

# A Critical Examination of Oracy in the Graphics Classroom: An Action Research Study

Programme:  
Bachelor of Science (Honours)  
in Education ( Design, Graphics  
and Construction)

Student Name: Cian Howley - Supervisor: Dr Pauline Logue

## Introduction & Aim

Oracy, in this study, is understood as the ability to listen carefully and speak precisely, using appropriate language, and expressing the appropriate body language. The author of this study on the promotion of oracy skills in the Graphics classroom is a pre-service teacher in technical education. The experience of school placement heightened for the author the importance of oracy skills development in technical education. School placement provided the opportunity to observe and explore teaching excellence in the context of oracy-related teaching and learning activities, with an emphasis on voice projection, inflection, diction and animation. Furthermore, the author became aware of the importance of enhancing learner-confidence in public speaking and debating in the classroom. Selected teaching strategies employed by the author while on placement, in the form of an action research study, included poster presentation, peer teaching activities and 'circle of learning discussions'. The aim of this dissertation is to critically examine the effective promotion of oracy skills, in the Graphics classroom, using an action research methodology.

## Literature Analysis

Advanced library research, including the use of data bases and varied Boolean searches, enabled the identification of relevant sources. Cosgrove (2023) categorizes oracy as an important subset of literacy. Glazzard and Stokoe (2017) state, that no matter what type of classroom a child is in, they are expected to interact with others, take turns in conversations and sustain active listening while responding to what they have heard with relevant comments, questions or actions. According to Zwiers (2019), students are expected to use talk to organize, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events. School Inspection reports highlight the importance of Classroom Based Assessments, in the promotion of such skills (Department of Education, 2023).

## Methodology, Methods & Ethics

**Methodology:** The research methodology employed in this study was qualitative action research which is closely aligned with practitioner research. According to Baldwin (2018), practitioner research is carried out by practitioners "for the purpose of advancing their own practice". Action research is where researchers conduct research on their professional practice. It generally entails a cyclical process of organising, carrying out, observing, and reflecting, which produces incremental discoveries and understandings. According to Willis (2014), action research is "often done by practicing ... professionals rather than research professionals, and the reasons for doing it are typically very practical rather than theoretical".

**Methods:** The data gathering methods included journaling (critical reflections), teacher observations and an interview with a professional teacher.

**Ethics:** Consent was obtained from the school placement host school and from Atlantic Technological University Galway. Anonymity was guaranteed. No research was conducted on minors. GDPR requirements were followed, including secure storage of data.

**Contact**  
Cian Howley  
Atlantic Technology University  
Email: [G00389609@atu.ie](mailto:G00389609@atu.ie)  
Website: [Cianhowley.weebly.com](http://Cianhowley.weebly.com)

### Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Pauline Logue for her great guidance and help throughout this study. Her generous donation of time and life experiences has been extremely beneficial to my work. I would also like to thank Susan Rogers for her guidance and help with the design of my poster. Her design expertise inspired my poster in a significant way.

## Data Analysis Methodology

The data analysis methodology was adapted from the Braun & Clarke six-step method of thematic analysis (see figure 1). The model used was the Atlantic Technological University model which involves four stages (see figure 2). These stages include, generating codes and categories from the data sets, generating cluster themes from the codes and categories, generating dominant themes, and the data analysis write-up. An Excel worksheet was the instrument used to collate the codes and generate the dominant themes (see figure 3). Two dominant themes were identified.

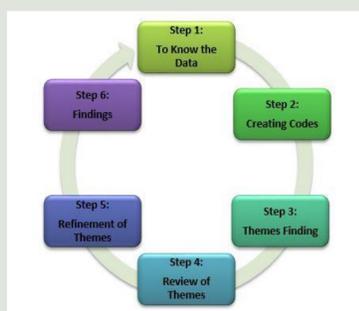


Figure 1. Braun & Clarke Six Step Model. (European Proceedings , 2019).

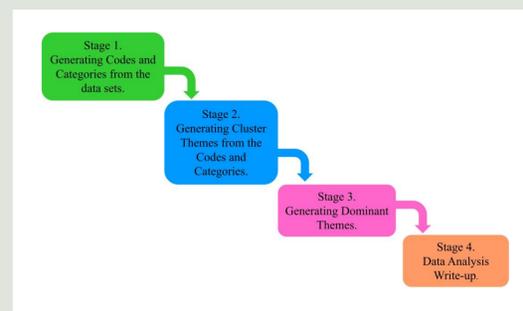


Figure 2. Four Stage Atlantic Technological University Model. (Original image).

