Newcastle University

Supporting the Development of Oracy: Project Evaluation

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Executive Summary

Context

Oracy has been defined by The Oracy Education Commission as 'the ability to articulate ideas, develop understanding and engage with others through speaking and listening'. It is increasingly recognised as essential for educational success, employability, and participation in civic life. Current government policy (DfE, Ofsted) has stressed both the importance of oracy, and the need for explicit teaching of the skills involved. Business leaders have highlighted that in an 'AI-disrupted labour market […] spoken language and listening skills are likely to grow in value' with in-person communication becoming a way for people to distinguish themselves (The Oracy Education Commission).

Despite strong evidence that oracy improves learning outcomes and supports equity and inclusion, its role in higher education is underdeveloped and under-researched (Heron et al, 2023). At Newcastle University, oracy aligns closely with the Leading Edge Curriculum (LEC) and communication features in the Skills and Attributes that students are expected to use and develop throughout their course.

Within schools, while it is recognised that excellent practice in the teaching of oracy exists, the national picture in schools 'remains patchy and inconsistent' (The Oracy Education Commission, p. 7). The DfE has identified a need for teachers to be provided with 'practical tips, tried-and-tested strategies and examples of best practice'.

The Pilot Project

This pilot project brought together Newcastle University academics (History, English and Law), A-Level teachers from three North East secondary schools (History and English), and University Professional Services staff. The project was led by the University Library's Education Outreach and Transition team. The project team was supported by training from national oracy charity, Voice 21. Over one term/semester, participants trialled a range of structured oracy strategies in lessons and seminars, reflected on their practice and observed the impacts on their students.

The project aimed to:

- Equip teachers and academics with practical, research-informed oracy strategies to encourage participation in lessons/seminars.
- Improve student confidence, participation, and the quality of discussion.

Evaluation Approach

A mixed-methods evaluation was conducted that drew on pre and post-project surveys (students), student focus groups, academic/teacher reflective logs, interviews, and project meeting notes. Given the small-scale nature of the pilot, the evaluation findings are intended to identify trends and points of interest rather than provide causal claims or make generalisations.

Key Findings

1. Participation – the current context

- Students clearly understand the value of oracy but report high levels of anxiety when speaking in whole-class or whole-seminar settings.
- Stage 1 undergraduate students experience additional academic and social 'culture shock' (Dawe, 2023, p. 8) as they transition from home and their school/college learning environment into university studies.
- Confidence drops sharply as students are asked to share ideas in front of larger groups - a pattern seen at A-Level, UG Stage 1 and UG Stage 3, indicating that this is not simply a temporary transition issue.
- Fear of being wrong, appearing unintelligent, social dynamics, neurodiversity, personal characteristics and unfamiliarity with peers were major barriers to participation.

2. Impact of oracy strategies on participation and confidence

- The Voice 21 strategies trialled by the participants were overwhelmingly valued by students and staff. They were found to:
    - Scaffold participation and reduce anxiety.
    - Encourage wider and more equitable contributions.
    - Improve the depth and quality of discussion.
    - Support idea development, argumentation and assignment/essay writing.
- The quantitative data showed improvements in students' overall confidence to contribute in seminars, especially where strategies were embedded over time.
- The strongest results were seen where oracy strategies were integrated systematically across a module (as was done in the School of English), rather than used on a standalone basis.

3. Impact of oracy strategies on teaching practice

- The academics reported more dynamic, inclusive learning environments and an end to '*silent seminars'.*
- Classroom talk shifted from teacher–student *'ping-pong'* to more authentic student-to-student dialogue.

- The strategies also supported less experienced staff, including Postgraduate Demonstrators, by providing structure and ideas.

4. Challenges

- Initial concerns were raised about content coverage and the quality of the learning that took place when discussion was less tightly controlled. However, this was felt to be typically due to insufficient integration of the oracy strategies, rather than the strategies themselves.
- Effectiveness depended on student preparation, consistent attendance, and suitable room layouts.
- The time required to plan, scaffold, and embed strategies was underestimated and has implications on workload.

Key Lessons

- Oracy must be explicitly taught, scaffolded, and embedded over time; one-off activities to develop oracy skills are less effective.
- Structured talk benefits learning, confidence, and progression, particularly at transition points (e.g. the move from A-Level to undergraduate study).
- Cross-sector collaboration (across schools and universities) deepens understanding of the student educational experience that students have had (school/college) and are heading to (university) and this has the potential to support more effective transition.
- Oracy skill development aligns strongly with essay-writing frameworks and assessment criteria.

Recommendations

This report provides recommendations for further actions and opportunities to develop this work (see p. 30 for the recommendations in full).

Strategic and Institutional

- Newcastle University should articulate a clear institutional stance on oracy as part of the Leading Edge Curriculum (LEC)
- The schools involved should articulate a clear institutional stance linked to the Gatsby Benchmarks, ideally across their wider school Trust, to embed oracy in their Trust-wide practice

Research

- Newcastle University should seek external funding to develop a longitudinal, interdisciplinary, mixed-methods research project spanning post-16 education (sixth forms, colleges and universities) with Voice21

Curriculum and Pedagogical

University

- Oracy best practice should be shared more widely across Newcastle University through training opportunities (e.g. NEPS) and online resources on the Learning and Teaching Development website
- A pilot group of programmes and/or modules should trial embedding oracy skills development within teaching
- Oracy Champions should be assigned within Faculties and Schools

Schools

- Oracy best practice should be shared more widely within the schools involved and their associated trusts
- An oracy lead should be assigned within each school
- A pilot group of subjects and/or key stages should trial embedding oracy skills development within teaching within the context of supporting the transition to university

Transition

- Academics from Newcastle University and local A-Level teachers should continue to work together to gain a deeper understanding of the educational setting their students are coming from and going to

1 Context

What is oracy and why is it important?

Oracy was defined by the Oracy Education Commission in their 2024 report, 'We Need to Talk', as: 'Articulating ideas, developing understanding and engaging with others through speaking, listening and communication' (The Oracy Education Commission, 2024, p. 14). The report drew on wide-ranging evidence that identified the importance of oracy in improving young people's life chances and concluded that 'Parents want it, the economy demands it, democracy needs it, teachers welcome it and our children deserve it' (ibid, p. 7).

In the recent Curriculum and Assessment Review commissioned by the Government, the review panel concluded that oracy is 'important for future study, life and work' and recommended the need for an Oracy Framework to support practice (2025, p. 42). Since the review was completed, the Secretary of State for Education has announced the publication of this framework, identifying the need to 'ensure more young people become confident and effective speakers' (Department for Education, 2025).

Employers have similarly highlighted the importance of oracy, with a YouGov poll in 2024 finding that Business Leaders consider oracy to have 'significant economic value, and that it enhances the promotability of employees' (The Oracy Education Commission, 2024, p. 34). Furthermore, business leaders believe that in an 'AI-disrupted labour market […] spoken language and listening skills are likely to grow in value' (ibid, p.34), with in-person communication becoming a way for people to distinguish themselves. According to Carl Frey, Director of the Future of Work Programme at the University of Oxford, being able to debate and discuss will become increasingly important as these 'foster social skills and creative thinking, the domains where humans are going to hold the comparative advantage in the future' (Stewart, 2019). Ensuring that all young people develop excellent oracy skills is therefore as important as ensuring they are literate and numerate.

Oracy in the school setting

The teaching profession has long recognised the importance of oracy, valuing the key skills of speaking, listening and communication. Education research over many decades has evidenced the significant impact oracy skills can have on children and young people's progression. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), whose evidence-based research informs practice in schools, has categorised Oral Language Interventions as 'High impact, for very low cost, based on extensive evidence' (EEF, 2025). The EEF particularly highlights that oral language interventions can be an effective approach for supporting disadvantaged pupils from lower socioeconomic

backgrounds who 'are more likely to be behind their more advantaged counterparts in developing early language and speech skills, which may affect their school experience and learning later in their school lives' (Ibid). Improving children's oracy skills therefore has the potential to create equity of access for all students arriving at university regardless of their background.

While it is recognised that in schools across the country 'excellent practice' in the teaching of oracy exists (The Oracy Education Commission, 2024; DfE, 2025), the national picture in schools 'remains patchy and inconsistent' (ibid, p7). Here in the North East of England, the North East Combined Authority has recognised the importance of both the issue and the need for training by recently partnering with national oracy charity, Voice 21, funding an oracy programme for 100 schools entitled 'Voice North of Tyne'. The need for teachers to be provided with 'practical tips, tried-and-tested strategies and examples of best practice' was similarly highlighted by the Department for Education in their response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review (DfE, November 2025).

The Government's commitment to oracy is evidenced in its inclusion in the new 2025 Ofsted Inspection Framework which states that all schools should ensure that 'all pupils are explicitly taught how to communicate effectively through spoken language (oracy), articulate ideas, develop understanding and engage with others through speaking, listening and communication' (Ofsted, 2025, p.19).

Oracy in the university setting: Newcastle University

A student's transition from school or college to university has long been recognised by the university sector as one that creates a 'culture shock', which has both an academic and social dimension (Dawe, 2023, p.8). This has not gone unaddressed by universities, who provide a range of support services and resources to address the challenges that new students face. At Newcastle University, for example, this includes: Student Health and Wellbeing support and activities, in-person study skills provision provided by the Academic Skills team, online study skills resources for prospective and new students provided by the University Library, as well as subject-specific support including the University's Peer Mentoring scheme and dedicated Academic Advisers for all students.

For many students however, the academic experience is particularly challenging. Research undertaken by Debra Myhill (2020) at the University of Exeter found that 'students from all qualification backgrounds struggled with different expectations of learning at university' and that they arrive at university with 'different levels of disciplinary knowledge at the start of their course'. The research found that this impacts on confidence levels, attendance and progression. These academic challenges faced by students transitioning to university, alongside the lifestyle changes associated with

starting university like living independently, can have a significant impact on students' willingness to speak to and in front of their peers.

Student expectations combined with new ways of learning and the impact of technological developments (especially AI) have also led universities to develop curricula and assessment approaches that are more appropriate for the 21st-century university experience. For Newcastle University, this comes in the form of the newly-developed Leading Edge Curriculum (LEC), a key strand of the University's Education for Life 2030+ Strategy. The LEC's aim is to provide 'a shared, institution-wide framework to support high-quality, future-focused education that is academically rigorous, inclusive, and clearly articulated across the student journey'.

The LEC is currently in its pilot phase at the time of releasing this report, with select programmes being reviewed and redesigned in line with the principals of the Leading Edge Curriculum. Crucially, courses should enable students to develop a range of skills and attributes through academic, professional and personal growth that empowers them to develop as a 'whole person'. Given the importance of oracy in the university student journey, communication has been identified as one of the core skills students should develop throughout their course (see Appendix 1).

2 The Oracy Pilot Project

Developing the pilot project

The University Library's Education Outreach and Transition Team, who conceived this project, work to support A-Level students to successfully transition from school or college to university studies. Much of their work has included a focus on oracy. For example, they led an A-Level Parliamentary Debate project in collaboration with the National Civil War Centre and developed communication skills resources with Student Health and Wellbeing for their Sixth Form Study Skills provision. Through this work, the team became aware that teachers and academics were experiencing challenges in lessons and seminars with respect to participation, particularly when students were asked to discuss their ideas with others and in front of a whole group of their peers.

In order to better understand the issues from both academic/teacher and student perspectives, and to explore some possible solutions, a pilot project was designed that would:

- Equip university teaching staff and school teachers with evidence-based teaching strategies that would help develop their students' oracy skills and encourage them to actively participate in seminars/lessons.
- Develop students' oracy skills, thereby equipping them with the vital skills they will require to succeed at and beyond university and to shape the societies in which they will live and the professions they choose to enter.

The project team was led by Education Outreach Officer, Gillian Johnston and latterly Education Outreach and Transition Manager, Sara Bird, and was made up of academics from the Schools of History, English and Law, A-Level teachers from four local secondary schools and a Sixth Form College representing the same subjects, and a member of the University's Academic Skills team.

As part of the pilot, the academics and teachers:

- Attended training sessions provided by oracy charity, Voice 21
- Planned and trialled a range of oracy teaching strategies in seminars/lessons over the period of one semester/term
- Evaluated these strategies by completing weekly reflective logs
- Attended regular project planning and feedback meetings

Where possible, the academics and teachers also took up the opportunity to observe each other's practice.

Voice 21

Voice 21 is a UK oracy charity who 'work with schools to transform the learning and life chances of young people through talk' and 'campaign for oracy to have a higher status in the education system' (voice21.org/our-mission). They have created professional development programmes for school teachers to help develop their expertise in oracy teaching. Voice 21 was keen to explore the potential of their approach in the university sector, with the transition from A-Level to undergraduate studies considered an appropriate starting point. In order to support the team from Voice 21 to develop relevant training for the project team, they were provided with a summary of the contextual data collected prior to the pilot project taking place (see Part 3: Evaluation for information about the contextual data).

