



**MODULE CODE: ECEW7014**

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**ASSIGNMENT TITLE:** A critical account and evaluation of either a macro-level system change (i.e. country level) or micro-level system change (i.e. local level).

|              |                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                        |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| RESEARCH     | For this assessment, you can use Generative AI to support you in research, including searching for bibliography, using tools to summarise, compare and interrogate materials.                   | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/><br>No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| STRUCTURE    | For this assessment, you can use Generative AI to support you in structuring your submission, including creating a draft argument structure, identifying parts and headings, etc.               | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/><br>No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| PROOFREADING | For this assessment, you can use Generative AI to check your own text/creation for grammatical and syntactical mistakes, including rephrasing of your own work within specific standards.       | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/><br>No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| WRITING      | For this assessment, you can use Generative AI to create text for submission.                                                                                                                   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/><br>No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| CREATIVE     | For this assessment, you can use Generative AI to create creative materials, such as images.                                                                                                    | Yes <input type="checkbox"/><br>No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| PROGRAMING   | For this assessment, you can use Generative AI to create and check code.                                                                                                                        | Yes <input type="checkbox"/><br>No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| NONE         | For this assessment, you are not allowed to use <b>any</b> type of Generative AI support. This includes research support, structure support, writing/proofreading support and creative support. | Yes <input type="checkbox"/><br>No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

## Use of Generative AI in Assessment

### AI Acknowledgement

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work.

I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

I acknowledge the use of Microsoft Co Pilot on 27.02.26 to support me in structuring my assignment. I used the prompt(s):

1. Help me create a draft structure for my assignment.

I acknowledge the use of Microsoft Co Pilot on 24.03.26 to support me in structuring to search for bibliography I used the prompt(s):

1. Summarise the key points of this text for me.

I acknowledge the use of Microsoft Co Pilot on 21.04.26 to support me in checking for grammatical mistakes. I used the prompt(s):

1. Please check my work for any grammatical mistakes.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work.

I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

## Context for Change

The focus of the assignment is a micro-level change, centred on the whole-school approach to developing oracy through a framework inspired by Voice 21. The context for this change is a one-form entry primary school in Wales with pupils aged 3-11.

Prior to this change, whilst there was some evidence of effective oracy happening in classes, there was a need for a clearer progression model across the school. There was a lack of consistency amongst teaching staff and pupils' confidence to communicate effectively. Structured opportunities for oracy were limited, with varied approaches being used by practitioners. Without a shared vision and consistent approaches, there was a risk that pupils' opportunities for development could be limited.

It became recognised that as a staff team, we could strengthen pupils' oracy and communication skills to help pupils transfer these skills across contexts. Rather than viewing speaking and listening as discrete elements of the curriculum, the initiative sought to position oracy as a fundamental part of teaching and learning across all areas of learning. This reflects a growing recognition within educational research that oracy underpins both communication development and academic progress (Alexander, 2020) and is in line with Curriculum for Wales (CFW) which places a strong emphasis on developing pupils' communication and critical thinking skills. This is further supported by Mercer (2014) who recognise the need to move beyond incidental classroom talk and emphasise the importance of explicit teaching and embedding of oracy skills. However, Mercer (2014) has been criticised for predominately focusing on classroom level interactions. As Fullan (2007) highlights, sustainable change relies not only on shared vision, but on the capacity of practitioners to enact change within the realities of their setting. The framework was not designed to increase workload, but to reduce it, something which the system leaders were cautious of in an already busy and demanding environment.

The oracy framework, informed by Voice 21, incorporated structured 'talk tactics' and sentence stems designed to extend pupils' vocabulary and strengthen communication skills. These included strategies such as building on others' ideas, expressing opinions and active listening behaviours, which progressively developed from Reception to Year 6.

