

Let's Think in English

This submission is on behalf of Let's Think in English, one of the Cognitive Acceleration programmes developed at King's College London.

Summary

- Talk is our most natural and effective medium to develop thinking: there are cognitive, social and democratic benefits to an education system rooted in talk
- Let's Think in English is a programme that makes an impact on children's development through structured dialogic challenge
- There is deep and longitudinal evidence to show that structured dialogue is essential to improve social and educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils
- This approach to teaching emerges from collaborative professional development which supports teachers to work through changes to their own thinking through cycles of change in practice.
- Government policy has been the most significant barrier to developing all aspects of oracy, including talk for thinking
- Changes to assessment and curriculum through policy will be necessary to unlock the power and development of talk and will need to be supported with funding, recruitment of professional bodies and the support of government agencies.

The value of talk for thinking

1. Oracy, as we understand it, has four branches in relation to education:
 - a. the process of learning to talk – initial and additional language acquisition.
 - b. learning to express feelings, thoughts and ideas through talk: formally and informally and for a variety of purposes.
 - c. learning to manage oneself as a speaker and listener in social situations: paying attention, responding to others, making oneself clear to others.
 - d. developing and deepening understanding and therefore cognitive skills (intelligence) through dialogic exchange with others
2. It is primarily, though not exclusively, aspects c. and d. we develop in Let's Think in English, a Cognitive Acceleration programme constructed on the same principles as Cognitive Acceleration in Science Education (CASE) (Adey and Shayer 1994; Adey 2010). CASE itself derives from lengthy research and has been repeatedly proved to be highly effective – <https://www.letsthinkinenglish.org/evidence-of-success/> Our programme is rooted in Vygotskian theory that thought and language develop in combination and crucially in a social context through conversational turns. A more

knowledgeable other, whether teacher or care-giver, inducts children in to ways of thinking and understanding through the medium of dialogue. Children’s talk, if we promote it, explore it, extend it, gives us an X-ray into their current understanding. Skilful adult dialogue can scaffold existing understanding and support children to work through challenge to promote development. Since the work of Douglas Barnes in the 1980s, working with Vygotskian theory, we know that children can also stimulate and scaffold the development of understanding for each other. Essentially, the social group – the class – is part of the answer, not the problem.

3. The Let’s Think in English programme consists of carefully structured lessons on fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama and film which are designed to be used fortnightly. Guided by the teacher, pupils explore the implications of text, developing the cognitive skills of inference, deduction, exemplification, analogy and hypothesisation. Developed from 2009, the programme is now used by some 350 schools, primary and secondary, in the UK and overseas with many more undergoing training. Sample lessons are available at <https://www.letsthinkinenglish.org/sample-lessons/>

4. Although Let’s Think in English (LTE) raises all pupils’ attainment, it is particularly successful with those assessed as lower-attaining. For example:

- **Inter-Community School, Zürich.** This school used Let’s Think in English lessons fortnightly for a year with Year 5 and 6 classes. The school uses the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) test. At the end of the year the pupils achieved significantly increased attainment in Reading, Narrative Writing and Expository Writing comparable to the top 14 International Baccalaureate schools in the control sample (effect sizes of +0.30, +0.12 and +0.42 respectively). **However, the least able quartile of the pupils achieved higher results – effect sizes of +0.42, +0.46 and +0.67 respectively** (Black 2018).
- **Hampshire.** At six schools in Hampshire, two teachers taught LTE lessons fortnightly to Year 8 and Year 9 classes throughout 2013/14 with regular support meetings. The students were teacher-assessed (TA) at the beginning and end of the year for Reading and Writing and took two different APP tasks in response to an unseen text in timed conditions with a shared mark scheme in September 2013 and June 2014.

All the students made better progress than expected with the free school meal (FSM) students making greater progress in every category:

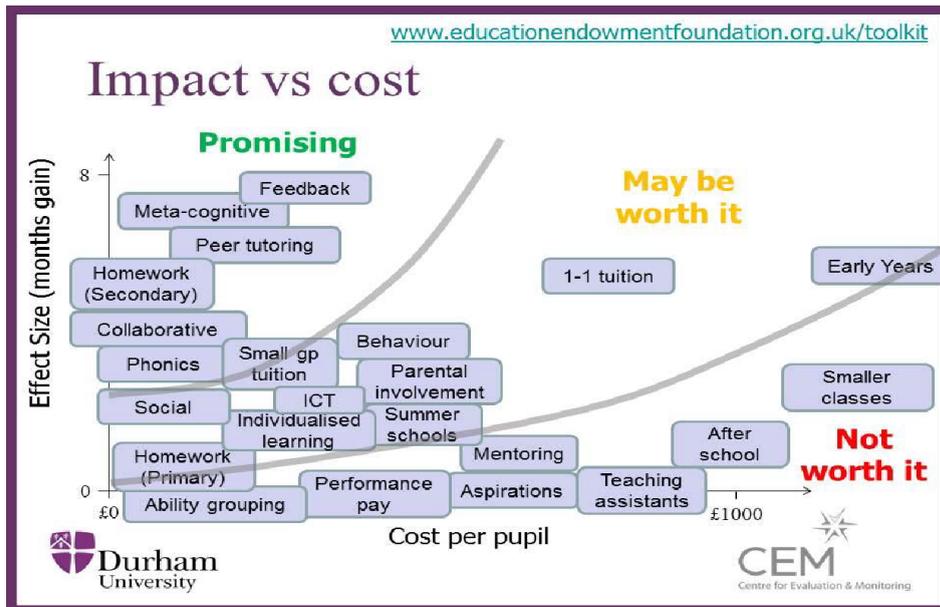
Year 8 TA Reading –	3+ sublevels progress :	All students 28%	FSM 38%
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Year 8 APP Reading –	2+ sublevels progress :	All students 61%	FSM 90%
Year 8 TA Writing –	2+ sublevels progress :	All students 65%	FSM 100%
Year 9 TA Reading –	4+ sublevels progress :	All students 15%	FSM 28%
Year 9 APP Reading –	3+ sublevels progress :	All students 42%	FSM 50%
Year 9 TA Writing –	3+ sublevels progress :	All students 38%	FSM 44%

<https://www.letsthinkinenglish.org/evidence-of-success/>

5. Further research is required, but these results and others indicate **that an orally based programme like Let’s Think in English significantly raises the attainment of less able pupils**. Teachers report that these students, for whom reading and writing has become a barrier, gain confidence when encouraged to discuss texts orally. This is reflected in due course in their reading and writing which gains in the range of vocabulary and grammatical structures used.

6. The active components and impact of Cognitive Acceleration programmes are aligned with recommendations published as high impact, low cost interventions in the Education Endowment Foundation’s (EEF) Teaching and Learning Toolkit. The EEF was created by Government in 2011 to commission research on how schools can raise attainment especially by disadvantaged pupils. In 2012 it commissioned the University of Durham to conduct a meta-analysis of relevant research. This is published as a Teaching and Learning Toolkit on the EEF website and is updated from time to time (EEF 2019). Currently it summarises 35 interventions with an indication of effect expressed in months gained or lost. According to the Times Educational Supplement it now summarises some 13,000 pieces of research and is consulted by more than two-thirds of Senior Leadership Teams in English schools. The following visual representation is taken from Coe (2012)



7. Four of the six most effective interventions – feedback, metacognition, peer-tutoring and collaboration – are dependent on oral interactions between teacher and pupils and between pupils. This finding overlaps with other meta-analyses of effective educational interventions such as John Hattie’s *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning* which finds that three of the four most successful programmes are reciprocal teaching, problem-solving teaching and self-verbalisation/self-questioning (Hattie 2012, page 84).
8. On this evidence, orally-based programmes are needed to raise the attainment of pupils assessed as less able on their reading and writing. In secondary schools these pupils are often allocated to lower-ability sets where language range, stimulation and motivation are low and progress is limited. If mixed-attainment teaching is unavailable, these pupils need orally-based programmes to raise their ability and therefore their opportunities in life.

Provision

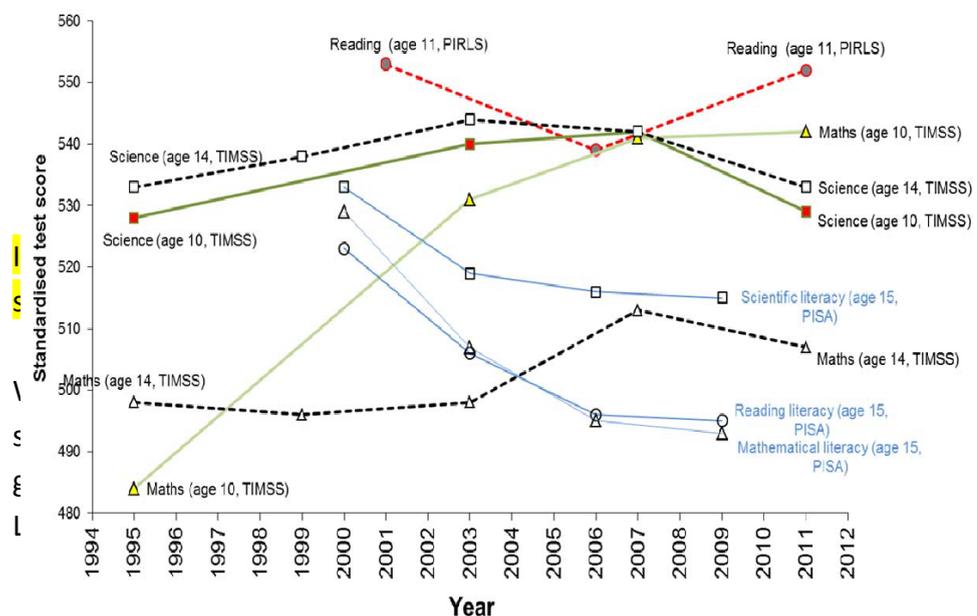
9. There are three aspects to improving educational provision:
 - principled, research-informed government policy,
 - its support through directed funding streams,
 - schools’ access to and engagement with professional development approaches that build teacher and student knowledge, skills, efficacy and agency.
10. In our education system, at least since the 1960s, spoken language has had a lower status than reading and writing. This is in part due to the increasing currency of

