

Teaching and Learning Link

Spring 1 2025



Dialogue: Sam Rasmussen, VP

Dialogue is a key pillar of Ely Expects, as high-quality communication between students and teachers creates greater opportunities for learning, confidence-building, and ultimately, stronger outcomes. Oracy enables students to articulate ideas, debate different viewpoints, and develop essential listening skills—crucial both in school and beyond. The impact of recent CPD oracy workshops on lesson planning is explored below. Teacher feedback plays a vital role in student progress, offering opportunities for reflection, identifying strengths, and addressing gaps in knowledge and skills. Mini-whiteboards are a valuable tool for assessing understanding and providing instant feedback—effective classroom strategies for their use are detailed on the second page of the Link. Academic mentoring provides personalised support, helping students set goals, overcome challenges, and stay on track for success. Understanding the curriculum and personal strengths through assessment is critical in enabling students to take ownership of their learning and remain focused on improvement.

Together, these elements foster a culture of trust, respect, and collaboration between students and staff as partners in the learning journey.

How have you used ideas from the oracy workshops?

Linguistic oracy

A blank bullseye diagram was given out and staff had to come up with a question. Vocabulary, increasing in difficulty, was written in the circles that related to the question. Once completed, students can work in pairs answering the question. Students award points for the vocabulary used within their answer.

Teachers were also shown how a quick game of bingo can be used as a starter or plenary. Students draw a quick grid in their books then add random words from a key vocabulary list. Teachers read definitions which students can cross off to 'win'.

We also explored several oracy-based tasks to help students develop their evaluative and discussion skills. We discussed an evaluation task where students assess a statement by agreeing, disagreeing, or partly agreeing, using structured discourse markers such as "firstly" and "however" to support their reasoning. A sliding scale activity was also reviewed, allowing students to rate their level of agreement. Additionally, an interactive task using controversial topics was introduced, encouraging students to collaborate and discuss their views. These activities aim to enhance students' critical thinking, articulation, and engagement in classroom discussions.

Heather Clark-Hope, English CL and Emily Hill, Geography CL

Key terms and oracy

The focus of this session was exploring different ways of teaching key terms through oracy. We worked with our acronym PIPEDBAP, which consolidates the key vocal skills in Drama, such as pitch, intonation, pace etc.

We demonstrated how these terms could be taught through practical oracy strategies such as vocal modelling and choral response, both of which help embed this important vocabulary for later retrieval. We had time in the session too to discuss how similar strategies could work in other subjects.

Catherine Seymour, Drama CL and Jake Newton, Drama

The session was really interesting and has been useful as a reflection point for my own practice, particularly the relevance of pitch and tone when communicating with students. As TAs, we are constantly adjusting both skills to suit the moment, but it was useful to be reminded of this. I have since become more conscious of the ways I adapt my tone and pitch, particularly when mentoring students 1:1 as opposed to working within a larger group.

Kate Risk, TA

I am planning to use the bullseye vocabulary strategy in an upcoming Year 9 lesson, to support students as they prepare for an assessment.

The class is about to tackle an analytical essay on a short story we have read. The text has some complex themes such as moral ambiguity and the idea of trauma. Students currently lack some of the vocabulary to explore these themes, so I will be introducing a 'bullseye' paired oracy activity. Using these words out loud with partners should hopefully support students to embed them in their analysis.

Gareth Humphreys, English

Listening skills

This session focused on active listening skills, separating these into six separate strands, such as listening to support the speaker, listening to reflect and listening to respond. We also explored the idea of 'listening' to non-verbal cues, pitch and tone to interpret the emotions of a speaker, with some interesting discussion around how to support students with SEND needs in this key area.

Sam Rasmussen, VP and Charity Novick, English

I've used some of the strategies we explored in my KS3 Science Session 6 Club, with really good impact. This is a very lively group who have so many ideas that they sometimes struggle to listen to each other.

I introduced the idea of 'listening to respond' to the group, using a pair of goggles as a way to mark out the speaker. Students were encouraged to listen carefully before formulating a point which linked closely to what they had heard. This worked well and I think it would translate effectively to other ordinary KS3 teaching too.

Isobel Wilson, Science

Our oracy approach

The focus of the session was to introduce our approach at Ely College to oracy and to onboard people to the Voice 21 platform if they hadn't already done so.

We also looked at the resources in the Ely College folder which many people found really useful. Time was given to plan an activity too.

Sam Manning, Science

Oracy in the curriculum

My session focused on building a sense of challenge and progression into our oracy curriculum over time, building fundamental oracy skills to support the broader curricular aims for each subject. The main takeaways were:

- Begin with a clear vision for how oracy can support your subject, rather than seeing it as a bolt-on.
- Identify the key oracy skills that students can use and develop other time and map these throughout your key stages.
- Plan and build in activities to support this. Middle leaders can help their teams to contribute to this by having clear systems and consistent resources for planning.

Ross Perkins, History CL

Ross directing us to the toolkit for curriculum planning and the areas that he found most helpful was hugely appreciated. Noticing which areas of the Voice 21 information he had emphasised and 'zoned in on' in terms of his planning was beneficial in editing and changing our own mapping - and how it was justified.

I have already created a similar mapping for oracy which clearly identifies progress. I think moving forward, it would be important for me to identify the more specific tasks within our curriculum and how they are meeting this overall goal now that the mapping is more secure.

