



The Power and Possibilities of Oracy in Québec ELA Classrooms

REPORT 2022

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2020 Survey on the State of Talk in Québec's English Schools prepared by the English Language Arts programs team in collaboration with the PACTE Subcommittee for Talk (2019-2022), data analysis by the English Language Arts programs team.

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Foreword

As the author and team coordinator of the current generation of English Language Arts (ELA) curricula, both myself and my team strove to consolidate the knowledge of teachers in the programs we produced. This was supplemented with developments in pedagogy and the discipline itself since the previous curricula were written.

The research and orientation of “The Power and Possibilities of Oracy in Québec ELA Classrooms” follow the curricula while enriching their translation into practice, keeping teachers and students at the core of their recommendations. In so doing, this report stresses the critical role of talk in language development, in the growth of key thinking strategies and critical judgment, and in literacy. In turn, this understanding sets a tone of advocacy, inclusion and social change as we move forward.

The intention in the various ELA curricula is to give talk—the kind that happens in discussions, in group work, as an element of the writing and production processes, and in so many other classroom activities—the place it deserves in teaching and learning. In other words, it is informal talk that is emphasized, not to the exclusion of speeches or debates or other formal uses of talk, but rather as the foundation out of which more formal talk issues. Too, we sought to reinforce the fact that informal talk is a fundamental aspect of life in society as much as its more formal expressions, perhaps even more so in light of the prevalence of teamwork in the workplace.

No less important is listening, whether in a classroom or the workplace. As teachers know, even the most articulate speakers aren’t necessarily the best listeners; listening is different from simply hearing something. The Talk competency at both the elementary and secondary levels emphasizes opportunities to develop listening skills by having students participate in discussions and group projects. Just as the reading-writing connection is vital to becoming a better reader and writer, so the talking-listening connection presents optimum conditions for even the youngest students to improve their talking and listening strategies and skills. In addition, as students work with a balance of spoken, written and visual texts, they learn that certain texts, notably those we find in social media, require the strategies of a focused listener. How else can the messages of advertising or news stories be understood and analyzed if not by listeners adept at critical thinking? As the screen commands an increasingly important role in our lives, so must our students learn how to manage the content it wields if they are to become fully literate individuals.

ELA as a discipline enjoys a different history from the precepts that guide the teaching of French, be it as a mother tongue or a second language. In the seminal work of Ferdinand de Saussure, a distinction is made between “langue” and “parole,” the latter being language in use and the former, the structure and conventions of language. The two are distinct but not mutually exclusive; however, teaching language structures and conventions doesn’t guarantee literacy. “The Power and Possibilities of Oracy in Québec ELA Classrooms” quite rightly follows the history of our discipline by emphasizing the importance of language-in-use in the development of literacy.

I’m certain that this document will provoke important questions and a good deal of pedagogical inquiry and innovation. This is important work that we do together.

Abigail Anderson

Coordinator of ELA Curriculum (1984-2010) at the Ministère de l’Éducation du Québec



PART 1:
Using Language
to Communicate and to Learn

Understanding oracy

What is oracy? We will choose a capacious definition here: oracy is learning *to use* our voices as well as learning *through* our voices. The aim of oracy education is to guide the development of students' own voices so that they may take charge of their own learning, and to foster learning environments in which every student can be heard. The word *voice* is important as the force of student expression that includes words, sounds, gestures and more. Oracy education focuses deeply on speaking, but it also calls us, as the English Language Arts community, to listen beyond words. Valuing the voice of every student means learning *how* to hear them, and teaching students how to hear each other. What happens when we provide a safe space for our shy students learning to re-value their softness of presence or when our students from disadvantaged areas benefit from classroom conversations that value equity? What is the impact on our classroom conversations when our students are attuned to the roar of international protest and the tiny mumble of discomfort right in front of them? What happens when we learn how to listen to the students who have historically been excluded from the conversation? What can we learn from the robust voices that issue from, for example, alternatively-communicating autism? How can we guide all our students in finding confidence with their own ways of voicing, and how can we teach them to advocate for and appreciate what else a strong voice can be? By developing this capacious vision for oracy education, we are developing the ethics that we want to see in it. By committing to opening a conversation about talk in which every voice matters, we are committing to being accountable to our learning community in the ways we listen to and provide space for every voice in this conversation.

This means that not only are we holding ourselves accountable for considering classroom talk from multiple perspectives, but we are working to move beyond the power paradigm that has long shaped the discussion. Sociocultural perspectives in literacy studies¹ call us to develop pedagogies that recognize the diverse literacy practices of our students and to challenge a model of literacy education that excludes the practices of many nondominant communities. Critical literacy studies have prepared us to empower marginalized voices to navigate discourses of power (Freire, 2013), and contemporary literacy scholars urge us further to move beyond these hierarchies of power through pedagogies that “reflect a culturally sensitive account of literacy that rejects static and homogeneous views of the literacy practices of cultural communities” (Gutierrez et. al, 2009). How can oracy education help us to create pedagogies that value the individual voices and perspectives of all our students?

¹ See: Gee, 1991; Street, 1993.

There is no question that English Language Arts teachers across Québec value the voices and contributions of every student, and that the goal of literacy education for teachers across the province is to amplify each student’s unique potential. Oracy is part of literacy,² and yet teaching oracy as part of a literacy curriculum may be challenging. But as we explore the affordances of classroom talk as a part of literacy learning throughout this report, we hope to engage with teacher concerns as the basis for considering how, together, we can make the shift toward more dialogic school cultures together. These are changes that can be undertaken within each of us, as teachers, consultants, researchers, community members, parents, and students: How will we build a better world by learning to hear every voice and by learning to amplify what each voice offers? This report is an invitation to a conversation that is just beginning, a conversation where we hope:

- ① to engage with the perspectives of Québec English Language Arts teachers through a dialogic inquiry with data collected from a 2020 survey on talk in the classroom
- ② to explore the relationships between the Québec Education Program’s vision for talk in English Language Arts classrooms, teachers’ experiences, emerging research and global concerns
- ③ to provide an overview of research on the importance of oracy in English Language Arts classrooms and beyond

By seeking the thoughts, feelings, ideas and needs of Québec English Language Arts teachers about classroom talk through our survey, which we synthesize in Part 1 of our offerings here, we sought to understand the kind of conversation our community most wants and needs to have about oracy education. In Parts 2 and 3 we explore the power and possibilities that oracy education can offer all our students as they move beyond the classroom into the world. By sharing in this report the multiple voices and perspectives of our teaching and learning community, the Québec Education Program, and emerging oracy and literacy research, we hope to continue the conversation with as many new voices as possible.

² Contemporary literacy scholars have challenged the ancient divide between oral and literate cultures, recognizing that orality and literacy are not separable systems of meaning-making but rather flow together as connected practices of expression and thought. For more information, see: Gee, 1990.

Why classroom talk matters

“Classroom talk is ‘the most important educational tool for guiding the development of understanding and for jointly constructing knowledge’”

Neil Mercer and Steve Hodgkinson, 2008, xi

The conversation around oracy in education has emerged alongside the deepening understanding of how learning happens and what facilitates it best. It is now widely acknowledged that school in its original conception—students sitting quietly and receiving knowledge from teachers—is not exactly how the work of thinking, learning, sharing and growing gets done. Contemporary education recognizes that students need opportunities to share and build ideas, to actively process their thoughts in relation to the thoughts of others, and to use their voices as they process their own learning and apply it meaningfully in the classroom and the world. This shift includes a breadth of oracy research exploring the benefits of teaching and learning through dynamic talk and how to do it well. It has also included a policy shift in past decades in Canada and the United States to include speaking and listening among the cross-curricular skills students develop. The Québec English Language Arts programs’ focus on talk as a core competency is designed to carry out the vision of more active, collaborative and empowering learning and to nurture the possibilities this vision creates for Québec students. It is also grounded in more than 60 years of literacy research which acknowledges that oracy is part of literacy: speaking and listening are a fountain of thought and communication that flows into reading and writing (see, Vygotsky 2012; Bahktin 1982).

“

[O]racy is part of literacy: speaking and listening are a fountain of thought and communication that flows into reading and writing.

”

Oracy education recognizes that this fountain of collective thought that is classroom talk can be channeled toward shared learning. Our students may not already know how to leverage the force of their own voices, how to make more room for each other’s voices or how to explore the possibilities of a conversation to form new and deeper thinking. Students “need talk in order to learn about the world, teachers need talk in order to learn about students” (Alexander 2020, p. 1). The goal for teachers, therefore, is to apply the mutual benefits of classroom talk in our pedagogies. If we invest in the power of our students’ voices to carry their collective thinking and learning, all the rest of our curricular goals will flow from this abundance. The conversation about investing in classroom talk begins by recognizing how much teachers are already doing. As we explore ways of teaching talk throughout this report, we will explore ways teachers can leverage elements of their current practice to push classroom talk in new directions.

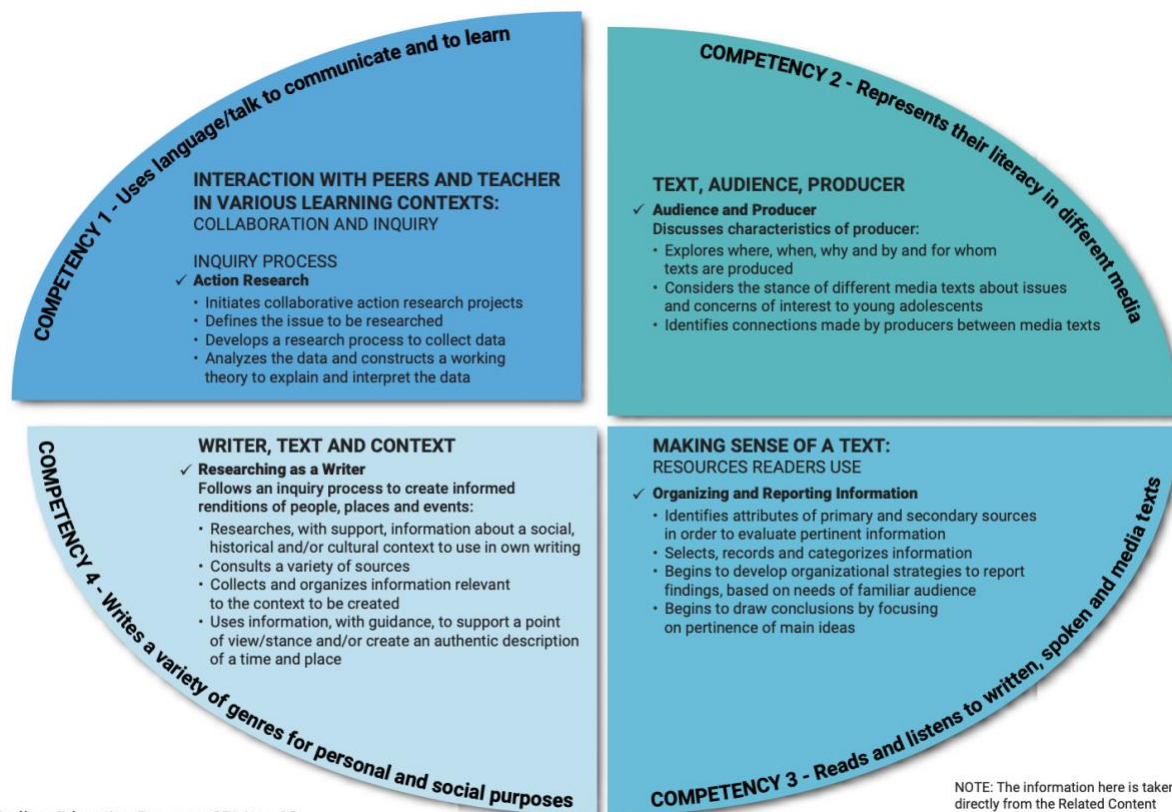
Oracy within literacy: Supporting the English Language Arts curriculum through talk

Reading, writing/producing and talk make up the *Québec Education Program's* English Language Arts competencies because they are all part of literacy, and they are all intimately connected expressions of literacy learning. As students read their way through information and ideas, write and express their literacy through different media, and use language to communicate and to learn, they are moving through a system of meaning-making that relies on each of these ways of thinking and sharing.

Making meaning is a process: students develop their competency in reading, writing and talk over time and in relation to specific contexts, goals and tasks. A unique aspect of classroom talk is that it is also a way of working through the process—together! “The focus of this competency is language in use for communicating and for learning, i.e. oral discourse used in all its varieties, with a special emphasis on active learning through talk” QEP, Elementary English Language Arts (EELA) p. 99. The Secondary Cycle Two program expands on this idea stating that the “two uses of language—to communicate and to learn—which were also the focus of the EELA program, continue to be increasingly important to the developing literacy of the student and to [their] success in secondary school and beyond” QEP, Secondary English Language Arts, Cycle Two (SELA 2) p. 93.

Of course, it is challenging to gauge each student’s process of learning to “[use] language to communicate and to learn.” The necessity of grading students’ proficiency with talk at multiple points during each cycle often leads us to use presentational³ talk as a measure of success, given the more specific structures, features, codes and conventions of such performance-style genres. The unfortunate result is that spoken language as performance or product may “[undervalue] the weight of research evidence on talk as process, to shape thinking” (Hudson & Sutherland, 2015. p. 1.) Reorienting the focus of the competency toward talking to learn may require a shift in teaching practice, and new modes of assessing exploratory talk as described later in this report. While presentational genres of talk are valuable and develop students’ facility with a variety of skills, students nevertheless need multiple and ongoing opportunities to explore their ideas and values and to develop their learning through collaborative, exploratory talk.

