

Developing the Talking School: Guidance for teachers

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The Talking School research project

As part of the Talking School research project, led by Alan Howe for CfBT Education Trust, a research report has been compiled which details the activities undertaken at St Mark's Academy and Oxford Spires Academy and assesses their impact.

Copies of this document can be downloaded from www.cfbt.com





Contents

Summary	2
1 Introduction	3
2 What is a Talking School?	6
2.1 Characteristics of a Talking School	6
2.2. Dimensions of a Talking School	7
3 The Talking School project: enhanced assessment criteria	8
4 Exploratory vs. persuasive talk	10
4.1 Exploratory talk	10
4.2 Persuasive talk	10
5 Teaching approaches	11
5.1 Constructive controversy: improving learning by arguing <i>for</i> and then <i>against</i> your options	11
5.2 Effective Talking School techniques	13
6 References	19
7 Appendix: School information	19



Summary

The 'Talking School' is one which prioritises the importance of talking and listening as a means of thinking and learning; as a way of developing collaborative and cooperative skills; and as insightful evidence into the understandings and ideas that students bring, develop and extend, in the classroom.

This guidance document outlines the characteristics of a Talking School and details practical methods that can be used in the classroom for teachers interested in adopting the approach.

In recognition of the value of talk for learning and life, CfBT, in collaboration with two of its sponsored academies, St Mark's Church of England Academy and Oxford Spires Academy, established a research project to investigate the potential of discussion, debate and argument in the lower secondary years. Both schools were committed to the importance of developing students' oral language skills in ways that fitted with the Talking School approach.

One of the key recommendations of the research for other teachers and schools interested in developing a Talking School is to adopt a similar model to that successfully used in the research project. We recommend that schools start in a small way with a group of willing teachers from at least three subjects, including English, with a view to scaling up at a later time once the methods selected have been trialled and evaluated.

The implementation of a Talking School approach resulted in evidence of positive impact on the quality and depth of student writing. A method for assessing the impact of introducing the Talking School techniques on student performance is proposed, based upon individual speaking/listening criteria and corresponding levels of ability.

The document concludes with an extensive section which outlines some of the techniques and tools that can be used for developing student proficiency in talking and listening, and in using disciplined discussion and debate in learning. Key amongst these is the method of 'constructive controversy': a technique that involves improving learning by arguing *for* and then *against* your options.



1 Introduction

The concept of a 'Talking School' was developed by CfBT following the publication in 2011 of the report *Debating the evidence: an international review of current situation and perspectives*. The report highlighted the wide range of evidence for the value of schools making a conscious effort to develop young people's spoken language skills to enhance participation in life and work:

'In today's global society, the latest news stories and events from across the world, along with the opinions of others, are the subjects of constant debate. The internet and social media have brought people from all walks of life together to discuss, criticise and comment in a way never before known; whoever and wherever they are, individuals are almost always able to join in and make their voices heard. This places increasing demands on the individual, and the ability to analyse information and communicate knowledge effectively is a key feature of modern life.'

*'At the same time, in the UK, concerns are expressed that young people who may be comfortable in front of a screen are lacking in the communication skills needed in the workplace and in life. In a world where increased employability is a key issue this is an important point and one that is highlighted by the most recent Confederation of British Industry (CBI)/Education Development International (EDI) Annual Education and Skills Survey, which found that 42% of employers are not satisfied with the basic use of English by school and college leavers.'*¹



Literacy is a product of subsets of applied knowledge and skills in four, interdependent components of language – listening, speaking, reading and writing. An effective whole-school approach will vigorously promote each of them, and seek to strengthen the connections between each.

As well as the importance of effective communication, and confident understanding and use of language in adult life and work, there is a wealth of evidence that indicates the importance of talking and listening in education as a means of thinking and learning; as a way of developing collaborative and cooperative skills; and as insightful evidence into the understandings and ideas that students bring, develop and extend, in the classroom.

