



EBOOK

ORACY FOR LEARNING





This extensive guide will explore the integration of Oracy in classrooms, as well as looking at specific strategies that complement both Cognitive Science and Oracy and providing tips to maximise Oracy in your setting.

To help develop Oracy at your school or college, we have designed the Oracy for Learning course on the Teacher CPD Academy with Nikki Sullivan and Kelly Heaton, emphasising the importance of effective communication skills in academic success.

Visit the Teacher CPD Academy

WHAT IS ORACY?

Oracy refers to the ability to communicate effectively through speech as well as good listening skills. It involves using language to express thoughts, ideas and feelings, and to interact with others in a way that is clear, coherent and appropriate. In the classroom, many students hesitate to participate due to fear of judgment or shyness, hindering their ability to share valuable insights. Overcoming this barrier is crucial for students to thrive academically, with effective communication serving as a cornerstone for success..

Recommended reading:

- [Oral language interventions](#)
- [Oracy in the classroom: a teacher's guide](#)

WHY IS ORACY IMPORTANT?

There are many benefits of getting students to talk in class. Let's take a look at what these are...

Consolidating students' learning

Utilising speech as a powerful tool can significantly boost your students' educational journey, transcending mere information exchange. Encouraging class discussions aids students in synthesising information, leading to a deeper understanding of the subject matter and [reinforcing their learning](#).

Fostering student engagement

Encouraging active verbal participation from students serves as a catalyst for maintaining their focus and involvement during lessons. By prompting students to actively contribute through answering questions and engaging in dialogues, you can help promote their critical thinking skills, ultimately enhancing academic performance according to [recent research findings](#).

Allowing students to find their own voices

Encouraging students to express their thoughts, opinions and questions vocally empowers them to articulate their understanding of the content. This practice not only cultivates self-assurance, especially when their contributions are valued, but also nurtures their ability to communicate effectively and develop a distinct voice in the learning process.

Cultivating a collaborative environment

Facilitating classroom interactions through discussions cultivates a sense of community among students, fostering connections and [enriching the classroom dynamic](#). By encouraging peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and collaborative problem-solving,



students not only strengthen their bonds but also gain diverse perspectives that enhance their overall learning experience.

Recommended reading:

- [Curiosity and learning: 6 reasons why students should ask why](#)
- [The one about reading out loud](#)
- [The one about teaching others](#)

WHAT ARE THE CORE FOUNDATIONS OF ORACY?

Engagement in classroom dialogue is a critical element of effective Teaching & Learning. Harnessing the power of Oracy, which encompasses both speaking and listening skills, can serve as a potent tool to deepen your students' critical thinking abilities.

Delving into the intricacies of Oracy within the educational landscape, our [Teacher CPD Academy](#) topic area, Oracy for Learning, curated and presented by [Nikki Sullivan](#) and [Kelly Heaton](#), aims to equip teachers with the expertise needed to leverage communication skills for enhanced learning outcomes.

To commemorate its launch, a collaborative effort with Nikki led to a free flash webinar, offering valuable insights into key aspects of this enriching topic.

[Watch it here](#)

To effectively implement Oracy practices in the classroom, Nikki advocates for the following strategies:

- ***Establishing clear discussion guidelines*** – Setting explicit rules for conversations, including cues to signal the conclusion of discussions, fosters a structured and respectful dialogue environment.
- ***Making sure there is no “empty talk”*** – Ensuring students possess foundational knowledge acquired either through memory retrieval or teacher-led explanations promotes meaningful exchanges.
- ***Ensuring all students are participating*** – Encouraging all students to [engage actively](#) by nurturing their self-confidence, creating stimulating learning settings and structuring discussions to elicit diverse perspectives aids in fostering a participatory classroom culture.

- **Encouraging in-depth responses** – Cultivating depth in student responses involves [posing thought-provoking questions](#) that prompt critical thinking and meaningful discourse, enriching the learning experience.
- **Being aware that talk is transient** – Acknowledging the fleeting nature of spoken words underscores the importance of providing opportunities for students to take notes, ensuring retention and reinforcement of knowledge shared during discussions.

Recommended reading:

- [The important role of Oracy in facilitating deep learning](#)
- [Oracy for All? One school's approach to integrating oracy across the curriculum](#)

HOW DOES ORACY ENABLE HARD THINKING?

