The Oracy Skills Framework and Glossary

Oracy Cambridge
HUGHES HALL
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Hughes Hall Centre for Effective Spoken Communication

voice 21

Cognitive

Content
- Choice of content to convey meaning & intention
- Building on the views of others

Structure
- Structure & organisation of talk

Clarifying & summarising
- Seeking information & clarification through questions/ing
- Summarising

Self-regulation
- Maintaining focus on task
- Time management

Reasoning
- Giving reasons to support views
- Critically examining ideas & views expressed

Social & Emotional

Working with others
- Guiding or managing interactions
- Turn-taking

Listening & responding
- Listening actively & responding appropriately

Confidence in speaking
- Self assurance
- Liveliness & flair

Audience awareness
- Taking account of level of understanding of the audience

Linguistic

Vocabulary
- Appropriate vocabulary choice

Language
- Register
- Grammar

Rhetorical techniques
- Rhetorical techniques such as metaphor, humour, irony & mimicry

Physical

Voice
- Pace of speaking
- Tonal variation
- Clarity of pronunciation
- Voice projection

Body language
- Gesture & posture
- Facial expression & eye contact

The Oracy Skills Framework

The Oracy Skills Framework (OSF) specifies the various skills young people need to develop to deal with a range of different talk situations. The framework has been developed by drawing on available existing resources and research, and in consultation with a range of experts. The OSF is designed to help school leaders, teachers and pupils understand the physical, linguistic, cognitive and social/emotional skills that enable successful discussion, inspiring speech and effective communication.

The OSF can be used to help teachers and pupils set specific oracy targets for pupils, and to provide them with formative feedback on their use of speaking and listening. The OSF not designed to be used as an assessment framework, and we recommend that schools do not use it for this purpose.

Glossary of key words and terms

In this document, we offer some definitions for the key terms in the OSF. Please note that the characteristics of spoken language are not entirely separate or distinct, so there is inevitably some overlap between the definitions of some of the items described below.

PHYSICAL

Pace of speaking

A skilled speaker will talk at a speed which allows listeners sufficient time to process what is said, while also avoiding excessive pausing or hesitation.

Tonal variation

Especially in a public speaking situation, a speaker should be assessed on how they use variations in emphasis, volume and pitch to enhance the meaning of their speech.

Clarity of pronunciation

A skilled speaker will pronounce words with suitable clarity and precision, without muttering or slurring them, so that the speaker is understood by their audience. The ways in which particular words are pronounced can also vary according to the geographical and social origins of speakers, reflecting their personal histories and identities. This applies also to those who have learned English as a second language. No single accent is the 'correct' one, though it is widely accepted that a speaker's accent affects how they are perceived by listeners, both positively and negatively (depending to a great extent on the listener's own history and identity). For reasons of social advancement or adaptation to life in a local community, children may make conscious efforts to modify their accents, and that is normal and understandable. But for oracy assessments, a speaker's accent should only be considered problematic if it is judged to interfere significantly with how clearly they can be understood by listeners in a given situation.

Voice projection

This means speaking loudly enough to suit the needs of the situation. So a skilled speaker would not whisper when addressing a whole class or other similar large audience, or shout in a small group situation.

Gesture and posture

Especially in public speaking situations, a skilled speaker can use gestures to enhance the meaning of their speech. These should not be exaggerated or distracting, but appropriate to the nature and scale of the situation. A speaker's or listener's engagement with those with whom they are interacting can be shown by how they sit or stand. For example, when making a formal presentation, posture should be upright and 'open', reflecting the speaker's awareness of the demands of this kind of speaking as public performance.

Facial expression and eye contact

One of the most important ways in which a speaker or listener can demonstrate engagement with those they are communicating with is through their facial expression. Eye contact can also help maintain good interpersonal communication, if used appropriately in any situation.

LINGUISTIC

Appropriate vocabulary choice

The quality of a spoken presentation or group discussion, across a range of situations, can be affected by a speaker's choice of apt and varied vocabulary. In some situations, this will involve the appropriate and accurate use of relevant technical terms.

Register

By 'register' is meant the use of language appropriate for the social situation. The most obvious aspect of register is how a speaker's language is adapted to the relative formality of a situation. For example, in a job interview the normal expectation would be that a speaker should avoid slang terms and casual humour. In an informal chat amongst peers, on the other hand, maintaining a very formal style would be odd and not conducive to enhancing solidarity with others present. In drama activities, this would involve the ability speak in a way that is 'in tune' with the character being portrayed.

Grammar

The grammatical correctness of speech is often a matter of public debate, but that debate is rarely well informed. There is often confusion between what is grammatically correct and what is correct in Standard English, with no account taken of what may be

correct within a regional dialect (regional dialects are, somewhat unfortunately, known as 'non-standard' varieties). It is also sometimes asserted that children should 'always speak in complete, grammatical sentences', when it is not normal for any speakers to do this consistently.

Assessing the correctness of a student's grammar is likely only to be relevant in formal public speaking situations (as opposed to, say, talk during group work), as the usual expectation in such situations is that Standard English grammar will be used. Of course, in some role play/drama situations, the use of Standard English grammar might well be inappropriate. There will be some situations, such as formal presentations, in which Standard English will be most appropriate, whereas in other situations another dialect or variety may be more appropriate (e.g. amongst peers or other members of a local community). A speaker may be able to use more than one dialect or varieties of English – for example, a regional variety as well as Standard English. In drama or other performance situations, a speaker may demonstrate their skill and language awareness by switching dialects.

Rhetorical techniques

Good speakers are able to use devices such as metaphor, simile, anecdote and jokes to enhance their meanings and build rapport with their listeners. The effective use of such devices – which can also include such things as offering short lists, repeating key words for emphasis, and so on – can help a speaker communicate more effectively. Such devices can, of course, be used effectively or otherwise.

COGNITIVE

Choice of content to convey meaning and intention

An effective communicator will exercise judgement over what content is relevant and interesting for speakers to hear, given the particular situation and communicative task involved.

Building on the views of others

When talk is being used to develop shared understanding, a skilled speaker will draw upon what others say when they make their own contributions.

Structure and organisation of talk

A skilled speaker will select and organise the content of their talk so that it is relevant, clear and comprehensible to listeners. They will also take account of the conventional ways in which language is designed to get things done in specific situations. So, for example, a 'lecture' is for imparting information to an audience, a 'debate' is for airing and reconciling different points of view, a 'play' is for the dramatic presentation of a narrative, and a 'team discussion' is for pursuing and finding a solution to a shared task or problem. Different genres have different structures and patterns of interaction. A highly skilled speaker will be able to adapt their talk to suit the needs of the relevant genre,

while a less skilled speaker may not be able to do so. For example, if a speaker treats a group discussion as an occasion to give a formal lecture, they are showing a lack of skill in this respect.

Seeking information and clarification through questions

The skilled use of spoken language does not depend on speakers only providing information clearly, but also on their seeking relevant information and/or clarification from others: for example, through the use of appropriate, well-designed questions.

Summarising

This is the ability to provide a clear summary of matters presented or discussed: for example, the main points of a presentation, what has been agreed following a group discussion, or what questions have been raised in a debate.

Maintaining focus on task

This simply means the demonstrated ability to concentrate on what needs to be done and avoid distractions.

Time management

Effective speakers do not misuse the time available to them. For example, they will ensure that they keep to the allocated time when making a speech, avoid taking turns that are too long in a conversation, and manage the time available in a group discussion to ensure that it reaches a conclusion.

Giving reasons to support views

The key issue here is that, whether in presentational talk or in discussion, a speaker is able to explain and justify their points of view clearly and effectively in words.

Critically examining ideas and views expressed

The focus here is on how well a speaker is able to use language to test ideas and opinions, in a way which is constructive but not aggressive.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL

Guiding or managing the interactions

This refers to a speaker's ability to enable a conversation, discussion or debate to continue by making appropriate contributions using suitable strategies to encourage

others to contribute. So a speaker could draw the attention of participants in a discussion to the aims of the task in hand, encourage other speakers to take a turn, and so on. They may act as the chair of a meeting, or as 'devil's advocate' in a discussion.

Turn-taking

Especially in group discussions, skilled speakers will act sensitively in taking turns to speak and allowing sufficient opportunities for others to do so.

Listening actively and responding appropriately

This refers to a speaker's skill in showing that they are attending and listening to what other speakers have said. It also includes a speaker's ability to provide appropriate and clear answers, within the limits of their knowledge, to any reasonable questions posed.

Self-assurance

Assessing the quality of a person's use of spoken language should take account of their effectiveness in not seeming nervous in any specific kind of talk situations. They may well be feeling quite apprehensive, but are able to manage their feelings so that it does not show. This skill includes the ability to cope with being questioned or interrogated, or to deal with heckling, disputes, emotional conflicts, lack of cooperation, and so on.

Liveliness and flair

This skill is most relevant to presentational talk and drama activities. It represents the extent to which a speaker is able to show enthusiasm and imagination to achieve a distinctive and effective use of talk.

Taking account of level of understanding of the audience

An important aspect of using spoken language effectively is judging what your listeners already know, or do not know, about the topic being dealt with. Thus, a speaker has to judge what knowledge a listener can be assumed to have – such as knowledge of the local geography of an area if someone has asked for directions, or of the technical language of computing if someone has asked for help with setting up their laptop. Making that assumption would only be justifiable if the speaker had good evidence that such knowledge was held in common. But equally, including basic information about a topic in a speech to an audience of experts on that topic would demonstrate a poor judgement of the level of understanding of that audience.