³ “Presentational talk . . . offers a ‘final draft’ for display and evaluation: it is often heavily influenced by what the audience expects. Presentational talk frequently occurs in response to teachers’ questions when they are testing [students]’ understanding of a topic that has already been taught. It also occurs when anyone, child or adult, is speaking to a large or unfamiliar audience” p. 5, Barnes, 2008.

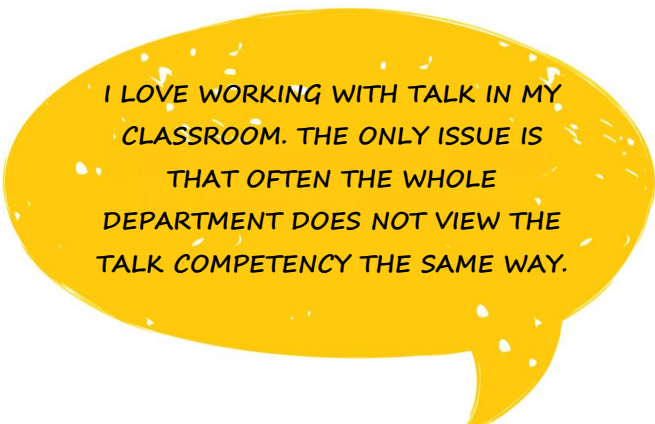


Québec Education Program, SELA, p. 92.

Dynamic classroom talk provides ELA students with opportunities to process and share their thoughts about reading and writing so that they start, continue and finish reading/viewing tasks with the momentum of collectively sparked questions and insights, and so that they come to writing/production tasks well-nourished with ideas that stimulate and extend their thinking. But classroom talk can also be leveraged as a pedagogy in itself, which sets the conditions and extends the possibilities of these learning opportunities. Language and meaning-making are learned and developed in specific cultural contexts that are inherently social. Dialogic teaching⁴ (Alexander 2020) favours reciprocal and ongoing talk for effective teaching and learning between the teacher and the student. It harnesses the power of classroom talk to enable students to reason and argue, to understand and navigate different systems of logic, and to create and recreate knowledge and understanding that is meaningful to them. These are lifelong skills that extend well beyond the realm of the classroom. Involving our students in the process of creating the conditions for mutual learning and meaning-making prepares them to jointly construct such environments in their daily lives and civic pursuits.

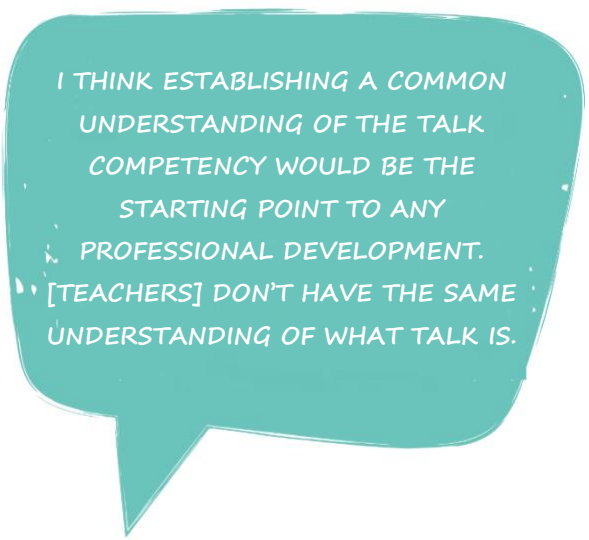
⁴ For a brief explanation of dialogic teaching see: <https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/research/programmes/dialogic/whatis.html>.

Oracy inquiry in Québec English schools: Study design, scope and purpose



I LOVE WORKING WITH TALK IN MY CLASSROOM. THE ONLY ISSUE IS THAT OFTEN THE WHOLE DEPARTMENT DOES NOT VIEW THE TALK COMPETENCY THE SAME WAY.

-Anonymous Teacher,
2020 Survey on the State of Talk in Québec's English Schools



I THINK ESTABLISHING A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF THE TALK COMPETENCY WOULD BE THE STARTING POINT TO ANY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. [TEACHERS] DON'T HAVE THE SAME UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT TALK IS.

-Anonymous Teacher,
2020 Survey on the State of Talk in Québec's English Schools

In 2018, the Provincial Advisory Council for the Teaching of English (PACTE)⁵ agreed that classroom talk should be a focus for sustained inquiry and initiative, due to its transformative potential for learning in Québec English Language Arts classrooms. The Council was concerned that the Talk competency required more inquiry and resource development within our professional community. As part of this initiative, the PACTE Subcommittee for Talk was formed. In fall 2020 the PACTE Subcommittee for Talk accompanied by the ELA programs team surveyed English Language Arts teachers from nine English school boards, one bilingual school board and English private schools across the province.⁶ More than three quarters of teachers surveyed agreed that the Talk competency develops important skills for their students and requested more resources for teaching and assessing talk.

⁵ The PACTE is a MEQ-led group. It meets a couple of times a year to identify issues, share information and consult regarding pedagogical needs, professional development and resources for the teaching of English Language Arts. The council is comprised of education professionals from the youth sector and post-secondary, including ELA consultants from the nine English school boards, representatives from McGill, Bishop's and Concordia Universities as well as private schools, CEGEP and select MEQ directions.

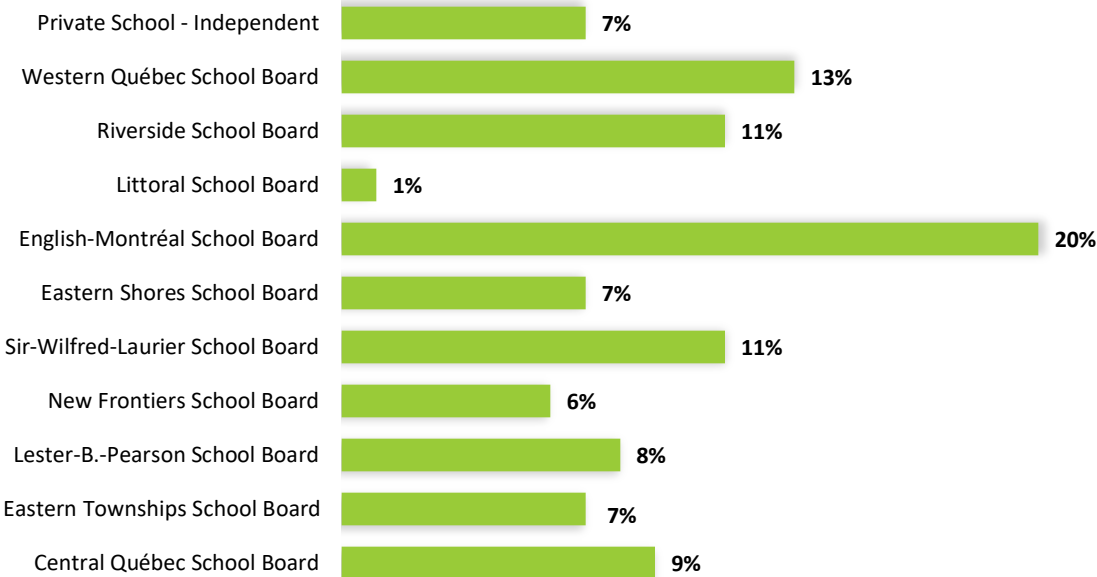
⁶ Survey data available upon request at FGJ-ELA@education.gouv.qc.ca.

We received over 300 responses from English Language Arts Teachers (49% elementary and 51% secondary level).

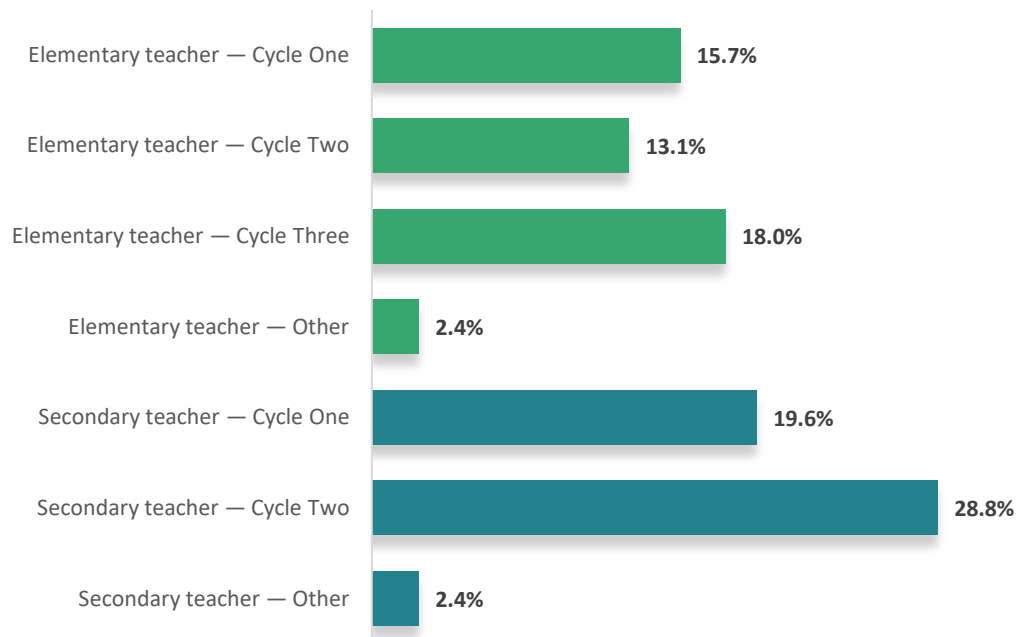
The survey was guided by four research questions:

- 1 What does “using language to communicate and to learn” mean to ELA teachers in Québec classrooms?
- 2 Why does our Talk competency matter?
- 3 How do ELA teachers and students in Québec currently engage with talk in the classroom?
- 4 What helps and hinders talk in ELA classrooms?

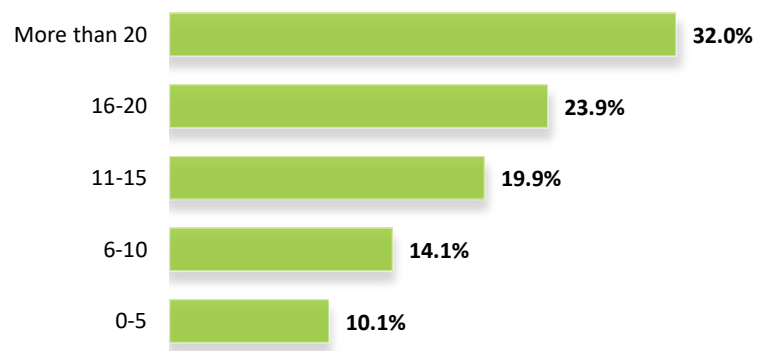
Survey respondents represent a range of teaching experience and contexts across the province:



What best describes your main role in your school/learning centre?



How many years' experience do you have in the field of education?



The purpose of gauging Québec ELA teachers' perspectives on and experiences with classroom talk through this survey was to bring teacher insights and concerns into a conversation—alongside the Québec Education Program's Talk competency and emerging oracy research—about strengthening the conditions for learning through dynamic talk in Québec ELA classrooms.

This report is an initial output from this continuing conversation and inquiry, intended to suggest future directions and invite new possibilities as well as to build an understanding among teachers and the MEQ of the existing and emerging research about what oracy education means and what the Talk competency can do for student learning. We have woven teachers' voices from the survey throughout this report, keeping our oracy inquiry and our dialogue with teachers' experiences alongside the current research every step of the way.⁷

⁷ For more on dialogic inquiry, see: Wells, 2009.

Oracy education in action

Both teachers and students benefit from a classroom environment grounded in rich, generative and abundant classroom dialogue. Students learn through talk; as they engage with their friends and peers, hash out ideas, talk their way to meaning, question, negotiate, challenge, clarify and confer, they practise and hone vital oracy skills “empowering them for lifelong learning and democratic engagement” (Alexander, 2020, p.1). At the same time, teachers learn about the students in their classrooms. Through discussion and attentive listening, teachers can discern the interests of their students, assess strengths and identify areas for improvement, devise learning intentions and support students’ progress as they develop their competency.

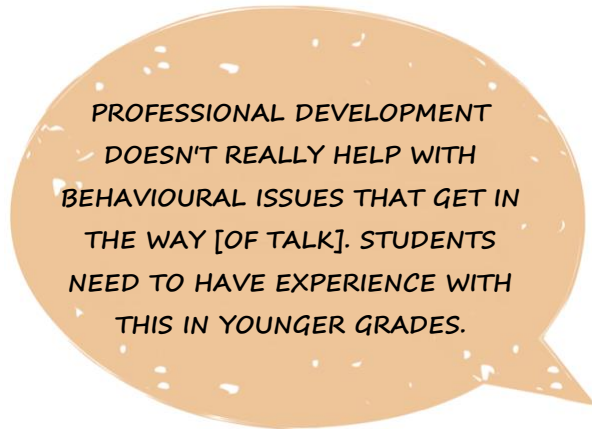
Mobilizing the power of dialogic teaching

“Perhaps most importantly, dialogic pedagogy disrupts the traditional classroom power dynamic, positioning school as a place where students have an equal share in their education. Students are not empowered; rather they are shown that their inherent power has been recognized—and that it matters.”