The importance of structured talk in promoting learning is widely recognised throughout research. Alexander (2020) emphasises the role of communication in supporting reasoning and understanding, while Mercer and Dawes (2014) argue that pupils benefit from explicit teaching of the skills required for effective communication. Such perspectives suggest that oracy should be structured and embedded within teaching practice. Furthermore, this approach aligns with the expectations of the

Curriculum for Wales, which places a strong emphasis on the development of communication, collaboration and critical thinking as key competencies for learners.

### Change Drivers

The need for the change arose from a combination of internal and external drivers, including policy and research drivers. Internally, observations and oracy assessments indicated that opportunities for purposeful talk were inconsistent and did not occur with sufficient frequency to enable pupils to confidently develop their skill set. A recent Estyn inspection from within this context identified an area of improvement, for pupils to gain confidence sharing ideas and to communicate their ideas articulately, further reinforcing the need for a structured framework. Externally, educational policies reflect a growing focus on oracy and highlight the significant impact of oracy on disadvantaged learners (EEF, 2021), further supporting the need for a structured change due to the increasing percentage of ALN pupils in this setting.

While the need for a whole-school approach had been identified, achieving this required more than a shared goal. It required collective ownership amongst all staff (Fullan, 2007).

The development of a whole-school approach therefore reflected a system-led response, in which staff understanding and visions were aligned. This included developing a shared language for oracy, creating opportunities for collaborative professional learning, and ensuring that members of senior leadership supported the change. As a result, oracy was repositioned from an individual classroom strategy to a system-wide priority.

At a school level, the requirement for change derived from ongoing professional reflection and evaluation of classroom practice. Observational evidence and professional conversations indicated that opportunities for purposeful pupil talk were inconsistent, both in frequency and quality. While some teachers demonstrated effective use of questioning and discussion, these approaches were not embedded systematically, resulting in variability in pupils' ability to express their ideas. This aligns with Mercer and Littleton (2007), who suggest that without explicit structures and shared understanding, classroom talk is unlikely to consistently support cognitive development. Therefore, the absence of a clear approach to oracy limited its potential to function as a tool for learning across the school.

In addition, concerns around pupil confidence and participation further contributed to the need for change. Informal assessments and classroom interaction suggested that some pupils were reluctant to contribute verbally, potentially limiting their access to learning. This is particularly significant given the established relationship between language development and educational attainment. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2021) highlights that oracy-based language interventions can have

a substantial positive impact on pupil outcomes, reinforcing the importance of planned opportunities for talk.

Alongside these internal drivers, external policy developments within Wales have played a significant role in shaping the direction of change. Curriculum for Wales (2022) places a strong emphasis on the development of communication, as a key skill for learners. Oracy is implicitly embedded within several Areas of Learning and Experience, reflecting a broader shift towards skills-based education.

Furthermore, research highlights the importance of structured talk. Alexander (2020) argues that high-quality classroom conversation is central to developing reasoning and understanding, while Mercer and Dawes (2014) emphasise the role of explicitly teaching pupils how to use talk effectively. These perspectives suggest that oracy should be a pedagogical priority that requires consistency. Therefore, the move towards a whole-school approach can be understood not only as a response to local need, but as part of a broader alignment with evidence-informed practice.

From an international perspective, countries such as Singapore adopt structured approaches to classroom talk that are embedded within a broader culture of pedagogical consistency, a principle which is supported by strong alignment between policy and classroom practice (OECD, 2010). However, as Harris (2012) argues, successful system change is dependent on context and needs to be adapted accordingly, highlighting the importance of considering local context when interpreting wider evidence.

Combined together, these internal and external drivers highlight the need to adopt a systems-led approach to oracy development to achieve a shared understanding across the school.

