



An Institute of



NANYANG  
TECHNOLOGICAL  
UNIVERSITY  
SINGAPORE

# Helping Students Discover the Joy of Talk

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**TRANSFORMING TEACHING  
INSPIRING LEARNING**

Stop  
talking.

Get into your  
groups and  
discuss.

Talk it over  
with your  
partner.

Work in your  
groups to get  
the answer.

Please  
keep quiet  
and do your  
work.

Should students  
take on part-time  
work?

A: And the good thing is you can earn money.

B: Ya, can earn money.

A: Can buy my things, like... my branded stuff.

B: Ya, lor, can buy new handphone.

C: It affects the students' performance in school.

D: What if their parents want them to take up part-time jobs?

C: Then they have no choice.. Must listen to parents, right?

E: I think if they want extra money, then they should go and get jobs.

C: Ya, when they have financial difficulty and...

E: What if they are greedy for money? You know ... they become money-face! (Laughs)

Source: Goh, 2008

# Central Questions

- What is the value of talk?
- What kinds of talk do students need to develop?
- What makes talk enjoyable and how can we help learners enjoy talk in academic contexts?

# What is the value of talk?

# 21<sup>st</sup> C Skills

## Learning and Innovation Skills

- Creativity & Innovation
- Critical thinking & problem solving
- Communication & collaboration

## Life and Career Skills

- Flexibility & adaptability
- Initiative & self-direction
- Social & cross-cultural
- Productivity & accountability
- Leadership & responsibility

## Information, Media and Technology Skills

- Information literacy
- Media literacy
- ICT literacy

The centrality of  
talk

(Based on Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2011)

# Talk occurs during...



Whole-  
class  
teaching



Pair  
work



Group  
work



Group  
work





Source: NTU

Learners use talk to jointly develop a better understanding about an issue or a subject in question.



## Oracy:

A person's ability to use the skills of speaking and listening **to engage with and influence his or her world in learning, thinking and communication.**

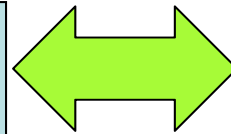
(Barnes, 1988; Wilkinson, 1965)



Source: NIE

# Oracy

**Oracy as Competence**



**Oracy for Learning**

**“Speech as language skills”**

**“Speech as action upon the world”**

(Maclure, 1988)

“The general aim of education to develop the whole person is immediately relevant to the development of oracy, and oracy will be a necessary and important constituent of that wholeness.”

(Wilkinson, 1965, p. 40)



Oracy contributes to the way children gain knowledge and understanding from social interaction.



*Child (3;4) is talking to her parents during dinner.*

Child: When I fall, Daddy can fix me.

Father: No, Daddy can't. That's why Daddy says you mustn't jump on the sofa.

Mother: If you fall, you'll hurt yourself, just like Humpty Dumpty. Remember Humpty Dumpty?

Child: He fell down from the wall and he cracked open!

Mother: Yes.

Child: But I'm not an egg.

Source: Goh & Silver, 2006



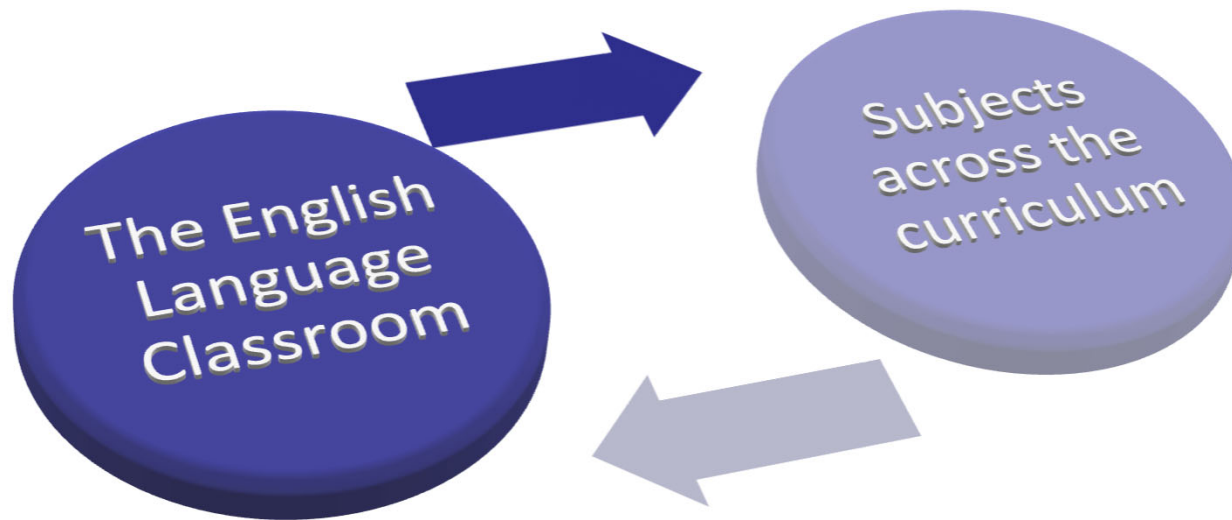
Oracy facilitates literate thinking and the acquisition of academic literacy.

