

A Culture of Speech



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What's the idea?

Like reading or writing, oracy is a skill which should be taught explicitly across all subjects. You can develop rhetoric by providing regular opportunities for all students to engage in structured speech events.

What does it mean?

Verbal communication skills are crucial to success in academic life and beyond. Structured speech events are planned activities that develop students' oracy skills, discreetly and over time. They can take the form of small additions to a lesson or more formal, extended events (see ideas below).

By creating a wide range of speech opportunities within the curriculum, we can ensure that students develop fluency in the formal Standard English. Good oracy is not always about using 'correct' English, however; students also learn to adapt their speech modes to suit their context, for example, knowing when it is appropriate to use local dialect or slang.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

» Fitch A (2015) Spoken Literacy and Rhetoric in the Classroom (A HGS resource). In Sherrington T Making speech count: Rhetoric in practice. Available at: <https://teacherhead.com/2015/09/09/making-speech-count-rhetoric-in-practice/> (accessed 11 January 2019).

What are the implications for teachers?

Ideas for smaller speech events:

Include speech little and often so that it becomes a normal part of students' learning experiences. Build up to big presentations and formal assessments using plenty of smaller speaking activities.

Try using plenaries and starters for mini-presentations: set up a rota and ask a different student to recap previous learning or summarise new learning. During lessons you could ask students to articulate their own ideas verbally before writing anything down.

Support less confident students by preparing them in advance; let them know that you'll ask them to present their ideas to the rest of the group so they have a chance to plan what they are going to say.

Ideas for extended structured speech events:

Speech events take time; rushing through 30 presentations in 45

minutes will give the impression that you don't think they're important enough to spend more time on, so plan larger speech events carefully.

All students should take part in formal presentations individually and as part of larger groups. You can also plan structured debates with opening and closing statements and sequenced contributions. Share guidelines for the content, length and style you want and devote time to feeding back afterwards. Eventually students will manage the whole debate, from start to finish, without your input.

For homework, ask students to memorise a poem or speech and get them to recite their choice to the rest of the group. Use videos of great public speakers (like Martin Luther King) to help them prepare.

Top tips:

Set high expectations of students' speeches – they should value the development of skilful speech as highly as they do reading or writing.