### System Leaders

System leaders can be defined as individuals who influence practice beyond their own classroom, or setting (Hopkins and Higham, 2007). There is often a definitional overlap between system leaders and system leadership amongst literature, therefore literature surrounding these terms often varies in quality. Arguably, the system leadership approach used in Wales is similar to that used in Australia as they provide robust support (Harris, 2012). Donaldson promoted some of these ideas in CFW by giving teachers more autonomy (Donaldson, 2012). Originally, it was thought that system leaders needed to be school leadership and management, however, recent research suggests that it is the attitude and ambition of the practitioner which makes the biggest difference to being a system leader (Russell and Cranston, 2012). Building upon this, Boylan (2013) suggests that the notion of system leadership can derive from below senior leaders. Although this literature was written prior to CFW and is based on an English curriculum, the idea that practitioners can work together to share practice is an idea that is embedded across CFW. However, this is contested by Dunlop (2020), who argues that initiatives often fail at the

implementation stage due to a disconnect between system-level expectations and school-level realities, at such points intended policy is often reshaped by contextual realities.

The implementation of a whole-school approach to oracy highlights the significance of system leadership operating across multiple levels within the school. System leadership in this context extends beyond traditional hierarchical roles and includes practitioners who influence, and shape organisational change. As Harris (2013) argues, leadership is most effective when it is shared. In this case, the development of an oracy framework was initiated and driven by a classroom teacher working in collaboration with senior leaders, demonstrating how leadership for change can emerge from within the system rather than being imposed through hierarchical structures. However, Harris (2013) fails to consider that for collaborative practice to be successful, all staff must be engaged, something which in reality is difficult to achieve. This tension was evidenced in this context where initial resistance from some staff suggests that distributed leadership alone may not guarantee success without sustained support.

The initial phase of this process involved professional conversations between the teacher and the headteacher, through which a shared understanding of the need for a more structured and formal approach to oracy was discussed. By engaging senior leadership early in the process, the proposed change was positioned within wider school priorities and linked directly to a school improvement target, ensuring that it was supported at a strategic level. This collaborative approach demonstrates how leadership can be built by professional trust, rather than just formal job titles alone.

A key element of this leadership was the development of a whole-school oracy framework that progressed from Reception to Year 6. This framework aimed to establish progression and consistency in the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills, addressing the previously identified lack of coherence across classrooms by giving teachers and pupils clear sentence starters to use. The creation of the framework demonstrates systems thinking, as it moves beyond individual classroom practice to consider how oracy is structured and progresses across the school as a whole. Fullan (2007) argues that coherence is essential for sustainable and effective change, and the development of shared frameworks can play a critical role in positioning new ideas across a system. In this sense, the framework functioned not only as a practical resource for teachers, but also as a means of articulating a shared vision for oracy within the school, both for teachers and pupils. However, Fullan (2016) has been criticised for underestimating the everyday demands placed on teachers and his approach fails to consider the reality that not all practitioners engage equally.

The framework was introduced by the practitioner during a staff meeting which further reiterates the role of leadership, but also the importance of collaboration. This

process created a safe space for open dialogue and an opportunity for staff to share honest feedback, helping to ensure that everyone had a shared vision going forward. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) suggest that practitioners are more likely to implement and sustain changes if they have an active role in the process and feel listened to. The staff meeting in this context not only acted as a means of communication, but as a platform for collective engagement, enabling staff to contribute to the development and address any concerns. However, staff meetings may have been more beneficial for practitioners who are more confident speaking, potentially disadvantaging quieter members of staff.

The co-construction of the sentence stems reflects a practical example of how system leadership translates into practice. The sentence stems were discussed within a group setting, enabling foundations for a shared understanding towards pupil talk and expectations. The framework promoted consistency and provided guidance on what progress across the year groups looked like. Mercer and Dawes (2014) argue that explicit scaffolding in developing pupils' ability to listen effectively, suggesting that a structured framework is essential to extending pupils' critical thinking. The introduction of sentence stems reflects a strategic response to the evidence, providing teachers with a practical means of embedding oracy within classroom practice.

Teaching staff played a central role in enacting the change in this context. For the framework to be successful, it required teachers to adapt their pedagogy and to embed the oracy strategies into everyday practice. Without teachers playing an active role and sharing the vision, implementing change can become difficult and unsustainable (Spillane, 2006).