Settings taking part

The following table details the schools and University departments that took part in the pilot; the number of teachers/academics who trialled the strategies and the number of students who experienced them.

School	A-Level Subject	Year	No of teachers trialling the strategies	No of students experiencing the oracy strategies
Ponteland High School	History	12	1	17

St Thomas More Catholic High School, North Shields	English	12	1	9
St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy	History	12	1	7

University Schools	Undergraduate stage	No. of academics trialling the strategies	No of students experiencing the oracy strategies
Law	Stage 1	5	329
History	Stage 1	2	Lecture: 140 Seminars: 23
History	Stage 3	1	27
English	Stage 1	2	32

3 The Evaluation

Evaluation and data collection

The aim of the evaluation was to better understand the student and academic/teacher experience of participation in A-Level lessons and university seminars, and to explore the impact of adopting evidence-based oracy strategies on pedagogy (teachers and academics) and confidence and participation (students). Pre-pilot contextual data was collected in the form of surveys (UG students in Law, History and English, and A-Level students in History and English), as well as early project meeting notes where issues in relation to oracy and participation in seminars and lessons had been identified by the participating teachers and academics. This contextual data was used by Voice 21 to plan the training and to inform the development of the evaluation research questions and data collection methods.

Research questions

1) What is the current situation in schools and universities in relation to participation and oracy in lessons and seminars – from student and academic/teacher perspectives?
2) Which Voice 21 oracy strategies were trialled and what impact (if any) did the use of the strategies have on participation in lessons and seminars?

3) What challenges (if any) were faced when implementing the strategies?
4) What can we learn from the pilot outcomes?

Data collection

In order to answer the research questions, a mixed-methods approach to data collection was adopted that included both quantitative and qualitative methods. With the focus of the pilot on the experience of transition from school/college to university, the data collection predominantly concentrated on the participating A-Level students and Stage 1 undergraduate students. However, with one of the university academics only teaching Stage 3 UGs in the pilot semester, a separate survey and reflective log were included. This additional data has provided an interesting comparator.

The methods included:

- Pre and post-project student surveys
- Student focus groups
- Academic and teacher reflective logs
- Evaluator field notes and observations
- Project meeting minutes
- Module and lesson plan exemplification

Full ethical approval was granted by the HASS Faculty Ethics Committee (Ethical Approval Reference No: 61335). The full table of methods is provided in Appendix 2.

Limitations

This was a small-scale pilot project lasting one term/semester across three subject areas. The number of participating students and teachers and academics was small, participation in surveys was voluntary and, as with most education research, there are many external factors that could impact on the findings which are beyond the remit of this evaluation. The intention of the pilot has been to determine trends and points of interest that could be researched in more detail if a larger-scale project is undertaken.

One school and one sixth form college withdrew from the pilot. This resulted in Law not being represented as a subject at A-Level.

4 Findings

Research Question 1: What is the current situation in schools and universities in relation to participation and oracy in lessons and seminars?

The student perspective

Both the A-Level students and the Stage 1 undergraduates who took part in focus groups had a good understanding of the importance of oracy in both their daily lives and in their learning. They described good communication skills as impacting on '*confidence*', a way of *'getting to know people'*, a way of sharing ideas and learning from others, a way of clarifying their own ideas, and important during job interviews and in the workplace. One History undergraduate spoke of how the only way they get any '*breakthrough*' in their work is *'through talking about it'.*

When asked to describe the conditions that promote participation, the students identified a range of factors:

- Good relationships with peers and teachers/seminar leads
- Talking in small groups before sharing with the larger group as *'you feel a bit more validated that what you're saying is the right thing. And so then it's a bit easier to say it to the entire class'*
- Good preparation for the lesson/seminar
- Being given time to think and not be put on the spot for an instant answer
- A room and seating that promotes discussion (e.g. separate tables for small groups, tables in a horse-shoe shape for whole groups)

While the students appear to understand the importance of oracy skills and the conditions needed to ensure they use and develop these skills, they also identified a large number of factors that impact on feeling unable to participate. These included:

- Worrying about *'being wrong'*
- Being in a group with strangers where it might '*not be as comfortable disagreeing'* with them, and waiting to see if their ideas align with those of others before speaking
- Being put on the spot and '*feeling like you have to say something'*
- Being in a pair or group when others have not prepared or completed pre-work
- For the A-Level students, they highlighted the impact of '*social spheres'* – the feeling that people who are '*more popular should speak ahead of us*' or the worry that the more popular people would *'laugh at us'*
- For the undergraduate students, they highlighted that starting university was *'quite a step up'* academically, with some students worrying about the '*need to say smart things*'

- The undergraduate students also spoke about the overwhelming nature of starting university, moving away from home and '*trying to keep on top of everything'*, with one student describing how all of these compounding factors can '*build up'*

The pre-project survey data evidenced a situation in which many students lack the confidence to speak in front of teachers/academics and peers in lessons or seminars (see Figures 1 and 2). 93% of the A-Level students, for example, felt confident when sharing ideas in small groups with peers they knew quite well, but only 43% felt confident when having to share ideas in front of the whole class. This is despite the fact that they will probably have known these peers for many years.

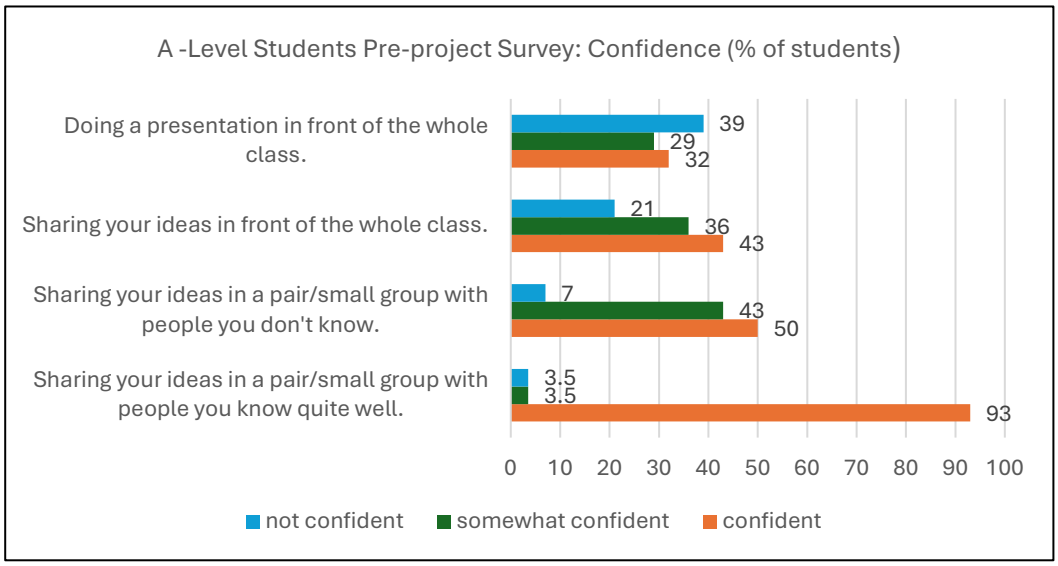


Figure 1

In the UG Stage 1 pre-project survey, the data followed similar patterns, with higher levels of confidence in small groups (46%) dropping to 13% at the prospect of having to speak in front of a whole seminar group (see Figure 2). It is important to note the UG Stage 1 pre-project survey did not distinguish between 'sharing your ideas in a pair/small group with people you know quite well/people you don't know,' as this was completed in their first seminar when they did not know each other.

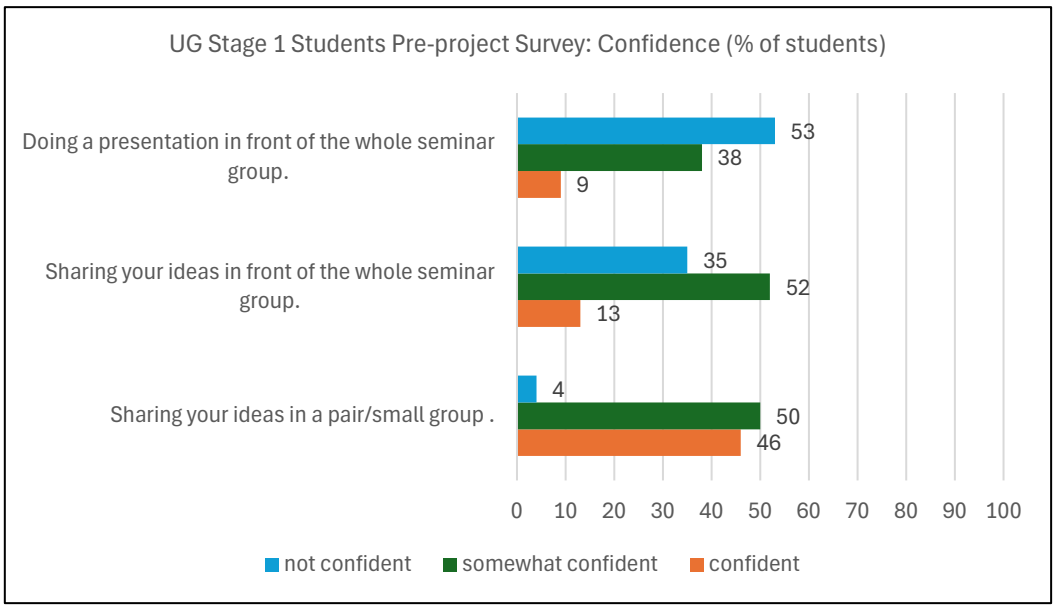


Figure 2

These results are of course not unexpected at this point in their university journey. However, comparison with the UG Stage 3 pre-pilot project survey shows similar issues, despite the increased length of time at university. Complete confidence drops from a high of 73% of students when 'sharing ideas in a pair/small group with people you know quite well' to 27% in front of the whole seminar group.

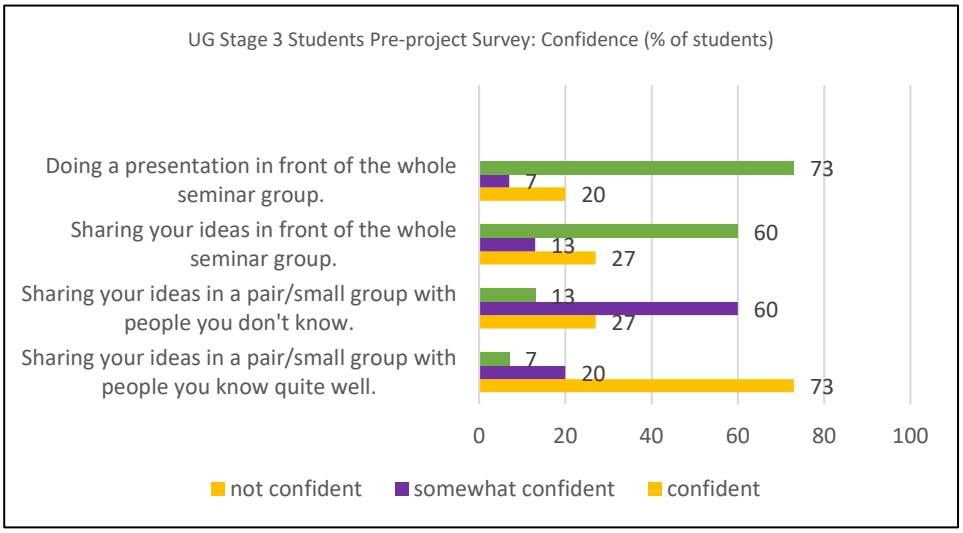


Figure 3

Open questions in the survey asked the UG stage 1 students who had answered 'somewhat confident' or 'not confident' to any questions to explain how they feel in these situations, which elicited the following common responses:

- *'Nervous'*
- *'Jittery'*
- *'Anxious'*
- *'Stressed'*
- *'Worried'*
- *'Apprehensive'*
- *'Restless'*
- *'Scared'*
- *'Overwhelmed'*
- *'Distracted'*
- *'Awkward'*
- *'Uncomfortable'*
- *'Pressure'*
- *'Embarrassed'*
- *'Self-conscious'*
- *'Giggly'*

One student explained they feel '*Hot and flushed, high anxiety and stressed. Distracted*' and another stated they feel '*Very nervous, shaking, sweating, voice trembling and terrified about not being able to finish my talk. I feel as though I'm going to pass out. I don't feel I'm in control at all*'.