Creating a 'Talking School' is not easy. In particular, there are three challenges that present themselves to a school which is serious about making a commitment to developing student participation in learning through talk, and increasing their proficiency in spoken language skills:

1. Research from many countries into classroom interaction shows that, as a general rule, teachers talk much more than their students. Much classroom communication is rather limited, following a regular pattern sometimes called 'IRF' ('Initiation, Response, Feedback'): the teacher initiates, the learner responds and then the teacher gives feedback. This approach is often criticised as being more conducive to a learner saying what the teacher wants to hear rather than resulting in genuinely open communication.² One challenge therefore involves a 'rebalancing act' for teachers – finding ways of continuing to teach well (or even teach better) through varying the kinds of exchange and developing alternative patterns of communication.

¹ Akerman & Neale (2011).

² British Council (2013).



2. The second challenge involves achieving consistency in approach across the school so that students meet common demands and expectations in lessons. Students are best supported as users of language by adults who offer good models themselves, and whose teaching approaches do not mix or contradict the key messages about the value placed on oral communication. Achieving this is often difficult; best practice needs to be spread to enable a productive exchange of ideas and strategies within and between subject departments. This involves a time commitment and a willingness to try out new approaches.

3. The third challenge is a specific *teaching* challenge. There used to be a prevailing view that the critical barrier was providing 'opportunity'. The argument was that students did not develop and use language well in school because they were denied opportunities... and once these were opened up, all would follow. However, we know now that opportunity on its own is not enough. There are ways of structuring language; of tackling a communicative task; of interacting productively and positively; of listening attentively and thoughtfully; and of challenging and disputing, that need to be explicitly taught. Students will not simply find out how to engage in powerful and 'eloquent' ways of talking by discovering these for themselves. They need models, motivation and skilled teachers who both value the language that students use naturally in their home communities, and know how to build a fuller repertoire of skills and structures. In a secondary school the English department has a critical role: it is in English that curriculum time can be devoted, justifiably, to direct attention to developing spoken language skills. Other subject teachers can reinforce the drive that the English team might be able to give to high standards of talk – providing they know what can be expected, and how to expect it.

It was in direct response to these challenges, and in recognition of the value of talk for learning and life, that CfBT, in collaboration with two of its sponsored academies, St Mark's Church of England Academy in Mitcham, Surrey and Oxford Spires Academy, established a research project to investigate the potential of discussion, debate and argument in the lower secondary years (Key Stage 3). Both schools were committed to the importance of developing students' oral language skills in ways that fitted with the Talking School approach.

One of the key recommendations of the research for other teachers and schools interested in developing a Talking School is to adopt a similar model to that successfully used in the research project. We recommend that schools start in a small way with a group of willing teachers from at least three subjects, including English, with a view to scaling up at a later time once the methods selected have been trialled and evaluated.

This guidance document outlines the characteristics of a Talking School and details practical methods that can be used in the classroom for teachers interested in adopting the approach.

Developing the Talking School – the action research project at St Mark's Academy and Oxford Spires Academy

The Talking School approach combines collaborative talk with planned opportunities within the curriculum for more formal aspects of speaking and listening. Students discuss, debate and argue about ideas and issues in a structured way.

The action research project undertaken by teachers at St Mark's and Oxford Spires sought to accelerate progress in literacy at Key Stage 3, by adopting the Talking School methodology.



This involved focusing specifically on key aspects of oral language development. Students were taught how to develop their skills in discussion and debate in a range of subjects – to deepen their subject understanding and sharpen their critical thinking skills, and to support their progress in writing.

The focus on discussion and debate was part of a wider whole-school approach designed to enhance students' oral competence and confidence. In each school, a group of subject specialists worked together to jointly plan lessons and use a common set of teaching strategies and classroom activities.

The progress of individual students was tracked and the impact of the approach assessed through a combination of quantitative measures and qualitative action research methods. In both schools students made better than expected progress in the subjects (including English, science, humanities, religious education and drama) that were involved in the initiative. Progress was especially good in English and humanities. Evidence from a range of sources indicated that students' competence and confidence in key aspects of speaking and listening (for example presentation and debate) were significantly enhanced. The full report is available at www.cfbt.com

Teachers found evidence of a positive impact on the quality and depth of students' writing.

