

## Transcript - Vocabulary and oracy strategies for the KS3 classroom

### **OUP, Sam Evans**

Welcome you all to this Twitter Space on behalf of OUP Secondary. I'm very excited to have our special guests Gaurav and Helen with us this evening talking about vocabulary and oracy strategies for the key stage three classroom.

### **Helen Prince**

Thanks, Sam. This is very exciting. This is my first Twitter Space, so I don't know about you, Gaurav, but I've not done one of these before. And I did a little trial with Sam this morning and there are there are little buttons that make sounds. I don't know if you've come across that so this so this is the bell. This is the like dinging bell. (ding). How cool is that? So I just we chatted this morning and I said right, this is the bell that we're gonna use when there's a brilliant point that one of us makes well, mostly you Gaurav. I'm going to go like that (ding) because that's a perfect, that's a perfect moment to just have a little highlight of a point that one of us makes. Anyway, I'm probably waffling already. It's probably been a long day for all of us if we were in education, it's always been a long day, isn't it? By 5 past 6?

So I think Sam was kind of a little bit keen for us to introduce ourselves. So I'll just really briefly introduce me and then, Gaurav, maybe you could just say a few bits about you. I am Helen Prince and do quite a lot of work with OUP, which is an absolute joy, and have done some writing for them and vocabulary books for them. Vocabulary is my absolute passion. Oracy is a moral cause and I'm determined. That we make a difference to the lives of our children through really boosting what we can do through talk and how we value talk in the classroom. And I think we are on a really good trajectory with that. I think that life is moving forward in terms of oracy. So yeah, that's me being an education for 20 something years always in English. Teacher at heart and work cross phase now, which is a joy to see what happens between early years and year 13. It's really it's a really fascinating picture to see what that looks like as you travel through the years.

Gaurav, do you want to just say a few? Words about you.

### **Gaurav Dubay**

So I'm Gaurav Dubay. I'm a head of English in a Birmingham school, inner-city school, where 44% of the students are EAL students. Not in the early stages as such of learning English, but a lot of their English is transactional, conversational rather than academic. But as well as that role I'm the subject network lead for English across The King Edward Foundation in Birmingham. And I'm also an evidence lead in education. I'm a big believer that oracy is one of the untapped tools that we really need to start tapping into and can lead to so much improvement with our children in terms of their confidence in terms of their academic results. So I'm really looking forward to the conversation we're going to have this evening.

### **Helen Prince**

Brilliant. And we, we've had a chat before, haven't we? We had recorded a podcast for Teacher Hug Radio.

**Gaurav Dubay**

Yeah, it was Teacher Hug Radio. Yeah, that was fun.

**Helen Prince**

So it's nice to chat again, but one day we'll get to meet. What do you reckon?

**Gaurav Dubay**

Yes, I think that would be a really good idea.

**Helen Prince**

Do it. Let's do it. I'll meet you halfway.

So having spoken with the lovely people at OUP, I think the vibe really is for us to think about why vocab and oracy are important to us. So I'm just going to pose that question and think, you know, was it since day dot as a teacher that you really thought vocabulary and oracy were valuable? Or did it creep up on you?

**Gaurav Dubay**

I think I would say it definitely crept up on me. One of the things that's always been important in my teaching is that whole purpose of teaching for me, is that our children have a voice. Voice through writing, voice through speaking, and having that confidence to be able to really develop their own agency. But over time. I think I began to realize that there were certain things that needed to happen. You know, I firstly I became cognizant of the fact that the students that I taught. Again, in another inner city, Birmingham school, our students didn't have the tools to speak very well the vocabulary they had was very, very limited. And then obviously after that, as I did more digging and more research, I recognised that oracy was also something that we needed to invest in and thought for some of our students it could be that second chance that they need, or that they don't necessarily get a home. So for me it was very much a kind of, I guess, a moral vision. I guess that started to happen really.

**Helen Prince**

Yeah, that's really interesting. I think similarly, actually for me, because I think it crept up - the fact that it really runs deep – how important it is to value our children's voice. You know that concept that we want to empower them with a really passionate, vibrant voice. That sort of crept up on me I think. I wish in a way that had dawned on me a bit earlier, was that concept that vocabulary really is that viewfinder for everything that our children access.

