Myatt & Co
films for teachers and leaders

The oracy shift - Omar Jennings and Mike Gardner

Far from being a temporary trend, oracy is a core component of education, vital for attainment, inclusion, and preparing young people for life beyond school. In education, work, and civic life, the ability to think, reason, and solve problems together through talk is fundamental. Research from psychology, linguistics, and neuroscience shows that human intelligence is collective, and that language enables people to think and reason together.

The UK's Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR) highlights the importance of spoken language and identifies inequities in how it is taught and supported. It notes that some pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or with additional needs, are less likely to develop strong communication skills unless schools intervene deliberately. CAR recommends clearer guidance and a structured approach to oracy, alongside frameworks for reading and writing, to ensure it is embedded consistently across the curriculum.

In this recording, Omar Jennings and Mike Gardner discuss how schools can embed oracy as a protected, long-term priority rather than leaving it to chance or "initiative status". They explore how leadership can build a culture that values language, learning, and inclusion equally, and how oracy can help all pupils communicate, reason, and collaborate confidently.

They also share practical, evidence-informed examples of classroom practice, including approaches to vocabulary instruction, repeated reading, dual coding, and creating safe, dialogic classroom spaces. The discussion covers curriculum design, staff development, and workload management, highlighting ways to protect staff wellbeing while sustaining high-quality oracy practice.

Reflection questions

For teachers
- How do I create classroom spaces where pupils can develop their oracy skills safely and confidently?
- In what ways do I explicitly teach vocabulary and language structures to support comprehension for all pupils, particularly those with less exposure to spoken English at home?
- How can I use dialogue, repeated reading, and dual coding strategies to embed oracy as a consistent part of learning, rather than a supplementary activity?
- How do I help pupils reflect on how they are developing as communicators, critical thinkers, and collaborators, not just as readers or writers?
- What small changes could I make tomorrow to ensure that talk and discussion are integrated across all lessons and subjects?

For curriculum leaders
- How does our curriculum ensure the progressive development of oracy across all year groups and subjects?

- Where do pupils encounter opportunities to use language for reasoning, explaining, and problem-solving, rather than only responding to questions?
- How do we ensure that assessment recognises growth in communication, comprehension, and vocabulary, alongside academic outcomes?
- How do we support teachers to embed evidence-informed oracy strategies in ways that are tailored to their classroom contexts?
- Does our department have a shared understanding of what strong oracy practice looks like and how it contributes to pupils' overall learning and personal development?

For pastoral leaders
- How do I help pupils feel that their voice matters and that using language confidently is valued throughout the school?
- In what ways do we create supportive routines, mentoring, or assemblies that encourage reflection, dialogue, and mutual understanding?
- How am I modelling clear, empathetic communication and active listening in interactions with pupils and colleagues?
- What structures or practices help to reduce anxiety around speaking and listening for pupils who may lack confidence or exposure to English at home?

For senior leaders
- How clearly is the school's approach to oracy articulated and embedded across the curriculum and throughout school life?
- Are staff wellbeing and sustainable workload considerations central when implementing oracy-focused initiatives and curriculum reforms?
- How do we ensure that evaluation of oracy programs is evidence-informed, context-sensitive, and scaled thoughtfully?
- What systems are in place to celebrate progress in pupils' communication skills alongside academic outcomes?
- How are leaders building a culture where teaching staff feel supported to embed oracy, reflect on practice, and innovate without compromising wellbeing?