When asked why they feel this way the following key themes emerged:

- Worrying about how they appear in front of others
    - *'Others seem better read/informed/ greater ability to argue their case'*
    - *'Because I am in front of people whose opinions I care about and don't want to seem silly*.'
- Fear of being wrong
    - *'Because I'm afraid of making a mistake.'*
    - *'Because if an answer is wrong, you look daft no matter what people tell you to begin with.'*
- Their individual personality/characteristics/neurodiversity
    - *'I honestly feel that it's due to a hyper-awareness of my accent/dialect being from Newcastle myself and fearing judgement from my largely Southern seminar groups.'*
    - *'I have an anxiety disorder that effects my public speaking and my confidence.'*

These comments show students not only have a negative emotional reaction to the concept of speaking in front of their peers – typically associated with feelings of anxiety, worry and pressure – but that students feel this way primarily due to their concerns about the content of what they will say (i.e. if it is incorrect, or if it will be judged by others in some way).

Academic/teacher perspective

The situation presented by both the teachers and academics during the early project meetings was very similar. Both identified students in lessons/seminars with low confidence who feel unable to share their ideas in front of others, as well as students who are over-confident. They described how patterns begin to emerge that are then difficult to alter (i.e. the confident students feel the need to talk in order to fill silences and those initially frightened to speak find this increasingly more difficult as time passes). At university level, group dynamics, personal background and different levels of disciplinary knowledge at the start of a course were also identified as impacting on participation.

The situation in schools is exacerbated by the pressure of exams and the need for large amounts of content to be taught, which often impacts on the time that can be spent on discussion and debate. As a consequence, when a student starts university, they may be unaccustomed to sharing their own ideas or speaking in front of large groups of people, which is a requirement in seminars, especially in Humanities subjects.

Several academics raised the issue of low and/or mixed attendance and how this impacts on the ability of a seminar group to build the relationships needed to feel more comfortable to share ideas. There was also a recognition that a silent seminar is *'awful'* for all of those involved.

Research Question 2: Which Voice 21 oracy strategies were trialled and what impact (if any) did the use of the strategies have on participation in lessons and seminars?

The Strategies trialled

The teachers and academics were introduced to a variety of oracy teaching strategies during a training session provided by Voice 21 in May 2025. This provided them with several months to plan their use, ready for the 2025-2026 academic year. The majority of the project team in both the schools and the University focused on the trialling of two or three strategies on a standalone basis that they considered would be appropriate in their context. In the University's School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics (SEL), the academic planned the majority of the strategies into a series of seminars

throughout the teaching of a module. This consistent, embedded approach helped students gradually build up their oracy skills over time alongside their knowledge of subject content (see Appendix 3). This was uniquely delivered by two Postgraduate Demonstrators, who were provided with detailed teaching materials (see Appendix 4 for an example).

The strategies trialled by the project team included:

Strategy	Trialled by
Sessions that explored the purpose of seminars and what is expected of students – rules for talk, the difference between presentational/exploratory talk etc.	Newcastle University: Schools of Law, History and English
Talk Tactics (sentence stems) provided on handouts/modelled/on boards	Ponteland High School St Thomas More Catholic High School Newcastle University: School of English
Small group discussion leading to whole group discussion – this was also trialled as pairs, 3s, 4s and then whole group	St Thomas More Catholic High School St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy Newcastle University: Schools of Law, History and English
Discussion/Talk Roles - Instigator, Challenger, Summariser, Scribe, Ambassador etc.	St Thomas More Catholic High School Newcastle University: Schools of Law, History and English
Concept Cartoons –Taking different positions on a topic- which involves the depersonalising of ideas (particularly emotive and controversial ones)	St Thomas More Catholic High School Newcastle University: Schools of Law and English
Fed-in facts - to provoke longer discussions and extend them, a new piece of information is added to the discussion by the teacher/academic.	St Thomas More Catholic High School Newcastle University: School of English
Debates/debate preparation	St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy St Thomas More Catholic High School

	Newcastle University: Schools of History and English
Hot seating	St Thomas More Catholic High School
Room layout/position of academic	Newcastle University: Schools of History and English

More detailed explanations of the strategies with some examples of how they were used are presented in Appendix 5.

Drawing on data from pre and post-project student surveys, A-Level end-of-project focus groups, Stage 1 UG mid-project and end-of-project focus groups, academic/teacher Reflective Log entries, interviews with academics, and project meeting notes, this section will explore the impact of these strategies on participation in seminars and lessons.

The impact of the strategies on participation

The feedback on the use of the strategies was overwhelmingly positive, although with some caveats that will be explored in the conclusion. Most strategies were described as '*engaging*' the students and creating a more *'dynamic'* and '*animated'* environment. It was highlighted by academics and teachers that when the strategies were adopted there were no silent lessons or seminars. Some strategies were particularly effective at improving confidence over time, as they scaffolded talk and helped build relationships which in turn resulted in conversations continuing *'beyond what [the students] may have felt was a natural end point'.*

A-Level students

By the time an A-Level student is studying for their A-Levels in a Sixth Form attached to their secondary school (which made up the examples in the pilot study), relationships are typically well-established between the students themselves, and between the students and their teachers. While this impacts more positively on oracy in general, as previously highlighted, issues around confidence to participate still exist.

As a consequence, when asked to comment about the strategies trialled by their teachers, the students in the focus groups were overwhelmingly positive. They commented on the scaffolding that the strategies provided and how this was particularly effective when *'you are not sure what to say'.* The "Talk Tactics" sentence starters, for example, although considered *'unnatural'* and *'awkward'* by students at first,

did help to '*break the ice*', and help *'with the flow of ideas'*. This was also highlighted by teachers, who identified the same initial feeling:

> *'After an initial period of awkwardness when first using the stems, the students embraced them as the half term progressed, and they proved to be a highly effective classroom tool. I will definitely continue to use them moving forward as a regular part of my classroom practice'.*

Similarly, the History debate strategy adopted at St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy was very positively received by the students. In this example, the debate took place after several structured stages (see p. 41), ensuring the students were secure in the subject content knowledge. Interestingly, despite being very nervous, all stated they became *'more confident'* as the debate progressed. This statement was echoed by all the students: '*I think it made me more prepared for the next one, because I just won't be anywhere near as nervous as that'.*

The students also spoke about the impact of the strategies on their learning. The debate where the students had to present their ideas was described as '*like revising'* because presenting made it '*stick in your head'.* Receiving feedback after the debate also helped the students *'see what you've done wrong and also what you've done well.'*

Similarly, the hot seating strategy (see p. 40) that took place in English at St Thomas More Catholic High School was also considered to have supported essay writing. One student described the strategy as *'amazing'* because it helped them to '*understand the character so much better'.* Through answering the questions put to them by their peers they explained how they had gained '*a more in-depth, almost personal connection with the character'* that' *helped [them] build an argument'* in their essay.

The students also described how the "Small Group to Large Group" strategy helped to build confidence and provided the opportunity to discuss opinions amongst friends before being asked in front of the whole group. This was considered to be particularly effective for the less confident students as it helped to '*validate*' their ideas. Hearing a range of ideas from others in the small group setting was also considered to help with the discussion part of their essays because '*even if you don't agree with it 100%, it's still something you can write down as well.'* Teachers and academics also found this to be an effective strategy, describing their students as being '*more comfortable about talking (both with different students in small groups and in the whole class)'* and that it was easier *'to ask individuals to contribute (especially when they had already made a good point in their pairs)'.* This strategy also shifted the teacher/student dynamic, with students frequently talking to one another during the whole group section of the lesson and not just directing their talk at the teacher. As one A-Level teacher described it:

> *'[The students] were much more vocal and listened and talked to each other rather than directly to me as they have in previous years. This helped to move the*

classroom talk dynamic from student-teacher-student "ping pong" to a more generative conversation.'

When analysing the post-pilot project survey data in order to examine the impact on confidence, there was an interesting difference expressed when compared to the pre-pilot project survey. While the number of students whose overall confidence when asked to share their ideas in front of the whole class had improved from 79% pre-pilot to 90% post-pilot (expressed as 'confident' and 'somewhat confident), total confidence expressed as 'confident' had fallen from 43% pre-pilot to 25% post-pilot (see figures 4 and 5).

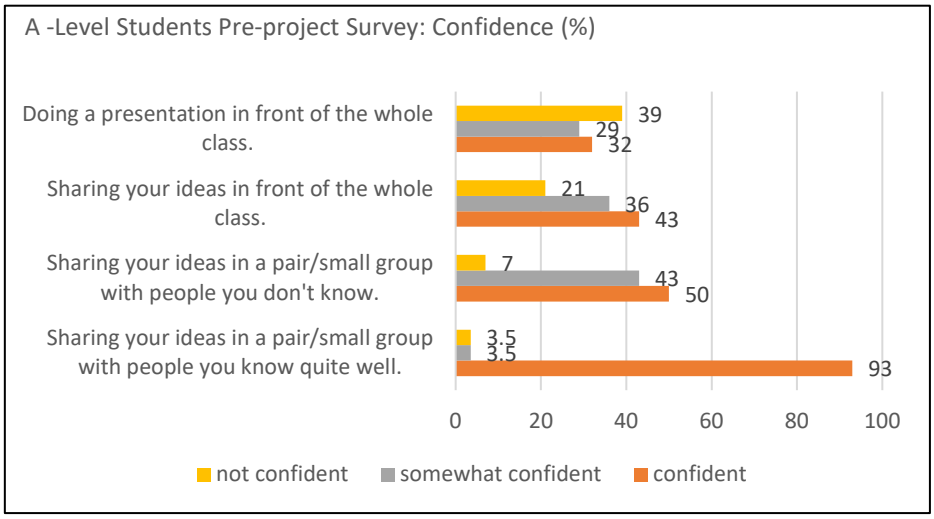


Figure 4

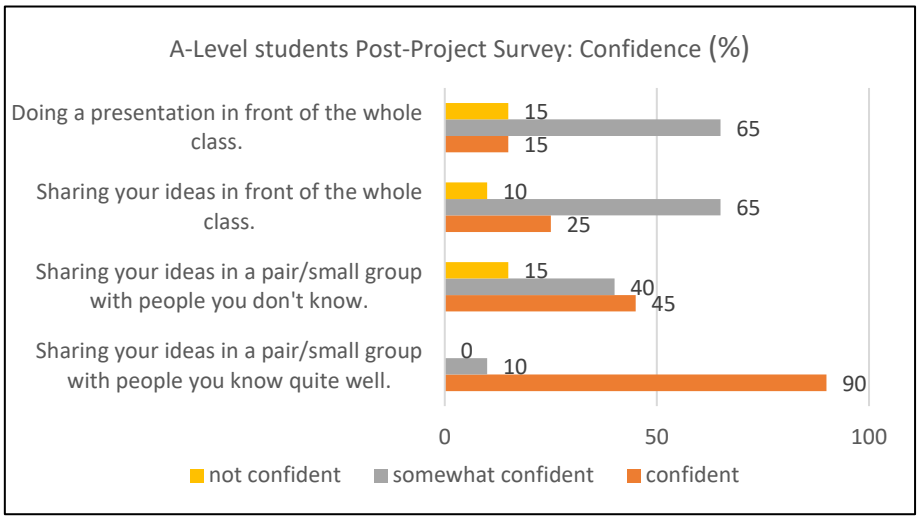


Figure 5

A hypothesis for why this drop in total confidence across A-Level History and English Literature might be the case was proposed by the A-Level teachers. They commented that when the pre-pilot project survey was completed, their students had not yet

started the A-Level subject content and were therefore basing their confidence levels on their experience of doing GSCEs. The A-Level syllabus for both English Literature and History requires students to provide arguments for a range of positions and come to their own conclusions, which is a very different approach to the GCSE. The teachers explained that confidence levels typically dip and then pick up again as the two-year A-Level courses progress. With the post-pilot project survey having been completed only 11 weeks after the initial survey, it is possible that the results reflect this characteristic dip. The teachers suggested that surveying the students at the end of the year, where they had more experience of both the strategies and content, may yield different results.

Where oracy strategies were planned thoroughly, mapped onto relevant upcoming exam or assessment work, and adapted to suit the structure of a lesson, teachers saw high quality engagement from their students. For example, in an English Literature lesson, where a three-part structured pair talk that featured both "Fed-in Facts" and "Talk Tactics" was used, the teacher reported that, by the end of the lesson:

> *'The students all spoke clearly and meaningfully; all their comments responded to the previous speaker's ideas, and they all offered different insights, showing they had listened to all those who had spoken before them'.*

The teacher reflected after the lesson that the oracy techniques they had used '*helped explicitly show that ideas and interpretations take dialogue and time to evolve'* and that by allowing the students two stages of thinking time, students then '*felt confident in speaking to their partners about their ideas'.* The teacher also observed that several students '*have become much more confident in expressing their ideas and sharing in front of the class'* in general. The teacher believes that this is because talk has been '*normalised and expected throughout the lesson',* demonstrating the impact of consistency.

