Julia Reckermann
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Oracy in English Language Education

Insights from Practice-Oriented Research

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It is our honour to dedicate this book to Bärbel Diehr, who has supported, inspired, and motivated all of us in various ways and situations for many years with her loving, professional, and humorous self.

Acknowledgements

Contents

Abbreviations

AR	Action Research
A&E	Analysis and Exploration
BIG	*Beratung. Information. Gespräch.*
CA	Conversation Analysis
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CA-SLA	Conversation Analysis for Second Language Acquisition
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CIC	Classroom Interactional Competence
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
DBR	Design-Based Research
D&C	Design and Construction
DP	Design Principle
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EDR	Educational Design Research
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
ELICOS	English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students
ELT	English Language Teaching
E&R	Evaluation and Reflection
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
FL	Foreign Language
FLA	Foreign Language Anxiety
FLCAS	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale
IA	Interactional Awareness
IC	Interactional Competence
I&S	Implementation and spread
JIM	*Jugend, Information, Medien* (i.e., youth, information, media)
KMK	Kultusministerkonferenz
LCA	Listening Comprehension Approach
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language

LCP	Literature Class Project
MA	Metacognitive Approach
MSB NRW	*Ministerium für Schule und Bildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen*
MSW NRW	*Ministerium für Schule und Weiterbildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen*
NRW	(The German federal state of) North Rhine-Westphalia
OCE	Oral Communication Exam
OSF	Oracy Skills Framework
PAP	Pronunciation Assistance Program
PA	Process Approach
PEAK	Acronym for the study *English ab Klasse 1* (i.e., starting English in Year 1)
PrimA	*Praktikum im Ausland* (i.e., internship abroad)
RP	Reflective Practice
SAE	Standard Australian English
SLB	Santa Barbara Ladies (Corpus)
SETT	Self-Evaluation of Teacher Talk framework
STT	Student Talking Time
TAPS	Teaching and Assessing Spoken English in Primary School
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TTT	Teacher Talking Time

Practice-Oriented Approaches to Researching Oracy in English Language Education: An Introduction

Philipp Siepmann, Julia Reckermann, and Frauke Matz

Abstract This volume is the final result of the symposium *Fostering and Assessing Oracy in English Language Education: Insights from Practice-Led and Design-Based Research* that was held at the University of Münster, Germany, in June 2021. Our understanding of oracy developed over the time from planning the symposium to publishing this book and is mostly based on the oracy skills framework (Mercer et al., 2019) as well as Diehr's elaborations on oracy in this volume. Oracy refers to the foreign language learner's competence to realise own speaking intentions and successfully participate in oral discourse, taking into consideration the four strands of oracy (linguistic; cognitive; physical; social, cultural, & emotional). This introduction sketches this conceptualisation of oracy and depicts why and how this field benefits from practice-oriented research. The latter is understood as research that is either conducted in close cooperation with practicing teachers and thereby partly even practice-led, or has a clear focus on teaching practice and is thereby directly relevant for teachers and practitioners. This chapter also introduces the readers to the structure of the whole volume and summarises each contribution.

Keywords Introductory chapter · Overview · Oracy · Practice-oriented research · Structure of the volume

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1   Background and Rationale

This edited volume was inspired by a one-day symposium entitled *Fostering and Assessing Oracy in English Language Education: Insights from Practice-Led*[1] *and Design-Based Research*, which was held at the University of Münster, Germany, in June 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced schools and universities to close for several months and switch to distance learning, the symposium was held online. As the organisers of this event, we felt slightly uncomfortable discussing issues of promoting and assessing oracy in a videoconference format, considering that most oral communication still takes place in face-to-face encounters. At the same time, this was a powerful reminder of the changing nature of oracy: Our social interactions, and thus much of our communication, are increasingly taking place in virtual environments. This raises fundamental questions for language teaching, since the development of learners' oral communication competences – whether online and offline, mediated, or face-to-face – is regarded as one of the central aims of language education (Banathy & Sawyer, 1969; Brown & Yule, 1983; Bygate, 2010; Goh & Burns, 2012). These questions are eminently practical, as language teachers in the COVID-19 era can attest: Faced with the challenge of rapidly implementing digital learning environments, they needed to swiftly adapt their teaching methods to these unforeseen circumstances, encourage learners to talk to each other in videoconferences and participate in virtual group work, as well as find innovative ways to give feedback and conduct language assessment (Akbana et al., 2021; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021).

