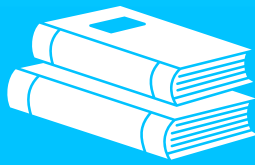
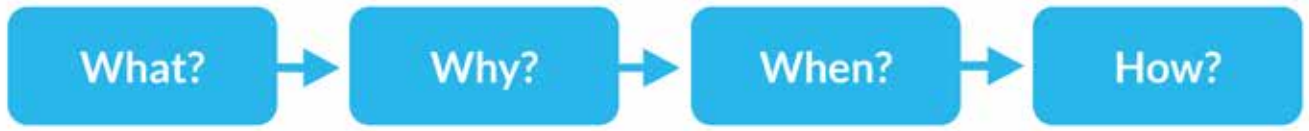


Theory Guide:



Oracy

Oracy: Overview



In this theory guide you will understand:

- what oracy is
- why oracy is important
- when it is important to consider oracy
- how to embed oracy into your lessons



What is oracy?



Oracy refers to the ability to express oneself fluently and effectively in spoken language. The Oracy Education Commission's report, *We Need to Talk* (2024), defines oracy as encompassing the articulation of ideas, development of understanding, and engagement with others through speaking, listening, and communication.

The report emphasises that oracy is fundamental to children's early development, cognitive processes, social and emotional well-being, confidence, and the capacity to engage in constructive discussions on important issues.

By prioritising oracy alongside literacy and numeracy, the commission advocates for its integration across all subjects and educational stages, ensuring that learners develop and apply communication skills to deepen their understanding and engage critically with their peers. This comprehensive approach underscores the necessity of equipping students with strong spoken language skills to navigate the complexities of the modern world effectively.

Teaching oracy effectively requires explicit instruction, a structured framework, and a supportive classroom environment where students feel confident to express themselves. This guide will detail how teachers can explicitly create the conditions for oracy to be effective in their lessons.

However, embedding oracy into teaching presents several challenges for teachers and schools, despite its clear benefits. Many teachers feel they don't have enough time to explicitly teach oracy due to packed curricula and exam pressures. Subjects are often content-heavy, leaving little space for extended discussion and structured talk.

In addition, many teachers haven't been trained in how to teach oracy effectively and some worry about losing control of discussions or managing classroom talk productively. To add to this, some teachers may lack confidence in assessing oracy in a structured way.

Some students may also feel shy, anxious, or self-conscious about speaking in front of others, while others dominate discussions, leading to unequal participation. Furthermore, in some classrooms, students lack the vocabulary or confidence to articulate their ideas fully.

Reflecting on the persistent problems with embedding oracy into teaching with a coach and mentally rehearsing different courses of action can support teacher judgement.

Oracy:

Why is oracy so important?



Oracy is fundamental to learning. Research from the Oracy Education Commission and Voice 21 highlights that strong spoken language skills improve cognitive development, academic success, social confidence, and employability.

Speaking is thinking aloud. When students explain their ideas out loud, they process and refine their understanding, as talking through problems helps students clarify their reasoning. Explaining concepts aloud also improves memory retention and structured discussions promote higher-order thinking skills.

Furthermore, strong speakers often become strong writers. If students can say it, they can write it. Spoken language supports the development of sentence structure and vocabulary, while oral rehearsal helps students organise their ideas before writing. Discussing texts out loud also improves reading comprehension. Further research also highlights that students from disadvantaged backgrounds often start school with a smaller vocabulary than their peers. Explicit oracy teaching can act as a lever for education equity, as it narrows the word gap, giving all students access to rich language. Improving spoken language skills can also boost reading, writing, and overall academic achievement.

Finally, public speaking and effective communication are essential life skills and students who practice speaking feel more confident in academic and social settings. Oracy helps students engage in respectful debate and express their views persuasively and confident speakers are better prepared for job interviews and future careers.

Oracy isn't just about talking—it's about thinking, learning, and succeeding in life. To ensure every student benefits, schools need to build a culture where speaking is valued as much as reading and writing

Oracy:

When is it important to consider oracy?



When planning: When planning lessons, teachers should deliberately structure opportunities for oracy to enhance learning, engagement and understanding. Start with learning intentions - what do you want students to achieve through oracy? It is worth considering whether oracy is being used to:

- Deepen understanding of a concept
- Develop critical thinking
- Build confidence in spoken expression

Teachers should also plan for different types of talk, such as exploratory talk where students discuss and refine their ideas, or reflective talk, where students articulate their learning process, such as metacognitive discussions. Some students may need structured support to develop their oracy skills, such as sentence stems and frames, or modelling and exemplars. This is also worth keeping in mind during the planning phase.

At critical points: When embedding oracy in lessons, teachers should ensure that students are actively engaged, thinking critically and developing their speaking skills.

When activating thinking, teachers should set a clear oracy focus, where they explain how students will use speaking to deepen their learning. Starting with a quick Think-Pair-Share discussion question, or verbal recap of prior learning may help set discussion norms and reinforce expectations for active listening, turn-taking and speaking in full sentences.

Teachers should also model effective spoken language, by demonstrating academic vocabulary, sentence structure, and reasoning aloud. Using structured questioning to check everyone is still on task, such as cold calling and no-opt out ensures that everyone is thinking hard and being supported to engage in high-quality talk.

After checking for understanding: with oracy, traditional CFU strategies may not reveal gaps in students' comprehension or speaking abilities. Instead, teachers should use purposeful, interactive and formative approaches to assess understanding effectively. To check for understanding in oracy tasks, clear success criteria is needed, such as:

- Are students using subject-specific vocabulary correctly?
- Are they structuring their responses logically?
- Are they building on others' ideas or challenging viewpoints effectively?
- Are they projecting their voices and articulating their ideas clearly?

Oracy:

How to embed oracy into lessons effectively



Oracy is not a discreet subject which should be bolted on to a pre-existing curriculum. It should be embedded into all subjects. There are many methods to include oracy in lessons. Here are some key principles to guide teachers in how to embed oracy effectively.

Establish a whole school oracy culture: This starts with setting clear expectations that speaking and listening are just as important as reading and writing, as well as creating a classroom talk environment where all students feel encouraged to speak. Many schools have done this effectively by developing shared oracy strategies across subjects, so students encounter familiar talk structures in every lesson.

Use a variety of talk structures: Using a range of discussion formats to develop different aspects of oracy can be useful:

- Think-Pair-Share → Encourages all students to formulate and refine ideas.
- Structured Debates → Develops persuasive speaking and critical thinking.
- Hot-Seating → Encourages role-play and deeper questioning.
- 'Basketball' Discussions → Students pass the discussion to one another instead of responding to the teacher.

Scaffolding speaking: Providing sentence starters to support structured speech can help build confidence, especially for hesitant speakers. Graphic organisers can also help students structure their responses before speaking, while introducing tiered vocabulary banks can encourage students to use academic language.

Modelling effective talk: Teachers should demonstrate effective speaking and listening by modeling academic talk. Using 'Think Alouds' to show how to structure responses can be an effective scaffold. Teachers can also play recordings of high-quality discussions and deconstruct the active ingredients, so students are able to hear strong examples and understand how to emulate their structures.

Any technique will only be effective if it is linked to a well-understood problem. Reflect on and define the problem you are trying to solve or do so with your coach. Then, you can use our decision tool for suggestions as to techniques you can adopt, adapt and test.

Problems related to this area:

- How do I plan lessons that use oracy as a tool to help students understand the knowledge and concepts?
- How do I create a safe culture for effective oracy?
- How do I provide scaffolds to help reluctant speakers take part?

Oracy:

References and further reading

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