Explicit teaching of discursive writing is a key condition for the successful transfer of talk into writing which shows an increased ability to explore, consider and present ideas and arguments.

The project identified several aspects of provision that contributed to all of these outcomes, including:

- consistent approaches taken by teachers to the use of discussion and debate in teaching and learning, so that students become accustomed to a common set of high expectations, and have plenty of opportunity to practise and develop skills, often as a result of explicit teaching
- regular opportunities (over two terms) for students to discuss ideas, to acknowledge and consider alternative points of view and aspects of evidence, and to sharpen their ability to marshal, present and counter arguments.

Teachers involved in trialling the Talking School approach valued the opportunity to work on an initiative with a common focus on a key aspect of overall literacy development that also enhanced subject learning. Their repertoire of teaching strategies was expanded through effective professional learning, applying a range of well-researched strategies to their own subject areas, allied to collaborative support arising from participation in the research, so that approaches could be tried out and refined after joint reflection and review.



2 What is a Talking School?

2.1 Characteristics of a Talking School

From a teaching and learning perspective,³ a Talking School is characterised by, for example:

- Dialogic talk (a scenario in which both teachers and pupils make substantial and significant contributions and through which children's thinking on a given idea or theme is helped to move forward) as part of teaching and learning (whole class, small group, 1-1)
- Carefully designed programmes of teacher-led, group-based activities
- Classrooms that encourage 'exploratory' talk, to enable students to grapple with new ideas and to think through an issue or a problem
- Effective questioning strategies that promote thinking and offer cognitive challenge, and where there is a consistent expectation that students will expand on, elaborate and explain their ideas
- Focused, productive talk before, during and after writing
- Research and enquiry that leads to detailed explanations, accounts and debates
- Teaching that provides good models of talk: both 'formal' ways of using appropriate subject terminology, and language structures, but also models of a range of styles: for example, recount an anecdote; use an analogy to explain a tricky concept; hypothesise and 'think aloud'; listen carefully and respond; think quickly on their feet; challenge and affirm; disagree courteously etc.
- Students who develop proficiency in appropriate academic discourse (for example, 'talking like a scientist'), using the correct vocabulary of the subject
- Students who value what they and others say, and who are aware that teachers are interested in what they say because it provides a window onto their learning

These contexts – those focusing on students explicitly *talking* – will be balanced by periods of reflection, and opportunities for students to listen attentively, read widely, study carefully, and write extensively, uninterrupted by others.

From a 'learning to use talk' perspective,⁴ a Talking School is characterised by, for example:

- a range of visitors who talk interestingly and encourage students to converse, to discuss, and to debate
- student participation in the life of the school, which encourages discussion, debate, negotiation and persuasion about authentic matters – so that talk is seen as 'action on the world'

³ See, for example: Alexander (2000), Mercer (2000), Howe (1992).

⁴ See, for example: Akerman & Neale (2011), Jones (1988).



- planned opportunities for students to use the spoken word in artistic and creative ways: for example oral storytelling; in improvised and scripted drama; as part of festivals and celebrations
- formal debating activities – for example, coaching and tuition in debating strategy, including competitive debating – allied to the effective use of debate and formal discussion to deepen learning and build oral skills and confidence.

A Talking School is also one in which all the adults who come into contact with students are conscious of their roles in promoting good standards of talking and listening.

2.2 Dimensions of a Talking School

The most powerful way, then, in which a school can enable all students to develop confidence and competence in the spoken word is to focus attention on two key aspects: learning through talk; and learning to use talk. The former emphasises the inherent benefits that talking activities might bring of themselves and the learning that can be maximised through talking activities; the latter concentrates on developing students' proficiency in their use of language itself.