Against the backdrop of these societal and educational challenges, Foreign Language (FL) research, as an applied science (Caspari & Grünewald, 2022), can make a valuable contribution to developing innovative and effective ways to tackle the ever-changing nature of oral communication and to thereby shape a pedagogy of oracy in FL education. This volume sets out to re-frame the concept of oracy and to present current research on a range of issues revolving around this concept. What the studies comprised in this book have in common is their strong focus on classroom practice. Before providing an outline of the structure of this edited volume, the key terms 'oracy' and 'practice-oriented research' will thus be briefly defined in the following sections.

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[1] The symposium was originally intended to focus more narrowly on practice-*led* research, which we understand as research which takes the practical problems of teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as a starting point and which involves stakeholders from a very early stage of a research project. However, with regard to this edited volume, we deemed this focus to be too narrow and thus broadened its scope, which is reflected in the use of the term 'practice-oriented' research. The term practice-led research is used wherever the narrower definition applies.

2   Oracy: A Working Definition

In the almost three years after the symposium, in which we have compiled this volume, our understanding of the term oracy has significantly evolved through discussions within our team of editors and with critical friends.[2] At the time of the symposium we used it as an umbrella term for a focus on oral competences (predominantly listening and speaking) in language education, as it is commonly understood even in the most current research (e.g., O'Brien, 2022; Qiu & Xu, 2023). We have, however, come to understand that there is a need to thoroughly revisit this understanding of oracy. As will be elaborated on in Siepmann (in this volume), "Re-Framing Oracy in English Language Education", oracy should be understood in a more comprehensive and holistic way.

For the purpose of this introduction, we define oracy as the competence of language learners to realise their own speaking intentions and to successfully participate in oral discourse in the target language (see Diehr, in this volume, for an elaboration of this aspect). The latter, naturally, also encompasses listening competences, which are an inherent part of oracy. Focusing on the oral competences of listening and speaking as well as successful FL communication, such a definition acknowledges the primacy of speech in (second) language acquisition (Banathy & Sawyer, 1969) and expands on Wilkinson's (1968) original definition of the term as a counterpart to literacy in educational contexts. A timelier definition of oracy, however, does not understand oracy and literacy as binaries, but rather as a continuum (Koch & Oesterreicher, 1985). It thus also includes digital oralities (Delius & Freitag-Hild, 2022; Hallet, 2014) and is undergoing a comprehensive re-conceptualisation equivalent to the concept of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996; Kalantzis et al., 2016), which is also part of Diehr's discussion of the term 'multi-oracies' (see Diehr, in this volume).

In addition to this output-oriented and comprehensive understanding of oracy, we would like to add that oracy encompasses multiple competences, most notably speaking (Goh & Burns, 2012; Luoma, 2004) and listening (Field, 2008; Rost, 2013), but also, least questionably, strategic competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1996), pragmatic competence (Roever, 2009), language awareness (Goh, 2017), and Interactional Competence (IC) (Galaczi & Taylor, 2018; Young, 2011). Rather than defining oracy in terms of these competences, however, we prefer to follow the structure that was proposed by Mercer et al. (2019) in the Oracy Skills Framework (OSF). The OSF encompasses four strands: the linguistic, cognitive, physical, and social/cultural/emotional. In Siepmann (in this volume), this concept – originally aimed at first language learning contexts – will be adapted for contexts of English language education (i.e., the teaching and learning of English as a foreign or second language). This chapter will further elaborate on the four strands and their impetus regarding developing and supporting language learners' oracy.

