

# Oracy and Disadvantage

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The impact of oracy in our schools

Will Collins



# 1. The Oracy Gap



On entry to school, disadvantaged children's spoken language development is significantly lower than their more advantaged peers.

19  
months

Gap between the language skills of five year olds in the lowest and highest income groups (quintiles).

Source: Communication Trust 2017, *Talking About a Generation*



Without intervention, these gaps grow, as pupils with the strongest language skills make the most progress in all areas of the school curriculum.

**2x as  
likely**

Pupils receiving FSM are 1.6 times more likely to be below language expectations at age 5, compared to their non-FSM peers. This gap grows to twice as likely to be below language expectations at age 11.

Source: Moss and Washbrook 2016 *Understanding the Gender Gap in Literacy and Language Development*

## 2. The Impact of Oracy



### Oracy increases confidence

empowering students with the belief that their voice has value, developing the ability to articulate thoughts so others will listen

“

Sometimes she does choose people who are really quiet and they don't really want to do it because they're really shy, but then Miss chooses [them] and they gain more confidence.

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*Zara, year 6 pupil*

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Source: Millard and Menzies 2016, *State of Speaking in our Schools*



Oracy improves academic outcomes developing learners who can think critically, reason together and have the vocabulary to express their knowledge and understanding

**+5**  
**months**

On average, pupils who participate in oral language interventions make approximately five months' additional progress over the course of a year.

Source: Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) evaluation of oral language interventions.



### Oracy fosters wellbeing

supporting students to build successful relationships, talk through issues, express feelings and resolve conflicts

**1.5x as  
likely**

Young people with poor communication skills are one and a half times more likely to have mental health difficulties, even after taking account of a range of other factors that might have played a part

Source: Communication Trust 2017, *Talking About a Generation*





### Oracy equips students to thrive in life beyond school

helping them to progress, access employment and engage in civic life

# 60%

60% of business leaders include communication skills in their top three most important considerations when hiring.

Source: CBI/Pearson 2018, *Educating for the Modern World*



**Oracy narrows gaps**  
enabling disadvantaged students to fulfill  
their potential

**+6**  
**months**

Additional progress that  
pupils from  
disadvantaged  
backgrounds can make  
through oral language  
interventions.

Source: Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) evaluation of oral language interventions.



**Oracy promotes social equity**  
leading to a fairer society where everyone,  
regardless of background, finds their voice  
for success in school and in life

“

You are the only second chance for some children to have a rich language experience. If these children are not getting it at school, they are not getting it.

”

