



University of
Reading

Improving schools' oracy education for multilingual and Gypsy Roma Traveller pupils

The Talk-Rich Teaching Toolkit

**A joint University of Reading and
Hampshire EMTAS research project**

Project Team

University of Reading: Naomi Flynn and Ingrid Nanne Lippmann

Hampshire EMTAS: Sarah Coles, Claire Barker,
Astrid Dinneen, Helen Smith, Kate Grant, Michelle Lancaster,
Lynne Chinnery, Thibaut Maguire



**Hampshire
County Council**

Ethnic Minority and Traveller
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Project rationale



One in five pupils in England are learning English as an additional language (EAL) but they receive limited attention in education policy. Thus, they are under-prioritised in school development plans, some fail to make age-expected progress, and their teachers can feel ill-equipped to teach them. Schools need low-cost time-efficient solutions to address these shortfalls.

The current foregrounding of oracy education is a golden opportunity to highlight the benefits of talk-rich classrooms for these multilingual¹ pupils' social and academic development. This project combined the research evidence

of Prof Naomi Flynn, University of Reading, with the professional know-how of Hampshire's Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS), to build an online Toolkit that tackled all the above.

Why oracy for multilingual and GRT² pupils?

There is strong evidence that a carefully implemented, inclusive, oracy-rich curriculum can support learners who use EAL to build solid foundations in both their home or preferred languages and in English.

We Need to Talk: The Report of the Commission on the Future of Oracy Education in England (2024)



Policymakers and schools are paying more attention to oracy education because of its recognised benefits in improving outcomes across the curriculum³. **Oracy also has the potential to enhance pupils' sense of well-being and school belonging⁴.** However, there is less research relating the specific impact of oracy education on pupils who are from minoritised groups. This is surprising because existing

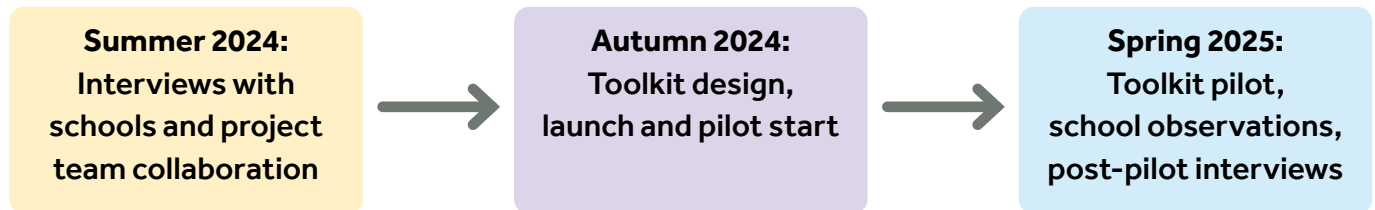
studies demonstrate the importance of a talk-rich classroom for pupils who need to learn and use English⁵. Thus, in this project, our aim was to harness the direction of policy for the positive benefits oracy education can give to multilingual, GRT and all learners. It builds on several existing studies, from the US and the UK, where training teachers to say less so that their pupils can say more has improved pupils' attainment⁶.

Why an online Toolkit?

We knew from experience that schools need professional development resources offering one-stop quick-access advice that works when face-to-face expertise is not readily available. We also wanted to create a resource that

complemented EMTAS' existing online materials but had the potential for roll out beyond Hampshire schools where expert teams for multilingual and GRT pupils may not exist.

Project activity



What schools wanted in an online Toolkit

In scoping out what would work, we interviewed Headteachers, Deputy Headteachers, and EAL and GRT co-ordinators, in 15 Hampshire primary schools, in the summer term of 2024. They told us that the following are what they want from an online oracy Toolkit:

- It must dovetail with other school priorities to avoid 'overwhelm'.
- It should not demand staff meeting time or course attendance.
- It must be quick-read quick-wins (one side of A4) and easy access (one click).
- It must include guidance for different levels of language proficiency.
- It must include activities suitable for EAL and GRT learners and how to adapt planning to include them.
- It must be focussed on quality first teaching.
- It must include guidance for Learning Support Assistants (LSAs).