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[2] We would like to cordially thank and acknowledge the input from Bäbel Diehr at this point.

    In short, the *linguistic strand* of oracy in English language education addresses the structural and pragmatic differences between speech and writing (Brown & Yule, 1983; Bygate, 1987; Halliday, 1989). Features of spoken discourse should be considered not only in teaching by explicitly addressing them in the classroom (Goh, 2014), but also in classroom-based language assessment (Fulcher, 2014; Luoma, 2004). The *cognitive strand* highlights the specific processing conditions of oral communication, such as time constraints and reciprocity as well as the complex psycholinguistic processes of (bilingual) speech production (Kormos, 2006; Levelt, 1989). To foster oracy in English language education means to help learners to become more fluent using formulaic language and automatisation, as well as to deploy strategies such as coping. Knowledge of the cognitive processes underlying speech production will also help teachers to structure speaking activities in a way they reduce learners' cognitive load (Diehr & Frisch, 2008). By including a *physical strand*, this notion of oracy emphasises that oral communication is, essentially, a physical activity, as meaning is conveyed not only verbally, but also through body language, gestures, facial expressions, and voice. Fostering oracy in English language education should therefore involve the learners' whole body and provide ample opportunity to practise pronunciation and intonation. Lastly, the *social*, *cultural*, and *emotional* strand stresses that oral communication is a highly contextualised and socially situated practice embedded in cultural contexts. The conditions for (successful) communication are largely shaped by the relationships between interlocutors, which are also influenced by their emotions, including their intentions and motivations for speaking. Anxiety may also play a significant role in speaking a FL and should therefore be given special attention in the FL classroom.

    The chapters of this volume contribute to the development of a contemporary notion of oracy in English language education along these strands. Albeit no contribution investigates the complex concept of oracy as such, each tackles important notions of it and thereby helps to shape a more holistic and realistic picture of the 'what, why, and how' of promoting FL learners' oracy.

3   The Need for Practice-Oriented Research on Oracy in English Language Education

One reason why we have chosen to combine the topic of oracy with a focus on practice-oriented research is that in recent years, more practice-oriented approaches to investigate current issues, such as oracy, have started to gain momentum in the field of English language education (see, e.g., Chalmers et al., 2023). Researchers gradually came to realise how important it is to investigate issues that directly concern the FL classroom, such as specific aspects of the teaching of oracy, in close or at least closer cooperation with school practice and thereby acknowledge the roles which different stakeholders play in generating theoretical ideas as well as improvements of classroom practice (see Burns as well as McKenney's contributions to this volume for some exemplary studies). These approaches aim to close the divide

between research and classroom practice in FL education as diagnosed by Sato and Loewen (2022, p. 509):

> There seems to be a gap between the two professional communities [of practitioners and researchers], hindering reciprocal exchanges of theoretical issues and pedagogical ideas. Without a bidirectional, collaborative, constructive dialogue, L2 researchers may conduct studies that are irrelevant and out of touch with real-world teaching issues. Without a dialogue, L2 teachers may rely on their personal experience and intuitions in making pedagogical decisions that may not be the most beneficial for student learning. Without a dialogue, L2 research is circulated only in researcher communities, no matter how much researchers claim that their findings have implications for practice.

We understand practice-oriented research as a form of empirical inquiry using research methods to improve classroom practice and, often but not necessarily, develop applied theory. It is therefore usually carried out in close collaboration with stakeholders such as teachers, learners, and other relevant practitioners. Practice-oriented research follows a situated, highly contextualised approach that considers the many variables that influence learning environments, generating ecologically valid theoretical insights into classroom practice (McKenney & McReeves, 2019). This presupposes, however, that researchers are willing to leave their 'ivory tower' and shift (some) responsibility to teachers and other stakeholders (Cviko et al., 2014; McKenney & McReeves, 2019; Penuel et al., 2007).[3] It also implies a humble and reflexive self-understanding of researchers and their discipline, which is attuned to the needs of teachers and learners in everyday classroom practice.