Oracy is important in fostering the essential cognitive process known as “hard thinking” – considering and putting together information carefully and actively, going beyond mere memorising. Encouraging students to go beyond surface-level understanding prompts them to interact with concepts on a deeper level, using questioning, reasoning and critical judgment.

In the Oracy webinar highlighted earlier, the insightful conversation between Nikki and InnerDrive’s lead psychologist, Bradley Busch, illuminated the integral role of both listening and speaking components of Oracy in developing hard thinking skills. Here are the key insights shared...

1. Active listening

Nikki advocates for enhancing students’ listening ability through a strategic approach to questioning. By asking thought-provoking questions, you can stimulate active engagement and deep comprehension for your students.

We can evaluate how well students actively listen by asking:

- Are students comparing what they hear with what they think?
- Are students actively listening to both their teacher and fellow students?
- Is students’ attention cued, secured and sustained?

2. Speaking and shaping

As emphasised by Nikki, verbal expression plays a vital role in shaping students' cognitive processes. Encouraging students to articulate their thoughts not only refines their understanding but also moulds their thinking patterns. To foster hard thinking through speaking:

- Give your students opportunities for exploratory talk, to help them thrash out their ideas
- Ensure all students are participating
- Encourage your students to share their final thoughts through more presentational speaking

Recommended reading:

- [The important role of Oracy in facilitating deep learning](#)
- [Why does thinking hard about something help students learn it?](#)
- [An overview of effective questioning in the classroom](#)

HOW TO GET STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CLASSROOM

Some students may find it challenging to speak up in class discussions at first; however, once the ball gets rolling, participating in the classroom becomes more natural and comfortable.

[In a comprehensive study](#) exploring teacher-student dynamics, researchers delved into the strategies employed by teachers to motivate students and elevate the quality of their work. The study revealed a significant correlation between the level of teacher engagement and the quality of the work that students produced.

So, here are some strategies to [cultivate a classroom environment that engages students...](#)

1. Maintain an appropriate pace of instruction

Balancing the delivery of new concepts with maintaining an interactive and dynamic teaching approach is key. Strive to allow ample time for students to grasp information while keeping the instruction engaging. While there's no fixed formula, [regularly assessing student understanding](#) can guide your pace adjustments effectively.

2. Teacher characteristics

[Research highlights](#) the impact of teacher characteristics on student participation. When a teacher is supportive, empathetic and approachable, it can encourage active student participation and create a conducive learning atmosphere.

3. Encourage a sense of belonging

Recognising the innate human need for belonging, particularly [amplified during adolescence](#), stresses the importance of fostering a shared identity within the classroom. By promoting inclusivity and acceptance, you pave the way for students to feel valued and secure among their teachers and peers. Establishing a [psychologically safe space](#) empowers students to express themselves without fear of judgment, fostering a culture of open communication and mutual respect.

Recommended reading:

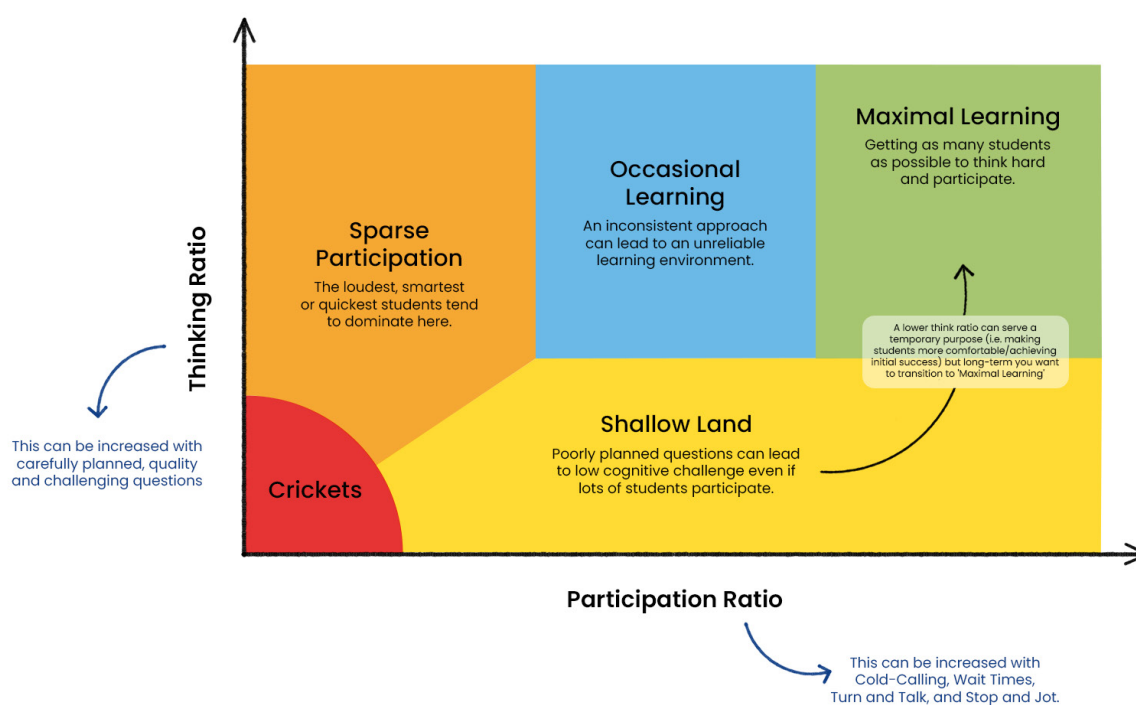
- [Oracy in class: How to encourage students to speak up and participate](#)
- [Rosenshine's 5 tips for engaging students with questions](#)
- [10 ways to deal with 'I don't know' answers in the classroom](#)