There was acknowledgement from the A-Level teachers that for the strategies to yield the most success, they should be embedded consistently within lessons and planned thoroughly like this. One teacher commented on how a lack of planning ultimately impacted on students' delivery:

> *'When it came to the delivery students were quite poor and not confident. Mostly down to poor planning on my part - next time I'll allocate more time to the delivery section, allow practise and encourage different ways of delivery through modelling or getting them to link more directly to the emotions the original individuals would be feeling'.*

Undergraduate (UG) Stage 1 students

The Stage 1 UG students who took part in the focus groups all considered the strategies trialled to have been successful and worth pursuing in future. Of those trialled, the "Small Group to Large Group" strategy was considered to be very effective, particularly if roles were also assigned and rotated. This strategy enabled students to test ideas and build consensus before having to present to the wider group. It required more students to contribute and it was observed that, over time, reluctant speakers were becoming more involved. As one student commented, '*it's a good method of getting people to voice their ideas without having to speak in front of 20 people which they might not want to do'.* Hearing from different people was also valued by the students because *'the more people that talk, the more ideas you get and the better the discussions become'.* While some group roles were favoured over others (i.e. fewer enjoyed being the summariser who had to present to the whole group), there was recognition that '*this gets you familiar with standing in front of a group'*.

Several strategies were singled out as supporting the writing of assignments. The "Concept Cartoons" used in the Law School enabled the students to understand '*different opinions'* that they *'would not necessarily have thought of'.* As one Law student described:

> *'I think it helped that it was linked to the essay, as I had no opinion of my own on the essay. I was really unsure what it meant. So even though I didn't go down the route of what our group argued, it was helpful to see the other arguments, the other characters.'*

Many of the strategies were also considered to link well to the structure of assignments/essays by the academics. This both supported the development of relevant subject content knowledge and helped the academics and teachers to make the case for the importance of talk:

> *'The discussion of "positions" seemed to have helped the students to identify, before they have properly started to draft the essay, that we are looking for them to adopt their own position on the question set, rather than write a descriptive essay'.*
>
> *'It not only engages [the students] with the material but gets them thinking about arguments in essays and selecting the point they want to argue (rather than listing all the relevant factors)'.*

Similarly, the "Talk Tactics" strategy used in English, where the students had to build on, challenge and summarise the ideas of others in their group, was considered to help the students to '*get higher marks'*, as the tactics required them to develop and talk about their ideas. The seminar leads were also able to draw on the language of the "Talk Tactics" to make this case. For one seminar leader, this was also seen as a result of the embedded approach as well as the strategy itself:

> *'Yesterday's seminar was different from last year's: chiefly, because the students have started to use the language and structure of the oracy Talking Roles - even when I did not refer specifically to the roles! - in their responses. One student said "Building on what X said, I would..." Another said "I agree with Y, but..." It seems that the last four weeks have started to have an influence on how the students phrase and order their discussions'.*

One student who stated they '*didn't like the idea of debates'* described that they had been surprised by how much they had enjoyed taking part in one in their English seminar. In this seminar, the seminar lead adopted a range of the strategies used earlier in the semester to build up to the actual debate. The students were first given a point to discuss in pairs, with the pairs then brought together into smaller groups to develop an '*overall argument'* that had '*to flow'.* This was considered to be an *'interesting'* approach by the students, as they valued the scaffolding that meant that they were not being asked to '*launch'* into a debate.

The "Concept Cartoons" also encouraged students to explore ideas and positions that that they may not have considered before, or that may have been controversial. One academic described how the depersonalising of the content under discussion enabled students *'to offer opinions to the discussion that were not tied to their own critical ability or voice',* and where they did not feel *'their critical position was under scrutiny'.*

The students did comment on the fact that it takes time to embed the strategies as they are often unfamiliar and can also seem unnatural at first. One Law student, for example, stated that the "Concept Cartoon" strategy needed to be used more frequently because at the start it was *'quite a foreign concept'.* They added that it would have been beneficial to use them more often, because *'everyone went back to not speaking as much, so if we'd done that cartoon thing a couple more times it would have reinforced it and people would speak a bit more'.*

There was also a similar recognition among the academics that it takes time to embed any strategies adopted, and that their use needs to be planned to be embedded consistently over a term/semester or even entire year to allow students to familiarise themselves with them: *'It would have been better if I had scaffolded over the course of the semester, so that towards the later stage of teaching we could jump right into debate'.*

In terms of impacts on confidence to share ideas, the post-pilot project survey evidenced improvements across all of the oracy scenarios presented. With respect to the overall confidence of students to 'share ideas in front of the whole seminar group' (expressed as 'confident' and 'somewhat confident'), this improved from a starting point of 65% to 81% by the end of semester 1 (see Figure 6).

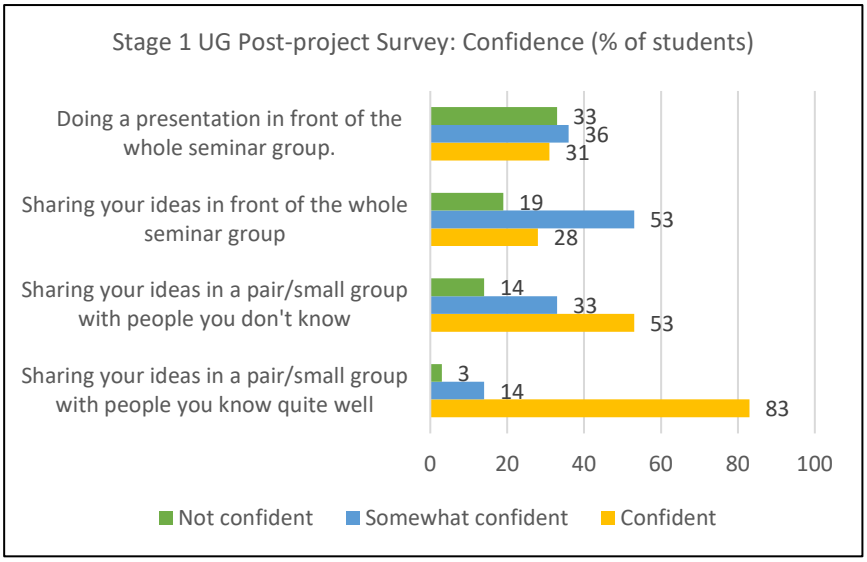


Figure 6

Though there will of course be a natural increase as students become more familiar with the seminar experience and get to know their peers, these results compare favourably with the contextual survey undertaken in March 2025 where the Stage 1 students had been at university for almost two semesters. Here, only 75% of the students had overall confidence to share ideas in front of the whole seminar group (see table in Appendix 6).

Even more interesting are the results obtained when filtering out the Stage 1 UG students studying English who completed the post-pilot project survey. In History and Law two or three strategies were trialled in isolation, whereas in English an integrated oracy programme was developed that lasted for 11 weeks and included the majority of the strategies (see Appendix 3). Here, we see that 92.5% of the students expressed overall confidence to share ideas in front of the whole seminar group and no students

lacked confidence to share ideas in pairs/small groups either with people they know quite well or don't know (see Figure 7).

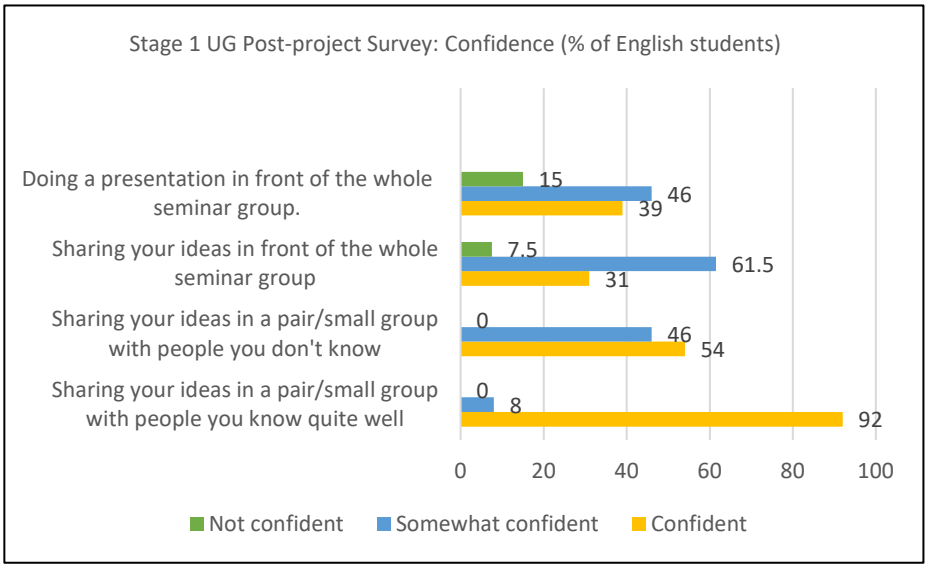


Figure 7

This would suggest that sustained and consistent oracy strategies embedded over time have more positive impacts on student participation than occasional or isolated use of oracy strategies. This impact was clearly evidenced by one of the Stage 1 English students when they compared their experience of seminars using the oracy strategies and participation in other seminars: *'I definitely don't speak in [the non-oracy seminar] as much, if at all. I don't know if it's because we don't do the kind of smaller groups and discussions. In [seminar lead's] one, it feels a lot more relaxed and conversational.'*

Research Question 3: What challenges (if any) were faced when implementing the strategies?

Although the impact on oracy when using the strategies was considered to be overwhelmingly positive and saw an increase in student engagement, there were several challenges raised in the feedback from the academics, teachers and students during the trialling process.

The first of these relates to concerns about the content covered and knowledge acquisition when oracy strategies are adopted and the academic/teacher has less control over the discussion. It was felt that this sometimes resulted in a discussion not being as *'deep/thorough/accurate as it could be'.* These issues were raised during the trialling of "Concept Cartoons" in the Law School. In these seminars, the academics

could not '*confirm the knowledge outcomes for the topic were met, as each discussion was so different'.* This resulted in remedial work having to be undertaken. The marks from the module assignment would suggest content coverage might be an issue, as the results at the higher end (1st, 2:1 and 2:2) dropped in comparison to the previous year. Further discussions between the project team (which drew on their own experiences as well as the student feedback) concluded that the issue of content/depth would be positively impacted through detailed planning of when and how the strategies are used within sessions.

The UG students commented on the fact that some oracy strategies relied on preparatory work being undertaken prior to a seminar taking place, and that if this was not completed by some students, group and paired work was very difficult. This was often exacerbated by the room layout. In the Law School for example, the tables in one seminar were in narrow rows where students described feeling *'stuck with the people either side'* of them. The Law students spoke of times where they were next to someone who had not done the preparatory work and so could not take part in a discussion. They commented that in seminars with round tables '*it's much easier to talk'.*

The A-Level students spoke of similar issues resulting from room layouts. Where there were tables in small groups or in a horse-shoe shape, the environment was considered to be less formal and participation considered much easier. Yet in many of their lessons, particularly those with large numbers of students, the tables were typically in rows and the students were spaced out. The students commented that in such lessons they rarely spoke.

Another challenge faced by the academics in particular was the fluctuating attendance of seminars. With many of the oracy strategies relying on group work and the building of relationships to create an environment conducive for talk, having people absent made it difficult to '*build camaraderie'* or allow people the opportunity to try out different group roles.

Finally, the time it takes to plan which strategies are adopted and how they are used was *'underestimated'* by some participants. It was therefore established that their use needs to be carefully considered and there needs to be an understanding of the scaffolding required to ensure their success.

Research Question 4: What can we learn from the pilot outcomes?

Students

Both A-Level and Stage 1 undergraduate students have a good understanding of the importance of oracy as a transferrable skill – for learning, for work and in their social lives. However, while they are able to articulate the importance of oracy and the

characteristics of environments that facilitate talk, this doesn't necessarily translate into practice. The pre-pilot project surveys evidenced that many students have low levels of confidence when asked to share ideas in larger groups (whole class/seminar), with this causing anxiety and a fear of looking academically inferior in front of others. Although at the Stage 1 UG level this may be considered a transition issue that resolves over time, surveys with a sample of Stage 3 UG students, plus an earlier contextual survey taken across all three UG stages, would suggest this to be otherwise. While this project's focus was on this transition stage, strategies are therefore needed that support *all* students beyond A-Level and Stage 1 UG to continuously develop their oracy skills, empowering them to achieve all of the essential knowledge, skills and attributes they need to succeed in the future.

The Voice 21 strategies that were trialled in the schools and university were enjoyed by the students and considered effective. The results of the focus groups and post-pilot project surveys evidenced that they scaffolded participation, developed students' confidence and encouraged more people to contribute in lessons and seminars. Importantly, they encouraged the development of ideas and argumentation that translated directly into essay-writing and the potential for higher marks.

The need for the strategies to be planned and integrated over a series of seminars or lessons (as was done in the School of English) in order for the students to get used to them and ensure they felt *'natural'* was considered important. A one-off approach was considered to be of less benefit. The focus group students all expressed the need for the strategies to be continued and valued the impact they had had on their learning experience.

