



Dennis-Yarmouth RSD

Instruction Office Newsletter

Oracy in the Classroom: Strategies for Effective Talk

"What makes me enjoy talking the most," explains Milo, a Year 3 student, "is that everybody's listened to you, and you're part of the world, and you feel respected and important."

Oracy -- the ability to speak well -- is a core pedagogy at School 21, a London-based public school.

"Speaking is a huge priority," stresses Amy Gaunt, a Year 3 teacher. "It's one of the biggest indicators of success later in life. It's important in terms of their employability as they get older. It's important in terms of wellbeing. If children aren't able to express themselves and communicate how they're feeling, they're not going to be able to be successful members of society."

From forming different groupings to using talking points, learn how you can integrate strategies for effective talk in your classroom.

How It's Done

Embedding Oracy Into Your Classroom (It's Already Happening)

The first step in embedding oracy into your classroom is accepting that it already happens -- your students talk a lot, and you can leverage that, suggests Gaunt. "You start from the idea that talking isn't an extra thing," she advises. "It's children discussing ideas with each other and coming up with their own conclusions. Talk supports thinking, and that means it supports learning."

(Continued on page 2)

March 2017

Volume 4, Issue 7

IMPORTANT DATES

March 12 – Daylight Savings Time begins



March 14- Pi Day



March 20- Spring begins at 6:28AM



March 21- World Poetry Day

March 22- State of the District meeting
(DYH auditorium- 2:20; 3:20; 4:15)

IMPORTANT NOTICE:

Central office is a **fragrance-free zone** so please be respectful and plan accordingly when you visit.

Due to one of our members at the CO being highly sensitive to any type of fragrance, we ask that staff visiting/meeting at the Administration building refrain from using any scented products. Fragrances from personal care products, air fresheners, laundry and other cleaning products have been associated with adversely affecting a person's health. We ask that we all work together to make the environment a safe and healthy workplace for everyone.



Thank you very much for your cooperation!





(Continued from page 1)

Teaching oracy means putting more intention behind how you guide and organize your students' talk. When they gather for group work or discussions, give them talking guidelines, roles, and tools. For example, sentence stems are starting phrases that help them complete their thinking in a full sentence and add intention to how they form their thoughts and communicate their learning.

Create Discussion Guidelines With Your Students

Creating discussion guidelines with your students is a great place to start implementing oracy in your classroom. "Once you've got them, it encourages you to include a lot more discussion within your lessons, and it also gives you a framework for those discussions," says Gaunt. "Having a clear set of guidelines makes sure that discussion is focused and that it has good learning outcomes, as well."

Create your discussion guidelines with your students. Show them examples of what good and bad discussion looks like. You can show them a prerecorded video, or model for them with another educator. "Through looking at the differences between good and bad discussion, we were able to say, 'These are the five or six key things that we think make a really good discussion.' And they become our discussion guidelines," says Gaunt.

Here are a few of the discussion guidelines that School 21 students have created:

- ✚ Always respect each other's ideas.
- ✚ Be prepared to change your mind.
- ✚ Come to a shared agreement.
- ✚ Clarify, challenge, summarize, and build on each other's ideas.
- ✚ Invite someone to contribute by asking a question.
- ✚ Show proof of listening.

"If you don't show proof of listening, that means the person who's talking doesn't feel like they have the proper respect, and they don't feel like they're important in the discussion," explains Milo.



Guide Your Students to Reach a Shared Agreement

It's common for young children to stay stuck in their beliefs and want to get their opinions across, which is one reason why it's important for them "to try to reach a shared agreement," explains Gaunt, "but sometimes that's not going to happen." A shared agreement lets students know that it's OK to change their mind, as well as the progression of their discussion and how it's going to end: They will share their ideas, listen to each other, possibly change their minds, and then come to an agreement. Understanding the flow of discussion helps to guide them through it.

Help Your Students Analyze Discussion Guidelines

Use **talk detectives** -- one or two students who go around the room and observe their peers talking in group discussions -- not only to help enforce the guidelines but also to give students an opportunity to reflect on them. Your talk detectives will have a sheet of paper with the discussion guidelines on one side, and then three boxes to the right of it where they can write students' names and what they said that fit within the guidelines. "For example," explains Milo, "somebody might say they invited somebody to contribute by saying, 'So, what's your idea?' They would write their name and what they said."