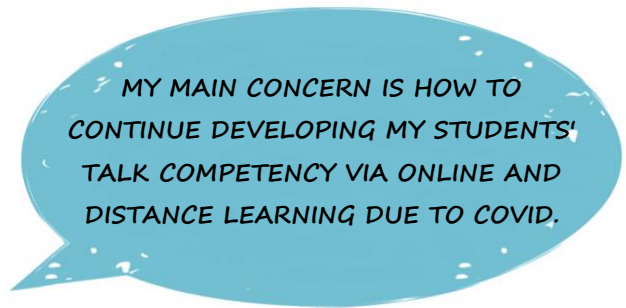
Matthew R. Kay, 2018, p. 5

Teachers across the province recognize that the success of dialogic teaching and abundant talk pedagogies depend upon building classroom environments and school cultures that support talk. If we don’t have learning environments and pedagogical practices that support talk, we are stuck negotiating with our students’ reactions to the ways in which school environments have traditionally discouraged their autonomy. The nearly 40% of teachers surveyed who are concerned that talk activities lead to distractions and disruptions, and the 36% of teachers who worry that talk activities make shy and quiet students uncomfortable, are correct about the effects they are witnessing: our students may not already be prepared for learning environments that account for their autonomy and build pedagogical potential from their contributions. Building the pedagogies, conditions and expectations that guide our students’ understanding of their own potential as co-constructors of the learning environment is a process. The development of our students’ readiness to take on the responsibilities of a democratic classroom and their development within the Talk competency is also a process. Further, these are processes that may be new to both students and teachers. A third of survey respondents also noted the challenges of facilitating talk activities in virtual learning environments, highlighting the fact that building the learning environment may work differently in this setting. And the 40% of teachers who responded that they feel there is not

enough time to teach talk because of the demands of teaching reading and writing underscores the fact that talk pedagogies and dialogic classroom environments must be established and given time to grow in their practices before we begin to see their connections to and expansions of the literacy practices we teach. These are shifts that we are all navigating—teachers, students, researchers, consultants and schools— together, as the learning community that surrounds our classroom communities. As with any other competency that we teach, allowing our classrooms to develop through talk pedagogies will require our growth, patience, belief, and encouragement of one another.



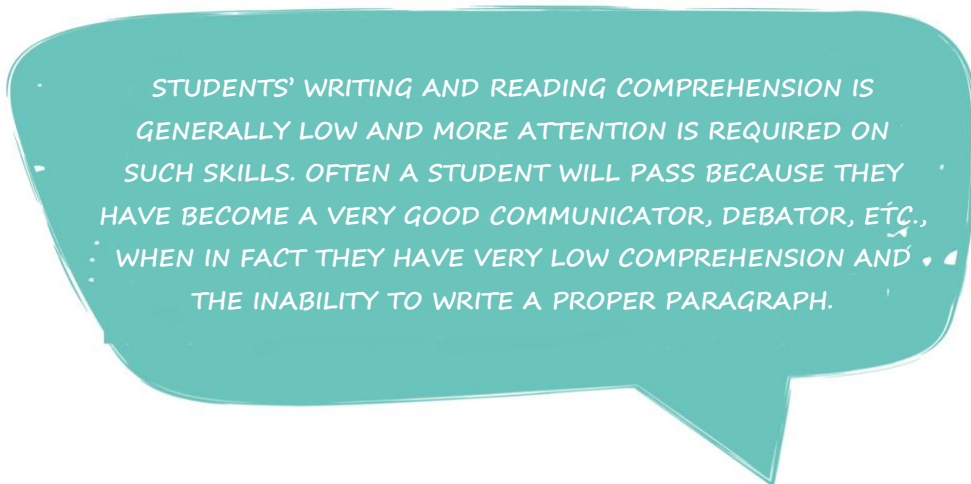
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DOESN'T REALLY HELP WITH BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES THAT GET IN THE WAY [OF TALK]. STUDENTS NEED TO HAVE EXPERIENCE WITH THIS IN YOUNGER GRADES.



MY MAIN CONCERN IS HOW TO CONTINUE DEVELOPING MY STUDENTS' TALK COMPETENCY VIA ONLINE AND DISTANCE LEARNING DUE TO COVID.

-Anonymous Teachers, 2020 Survey on the State of Talk in Québec's English Schools

Going forward, we can continue to design and manage classroom environments that promote oracy. We can help our students to develop confidence in the dialogic classroom. We can integrate the Talk competency as a natural component of the literacy competencies as the SELA 1 program describes.⁸ Most importantly, we can provide support for each other through these changes, whether we are in virtual or in-person learning environments.



STUDENTS' WRITING AND READING COMPREHENSION IS GENERALLY LOW AND MORE ATTENTION IS REQUIRED ON SUCH SKILLS. OFTEN A STUDENT WILL PASS BECAUSE THEY HAVE BECOME A VERY GOOD COMMUNICATOR, DEBATOR, ETC., WHEN IN FACT THEY HAVE VERY LOW COMPREHENSION AND THE INABILITY TO WRITE A PROPER PARAGRAPH.

*-Anonymous Teacher,
2020 Survey on the State
of Talk in Québec's
English Schools*

⁸ As explained in the Secondary English Language Arts Cycle One program (SELA 1), "Literacy is a whole system of communication and the separate competencies represent 'the parts' that make up the whole" p. 88.

The following chart describes oracy education in action for both teachers and students, providing a brief guide to how a dialogic classroom environment functions.

Teachers in Action	Students in Action
<p>Create a classroom environment where dynamic talk can flourish.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers set the tone for talk through classroom expectations and values. Teachers create a safe space that promotes mutual trust, sharing and productive risk-taking. Teachers consider the physical arrangement and organization of the classroom. Teachers use synchronous and asynchronous possibilities for online talk. Teachers group students thoughtfully, and through talk, teach students how to manage peer relations democratically. 	<p>Take an active role in leading and shaping classroom talk once classroom culture and expectations have been established.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students gradually learn to facilitate discussions themselves. Students gradually learn to manage the talk environment both in the classroom and online, promoting a safe space and encouraging the sharing and productive risk-taking of peers. Students gradually learn to arrange for talk, considering physical space and recognizing the needs of themselves and their peers. Students recognize that online talk is as beneficial as in-person talk and participate thoughtfully and respectfully. Students gradually learn to engage democratically with peers at increasingly sophisticated levels.
<p>Recognize talk as central to learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers seize opportunities for talk to deepen and enhance student learning. Teachers promote the social and emotional advantages of talk by fostering student agency, self-esteem, collaboration and peer support. Teachers help students understand talk as a transversal, cross-curricular skill through the creation of a variety of contexts in which students can use talk for different purposes. 	<p>Recognize talk as central to learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students gradually learn to recognize opportunities for exploratory⁹ talk and the value dialogue affords for deepening their own learning and that of their peers. Students gradually assume their own agency in the talk environment and value the equal agency of their peers. Students gradually develop talk skills for a variety of contexts and purposes.
<p>Teach talk explicitly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers co-create norms and guidelines with students for talk in the classroom or netiquette guidelines for online conversations, post them for easy reference and review them as needed. Teachers identify needs, and model and teach skills and principles. Teachers take advantage of opportunities for teaching talk as they arise. Teachers foster students' development of talk over time. 	<p>Learn about talk explicitly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students co-create norms and guidelines with the teacher so that the expectations for talk are well-defined for both classroom and online talk. Students gradually understand their own relationship with the Talk competency, identify their own goals and experiment with new skills. Students gradually take advantage of opportunities to develop their thinking through talk. Students reflect on their development of the Talk competency over time.

⁹ For more information on exploratory talk see: Barnes, 2008.

Teachers in Action

Maintain high expectations for talk.

- Teachers create a variety of carefully planned, challenging and purposeful learning contexts.
- Teachers ensure expectations are clear and understood.

Value every voice.

- Teachers support and encourage all students.
- Teachers learn each student's unique voice and capacities and guide them as they develop their oracy skills.
- Teachers provide an accepting space for every student to have a voice and encourage gradual participation.
- Teachers listen meaningfully and establish a culture in which students do the same.
- Teachers recognize that all students benefit from dynamic classroom dialogue.

Students in Action

Maintain high expectations for talk.

- Students engage with a variety of challenging and purposeful learning contexts and gradually assume more choice and leadership.
- Students meet the expectations of the classroom talk environment and gradually shape its goals and directions.

Value every voice.

- Students support and encourage each other.
- Students develop awareness and appreciation of their own and others' voices and support each other in pursuit of their own expressions and goals.
- Students build confidence in the use of their own voices by contributing thoughts or ideas to support learning/meaning in a variety of contexts.
- Students listen actively¹⁰ and promote meaningful listening in the learning environment.
- Students recognize that each of their peers is a valuable part of their discussions.

DID YOU KNOW?

“Exploratory talk is hesitant and incomplete because it enables the speaker to try out ideas, to hear how they sound, to see what others make of them, to arrange information and ideas into different patterns. [It] provides an important means of working on understanding, but learners are unlikely to embark on it unless they feel relatively at ease, free from the danger of being aggressively contradicted or made fun of” pp. 4-5, Barnes, 2008.

¹⁰ An active listener ensures that the speaker knows they are being heard.

What does *Using language to communicate and to learn* look like in your classroom?

In our 2020 *Survey on the State of Talk in Québec's English Schools*, we asked teachers to describe what using language to communicate and to learn looks like in their classrooms. All responses were anonymous.

IT LOOKS LIKE STUDENTS ENGAGING IN DISCUSSIONS WITH EACH OTHER ABOUT THE TOPICS WE ARE ADDRESSING. IT LOOKS LIKE PUBLIC SPEAKING, BOTH IN THE CLASSROOM AND ON A REGIONAL LEVEL. IT LOOKS LIKE HEALTHY COMMUNICATION BETWEEN MYSELF AND MY STUDENTS IN THE FORM OF STUDENT CONFERENCES AND SO MUCH MORE.

STUDENTS WORK TOGETHER DURING EVERY CLASS TO DEVELOP IDEAS THAT ARE THEN SHARED WITH THE ENTIRE CLASS. I SPEND MY CLASSES GOING FROM GROUP TO GROUP TALKING TO STUDENTS, LISTENING, GIVING FEEDBACK AND GUIDANCE. WE HAVE SOCRATIC CIRCLE DISCUSSIONS DURING WHICH STUDENTS DISCUSS IDEAS IN A LARGE GROUP CONTEXT WITH LIMITED TEACHER INTERVENTION. STUDENTS WORK TOGETHER TO ANALYZE IMAGES, DEVELOP NEWS REPORTS, WRITE RANTS, POETRY, SHARE LITERATURE CIRCLE NOVELS.

IT OFTEN LOOKS LIKE GROUP WORK AND THINK/PAIR/SHARE TYPE ACTIVITIES. I'VE STARTED INCORPORATING TALK A LOT MORE IN MATH AS WELL, WHERE STUDENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO SHARE THEIR STRATEGIES AND BUILD OFF EACH OTHER'S STRATEGIES IN ORDER TO GAIN MORE UNDERSTANDING OF MATH CONCEPTS. IN ELA, WE USE TALK A LOT DURING OUR NOVEL STUDIES WHERE STUDENTS SHARE OPINIONS AND PREDICTIONS ABOUT THE TEXT.

I THINK EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IS VERY IMPORTANT IN MY STUDENTS' DEVELOPMENT. . . I HAVE NOTICED A SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT IN MY STUDENTS' ABILITIES TO OFFER UP THEIR OPINIONS AND RESPOND TO DIFFERENT TEXTS OR TOPICS. YES, TALK IS NOISY BUT WHEN IT IS DONE EFFECTIVELY, IT CAN LEAD TO SOME GREAT RESULTS! I WOULD SAY THE TALK COMPONENT DEFINITELY HELPS SUPPORT MY STUDENTS' READING AND WRITING SKILLS.

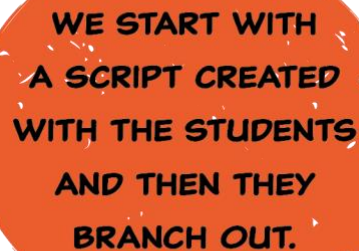
STUDENTS ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN CLASS DISCUSSIONS ABOUT THE TOPIC BEING DISCUSSED OR EXPLORED. THEY SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, QUESTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE. THEY RESPOND AND REFLECT ON THE IDEAS AND THOUGHTS EXPRESSED BY OTHERS IN THE CLASS.

CLASS IS BUILT AROUND A VARIETY OF SMALL-GROUP AND WHOLE-GROUP DISCUSSIONS. SOMETIMES THE TALK IS MODERATED BY THE TEACHER; OTHER TIMES THE GROUPS THEMSELVES LEAD THE TALK. MOST TALK IS SPONTANEOUS OR LOOSELY PREPARED. MORE FORMAL TALK (SPEECH, DEBATE) IS USUALLY CONSIDERED A PRODUCT OR PERFORMANCE AS WELL AS TALK, THUS COVERED BY TWO COMPETENCIES.

