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CONSTRUCTIVE
TALK

Strategies for behaviour management and talk-based tasks

in challenging classrooms

Chapter 1

Talk under attack?

An overview of the debate

A chronology of talk's place in the curriculum

A creative phase for talk?

1965 Andrew Wilkinson coins the word 'oracy'

1967 The Plowden Report puts the child at the centre of the educational process and states that spoken language plays a central role in learning

1969 Publication of *Language, the Learner and the School* by Barnes, Britton and Rosen

1973 Action research groups on oracy in primary schools

1974 Bullock Report, *A Language for Life*, suggests that language competence grows through the interaction of writing, talk, reading and experience

1977 Harold Rosen, while at London University, establishes an archive of recordings celebrating the rich variety of pupils' language

1986 National Oracy Project established

The battle begins?

1987 National Curriculum Task Group on Assessment and Testing, chaired by Professor Paul Black, produces new recommendations for assessment that include a ten-point scale for measuring standards in English

1988 The Kingman Report puts forward a model of the English language in use and makes recommendations for the teaching of knowledge about language in Initial Teacher Training

1989 Language in the National Curriculum (LINC) project set up to develop teaching materials to improve knowledge about language

1989 The Cox Report suggests that the three strands of English, Speaking and Listening, Reading and Writing, should be of equal value

1990 National Curriculum created five attainment targets (four at Key Stage 3), later changed to three. Speaking and Listening was a separate and equal component of the curriculum. An integrated approach emphasised

1991 LINC teaching materials censored by Tim Eggar (Minister of State)

1992 Ofsted established

1993 National Curriculum Council (NCC) publishes *National Curriculum English: The Case for Revising the Order*

1993 SATS tests introduced based on assessing of reading and writing at Key Stages 1, 2, 3. Widespread boycott of Key Stage 3 tests

1995 Following the Dearing Review a slimmed down version *English in the National Curriculum* is published by the DfE

1996 National Literacy Task Force introduced the principle of National Literacy targets

1996–8 National Literacy Project

1998 National Literacy Strategy and Framework for Teaching focused on reading and writing

A new, eclectic phase?

2000 Curriculum 2000 – schools should cover three strands of English

2003 Qualifications and Curriculum Authority Conference on 'The Grammar of Talk'

2003 Excellence and Enjoyment

2003 Primary and Secondary National Strategies introduced, incorporating the National Numeracy Strategy and the National Literacy Strategy

2003 QCA issues new materials on Speaking and Listening

(Source: This chronology has been adapted and developed from information in Cox, B (1996) *Cox on the Battle for the English Curriculum*.)

The inclusion of speaking and listening as a separate profile component in our recommendations reflected the working group's conviction that they are of central importance to children's development. The value of talk in all subjects as a means of promoting pupils' understanding, and of evaluating their progress, is now widely understood.

Cox, B (1991)

and use these insights to develop oral skills and guide future teaching plans.

The Richmond English Record (see Figure 10.1) is a useful grid for analysing the higher-order skills that pupils are using and gives the teacher an opportunity to record the group response. Notes on observations can be kept in an exercise book or a file with dates; this will be useful to refer back to when writing up reports in the same way as pupils' oral evaluations can assist this process.

An aide-mémoire of things to look for (tick those features observed)

Look for signs of evaluative and reflective thinking:

questioning
commenting
repeating
participating
describing
responding
reinforcing
suggesting
. . .

arguing
discussing
requesting
reasoning
persuading
conceding
encouraging
. . .

reflecting
. . .

Name:

Date:

Activity: Size of group:

Record of observation:

(Initials)

supporting
asserting
planning
collaborating
initiating
narrating
sequencing
stating
. . .

speculating
hypothesising
negotiating
justifying
categorising
recalling
comparing
. . .

Look for communication strategies:

listening attentively
body language
gestures
eye contact

facial expressions
awareness of audience
bludgeoning
causing silences
. . .

Figure 10.1 Speaking and listening observation sheet.
Source: The Richmond English Record (1989).

Engagement This is when students encounter new information or material	
Exploration This is when students explore that new information	
Transformation Students are required to use their understanding to work with the information to make decisions	
Presentation The students present their findings to an interested audience	
Reflection Students look at what they have learned and the process they have gone through	
Notes/Comments	

Figure 11.1 A model for small group learning – grid for staff training.

Source: This table is derived from information found in Cook, J, Forrestral, P, Reid, J (1989) *Small Group Learning in the Classroom* Chalkface Press.

Transformation: stage 3

The trainer discussed some of the key issues involved in establishing successful group work, e.g. classroom ethos, the need for careful planning and ground rules for talk to ensure that the groups worked well. The group was then divided into two smaller groups. Group A was asked to produce on a large sheet some ground rules for talk in challenging classrooms (see Figure 11.3). Group B was asked to produce an *aide-mémoire* for teachers when planning for talk, again on a large sheet (see Figure 11.4).