



THE ARTICULATE CLASSROOM

TALKING AND LEARNING
IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Edited by Prue Goodwin

Routledge Education Classic Editions

THE ARTICULATE CLASSROOM

This is a classic edition of Prue Goodwin's acclaimed collection of articles by leading educationalists on the place of talk in the primary curriculum, which now includes a preface from Lyn Dawes. A talking classroom is both a crucial part of every subject area and a subject in its own right. For all primary teachers committed to deepening their understanding of the pivotal role talk plays in learning, this book focuses attention on the importance of fully enabling pupils' learning potential.

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Prue Goodwin is a lecturer on literacy education and children's books. Having spent many years working at the University of Reading, she is now freelance as a lecturer to education professionals and a consultant to children's publishers.

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Primary School

Classic Edition

Edited by Prue Goodwin

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PREFACE

Lyn Dawes

Children learn talk from those around them. They become articulate by using talk with others, learning through experience how to speak fluently and coherently in order to communicate effectively. Learning to talk can be a very satisfying process during which the child can readily perceive the impact of the things they say on others, as they make choices about what to say, when, and how. Children usually like it when others listen to them and engage them in a conversation. Some may have specific difficulties, but learning to talk is, for most children, simple, straightforward and cumulative. This ability to speak and listen has a huge impact on a child's educational achievements, and talk remains the child's primary communication medium, long after they have learned how to read and write.

A child's capacity to use talk is an indication of the language environment that they have experienced. Setting aside those who have specific learning difficulties, we can see what language opportunities a child has experienced by talking with them. Children who speak three or four languages, those who can tell a story or explain their own thinking, or children who cannot tell you their own name or who respond to questions in fearful monosyllables, reveal something of their talk history. The articulate child is a child who has had sustained chances to speak and listen, and has made the most of them. If we use an analogy from computing, the physiology of the child is the hardware; the software is the set of talk skills they learn by immersion and practice. The idea that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to become adept at things like playing an instrument or becoming an expert at any skill, possibly also applies to children and spoken language – they need to hear talk, and use it, frequently, to become fluent.

Children's experience of talking in out-of-school settings varies considerably, both in quantity and quality. So the child arriving in school presents themselves with a capability to listen, understand, and speak, at a particular stage of development which may or may not enable them to make sense of the learning

they are offered. This starting range of advantage and disadvantage may persist for years and years.

This is what this book sets out to address, because education does not have to be like this. Children learn to talk at home. But children also learn to talk in school. Ways of working with words, of listening and responding to others; language tools which can be used to encourage others to think and speak; an awareness that talk with classmates helps learning; and the vocabulary with which to initiate and sustain an exploratory discussion are all things that can and should be directly taught in classrooms. Indeed for many, many children, this ‘second chance’ to learn to become an articulate speaker and active listener is the making of them, providing them with the tools they need to express their ideas and gain access to the ideas of others. These are life skills which should be learned through the teaching of talk in school.

The teaching and learning of speaking and listening is of primary importance, on a par with teaching and learning of reading, writing and mathematics. Indeed unless a child can speak and listen effectively, their ability to access these other important areas is diminished. The history of education indicates that the importance of talk for learning has been acknowledged, forgotten, and remembered again, in unnecessary cycles dependent not on expert knowledge of education, but on political forces and individual whims. The necessity to provide direct teaching of speaking and listening has not been in the gift of the teacher, even though teachers are well aware how important this is. Instead, teaching talk has been tolerated or forbidden by curricular edicts, testing regimes, and the influence of inspection regimes focused on particular sorts of results. The design of schooling which promotes accountability of the teacher (and the entire school) through testing a child’s ability to spell, produce specific items of grammar in a written text, and manipulate numbers, of course provides children only with opportunities to focus on things that will be tested. It is in this climate that children in primary schools live and grow and learn some things – but do not learn other things like how to speak and listen, and for many children, their chance to become articulate passes by.