"It's getting the children to think about their conversations meta-cognitively," says Gaunt. "That's been really successful."

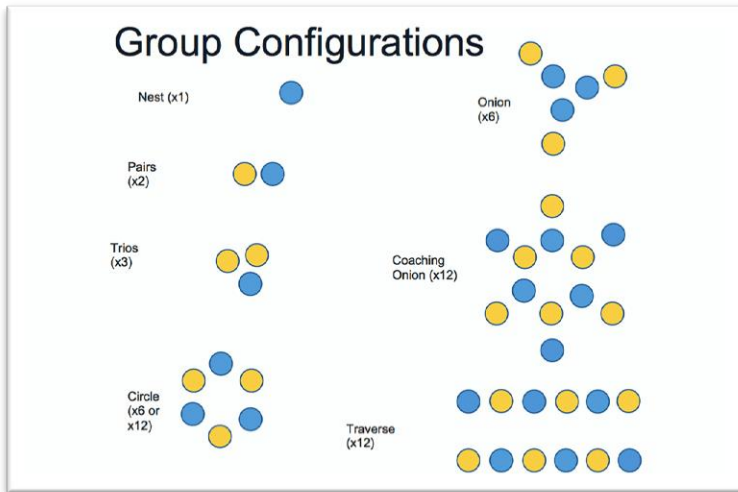
Consider How to Group Your Students

Each grouping will yield a different type of conversation. Consider how to group your students based on the different types of conversations you want them to have. When starting out, focus first on teaching your students how to work in pairs. In the primary grades, School 21 largely uses pairs, trios, and **traverse** (see image below), and focuses on the other group structures -- like **onion grouping** -- as they get older. Each group configuration below shows different ways to do partner talk. "The colors represent partners A and B," explains Gaunt.





"A blue dot is always next to a yellow dot."



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"We do a lot of, 'Turn and talk to your partner about this,' but what we noticed was that children weren't actually listening to what their partners had to say," recalls Gaunt. "We had to teach them what good partner talk looked like," emphasizing:

- ✚ Looking their partner in the eyes
- ✚ Thinking about the volume they're speaking at
- ✚ Giving their partner personal space

Working in trios is good when students discuss talking points (usually controversial statements) where they start out by agreeing or disagreeing with the statement, and then work toward coming to a shared agreement among the group.

When they begin exploring how to talk in larger groups -- five or six members -- they start to take on roles to help them guide the discussion.

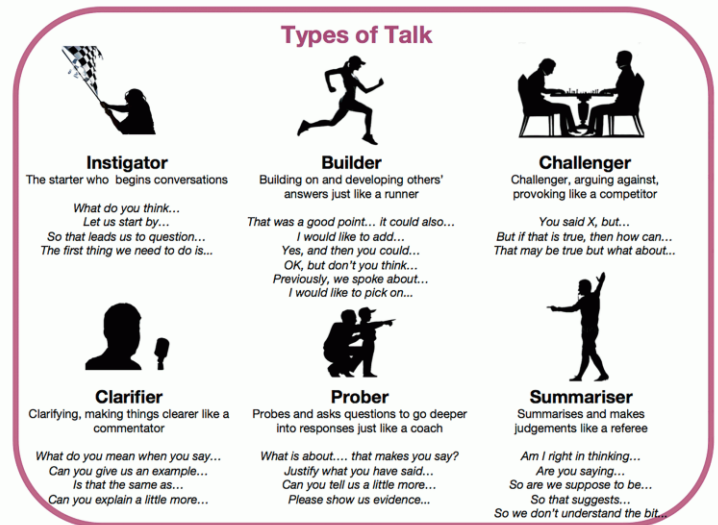
Create Discussion Roles

As adults, there are roles that we innately play in conversations, and we need to teach them to our students, says Gaunt, adding, "I used to think that if you let children talk, they'll just naturally be able to talk, but actually, we need to teach them how to talk."

In primary, there are three roles that School 21 focuses on initially: clarifier, challenger, and summarizer. "We need to teach them what those roles are, what they mean, what they look like in conversations, and the



language and phrases that we might use if we're playing those roles" explains Gaunt.