There are a number of English schools in boards across the province that offer French immersion to their students. Students in these programs may be getting little or no English instruction in the early elementary grades and in some cases don't fully begin English instruction until Cycle Three. These circumstances present additional challenges for ELA teachers and may account for some of the responses in the survey that describe the Talk competency in their classrooms like this:



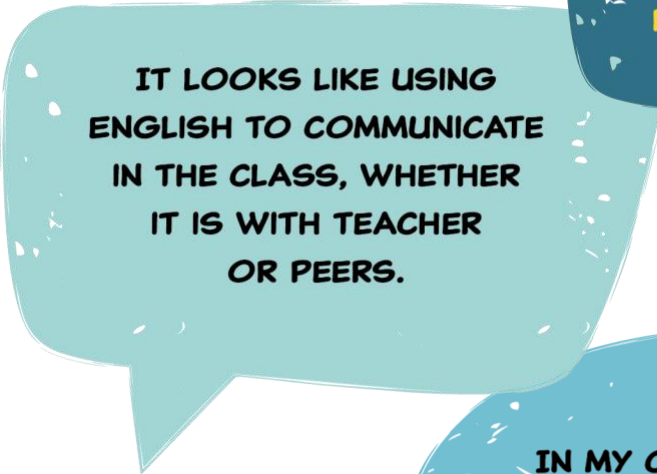
THE LANGUAGE USED IS MAINLY FRENCH.



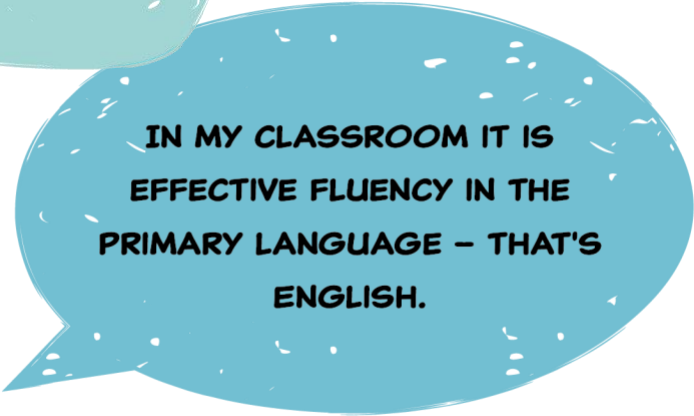
WE START WITH A SCRIPT CREATED WITH THE STUDENTS AND THEN THEY BRANCH OUT.



DISCUSSIONS ARE GUIDED THROUGH THE USE OF PROMPTS AND MODELING.



IT LOOKS LIKE USING ENGLISH TO COMMUNICATE IN THE CLASS, WHETHER IT IS WITH TEACHER OR PEERS.



IN MY CLASSROOM IT IS EFFECTIVE FLUENCY IN THE PRIMARY LANGUAGE – THAT'S ENGLISH.

Learning to value talk

We often hear that talk is cheap, and particularly in the classroom, the traditional image of what counts as on-task behaviour can make it difficult for us to open up to the chatty exuberance of dialogic teaching and learning. Re-valuing the potential in student talk is the first step in steering it toward shared learning. The only thing that separates “idle chatter” from productive discourse is how we teach to it, how we build with it and expand it, how we illuminate its paths toward collective inquiry, and how we teach our students to do that, too. Then chatting in the classroom always builds toward shared questions and shared learning, because we have taught our students how to build their observations into ideas and their ideas into inquiries, and we have empowered them to do so by valuing even their most idle chatter and modeling for them all its possible directions. Alexander (2020) reminds us that:

In its pursuit of the metalinguistic alongside the communicative, dialogic teaching is more than just ‘classroom talk.’ It is as distinct from the question-answer and listen-repeat routines which most of us experienced at school as it is from everyday conversation, aiming to be more consistently searching and reciprocal than both.

. . . [D]ialogic teaching also celebrates talk for talk’s sake, relishing language in all its forms and rejoicing in expression, articulation, communication, discussion and argumentation. And, in doing so, dialogue takes us beyond classroom transactions into the realm of ideas and values, for dialogue is as much a stance or outlook – on human relationships, knowledge, education, culture and society – as it is a pedagogical technique. (Alexander 2020, pp. 1-2)



Our capacity to value the tentative, messy, exploratory process of collaborative talk and learning is essential in promoting its success.

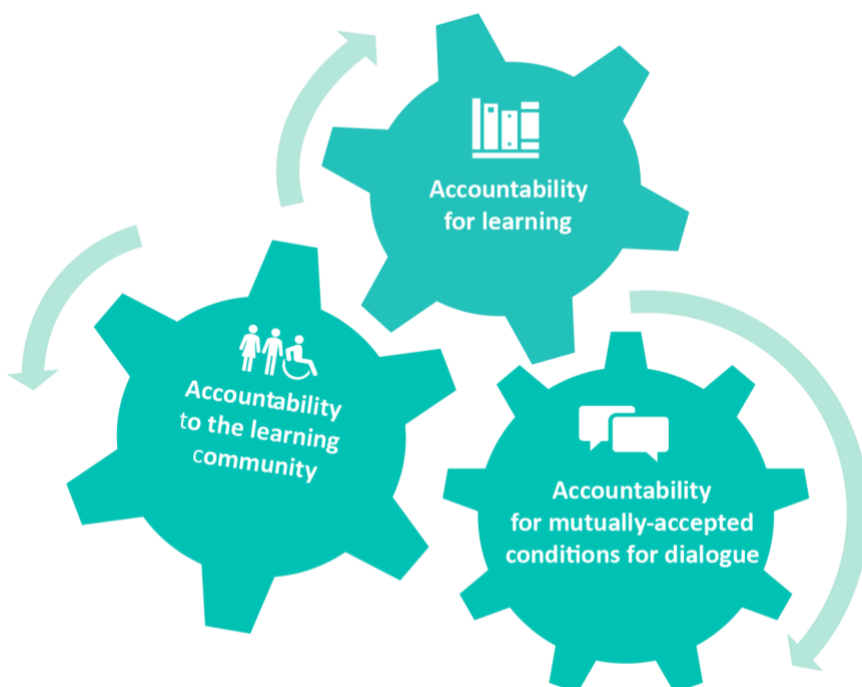


Dialogic teaching encourages us to cede more authority and autonomy to our students, who then become each other’s resources (Haynes, 2015). If at first it is challenging to let go of the more traditional monologic—teacher as expert—pedagogies, it is also rewarding to gradually hand more control over to our students and to experience the benefits: as students become more autonomous in their learning and are able to support each other through collaborative discourse, the teacher’s investment in building this classroom culture pays off as the students take on more responsibility for the learning community and become more and more capable of facilitation. As we develop dialogic, collaborative classrooms, it’s important to note that learning through talk may be noisy, messy, tentative and unstructured (Alexander, 2020). Learning itself is messy, and therefore we cannot rely on presentational talk alone if

we want to give our students room to think through their ideas. But the unstructured process of learning through talk is not unguided or without purpose. Rather, it is rigorously in development. Our capacity to value the tentative, messy, exploratory process of collaborative talk and learning is essential in promoting its success.

To teach our students how to build their talk toward shared learning, we can look to the work of Michaels et al. (2016), who focus on accountable talk. Not only does accountable talk provide a framework for teaching students how to anchor their conversations with evidence, subject-specific vocabulary and supporting ideas, it teaches students to tend to their relationship with their learning community through the way that they share their thinking. When we engage in accountable talk (Michaels et al., 2007), it promotes equal access to learning conversations by engendering dialogue that is rooted in three types of accountability:

- 1 accountability to the learning community, which calls students to consider the stakes of a conversation in relation to their peers' experiences and contributions, and to build their contributions to the conversation through deep and meaningful listening and presence
- 2 accountability for mutually accepted conditions for dialogue, in which students construct shared practices for productive conversation and maintain clear and open terms for thinking together
- 3 accountability for learning, in which students share in a rigorous engagement with clear and open information sources and maintain an ethic of equal access to information as the basis for dialogue.



When students feel accountable to their learning communities and for helping to create equitable conditions for learning and growing together, they become an important part of a paradigm in which all voices matter, which is an essential element for the society we are building.

Creating opportunities for talk versus teaching talk

“It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that because you have created opportunities for students to use [talk] that you are teaching them [talk]”

Amy Gaunt and Alice Stott, 2019, p. 65.

Without a doubt, there is a lot of talking going on in our English Language Arts classrooms. From small group and whole class discussions, think/pair/shares, literature circles, collaborative projects and conferencing, to debates, public speaking and slam poetry. Is it accountable talk? Are our students learning how to leverage their voices? According to Mercer (1995), group talk has little educational value if students are not taught effective ways of talking together and if they don't know how to develop strategies for thinking collectively. All types of talk, whether exploratory or presentational require explicit teaching. So, we asked teachers to describe some of the leading techniques/strategies they use to teach talk explicitly. The bar graph below illustrates Québec ELA teachers' most popular scaffolding methods.

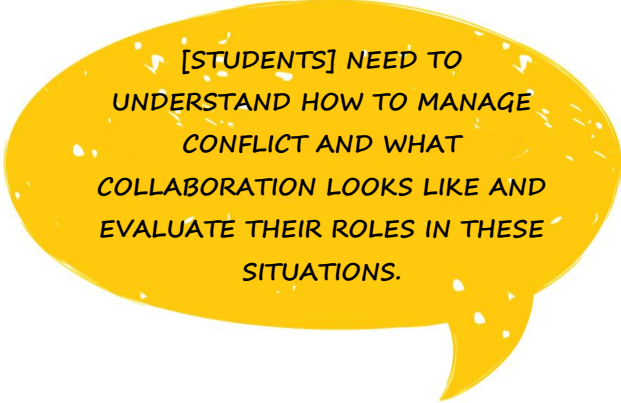


2020 Survey on the State of Talk in Québec's English Schools

**IN ALL TYPES OF TALK, STUDENTS
REQUIRE SCAFFOLDING AND DIRECT
INSTRUCTION IN THE SAME WAY THEY
DO FOR READING AND WRITING.**

-Anonymous Teacher, 2020 Survey on the State of Talk in Québec's English Schools

Scaffolding individual and collective thinking through talk using teacher intervention can help develop possibilities for new learning cycles in both individual learners and peer collaboration (Panselinas and Komis, 2009). Within the context of inquiry-based learning, students cooperate through ongoing discussion to address issues, share information and ideas, and provide solutions to problems. Individual questions or answers are redirected to the group by the teacher. When a solution is found, or a consensus reached, the teacher follows up, or encourages students to move forward with new questions or avenues for reflection provoking a spiral of verbal exchanges and collective thinking. Through this style of dynamic framing “students take more initiatives in conversation; teacher grants more autonomy to them, while scaffolding is based on participation, in a discourse where differences in perspective are welcomed and encouraged” (p. 99).

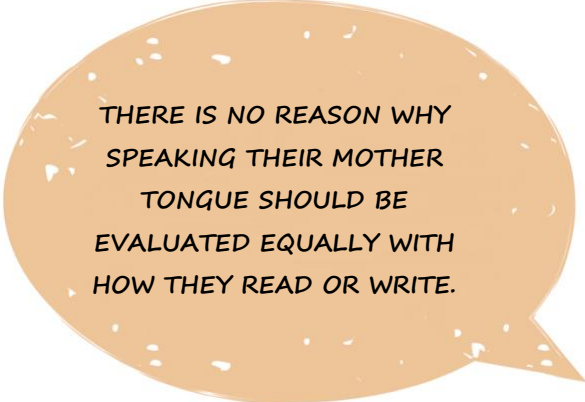


[STUDENTS] NEED TO UNDERSTAND HOW TO MANAGE CONFLICT AND WHAT COLLABORATION LOOKS LIKE AND EVALUATE THEIR ROLES IN THESE SITUATIONS.

-Anonymous Teacher, 2020 Survey on the State of Talk in Québec’s English Schools

In the 2020 survey, we also asked teachers in which situations their students required explicit instruction to use talk to communicate and to learn.

- 86% of teachers felt students lacked explicit talk skills to participate in presentational talk—speeches, debates and presentations, 10% felt their students needed no instruction and 4% were not sure
- 73% of teachers felt explicit teaching was necessary for collaborative exploratory talk—small group and whole class discussions, 26% felt their students needed no instruction and 1% were not sure

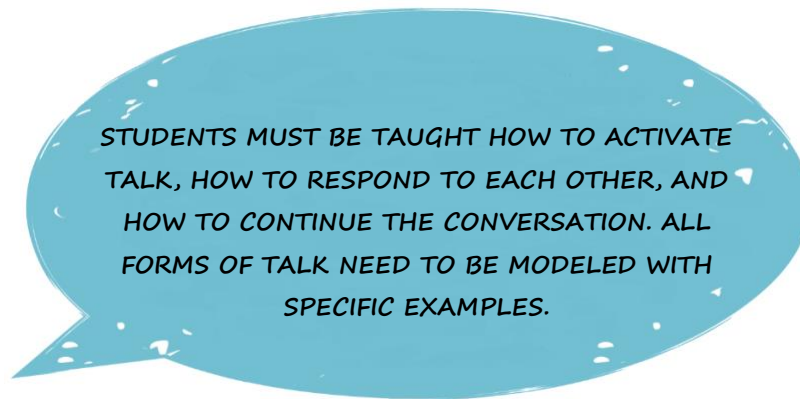


THERE IS NO REASON WHY SPEAKING THEIR MOTHER TONGUE SHOULD BE EVALUATED EQUALLY WITH HOW THEY READ OR WRITE.

-Anonymous Teacher, 2020 Survey on the State of Talk in Québec’s English Schools

Our perception of whether our students need explicit instruction for collaborative talk likely depends upon our understanding of the role of talk in our classrooms and what talk can produce for student learning. If we approach talk as the venue for developing thinking, exploring and co-constructing literacy learning, and building student autonomy in the learning environment, the necessity of teaching these skills emerges more clearly.

