

# ORACY IN CLASS: HOW TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO SPEAK UP AND PARTICIPATE

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Sometimes in class, students do not feel comfortable enough to answer their teacher's questions or speak up – even if they have interesting ideas to share. Fear of judgement or shyness often keeps knowledgeable students from engaging in the classroom.

However, expanding their capacity to communicate and take risks academically is vital to a student's success. And the key to it lies in the teacher. So, how can you create a supportive classroom environment where they feel safe to do so? Read on to learn more about:

- The importance of students speaking up in the classroom.
- Student-teacher relationships.
- How to motivate students to participate in class.

## WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT FOR STUDENTS TO SPEAK UP IN THE CLASSROOM?

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

### *Consolidating students' learning*

Speech is an essential tool for enhancing students' learning, not just a way to transfer information between two people. Discussing topics in class helps students to process the material through integration of information and has been [found to solidify learning](#).

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### ***Keeping students engaged***

Asking students to verbally participate in class keeps them engaged in what you're saying. It essentially forces them to adapt to an active mode of learning, as answering questions and joining class discussions pushes students to think critically. [Research has found](#) that when students use an active method of learning, their academic performance significantly increases.

### ***Allowing students to find their own voice***

Telling your students to voice their opinions, answers and questions aloud allows them to put together their thoughts and understanding of the material. This also helps them develop self-confidence, especially if they get an answer right or offer interesting perspectives.

### ***Building relationships between students***

Engaging in classroom discussions helps students build connections with one another and strengthens classroom community and culture. Students may also offer new ideas or find alternative ways to explain a complicated concept to their peers, which enables greater learning.

## **HOW CAN STUDENTS' CHARACTERISTICS AFFECT TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS?**

[In one study](#), researchers examined how student characteristics such as prior achievement and self-perception of ability influence verbal interactions between teachers and students. The results showed that students who had a higher perception of their own abilities were more actively engaged in these interactions. They demonstrated increased verbal engagement, provided elaborate answers to teacher questions and received more supportive feedback.

These findings have important implications in the classroom. They suggest that competence is important for confidence, which you can increase by helping students gain knowledge and be successful (hello, Rosenshine's seventh Principle!).

Likewise, fostering a positive self-concept of ability among students is crucial to promoting their engagement and participation. Potentially, supportive feedback and creating an inclusive learning environment that minimises fear of failure could be key to this.

At times it may also be a good idea to ask open-ended questions that require students to provide elaborate answers. This encourages critical thinking and fosters active participation in class discussions. When students have the chance to express their thoughts and opinions, they are more likely to feel valued and confident, which in turn motivates them to continue participating.

## **WHICH STUDENTS CHOOSE TO RAISE THEIR HAND TO PARTICIPATE?**

The frequency of hand-raising is a good indicator of students' voluntary involvement in the learning process. [A recent study](#) examined this behaviour using self-reports, video observations and interviews, revealing substantial variations between students. It found that students who raise their hands more frequently tend to be more cognitively active, which suggests that cognitive involvement influences their decision to participate.

You can apply these findings to encourage more students to participate by using Think, Pair, Share. This strategy allows students to discuss concepts or problems with a partner before sharing their thoughts with the whole class. Encouraging students to engage in dialogue and collaborate promotes active cognitive involvement and increases overall participation.

It is also important to consider the role of student motivation in hand raising. The researchers in this study found that extrinsic motivation had a negative effect on the frequency of hand raising. Incorporating activities that tap into students' curiosity and allow for open-ended discussions can help boost situational interest and encourage more students to raise their hands.

## **3 WAYS TO MOTIVATE YOUR STUDENTS TO SPEAK UP IN THE CLASSROOM**

While some students may find it challenging to speak up in class at first, it becomes much easier once the ball gets rolling.

[In one study](#), researchers observed and interviewed teachers and collected student work to determine how teachers motivated their students in their classroom. They found that having highly engaging teachers was linked to the quality of work students produced. Here are some features of engaged student classrooms you could try and replicate in your own:

### ***1. Maintaining an appropriate pace of instruction***

This means finding the balance between leaving enough time for students to grasp new concepts and ensuring that instruction remains dynamic and engaging. No set formula exists for this, so it will ultimately come down to a judgement call. Fortunately, checking for understanding regularly can help inform this decision.

### ***2. Teacher characteristics***

Research has found that the characteristics of teachers can affect whether students participate in class. If the teacher is supportive, understanding and friendly, it can promote active student participation.

### ***3. Encourage a sense of belonging***

Humans have an innate need to belong, which is intensified during adolescent years as this is the period where many try to figure themselves out on a personal and social level.

Therefore, promoting a sense of belonging in the classroom creates a shared identity between students, which allows them to feel valued and accepted by their teacher and peers. This ultimately means that you are creating a psychologically safe classroom for your students, where they will feel less afraid to speak up because they are worried about what others might think or say about them.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Speaking up in class can be intimidating, but it has too many benefits to miss out on: verbal engagement can enhance students' social development and improve their learning.

A classroom is always richest when all voices are heard. No quick or easy solution exists. It involves nurturing a positive self-perception among students, encouraging active participation and creating a cognitively engaging learning environment. Hopefully, doing so can help spark student curiosity, maximise participation and ultimately accelerate their learning.