

Oracy curriculum, culture and assessment toolkit

MAXWELL, Bronwen, BURNETT, Cathy, REIDY, John, WILLIS, Benjamin and DEMACK, Sean

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Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit

Evaluation report and Executive summary

June 2015

Independent evaluators:

Dr Bronwen Maxwell, Professor Cathy Burnett, Dr John Reidy, Ben Willis, Sean Demack

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)



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For more information about the EEF or this report please contact:

Robbie Coleman

Research and Communications Manager
Education Endowment Foundation
9th Floor, Millbank Tower
21-24 Millbank
SW1P 4QP

p: 020 7802 1679

e: robbie.coleman@eefoundation.org.uk

w: www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk

About the evaluator

The project was independently evaluated by a team from the Centre for Education and Inclusion Research at Sheffield Hallam University.

The evaluation was directed by Dr Bronwen Maxwell. The project director was supported by Professor Cathy Burnett, Dr John Reidy, Ben Willis and Sean Demack.

Contact details:

Dr Bronwen Maxwell

Centre for Education and Inclusion Research
Sheffield Hallam University
Unit 7 Science Park
Howard Street
Sheffield
S1 1WB

p: 0114 225 5166

e: b.maxwell@shu.ac.uk

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Executive Summary

The project

This report evaluates a developmental project designed by School 21 and the University of Cambridge to improve Year 7 students' oracy skills. The project involved developing an Oracy Skills Framework, which sets out the physical, linguistic, cognitive, and social-emotional oracy skills required by students for education and life. Other components which were informed by this framework are:

- a dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum comprising weekly oracy lessons;
- oracy in every lesson;
- building a whole school oracy culture; and
- an Oracy Assessment Toolkit.

These components were piloted and further developed with Year 7 students within School 21 from September 2013 to July 2014. During the final stages of the project the components were brought together to create an 'Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit' that can be adopted by other schools and a website was created, Voice 21 (<http://voice21.org/>), containing guidance and resources for schools using the Toolkit.

This report focuses on an evaluation of:

1. The approaches and materials which formed the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit, including an indicative impact finding on the impact on Year 7 pupils in School 21.
2. What further development of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit is needed and would enable a more robust evaluation of its impact.

What did the project find?

Oracy Skills Framework - The Oracy Skills Framework provided an appropriate and effective structure to support the design, review and refinement of School 21's Year 7 oracy curriculum. It effectively underpinned the development of an assessment tool which supports diagnostic and formative assessment in oracy, and tracking of students' progress.

Year 7 oracy curriculum - The curriculum appears to have been well designed to provide sound foundations for the development of oracy skills with particular strengths in supporting persuasive talk and talk for presentational purposes as well as in formal contexts. A number of elements remain under development and a strengthening of the cognitive strand, including provision for exploratory talk, is required. The curriculum also needs to emphasise the need to address oracy within a diverse range of informal as well as formal contexts and explore the appropriateness of talk to context.

Oracy in every lesson - The commitment to promote oracy across the curriculum, and in every lesson, has ensured that School 21 staff and students possess and utilise a shared language for oracy and are familiar with a range of approaches for organising, promoting and reviewing talk. Students have opportunities to use talk within a diverse range of motivating contexts and for different purposes. However, further consideration of how to engage students in exploratory talk and how this supports learning across the curriculum is required.

Whole school oracy culture - The multi-stranded approach to embedding oracy across School 21 has been effective in generating commitment from students and staff.

Oracy Assessment Toolkit - The Oracy Assessment Toolkit provides a useful tool for measuring students' oracy skills along with a range of support materials which if used appropriately, following training, should enhance the reliability of the tool.

Indicative impact - Findings from the pre and post Ravens Progressive Matrices tests, administered by the evaluators, showed no impact of the intervention on student's non-verbal reasoning skills. However, tests undertaken by the University of Cambridge using the prototype Oracy Assessment Toolkit developed for this project provided a tentative indication that the intervention had a positive impact on students' oracy skills. As explained below neither of these tests were able to provide conclusive evidence of the impact of the intervention.

How was the project conducted?

The evaluation was undertaken alongside the development of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit and is therefore primarily formative, with the main purpose of supporting the further development of the project. These formative findings are informed by a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection including: observations of oracy teaching, teaching of other subjects and whole school oracy activity; interviews and focus groups with the School 21 and University of Cambridge project teams, School 21 senior leaders, oracy teachers, teachers of other subjects, and students; and a review of the Voice 21 website and other documentary evidence.

It was not appropriate at this initial stage of development to attempt to provide a robust measurement of impact. Two indicative quantitative measures of impact were captured:

1. The Raven's Progressive Matrices Test - a non-verbal reasoning test. Pre and post test results at the beginning and end of the academic year for 20 Year 7 students from School 21 were compared with 18 Year 7 students from a comparison school with similar characteristics.
2. The prototype Oracy Assessment Toolkit created by the University of Cambridge. This was used with 12 Year 7 students in School 21 and 12 Year 7 students in a comparator school on a pre and post basis spanning five months within the academic year.

A number of factors severely limit the confidence that can be placed in the measurement of impact that was possible during this project. These include: the lack of an existing standardised test that accurately measures the oracy skills that the project was setting out to develop; impact measurement being undertaken at the same time that the project was being developed; and the project only being implemented in one school.

How much does it cost?

This has been a developmental project in one school and therefore, at this stage, there is not an established cost for the intervention and an assessment of cost effectiveness cannot be made. School 21 estimates that the cost of providing training for local schools would be approximately £6,000 per school. In addition, participating schools would need to fund participants' travel and any necessary cover costs.

Training activity	Cost
One full day of CPD including visit to School 21 for all school staff	£3,500
Four twilight sessions for teachers delivering the dedicated oracy Year 7 curriculum	£2,000
Attendance at three focus groups by a senior leader and one nominated oracy lead teacher (assuming 6 schools participate in the focus groups)	£500

The Voice 21 website resources and the assessment tool resources on the University of Cambridge website are freely available to any school.

Key Conclusions

1. The Oracy Skills Framework provides a useful tool for schools wishing to review and develop their approach to oracy. The associated Oracy Assessment Toolkit provides teachers with a tool that can be used diagnostically and to track students' progress in developing oracy skills.
2. The Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit as implemented in School 21 appears to provide a sound foundation for the development of oracy skills, with particular strengths in supporting persuasive talk and talk for presentational purposes and in formal contexts. This multi-stranded approach may demand some fundamental shifts in approach for any new school adopting it, including allocating dedicated curriculum time, cultural changes and whole staff training.
3. Further refinement of the curriculum and associated resources is required to highlight the role, nature and development of exploratory talk and to ensure diverse opportunities for oracy, formal and non-formal, are provided. The supporting website requires development to provide an effective professional development resource for other schools.
4. It was not possible at this stage of development to provide a valid measurement of impact. Piloting in other schools and further research would be required prior to a randomised control trial of the intervention to establish a stronger evidence base on the impact on oracy skills and attainment across subjects. Research is also required on how the intervention is interpreted in other schools, and on the opportunities and barriers that arise when implementing these approaches at other sites.

1. Introduction

1.1 Project

This development project comprised two main phases: a design phase from January to July 2013 and a pilot stage which included further developmental work from September 2013 to July, 2014.

In the first phase the University of Cambridge developed an Oracy Skills Framework (Appendix 1), which sets out the oracy skills needed by students for learning and life, and an Oracy Assessment Toolkit. The Oracy Skills Framework has informed the design of all elements of the project. During phase one School 21 began to codify the approaches that they were already taking to support students' oracy and developed further strategies and resources to support the development of oracy.

During the second phase School 21 piloted three interrelated approaches to developing oracy, namely: a dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum where one lesson a week is spent teaching oracy; oracy in every lesson; and a whole school oracy culture. In addition the Oracy Assessment Toolkit developed in the design phase was tested by the University of Cambridge in School 21. Further development and refinement work on all aspects of the project continued throughout the pilot phase.

During the final stages of the project School 21 brought together the project strands to create an 'Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit' that can be adopted by other schools. This Toolkit comprises:

- **The Oracy Skills Framework** – which sets out the physical, linguistic, cognitive and social and emotional oracy skills that students need to succeed in learning and life.
- **A dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum** – including units, lesson plans and resources for weekly oracy lessons.
- **Oracy in every lesson** – including strategies for developing oracy in other subjects and enhancing learning in other subjects by using oracy approaches.
- **A whole school oracy culture** – strategies and techniques to embed an oracy culture.
- **The Oracy Assessment Toolkit** – which can be used by teachers to track students' progress against the skills in the Oracy Skills Framework.

To provide guidance and resources for schools wishing to use the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit School 21 developed a website Voice 21 (<http://voice21.org/>). This is linked to, and supplemented by, a University of Cambridge webpage (<http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/oracytoolkit/>) that provides additional resources and guidance on the Oracy Skills Framework and the Oracy Assessment Toolkit.

1.2 Background evidence

The intervention aims to establish a whole school approach to developing oracy. Research over many years has demonstrated the central role of talk in learning across the curriculum (Barnes and Todd, 1976; Mercer, 2008; Alexander, 2001) and the need to support students in developing a broad 'repertoire' of talk. An oracy curriculum that supports talk for learning might therefore be expected to include a range of opportunities for different kinds of talk. As Alexander (2012: 4) argues,

Students need, for both learning and life, not only to be able to provide relevant and focused answers but also to learn how to pose their own questions and how to use talk to narrate, explain, speculate, imagine, hypothesise, explore, evaluate, discuss, argue, reason and justify.

In a presentation given during a Department for Education seminar on oracy, for example, Alexander (2012) argued that there is 'robust evidence' for the relationship between the quality of classroom talk and attainment in core subjects. Indeed, a series of quasi-experimental studies have correlated:

- group discussion with learning, with impacts for example on scientific understanding (e.g. Rivard and Straw, 2000)
- mathematics and reading (Kutnick and Berdondini, 2009)
- an explicit focus on exploratory talk with reasoning (Mercer et al., 1999).

Employers have also called for the need to ensure that students develop effective communication skills, and the ability to talk for persuasive purposes has been linked to effective participation in civic and social life (Hartshome, 2011).

Many teachers and schools however remain uncertain about the explicit teaching and assessment of oracy. Understanding progression and attainment in oracy is problematic as talk is by nature ephemeral and consequently difficult to record and analyse, and people will speak differently in different contexts. Consequently the efficacy of talk needs to be assessed in relation to purpose, audience and context. There have been various moves to raise the profile and status of oracy across the curriculum in England including *The National Oracy Project* (Norman, 1992) and the inclusion of speaking and listening guidelines for *Assessing Student Progress* (QCDA, 2008). However, as the University of Cambridge team highlights (Mercer et al., 2014), oracy has received far less attention than reading and writing and its scope has been reduced in the new National Curriculum (DfE, 2014). This is particularly the case at Key Stage 3, where the programme of study foregrounds opportunities for formal speaking, such as presentations and debates. The new National Curriculum includes less emphasis on talk for learning than the previous curriculum, although the role of talk across the curriculum is acknowledged, particularly in Key Stages 1 and 2.

With these developments in mind, it is worth noting that this report sometimes distinguishes between the development of talk for presentational purposes and talk for learning and reflection. We recognise that this distinction is rather problematic. The very process of deciding how best to communicate ideas, for example, is likely to involve clarification and reflection on learning that itself may enable students to develop greater understanding. However, we suggest this distinction is helpful as it acknowledges different emphases that we might expect from an oracy curriculum and this has implications for what we expect from students' talk in different contexts. Barnes and Todd, for example, in their seminal research into classroom group work articulate this distinction by differentiating between the exploratory talk associated with learning which '*is usually marked by frequent hesitations, rephrasings, false starts and changes of direction*' (1976: 28) and the '*final draft language [in speech or writing] is the contrary of exploratory: far from accompanying (and displaying) the detours and dead-ends of thinking, it seeks to exclude them and present a finished article, well-shaped and polished*' (Barnes and Todd, 1976, p. 108). While 'final draft language' may be easier to evaluate (not least because it is easier to 'hear'), repeated studies have suggested that the effective promotion of exploratory talk can have a significant impact on learning. An oracy curriculum therefore might be expected to make a significant contribution to promoting a 'dialogic space' (Wegerif, 2007) in which '*different ideas, perspectives and understandings can be collectively explored, and material can be modified to record the development of a discussion and capture emerging ideas*' (Mercer and Littleton, 2007: 90). Influential work by Mercer and colleagues has generated guidelines and resources to support exploratory talk and a series of experimental studies have demonstrated the impact of this work (see Mercer and Littleton, 2007). Research involving multimodal analysis of collaborative learning has also highlighted how individuals draw on different modes such as gesture, posture and gaze as they negotiate meaning (Taylor, 2013).

While further research is needed in this area (Howe and Abedin, 2013), the discussion above suggests there is a strong mandate for more effectively promoting oracy in schools and that an oracy curriculum might reasonably be expected to:

- support the development of talk for learning;
- provide opportunities for students to use talk effectively in diverse contexts and for a range of purposes and audiences including those associated with different subjects;

- equip students to reflect on their use of talk and make choices about the kind of talk that is appropriate to different contexts.

The main purpose of this evaluation is to consider the potential of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit developed by School 21 and the University of Cambridge to make a valuable contribution to practice in each of these areas.

1.3 Evaluation objectives¹

Research aims

This is a formative evaluation which aimed to support the development of the project by providing:

- indicative evidence of the potential of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit to impact on student attainment;
- an independent view on the quality and fitness for purpose of:
 - the Oracy Skills Framework, the dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum, approaches to oracy in every lesson and approaches to building a whole school oracy culture;
 - the Oracy Assessment Toolkit, methods of administering the tool and associated training materials;
 - the CPD and resources (on the Voice 21 website) provided to support the implementation of the intervention;
 - guidance on developing intervention approaches, materials and training that are replicable and potentially testable through a randomised control trial.

Evaluation questions

1. Impact

- 1.1. What has been the impact of the pilot on the development of students' oracy skills?

2. Oracy Skills Framework

- 2.1. How well does the Oracy Skills Framework represent the skills required by children and young people to succeed in education, employment and life?

3. Dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum, oracy in every lesson and whole school oracy culture

- 3.1. To what extent do these approaches provide the resources needed to enable children and young people to develop the skills identified in the Oracy Skills Framework?
- 3.2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches and the proposals for deployment, with a particular focus on their usability and impact on students' engagement and learning?
- 3.3. In what ways can these approaches and proposals for deployment be improved?

4. Oracy Assessment Toolkit

- 4.1. Is the assessment being administered consistently?
- 4.2. How well does the assessment guidance support consistent administration of the test?
- 4.3. How reliable and valid is the assessment tool as a measure of oracy skills?
- 4.4. What changes need to be made to the assessment design, administration and guidance to ensure reliability and validity and consistent administration?

5. Supporting CPD and resources

- 5.1. To what extent do the design and delivery of CPD and the presentation of resources on the Voice 21 website fit with the current knowledge base on effective CPD?
- 5.2. How effective is the CPD in developing: teachers' knowledge and understanding of how to deliver the oracy curriculum/ implement oracy in the wider curriculum; the motivation and

¹ Due to the developmental nature of the project, the initial intentions for the intervention design have evolved and changed over the project period. Consequently, the original evaluation aims and questions have been modified to ensure that the key components of the intervention, as they emerged, have been subject to independent evaluation.

confidence necessary to implement the curricula; and their ability to effectively implement the curricula?

5.3. In what ways can the CPD delivery and the Voice 21 website be improved?

6. Replicability of the intervention

6.1. Are the outputs of the pilot usable as a set of inputs for use in other schools? Where are the risks to consistency and coherence, and how can they be overcome?

1.4 Project team

Delivery team: School 21 and the University of Cambridge

The project delivery team comprises staff from School 21 and the University of Cambridge. School 21 focused on the development, implementation and codification of: the dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum; oracy in every lesson and the whole school oracy culture. In addition School 21 created the Voice 21 website to host the resources produced in this project and proposed a CPD package to support other schools wishing to develop their approaches to oracy. Delivery of the project at School 21 was directed by Edward Fidoe (Chief Executive Officer - 21 Trust) supported by project manager Ben Mortimer. Daniel Shindler, a School 21 drama and oracy teacher, has led a core team of teachers in developing the oracy curriculum and resources. Holly Page was employed to populate the Voice 21 website with the materials produced during the project. The School 21 head and deputy head teachers have championed oracy across the school. The school has been supported by an expert advisory board.

The University of Cambridge team comprises Professor Neil Mercer, Paul Warwick and Dr Ayesha Ahmed. The team developed the Oracy Skills Framework in consultation with a range of academic and professional experts. This included undertaking a review of research and innovation in oracy, including studies from a range of sub-fields including speech and language development and the teaching of English to speakers of other languages to underpin the development of the framework (see Mercer et al., 2014). In addition, the University of Cambridge team developed the Oracy Assessment Toolkit and tested this with students from School 21 and a comparator school. The team undertook a review of the validity and reliability of the tool, which is also reported in Mercer et al., 2014.

Evaluation team: Sheffield Hallam University

The Centre for Education and Inclusion Research at Sheffield Hallam University was responsible for the evaluation design, qualitative data collection, administering of the Raven's Progressive Matrices Test, qualitative fieldwork, professional review of documentary evidence, analysis and reporting. The team comprised:

Dr Bronwen Maxwell	Project Director and CPD expert
Professor Cathy Burnett	Literacy and curriculum expert
Dr John Reidy	Test design and RCT expert
Ben Willis	Project Manager
Sean Demack	Statistical advisor on potential RCT design

The Language and Literacy research group at Sheffield Hallam University contributed to the review of the Voice 21 website.

1.5 Ethical review

The evaluation was approved by the ethics committee at Sheffield Hallam University. Opt-in consent was sought from parents/carers prior to the trial at School 21. The rationale for seeking opt-in parental consent for the intervention group was that consent covered not only participation in the Raven's

Progressive Matrices tests but also lesson observations and student focus groups conducted by the evaluation team. In addition opt-out consent was sought directly from students. Opt-in consent was also gained from all staff who were interviewed or attended focus groups at School 21. At the control school it was not deemed necessary to request opt-in parental consent because student involvement related solely to testing. Opt-in consent was obtained from the head teacher of the control school and opt-out consent was obtained from parents. Students had the opportunity to opt out prior to the tests. All consent documentation was accompanied with a bespoke information sheet (Appendices 3-8).

2. Methodology

2.1 Intervention

The end point of this development project was the codification of an Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit and the production of the Voice 21 website to host the intervention resources. In this section we describe this intervention in the form that it is envisaged by School 21 in their final report (Fidoe, 2014). It is important to note that the evaluation was taking place while the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit was being developed.

The key components of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit are:

- an Oracy Skills Framework
- a dedicated Year 7 curriculum
- oracy in every lesson
- oracy culture
- the Oracy Assessment Toolkit.

We describe each of these components in more detail below.

