Overview of Speaking and Listening in the English/Media Classroom

> **"Talk is the sea on which all else floats."** *Britton Language and Learning 1970*
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> **"For most adults there are more literacy events which call for appropriate knowledge of forms and uses of speech events, than there are the occasions for extended reading and writing."** *Brice Heath 1982*

Concerns and Issues

- Speaking and listening is overshadowed by emphasis on literacy and the written end-product – eg. No opportunity for oral assessment at GCSE any longer.
- Emphasis on pen and paper exams for summative assessment means the written word is valued over the spoken word in schools.
- It has been suggested that some European classrooms have a much greater emphasis on oral language in learning than British classrooms (eg. French and Russian – Alexander)
- There are concerns about the limited range and quality of speaking and listening in classrooms & that too little emphasis was placed on Speaking and Listening (Ofsted English 2000-2005: A Review of the Inspection Evidence 2005)
- Promoting pupil-led talk is difficult and regarded as ambitious pedagogy – "the idea of scaffolding learning through talk is easy to understand but hard to apply" (Peon & Rojas-Drummond 2004)
- Government advice on speaking and listening has been incoherent over the last 15 years
- Some would say a punitive monitoring and performance culture deters teachers from taking risks and experimenting with talk in the classroom.
- English at the Crossroads (Ofsted 2009) found that the teaching of speaking and listening had improved and schools were devoting more time to oral work, especially as a tool to improving writing. However, teachers rarely used it to help pupils improve their spoken language or understand differences between speech and writing. They found little analysis of speech and how we might talk in different ways in different contexts.
- Some suggest that there is a lack of 'talk which challenges pupils to think for themselves' and a 'dominance of closed questions'; 'ubiquitous and unspecific praise rather than constructive feedback to inform future learning'; and the 'rarity of autonomous pupil-led discussion and problem solving' (Alexander 2006).
- Tendency of the teacher to dominate discussions; they are not truly student led.
- Opportunities for exploratory talk are limited and closed questions dominate.
- Dominance of Initiation- Response-Feedback model in the classroom (Coulthard 1992) allowing few pupils the opportunity to give extended responses or demonstrate higher order thinking

- There is still not a full recognition of the central place oracy deserves in the curriculum or consistent practice across schools.

Other things to think about:

The role that improved oracy plays in improving writing:

"Empirical evidence identified by the review indicates the benefits of collaborative writing in supporting general improvement in writing, and especially the talk that accompanies collaborative writing. This benefit could be used more actively to support development in complex expression."
Effective ways of teaching complex expression in writing: a literature review of evidence form the secondary school phase. Debra Myhill, Ros Fisher, Susan Jones, Helen Lines and Alun Hicks University of Exeter April 2008

The National Literacy Trust launched a major survey on Speaking and Listening in June 2011 – does this represent a renewed interest in the role of oracy?

List of publications and websites:

Language and Learning James Britton 1970

Constructive talk in Challenging Classrooms Valerie Coultas 2006

Thinking Voices: National Oracy Project Kate Norman 1992

Advances in Spoken Discourse analysis M. Coulthard 1992

Exploring Talk in School Mercer, N. and Hodgkinson, S. 2008

Dialogic Teaching Alexander R J 2008

Culture and pedagogy: international comparisons in primary education, Alexander R J 2001

New perspectives on spoken English in the classroom QCA 2003

Introducing the grammar of talk QCA 2004

http://thinkingtogether.educ.cam.ac.uk/

The British Library website www.bl.uk

http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/secondary/english/teachingandlearning/teachingspeakingandlistening