Academics/teachers

The academics and teachers that took part in the pilot project all considered the project to have been a success, having impacted positively on both their own practice and the confidence and participation of their students.

Working collaboratively across HE and schools (through the regular feedback meetings and including the opportunity to undertake observations in each other's settings) helped the teachers and academics to understand the learning environment that their students were heading to or coming from. This, coupled with the pre-pilot project surveys with the students, helped them to better '*understand some of the obstacles to oracy'* that students face.

The Voice 21 strategies were considered to have been successful, particularly those that scaffolded talk (e.g. "Small Group to Large Group with Talk Roles", "Talk Tactics", and "Fed-in Facts"). Reflection on the trialling led to the conclusion that oracy strategies need to be planned over a semester/term/year, gradually supporting students in developing their oracy skills through the gradual addition of different strategies. This

was shown to be effective in the School of English where the strategies were mapped against the subject content outcomes, and similarly with A-Level groups when working towards a subject-specific debate. Where the strategies were considered to have been less effective (i.e. they appeared stilted and unnatural or did not encourage in-depth learning), reflection at the end of the pilot led the team to conclude this was due to a lack of integration and not embedding them over a long enough time period.

The project outcomes have also evidenced positive impacts on the writing of essays/assignments. Many of the strategies mapped onto writing frameworks and assessment criteria, enabling teaching staff to use talk in a lesson/seminar to develop ideas and arguments that students could then draw on in their assessments/exams.

A project outcome that was not initially considered as part of the evaluation is the very positive impact that the strategies, in combination with the 11-week embedded oracy programme and associated teaching materials, had on the two Postgraduate Demonstrators teaching in the School of English. One in particular was new to teaching and had been very fearful of '*silent seminars*'. The strategies and programme supported the development of their practice, providing them with ideas and ways of working that improved their confidence.

All of the teachers and academics involved in the project have continued to use the strategies in their current teaching, and are planning to take them forward, which is a testament to their positive impact.

5 Conclusion

The ability to communicate effectively is recognised as an important life skill that can positively impact access to, and the experience of, education and the workplace. Being skilled in oracy in particular has the potential to ensure that all young people, regardless of their background, can participate and ultimately succeed in all aspects of their lives. This is recognised and being acted on across the education sector, with universities like Newcastle embedding communication skills within their courses and the DfE committing to prioritising oracy in schools. As employers have also highlighted, in a world of AI, the specific ability to communicate effectively in-person will allow people to distinguish themselves in the workplace and could positively impact on their promotability.

In the school and university setting, many young people lack the confidence to share their ideas in front of large and/or unfamiliar groups, and even with peers that they know quite well. These students feel anxious and worry about how they appear to others. For Stage 1 Undergraduate students, their participation in seminars in particular is additionally impacted by the academic and social 'culture shock' (Dawe, 2023, p. 8) they experience as they transition from home and an educational experience where

relationships are 'typically closer and more constructive' than at university (Myhill, 2020). This pilot research project has highlighted the need for teachers and academics to understand each others' settings and the educational experience that students have had (school/college) and are heading to (university).

This project has made clear that oracy is a skill that needs to be explicitly taught and embedded within the curriculum, and that students need be made aware of the importance of oracy and how it is 'fundamental to constructing disciplinary understanding' (Heron, 2023). The Voice 21 oracy strategies trialled in the pilot project were described as easy to implement and impacted positively on student participation in lessons and seminars and on students' understanding of subject content. Certain strategies (e.g. "Talk Tactics") were described as supporting essay writing, because of their focus on the development of in-depth understanding through instigating, building on, challenging and summarising ideas. These mapped effectively onto essay writing and marking frameworks.

This project has clearly demonstrated that embedding and building up knowledge, experience and confidence in using oracy strategies over a series of lessons has the capacity for the greatest impact. This has further highlighted the need for detailed planning to take place to ensure the embedding of the strategies over several terms/semesters, or possibly even over a two-year A Level course or three-year UG programme. There are implications on workload that therefore need to be considered.

Oracy is a significant issue currently facing the education sector, and as a consequence this project and its subsequent outcomes are highly relevant. It is one of the key priority areas identified by the Government, and the DfE is currently developing an Oracy Framework to be introduced into schools. The introduction of communication (including oracy) as an area of focus in the 2025 Ofsted Inspection Framework shows the Government's commitment to ensure that schools prioritise this over the coming years.

In the university sector, research in the field of Academic Literacies has highlighted the importance of what has been termed 'Oracy for Learning' (Academic Oracy) as a means to 'better support student engagement and success' and more 'equitable participation in undergraduate classrooms' (Balloo, 2025). This research has also highlighted however, that there is a need for universities to 'raise awareness and understanding of oracy practices'; to 'upskill educators and students, to better use academic oracy' (ibid) and 'for further research' in this area to be undertaken (Heron et al, 2023).

With the current focus at Newcastle University on the development of the Leading Edge Curriculum (LEC), and the embedding of 'Essential knowledge, Life skills and Attributes' in order that students develop a 'growth mindset', this presents a prime opportunity for the university to position itself as a national leader in oracy research and practice in Higher Education.

6 Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed by the project team. They also draw on ideas proposed by participants attending a dissemination workshop delivered by the project team at Newcastle University's Learning & Teaching Conference in March 2026.

Strategic and Institutional

Given the emphasis the Government is placing on oracy at present, evidenced in both their White Paper recommendations for an oracy framework in schools and its inclusion in the 2025 Ofsted Framework, both the schools that took part in the project and the University are uniquely placed to embed oracy within their respective curricula and become a sector leader in academic oracy research and practice.

Oracy is increasingly being recognised as a core educational entitlement and a foundational life skill, equivalent in importance to literacy and numeracy. It clearly offers tangible benefits, equipping young people with transferrable skills and improving their employability opportunities, which directly link to both the Gatsby Benchmarks in schools and the Education for Life 2030+ Strategy at Newcastle University.

It is a recommendation of this report that Newcastle University should articulate a clear institutional stance on oracy as part of the Leading Edge Curriculum (LEC). Within schools, it would recommend that the schools involved should articulate a clear institutional stance, ideally across their wider school Trust, to embed oracy in their Trust-wide practice.

Research

This pilot demonstrated strong evidence of the impact oracy interventions can have on student confidence, participation, learning, and equity of access to higher education. It also presented clear pedagogical benefits for all staff involved, highlighting that the period in which students transition to university is key to ensuring ultimate student success and progression. However, the pilot was by its nature limited in terms of the small sample size and short duration. It would be the recommendation of this report that this pilot clearly evidences a strong case for further large-scale, longitudinal research into oracy led by Newcastle University.

The University should seek external funding to develop a longitudinal, interdisciplinary, mixed-methods research project spanning post-16 education (sixth forms, colleges and universities). Partners should include academics across all three faculties and A-Level teachers across corresponding subjects, Voice 21, the University Library's Education Outreach and Transition team, the University's Learning and Teaching Development Service, the University's Academic Skills team and the University's Student Health and

Wellbeing Service. Focus areas for further oracy research could include: student confidence and participation, student wellbeing, student academic attainment, equity of access to HE, student attendance, transition from A-Level studies to university, and teaching pedagogy.

Curriculum and Pedagogical

Evidence from this project shows that oracy is most effective when explicitly taught, integrated with subject content and assessment, and developed as a skill over time. This best practice should be shared more widely across both schools and the University.

Within the university this could be achieved through the following interventions:

- Oracy strategies to be included within training for new academics and PG Demonstrators through Newcastle Educational Practice Skills (NEPS) by the Learning and Teaching Development Service (LTDS) and the Researcher Education and Development (RED) teams.
- Dedicated webpages to be developed by LTDS to host an oracy toolkit for Newcastle University staff with accompanying case studies, videos, planning exemplars, and blog posts that share staff and student experiences.
- A pilot group of programmes and/or modules to be formed to trial embedding oracy skills development within teaching that is aligned to learning outcomes and assessment criteria.
- Oracy Champions to be assigned within Faculties and Schools (with appropriate staff training) to support the development of wider oracy strategies. These champions would share ideas/approaches and support the planning and embedding of oracy skills development into pilot programmes/modules.
- When using oracy strategies within teaching, staff to be clear and explicit with students about why they are being used and what the benefits to them are in terms of their experience, confidence, employability and transferable skills, as well as the academic benefits.
- Where possible, seminar spaces and furniture to be set up to support small-group discussion (e.g. round tables, horseshoe layouts, circles).

Within the school environment this could be achieved through the following interventions:

- An oracy lead to be assigned within each school who would provide training in oracy pedagogy for teaching and support staff.
- A pilot group of subjects and/or key stages to be formed to trial embedding oracy skills development within teaching that is aligned to learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

- When using oracy strategies within teaching, staff to be clear and explicit with students about why they are being used and what the benefits to them are in terms of their experience, confidence, employability and transferable skills, as well as the academic benefits.
- Oracy approaches for A-Level students to be developed that will directly support students as they transition into university and the workplace.
- Where possible, teaching spaces to be addressed to ensure furniture layout supports small-group discussion (e.g. round tables, horseshoe layouts, circles).
- Where relevant, approaches to oracy within individual schools to be upscaled to be used across school Trusts.

Transition

This pilot focused specifically on the transition between A-Level studies and Stage 1 undergraduate studies, and clearly highlighted the positive benefits of sharing best practice across the different educational settings. This was twofold in the opportunities it provided for the students, as well as the pedagogical benefits to the university and school staff. It would be the recommendation of this report that these interactions and opportunities are continued. All those within the project team commented on the benefits and there is a clear opportunity to build upon this foundation for any future work or research in this area. The findings particularly highlighted the vulnerability many students feel during this transition, and how improved oracy skills can help ensure equity of access to and progression through Higher Education for all students, regardless of their background.

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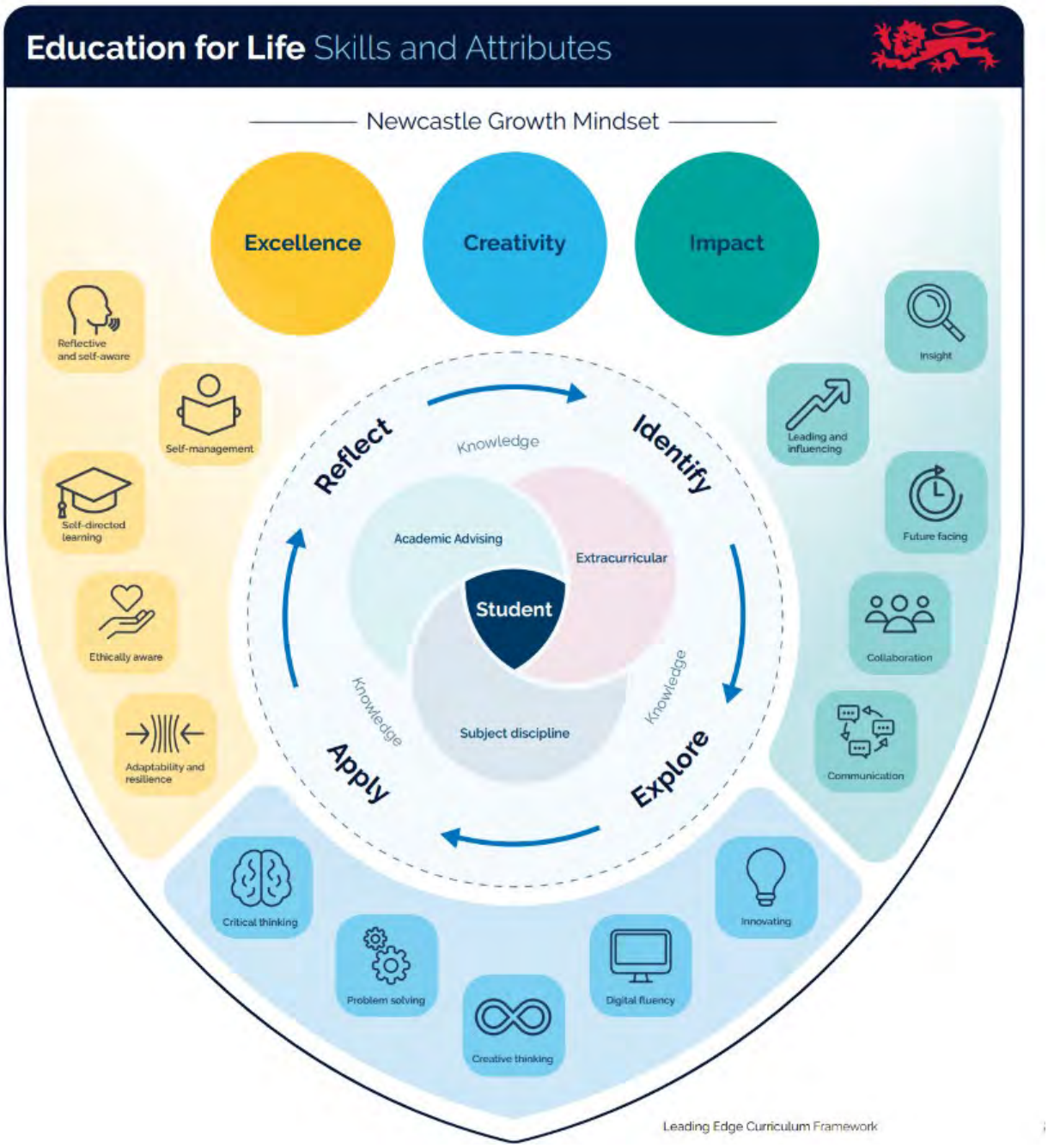
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Appendix

