

# Rationale

## If a child can't SAY it, a child can't WRITE it.

A child can only write (unsupported) using the language stored in his or her own brain. Once a child is able to speak confidently, they are able to verbalise every word and language structure they know, but are obviously unable to verbalise words and structures that they do not know. In this sense, the word 'know' means that the child has stored information in the long term memory and is able to retrieve it and understands how to use it.

### What impact might this have on children's writing?

Writing is formed through thought, and thinking is interpreted through an 'inner voice' in our brains. This voice talks to us and the voice we hear is most usually our own voice. It can only use language that we know and own. A child, therefore, can only speak or write within the range of vocabulary and language structures that they have already learned within the home, community or school.

### Why do many children appear to be entering our education system less articulate than in the past?

Those people who are raised in homes steeped in articulate dialogue develop a rich and varied speech code that they can adapt for different purposes and situations, including communication with:

- those younger or older than self
- those less likely to understand sophisticated language
- those who are vibrant and articulate debaters.

**Sithee! If kid c'nt say't kid c'nt reet't!  
Us reets as us spiks an' us spiks as us  
eers ... Wot cums owt o't pen is wot'd  
cum owt o't mowt. Us c'nst ownli reet  
wi't language in us 'eard ...**

When required by circumstance, most adults can:

- make speech more formal
- use community speech (whether it involves variations from Standard English or the use of correct grammatical forms with a localised pronunciation)
- use Standard English
- emulate the speech of other communities with differing degrees of success (including received pronunciation if that is not their norm)
- change pitch, emphasis, volume and emotion at will.

Today, however, many children are growing up without developing this full range of oratory skills. Many children spend considerable amounts of their home life in solitary occupations, often involving technology. They live in front of televisions, laptops, computer games and other electronic devices that educate and/or entertain them. Today's children are often highly skilled in managing technology (which is a great asset for life in the twenty-first century) and in interpreting and thinking in its associated language. However, they are often not spending sufficient time engaged in articulate and lively oral discussion and debate. This behaviour leads to forms of language deprivation, not necessarily associated with social or economic deprivation.

“The perception of primary schools visited by the Review is that more children are entering primary schools with impoverished language and poor social development ...

Research in the USA (by Risley and Hart) has shown that by the age of 5 some children from impoverished language backgrounds have heard 32 million fewer words than the average ‘middle-class’ child ...

Unbeknownst to them or their families, children who grow up in environments with few or no literary experiences are already playing catch up when they enter kindergarten and the primary grades ...

(‘Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum: Final Report’, Sir Jim Rose, CBE, 2009)



Language deprivation does not, however, necessarily mean that the individual does not have enough language for their daily purposes (they frequently have a diverse range of language within a specific field of need) but rather that they do not have the flexible and sophisticated language models required for high level achievement in writing, as measured through national tests.

A further complication in this aspect of children’s development today is that many of their parents may also suffer from similar forms of language deprivation, having grown up in similar circumstances. Thus, even if they wish to redress the situation, parents may not always be confident or competent to do so.

**Why is the conscious promotion of TALK so important for children today?**

Many conscious human operations are informed, enjoyed, endured and evaluated through language. Conscious operations are experienced or re-experienced through thought, are often communicated through speech and may be recorded in writing. These processes are all language driven and the language they are described or expressed through is the language of the individual experiencing them, unless the person is quoting from another source. In this case, the previously unknown words and structures may not be retained in the long term memory.

Furthermore, some language that has been retained is perceived by many children to ‘belong’ to someone else and is not to be used freely for their own purposes. An example of this is the many familiar phrases learned through repetition of traditional tales and nursery rhymes, which are rarely used by anyone or in any context other than in a retelling of that tale or rhyme.

For example:

**Along came a spider ...**

The phrase ‘Along came ...’ could be a very effective sentence opener in children’s writing, but is rarely used except to recite *Little Miss Muffett*.

A child exposed to a range of articulate speech from birth, and involved in active discussion and debate from their earliest days, will usually develop the gift of articulate speech. The range and variety of language an individual has is most directly influenced by the range he or she is exposed to during the first, formative years. Research tells us that the first three years of a child’s life are crucial in the development of language. The next two years are also highly significant and thus speech is heavily influenced before the world of formal education has had an opportunity to impact upon it.

**Why must the promotion of TALK be built into every school’s curriculum and every teacher’s practice?**

Talk is crucial within education (for purposes of clarification, use of sign language for the deaf is classified as talk in this publication) being the audible (or visual) form of the main medium through which learning takes place and is evidenced.

The following are the three main functions of talk within a school:

**1 To participate in the process of learning and to actively learn**

- Talk is deployed within classrooms as a medium for pupils to explore, share, communicate and extend their understanding.
- Pupils must be able to access and understand articulate and fluent speech in order to access teachers' extended talk, which is often the primary method used to transmit much of the learning expected to take place.
- Pupils must access fluent and often technical language in text. Reading is conversion of another's written language into meaning. Meaning is understood through language interpreted by the 'voice' heard in the head. Meaning can only be understood within the range of language a pupil already knows or is able to look up and define.