Learning through talk Advancing students' capacity for productive, rational and reflective thinking	Learning to use talk Advancing students' proficiency in using language to express their thoughts and to engage with others in joint intellectual activity
Building opportunities and contexts for students to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discuss, collaborate, and think together • engage in reasoned dialogue and debate with each other and their teachers • research, enquire and provide spoken accounts of findings 	Explicit teaching and modelling of different ways of using talk to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discuss and debate • negotiate • argue and persuade • explain • instruct • use the academic discourse of subjects • perform (e.g. drama, storytelling) Creating specific opportunities outside lessons for talk: e.g. debates, school council
Assessment that uses student talk as evidence of learning (formative and summative) Assessing proficiency in speaking and listening	



3 The Talking School project: enhanced assessment criteria

The following grid draws on similar approaches, for example the former DCSF's (Department for Children, Schools and Families) *Assessing Pupils' Progress*⁵ materials that show how students can make progress in specific aspects of language and literacy. It has been specifically designed to capture key aspects of performance in argument, discussion and debate.

The two participating schools used the grid to make assessments (usually half-termly) of the progress made by individual students.

One of the most effective ways of using the grid is to make a copy for each student being assessed, and to use a highlighter to record when there is evidence (which can simply be observations of what the students say, and how they respond). The grid is also useful for both students and teachers as a 'map' of the range of spoken language skills that the various classroom approaches adopted are intended to promote and sharpen. Part of the success of the project was due to students becoming more aware of the value of speaking and listening skills, and of their own strengths and weaknesses in specific aspects.

⁵ DfE (2011).



Level	Talking to others: presenting ideas and arguments effectively	Talking with others: listening, contributing and responding	Evaluating talk	Level of independence
	Using talk to express, explore and explain ideas Adapting and varying talk to suit purpose and listeners	Contributing, challenging and responding to others' contributions	Evaluating how talk is used in different ways for effect and impact Using this to improve own performance	
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaks in extended turns to express straightforward ideas with some relevant detail structures talk so that ideas are clear and listeners can follow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> asks questions that show some understanding of another's ideas and views introduces new ideas into a discussion to move it forwards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> comments on how to make choices in content and language to improve expression and presentation of ideas 	<p>Needs support and some prompting. Proficiency evident in more familiar, less formal, contexts</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p>Starting to show independence, but still needs support and some prompting, across a range of contexts</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p>Confident, independent self-regulating, across a range of contexts</p>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> expresses and explains relevant ideas, to make meaning explicit and to engage listeners shapes and adapts talk in deliberate ways for clarity and effect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> moves a discussion or debate forwards by adding detail, challenging another's views, or offering alternative ideas responds to questions and challenges by referring to evidence, and elaborating and extending ideas to help the listener 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> challenges and presents alternative views, in a courteous and appropriate manner adopts a range of roles in discussion and debate, showing some evidence of independent decision-making 	
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses evidence and gives reasons for viewpoints uses a range of strategies to engage with and persuade listeners, including tone of voice and non-verbal features (e.g. eye contact, gesture) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> challenges and presents alternative views, in a courteous and appropriate manner adopts a range of roles in discussion and debate, showing some evidence of independent decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> evaluates own and others' contributions to discussion and debate, making reference to strengths and areas for improvement 	
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a range of persuasive and rhetorical strategies to influence listeners, including emphasis, pace, tone of voice, and expressive gesture organises ideas in a logical sequence, and structures an extending contribution showing good awareness of listeners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> challenges and responds persuasively and appropriately sustains a range of different roles and responsibilities in discussion and debate, making well-judged contributions that show good understanding of issues and ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> analyses and explains why a spoken presentation, or contribution to discussion and debate, is effective, or in what ways it can be improved, using appropriate terminology to describe features 	
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> draws on a range of evidence to explain and justify views, showing understanding of, and ability to convey complex ideas makes confident and varied use of a range of expressive features, adapted appropriately for audience and context, including assured and often sustained use of talk in more formal contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develops thoughtful and perceptive insights and understanding of differing views and sides of an issue listens with concentration and alertness, and makes detailed and insightful contributions to discussion and debate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrates critical awareness of the impact of own and others' spoken language, using appropriate terminology to describe features 	



4 Exploratory vs. persuasive talk

It can be useful to distinguish between two overlapping aspects of talking and listening when considering ways to promote and develop ‘productive’ discussion and debate both between students and with their teachers. The first – ‘exploratory talk’ – is characterised by a level of informality and high levels of interaction, where attention is on getting to grips with the topic, on thinking through ideas, and on reaching a joint conclusion or solution. For the second – ‘persuasive talk’ – the emphasis is more on individual performance, on solo ‘turns’, and on deploying a range of rhetorical strategies to convey and convince.