The Oracy Skills Framework

The Oracy Skills Framework (Appendix 1) identifies the skills needed to be able to communicate effectively in a range of settings and styles, using a wide vocabulary with fluency. The Framework isolates key components of spoken language, breaking them into four areas: **physical**, **linguistic**, **cognitive** and **social and emotional**. The Cambridge team identify these strands as ranging from

...the 'physical' (voice projection, gesture and so on), 'linguistic' (using appropriate vocabulary, choosing the right register and language variety for the occasion), 'cognitive' (such as organising content well, taking account of the level of understanding of an audience) and 'social and emotional' (such as managing group activity, taking an active role in collaborative problem solving, and so on). (Mercer et al., 2014: 3)

The Oracy Skills Framework is intended to be relevant in any context, formal or informal, within and beyond school, and underpins the design of the dedicated Year 7 curriculum, approaches to oracy in every lesson and the Oracy Assessment Toolkit. Explanation of the specific items in the oracy skills framework can be found in (Mercer et al., 2014: 53-57).

Dedicated Year 7 curriculum

One lesson a week is dedicated to teaching oracy throughout Year 7. The aim of this dedicated oracy curriculum is to provide students with a variety of contexts in which to develop all four skill areas. The curriculum continues to be constantly reviewed and developed and the supporting Voice 21 website continues to be updated. Outline plans, supporting resources and exemplar video clips have been developed for the four units of work that make up the dedicated oracy curriculum and are available on the Voice 21 website. These are:

Unit 1: Finding our voice: This module aims to equip students with a range of strategies and protocols to support them in their listening, talking and ability to work effectively in group situations. It also familiarises students with the four strands of the Oracy Skills Framework.

Unit 2: Performance poetry: Performance poetry is used as a vehicle to explore effective talking and listening in small groups. The module focuses particularly on the physical and social and emotional strands of oracy.

Unit 3: Persuasive techniques: In this module students explore a range of different formal and informal talk scenarios in which persuasive techniques are deployed and reflect on how they might best share their views with others. There is a focus on well-being and on the linguistic strand of oracy.

Unit 4: Ignite: This module prepares students for a five-minute individual talk on a subject chosen by the student which is delivered without notes to an audience. Students are encouraged to use the techniques that they have acquired over the year and draw on skills from all four strands of the Oracy Skills Framework to deliver their speech.

Appendix 2 outlines some of the ways in which School 21 has embedded the Oracy Skills Framework within the dedicated oracy curriculum.

Oracy in every lesson

School 21 has identified a number of teaching and learning strategies that can be used in all subject areas to support the further development of students' oracy skills as well as to support learning in the subject. The intention is to use oracy approaches in every lesson. These include the techniques included in Unit 1 of the dedicated oracy curriculum, group work protocols, use of peer critique, ghost reading, collective writing and robust vocabulary teaching/use of tiered vocabulary.

Oracy culture

A key feature of the School 21 approach to oracy is the development of a whole school oracy culture. The Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit includes four initiatives to support a whole school oracy culture:

Assemblies: Students sit in the round and engage in interactive activities, often in coaching groups of six or twelve students. These activities cover many of the oracy strategies taught in the dedicated Year 7 oracy lessons, for example types of talk, listening strategies and working in groups. Assemblies are also intended to be a CPD tool for teachers who are able to observe other teachers modelling oracy teaching.

Coaching groups: Each year group is split into coaching groups formed of twelve students and one teacher who meet together on a daily basis. Students are encouraged to reflect on their learning and behaviour and coaching groups may be used to explore morals and values and discuss social issues. Oracy skills are developed through talking points and open questions that stimulate discussion and debate.

E-portfolios: Instead of a traditional parents' evening, students are required to draw on their oracy skills to deliver a selection of their best work to a panel comprising their parents, coach and a school governor and respond to the panel's questions.

Story of learning: School 21 believes that the experiences that a student has at school should form a 'story of learning'. In addition to recounting this in their e-portfolio, students are required to speak passionately about their successes by recounting their story of learning when guiding visitors around the school and meeting with potential future students and their parents at open evenings.

Oracy Assessment Toolkit

The **Oracy Assessment Toolkit** is based on measuring the skills set out in the Oracy Skills Framework and comprises:

- a set of three initial and end of year oracy assessment tasks

- a set of six additional tasks to be used for assessment for learning
- a rating scheme for assessing students' performance on these tasks and for giving students feedback.

Full details of the assessment tasks including instructions for teachers and for students, the rating scheme and rating proformas for teacher assessment and proformas for self and peer assessment (assessment for learning tasks only) can be found in Mercer et al. (2014) and at <http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/oracytoolkit/>.

In summary the Oracy Assessment Toolkit includes three assessment tasks that can be conducted at the beginning and end of Year 7: a formal presentational speech; an instructional activity whereby one student enables another to complete a specific task; and a group discussion in which three students are asked to reach joint conclusions about a specific topic. The rating scheme enables teachers to give students a rating for each of the skills from the Oracy Skills Framework that are relevant to the task. Teachers can use this information to create a skills profile for each student and plan teaching to meet students' needs. Using this group of assessment tasks at the beginning and end of the year enables teachers to track students' progress. The rating schemes as used at School 21 during this evaluation are included in Appendix 9. Finalised versions of the instructions and ratings sheets for all three tasks are available electronically on the Voice 21 website (<http://voice21.org/>) and <http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/oracytoolkit/>. Exemplar videos of assessment of the tasks that enable teachers to moderate their grading are available on the University of Cambridge website (<http://sms.cam.ac.uk/collection/1830303>).

In addition to the three assessment tasks described above, the University of Cambridge team have developed six additional assessment for learning tasks which are designed to be used flexibly and adapted to fit with a school's existing curriculum. Details of these and the associated rating schemes and proformas can also be found in Mercer et al. (2014) and at <http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/oracytoolkit/>.

Supporting CPD and resources

School 21 have proposed a package of CPD support for schools wishing to take on the full intervention. This comprises:

- a one-day training session for all staff that includes a visit to School 21 and focuses on whole school oracy strategies and techniques and unit 1 of dedicated year 7 oracy curriculum
- four twilight training sessions for lead oracy teachers focusing on Units 1-4 of the dedicated year 7 oracy curriculum
- three focus groups staged over the first year of implementation. Each group would include one senior leader and one lead oracy teacher from approximately six different schools together with a senior leader and a member of the oracy team from School 21.

In the longer term it is envisaged that schools who are trained by School 21 will go on to lead training for other schools.

This CPD support is supplemented by websites that are freely available to anyone interested in developing oracy. The Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit can be found on the Voice 21 website at <http://voice21.org/> and additional information on the Oracy Assessment Toolkit can be found in the University of Cambridge project report (Mercer et al., 2014). Resources for undertaking the assessments and exemplar videos of assessment grading are available at <http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/oracytoolkit/>.

2.2 Evaluation design and methods

Overall design

As the research aims and questions outlined in Section 1.3 indicate, this was a formative assessment designed primarily to support the development of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit.

The evaluation was undertaken in two stages. The first phase from February to August 2013 was an independent professional review of the plans and materials for developing and assessing oracy that were developed by School 21 and the University of Cambridge in preparation for using with Year 7 students in School 21 in phase 2. In addition to examining documentary evidence the evaluation team conducted telephone interviews with the Project Director and Project Manager at School 21 and the University of Cambridge team. A further meeting was held with the University of Cambridge team to discuss their plans for developing the Oracy Assessment Toolkit and testing its reliability and validity. The findings of this review were reported in an interim report (Maxwell et al., 2013) and shared with the delivery partners and EEF. The report provided a set of questions designed to support development in the second phase of the project., In addition two overarching recommendations were made, namely:

- to set out a clear framework of aims, objectives, outcomes and indicative content for the oracy curriculum that School 21 want to promote
- to take stronger account of the need for replicability in the design of curriculum and CPD approaches and materials.

In this report we focus on the second phase of the evaluation. This ran from September 2013 to July 2014. In this second phase a dedicated Year 7 curriculum was delivered via weekly oracy lessons and a range of strategies were implemented to incorporate oracy in every lesson and underpin a whole school oracy culture. In addition, the Oracy Assessment Toolkit tasks were piloted. Throughout the year School 21 and the University of Cambridge team were engaged in reviewing and further developing the intervention. The data collection activities undertaken by the evaluation team in phase 2 of the evaluation and timings are summarised in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Data collection activities conducted by the evaluation team in phase 2 of the evaluation

Date	Data collection activity
Sept 2013	Raven's Progressive Matrices pre-test administered in School 21 and one control school
Nov 2013	Field visit to School 21: three observations: assembly; drama lesson; mathematics lesson three interviews: project lead, project manager, and English teacher two focus groups: two oracy leads; three teachers of other subjects
Jan 2014	Meeting with University of Cambridge team to review the initial assessments made using the Oracy Assessment Toolkit and discuss their approach to measuring the validity and reliability of the assessment tasks
Feb 2014	Field visit to School 21: one observation: oracy lesson four interviews: project leader and project manager; head teacher; oracy lead; oracy teacher two focus groups: seven pupils; eight teachers - oracy and other subjects
June 2014	Field visit to School 21: two observations: oracy lesson; humanities lesson three interviews: project leader; oracy lead; teacher of another subject

	two focus groups: seven pupils; three teachers - oracy and other subjects
End June 2014	Raven's Progressive Matrices post-test administered in School 21 and control school
July 2014	Assessment of videos of School 21 students undertaking the Oracy Assessment tasks by four secondary English teachers from outside School 21. This activity, managed by the evaluation team, combined an independent check of inter-rater reliability and a focus group to gather teachers' views on using the Oracy Assessment Toolkit.
July/ Aug 2014	Telephone interviews: Project director, School 21 oracy teacher and teacher responsible for developing the Voice 21 website
Oct/Nov 2014	Review of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Voice 21 website and the University of Cambridge's Oracy Assessment Toolkit website the final report produced by School 21 (Fidoe, 2014) the final report produced by the University of Cambridge team (Mercer et al., 2014)
Nov 2014	Telephone interviews: Project director and University of Cambridge team

Measurement of impact

As previously explained, the main purpose of the evaluation was to support the development of the intervention to a stage of being ready for use by other schools. It was not feasible at this initial stage of development, where the intervention was subject to continuous development and only delivered in one school, to provide a robust measurement of impact. However, indicative measures of impact were captured using the Raven's Progressive Matrices non-verbal reasoning test and the Oracy Assessment Toolkit created by the University of Cambridge. We discuss these and their limitations below.

Raven's Progressive Matrices test

To establish the impact of the intervention generally on learning beyond language-related attainment measures it was decided to utilise the Raven's Progressive Matrices as this is a widely used standardised non-verbal reasoning measure. It is also a measure that members of the University of Cambridge team have used in previous research to demonstrate the general impact on learning of an explicit focus on exploratory talk on attainment (e.g. Mercer and Littleton, 2007).

To assess the impact of the intervention on School 21's students' progress in non-verbal reasoning a control school was recruited from the same geographical location with similar characteristics. Initial testing using the Raven's Progressive Matrices took place in mid-September 2013 in both schools. This was the earliest point in the new academic year that the students were able to be tested and was early enough for there to be little impact of the oracy curriculum on non-verbal reasoning at School 21. The students were then tested again using the Progressive Matrices in June 2014.

Students in both School 21 and the control school were tested in September 2013. School 21 asked for consent from parents/carers of all 75 Year 7 students. However, despite repeated requests, consent forms were only returned from the parents/carers of 36 students (14 females, 21 males and 1 student did not record gender). At the control school 19 Year 7 pupils were available (12 females, 7 males) to complete the Raven's Progressive Matrices test on the scheduled day of the test.

The post test was conducted in both schools at the end of June 2014. At School 21, of the 36 students who took the post-test 20 students (10 males, 9 females and 1 student did not record gender) were available on the day of the post-test. In the control school 18 (11 females and 7 males) of the original 19 students who were tested in September 2013 took part in the test in June 2014 (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Number of students given the Raven's Matrices at the pre-intervention stage and those who were then tested again post-intervention

School 21

- 36 students at initial testing
- 20 students at follow-up

Control School

- 19 students at initial testing
- 18 students at follow-up

Students were tested on the Raven's Progressive Matrices on both occasions in groups with all sessions being introduced and overseen by the same researcher from the evaluation team. Testing sessions took between 45 and 60 minutes to complete. Only those students who completed the Raven's Matrices at pre- and post-intervention were included in the inferential statistical analyses. The answers were scored according to the standard scoring template and converted to standardised scores utilising the tables in the Raven's Progressive Matrices Manual. The standardised scores provide age-appropriate scoring norms to aid interpretation of student performance on this particular measure.

A number of factors limit the confidence that can be placed in this measurement of impact. Although the test has been used as a measure of non-verbal reasoning skills it does not constitute a global measure of impact upon non-verbal skills (e.g. mathematical reasoning or spatial ability) but a specific measure of non-verbal reasoning. It also does not measure the full skill set covered by the Oracy Skills Framework that underpins this intervention. Indeed this is the rationale for the University of Cambridge developing an Oracy Assessment Toolkit as part of this project. The continuing development of the interventions between the pre- and post-test also reduces the confidence that can be placed in the findings. It is interesting to note that some students from both the intervention and control schools reacted critically to undertaking the Raven's test and genuinely questioned how it was relevant to talking or oracy.

University of Cambridge pilot Oracy Assessment Toolkit

The University of Cambridge used their pilot Oracy Assessment Toolkit to undertake an initial assessment of 12 students in School 21 and 12 students in a comparison school (a different school to that used as the control school for the Raven's testing) in October 2013 and a follow-up test in April 2014. For full details of the assessment tasks, rating criteria and assessment recording proforma see <http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/oracytoolkit/>. Students undertook three tasks at the pre and post assessments. The tasks were: an individual presentation task, a group talking points task, and a paired instructional task.

In this report we present the evidence from the University of Cambridge's analyses of these assessment results to provide a further indication of the impact of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit. Each assessment was graded as bronze, silver or gold. These ratings were converted to numbers as shown in Appendix 10.

The mean overall task ratings for each task for students from School 21 were then compared with the mean overall task ratings for the comparison school at pre and post test and the difference in means calculated. Further details of the analysis can be found in Mercer et al. (2014: 23-26).

The Cambridge assessment tool has stronger validity as an impact of the oracy intervention than the Raven's Matrices test as it is designed to measure the skills in the Oracy Skills Framework. However, the Cambridge measurement also has limitations: the assessment tool itself was under development between the pre and post test and the sample sizes are small. In addition the assessment tool is not as yet a standardised assessment test.

Qualitative data

As Table 2.1 indicates, qualitative data were collected over the course of the pilot. This comprised three field visits which included observations of teaching and interviews and focus groups with oracy teachers, teachers of other subjects, students, school leaders and the project leaders. These were supplemented by telephone interviews with the delivery team at School 21 and the University of Cambridge team. In addition the evaluation team met with the University of Cambridge team to review the use of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit and the work being undertaken by the team to assess the validity and reliability of the assessment tasks. The evaluation team arranged for a group of secondary English teachers to use the Oracy Assessment Toolkit to assess videos of School 21 students undertaking the assessment tasks to provide an independent measure of inter-rater reliability and to provide additional views on the Oracy Assessment Toolkit. The Voice 21 website, the University of Cambridge Oracy Assessment Toolkit website and associated materials, and the School 21 and University of Cambridge final reports were reviewed by the evaluation team. The Language and Literacy in Education Research Group at Sheffield Hallam University also undertook a review of the Voice 21 website.

The evaluation questions were used as a framework to organise the qualitative data and a thematic analysis of the data was undertaken in relation to each evaluation question.

Participation and recruitment

All 75 students in Year 7 in School 21 were engaged in the oracy intervention throughout the academic year 2013/14. The oracy intervention was an integral part of the overall curriculum and school experience provided for Year 7. Details of the numbers of students in School 21 and the control school who undertook the Raven's Matrices test and of the students whose progress in oracy was measured using the University of Cambridge pilot Oracy Assessment Toolkit are given above.

Protocol violations

At the time the protocol was produced the intended intervention was at a very early stage of development. It was therefore necessary to make some changes to the evaluation questions and data collection activities published in the protocol to ensure that the evaluation matched the emerging intervention design and the intervention activity that took place within the project period. The main changes are described below:

- The protocol assumed that a bank of oracy resources would be developed in the design phase of the project and then piloted in School 21. To better match the developmental nature of the project and School 21's developing codification of the key approaches that support the development and use of oracy skills we have amended the evaluation questions that previously related to 'a bank of interventions' to focus on the dedicated Year 7 curriculum, oracy in every lesson and a whole school oracy culture.
- The evaluation questions were also written on the assumption that a codified package of CPD activity would be delivered to teachers in School 21 as part of the pilot. While staff did participate in a range of professional development activities related to oracy during the pilot period this was an integral part of school CPD activity, rather than a discrete identifiable

activity. This limited the planned evaluation of the intended CPD package. Although observations of CPD activity were not undertaken, teachers were asked about what had supported their professional learning in relation to oracy teaching and learning in interviews and focus groups.

3. Findings: Impact

In this section we present evidence on student progress from the pre and post Raven's Progressive Matrices tests and the pre and post University of Cambridge pilot Oracy Assessment tests. We address the following research question:

What has been the impact of the pilot on the development of students' oracy skills?

As discussed in Section 2.2 we are only able to place limited confidence in the measures of impact presented in this section due to the developmental nature of the project, the location of the project in only one school, and the lack of a standardised test to measure the range of oracy skills that the project was seeking to develop.

We also present qualitative evidence on the impact on student engagement and the practices that appear to underpin this engagement.

3.1 Impact on students' oracy skills and learning

The means and standard deviations for the raw scores and age standardised scores for School 21 and the control schools at the pre- and post-intervention stages for the Raven's Progressive Matrices are presented in Table 3.1. It is apparent from the table that the control school students appear to have performed better at the pre-intervention stage than the intervention school students. However, the difference between the schools was not statistically significant for either the raw scores ($t(36) = 1.05$, $p = .302$, $d = 0.35$) or the age standardised scores ($t(36) = 0.81$, $p = .423$, $d = 0.27$). It would appear therefore that at the time of the initial testing there was no difference in non-verbal reasoning ability between the students in School 21 and those in the control school.

The means and standard deviations for the post test as presented in Table 3.1 indicate that again the control school students performed better overall than the intervention school. Both schools improved in terms of raw scores from pre- to post-intervention assessment; however, the age standardised scores for both schools reduced a little over this time period. The standard scores are important as these are age appropriate scores and thus the post-intervention scores reflect the fact that the students were older at this time of testing. For us to demonstrate the impact of the dedicated Year 7 curriculum, oracy in every lesson and the whole school oracy culture on non-verbal reasoning we would have to show that the Raven's age standardised scores had increased over time and this was not the case.

To statistically evaluate the impact of the oracy curriculum for the intervention school an analysis of covariance was undertaken with the school (intervention vs control) as the between-participants factor and raw scores on the Raven's Matrices as the dependent variable. The pre-intervention Raven's raw scores were entered as the covariate. The analysis showed no significant difference between the two schools post-intervention once the pre-intervention scores had been partialled from the analysis ($F(1,35) = 0.96$, $p = 0.33$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$). As we would expect there was a significant relationship between pre-intervention and post-intervention scores ($F(1,35) = 35.95$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.51$). A similar pattern was seen in the analyses of the age standardised scores on the Raven's Matrices showing that the difference between the schools' post-intervention with the pre-intervention scores partialled out was non-significant ($F(1,35) = 1.23$, $p = .276$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$). These analyses indicate no particular benefit of the oracy curriculum utilised by School 21 in terms of non-verbal reasoning as measured by the Raven's Progressive Matrices.