Appendix 1: Education for Life Skills and Attributes



Appendix 2: Evaluation Data Collection Methods

Data	Timeframe	n=
Contextual online survey to inform the Voice 21 training and project planning: UG students in Law, History and English	March-April 2025	54
Contextual paper-based survey to inform the Voice 21 training and project planning: A Level students (state and independent schools, Sixth Form College)	March-April 2025	65
Pre-pilot project survey: UG students Stage 1- Law, History and English	September 2025	68
Pre-pilot project survey: UG students Stage 2 and 3 -Law, History and English	September 2025	43
Pre-pilot project survey: A Level students Year 12 (taking part in pilot)	September 2025	40
Post-pilot project survey: UG students Stage 1 (taking part in pilot)	December 2025-January 2026	36
Post-pilot project survey: UG students Stage 3 (taking part in pilot)	December 2025-January 2026	9
Post-pilot project survey: A Level students Year 12 (taking part in pilot)	December 2025-January 2026	20
Focus group interviews with UG Stage 1 students taking part in pilot - Law, History	October 2025	5
Focus group interviews with UG Stage 1 students taking part in pilot– Law, History and English	December 2025	5
Focus group interviews with A Level students taking part in pilot	January-February 2026	30
Reflective log entries: Academics and teachers	October-December 2025	38
Feedback from academics, teachers, member of academic skills team (project meetings, interviews)	September 2025-March 2026	9

Appendix 3: Oracy integration programme in School of English

This module follows an iterative structure: it teaches only three texts (a play, a poem, a short story), and returns repeatedly to each text. First the students close read the texts in turn (block 1), then they read criticism about the texts (block 2), then they engage with broader theoretical ideas that each text leads towards (block 3).

Oracy Integration

Block 1:

Week	Content	Oracy
1	Introductory welcome and overview	Introducing the idea of oracy
2	Close reading poetry	Seminar leader models 'talk tactics' in response to student observations; students then use talk tactics in small groups.
3	Close reading drama	Discussion roles: divide seminar into threes. One student is summarizer, one is instigator, one is everything else. Instigator quizzes everything else about a scene, summarizer then reports back to whole seminar
4	Close reading prose	Same as week 3, but add in reflection: could someone who is usually silent be the 'everything else', could someone talkative be the summarizer? Check-in on how people feel about speaking.

Block 2

Week	Content	Oracy
5	Students discuss an article about the poem	Try out different kinds of grouping: trios, partners, circle, nest, fishbowl
6	Students discuss two articles about the play	Groups of students have to create a 'concept cartoon' (how would the critic who wrote article A read this scene…); support discussion of each critic with 'fed in facts' (the critic who wrote article B also says that…)
7	Students discuss two articles about the short story	Students use the talk tactics to interrogate the articles (can they challenge them, probe them, summarize them, etc.)

Block 3

Week	Content	Oracy
8	Hold a full class debate on a topic inspired by the poem	Debate (reminder of oracy skills to use)

9	Peer-marking of essays about the play	Nothing explicit: each group of peer markers must justify their mark to group using oracy skills
10	Peer-marking of reflective writing about the process of studying the short story	Nothing explicit: each group of peer markers must justify their mark to group using oracy skills
11	Reflection on formative work (a short essay), assessment advice	Use a 'traverse' grouping to have students summarize their formative work repeatedly. Remainder of seminar tailored to need for advice.

Appendix 4: Teaching materials from the School of English

Seminar 3 Guidelines

This seminar continues practicing close reading skills and developing oracy. Some guidelines.

Begin the seminar by getting everyone to share their list of what they do when they read drama. Write this on the board (or project it).

Put students into small groups (different to their study groups). Get the students to share how they used some of the stuff on the board when reading 2ii and 2iii.

Read 2iv out loud. Either you read it, or you can read it 'around the room', where each student reads until they reach a bit of strong punctuation (;. !, ?, etc. - not commas).

Time permitting, show the video of 2iv also. Now put students into groups of three. With reference to VOICE 21, Discussion Roles.pdf,

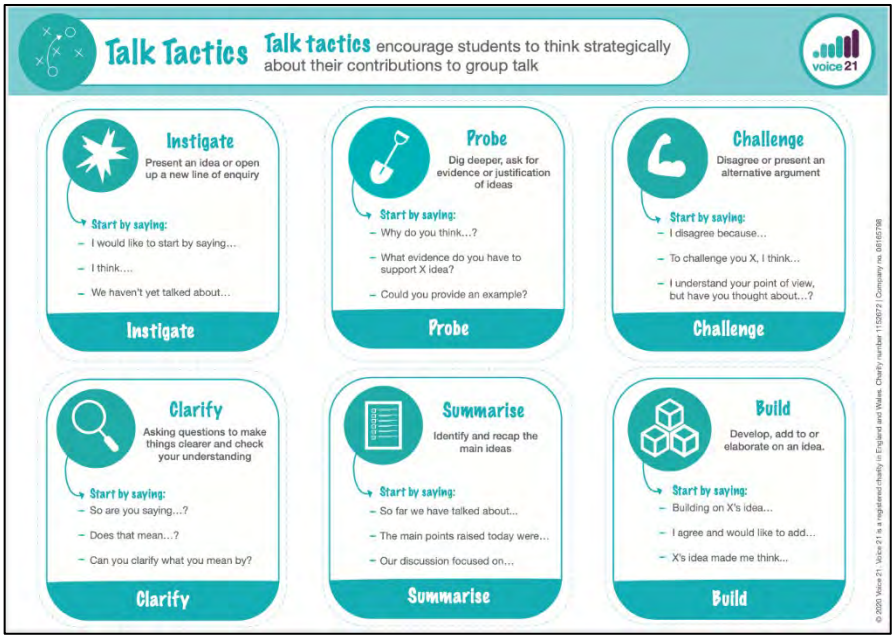
ask one person to be the 'instigator', one person to be the 'summarizer', and one person to be everything else. Encourage students to choose the role they feel most comfortable with. The 'instigator' says what they think about 2iv; the 'everything else' asks questions, responds and tries to keep things going; the 'summarizer' says *nothing* but simply records the discussion.

After a while, stop the students. Each trio's 'summarizer' now reports briefly on what was said in their trio.

Appendix 5: Oracy Strategies - some examples

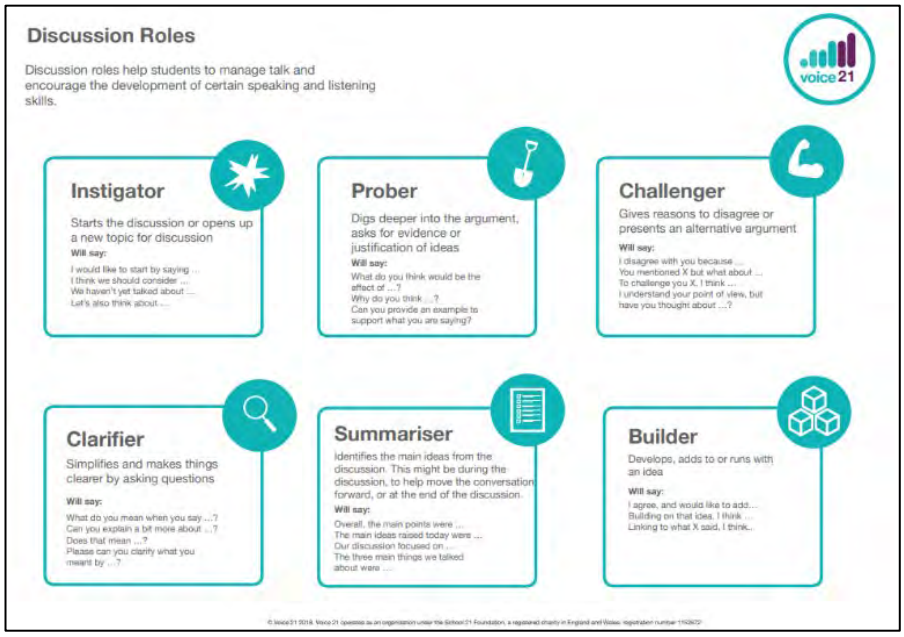
1. Talk Tactics: sentence stems

These can be provided on a sheet on the tables, on the board and/or modelled.



2. Small group to large group discussions with roles.

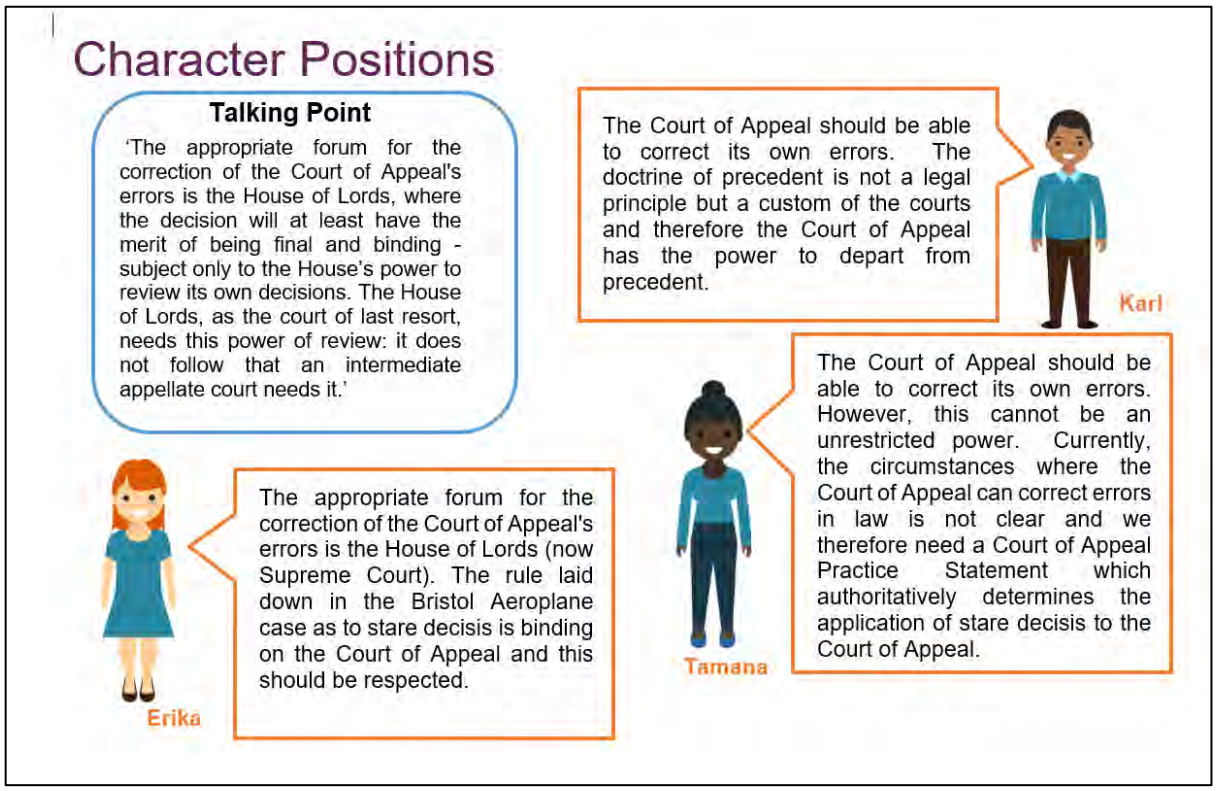
This formalises the Talk Tactics stems into roles. Frequently only 3 roles are assigned, typically: the instigator, the challenger and the summariser (who also acts as a scribe and then feeds back the discussion to the wider group).



3. Concept Cartoons:

A talking point is identified and then 3- 4 contrasting positions are presented. An individual or group are asked to argue the case for one of the positions and to listen to those of the others. This is particularly effective when discussing emotive and controversial ideas.