**Gaurav Dubay**

Yeah, absolutely. I think one of the things that perhaps I didn't realise was during teacher training, there wasn't that much of a focus on vocabulary or the opportunities about how we actually give our children a voice. I think a lot of us are, you know, we became teachers, at least when I became a teacher, which

was a number of years ago, we wanted to do it because we really did want to change the world, you know.

**Helen Prince**

We wanted to change the world. (bell ding)

That's why we went in.

**Gaurav Dubay**

Ohh, I'd love the bell.

But yeah, you know, we wanted to change the world and we thought we could be the next kind of Robin Williams in, you know, *Dead Poets Society* or something like that, you know.

**Helen Prince**

We were standing on that desk, weren't we?

**Gaurav Dubay**

The kids were staring back at me, thinking what on Earth is he doing? But you know, after a while I, you know, we suddenly started to realise - actually those changes that we really want to make, it's actually in the classroom and it's not just about having these opinions and these feelings, it's actually digging deep and thinking about what can we actually do in the classroom. The little things that are going to make the biggest difference, and I do believe that vocabulary and oracy are the two big kind of levers I guess in making that difference.

**Helen Prince**

Yeah, definitely.

And I think maybe we're a bit more confident to do that now. Because previously, I mean, certainly personally speaking, there's probably been too much emphasis on writing and finding kids with a pen in their hand, writing in a book seemed to be the most valuable thing we could do when, you know, actually you've got to track back from that because unless they can say it, they'll never write it. So that focus on talk and that focus on vocab and how we can all really rehearse written outcomes before we get the pen in the hand. Maybe that's a braver step that we were a bit nervous of, you know. Maybe too many people were thinking about, you know, there's got to be evidence here. What's the accountability? What have they actually created and written and what? What's the visible outcome and maybe talk isn't visible enough. Maybe that was one of our barriers.

**Gaurav Dubay**

Yes, I would 100% agree with that. The idea that you couldn't evidence the talk that you wanted to, you know, in a book or anything like that. And so I suppose we sort of started to shy away from it. And I think the word confidence is really an important one because I think that's something that I developed over time because I began to realize actually, it doesn't matter what other people are saying. What matters is that my children are making the progress that they need to make. And sometimes you have to make some very brave decisions in spite of stakeholders and all those are the people around us and actually

say that this is the right thing for our students. We need to invest in this because if I invest in my student's/children's ability to speak and use vocabulary effectively through talk. Then I'm actually investing in their writing as well, and all those visible outcomes will show improvement as well.

**Helen Prince**

Yeah, 100%. And it's not about talking more, you know, it's about that really carefully constructed dialogue that's really purposeful and that's really vibrant. You know anybody who wants to come in and see what's going on in a classroom will just be, you know, bowled over by that real purposeful talk. It's not something we should shy away from, is it?

**Gaurav Dubay**

Absolutely not. And I think, you know, that idea of purposeful talk is a very interesting one because we're still in that. We're still in that unique place that, you know, where oracy teaching is really at its infancy and it's starting to improve, but it doesn't necessarily mean we want our students to have conversations for the sake of having conversations. Really seeing for the students and for those people who are who are looking what the purpose of that talk is and how it's actually going to enable them to move on.

**Helen Prince**

It's that lovely Mary Myatt phrase, isn't it, High-challenge Low threat - because you're challenging. It's really challenging this kind of dialogic talk that's really purposeful constructive, but it's really quite low threat because it's talk, you know, and it's transient. If you want to improve on it, you know, you've said it and it's gone and then you can improve on it. And I think that that's a really lovely way into thinking about, you know, getting better and not being frightened to be wrong with your ideas and having another go and another go and talk is a perfect place for that, isn't it?

**Gaurav Dubay**

And it's that developing of that ethos. You know, the classroom ethos that you want to create a climate of high-challenge and low-threat. Talk is really that rehearsal process where you are allowed to make those mistakes. You know what? I saw it beautifully recently in a maths class where the students were encouraged to use three terms in their talk and rather than the teacher expecting their students just to use these three words willy nilly, he gave them sentence stems and words were in those sentence stems and they were one of the first four words, if you like, in those sentence stems to get them to start talking and to use those words accurately as well.