written examinations for public examination and for school accountability. Reading and writing are also easier to assess with reasonable accuracy, leading as they do to concrete outcomes not ephemeral product that must be electronically recorded to be assessed.

11. There is a long and chequered history of policy decisions that fly in the face of strong educational evidence and frustrate attempts to raise the profile and skills of teaching talk and teaching through talk. We have cited some examples of this below to demonstrate the frustration and difficulty in establishing oracy as part of teaching and learning in schools in England

- The National Strategies, a government agency formed to implement policy from 1997 to 2011, used a top down professional development approach and an unhelpfully selective use of research evidence to ‘raise standards,’ effectively judged only through league tables of SAT and GCSE results. That this led to a reduction of educationally productive dialogue is now well documented (Wyse, 2003; Burns & Myhill, 2004).
- The National Strategies ignored powerful evidence that cognitive skills can be accelerated through focused oral discussion in programmes such as Philosophy for Children (USA), Feuerstein’s Instrumental Enrichment (Israel), Mercer and Alexander’s Dialogic Teaching (UK) and Adey & Shayer’s Cognitive Acceleration (UK) and instead promoted a model of teaching and assessing single lesson objectives.
- By 2008 it became apparent that attainment was not rising against international comparisons (diagram from Coe, 2012).

Performance of England in international surveys



see and hear children's emerging understanding so that they could act on this
It was announced that the National Strategies would end with their
supplier's contract in March 2011.

- Within the same era, Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam's findings (1998, 2002), summarised in *Inside the Black Box* were published and consolidated as guidance to schools. The principles became known as Assessment for Learning (AfL). Concrete approaches were developed that helped teachers to see and hear children's emerging understanding so that they could act on this in the moment and to support learners to climb inside the assessment process so that they too could be agents who reflected on the nature of progress.
- In practice AfL sought to move teaching and learning from the traditional model that "teaching is telling and learning is listening" to one in which "building knowledge is part of doing things with others" (Watkins, 2003). "The key assumptions of AfL are that learning is an active, social process in which the individual makes meaning which is best done by building on what is known already" (Stobart, page 150). **The effect of AfL was to give powerful research evidence to support pupils' oral participation in all lessons rather than limited to particular programmes such as Philosophy for Children and Cognitive Acceleration.**
- The National Strategies initially adopted AfL as part of its support to schools. Although there were some early signs that this led to increased attainment in trial schools, the AfL approach became subsumed into an assessment programme called Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) derived from a small research project run by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) with little evidence behind its capacity to raise attainment. APP assessed Reading and Writing only, not Speaking and Listening. Because APP could be used to produce concrete, though not necessarily reliable, attainment data, it gained traction with policy makers. Schools could be held to account with comparative, numerical indicators rather than supported to adopt the evidence-based principles of AfL.
- This principle has played out in relation to Speaking and Listening in GCSE English. When GCSE was initiated in 1986 by combining GCE O Level and the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE), all the English and English Language specifications included an assessment of spoken English (Speaking and Listening) accounting for between 25 and 33.3 per cent of the total mark. This component was teacher-assessed, moderated by the Examination Boards

using visiting moderators or sampling of recordings. There was no other assessment of spoken language except in Modern Foreign Languages. In 2015 the Secretary of State for Education took the view that teacher assessment of Speaking and Listening was unreliable and required that GCSE English and English Language are awarded on the basis of Reading and Writing only. This also applied to the new GCSE English Language specifications examined first in 2017. Spoken Language is assessed and its grade reported, but it does not count towards the student's GCSE English Language grade.