In this example from a Law School Stage One module, three positions were taken from the academic debate on the topic being explored, namely Lord Denning's argument in the Court of Appeal case of Davis v Johnson, Lord Diplock's judgment in the House of Lords appeal (which overturned the Court of Appeal in the same case) and Prime and Scanlon who wrote an academic article on the topic. In past years it was found that during the first semester students often found it difficult to develop and discuss their own position and it was hoped that this strategy might help address this. In advance of the session, the students were asked to complete essential reading and prepare answers to questions which would enable them to take part in the debate. In the seminar they were assigned a group and a position to argue together.



4. Hot-seating

Students are asked to take on a role. This could be a character in a novel or play or a significant person in a field of study. The students are given time to plan their point of view, ideas and attitudes. Working either in small groups or one large group, one student takes the 'hot seat'. The remaining group members ask questions from the perspective of their own character, with the student in the

hot seat answering as their character. This enables the student to inhabit the character and 'walk in their shoes'.

5. Fed-in facts

Students are provided with a stimulus and a driving question. They discuss the stimulus together. The teacher gradually feeds in additional facts to build their understanding of the stimulus. (https://voice21.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Fed-in-facts.docx-1.pdf)

6. Debates

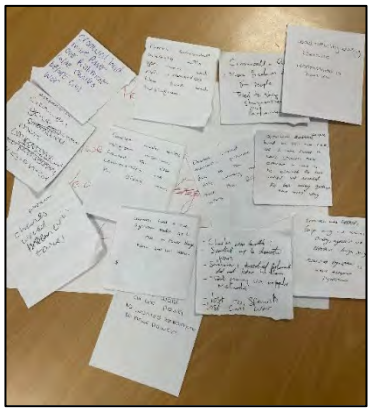
The following is an example of how a debate was structured in an A Level History lesson at St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy.

I. 45 minutes was spent focused on content to ensure that the students were secure with the knowledge needed for the debate.

II. The students were given the debate topic and had to write as much evidence for each side of the debate as possible.

III. Practising reading out loud: Every student then had to read each piece of evidence out loud. The teacher explained that a huge part of debating is the preparation and how that helps with confidence for speaking as it allows them to have a script etc.

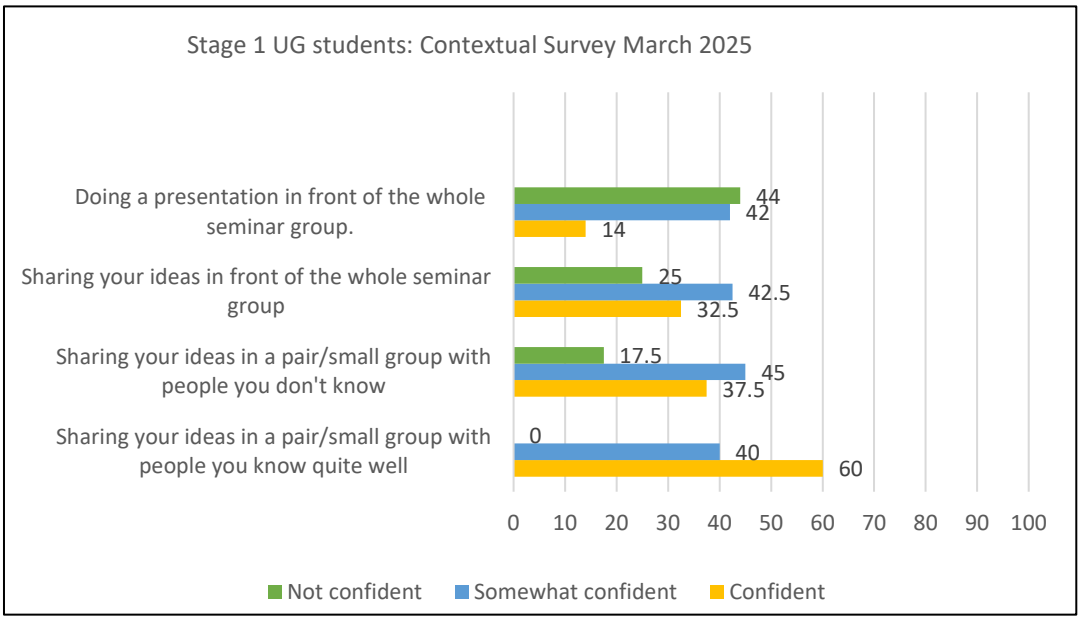
IV. Movement and organising ideas: Each student wrote down 2 pieces of evidence for each side of the debate on pieces of paper, then together they all had to organise to form cohesive arguments (used concentric circle strategy, strongest argument at the centre).



V. Each student was allocated a number (for the running order of the debate) and wrote a mini speech using the organised evidence.

VI. The students had to stand up and each one deliver their speech to an audience made up of Year 13 A Level students and teachers who then provided feedback.

Appendix 6: Contextual survey results



Appendix 7: Reflective Logs summary (academics and teachers)

The following is a summary of the key strategies trialled by the academics and teachers during the pilot project. It details what took place and includes their feedback. The analysis draws on 38 reflective log entries. Statements in italics are direct quotes.

Strategies piloted: academics

1. Sessions that explored the purpose of seminars and what is expected of students – rules for talk, presentational/exploratory talk
2. "Talk Tactics" (sentence stems) provided on handouts/modelled/on boards
3. Small group discussion leading to whole group discussion – this was also trialled as pairs, 3s, 4s and then whole group
4. Discussion/Talk Roles - Instigator, Challenger, Summariser, Scribe, Ambassador etc.
5. "Concept Cartoons" – sitting with uncertainty, depersonalising of ideas particularly emotive and controversial ones
6. "Fed-in facts" - to provoke longer discussions, new piece of information is added by the teacher/academic.
7. Debate
8. Room layout/position of academic
9. Using multiple strategies in one seminar: Examples from English and History

1. Sessions that explored the purpose of seminars, and what is expected of students – rules for talk, presentational/exploratory talk.

History:

In History the oracy discussions took place in a seminar at the start of the module (with a group size of 23), and in a lecture to the whole stage one cohort (140 students) delivered with the support of the Academic Skills team.

In the seminar the students were asked to come up with 'Rules for Talk' and discussed the difference between 'Presentational' and 'Exploratory' talk. This session was considered an effective way to encourage the students to think about the issues themselves, rather than being told what was expected. They came up with several good ideas e.g. *engaging in good faith and really listening to each other's ideas; being polite and respectful; for the discussion to be 'judgement free' so as to allow for a range of perspectives to be heard; that participants in the seminar should be comfortable*.

The lecture in History was entitled 'What History seminars are for' and was delivered jointly with a member of the Academic Skills Team. The lecture explored: the purpose of seminars, common misconceptions, and why learning through talk is encouraged in History. Even though this took place in a lecture theatre, the students were still asked to discuss in small groups a) how they thought

university seminars would differ from school lessons; b) why they think we teach them through seminars; and c) what they expect the biggest challenges to be.

This session was considered to be very *enjoyable* and *seemed to spark a lot of conversation during the group work.*

English:

In English a discussion about oracy took place in the first seminar as part of an icebreaker activity (16 students). The small group to large group discussion approach (see point 2) was adopted to do this, and was considered to be a good way for the students to get to know each other. This activity was the first in the 'Oracy integration' plan developed by the School of English. This sought to build up the students' confidence through the sequencing of the Voice 21 strategies over the 11 week semester (see Appendix 3 for the full plan).

Law:

In Law during initial induction sessions, the importance of attendance at, and engagement in, seminars was stressed and this appeared to result in students *turning up to the seminars expecting to work.*

2. Small group discussion leading to whole group discussion – this was also trialled as pairs , 3s, 4s and then whole group.

Asking the students to work in small groups before discussing their ideas with the whole group, was generally considered to be an effective strategy, that *worked well* and was easy to adopt. It helped build relationships and ensured that all the students had to contribute, albeit at level where they felt comfortable. Moving from pairs to 3's to 4's etc. was considered to help build momentum towards the whole group discussion as it *equipped the students to respond in the whole group discussion that followed.*

There was evidence that over time, students who began just talking in the small groups felt more confident to talk to the whole group.

I was struck in both groups that the students are now much more comfortable about talking (both with different students in small groups and in the whole class). Everybody contributed to the whole class discussion in both sessions and it felt easy and comfortable to ask individuals to contribute (especially when they had already made a good point in their pairs).

One challenge highlighted by several academics was the problem of fluctuating numbers attending the seminars. This often made *sticking with the same groups and building camaraderie within the class difficult.*

3. Discussion/Talk Roles - Instigator, Challenger, Summariser, Scribe, Ambassador etc.

Assigning a role to group members was trialled by the academics in each subject. In one English seminar two groups of students were asked to discuss a short poem and then a volunteer from each group acted as an 'ambassador' and relayed the last group's ideas to the next group. The groups were asked to listen to the ambassador, and then to respond to their ideas (both agreeing and debating).

This strategy did appear to encourage the students *to have deeper conversations and develop their ideas.* There was also evidence in the English seminars that these roles were referred to by the students when their organic conversation had *stalled or dried up* i.e. it enabled the students to *continue conversations beyond what [they] may have felt were a natural end point.*

This strategy was considered to be similarly effective in History:

The process of ensuring each group has a spokesperson has been increasingly effective at bringing more voices into the whole group discussion. It offers an opportunity to engage directly with the students and build their confidence by providing positive feedback before the whole group discussion.

Whilst this approach worked well in the small group situation, some feedback highlighted that having a summariser resulted in more *stilted* whole group discussions that were less *organic.* It also proved harder to *encourage wider discussion beyond the specific summary delivered by the summariser.*

4. Talk Tactics (sentence stems) provided on handouts/modelled/on boards

In English this was trialled in different ways. In one seminar individual handouts with the sentence stems were placed on desks for the students to refer to throughout. The students were asked to try and use at least one of each of the tactics throughout the seminar. In another seminar, the seminar lead modelled the "Talk Tactics" in their response to one groups' ideas (*I asked for clarification, challenged and summarised*). A volunteer from each group was then asked to visit the other groups and use the same "Talk Tactics" that had been modelled.

Although the use of stem sentences was often described as feeling *forced*, resulting in *stilted* conversations, this was found to change over time as the stems became a natural part of conversation:

Yesterday's seminar was different from last year's: chiefly, because the students have started to use the language and structure of the oracy Talking Roles -- even when I did not refer specifically to the roles! -- in their responses. One student said "Building on what X said, I would..." Another said "I agree with Y, but..." It seems that the last four weeks have started to have an influence on how the students phrase and order their discussions.

"Talk tactics" was also considered a useful way to help students understand how to structure an essay and consider the dialogic nature of reading criticism. For example: *[the module] is structured around the talking roles: the writer has offered or instigated several points within a larger argument, and then the reader can challenge and summarise and extend and clarify their argument (thereby finding the strengths and weaknesses of the scholarship).*

In the early stages *most students were good at instigating points and supporting them with evidence, and all of the students were adept at agreeing with each other and adding supporting evidence.* There were fewer examples of students asking for clarification or challenging each other's points. Further modelling and opportunities to practise are required.

5. Concept Cartoons (and 6. fed-in facts)

"Concept Cartoons" were trialled in English and Law.

English: Groups of students had to create a 'concept cartoon' (How would the critic who wrote article A read this scene…?). The 'Fed in facts' strategy was also adopted to support the discussion. e.g. the critic who wrote article B also says that…'

This strategy was considered to be very engaging resulting in discussions that *easily filled the hour and could have continued on'*

Crucial to the strategy's success was that *it enabled the students to offer opinions to the discussion that were not tied to their own critical ability or voice, which has been a limiting factor in discussion so far.* It encouraged the students *to critique their chosen critic's point of view, seeing the text from their perspective and thereby finding that perspective's limitations.*

It was observed that some students contributed to the whole group discussion with *much more confidence and fluency than they had in previous seminars, where they may have felt their critical position was under scrutiny.*

The "Concept Cartoons" approach was also considered to be a good way to prepare students for the mid-module assignment.

Law:

Concept Cartoons were adopted in the first seminar of a Stage 1 module. The strategy was used to present three positions relating to an essay question the students were being asked to consider on the topic of Precedent in the English Legal System.

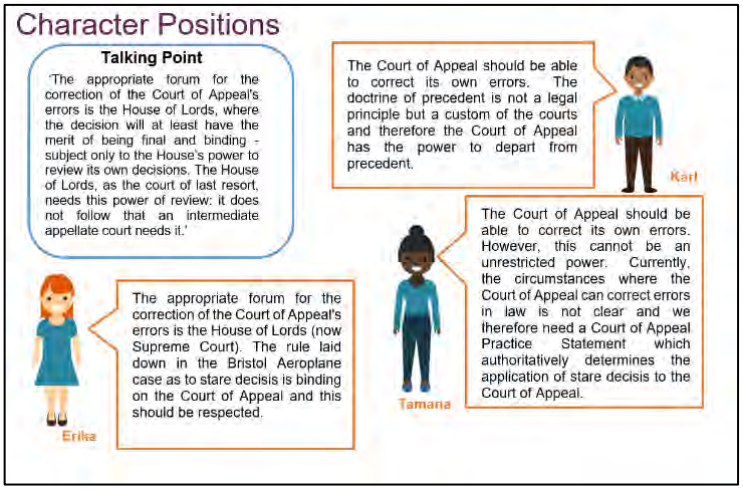
The students were given preparatory reading and questions to answer. In the seminars the students worked in groups and assigned themselves a role as either Speaker, Note-taker or White-board writer.

