

Oracy APPG evidence from Topsy Page – freelance oracy trainer and consultant

- I work with schools to develop a culture of high-quality dialogue and reasoning across the curriculum.
- I believe high quality talk is a vital ingredient in narrowing the gap and improving outcomes.
- I was previously a primary teacher and school leader.
- As part of my work with schools I carry out **‘Talk Audits’** – looking at the quality and impact of classroom talk – teacher and pupil.
- This evidence is in three sections: Part A - quotes from pupils, Part B - extracts from a typical Talk Audit report, and Part C - extracts from Talk Audits showing how a focus on Oracy can bring about change.
- The evidence I have submitted is a fraction of what I have. Please look at my website www.topsypage.com for more pupil voice, and examples of good practice.
- I am happy to speak to the Committee if that would be useful, and could bring colleagues from schools I work with who have experience of developing successful ways to bring high quality oracy opportunities to their pupils.
- Please note also that I highly recommend **Philosophy for Children (P4C)** as an excellent methodology for developing Oracy skills.

PART A - quotes from pupils

- Pupil voice is a key aspect of my Talk Audits.
- I have asked 200+ children (from 12 different primary schools Manchester, Salford and Sheffield) questions about the balance of teacher and pupil talk, which children talk in lessons, how they are chosen etc.

There are three reoccurring themes in the Pupil Voice:

- 1. Children don't get to speak enough in lessons. The teachers talk too much.**
- 2. Children should get to talk in pairs more, and to lots of different partners (they rarely get to change partners).**
- 3. The common practice of 'hands up' means only some children talk in lessons. All children should have the opportunity. Random selection is a good alternative – it is fair and gets everyone involved in the learning.**

Theme 1 pupil quotes

I think if we can discuss more we are learning more, instead of them telling us. (Age 9)

I think the children should do more talking because if we talk more we could solve our mysteries and we would say the ideas in our heads. (Age 6)

My teacher definitely goes on a bit. He even says, 'I know I'm yacking on' but then he just keeps talking and we're thinking, 'Can we please get on with our work!'. (Age 8)

I feel like the children should speak more so they can ask important questions. (Age 7) Pupils should get more time to talk about their ideas. (Age 10)

I think the children should do more talking so the teacher knows if we understand. (Age 11)

They talk too much! Usually they take ages to send us to our seats to start working.

I'm always thinking, can they be shorter and quicker? (Age 8)

The teachers! They're always talking – we don't really get much time to talk to our partners! (Age 8)

It is true! They talk a lot. When they've stopped talking we get to talk to a partner for 30 seconds then the teachers get to talk again! (Age 7)

Teachers talk about 90%. They talk all day! They talk way too much.

(Age 10) We need more time to talk so we can explain properly. (Age 10)

Too much! Sometimes they repeat things. That's annoying – we've heard it already. (Age 11)

I think we should talk longer. We only get 10 seconds to answer a question then they move onto the next person. (Age 7)

I think children should get more chances to talk because if they get to explain more it could help others. (Age 10)

The teacher repeats if we can't hear someone ... if the teacher keeps repeating it gets repetitive, boring and confusing. (Age 11)

In English the pupils could talk more to share their ideas. You might want to know what other people think. (Age 11)

Theme 2 pupil quotes

**I like that! I like talking to different people.
Once I had someone who just sat there for a
whole term! (Age 5)**

I think it's good because your partner shares ideas and it means you learn more. (Age 5) Talk partners help us help each other. (Age 7)

You need to use other people's brains. They talk, you talk and you try to link it together. (Age 10)

They can teach you different things. If you stay with one person it's just their

mindset. (Age 10)

Yes, because it can change your perspective about things. You might change your mind. If you're with the same person it will be the same idea. (Age 11)

If you swap partners you'll get more ideas that they're thinking and it'll be easier to get description. (Age 8)

I agree because we always know what's coming from that same partner. If we could mix we wouldn't know what's coming out of them. (Age 9)

Theme 3 pupil quotes

When it's hands up they pick the smart children. I think the other children should get more of a go.
(Age 10)

Hands up is mostly about smart people. (Age 9)

It's mainly the same people who put their hands up. (Age 10)

Some people might be too shy or unconfident to put their hand up. (Age 11)

I like random selection because you get to know everyone's answer. You hear other opinions. Hands up is for sensible people only. (Age 8)

Random selection can boost confidence for people who don't usually answer. It means there will be a good mix of all children answering the questions. (Age 11)

With hands up, if the same people are picked others feel unwanted. With random selection you would have a good balance. (Age 9)

I like random selection because for questions with more than one answer it's good to hear lots of ideas... If the same people get picked other people start to feel their answers are not good. (Age 9)

I don't mind if I don't get picked because I like listening to others' opinions – I might learn something. (Age 10)