**2 To convey learning**

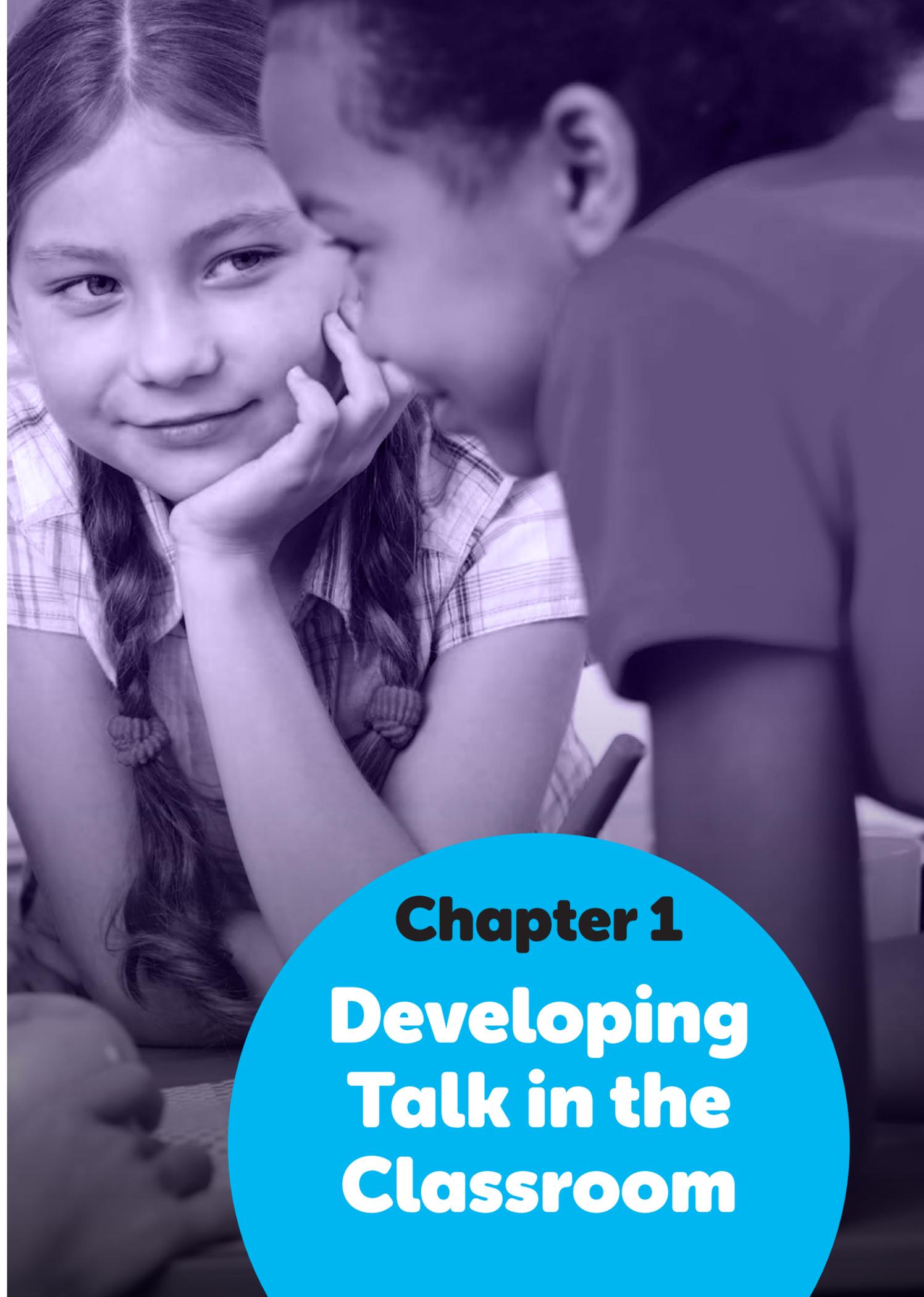
- All knowledge, skills and understanding can be explained, described or defined through language. In tests and examinations this is most usually done through writing, which, as has already been stated, is directly associated with talk through the process of thought.
- If a pupil can articulate that which they have learned in flexible ways, and is able to respond to further questioning or debate, this is one of the most powerful forms of evidence of knowledge and understanding.

**3 To learn to talk**

- Basic communication is almost always acquired in the home. However, today, many Early Years' practitioners are finding that they are being required to increase the time spent on the enhancement and enrichment of children's talk and language as many children are entering our education system with forms of language deprivation.
- Within the existing English Curriculum there is already specific requirement for activities and experiences associated directly with talk, including drama and role play, debate, oral performance of poems and readings and the making of oral contributions to all lessons when required. Thus the continuing development of speech and communications skills is a shared responsibility for all adults in a school.
- The worlds of education makes a major contribution to the continuing maturation and development of the individual's language bank through exposure to increasingly sophisticated language and structures.

**These three main purposes of talk may best be summarised as:**

1. **TALKING TO LEARN**
2. **TALKING ABOUT LEARNING**
3. **LEARNING TO TALK**



**Chapter 1**  
**Developing Talk in the Classroom**