4 TEACHING STRATEGIES TO LINK ORACY AND COGNITIVE SCIENCE

By teacherCPDacademy.com

With Labour's announcement emphasising the prioritisation of oracy and "speaking skills," many are wondering what this might look like in practice. The fear is that we end up prioritising developing speaking skills at the expense of knowledge. In essence, that we teach students how to speak, but without giving them the fundamental understanding about what they are speaking about.

Are the two mutually exclusive? Does it have to be an "either-or"? Could it be that principles and strategies that are grounded in Cognitive Science can go hand in hand with "speaking skills"? Specifically, could the latter help enhance Retrieval Practice, as well as overall learning?

Seminal and recent research suggests that there can be a harmonious relationship between the two, facilitated by the following teaching techniques:

- Cold-Calling
- Think, Pair, Share
- Participation Ratio
- Wait Times

These four strategies can help enhance not only what our students think about, but how they communicate their ideas.

1. COLD-CALLING

Cold-Calling is essentially calling on a student regardless of whether they have raised their hand or not. This can help ensure that everyone is part of the classroom conversation, and that

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participating is not just for the loudest, quickest or smartest. It also helps ensure everyone is listening to each other's answers.

Studies have shown that by Cold-Calling regularly, voluntary classroom participation can increase to about 90% of the class, within just a few weeks. Not only can this technique help students develop their speaking skills, but it also gets them to engage in Retrieval Practice. This works because asking a question will allow all your students to start thinking of the answer. The act of retrieving that information is enough to strengthen their memory of it.

What is particularly interesting is that Cold-Calling seems to benefit shy students, particularly girls who may have previously been reluctant to participate. This is important as they may know the answer to the question but just aren't confident enough to raise their hand and answer it. Cold-Calling these students allows you to make the decision for them, which over time will boost their confidence when speaking up in class, ultimately improving their oracy and learning.

2. 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.

A recent study found that students who engage in Think, Pair, Share were about 1.7 times more likely to raise their hand than those who were asked to immediately answer the question. This is likely attributed to the combined effects of individual preparation and receiving validation of their ideas from their partner, making them more likely to speak up and voice their answers. Indeed, researchers in this other study found that students who were taught using Think, Pair, Share improved more in their speaking performance than those in the control group.

When taking these findings together, it is evident that using Think, Pair, Share can help steer your students toward maximising their learning potential, while elevating their oracy skills along the way.

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3. PARTICIPATION RATIO

The Participation Ratio, as described by Doug Lemov, is the proportion of your class who are actively participating in the lesson. It is usually mentioned alongside Thinking Ratio, which describes how hard and deep students are thinking.

A study found that high internal behavioural engagement (i.e., Thinking Ratio) did not guarantee student achievement if it was not accompanied by talk (i.e., Participation Ratio). It is therefore very important to instil a good Participation and Thinking Ratio during learning.

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4. WAIT TIMES

Wait Time is the time between a teacher asking a question and calling out to get a response from a student. Research has consistently shown that if we can optimise Wait Times, it can improve both the quality and quantity of answers, as well as reduce the number of "I don't know" responses.

This is because given ample time, students can effectively retrieve relevant information and construct well-formed answers. As a result, their confidence grows, encouraging them to share their thoughts with the rest of the class. This not only allows them to reinforce their learning through retrieval, but also provides valuable opportunities for honing their speaking skills.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Oracy means different things to different people. The danger is students talking lots but not thinking hard enough. We want deep, critical thinkers who can draw on information from their long-term memory. Cold-Calling, Think, Pair, Share, a good Participation-to-Thinking Ratio and Wait Times can all help facilitate this.

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Oracy clearly covers a large range of areas. Some may prove to be more beneficial to learning, well-being and confidence. In terms of learning, it may provide a route to help clarify and crystalise the internal thought processes in our students' heads during their learning. If not, it will just be a lot of chatter without much substance.

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