I don't get picked much. She looks at me but then she looks away and picks someone else. (Age 11)

I don't think I get picked enough because I get most of the answers wrong. But I get some right. (Age 7)

Sometimes the cleverest people always know what to say then the others don't have a chance. (Age 8)

I prefer lolly sticks because hands up is quite tiring. Your arm starts to ache. (Age 10)

Lollysticks are a good thing. Everyone has to have a go and try to say something. Because you get more educated if you talk or ask about things. (Age 9)

Part B – extract from a Talk Audit before a focus on Oracy began

Talk in whole-class learning

Teacher talk

- On average, the ratio of teacher to pupil talk was probably about 80% teacher talk: 20% pupil talk. For example, in one class a teacher talked for over 10 minutes with only occasional and limited pupil response to teacher questioning. Shifting the balance of learning talk in favour of pupils will take effort and dedication, but it is possible and will transform the school.
- Some teachers repeated instructions and explanations several times. For example, in one class the teacher repeated a set of instructions six times. Despite this, pupils did not follow the instructions and in fact the repetition was not exact, leading to confusion about the expected order of tasks.
- In most classes, the teacher read out learning objectives and questions which pupils could have been asked to read out.
- Most pupil answers were repeated by teachers, potentially lowering the status of pupil talk. •

Teachers sometimes interrupted to finish, clarify or repeat pupil answers.

- Some pupils feel that excessive teacher talk is preventing them from getting their work done (see Appendix). •

Some teachers used loud voices throughout the lesson.

- Some teachers spoke very quickly and gave lots of rushed instructions or explanations. • Some teachers spoke with informal language or grammatical errors. For example, *When someone has showed respect... Was there (for Were there)... When you're sat beautifully... Kinda... Wanna...* • There was lots of non-specific praise, for example *good boy, fantastic, good, excellent*. Research suggests that this type of praise does not have a positive impact on learning as it is 'ego focused' rather than task focused.

Teacher questioning

- There were a lot of teacher questions. These were mainly recall questions, and quite often *guess what's in my head* type questions, or rhetorical questions e.g. *Does everyone understand, yes?* There was little questioning for reasoning, or to extend pupil answers.
- Minimal 'think time' was given after teacher questions.
- Questioning did not encourage pupils to build on each other's responses, or to challenge them. • Key opportunities to value pupil talk and use it as a resource for learning were missed. (If a child reveals a misconception, asking the class *What do others think?* is a simple, effective questioning technique.)

Listening

- There were a number of reprimands about not listening well. For example: *X are you listening? Do you need to come up here with me and tell everyone the instructions? No? Good listening please.* However, there did not appear to be any structures in place to teach, practice or check for good listening.
- Pupils rarely looked at the pupil who was speaking.

Pupil talk

- Most pupil answers were very brief, usually between one and five words. Pupils were not generally encouraged to expand or give reasons.
- Not all children were audible during whole-class learning.
- In most classes, children didn't face their peers when speaking (they spoke to the teacher). •

In most classes, pupils did not ask questions during whole-class learning.

- There was no pupil to pupil interaction during whole-class learning.
- The children often didn't answer in full sentences, even in Upper KS2.

Managing talk

- Most classes used hands up as their method of choosing which child would respond; often the same children were putting their hands up, whilst some children never put up their hands. Hands up can allow children to opt out of learning, and can mean teachers rely on the same confident speakers.
- Teachers generally directed children to address them (*Tell me*) rather than their classmates (*Tell us* or *Tell everyone*).

Part C – Talk Audits showing change after a two year focus on Oracy

Here follows extracts from a recent Talk Audit carried out at a school in Salford – two years after a high focus on Oracy was taken on by the

school. In the boxes are extracts from the 2017 report. The school has moved on considerably, but sees this journey as just beginning – much more to do in terms of achieving consistency and opportunity for all children.

Teacher talk - Talk Audit 2019

Good practice

- In all classes, staff talk was positive and encouraging.
- In most classes, teachers avoided excess teacher talk (e.g. repeating instructions, repeating pupil answers, or reading out from the board). On average the ratio of teacher to pupil talk was around 50:50.
- In some classes, teachers modelled thinking and talk phrases e.g. *I think...*, *I wonder if...*
- In some classes, teachers used specific techniques, such as clarifying and encouraging pupil challenge, to address misconceptions e.g. *Do you mean sad or scared? Does anyone disagree?*
- Some teachers used the phrases *Tell us... or Tell everyone* to encourage pupil-to-pupil communication (rather than *Tell me...*)
- In all classes, staff used standard English consistently (no slang or grammatical errors).
- In some classes, teacher talk was effectively used to

model descriptive language and detail.

