



Why Oracy Starts in Nursery SCRIPT

“Welcome to Session 1 of our **Communication, Oracy and Vocabulary** series.

Across the next six weeks, we're going to focus on something that sits underneath almost every other area of Early Years learning:

communication.

Before children become readers, writers or independent learners, they are already learning through talk.

They are listening.

Watching.

Imitating.

Gesturing.

Testing out words.

Asking questions.

Explaining what they mean.

And gradually learning how language helps them make sense of the world.

That's why oracy doesn't begin when children are old enough to debate or present to a class.

It begins much earlier.

It begins in the everyday conversations children have with the adults and children around them.

So today we're starting with the foundation:

Why does oracy matter so much in Nursery, and what role does every adult play in developing it?”

Slide 2 – Safeguarding Spark

“Let's begin, as always, with our Safeguarding Spark.

The scenario is:

A child rarely speaks during nursery sessions but appears relaxed and chatty with their parent at collection. What is the most appropriate response?

Take a moment to consider the options.

Do we assume the child is simply shy?

Do we allow other children to speak for them?

Do we stop asking them questions so they don't feel pressured?

Or do we observe their communication across different situations, discuss what we're noticing with colleagues and parents where appropriate, and consider whether additional support may be needed?

The contrast in the child's communication matters.

They are able to communicate freely in one situation, but not another.

That doesn't immediately tell us why.

But it does tell us that we need to **notice carefully rather than make assumptions.”**

Slide 3 – Safeguarding Spark: Answer

“The most appropriate response is **A**.

We observe the child's communication across different situations, discuss concerns with colleagues and parents where appropriate, and consider whether additional support might be needed.

The important thing here is that we don't immediately label the child as shy.

There could be many reasons why a child communicates differently in Nursery.

They may still be developing confidence.

The environment may feel overwhelming.

They may communicate more comfortably with familiar adults.

There may be a speech, language or communication need.

Or there may be something else affecting how safe or confident they feel.

So our role is to observe.

When do they communicate?

Who with?

In which areas?

Do they use gesture or facial expression when they don't speak?

Do they communicate more confidently one-to-one than in a group?

Then we bring that information together with what families and colleagues know.

The key message is:

don't assume silence means there is nothing to say.

Notice the child carefully and create safe opportunities for communication.”

Slide 4 – Success Criteria

“By the end of today's session, there are three things we're aiming to understand.

Firstly, **what oracy actually is and why it begins in the Early Years.**

Secondly, the relationship between **talk, thinking and learning.**

And thirdly, the role every adult plays in creating opportunities for purposeful talk.

That final point is particularly important.

Oracy isn't the responsibility of one person.

It doesn't only happen during a planned communication activity.

It happens throughout the entire day.

At the door.

At snack time.



During play.

When a child is upset.

When we're getting coats on.

When two children are trying to solve a problem.

Those everyday moments are where communication develops.

So today's session isn't about adding another activity to the timetable.

It's about becoming more conscious of the opportunities that are already there.”

Slide 5 – Our Journey

“Let's look at where we're going across the next six weeks.

Today we're beginning with **Why Oracy Starts in Nursery**.

Next week, we'll focus on **Building Vocabulary Through Everyday Moments**.

Week 3 moves into **Storytelling, Talk and Conversation**.

Week 4 focuses specifically on **Developing Listening Skills**.

Week 5 looks at **Supporting Children with Speech and Language Needs**.

And finally, we'll bring everything together by exploring how to create a genuinely **Language-Rich Environment**.

There's a deliberate progression here.

We begin with the reason communication matters.

Then we'll look at the practical building blocks: vocabulary, conversation, listening and targeted support.

And throughout the series, the message will remain consistent:

Oracy is not one lesson. It is the culture of communication children experience every day.”

Slide 6 – Why This Matters

“Children are born ready to communicate.

Long before they learn to read or write, they're already learning how communication works.

They listen.

They watch faces.

They imitate.

They gesture.

They begin to speak.

Then gradually they explain, question and reason.

All of those early experiences lay foundations for future learning.

Think about what a child needs before they can write an idea independently.

They need to have ideas.

They need language to organise those ideas.

They need vocabulary to express them.

They need experience of hearing sentences and stories.

Those things begin through talk.

That's why oracy isn't an 'extra'.

It isn't something we add once literacy is secure.

It is part of what makes later literacy possible.

Every high-quality conversation strengthens those foundations.”