   All contributions in this edited volume are to individually varying degrees practice-oriented, some even firmly practice-based (Sato & Loewen, 2022) and thereby even arguably practice-led, that is, driven by pedagogical issues which arise in everyday classroom-practice. As such, this type of research aims at developing innovative teaching and learning practices with regard to oracy from various angles. The methodological frameworks employed by these studies range from Action Research (AR), which is usually practitioner-led and primarily aims to improve classroom practice, to Design-Based Research (DBR), which typically involves stakeholders throughout the research process with a dual focus on developing practical solutions and theoretical insights. Other contributions are based on a more theoretically driven mixed-methods design, but with an explicit emphasis on the practical implications and are conducted in close partnership with practitioners. The diversity of research perspectives is also reflected in the variety of aspects of oracy they address, which include drama-based teaching methods for encouraging speaking, innovative ways of assessing oral competences, as well as the application of Conversation Analysis (CA) in pre-service teacher education seminars. While some contributions highlight the research outcomes – such as Wirag's, Folkerts and Matz's, or Schlieckmann's chapters – others foreground the research process itself and give an insight into the collaboration between researchers and practitioners, such as Delius's chapter.

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[3] What is stated in the last two sentences does not really apply to Action Research (AR). It is still of importance, since in AR, the teacher is also the researcher and thereby takes up a double-role instead of reconsidering his/her role as either a researcher or a teacher.

4 Structure of the Book

To frame the contributions, this volume is divided into three main parts: *Part I* addresses fundamental theoretical and methodological issues related to oracy on the one hand, and practice-oriented approaches to researching oracy in English Language Teaching (ELT) on the other. *Part II* includes studies concerned with fostering and assessing oracy in primary and secondary ELT. *Part III* focuses on teacher education and how pre-service language teachers can be prepared to develop and evaluate their learners' oracy.

4.1 Part I: Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives on Researching Oracy in English Language Education

Part I introduces the key concepts and research approaches addressed in this book. In doing so, it provides a theoretical and methodological framework for practice-oriented research on oracy. Moreover, it serves to guide researchers and practitioners interested in applying practice-oriented empirical research with the aim of improving classroom practices.

Philipp Siepmann delves deeper into developing a timely definition of oracy. The author argues that there is a need to re-frame oracy in EFL education to draw attention to the challenge of becoming a proficient listener and speaker in a FL and its implications for teaching and assessing oracy. Rather than defining oracy primarily in terms of the skills and competences involved, as was the case in early conceptualisations, this chapter adopts the four-strand model of the OSF (Mercer et al., 2019; Mercer & Dawes, 2018) and adapts it to FL learning and teaching contexts, as outlined above.

In her programmatic contribution, **Bärbel Diehr** traces historic and contemporary developments of orality and oracy in FL education. In the context of digitality and the resulting increasing multimodality of oral communication, Diehr argues that the concept of oracy needs an extensive revision, similar to the shift from literacy to multiliteracies (New London Group, 2000; Kalantzis et al., 2016). She thus proposes 'multi-oracies' as an equivalent concept and develops a continuum from orality to oracy, the latter focusing more on learners' communicative intentions towards engaging in meaningful discourse. In reviewing three empirical studies on young learners' oral competences conducted in German primary school contexts, she reveals several important research gaps. She closes by raising some fundamental questions for research on oracy in English language education, which can guide future (practice-oriented) research projects in this field.