Table 3.1: Means and standard deviations (in parenthesis) for the students from intervention and control schools for the Raven's Progressive Matrices²

	Pre-intervention		Post-intervention	
	Raw scores	Standard scores	Raw scores	Standard scores
Intervention school (n = 20)	31.25 (6.28)	100.75 (18.37)	32.05 (5.65)	97.757 (16.02)
Control school (n = 18)	33.06 (3.95)	105.00 (13.17)	34.50 (4.60)	104.44 (13.81)

We should note that absence of an improvement in the Raven's scores should not be seen as evidence of an absence of impact of the oracy intervention but rather that there does not seem to be an impact on the non-verbal reasoning skills as measured by the Raven's Progressive Matrices. Additionally, this could indicate a lack of power in these analyses given the rather small sample size.

In summary the pre and post Raven's analyses show that there appears to be no benefit from the oracy curriculum on students' non-verbal reasoning skills. This suggests that the curriculum may not have more general benefits for student attainment beyond improvement in their language skills.

Pre- and post- test using the prototype University of Cambridge Assessment Toolkit

In this section we present the results of the assessments conducted by teachers with 12 School 21 students and 12 students in a comparison school using the prototype Oracy Assessment Toolkit. These analyses, conducted by the University of Cambridge team and reproduced here, are set out in Mercer et al. (2014: 23-26). The evaluation team were not involved in these assessments.

In their first analysis the Cambridge team compared teachers' ratings of the three assessment tasks at the initial (October 2013) and follow-up (April 2014). For School 21 these indicated a very small amount of student progress. The difference between the initial and follow-up task means was +0.47 for the individual presentations (initial mean = 3.64, follow-up = 4.11), +0.80 for the group talking points task (initial mean = 4.20, follow-up = 5.00) and -0.78 for the paired instructional task (initial mean = 4.61, follow-up = 3.83). Likewise, their scores indicate little student progress at the comparison school where the differences between initial and follow-up means were: individual presentations = -0.23 (initial mean = 4.46, follow-up = 4.23); group talking points task = -0.48 (initial mean = 4.50, follow-up = 4.02); paired instructional task = +0.25 (initial mean = 4.75, follow-up = 5.00).

The Cambridge team considered that the low progress may be accounted for by high initial ratings by the teachers who knew the students that they were rating. They therefore sought to eliminate the potential bias by undertaking researcher assessments of the videos of the students undertaking the assessment tasks. These assessments were undertaken by the University of Cambridge research team who were very familiar with the ratings scheme. The results for the researcher ratings are shown in Tables 3.2 to 3.4 below:

Table 3.2: Individual presentation task mean ratings by University of Cambridge researchers

	School 21	Comparison School
Initial task	2.91	3.90
Follow-up task	4.55	4.00
Difference in means	1.64	0.10

² The means included here are only for those students who completed the Raven's Progressive Matrices at both pre-intervention and post-intervention testing phases.

Table 3.3 Group talking points task mean ratings by University of Cambridge researchers

	School 21	Comparison School
Initial task	4.17	2.33
Follow-up task	5.25	3.00
Difference in means	1.08	0.67

Table 3.4: Paired instructional task mean ratings by University of Cambridge researchers

	School 21	Comparison School
Initial task	4.17	2.25
Follow-up task	4.75	2.50
Difference in means	0.58	0.25

These assessments provide a clear indication of progress at School 21 in relation to the individual presentation task and the group talking points task (difference in means +1.64 and +1.08 respectively). There is a less clear, but positive, indication of progress at School 21 in relation to the paired instructional task. As the Cambridge team point out, the paired instructional task was changed between the initial and follow-up test as some students misunderstood the initial task, so less confidence can be placed on the findings from this task.

In comparing the results from School 21 to those from the comparison school at the initial test, the mean ratings for group talking points and the paired instructions task were higher in School 21 than the comparison school, and for the individual presentation the mean ratings at School 21 were lower than the comparison school. The Cambridge team suggest that the noticeably higher initial ratings for School 21 students on the group and paired tasks may reflect the fact that by the time the initial tasks were conducted in October the students had already been introduced to the oracy-led curriculum. The evaluation team would agree with this suggestion. There is no evidence to suggest that the School 21 pupils had higher academic ability at this stage than the comparison school; in fact our analysis of the Raven's Matrices suggests if anything the reverse.

The ratings for School 21 were higher for all the follow-up assessments than those of the comparison school where rates of progress were lower than for School 21. Overall the data indicate that for each task students' progress was greater in School 21 than in the comparison school. The Cambridge team did not have sufficient data to test whether or not the difference was statistically significant and therefore these conclusions should be treated with a good deal of caution.

As we outlined in Section 2, there are some important limitations in using this prototype Oracy Assessment Toolkit to attempt to measure impact at a development stage in a project with a small sample of students in one school. While the Cambridge team claim that the results can '*be cautiously taken as an indication that School 21's oracy-led curriculum is making an impact on the development of children's oracy skills*' (Mercer et al., 2014: 25-26), testing of a larger group of pupils would be necessary to substantiate impact claims.

It is interesting to note that the assessments indicate that students made the most progress in relation to the presentational task. This reflects a key finding from our qualitative work that the School 21 oracy curriculum implemented at School 21 has a particularly strong emphasis on presentational talk. It also supports the explanation given above for the lack of progress found using the Raven's Matrices test, which is a stronger proxy measure of the development of exploratory rather than presentational talk.

3.2 Impact on student engagement

Focus groups with students and classroom observations suggested that there is strong student engagement with the dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum and with using talk to support learning across the curriculum. This seems to be associated with:

- lessons couched in 'real' contexts and meaningful tasks
- children's experiences/perspectives and existing uses of talk are used as the starting point
- clear routines for managing/organising oracy (e.g. coaching groups, protocols for group work)
- shared frameworks for talk (feedback on 'desirable' oracy behaviours; sentence starters)
- the role of coaches in encouraging engagement in the collaborative learning process
- the establishment of 'safe' teaching and learning spaces where many are confident to talk
- opportunities for students to make choices about how to use oracy protocols.

In lessons observed there were multiple opportunities for students to engage in discussion in groupings of varying size. Most students readily engaged in discussion and routinely used the oracy techniques they had been taught, e.g. turn-taking, building on previous speaker, use of sentence stems, within group sessions. Teachers who had worked in other schools felt that students at School 21 had greater confidence to speak in different circumstances than others they had taught. One, for example, felt that the explicit opportunities to present their ideas and views led to higher 'levels of eloquence' (Visit 1 Teacher Focus Group), and another commented that students at School 21,

are more confident and willing to express their ideas and not that bothered by being wrong, in my last school they were just afraid. Here there's like 17 hands go up, in my old school I'd be the one trying to gee everyone up to speak but here it's the opposite' (Teacher interview Visit 3A)

Staff we spoke to at School 21 were also convinced that the focus on oracy is related positively to learning outcomes across the curriculum. The project director told us that students...

...enter below national expectations and we think our data is saying that by the end of Year 7, they're above... You can't disaggregate the success of the students in their maths for example from their talk; progress in maths is well above national average in similar schools and the same in English, and I think that's entirely down to the ability of the children to talk about and reflect on their thinking.

When asked to explain why this may be the case, he focused on the role of talk for learning:

That came across in the maths assessment and it became very obvious that they were used to using talk protocols to solve problems mathematically and how they went about tackling it definitely relying on paired work to do that, and a lot of subjects would emphasise the importance of talk, of working as a group in order to solve a problem, talk can help you, the sort of inter-thinking, the usefulness of talking to other people, sharing ideas.

4. Findings: Oracy Skills Framework

4.1 Introduction

In this section, we begin by considering how well the Oracy Skills Framework (Appendix 1) represents the skills required by children and young people to succeed in education, employment and life. We then report our findings on the application of the framework in School 21 and its effectiveness as a diagnostic tool to identify students' strengths and areas for development and for supporting progression in oracy.

4.2 Structure of framework: The four strands

The Oracy Skills Framework presents oracy development in terms of four strands of skills: **cognitive**; **physical**; **social and emotional**; and **linguistic**. The framework appears to draw on a range of traditions of research related to language and meaning and their role in social interaction, although these are not made explicit. It is recognised that there is overlap between the four strands. However, as the framework is designed to be 'teacher-friendly', it has been designed to be accessible and not overwhelming. As a member of the Cambridge team explained:

There's always this tension between what teachers might genuinely use because it won't take weeks of time to prepare or do and covering things in a totally comprehensive way.

The team expand on this in their final report

Although we have striven to make the framework as comprehensive and accurate as possible, our aim of creating something that would be accessible and useful to practising teachers meant that we had to balance detailed accuracy and complexity with clarity and practical usefulness. We therefore readily admit that our framework might not satisfy the rigorous criteria of an academic linguist; but our experience in its development and trialling encourages us to believe that it will help a teacher perceive more clearly quite what aspects of skill are involved in being an effective user of the spoken language. (Mercer et al., 2014: 11)

The University of Cambridge have reviewed the framework with an expert advisory panel who agreed that its scope was appropriate.

The focus on skills is distinct from that adopted by other frameworks for curriculum and assessment in speaking and listening which have tended to focus on the range of contexts for talk, rather than skills that might be applied across contexts. It is not possible to gauge how effective this skills-led approach has been in impacting on oracy at School 21 as it is not possible to disassociate this from other dimensions of the provision at the school, e.g. the high value placed on talk, the provision of multiple contexts for talk, and the focus on reflection on appropriateness of talk to context. However the focus on skills, and the division of skills into these four strands, does appear to have been helpful to both staff and students at School 21 who, during interviews and focus groups, articulated their understanding of the different strands. This shared understanding of the framework is cited by the school as a key dimension of their approach as it supports ongoing reflection by staff and students:

A full understanding of the Oracy Framework then provides the teacher and student with a shared language with which to critique their performance and focus in on the skills in a very specific way. (Fidoe, 2014)

In relation to the **cognitive** dimension, School 21 teachers described their commitment to a 'constructivist group work approach to learning'. As the head teacher explained,

... obviously a talking classroom produces higher order thinking but you've got to see exploratory talk as a pedagogy, a way of thinking and a way of producing better thinking.

In terms of the **social and emotional dimension**, the curriculum is underpinned by a firm commitment to enabling students to 'find their voice' and this is seen as essential to confidence and future participation:

Head teacher: *By giving students the chance to find their voice and having the chance to speak in a range of settings you are making them not just prepare for their life that they will lead but also it gives them a sense of confidence and wellbeing that they can articulate and use and be listened to.*

The emphasis on oracy is seen as particularly empowering for those students who find it difficult to express themselves and explore ideas through writing. During a classroom observation (Observation Visit 3B), one student gave an impromptu performance of his 'Ignite' speech³. The teacher explained afterwards that this student is dyslexic and has difficulty writing, but that he can engage orally with difficult ideas and present these. Two students commented:

In a group you socialise which helps you in the future because you can work with anyone whether you like them or not you'll be able to work with them without fussing or complaining. (Visit 2, Pupil focus group)

In oracy we have to speak in front of everyone which makes us like I'm not really nervous now, but like he said we have to speak and it just makes you feel better. (Visit 3, Pupil focus group)

The **physical** dimension is seen in terms of aspects such as tone, pitch, facial expression, gesture, posture and eye contact. The school's strong emphasis on drama has provided rich opportunities to develop the physical dimension of talk for presentational purposes. As one student noted:

In my oracy session with Mr xxx we discussed about being 'strong and wrong' so if you get something wrong you can just carry on, don't like pause in the middle. (Visit 2, Pupil focus group)

The **linguistic** dimension has been a particular focus for development in 2013/14 informed mainly by consultancy with Wendy Lee of The Communication Trust. During the period of the evaluation, teachers at School 21 were exploring ways of supporting vocabulary development, for example by differentiating between three tiers of language (Beck, 2013). As the project lead explained this is...

...based on the principle that there are 3 tiers of vocabulary: tier 1, 2 and 3. Tier 1 is very basic words. Tier 3 is very specific words like photosynthesis...technical words. Those tier 1 and 3 words tend to get taught explicitly but tier 2 are often not, they are words like discuss, reflect, compare; the sorts of words you find in broadsheet newspapers rather than tabloids and now we've got a programme to teach those words explicitly. (Telephone interview with project lead)

Students commented on how feedback had helped them revise the language they used:

In that first week we were looking at other Ignite speeches to motivate us to do our own and Miss xxx told us we have to use new vocabulary and be eloquent and also to have a good title

³ Students in Year 7 all develop and present 'Ignite' speeches based on the format developed through Ignite events (<http://igniteshow.com/>), during which presenters talk for 5 minutes about a subject of personal or professional interest using 20 slides that auto-advance every 15 seconds. See School 21 examples at <http://school21.org/secondary/beautiful-work/ignite-speeches-2013>.

because the title catches the person's attention, so if you have a good title then they're going to like the speech. (Visit 2, Pupil focus group)

Like the teachers gave us the confidence to perform it, they would just give us advice and how you would be able to perform it properly, in a way that the audience would engage with you. (Visit 3, Pupil focus group)

The linguistic dimension is also being developed through discussion about texts (using reciprocal reading), a focus on etymology, reflection on use of vocabulary, and an emphasis on choosing the most appropriate vocabulary for the context.

4.3 Application of the framework

Given that all four strands could be seen as applicable to any instance of talk, it is possible they may be difficult to untangle in practice. Distinguishing between different skills for teaching and assessment purposes could lead to an atomistic curriculum which artificially distinguished between different skills in unhelpful ways, for example through narrowly framed activities. However, our fieldwork suggests that this does not appear to have happened at School 21. It appears that the framework has been valuable to the school in helping to articulate the scope and range of oracy, and that this focus has not distracted from the need to plan for meaningful contexts for oracy development.

The framework is given high profile within the school. Classrooms display notices related to giving 'proof of listening', 'professional behaviour', 'volume of talk', 'working hard and showing respect', class rules, lists of vocabulary and types of talk (e.g. explaining, describing, explaining, comparing, justifying, predicting, creating, etc):

We've got various oracy displays up to show those different categories visually. One of them is a graffiti display where the children can jot on different ways of recognising the different areas and one of them is just quite an informative display. (Telephone interview, Oracy teacher)

4.4 Diagnostic use of framework

At School 21, the 4-strand framework appears to work on a number of levels. It provides a starting point for staff development, school review and to analyse the needs of a particular cohort. For example, School 21 told us they initially focused on the cognitive strand of the framework but teachers identified a need to develop the physical strand (pitch, eye contact, etc) and this led to a focus on performance poetry. As explored above, and following further review, the school is now strengthening provision for the linguistic element:

I guess the progression in oracy highlighted to us that [the linguistic strand] was a particular area we needed to work on and we started to bring it in with the extra assemblies, some coaching group work on vocabulary and some targeted vocabulary work in the oracy lessons. (Telephone interview, Oracy teacher)

The four strands are also used diagnostically to identify individual students' strengths and areas for development. The framework is also used explicitly with the students to support self and peer assessment. The framework also informs teacher, peer and self-assessment. As this teacher went on to explain:

We've tried to make the 4 strands permeate every aspect of the work, when they are drafting [the Ignite speech], redrafting it, then they are coaching each other [...]the children are able to explicitly say the area that they think they are strongest in and the area that they think they're weakest in. (Telephone interview, Oracy teacher)

There is a recognition that different students will find different contexts more or less challenging, and that school cannot prepare students for all contexts they might encounter. The framework is used to inform approaches that engage students in considering what might be appropriate in different contexts. As the project manager commented:

The nature of the situation is a skill in itself ... it's to do with register and genre, ... if you teach specific contexts like you say here are the appropriate phrases for a job interview or for x, y and z then you're not really teaching them oracy, you're teaching them how to finish school. So that's why we've basically suffused it throughout the skills framework, it's always about context and the problem with that is there is an infinite number of contexts. (Visit 2 Interview with project manager)

4.5 Using the framework to support progression in oracy

The framework is designed to support a recursive curriculum, revisiting different skills in relation to increasingly challenging content and contexts, where context is understood in terms of the purpose for talk, and the type and size of audience. For example, the Year 7 Ignite talk is based on a self-selected topic. In preparation for this, children are required to present their talk in what might be expected to be increasingly demanding contexts, so children move from presenting to their peers, to students in other classes, to a public audience. In Year 8 students are required to create and present a second Ignite talk. This second 'Expertise Ignite' involves creating a speech based on an essay. This is more demanding as it requires students to engage with unfamiliar material. One of the teachers responsible for developing the original framework explained that 'if Year 7 is finding your voice, Year 8 is about developing the voice'. As the project manager explained:

In Year 7 you're already in quite a challenging situation because you've come to a whole new school and you're dealing with ... unfamiliar people in different sized groups, some of them you know better than others, you're not entirely sure how formal the whole situation is, you don't have much in common with them ... that's a tricky context, but by the time that you're in Year 8 you've got friends so you need a new challenge and so it's like we'll give you a harder purpose, to persuade someone of your argument because that's harder than just describing something and we'll give you a large audience of adult strangers because that's more difficult than a smaller audience of familiar teenagers. (Visit 2 Interview with project manager)

The curriculum is designed to support a developing awareness of context so that students can make appropriate choices about their use of talk.

4.6 Summary and recommendations

The framework seems well designed to inform the development of an oracy curriculum that will support progress in oracy. At School 21 the framework appears to have supported staff to develop a broad-ranging oracy curriculum for their students to provide a variety of purposeful contexts for talk. It provides the basis for a shared language for oracy teaching across the school. School 21 has used the framework diagnostically to inform staff development, the focus of teaching within different units and to support the progress of individual students. This demonstrates how the framework can be used productively by specialist and non-specialist teachers to inform curriculum development and support progress in oracy.

The framework's effectiveness however will depend on how it is interpreted and operationalised. It is not intended to determine a prescriptive or atomised curriculum, but rather to be used diagnostically to inform the focus and direction of teaching and learning activities. Whereas School 21, for example, highlighted the linguistic dimension as an area for development with their students, other schools may highlight other areas or, perhaps more likely, the focus may differ in the context of different audiences and purposes for talk. It is therefore essential that any guidance for other schools acknowledges this flexibility, and supports appropriate choices about the direction and emphasis of oracy provision in

different school contexts. Moreover, in foregrounding the framework in presenting the curriculum, there is a risk that School 21's emphasis on providing diverse contexts for oracy could be missed. (This is explored further in Section 5.2.) It is also important to emphasise that the four strands of the Oracy Skills Framework – cognitive, social and emotional, physical, and linguistic – are closely related in multiple ways. Careful explication is necessary to avoid the kind of decontextualised or atomised teaching that may not be conducive to oracy development.

We recommend that:

Guidance for other schools needs to emphasise that:

- the four strands of the Oracy Skills framework are closely related and to be effective teaching needs to be contextualised and should not overly focus on individual skills in isolation from other skills
- the framework should be used flexibly to support appropriate choices about the direction and emphasis of oracy provision in different school contexts.