Talking to learn

LEARNING TO TALK



# Oracy Development in Schools



The various subjects in the curriculum enable pupils to develop different ways of thinking and communicating through the spoken language.

“Like the child’s conversational learning of and through language in the pre-school years, learning in school can be seen quite largely as a continuing apprenticeship in discourse, as he or she participates in, and takes over, the different discourse genres – that is, ways of making meaning – that are encountered in various subjects of the curriculum.”

(Wells, 1992, p. 291).

# Benefits of Talk to a Child's Development

- Cultivating a questioning stance
- A curious disposition
- Pursuing one's beliefs
- Opening up to others
- Developing empathy
- Developing language creativity
- Recognising ambiguity
- Accepting of differing views
- Constructing knowledge and understanding jointly with others

What kinds of talk do students  
need to develop ?

“...not the kind of talk that simply feeds back information, but rather talk that has the power to shape knowledge through participant engagement with a range of processes – hypothesizing, exploration, debate and synthesis. This kind of talk is antithesis to “right answerism” and facilitates learning which is active and which prepares young people for a complex world with many uncertainties and many occasions when rational choice is required.”

▪

(Barnes 2010, p.7)



Teacher: What is the capital of Venezuela?

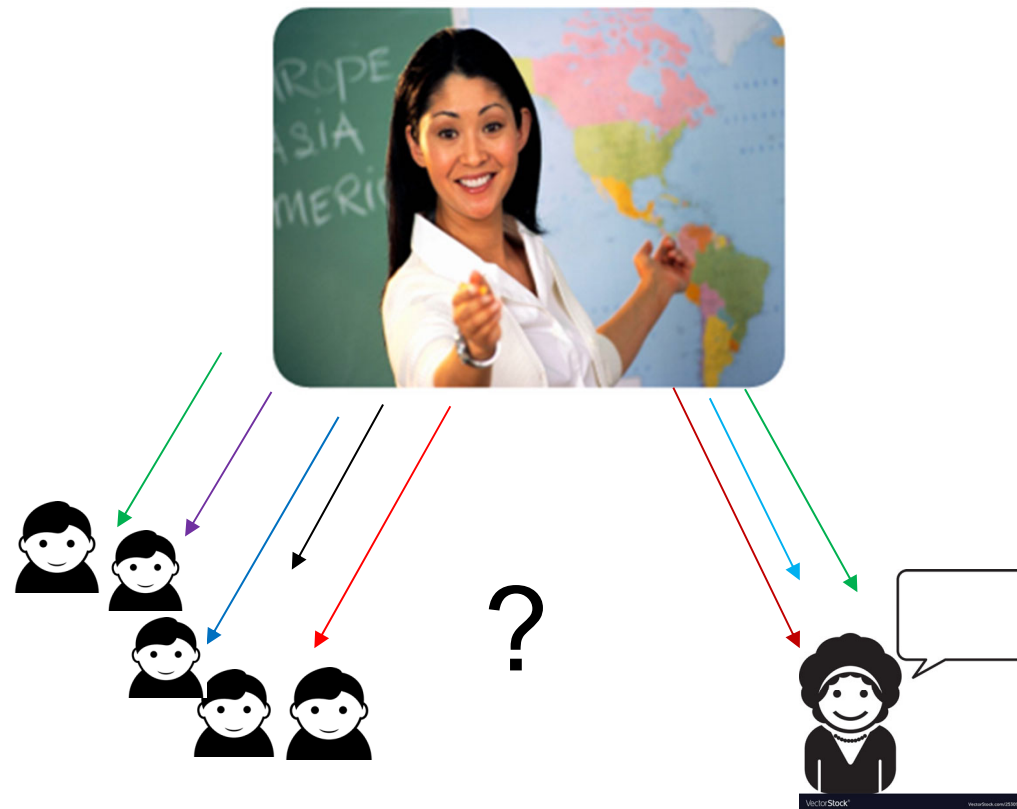
Student A: Caracas!