The contributions by both **Anne Burns** and **Susan McKenney** present two practice-led research frameworks that they themselves have helped to shape and popularise in different areas of educational research. **Anne Burns** starts with a brief introduction to AR and its characteristics. She postulates that AR, as a

research-based approach to implementing innovative classroom practices, can contribute greatly to teachers' professional growth. On this basis, she presents several studies from an Australian AR programme aimed at improving teaching methods, for instance, to develop learners' oracy in the language classroom. **Susan McKenney** introduces key principles and rationales of Educational Design Research[4] (EDR), an articulation of design-based research originally introduced by van den Akker et al. (2006) and further conceptualised by McKenney and McReeves (2019), in relation to the 'what', 'why', and 'how' of this research framework. The advantage of this research framework lies in its dual goal of developing solutions to practical challenges and the simultaneous development of their theoretical understanding. She illustrates the principles of EDR with reference to several research projects from various educational contexts focusing on aspects of oracy. As these studies show, EDR can provide (some of) this much-needed evidence to support language educators in creating supportive learning environments where learners are encouraged to speak in the FL.

4.2   Part II: Research on Fostering and Assessing Oracy in English Language Education

The contributions collected in *Part II* of this volume introduce innovative approaches to fostering and assessing oracy in English language education, with each contribution addressing different aspects of oracy. They share a proximity to classroom practice, which is evident in the close cooperation with key stakeholders or even research-practice partnerships between universities and schools. To a varying degree, the studies showcased in this part refer to the linguistic, cognitive, physical, or social/cultural/emotional strands of oracy, sometimes even a combination of several strands.

Andreas Wirag presents a research project resulting from a partnership between a local secondary school and the University of Göttingen, Germany. His contribution focuses on quantitative data gathered in his mixed-methods study and examines the extent to which role-playing and role-work can help reduce FL anxiety in the context of oral FL competences. Thereby, he also provides insights into the emotional apsects of oracy. In relation to the topic of this edited volume, his contribution also highlights the constructive synergies that can arise from research partnerships between schools and universities.

This finding is also supported by **Katharina Delius**'s contribution, which reflects on the roles of stakeholders in her DBR project on the advancement of speaking competence through a genre- and drama-based approach in a secondary school

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[4] In this book, the more general term Design-Based Research (DBR) is used to refer to projects drawing on this "family of related research approaches" (van den Akker et al., 2006, p. 4). Educational Design Research is a term commonly used when referring to McKenney and McReeves's (2019) generic model and/or their approach to DBR.

English classroom. Her contribution shows that the roles of researcher(s) and practitioner(s) can shift quite dynamically over the course of a DBR project, as different kinds of expertise are required at different stages of the project.

Against the backdrop of the inclusion of listening tests in the written *Abitur* examinations in Germany, **Jens-Folkert Folkerts** and **Frauke Matz** report on a mixed-methods study conducted as part of a DBR project on the teaching of listening in the English language classroom. As the study aims to develop Design Principles (DPs) for fostering learners' listening competence, the initial Analysis and Exploration (A&E) phase (McKenney & McReeves, 2019; see also McKenney, in this volume) explores teachers and learners' views on how listening is currently taught in the English language classroom of German secondary schools.

Philipp Siepmann gives an insight into his DBR study on Oral Communication Exams (OCEs) in the EFL classroom in Germany. His contribution reveals that task design has a significant impact on learners' communication in the exam and is an important factor in ensuring a valid assessment of their oral communicative competences. To illustrate the practice-led approach of his study, his contribution describes typical process structures and outcomes using the example of the design of a new assessment task and a respective DP.

Rebecca Schlieckmann presents results from the A&E phase of her DBR project on the use of OCEs in place of (written) class tests at the transition between primary and secondary school in Germany. To explore the potential and possible challenges of their implementation, she interviewed teachers of English in the final year of primary school and the first year of secondary school education, as well as pupils before and after their transition to secondary school. This constellation provides a unique insight into the views of these stakeholders on assessing oral rather than written competences at the beginning of secondary school.

4.3   Part III: Enabling Pre-Service Teachers to Foster and Assess Oracy—Insights from Research on Teacher Education

As the contributions in this edited volume show, fostering and assessing oracy is a challenging task for language teachers. It is therefore an important aspect of teacher education to raise awareness of the nature of spoken language and its implications for teaching. The two contributions in Part IV of this volume put a spotlight on innovative teaching methods in teacher education programmes in Germany and Chile, which share the common goal of enabling teachers to foster, diagnose, and assess learners' oracy. They both draw on research on Interactional Competence (IC) as well as on methods of Conversation Analysis (CA) (Sacks et al., 1974), which in recent years have increasingly been adopted in the context of second language acquisition and education (Walsh, 2013; Waring, 2016; see also Walper et al., in this volume).

