A framework for socially just oracy education

AIM: To enhance students' oracy education while promoting socially just learning experiences and raising critical consciousness

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Oracy involves learning to, through and about talk[1]. Social justice, inclusion and diversity are at the heart of each.

Learning to talk encapsulates the explicit teaching of speaking, listening and communication skills that help students become creative, flexible and resourceful communicators across a wide range of contexts.

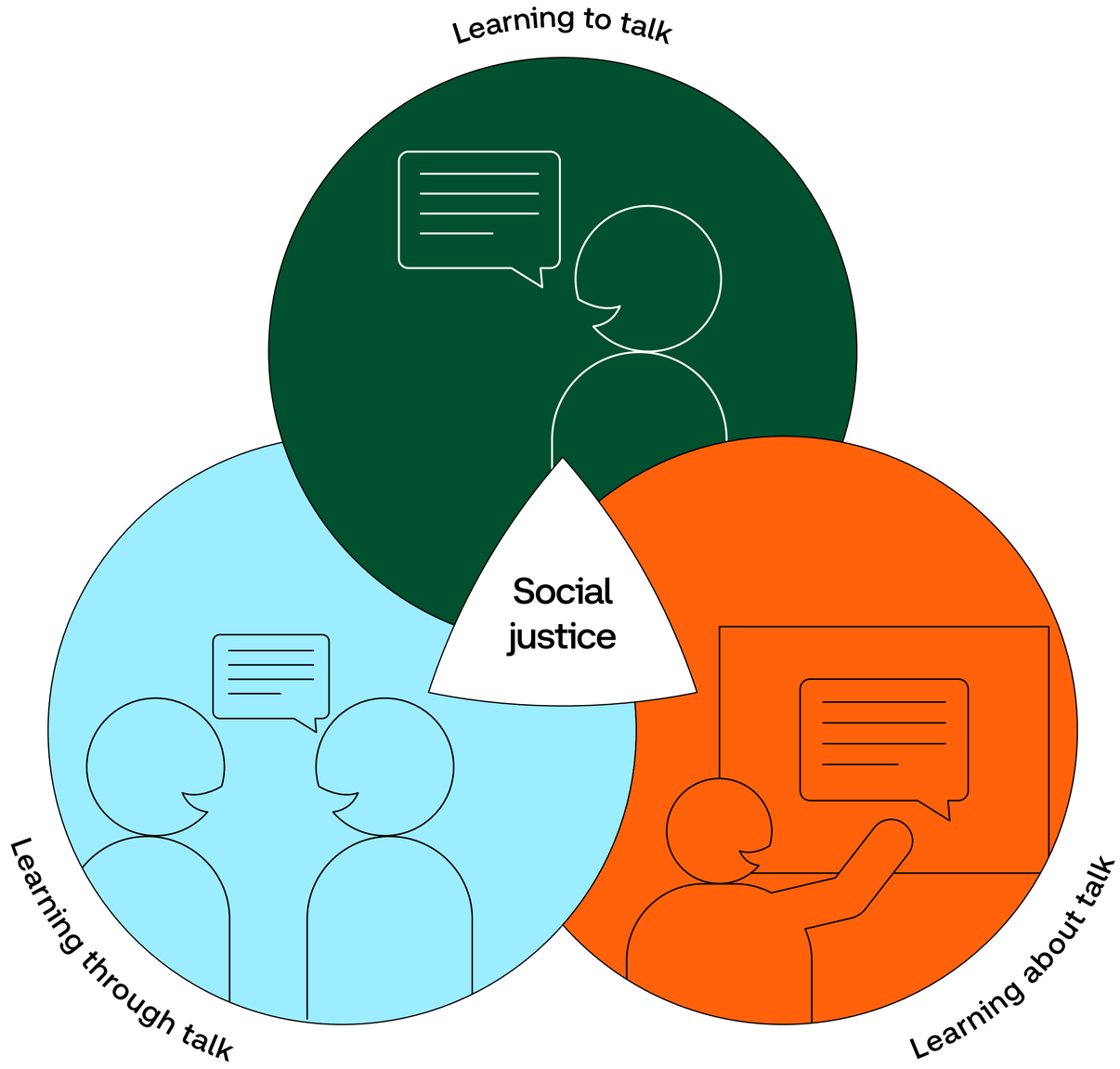
Learning through talk refers to the use of talk-based (or ‘dialogic’) pedagogies to shape and enhance student thinking and learning across the curriculum.

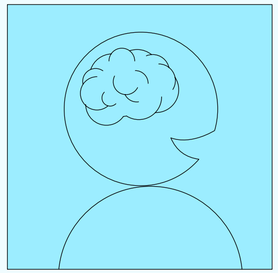
Learning about talk involves explicit teaching about spoken language and communication and the raising of teachers’ and students’ critical language awareness.