BOOSTING THINKING RATIO AND PARTICIPATION RATIO

In an illuminating conversation with Doug Lemov, which you can read in its entirety here, he introduces the concept of the Participation Ratio, which indicates the active involvement of students in the lesson, complemented by the Thinking Ratio that gauges the depth of cognitive engagement.

Maximising Cognitive Engagement

A joint InnerDrive & Doug Lemov creation | @Inner_Drive | innerdrive.co.uk



Recent research highlights the significance of balancing internal behavioural engagement (Thinking Ratio) with verbal interaction (Participation Ratio) to enhance student achievement. It is crucial to create a balance of both ratios during instruction to optimise learning outcomes.



Doug Lemov suggests a practical strategy to achieve this is to preplan thought-provoking questions before class. This approach ensures that your questions stimulate critical thinking without overwhelming students, fostering a supportive environment for active participation and confident responses. Elevating both Participation and Thinking ratios not only boosts student learning, but also fosters Oracy skills and student motivation. By prioritising these ratios, you can empower students to maximise their cognitive engagement and overall learning experience.

Recommended reading:

- [Thinking and Participation Ratios: How to maximise cognitive engagement](#)
- [4 teaching strategies to link Oracy and Cognitive Science](#)
- [Should we actually be encouraging students to opt out of answering questions?](#)

THE ROLE OF COLD-CALLING IN DEVELOPING ORACY

What is (and isn't) Cold-Calling?

[Cold-Calling](#) is essentially calling on a student to answer a prompt or question regardless of whether they have raised their hand or not. This can help ensure that everyone is part of the classroom conversation, and that participating is not just for the loudest, quickest or smartest. It also helps ensure everyone is listening to each other's answers.

It's crucial to emphasise that Cold-Calling is not intended as a form of behaviour management for shaming inattentive students. Similarly, it doesn't mean no hands up; rather, it broadens the scope beyond a self-selected group, enabling a more inclusive and dynamic classroom environment

[Check out this video for more.](#)

How does Cold-Calling boost Oracy?

Research indicates that implementing Cold-Calling consistently can boost voluntary classroom engagement to approximately 90% of students within just a few weeks. Beyond enhancing speaking skills, it fosters active participation in Retrieval Practice. Questions that any student may be expected to answer prompts the whole class to think of an answer, allowing all students to practise retrieval regardless of whether they are called on.

Another benefit of Cold-Calling is its positive impact on shy students, particularly girls who may have previously hesitated to engage actively in class discussions. This is important, as these students might possess the knowledge but lack the confidence to volunteer answers. By employing Cold-Calling with these students, you can proactively involve them, gradually building their self-assurance in voicing their thoughts. This not only enhances their Oracy skills but also contributes to a more enriched learning experience for them.