A	B
	CATEGORIES OR CODES
ARC#1	Oracy training is a valuable skill set that can benefit students both in school and outside of school. (ARC#1,P1)
	By developing a student's oracy skills, you can help students become effective communicators. (ARC#1,P1)
	I had made the new material understandable to all students (ARC#1,P2)
	the video had helped the students identify oracy skills in everyday life (ARC#1,P2)
	displayed how to present a poster appropriately following all process and procedures. (ARC#1,P2)
	One of the key learnings I had taken from this conversation, is when my co-operating teacher told me that the only oracy training he got, was in first year of college, where they spent a couple of hours developing their oracy skills
	After that, there was no emphasis put on developing their oracy skills or improving their oracy skills as it was seen common skill. (ARC#1,P2)
	I discovered that a lot of students believed that their oracy skills had improved a lot (ARC#1,P2)
	that they really enjoyed the working on their projects. (ARC#1,P2)
	Some students were very honest and revealed that they had been nervous about speaking in public. However, after receiving oracy training, their confidence grew, making them feel more comfortable speaking in public. (ARC#1,P2)
	One thing I have realized, in dialogue with my co-operating teacher is, there can be limited training and emphasis put on oracy in initially teacher education in some colleges. (ARC#1,P2)
	sufficient training on oracy, they are reluctant to carry out activities where students will be presenting or debating in front of the class. (ARC#1,P2)
	teachers won't know what to grade. (ARC#1,P2)
	oracy skills and abilities' (ARC#1,P2)
	oracy skills, will be neglected. (ARC#1,P2)

Figure 3. Excel Worksheet: generating codes from the data sets, using colour coding. (Original image).

## Student Posters



Teaching strategies relating to my research topic have included Poster Presentations. (Original image with permission from the host school).

## Theme 1 - Promoting Oracy Training: Research Findings & Discussion

There can be limited training and emphasis put on oracy in initially teacher education in some colleges (Reflection 1, page 2). A senior teacher, who contributed to this study, commented about the lack of oracy training in third level (Interview 1, page 2). Due to the lack of oracy training some teachers have received, they are reluctant to carry out active teaching methodologies in the classroom, as they do not know what to grade or how to appropriately carry out these activities (Reflection 2, page 2). The findings show that the oracy training the students had received before carrying out an activity, was noticed in their actions (Observation 1, page 2). An observer mentioned that students used appropriate body language, voice projection, actively listened to their peers and teachers, used appropriate terminology and pronounced difficult words with ease, once properly trained (Observation 1, page 2). This mirrors research by Goossen (2021).

## Theme 2 - Oracy & Wellbeing: Research Findings & Discussion

When a student is sharing their emotions and feelings they are also practicing and developing their oracy skills (Reflection 3, page 2). To share their feelings in a meaningful way they must be able to use the correct language and tone, otherwise it may be difficult for a person to understand how a person is feeling (Reflection 3, page 2). The 'circle of learning discussion' which was an original strategy in this study, highlighted the importance of wellbeing and how it has been integrated within post primary schools in Ireland (Reflection 3, page 2). One of the most striking pieces of information that was discovered, was generated from the teacher that observed this teaching strategy. The observer mentioned that when they were in college they were instructed not to openly inquire about a student's feelings or opinions on a particular subject or query (Reflection 3, page 2). They discussed the reasoning behind this, was a conception that students could become a target of bullying if they openly expressed their emotions (Reflection 3, page 2). From this conversation, I quickly realized that a lot of senior teachers have not been trained on student wellbeing. As a result, they are hesitant to provide activities that require students to express their emotions and feelings in a mature manner, within a respectful environment. This could be linked to insufficient oracy training the teacher received in third level. This contrasted with research by Jenlink (2022).

## Conclusions & Recommendations

The study confirms the effectiveness of selected oracy training strategies conducted by the author while on school placement. It also concludes that there was a lack of oracy training in initial teacher education, for some of the teachers involved in this study, hence their reluctance to carry out active teaching methodologies related to oracy skills development in the classroom. Specifically, the planning, management and assessment aspects of these activities proved challenging. Furthermore, observers and one senior teacher interviewee indicated that they had not been trained in relation to oracy and student wellbeing. This study recommends further research into initial teacher provision of oracy training and a deeper investigation of the relationship between oracy and wellbeing at post primary level.

### References

- Baldwin, L. (2018). *Research Concepts for the Practitioner of Education Leadership*. Netherlands: Brill
- European Proceedings, (2019). Six-Step Model of Thematic Analysis. Image AT Figure 6: Six-Phrase Framework of Thematic Analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006), Akemi In Communicate To Win Big ([europeanproceedings.com](http://europeanproceedings.com))
- Glazzard, J. & Stokoe, J. (2017). *Teaching Systematic Synthetic Phonics and Early English: Vol. Second edition*. St Albans, Herts: Critical Publishing.

- Goossen, J. (2021). *Public Speaking Laws of Success: For Everyone and Every Occasion*. New York: Morgan James Publishing
- Jenlink, P. (2022). *STEM teacher Preparation and Practice for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Research-based Insights*. North Carolina: Information Age Publishing
- Willis, J. W. (2014). *Action Research: Models, Methods, and Examples*. North Carolina: Information Age Publishing
- Zwiers, J. (2019). *Next Steps with Academic Conversations: New Ideas for Improving Learning Through Classroom Talk*. Routledge. Oxfordshire United Kingdom: Routledge.