Teacher: That's correct!

Teacher: Name the largest country in South America.

Student B: Chile.

Teacher: Try again.



Adults can use talk to help learners develop new ways of thinking about a subject and skills for expressing themselves



# Two kinds of learner talk for educational purposes (Barnes, 2008)

## Presentational talk

- Audience-focused
- Providing expected answers
- Offering a “final draft”
- Complete and correct

## Exploratory talk

- Self-focused
- Working on understanding
- Trying out ideas and test reactions
- Hesitant and tentative

# Presentational Talk



# Exploratory talk can (potentially) occur during...



Whole-  
class  
teaching



Pair  
work



Group  
work



Group  
work

# What is Exploratory Talk?

Talk where learners express their ideas openly, adopt positions, evaluate viewpoints, express tentativeness, negotiate ideas and modify their viewpoints.

“...not the kind of talk that simply feeds back information, but rather talk that has the power to shape knowledge through participant engagement with a range of processes – hypothesizing, exploration, debate and synthesis. This kind of talk is antithesis to “right answerism” and facilitates learning which is active and which prepares young people for a complex world with many uncertainties and many occasions when rational choice is required.”

“**Exploratory talk** is important in learning because it provides a ready tool for trying out different ways of thinking and understanding.”

(Barnes 2010, p.7)

A key characteristic of exploratory talk is the element of 'collaborativeness' demonstrated through

- (a) invitation to others to participate,
- (b) extension of previous contributions,
- and
- (c) acknowledgement of others' identities.

(Barnes & Todd, 1977, p.3).



# Exploratory Talk during Group Discussions

**Learners use speech to jointly develop a better understanding about an issue or a subject in question.**



# The Purposes of Group Discussions

## **Speaking & listening practice**

Language tasks for developing language fluency and accuracy, confidence and motivation (Johnson & Morrow, 1981).

## **Interthinking (thinking together)**

The use of language for thinking together, for collectively making sense of experience and solving problems (Mercer et al. 1999; Mercer 2000).

## **Safe environment for experimenting with ideas**

Symmetrical nature of peer interaction encourages exploratory talk to try out new ideas (Barnes, 2010).

Richness of student contribution in peer talk that is lacking in teacher-student talk (Howe & Abedin, 2013).

# Types of Talk and Thinking (Together)

**Cumulative Talk:** “speakers build positively but uncritically on what the other has said, partners use such talk to construct a common knowledge by accumulation” (Mercer, 1996: 369).

**Exploratory Talk:** “when partners engage critically but constructively with each other’s ideas. Statements and suggestions are offered for joint consideration. These may be challenged and counter challenged, but challenges are justified and alternative hypotheses are offered” (Mercer, 1996: 369).

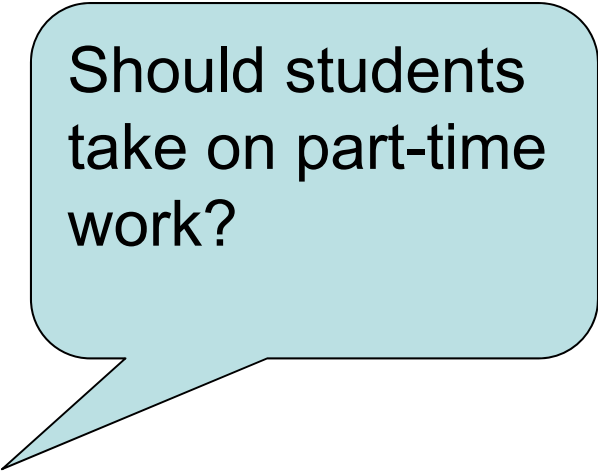
## Cumulative

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## Exploratory

C: It affects the students' performance in school.

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Source: Goh, 2008

# We need to teach exploratory talk explicitly:



What makes talk enjoyable and how can we help learners enjoy talk in academic contexts?