The approaches within this context reflect a distributed model where both responsibility and success are distributed across all staff, aligning with Fullan (2016) who emphasises the importance of collective responsibility for changes to be sustainable in the long term. By involving everyone in the process, the initiative made members of staff feel valued, therefore increasing the likelihood that the framework would be embedded long term.

However, it is important to recognise that the enactment of system leadership is not without challenges. Teachers' confidence and knowledge of Voice 21 and time constraints can all act as barriers to implementation. Kotter (1996) highlights the importance of maintaining momentum and addressing obstacles within the change process, suggesting that leaders must be responsive and reflective. In this context, the success of the initiative was dependent on the ongoing support and opportunities to reflect as a whole staff team. This emphasises the importance of viewing leadership as an ongoing process rather than a one-off event.

Overall, this micro change demonstrates how system leadership can be enacted through different roles and actions across the school. The classroom teacher acted as a catalyst for change, working in partnership with senior leadership to develop a

structured framework and engage staff throughout the process. As such, leadership is understood not simply as a positional title, but as the capacity to influence and motivate others towards a shared goal.

### Progress

The oracy framework and sentence stems were introduced in January 2026. As opposed to a fixed model, the framework was introduced as an evolving approach with phased stages to support gradual embedding and staff engagement. This aligns with the view that sustainable and effective change is achieved through group collaboration and shared ownership (Fullan, 2007).

The initial stage of the process involved the introduction of the framework during a whole staff meeting. This meeting provided an opportunity to present the new idea, alongside strategies and resources such as the use of 'talk tactics'. Importantly, the framework was not shared as a fixed model, but instead, the meeting created space for staff to contribute suggestions and improvements, helping to ensure that all staff members had a shared vision. Initially, some staff members disagreed with the framework including the younger year groups. However, after conversations, a shared idea was created. This collaborative approach is supported by Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018), which highlights the importance of engaging teachers as active participants in the change process.

Following this initial introduction, a range of practical resources were shared through a digital platform that was accessible to all staff, providing access to resources and examples of pupil work. This ensured that the framework was not only conceptually understood, but staff felt supported. In addition, video examples from a Reception class were shared, modelling how oracy strategies could be implemented in the early years. This was particularly significant in demonstrating that structured oracy could be embedded from the earliest stages of learning, challenging some assumptions made by other teachers that such approaches were only suitable for older pupils. The use of modelling aligns with research which highlights the importance of making pedagogical practices visible in supporting teacher development (Spillane, 2006).

As the implementation of the framework progressed, monitoring was undertaken through informal learning walks, which provided insight into how the framework was being enacted across year groups. These observations enabled the system leaders to evaluate the impact of the framework, including emerging strengths, and areas where further support may be required. Although the learning walks provided an insight, it is important to recognise that these only provide a snapshot and offer limited evidence of long-term insight into classroom practice.

A key phase in the process occurred at the end of the first half-term, when all staff met together to review the implementation of the framework. The whole-school meeting provided an opportunity for collective reflection, enabling staff to share their

experiences and consider the impact of the framework on pupil learning and progress. At this stage, staff were asked to complete a survey, which gathered qualitative data on teacher perceptions and allowed for comparison with a baseline survey conducted prior to the implementation of the framework. The use of both baseline and follow-up data reflects a systematic approach to evaluating change, ensuring that decisions were informed by evidence rather than assumptions. Although, it is important to recognise that the evidence largely relies on teacher subjective perception rather than quantitative data.