Katherina Walper-Gormaz, **Natalia Pinuer**, and **Constanza Velásquez's** study uses CA to explore the development of Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) in a workshop for pre-service EFL teachers. The authors thus extend the notion of oracy in two highly productive ways: Firstly, they draw attention to the fact that to teach oracy to their pupils, teachers must initially acquire interactional awareness and CIC themselves, which the authors define as the extent to which they align their use of language with different teaching situations. Secondly, they emphasise that because oral communication includes a range of non-verbal elements, research on oracy also needs to include embodied communicative practices, thus emphasising the often-neglected physical strand of oracy (see Sect. 2).

Susanne Reinhardt and **Dagmar Barth-Weingarten** use CA to promote the professional competences of student teachers in diagnosing and assessing learners' speaking competences. Their contribution highlights the course design and the application of micro-analytic methods derived from CA. In doing so, they round off the practice-led research focus with a research-based teaching concept for teacher education, via which they aim to address their future teachers' competences in assessing oracy. The authors thus draw attention to the synergies that can arise from bringing ELT and research closer together.

5 Limitations

We are aware that this volume, like any publication, has a limited scope and can only present a small number of studies and a limited range of research approaches. There are four main limitations we would like to address:

- The first is a limitation in terms of research contexts: Most of the contributions come from German researchers and have been conducted in different educational contexts in the German educational system.
- A second limitation concerns the diversity of research approaches: Arguably, there is a certain focus on DBR approaches, while AR is only dealt with in one chapter and other practice-oriented approaches, such as Gibbs' (2013) Reflective Cycle or Kolb's (2015) Experiental Learning Theory are not or hardly covered. We are also aware that within DBR (and similarly within AR) there are other conceptualisations and frameworks that are not included in this volume.
- As a third limitation, we have chosen to focus specifically on research in the contexts of English language education, although we are aware of similar research in relation to (foreign) languages other than English.
- And, finally, there are numerous important areas within the field of oracy research that are neglected. Most notably, aspects of multilingualism are not considered by any of the studies; moreover, issues of digitality and oracy deserve increasing attention but are hardly covered in this book.

Most of these limitations are based in the history of this volume. The majority of chapters are the proceedings of the aforementioned symposium at the University of

Münster. Although we had circled the call for papers to a wide, national and international, audience, we mostly received abstracts from researchers in the German context, which explains the limitation regarding the book's scope. With our keynote speeches given by **Anne Burns** and **Susan McKenney**, we have per se set a focus on AR and DBR, without, however, excluding other practice-oriented approaches. The fact that current topics such as digitality or multilingualism are hardly paid attention to showcases that research needs to keep track with current developments and is needed in these very areas.

While acknowledging these limitations, we nevertheless hope that this book can provide a valuable impetus for the further development of this field of research.

6 Conclusion

As this overview has illustrated, the contributions to this edited volume present a variety of practice-oriented research projects in the field of oracy. They range from the use of research methods to systematically improve learning environments and teaching methods, as in AR approaches, to the development of "responsively grounded" (McKenney & McReeves, 2019, p. 4) theory in close consultation and collaboration with stakeholders, as exemplified by EDR. An important insight gleaned from these studies is that research and practice cannot be seen as two separate systems or microcosms. Rather, they complement each other in ways that enable innovative, evidence-driven practice when the different kinds of expertise of researchers, educators, pupils, and other stakeholders are brought together in productive ways. We firmly believe that such approaches to research bear great potential in tackling crucial issues in English language education, such as oracy, with beneficial outcomes for teachers and classroom practice on the one hand, but for the scientific discourse and theory on the other.

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