5. Findings: Dedicated Year 7 curriculum

5.1 Introduction

During the pilot period School 21 implemented and further developed the dedicated Year 7 curriculum in weekly oracy lessons, oracy in every lesson and a whole school oracy culture. These three components of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit are highly related. For example oracy techniques taught to pupils in the dedicated oracy lessons are used by other teachers in subject teaching and in whole school activity such as assemblies. In order to report our findings clearly we have reported our findings on each of these components separately: in this section we review the dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum, in Section 6 we review the approaches to oracy in every lesson and in Section 7 the strategies and techniques used to build a whole school oracy culture.

It is therefore not possible to arrive at definitive judgements about its appropriateness or the effectiveness of the three components, reviewed in Sections 5-7, either in terms of scope or ease and effectiveness of application, because they were still being created and/or refined during the pilot period. It must be emphasised that further development work is still ongoing and that areas that we identify for development may now have been addressed. They are highlighted here however as they are areas which we suggest will be important foci for other schools adopting the approaches to consider.

The findings in Sections 5-7 are based on analysis of our school visits staged over the pilot period which comprised discussion with staff and students, and observations of oracy lessons, other subject lessons and whole school activity. In our commentary we at times distinguish between the intervention as described on the Voice 21 website (which was created at the end of the project) and the enactment of the intervention in School 21.

In this section we focus on the dedicated Year 7 curriculum.

5.2 Dedicated Year 7 curriculum : Overview

The Year 7 oracy curriculum includes four units: Finding your voice, Performance Poetry, Persuasive Techniques, and Ignite. Each unit is designed to provide a variety of contexts in which students can develop, use and apply the skills represented by all four strands of the Oracy Skills Framework. Units are structured in three phases: immersion, skills development, and performance; and are supported by a series of lesson plans and resources that provide guidance for less experienced teachers but that could be adapted as necessary. The first unit, Finding your voice, supports students in reflecting on their own use of talk and also introduces a range of protocols that will be used across the curriculum. Subsequent units are designed to consolidate skills explored through preceding units.

On the Voice 21 website, an overview of each phase is provided along with lesson plans and a series of resources. Some units are more developed than others and some resources are currently provided with little or no commentary. Some further narrative is needed to indicate how the units are intended to be used, i.e. whether they are intended to constitute a coherent series of lessons or whether they are sample lessons and/or how they might be adapted. Lessons are presented in different formats and with different levels of detail, e.g. some as PowerPoints and some as Word documents. This means that sometimes the stages of the lesson are made explicit while at others they are implied. Some approaches are currently included as handouts, e.g. 'Group Protocols', with no accompanying lesson plans to indicate how these have been introduced or contextualised in practice. Some phases, e.g. Phase 3 in Unit One, do not yet have any lesson plans. It would be helpful to agree a consistent format for the level of detail that needs to be provided for each lesson. This would be likely to include statements of the key opportunities and objectives of the unit as a whole and of each lesson, possibly along with suggestions of possible adaptations and contexts for learning.

The decision to examine talk in depth through four units seems highly appropriate as it allows sustained engagement with particular types of talk and greater potential for children to develop confidence and skills over time. The disadvantage of this approach is that the curriculum could be seen as neglecting broader repertoires of talk. The emphasis on developing talk across the curriculum is therefore important.

During visits to School 21, it was clear that the talk curriculum took place within a range of contexts that were meaningful and relevant to the students. In our professional opinion, this approach is a strong feature of the school's provision. However this dimension, which would be seen as an essential feature of an effective talk curriculum, is not always highlighted within the lesson plans. While it is recognised that the framework focuses on skills, there is a need to emphasise that these skills need to be addressed within diverse contexts, and that talk needs to be evaluated in relation to appropriateness to context. We consider aspects of the dedicated Year 7 curriculum in more detail below.

5.3 Talk for presentational purposes

The curriculum as implemented at School 21 includes a strong emphasis on talk for presentational purposes and the curriculum as outlined on the Voice 21 website reflects this in its guidelines for supporting talk in formal contexts and talk for persuasive and presentational purposes, e.g. through formal debate, pitching an idea and Ignite presentations. This dimension draws heavily from drama practice. Support for developing talk for formal presentational purposes appears to be a strength of the curriculum. Indeed, it was noticeable that students tended to focus on such opportunities when we spoke to them about oracy. During student focus groups, students spoke confidently about the different strands of the framework but did so primarily in terms of presentational talk. When asked to explain the strands, for example, they identified a need to focus on '*physical, emotional and social*' dimensions, and then qualified these with the following comments:

- *Physical is when you start using hand gestures and show body language to the audience and it's another way to interpret what you're saying as well.*
- *Emotional is where your words have like meaning so it's going to get the audience fired up and make them think something else.*
- *One I think is called cognitive and that is like when you're speaking you're thinking of what to say next.* (Comments from Visit 2 Pupil focus group)

The focus on developing presentations appears to be a real strength of the school's approach. During lesson observations, aspects of spoken language were taught explicitly, e.g. tonal shift, and students were able to make use of these in their presentations. Student comments, for example, suggested their engagement with the Ignite unit of work had impacted on their ability to analyse and review their talk for presentational purposes. One teacher commented that some students may overuse certain elements. Making careful judgements about how to draw on different skills for different audiences will be an area for development for the school. The focus on ongoing reflection and review seems well designed to support teachers and students in deciding which kinds of rhetorical strategies are appropriate in any given context. We encountered less evidence of students reflecting in depth on their use of talk for learning, and this is explored below.

5.4 Talk for learning

As explored in Section 4.2, School 21 state a firm commitment to promoting talk for learning and there was certainly evidence of this in our fieldwork. Teachers spoke of the value of group talk, for example, and we saw many examples of opportunities for discussion and of teachers providing support for students to engage in group discussion. However, at the time of writing, the curriculum as presented on the Voice 21 website includes less focus on this dimension of oracy. Many opportunities for group discussion are provided but there is less emphasis on what effective group discussion looks like or how it might be supported. In the 'Four Coaching Strands' unit, for example, the cognitive strand is

defined in terms of 'clear arguments' and 'good organisation of points'. While these are elements worth exploring, this suggests that the cognitive strand is being understood in terms of the communication of knowledge with less emphasis on exploratory talk.

It is our professional view that the curriculum as outlined on the Voice 21 website needs to include greater emphasis on the different kinds of talk that might be appropriate in different contexts and for different purposes, to include a focus on the kind of talk that might be associated with developing thinking or understanding. For example, in Unit One, the same prompts are used to discuss the nature of a group discussion and a 'just-a-minute' presentation (see Oracy Critique lesson and Oracy Analysis Practice session). The kind of talk you might expect from these two tasks is different. It may well be that these differences emerge in the discussions following the children's review, and the materials do refer to differences between formal and informal talk, but this is not made explicit in the commentary. Similarly, distinctions between 'good' talk and 'bad' talk are made (e.g. see lesson Talking about Talk). This may be misleading as it suggests there is one type of good talk.

5.5 Reflection on talk

The approaches used by School 21 provide strong support for developing a shared language to support organising for and reflecting on talk. There is a focus on making talk explicit, working with students for example to generate lists of what makes effective talk, and encouraging students to review others' talk, for example that of visiting speakers. This includes considering body language, turn taking, and group dynamics. As one teacher commented,

One of the last lessons we did working in groups of three, they did a little pie chart of who'd contributed in a three ... getting them thinking about how much they contribute when they contribute, do they have to contribute the same amount each time or not ... and just that awareness there of 'these are the roles I have to play, these are things that I have to be aware of' and so this term I'm giving them the chance to show that they've understood that. (Visit 2 interview, oracy teacher)

There is also a strong emphasis on encouraging students to reflect on their use of language in ways that will position them strongly in relation to others, looking forward to employment situations and their broader adult life. One teacher explained:

Year 7 focused on the basics of vocabulary between formal and informal usage, e.g. 'the language of home, language of playground, language of school'. Getting to Year 8 it is about taking their vocabulary 'up a notch' and seeing if they can understand 'the language of being taken seriously'... academic language and if they can think of the right types of situations they can use that in. (Telephone interview, oracy teacher)

As exemplified and explored further in Section 6.4, students we spoke to and observed engaged readily in this reflection although comments tended to focus on the physical, social and emotional dimensions and less on relationships between talk and understanding or thinking.

Vocabulary development has been a particular focus for the school. The school has trialled a range of approaches. The most effective approaches are likely to be those that teach vocabulary development in contextualised ways. The same teacher provided examples of this:

So in the role of an expert they need to use precise, technical language that's connected to what they're speaking about ... the tier 2 words being things that could cut across different subjects, things like analyse, summarise, profile words like that that connect to broadsheet reading. (Telephone interview, oracy teacher)

School 21 are also implementing a vocabulary programme they have devised with Wendy Lee of the Communications Trust and which is currently being rolled out to schools in East London. School 21 state that initial feedback from schools suggests that this approach 'is having a significant impact on

their students; linguistic competency'. At this point, it is not clear whether or how this is being integrated within the dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum.

5.6 Summary and recommendations

Given the developmental nature of the project we are unable to arrive at a definitive judgement about the efficacy of the dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum. For example, during the evaluation period, the curriculum was undergoing ongoing review with a particular focus on vocabulary development and further refinements may take place as a result of this.

The four units that comprise the proposed curriculum appear to be well selected to explore the four strands of oracy skills in the Oracy Skills Framework and to establish strategies that can be used to support learning across the curriculum. The distinctive quality of the dedicated Year 7 curriculum is the identification of a set of skills which may be used across different contexts, with an emphasis on making appropriate choices about how to draw on these appropriately within these different contexts. Each topic is examined in depth and each unit culminates in a motivating opportunity for application of skills learned.

Provision for developing talk for presentational purposes appears to be a particular strength and the work draws effectively from drama practice. There is an emphasis on the effective communication of an argument or point of view in formal and informal contexts and this seems to be directly aimed at preparing students for economic success and participation in civic life. The curriculum guidance available on the Voice 21 website includes less detail on: the development of talk for learning; the need to provide informal opportunities for talk; and the need to embed the oracy curriculum within diverse meaningful and motivating contexts associated with different kinds of talk.

In any process of curriculum design, decisions are made about what to include and some possible elements are excluded. For example, the school has chosen to focus in depth on selected opportunities for talk which appear to be well chosen. However, there is a need to be more explicit about how contexts might be provided across the curriculum to ensure students develop broad repertoires of talk.

It is worth noting that previous attempts to develop provision for oracy have generated other proposals which perhaps reflect different values and priorities (e.g. see Norman, 1992; QCA, 2003). An oracy curriculum might for example: explore metalinguistic awareness through considering different languages and dialects; include a focus on oral heritage; or provide opportunities for talk that are more conversational and less structured. It may be that the School 21 curriculum develops to include some of these elements. In any case, however, there is a need to recognise that the School 21 curriculum is underpinned by particular aims, objectives and principles, and these need to be stated clearly. For example, if the curriculum is designed primarily as a way of supporting talk in formal contexts then this needs to be stated.

It is our professional view, however, that the oracy provision at School 21 is, and should be, more inclusive than this apparent emphasis in the materials suggests. The curriculum, as presented on the Voice 21 website, therefore needs to include a clearer statement about the different kinds of opportunities that should be provided to support oracy. This would require explication of the value of both formal and informal opportunities for talk, and support for schools in providing opportunities for students to use talk for learning, i.e. to use talk to develop ideas as well as communicate them. Addressing this will involve focusing in more depth on the cognitive strand of the framework.

We recommend that:

School 21 continues to refer to expertise and approaches developed outside the school to ensure that provision takes account of recent research studies and development projects. This would include revisiting support for promoting talk for learning, particularly in relation to exploratory talk.

The dedicated Year 7 curriculum documentation and associated resources be further refined in terms of content and presentation. In particular these should:

- clearly state the aims, objectives and underpinning principles of the dedicated Year 7 curriculum so that other schools are clear about what the curriculum is, and is not, designed to achieve
- highlight the role, nature and development of exploratory talk
- emphasise the need to provide a range of motivating and relevant contexts for talk.

6. Findings: Oracy in every lesson

6.1 Introduction

In our professional view, a particular strength of the School 21 approach is the emphasis on ensuring that approaches and skills developed through oracy lessons are applied across the whole curriculum. In this section we explore how this cross-curricular approach is implemented, identify strengths that can usefully be shared with other schools, and make some recommendations for further development. In doing so, we refer to the resources available on the Voice 21 website at the time of writing, and to approaches we observed during visits that could usefully inform the future development of those resources.

6.2 Approaches used across the curriculum

Selected approaches are included on the Voice 21 website with recommendations for their use across the curriculum, e.g. related to groupings, protocols, and references to three tiers of language. It is worth noting that the provision for oracy at School 21 has also drawn on a variety of other approaches and techniques for supporting collaborative talk for learning: e.g. The Kagan Method (<http://www.kagan-uk.co.uk/>) and CASE (Commission of Accelerated Science Education <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/education/research/crestem/Research/Past-Projects/Cognaccel.aspx>) described by one of the teachers as 'a way of thinking and talking about science which is very logical and cognitive and the lessons are brilliant'.

Teachers we spoke with told us that students now *expect* to use talk for learning as they become more used to these approaches. For example, one teacher noted:

You have some high ability kids and some low ones, so get them to explain what they did. I think we promote it so much and we're OK with the talking, I think it's embedded in them so much now, it's how they approach every task they do, they know straight away they can talk about it without us saying 'you shouldn't be talking about this'. (Visit 3 Teacher focus group)

6.3 Organising for talk

The school has introduced a number of protocols to provide support for different kinds of group discussion. Students commented on how the protocols supported the management of group work:

When you're in the groups you're actually getting more ideas and you're saying your ideas and everyone can hear you share your ideas.

When you're in a group you can share your knowledge and your ideas ... and when you negotiate with people in the group, whether it's six people or three, in that amount of time you still get loads of stuff from it. (Visit 2 Pupil focus group)

These protocols are well embedded and in use across the curriculum. Teaching approaches developed in oracy lessons are used elsewhere across the school curriculum. For example, the mathematics teacher often uses the 'traverse formation' (observed in a drama lesson where students stand in two lines facing each other) for mental arithmetic as it means that students rely on talk to solve problems. This consistent approach seems to be having an impact on how students approach learning. During our visits, students were observed readily introducing protocols during group work, standing to present their ideas, using sentence stems to help structure contributions, and using strategies for turn-taking and presenting orally.

6.4 Talk for learning

Creating a climate in which talk is valued would certainly seem to be an important condition for exploratory talk to thrive. A focus on the role of talk for learning underpins the school philosophy and is reflected in approaches to classroom organisation, curriculum development, pedagogy (e.g. problem-based learning) and continuing professional development for staff. Despite the reservations expressed in Section 5.4 about the oracy curriculum as represented on the website, teacher focus groups and lesson observations suggested that students were applying what they learned in oracy lessons across the curriculum in ways that were likely to support learning. They used many of the protocols designed to support effective group work. For example, in a mathematics lesson:

Students are given 3 different shapes made of same number of squares. They are asked to discuss in groups what is the same and what is different about these shapes. The group I observe starts talking about the task straight away, beginning by deciding how to tackle it together. (Observation Visit 1B)

Teachers spoke of the relationship between talk and learning in their specific subjects. The history teacher for example believed that the focus on oracy was supporting historical skills. When asked about the relationship between oracy and history, he said 'it's impossible to separate the two'. He saw the specific contribution of oracy to history teaching as related to the students' ability to critique:

I think the fact that they're able to talk through their ideas and are starting to understand that an argument is better when they have facts and evidence to support it. Now they'll say things like 'what source did you get that from?' and I don't think that would come through without the oracy programme, I think it has to be a whole school thing – I think if I was pushing that in history it wouldn't work. (Teacher interview Visit 3A)

Students, however, when asked to define oracy during our focus group, focused primarily on presentational aspects, for example:

Oracy is about like developing your eloquence and also being able to perform to make yourself heard and also just developing your voice further whilst using hand gestures and different oracy attributes.

It's also about using your eye contact and getting the audience involved using body language. (Visit 2 Pupil focus group)

While these reflections were useful, the emphasis on presentation did raise questions for the evaluation team about the place of exploratory talk. It is quite possible that this emphasis on presentation reflected the focus (at the time of visits) of oracy teaching linked to Ignite talks. It is also perhaps easier to refer to these aspects of talk than it is to reflect on group discussion. Some students did comment on group work, but focused on management of group discussion rather than on how this might support the development of ideas or understanding:

Another skill in oracy is when you're working in groups, like larger than what you'd expect it to be because normally you're happy to work in twos but in oracy you have to work in threes or sixes, just larger than you might have expected.

It's also about like manners so for example if someone was talking you would have to show them that you're listening so the speaker can feel more comfortable and more in the zone to speak aloud to you. (Visit 1 Pupil focus group)

Classroom observations certainly suggested that students were keen to engage in group discussion and all group discussions observed were clearly related to the tasks in which students were engaged. On occasion, students were observed engaging comfortably and confidently in discussion and the protocols seemed to enable and support this, as exemplified in the following extract from field notes

from a lesson observation. In this example, well-established routines for turn-taking seem to support students in taking a whole class discussion in a direction unplanned by the teacher:

During a feedback session the teacher asks a summariser to reflect on their learning. As she does so, another student puts up his thumb [a signal that he wants to speak]. It seems that what the summariser said had prompted an idea. Seeing the raised thumb, the teacher nods for him to speak. As he speaks, others raise their thumbs too and, taking this as a cue, the speaker nominates someone to respond. Response follows response and the talk shifts from a cumulative series of summaries to an exchange of views during which students build on and challenge each other's ideas: 'I agree but I also think that...', 'I agree but sometimes you can...' Girls and boys are equally represented here. The teacher listens as the discussion unfolds [he later tells me he didn't plan for this discussion] then returns them to the planned routine of summarising, until all groups have finished doing so. (Observation Visit 3A)

In this example, and in others observed, students drew clearly on turn-taking protocols and used sentence starters (e.g. 'I wonder if...', 'Alternatively...') to help structure their contributions. They often added to others' ideas, and sometimes asked one another for clarifications.

As might be expected during a development phase (for students and staff), this shared language seemed to work with varying levels of effect. In some observations, it seemed that protocols and sentence starters worked to support formal uses of talk (e.g. for presentations or debate). They may have been less supportive of the more free-ranging exploratory talk described in the opening of this report.

It is important to emphasise that we conducted very few observations during this evaluation. It is therefore not possible to draw conclusions here about the quality of exploratory talk across the school, but it is worth noting that this may be an area to explore further, particularly in the light of comments about the curriculum in Section 5.1.

The strong emphasis on drama appears to provide compelling contexts for talk and for developing skills related to the four strands. For example, the drama teacher told us that children often used '2 tier' language (see page 25 for definition) during drama lessons. As he noted, during drama 'they want to say something, they stretch for language'. The emphasis on meaningful contexts for talk aligns with a focus on meaningful contexts for learning across the curriculum at the school. For example the history teacher reflected on various ways in which talk had been integrated within enquiry-led project work:

We're trying to make real-life outcomes for all our students, so we're doing a walking tour of London – looking at objects of historical significance – choose an object and write an essay defending the choice of object and then symbolise this through art.