All our students deserve to benefit from explicit instruction that will support them in their oracy development. But how can we ensure that we are listening to every student as they develop their unique contributions and relationships with literacy and oracy, to best develop their voices?



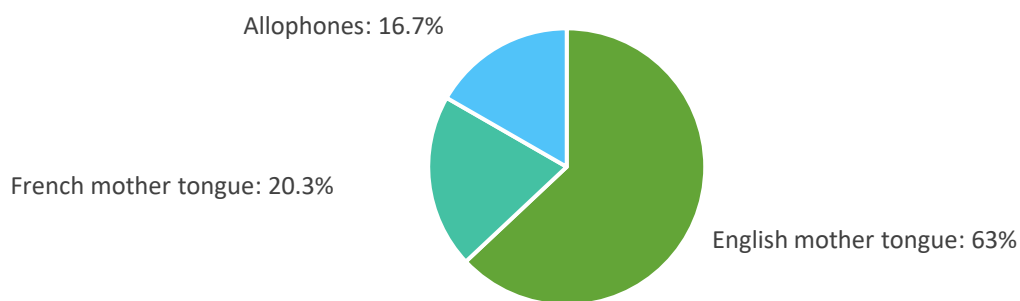
-Anonymous Teacher, 2020 Survey on the State of Talk in Québec's English Schools

Listening to every student

Literacy education provides an important opportunity to “amplify students’ cultural repertoires” (Cole & Griffin, 1980), building the community-specific literacy practices of all our students into future accounts of the various literacies our society values and grows from. In Québec, the linguistic and socio-economic patchwork of our school communities adds a challenging layer to the cultural fabric given the diversity they create in our student bodies. Historically this diversity has led to the marginalization of students whose literacy practices and home cultures differ from those of their school community (Heath, 1983). Students arrive at school with all types of literacy skills, perhaps different from those traditionally expected and accepted in the classroom. Contemporary literacy research seeks to free us from “scripts of risk [...] and deficiency” (Gutierrez et al., 2009, p. 238). Today’s literacy educators are tasked with overcoming the historical framing of differences as deficiencies. Where once we may have traditionally perceived “gaps” to be filled in the skills of students who are navigating the differences between school and home cultures and literacy practices, we now strive to celebrate all the contributions of these students toward our classrooms’ diverse repertoires of practices for shared meaning-making.

As we prepare our students to navigate existing inequality *and* to work to change the practices of the discourse communities that hold the most power, we are creating more equity for the future. Oracy education provides an opportunity for our students to become the voices of this change. How can we ensure that we are listening to the unique voice of each student and strengthening the potential it brings to the conversation? This question orients us toward honouring differences in oracy and literacy education, which extend into the celebration of differences our students can speak into the world.

English-language public school populations in Québec (2015)



The cultural, socio-economic and linguistic diversity of Québec’s English schools provides us and our students with abundant opportunities for building collaborative discourse across a variety of communities. Each region in our province represents a diverse composition of anglophones, francophones and allophones,¹¹ a variance in the socio-economic status of our students and their families¹² (not to mention our schools), and a distinct aggregate of cultures including those of recent immigrants to the province.¹³ In the classroom, this means that teachers might be teaching a large percentage of students whose first language is not English, or whose family situations make it difficult for them to meet the demands of the traditional classroom. This diversity within our classrooms adds a complex dimension to teaching talk in this province. It is important not to make judgements or assumptions about the oracy skills our students bring to school, but rather to support them in developing their competency and value what they bring to it. Oracy education can mobilize all our students’ different powers for sharing, telling and creating the social transformations only they can put forth. Students who have inherited the effects of social inequality are precisely the voices capable of advancing the transformations needed in our society today. By recognizing the gifts of perspective that each student contributes to the learning environment, we can teach them to speak from the value of their differences and to encourage each other to do the same. Oracy education not only gives our students “a space for their voices to be heard and valued” (Haynes, 2015, p. 10), but it teaches them how to create this space for themselves and each other as they go out into the world.

¹¹ A 2021 brief by Ciamarra et al. published by Concordia University states that “Over a third of students in the English-language sector do not have English as their mother tongue.” And, since 2006, more francophones than allophones make up the public English-language school system, particularly outside Montréal, so while the chart above may be representative of the province, the statistics vary significantly from region to region. The English Montréal School Board is an exception with substantially more allophones than francophones (Ciamarra et al., 2021). The linguistic and cultural diversity of our classrooms adds a complex dimension to teaching talk in this province.

¹² For the socio-economic demographics of all public schools across Québec, see: *Indices de défavorisation des écoles publiques 2020-2021*, Ministère de l’Éducation http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/PSG/statistiques_info_decisionnelle/Indices-defavorisation-2020-2021.pdf (available in French only).

¹³ As of 2011, immigrants represented one in eight people in Québec. For more information, see: https://veg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/Analysis_Immigration-in-Quebec-2014.pdf.

Fostering student confidence

“[I]n particular, a sense of confidence is a most powerful precursor and outcome of schooling. It is particularly powerful in the face of adversity—when things do not go right, or when errors are made. Having high levels of confidence—“can do,” “want to do”—can assist in getting through many roadblocks.”

Hattie, 2009, p. 47

Leveraging our students’ perspectives and contributions toward shared learning begins with building their confidence in doing so. We asked teachers in our *2020 Survey on the State of Talk in Québec English Schools* to rate the confidence levels of their students in a variety of talk tasks. Teachers noted substantial room for growth in their students’ confidence with skills such as justifying ideas, selecting and using an appropriate register, listening actively and critically, and clearly articulating ideas. This observation opens our inquiry here toward ways of supporting our students in developing the confidence they need. As educators, how can we recognize the factors that may be building or diminishing our students’ self-esteem, and how can we create classroom talk environments that nurture and support our students’ fullest visions of their potential?

DID YOU KNOW?

“Male students often lead and dominate classroom discussions,” which can have the effect of teachers “unconsciously rely[ing] on male students as their target or go to responders and volunteers” (Alber 2017).

And, according to Sadker et al. (2009), teachers focus more on boys, interacting with them more often and asking them better questions, engaging less often with girls, specifically asking them fewer questions, clarifying and correcting less often and providing less feedback.

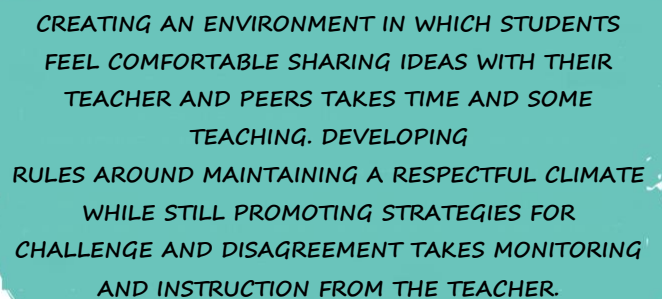
Imagine the implications for gender non-conforming youth in the classroom, and the importance of creating safe spaces for the full participation of these students (Baker et. al, 2018).

We have a unique opportunity as teachers to help foster a sense of confidence, engagement and agency¹⁴ in all of our students. As ELA teachers it is our responsibility to help them build the necessary competency and self-esteem to find and express their own voices. A positive and safe classroom environment is only one part of the puzzle. When the learning goals and success criteria are clear and attainable, students feel more confident, and their confidence contributes to motivation and success (Hattie, 2009). How do students know if they are good communicators or active listeners? How do they know what goals to set for themselves to improve their oracy skills? Through ongoing formative assessment, we can plan our instruction to meet the needs of our students and provide them with effective feedback to enable their growth (Hattie, 2011). We need to talk to our students about talk and provide them with feedback that encourages self-reflection, and that reminds them what they already know and asks them to check if they have used their prior knowledge. Effective feedback can have a strong influence on our students' belief in themselves (Hattie, 2009).

“Well-crafted discussions build confidence, and confidence is a sacred currency to students and teachers alike.”

Matthew R. Kay, 2018, p. 5

Not surprisingly, confidence and oracy skills develop in synergy and go far beyond the classroom. In their recent survey, the United Kingdom National Literacy Trust found that two thirds of the young people who responded “feel that good speaking and listening skills will give them the confidence to pursue the things they want to do in the future,” and, similarly, that “4 in 5 adults agree that good speaking and listening skills give people the confidence to pursue their aspirations” p. 4 (Teravainen-Goff et al. 2020).



CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH STUDENTS FEEL COMFORTABLE SHARING IDEAS WITH THEIR TEACHER AND PEERS TAKES TIME AND SOME TEACHING. DEVELOPING RULES AROUND MAINTAINING A RESPECTFUL CLIMATE WHILE STILL PROMOTING STRATEGIES FOR CHALLENGE AND DISAGREEMENT TAKES MONITORING AND INSTRUCTION FROM THE TEACHER.

-Anonymous Teacher, 2020 Survey on the State of Talk in Québec's English Schools

We conclude section 1 with the proposition that the possibilities of oracy in our classrooms depend upon our understanding of its role in learning and literacy, our belief in our students' unique capacities and our careful creation of the conditions necessary to see these things flourish. Once we have created and facilitated collaborative, dialogic learning environments in which every student is an equal participant in shared literacy learning, we are ready to explore the power of oracy education for our students' futures.

¹⁴ For more information on agency see: Fisher et al. 2021.



PART 2:

The Power of Oracy Education

Oracy in the classroom and beyond

“The idea of active citizenship clearly implies that in promoting and challenging forms of power relations or social values, participants would need a critical understanding of the consequences of arguments and actions, and their implications for the welfare of self and others.”

Rob Gilbert, 1997, p. 105

Oracy education is about lifting every student voice. By empowering learners and creating collective environments of accountability, reciprocity, mutual respect and the co-creation of thinking, learning, growth and possibilities, oracy education calls us to ask an important question: what kind of world do our students deserve to live in, and how are we preparing them to speak up for it? Our students are navigating the immediate and long-term realities of massive global changes. Their voices are essential in helping them to leverage their own potential and empower them to take on the work of creating the best conditions for an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world—now and in the future. Oracy education can connect discourse communities;¹⁵ support inclusion, advocacy and social change; and help students design the futures they will build.

Connecting discourse communities

Some 96% of Québec ELA teachers feel that talk is a crucial skill for their students to voice their opinions and participate in school and the wider community.

2020 Survey on the State of Talk in Québec’s English Schools

Oracy education teaches students to recognize, think through, navigate and appreciate a world full of different discourse communities (Gee, 2015). Discourses unique to different communities can teach us about different ways of knowing, understanding and living. “Discourse in the SELA program is language-in-use that gives expression to the social context and conditions in which it is produced or interpreted (C)ommunities distinguish themselves by creating a discourse that identifies members of that community and their relationship(s) to one another, including shared knowledge, values and beliefs”

¹⁵ Discourse: language used for the purposes of communication, giving expression to the social context and conditions in which it is interpreted and understood. For example, communities distinguish themselves by creating a discourse that identifies members of that community and their relationship(s) to one another, including shared knowledge, customs and genres that perform particular functions. Everyday examples include the medical, academic and educational communities (SELA 2 p. 67).

(SELA 1 p. 85). Teaching our students to appreciate a world full of diverse discourse communities and to value a multitude of ways of speaking, thinking and being is to teach them how to work with and among others and to help them develop new ways of listening between communities.

We each belong to several discourse communities at the same time (e.g. school and work communities, families, spiritual and religious communities, affinity groups, linguistic communities, cultural groups, etc.), and in fact the SELA 1 program states that “the classroom community of readers and writers is also a discourse community” (p. 85) in which students “explore the uses of language in a democratic society by examining how discourse is used in the classroom and in the community” (p. 95). But often we experience conflicting values between the different communities we belong to.¹⁶ In the era of technology and globalization, our students belong to and navigate more discourse communities than previous generations. Oracy education can teach students how to hold differences as advantageous and how to draw from them to build new possibilities between communities. Of course, this is especially important in times when political discourse has become not only divisive but rhetorically bewildering. Our students are crossing the gulf between the open, deliberative discourse of democratic engagement we encourage in classrooms and the obfuscation of the fake news era that has stunted productive dialogue and created deep rifts in many communities (Alexander 2020). But if talk is a challenge in a fraught political climate, talk is also the way through it, and lifting students’ voices might just usher in a new era of collaborative discourse.

¹⁶ See: Gee, 2015, p.179-180.

Inclusion

“All students must have access to the learning conversation.”

Sarah Michaels et. al., 2016, p. 14

Creating the conditions for all students to have equal access to the learning conversation is often a concern for teachers, and this concern relates to very important questions about each student’s relationship to talk. But rather than promoting a model of classroom talk that is inaccessible for some students, our work is to ask how classroom talk can fold each student’s talents, learning abilities and ways of thinking into its ethos of shared learning and expression. Through deep listening and presence, our students can learn new ways of conversing in relation to the experiences and practices of their peers. Our classrooms are always a constellation of bodies with unique capacities and perspectives, yet the unfortunate reality remains that significantly unique learners have already been excluded from our classrooms as we are still learning to build a more inclusive world. The Talk competency presents an opportunity for students as well as teachers to learn how to be in conversation with the whole world, not just a classically abled world. We may learn that alternatively communicating autism can teach us much about what it means to use our voices.¹⁷ We may learn about the tactile languages of DeafBlind communities,¹⁸ and how DeafBlind scholarship and poetry transform the physical aspects of talk. When we plan, teach and assess talk, we are not asking students to align with an existing determination of what talk must be, we are asking how each student is teaching us what else talk *can* be. Each key feature in the Talk competency is an opportunity for expression—how are students expressing what the Talk competency can become through their unique engagement with its requirements, and how can we help them develop their expressions into new opportunities for the learning environment? What does each student teach *us* about talk, and how can we create learning environments that celebrate it?