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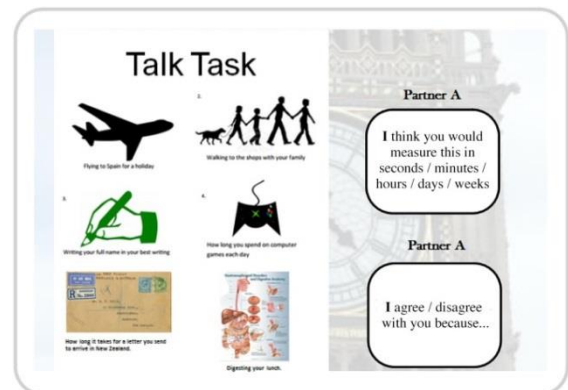
To introduce conversation roles to your students, model them. School 21 teachers play recorded videos of themselves having conversations, and have their students analyze, identify, and discuss the roles they played. "They can then apply that to themselves and reflect back on what they're doing," says Gaunt.

Once your students initiate the roles without guidance, you can introduce them to other roles, like builder, instigator, and prober.

Create Structured Talk Tasks

School 21 uses **Talk Tasks**, structured activities to help students discuss their learning within a lesson. They often use visuals to describe their Talk Tasks.

In a math lesson about how time is measured, they have a visual split into two columns. One column shows six images relating to different measurements of time, and the other one has sentence stems for partners A and B to discuss those time measurements.



© School 21





Talking Points, a controversial statement to initiate discussion, can be used in any subject. Talking points encourage discussion by navigating away from yes or no responses to questions, introducing students to a format on how to carry out the conversation. Students will either start speaking by saying, "I agree with that statement because" or "I disagree with that statement because."

In School 21's history lesson on Ancient Greece, teachers used the talking point, "Beliefs were not important at all in Ancient Greece," and had their students talk in trios.



Ghost Reading is a cross-curricular tool for encouraging students to speak. Have your students read aloud a text together. Leave it up to them to determine how long they read and who reads next.

Collective Writing is a piece of writing created collaboratively. Pick a topic -- whether in science, English, history, or anything else -- and have your students take turns speaking about it. They can offer a paragraph, a sentence, or even a word, whatever they're comfortable with. Write down what your students say, and then read it aloud when they're done.

Build Comfort and Confidence in Your Shy Students

With time, the foundations of oracy skills -- discussion guidelines, discussion roles, and choosing the level of participation in structured talk tasks -- build up a student's confidence around speaking.

To ease your students into talking, start them off with sentence stems -- a few words to help them start their sentence. This reduces the uncertainty of what they should say, gives them a framework on how to focus their sentence, and helps them to speak in full sentences.

"Sentence stems are a way of scaffolding people to talk, especially when people are less confident," says Gaunt. "If you give them that structure to hang their ideas and thoughts on, and they don't need to think so

much about how they're going to start their sentence, they're more confident to just speak."

You can encourage your students to build on each other's ideas by using sentence stems. They can say, "Linking to So-and-So's point, I think that..." You can also use sentence stems to have your students explain their learning by saying, for example, "I started looking at this math problem by..." Below are more sentence stems that you can use in English, history, art, and science.

English

- ✓ A similarity between these texts is...
- ✓ A difference between these texts is...
- ✓ The author's choice of X shows...

History

- ✓ In this era...
- ✓ This artifact shows that...
- ✓ This source illustrates that...
- ✓ This source is biased because...
- ✓ This source is more reliable because...

Art

- ✓ I like this picture because...
- ✓ I prefer the work of X because...
- ✓ The composition of this piece shows that...
- ✓ The techniques I have noticed are...

Science

- ✓ The results show that...
- ✓ The conclusion I have drawn is...
- ✓ There is a correlation between ... and ...
- ✓ An anomaly I noticed is...
- ✓ I have observed...

Oracy is embedded in School 21's culture. Starting in primary, students build their oracy techniques in the classroom, every day and in every lesson. In secondary, they continue to **develop their oracy skills through public speaking**. "We're practicing it all the time in every lesson we're in," says Matilda, a Year 9 student, "and by the time you get to Year 9, it's almost instinctive."





Rethinking Homework

(Originally titled “Does Homework Help?”)

In this *Education Update* article, Alexandria Neason reviews the research on the impact of homework, which is decidedly mixed. One study showed a correlation between completing homework and better scores on unit tests, but the link was weaker in elementary schools. Other studies found no strong evidence of homework leading to higher grades. “We still can’t prove it’s effective,” said education professor Cathy Vatterott, author of a 2009 book on homework. “The research is flawed and idiosyncratic.”

