

Talk Routines Oracy Initiative 2024 - 2025



Overview

From September 2024 to September 2025, Torriano Primary School led a borough-wide initiative focused on strengthening communication and language teaching in the Early Years. In collaboration with seven Camden schools, the project aimed to embed structured talk routines across EYFS and into Year 1, with a dual focus on pedagogy and professional development. The initiative responded to national concerns about language gaps in the Early Years, particularly among disadvantaged pupils. Drawing on Torriano's expertise as a Voice 21 Centre of Excellence and Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Research School, the programme built on the Camden Kids Talk and ShREC approaches to create sustainable, evidence-informed change in the participating Early Years settings.

Why this and why now?

Language gaps in the Early Years are a persistent barrier to equity. Research shows that disadvantaged pupils are, on average, 4.6 months behind their peers by the end of Reception, (EEF). Early oracy is a high-impact strategy for narrowing this gap, particularly when embedded in daily routines and supported by high-quality professional development, (EEF). Torriano's leadership in oracy pedagogy positioned it to lead this next phase of work, uniting schools around a shared priority, developing language-rich environments and equipping EYFS leaders to drive change.

Goals and Intentions

The initiative set out to:

- Embed dialogic talk and structured routines across EYFS classrooms.
- Narrow the vocabulary gap, especially for disadvantaged pupils and those with EAL or additional needs.
- Build staff capacity to lead and sustain evidence-informed practice.
- Equip EYFS leads to design and deliver high-quality professional development within their own settings.

93% attendance and the strong survey feedback reflected high engagement and a clear appetite for development across the participating schools.



What we did

The programme combined theory, practice, and collaboration through five structured sessions.



Knowledge-building: Leaders explored the evidence base for oracy, observed practice in Torriano's EYFS classrooms, and examined how talk routines were embedded into daily provision.



Embedding practice: Leaders adapted medium-term planning, created tailored implementation plans, and observed effective strategies in action.



Professional development: The final session focused on equipping leaders to cascade learning through school improvement planning and team training.

The initiative included a group visit to Netley Primary School for cross-school observation, the formation of peer working groups for feedback, and continued collaboration into the autumn term to support implementation. Resources developed included model implementation plans, vocabulary scaffolds, and tools aligned with EEF guidance to support effective professional development.

Impact on Practice

Pedagogical shifts: All participating schools adapted their medium-term plans to include progressive talk routines. Teachers implemented strategies such as talk partners, hoop groups, and talk guidelines, leading to improved learning behaviours and collaborative engagement

Leadership development: Leaders developed mental models for oracy pedagogy, enabling them to articulate the rationale and lead implementation confidently.

Professional capacity: EYFS leads gained the tools and confidence to deliver professional development, supported by structured observation and reflection. 80% of participants reported increased confidence in leading professional development.

Collaborative culture: Peer visits and working groups fostered shared expertise and collective responsibility for addressing the language gap.

Surveys showed that 80% of leaders felt more informed and confident in using professional development approaches with their teams.



Key takeaways for effective implementation

Invest in clarity and planning for implementation: Effective change in Early Years settings requires a clear, well-sequenced plan. The EEF's Guide to Effective Professional Development recommends using structured implementation cycles that include goal-setting, adaptation, and evaluation to embed sustainable practice.

Position EYFS leaders as agents of change: Empowering Early Years leaders to lead professional development within their settings builds capacity and ensures that change is contextually relevant.

Use exemplars and high-quality resources to support staff: Providing model plans, video exemplars, and planning templates helps unify practice and reduce cognitive load for staff.

Foster collaboration across settings: Peer observation, shared planning, and joint evaluation strengthen professional learning and foster collective responsibility.

Embed talk routines into curriculum planning: Integrating structured talk into daily routines and medium-term planning ensures consistency and progression. The Voice 21 Oracy Framework supports this by breaking down oracy into physical, linguistic, cognitive, and social-emotional strands, which can be explicitly taught and modelled.

Explicit Talk Routine Strategies

Talk Partners

Pupils were paired to practise structured turn-taking and collaborative dialogue. This routine supported active listening and reciprocal communication.

Talk Guidelines

Classrooms established shared expectations for speaking and listening, helping children understand how to participate respectfully and effectively in conversations.

Hoop Groups

Small group discussions using physical hoops to define space and roles, encouraging focused talk and inclusive participation.

Explicit Teaching of Participatory Behaviours

Teachers modelled and taught behaviours such as turn-taking, listening, and responding, making these part of daily routines.

Vocabulary Scaffolding

Strategies included modelling vocabulary, using sentence stems, and designing activities that promote language development.

Collaborative Talk Opportunities

Structured opportunities were created for children to engage in group discussions, problem-solving, and storytelling.