For example, what if we provided our students with talk role models who encompass a variety of unique capacities and abilities, from speakers who stutter and have embraced their own rhythms¹⁹ to the world’s leading youth climate activist who experiences selective mutism?²⁰ How can practising the Talk competency become an opportunity for our students to build more inclusive societies through the ways they learn to listen and the ways they feel empowered to speak and participate?

¹⁷ For more information, see DJ Savarese’s advocacy for “inclusive lives for all nontraditionally speaking people”: <https://www.djsavarese.com/>

¹⁸ For more information, see: <http://journalofasl.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2020/12/protactile-linguistics-discussing-recent-research-findings.pdf> (Nuccio and Clark, 2020).

¹⁹ See this story from Kevin Murphy explaining his experience with stuttering to the pizza delivery person: <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/203/recordings-for-someone/act-two>.

²⁰ For more information on Greta Thunberg’s experience of selective mutism, see: <https://www.businessinsider.com/greta-thunberg-selectively-mute-before-climate-activism-film-shows-2020-11>.

Accountability to our learning communities

“He says, A sad song is something from the heart, like the blues. The Innu language is like music that you sing, with slow intonations that you stretch out further with your breath. There are no vowels, and that makes the language impenetrable, like a return to nature: harsh, all bark and antlers.”

(Translation) Naomi Fontaine, 2013, p. 25.

If we are committed to growing in our teaching and learning practices in ways that listen to the connections between all kinds of discourse communities, we will have to face some uncomfortable truths. A focus on oracy calls forth our accountability to the ancient “oral-culture/literate-culture” divide which sociocultural literacy studies has worked to dismantle,²¹ and yet which functioned for a very long time as a colonial tool of oppression. What practices of orality were forcefully ignored during colonization, and have been ever since? To want oracy education for our community now, to want new ways of speaking, listening and connecting communities is to want to finally hear what has gone unheard between settler culture and the First Nations, and to want the responsibility and accountability that this carries with it.

I Lost My Talk

I lost my talk
The talk you took away.
When I was a little girl
At Shubenacadie school.

You snatched it away:
I speak like you
I think like you
I create like you
The scrambled ballad, about my word.

Two ways I talk
Both ways I say,
Your way is more powerful.

So gently I offer my hand and ask,
Let me find my talk
So I can teach you about me.

Rita Joe, 2015, p. 11.

²¹ See: Gee, 2015, p.55.

The writings by Indigenous authors in this section illustrate this history of unlistening, as Fontaine describes the beauty of the Innu language and Joe tells how her language was taken away. To honour the ways of listening and sharing grown within the traditional knowledge and practices of the First Nations, we must first grow in our ability to listen as the inheritors of an ancestral legacy of unlistening. We must grow in our readiness to listen in new ways, and we must tend to this commitment alongside our students.²²

As we acknowledge and discuss a history of disregarding and discounting the voices of many communities, we cannot move forward without addressing the discomfort that arises from these difficult conversations. How do we deal with this discomfort? Which is to say, how can we act upon our accountability to our learning communities by staying with the conversation even when it's hard? Kay (2018) reminds us that we must begin with developing a community in which we learn to listen actively and celebrate the voices and ideas that are shared, thus allowing us to “mak(e) space for the too-often-ignored voices in history” (p. 56). He recounts the wisdom of Frederick Douglass, 19th century American social reformer, orator and abolitionist, who “knew what many are noticing now: that we never seem to graduate to the *next* conversation. The hard one. . . . (Douglass) called for us to . . . seek out and value historical context, to be driven by authentic inquiry, and above all, to be honest – both with ourselves and with those with whom we share a racial dialogue” (p. 4).

If we can provide our students with opportunities to expand their understanding through rigorous discussions, important learning can occur. It is only through these hard conversations that we can acknowledge past and present wrongs and injustices, and begin to seek reparation and reconciliation.

Advocacy through oracy

“The next generation needs to be far better at this stuff than we have been. They are coming of age in a world of artfully disguised injustices, most of which will stay invisible and vicious if people never learn how to meaningfully discuss them.”

Matthew R. Kay, 2018, pp. 5-6

In a time of widespread political and social upheaval, cultural tensions and environmental concerns, and from dealing with the global COVID-19 pandemic, our students have witnessed seismic shifts worldwide and are negotiating significant social, economic and intellectual changes for the future. This has catalyzed already essential questions for teaching and learning. For English Language Arts, it

²² For more information, see: Jacobs 2019.

presses the question of how talk and text lead to action (Wells 2001), so that our classrooms might take on literacy learning oriented toward students finding their voices to speak up for themselves and others. It envisions mutually constructed goals for social change in order to amplify our students' potential to carry this learning into social action. Action is the greatest form of accountability our students can assume within their learning communities. The distance and social isolation of the pandemic has made community action feel more challenging, but also more important. As we reflect on the interconnectivity of our communities after a lengthy period of online and hybrid learning, and as we learn how to support well-being – our own and each other's – in new ways, we imagine the future our classroom conversations can build going forward. Here are some of the things we imagine talk can do for our students and our world.

Some 96% of teachers feel that their students' ability to talk is a key component in their social and emotional development.

2020 Survey on the State of Talk in Québec's English Schools

Almost 2/3 of ELA teachers feel that talk is essential in students' exploration and understanding of their own feelings.

2020 Survey on the State of Talk in Québec's English Schools

Advocacy for collective well-being: Our learning conversations and the ways we teach talk can help students to process and make sense of the world, and to process and communicate their individual and collective needs. While historically, *well-being* has not been framed as a learning target in formal education, the COVID-19

93% of Québec ELA teachers feel that talk is important to enable students to explore and understand their own feelings, and 92% feel that talk is necessary for their students to develop the ability to empathize with others.

2020 Survey on the State of Talk in Québec's English Schools

pandemic has brought it to the conversation in such a fundamental way that every competency can now be understood in terms of how it equips our students to stay well and to care for others. This is an important shift in our conversations about what education can do. As our students process pandemic-era health concerns and social isolation in tandem with its compounded effects on everyday health and mental health, the Talk competency can facilitate their engagement with these questions. According to Millard and Menzies (2016), oracy skills empower students to tell their own stories, self-advocate and move beyond their challenges. In this way, talk can also help students to understand wellness as a collaborative effort.

“If children are provided with the opportunity to engage critically with issues of social justice, equity, and diversity that exist in the world around them, and importantly, are shown that their voices are valued and respected, they will develop the ability to discern injustice and the confidence to speak out about social justice issues.”

Diane Vetter, 2008, p. 88

Advocacy for social change: “[Our students’] spoken language, and their capacity to use it to think, reason, find their way in a dangerous world and play their part as citizens in a democracy, are of the highest priority” (Alexander, 2020, p. 66). It is imperative that we, as educators, help our students to find their voices and to become critical, engaged and active citizens. Imagine a future in which international negotiations and deliberations are undertaken by leaders who do so with care and accountability to all the communities involved—leaders who not only know how to speak but know how to truly listen and to create the conditions for others to be heard. These are the empowering oracy skills our students can build to create better futures, not only by promoting civic engagement, but by preparing themselves to participate in global dialogue as citizens of the world.

“

It is hard for a student to unlearn empathy, to forget discernment, to dismiss the importance of solid evidence once they’ve grown used to demanding it.

”

What do Michael McCreary, Autumn Peltier and Malala Yousafzai have in common? They share oracy skills that have empowered them to voice their beliefs, concerns, ideas and values. They have recognized social, environmental, educational and economic injustices, and they use their voices to draw awareness to these issues in an effort to promote understanding and change. However our students choose to participate in their communities, whether at the level of global activists or at the level of compassionate neighbours, voters, caregivers and workers, we propose that all of our students can learn how to contribute the value of their own voices. Moving beyond the image of writing and delivering speeches as the basis of civic engagement, contemporary oracy education “help[s] students develop healthy habits of both mind and discourse that will serve them for the rest of their lives. It is hard for a student to unlearn empathy, to forget discernment, to dismiss the importance of solid evidence once they’ve grown used to demanding it” (Kay, 2018, p. 5).

Oracy education has the power to lift student voices—empowering them to speak up for themselves and their families, communities, beliefs and values. As our students will carry with them the oracy skills they learn in the classroom, in the future we can expect citizens who actively listen, support their ideas and opinions with evidence, collaborate, empathize and use their voices to create a better world. Imagine the possibilities!



PART 3:
The Possibilities of Oracy Education

Talk: Challenges and opportunities

Two powerful things can be heard across this dialogue with teachers. First, there are many urgent concerns around the Talk competency among Québec ELA teachers. Second, there are many ways of thinking about the Talk competency and how it is taught and practised in Québec’s ELA classrooms. These are both energizing contributions—how can we best address teachers’ concerns and capitalize on the possibilities of oracy education? How do the importance of explicitly teaching talk, the necessity of planning for talk and the intricacies around assessing talk connect with a deeper discussion around the affordances of the competency itself? How can we make these connections and generate these possibilities as we discuss talk together? Understanding the possibilities of classroom talk means understanding its challenges. If we can deeply dialogue about what hampers talk in our classrooms, we can begin to tease out more opportunities for teaching talk.

CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
<p>Talk is often seen as less valuable than reading and writing.</p> <p>For centuries, reading, writing, and arithmetic have reigned as the essential elements of children’s education (Alexander 2013). In ELA, writing is often seen as the “real” work. And while presentational talk is seen as communicating learning outputs, exploratory talk is not well understood for its learning benefits and real-world applications. Talk is also often seen as primarily social, with its cognitive and cultural functions less well understood.</p>	<p>What happens when we re-value talk?</p> <p>When classroom talk assumes its full potential in our classrooms and students learn to carry meaningful dialogue, sustain caring relations within their learning communities and explore the fruitful interplay between reading and writing through dialogic inquiry, the value of talk will speak for itself.</p>
<p>Classroom talk can lead to distraction or disruptive behaviour.</p> <p>We may find ourselves worrying that talking in class leads to high noise levels, unruly behaviour and students going off task, making classroom management a challenge.</p>	<p>How can we manage students so that distractions and disruptive behaviour are minimized?</p> <p>When students and teachers co-create and establish norms and guidelines for classroom talk, with expectations that are clearly understood, talk becomes much more manageable. When students are taught how to communicate effectively, when they feel that they can take risks without fear of judgement or ridicule, and when they are given interesting ideas to discuss, they are more likely to be engaged and on task.</p>

Talk is naturally acquired and doesn't need to be taught.

Given that talk was not historically prioritized as an educational target, students have often been left to navigate dialogue and make sense of discourses on their own.

What happens when we take student talk seriously and teach talk explicitly?

In the act of teaching talk explicitly, we are letting students know that we want them to be heard. Making talk an inextricable part of the teaching and learning process can help facilitate the acquisition of other learning goals. In addition to helping our students navigate the variety of discourses they each bring to the classroom community, we can learn to hear, value and advocate for the varied discourses of our students who bring diversity to the dominant discourse of the school community.

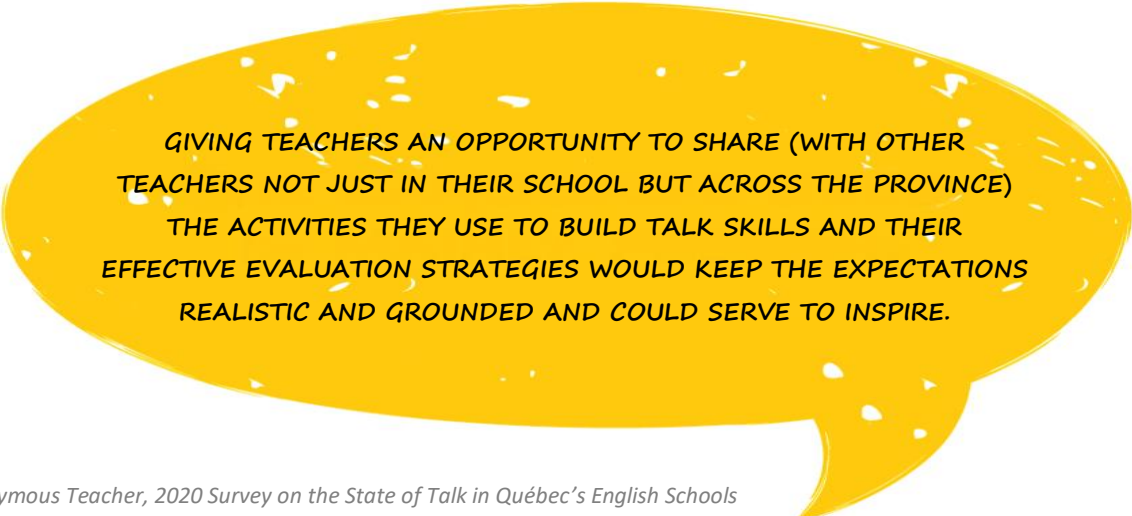
Talk is difficult to assess.

Beyond presentational talk, it can feel like a strange and difficult undertaking for teachers to assess progress in the many subtle movements of classroom dialogue.

What can talk teach us about assessment?

