaking skills can also increase a student's political interest and engagement..This is an especially essential skill for students to develop as they approach the legal voting age. If students are not encouraged to engage in politics they will not acknowledge the importance of their contributions, and ultimately will be unable to support change that they believe in. For future success, it is critical that everyone has the opportunity and ability to express their views. This starts with speaking skills.

3) Do students need to be explicitly taught oracy? How is it part of your lessons and what skills do you learn?

Students should be taught oracy explicitly. Lessons dedicated to oracy will benefit students immensely, not only across their English studies, but across all of their subjects as well as outside of school. Oracy can be taught in a multitude of ways, providing students are encouraged to formulate their own opinions and ideas, engage with others, and develop a deeper understanding of topics, oracy skills can be learnt. Oracy enables people to develop their confidence, broaden their awareness of worldwide issues and introduces a sense of ability to make changes for the better. Oracy empowers people, it provides individuals with the opportunity to convey their thoughts, opinions, and ideas. It allows people to better understand themselves as well as those around them and sets the foundations for change. The skills learnt though oracy is not limited to the classroom, in fact oracy provides students with essential skills that will aid them throughout the entirety of their lives.

4)How has developing your speaking and listening skills helped you personally (e.g. with your studies, confidence, socially)

Since starting debating, my speaking and listening skills have developed immensely. It has allowed me to improve my written work, therefore aiding my studies. For example, I have seen improvements in my ability to convey points clearly and concisely, as well as gaining a deeper understanding of particular writing techniques and styles, which I can use to better my work. Debating has improved my ability to communicate with a range of people, from my peers, to teachers, or even representatives for courses and work experience. Perhaps one of my favourite benefits I have gained from taking part in debate, is the deeper understanding of topics and the ability to discuss issues. I have found that debating has introduced me to a wide variety of topics and motions that I otherwise would have been unaware of. Debating has also given me the opportunity to form lasting friendships with people who share a similar passion for speech and expression.

5) Why is learning to express your views and feelings even more important following the challenges of lockdown and ongoing uncertainty and disruption? Has the ability to express yourself and talk about concerns helped in recent months?

In a time where there is worldwide uncertainty and disruption, it is easy to become overwhelmed and can cause significant anxiety among individuals. Learning to express your feelings and having the confidence to reach out to people allows individuals to access support. Particularly during lockdown, the mental health of many suffered due to the lack of social interaction, loss of jobs, and concern over the virus itself. The importance of communication was highlighted and the need for people to express their feelings emphasised. Having the ability to voice your concerns is essential to maintain a healthy mental wellbeing and allows people to support one another. Personally, I feel that having such vital skills has meant that I have been able to access support during such difficult times. Being able to express my feelings and views during lockdown has reassured me that there are people who I can talk to. Others expressing their views and feelings have also meant that people who feel similarly can be assured that their concerns are valid, and they are not alone, a powerful sentiment that can improve countless people's mental wellbeing.

6) Did opportunities to develop your speaking skills lesson during lockdown, and does the current disruption and new rules make this more difficult? How do you overcome these barriers in the classroom?

Over lockdown there was undoubtedly a dramatic decrease in the opportunities people had to develop their speaking skills. Not only were students unable to attend classes in person, reducing the opportunity to work with their peers and teachers, but they were also unable to socialise with friends. For many, the only form of communication available was online. Communication online is significantly different to the communication expected when talking in person

7) Is the ability to speak up and express your views important to engage with democracy and politics?

The ability to speak up and express your views are fundamental to democracy, giving an individual the chance to have their voice heard and considered. Speaking up allows people to have their own voice, giving them the opportunity to form their own educated opinions and viewpoints, as opposed to being influenced by those around them. The skills which enable an individual to engage with democracy and politics are indispensable. These skills enable people to work towards change. They give people the power to fight against what they believe to be wrong, and equally to support the things that they believe to be right.

Those unfortunate enough to have not been taught these skills are at a significant disadvantage when engaging with democracy and politics. They may not be able to effectively express their opinions and therefore are unable to contribute as greatly as those with the skills to express themselves efficiently. Not being able to express your thoughts and feelings effectively leaves people unable to make changes and fight for what they believe in, a right all should be able to access.