4.1 Exploratory talk

‘Exploratory talk’ occurs when partners engage critically but constructively with each other’s ideas. Relevant knowledge is shared, suggestions are sought and opinions offered for joint consideration. Ideas and suggestions may be challenged and counter-challenged, but challenges are justified with reasons. In exploratory talk, knowledge is made publicly accountable (that is to say students have to justify their ideas and defend themselves to their peers) and reasoning becomes apparent in the talk.’⁶

Evidence that students are engaged in exploratory talk will include:

- frequent use of ‘because’ and ‘why’
- increased quality and length of listening
- increased elaboration of points made, using examples, evidence, explaining and justifying
- increased use of questions from students.

4.2 Persuasive talk

To enable students to develop skills in promoting, justifying or defending a point of view, they need to learn how to use supporting evidence, example or illustration, all of which are linked back to the main argument.

The supporting material may be:

- evidence, for instance statistical, tangible proof
- example, such as an account of a specific case
- illustration, for instance an image or testimony.

The purpose of supporting material is to make an assertion credible. The pattern is therefore to make a point, introduce an example, and then imply the way the example confirms the assertion.

⁶ Mercer (2000).



5 Teaching approaches

The following sections outline some of the techniques and tools that can be used for developing student proficiency in talking and listening, and in using disciplined discussion and debate in learning. Key amongst these is the first: ‘constructive controversy’.

5.1 Constructive controversy: improving learning by arguing *for* and then *against* your options

‘Constructive controversy’ (CC)⁷ is a classroom discussion and debating format designed to help students to get the most out of an issue or controversial topic by assigning them ‘positions’, asking them to generate arguments in favour of that position, then requiring them to argue against that position, and finally asking them to synthesise what they have learned into a position, solution or course of action that most can agree with.

CC involves deliberately setting up a clash of ideas, before enabling students to reach a resolution based on argument and evidence.

CC focuses students’ attention on the intellectual conflict surrounding a complex, relevant and yet unresolved issue, and introduces key elements of discussion as well as debate.

To facilitate a productive discussion, CC employs unique strategies that advance students’ criticality and reasoning skills while seeking to diminish antagonism. This methodology has six adaptable parts:

1. Set up

The teacher first asks a complex central theme question (e.g. ‘Is the ‘Occupy Movement’ in our democracy constructive or destructive?’ or ‘What should the main character do – action A or action B?’). To learn relevant background information, students might:

- brainstorm possible solutions to the issue or problem
- examine various pieces of evidence related to the central theme question.

2. Form advocacy teams

Next, the teacher organises students into groups of four and, within each group, assigns each pair of students a position. The students individually research and organise information, and then work as a group, or a pair, to construct an oral presentation – supporting why their scenario or solution or viewpoint should be chosen.

⁷ For accounts of the approach, go to: http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_71.htm or <http://ctl.utexas.edu/teaching-resources/teach-your-course/facilitate-with-intention/constructive-controversy/>



3. Present, listen, question

In the third step, students use evidence and logic to express their assigned position to the opposition group. At this time, students in the opposition group listen carefully, seek to understand the rival perspective, and, when necessary, ask clarifying questions. The 'opposition group' then presents their perspective as the opponents listen, seek to understand the perspective and ask clarifying questions. This step enables each group to advance their position while gaining a comprehensive understanding of the opposing position.

4. Discuss, debate, refute

In the fourth step, students candidly discuss and debate the issue. They advance their perspective, use evidence and logic to comment on the opposing position, and rebut critiques. This step enables students to better comprehend the divisions between the two divergent perspectives.

5. Switch positions

In the fifth step, student pairs are regrouped into new groups of four, and then in their new group reverse the perspectives and present their opponents' position. This step facilitates students' understanding of the evidence and logic of both positions by purposefully forcing them to think beyond their original perspective.