Ryan Scott, RE CL

I found this session really useful and interesting and was particularly pleased to have the opportunity to explore all the options on offer and to share thoughts on how these might work for me. I found the Voice 21 examples and ideas very easy to follow and I think they will be straightforward to adapt and implement too. I'm particularly drawn to the social and emotional aspects of oracy, so I was pleased to see this strand represented in the Framework, and to start thinking about what this might mean in the classroom.

In Science, we already have a very user-friendly oracy plan, with the suggested activities colour-coded for each unit. It's going to be simple to get on and develop these strategies going forward.

Paul O'Brian, Science

Want to find out more?

Look on the **Staff TEAMS page** under the **QUILT Teaching and Learning channel**. Let us know if you experiment with these strategies in your own classroom, so we can showcase your work in a future Link!



What are the best ways to use mini whiteboards?

Dylan William describes mini whiteboards as the “greatest development in education since the slate”, and I’m inclined to agree. I use them for all sorts of activities but find them most powerful for what William calls ‘minute-by-minute and day-by-day’ formative assessment, where very frequent but lightning-quick whole class checks of key learning points enable immediate reactive adjustments of teaching within a lesson. Taking constant readings of progress in this way means that gaps and misconceptions can be identified and sorted before anyone in room is in danger of falling behind.

There are challenges with mini whiteboards too, some of which are discussed below. Used well though, it’s hard to think of another strategy which offers such instant and inclusive student-teacher classroom dialogue.

Charity Novick, English

Optimise your mini whiteboard routine with the WALKTHRU’s ‘Show me’ technique

Explaining your routines ahead of time can create a **streamlined** teamwork approach to learning, **empowering** everyone to participate in the **dialogue**

1 Set a question with a **goal** and a **timeframe**. Provide **thinking time**.

2 Ask students to **‘hover’** their boards face down. Then signal **1-2-3-Show Me!**

It’s worth taking time to help **students practise this routine** until it is **slick and automated**.



DID YOU KNOW?

Meridian Learning groups the WALKTHRU’s usefully into clusters. However, **if you would like to access individual WALKTHRU’s separately, you still can!**

<https://walkthrus.co.uk/>
Username: walkthrus@meridiantrust.co.uk
Password: M3ridianL3arning@

Mini whiteboards in Science

We use mini whiteboards a lot in Science and many classrooms have dedicated trays on each bench with boards, pens and rubbers. This cuts down on organisational logistics and means that it is possible to use the boards flexibly and swiftly throughout lessons. We follow Adam Boxer’s recommendations of the best routines and these work really well:

<https://tipsforteachers.co.uk/adam-boxer/>

We find the whiteboards can be particularly useful for planning long answer questions, especially method questions which require the students to remember multiple steps. Listing the steps on the whiteboards at the planning stage supports the writing of detailed and accurate full answers. This is particularly powerful with some of our students who struggle to make a start on harder tasks, finding the empty page a bit challenging.

Imogen Heath, Science

Mini whiteboards for A Level

I use mini whiteboards all the time, particularly with A Level. My Year 13s are quite a small group and can be uncomfortable speaking their ideas out loud, even though they know each other well by this point. The mini whiteboards help them to express their ideas and share brainstorming, also ensuring that everyone opts in to the learning.

We also use the boards for drafting short parts of essays, particularly thesis statements, relating these to the AOs. This can be a really helpful way to distil thinking and make sure students are hitting the key points efficiently.

Charlotte Russell, English

Classroom challenge	Possible solution?
Students doodle on their boards	Pre-teach students: ‘Your board is for work, not for artwork’. Repeat as needed.
The pens keep running out	Buy better pens. These ESPO ones are inexpensive and last well: https://www.espo.org/espo-smartbuy-slim-barrel-drywipe-pens.html
Students copy the responses of others	Address this as a whole class point to avoid shaming individual students who may be struggling (e.g. ‘Remember, I’m interested in what you think, not in what your neighbour thinks’). Offer additional brief verbal learning checks following mini whiteboard work for students who may be copying.
Students leave their boards blank	Pre-teach students that this counts as a very visible refusal to complete a learning task. If they really don’t have an answer, they should write a question mark. Following discussion of responses from the rest of the group, go back for brief verbal learning checks with those who initially wrote question marks to ensure full engagement (e.g. ‘Fred, what’s your answer now you’ve heard some ideas?’).
Students write too much on their boards	Change what you are asking them to do in the first place or clarify your expectations (e.g. ‘I don’t need an essay!’). As a rule of thumb, if a task is generating long responses, it probably isn’t a mini whiteboard task.
Students’ handwriting is too tiny to read	Model what you need to see with the group, holding up a board with tiny writing against some larger examples. Explain teacher cognitive load to the students to rationalise the need for clear writing.
Students flap their boards to make an entertaining wobbly noise	Pre-teach students: ‘Quiet boards, thank you. No musical instruments today.’ Repeat as needed.

NEXT TIME...

Join in too!

Showcase **your professional practice** and contribute to the vibrant T and L culture around college!

The next edition will focus on Standards. We need **YOUR EXPERT ANSWERS** to these questions:

How can we help students reduce needless perfectionism?

How do you help students maintain good homework standards?

How do you use data to support your lesson planning?

What are your most useful classroom routines?

Keen to contribute? Good! Contact **Sam Rasmussen** or **Charity Novick** with ideas, articles, tips, reviews etc.

HAVE YOUR SAY