Unlocking Oracy (2025) by *Nikki Sullivan, Kelly Heaton, Lucy Lowde*

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Content	Do This
1. Unlocking Oracy: A Way In...: →students (Ss) own thinking/Ss ideas/how they see themselves/others' thinking = a door. Purposeful classroom talk benefits lower prior attaining Ss. History of Oracy (O) (vs. oracy): 1960s, to go with Literacy/Numeracy, Definition: is about speaking and listening, both a process (learning through talk) + an outcome (learning to talk/about talk). Book is about principles/practices that enable teachers (Ts) to strengthen/enhance: 1. O & teaching + learning: O helps Ss learn, 'a fibre of pedagogy' (like Literacy strategies). 2. O & personal development: sc*hools enrich/expand horizons. 3. O & communicating effectively: O for its own sake needs to be taught.	• Schools should be places where *all* Ss speak • High speech, language, & communication needs (SLCN) associated with mental health issues/free school meals/low socio-economic status (SES) • O ≠ 'having a debate'/'less T talk'/'Ss simply discussing: Ss listen/talk every lesson • We don't teach O by using O
2. Oracy & Teaching and Learning: Justifications: talk for thinking (shapes thinking)/learning (scaffolds thinking)/ mastery (deepens understanding (U))/teaching (→ formative assessment (FA)). Written vs. O→ false dichotomy. Research (Sedova/Sedlacek, 2023): S achievement linked to high internal behavioural engagement IF they also talk (46/639 Ss *did not speak at all*!!) Issues: talk might go off topic/its transient. O in subjects/age/stage will differ. Pitfalls: 1. Non-participation: Lemov: need high participation ration, use Cold Call (CC), Turn & Talk (TT). 2. Empty Talk: need high thinking ratio, spectrum (informal/ exploratory →formal/presentational), Ss need knowledge (K) to talk about, think *with* K in working memory (WM), *for* K in long-term memory (LTM). 3. Not Considering 'Acceptable' Range of Meaning (ARM): 'Accountable Talk' → heard by circulating/sampling/checking for U (CfU) →T clarifies range. 4. The Transience of Talk: talk is transient →increases cognitive load, could write 5. Allowing the Buzz to Become a Hum: circulate enough/long enough for deep thinking/not too long →off topic. 6. Insufficient Consistency: takes time to build consistency/ new →opportunity cost. Core Foundations: 1. Behavioural routines & norms: shared U of how Ss indicate they want to respond/language to use/how Ss demonstrate they're paying attention. 2. Culture of Talk/Error: make messy learning/errors explicit. 3. Loud & Clear so All Can Hear. 4. Carefully Chosen Cues : positive/consistent. 5. Modelling/ Scaffolding Academic Speech: as distinct from everyday/incl. vocab. 6. Curriculum Clarity: what exactly do they need to learn. T can adapt/vary all pedagogical practices (PPs) to meet purpose/need selection/choice →K of how people learn/research/age/stage/subject.	• 2 risks; hesitant of efficacy of O = underuse, enthusiasm = misuse/overuse • It's about *selecting* pedagogical approach • Need strong climate of learning first (and silence sometimes appropriate) • Verbally summarising better than copying • Refer to Lemov: Teach Like A Champion strategies (e.g. bouncing)/ PR/TR ratios • Ss cannot talk themselves to new K – need K from their LTM/T exposition • Decide when Ss should write →offload WM • Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) →Transient Information Effect (TIE) • Sustaining a buzz is a *balance* of timings • Need a safe space to speak/make mistakes • Adaptation of practices to learning needs/ situation is nuanced→ avoid lethal mutation • Oral language skills + literacy reinforce each other → enhanced learning
3. Oracy & Securing Attention (A): = gateway to cognition. Key concepts: A capacity is always full/multi-tasking = myth/A not designed for school (bio secondary). Secure A + active listening by: cueing ('Everyone listening, ready to respond'(ELRR)/checking for A (use of questions (Qs))/rehearsal (O like anything else). **Choral PPs:** T→S: Choral speaking/call & repeat (to T/partner)/call & cloze (say answer to cloze exercise/steps in method etc.)/choral speaking & correcting misconceptions (get S then class repeat correct answer). **Dialogue PPs:** T↔S & S↔S: reciprocal + cumulative, speaking AND listening required: cue with ELRR → CC/'start us off'/ABC (Agree/Build/Challenge sequence as class/in trios)/discussion roles (like sentence starters for discussion)/'Final thoughts..' 'What else..' (could have 'hands up').	• Multi-tasking = task-switching = inefficient • Use consistent cues with shared meaning • Qs get Ss to think + CfU (Dylan Wiliam) • Making sense of words → read/say/use in context e.g. call & cloze • Choral PPs embed culture → power to unify • Care: Initiation-response-feedback limiting • Always explain strategy + expectations of S • Cues/routines help to scaffold dialogue