Schools were also keen that any guidance intentionally supports inclusive practice that promotes belonging. As one of our project's Headteachers put it:



“Diversity is having a seat at the table, inclusion is having a voice, belonging is having that voice heard.”

Designing the Talk-Rich Teaching Toolkit

Taking our lead from what schools wanted, combined with our expertise and research evidence, we developed five guiding principles for the Toolkit, and these were:

- 1 School belonging
- 2 Talk-Rich
- 3 Inquiry-led
- 4 Collaborative
- 5 Small group

We started with School Belonging because our conversations indicated that celebrating difference must be prioritised ahead of any teaching-related changes. The principles also reflected the US-designed Enduring Principles of Learning that had driven this project’s predecessor⁷.

The Toolkit was introduced during online meetings with schools in October 2024, and options discussed as to how they might choose to work with it. Schools were encouraged to make it their own so that it aligned with their current priorities and to consider only small-step changes to practice that would embed over time.



The Toolkit content

The Toolkit explained	Getting started with the Toolkit	Learning and teaching with the Toolkit	Toolkit oracy resources
• The principles of talk-rich teaching • The role of school belonging • The benefits of oracy • Linking with the EMTAS EAL Excellence Award and Traveller & Showmen Excellence Award	• Getting started for leadership teams • Getting started for EAL leads and Traveller & Showmen (GRT) leads • Getting started for teachers • Getting started for learning support assistants	• Oracy approaches for medium-term planning • Oracy approaches for all learners • Oracy approaches for learners with limited proficiency in English • Oracy approaches for learners with English proficiency • Oracy approaches for learners with competent English proficiency • Oracy approaches for children of Travellers & Showmen families	• Padlet of resource links • Let’s Talk and Think-Talk sentence starters • Oracy lesson video

What schools did with the Talk-Rich Teaching Toolkit

Nine schools who had at least 10% multilingual or GRT pupils piloted the Toolkit: three primary, three junior and three infant. They took different approaches to implementation, and these can be summarised as:

- being led by the Headteacher or other senior leaders
- involving all staff or some staff
- involving staff meeting time or not
- All schools focussed on School Belonging and one or two other principles.

Schools made small shifts in practice that supported greater use of talk, using the guidance related to oracy approaches for learners at different levels of proficiency in English. The most popular strategies chosen were:

- using sentence stems (starter phrases) to support dialogue
- reducing group sizes to four to promote active discussion
- using learning questions to make the lesson inquiry-led
- intentionally focussing on reducing teacher talk.

“The Toolkit principles aligned with everything that we do as a school.”

Deputy Headteacher, primary school

What schools reported as successes

- Multilingual learners grew in confidence to take part in small group conversations using new vocabulary.
- Multilingual learners were better able to articulate the questions they needed to ask when they did not understand things.
- Traveller children were better engaged in small group teaching.
- Learners were better able to listen and offer opinions.
- Teachers found that, in saying less, and working with groups, they became better active listeners.
- Teachers appreciated understanding the 'why' of implementing oracy, and 'permission' to design talk-based activities rather than worrying about written 'evidence'.
- Headteachers appreciated the ways in which Toolkit content could be adapted to local need and matched to school priorities.



“Children that were not talking are now talking.”

Headteacher, junior school

Case studies

1: Infant School

In this Infant School with 8% multilingual pupils, the focus was on the principles of Talk Rich and School Belonging. The school were also working on oracy with members of Hampshire's English and Maths advisory teams. Thus, the Toolkit gave them a resource bank with which to unite several oracy-related initiatives for the benefit of all learners.

Sentence stems were created on speech bubbles that children or adults could use to promote conversations. These were differentiated for year groups in terms of their complexity, and used across the curriculum.

As part of their focus on School Belonging this school ran parental workshops to mitigate the isolation some multilingual families can experience.

“It is having a really positive impact where the children are developing their vocabulary and language.”

Deputy Headteacher, infant school



2: Junior School

In this Junior School with 20% multilingual pupils, uptake of the Toolkit was embedded in the school's focus on developing high quality talk in maths lessons.

They used sentence stems with talk partners and focussed on intentionally reducing teacher talk through activity design that required more time for pupil talk.

Teachers reported that where they listened more and talked less, opportunities for the children's extended discussion developed organically.