Last week we had a Harkness debate⁴ about why history is often about kings and queens and not ordinary people – and the plan is to do another in a fortnight's time where they defend their object – an exhibition event where they stand by their object and talk about it. We tried it with Year 8 with a World War 2 exhibition and found that when they had the real audience they just stepped up. (Teacher interview Visit 3A)

During lesson observations, students were observed considering purpose and audience whether or not there were prompts from their teacher to do this. This teacher emphasised the importance of being able to explain what they had learned and communicate their point of view:

⁴ Approach designed to disrupt conventional 'teacher-led' discussion by using round-table discussions to enable Socratic dialogue between teachers and pupils.

We use all the protocols to generate fantastic writing, and to talk about reading as well...but more profound than that – we had a WW1 exhibition, an art/humanities collaboration, project-based, immersing the children in WW1 and producing an installation. A key part of the end project is showing their parents around the exhibition. That all came together because of their ability to summarise information that's in front of them and both demonstration of learning and stretching of them cognitively, so it's sort of hard-wired into the curriculum for next year. (Teacher focus group Visit 3)

6.5 Summary and recommendations

Teacher interviews and lesson observations suggested that the commitment to promote oracy across the curriculum in every lesson is a strong feature of the School 21 approach. In talking with us, and during lessons, staff and students utilised a shared language for oracy and were familiar with a range of approaches for organising, promoting and reviewing talk. The emphasis on providing meaningful contexts for talk across the curriculum is a particular strength.

School 21 attribute student attainment to this strong oracy focus and students appear to expect to be involved in group discussion and apply the protocols and skills developed through the dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum across all subjects. The evaluation team observed many students drawing on sentence stems and protocols to enable their participation in discussion and to structure exchange of views. While students appear keen to engage in discussion and debate the evaluation team, we're not able to draw conclusions about the **quality** of exploratory talk (as we were only able to conduct a small number of observations). It would seem that the development of exploratory talk is worth further scrutiny particularly in view of the results from the Raven's Matrices tests and our evaluation of the curriculum outlined in Section 5.

We recommend that:

- School 21 review the extent to which students engage in exploratory talk across subjects and how this is promoted across the school.
- School 21 develop further 'oracy in every lesson' documentation and resources that focus more strongly on exploratory talk.

7. Findings: Whole school oracy culture

7.1 Introduction

Establishing a whole school oracy culture is an integral part of School 21's approach to developing students' oracy and supporting their learning across subjects. We begin this section by reviewing the approaches taken by School 21 to build a whole school oracy culture. School 21's position as a new school with a small school population⁵ has enabled it to place oracy centrally within all school activity. We therefore also consider the issues other schools may face in trying to establish an oracy culture.

7.2 Building a whole school oracy culture in School 21

School 21 plans a variety of opportunities for oracy which help to generate what the staff team view as a 'culture of talk' at the school. These include student-led parents' evenings during which students talk their parents through their achievements, and peer-to-peer and tutor coaching, e.g. Year 8 pupils coach Year 7 students to develop their Ignite talks. This multi-stranded approach has raised the status of oracy and generated a shared commitment to oracy development by the teaching staff. As the project manager (Visit 2) noted:

There is no question that we have produced a strong oracy culture within the school which for the purposes of this project is both good and challenging and the reason that the teachers are so immersed in it.

Year Group assemblies also play an important role in this regard. One teacher noted that:

We all do assemblies ... which isn't just talking from the front of but addressing the circles – so maybe there is something cultural that is encouraging talk and so on – something cultural that is in the air, that is hard to pin down. (Teacher focus group Visit 2)

As the following field notes from an observed assembly illustrate, assemblies are characterised by opportunities for student participation through group discussion:

Students enter the hall and stand in one large circle. All teachers are present, ready to take up roles as group coaches. Each has a notebook and felt pen or mini whiteboard. After ringing a bell to signal the start of assembly, the teacher tells the students they are now in the court of King Arthur and must use a counting system to decide who will be the next king. He asks the students to talk in pairs to predict where someone should sit in the circle if they wish to be chosen. He gives them prompts to help them participate in the discussion:

- *What is the question?*
- *I bet you're thinking...*
- *I am dying to tell you...*
- *What I don't get...*

The teacher rings a bell and the discussions stop. He takes feedback and then asks them to move into their coaching groups and share ways of solving the problem. As they discuss, teacher coaches listen, sometimes intervening to encourage the students to think about how to manage the discussion. After this, they are invited to share solutions. Individuals stand to do so, sometimes walking around the room as they explain their ideas. All are invited to share their ideas later on a 'maths challenge board'. (Observation Visit 1A)

⁵ School 21 is a new school, which during the pilot period had only Year 7 and 8 students. The Year groups are small, for example there were 75 pupils in Year 7.

Assemblies are used to explore a range of issues and topics, but are also used to address focus areas within the oracy curriculum, for example, staff told us that some assembly time had been devoted to exploring vocabulary use in different situations.

7.3 Establishing an oracy culture in other schools

School 21 believe that the deployment of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit 'can only be successful if schools are wholly committed to its implementation and requires Head Teachers to be fully engaged in transforming whole school culture' (Fidoe, 2014: 27). The development of oracy is closely related to other aspects of the school's curriculum and pedagogy. Other emphases in School 21 on wellbeing, leadership and enquiry, for example, are seen as both reinforcing and benefitting from the oracy curriculum. As the head teacher commented:

The way you set up a school day flows from that and assemblies and the way you set up a classroom and the way you train teachers and their pedagogy so just as you wouldn't line them up in rows in an assembly you wouldn't line them up in rows in a classroom. (Head teacher interview Visit 2)

He continued to explain that a key challenge:

...is to buy into how you make a school a talking school. ... [oracy] can't be a sideline or a discrete curriculum where you go into an oracy lesson and then the rest of the day you're told to line up in lines and told to be silent, there's just no logic to that so a school has got to embrace the back-cultural piece more importantly than the other elements because otherwise it doesn't work. (Headteacher interview Visit 2)

This raises questions about the extent to which it is possible to translate the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit to other settings. It is also acknowledged that School 21's size and whole school oracy culture make positive engagement far more likely. As one teacher explained:

Every single teacher is aware of the four different strands – the physical, social/emotional, cognitive, linguistic...and that the cognitive and the linguistic are really the two areas for development...everyone is aware and talks to their particular coaching groups about those elements. It's easier to do if you are establishing a new school and harder to do if you are fighting your corner in a larger school that has a vision already established...traditionally I think oracy would be seen as English and drama departments and possibly not as relevant for other people. (Telephone interview, oracy teacher)

This teacher also acknowledged that a focus on oracy is not necessarily new for schools. As one teacher commented, an oracy curriculum is not:

...brand new altogether, it's often just a formalising of good practice that's probably already going on in a lot of good schools but I guess trying to get people to be more analytical with what they are doing...In schools I've taught in before you've been in the habit of saying he's good at public speaking, she's not as good and you're not looking at analysing the different areas.

7.4 Summary and recommendations

School 21 plans a variety of opportunities for oracy which help to generate a 'culture of talk'. The School has reworked traditional school practices, such as assemblies, staff development sessions, and parents' evenings, to ensure that talk plays a central role. This multi-stranded approach has ensured that oracy has high status within school and there is a shared commitment to oracy development by the teaching staff. Students know that talk matters and that what they say will be listened to. It is also worth noting the reciprocal relationship between the oracy curriculum and other provision at School 21 where the development of oracy is closely related to other aspects of the

school's curriculum and pedagogy. Emphases on wellbeing, leadership and enquiry, for example, appear to both reinforce and benefit from the oracy curriculum, and the school benefits from specialist drama teaching.

School 21's position as a new school with a small population may also mean that positive engagement is more likely as staff and students join a school where oracy has been emphasised from the start. The school also benefits from the expertise of a very experienced specialist drama teacher. These school-specific factors raise questions about the extent to which it is possible to translate the School 21 approach to other settings. It is our professional opinion that the school are right to draw the boundaries of their proposed intervention broadly to include oracy across the curriculum and whole school culture as well as the Oracy Skills Framework and the dedicated Year 7 curriculum. However, it may be that its success is dependent on multiple aspects of the very specific conditions at School 21.

We recommend that:

Any further evaluation of a scaling up of the intervention would need to consider how School 21's oracy approach is interpreted in other schools, and on the opportunities and barriers that arise when implementing these approaches in other sites.

8. Findings: Oracy Assessment Toolkit

8.1 Introduction

In this section we evaluate the Oracy Assessment Toolkit. As described in Section 2.1, the Oracy Assessment Toolkit, developed by the University of Cambridge, comprises: a set of three oracy assessment tasks that can be used to diagnose and track students' progress in oracy – a formal presentational speech, an instructional activity and a group discussion; a set of six additional tasks to be used for assessment for learning; and a rating scheme for assessing students' performance on these tasks and for giving students feedback. The rating scheme enables teachers to give students a rating for each of the skills from the Oracy Skills Framework relevant to each task.

The evaluation questions set out in the protocol focus on assessing the robustness of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit as an independent measure of oracy that can be used for testing purposes by considering consistency of administration, reliability and validity. We start this section by addressing reporting on these issues.

It is however very important to note that the University of Cambridge team clearly state that their Oracy Assessment Toolkit has been designed primarily to provide a useful and usable tool for teachers who can use the assessment tasks to draw skill profiles of individual students and plan relevant teaching on the use of spoken language. As the team make clear:

As we are not scoring children in a way that will involve comparing their performance across schools or even within schools, reliability is not a major concern. What is important is that the ratings given form a useful and informative basis for teachers to give feedback to the students and help them move their learning forward. (Mercer et al., 2014: 31)

In recognition of this key aim of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit we also consider in this section the extent to which the Toolkit provides a usable and useful tool for teachers.

8.2 Consistency of administration of the assessment tasks

The evidence from the University of Cambridge report (Mercer et al., 2014) suggests that the Oracy Assessment Toolkit was being administered consistently. Our own examination of the videos of students undertaking the various oracy assessment tasks suggested that the task protocols were being adhered to and the students were provided with consistent instructions on each occasion they were assessed. It should be noted that the original instructional task – the Map task – was deemed to be inappropriate for a number of reasons particularly relating to the students' understanding of what they were required to do and what their partners could see on their own maps. In light of this the University of Cambridge team replaced this task with the Lego task at the follow-up test stage which was a significant improvement from students', teachers' and the experts' perspectives.

8.3 Rating scheme

The University of Cambridge set out using a three way rating scheme – gold, silver and bronze. This was based on a mastery model where students demonstrate each skill either consistently, or only some of the time, or not at all. In the Oracy Assessment Toolkit teachers are asked to rate students as GOLD if they 'consistently demonstrate this skill', as SILVER if they 'demonstrate this skill some of the time' and BRONZE if they 'rarely or never demonstrate this skill'. Our evaluation found mixed responses to the three way rating scheme. For example, a teacher we interviewed at School 21 was broadly positive about the three point scale:

Actually the bronze, silver and gold, there's something there that works...I'd initially thought that I'd want more strands but I think the three actually worked quite well and you do find that somebody broadly comes into one category.

The Cambridge team found that many teachers wanted to be able to discriminate between performances in a more fine-grained way, and as a result the final rating scheme comprises 7 points by allowing the use of + and - within the scale. The seven point scale has the potential to lead to better discrimination between students and within students across time. However, the finer grained scale may result in teachers adopting a more instrumental approach to the assessment rather than using the assessment as a way of thinking more deeply about their students' needs, strengths and progress.

The positive language used in the rating scale was welcomed. As a School 21 teacher observed:

When I've used that language with children they've liked that idea of being gold, silver or bronze...I like the idea that it's quite positive, it's a medal whatever you are getting and you can say to them you might be bronze overall but you have this element of silver here. (Teacher interview, Visit 2C)

8.4 Reliability of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit

The reliability of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit was assessed independently at Sheffield Hallam University through a teacher workshop. Five English teachers from local schools attended the workshop and used the assessment tasks to rate students' oracy skills. The teachers rated videos of students from School 21 undertaking the Lego, Talking Points and Presentation tasks. The video recordings were from the follow-up assessments of students undertaken in April or May towards the end of their first year of the oracy intervention. The teachers were presented with five video clips; two each of the Lego and Presentation tasks and one of the Talking Points task. For each task the teachers were given an overview of the task and the instructions produced by the University of Cambridge team and also used in their testing of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit. The teachers were also given an explanation as to how to grade each skill being assessed in terms of the three point Gold, Silver and Bronze rating scale. The teachers then viewed the videos and gave their ratings on the ratings sheets provided to them. Upon completion of all the ratings tasks there was a 15 minute discussion of the teachers' experience of using the Oracy Assessment Toolkit to assess the students' oracy skills.

Reliability was assessed in a number of ways. First the five teachers were compared to see how often they agreed ratings for each of the skills for each of the tasks. In order to achieve this each possible pairing of the teachers was analysed to calculate agreement on each assessed skill. With five teachers this meant that there were 10 possible pairings to establish levels of agreement (teachers 1 & 2, 1 & 3, 1 & 4, 1 & 5; 2 & 3, 2 & 4, 2 & 5, 3 & 4, 3 & 5, 4 & 5). The number of times the teachers agreed for each skill associated with each task is presented in Table 8.1. This table demonstrates at least moderate levels of variability in the number of times judges agreed with each other on the various ratings tasks. Given that there are three possible grades given by the judges we would expect approximately 1 in 3 ratings to be in agreement by chance. As can be seen in Table 8.1 most ratings were numerically above chance. For all of the ratings given with the exception of overall ratings for the Lego and Talking Points tasks there were 10 pairwise comparisons (one rater did not complete the overall ratings for the Lego and Talking points tasks and so for these there were six pairwise comparisons). Chance level agreement would therefore be 3.3 for all but the overall ratings for the Lego and Talking Points tasks (where chance would have been 2). For the Lego task it is apparent that the level of agreement between the raters is better for video 1 than it is for video 2. This is a concern as with a reliable assessment tool we would expect good levels of agreement for both of the videos. There is perhaps a greater level of consistency for the Talking Points task but even here there are a number of times where the raters have failed to agree above chance levels. Particularly concerning here is the poor performance on the items 'Is willing to listen' where there is below chance agreement for all three students being rated. This item should perhaps be modified to make it more reliable. It is interesting to note that in the University of Cambridge report (Mercer et al., 2014) there is a suggestion that this item be amended to reflect active rather than passive listening. For the Presentation task there is good agreement for the first student but relatively poor agreement on many

of the items for the second student. Again this is worrying as we would expect above chance agreement for all students being rated.

Along with this descriptive analysis inter-rater correlations were calculated as an alternative measure of inter-rater reliability. Following the procedure outlined by Hatch and Lazaraton (1991), Pearson Product-Moment correlations coefficients were calculated for all judges and then to avoid issues of skewness a Fisher z transformation was applied to these. These transformed correlations were then entered in to the following formula:

$$r_{tt} = \frac{n r_{AB}}{1 + (n - 1)r_{AB}}$$

where r_{tt} is the overall reliability of the judges, n is the number of raters and r_{AB} is average correlation between the raters (this latter was the z-transformed average correlation). For each student rated on the Lego task the inter-rater reliabilities were comparatively low (0.51, 0.44, 0.65 and 0.48). For the Talking Points task the reliabilities were better but still a little low at 0.63, 0.67 and 0.66. Finally, for the presentations the reliabilities were 0.52 and 0.71. Overall, these reliability coefficients would lead us to question the reliability of the assessment tool. However, it has to be remembered that the teachers undertaking the ratings in this analysis were not trained in using the oracy tool and as such we would expect greater variability in the ratings given than for raters who have been trained. Hatch and Lazaraton (1991) suggest relatively low reliability coefficients may be the result of untrained raters and this may be the case in the current analysis.

Table 8.1: Number of times raters were in agreement for each of the oracy tasks

Task	Video 1		Video 2	
	Student A	Student B	Student A	Student B
3 i) Uses vocabulary to suit topic, purpose and situation	6	4	1	3
4 ii) Register	6	6	3	3
5 i) Chooses and organises content to convey meaning and intention	4	4	4	3
6 i) Seeks information and clarification through questions	2	10	6	4
7 i) Maintains focus on task	10	10	6	6
9 i) Takes account of level of understanding of audience	4	10	2	6
11 iii) Takes turns appropriately	6	4	3	4
12 ii) Responds appropriately to questioning	6	6	4	4
13 iii) Participates actively in discussion	4	6	4	4
Overall assessment*	1	3	3	0
Talking Points Task:				
	Student A	Student B	Student C	
2 iii) Makes eye contact	6	2	5	
6 i) Seeks information and clarification through questions	6	6	2	
7 i) Maintains focus on task	6	6	4	
8 i) Gives reasons to support views	10	6	6	
11 ii) Sustains dialogue	6	4	8	
11 iii) Takes turns	4	4	3	
12 i) Responds to and builds on views of others	3	4	2	
12 ii) Responds appropriately to questioning	6	6	6	
12 iv) Is willing to listen	1	2	2	
13 iii) Active and whole-hearted participation in discussion	3	4	6	
Overall assessment*	3	3	1	
Presentation Task:				
	Student A	Student B		
1 i) Clarity and projection of voice	6	6		

1 ii) Tonal variation	6	3
2 i) Gesture	4	4
2 ii) Posture	4	6
6 Use of metaphor, humour, irony, mimicry and other rhetorical devices	6	4
3 Vocabulary choice to suit topic, purpose and situation	6	4
5 Fluency and flow of talk	6	1
7 i) Choice and organisation of content to convey meaning and intention	6	2
9 ii) Time management	6	2
11) Taking account of level of understanding of the audience	6	1
14 i) Self-confidence	10	2
14 ii) Liveliness, flair	4	2
Overall assessment	10	1

* These rating totals were based upon 4 raters rather than 5.

One of the reasons why the assessment of oracy is commonly understood to be problematic is because it is often seen as subjective. It is not surprising therefore that Sheffield focus group teachers commented on the subjective nature of assessment based on these tasks and on the different ways in which the criteria could be interpreted. For example, one Sheffield focus group teacher noted her personal preferences in how people presented ideas to her:

I quite like people that maybe seem a little bit unsure of what it is that they're saying, and I think that that's maybe a deliberate presentational ploy that a student might use. You could have argued that the girl was deliberately hesitant as she's talking to Year 6s and she's thinking carefully about what they might need to know and what they don't. There's that whole, kind of, boys get assessed as better speakers sometimes because of this narrow view of confidence as well, so that where it got to self-confidence and liveliness and flair at the bottom, that was where I felt there was most room for who are you talking to, and about what, and in what situation?

While assessment of oracy is always likely to be subjective to some degree, the University of Cambridge team reported a reasonable level of inter-rater reliability in their trial of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit. They report inter-rater reliability at the level of 0.77 (Mercer et al., 2014). This level of reliability was reported for the post-intervention presentation task and so given our relatively low reliability ratings for the Lego task it would be good for the University of Cambridge team to report specific reliability statistics for this task in particular.

The University of Cambridge team emphasise the need to ensure teachers have opportunities to moderate judgements and talk together, as they explained in a telephone interview:

[Our] intended way around this issue [reliability] is by our bank of video exemplars because the easiest way to learn how to rate these kinds of tasks, I mean from the videos, is through seeing examples that benchmark the standards so that teachers can look at what their children have done and look at what's in our bank and say ah right that's what a silver presentation looks like and this is why... and that to me seems an ideal way to address validity concerns for this kind of scale.