Slide 7 – Oracy Before Literacy

“When we hear the word ‘oracy’, we can sometimes imagine something quite formal.

Perhaps a child speaking in front of a group or giving a presentation.

But in Nursery, oracy looks very different.

It might be a child telling another child:

‘That's mine.’

A child explaining:

‘It fell because it was too tall.’

A child asking:

‘Where has the water gone?’

Or a child saying:

‘I'm sad because she wouldn't let me play.’

Those are all significant communication moments.

The child is not simply learning to pronounce words.

They're learning how language allows them to represent thoughts, feelings, experiences and relationships.

And the richer those early communication experiences are, the stronger the foundation we create for everything that comes later.

Reading and writing don't replace spoken language.

They grow from it.”

Slide 8 – Every Adult Is a Language Teacher

“One of the most important ideas in today's session is that **every adult is a language teacher.**

Children don't only learn language during carpet sessions.

They learn language when adults greet them warmly.

Eat alongside them.

Play with them.

Help them solve a problem.

Comfort them.

Share a story.

Wonder with them.

Imagine a child arriving and an adult simply saying:

‘Morning.’

That's one interaction.

Now compare that with:

‘Good morning. You've brought your red umbrella today — it looks like you were expecting rain.’

Suddenly there is language, connection and an invitation to respond.

The same is true at snack time.

Rather than simply serving food, we might talk about what is crunchy, smooth, sweet, full, empty, more or less.

Every interaction is potentially a communication opportunity.

That doesn't mean we need to talk constantly.

It means we use the moments that matter well.”

Slide 9 – Talk Supports Thinking

“Talk isn't simply a way of reporting what children already know.

It actually helps children **form and organise their thinking**.

Sometimes you'll hear a child working something out aloud:

‘No... that won't fit there... maybe this one... it's too big... I'll put it here.’

That's thinking happening through language.

When adults talk alongside children, we're helping them develop that process.

We can model:

‘I'm wondering why that happened.’

‘You've tried two different ways.’

‘You thought that one would fit, but you've changed your mind.’

We're giving children language for thinking.

And gradually, some of that spoken thinking becomes internal thinking.

So when we create rich opportunities for talk, we're not simply building confident speakers.

We're helping children develop the tools they need to reason, plan, remember and solve problems.”

Slide 10 – The Language Gap



“Children arrive in Nursery with very different experiences of language.

Some have experienced thousands of rich conversations.

They may have been surrounded by stories, songs, explanations and lots of adult talk.

Others may have had far fewer opportunities.

The important thing is not to make assumptions about families or to attach judgement to that difference.

Our role is to think about what we can provide **from this point forward**.

High-quality Early Years provision can help ensure every child experiences rich conversation, new vocabulary, storytelling, singing, shared thinking and meaningful play.

That makes communication a question of equity as well as curriculum.

We cannot control every language experience a child had before they arrived.

But we can make sure that once they're with us, their voice is noticed, developed and valued.

As the slide says:

Every child deserves to find their voice.”

Slide 11 – What Does Purposeful Talk Look Like?

“Purposeful talk doesn't necessarily mean children sitting in a circle taking turns to answer questions.

Often, the richest talk happens in play.

A child building.

A child pretending to cook.

Two children negotiating who will be the doctor.

A child telling you about something they noticed outside.

Purposeful talk has a reason behind it.

Children might be explaining.

Predicting.

Imagining.

Negotiating.

Remembering.

Questioning.

Or solving a problem.

The important thing for us is to distinguish between simply generating noise and actually creating **communication that develops thinking**.

Sometimes a two-minute conversation about a snail found outside will do far more for language than a ten-minute adult-led question-and-answer session.

Quality matters more than quantity.”

Slide 12 – Oracy in Practice

“Let's take the example from the slide.

Imagine children are building with blocks.

The practitioner might say:

‘I can see you're balancing those carefully.’

That is useful commentary.

It gives language to what the child is already doing.

Then perhaps:

‘What do you think will happen if you add another block?’

Now we're encouraging prediction.

Or:

‘I wonder why that one fell over.’

Now we're inviting reasoning.

And:

‘You've solved that problem differently this time.’

Now we're helping the child reflect on their own thinking.

Notice how natural those interactions are.

The adult isn't delivering a mini-lesson on balance.

They're joining the child's learning and using language to deepen it.

The goal isn't simply conversation for conversation's sake.