4. Oracy & Enabling Hard Thinking: Effective learning is effortful, K →foundation for deep learning. Thinking hard not automatic, needs setting up by T. Ensuring Ss are thinking hard: 1. ..we're not making it hard to think: WM = bottleneck, manage CL avoid transience. 2....by asking a range of questions: surface vs deep thinking, use initiate/probe/expand types 3.... Have something to think with: providing vocab/wording Qs to appropriate challenge. **Questioning PPs:** vocal equity (peer talk/draft answer first/3-point communication)/CC + wait time, choose Ss carefully)/monitor interactions (e.g. tally chart)/no opt-out (scaffold over time, have options). **Think/Pair/Share (TPS) PPs:** set up (confirm or set up pairs/set up seating plan/be clear about topic + what they're doing + who's going first/choose whether they think first/final answer on MWB/listen in/don't get drawn in), scaffolding discussion (sentence stems for each partner), What I Thought/What I Think (before/after discussion)	• Thinking hard → thinking about meaning • Offload info →mini-whiteboard/notes to reduce CL • All Qs should be purposeful and planned • Have norms so Ss can ask Qs • CC wait time should be longer than you think • Have range of warm go-to phrases to develop opt in – think long term • TPS – MANY benefits →careful listening as well as talking + reduces anxiety/safe space + chance to practice/rehearse + scaffolding.
5. Oracy & Making Meaning: by connecting to what they already know. Can be limited by their vocab→ not just definitions, need to use words. Thinking aloud →develop schema/ cognitive architecture, O can bridge T explanation →S meaning making, 'compare /contrast/categorise'= processing, always activate relevant prior K (PK). **Visual Scaffolds PPs:** Overcome transient T talk (keep info they need on display), enable S meaning making: (e.g. diagram/graphic to discuss), peer explanation (needs teaching how, see, Ss have roles), graphic organisers (GOs)(see @olicav, different types for different purposes, two channels in	• Making OUR cognitive architecture visible helps them build theirs • MARGE model helpful (see In Action book) • All Ss need to be clear what a strong answer looks like: probe/bounce/3rd turn • See @olicav Dual Coding for Ts/Organise Ideas for visual scaffolds

(visual + verbal), use GOs to chunk/compare/sequence/cause & effect), theme & variation (no one right way, T selects/adapts). **Student Talk PPs:** Formal talk (be clear feedback (FB) *extends/improves* S, set high expectations), Qs (plan well-worded Qs that elicit high quality responses + lots of info), detailed responses (establish cues → single words, e.g. "and why"), keyword prompt ("include … in your answer", choose when to use), Third Turn (build on Ss own and others' responses, T needs range of 'talk moves', make established norm).	• "Reading and writing float on a sea of talk" • Practice ≠ perfect, makes permanent • Beware over/under scaffolding with visuals • Avoid doing Qs on the fly • Aim for 'feed forwards' not 'feed back', improve the student not the work (Wiliam)
6. Oracy & Strengthening Memory: Learning = change to LTM, forgetting happens. Allowing forgetting: can be beneficial, difference between 'storage strength' & 'retrieval strength, it's all in there, useful lens for planning repeated/active processing. Retrieval Practice (RP): is >> than restudying = testing effect (reliable research), more effective if 'desirable difficulty' = more effortful = stronger memories. Strengthening memories via O: varies the conditions, not just writing. **Self-explanation (SE) PPs:** What/How/Why (S generate SE to link new K to old/how + why they wrote answer, needs scaffolding/prompts). Timing (debate: need secure PK or low PK to help build – T must find sweet spot, CfU essential first). What to SE (from text: inferences using PK/from diagrams: each part of it/from worked examples (WEs)). Metacognition (MCG) (why did I go about it that way) **Elaborative Interrogation (EI) PPs:** First steps (root Qs for 'why' need planning, work back from desired answer, T can model, then T→S). Checking (S answer must be checked) Familiarity (need sufficient PK, balance →can destroy confidence/embed misconceptions if too little) EI: S↔S (they need Qs at start, T circulates/Ss check using giving answers/MWB after). Optimising EI (via timing, precision of endpoint, training them so Qs become S generated).	• Using our memories alters them →retrieval = learning event (Bjork) • Aim for high storage + high retrieval strength via RP that requires effort to recall/use • Ss may need training in self-explanation, and prompts to help structure it • SE makes their use of vocab visible/can deal with ARM more effectively • SE not useful for everything, needs selection • Explaining stages in WEs VERY important – for T and for S • EI tricky as S can go off track, need guidance, significant planning • Worth training S so they can use independently when reviewing/revising.