The Concept Cartoons were considered to *work very well,* and attendance was good. The groups were *animated, able to discuss the positions, and able to identify where the positions came from in*

the debate. All students participated in the seminar, and even where it was obvious that some students hadn't completed all the reading, they all participated in the group discussions.

It was also felt that the *discussion of 'positions' seemed to have helped the students to identify, before they have properly started to draft the essay, that we are looking for them to adopt their own position on the question set, rather than write a descriptive essay.*

Benefits were particularly seen with respect to *the 'mid-range' students*, who appeared to *benefit from the group discussion and identification of the full range of debate topics*.



Having taught the same seminar last year, the academic reflected that:

Last year's sessions were generally led by a small number of students with some students remaining passive. The concept cartoons and group work resulted in all students being active in the seminar and led to the students identifying a wider range of arguments with significantly less teacher-led discussion.

There were also some challenges:

- Some students were reluctant to speak and did not want to volunteer to take on the 'speaker' role.
- The board room style seminar room was not conducive to effective group work.
- 50 minutes was not enough time to work through the arguments effectively. The students were keen to debate but time was limited.
- Writing up on the whiteboard slowed down the conversation and led to pauses. One student, who had the white board writer role, commented that they had found it difficult to capture all that was being said.
- The weaker students floundered and need more scaffolding.
- It was difficult to ensure that the knowledge outcomes were met as each discussion was so different. The marks from the assignment would suggest this might be an issue, as the results at the higher end (1st, 2:1 and 2:2) dropped in

comparison to the previous year's results (whilst acknowledging that the essay question and the student cohort were different and that therefore like for like is not being compared).

The academic reflected that for the concept cartoons to work effectively in the Law seminars, more scaffolding is required for the weaker students, including more detailed questions in the preparatory work. Consideration of when the concept cartoon sessions are included in the module should be thought through i.e. they would benefit from taking place once the students know each other better. More time is also needed to ensure that the knowledge outcomes are met.

6. Debates

In English a structured spoken debate took place that drew on the model of a parliamentary debate. *The discussion prompt became a "motion", there was a chair, and there was a government and an opposition team. Within that framework, the students employed the talking roles system from earlier in the semester, but in a very formalised manner: one side was instigating arguments, the other was challenging, and then the roles were reversed. I was the chair and summarised their arguments back to them, continually re-phrasing until they felt my summary matched their argument (I did this to help them practice articulating their argument until another person fully understands it).*

Feedback evidenced that having a debate at this point in the oracy planning sequence i.e. week 8 (see Appendix 3 for full plan), was very effective. *The students were alert and engaged (at 4:30pm on a dark wintry Thursday!), and their speeches were polite, persuasive and well-phrased. They often used the talking-roles-style phraseology ("I would challenge that...", "I disagree with X..."), and I mirrored that back to them with my clarify / summarise role ("So are you saying...?", "The main points raised today were..."). The seminar was focused on "argumentation" and learning how to manage arguments in essays, and I think the debate activity combined with the oracy strategies supported that aim*.

In History one seminar focussed on debate preparation. The students had to identify a 'side' to the argument they wished to take, then choose which factors they thought were the most important from those that had been collectively identified in earlier small group work. This strategy was considered to be *a very easy one to implement and is very useful to general learning outcomes. It not only engages [the students] with the material but gets them thinking about arguments in essays and selecting the point they want to argue (rather than listing all the relevant factors).*

In another History seminar the academic combined oracy techniques used in previous weeks to encourage the students to have a debate. This included: *setting questions and giving them time to think about these in advance and then providing sentences to allow them to build on each other's points and arguments*. Whilst the resulting debate was considered to be *a bit stilted* and *not as deep/thorough/accurate as it could be* in both seminar classes *the majority of people contributed to that whole class discussion (6/10 and 5/6) and others made significant contributions in the groups.*

7. Room layout/position of seminar lead

Several academics trialled the impact of their position in the seminar room on the group dynamic and resulting discussions.

In English, one academic used different groupings in conjunction with different room arrangements. This included, students talking from their study groups in pairs or threes, while the lead was at the front of the room or the students sitting in a circle with the lead in the centre.

Reflection by the academic identified that confidence levels varied with the different groupings and arrangements, with some students '*very happy to address the whole seminar when I stand at the front, while others are definitely more confident in pairs or in trios'*. The circle arrangement, where the academic was in the centre, was also considered to be '*fascinating*', because *'a few of the quieter students suddenly joined in with the discussion; in previous weeks they have stayed silent, but yesterday they spoke up during the circle.'*

In History one academic was considering *whether I need to move so that I am behind them rather than in front of [the students] to encourage them to engage directly with each other. There is a little of this going on, but it still does not feel natural.*

This was then trialled the following week:
Almost all students contributed to the full class discussion on the primary sources and to the debate. Me sitting at the back also encouraged them to address each other rather than me.

8. Using multiple strategies in one seminar

English seminar example

This seminar used a range of oracy strategies / talk tactics. We began with a whole group discussion about reading drama, especially which specific tools and techniques we might employ or look for in the text / performance. Then the seminar broke into small groups and discussed how they each applied those tools and techniques to Act 2 (scenes 2 and 3). After that ten minute discussion, the groups then shared their ideas with me and the rest of the room. For the second half of the seminar, I read Act 2 scene 4 aloud and asked small groups to discuss it. This time, however, I displayed the talk tactics on the board and suggested that the group members play specific roles: one person was the instigator, one person was the summariser, and one person did everything else (challenging, inquiring, extending, supporting etc.). At the end, the summariser conveyed the group's ideas to the room and to me.

Feedback

In general, today's strategies worked very well; they prompted excellent discussion and most students seemed to benefit from the clearly defined speaking roles. I did notice, though, that some students

were slightly unnerved by the autonomy of the small group work and the pressure of the speaking roles. They asked me "which ideas should I be looking for? Themes?" I suspect that uncertainty was to do with the transition from A-Levels closely guided (and heavily thematic) reading to the more independent work at university, and I offered a few starting points to get the conversation flowing. For future seminars that use the speaking roles and small group analyses of texts, I will have one or two discussion prompts ready just in case.

History Seminar example:

Icebreaker exercise taking a position on a controversial topic and then discussing it. Small groups with scribes and spokesperson. Working towards debate talk/essay writing by taking an essay-style question and then breaking down the process: 1) Come up with as many points as you can in response (one group arguing one way and the other the other way) 2) Agree on the best three points. 3) Come up with supporting examples/evidence for those points. 4) Put the points in the best/most logical/most effective order.

Feedback

The debate talk techniques worked reasonably well in both groups but the feel of the groups was very different due to numbers. In particular my Wednesday group had just 4 people in it. I therefore moved us from the seminar room to my office (we would have been lost in the seminar room) and the session then worked very well. The students essentially all had to participate because there was only four of them, but in some ways that gave them more confidence. This does make me wonder about the effectiveness of large seminar groups.

Strategies piloted: teachers

1. Talk tactics (sentence stems)
2. Hot-seating
3. Debate
4. Talk triads (with Talk roles)
5. Fed-in facts

1. Talk tactics (sentence stems)

History:

The teacher provided the sentence stems on laminated cards and used them both as a planned part of lessons, as well as on an ad hoc basis.

Although there was an *initial period of awkwardness* (commented on by both the students and teacher), *once the strategy has been used a couple of times in lessons and everyone is participating/using them, that initial sense of awkwardness soon diminishes.*

The teacher reflected that the Talk Tactics stems *were very effective in encouraging high quality oracy in the classroom. When used in appropriately in selected lessons, they resulted in increased student participation and confidence in regards to student talk*.

The teacher identified the following positive impacts over the term:

- Improved student willingness and confidence to participate
- Better quality oracy
- Quality of student thinking
- Deeper student understanding of the topics/events than when the lessons had been taught in previous years

2. Hot seating

English:

In an English lesson which was exploring the play Othello, the students were assigned roles or perspectives e.g. Othello, Desdemona, a modern audience. They were asked to plan questions to ask of Iago, who would be in the 'hot seat'. The student assigned Iago had to plan their point of view and attitudes, thinking about how they would respond to each speaker who questioned them. This approach was considered to be very effective:

All students participated and showed genuine, careful thought about the questions 'they' (their character/perspective) would like answered.

Most remarkably, the student playing Iago changed their answer to similar questions, depending on who asked it. For example, both 'Roderigo' and 'Othello' asked why he was setting up his plot against Othello, but 'Iago's' response reflected the character's deception and use of Roderigo in the plot itself, as well as the student's own interpretation of Iago's behaviour across the play.

3. Debate

History

In this History lesson, the teacher created a clear structure leading to a final debate:

I. 45 minutes was spent focused on content to ensure that the students were secure with the knowledge needed for the debate.
II. The students were given the debate topic and had to write as much evidence for each side of the debate as possible.

III. Practising reading out loud: Every student then had to read each piece of evidence out loud. The teacher explained that a huge part of debating is the preparation and how that helps with confidence for speaking as it allows them to have a script etc.

IV. Movement and organising ideas: Each student wrote down 2 pieces of evidence for each side of the debate on pieces of paper, then together they all had to organise to form cohesive arguments (used concentric circle strategy, strongest argument at the centre).

V. Each student was allocated a number (for the running order of the debate) and wrote a mini speech using the organised evidence.

VI The students had to stand up and each one deliver their speech.

When reflecting after the lesson, the teacher observed that *the students were very engaged with the process and grew in confidence throughout - all agreed that they preparation and repetition helped them feel better about the speech element*.

Breaking down the debate preparation into different stages was considered to be extremely effective. The teacher had been *gradually introducing them to the debate structure over a few weeks. It is much less daunting for them and allows them time to process the concept of debating.*

The teacher also highlighted the importance of having *really secure knowledge initially,* as this impacted positively on the students' confidence.

4. Talk Triads

English:

In one English lesson the students were presented with a statement in the style of an A Level exam question, which offered an opinion on Iago in the play Othello. After individual thinking and preparation time, the students moved into small groups. One student was asked to listen/record the ideas shared, and the others discussed their responses using the "Talk Tactics". After the first round of discussion the initial ideas were shared with the whole group. In round 2, a new student became the listener/recorder and the other students had to find a counter-position or alternative to the ideas they'd shared in the first round of discussion.

This strategy was considered to work well. The students *were much more vocal, and listened and talked to each other rather than directly to me as they have in previous years. This helped to move the classroom talk dynamic from student-teacher-student 'ping pong' to a more generative conversation.*

The teacher reflected after the lesson that the approach could be improved further *by assigning roles from the talk tactics shared by Voice 21, so that the focus moves to building ideas and co-constructing an argument.*

5. Fed-in Facts (adapted: 'yes/yes, but')

English:

In one English lesson an adapted version of 'fed-in facts' was used as part of structured pair talk. The focus was the drafting of an answer to an exam-style essay question. The discussion had 3 parts and involved two rounds of initial thinking time.

Part 1: *In round one the students wrote their immediate responses to an example exam question on to mini whiteboards . They were the given a second round of thinking prompts (fed-in facts), offering alternative perspectives on answering the question, to build their immediate ideas. Students then discussed this in pairs before writing a summarised thesis statement on a post-it note.*

Part 2: After this first discussion, the students explored and analysed the assigned extract that they would receive in an exam practice. After each stage in the discussions, the students were asked to return to their first ideas on the post-it note, and to change or add to it as they saw fit.

Plenary:

At the very end of the lesson, the teacher adopted a talk tactic: 'Yes and/yes but'. *In previous iterations, students had bounced their ideas back and forth in pairs, using the introductory phrase 'yes and...' or 'yes, but...' to challenge or build on the previous speakers ideas. In this lesson, after all our reading and thinking, I explained students were going to do this as a chain, down the table, responding each in return. I started them off by reiterating the opinion given in the exam question.*

The students all spoke clearly and meaningfully; all their comments responded to the previous speaker's ideas, and they all offered different insights, showing they had listened to all those who had spoken before them.

The teacher reflected after the lesson that the oracy techniques they had used *helped explicitly show that ideas and interpretations take dialogue and time to evolve.* Building in two early rounds of thinking ensured that the students *felt confident in speaking to their partners about their ideas.* They also observed that several students *have become much more confident in expressing their ideas and sharing in front of the class*. The teacher believes that this is because talk has been *normalised and expected throughout the lesson.*

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