What’s indisputable is that lower-income students find homework a challenge, and not completing homework has a disproportionate impact on their grades. Myron Dueck, a Canadian school leader and author, says one of the most serious effects of homework is “the exacerbation of social and economic inequities that already exist.” Students who are struggling with food insecurity, unstable housing, noisy and distracting home environments, inadequate computer access, after-school jobs or child care, and the normal challenges of adolescence often find homework too much to handle. And indeed, studies of high-school dropouts cite homework as one of the top reasons for throwing in the towel.

Given this gap-widening effect (“We are basically punishing them for their poverty,” says Vatterott) what should schools do? Neason summarizes some possible policy tweaks:

- **B**eef up the rigor and engagement of in-school lessons so that missing homework takes less of a toll on achievement. One district made a point of including music and sensory objects in heavily scaffolded lessons.
- **G**ive students opportunities to complete homework in school with a conducive study environment and good computer access.
- **U**se homework to reinforce already-mastered skills or complete assignments that were launched in class rather than introducing new material. “Homework should reinforce students’ confidence in their abilities, not shatter it,” says Neason.

- **D**on’t assign busywork. Each homework assignment should have a clear rationale and add value.

- **D**on’t assign homework that requires students to buy special materials like poster board.

- **D**on’t portray homework as a test of responsibility. Students may be ashamed to tell teachers about out-of-school struggles that make homework difficult for them to complete.

- **R**ethink the weight of homework on grades. Students might be graded on what they learn rather than on process pieces such as homework assignments. One approach is to make homework optional and check for understanding with a quick quiz the next day.

- **R**ethink zero-to-100 grading scales, which have a devastating effect when a student gets a zero for missed homework. A 6-5-4-3-2-1 scale mitigates this effect.

- **A** variation on this is limiting homework to 10 percent of students’ grades or giving a grade of incomplete with time to complete it, perhaps during lunch or recess.

- **A**t the elementary level, eliminate homework entirely. Some elementary schools have stopped assigning homework and encourage students to play and read after school.

“Does Homework Help?” by Alexandria Neason in *Education Update*, January 2017 (Vol. 59, #1, p. 1, 4-5), ASCD member log-in access at <http://bit.ly/2k4lvyc>

Nine Possible Ways to Conduct a Classroom Discussion on a Book

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, Sarah Lightner and Ian Wilkinson (The Ohio State University) say that classroom conversations about texts are vital to building vocabulary, content knowledge, reading comprehension, and higher-order thinking. Lightner and Wilkinson believe there are nine approaches from which teachers can choose, depending on their overall goals, what they’re teaching, and their students’ needs. These approaches get students acquiring





information, making emotional connections, and engaging in critical analysis.

❖ **Literature circles** – Each group of students chooses a book from sets chosen by the teacher and decides how much to read in preparation for regular meetings. Initially, students assume roles in the meetings – discussion director, illustrator, connector, summarizer, word wizard – although the roles usually phase out as students become proficient at managing peer-led discussions. The teacher circulates and intervenes as necessary. The goal of literature circles is to foster habits of sustained and engaged reading and provide a foundation for interpretation, prediction, analysis, and comprehension.

❖ **Book club** – Small groups of students read the same text (chosen from books on a common theme selected by the teacher), write responses in journals, and use their responses to engage in discussion. There's a whole-class "community share" and then small-group book club discussions, the goal being to enhance students' awareness of issues on the theme or the historical background of the text. Teachers may also use this approach to enhance the quality of students' conversations, build fluency, develop vocabulary, and improve comprehension.

❖ **Grand conversations** – The teacher sets up several literature study groups, assigns a book to each one (or students choose a book from a list supplied by the teacher), gets students reading manageable chunks, and meets with each group for a few minutes a day to make sure they're on track. The teacher may do a daily all-class read-aloud and pose a "big question" for discussion. When groups finish their books, they meet with the teacher to discuss story elements, their enjoyment and interpretation, and any personal connections.



❖ **Questioning the author** – The teacher helps students see the author as an imperfect writer who may not always present ideas clearly. While reading the text with students, the teacher asks questions like, *What is the author saying here? Why is the author giving us this information? Is the author saying that clearly?* The teacher encourages collaboration by weaving together students' responses as they collectively work to make sense of the text.