Consider the power of teacher-student conferences, accompanying a student in their relationship with talk, discussing their strengths, challenges and goals, and finding outlets for their unique talents. This is how we approach reading and writing. It's also a reminder of what assessment and feedback can do as a way of nurturing each student's unique process.

Another contribution to this dialogue among Quebec ELA teachers is the clear ways that we can build upon each other's experiences and techniques. Yet the data from our survey shows that 65% of teachers are planning for talk on their own. This is not surprising for many teachers in small schools who don't have access to colleagues with whom they can collaborate. So how can we activate the Talk competency first amongst ourselves to share best practices and then bring it more fully to our students?



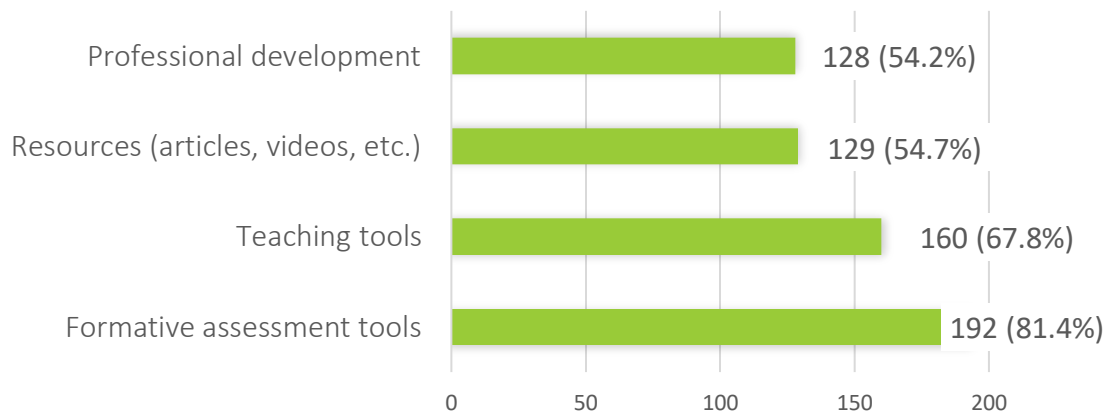
GIVING TEACHERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE (WITH OTHER TEACHERS NOT JUST IN THEIR SCHOOL BUT ACROSS THE PROVINCE) THE ACTIVITIES THEY USE TO BUILD TALK SKILLS AND THEIR EFFECTIVE EVALUATION STRATEGIES WOULD KEEP THE EXPECTATIONS REALISTIC AND GROUNDED AND COULD SERVE TO INSPIRE.

-Anonymous Teacher, 2020 Survey on the State of Talk in Québec's English Schools

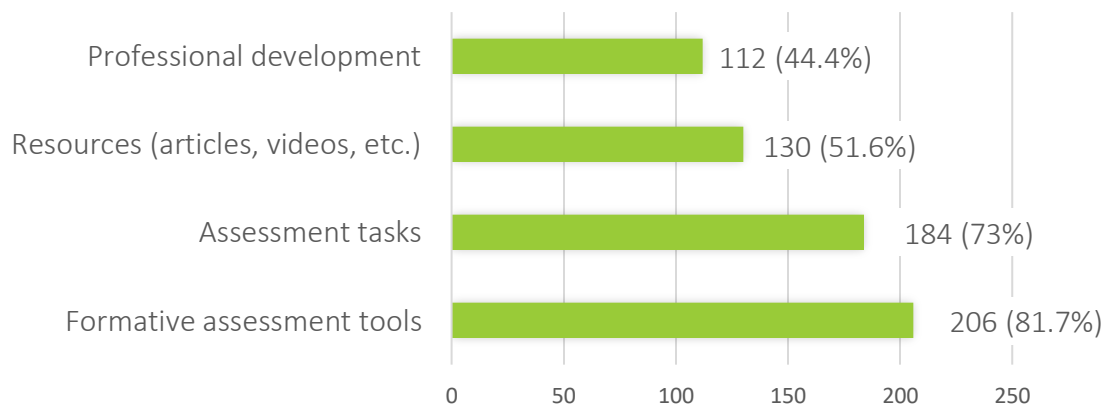
When we surveyed Québec ELA teachers about talk in their classrooms, we knew that we were starting a conversation that would grow into further inquiry and possibilities. This is to say that we were starting a dialogue, and the way that we discuss the survey data here is an implication for what the Talk competency can do for our teaching and learning communities. Within this conversation, we want to be as rigorous with our expectations for talk as we would be with our students. We hope this report will spark conversations within our teaching and learning communities that will elevate the value of talk in our classrooms.

One of the major issues that has risen to the surface throughout our study of the Talk competency is the need for quality tools and resources to support oracy education. The majority of teachers across the province highlighted formative assessment tools as their number one choice to better teach and assess talk.

What would most help you teach talk?



What would most help you assess talk?



Oracy tools to support teachers and students

One way we can be accountable to the teaching communities this survey data represents is to actively listen and promptly respond to their concerns. The PACTE Subcommittee for Talk, made up of elementary and secondary ELA and literacy consultants from six different school boards, began work in 2019 on a suite of resources, including a foundational tool for the Talk competency (Appendix 1) that illustrates the skills students need to become effective communicators. The *Oracy Skills* tool, initially inspired by Voice 21²³ and Cambridge University's *Oracy Framework*, was designed based on the EELA and SELA programs as well as the Progressions of Learning. The tool depicts four strands that target the necessary skills, namely physical, linguistic, cognitive and, social and emotional. Metacognition, which figures prominently throughout the Elementary and Secondary Cycle One and Two programs is prevalent throughout each of the strands. The *Oracy Skills* tool was field tested during the 2020-2021 school year at both the elementary and secondary levels and simultaneously validated by Bishop's University.²⁴

In conjunction with the *Oracy Skills* tool, the PACTE Subcommittee for Talk also designed two developmental oracy continua (Appendices 2 and 3): one especially created for planning instruction and providing feedback, and a second for student reflection and goal-setting. These complementary tools include the strands from the *Oracy Skills* tool and carry over the same colour-coding for easy-to-recognize elements. These tools are part of a larger oracy toolkit,²⁵ which includes a *Glossary of Oracy Terms* (Appendix 4) that has been developed to support the ELA curriculum's Talk competency.

²³ Voice 21 is a non-profit education charity that works to promote oracy across the United Kingdom.

²⁴ For more information see: Riddell, 2022.

²⁵ Available on Literacytoday.ca.

Building futures through talk

“Oracy also holds the keys to broader societal benefits. Employers need a workforce capable of communicating with clarity and sensitivity, and society needs citizens who can engage thoughtfully and actively in the democratic process.”

Will Millard and Loic Menzies, 2016, p. 8

Our inquiry into oracy has yielded much for reflection. We know that classroom talk matters; it is crucial for the construction and co-construction of knowledge as well as the consolidation of understanding. We acknowledge that talk is an integral aspect of the English Language Arts curricula— inextricably linked to reading, writing, production and the process of making meaning. Oracy research highlights the immense importance of speaking and listening, not only in English Language Arts classrooms but as a cross-curricular skill and conduit to developing more engaged and empowered citizens.

We know that talk supports students as they move beyond school and into adulthood.²⁶ From within the ethos of cultivating shared learning and accountability to the learning community, talk positions students to invent expansive, inclusive and compassionate prospects not only for future societies, but also for themselves as individuals.

Our dialogue with ELA teachers across the province highlighted many approaches and strategies being used to teach talk. It also drew attention to the challenges of classroom talk and the urgency to provide teachers with quality resources that support oracy education. The conversation has allowed us to explore the relationships between our English Language Arts curriculum, the needs of our professional and student populations, and emerging oracy and literacy research. It allows us to ask: what can we continue to learn together in a collaborative inquiry as we expand the possibilities of oracy in our classrooms?

Teachers’ experiences, emerging research and global concerns leave us with questions to ponder as we consider the possibilities oracy education can offer, namely: What new relationships can we forge by developing and using the Talk competency? How can we adapt our pedagogy to best leverage the benefits of oracy in the classroom? And, how can we approach oracy in the classroom with the spirit of dialogic inquiry, which is to say, with an openness to questioning our reasons for talk, the collaborative actions and interactions in our classrooms, and the effectiveness of our learning environments? And how can we do this together as a learning community, within a continuing conversation? The challenges of changing the conversation about classroom talk speak for themselves, and fortunately, as we move forward together, so do the possibilities.

²⁶ Speak for Change report, p. 10.

Appendix 1

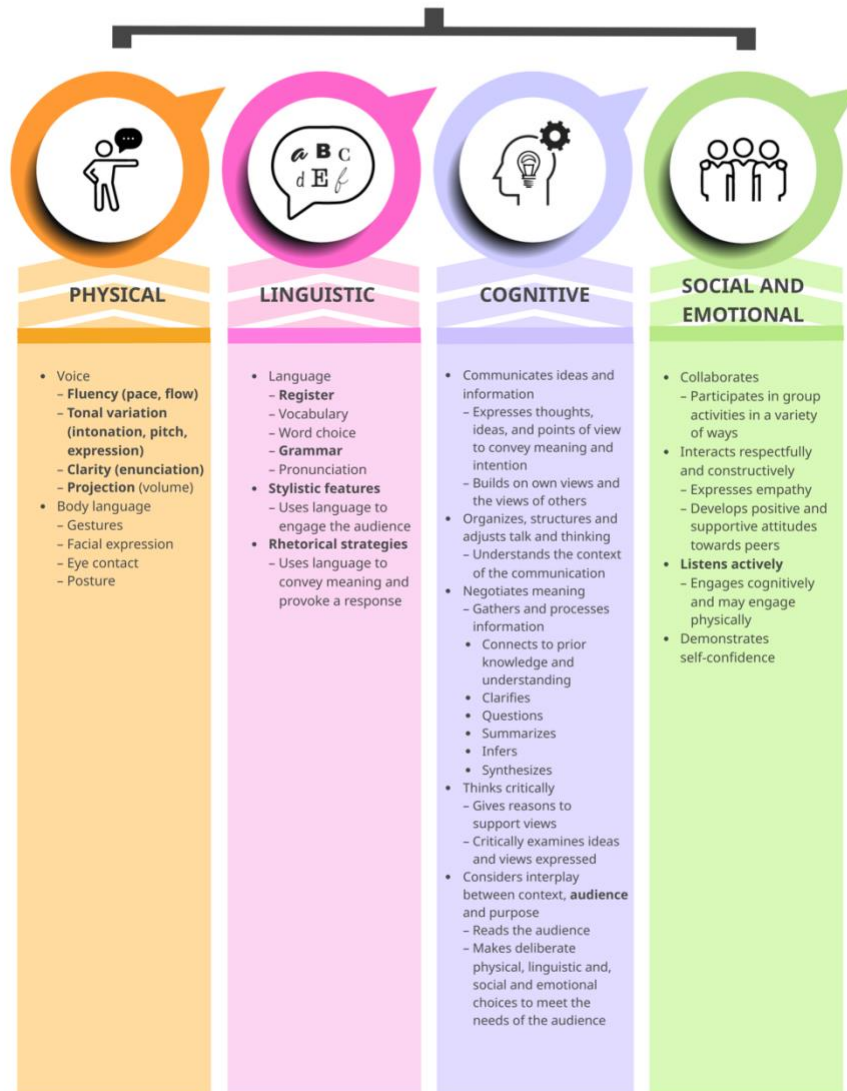
Oracy Skills

Oracy enables us to navigate our own learning and our world through the skills and processes of talking and listening.



METACOGNITIVE

- Develops as a learner and a thinker
 - Reflects on self as a communicator (approaches, strategies, skills)
 - Uses understanding of oracy to grow as a communicator and a learner
 - Recognizes the value of their own contributions and their impact