Planning for such opportunities would seem to be highly appropriate particularly as this approach is very much in line with existing moderation procedures including those used extensively for the assessment of writing. The University of Cambridge team's inter-rater reliability analysis was based on assessments made with better trained raters and as noted above they reported generally higher correlations than we report here. On the basis of the evidence from our test of the Oracy Assessment

Toolkit and the testing reporting by the University of Cambridge we would suggest that the Oracy Assessment Toolkit is only reliable if it is utilised by appropriately trained raters.

8.5 Validity of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit

The validity of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit can be evaluated in a number of ways and as with the validity of any assessment tool the evaluation of validity is an ongoing process. As we have highlighted the oracy assessment tasks were designed to align with the Oracy Skills Framework developed by Mercer et al. (2014). Indeed the individual items which are rated for each of the tasks have been directly developed from this skills framework. As such it can be argued that the Oracy Assessment Toolkit has a good deal of validity. The Oracy Skills Framework highlights aspects of oracy that have not been considered in previous attempts to develop assessments of oracy. The Sheffield focus group focused particularly on the physical strand, for example, one teacher commented:

Where we've got clarity and projection of voice, and tonal variation, gesture and posture – tonal variation I found quite helpful, because I feel like that's something that doesn't currently exist in criteria that I have to apply within English, and yet it's something that you really do want to be able to see in the way that a kid is expressing themselves.

I can see a place for posture, like, for example, with that first child. He was constantly fidgeting, and, you know, it is important that you focus your audience by standing in a certain way, you know, commanding the room, that is a part of presentation.

Validity can also be measured in terms of how well experts and practitioners accept it as a valid instrument (this is often called content validity). The University of Cambridge conducted video review days with teachers who had used the oracy assessment, teachers who had not been involved in using the toolkit and a panel of oracy experts. The data from the Cambridge team's evaluation of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit suggest that there is variability in validity in terms of the particular tasks. In this regard it would appear that the Lego task has a high level of validity. The experts and teachers from the Cambridge trials were particularly positive about this task in enabling students to demonstrate their ability to engage in exploratory talk. The Talking Points task however appeared to attract fewer positive comments as it was apparent that in many cases the students were not discussing the topics as such but quite mechanistically listening to each other's views. As a teacher we interviewed at School 21 explained:

The children at this school are very used to the idea of taking turns and they are very good at that but they didn't actually engage in any real debate. So what tended to happen was that each child said their point and they sort of just took turns very statically. (Teacher interview: Visit 2C)

When observation and students and teacher feedback indicated that tasks were not engaging in purposeful talk they were revised, as one of the University of Cambridge team explained:

We did modify the Talking Points task from the initial task to the end task because when we looked at some of the items on Talking Points we felt that some of them didn't problematise issues enough or didn't create a dilemma ... the one that people responded to most was that footballers are paid too much. There was a real genuine debate and clash of opinions and we looked at other items and we thought actually they are a bit anodyne. In the end we reduced the number of tasks and made them more problematic in nature.

Tasks had also been designed to be stand-alone to provide a 'level playing field' for all students, and teachers in the Sheffield focus group agreed that this had been achieved:

What I liked about that as well was it made an automatic level playing field to some extent. I felt like in the group discussion, the lad on the left, you know, I agreed with some of his views,

but he had clearly had discussions before and thought about these ideas before ... whereas I felt like sometimes there's a cultural advantage in a discussion, isn't there? Like in terms of your richness and your knowledge and the experiences that you've had, whereas that Lego task, pretty much everybody can have a go and demonstrate a real range within that.

Regarding validity, it is worth noting that teachers in the Sheffield focus group felt that the three way rating scheme led them to judging the frequency with which students used certain skills rather than how they did so. One of the Sheffield focus group teachers felt that this approach prompted her to focus on frequency not quality:

I feel like on that task I ended up doing, when it came to the overall assessment, doing this, kind of, accrued sense of how many S's and G's and B's have I put up, and then counting it up.

Another Sheffield focus group teacher, who also found herself focusing on frequency, commented that frequency in relation to some skills could be detrimental:

Gesture, you could imagine somebody sitting there going, 'Yes, that boy made loads of gestures' – loads of fruitless gestures, repetitive meaningless gestures, whereas the girl was much more strategic in her use of gesture. That, when you compare gesture to, you know, consistently demonstrate this skill, like you could accidentally over-reward that boy. I don't know, it seemed a bit of a clumsy thing.

The decision to ask teachers to rate in terms of varying levels of consistency was taken by the University of Cambridge team to make it easier for teachers to arrive at appropriate judgements, and they reported that this had worked effectively for the teachers they worked with, who had received some training in use of the tasks. The Cambridge team felt that this training, or further guidance, is necessary to explore what is meant by 'consistency':

You're always working with that judgement of quality as well ... that's the kind of thing we try and explain and it's a case of trying to explain that down to some guidelines that take both of those aspects into account.

Relating to the 3-point ratings scheme some of the teachers at the independent Sheffield Hallam University focus group would have preferred a more finely graded scale:

I would have liked a finer grading within it, I think, because I found it difficult. Like [another teacher in the group] said, I was putting silver for a lot of them, but didn't feel that they were on a similar level in terms of their oracy.

It is interesting to note however that the 3-point ordinal scale we used at our testing session has now been replaced by the University Cambridge team with a 7-point ordinal scale. It is as yet unclear if this will address the concerns outlined above about measuring frequency rather than the quality and consistency in using that skill (see Section 8.3).

The Sheffield focus group teachers also expressed concerns about the use of other terms that could have been used with regard to the rating process. They briefly agreed that they needed to consider 'appropriate' use of talk, but went on to discuss that 'appropriateness' too is problematic:

I agree with [another focus group teacher] in terms of the use of that word 'appropriate'. It's always a bit of a problem when you find that in criteria. It became a bit meaningless in such a specific set of circumstances.

A further concern expressed during the Sheffield focus group was that it might be possible to 'teach to the test', and therefore undermine the validity of the test, as has happened in other areas of language and literacy education, leading to a narrow and atomised provision for oracy:

The other issue is how easy would it be to, kind of, train a child to be able to fill these criteria without them actually being a good speaker. I know that's true in lots of areas of English, but that was something I found. I felt uncomfortable especially with the presentation one with that. I felt it could fit and it didn't actually mean that they were a good speaker.

The Oracy Assessment Toolkit appears to have a good level of face validity with the students that the Cambridge team interviewed indicating that they thought the tasks were appropriate for measuring their oracy skills.

In summary we consider that the Oracy Assessment Toolkit provides a reasonable level of validity and that the evidence of validity we were able to examine supports the claims for validity made by the Cambridge team.

8.6 Training and support for using the assessment tasks and rating criteria

While there is not as yet a test handbook, the Cambridge team has produced a number of supporting resources which have been made available via a dedicated website (www.educ.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/oracytoolkit/). The landing page for the Oracy Assessment Toolkit provides an overview of the rationale for development of the toolkit as well as a video of Professor Neil Mercer introducing the Oracy Assessment Toolkit and the Oracy Skills Framework. From this landing page there are links to the skills framework and the toolkit itself. On the Oracy Skills Framework page the image does not load properly but there is a link to a PDF file which has the image detailing the four strands of the framework. There is also a link to a document which contains a glossary of the skills highlighted in the Oracy Skills Framework. This is particularly useful as it provides guidance on what would be expected of an appropriately skilled speaker in relation to the items contained in the framework. It would have been useful in this section of the site to provide the rationale for the Oracy Skills Framework and a summary of how it was developed. This would aid the understanding of the function and utility of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit.

The next section of the site provides an overview of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit tasks. It provides a brief description of the oracy tasks along with an example assessment form. This provides a helpful overview of the oracy tasks themselves and there are additional links to the specific tasks with links to task instructions.

The guidance on completing the assessment sheets on the website states that '*Teachers have adopted a variety of approaches to completing these sheets and there is no 'correct way'*'. If the tasks are to be used for professional development purposes and as a basis for professional discussion this appears appropriate. However, it may undermine the drive for consistency in the use of the toolkit and the assessments of oracy, particularly by teachers who may be relying solely on the web materials for training. While it is recognised that the tasks are intended to be 'teacher friendly' perhaps there needs to be clearer guidance on how to complete the sheets to ensure reliability and consistency.

This section of the website also provides teachers with both the simple 3-point Gold, Silver and Bronze ratings scale and a finer-grained 7-point scale which enabled raters to give grades with '+' and '-' ratings. Since the University has now adopted a 7-point scale the instruction sheets and proformas will require amendment.

The specific task pages would be enhanced by providing more detailed descriptions of the tasks, along with a rationale for their development as part of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit. In addition, the links to the PDF files could have more meaningful descriptions rather than just consisting of the filenames. This would make it clearer to teachers and researchers what the links are pointing to. The link to the Lego task has images of the models which students are trying to build. If these are the images that the students are describing to their partners this needs to be made explicit.

The documents in the Assessment for Learning tasks section site provide very good introductions to the tasks and a clear rationale for each task. It would be helpful for this level of detail to be provided in the explanations of the main oracy assessment tasks (i.e. the individual presentation, the instructional Lego task and the group Talking Points tasks).

There is a link provided to a Record Sheet but this does not provide sufficient information on the purpose of the sheet and or how it can be effectively utilised by teachers.

The final link is to the web repository which hosts the exemplar videos of students undertaking the oracy assessment tasks. This webpage provides access to nineteen videos from across the spectrum of oracy skills for each of the assessment tasks. Along with each video there is a very useful description of why that video has been graded in the way that it has. This is illustrated by this description from the Talking Points Silver Minus exemplar:

Look at the girl in the middle, who presents a Silver minus performance. She interacts well, making clear eye contact with both of the other participants; she listens and responds actively throughout the discussion. She is willing to take turns, though the turn-taking in this group is not systematic.

The videos and commentaries provide an excellent resource for teachers to develop understanding of oracy and are the most effective means of ensuring that the Oracy Assessment Toolkit is used consistently by teachers and researchers and thus of ensuring higher levels of reliability. We therefore suggest that more needs to be made of the importance of videos and commentaries for training purposes and to support teachers' discussion of oracy in the introduction to the Oracy Assessment Toolkit on the University of Cambridge website and on the Voice 21 website. The initial page with the link to the external site requires information relating to the purpose of the exemplar videos and indeed should be reinforcing the importance of engaging with these as part of teachers' training.

8.7 Use of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit within the School 21 curriculum

During the period of this evaluation the initial and follow-up tests were conducted by oracy teachers at School 21 and at least one of the oracy teachers made some use of the assessment for learning tasks. In addition School 21 have developed and begun to use an oracy Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) grid to track student progress against the skills in the Oracy Skills Framework. At this stage it is not clear how the Cambridge Oracy Assessment Toolkit is intended to fit within the overall Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit. It would be helpful for this to be articulated. There is also a need to consider the relationship between the Voice 21 website and the University of Cambridge website and the explanations that are placed on both to explain this relationship.

8.8 Summary and recommendations

In our opinion the Oracy Assessment Toolkit could potentially provide valid and reliable measures of students' oracy skills, however more data are required before this can be firmly established. There is good evidence from the University of Cambridge team that they take the reliability and validity of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit very seriously. They have changed one of the assessment activities already (from the Map Task in the original design to the Lego Task currently) and this has led to a significant improvement in the toolkit. Additionally, they have listened to the feedback from their own experts and raters concerning refining the grading scheme. The original scheme allowed raters to use just Bronze, Silver and Gold ratings to judge each skill associated with each of the oracy tasks. However, feedback indicated that a finer-grained scale was needed and so the scale was adjusted to incorporate +/- ratings. This increased the scale from a 3-point scale to a 7-point scale (Bronze, Bronze+, Silver-, Silver, Silver+, Gold- and Gold). The team also acknowledge that appropriate training is vital to the reliability of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit. Thus is it recommended that all documentation provides clear advice that the tool should only be utilised by appropriately trained raters. To this end the Cambridge team have made available exemplar videos which provide

prospective users with examples of students with differing abilities performing the oracy assessment tasks, together with a brief narrative of what skills the students are demonstrating. It is also important to recognise the potential value of these exemplar rating videos and commentaries in supporting teacher talk about oracy and teacher professional development. This potential use is not yet sufficiently visible on either the University of Cambridge or the Voice 21 website.

A tension exists between developing an assessment tool with very high levels of reliability that could be used in a large scale trial and producing an assessment tool that is usable by, and useful to, teachers. The University of Cambridge have been clear from the outset that their intention is the latter.

We recommend that:

Further reliability analyses are undertaken particularly on the use of the 7-point ratings scheme as well as a proper item-analysis. In order to do this a larger sample of raters would be required.

The University of Cambridge continue to review the assessment tasks to ensure validity as they are used in different contexts.

Exemplar videos to support teachers in undertaking reliable assessments and as a basis for teacher professional development are produced. Videos exemplifying achievement at Gold level for the talking points task would be particularly useful.

The way in which the Oracy Assessment Toolkit is presented on the University of Cambridge Oracy Assessment Toolkit website is reviewed ensuring that:

- some context to, and rationale for, the Oracy Skills Framework is provided
- clearer and more detailed descriptions of the contents of each of the task-specific pages are presented along with more meaningful named links to documents
- clear advice on using the assessment sheets to enhance reliability is provided.

The way in which the Oracy Assessment Toolkit is intended to be used within the overall Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit intervention is clearly articulated and a clearer explanatory link is made between the University of Cambridge website and the Voice 21 website.

9. Supporting CPD and resources

9.1 Introduction

Given the developmental nature of the project we are unable to provide an assessment of the CPD that would be available to schools adopting the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit. In this section we therefore report briefly on School 21's teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the oracy CPD that took place during the development period and then focus on the proposal set out in School 21's final project report (Fidoe, 2014) for CPD for other schools. We also present a professional review of Voice 21, the website developed in this project (<http://voice21.org/>). The materials on the University of Cambridge website that support the use of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit were reviewed in Section 8.

Stoll et al.'s (2012) literature review identified nine strong claims about effective professional development, namely that effective professional development:

1. starts with the end in mind (i.e what are the intended outcomes? particularly for students)
2. challenges thinking as part of changing practice
3. is based on assessment of individual and school needs
4. involves connecting work-based learning and external expertise
5. comprises professional learning opportunities that are varied, rich and sustainable
6. uses action research and enquiry as key tools
7. is strongly enhanced through collaborative learning and joint practice development
8. is enhanced by creating professional learning communities within and between schools
9. requires leadership to create the necessary conditions.

We draw on these criteria to inform our consideration of the CPD experienced by teachers at School 21 during the pilot and the effectiveness of School 21's proposals for CPD to support the roll-out of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit.

9.2 Oracy CPD at School 21 during the pilot

School 21 has from its start-up, embedded a whole school oracy culture which integrates the development of students' oracy skills with other school aims such as student wellbeing and leadership. It is therefore somewhat difficult to draw a clear boundary around CPD that is specifically designed to support the development of oracy from those CPD activities that have the broader aim of supporting the development of School 21's wider curriculum and culture. The head teacher and project manager pointed to whole school oracy focused CPD events, coaching, assemblies and the visuals in all classrooms as all contributing to supporting all teachers in developing their oracy teaching and/or the use of oracy to support learning in their subject.

The project manager (Interview, Visit 2) explained:

We've not measured impact on teachers yet, however there is a huge impact on all the teachers and you see it in the practice of all the lessons.

Although the impact of oracy CPD has not yet been measured it was evident from all interviewees that there is a clear focus on intended student outcomes, or as Stoll et al. (2012) phrase it, CPD 'starts with the end in mind'. The Oracy Skills Framework has the potential to be particularly helpful in supporting teachers' CPD and providing a common language to talk about oracy. The end of the project report (Fidoe, 2014) matches some oracy techniques that teachers may use in any subject with skills identified in the Oracy Skills Framework. Further development of this approach is likely to enhance support for teachers.

When teachers were asked about the CPD they had received around oracy they all pointed to assemblies, identifying them as important in helping them learn oracy approaches. All staff are present in assemblies and students work in groups of 12 within their form. The teachers leading the assembly model approaches that other teachers can use within their own teaching. As one teacher explained:

So then certainly things like the pairs, how children work together in pairs, how children work together in threes, the rest of the staff would understand that and would also understand the language of oracy that we use like the instigator, the builder, the competitor, every member of staff has got that up on their wall. (Teacher interview, Visit 2C)

This process of interaction and mutual development between teachers aligns with the notion of joint practice development which Fielding et al. (2005) demonstrated supports the exchange of knowledge between teachers and is recognised as contributing positively to effective professional development (Stoll et al., 2012).

Teachers emphasised the importance of the scaffolding provided by the common protocols for oracy developed in this project and the oracy visuals that are placed in every classroom. A teacher focus group also noted that as the school grows in size and more teachers are recruited, maintaining consistent approaches will become more challenging:

We have to grow the consistency – how we induct staff and keep the training regular – but not over-kill – having that consistency but still having innovation. So by having common protocols and using that, we try and keep it consistent. With any sort of new model that you are trying to embed you need that. (Teacher focus group, Visit 2)

In addition oracy teachers participated in training from the University of Cambridge team using the prototype assessment tool and attended an assessment moderation event at the university. They were also supported by external drama coaches. The use of external expertise to support professional development is a key feature of effective professional development (Stoll et al., 2012).

9.3 Proposed CPD package for other schools

Developing an appropriate approach to CPD to support other schools to implement the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit presents a number of challenges. School 21 had the advantage of being a new school, starting in their first year with only Year 7 students and a small staff group recruited with the school's distinctive ethos in mind. They were therefore able to embed an oracy culture and high expectations of students' progress and achievement in oracy from inception. In contrast, the CPD required by staff in other schools will need to take account of established cultures and practices and, in most cases, impact on a larger staff group that may primarily be engaged in more tightly subject-focused professional learning activities and communities.

In a potential CPD package, the head teacher (Interview, Visit 2) of School 21's aspiration is for a tailored coaching approach:

We don't like training where someone just sort of comes in and delivers something and goes again and what we will do in local schools is all time-consuming and we will work alongside them and actually find out from them what they need and what they're expecting, there'll be a huge variety and therefore we'll have a set of programmes and toolkits that will apply to anyone but I want to tailor it to what the individual schools require at whatever stage they're at.

Such an approach has the potential to address the complexities of integrating an oracy curriculum and culture into more established schools and there is a substantial body of evidence that supports the effectiveness of coaching as a school change/improvement strategy (see for example Simkins et al., 2009). This intended approach also incorporates a number of the key features of effective

professional development identified by Stoll et al. (2012), namely: it is based on assessment of individual and school needs; it involves connecting work-based learning and external expertise; it comprises professional learning opportunities that are varied, rich and sustainable; it is strongly enhanced through collaborative learning and joint practice development; and it creates professional learning communities within and between schools.