Because the idea of Cold-Calling can cause some anxiety in students initially, usually because of a fear of public speaking or making mistakes, it's important to approach this thoughtfully and early on. Let students know what you're doing and why you're doing it, give them ample and frequent exposure to Cold-Calling, and actively foster a supportive classroom environment where they won't worry about being ridiculed or stigmatised for mistakes.

These worries are natural, so this should be seen as an opportunity to extend tailored support rather than a reason to avoid Cold-Calling. By offering reassurance and guidance, teachers can help students overcome their apprehensions, fostering a culture of growth and empowerment in the classroom.

[Check out this video for more.](#)

Recommended reading:

- [A complete guide to Cold-Calling in the classroom](#)
- [The 5 mistakes to avoid when Cold-Calling](#)
- [Designing better Cold-Calling questions to get students to think harder](#)

THE ROLE OF THINK, PAIR, SHARE IN DEVELOPING ORACY

What is Think, Pair, Share?

[Think, Pair, Share](#) involves getting students to think of an answer to a question individually, then discuss it with a partner, and finally share their thoughts with the rest of the class.

What are the benefits of Think, Pair, Share for Oracy?

[In a recent study](#), 391 students were asked to self-report their level of shyness. The students were then divided into three groups:

1. “Think, Share”, where students came up with answers individually before sharing them.
2. “Think, Pair, Share”, where, after thinking individually, students paired up to discuss with a partner before presenting their answers.
3. “Share”, where students answered questions immediately.

The results: students in the “Think, Pair, Share” group were 1.7 times more likely to raise their hand than those in the “Share” group and reported lower levels of anxiety than the “Think, Share” group.

[In another study](#), the researchers observed a significant enhancement in speaking performance among students in the Think, Pair, Share teaching group, surpassing the progress made by those in the control group.

These findings highlight the effectiveness of Think, Pair, Share in fostering student engagement and skill development in the classroom.

When to use Think, Pair, Share, and how to do it well

Having recognised the pivotal role of thinking in the learning process, it becomes apparent that we need to give students time to think. Giving students this initial Think time, even if just for a few seconds, allows them to consider their answer more carefully – which is then extended by the Share time.

This collaborative approach doesn't only help students think more deeply, though: it also helps boost their confidence and teamwork skills. Discussing their thinking with a partner before addressing the whole class can also help reduce their worries about public speaking and make them more confident about their answer.

However, it's worth noting that despite its effectiveness, Think, Pair, Share is a time-consuming strategy that requires a few minutes per question, while Cold-Calling allows you to get quick answers. Striking a balance between these two is crucial to boosting students' learning outcomes without running out of lesson time.

Sufficient Wait Times are useful in finding this balance, by allowing students a few seconds to think before being Cold-Called, so that you can reserve Think, Pair, Share for concepts that require students to think more deeply or discuss complex ideas. Transitioning directly to the "Pair" phase before Cold-Calling students can also allow you to effectively direct classroom discussions and maximise learning opportunities.

Recommended reading:

- [How to Think, Pair, Share](#)
- [Think, Pair, Share: Why it's important, and how to do it](#)

FAQ

To answer some of the most frequently asked questions about Oracy, we enlisted the help of Oracy expert, Lucy Lowde. Our deepest thanks to her for the following insightful answers.

What is Oracy?

Oracy is the ability to express yourself in different contexts, to adapt your language choice to your audience and to choose the appropriate and most meaningful vocabulary or literary device. It is also the ability to structure your thoughts into coherent and meaningful speeches and to engage an audience through spoken word. Finally, Oracy is also the ability to listen to others and to communicate non-verbally through body language, gestures and expressions.

In short, Oracy is the ability to successfully communicate.

Why is Oracy important?

It is imperative that we educate our students to become confident communicators and not to assume that all learners are, without being taught to be, good communicators; understanding that, instead, good and confident communication skills require a strong Oracy education.

Oracy is an important factor in boosting students' social, emotional and interpersonal skills, which is vital to ensure social mobility and the future readiness of our students. It is also an important tool to help boost attainment through developing essential skills both in spoken word but also the written word.

A discrete Oracy education is important in developing the Oracy skills of physical, cognitive, linguistic and social/emotional communication. Communication is one of the highest rated skills for employers, and as we see the world of work changing



and workplaces altering, strong communication skills are more important now than ever.

How does Oracy relate to other skills?