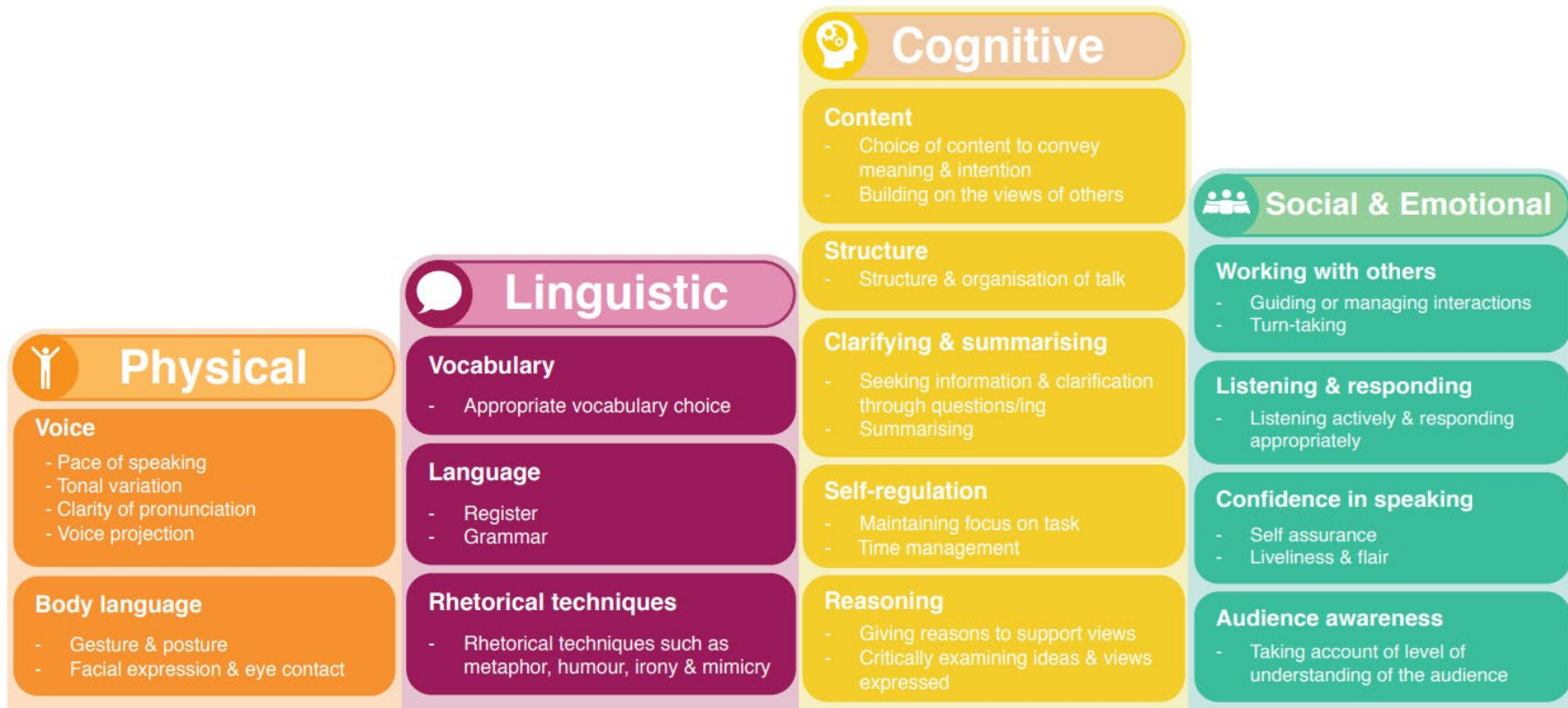
*Neil Mercer, Emeritus Professor,  
University of Cambridge*

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# 3. Teaching Oracy

- Explicit teaching of oracy supports ALL students, but particularly those whose oracy skills are under-developed.
- Oracy-rich classrooms and schools model high quality spoken communication as well as giving students the opportunity to learn and practice their own oracy skills.
- We need to demystify the teaching of oracy:
  1. Break oracy down into a concrete, teachable set of skills.
  2. Break the teaching of oracy down into clear strategies and approaches.

# The Oracy Framework



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# The Oracy Benchmarks

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1

*Sets high expectations for oracy*

2

*Values every voice*

3

*Teaches oracy explicitly*

4

*Harnesses oracy to elevate learning*

5

*Appraises progress in oracy*



# DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

WE GIVE PROOF OF LISTENING



WE RESPECT OTHERS' IDEAS

WE BUILD, CHALLENGE, SUMMARISE,  
CLARIFY, AND PROBE EACH OTHER'S IDEAS



WE ARE PREPARED TO CHANGE OUR MIND

WE INVITE OTHERS INTO OUR DISCUSSION

WE TRY TO REACH A SHARED AGREEMENT



# ONLINE DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

CONSIDER YOUR BODY  
LANGUAGE



SPEAK LOUD & CLEARLY

SIGNAL WHEN YOU WOULD  
LIKE TO SPEAK

OR USE THE CHAT  
FUNCTION TO SHARE  
YOUR IDEAS

ASK QUESTIONS TO CLARIFY & PROBE  
WHAT SOMEBODY ELSE HAS SAID

REMEMBER TO BUILD,  
CHALLENGE & SUMMARISE  
EACH OTHER'S IDEAS



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# 4. Case Study

- Oracy has been at the heart of their school approach since 2018.
- Whole school approach: CPD, PD targets, the Bishop Character Curriculum, oracy in every subject, oral assessments in place of written assessments.

### The impact:

- The attainment gap between economically disadvantaged students and their peers has closed.
- 94% of pupils feel the focus on oracy has helped them make better progress.
- Improved oracy has supported students to articulate themselves better, improving behaviour and supporting the resolution of conflict.



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