The package of CPD proposed by School 21 is set out in Section 2.1. The engagement of senior leaders in CPD, as proposed, would appear to be essential. It is fundamental to helping schools develop an oracy culture as well as ensuring that leaders have sufficient understanding of the intervention to create the necessary conditions to enable teachers to implement the toolkit – a necessary condition of effective professional learning (Stoll et al., 2012). As Section 7 has identified, developing a whole school oracy culture is a core feature of the School 21 approach, but one that may be difficult for other schools to embed, as a School 21 teacher observed:

We all do assemblies ... which isn't just talking from the front but addressing the circles – so maybe there is something cultural that is encouraging talk and so on ... something cultural that is in the air, that is hard to pin down. (Teacher focus group, Visit 2)

At this stage it is not possible to ascertain whether the proposed CPD package will be sufficient, particularly in terms of the amount of coaching provided, to support schools to embed oracy; such a judgement would require assessment when the package is piloted.

9.4 Voice 21 website

The following evaluative commentary is based on a review of the Voice 21 website: by two members of the evaluation team on 24 November 2014; and by members of the Sheffield Hallam University Language and Literacy Education Research Group on 24 September 2014. It is recognised that the website was still under development when these review meetings were held and that School 21 believe that the best way to support CPD is face-to-face and that the website might not therefore be expected to stand alone. However, as we were not able to observe any CPD activity, we have focused attention on the Voice 21 website.

Our commentary in this section is intended primarily to be used formatively to inform the next stage of website development to enable School 21 to use the website as effectively as possible in communicating their approach. These comments are intended to be read alongside those related to the dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum and oracy in every lesson as they appear on the website, presented in Sections 5 and 6.

The University of Cambridge website also provides materials to support professional learning for teachers using the Oracy Assessment Toolkit. This has been reviewed in Section 8. In this section we examine the interrelationship between the Voice 21 and the University of Cambridge websites and ways in which that supports and limits their use as CPD resources.

Structure and organisation of the Voice 21 website

The structure of the website reflects the elements of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit, i.e. there are links to: the Oracy Skills Framework; the dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum; oracy in every lesson; and building an oracy culture. There are also links to the University of Cambridge Oracy Assessment Toolkit. It would be helpful to have some explicit signposting as, when we visited the site, our perspective was that key elements, such as the Oracy Skills Framework and the curriculum, while present, were not foregrounded. The use of the Oracy Skills Framework in guiding curriculum and assessment could also usefully be highlighted.

The website is attractive and includes a variety of approaches for teachers and leaders from other schools to draw upon. It provides a bank of resources which will be useful to teachers and organising

opportunities for oracy. The current approach is to let these materials 'speak for themselves'. Few resources include any written commentary, although spoken commentary is given in some videos.

The inclusion of a large number of videos would seem to be a strength. The videos exemplify approaches in an accessible way. It was our view that the most useful videos are those that relate to a sequence of videos and are clearly placed within a programme of work – and where this is easily apparent to the viewer.

A more 'mediated' approach might provide a more detailed rationale for approaches illustrated by videos, along with guidance on how these might be used within a sequence of activities, and principles for adapting them for use in other contexts (e.g. linked to other topics or other foci in oracy). Drawing on some of the rationales presented in the School 21 final report (Fido, 2014) would begin to address this issue. Some exemplification of how resources might be adapted for use by students of different ages would be helpful.

Content of resources

The exemplar resources provided are engaging and practical. It is recognised that School 21 have identified resources that might be seen as generic, that could be used and applied in a variety of contexts, and it is likely that this approach will be welcomed by teachers. In lessons observed, and in lesson outlines provided on the website, there is a clear emphasis on providing meaningful contexts for talk (with a range of purposes and audiences). We suggest that it is important that the resources on the website are enhanced with the addition of explicit reference to the need to apply these approaches within specific meaningful contexts, and for the need to provide diverse contexts for oracy and to explore repertoires of talk.

Suitability for a teacher/school audience

While it is generally agreed that oracy has not been a priority within the curriculum (e.g. see Alexander, 2012), all schools will have addressed speaking and listening and there are many schools in which talk has been a focus for development. School 21 believe their curriculum has a distinctive contribution to make and our evaluation indicates that the proposed curriculum brings together key elements in ways that promise to prove useful to teachers in developing this important area. However, while the School 21 approach includes distinctive elements, it would be overstating the case to argue that a focus on oracy is either unique or new. Teachers' existing expertise and prior research therefore need to be acknowledged within the materials. Some schools may otherwise not engage with the materials if they feel that they offer nothing new, or if they read the materials as discounting work developed elsewhere. The need to recognise existing individual and school expertise also links to Stoll et al.'s (2012) claim that effective professional development should be based on an assessment of individual and school need.

Identifying the distinctive contribution of Voice 21

Linked to the previous point, there is a need to clarify what is distinctive about the School 21 approach as represented on the Voice 21 website. It would be helpful to more clearly foreground and justify the key elements of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit, i.e. the Oracy Skills Framework, the dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum, oracy in every lesson, an oracy culture and the Oracy Assessment Toolkit. These dimensions are present, but the website does not clearly explain the link between the overarching Oracy Skills Framework and the specific activities recommended. It would also be useful to have further detailed exemplification of how teachers have worked with the framework to support pupils' development, and of the challenges they have faced while doing so. Similarly, it is clear that School 21's provision is informed by the need to provide motivating contexts for oracy and yet this is not explicitly stated on the website. At School 21, oracy is carefully contextualised within a range of motivating and challenging projects. However, this does not appear

to be made explicit. Since other schools may integrate oracy in different ways, it would seem to be important to clarify the importance of planning for relevant contexts.

Need for additional guidance and resources on developing exploratory talk

Currently, the website provides good exemplification of talk for presentational and formal purposes, using talk effectively to argue a point of view, for example, or formally present information or opinion. In parts of the website – particularly the rationale for the development of oracy (e.g. see Spreading the Word video) – and in some teacher interviews, there is an articulation of the relationship between talk and learning. However there were fewer examples of talk for learning on the website. There is good support for organising for talk, e.g. through talk protocols, but less for exploring and planning for the development of exploratory talk and on its speculative nature. Talk on the Voice 21 website is often presented as a means of communicating thinking rather than developing it. Given the substantial amount of research which highlights the relationship between talk and learning, this would seem to be an area to develop. This might be done, for example, by linking to examples provided through other projects or other schools, or by providing examples from School 21 to illustrate how these insights from prior research have been applied.

External research evidence

The approach to oracy at School 21 has been developed through a process of considerable innovation and ongoing review by a dedicated and creative staff team. Given the breadth of what is being attempted, and the developmental nature of the project, there is a need to provide clear justification for what is being promoted to other schools and also to acknowledge the provisional nature of what is being claimed to be successful. In this regard it would be helpful to make explicit the sources that have informed the development of the curriculum. For example, there is a link to research on the website which lists a number of sources, including research reviews, commentaries and two journal articles. It is currently unclear why these sources have been selected or whether (and if so how) they have informed the development of the curriculum.

Using the website to support CPD

The website is presented as a series of resources, rather than as a structured web-based professional development tool. For example, at the time of review the section headed 'Teacher Training' comprised a series of videos taken from a training day at School 21 but there is no rationale for the materials or explication of how teachers visiting the site may draw on them for professional development purposes. Although School 21 recommend that the website is used alongside a supporting CPD package, the website is publicly available for any school to access. Therefore we suggest that consideration is given to how the website might work to support continuing professional development of teachers in other schools. This would require, for example, clear guidance on how to use the website for professional purposes, taking account of teachers' prior knowledge and existing expertise, activities that encourage teachers to reflect on how the proposed approaches fit with their practice, and the needs and strengths of their students.

Usability of website

There are some glitches in the Voice 21 website that will need to be addressed as it is further developed. For example, some hyperlinks do not work, and there are too many clicks to access key documents.

9.5 Summary and recommendations

Oracy CPD at School 21 has been positively received by teachers, and both teachers and leaders point to assemblies where oracy teaching is modelled, oracy protocols and classroom visuals are

important CPD tools. The proposed CPD package to support other schools implementing the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit has yet to be piloted. The CPD package design includes a number of techniques, such as coaching, that have been shown to be effective in supporting teachers' professional development.

Since the overall CPD package to support schools in implementing the School 21 oracy approach is still to be implemented we focus our recommendations on enhancing the effectiveness of the Voice21 website as a CPD tool. We recognise that the site is still under development and some of these issues may now have been addressed. The website includes sections linked to each component of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit, although the relationships between these components could be more effectively signposted. The exemplar resources provided are engaging and practical although more could be done to provide a rationale for the School 21 approach and the strategies recommended. The website provides good exemplification of talk for presentational and formal purposes, using talk effectively to argue a point of view, for example, or formally present information or opinion.

We recommend that:

The effectiveness of the proposed CPD package should be evaluated when it is rolled out to other schools.

The effectiveness of the Voice21 website could be enhanced by:

- a structure that foregrounds the Oracy Skills Framework and the other key components of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit and explains the relationship between these elements
- clear rationales and explanations for all materials explaining their purpose and intended use in relation to other materials
- identifying the unique contribution of the School 21 approach as well as acknowledging work that is already in place elsewhere and signposting through the site for teachers with differing levels of prior knowledge and experience of oracy teaching
- the addition of materials that exemplify talk for learning.

As the project progresses it would be helpful to add a section that exemplifies how other schools have used the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit.

10. Conclusions

Key Conclusions

1. The Oracy Skills Framework provides a useful tool for schools wishing to review and develop their approach to oracy. The associated Oracy Assessment Toolkit provides teachers with a tool that can be used diagnostically and to track students' progress in developing oracy skills.
2. The Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit as implemented in School 21 appears to provide a sound foundation for the development of oracy skills, with particular strengths in supporting persuasive talk and talk for presentational purposes and in formal contexts. This multi-stranded approach may demand some fundamental shifts in approach for any new school adopting it, including allocating dedicated curriculum time, cultural changes and whole staff training.
3. Further refinement of the curriculum and associated resources is required to highlight the role, nature and development of exploratory talk and to ensure diverse opportunities for oracy, formal and non-formal, are provided. The supporting website requires development to provide an effective professional development resource for other schools.
4. It was not possible at this stage of development to provide a valid measurement of impact. Piloting in other schools and further research would be required prior to a randomised control trial of the intervention to establish a stronger evidence base on the impact on oracy skills and attainment across subjects. Research is also required on how the intervention is interpreted in other schools, and on the opportunities and barriers that arise when implementing these approaches at other sites.

10.1 Limitations

This evaluation has been conducted alongside the development of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit. The primary purpose of the evaluation was to provide an independent view to support the development of the intervention; it is therefore not a full evaluation of the toolkit as it has now been developed. Our findings are necessarily partial and indicative and some of the issues we raise will have been addressed as part of continuing development work. We are also unable to make valid claims about the impact of the intervention at this stage. Our review of the University of Cambridge's claims for the validity and reliability of the assessment tool, developed during the project lifespan and piloted as a pre and post measure, provides a reasonable degree of confidence in the measure. However, during the trial it was only used to measure the progress of 12 students and the timing of the pre- and post-tests did not cover the full year. The Raven's Progressive Matrices non-verbal reasoning test adopted by the evaluation as an assessment of impact beyond language skills has been used in previous research on oracy development (Mercer and Littleton, 2007), but can only be considered to be a partial measure of improvements in non-verbal skills.

10.2 Key conclusions and interpretation

This developmental project has culminated in the identification of a bounded Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit that, with some refinement and further development, is ready for piloting with other schools. It has potential to make a valuable contribution to the promotion of oracy which, research (Mercer, 2008; Alexander, 2001) has suggested, plays a central role in children's learning and in students' current and future lives.

Impact

It was not the intention of this evaluation to assess whether the intervention has a positive impact on student attainment. Given the developmental nature of the project it is also too early to make confident judgements about the effectiveness of the intervention on students' oracy skills or learning. While there are indicators from the prototype University of Cambridge Oracy Assessment Toolkit, used at two points during the year, that the approaches used by School 21 are having a positive impact, only 12 School 21 students were tested. The Raven's Progressive Matrices non-verbal reasoning test conducted by the evaluation team did not show a significant improvement in students' progress compared to students in a control school. The Raven's Matrices test is only a proxy measure of oracy and has strong limitations. It is possible, however, that in part the Raven's Matrices test result may also reflect a theme identified during the evaluation, namely a greater focus on engaging in and reflecting on talk for presentational purposes than on exploratory talk. Alternatively the result may have occurred because the impact of the focus on talk has yet to be realised in students' 'talk for learning'. However, this does suggest that exploratory talk should be a focus for further scrutiny at School 21.

Below we draw conclusions relating to the key components of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit it is important to note that the components are highly interrelated and when used in combination they are mutually reinforcing in terms of the development of oracy.

Oracy Skills Framework

Our qualitative research findings indicate that the Oracy Skills Framework has provided an appropriate and effective structure to support curriculum design and to underpin the development of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit. It also provides the basis for a shared language for teachers implementing the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit. However, further research is required to see how effective the Oracy Skills Framework is in other contexts and this further review may generate the need for further refinement.

Dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum

Given the developmental nature of the project we are unable to arrive at a definitive judgement about the efficacy of the dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum. However, the four units that comprise the proposed curriculum are well designed to explore the four strands of oracy skills in the Oracy Skills Framework. The distinctive quality of this curriculum is the identification of a set of skills which may be used across different contexts, with an emphasis on making appropriate choices about how to draw on these appropriately within these different contexts. The explicit oracy focus, and focus on reflection, allows for each topic to be examined in depth and each unit culminates in a motivating opportunity for the application of skills learned. Particular strengths include: provision for developing talk for presentational purposes; the role of drama; and the effective communication of an argument or point of view.

A number of elements remain under development in the curriculum materials and a strengthening of the cognitive strand, including provision for exploratory talk, is required. The curriculum materials also need to emphasise the need to address oracy within a diverse range of informal as well as formal contexts and explore the appropriateness of talk to context. In complementing the dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum, which perhaps inevitably focuses on selected types of talk, there is a need to clarify how contexts might be provided across the curriculum to ensure students develop broad repertoires of talk. There is also a need to recognise that the School 21 curriculum is underpinned by particular aims, objectives and principles, and these need to be stated clearly.

Oracy in every lesson

The commitment to promote oracy in every lesson is a strength of the School 21 approach as is the emphasis on providing meaningful contexts for talk across the curriculum. Staff and pupils possess and utilise a shared language for oracy and are familiar with a range of approaches for organising, promoting and reviewing talk. School 21 attribute positive pupil attainment to this strong oracy focus and students appear to expect to be involved in group discussion and draw on strategies developed during oracy lessons to help them do so. Given what we perceive to be an emphasis on talk for presentational purposes in the website materials, it would seem that the development of exploratory talk is worth further scrutiny.

Oracy culture

The school plans a variety of opportunities for oracy which help to generate a 'culture of talk', e.g. assemblies, staff development sessions and parents' evenings, to ensure that talk plays a central role. Oracy therefore has high status within the school and there is a shared commitment to oracy development by the teaching staff. The development of oracy is closely related to other aspects of the school's curriculum and pedagogy. Other emphases on wellbeing, leadership and enquiry, for example, appear to both reinforce and benefit from the oracy curriculum, and the school benefits from specialist drama teaching. School 21's position as a new school with a small student population may also make positive engagement by staff and students more likely. This raises questions about the extent to which it is possible to translate the School 21 oracy approach to other settings.

Oracy Assessment Toolkit

The University of Cambridge Oracy Assessment Toolkit was designed to provide a range of tasks for students to demonstrate their oracy skills and ratings scales for teachers and independent reviewers to assess oracy attainment. The toolkit provides a variety of contexts for the assessment of different kinds of talk and has the potential to offer reliable and valid assessments of students' oracy skills. However, further refinement is needed to increase the reliability of the toolkit. The analyses presented by the University of Cambridge team suggest that with appropriately trained raters the assessment tool has reasonable reliability. We note though that they have not presented the reliability coefficients for all of the assessment tasks. Our own reliability analysis suggests that using the tool with untrained raters results in low levels of reliability. The 7-point scale developed during this pilot appears to provide more reliable ratings than the original 3-point scale. Further piloting of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit with the package of support materials that have been produced in this pilot would enable the appropriateness of the 7-point scale to be explored together with further testing of inter-rater reliability.

It is important to note that the Oracy Assessment Toolkit has been designed as a tool for teachers to use to diagnose and track students' progress and in this respect the evaluation indicates that teachers perceive it to be a usable tool. The toolkit would require significant further development and trialling if it was intended to be developed to the stage required to provide a standardised test. The exemplar rating videos and accompanying commentaries on the University of Cambridge website have strong potential for supporting teachers' professional development and stimulating teacher talk and debate about oracy. The evaluation highlighted the need for teachers to receive training prior to using the toolkit and for some reorganisation of the Oracy Assessment Toolkit website.

Supporting CPD and resources

The proposed CPD package to support other schools in the implementation of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit has yet to be tested. Significant progress has been made in setting up the Voice 21 website, which provides access to key approaches, teaching resources and associated video clips. Further work is now needed to enable the website to underpin CPD for schools wishing to develop oracy. This includes structuring the website to foreground the Oracy Skills

Framework and providing a commentary that explains the rationale for all materials and how they link together.

10.3 Further development of the intervention and future research

A key task during this project was for School 21 to identify from its embedded practice a bounded intervention that could be shared with other schools. Placing boundaries on the intervention took time and it is only towards the end of the project that clarity has emerged around defining what has now been termed the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit. We therefore recommend that a further pilot is undertaken with a small number of schools. This would enable a more robust measurement of impact as well as exploration of how the pilot schools understand and deploy the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Framework and relate it to existing oracy practices. As we have highlighted, some schools may find it difficult to implement the full toolkit in the way that it has been embedded in School 21. Piloting would also offer the opportunity to assess the effectiveness of the proposed CPD package and the Voice 21 website, and further refine and test the Oracy Assessment Toolkit to establish reliability and validity.

10.4 Recommendations for development of the Oracy, Culture and Curriculum Toolkit

Below we summarise our recommendations for the further development of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit:

Oracy Skills Framework

The Oracy Skills framework should continue to be subject to review to assess its appropriateness in other settings.

Guidance for other schools needs to emphasise that:

- the four strands of the Oracy Skills Framework are closely related and to be effective teaching needs to be contextualised and should not overly focus on individual skills in isolation from other skills
- the framework should be used flexibly to support appropriate choices about the direction and emphasis of oracy provision in different school contexts.

Dedicated Year 7 oracy curriculum

School 21 continues to refer to expertise and approaches developed outside the school to ensure that the curriculum takes account of recent research studies and development projects. This would include revisiting support for promoting talk for learning, particularly in relation to exploratory talk.

The dedicated Year 7 curriculum documentation and associated resources be further refined in terms of content and presentation. In particular these should:

- clearly state the aims, objectives and underpinning principles of the dedicated Year 7 curriculum so that other schools are clear about what the curriculum is, and is not, designed to achieve
- highlight the role, nature and development of exploratory talk
- emphasise the need to provide a range of motivating and relevant contexts for talk.

Oracy in every lesson

School 21 review the extent to which students engage in exploratory talk across subjects and how this is promoted across the school, and ensure that the oracy in every lesson documentation and resources give greater emphasis to exploratory talk.

Oracy culture

Any scaling-up of the intervention would need to consider how School 21's oracy approach is interpreted in other schools, and on the opportunities and barriers that arise when implementing these approaches in other sites.

Oracy Assessment Toolkit

Further reliability analyses are undertaken particularly on the use of the 7-point ratings scheme as well as a proper item-analysis. In order to do this a larger sample of raters would be required.