7. Oracy & Supporting Reflection (Ref): = part of MCG. Intro to MCG (complex, MCG learner has K (of learning + effective strategies) + control, Ref compares outcomes/goals & adjusts) Ref & O (Benefits: O ↔Ref) Qs as tool for reflection & O (IMPROVE model: Comprehension (what is the task)/ Connection (what do I know)/Strategy (what will I do)/Reflection (how well did that work), Ref at the end but should be throughout). Checking (As in SE/EI T must check Refs) **MCG Prompts PPs:** Partner talk + MCG discussion (Use IMPROVE to Ref before/ during/after, comparison with peers helpful). Timing (Before: IMPROVE C/C/S, during: add in pauses for Ref, after: clear guidelines for discussion). **Dialogic Qs for MCG PPs:** Scaffolding (Back & forth T↔S can benefit whole class, other Ss listen/think hard, needs carefully chosen Qs) Right kind of Q (series of Qs that build in challenge + general →specific, start with the end in mind). Good habits (need routines: listening/speaking/attention, start with CC 1st Q then bounce then dialogic with 1S). Next level (use as model for guided practice).	• MCG = conscious learning • Reflection can be individual or group • Goal of Ref = self-regulated learning • Needs scaffolding/teaching AND checking • IMPROVE = Mevarech & Kramarski (1997) • Consider pairings for Ref carefully • Oracy/Ref mats with Qs helpful – page185 • In all O parameters should be clear incl. if/how thinking should be captured • Off the cuff Qs tend to be superficial • Still need 'Ready to Respond' with dialogic Q
8. Oracy & Personal Development: Communicating (negotiating meaning)/ Relating (builds/ consolidates relationships)/Acculturation (building communities)/Democratic engagement (civic partnerships). **Insights: Doug Lemov:** Belonging (Bel) needs nurturing via interactions large & small, T listening & responding not (just) correcting →connection), develop habits of discussion via routines/norms/cues, need balance of structure & freedom, non-verbal communication can be powerful Bel signal. **Tom Sherrington:** *Mode A*: Explain/Model/ Practice/Question/ Feedback/Assess *Mode B*: Projects/Hands-on/Other. Activities: Open Response Tasks/Keep it Real: Authentic Products/Instructional Inputs/Presentations (not PowerPoint!) /Recitation & Performance, Mode A & B are integrated/enhance learning.	• Poor language skills →hard to manage challenging situations →anxiety/frustration/ stress →poor behaviour • Needs collective T effort to create a culture where every S feels their voice *matters* • See Teaching WalkThrus (Sherrington) – look for 80% Mode A, 20% Mode B • Presentations need clear expectations, rehearsal time, feedback improvement loops
9. Oracy & Confident Communicators: The Case: one of the most important life skills, O ='fit object of educational K', Ss need K + skills + confidence engage/listen/express themselves. O Frameworks: e.g. Voice 21 or English-Speaking Union, some overlap, may need additional inputs. Maximising the O offer: can have O related extra-curriculars e.g. debates/Model UN/ Ss leadership, issue of equity →use tutor time/homeroom. Other opportunities: inter-ventions with S who struggle with O, involve families via weekly debate prompts, add to praise/reward system, add to revision sessions/PSHE (personal social health education).	• All Ss should leave school confident that they 'have a voice' • Does not mean making all extroverts • *All* students need *access to chances to develop* their O • Extra-curricular opportunities give Ss more time e.g. developing debating skills
10. Recommendations & Reflections: O as a means (secures attention/supports learning + hard thinking + meaning making + personal development + reflection). O as an end (gives Ss K + skills to communicate effectively/confidently/appropriately in a range of contexts → academic success/relationships/active citizenship). An O lens: competing school priorities decisions, never enough curriculum time. Careful discussions: need to zoom in, be specific, define terms. A way in: O is not THE answer, or even AN answer, it's a way in to Ss thinking.	• O different in different subjects/ages/stages – discuss in those arenas, not generally • Think of the student who never speaks or is asked to speak… all day (they exist) • O is another ***lens*** like Literacy… think of it like that.