Spoken language in the curriculum

The 2014 Primary National Curriculum for England and Wales provides these statements which deal with spoken language:

Pupils should be taught to:

- listen and respond appropriately to adults and their peers
- ask relevant questions to extend their understanding and knowledge
- use relevant strategies to build their vocabulary
- articulate and justify answers, arguments and opinions
- give well-structured descriptions, explanations and narratives for different purposes, including for expressing feelings

- maintain attention and participate actively in collaborative conversations, staying on topic and initiating and responding to comments
- use spoken language to develop understanding through speculating, hypothesising, imagining and exploring ideas
- speak audibly and fluently with an increasing command of Standard English
- participate in discussions, presentations, performances, role play, improvisations and debates
- gain, maintain and monitor the interest of the listener(s)
- consider and evaluate different viewpoints, attending to and building on the contributions of others
- select and use appropriate registers for effective communication.

The NC Framework thus points out that children need to be taught such things; they cannot be expected simply to assimilate the ways of talking that will help them to learn. However The National Curriculum offers a framework of content – what to teach – but does not draw on educational theory – how to teach – and its assessment requirements are dominant. Schools which are academies are not required to teach the National Curriculum; all schools are under pressure to become academies, and all new schools are academies. Time constraints created by the testing regime and Ofsted inspections further combine to blight attempts to teach talk skills, or to use talk to good effect for curriculum learning. Unfortunately talk is time consuming and ephemeral, not readily rushed or tested, and these attributes make it difficult to organize in classrooms where children have not been taught that talk matters.

Non-statutory guidance in the National Curriculum says:

Pupils should be taught to speak clearly and convey ideas confidently using standard English. They should learn to justify ideas with reasons; ask questions to check understanding; develop vocabulary and build knowledge; negotiate; evaluate and build on the ideas of others; and select the appropriate register for effective communication. They should be taught to give well-structured descriptions and explanations and develop their understanding through speculating, hypothesising and exploring ideas. This will enable them to clarify their thinking as well as organise their ideas for writing.

The National Curriculum here indicates that children need to be taught the set of skills that will enable them to engage one another in exploratory talk, during curricular activities and when working without adult help. Such teaching and learning can and indeed does create an articulate classroom. The National Curriculum for English goes on to say:

Teachers should [...] ensure the continual development of pupils' confidence and competence in spoken language and listening skills;

and to reinforce the idea:

Rules for effective discussions should be agreed with and demonstrated for pupils. They should help to develop and evaluate them, with the expectation that everyone takes part. Pupils should be helped to consider the opinions of others.

This is all helpful, since the teaching of talk skills supports the child as they develop their capacity to think and learn through reasoning aloud with others. By helping children to talk to others, we can help children to have more meaningful inner dialogue – that is, to learn how to think things through carefully as individuals, weighing up a range of ideas and drawing on all the information they have, before assessing their own reasoning and coming to a decision. However the direct teaching of the skills of literacy and numeracy has priority over any teaching to do with oracy.

Oracy and the articulate classroom

The term ‘**oracy**’ refers to the development of children’s skills in using the oral language in which they are educated to communicate within a range of settings, including the classroom. That is, oracy refers to a child’s spoken language skills. The UK National Oracy Project of 1987–1992 was set up by the School Curriculum Development Council and one invaluable aspect of its continuing impact has been to keep the idea of oracy in schools alive. The Oracy Project established that careful planning for talk-focused curriculum activities is essential, and that both teachers and children benefit from an awareness of the aims and purposes of classroom talk. The teaching of oracy, its impact on curriculum learning and on a child’s thinking, has provided a continued focus for research, which in turn has inspired some teachers to put practical ideas for integrating oracy to good use in classrooms.

Part 1 of this book highlights the importance of talk for the individual child. It is perfectly possible for a child to go through whole school days saying very little; but the quiet child or the ignored child have much going on in their minds. Enabling children to express ideas with confidence, and to learn to listen carefully to one another, is the task of the teacher. Establishing a classroom ethos based on respect for ideas can help to create confident children. Providing children with chances to talk about things that they do and do not understand, and to listen to their classmates do the same, can ensure that every child sees the point of speaking up, and has the ability to do so.