Appendix 2

DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM OF ORACY SKILLS FOR PLANNING INSTRUCTION AND PROVIDING FEEDBACK			
PHYSICAL	LINGUISTIC	COGNITIVE	SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voice Body language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language Stylistic features Rhetorical strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates ideas and information Organizes, structures and adjusts talk and thinking Negotiates meaning Thinks critically Considers interplay context, audience and purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborates Interacts respectfully and constructively Listens actively Demonstrates self-confidence 
In a variety of talk contexts, both formal and informal, the student:			
EXTENDING			
<p>Masters the use of voice and body language and uses them deliberately to connect with and/or make an impact on the audience.</p> <p>Varies, adapts and controls these skills with ease.</p>	<p>Adapts register, adjusts word choice and uses specific vocabulary effectively and accurately for a range of contexts, purposes and audiences.</p> <p>Integrates stylistic features and rhetorical strategies skilfully and purposefully.</p>	<p>Has internalized the cognitive skills to communicate with ease.</p> <p>Tailors content and delivery to audience, adjusts talk as needed (can ad-lib).</p> <p>Processes and synthesizes information and ideas to fuel discussion and advance thinking.</p>	<p>Listens actively by interacting purposefully, respectfully and with flexibility.</p> <p>Communicates in a highly engaging manner; has a rapport with the audience.</p> <p>Chooses to lead or defer to another speaker when beneficial for group cohesion or audience interaction.</p>
CONSOLIDATING			
<p>Varies, adapts and controls voice and body language in light of context, purpose and audience.</p>	<p>Uses their understanding of register in light of purpose, context and audience.</p> <p>Makes deliberate word choices and employs a more extensive vocabulary.</p> <p>Employs and expands upon a growing repertoire of stylistic features and rhetorical strategies.</p>	<p>Makes connections and can expand on ideas.</p> <p>Purposefully chooses strategies to share ideas with clarity; persuade, convince, inform, entertain to meet the needs of the audience.</p> <p>Acknowledges and considers different perspectives.</p> <p>Analyses, selects and organizes pertinent information to fuel a discussion; explain, support, defend or rebut a position.</p>	<p>Listens actively by considering and responding to the feelings and ideas of others.</p> <p>Reads their audience and adapts communication to connect with them.</p> <p>Contributes in an assured manner through constructive and positive interactions.</p>
DEVELOPING			
<p>Builds control of voice and body language and starts to use them to communicate in a variety of situations.</p>	<p>Experiments with register in light of a growing awareness of purpose and audience.</p> <p>Explores the versatility of words and increases vocabulary.</p> <p>Begins to use familiar stylistic features.</p>	<p>Expresses and supports ideas related to the topic and/or purpose.</p> <p>Begins to read the audience and experiments with physical, linguistic and social and emotional skills to meet their needs.</p> <p>Experiments with a range of strategies: questions, clarifies, gives examples, explains, summarizes, builds on ideas to construct meaning.</p>	<p>Follows social conventions for talk in a variety of contexts.</p> <p>Demonstrates listening using a variety of verbal and non-verbal responses.</p> <p>Builds confidence in own opinions by contributing thoughts or ideas to support learning/meaning in a variety of contexts.</p>
BEGINNING			
<p>Explores different ways to utilize voice.</p> <p>Uses gestures to support developing linguistic and cognitive skills.</p>	<p>Adopts a register for a familiar audience and context.</p> <p>Uses familiar vocabulary and attempts to use new words.</p> <p>Is acquiring a working knowledge of grammar.</p>	<p>Shares own ideas.</p> <p>Develops an emerging awareness of purpose and audience.</p> <p>Adjusts thinking and organizes ideas when questioned, encouraged or supported.</p>	<p>Understands social conventions of communication: waiting their turn, listening when others are speaking.</p> <p>Expresses thoughts, ideas or understanding, sometimes tentatively, as their self-confidence grows.</p>
BEFORE BEGINNING			
Behaviours and skills not yet at the beginning level do not appear on the continuum.			

- This continuum shows the development of oracy skills. Refer to the *Oracy Skills* tool for more details.
- These descriptors provide an overview of what oracy skills could look like in action. They are NOT an exhaustive list.
- Levels build upon each other. Higher levels assume that students have already mastered the skills in the previous steps.
- Terms in **BOLD** are defined in the *Glossary of Oracy Terms*.
- Oracy skill development requires explicit instruction, scaffolding and practice in a variety of contexts.

Appendix 3

DEVELOPMENTAL CONTINUUM OF ORACY SKILLS FOR STUDENT REFLECTION AND GOAL-SETTING			
METACOGNITIVE			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am developing as a learner and a thinker. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I reflect on myself as a communicator (approaches, strategies, skills). ○ I use my understanding of oracy to grow as a communicator and a learner. ○ I recognize the value of my own contributions and their impact. 			
PHYSICAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voice • Body language 	LINGUISTIC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language • Stylistic features • Rhetorical strategies 	COGNITIVE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates ideas and information • Organizes, structures and adjusts talk and thinking • Negotiates meaning • Thinks critically • Considers interplay between context, audience and purpose 	SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborates • Interacts respectfully and constructively • Listens actively • Demonstrates self-confidence
EXTENDING			
I can skilfully and deliberately use my voice and body language to make an impact on my audience.	I choose from a wide range of linguistic skills to engage my audience and evoke responses. I can play with language skilfully and purposefully.	I choose strategies that enhance communication. I can anticipate the response of my audience and make choices accordingly. My participation and contributions have the intended effect on my audience in light of the purpose.	I listen actively and respond to my audience with awareness and sensitivity. I build rapport and engagement with my audience with ease. I can adjust my contributions for the audience and respond accordingly to enhance interaction, collaboration or cohesion.
CONSOLIDATING			
I am aware of the impact of my voice and body language and adapt them as needed.	I use language effectively with awareness of my purpose, the context and my audience. I choose words with care and have a wide vocabulary.	I participate in many facets of a discussion. I support my ideas and opinions with pertinent information and consider different perspectives. I am aware of my purpose and audience and can adjust my talk based on their response.	I listen actively to others and contribute thoughtfully and respectfully. I can read the verbal and non-verbal cues of my audience and connect with them. I am confident contributing in a varied range of contexts and with a broader audience.
DEVELOPING			
I am learning to use my voice and body language to communicate in different situations.	I use language to express myself in different ways depending on my purpose and audience. I work on building vocabulary to use in different situations and for specific topics. I explore the impact of my style and grammar for my purpose and audience.	I explain and develop my ideas. I can recognize the needs of my audience. I notice their response to what I am saying. I use strategies like questioning and summarizing, and sometimes build on the ideas of others.	I practice social conventions in different talk situations to maintain respectful and productive interactions. I listen and respond constructively when talking with others. I am comfortable taking risks when expressing my ideas.
BEGINNING			
I can change the way I speak and use body language to communicate.	I try different ways of speaking depending on my purpose and audience. I use familiar vocabulary and try out new words. I am working on using correct grammar.	I share my ideas. I can take my ideas farther and adjust my thinking after listening to and talking with others.	I listen to others, wait my turn and participate either verbally or physically. I express myself with growing confidence depending on context and audience. I sometimes need encouragement when I share my ideas.
BEFORE BEGINNING			
Behaviours and skills not yet at the beginning level do not appear on the continuum.			

- This continuum shows the development of oracy skills. Refer to the *Oracy Skills* tool for more details.
- These descriptors provide an overview of what your oracy skills could look like in action. They are NOT an exhaustive list.
- Levels build upon each other. Higher levels assume that you have already mastered the skills in the previous steps.
- Terms in **BOLD** are defined in the *Glossary of Oracy Terms*.

Appendix 4

Glossary of Oracy Terms

This glossary defines terms used in the suite of oracy skills tools and documents, and explains concepts and practices related to oracy/talk.

Active listening: giving full attention to the speaker and thinking about what is being said. It is an active process in which a conscious decision is made to listen to and understand the ideas of the speaker. Active listening may include *Social and Emotional* skills like putting the speaker at ease, *Physical* skills like nodding and making eye contact and *Cognitive* skills like agreeing, seeking clarification and paraphrasing.

Inspired by SkillsYouNeed.com <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/active-listening.html>

Additional ideas <https://www.edutopia.org/article/what-does-good-listening-look>

Audience: anyone you are speaking to or communicating with. In informal contexts, this could include conversation partners and members of small groups. In more formal situations, this could be your debate team, opponents and the people attending the debate; peers who listen to a class presentation; people in the audience of a spoken word performance, for example.

Clarity: the quality of being coherent and intelligible

Dialogic teaching: “Dialogic teaching is good for students. It harnesses the power of talk to engage their interest, stimulate thinking, advance understanding, expand ideas and build and evaluate arguments, empowering them for lifelong learning and democratic engagement. Being collaborative and supportive, it confers social and emotional benefits too.

Dialogic teaching helps teachers. By encouraging students to share their thinking, it enables teachers to diagnose needs, devise learning tasks, enhance understanding, assess progress and assist students through the challenges they encounter.”

Source: Alexander, 2020, *A Dialogic Teaching Companion*, prologue. London: Routledge.

Enunciation: the act of pronouncing words or parts of words clearly

Exploratory talk: sharing with their teacher and peers (Elementary English Language Arts program, EELA p. 74); through talk or exploratory language, the student constructs meaning by exploring new ways of expressing thoughts, ideas and feelings, and of constructing meaning. They experiment with different linguistic forms and features, developing a growing repertoire of language and learning strategies. The student takes an active role in group discussions, problem-solving activities and classroom drama activities, using their repertoire of strategies purposively and effectively. They communicate clearly and appropriately, and respond to and support the communication of others. They explore issues and ideas that are personally significant. (EELA p. 99) Collaborative talk, with its tentative and exploratory qualities, allows for the use of questioning and hypothesizing, of searching for answers, of playing with ideas, and provides an important way for the student to assimilate and integrate new knowledge. (Secondary English Language Arts program, Cycles One and Two, SELA1 p. 93 and SELA2 p. 12) See also **Types of talk** below.

Fluency: the ability to speak smoothly and easily, which includes:

pace - the speed at which one speaks

flow - the way sounds, syllables, words and phrases are joined together

Grammar: the study or use of the rules about how words change their form and combine with other words to express meaning (dictionary.cambridge.org); language-in-use, being able to apply the appropriate codes and conventions (SELA2 p. 60)

Norms and guidelines: Norms are an accepted standard or a way of behaving or doing things that most people agree with. Guidelines are information intended to advise people on how something should be done. (dictionary.cambridge.org)

In a classroom context, it is recommended that norms and guidelines are established or co-created with students so that expectations for talk are clear and well defined. Class norms and guidelines should be posted for easy reference.

Oracy: The term “oracy” was coined by Andrew Wilkinson and his team at the School of Education at Birmingham University in 1965 in response to their sense that the orate skills of speaking and listening were being sidelined by a focus on reading and writing.

Oracy is learning *to use* our voices as well as learning *through* our voices. Oracy enables us to navigate the world and our own learning through the skills and processes of talking and listening.

Presentational talk: see **Types of talk** below

Projection: volume adjusted to meet the needs of the context and audience

Quality talk: Quality talk is essential to learning. High quality teacher talk includes:

- effective explanations
- modeling expert thinking
- questioning with purpose and to promote student participation

High quality student talk means that students:

- express themselves with confidence
- participate effectively in a variety of collaborative talk situations
- talk “like experts” using academic and subject specific language

For more information, visit <https://sandagogy.co.uk/high-quality-talk/>

Register: tailoring the language used to suit the intended audience and context, e.g. addressing younger children as opposed to parents. Register also varies according to content, e.g. relating scientific facts to an uninformed audience, delivering a sports commentary on an all-sports show. (SELA1 p. 126)

Rhetoric: the art of effective speaking or writing, of influencing an audience; the study of the effective use of language (SELA2 p. 67)

Rhetorical strategies: devices used by speaker/producer to influence an audience, e.g. emotional appeal, call to action (SELA2 p. 67)

Rich talk: is relevant to the interests and positions of speakers and listeners. It is meaningful to their experience and understanding. Rich talk is undertaken with a clear purpose that reaches beyond meeting a curriculum expectation. It is authentic talk, not contrived or scripted in any way. Rich talk is collaborative; therefore, all voices are respected and heard. It engages participants in the subject matter, immerses them in the learning experience and facilitates the acquisition of knowledge and the discourses (Gee, 2008) of learning. Rich talk is founded in prior knowledge and experience while inquiring into new avenues of thought and learning. It is critical talk that questions, analyses and evaluates to make meaning, construct new understandings and facilitate metacognitive awareness and higher-level thinking. Rich talk stimulates and is stimulated by thought. It is the means by which thought comes into existence (Vygotsky, 1934, 1986).

In short, rich talk is relevant, meaningful, purposeful, authentic, collaborative, engaging, critical and stimulating. It facilitates connections to prior knowledge and experience, meaning making, knowledge acquisition, inquiry, construction of new understandings, acquisition of discourses (Gee, 2007), meta-cognitive awareness and higher-level thinking.

Source: Vetter, Diane. *The Impact of the Implementation of Rich Talk Curriculum on the Cross-curricular Learning of Grade 3 Students*, York University Libraries, 2009.

Social conventions: any of various established rules, methods, procedures, and practices that have been accepted as guides for social conduct over a relatively long period. Often unwritten, arbitrary, and self-perpetuating, social conventions usually pertain to relatively mundane aspects of society, such as etiquette, social ceremonies, and decorum (dictionary.apa.org); common standards within a social group regarding socially acceptable behaviour, in particular during social situations (oxfordreference.com), for example, in conversation: waiting your turn to speak (not interrupting), making appropriate eye contact, respecting personal space.

Stylistic features: stylistic features and devices such as repetition, humour, parody, exaggeration and imagery used for emphasis, interest and special effect, and to create a personal style (SELA1 p. 96)

Syntax: knowledge of common language patterns (EELA p. 77); ordering words to construct meaning, e.g. using sentence variety, using clauses to extend thinking (SELA2 p. 61)

Tonal variation: variation in:

Intonation: rise and fall of the voice

Pitch: degree of highness or lowness

Expression: how feelings, mood and atmosphere are expressed using the voice

Types of talk: Genre in the SELA program is a type or kind of text, defined in terms of its social purpose...(T)exts are becoming increasingly (blended, and therefore) multigenre in nature. (SELA1 p. 86)

Some examples of types of talk as defined by Gaunt and Stott include:

- **Exploratory:** There is collaboration and shared purpose. Contributions are treated with respect. Students provide reasons for their opinions. Students politely challenge, question or probe the ideas of others (p. 22). Contexts for exploratory talk include solving a problem, discussing an issue, explaining or interpreting a concept and engaging in role play. p. 24
- **Presentational:** Students present their understanding to others. The speaker's attention is focused on the audience (p. 24). Contexts for presentational talk include for example, debates, presentations, and hosting an event. p. 24
- **Cumulative:** Contributions build on each other but go unchallenged and are not questioned. Only one point of view is considered. pp. 21-22
- **Disputational:** There is frequent disagreement, which may not be supported with reasons. Contributions are competitive rather than collaborative. p. 22

Source: Gaunt, Amy & Stott, Alice. *Transform Teaching and Learning Through Talk: The Oracy Imperative*, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.

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