And you know, and you can see that their engagements with the maths that they were doing improved. But also that accuracy when it came to actually doing that visible outcome, that independent work you could really see that they'd understood that the purpose behind the maths that they were doing as well, so yes, I absolutely think that's important.

**Helen Prince**

That's so good. That's so. I don't know if you are ever brave enough. Sometimes I'm brave enough to listen to Miriam Margolyes. She was on Radio 4 last night and I was listening to her talking about Dickens. Saying that Dickens used to do that exact thing. He used to rehearse what he was going to

write in the mirror. And he would, he would say, oh, I'm not sure which sentence I like best and he'd go to the mirror and sort of rehearse it and talk it out loud and perform because obviously he was a real performer of his works. And before he even wrote the line down, he'd go and perform it to the mirror and then choose, you know, which one he liked better from the performance of it. And then write that down. I thought that was very, very clever.

**Gaurav Dubay**

I think that's awesome actually. I'm a big fan of Miriam Margolyes anyway. I love listening to her. I love listening to her voice on my old audio books. She reads some audio books as well.

**Helen Prince**

He's just got this delightfully innocent voice, hasn't she? And then she slaps you with quite high octane.

**Gaurav Dubay**

Yes, yes, yeah. Although you know some of the things she says can be quite outrageous at times. But you know, we all have that outrageous kind of individual in our lives, don't we?

**Helen Prince**

But I love that that, you know, Dickens was maybe our very first advocate of oral rehearsal. But, you know, I'm not sure if he had mini whiteboards. I think you need a mini whiteboard when you're doing oral rehearsal. But maybe he didn't have that but rehearsing in the mirror. And that's sort of nice segue into the concept of drama, isn't it? And I know that we've spoken before about the real value of drama when it comes to sort of rehearsing, hot seating, or thinking about how we might speak like a specialist or all of those elements that really build a vibrant world of words, putting kids in role. And do you do that very much in your school? Is that something key stage three are pretty good at?

**Gaurav Dubay**

I think it's something that we are doing more and more so of right now. We actually have mapped out all oracy provision from year seven all the way up to year 13 and we've made it very clear what our kind of oracy goals are. And one of those is to do with drama.

So if I give you an example of year 9, for instance, in terms of key stage 3. One of the things that we're we were looking at in an English department in terms of Romeo and Juliet is to what extent can we see characters as autocratic, the Prince being one of the key characters, and Lord Capulet, perhaps as being a kind of like a benign autocrat in his own household. Obviously, those words and having the definition, for instance, the term autocrat and breaking down into the more etymology, all really really important. But the one thing that really enabled them to understand what that word meant was through the drama where they had to do a performance of act one, scene one. There were sixty lines. They were working in groups of 6. And they had to present the Prince when he comes in as an autocrat, or to what extent they could see him as an autocrat and. It was just really interesting to see interpretations that they brought with because drama really allowed them to explore a different kind of interpretation. So one particular group did a kind of like a pharaoh kind of leader from the ancient world. And I thought that was a really interesting way of doing it.

Another group, clearly mimicking Vladimir Putin, you know, so bringing in the world's current world of politics into their interpretation and that. And that they did that really, really well and so absolutely, I think that the drama and the possibilities it can provide children in terms of their thinking, I think. I think it is invaluable and it's certainly something that schools need to embrace more of because it's perhaps something we started to shy away from as a result of speaking and listening at GCSE level. Of course it isn't less important in many ways. And they seem more of a chore. It's really helped develop our students thinking beyond just the normal bog standard answers that you ordinarily would get. And it's enabled them to develop that engagement with words as well and really understand what those kind of terms mean.

### **Helen Prince**

Yeah, amazing. And it and it lives long, doesn't it? You know those are the moments that kids remember and they're retained. And I think if you put pupils in role or you ask them to take on a character or even you know to sort of think metacognitively about, you know, what's that process of drama doing. You know, what am I actually doing when I am in role like that. I just think that there's there's so much more that can be gained and it is much more easily retained in memory.

### **Gaurav Dubay**

Absolutely.

You know we speak a lot about, you know, memory and recall and and all those sorts of things. I think it for me it's very much part of, you know, the idea of storytelling, I guess.