Part 2 of this book offers a range of contexts in which children speak and listen effectively with their teachers and their classmates. There must be an infinite number of scenarios in which combination of a particular aspect of the curriculum, a specific classroom, and an individual child, provide clear indicators of effective speaking and listening. For the teacher, the confidence to plan and create such opportunities rests on their belief that such work is of high value, on a par with

other times when they will adopt a more didactic style. This confidence to be ‘on a mission’ when it comes to fostering oracy has much to do with school management and the awareness of school leaders. There must be an equal number of scenarios in which children’s voices are ignored, their ideas rejected, or their creative uses of talk dissipated into general chatter or social talk. Social talk is essential, but in the classroom, children need to be taught that their task is to talk in order to learn, for themselves, and for their classmates. This is a powerful responsibility and it is always very exciting to see children step up and take opportunities to engage in exploratory talk, to ask one another probing questions, or to listen to extended hypothesising or speculation, finding a way to summarise and share what they hear.

Part 3 of this book provides timeless examples of the small but creative steps children take, especially as they learn through narrative. Narrative is a key feature of human social interaction, and talk is a child’s best way to begin to take part in hearing and telling stories.

Part 4 of this book looks at two distinct ways to use particular language so that children can understand the power of spoken and written language. These aspects of language use might be given little attention because they seem obvious; how to talk in a group, and how to best use computer software. But unless every child has insight into what is actually happening in such situations, they cannot support one another’s learning, and the classroom offers less of an educational experience.

School practice and research

Some examples of good practice in the teaching of oracy can be found in many schools and groups of schools. Just two examples are the Bradford Talking Schools project which focuses on giving every child a voice, and School 21 with its oracy-led curriculum. The school where I am fortunate enough to be a Governor, Water Hall School, has a clear focus on talk for learning, and uses children’s ideas expressed through talk to establish the values which make the school highly effective. Here are some of the school’s core values:

We talk to each other.

We play with others.

We learn from each other.

We listen to others and make all people feel important.

Such ideas are discussed and applied constantly, helping the child to develop their capacity to talk whilst learning – and vice versa. The continuing interest in oracy in classrooms, fostered by teachers, has been supported by academic research findings. Between 2007 and 2009, researchers in the Faculty of Education at Cambridge completed the Primary Review which highlights important aspects of oracy, and continues to support relevant and practical research.

The articulate future

Since the first edition of *The Articulate Classroom* was published in 2001, an understanding of the importance of the teaching of oracy has flourished, bringing with it new approaches and new strategies. Such initiatives as Talk Partners, Pair-and-Share, Story Bags and Boxes, Circle Time, Talking Points and other ideas have provided structures to support teachers in their wish to encourage every child to become articulate.

Research work in fields as diverse as neuroscience, psychology and sociology has provided evidence, for example that the teaching of talk supports the development of individual thinking. Providing a child with an education that will enable them to make the most of their capacities necessitates teaching them how to work with others through spoken language, and research supports that idea. In addition the integration of computers into everyday life, and education, has brought new chances to speak and listen, and has made immediate the importance of teaching oracy. The most powerful uses of computers, to find out useful things and communicate creatively with others, depend on a child's understanding of the importance of language. Children confined to merely playing games with computers are seriously disadvantaged. The chance to talk with others around the world offers real opportunities – but not to the child who does not know how to talk to the classmate seated next to them.

The Articulate Classroom offers an invaluable snapshot of education in the time around the year 2000; some things change, but some do not, and this book with its fresh examples and its direct line to the classroom, shows that the importance of teaching speaking and listening has not altered. It remains as urgent as it ever was.

Every child must become articulate separately, and this process happens through their life and school experiences. The child whose school recognises the crucial importance of spoken language for thinking and learning can expect to be given direct tuition in talk skills which will stand them in good stead throughout their school and work life. The teaching of talk for learning in Primary education happens at a critical time in a child's life, when they are beginning to reflect on a range of ideas, to imagine new worlds, and to want to say what they think. Children in classrooms can provide just the right sort of audience for one another's tentative ideas and fledgling hypotheses. The classroom in which children know that they are equally important, and in which someone will listen carefully to them, and want to hear their point of view, is a truly educational place. Our entire society has huge issues to deal with that will only ever be resolved when it is possible to talk about them; children in school now are the people who must take the legacy of both what is problematic in society, and what is best. Children who are articulate, able to listen to others and express a reasoned point of view, negotiating outcomes, and summarising what they have heard, will become the mediating citizens of the near future. Children who can engage others in story, or make best use of the available media to find out what is true and right, are likely to have better chances to develop hopeful and positive ways of thinking. Talking and learning in the

primary school are inextricably linked. The articulate classroom is a privileged place to be, and is the right of every child.

