

**Session Report for Session Eight**  
**18<sup>th</sup> October 2001: 14.15 – 17.15**  
**Philip Rush. College, FCH**

**NLS / KS3 Teaching and Assessing Speaking and Listening**

**Outline of Importance:**

We started the session discussing the importance of Speaking and Listening. At present Speaking and Listening forms one of the three key areas of the Attainment Targets. At present 20% of the mark awarded for GCSE English is awarded for Speaking and Listening. Thus there must be a proportionate effort put into the teaching of Speaking and Listening.

Too often the skills involved in Speaking and Listening are regarded as innate: a sort of register of the pupils' verbal intelligence, rather than as a skill which can be acquired. As with non-fiction texts in the curriculum, a new emphasis is placed upon making explicit the conventions of a given type of talk, rather than expecting the pupils to pick up the implicit cues and teach themselves, as was the case in the past. Thus modeling speech or active listening continues to take on importance, as it has with non-fiction texts. This modeling should consist of demonstrating and breaking down knowledge about Speaking and Listening into areas for investigation and development.

**Historical Outline**

Keith Joseph as Secretary of State for Education in the 1980s intervened in the work of the School Curriculum Development Committee to insist on the development of Speaking and Listening in the curriculum. Further, he instituted a separate grade from 1-5 to be awarded with GCSE English for Speaking and Listening. The English working group for the development of English in the National Curriculum continued the momentum by recommending that Speaking and Listening should take up one third of the English Curriculum with an attainment target (AT1). This became law in the form of Statutory Orders (DES 1989,1990). The aim was:

The development of pupils' understanding of the spoken word and the capacity to express themselves effectively in a variety of Speaking and Listening activities, matching style and response to audience and purpose.

This aim has remained unchanged since then, but has been considerably refined and defined. This has been particularly refined by the National Oracy Project, which was set up to research, advise and publish on the implementation of the new initiatives. They also tried to publicize the most effective teaching practice they observed in schools.

**Teaching**

The teaching of Speaking and Listening has proved an ever expanding field. From starting with very little, the work of the NOP among others has produced a huge amount of publications on how Speaking and Listening can be taught.

A basic teaching sequence is suggested in [English Department Training](#) (2001, Speaking and Listening). It suggests the most basic teaching sequence might look like this.

1. Teaching objectives which are made explicit to class
2. Provide an example / model of an oral language text type and use in class / group discussion or investigation
3. Identify purposes, outcomes, ground rules
4. Define speaking and listening conventions
5. Activity or oral task that enables pupils to rehearse and explore language conventions in supported context
6. Reflection and review refocusing on Speaking and Listening objectives.

This is a familiar pattern used in the teaching of non-fiction text types for writing and reading, and is also similar to the LPU and NLS structure of RoTAS (Remember mOdel Try, Apply, Secure). It doesn't however give any details of how activities or concepts can be broken down, or ideas for structured Speaking and Listening activities. Thankfully there are plenty of these from the NOP.

Speaking and Listening can be broken down into the formal matrix of

Formal	Informal
Single	Group

This can be used both to teach and assess. What is of particular interest is how to structure group work, which is perhaps the most unwieldy of the above. The NOP chose the following as particularly effective ways of getting group talk going.

**Brainstorming:** all pupils in one large group contribute ideas, which are written down indiscriminately, to be discussed later.

**Jigsaw:** Home groups set up. Each member picked to be an expert on one aspect. Experts then form groups and discuss their specialist subjects. The home groups reform and put together all the specialist knowledge

**Twos to Fours:** Children work in pairs. Then pairs join to form a more knowledgeable four, then eight etc.

**Rainbow groups:** Groups work together and then each given a number and new groups form with all the number ones, all the number twos etc. Thus all the knowledge in the room is dispersed.

**Envoys:** From a group, one pupil leaves and goes to another group. This envoy tells the other group what his/her group has discovered and collects information about what that group is doing before returning to the home group.

**Listening Triads:** in groups of three, two students talk, the other student makes notes on how they talk

Meanwhile it is also vital that the Teacher who may be trying to help a group develop their discussion is self-evaluative. NOP is very keen on defining teachers' potential roles in group talk with pupils. Here are two different lists for consideration.

<b><i>John Johnson's List (NOP)</i></b>	<b><i>Roy Corden's List (NOP Staffordshire)</i></b>
Organizer	Responding to children's expertise
Provider	Responding as working group member
Supporter	Responding as neutral chairperson
Arbiter	Scaffolding learning
Collaborator	Responding as source of raw information
Working group member	Responding as equal
Director	Responding as learning partner

Editor	Responding with minimal intervention
Friend	
Adviser	
Learner	
Expert	
Listener	

### **Progression**

In the session we also talked about the importance of the idea of progression, which is a central concept in all NC matters. Speaking and Listening must not be seen as a monolithic block of skills. Rather it is a continuum of learning. English Department Training (2001) identifies this as a move from a supported activity (scaffolding) to independent skills and knowledge. This over KS3 will be matched by ‘increasing challenge of content and context’. The matrix they suggest is that over a year, say year 7, the pupils should move from simple action (using an oral text type) to the ability to apply it at the right time and reflect upon its effects. This reflection and comparison to other oral text types should then lead to the ability to evaluate oral text types, group talk or their own listening skills. In each year the contexts and content should become more sophisticated.

The above can all be matched to the actual Attainment Targets as set out in En1.

### **Assessment**

Talk is an ‘unfamiliar medium for teachers to use in assessment’ Johnson p. 25 (1995). While there is no magic answer, a number of things help. Having clear objectives for talk gives clear criteria for assessment. Meanwhile it is important to remember some of the following:

- Assessment of talk is very different to assessment of something *through* talk
- When children talk they don’t always make all their knowledge explicit (iceberg effect)
- Pupils can find it hard to display all their knowledge in conversation with teachers, with whom they may not feel as relaxed as you assume
- A misunderstanding of the nature of the task may result in poor performance

### **Other Issues:**

#### ***Standard English***

Since the early 1990s the influence of certain rightwing think tanks ensured that earlier concessions to dialect English were withdrawn. This led to the situation that in 1994 draft proposals required students to be ‘taught to use vocabulary and grammar of standard spoken English’. Delightfully this was followed by a general inability to define what constituted standard spoken English. The effects of this debate are still with us however: if one is assessing spoken English can one award a national mark for GCSE to a child who spoke entirely in dialect. And if not, how can you define what doesn’t count as dialect. (John Major under whom this was introduced, couldn’t himself pronounce ideology or self-righteousness).

#### ***Links to Drama***

There are and should be very clear links to Drama throughout the teaching of Speaking and Listening

### ***Equal Opportunities***

Teachers must always be aware of children, groups, genders, ethnic groups, or social groups dominating, distorting or suppressing others' talk.

### ***Looking at Training Material***

To end the session we looked at a training video supplied by the government for the training of teachers in Speaking and Listening. We generally found the material weak. The objectives appeared clear, but were intellectually vague. They appeared to be 'pick any point of view, pretend briefly to believe in it, and then change it when someone else tells you to'. We found this inadequate and potentially confusing, while we recognized that what the teacher intended was to develop awareness of adjusting ideas and compromise.

### **Refs.**

Corden, R. 'The Role of the Teacher' in Thinking Voices (Hodder and Stoughton, 1992)

Johnson, J. 'Can we Raise the Standard of Speaking and Listening?' in The Challenge of English in the National ed. Protherough, R. and King, P. (Routledge, 1995)

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