Although Oracy is a discrete skill within itself, Oracy is also a great tool to enhance other skills. It involves embracing many different transferable speaking and listening skills that can enhance the development of other skills such as the explanation of facts, instruction giving and problem solving.

Oracy enhances students' social abilities and their ability to express themselves, supporting mental health and personal development through enhancing self-esteem, well-being and cultural exchange. It also develops the abilities of students within their core subjects through improving reading, writing and reasoning skills as well as comprehension. These transferable skills enable students to enhance their metacognitive skills and meaning making, which in turn enhances retrieval.

How does Oracy differ from literacy?

Oracy is a prerequisite to literacy, as oral language is a prerequisite to the development of reading and writing. Although Oracy and literacy are intertwined, they are discrete and separate skills and therefore both need to be taught as such.

Oracy is the ability to communicate through speech, body language and listening and is in many forms a transient skill, whereas literacy is the ability to read and write and is a more permanent/formal expression of skills.

Despite both Oracy and literacy development supporting one another, to have a maximum impact, the skills need to be discreetly taught as separate skills as well as complimentary ones.

What are the principles of Oracy?

The core principle of Oracy is for students to become confident and successful speakers and listeners in a wide range of contexts. The key principles that underpin Oracy can work in any language and setting. The four strands or skills of Oracy are: social and emotional, physical, cognitive and linguistic.

How is Oracy taught?

Students can both learn about and learn from Oracy. It can be taught discreetly through Oracy lessons, where students learn what Oracy is and what a good Oracy looks like, but also as a complementary skill within lessons or tutoring.

For example, we don't need to think about how we can "fit" Oracy into our lessons – it is all around us, in every verbal interaction that we have with students and that they have with one another. What we can think about is how to support, structure, scaffold and strengthen this dialogue to enable all students to think hard and share their thinking.

What are the benefits of Oracy in the classroom?

Research suggests that the average impact of an Oracy intervention within the classroom is an additional six months of progress within a year when exploring attainment (EEF). Oracy has also been shown to improve thinking, motivation and participation within the classroom, which results in better behaviour and a stronger climate for learning.

Oracy is fundamental to teaching – a thread through our pedagogy. Purposeful student talk creates opportunities for students to put things in their own words, to link what they are hearing with prior knowledge, and begin meaning making. In partner talk, for example, students can thrash around what they think and be tentative as they share, shape and reshape their thinking before formulating more final answers. Of course, central to Oracy is not just speaking but also listening. Supporting students to actively listen helps them to consider their own thoughts considering those of others.

How can teachers support Oracy in their classrooms?

Firstly, teachers need to understand the importance of Oracy within the classroom and explore what impact they want Oracy to have before implementing it so they can best support their student's Oracy journey. It needs to be given time, and opportunities for students needs to be made with the structure of the lesson as opposed to bolted on or just used in the spur of the moment. Planning Oracy means that discussions, questions etc. are structured and purposeful. For Oracy to work, it needs to be considered and supported, not assumed.

Oracy should in the first instance be taught explicitly, and good Oracy needs to be modelled before students take part in Oracy tasks so that the activities are impactful. Finally, creating encouragement, positive but constructive feedback and a culture of talk can help students feel confident to share their voices.

How can parents/guardians support Oracy at home?

First and foremost, the simplest way for parents/carers to support Oracy at home is to talk to their children and create an environment of talk. Understanding the importance of Oracy and how it will impact their child's life is important to this.

Parents/carers can support Oracy by asking children about their day, their hobbies, their future goals and questioning them to obtain deeper answers. They can model good oracy themselves or encourage children to engage in speeches by strong Oracy role models. They can allow their children time to practise speaking out loud, through practising their school speeches or just asking them to present ideas. Listening can also be developed at home through modelling by being active listeners but also through expecting active listening.

Evidence-informed professional development that **actually works.**

The Teacher CPD Academy is an InnerDrive service that helps schools and colleges design and deliver engaging professional development programmes that improve teaching quality and consistency.

What sets us apart?

The Academy is a complete professional development service, designed to embed evidence-informed practice over time.



Engaging

We just don't do boring. If you don't engage your audience, learning and change doesn't happen.



Flexible

One size doesn't fit all. It's not a system. Our experts help you use our resources, in your PD plan, in your context.



Success Management

We are not just a platform; we are a service. You get a dedicated account manager who will help you get the best out of our service.

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