The feedback gathered during this meeting indicated a number of positive outcomes. Staff reported that pupils had gained confidence speaking and listening, alongside noticeable improvements in the range of vocabulary being used by pupils. These observations were further reinforced by feedback from the headteacher, who was able to identify the impact of the framework beyond the classrooms. For example, pupils were observed applying sentence stems independently in different contexts, using “In my opinion, I think this food is delicious” to dinner staff. Such examples suggest that pupils were beginning to transfer these skills independently into wider aspects of school life. This aligns with the intended aim of the framework, which was to support pupils in applying communication skills across a range of contexts. Although, whilst observations suggest increased pupil confidence in using sentence stems, this may also reflect increased teacher prompting rather than genuine independence. As Biesta (2010) cautions, measurable improvements do not always correlate to deeper learning, particularly when strategies become proceduralised.

The collaborative nature of the evaluation process provided valuable insight into how each practitioner had adapted the framework within different areas of learning and routines, including phonics and problem-solving. While this variability reflects positivity, it also highlights the ongoing challenge of maintaining consistency within a whole-school approach. As Fullan (2016) suggests, balancing consistency with flexibility is a key tension within educational change, requiring ongoing communication and reflection. However, a limitation of Fullan’s model is that it pays limited attention to power dynamics within schools, where decision-making may still be influenced by hierarchical structures. Therefore, potentially making it more difficult for system level change to be enacted by middle leaders.

As a result of the evaluation, a collective decision was made to continue with the framework and extend its implementation as an ongoing school priority. It was suggested that the next area of focus should be group work and defined group roles, aligning with the ‘build’ and ‘investigate’ strands of the Voice 21 approach. This forward planning demonstrates a commitment to sustained and progressive change, rather than a one-off initiative. Kotter (1996) emphasises the importance of building on early successes to maintain momentum. In this case, the positive outcomes of the trial provided a strong foundation for further development.

Overall, the process of change can be understood as both structured and responsive, involving stages of introduction, implementation, evaluation and refinement. This highlights the importance of viewing educational change not as an ongoing cycle of development shaped by the experiences and contributions of everyone involved.

### Assessment of Impact

The impact of the whole-school oracy framework is visible through measurable changes in pupil outcomes and the conditions created for sustained development.

From a pupil perspective, there is emerging evidence to suggest that the framework has had a positive impact on pupils' confidence and their ability to articulate their thinking clearly. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review (MER) processes within Maths and Numeracy have shown that pupils are increasingly able to explain their reasoning using a wider range of vocabulary. This is particularly significant, as it indicates that the impact of the framework extends beyond discrete oracy sessions and is being transferred into other areas and contexts of learning. Further evidence of these skills being transferred is provided by the headteacher, who observed pupils independently using sentence stems in a range of contexts, such as a Reception pupil using the stems to explain their opinion to dinner staff. However, it is important to acknowledge the potential for bias. Much of the evidence is taken from teacher perceptions, informal observations and internal monitoring processes, which may be influenced by unconscious bias. This is especially true for the practitioner who introduced the framework, as an invested stakeholder, who could have unconscious bias due to their passion, which may lead them to focus on favourable evidence.

In addition to pupil outcomes, the initiative has had a significant impact on staff confidence and professional practice. Conversations with teachers revealed that, despite initially having varying levels of confidence, staff shared positive attitudes towards the framework and could see a positive impact on pupil progress. The availability of shared resources, modelling and opportunities for collaboration contributed to a realistic and sustainable implementation within their teaching. This aligns with Heifetz's emphasis on the importance of building relationships through deep listening and collaboration. By creating opportunities for staff to share their experiences and contribute to the development of the framework, the process enabled a sense of collective ownership, which is essential for sustaining change.

From a numerical perspective, oracy and Language Link assessments in Reception showed an average increase of 24.2% since the baseline assessments completed in September. However, it is difficult to attribute these improvements solely to the oracy framework as the progress could be a result of natural language development over time.

The approach taken also reflects Heifetz's (1994) idea that system leaders do not wait for fully developed solutions but instead create opportunities for learning through action. The decision to trial the framework within a half-term period enabled staff to engage with the approach in a practical way, allowing for ongoing reflection and adaptation. This "learning by doing" approach reduced barriers to engagement and encouraged staff to experiment with new strategies. As a result, the impact of the initiative can be seen not only in improved outcomes, but in the development of a more reflective and adaptive staff team who have a shared vision. However, this assumes that all staff are engaged and share a passion for developing whole-school oracy.