The goal is to help children **think through talk.**”

Slide 13 – Creating Space for Every Voice

“An important part of oracy is recognising that children communicate in different ways and at different rates.

Some children will immediately seek out adults and talk constantly.

Others may communicate more quietly.

Some may use gesture, facial expression or single words.

Some may need longer processing time.

Some may be learning more than one language.

If we only respond to the children who speak first and loudest, those confident communicators can receive an enormous share of adult interaction.

So we need to deliberately notice quieter children too.

That might mean joining them in play without immediately asking lots of questions.

Commenting on what they're doing.



Waiting.

Mirroring language.

Giving them time to respond.

A language-rich environment isn't one where everyone is forced to speak constantly.

It's one where **every child has meaningful opportunities to communicate in ways that feel safe and achievable.**

Slide 14 – Reflection

“Now I'd like you to reflect on your own practice.

Ask yourself:

Do I mainly create opportunities for children to answer my questions... or opportunities for them to express their own ideas?

That's quite an important distinction.

If most adult-child interaction is:

‘What colour is this?’

‘How many are there?’

‘What's that animal called?’

then children may become very good at responding to adult questions.

But do they get enough opportunities to initiate?

To tell us something?

To explain what they think?

To wonder aloud?

To disagree?

To change the direction of the conversation?

Children develop confidence when they understand that their voice genuinely matters.

So perhaps the question underneath all of this is:

When a child speaks to me, do they experience me as someone who genuinely wants to know what they think?”

Slide 15 – Small Reflection Activity

“For today's practical reflection, think about one ordinary part of your day.

It could be snack.

Arrival.

Outdoor play.

Lunch.



Construction.

Or getting ready to go home.

Now ask:

Where are the natural opportunities for conversation here?

And:

What do adults currently do in that moment?

Perhaps snack is quite functional.

We serve food, remind children to sit down and clear away.

Could we slow that moment down slightly and make space for genuine conversation?

Or perhaps at the coat pegs, adults automatically do things for children.

Could that become an opportunity for children to explain what they're trying to do or ask for the help they need?

We're not trying to turn routines into formal teaching.

We're simply noticing where purposeful language can live naturally.

Choose one routine and identify **one small opportunity for richer talk.**"

Slide 16 – Spark Forward

"This week's Spark Forward is intentionally simple:

Don't aim to ask more questions. Aim to have more conversations.

That's quite an important distinction.

Questions can be useful, but if we ask too many, children can begin to feel as though they're being tested.

Instead:

Be curious.

Listen carefully.

Wonder together.

Follow the child's comment.

Share an observation.

Leave a pause.

Allow the conversation to develop.

Because oracy isn't taught in one lesson.

It is built conversation by conversation, every single day.

So this week, choose one moment where you might normally ask several questions and instead try to have a genuine back-and-forth conversation.

Then notice what changes."



Slide 17 – Research Links

“Today's session is linked to several important sources.

The presentation highlights the Education Endowment Foundation's work on **Communication and Language Approaches** and **Preparing for Literacy**, alongside the EYFS Statutory Framework and Voice 21's work around oracy.

Together, these sources reinforce the importance of spoken language as a foundation for later learning.

There's also a quote on the slide:

‘Reading and writing float on a sea of talk.’

And that captures today's message very neatly.

Before children can communicate increasingly complex ideas through print, they need rich experience of ideas being communicated through spoken language.

They need stories.

Conversation.

Vocabulary.

Listening.

Explanation.

And opportunities for their own thoughts to be heard.

That is the foundation we're building.”

Slide 18 – Closing Reflection

“I'd like to finish with one final thought.

Children do not become confident communicators by chance.

They become confident because adults repeatedly create environments where their voice is valued.

Every conversation tells a child something.

It might say:

‘You belong.’

‘I'm listening.’

‘Your ideas matter.’

And those messages are about much more than communication.

They're about identity.

Confidence.

Relationships.

And a child's sense of themselves as a learner.

Today's conversations become tomorrow's readers, writers, thinkers and learners.

So as you move through the week, don't put pressure on yourself to create lots of new activities.



Instead, notice the conversations already happening.

Who gets most of them?

Who needs more?

Where could you slow down?

Where could you listen a little longer?

And where could one ordinary interaction become something richer?

Because oracy starts in Nursery not because we formally teach children how to speak.

It starts because, every day, adults show children that **their words, ideas and voices are worth hearing.**”