# Developing learners' joy in talk

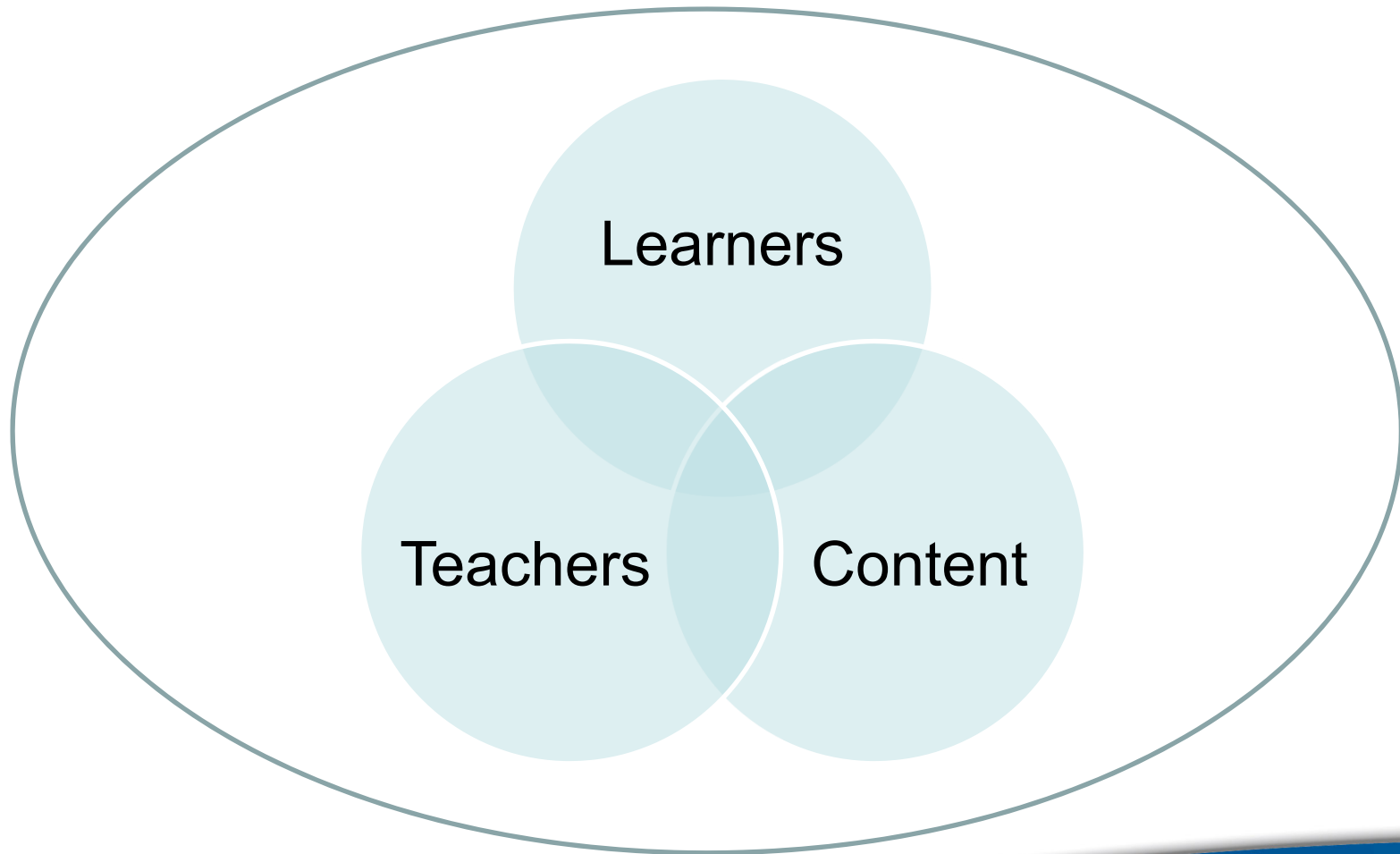
- Create environments for talk
- Direct attention to the process (not product) of talk
- Offer meaning and relevance (e.g. topics, purpose)
- Start from what learners' know
- Encourage curiosity and excitement in ideas
- Value both convergent and divergent talk
- Teach enabling skills: active listening and speaking
- Teach language for talk
- Model talk for active learning

# In successful group talk, learners

- display a critical-analytical stance (Wilkinson et al., 2010).
- listen actively and respond in a critical manner by arguing, reasoning, justifying and evaluating ideas (Alexander, 2006).
- engage in dialogic construction of the task (Bloome, 2015).
- have a common understanding of the collaborative nature of their talk, accepting it as part of their responsibility.
- jointly undertake inquiry and work towards a common understanding and agreed conclusion and respect minority viewpoints (Alexander, 2006).
- are metacognitively aware of their talk and learning (Palinscar & Brown, 1986; Reznitskaya et al. 2001; Wilkinson et al., 2010).
- Are actively shaping and reshaping their understanding (Barnes 2010)



# Challenges and Opportunities for Talk



# Central Questions

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# Thank you

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