❖ **Instructional conversations** – The teacher chooses a text, provides some background information, reads it with students, and leads a discussion focused on an interesting theme. The goal of this approach is to understand texts, learn complex concepts, and consider various viewpoints. It has been used successfully with English language learners and students with special needs.

❖ **Junior Great Books**

shared inquiry – Students read a text and the whole class discusses it with the teacher, focusing on interpretive questions that have more than one right answer. Students share their opinions, test various possible interpretations, and address the ambiguities of the text. The teacher then gives students a focus question for their note-taking as they read the text a second time. Students' notes

generate further discussion, and students consider and discuss significant words or phrases in the text. This approach aims to build students' comprehension, critical thinking skills, and enjoyment of reading as they explore the literary canon of noted novelists, essayists, philosophers, and poets.

❖ **Collaborative reasoning** – Students read a story or section of a story that raises a "big question" that could be resolved in a number of ways. Small groups of students then meet with the teacher and argue positions on the big question, give reasons for their positions, provide counterarguments, and respond to challenges. The goal is to critically

I ♥ Book Club





consider competing points of view, with the teacher facilitating, prompting, and pushing for clarification.

❖ ***Paideia seminar*** – The teacher chooses a text that contains key values and ideas being studied and leads students through multiple close readings. As the class discusses the text, the teacher challenges students to identify consequential ideas in the text, facilitates without talking too much, keeps students from straying from the focus, and asks open-ended questions that get students seeking understanding in the text, analyzing details, and synthesizing ideas.

❖ ***Philosophy for children*** –

Students read age-appropriate texts that address enduring ethical and philosophical topics. The teacher then asks students to generate open-ended questions about the issues raised in the text and selects one or more of their questions as the focus of all-class discussion. The goal is to develop strong reasoning skill, help students recognize the difference between good and poor reasoning, and get them thinking about important philosophical issues.

Of course teachers can mix and match components of these approaches to accomplish their goals. Lightner and Wilkinson list the key variables:

- ✓ ***Who selects the text?***
- ✓ ***What type of text is discussed?***
- ✓ ***How is the class organized?***
- ✓ ***When is the text read?***
- ✓ ***Is the discussion led by the teacher or by students?***
- ✓ ***Who decides what is discussed?***
- ✓ ***Who controls turn-taking?***
- ✓ ***Who decides if what students say is right or wrong?***
- ✓ ***Is the focus on authors' intentions?***
- ✓ ***Is the focus on students' emotional connections to the text?***
- ✓ ***Is the focus on textual analysis?***
- ✓ ***Is the focus on critical analysis?***



"Instructional Frameworks for Quality Talk About Text: Choosing the Best Approach" by Sarah Lightner and Ian Wilkinson in *The Reading Teacher*, January/February 2017 (Vol. 70, #4, p. 435-444), <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/trtr.1547/abstract>; the authors can be reached at lightner.30@osu.edu and wilkinson.70@osu.edu.

DEVELOPING STUDENTS' QUESTION-ASKING ABILITIES

(Originally titled "Five Ways to Strengthen Student Questioning")

In this *Education Update* article, New Jersey enrichment specialist Jeanne Muzi suggests ways to build students' question-asking skills:

- ***PASS-AROUNDS*** – Have students handle a series of interesting objects (hardware, photographs), then generate and evaluate questions.
- ***Q-STEM*** – Have students pick a sentence-stem (*How...? Why...? Are there...? Is it possible if...?*) and generate as many questions as they can on a topic they're studying.
- ***PARTNERS AND QUESTIONS*** – Have student pairs look at a lesson-relevant object (an artifact, photograph, art image) and take turns asking and answering questions about it. Which questions are most revealing and why?
- ***WHOSE EYES?*** – Display a thought-provoking image (a historic photograph, contemporary illustration), give students time to think about it, and then have them generate questions that might be asked by someone in the background (for example, a little girl at the end of the line in a photo of Ellis Island).
- ***QUESTION-A-GO-GO*** – Hang up an interesting photograph, blueprint, quote, artwork and over the course of a week have students post questions about it on sticky notes. Then discuss and display the questions on a Depth of Knowledge rainbow according to level.

"Five Ways to Strengthen Student Questioning" by Jeanne Muzi in *Education Update*, January 2017 (Vol. 59, #1, p. 8), <http://bit.ly/2jQz9YY>