- Some teachers used specific praise, for example, *What a lovely clear voice! We could all hear that!*

2017 Talk Audit: Teachers spent a lot of time repeating instructions, encouraging children to work more quickly, giving lengthy explanations and repeating pupil answers. On average, the ratio of teacher to pupil talk was probably about 80% teacher talk : 20% pupil talk.

On a few occasions classroom talk by teachers and learning assistants was informal.

Teachers used a lot of time repeating pupil answers – this occurred in the majority of lessons, for the majority of pupil answers. Pupils were not encouraged to build on each other's answers and to challenge each other. Key opportunities to value pupil talk and use it as a resource were therefore missed. Opportunities to address misconceptions or deepen understanding were glossed over as teachers were quick to move on to pupils who could give the correct answer.

- In one class, when a child was stuck the teacher discreetly whispered the sentence starter to them: *I can see...* This enabled the child to start talking.
- In some classes, music was used as a cue to transition – minimising teacher talk.
- In one class, a child repeated the instructions to the class – minimising teacher talk.
- In one class, the teacher corrected pupil grammar: *They was to They were.*
- In one class, the LSA challenged a child to speak correctly: *It's not like a right angle, it is a right angle.*
- An LSA teaching the class employed talk strategies: *Tell your partner, lolly sticks, Does anyone agree?*
- LSAs were actively supporting talk through listening and questioning.

Teacher questioning - Talk Audit 2019

Are you in agreement, or do you have a different opinion?

- Teacher

extend children's answers and encourage dialogue: *Can you add anything? So, do you agree with him? Have you got anything else to tell us? Who has a different idea?*

Good practice

- Most teachers used effective questioning strategies to

Tell me why. Does anyone agree? Are you an agreement, or do you have a different opinion? Why? Are you adding or is this a new point? Do you agree or disagree? Can anyone add any more? Tell us more. Anything else? How? Why, what makes you think that?

limited pupil response – meaning that the balance between teacher talk and pupil talk is skewed. The majority of the teacher questions were quick-fire recall questions, 'guess what's in my head', or rhetorical questions e.g. Does everybody understand what to do? Most classes used hands up.

• In some classes, teachers used open questioning, for example, Is it possible...? What is your favourite part of the story and why?

Very little 'think time' was given after teacher questions, resulting in poor quality or no pupil response.

2017 Talk Audit: There were lots of teacher questions, but

- Some teachers specifically gave children thinking time, often accompanied with a 'thinking action' e.g. hand on chin.
- In one class, the teacher demonstrated that pupils were expected to respond accurately to questions; she emphasised part of her original question when the child's first answer was not specific. This resulted in an accurate response.
- In one class, the question was displayed on the board, demonstrating planning for questioning.

Pupil talk and pupil-to-pupil dialogue - Talk Audit 2019

I disagree because a dinosaur might eat my cat!

- Nursery child, LS 2019

by staff to give reasons. Children gave extended responses due to teacher questioning and the emerging culture of pupil thoughts being valued.

Good practice

There was a lot of productive and purposeful pupil talk. Across the partnership pupils were encouraged

• In most classes, children looked at the speaker; in some

2017 Talk Audit: Most pupil answers were very brief, usually between one and five words. Pupils were not generally encouraged to expand or give reasons. Pupils rarely looked at the pupil who was speaking.

classes teachers encouraged the children to look at each other when they were talking. • In some classes, children were confident to challenge each other in whole class dialogue. • Some teachers asked children to add to what another child had said – encouraging pupil to pupil dialogue. • In some classes, children chose the next speaker.

- In all classes, there were some confident talkers; in some classes there were many. • In some classes, children asked questions to clarify and made clear and confident suggestions about how to improve work.
- In one class, peer dialogue and peer support were used as a resource for a child who was stuck. • Some teachers reminded their classes about the Talk Promises.
- In some classes, the Pupil Talk Prompts were placed in the centre of the circle, or on tables and children were confident to use them to build dialogue. For example: *It's my opinion that... I would like to add to what S said ... I disagree with you Miss because...*
- In some classes, the children were spontaneously using phrases such as *I agree* and *I disagree*. For example, *I disagree because a dinosaur might eat my cat!*
- In some classes, children were encouraged to ask questions. For example, in one class they knew that they could ask the speaker questions during a talk game. The speaker used the lolly sticks and randomly selected a few of their peers to ask questions.
- In one class, children read out from the board – minimising teacher talk and raising the status of pupil talk. • In one class, a talking toy – *Philosophy Fox* – was used. This helped to structure turn-taking and encouraged the children to talk.
- In some classes, songs and rhymes were sung and chanted enthusiastically. This not only helped with routines and transitions, but also was building vocabulary, phrases and facts (e.g. days of the week, weather, angles).
- In one class, children were asked to stand up when it was their turn to speak, thereby raising the status of the talk and allowing voices to project more easily.
- In one class, a child did the register – one way to raise the status of pupil talk.