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Oracy Assessment Toolkit

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INTRODUCTION

Prue Goodwin

Talking is such an every day activity that we seldom take much notice of it. But imagine a day without it. Even someone who lives alone is unlikely to escape the spoken word as they travel to work, pop into the shops or switch on the television. Most of us spend much of the day speaking to a range of audiences (e.g. partners, children, shopkeepers), for a range of purposes (greeting, explaining, complaining). Those of us engaged in teaching are involved with talk all day, whether as social interaction or with the exploratory talk that goes on whenever learning is taking place. Talk involves both speaking and listening. When we speak we shape our thoughts into meanings. The listener hears and unravels our meanings before they reply. But the functions served by spoken language are far more wide reaching than individuals communicating with each other. Looking at talk in its widest use we can see that it is the means by which:

- Each of us explore what we think and how we feel. It is human nature to tell others about important events in our lives, whether it is to share pleasures or to seek support. In extremes of emotion – distress, confusion or grief – we turn to counsellors, psychiatrists and spiritual advisers to help us. By talking through problems we begin to gain control over them and understand how best to overcome them.
- We understand and maintain comfortable human relationships. The relationships can be with our closest family and friends or at the level of international diplomacy. Keeping channels of communication open can resolve a squabble on the playground or prevent an international war.
- Society organises itself. Government in the UK works through discussion in committees and meetings as well as through the great debates in the House of Commons. The word parliament originates from the French *parler* – to speak, and a good orator is sometimes considered, rightly or wrongly, a good politician.

With talk, in all its various forms, being so central to all aspects of our lives, it is essential that children are given opportunities to become confident speakers and listeners. The programme of study for speaking and listening in the National Curriculum for English (DfEE/QCA 1999) indicates the importance attached to children gaining an understanding of oracy. In this book teachers, advisors and educational researchers have contributed chapters that consider good practice in teaching speaking and listening and have offered highly relevant contributions to an overall understanding of the place of exploratory talk in primary schools.

Talk in the primary curriculum

In the children's novel *Charlie Lewis Plays for Time* by Gene Kemp (1986), a supply teacher, Mr Carter, decides to get back to basics with the class. Charlie and his friend, Trish, find it all rather tedious:

I sat down where our Group A was silently working its way through oh, no, not again, *New and Improved English for Primary Schools*.

'D'you remember when we did it over and over in Mrs Somers' class?' muttered Trish, shooting down the page at the speed of light.

'Quiet there. This is a language lesson so there should be no talking AT ALL.'

After a minute, 'You should see what the rest have got. *Reading for Finding Out* and *Fun with Word Families*,' hissed Trish. I just wished she'd belt up and let us get on with it in quiet miserable boredom. Too late.

'Table A will stay on to work at break as they are apparently incapable of maintaining an orderly silence.'

In the 1960s, many primary teachers would have shared Mr Carter's views about talking in class. However, from that time onwards, the influence of educationalists and linguists such as James Britton (1970) and Joan Tough (1976) changed the commonly held idea that silent classrooms were educationally successful classrooms. Their work highlighted the pivotal role talk plays in learning, and focused attention on the need for all teachers to understand how to provide for a previously neglected aspect of their pupils' learning potential. In this chapter, we will look at how talk slowly gained in standing in the primary curriculum and ask what are the characteristics of an articulate classroom in a primary school.

Forty years of evolution

Despite the widespread knowledge of the importance of talk, modification of practice in schools has been very gradual. Back in the 1960s, teachers who associated talking with wasting time may have feared that classes would be full of chattering rather than purposeful conversations leading to enhanced levels of