### **Helen Prince**

Yeah, yeah, I think it's Willingham. Someone will jump in and tell me if it's wrong. But he said that memories, I love this 'memory is the residue of thought'. Residue of thought. So basically, if students don't think they can't learn.

### **Gaurav Dubay**

Yes, exactly. And I think that's what that what's what drama allows them to do because they're constantly thinking about the different decisions that they're going to make, how they're going to show a particular character in a specific way, but also balancing that with the needs of the audience and the people who will be watching them. Is this appropriate for our audience, are we being too extreme? You know, I said with that particular year nine group, one group, I'm not gonna say who it was, wanted to do a particular version of the characters, you know, to show almost this autocratic kind of behaviour of the Prince in Romeo and Juliet. They moved away from that political figure because they thought that they would offend certain students and they didn't want to offend. They just wanted to enrich their understanding. And that's empathy. Those wider skills that are not tested but are so lacking in the society in which we live and so you know for me this has such powerful potential and something that again, as I say, we need to tap into that much more.

### **Helen Prince**

100% yeah, that's so interesting, isn't it? And and that sort of links into that whole concept of, you know. Teaching for dialogue is, you know, real process that develops those virtues, isn't it of, you know, trust

and respect and, you know, creativity and hope and there's so much more, isn't it? There's so many layers. It's so nuanced. The reasons behind why this is a good idea, to be teaching for talk and for oracy and incorporating drama into that process, you know,

Plus, you know, I was. I was working with colleagues in key stage one and two yesterday and. I think we're, I hope, anyway, we're in a place now where it's really important that kids are enjoying what they do and they're having fun with what they do. And I think maybe about, you know, 5-10 years ago we were a bit more worried about that word 'Fun', but I'm a bit stroppier now. I don't care. I do think we need to be having fun with kids in the classroom with the activities that we ask them to do because otherwise there's a moment of disconnect and disengagement that, you know, we risk doing that. That doesn't need to happen if we're creating the activities where children can enjoy the activity as well as benefit from all of the myriad of ideas we've just spoken about, it just seems like a no brainer, a complete win.

### **Gaurav Dubay**

One of my sort of guiding proverbs if you like as it is a Jewish proverb which says, 'a good teacher makes learning a joy.' And that's something that has never left me. I think yes. Oracy is one of those ways in which you can make it fun, you can make it challenging as well because you're constantly using the discussion you know you've spoken about dialogic talk. And it was very natural really, to encourage students to think and develop ideas just by having their opinion valued and listened to creates that joy because I recognize that this is an environment where I'm going to be listened to and where I'm going to be taken seriously.

### **Helen Prince**

That moment where they might not feel successful when they've when they've written something because, you know, maybe some of the nuts and bolts of writing get in the way. But, you know, we all, we've all had many students who we say, 'If only you could write like this. You know your r speech is fabulous and they can feel that real success. You know, and then ultimately once they are able to say it, we can craft the writing to be more successful. It's getting that point of talk to be so well crafted before the writing will flourish.'

### **Gaurav Dubay**

And I think you know what? I spoke to you about the use of those oral sentence starters before. When those oral sentence starters also become your written sentence starters as well, you know you're embedding that. And it makes writing less of a demanding process because you're automatically encouraging your children to develop those skills. You know the vocabulary that they need to actually write a response. You know because of the rehearsal orally, they've seen this test criteria through the sentence stems that you've given them and then you can slowly remove that scaffolding. And so for me, I think it's such a powerful tool and something that I've seen across many different schools within my foundation as well. Really good crafted sentence stem can make a world of difference, and you know it's such a simple thing to do. It doesn't take hours to create, you know.

### **Helen Prince**

It does use that cognitive load because there's so much you're thinking about, isn't there, in that writing process, so that that oral rehearsal is so helpful.

Yeah, let's just sort of finish up, Gaurav, with something I read the other day from Tim Rasinski, who does loads on fluency. I don't know about you, but I seem to be talking about fluency a lot at the moment. I've just been in a lovely school in Plymouth. We were reading about what Rasinski says about about fluent speech and fluent reading being analogous. That sort of similar features being really comparable, and I thought that's really interesting actually, isn't it? Because we're doing a lot about echo reading and really bringing reading out into the performance space so that it's maybe, you know, much more about listening, and modelling and the prosody of bringing words to life when we're reading fluently and the thought that fluent speech and fluent reading are really one and the same. And I just wondered if you had any thoughts about that or how you approach fluency in terms of talk and and then that sort of crossover with fluent reading?