“Teachers said misconceptions were being picked up on more quickly, because they were listening into the conversations, rather than hands up and one or two children's responses.”

Headteacher, junior school

Implications for policy and practice

What does the project tell us about the benefits of oracy education?

- Oracy education works for multilingual learners and needs more emphasis in current policy at regional and national level.
- Oracy education fosters inclusive classrooms and respectful relationships.
- Oracy education develops confidence and agency among multilingual, GRT and all learners.

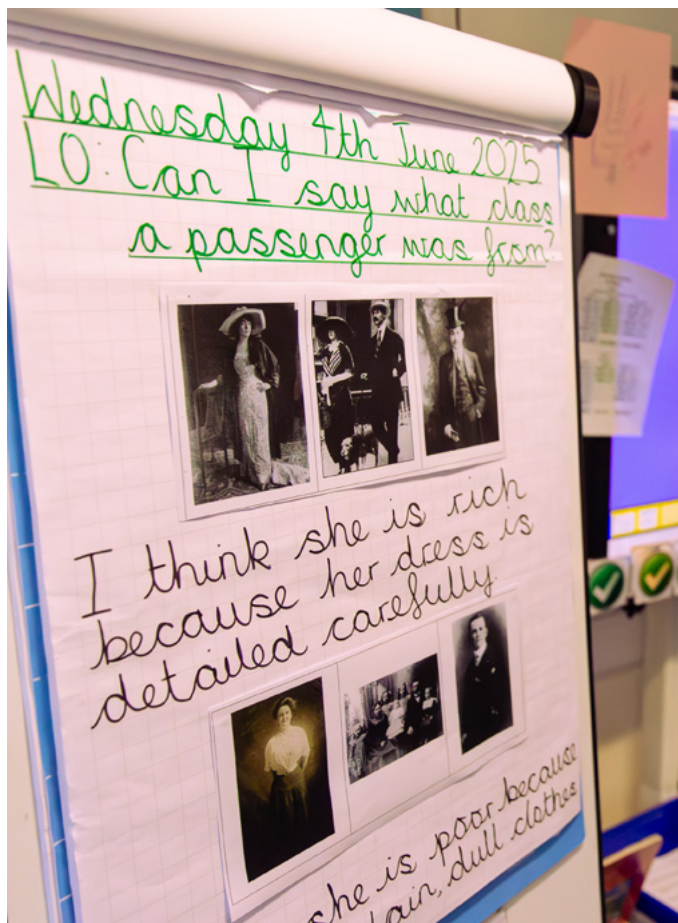
What does the project tell us about how schools engage with online resources?

- Advice about how best to use resources needs to be clear in the absence of the research team.
- Schools need to be able to make resources locally relatable.
- Success of new online resources is maximised when they match current school and policy priorities.

What happens next?

In the Autumn term 2025 the Talk-Rich Teaching Toolkit will be made available for access by all Hampshire schools. We plan, during 2026, to build a new website for the Toolkit which will give access to a much wider audience.

Watch this space!



Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgement is given to:

- The Headteachers, teachers and their school communities who contributed to discussion and who piloted the Toolkit with us.
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Find out more

You can read about the research which foregrounded the thinking behind the Talk-Rich Teaching Toolkit here <https://research.reading.ac.uk/talk-rich-teaching/>

Contact

Naomi Flynn

Professor of Multilingual Education
University of Reading
n.flynn@reading.ac.uk

Endnotes

- 1 We prefer the asset-based term multilingual because the acronym EAL refers only to a deficit in English rather than celebrating pupils' rich linguistic diversity.
- 2 We use the acronym GRT to refer to pupils of Gypsy Roma and Traveller Heritage. The term used by Hampshire EMTAS for these communities is Traveller & Showmen.
- 3 See for example Education Endowment Foundation <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/oral-language-interventions>; Voice 21 <https://voice21.org/publications/>
- 4 See The Oracy Commission's report <https://oracyeducationcommission.co.uk/oec-report/>
- 5 See Flynn at al (2024) <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/tesq.3224>
- 6 See The Talk Rich Teaching Project <https://research.reading.ac.uk/talk-rich-teaching/> and Teemant, Sherman and Tyra (2024) <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/tesj.872>
- 7 <https://research.reading.ac.uk/talk-rich-teaching/>

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