6. Decide

In the final step, through whole-class discussion and debate, students rethink the issue by deliberately working beyond their original perspective. In this step, students first identify common ground between the two perspectives and then seek to create a mutually agreed-upon new position.

Advanced teaching of key skills

It is useful to consider the place of games and short, focused activities as a prelude or accompaniment to the use of CC. There is a range of good ideas in the English-Speaking Union (ESU) booklet *Discover Your Voice*⁸ designed to get students speaking, to build their confidence, and to develop their persuasive skills, which can then be deployed in other lessons.

In addition, it is worth using shortened (single lesson) versions of CC as a way of:

- building up students' awareness of how to move on from the initial exploration of an issue
- taking up a position
- advocating for a position
- introducing focused listening and challenge.

⁸ ESU, 2008.



5.2 Effective Talking School techniques

In addition to CC there is a rich range of other techniques which might be employed in the classroom for different purposes. By using a mixture of these individual approaches teachers might best develop a sense of what works in their subject area and which activities inspire their students and pique their interest in debating and the advancement of their oral language skills.

Developing and understanding ‘ground rules’

Discussing ground rules can help to raise students’ awareness of how to make productive and positive use of the different groups that they will be working in. Best practice involves initial discussion with the class about possible ground rules. This may involve general ground rules for small-group and whole-class discussion, plus some specific ones for the debates and using the CC format. These might include: how to challenge; how to interrupt; or ‘tracking’ a speaker – looking at them, eye contact, nodding etc.

Modelling

We cannot expect students to be able to use strategies and behave in certain ways as speakers and listeners without offering them good models. This can involve ‘formal’ modelling, where either the teacher, other adults, or older students model how to go about, for example, presenting an initial argument, or responding to one by asking clarifying questions. It is worth considering the possibility of using video to film and then playing back to students so that they can reflect on their own activity, or to use ‘ready-made video’, for example the *Discover Your Voice* DVD from the ESU.

Group size and composition

To build up students’ skills and to support their developing competence and confidence in using persuasive language, consider the following aspects of successful small-group talk:

Size

- Pairs – everyone has to speak, but is inclined to agree
- Small groups (3–4) – diversity and security
- Larger groups (5–6) – greater variation in length and range of contributions
- Very large groups (6+) – may need chairing, certainly need social skills

Composition

- Self-selected – tendency to conformity and agreement
- Structured mix – benefits of diversity but also reproduces the power structures of everyday talk



Tasks that promote a range of speaking and listening

Students are most likely to talk productively and with increased precision if they are set a purposeful task that requires collaboration and also offers a genuine audience, or group of listeners.

Key design features of productive tasks include:

Group outcome

Set up a joint outcome for the group that will require all students to participate, such as a set of questions to be framed, or a collective decision.

Clear time constraints

Ensure that students are clear about how long they have. Focus attention on the task in hand by issuing interim time warnings, and use tight deadlines.

Explain – or negotiate – the outcome with students in advance

Ensure that students understand how they are to work, and what is expected of them both in terms of outcome and also how they are expected to go about the task.

Plan for spoken as well as written outcomes

For example, group presentation of a piece of research, or a choral reading of a poem followed by discussion of the techniques selected and their impact.

Design tasks that will promote different kinds of talking and listening

For example, help students to develop more 'combative' styles of argument by deliberately asking half the class in pairs to develop a series of arguments, whilst the other half work on the opposite side of the argument. Then set up groups of four made up of pairs from opposing sides.

Build in opportunities for students to link the focus or topic to their own experience

For example, explicitly encourage students to think of anecdotes from their own experience that will support an argument.

Learning environment and classroom organisation

Creating the right environment for productive talk is also crucial:

- Ensure the classroom can easily be reorganised to allow for groups and whole-class discussion.
- Think carefully about group composition and size: four is ideal. Use a range of strategies to group and regroup students. Avoid the limited roles that can emerge in regular friendship groups; consider single-sex grouping as well as mixed groups, and experiment with boy-girl seating to ensure mixed-gender pair work.
- Arrange for groups to regroup at key points so that students can explain their ideas to a new audience, receive fresh feedback, and listen attentively to others' ideas.



- Experiment with giving different groups a different task each, so that feedback to the whole class is more purposeful, and students have a purpose for listening.
- Use larger groups to teach students to raise issues, clarify understanding, present, justify and consider committed viewpoints, and to expose students to a wide range of ideas, views and opinions.

Group work strategies for making discussion purposeful and productive

Depending on the learning outcome, you can establish different-sized groups, and manipulate their composition and purposes to maximise participation and encourage students to strive for high standards of speaking and listening:

Pair talk

Easy to organise even in cramped classrooms, 'Pair talk' is ideal to promote high levels of participation and to ensure that the discussions are highly focused, especially if allied to tight deadlines. Use in the early stages of learning for students to recall work from a previous lesson, generate questions, work together to plan a piece of writing, or take turns to tell a story. Use pairs to promote 'response partners' during the drafting process, and to work as reading partners with an unfamiliar text. Ideal for quick-fire reflection and review and for rehearsal of ideas before presenting them to the whole class.

Pairs to fours

Students work together in pairs – possibly decided by friendship, possibly boy-girl etc. Each pair then joins up with another pair to explain and compare ideas.

Listening triads

Students work in groups of three. Each pupil takes on the role of talker, questioner, recorder. The talker explains something, or comments on an issue, or expresses opinions. The questioner prompts and seeks clarification. The recorder makes notes and gives a report at the end of the conversation. Next time roles are changed.

Envoys

Once groups have carried out a task, one person from each group is selected as an 'envoy' and moves to a new group to explain and summarise, and to find out what the new group thought, decided, or achieved. The envoy then returns to the original group and feeds back. This is an effective way of avoiding tedious and repetitive 'reporting back' sessions. It also puts a 'press' on the envoy's use of language and creates groups of active listeners.

Snowball

Pairs discuss an issue, or brainstorm some initial ideas, then double up to fours and continue the process, then into groups of eight in order to compare ideas and to sort out the best or to agree on a course of action. Finally, the whole class is drawn together and spokespersons for each group of eight feed back ideas. This strategy promotes more public discussion and debate.



Rainbow groups

A way of ensuring that students are regrouped and learn to work with a range of others. After small groups have discussed together, students are given a number or colour. Students with the same number or colour join up, making groups comprising representatives of each original group. In their new group students take turns to report back on their group's work.

Jigsaw

A topic is divided into sections. In 'home' groups of four or five, students allocate a section each, and then regroup into 'expert' groups. In these groups, experts work together on their chosen area, then return to original 'home' groups to report back on their area of expertise. The 'home' group is then set a task that requires the students to use the different areas of 'expertise' for a joint outcome. This strategy requires plenty of advance planning, but is a very effective speaking and listening strategy because it ensures the participation of all students.

Teaching debating skills

There are a number of simple ways to ensure that students can practise debating skills and then apply them to fuller-scale debates:

- Display posters featuring persuasive phrases which might be used by students in the course of their debates.
- Analyse a recorded speech. Identify supporting evidence, then test its validity and reliability.
- Analyse a recorded speech. Identify the language of logic and the language of persuasion.
- Invite groups to submit a well-argued point on the same subject, and identify what makes supporting material effective (for example if it plays on existing sympathies).
- Play 'Flip/Flop' in plenary time. Following a lesson which has been spent investigating arguments for and against a particular issue, give pairs of students a minute to prepare a short powerful argument for or against. In groups of four (two for and two against), each pair has one minute to put their argument. Then they are asked to switch (flip/flop) and take the opposing viewpoint.
- Use 'I couldn't agree/disagree more' at the end of a lesson to help students to re-present arguments, or to practise arguing strongly and cogently for a firm position, learning to refute an argument with evidence. Provide students with a provocative statement, for example 'School uniform is a good idea'. Go round in a circle, with each student saying why they agree or disagree with a new reason each time.