Three dimensions intersect these strands of oracy education (illustrated in the matrix outlined on pages 3 to 5). As we incorporate oracy into school curricula, we should aim for learning experiences across all three dimensions:

1. The cognitive dimension empowers students to develop the linguistic skills and knowledge that will help them to learn curricular content and become better communicators at school and beyond.
2. The relational dimension helps students make sense of their own language, communicative experiences and identities and how these relate to others.
3. The critical dimension helps students develop critical consciousness so that they can practice critical thinking, and name, understand and address linguistic inequalities and injustices.

1. As outlined by the 2024 Oracy Commission’s final report, We Need to Talk



	Learning to Talk	Learning through Talk	Learning about Talk
 **Cognitive**	Students engage in talk for learning (‘dialogic’ talk) and presentational talk across a range of settings. During dialogic talk, participants think out loud, exchange ideas, solve problems collaboratively, and arrive at shared understandings about the world. Dialogic talk is spontaneous and thus involves hesitation, half-formed statements and fillers (e.g. ‘er’, ‘like’). Contributions can be in any accent or dialect. Presentational talk is performative and may involve some level of preplanning. It includes speeches, presentations, formal debate, performance poetry, and podcasting. Students develop a range of active listening skills, such as how to listen to extract information quickly (as in a debate); how to follow an argument or understand new knowledge; and how to listen critically to evaluate what is being said. **Questions to consider:** • What does effective speaking and listening mean across a range of different contexts? • What speech skills do students learn at home and how can these be reinforced and extended at school? • What texts (e.g. TED talks, podcasts, oral histories) can help students understand the importance of spoken language skills and the effectiveness of different linguistic strategies and rhetorical devices?	Learning through talk happens during whole-class discussion, small-group work and pair talk. In dialogic whole-class discussion, teachers’ ask open and authentic questions to open up subject-specific dialogue (the Accountable Talk framework offers useful questions and sentence stems). Teachers probe student responses and push them to explain and clarify their ideas. Students explain their thinking, and build on, challenge or clarify others’ ideas. Different disciplines have different practices for reasoning and understanding and thus demand different kinds of talk. E.g., in mathematics, students learn to explain problem solving strategies; in science they learn to pose scientific questions, hypothesise, and discuss findings. What counts as justification also differs across disciplines. E.g., in English, students learn to draw on evidence from texts to support their views; in science, they learn to draw on data/observations and make inferences. **Questions to consider:** • What is the balance between teacher and student talk in whole-class discussion? • What is the balance between open and closed questions? • Do students engage with others’ ideas in a meaningful way? • To what extent do inquiry and evidence conform to disciplinary standards?	Students develop knowledge about spoken language, drawing on topics (e.g. history of English) and concepts (e.g. ‘slang’) commensurate with their age/key-stage. E.g., they might learn about the dialect local to their school: its unique vocabulary, grammar and pronunciations; its history and importance to local culture; and its relationship to ‘standard English’. Students learn about the differences between spoken and written language, which reflect their different modes of production and reception. Students develop their understanding of speech as context-dependent, recognising that what is ‘appropriate’ or ‘effective’ depends on audience, situation and purpose. Opportunities to learn about spoken language are available across all disciplines. E.g., in science, students might learn why effective science communication is important (e.g., to help people and governments make good decisions) and examine how science communicators use linguistic devices such as jokes, metaphor and narratives to communicate information in an accessible and engaging way. **Questions to consider:** • How can the languages and varieties spoken in the local community be used in teaching and learning? • How can local street signs, public signage, graffiti and advertising become prompts for learning about language? • What opportunities are there for learning about language across disciplines?