The University of Cambridge continue to review the assessment tasks to ensure validity as they are used in different contexts.

Exemplar videos, to support teachers in undertaking reliable assessment and as a basis for teacher professional development, are produced. Videos exemplifying achievement at Gold level for the Talking Points task would be particularly useful.

The way in which the Oracy Assessment Toolkit is presented on the University of Cambridge Oracy Assessment Toolkit website is reviewed ensuring that:

- some context to, and rationale for, the Oracy Skills Framework is provided
- clearer and more detailed descriptions of the contents of each of the task-specific pages are presented along with more meaningful named links to documents
- clear advice on using the assessment sheets to enhance reliability is provided.

The way in which the Oracy Assessment Toolkit is intended to be used within the overall Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit intervention is clearly articulated and a clearer explanatory link is made between the Voice 21 website and the University of Cambridge website.

CPD and supporting resources

The effectiveness of the proposed CPD package should be evaluated when it is rolled out to other schools.

The effectiveness of the Voice21 website could be enhanced by:

- a structure that foregrounds the Oracy Skills Framework and the other key components of the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit and explains the relationship between these elements
- clear rationales and explanations for all materials explaining their purpose and intended use in relation to other materials
- identifying the unique contribution of the School 21 approach as well as acknowledging work that is already in place elsewhere and signposting through the site for teachers with differing levels of prior knowledge and experience of oracy teaching
- the addition of materials that exemplify talk for learning.

As the project progresses it would be helpful to add a section that exemplifies how other schools have used the Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit.

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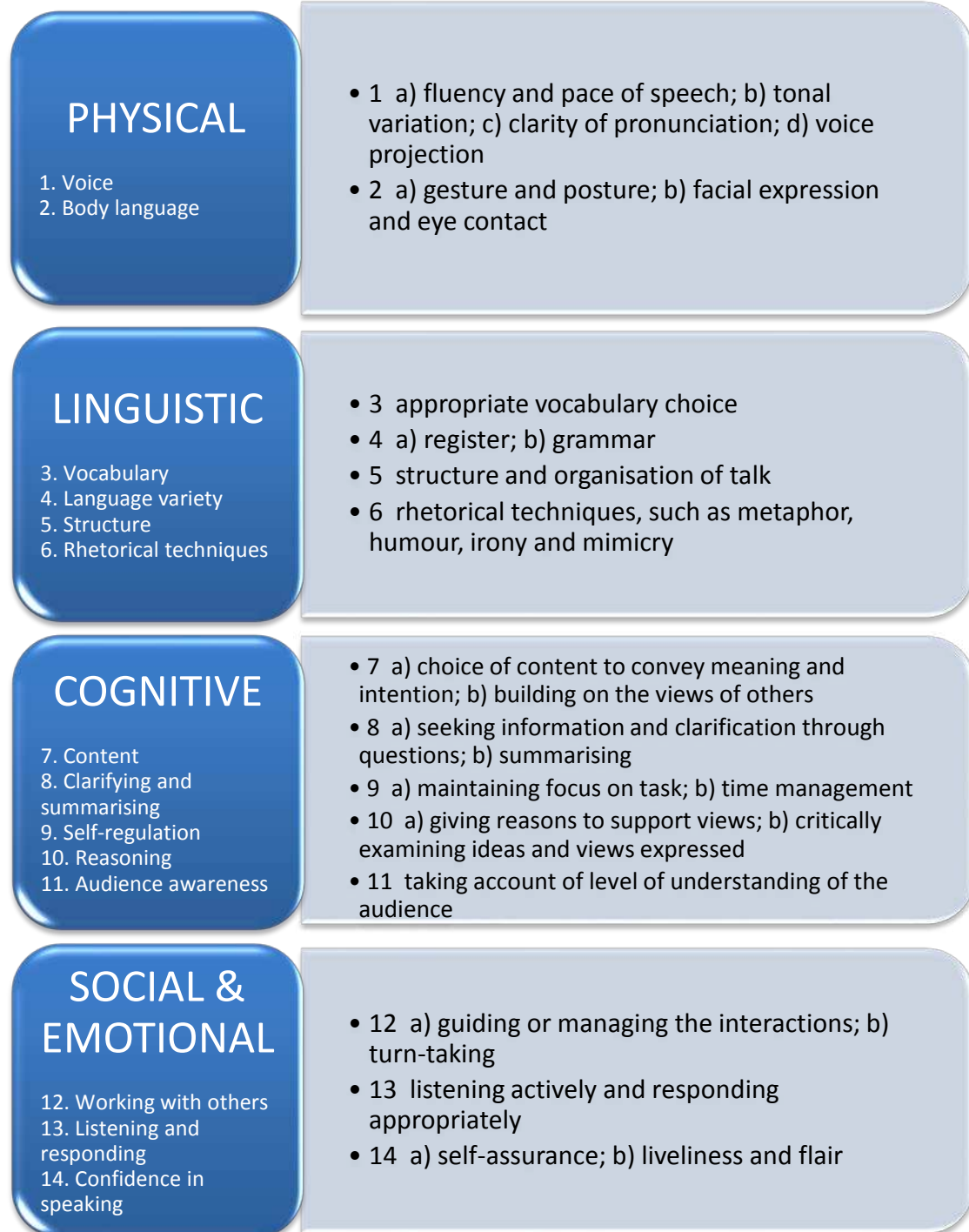
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Appendix 1: School 21 and the University of Cambridge Oracy Skills Framework



Appendix 2: School 21's mapping of the dedicated oracy curriculum to the Oracy Skills Framework

	Unit One: Finding Our Voice	Unit Two: Performance Poetry	Unit Three: Persuasive Techniques	Unit Four: Ignite Talks
Physical	Voice appropriate for small groups. Proof of listening in groups.	Body language and voice for performance.	Voice appropriate to formal contexts.	Use of voice to engage listener. Body language for presentation.
Linguistic	Language of justification. Dialogic language.	Creative and emotive language.	Formal and convincing language. Questioning techniques. Language of justification. Adapt register for different contexts.	Passionate language. Language of justification. Powerful arguments. Persuasion. Critical language.
Cognitive	Talk protocols. Pre-talk. Types of questions. Higher order thinking. De Bono's Hats.	Scripted, rehearsed language. Redrafting work.	Rapidity of response and thought process. Production of a spontaneous, cognitive argument in reaction to what is said. Summarising the debate.	Constructing a spoken argument. Time management. Redrafting. Peer critique. Reflection.
Social and Emotional	Groupings. Listening strategies. Talk protocols.	Collaborative group work. Audience engagement.	Managing interactions in a formal setting. Listening to others in a debate.	Peer critiquing. Engagement with personal topic. Engagement with audience through liveliness and flair.

Appendix 3: Parental information sheet (intervention)

Oracy research Project: Parental information sheet

School 21 and Cambridge University are piloting a programme of activities within the school curriculum to support the development of year 7 students' oracy skills. Sheffield Hallam University has been commissioned by the Education Endowment Fund (EEF), a charity dedicated to raising educational attainment, to evaluate this project. As part of the evaluation we would like to collect data from year 7 students.

What will the research involve?

Verbal reasoning tests: All year 7 students will be asked to take a verbal reasoning test in September 2013 and again in July 2014. This will take about 45 minutes and will take place during the school day. The results of the tests will be used to assess the progress made over the year and we will compare this to students in another school with similar characteristics. After the evaluation has been completed we may share the outcomes of the results of your child's test with School 21 to help them support your child. We will only present collated data in our evaluation report and your child's results will not be identifiable.

Observations of teaching and learning, videos of students' activity and student focus groups: Members of the evaluation team will be observing lessons on four days during the year. We will also analyse videos recorded by School 21 and Cambridge University of students taking part in oracy activities and taking part in a prototype assessment of oracy. We will ask a small number of students to take part in a focus group. In the focus group they will be asked about their experiences of oracy activities at School 21 and the impact of these activities on their learning. We will not share any individual student comments in focus groups with School 21 and no individual student will be identifiable in our reporting.

When will the report be published?

We will produce a summary project evaluation report that will be available on the Education Endowment Fund website (<http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/>). This report will name School 21 but all students will be fully anonymised. We may also use the data for academic and professional publications. Again students would be fully anonymised. If you have any questions please contact us using the details below.

What do I do if I don't want my child to take part in the evaluation?

Participation is voluntary and you can decide to not give your permission to allow your child to participate by not returning the consent form attached. Students themselves will also have the opportunity to opt out of the verbal reasoning test and all related aspects of the evaluation.

For any further enquiries please contact:

Ben Willis (Project Manager): b.willis@shu.ac.uk or tel: 0114 225 6059
Address: Centre for Education and Inclusion Research, Sheffield Hallam University, Unit 7 Science Park, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WB

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Appendix 4: Opt-in parental consent form (intervention)

Oracy research evaluation: Parental consent form

Dear parent/carer,

School 21 and Cambridge University are piloting a programme of activities within the school curriculum to support the development of year 7 students' oracy skills. We (Sheffield Hallam University) have been commissioned to evaluate this project.

As part of the evaluation

a sample of year 7 students will be asked to take a verbal reasoning test in September 2013 and again in July 2014 (the test will take about 45 minutes and take place during the school day)

we will observe lessons on four days during the year

we will analyse videos, recorded by School 21 and Cambridge University, of students taking part in oracy activities and taking part in a prototype assessment of oracy

We will ask a small number of students to take part in a focus group about these activities.

We will not share any individual student comments in focus groups with School 21 and no individual student will be identifiable in our reporting. Rest assured no individual child will be identified - all responses will be completely confidential and all data stored securely to ensure compliance with the 1998 Data Protection Act. No information about individual students will be reported or made available to anyone. After the evaluation has been completed we may also share the results of your child's test with School 21 to help them support your child. Anonymised data (without names) will be shared with the EEF.

Participation in the evaluation is voluntary and if at any stage during the project you no longer wish your child to take part please contact the evaluation project manager (details below) who will ensure no data from your child is used. Students themselves can also choose on the day whether or not to take part in the test, focus groups, any observations and request that their data not be used.

If you ARE willing for your child to take part in the research please complete the slip below and give it to your child's teacher or take it to the school office.

✂-----

Please return this slip to your child's teacher (or school office).

Oracy research, I do give my permission for my child to take part in the evaluation.

Child's full name:

Signed:

Parent/carer

Date.....

Appendix 5: Information sheet control (school)

Oracy research Project: information sheet

Sheffield Hallam University has been commissioned by the Education Endowment Fund (EEF), a charity dedicated to raising educational attainment, to evaluate a project focused on piloting a programme of activities within the school curriculum to support the development of year 7 students' oracy skills. As part of the evaluation we would like to collect data from year 7 students.

What would the research involve?

Verbal reasoning tests: A sample of year 7 students would be asked to take a verbal reasoning test in September 2013 and again in July 2014. This would take about 45 minutes and would take place during the school day. The results of the tests would be used to assess the progress made over the year and would compare this to students in another school with similar characteristics. Participation is voluntary and parents would be written to separately and given the opportunity to withdraw their child from the evaluation. The students themselves would be given the option to not take part on the day of the test.

When will the report be published?

We will produce a summary project evaluation report that will be available on the Education Endowment Fund website (<http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/>). We may also use the data for academic and professional publications. Again students would be fully anonymised. If you have any questions please contact us using the details below.

What would the benefits be for my school?

The project should provide evidence about what types of programmes make a difference to students' attainment. At the end of the project all schools will be able to access the findings of this evaluation on the EEF website. Additionally we would provide an event for staff run by Neil Mercer (an international expert on oracy) at Hackney New School to enable the school to benefit from the latest research on oracy.

For any further enquiries please contact:

Ben Willis (Project Manager): b.willis@shu.ac.uk or tel: 0114 225 6059
Address: Centre for Education and Inclusion Research, Sheffield Hallam University,
Unit 7 Science Park, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WB

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Appendix 6: Information sheet control (parents)

Information Sheet

The Education Endowment Fund (*EEF*) an independent charity dedicated to raising educational attainment is supporting a project that is trialling a programme of activities designed to assess and improve the oracy skills of year 7 students. The Centre for Education and Inclusion Research at Sheffield Hallam University has been commissioned by the EEF to evaluate this project.

As part of the evaluation the aim is to compare the progress of students in the school that is undertaking the trial with student progress in a 'control' school with similar characteristics. Hackney New School has kindly agreed to act as a control school.

A sample of year 7 students will be asked to take a verbal reasoning test in September 2013 and again in July 2014. The test will take about 45 minutes and will take place during the school day.

The aim of the project is to provide evidence for all schools about what types of programmes make a difference to students' attainment so they can make informed choices about how best to use their resources. On completion of the project all schools will be able to access the findings of this evaluation via the Education Endowment Fund website www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk.

Following completion of the project we will also provide an event for staff at the school led by an international expert in oracy, to enable the school to benefit from the latest research on oracy.

What will happen to the information you collect about my child?

The results of the tests in your school will be compared to the results in the trial school and national data on results from these tests. Apart from being available on the website above, the University may publish the findings in an academic or professional journal. The name of your school will be anonymised and your child's results will not be identifiable.

All information about children, including test results, will be held confidentially and in compliance with the Data Protection Act. After the evaluation has been completed we may also share the results of your child's test with your school to help them support your child. Anonymised data (without names) will be shared with the Educational Endowment Foundation for current and future research purposes.

What do I do if I don't want my child to take part in the evaluation?

Participation is voluntary and you can decide to not give your permission to allow your child to participate by returning the consent form attached. Students themselves will have the opportunity to opt out of both the verbal reasoning test as well.

Further information

Further information is available from Ben Willis who is the Evaluation project manager. Ben can be contacted via e-mail b.willis@shu.ac.uk or telephone 0114 25 6059. Our address is, Centre for Education and Inclusion Research, Unit 7 Science Park, Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street, S1 1WB

Appendix 7: Opt-out control school consent (parent)

Oracy research: Consent form

Dear parent/carer,

The Education Endowment Fund (EEF), a charity dedicated to raising educational attainment, is supporting a project that is trialling a programme of activities designed to assess and improve the oracy skills of year 7 students.

Sheffield Hallam University has been commissioned to evaluate this project and we would like to compare the progress of students in the school undertaking the trial with a 'control' school. Hackney New School has kindly agreed to act as a control school. A sample of year 7 students will be asked to take a verbal reasoning test in September 2013 and again in June 2014. The test will take about 45 minutes and will take place during the school day.

Rest assured no individual child will be identified - all responses will be completely confidential and all data stored securely to ensure compliance with the 1998 Data Protection Act. No information about individual students will be reported or made available to anyone. After the evaluation has been completed we may also share the results of your child's test with Hackney New School to help them support your child. Anonymised data (without names) will be shared with the EEF.

The project should provide evidence about what types of programmes make a difference to students' attainment. At the end of the project all schools will be able to access the findings of this evaluation on the EEF website, and we will also be providing an event for staff at Hackney New School to enable the school to benefit from the latest research on oracy. Please find attached a project information sheet with further information with my contact details should you want to contact me about this project.

If you would prefer your child NOT to take part in the verbal reasoning test, please complete the slip below and give it to your child's teacher/ take it to the school office.

✂-----

Please return this slip to your child's teacher (or school office).

Oracy research evaluation

I do not give my permission for my child to take part in the verbal reasoning test

Child's full name:

.....

Signed:

Parent/carer

Date.....

Appendix 8: Control school consent (Senior leader)

Oracy research: Consent form

Dear Senior leader,

The Education Endowment Fund (EEF) is supporting a project that is trialling a programme of activities designed to assess and improve the oracy skills of year 7 students at an intervention school.

Sheffield Hallam University has been commissioned to evaluate this project and we would like to compare the progress of students in the intervention school with your school which would act as a 'control'. A sample of year 7 students would be asked to take a verbal reasoning test in September 2013 and again in July 2014. The test would take about 45 minutes and take place during the school day.

Rest assured no individual would be identified - all responses would be completely confidential and all data stored securely to ensure compliance with the 1998 Data Protection Act. No information about individual students would be reported or made available to anyone. After the evaluation we would share the results of your student's test with you. Anonymised data would be shared with the EEF. Participation is voluntary and parents would be written to separately and given the opportunity to withdraw their child from the evaluation. The students themselves would be given the option to not take part on the day of the test.

The project should provide evidence about what types of programmes make a difference to students' attainment. At the end of the project all schools will be able to access the findings of this evaluation on the EEF website. Additionally we would provide an event for staff run by Neil Mercer (an international expert on oracy) at CONTROL school to enable the school to benefit from the latest research on oracy. Please find attached a project information sheet with further information with my contact details should you want to contact me about any aspect of this project.

✂-----

I give my permission for CONTROL School to be involved in the oracy evaluation and for a sample of year 7 students to be tested.

Name:

Signed:

Date.....

Appendix 9: University of Cambridge initial and end assessments rating schemes

A9.1 Rating scale

For each skill, a student is assessed on a three-way, GOLD/SILVER/BRONZE scale:

- GOLD means 'consistently demonstrates this skill'.
- SILVER means 'demonstrates this skill some of the time'.
- BRONZE means 'rarely or never demonstrates this skill yet'.

(Mercer et al., 2014: 64)

A9.1 Lego task rating proforma

Oracy Skill	Student A	Student B
Linguistic		
3 appropriate vocabulary choice		
4 a) register		
Cognitive		
7 a) choice of content to convey meaning and intention		
8 a) seeking information and clarification through questions		
9 a) maintaining focus on task		
11 taking account of level of understanding of the audience		
Social & Emotional		
12 a) guiding or managing the interactions		
12 b) turn-taking		
13 listening actively and responding appropriately		
Overall assessment		

(Mercer et al., 2014: 64)

A9.2 Talking points task rating proforma

Oracy Skill	Student A	Student B	Student C
Physical			
1 c) clarity of pronunciation			
2 b) facial expression and eye contact			
Linguistic			
4 a) register			
Cognitive			
7 b) building on the views of others			
8 b) summarising			
9 a) maintaining focus on task			
10 a) giving reasons to support views			
10 b) critically examining ideas and views expressed			
Social & Emotional			
12 a) guiding or managing the interactions			
12 b) turn-taking			
13 listening actively and responding appropriately			
Overall assessment			

(Mercer, Warwick and Ahmed, 2014 p74)

A9.3 Presentation task rating proforma

Oracy Skill	
Physical	
1 a) fluency and pace of speech	
1 b) tonal variation	
1 c) clarity of pronunciation	
1 d) voice projection	
2 a) gesture and posture	
2 b) facial expression and eye contact	
Linguistic	
3 appropriate vocabulary choice	
4 b) grammar	
5 structure and organisation of talk	
6 rhetorical techniques, such as metaphor, humour, irony and mimicry	
Cognitive	
7 a) choice of content to convey meaning and intention	
9 b) time management	
11 taking account of level of understanding of the audience	

Social & Emotional	
14 a) self-assurance	
14 b) liveliness and flair	

(Mercer et al., 2014: 80)

Appendix 10: University of Cambridge assessment task grading conversion to scores

Rating	Numerical score
Bronze	1
Bronze +	2
Silver -	3
Silver	4
Silver +	5
Gold -	6
Gold	7

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The Education Endowment Foundation
9th Floor, Millbank Tower
21–24 Millbank
London
SW1P 4QP
www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk