Oracy in the classroom: the impact of pupil-centred talk on learners with English as an Additional Language

William Walden

A Research & Development Project

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INTRODUCTION

Many children in the United Kingdom do not learn the curriculum in their mother tongue. The proportion of pupils in schools who speak English as an Additional Language is, on average, just under 14% (Strand et al., 2015). However, the distribution of this population is not even, as over 50% of schools in the UK have an EAL population of less than 5% while almost half of pupils in a typical London school are EAL (Greater London Authority, 2017). For some children, learning the curriculum in their native language is challenging. For those learning in a foreign language, the challenge can be greater.

A recent data summary from my own school, a medium sized community primary school in North East London where 56% of pupils speak EAL, reveals that the attainment and progress of EAL pupils in Literacy is lower than that of FLE (First Language English) pupils. This reflects the national picture; a gap exists between the achievement of EAL and FLE pupils in Literacy which, although narrowing slightly as children get older, is yet to close (Strand, 2015). In our school, since Spring 2017, not only is there a disparity between the attainment of EAL and FLE pupils in literacy, but also there has been a slight decline in the achievement and progress of EAL pupils overall. For Upper Key Stage 2 classes, EAL attainment in writing is amongst the lowest in the school. Closing the attainment gap between EAL and FLE pupils needs to be addressed, but how do we achieve this?

Like many schools with a similar pupil demographic, the challenge of finding effective and inclusive teaching methods to narrow the gap between EAL and FLE pupils is considerable. Strand et al. (2015) believe that English language proficiency is the major factor influencing the performance of EAL pupils. For many children, early communication is predominantly spoken (Fitzhenry & Murphy, 2017) and as they move

through their formal education, oracy is perhaps the most crucial skill for building language proficiency (Mercer, 1999; Bruner, 1999; Alexander, 2003; Rose, 2006). Even so, despite its crucial role in developing both oral and written proficiency (Perera, 1984), oracy is often lost in schools and becomes secondary (Mercer, 2008).

For EAL pupils, a return to the development of spoken language, a focus on oracy, may be key to their progress and success. Given the positive outcomes of peer learning (Piaget, 1932/65; Bruner, 1999; Claxton, 2009), an intervention to promote pupil-led oracy in the classroom could positively impact on EAL pupils' language proficiency.

Rationale

Before designing an oracy intervention, I investigated the existing state of classroom oracy in my own school and the impact it was having on EAL pupils. The data I collected, which I will discuss in more detail later in this project, was taken from two classes in Key Stage 2; one Year 4 class and one Year 5 class. Initial findings suggested that EAL pupils: lack confidence when speaking; find it difficult to articulate themselves; and have low quality academic discussions with their peers. Questionnaire results revealed that 69% of EAL pupils speak only 'some of the time' or 'hardly ever' in discussion scenarios; a quarter claim that they hardly ever expand on points they have made in discussions; and a third of EAL pupils feel that they have low confidence when sharing ideas in class. These findings were supported by observations and pupil interviews with six EAL focus children from the two classes. I observed pupils make very few developed points in discussions, remaining quiet and even disengaged on a number of occasions. Any articulations were either fragmented by long pauses or incomplete. Likewise, in interviews, pupils expressed that they often avoid speaking aloud in class,

they feel nervous or shy if they have nothing to say, and they fear getting things wrong in discussions.

For EAL pupils nationally, this is not uncommon behaviour. Cummins (2000) found that in many classroom interactions, EAL pupils say little or nothing at all and Miller (2004) found that 'speaking audibly and without anxiety in another language is an enormous challenge for all but the most extrovert and intrepid students' (295). The findings I drew from my own school seem to fit the pattern for EAL pupils nationwide.

Finding a strategy to address this issue is important for my own teaching practice, for my school and for wider pedagogical practice. Improving EAL oracy will ensure more inclusive teaching in my own school. It also has the potential to narrow the attainment gap between EAL and FLE pupils, and ensure an improvement in EAL progress and attainment. Equally, developing language proficiency for EAL pupils in our school may help children transition more easily and feel more confident and settled. Should findings be significant, this research could offer a better understanding of pedagogical practice which benefits EAL learners and could pave the way for the ideal of 'oracy in every lesson' (Maxwell, 2015:3).

The Research Project

This research project investigates the level of impact an increase of oracy in the classroom has on the confidence, articulation and quality of the communication of EAL pupils in learning contexts following the belief that communication is built upon strong oral foundations (Perera, 1984). It considers a comprehensive range of empirical and theoretical literature, assessing strengths and limitations, in order to identify what is already known about oracy, its existence in national pedagogy and its role in the development of EAL learners. A methodology section outlines both the intervention I

designed to address the identified issue and the research methods I used to gather and evaluate data. I present my data and findings with a discussion and evaluation, referencing key literature from the literature review. Ultimately, I present implications for practice in my own school and wider society regarding the use of oracy to raise the attainment of EAL pupils.

Limitations

Due to my project having a small sample, drawn from a single school in one geographical area of the country, I will not present findings which attempt to transform current pedagogy surrounding the learning and teaching of EAL pupils. Due to time constraints, I was not able to complete more than one intervention and I only present findings from one data set drawn from one population. I will not, therefore, generalise, however I am confident that my research will have an impact on my own pedagogy and teaching and learning across the school and will contribute towards the wider field of research.

An additional limitation is that this project will only consider the impact of the intervention I have designed to enhance the language proficiency of EAL pupils. It will not take into consideration any other external influences, for example home learning environment or additional support outside of school, which may influence the progress and development of EAL pupils.

Key Terms

According to Alexander (2003), oracy is defined as the point where learning to talk and learning through talk meet. By using talk as a tool to build on thoughts and concepts, a speaker also acquires and practises new language skills. Similarly, Mercer (1999) defines oracy as a three pronged tool: a cognitive tool ‘to process knowledge’, a social tool ‘for

sharing knowledge' and a pedagogic tool which 'one person can use to provide intellectual guidance to another' (96). For the purpose of this study, I define oracy as the use of collaborative talk in a formal setting which enhances language proficiency and cognitive skills.

Throughout this research, the term EAL refers to learners whose first language is one other than English. EAL encompasses pupils who have varying levels of proficiency, from those who are new to English to those who are both academically and socially fluent. I will consider the views of EAL pupils with varying levels of proficiency. However, the purposive sample of EAL pupils I will observe and interview specifically (which I discuss in more detail in my methodology chapter) will be those with developing proficiency in English, as defined by our own school EAL policy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the aims and themes of my research project. It draws on a range of theoretical and empirical literature, most of which is contemporary (from the last ten years). It draws parallels and contrasts between similar pieces of research, highlighting any strengths and limitations. Writing the literature review allowed me to identify what is known and unknown about my field of research, generate research questions for my own intervention, evaluate my findings and consider implications for my own pedagogy, teaching practice in the school and wider academic and teaching developments.

A rationale for oracy: why is oracy in the classroom important?

Mercer, who is director of Oracy Cambridge, a centre for effective spoken communication, believes that 'a child's understanding may be shifted by interacting with another child' (1995:90), a belief founded upon the work of constructivist theorists Piaget (1932/65) and Vygotsky (1978). Essentially, oracy between two or more pupils is a medium through which reasoning and understanding is nurtured, resulting in development for all participants.

Skidmore (2000), who analysed cases of pupil-teacher interaction in lessons, identified that when a sequence of dialogue departs from a teacher-led model and focuses more on pupil-pupil discussion, a 'collective process of knowledge generation' is achieved 'through the external, social dialect of discussion and debate' (292), enhancing pupils' knowledge and understanding. One limitation of Skidmore's research, however, is that is draws on a small number of case studies, so we cannot assume that it applies to schools on a broader scale.

In order to appreciate the effects of oracy for learning on a larger scale, Alexander and Wolfe (2008) produced an evaluative report bringing together findings on the topic over the last three decades. They draw comparisons between studies focused on talk in the classroom, offering a comprehensive overview of successes and suggested next steps for future projects. They claim that 'children learn more effectively … when they are actively engaged in pedagogic activity, through discussion, dialogue and argumentation' (2) and encouraging children to reason and debate through talk will help them to adopt habits of critical inquiry – a key component of Mercer's exploratory talk (2008) which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Like Alexander and Wolfe's evaluative summary, a report by Ofsted (2012) recognises the impact of oracy in the classroom. Given that the report is based on an extensive survey of 1,480 lessons nationwide, we can assume that the results strongly indicate the effectiveness of classroom oracy. It found that 'the earlier … all children develop confidence in their speech, along with an extensive vocabulary, the more likely it is that they will be able to improve their overall competence in reading and writing' (48). These findings demonstrate that oracy in the classroom enhances wider pupil performance, which is particularly important if we aim to accelerate EAL pupils' learning. It also resonates with the findings of Bain (1992), who found that 'pupils regard[ing] themselves as poor speakers … are unlikely to use oracy effectively as a tool for learning' (83). This evidence suggests there are strong trends between using oracy in the classroom and pupils' mindset, confidence and academic achievement.

Similarly, the Department for Education and Skills (2007) produced a report that highlights the skills developed by pupils using oracy as a tool for learning which include: 'questioning, analysing and hypothesising' (16). This combination of evidence creates the

perception that oracy is a learning tool which has a high impact upon children's ability to learn across a range of disciplines.

However, it is important to consider that, although oracy promotes learning and development through verbal participation, many pupils learn just as effectively when they are not talking. Ollin (2008) found that many learners engage in 'silent pedagogy' where interaction and participation is not 'manifested in talk or overt face to face engagement' (266). In a study of detailed interviews with 25 teachers in a post-16 setting, Ollin concluded that talking has become 'inextricably linked to the learning process' (267) and silent participation, or listening, is 'construed as passivity by observers' (266) when actually it offers pupils the chance to 'be engaged in a variety of internal activity – listening, cognitively processing, emotionally processing' (272). Conversely, in a similar study of students in a post-16 setting, Tatar (2005) found that silence amongst EAL learners was often a 'face saving strategy and 'the product of a feeling of inarticulacy' where pupils 'felt their language abilities and content knowledge to be insufficient to express themselves clearly' (288). Where Ollin found silence to be a positive part of the learning process, Tatar found it to symbolise a feeling of inability to participate. Alerby and Alerby (2003) promote a balance, highlighting that it is important to have 'time and space to reflect on the process of teaching and learning' (47). For many pupils, 'silence is imposed, as one cannot find the words to respond' (42) while not everybody possesses 'either the ability or courage to make their voice heard' (47). Although Ollin and Tatar's post-16 research has limitations to my research into primary education practices, together with Alerby and Alerby, it is clear that having room for quiet reflection and listening is an important facet of oracy in lessons. Equally important, however, especially given my EAL focus group, is that silence can often be a sign that pupils may want to, but are unable to communicate and articulate their thoughts.

To summarise, research suggests that oracy is an important pedagogical tool for learning. It allows children to develop reasoning and understanding (Mercer, 1995; Skidmore, 2000; Alexander and Wolfe, 2008) and pupil confidence (Bain, 1992; Ofsted, 2012). However, we must not underplay the significance of quiet observation in pupil development (Ollin, 2008; Alerby and Alerby, 2003). Although there is some mention that oracy develops confidence (Alexander and Wolfe, 2008), the level of impact oracy has on overall language proficiency remains less clear.

The state of oracy in schools nationally

In 2013, a report by the Department for Education stated that 'pupils should be taught to speak clearly and convey ideas confidently … justify[ing] ideas with reasons [and] ask[ing] questions to check understanding' (10). However, research has found that oracy has always been secondary to reading and writing in the classroom (Mercer; 2008) and that 'spoken language has yet to secure the place in primary education that its centrality to learning, culture and life requires' (Alexander, 2010:269). Furthermore, Purcell-Gates (2006) highlights the need for spoken and written language to be enhanced as separate disciplines. As oracy is crucial to a child's development (Piaget, 1932/65; Mercer, 1995; Rose, 2006) it seemed essential for the government to promote it as a statutory discipline of the New National Curriculum for Primary Schools (DfE, 2015) with the aim that all pupils should develop a capacity to articulate and justify their arguments and opinions, build on and evaluate discussions with others and speak fluently by the end of Year 6. Given the demands for oracy in the curriculum (DfE, 2013), and considering results from my initial findings, as outlined in the introduction, my school is not fully meeting the needs of EAL pupils and the demands of the curriculum.

The need for an increase in pupil oracy is not a new phenomenon. The National Oracy Project (NOP), established in 1987, aimed to 'enhance the role of speech in the learning process … by encouraging active learning' (Norman, 1992:xii). The project comprised a sample of teachers who contributed evidence of their practice to a database which was used to assess the breadth and quality of oracy in schools. However, in an evaluative report of the state of oracy in schools following the NOP, Johnson et al. (1992) found that despite a drive to increase the quantity of children's talk in lessons, there was often a limited repertoire of strategies in place to enhance the quality of their talk. While this evaluation raises questions around the strategies used to enhance oracy, we cannot apply the findings to the state of oracy in schools nationally given that data was collected from a sample of just two British schools.

As highlighted earlier, oracy is now a key factor of the current National Curriculum for primary education (DfE, 2015) and, as I discussed previously, oracy is a tool which many have proven has a positive impact on pupils' achievement (Alexander & Wolfe, 2008; Mercer, 2008; Skidmore, 2000). Although a statutory requirement, it is important to analyse how effectively oracy is currently being used as a strategy in schools across the country.

In a recent review of the major policy initiatives and research that have shaped the place of oracy in the classroom, Jones (2017) found that, despite being a national priority, children's spoken contributions in class are 'rarely longer than three words' (503). Interestingly, the Ofsted report (2012) conducted five years earlier, which drew data from 1,480 lessons, found that in the majority of lessons pupils rarely had opportunities to discuss issues and thoughts in class. Therefore, despite initiatives and statutory documentation introduced in the years between these studies, it appears that schools are not promoting oracy effectively in lessons and pupils have limited opportunities to

discuss issues and ideas and subsequently develop their ability to convey thoughts orally. As Jones (2017) reviewed extensive policy initiatives and research from the last two decades and beyond, her findings are reliable and support her observation that oracy is yet to have its 'rightful place' (507).

So why is it that, despite its proven advantages, pupils still do not always have the chance to to practise oracy in the classroom? One belief is that teachers have a tendency to dominate discussion in classroom situations. Howe and Abedin (2013) strongly endorse this in their findings from a systematic review of 225 studies, with the majority of publications reviewed written between 2002 and 2011. A strength of their research is that the publications reviewed used a balance of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, thus creating a comprehensive view of classroom talk. However, one limitation is that some publications were taken from the USA and other countries, meaning that some of the data is not necessarily representative of classroom talk in the UK. One important finding was that dialogue in classrooms was, generally, facilitated and structured by the teacher. A common theme of the reviewed research was that 'teachers find it extremely difficult to promote exploratory talk [amongst pupils] in classrooms' (341), and when pupil-pupil dialogue did occur, the high attaining pupils were found to dominate discussions and contribute disproportionally. This, for my own research and intervention, is one of the key issues that I hope to address by developing protocols to help pupils facilitate their own exploratory discussions.

The conclusion that teachers tend to dominate classroom talk supports the findings of Myhill et al. (2006) who, after analysing classroom discourse in the TALK project, recommend that teachers need to step back from discussions and act as facilitators putting children in charge. Similarly, and more recently, Alexander and Wolfe (2008) found that 'the dominant pattern of communication consists mainly of teachers talking with little

uptake of children's contributions' (3) and Millard and Menzies (2014), who surveyed 900 teachers and school leaders across the UK, collecting observational and interview data from 26 focus groups and 11 experts, found that although 'teachers feel oracy is valuable because it can underpin pupils' development linguistically, socially and emotionally' (72), they still dominate talk situations, stifling pupils' engagement within the learning process, and provision for pupil-centred oracy was 'patchy and inconsistent' (72).

One reason for this pattern could be, as Skidmore (2000) found, that teachers feel the need to exercise 'near-total control' (288) over talk situations in order to maintain the focus of the lesson, or that teachers naturally feel the need to intervene in discussions and override pupil talk to help 'clear up … misunderstandings' (288). Regardless of the reasons, evidence strongly suggests that teachers dominate classroom talk which undermines the belief that knowledge should be obtained by children and not imposed by adults (Moll and Greenberg, 1990) and confounds the belief that 'if we want children to talk to learn, as well as learn to talk, then what they say actually matters more than what teachers say' (Alexander, 2003:37).

Where oracy provision may be inconsistent across the country (Millard and Menzies 2014), there is one school that is fully adopting oracy in lessons. School 21, in Stratford, East London, have worked in collaboration with Oracy Cambridge, to run 'Voice 21', a whole school oracy project, creating an oracy rich curriculum and promoting talk in every lesson. Maxwell et al. (2015) produced a report evaluating the effectiveness of the project after its initial year. It gathered quantitative data from assessments of 75 students in year 7, which, although offers a comprehensive view of the impact of oracy amongst one entire group of learners, has limitations regarding the lack of qualitative data. There are also limitations regarding this report when it comes to my own project, as the nature of

pedagogy in the primary classroom – where children develop relationships within one class and with one teacher – is very different to the dynamics of secondary school classrooms. Despite limitations with the report, Maxwell et al. found that increasing talk in the curriculum, following clear routines and frameworks for discussion, does have an impact on children's oracy skills by helping pupils find their voice and develop articulation. However, they note that there is a need to develop talk of a more exploratory nature.

So, is the ideal for oracy, as outlined in the National Curriculum (DfE, 2015), being achieved by schools in this country? It seems that schools are falling short of the ideal (Ofsted, 2012; Jones, 2017) with teachers dominating classroom discussions rather than allowing greater pupil autonomy (Howe and Abedin, 2003; Myhill et al., 2006; Alexander and Wolfe, 2008; Millard and Menzies, 2014). However, there is evidence that, in some regions, at least, schools are giving oracy its rightful and necessary place (Maxwell et al., 2015). Overall, it is clear that more can be done to promote the importance of oracy and ensure its growth in teachers' pedagogical practice.

Classroom talk and EAL pupils

This project will focus on the impact of pupil-centred talk upon EAL pupils. It is therefore essential to explore the importance of oracy to EAL learners and the effectiveness of current pedagogy to this end. The DfE (2013) stated that 'teachers should set high standards for every pupil' (8). However, Cummins (2000) claims that in over 50% of classroom interactions 'EAL pupils either say nothing or supply one-word answers' (404). This may be because some EAL learners are shy or lack the confidence to speak English in class (DfE, 2011), a belief echoed by Tatar (2005) earlier in my literature review. Similarly, Miller (2004) states that, for many EAL pupils, 'speaking

audibly and without anxiety in another language is an enormous challenge for all but the most extrovert and intrepid students' (295). She adds that EAL speakers often survive by accruing a 'necessarily symbolic capital' (291); 'identity kits' they can use to move through a range of discourses by 'sounding right' (312) without necessarily having a deep understanding of the language they have adopted.

With this in mind, it is important to consider the research of Cummins (1984) that highlights the difference between EAL pupils having Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS allow pupils to develop the 'identity kits' noted by Miller (2004) which allow them to survive socially and according to Cummins (2000) can take as little as two years to grasp. It is believed that an interactive approach to teaching and learning, such as the use of talk partners and groups, can help EAL pupils become conversationally fluent in English in two to three years (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). On the other hand, CALP, which demands fluency within an academic context, can take EAL learners up to seven years to develop fully. Cummins (1984) argues that in order for EAL pupils to develop CALP, it is important to focus on using language within a specific context, focus and structure. Therefore, to achieve academic language proficiency and help EAL pupils meet the end of Key Stage 2 demands of the National Primary Curriculum (DfE, 2015), it appears that intervention is required to increase structured oracy in the classroom.

Many believe that a way to develop structured oracy in the classroom is to provide scaffolding, to those who need it, in the form of stem sentences. Stem sentences are ready-made sentence openers, 'chunks of language that help language learners develop fluency' (Carrier, 2005). For all children, they have been found to aid the formulation of concept into words (Bellamy, 2016), they encourage active listening in group discussions (Wetherbee et al., 2017) and they enable more pupils to 'participate in discussion and

structure exchange of views' (Maxwell, 2015:36). Specifically for EAL pupils, Afitska (2015) found that stem sentences have a positive impact upon their participation in discussions despite the fact that they are often time consuming to create and won't automatically appeal to all learners, as echoed by Coultas (2015) and Williams and Roberts (2011). Afitska's intervention research considered the impact of stem sentences in four state primary schools in the north of England over a period of 24 months. She found that stem sentences allow pupils to focus on 'receptive skills' (cognition and concept) and alleviate their worries surrounding 'productive skills' (communication) (9). Equally, White et al. (2006) found that stem sentences increase the confidence, motivation and involvement of EAL pupils in group discussions. Stem sentences appear to be a highly recommended strategy for the encouragement of language development and reinforce the importance for quality structured oracy in the classroom. However, there are few research projects which reveal the true extent of their impact. The impact of stem sentence scaffolding will therefore be a considerable focus of my research project.

As well as a lack of research projects focused on the impact of stem sentences, Howe and Abedin (2013), when exploring research focused on oracy in the classroom, discovered that a small minority of studies focused on oracy and EAL pupils. Those that did, show EAL pupil contributions as infrequent compared to majority ethnic background pupils. For Cummins (2000) there is a vital need for programmes which dedicate more time for EAL pupils to achieve on the same level of English speaking peers and uphold the stipulation of the Department for Education (2013) that teachers should 'plan teaching opportunities to help pupils develop their English and should aim to provide the support pupils need to take part in all subjects' (8) in order to 'develop pupils' spoken language' (10).

In a case study which looked at five teaching scenarios in primary schools, Chen (2009) found that EAL pupils were often taken out of class for small group teaching sessions. Although this was found to be beneficial, it counters the inclusive ideal outlined in the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013). However, this project was limited to only five case studies, thus not giving a picture of whether this was common practice across British schools. Equally, it opposes the beliefs of Piaget (1932/65) and Bruner (1999) who stress the importance of collaboration, not segregation, in learning.

In summary, there appears to be little research on the impact oracy has on EAL learners (Howe and Abedin, 2013). In the research that exists, EAL pupils appear amongst the quietest and most reticent in classroom based oral situations (Cummins, 2000). This does not help EAL pupils to develop CALP (Cummins, 1984) as demanded by the curriculum (DfE, 2015). In order for teachers to meet these demands and 'differentiate provision in order to achieve some equity of outcome' (Kotler et al., 2001:404), collaboration may be the solution.

Achieving oracy in the classroom: establishing collaboration

As I highlighted at the beginning of this literature review, there is evidence which suggests that oracy is crucial for pupils' learning and development (Mercer, 1995). There are also indicators that collaboration amongst pupils promotes the strongest outcomes when it comes to oracy (Skidmore, 2000; Alexander & Wolf, 2008).

The work of Piaget has revealed that interaction between peers results in significant leaps in development (1932/65). Building upon this, Bruner's theory on knowledge development (1999) highlights that knowledge is 'discoverable by discussion' (9). In discussion, things aren't simply shared; learners 'achieve some meeting of minds with others who may have other views' (12) and advance meaning and understanding together.

Claxton (2009) describes this notion as ‘contagious minds’ (181). Similarly, having closely observed this process in a number of case studies, Moll and Greenberg (1990) believe that pupils learn most effectively when they exchange funds of knowledge, ‘using themselves and their peers as resources for thinking’ (329), exploring problems in small groups (Stein et al., 2008). Evidently, oral collaboration has a strong impact on pupils’ learning and development.

Recently, Hattie (2009) analysed more than eight hundred meta-analyses which, in total, included the findings of 52,637 pieces of research, in order to discover what aspects of pedagogy had the most impact upon pupil learning. His findings are based on quantitative data (meta analyses being statistical in nature) measured against a base-line of academic achievement. The research, therefore, lacks qualitative data which often reveals more candid explanations, such as social and emotional factors, differences in teaching style and school ethos. The large scale of his research, however, supports his claim that, quantitatively, co-operative and collaborative learning between peers has a strong impact upon achievement.

Collaboration is not always easy to achieve in a classroom setting though. Jones (2017) found that ‘although children may be organized to work in groups, they [often] tend to operate as individuals within those groups’ (505). Also, Brice-Heath (1982), in a study of the learning habits of children from different backgrounds, found that children who experience cultural differences in their upbringings naturally follow different rules when speaking to and working with others. Some turn-take, listen and create dialogue while others are more aggressive, asserting their own opinions. Therefore, within collaborative situations, teachers often feel that they must work as a mediator and control dialogue so that it is fair. Another disadvantage to collaborative work, noted by Mercer (1995), is that often ‘a more knowledgeable and capable individual can dominate decision making

[which] may hinder … the less able' (93) and the success of collaborative activities 'depends on what purpose it has, and how it is organised by the teacher' (92).

There are obvious benefits as well as challenges to collaborative discussion. They allows pupils to learn from each other (Moll and Greenberg, 1990; Bruner, 1999) but they can also result in situations where the most confident and proficient pupils dominate (Mercer, 1995; Jones, 2017). So what type of talk promotes the richest discussions amongst pupils?

Achieving oracy in the classroom: encouraging exploratory talk

Of all the variants of discussion (disputational, cumulative and exploratory) identified by Mercer (1995/2008), exploratory talk is the most beneficial to children's learning. Where Mercer identifies that cumulative talk seems to aim for 'the achievement of consensus' by an accumulation of points (1995:105), exploratory talk (Mercer, 2008) encourages participants to critically challenge one another, seek reasons and justify thinking, resulting in rich, developmental discussion. An ethos should be developed where 'the group takes responsibility for decisions; reasons are expected; challenges are accepted; alternatives are discussed, before a decision is taken; and all in the group are encouraged to speak by other group members' (Mercer, 1999:99). Because of its critical nature, exploratory talk is characterised by hesitations and incomplete points, questions and listening as all participants 'arrange information and ideas into different patterns' (Barnes, 2008:4).

Alexander and Wolfe (2008), when reviewing talk in learning situations, identified that learners must 'engage with [other]'s point of view in ways that challenge and deepen their own conceptual understanding' (3) in order to achieve exploratory talk. However, they conclude that less attention has been given to developing the repertoire of children's

talk necessary for exploratory discussion; 'their capacities to narrate, explain, ask questions, speculate, argue, reason and / justify' (8-9). Equally, Skidmore et al. (2003) explored the dynamics of discussion in a small scale research project and found that there is work to be done on children's discussion skills and a need for children to 'challenge and probe each other's reasoning' (52).

Addressing these issues and achieving exploratory discussion will 'not only enable children to become more effective in using language as a tool for reasoning and sharing knowledge, but [will] also lead to raised levels of individual achievement' (Mercer, 1999:108). EAL pupils need more opportunities to develop language skills and given that pupils learn and develop knowledge and language collaboratively (Bruner, 1999), exploratory talk amongst peer groups may be the answer to raising their oral proficiency and thus, as outlined by Strand et al. (2015), their overall achievement in Literacy.

Achieving oracy in the classroom: structuring collaborative exploratory discussion

Flitton and Warwick (2013) analysed strategies used to create environments for purposeful classroom talk. Through observations, they found that 'the teacher's orchestration of talk [is an] overarching theme that pervades the interactions which take place between … pupils' (101). Essentially, the better the teacher understands group talk strategies, the more effectively they can organise pupils to lead their own high quality discussions, a notion backed by Mercer (2008). Interestingly, Howe and Abedin (2013), after their comprehensive, systematic review of 225 empirical pieces of oracy research, found that 'more is known about how classroom dialogue is organized than about whether certain modes of organization are more beneficial than others' (325).

Like Howe and Abedin, Mercer (1999) noticed that little research had been conducted into effective ways to organise pupil-pupil dialogue. He designed an experimental

teaching programme to ‘improve the quality of children’s reasoning and collaborative activity’ (95), using control and intervention groups to gather both qualitative and quantitative data, allowing for precision and accuracy. Mercer found that ‘primary teachers hardly ever drew attention to the way [pupils] used language together, or explicitly sought to encourage effective ways of using it to share knowledge and solve problems’ (98). Interestingly, in a later study (2008), focusing on the same theme, Mercer observed teachers and talk in the classroom and found that pupils achieved more if discussions involved ‘question and answer sequences’ where ‘why questions’ encouraged reasoning and reflection (93). Similarly, Kutnick and Berdondini (2009) developed a quasi-experiment focused on building group dynamics to enhance the quality of group work. They found that establishing relationships based on listening and mutual respect resulted in richer, more productive discussions. This was a large scale study, observing 980 children over one year, which provides an accurate portrayal of what creates effective, collaborative discussion. One limitation of the study is that it used purely quantitative methods, taking an increase in academic attainment as a measure of success. For this reason, the research lacks the candid and often ‘intangible’ (Cohen et al., 2007) details that qualitative methods offer.

Overall, the evidence suggests that there are a number of organisational factors which, if implemented, encourage richer and more productive pupil-centred discussion. There is a need to encourage pupils to ask each other questions and to build relationships where mutual respect, inclusion and listening are central. What is clear is that children need tools to scaffold and manage discussions. Currently, there is a lack of research exploring how to achieve this and this will form one element of my intervention.

Summary and Implications

Oracy is an important part of classroom culture. It develops reasoning, understanding, confidence and language skills. This has triggered government initiatives to increase opportunities for oracy in the classroom, beginning with the National Oracy Project in 1987. However, there is evidence to suggest that oracy has never really received the attention it deserves (Johnson et al., 1992; Millard and Menzies, 2014). This is clearly an issue, given the stringent requirements for all pupils to achieve oral fluency by the time they leave primary school, as stipulated by the New National Curriculum for Primary Schools (DfE, 2015). We must create more opportunities for oracy in the classroom, not just because it is a government requirement but because it has been proven to have a high-impact on pupils' learning and development.

Research suggests that collaboration between peers promotes positive learning and development which is particularly prevalent when discussions are exploratory. Peer collaboration can be a positive platform to encourage an increase in oracy in the classroom. However, for pupil facilitated exploratory talk to take place, they require mechanisms and structure.

Although oracy has a high level of impact upon pupils' reasoning skills (Mercer, 1995) and confidence (Bain, 1992), there is less evidence confirming its impact on fluency and articulation. This is something that I will assess through the design, implementation and evaluation of the pupil-led oracy intervention as part of my research project. Equally, there has been little research evaluating the impact of oracy on EAL learners. As EAL pupils can be some of the more reticent in classroom situations (Cummins, 2000), I will aim to show whether an increase in oracy enables EAL pupils to not only make

significant progress with their language proficiency, but with their confidence and involvement in learning situations too.

Research Questions

Considering the findings and implications of my literature review, the following research questions will inform the design, implementation and evaluation of the intervention I will use to investigate the level of impact increasing oracy in the classroom has on the confidence, articulation and quality of EAL pupils' communication in learning contexts:

- What is the overall impact of an oracy intervention on the confidence of EAL pupils, their fluency when expressing points and the quality of their contributions in pupil-led discussions?
- Do structured talk routines encourage EAL pupils to be more forthcoming with their points in discussions?
- What is the impact of providing stem sentences on the fluency of EAL pupils during and after discussions?
- How successfully do pupils facilitate their own exploratory discussions? What effect does this have on EAL pupils in particular?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Overview

To answer my research questions, I chose a practitioner research approach, following a research plan identified by Cohen et al. (2007): 'identifying a problem, planning an intervention, implementing the intervention, evaluating the outcome' (312). I planned an intervention to improve three keys findings from the pre-intervention data: the quality of EAL pupils' discussion; their confidence when speaking; and their overall fluency of articulation (as discussed in the rationale for this research in the opening chapter). I was also interested in the overall impact an oracy intervention would have on all pupils, not just on EAL pupils' oral proficiency. I decided to run an intervention centred on small group discussions in class, using stem sentences as a scaffolding tool. This is something I will expand on in the next section. Before and after the intervention, I gathered data from both the groups who received the intervention and a control group allowing me to evaluate outcomes and assess the overall impact of the intervention. I followed a triangulated approach, combining quantitative questionnaire data from two classes and qualitative observations and interviews with a purposive sample of six EAL focus children. I used a control group to validate my data and assess the overall impact of the intervention.

Intervention Design

Pre-intervention data - which I will discuss in greater detail in the next section - suggested that EAL pupils lack confidence when speaking, find it difficult to articulate themselves, and have low quality discussions with their peers. I therefore designed an intervention to improve the oracy of all pupils, but with a specific focus on EAL pupils, centred on daily talk sessions where small groups of up to four pupils discussed a

question, statement or problem, following an oracy framework for discussion as outlined by Maxwell (2015). I made sure that discussions were held daily, becoming a component of everyday classroom practice.

I carefully selected discussion groups; mixing ability and language proficiency, including at least one proficient English speaker in each group but being mindful to keep a balance so as not to encourage dominance within discussions (see Howe and Abedin, 2013). As vocabulary knowledge is something Preston and Gardner (1967) believe aids word production and fluency of expression, it was important that EAL pupils were grouped with at least one proficient FLE speaker, who could model oral sentences and introduce vocabulary.

I designed daily, twenty-minute discussion sessions, allowing ten minutes for a pupil-centred group discussion, five minutes for summarising and five minutes for each group to share their outcomes with the class. I made sure the stimulus question, statement or problem had universal appeal and was accessible.

Bearing in mind Howe and Abedin's (2013) finding that discussions are often teacher dominated and Moll and Greenberg's (1990) belief that students learn best when they exchange funds of knowledge, it was important that group discussions were regulated by the pupils themselves, with little or no teacher intervention. With this, there also came an opportunity to address the issue of the overall quality of discussion and EAL pupils' articulation of points.

I designed a 'discussion tool' with seven sections (see Appendix 1) outlining the components of an 'exploratory' discussion: point making, building ideas, disagreeing, including others, expanding points, summarising and presenting (see Mercer, 1999/2008). When introducing the tool to the intervention groups, I made sure to model each skill and

explain why it helps generate richer discussion. I encouraged pupils to follow these skills, using the tool as a reference to help them facilitate their own discussions. One of the most important sections of the tool was 'including others'. Maxwell (2015) identified that quality oracy is achieved in groups who manage the group dynamic and work together. Pre-intervention data suggested that EAL pupils do not speak as frequently or as willingly as FLE pupils. Therefore, it was important that pupils looked to encourage contributions from quieter members of their group.

Each section of the tool also featured stem sentences, creating a 'framework for talk' (Alexander and Wolfe, 2008:10) to scaffold the contributions of all pupils, but specifically EAL speakers. Stem sentences help learners structure their group discussions, using discourse markers (although, however, because) to build and develop arguments and coherence within discussions (Schiffrin, 1987) and organise content promoting appropriate linguistic vocabulary (Maxwell, 2015). They also encourage inclusion and accessibility for all learners in the group as EAL pupils can follow stem sentences to construct and offer their own thoughts and opinions.

As well as offering points and building on one another's contributions, it was important to establish a culture where pupils could find ways to challenge and scrutinise points made by others (Mercer, 1999). I therefore spoke about disagreement as a positive feature of discussion, encouraging pupils to 'engage critically' with one another (Mercer, 1999:97). This, I felt, would improve the quality of group discussions and demonstrate that disagreement in conversation is often positive and useful, contrary to many pupils' perception in pre-intervention data. Equally, by encouraging disagreements, EAL pupils would be exposed to a wider range of ideas, thus providing them with more content to consider and build on.

A final, important feature of my intervention was to encourage groups to summarise their discussions prior to presenting them to the class. I hypothesised that in summarising their discussion, EAL pupils would have time to rehearse their contributions in preparation for feedback to the class. In pre-intervention observations, I noticed that most EAL pupils showed less fluency when articulating points to an audience. General extenders, 'ums and ers', and silent pauses can show vagueness in speakers' cognitive language construction (Overstreet, 1999). Summarisation offers the less proficient speaker a chance to rehearse their points, language and presentation. A non-spontaneous and rehearsed articulation might then lessen the hesitation and increase the confidence of EAL pupils when contributing orally in class. When it came to articulating their points before the rest of the class, I once again encouraged pupils to use stem sentences to explain how their discussion began, raise any disagreements made and how that altered the discussion, give examples of any interesting points made by others and share conclusions they reached. Ultimately, this area of the intervention alone could potentially have a great impact upon the confidence, fluency and quality of EAL pupils' oral contributions.

Regarding the overall purpose of this research project, I believe this approach to oracy in the classroom, if successful, could be scaled down and applied to all learning situations - talk partners in literacy; small group work in maths; table talk in topic sessions – in order to boost confidence, content, understanding and articulation of EAL pupils who are developing English language proficiency.

Intervention Schedule

In December 2017, I ran my initial inquiry into the existing state of oracy amongst EAL pupils in my school, gathering data via my research methods. This allowed me time to construct my intervention which would be run in two classes, my own Year 5 class and a

Year 4 class, from the beginning of February 2018. I ran the intervention until the beginning of April 2018, allowing 8-10 weeks in total for the intervention. I decided that this would allow sufficient time for impact, especially as pupil-centred discussions were occurring daily during this period. In April 2018, I gathered a second round of data – the post-intervention data – to assess the impact of the intervention on EAL speakers.

Research Methods: Introduction

In order to assess the impact of my intervention, I designed a triangulated approach, increasing the validity and reliability of data (Cohen et al., 2007), using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. These methods were: a questionnaire given to all pupils, interviews with a purposive selection of EAL pupils and observations of these focus pupils during discussion situations. As well as triangulating my research approach, I used a control group, who would not receive the intervention, as a way to measure and evaluate the impact of the intervention.

Research Methods: Questionnaires

I conducted questionnaires with all pupils (both EAL and FLE) from the intervention classes. Altogether, a population of 54 pupils received the questionnaire, 32 of whom (59%) are EAL. Cohen et al. (2007) stress that a 'sample size of thirty' (101) is considered the minimum required in order to accurately assess a situation using questionnaires. The pupil population I surveyed exceeds this minimum, thus producing valid results. I quantified the results from the questionnaires to create a picture of the state of oracy amongst EAL pupils in the pre-intervention stage, and repeated this process in the post-intervention stage to evaluate the impact of the oracy intervention.

A strength of questionnaires is that they provide reliable information in a short space of time (Edwards and Talbot, 1994), enabling the researcher to capture and measure the 'congruence between [the] existing and [the] ideal' (Cohen et al., 2007: 97) quickly and accurately. Being able to form a quick picture of the oracy of EAL pupils was useful given the time constraints surrounding the design and implementation of my intervention.

The design of my questionnaire was important in order to ensure validity, clarity and appeal. Cohen et al. (2007) highlight that a downside of many questionnaires is that multiple choice words are 'inherently ambiguous' thus resulting in 'seldom … more than … crude statistic[s]' (324). I sought to overcome this in two ways. Firstly, I used a Likert Scale (Lavrakas, 2008), giving a broad range of choices (always, most of the time, some of the time, hardly ever, never) which featured on every question aside from two visual ones (see Appendix 2). This meant that the participant could answer following a consistent and unambiguous range of choices. Secondly, I made sure that I administered the questionnaire to all participants. Cohen et al. (2007) believe that the 'presence of the researcher is helpful in that it enables any queries or uncertainties to be addressed immediately' and 'it typically ensures a good response rate' (344). Therefore, I could address any misunderstandings and ensure that all questions were responded to. Overall there was a 100% response rate for both rounds of data collection.

To avoid bias in the questionnaire, I did not use leading questions – 'questions that are worded (or their response categories presented) in such a way as to suggest to respondents that there is only one acceptable answer' (Cohen et al. 2007:334) – ensuring that pupils felt that they could choose their truest answer.

As I was presenting the questionnaire to Key Stage 2 pupils aged between 8 and 10 years old, it was important that its style was accessible, clear and appealing. Cohen et al. (2007)

note that questionnaires with too many worded questions can be off-putting for many children, impacting negatively on the reliability and validity of results. They stress the importance of the appearance of the questionnaire: 'it must look easy, attractive and interesting rather than complicated, unclear, forbidding and boring' (338). To achieve accessibility, I used simply worded, open-ended questions, ensured consistency in the wording of multiple choice options and used two visual questions – featuring a Likert Scale of facial expressions – when posing questions with an emotional nature.

The use of questionnaires generated reliable information which captured the state of oracy in the pre-intervention stage and the impact of the oracy intervention in the post-intervention stage. This gave me a strong foundation on which to triangulate my findings using two complementary qualitative methods - pupil interviews and pupil observations.

Research Methods: Pupil Interviews

In order to complement the quantitative findings of the questionnaires, I decided to use semi-structured qualitative interviews with a purposive selection of six EAL pupils, three from each class receiving the intervention. Cohen et al. (2007) highlight that qualitative interviews 'gather data on the more intangible aspects of the school's culture' (97), capturing candid, detailed and personal views on issues being explored. Speaking to a small group of EAL pupils in small scale interviews allowed me an insight into the state of oracy amongst EAL pupils in the first round of data collection and the impact of the invention.

Like the questionnaires, as interviews are question led, it was important to 'minimize the amount of bias as much as possible' (Cohen et al., 2007:150) in order to maximise validity of data. To this end, I followed a schedule of open-ended questions (see Appendix 3) to conduct pupil interviews. Cohen et al. (2007) highlight the advantages of

open-ended questions: ‘they are flexible … and they allow the interviewer to make a truer assessment of what the respondent really believes’ (357). The use of open-ended questions encouraged interviewees to talk freely. It allowed me to gather situational data which complemented that gathered in the questionnaires, thus building an accurate picture of the state of oracy before and after the intervention.

It was important that pupils felt confident they could talk openly during the interviews. Therefore, I opted to interview the focus pupils in two groups of three. There are many advantages to using group interviews. First, although Cohen et al. (2007) highlight that group interviews can sometimes produce a ‘group think’ situation, ‘discouraging individuals who hold a different view from speaking out in front of the other group members’ (373), they largely ‘encourage interaction between the group rather than simply a response to an adult’s question’ (374), allowing ‘discussions to develop, thus yielding a wide range of responses (373). Second, interviewing children in a group is often ‘less intimidating for them than individual interviews’ (374). Finally, by interviewing the focus pupils in two separate groups, I was able to draw patterns and trends in responses, knowing that trends would not appear as a result of a larger ‘group think’ situation. This would present a more accurate picture of the impact of the intervention.

It was important that children felt comfortable in interviews in order to maximise the quality of data. I minimised conflicts of power between the interviewer and interviewees: establishing trust; conducting interviews with a friendly demeanour; using ‘straightforward language’; allowing children ‘time to think’; and holding interviews in a familiar setting (Cohen et al., 2007:374). These factors are, according to Cohen et al. (2007), important in order to ‘establish trust with children, to put the child at ease quickly and to help [them] to feel confident’ (374). If children are relaxed and happy in interview situations, they are more likely to give open and honest responses.

I audio recorded the interviews on an iPad, opting not to take notes so I could minimise disruption and focus on the discussions taking place. I later transcribed the interviews. I tried, where possible, to capture the natural features of spoken language, including pauses and hesitations in order to avoid detachment from the dynamic aspect of discussion (Cohen et al., 2007).

Research Methods: Observations

To complete the triangulation, I observed each of the pupils I interviewed, gathering both qualitative and quantitative data. I found that observing pupils allowed me to assess the quality of oracy and discussion in its situational context, as well as gather quantifiable data relating to pupils' articulation, which I will discuss below.

The advantage of observation is that it is 'non-interventionist, where researchers do not seek to manipulate the situation or subjects' (Cohen et al., 2007:397). For Mercer (1999), observations allow the researcher to 'perceive … changes in the quality of children's talk' (101). For me, it offered an insight into oracy in action and allowed me to watch how frequently EAL pupils were involved in discussions, the quality of their contributions and their fluency. However, Cohen el al. (2007) see flaws in observation as a data collection method. They highlight observation is sometimes 'highly selective, just as perception is selective' (412), suggesting that the observer has an agenda which can, even if unintentionally, propagate bias. To overcome this, I use my observation data as one part of my triangulated method, in conjunction with questionnaire findings and interviews, and not as the principal source of data.

I made sure that the lesson used for the observation session was consistent with those used throughout the intervention – a single philosophical statement where children had ten minutes to discuss and five minutes to summarise – and that the lesson was taught in a

similar way to each class. The observation lesson required each group to order five animals from best to worst, based on their opinions and their group's interpretation of 'best to worst'.

I developed an observation schedule to complete while observing the focus pupils' discussions (see Appendix 4). During discussions, I noted the number of, and nature of, contributions each focus pupil made in their group. It was important that I commented on the nature of pupils' contributions as this, although time consuming, reveals the 'quality of spoken interactions' (Mercer, 1999:6).

I created a tally based schedule to record the style of pupils' contributions – their 'types of utterances' (Mercer, 1999:3) and any pauses or fillers (ums and ers) of their articulations outside of discussions when feeding back to the class. Ingram and Elliot (2016) highlight that long pauses can be seen as 'an indication of trouble in … interaction[s]' (42) which, for many speakers, may highlight fear, a lack of vocabulary or an inability to clearly express their thoughts. Although Maxwell (2015) points out that hesitations and false starts are a feature of exploratory discussion, at this point of the observation, I was focusing on the articulation of EAL pupils following the main discussion. I wanted to see how EAL pupils articulated content which had already been discussed within their group, therefore indicating their language proficiency and not just their ability to generate ideas.

Data Coding

Saldana (2009) highlights that coding is used to 'represent and capture a datum's primary content and essence' (3). As a process, it is 'not a precise science' (4), rather it is the subjective arrangement and linking of raw data into 'patterns of action' (5). For me, it

was an important process as it aided the transition between data collection and 'extensive data analysis' (4).

My questionnaire categorised data into themes in its design. For instance, question two reflects confidence, whereas questions four and five investigate talk quality (see Appendix 2). I therefore organised observation and interview data under descriptive codes to reflect the thematic areas of my questionnaire: EAL confidence, EAL articulation and talk quality. Using my main research themes as descriptive codes enabled me to keep my analysis coherent.

Saldana (2009) highlights that coding can 'sometimes summarize or condense data, not simply reduce it' (4). Although some of my data has been summarised, I have kept raw data examples, for instance quotes from interviews, in order to present pupils' views in their truest form. When coding my data, I used my questionnaire and interviews as my primary data sources, with observations used to support patterns and trends (as outlined in the section above).

Saldana (2009) points out that 'recoding can occur' (10) as a researcher becomes more attuned to perspectives and analysis and, as I presented my findings, I re-evaluated how I could use certain pieces of data.

To summarise, by coding my data, I was not only able to notice patterns, but also organise my findings into categories related to my research questions, making for a thorough approach to presenting and evaluating the outcomes.

Selection of Participants

In order to gain a more reliable insight into the impact of my intervention, I chose to conduct this research project using both focus and control groups. All classes involved

were in Key Stage 2 and of a similar age. Of the classes, my own class, Year 5, and a Year 4 class made up the focus group. A second Year 5 class acted as the control group. The focus group consisted of 54 pupils in total, 59% of whom are registered as EAL. The control group had 25 pupils in total, with just over 60% registered as EAL.

I chose to conduct the questionnaire with the entire population of the focus group and the control group, gathering responses from both EAL and FLE pupils. In the focus group, 52 pupils were surveyed in the pre-intervention round of data collection and 54 pupils in the post-intervention round. In the control group, 25 pupils were surveyed in both rounds.

For the interviews and observations, participants were selected via purposive sampling; the deliberate selection of a 'particular section of the wider population' (Cohen et al., 2007:110). As this research project investigates the impact of pupil-centred talk on EAL learners, I chose a small sample of EAL pupils from both the focus group and the control group, handpicking 'cases to be included … on the basis of … the particular/characteristics being sought' (Cohen et al., 2007:114-115). I chose three EAL pupils from each of the classes involved, a total of six from the focus group (two classes) and three from the control group (one class). The sample was selected following deliberate decisions emerging from discussions with class teachers, with various reasons for the choice of pupils including their reticence, difficuties articulating themselves in spoken English or those with distance to go in developing language. Primarily, participants selected were those who have been speaking English in a learning context for less than three years (or those developing proficiency in English) as these were pupils I felt would benefit most from the intervention. Cohen et al. (2007) note that a deliberately selected sample is 'perfectly adequate where researchers do not intend to generalize their findings' (113). I therefore intend to draw implications from this research project that

may offer insights into what may help EAL pupils in discussion situations and will not generalise my findings.

Ethical Considerations

This practitioner research project was granted ethical clearing by the Central University Research Ethics Committee. It complies with ethical guidance given by the British Educational Research Association (2011) and follows the modus operandi of the MSc Learning and Teaching at the University of Oxford. I have outlined key ethical issues below and discussed how I will overcome them having consulted BERA's (2011) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research.

One key ethical issue surrounds the fact that this project collects data from a sample of children who are unable to give informed consent. This was overcome due to the stringent standards and responsibilities expected by the teaching profession and the consent of the Headteacher. This is a low risk project, without sensitive data, which follows the standard protocols of evaluating and improving practice on a school based platform for which the Headteacher can permit overall consent for participants. Therefore, in order to carry out the data collection via the methodology detailed above, I gained the consent of the Headteacher. I did, however, inform participants' parents/legal guardians of the research via letter, allowing them to withdraw their children from the process should they wish. Equally, I made sure that I followed 'good assent practice', informing pupils about the research I was carrying out and allowing them to opt out of any research processes that went beyond usual practice, for instance, the involvement of pupils in focus group interviews not taking place within the standard timings of the school day (at lunchtime/after school).

This research includes interviews with an identified sample of children. Given that interviews can cause anxiety when conducted on a one to one basis, I chose to interview sample children in groups in order to alleviate pressure and expectation. I also conducted interviews in an environment the children were familiar with, such as their classroom. When it came to interviewing pupils in focus groups, the questions I asked concerned classroom matters only (see Appendix 3).

The use of a control group raised ethical issues regarding educational disadvantage. It was therefore important that I discussed the project regularly with teachers of both the control and intervention groups, ensuring that all classes were on track to fulfil their expected educational aims. Additionally, for teachers, there was a risk that this project could be taken as a criticism of current pedagogical practice within the school. However, it follows usual practice regarding teachers' continuing professional development.

There were ethical issues surrounding data protection, especially working with children. To overcome this, I ensured anonymity throughout the data collection process and the presentation/discussion of data. Equally, I made sure that any data collected was stored in a secure, password protected space, and only shared with my supervisor. All participants have been anonymised and all data collected will be destroyed within three months of the conclusion of the project.

Forms of Collaboration

This research project engaged with many colleagues in my school. Many have found that collaboration in research projects produces largely positive results, however there are some negative implications. Garcés and Granada (2016) suggest that collaboration is imperative in obtaining new knowledge. Similarly, Christianakis (2010) found that collaboration on research projects allows teachers to think more broadly about pedagogy,

encouraging participants to become 'inquiry-oriented, rather than implementer-oriented' (117). Also, Pine (2009) found that collaboration in research grows dialogue, reflection and action in schools. However, it is crucial to collaborate carefully. Waters-Adams (1994) highlights that collaboration can increase pressure on individuals regarding workload and performance. He also draws attention to the fact that outcomes need to be shared carefully as it can cause teachers to question the integrity of their own pedagogy. With this in mind, I planned any collaboration with colleagues carefully.

I collaborated initially with members of the Senior Leadership Team - the Headteacher, Assistant Headteacher and Inclusion Manager – in order to identify an area where learning and teaching required improvement. From a meeting focused on mid-term data, closing the attainment gap between EAL and FLE pupils in literacy was clearly a priority. We agreed that I could design and implement an intervention to increase oracy in the classroom.

EAL pupils in Year 4 and Year 5 were amongst the lowest attaining in Literacy in the school and we decided that these were the most suitable classes for my intervention research. For this reason, I collaborated with the Year 4 teacher in the design and implementation of the oracy intervention. Our discussions generated a number of ideas relating to the intervention's design including the use of a discussion tool, the style of the discussion sessions and the overall expectations we would follow during the intervention. This latter area was particularly important as it would ensure valid results. Throughout, I ensured that the Year 4 teacher and I were consistent with our implementation of the intervention, meeting regularly to check that we were progressing at the same rate, holding the same number of weekly discussions and setting equal expectations. These regular meetings also enabled us to discuss developing observations and thoughts on the impact of the intervention.

An additional area of collaboration involving the Year 4 teacher was the grouping of discussion groups and selection of the sample of EAL pupils I would interview and observe. It was important to have the Year 4 teacher involved in these decisions as she was most familiar with her pupils. Equally, she had taught my Year 5 class in the previous year and could therefore advise on the selection on focus pupils from my own class.

As well as working closely with the SLT team in the pre-intervention stage and the Year 4 teacher during the intervention, I collaborated with the Assistant Headteacher during both data collection cycles. It was important to ensure consistency during observations, therefore, the Assistant Headteacher offered to teach the observation lessons, allowing me to collect my data. This also allowed me to have a conversation about pupil interactions and contributions with another teacher who was present in these data collection lessons. Following data collection, I presented my findings back to the SLT team.

FINDINGS

Summary

This chapter presents my findings grouped into themes. I present pre and post intervention data from questionnaires, interviews and observations to create a picture of the impact of the oracy intervention upon EAL pupils. Primarily, findings are drawn from the intervention group; however, I acknowledge the role of the control group and consider informal observations I made throughout the intervention later in this chapter.

Do structured talk routines encourage EAL pupils to be more forthcoming with their points in discussions?

The first major theme of this practitioner research project considers the confidence of EAL pupils in oral situations; talking in groups and speaking in class.

Pre-intervention data:

In the first round of data collection, prior to the intervention, a number of EAL pupils expressed that they were less involved in group discussions and spoke negatively about speaking aloud in front of the class. In the questionnaire, I asked how often pupils spoke in group discussions. 31% of EAL pupils answered that they spoke either always or most of the time and 63% responded that they spoke only some of the time. Less than one third of EAL pupils appeared to be making frequent contributions in group discussions. It was important to explore the reasons surrounding the infrequent oral involvement of almost two thirds of EAL pupils in group discussions.

Group interviews with the purposive selection of focus EAL pupils shed light on this issue. When asked how often they spoke in group discussions, the first group of focus

pupils remarked that they ‘didn’t really say that much’. I queried why this was and one group of pupils suggested that their contributions were often received negatively:

Pupil 1: Err, umm, I don’t really … umm … well normally, I am kind of getting used to the idea that people don’t really let me speak.
Interviewer: How does that make you feel?
Pupil 1: Sad
Interviewer: Is there anything that would help you to say things even more?
Pupil 2: Hmm not sure
Interviewer: Is there anything that is difficult about speaking in groups?
Pupil 2: Um, yeah, sometimes when you have a good idea people don’t always like it.

It seemed that reasons for not speaking in groups were perhaps due to group dynamics and not necessarily just language differences. I posed the same questions to the second group of focus EAL pupils and responses were largely similar:

Interviewer: Is there anything that you find difficult about talking in a group?
Pupil 4: Err if you say something wrong you might feel miserable about it
Interviewer: What makes you feel miserable about it?
Pupil 4: When you get something wrong, other people might laugh at you
Interviewer: Do you feel that you can say things and people listen?
Pupil 5: I sometimes feel bored in my group, because when you have something to say, other people don’t listen because they are talking.
Pupil 6: Yeah, sometimes I can’t hear my group as they all talk at once

The separate group interviews revealed findings along a similar theme with reasons as to why two-thirds of EAL pupils responded that they speak only ‘some of the time’ pointing more towards issues surrounding group dynamics rather than a confidence in their own language.

Observation data supports this hypothesis. Whilst observing EAL focus pupils in group discussions, I noticed a trend. In group discussions there were many instances where more confident individuals dominated discussions, and the majority of EAL focus pupils sat back for the majority of the discussions, contributing infrequently and, when they did,

simply agreeing with statements made by others. This was particularly the case for Pupils 1, 2, 5 and 6 who sat quietly throughout discussions and, although they did speak once or twice, made simple statements agreeing with others. On one occasion, Pupil 5 agreed enthusiastically with her peers – 'that's what I thought!' – but added little extra and Pupil 3 began to speak – 'I think …' – but then gave up and simply agreed with other speakers in the group.

Interestingly, Pupil 4 was perhaps the most disengaged. Throughout the observation, she made few contributions. Those made were short, one or two word points and on one occasion she excused herself from the discussion entirely; responding to the question: 'what kind of person may have painted this picture?' she replied: 'I don't know any painters'.

Issues surrounding the lack of confidence of EAL pupils appear to be centred on the dynamics of their discussion groups. Many EAL pupils expressed a reluctance to speak because group discussions were dominated by individuals and, on occasions, pupils found ways to avoid or exclude themselves from discussions. This observation was, therefore, essential to address in the oracy intervention.

Aside from the group dynamics, it was also clear that EAL pupils lacked confidence when expressing themselves individually in front of the class. Almost a third of them (29%) responded negatively to the question 'How do you feel if you have to share your ideas in front of the class?'

In order to investigate this in more detail, I approached this issue in group interviews. Pupils in the first group said that they felt nervous or worried because they often didn't know what to say:

Pupil 1: It makes me a bit shy, because sometimes I don't really have a great answer

Pupil 2: Yeah, when the teacher picks me, I feel kind of nervous because I forget what we have said

Interviewer: Is there anything that would help that?

Pupil 1: Like, if someone gives me a clue

Interestingly, similar responses were given in the second interview group:

Interviewer: After discussions in a group, how do you feel when you have to share your ideas in front of the class?

Pupil 4: It makes me feel worried because if I don't have an idea, if I use someone else's idea, it might not be that … useful or …

Pupil 6: When nobody has something to say on my table, I kind of feel nervous, but when we have things to say, I kind of feel happy to say things to the class.

The interviews raised implications related to feeling unprepared when it came to constructing oral responses to share before the class. Interestingly, this problem was also apparent in the observations. In cases where EAL focus pupils were asked to speak before the class about their groups' discussion, many were not forthcoming. Equally, those who did eventually speak paused frequently for thought and often spoke quietly and without conviction.

I asked whether there was anything that would help them feel more prepared when talking in front of the class and pupils suggested that a 'good discussion' would help them know 'exactly what to say'. Again, this was something I considered when designing and implementing the intervention.

Post-intervention data:

After running the intervention for seven weeks I used exactly the same methods to gather post-intervention data. It clearly indicated a number of positive changes related to the confidence of EAL pupils in the context of group discussions in learning situations.

Where, before the intervention, under one third (31%) of EAL pupils commented that they speak 'always' or 'most of the time' in group discussions, post-intervention data reveals that this number has more than doubled, with 65% of respondents answering that they now speak 'always' or 'most of the time' (see Figure 1). The intervention, therefore, appears to have had a great impact on how forthcoming EAL pupils are in group discussions.

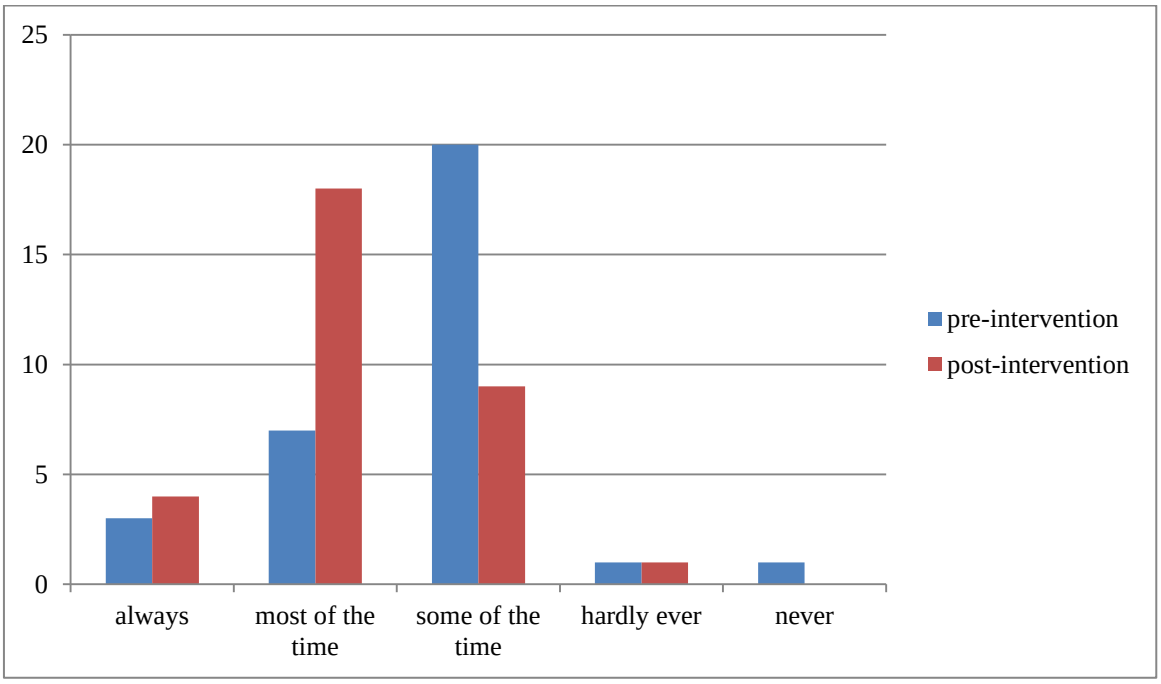

Figure 1: Questionnaire results for how often EAL pupils speak in group discussions

Group interviews support this finding. In the first interview group, with the same purposive selection of EAL focus pupils, I posed the question I asked in the first round of data collection: 'In group discussions, how often do you speak?' Responses were extremely positive:

Pupil 1: If we have a group discussion, I am one of those people who talk nearly all the time, but not all the time, but nearly all the time.

Pupil 3: I talk when I want to and my table encourage me to talk and I also listen to what they talk about and then I get examples from them.

Compared to the pre-intervention data, group dynamics have improved and groups seem to be less dominated by individuals and more inclusive overall. In the second group interview, responses were equally as positive about speaking in group situations:

Pupil 4: Usually I make a point and most people build on it
Pupil 6: I usually say something
Pupil 5: Some of the time I say something and sometimes I don't really understand what is meant but with a group discussion it explains more.

Observation data supported these findings. Overall, EAL focus pupils were more animated, much more vocal and, sometimes, even leading discussions. Individually, Pupil 2 made more points in discussions than previously. He was a lot more engaged and, although still quiet at times, was listening throughout. Pupil 6 made many contributions to discussions, all of which were expanded upon. The most noticeable shift in involvement was in Pupil 5. She was extremely animated in discussions, made huge efforts to follow exploratory talk stems from the discussion wheel and was, at points, directing the discussion and questioning the rest of her group; 'why did you think that?' Overall, EAL pupils appeared to be more confident, more forthcoming and less hesitant when it came to speaking in their groups than before the intervention. They seemed to have embraced the fundamentals of exploratory discussion, explaining their points and interrogating the responses of others. Moreover, group dynamics had improved in discussions as a whole and participation was more evenly spread.

Post-intervention findings were also positive regarding the confidence of EAL pupils when speaking in front of the class. Questionnaire results show that the number of EAL pupils who felt anxious about speaking in front of the class had more than halved. Almost a third (29%) expressed negative responses in the pre-intervention questionnaire and this fell to only 13% in the post-intervention questionnaire. Many of those who responded

negatively in the pre-intervention stage responded positively in the post-intervention questionnaire, with responses to the question rising from 52% positive pre-intervention to 64% positive post-intervention.

This trend was noticeable in the focus group interviews. When I asked how they felt if they were chosen to speak in front of the whole class following their group discussion, pupils felt happy about sharing ideas and said they had lots of ideas to share as a result of discussions they had had. Noticeably, Pupil 3, who had previously been reticent when it came to speaking after group discussions, expressed that he 'kind of really wanted to speak and share [his] ideas', and Pupil 5 confirmed that, although sometimes she still felt shy, most of the time she felt confident about what she was going to say because 'if you summarise, you go over the discussion and it is clearer in your head'. Evidently, the focus on summarising their discussions – which featured on their discussion tool – played a key role in reassuring EAL pupils that they could recap and rehearse their ideas before sharing them with the class.

When I observed their confidence following the intervention, it was clear that summarising discussions helped EAL pupils to think clearly about how to present their opinions. Compared to pre-intervention observations, EAL pupils spoke with much more conviction and were less hesitant. Individuals drew on the stem sentences to summarise their discussion: 'First I thought … and [pupil's name] thought …, but then we started to change our minds'. The use of stem sentences is something I will discuss in greater detail in the following section. What is clear is that the features of the discussion tool – inclusion, disagreeing, clarifying points – has significantly enhanced the involvement of EAL pupils in discussions and summarising has helped them feel more confident in their own speech.

What is the impact of providing stem sentences on the fluency of EAL pupils during and after discussions?

In this section, I present data regarding the impact of stem sentences, beginning with findings from the pre-intervention stage followed by findings from the post-intervention stage. I have given more focus to the observation data, as it is easier to judge pupils' oral proficiency when witnessing it in action. However, I will evaluate this data by observing patterns emerging in questionnaires and pupil interviews.

Pre-intervention data:

When observing discussions, I measured pupils' fluency and articulation based upon a set of discourse markers including the number of silent pauses, indicating 'trouble in … interaction[s]' (Ingram and Elliot, 2016:42), or filled pauses (ums and ers) that pupils exhibited. I also counted the number of simple statements and simple agreements as indicators of a lack of fluency and discourse structure. In the pre-intervention observations I found the following:

> **Pupil 1** made simple statements ('I think …') or simple agreements ('I agree that …)'. Her articulations contained some silent pauses, the longest being five seconds, and many filled pauses.
>
> **Pupil 2** made only two oral contributions throughout the observation period, both of which were frequented by long silent and filled pauses. One of her points began 'I thought …' and then remained unresolved.
>
> **Pupil 3** was quite forthcoming with responses, but he made silent pauses (sometimes 10 seconds+), filled pauses, false starts and repetitions.
>
> **Pupil 4** made few contributions which were often short (one or two word responses) and characterised by long, silent pauses.
>
> **Pupil 5** demonstrated fluency when making short statements, but did not seize opportunities to develop her points. She did develop one point, but in general they were frequented by silent and filled pauses.

> **Pupil 6** was vocal during group discussions, but in feedback responses to the whole class paused frequently and spoke extremely quietly without conviction.

Overall, a pattern emerged highlighting a lack of oral fluency amongst the EAL focus pupils. Whether this was confidence or proficiency based remained unclear. Therefore, I interviewed the same pupils to find out more.

Pupils confirmed that they often feel startled or forgetful about what they want to say: 'I get … um … shocked because I don't know what to say and I get shy because I forget things' (Pupil 3). Additionally, they highlighted that they sometimes depend on repeating the articulations of others: 'This might be a bit like cheating, but , you know when the first person talks and you don't know what to say, you can just like copy them' (Pupil 4). It seems that lack of confidence and preparedness affects the oral proficiency of EAL pupils; however, the interview data did not reveal enough to draw a certain conclusion.

What is clear is that EAL pupils in the intervention group appear less proficient than FLE pupils articulating their ideas during and after discussions. This is something that they confirmed in the questionnaire. When asked whether they feel they are able to communicate their ideas clearly when speaking in class, less than half of the EAL population (43%) selected 'always' or 'most of the time', 41% admitted they communicated ideas clearly only 'some of the time' and 16% confirmed that they felt they 'hardly ever' or 'never' communicated their ideas clearly.

Post-intervention data:

Interestingly, post-intervention data from the questionnaire suggests there has been a positive impact upon the fluency and articulation of EAL pupils. When I repeated the questionnaire and asked whether they felt they were able to communicate their ideas clearly when speaking in class, 58% responded with 'always' or 'most of the time', a

15% increase since the pre-intervention data. Equally, there was a 7% decline in negative responses, with only 9% responding 'hardly ever' or 'never' down from 16% in the first round of data collection. However, 33% of EAL pupils still selected 'some of the time', so the impact was not as strong as I had hoped for (see Figure 2). Overall, though, there seemed to be an increase in confidence and fluency of oral articulation amongst EAL pupils.

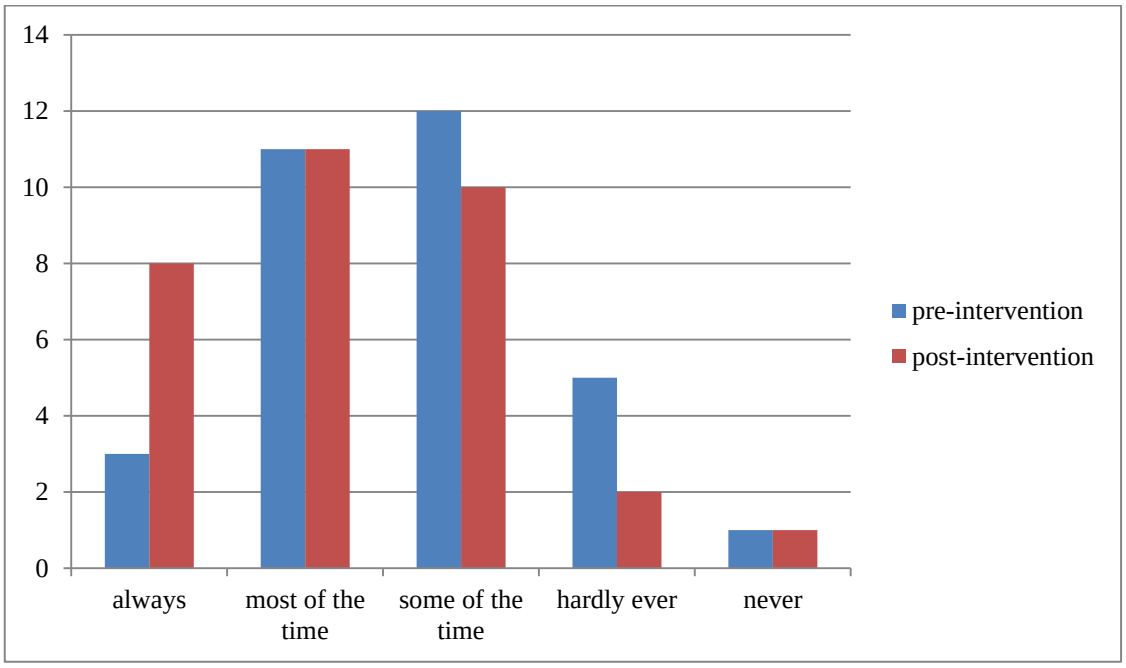

Figure 2: Results for how often EAL pupils feel they are able to communicate ideas clearly

I wanted to ascertain to what extent this was due to the use of the discussion tool. Interviews highlighted the impact the stem sentences upon some pupils. Pupil 5 stated 'if you tried to explain something complicated then you wouldn't know how to say it, then the wheel would help' and Pupil 4 agreed that the stem sentences were 'helpful' as it let them express points. Feelings were similar in interviews with the other focus EAL pupils. They also used the discussion wheel to help them start answers and points and Pupil 1 stated: 'when I don't know what to say it gives me a hint, so it helps me think of the start of my point'. Pupil 5 also mentioned that using stem sentences to summarise the

discussion played a key role in rehearsing and then presenting articulations: ‘most of the time I knew what I was going to say because if you summarise you go over the discussion and it is clearer in your head’ (Pupil 5).

The interview and questionnaire data suggests that stem sentences had a positive impact upon EAL pupils’ articulation and fluency. Observations of the EAL focus pupils confirmed that they had responded well to the stem sentences and used them to structure what they were going to say during and after discussions. As well as this, summarising discussions proved to be an important stage for individuals to build towards speaking before the class and feeding back on the discussion. In the second round of observations, I noticed the following for each pupil:

> **Pupil 1** spoke confidently with little hesitation. Of her articulations, only one had a filled pause. She listened and processed others’ contributions to shape her own. Whilst speaking, she frequently referred to stem openers (‘At first we thought …/Then …/However …’). This was a marked improvement in fluency since the first round of observations.
>
> **Pupil 2** was less hesitant when forming points and responses. She drew on stem openers (‘we thought … because …’) offering reasons to back up her own points and when agreeing with others.
>
> **Pupil 3** made more points during discussions than in the first round of observations. He expanded his points and, more involved and engaged overall, his language was prepared and more fluent. Compared to other pupils, however, he used stem sentences less.
>
> **Pupil 4** demonstrated a strong use of stem sentences, particularly when feeding back to the whole class, for example: ‘At first we thought … because …/I thought … because …/There were pros and cons such as …’ Her confidence seemed higher and she was more fluent.
>
> **Pupil 5** was very vocal. Not only did she make complex points, but she was often one of the participants who disagreed with and questioned others. She developed points using ‘because’ and included others by asking what they thought. Overall, this was a marked improvement compared to the first round of observations.
>
> **Pupil 6** had much more conviction and was less hesitant. He followed stem sentences - ‘At first we thought …/But then we changed our minds and thought

…' – and, during discussions, expanded points and offered reasons to back up his points.

Overall, all pupils had shown a positive change in their fluency when expressing points, although some more than others. The fact that pupils raised the topic of stem sentences in the interviews shows their awareness of them as an aid for developing their proficiency of spoken English.

How successfully do pupils facilitate their own exploratory discussions? What effect does this have on EAL pupils in particular?

The third focus of this research project is on how well pupils are able to facilitate their own exploratory discussions and what impact this has on EAL pupils. Literature suggests that the richest and most productive form of discussion is exploratory (Mercer, 2008). In light of findings from the literature review, I considered exploratory talk key to improving the proficiency and quality of EAL pupils' oracy. I then explored the quality of discussions EAL pupils were involved in before the oracy intervention.

Pre-intervention data:

I used questionnaire data to assess the quality of discussions EAL pupils were part of in learning situations before the intervention. It quickly became clear that, not only were they less forthcoming in discussions than FLE peers (as discussed earlier in this chapter), but EAL pupils felt that other children in their group did not always let them speak. Only 15% of EAL pupils felt that they were 'always' involved in discussions and 41% stated that they felt others offered them involvement only 'some of the time'. This finding required consideration in designing my intervention; in order to improve language proficiency amongst EAL pupils, they need to be more involved in discussions.

EAL focus pupils raised this issue during the group interviews. Pupil 6 expressed that sometimes talking in groups was hard because ‘everyone talks at the same time’ and later added that he often felt others did not let him speak: ‘I am kind of getting used to the idea that people don’t really let me speak’.

The dominance of discussions by individuals is something I witnessed in my first round of observations. On a number of occasions, pupils sat back and let others control and dominate group conversations and, largely, EAL focus pupils made few contributions. Overall, this suggested that discussions lacked both quality and structure.

In addition, it became clear that there was negativity surrounding opposing others in discussions. In the questionnaire, when asked whether they disagreed with other people in discussions, only 3% of EAL pupils answered ‘most of the time’ or ‘always’, and when asked how they felt if others disagreed with something they had said, only 16% saw opposing opinions as positive and okay, with over a quarter of EAL pupils (26%) viewing disagreement as negative.

In interviews, EAL pupils expressed their opinions on agreeing and disagreeing in discussions:

Interviewer: When you talk in a group, do you disagree much?
Pupil 1: I don’t really do it – sometimes – but not really most of the time
Pupil 2: I do sometimes, because like you need to say what you think
Interviewer: Is it easy or hard to disagree?
Pupil 1: For me it’s hard because I feel like I am hurting someone’s feelings

Here, we can see that pupils see disagreeing as something that ‘sometimes’ happens in group discussions, but that it can be a sensitive area.

There were moments in the pre-intervention observation where EAL pupils disagreed in their groups. However, when disagreements occurred, they were less related to the

subject of the discussion, and more in dispute; ‘just because others believe something, it doesn’t mean they are right’ (Pupil 6). On the whole, EAL pupils tended to agree rather than challenge other members of the group; ‘That’s what I thought!’ (Pupil 5).

The discussion quality I observed largely fitted Mercer’s (1995) category of cumulative talk, with individuals sharing points and building a consensus. A minority of both EAL and FLE pupils were willing to develop an opposing view to the majority opinion or challenge others on their thoughts. My main concern was that disagreeing is fundamental to the development of rich exploratory discussions, the types of discussions that would expose EAL pupils to a range of opinions, content and language. Thus, this was a skill and mindset I needed to develop through the intervention.

Post-intervention data:

Post-intervention data suggests that there has been a shift in pupils’ attitudes towards, and the overall quality of, discussions. Questionnaire results in the post-intervention stage show an increase in EAL pupils’ feelings of inclusion in discussions. Before the intervention, only 15% of EAL pupils said that others gave them opportunities to speak and 28% stated this happened ‘most of the time’. Therefore, the remaining majority of EAL pupils (57%) felt included only ‘some of the time’ or less. Following the intervention, 26% of EAL pupils responded saying they were ‘always’ involved in discussions. This is a rise of 11%, demonstrating a small, but significant, shift in the organisation and inclusiveness of pupil facilitated discussions.

When I interviewed the EAL focus groups, individuals responded that, in discussions, they felt more included: ‘some people made sure people were included by saying “what do you think?” and things’ (Pupil 4). This suggests that all pupils are now thinking about the group dynamics in their facilitation of discussions. The phrase ‘what do you think?’ is

one of the stem sentences lifted from the discussion tool, suggesting that pupils have been using the tool to help them facilitate their discussions. I asked pupils whether they felt including others was important in discussions:

Interviewer: Is it important that people are included in discussions?
Pupil 2: Yeah because if they are left out then you need to encourage them to talk and if they have a really good answer and the rest of us don't, then you can take that answer and build on it as a group
Pupil 3: If you leave people out, you could miss a good point.

Pupils have become more knowledgeable about what makes a quality discussion and are much more aware of the importance of inclusion.

The observation data confirms an increase in inclusivity. In all discussion groups, everyone appeared to be involved, even if some remained quieter than others. This was particularly noticeable when pupils were chosen to give feedback to the whole class. A pattern emerged of skills developed through the summarising stage of discussions, where pupils not only offered their own opinions, but offered other pupils' points of view as well, acknowledging good examples that were made. Many examples highlighted by those feeding back to the whole class were made by EAL pupils, plus almost all individuals began their feedback with 'our group thought …' This clearly demonstrates that inclusivity has increased and that all pupils' opinions, including EAL, are listened to and valued by the rest of the group.

There was also a noticeable shift in attitude towards opposing opinions and disagreeing in discussions. Questionnaires revealed that before the intervention, disagreeing with others in groups was viewed negatively, with only 3% stating that they either 'always' or 'most of the time' found ways to disagree with others. Equally, when asked how they felt if someone in their group disagreed with something they had said, only 16% of EAL pupils viewed this positively and over a quarter (26%) felt this was a negative action. Following

the intervention, there was a 20% increase in the number of EAL pupils who found ways to disagree, challenge or oppose opinions in discussions, with 23% of EAL pupils stating that they disagree 'always' or 'most of the time'. Additionally, there seems to have been an attitude shift towards disagreement in discussions, with 41% of EAL pupils now viewing disagreement as positive, an increase of 25%, and not a single person of the opinion that it is completely negative (see Figure 3).

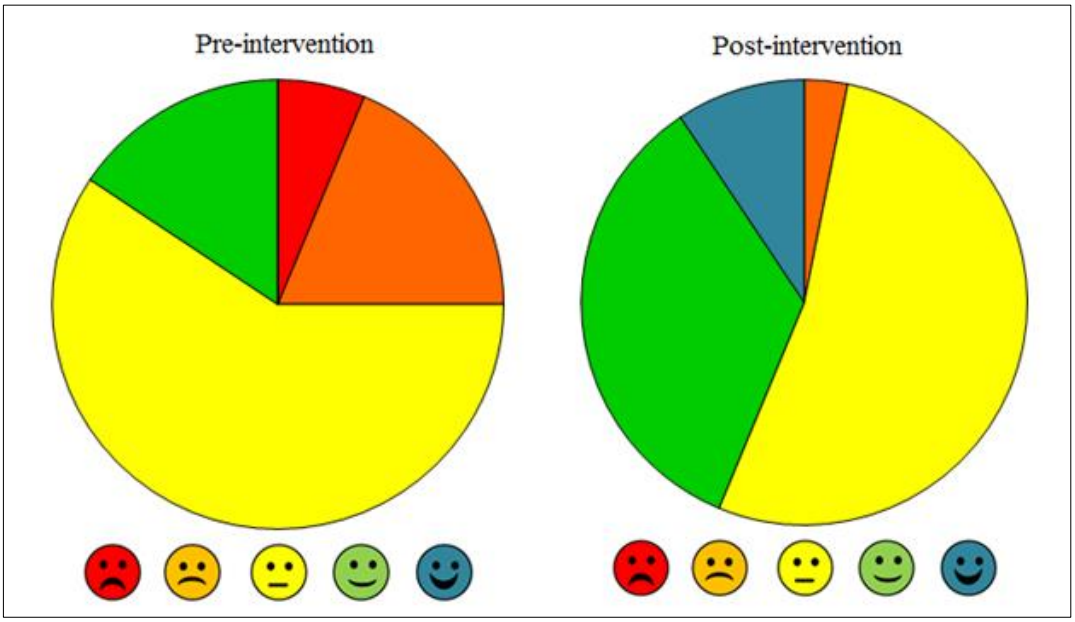

Figure 3: How do you feel if someone in your group disagrees with something you have said?

The shift in attitude towards disagreement in discussions was apparent in post-intervention pupil interviews:

Interviewer: What about disagreeing?
Pupil 2: Disagreeing is fine because then people know what can be improved
Pupil 3: But if you disagree you have to explain it
Interviewer: If you have made a good point and other people disagree, how does that make you feel?
Pupil 1: Sometimes it makes me feel … it's okay that they disagree and sometimes … um … I feel like … I am just fine with it

Pupil 2: I feel that it is okay because it gives me new ideas and a different way to think about something

Pupil 4: We disagreed a lot and it was helpful to see other sides of arguments.

Pupil 5: It sometimes made you feel a bit left out that no one agrees with you, but you learn like more things, like finding out both sides and why it might change your mind

Interviewer: Did you feel that if people disagreed you were left out?

Pupil 5: It was kind of like … it was fine because I did want to hear both sides. Sometimes I didn't agree with people when they disagreed with me.

Pupil 4: Most of the time I didn't really mind because they made good points

Pupil 6: I never really … I don't mind it.

Disagreement in group discussions is just one feature of exploratory talk where I noticed a positive shift in attitude in post-intervention observations. Before the intervention, I observed that group discussions were largely cumulative and even disputational in nature (Mercer, 1995). However, in observations following the intervention, pupils had developed more exploratory tendencies.

In post-intervention observations, Pupil 6 voiced disagreements and Pupil 5 questioned others. Many FLE pupils in the groups offered opportunities for them to agree or disagree: '[Pupil 6], do you agree?'. When giving feedback following group discussions, a range of opinions were expressed. Pupils used phrases such as: 'First I thought … but then I changed my mind' (Pupil 1), 'Well, at first we actually thought … but then we changed our minds and thought …' (Pupil 6) and 'We agreed that … and we disagreed that …' (Pupil 4). Overall, observation results show pupil discussions to be obviously exploratory in nature with pupils highly engaged and including others, as well as voicing reasoning and disagreement.

Control group data:

I used a control group in order to strengthen the validity of the intervention group data. Where there were a number of obvious changes surrounding the confidence, articulation and quality of EAL pupils' communication in the intervention groups, there were less noticeable changes amongst EAL pupils in the control group.

Pre-intervention stage data from the control group questionnaire presented findings consistent with the intervention groups. Responses showed that 33% of EAL pupils spoke 'always' or 'most of the time' in pupil led discussions. Post-intervention questionnaire data revealed an increase of 13%, with 46% of EAL pupils responding that they spoke 'always' or 'most of the time' in discussions. However, although there was an increase, it is only marginal when compared to the intervention group where responses more than doubled (31% of EAL pupils responded that they speak 'always' or 'most of the time' in group discussions before the intervention and 65% responded 'always or 'most of the time' after the intervention). The significant rise in the intervention group data compared to the control group data could indicate the overall effectiveness of the oracy intervention.

Similarly, in the pre-intervention stage questionnaire for the control group, just under a quarter (22%) of EAL pupils felt that other people in their groups 'hardly ever' or 'never' gave them opportunities to contribute. In the second questionnaire, 44% of EAL pupils stated that members of their group 'hardly ever' or 'never' gave them opportunities to contribute. This was significantly negative especially when compared to the intervention group's shift in opinion, in which EAL pupils showed increased positivity towards being

included in discussions. This suggests that the intervention had the desired impact on pupils organising and facilitating their own discussions.

Interview data from the control group suggests that there was less of an improvement in group dynamics and EAL pupils' involvement compared to results from the intervention groups discussed earlier. When I asked EAL pupils from the control group to describe group dynamics at the pre-intervention stage, they responded that they sometimes felt bored in their groups because other pupils did not listen and talked over each other. In the post-intervention stage, interviews revealed that this dynamic had stayed the same:

Interviewer: Talking in a group, what is that like?
Pupil 7: It's quite hard because sometimes you only have a little bit of time to talk
Pupil 8: Because like not everyone gets a turn to talk, because if someone else tries to say what they want instead of listening to others
Interviewer: Does that happen often?
Pupil 8: Sometimes
Pupil 9: Yeah sometimes

Unlike the groups who received the intervention, there were still problems with group dynamics and the inclusion of EAL pupils in discussions in the control group by the end of the intervention period. This suggests that the intervention did impact positively upon the EAL pupils who received it.

Observations in the control group suggest that pupils' oracy did not markedly improve compared to the groups who received the intervention. In the pre-intervention stage, discussions in the control group were cumulative, not inclusive of all pupils and the EAL focus pupils I observed remained quiet, with some making occasional contributions in their groups. Post-intervention, this remained largely similar. Disagreements were apparent in discussions, but they were confrontational and not constructive. Discussions remained cumulative in nature, with focus EAL pupils making few points. Overall, the

lack of a clear shift in the quality of discussions and involvement of EAL pupils, particularly when compared to the intervention groups, suggests that the oracy intervention had a positive impact on EAL learners who received it.

Conclusion of findings:

Overall, the findings paint a very positive picture of the impact the oracy intervention had on EAL pupils. Before the intervention, group discussions were dominated by confident individuals, not all pupils felt they were listened to and disagreements were mostly confrontational and not constructive. For EAL pupils, feelings of inclusivity and confidence were low and points they made lacked fluency and conviction. Following the intervention, group discussions were more organised and inclusive. During discussions, disagreements were more constructive and encouraged consensus. Above all, EAL pupils spoke more often, their articulations were more fluent due to the use of stem sentences and summarising, and their confidence had increased.

DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a discussion of my findings and existing literature in relation to my research questions. It reveals the impact of the oracy intervention upon EAL pupils which I reflect on in the conclusion that follows.

Do structured talk routines encourage EAL pupils to be more forthcoming with their points in discussions?

Cummins' (2000) finding that EAL pupils remain silent in over 50% of classroom discussions is perhaps one of the most thought provoking in recent years. Considering this, and the research of Miller (2004) which offers insights into EAL pupils' confidence, I hoped to investigate how much of this was to do with a lack of confidence. My pre-intervention results confirmed Cummins' finding, with over two-thirds of EAL pupils from the sample admitting that they were not forthcoming with opinions in small group discussions. Investigating a little further, a sentiment arose that some pupils in discussion groups didn't always allow others a chance to speak, implying the dominance of stronger individuals (Mercer, 1995). My observations of small group dynamics were consistent with Mercer's research (1995) and Brice-Heath's (1982) insight into the complexity of group talk situations amongst children from different backgrounds; I found that some children talked over others and appeared to follow their own set of rules when talking in a group. The overall negative dynamic resulted in feelings of exclusion and even sadness amongst EAL pupils. One might assume, therefore, that poor group dynamics results in low confidence and shyness amongst EAL pupils as described by Tatar (2005) and the DfE (2011).

As well as problems with being heard in small groups, EAL pupils expressed a lack of confidence even when they had a chance to voice their thoughts. In pre-intervention

questionnaires, almost a third of EAL pupils responded negatively about how they felt when sharing their ideas with the class. As Miller (2004) points out, it is important for EAL pupils to sound right and not sounding right can result in a fear of speaking. Many EAL pupils in my sample still lacked confidence speaking and sharing their thoughts despite having opportunities to be heard, suggesting that it is not just poor group dynamics and dominant individuals who cause low confidence amongst EAL pupils, it can also be related to language proficiency and fears of not sounding right.

It was clear that there was a need to organise group discussions, establishing a set of regulations which offer all pupils a chance to be heard. It was also clear that there was work to be done with increasing EAL pupils' articulation and proficiency in spoken. These were areas I built into the oracy intervention.

The post-intervention data suggests that EAL pupils have grown in confidence and are more forthcoming, both in small group discussions and when speaking to the class. In the post-intervention questionnaire, many EAL pupils claimed that they speak nearly all of the time, a dramatic increase compared to pre-intervention data. The framework introduced in the intervention made sure that small group discussions were not dominated by individuals and encouraged inclusivity. This seemed to have had a good impact. Group discussions were less dominated by individuals (Jones, 2017) and had a more inclusive atmosphere, so much so that EAL pupils felt that they could voice their opinions and even turn to their peers as a support to help their thinking (Moll and Greenberg, 1990). One pupil, when interviewed, even claimed that the groups helped them get examples and ideas, reflecting Claxton's belief (2009) that minds are contagious.

I believe the increase in confidence amongst EAL pupils when speaking in group situations is also down to the summarising stage of small group discussions. Many focus pupils, when interviewed, expressed that repeating and summarising points consolidated ideas and gave them content to use later or share to the class. The dynamics of small group discussions, stemming from the scaffolding I provided as a teacher (Mercer, 2008; Flitton and Warwick, 2013), enabled the children to scaffold and support each other. In a sense, learners assumed responsibility for creating Zones of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) where EAL learners receive greater support from others around them. This finding challenges Chen's recommendation (2009) for exclusive group interventions for EAL pupils. It seems that EAL pupils do benefit from collaborative activity with their FLE peers, so long as a positive and inclusive dynamic exists. With a supportive group dynamic, EAL pupils are encouraged to express themselves and, subsequently, will have the confidence to find their voice (Maxwell, 2015).

What is the impact of providing stem sentences on the fluency of EAL pupils during and after discussions?

The organisation and structure of group discussions enabled greater inclusivity of EAL pupils and subsequently an increase in their confidence. However, this was not the only benefit of the structures I put in place to support oracy in small groups. I wanted to see whether stem sentences would help EAL pupils articulate their thoughts and opinions within group discussions.

The pre-intervention data highlighted a lack of fluency amongst EAL pupils in expressing their ideas. This was problematic in light of the DfE expectation that 'pupils should be taught to speak clearly and convey ideas confidently … justify[ing] ideas with reasons [and] ask[ing] questions to check understanding' (2013:10), especially given that many of the pupils I observed were in Year 5, with just one year before the end of Key Stage 2.

Therefore, I felt that a structured approach to developing language, with stem sentences at its core, would help EAL pupils to develop the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency as identified by Cummins (1984) and meet the requirements outlined by the DfE (2013/2015).

Following the oracy intervention, the data I gathered showed that there had been a slight, but positive shift in the fluency and articulation of EAL pupils. In the second round of questionnaires, 58% of EAL pupils responded that they feel they 'always' or 'most of the time' communicate their ideas clearly, an increase of 15%. When observing small group discussions, I noticed that many EAL pupils looked to the stem sentences when making points. This complements Maxwell's finding (2015) that language scaffolds support pupils' oracy and articulation.

In interviews, pupils indicated that the stem sentences helped them organise their thoughts into words; Pupil 4 explained that they helped when trying to explain something complicated and Pupil 1 stated that they can often be a good starting point for speaking. This suggests that the stem sentences allowed children to focus on cognitive skills rather than productive skills (Afitska, 2015) and ultimately alleviate some worries they had about speaking (Bellamy, 2016). Additionally, like Wetherbee et al. (2017), I found that stem sentences sharpened listening and focus in group discussions as they helped pupils signal their intention to speak.

Stem sentences seemed to develop some EAL pupils' fluency and therefore their confidence and motivation when speaking (White et al., 2006). Overall, they offer EAL pupils opportunities to rehearse language in a modelled structure. This in turn has an impact on their language proficiency (Mercer, 1999; Bruner, 1999) and could even impact on other areas of the curriculum, such as writing (Alexander, 2003; Rose, 2006).

However, due to time limitations, this research project does not explore the wider impact of oracy on other areas of the curriculum. Furthermore, my post-intervention data suggests that not all EAL pupils felt the stem sentences helped their language proficiency, with 33% claiming that they feel they can communicate ideas fluently only 'some of the time'. This could be because the intervention period was too short, but it could also relate to Williams and Roberts' finding (2011) that stem sentences do not always appeal to every learner. Therefore, there is a need to investigate this issue further.

How successfully do pupils facilitate their own exploratory discussions? What effect does this have on EAL pupils in particular?

In order to consider whether the oracy intervention has helped children facilitate their own exploratory discussions, it is important to begin by considering what good exploratory discussion should look like. Alexander and Wolfe (2008) identified that exploratory discussions should encourage children to be critical of others' opinions and Mercer (2008) highlights the need for positive disagreement and justification of points.

When gathering pre-intervention data, it became clear that discussions amongst pupils were not exploratory and this, in turn, had a direct impact on the oracy of EAL pupils. Questionnaire results revealed that only 15% of all of EAL pupils felt they were always involved in discussions. When exploring this further, interviews revealed that pupils' felt that a major problem was pupils speaking over each other and not listening to points made, highlighting a situation far short of Alexander and Wolfe's (2008) ideal dynamics for exploratory discussion.

There was also a lot of negativity surrounding disagreement in discussions. Only 3% of EAL pupils stated that they voice disagreements most or all of the time. They said they felt disagreeing would hurt someone's feelings (Pupil 1). The pervading feeling that

disagreement is something negative highlights that discussions were not exploratory. It opposed the dynamics identified by Mercer (2008) and Skidmore's finding (2003) that, in order to have quality oracy in the classroom, teachers need to encourage children to challenge each other's reasoning.

I designed part of my oracy intervention to encourage an exploratory dynamic with a specific focus on helping pupils find ways to challenge each other's reasoning (Skidmore, 2003) whilst maintaining good relationships and mutual respect (Kutnick and Berdondini, 2009). It seems to have had a positive impact. Post-intervention data shows that there has been an increase in EAL pupils' feelings of inclusion. In interviews, many focus pupils confirmed that they felt respected and included, noting that other pupils often seek their thoughts and opinions. The exploration and consideration of other pupils' opinions highlights that exploratory talk has occurred in the intervention classes.

The 20% increase in the number of EAL pupils who, following the intervention, found ways to disagree constructively in discussions suggests a shift in attitude towards offering opposing points of view. This is supported by the 25% increase in EAL pupils who, following the intervention, saw disagreeing as positive rather than negative. It appears that the oracy intervention has triggered an attitude change amongst pupils towards what makes an effective discussion.

Perhaps the most significant outcome is something I noticed when observing EAL pupils present thoughts and opinions to the class. Evidently, all pupils have developed ways to explore and consider opposing points of view. This benefitted EAL pupils, as all who shared opinions with the class following a small group discussion presented a narrative, weighing up various opinions before sharing their own. This echoes Mercer's view (1995) that one child's opinion can be shifted by another's. Ultimately, exploratory talk

has exposed EAL pupils to both ideas and language, confirming that it is a form of classroom oracy which promotes individual achievement (Mercer, 1995).

CONCLUSION

My findings raise a number of points surrounding the impact of oracy in the classroom on EAL pupils and how we can adapt our practice to ensure that we maximise their overall learning outcomes.

Reflection on the intervention

The design of my intervention to support oracy in the classroom, particularly the use of the discussion tool, has allowed pupils to play a bigger role in their discussions and takes steps towards reducing teachers' tendencies to control small group discussions (Skidmore, 2000; Myhill, 2006). It places learning in the hands of pupils. Overall, it has proven the importance of the orchestration of classroom talk (Flitton and Warwick, 2013) and has introduced an effective strategy to encourage quality talk, filling the void that Johnson et al. (1992) identified and that had not been achieved after the National Oracy Project.

Its findings reinforce those of Maxwell (2015), who evaluated a similar oracy intervention – the 'Voice 21' project, at School 21 in Newham, London. Like Maxwell, I found that increasing opportunities for talk in the classroom has a positive impact as it helps pupils find their voice, increases confidence and improves articulation. However, unlike the 'Voice 21' project, which, according to Maxwell, failed to develop quality exploratory discussions amongst pupils, I feel that my intervention has begun to demonstrate strategies which do encourage pupils to have exploratory discussions.

My project focused specifically on the impact of the oracy intervention upon EAL pupils. The demand that all pupils should be speaking clearly by the end of KS2 (DfE, 2013) puts pressure on many schools, especially in light of Cummins' finding (2000) that in

50% of classroom interactions, 'EAL pupils say either nothing or supply one word answers' (404). My findings have shown that increasing pupil-led oracy does impact EAL pupils' confidence, articulation and talk quality in the classroom and that, given the right opportunities, they can meet the achievements of their FLE peers.

Reflection on collaboration

For me, collaboration during my research was largely positive. Following my initial collaboration with the Senior Leadership Team on the origins and focus of my research, they were supportive and keen to know any implications my project may have that would impact learning and teaching in our school. In particular, the Assistant Headteacher, who leads on learning and teaching in the school, was very active throughout my project, ensuring that I had sufficient time to run and evaluate my intervention. This was reassuring and gave me the opportunity to make sure my intervention was prepared and properly implemented.

In the design of the oracy intervention, discussions with both the Assistant Headteacher and the Year 4 teacher, who co-delivered the intervention with me, provoked discussion about pedagogy in our school and highlighted a willingness to explore the process and implications of my practitioner research (Pine, 2009). The only difficulty I experienced was concern about the intensity of the intervention schedule – a 20 minute session every day for at least eight weeks – putting pressure on other teachers' workload (Waters-Adams, 1994), and I did have to make sure that the Year 4 teacher I worked closely with throughout made time to implement oracy at least once a day.

Following data collection, I presented my findings to the SLT team and raised the implications for learning and teaching in our school, while promoting development and sharing knowledge (Garcés and Granada, 2016; Christianakis, 2010). Overall, I feel that

situational research, being able to gather data to make improvements within one's own school, is an effective and inclusive approach to developing learning and teaching.

Implications

This research project has implications for my own teaching practice, teaching and learning in my school and the wider field of pedagogy.

For my own teaching, I have recognised the importance of oracy in the classroom, particularly when it comes to encouraging the learning and development of EAL pupils. I feel that I have developed effective strategies and, although some do need further refinement, they promote rich, exploratory classroom discussions and encourage pupils to engage critically with each other (Mercer, 2008). My knowledge of the needs of EAL pupils, and how to best meet them, has expanded. Equally, I recognise the importance of scaffolding pupils' learning and the impact that such structure can have on their achievement.

Findings from my literature review suggested that, generally, provision for oracy in the classroom was inconsistent and secondary to reading and writing (DfCS&F, 2009; Alexander, 2010; Mercer, 2014; Jones, 2017). This was apparent in my own school prior to the intervention. I believe that the importance of oracy has been recognised in my school and is now a significant feature across our curriculum.

The attainment gap between EAL and FLE pupils in my school, and the declining achievement of EAL pupils in Literacy overall (as discussed in my introduction), needed addressing, and with 56% of pupils speaking EAL at varying levels of proficiency, devising a strategy was going to be a complex task. However, my findings have shown

that a scaffolded oracy intervention is one way to increase discussion in the classroom and it has the potential to impact upon reading and writing, closing the attainment gap.

This project has many wider implications for research and pedagogy focused on the improving pupil oracy and closing the EAL/FLE attainment gap (Strand et al., 2015). My findings suggest that, providing they are well structured by teachers, daily, pupil-centred oracy sessions have a positive impact on the development of EAL pupils' confidence, articulation and talk quality. It begins to address issues of anxiety in oracy identified by Miller (2004) and allows EAL pupils to move beyond 'sounding right' and into a place where they can feel more included in classroom discussions. Furthermore, my findings make clear the need for projects such as 'Voice 21' (Maxwell, 2015) but on a national level. Ultimately, this project endorses Maxwell's ideal of oracy in every lesson (2015) and Jones' call for oracy to be given its 'rightful place' (2017:507) in schools nationwide.

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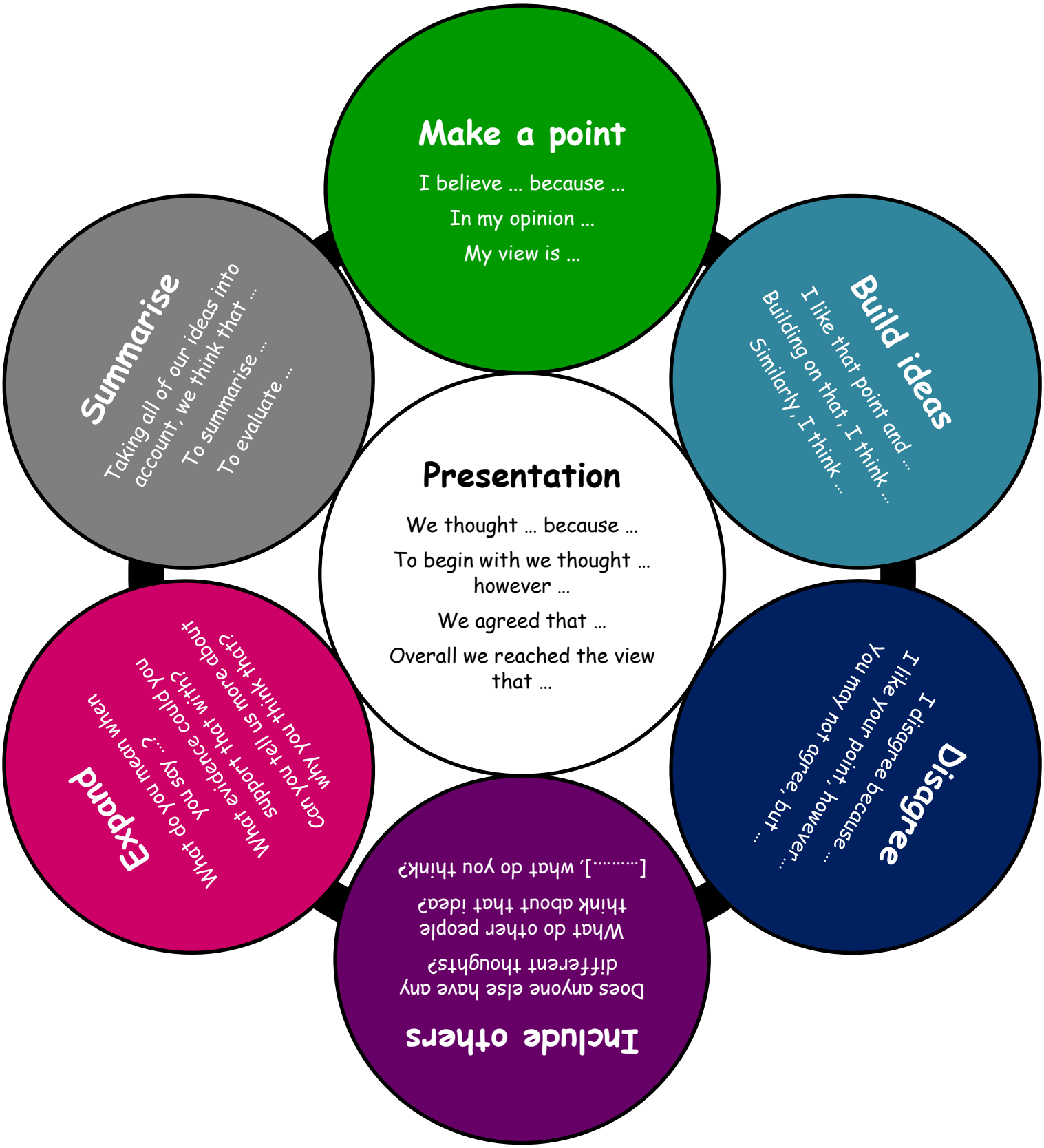
APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Discussion Tool



Appendix 2: Questionnaire

How often are discussions held in lessons? (eg. talk partners, small group discussions, class debates)
always most of the time some of the time hardly ever never
If you are having a group discussion, how often do <u>you</u> speak?
always most of the time some of the time hardly ever never
Do other children give you opportunities to speak?
always most of the time some of the time hardly ever never
How often do you give reasons to support your opinion?
always most of the time some of the time hardly ever never
When you have group discussions, do <u>you</u> ever disagree with what someone else has said?
always most of the time some of the time hardly ever never
How do you feel if someone in your groups disagrees with something you have said?

How do you feel if you have to share your ideas in front of the class?

Do you feel you are able to communicate your ideas clearly when speaking in class?
always most of the time some of the time hardly ever never

Appendix 3: Question Schedule for Interviews

1. Does talking about work with other pupils make learning easier? Why?
2. How often do you get to talk to a partner or small group about the work you are doing?
3. How are your paired/group discussions organised? Does this help?
4. When working in groups, how often do you speak?
5. Is there anything you find difficult about talking in a group?
6. When you speak in a group, are you able to disagree with each other?
7. Do you give reasons to support your opinion in discussions?
8. Do you feel you are able to communicate your ideas clearly when speaking in class?

Appendix 4: Observation Schedule

Pupil Name:										
Contributions to discussions: Quantity Style (Agree/Repeat/NewPoint/Expanded/Disagree)	Agree		Repeat		New Point		Expanded		Disagree	
Discussion Quality: Disputational (disagreements and less consensus) Cumulative (individual points made and accepted, uncritical) Exploratory (group build discussion, reasoning, listening, consensus)										
Articulation: Unrequested/Requested Extenders (silent pauses **SP**, filled pauses **FP**, repetitions **R**) False Starts **FS**	UnReq/Req		UnReq/Req		UnReq/Req		UnReq/Req		UnReq/Req	
	SP		SP		SP		SP		SP	
	FP		FP		FP		FP		FP	
	R		R		R		R		R	
	FS		FS		FS		FS		FS	