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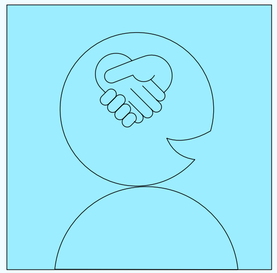 **Relational**	Students understand the importance of collaboration. They can manage interactions in small groups (e.g. in line with social conventions for turn-taking) and agree/disagree in a constructive manner. Students learn to listen with respect and empathy. They understand that in some situations there may be expectations about positive listening behaviours (such as maintaining eye contact with the speaker) but these are not appropriate all the time or to everyone (e.g. for someone who is neurodivergent or managing anxiety). Students understand that everyone has their own ways of speaking and that it is important to be respectful of others' language backgrounds, skills and experiences. Equally, teachers and students learn to respect others' right to silence, regardless of whether this has an observable meaning (e.g. as a way of thinking or changing the direction of the discussion) or not. **Questions to consider:** • What concerns do students have about speaking in different scenarios (e.g. small group discussion, whole-class discussion, a school assembly)? • What topics do students want to talk about (because they are of genuine importance to them)? • Who do students want to hear them and what can we do if they're not listening? • How can we connect with others to make our voices stronger?	Dialogic talk builds on relations of mutual respect, inclusivity and solidarity. Everyone must feel that they can contribute and that their perspectives are taken seriously (regardless of the forms of speech they use). This does not mean that everyone should agree – on the contrary, teachers and students are expected to subject ideas to scrutiny, press for justification, and challenge with alternative evidence – but supportive relationships are crucial if students are to participate in a robust exchange of ideas. Classroom culture is also important. An atmosphere that is collaborative rather than competitive is likely to encourage students to listen to others instead of vying to get across their own point of view. Fostering this culture may include introducing explicit ground rules for talk. A dialogic culture can also develop when students come to internalise their teachers' ways of interacting. E.g., when a teacher probes and challenges students' ideas to test their merit rather than offering ritualistic praise, they demonstrate that they take student contributions seriously. **Questions to consider:** • Is the classroom a safe space in which everyone feels able to participate? • To what extent are participants accepting and caring of one another? • Which students participate most actively? • Are there any students who do not participate at all?	Students explore their own linguistic identities, considering social and geographical influences. They consider how language relates to other aspects of their identities (e.g. age, gender and ethnicity). Students explore how different languages and varieties are rooted in the histories and cultures of different communities. They learn about the social and historical forces that led one dialect – 'standard English' – to become the dominant form of English. Through this, they understand that no languages or dialects are intrinsically better, or more correct, than any other. Students explore the importance of language in developing relationships. E.g., they might consider how speakers use linguistic accommodation (either reducing or reinforcing linguistic differences between themselves and their interlocutor(s)) to appear more likeable or to distance themselves from others. **Questions to consider:** • How can we recognise, value and extend students language repertoires? • What kinds of spoken and written texts can help students make connections between their own identities and histories and those of other peoples and cultures? • How can we create opportunities to understand and value different ways of being, knowing and speaking?

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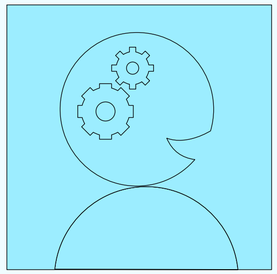 **Critical**	Students learn that not all ways of speaking are valued equally in society. Speech considered 'nonstandard' may be stigmatised in some contexts, while 'standard' speech typically has status. They learn that this has little to do with language; it is about the relative status of different speakers and the power they have held in society historically. Teachers and students actively resist and reframe deficit thinking about themselves and others. For example, "That's bad grammar" can be reframed to "That form of speech is considered 'nonstandard' and some people may judge you negatively when you use it in formal settings"; "We don't speak proper English" can be reframed to "We don't always speak in ways considered 'standard' but our speech is systematic, purposeful and meaningful". Students develop a critical understanding of their responsibilities as listeners. This involves thinking about how listeners' perceptions are shaped by ideas about the speaker, related to race, class, gender, (dis)ability and other characteristics. **Questions to consider:** • When students are invited to talk, are their utterances valued and taken seriously? • Who decides which forms of language are valued and which are stigmatised in different settings? • What factors influence our perceptions as listeners?	All participants should enjoy equal rights and opportunities within dialogic discussion. It is thus important to be alert to the ways in which participants can become empowered or oppressed, included or excluded in classroom dialogue. Classroom space can be utilised to shift the power dynamics in the classroom. For example, a circle seating arrangement sends out an egalitarian message – all participants are on an equal footing – which influences the nature of the relationships that develop between teacher and students during classroom discourse. Drawing on students' out-of-school knowledge and experiences is another way to disrupt conventional power relations and provide greater opportunities for marginalised students to participate in classroom discussion. **Questions to consider:** • Whose voices are heard and allowed in classroom discussion? Which ideas are and are not valued? • Whose ideas are the ones on which students build? • Whose ideas are ignored or discounted? • Who participates in directing the interaction? • How are power relations realised? How are differences managed?	Students explore the relationship between language and power. E.g., why are certain ways of speaking, (like 'standard English',) expected in some situations (e.g. in the classroom, at a job interview, on the news)? Who decides what is acceptable speech in these settings? What are the consequences of speaking differently? How might this lead to some speakers being unfairly evaluated or facing discrimination? In English, fictional texts can be used to prompt discussion on language attitudes, biases, and discrimination, and the impact these can have on people. In PSHE, students can explore their own experiences of these. In citizenship, they can consider how linguistic discrimination intersects with other forms of discrimination, such as racial prejudice, and how both may be reinforced by social and political systems. In history, they might explore the role of the English language in colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. Students are given opportunities to consider ways of resisting and challenging discriminatory power structures and forms of injustice. **Questions to consider:** • What values and beliefs do teachers and students hold about language (and speakers)? • How might these beliefs lead to different treatment for different people? • Can students name, understand and challenge linguistic injustices?

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Policy Brief: Shaping an oracy education that benefits all children and young people:

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Framework for socially just oracy education:

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