### **Gaurav Dubay**

I think for us in terms of fluency, which is something that we're working very hard at really at the moment. It begins with the teacher itself, it begins with the teachers sort of modelling what that fluent reading looks like. That passage, you know, that we're reading with the class. I'm gonna have to give a key stage four example because I suppose that's the one that's more fresh in my mind right now. But with year 10, for instance, we were looking at the Porter, the minor characters and thinking about the importance of those minor characters. So I modelled how I read the first part, knock knock knock. You know who's there by bells about.

When I put on my Scottish accent, because the majority of my relatives are from Glasgow. So I thought that would be a really good idea if I put on my Scottish accent. Just to add that sense of authenticity.

(bell ding)

Wow, yeah. The bell.

You know, so I made sure I did that and I thought about, and asked some questions. Why did I stress this particular word? What was the impact by stressing that word? Now let me read it again. How has the meaning changed? Just getting them to think about that, you know, fluency, the way that you project yourself can make a massive difference. Then we kind of tailored it down where I got them to read in groups of three, so each three had to read a particular section in a specific way. And you know, we shared it with the class before I got them to read it in pairs and eventually read it on their own. Just to show how the porters drunken comments actually are quite, quite dark and to think about, you know, the darkness behind that and how Shakespeare could possibly present that. And so for me, you know it, it comes from the teacher modelling and then goes down to the students. And you know, there are so many strategies, so many things that people talk about, like choral reading, the readers theatre. All these things that can be used for reading fluency but for me keeping it simple is the best, so modelling. Students working in pairs - eventually reading on their own. Before you encourage a few to read in front of the class as well. You know, so that they also have an audience. I think it's important that they understand that this is your audience because they tend to take it that a little bit more seriously as well.

Also really putting support mechanisms in place if there is something that there was an issue. When you actually need to go back, you might not go into the paired reading. You might model it a little bit longer



because you might have to dig deeper. It might be a decoding issue. They can't decode, which is why they can't read effectively. Or it could simply be, you know, you've got teenage child in front of you, he just doesn't want to read with any level of expression or anything like that. So we have to find different strategies for them to take it a little bit more seriously. To see them merit in reading fluently and with prosody and all that all those sorts. Of things as well.

### **Helen Prince**

100% and it's interesting, isn't it, that fluent speech is really well modelled, I think. I think we've been a bit nervous about reading to our students, reading to our pupils. I think there's been a moment where we found, oh, I don't know if this is proper work. At least you know some of the teacher voice I've done recently. I think that's been a bit of a concern that people think I'm not. That's not proper teaching. If I'm just reading to them for 20 minutes. Actually, that concept of modelling. You know, in everything we do, we model, don't we? We're modelling writing. We're modelling what it looks like to be a writer. We're modelling that Metacognitive process, and they need to hear great readers, and they need to hear what fluency sounds like and then that whole conversation, as you were saying about which are the words that really are the stand outs that, you know, why did we stress here why are we pausing? Because it, you know, it's teachable, isn't it? It's not just something that occurs, these are teachable moments and to provide those moments where they'd listen to fabulous readers and also to, you know, to really fantastic orators who are able to speak like a specialist to give you that subject knowledge and that sort of subject expertise through their talk, that's often, you know where fluency can be really brought to life, isn't it?

### **Gaurav Dubay**

And I think you make a really important point, you know about modelling because we can't take it for granted that our children have been exposed to good models of reading at home, and I keep saying and, you know, I believe school is a second chance for so many of our students. If we don't model, we're doing a disservice to so many of our, particularly our disadvantaged students. Who don't know how they ought to express the voice.