Moving from talk to writing

Whilst effective, productive speaking and listening activities can support students' knowledge and wider understanding of an issue, and their ability to use reason and logic to argue for a point of view, there is no *automatic* transfer of these skills into the written word. **Best practice in enabling students to make the move from spoken to written argument includes:**



- Appropriate use of writing frames and other supporting templates and guides that students can refer to as 'prompts' for organising their ideas, structuring an argument, using connectives to link ideas together, and so on
- Modelling how to plan and construct an argument
- Using examples of effective written argument to draw out the key features which students then emulate in their own writing
- Shared writing that explores and demonstrates how to construct a complex sentence, or how to organise a key point and supporting evidence into a coherent paragraph.

Encouraging reflection, review and explicit talk about talk

A key feature of an effective Talking School involves paying attention, in lessons, to making students' talk more 'visible' so that they can make the way that they talk and listen more subject to their conscious control:

- Teach students specific terminology to discuss the spoken language. Key terminology will include: turn-taking; contribution; audience; expression; anecdote; spokesperson; appropriateness; non-standard English; monologue; dialogue; tone; emphasis; ambiguity; intention; sub-text; gesture; pace; role.
- Introduce talk logs or journals. Encourage students to note down successful contributions they made, or to assess the contributions of others, and to reflect on what they have learned.
- Discuss and agree criteria for success in advance of an oral activity or task. If possible, watch/listen to examples first. Different tasks will require different types of talking and listening, and hence specific criteria. For example, criteria for evaluating a formal storytelling performance will need to be very different to those appropriate to some group research and oral feedback, or for conducting a successful interview.
- Use pupil observers. If you are planning a specific oral activity or task, then select a small group of students to stand back and observe, with some clear criteria to focus them on specific aspects. In a plenary session, take feedback from this group first, before highlighting the key learning and improvement points.
- Use video on occasions to enable students to observe themselves and to comment on their participation and performance.
- Aim to plan time at the end of a specific oral activity to discuss and debrief with students. Use quick pair discussions first, or ask students to comment briefly in their talk logs before inviting comment. Focus on 'what went well' before looking at areas for improvement.



Drama techniques

Using drama is a really effective way of encouraging and extending a wide range of roles and types of talk. The following are some well-known drama strategies that can be applied to learning across the curriculum:

Freeze-frame

Students select a key moment and create a still picture to recreate it. Use for reflection by other groups, or to lead into thought-tapping.

Thought-tapping

Students speak aloud private thoughts and reactions in role. The teacher freezes an improvisation or scripted piece, and activates an individual's thoughts by tapping them lightly on the shoulder.

Mime

Students show a key moment or interpret it without words, using exaggerated gesture and facial expression.

Hot-seating

One person takes on the role of a character from a book, or from real life/history etc; others plan and ask questions and the pupil responds in role.

Role on the wall

Draw an outline of a character on a large sheet of paper. With either improvised or scripted drama, ask students to build up a picture of the character by writing key words and phrases inside the outline. The teaching focus is on justifying the words that are written by reference to the text being studied or situation explored.

Transporting a character

In groups, students take a character and transport him/her to a different place/time zone, or to interact with a different set of characters. The aim is to preserve the key features of the role, for example transporting a character into a chat show, or on trial.

Alter ego

Groups offer advice to another character at a critical moment in his/her life.

Forum theatre

One group acts out a scene in front of others surrounding them in a circle. Watchers are able to stop the action and make suggestions for improvement, possibly via demonstration, before action proceeds.



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7 Appendix: School information

Oxford Spires Academy

This academy serves a diverse community in East Oxford. There are 799 students on roll, 209 of whom attend the sixth form. An above-average proportion of students come from minority ethnic backgrounds. About half the students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students who have special educational needs is approximately one quarter of those on roll. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is more than twice the national average.

St Mark's Academy

St Mark's Church of England Academy has around 820 students on roll. One in three students (a proportion that is three times the national average) has English as an additional language. The largest group of students are of White British heritage, although over three quarters are from a range of minority ethnic and cultural backgrounds, most from Black African or Caribbean backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is almost twice the national average.



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