Professional development

12. Let's Think programmes are proud of a highly successful professional development model. Since Joyce and Showers (1995) we have known that teacher's practice can only change in and through classroom practice and reflection. This is acutely true when teachers need to adapt the moves they make in dialogue, where decisions are made in an instant.
13. It is clear from this evidence that no policy directive or curriculum publication alone will transform any of the 4 oracy strands in education. This is most acutely true for the strand that aims to develop thinking through oracy. It is necessary to provide teacher and leader education that:
 - is rooted in theory and sited in practice,
 - promotes cycles of application and reflection in challenging but safe collaborative contexts,
 - is structured and spaced over time
 - builds the knowledge, expertise, confidence and belief that in turn transforms children's development. (Adey, 2006)
14. It is vital to acknowledge the importance of climate and culture to nurture or stifle teacher development. Teachers who lack agency and efficacy are less likely to encourage collaboration or explore thinking in the moment (Rubie-Davies et al. 2012). Control-oriented cultures tend to lead to control oriented teaching by teachers with lower expectations for their pupils: a dispiriting downward spiral (McDonald et al. 2016). The current performativity culture of Ofsted and school league tables can and have militated against deep and principled professional development.
15. Relating to your first set of guidance questions, teachers need to **value** the contributions that children can make. Let's Think teachers know that children's understanding of the world is under construction, but also that they are people in

their own right, whatever their age. Let's Think teachers have the **belief** that dialogic exchange is the primary means by which understanding can develop. As human beings we are not designed to read or write, but to speak and listen and to live, communicate and negotiate in social groups. Let's Think in English improves children's ability to work purposefully in social contexts. It unites children and teachers in a mission to develop new levels of cognition through text and talk. There is a broader, social democratic purpose of deepening our cognitive capacity together. The strands of oracy we effortfully develop seek to build self-efficacy and social responsibility at the same time as intellectual capacity.

16. Neil Mercer's initial inductive research into Exploratory Talk gave credence to what many teachers already felt. Simply asking children to talk in groups about a subject does not automatically lead to educationally productive discussion. Children need to be supported to work in groups, to understand what pair and group talk sounds like, how to listen and respond. It takes both belief and determined strategy to develop the climate, conditions, pupil and teacher behaviours for dialogue to affect the development of all children in the class. So we have an approach with transformative potential. It is not quick or easy to achieve, but the model and expertise for teacher professional development exists within these shores.
17. Evidence of the transformative effect of Let's Think in English on teachers' confidence and efficacy was demonstrated during the London Schools Excellence Fund Trial (2013 – 2015) in which 35 secondary and 8 primary schools in London participated – see <https://www.letsthinkinenglish.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/TeacherEfficacySurvey.pdf>

Barriers and ways forward to establish oracy in the curriculum

18. Oracy is difficult to establish in our education system. As we have outlined above, whenever appropriate programmes have been developed and initially implemented, changes in government policy have intervened to nullify them.
19. We therefore believe that the only way in which to establish oracy in the curriculum is to make it a requirement of summative tests and examinations. It is well-established that the most direct influences on teaching and learning are the assessments which pupils take for the purposes of school accountability. This is known in educational terminology as 'the backwash effect'.
20. Ideally the school curriculum would be reformed on the model of the International Baccalaureate of which oracy is an integral part:

- the Primary Years Programme (PYP) (ages 3 – 12) has an inquiry-led, transdisciplinary framework which challenges students to think for themselves and take responsibility for their learning as they explore local and global issues and opportunities in real-life contexts.

In the final year of the PYP, pupils carry out an extended, in-depth, collaborative project known as the PYP exhibition. This involves them working collaboratively to conduct an in-depth inquiry into real life issues or problems. They collectively synthesise all of the essential elements of the PYP in ways that can be shared with the whole school community. Oral presentation, based on previous years' experience, is integral to this. It also provides teachers with a powerful and authentic process for assessing student understanding.

- the Middle Years Programme (MYP)(ages 11 – 16) requires students to study subjects from 8 subject groups. Each year, students also engage in at least one collaboratively planned interdisciplinary unit which involves at least two subject groups. Oral communication and presentation are integral to these units.
- the Diploma Programme (DP) (ages 16 – 18) has a curriculum consisting of six subject groups and the DP core, comprising theory of knowledge (TOK), creativity, activity, service (CAS) and an extended essay.

Through the Diploma Programme (DP) core, students reflect on the nature of knowledge, complete independent research and undertake a project that often involves community service. Building on the PYP and MYP pedagogy, oral communication is an integral part of the programme.

21. If the English education is not reformed in this way, an oral assessment should be required in the Key Stage 2 English test and in all GCSE final assessments except perhaps Mathematics. This should count for at least 25 per cent of the final credit. It would be teacher-assessed, but the oral activity on which the assessment is chiefly based would be recorded. The recordings would be regularly sampled by the Standards and Testing Agency (KS2) and the GCSE Examination Boards to ensure reliability.
22. In view of the importance of oracy for cognitive development and social mobility, oral assessment should not be limited to English Language as in the past, but should rather be an integral part of all subjects (except perhaps Mathematics) at Key Stages 3 and 4.

Oral evidence. We will be happy to give oral evidence to the inquiry. We are also able to provide opportunities for APPG members to observe Let's Think in English lessons and talk with the teachers and pupils.

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