You know, I remember once somebody saying that the job of a teacher is to inspire future, inspirers. And you know which is, which is an interesting way of looking at it. Bit cheesy, but actually deep deep down. You know that if they're not, if they're not being shown something that will inspire them then they won't be inspired and they're unable to inspire others. You know, we want to create that kind of rolling cycle. So for me that modelling is important because it's the second chance. And so I think. I think you're right, the teachers have been very, very wary in the past of modelling reading in front of children. Very often because they've been told that teacher talk is, you know, teachers shouldn't be talking too much. You know, there should be 80% students, 20% of teacher talk, that kind of thing.

Fortunately, we're moving away from that kind of thinking now, and I think Ofsted's Subject to review in that regard that came out, I think in the summer for English, I think was really an important tool to give teachers the confidence to say, actually I can model that process. You know, this is even they, according to the research believe that's an important thing. And I think for many teachers, that's quite liberating as well, because for a long time that, you know, it's kind of been something that has not been. You know, well thought. And you know, you probably those people who did mould to their students like myself.

You know, when the visitor came in, you know you, you put on something different, then you'd carry on modelling for them anyway, you know. So that's just something to consider too .

### **Helen Prince**

Yeah, definitely. So go forth and model. That's our, that's our view- Go forth and model and and get in the drama, get in the fluency. And the models of great speakers. And reduce cognitive load with a bit of oral rehearsal. There we go. There's lots of lots of great talk there. Thank you.

### **Gaurav Dubay**

Well, thank you.

### **OUP, Sam Evans**

Helen and Guarav, just to say, we have had a question come in via DM asking if there are any resources that you recommend?

### **Gaurav Dubay**

I'm not doing a hard sell here. I just wanna make that very, very clear. These are two resources I value very much as far as reading is concerned, in terms of vocabulary, sorry. And and that's Helens book, *Boost Your vocabulary*. Which I think is a brilliant book. It's, you know, got there's three books and they have specific words. You know that that that can be high leverage in the classroom, for example, forshadowing and what it does, it breaks down. It has a number of activities. It breaks it down and it begins with sort of like direct instruction it looks at morphology and etymology, so it develops so that word consciousness. And they're very much challenging as well and and give students the opportunity to actually. I think the section is called 'Have your say' where they're actually talking about the words.

Yeah, so that they're moving from that novice and awareness of those words to an expert. And eventually it leads to that kind of independent writing as well. And I wrote. I wrote about it and actually a blog on it. I can't remember when but it was sometime like last year because I'm generally a big believer in this book.

As well the other resource that I think is really really use. So there is something again that's come out via Oxford. It's something that we're trialing with our students. It's called the Oxford Quest. Which is like a key stage 3 curriculum is this section called 'Boosting your vocabulary.' And so one of the lessons that we're doing right now we're focusing on is focusing on a newspaper report. And it looks at various nouns. Formal, informal, the type of words, what effect it has, what you would choose instead of the words that, you know, are there as well. And and it also has, I think in almost every sort of slide the key terms. So students are constantly engaging with the key terms and in order to reinforce the vocabulary. They're constantly having... There's a repetition of the keywords that are being used as well. So for me, I think those two resources are really, really good ones as well. Other stuff out there via Tim Shanahan in terms of morphology teaching, in terms of teaching vocabulary, which I think is really, really, really useful. One book that I read recently by Amy Gaunt and Alice Stott, 'Transforming teaching and learning through talk', which there's a whole section on vocabulary and using oracy to develop vocabulary. So much so the maths teacher I was talking about, right at the start of this talk - that that's where he got that particular idea of using oral sentence stems from, you know. And that's why I read the book

actually, coincidentally. It's a brilliant book and I would recommend it to absolutely everybody. It's a brilliant book.

**Helen Prince**

OK, I'm going to go and read that. I haven't. I've heard of it. Actually, I follow them on Twitter. But yeah, I need to go and get myself that one. And I'm gonna give a little shout out for a for an app called Chatter Stars that you might wanna play to boost vocabulary that certainly helps with looking at etymology and synonym and antonym and the whole raft of things that we need to build a powerful voice. So yeah, there's lots of resources, Guarav. Good question. Thanks, Sam.

**OUP, Sam Evans**

Thank you both so much to Helen and Guarav for a really interesting conversation this evening, and thank you to everyone who's joined us after a busy day in the classroom. Do follow us on @OUPSecondary to find out more about vocabulary boosting resources amongst other things, and we look forward to seeing you soon. Thank you.