Heifetz's three key characteristics of effective system leadership are also evident within this process. Firstly, the ability to see the larger system was demonstrated through the development of a framework that ensured progression from Reception to Year 6. Secondly, the emphasis on collaboration enabled staff to work together to share practice for the benefit of the wider school community. This was further extended through links with the local cluster and comprehensive schools, supporting the development of a shared culture around oracy and communication. Such connections reflect an understanding that system leadership extends beyond individual settings and involves contributing to wider networks of practice. Finally, the ongoing opportunities for shared reflection through staff meetings, surveys and evaluation processes, supported continuous improvement.

Furthermore, the initiative demonstrates an emerging capacity to lead beyond reactive problem-solving towards the development of a longer-term vision. While the initial drivers for change were inconsistencies in how oracy was being taught and pupil confidence, the process has evolved to focus on sustained development, including adding the framework as a School Improvement Priority and the planned next steps of group work and defined roles aligned with the "build" and "instigate" elements of the Voice 21 approach. The development of links with other schools within the cluster further supports this forward-thinking approach, enabling the sharing of practice and the co-construction of a broader oracy culture.

The observed improvements in pupil confidence and ability to explain reasoning align with findings from the EEF (2021), which suggests that structured oracy approaches support language development and higher-order thinking. However, it is important to acknowledge that the impact of the initiative remains ongoing and requires continued development. The EEF (2021) also emphasises that the framework needs to be used consistently, suggesting that potential variability in teacher practice could be a limitation to the ongoing development of the framework.

While staff confidence has improved, there remains a need for continued monitoring to ensure that the framework is applied consistently and effectively. Additionally, while qualitative evidence provides valuable insight, there is scope to strengthen the

evaluation process through the inclusion of more quantitative measures, enabling a more robust assessment of impact over time.

In line with Heifetz's (1994) emphasis on the leader's commitment to personal growth, this also requires ongoing reflection on leadership practice. Consideration must be given to how the framework can be further developed and how staff can be supported at different stages. This reinforces the understanding that system leadership is a continuous process of learning and development.

Furthermore, the inclusion of pupil perspectives aligns with Heifetz's (1994) emphasis on engaging those closest to the problem in the process of change. By actively seeking and responding to pupil feedback, the approach moved beyond surface-level implementation to create a more inclusive model of development. This also reflects a commitment to building relationships through listening, ensuring that pupils are active participants within the system.

In addition, the establishment of a pupil-led group, such as "talk detectives", provides an opportunity to deepen pupil engagement and introduce pupil-led evaluation. By involving pupils in the evaluation process, the system becomes increasingly reflective, with pupil feedback informing future development. Such an approach aligns with the principles of Senge (2015), who emphasises the importance of shared ownership within learning organisations.

The planned introduction of family engagement sessions further extends the scope of the initiative, recognising the importance of building a wider network of support around the child. By sharing the oracy framework with families, this approach aims to strengthen continuity between school and home, enabling pupils to apply their communication skills in a broader range of contexts.

Collectively, these developments reflect a longer-term vision centred on embedding communication as a core element of teaching and learning. The continued development of the framework, alongside growing connections beyond the school, suggests that the impact of this initiative has the potential to extend further, contributing to a sustained culture of oracy within and beyond the setting.

Overall, while system leadership can be seen as a crucial factor that created conditions for change through collaboration and shared language, it was not the sole factor in determining outcomes. Instead, the impact of the initiative is better understood as the result of an interaction between leadership, and staff engagement with the framework. This highlights the importance of viewing system leadership not as a singular driver of change, but as part of a broader process through which sustainable improvement is developed over time. This aligns with the work of Fullan (2017) and Spillane (2006), who emphasise the importance of shared responsibility in achieving sustainable change.

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