

ORACY AND CLASSROOM DIALOGUE

What happens when you make the whole class argue out loud?

One trainee teacher's Year 7 Latin class debated Roman history over four lessons, translated here for any subject where dialogue and argument matter.

One trainee teacher's Year 7 class of 31 flipped its class vote on a debate motion and pulled all but five learners into speaking aloud, after she gave them personas, named roles and paired rehearsal before the big moment, but this is her account of one class, not a measured trial.



WHAT HAPPENED

A four-lesson debate on the Roman games

A trainee teacher gave her mixed-attainment Year 7 Latin class of 31 four 50-minute lessons on the Roman gladiatorial games, building towards a class debate on whether the violence was justifiable as entertainment. Learners planned their arguments in small groups with named roles, then debated using a hands-up protocol so the whole class of 31 could take part. By the end, 26 of the 31 had spoken aloud (normally around ten volunteer an answer in her lessons), and the class's majority view on the debate motion had flipped from strongly in favour to mostly against.

26/31

learners spoke aloud in the debate



Each dot is one learner in the class of 31. Filled = spoke aloud in the debate (by reading a speech or offering a counter-argument).

The moves she used

1

Personas before positions

Learners argued from an assigned historical persona before being asked for their own opinion: easier to speak when the stake isn't personal yet.

2

Paired talk before public talk

A quick discussion with a partner came before any whole-class share; almost every pair then put a hand up to answer.

3

Named roles in fours

Researcher, counter-arguer, speech-maker: every learner had a specific job, so nobody was just watching.

4

An evidence box on the sheet

A dedicated space for "my source" once she noticed claims arriving without one; a number of learners then began backing their points with evidence.

Across your subjects and classes

This was one Latin class arguing about Roman history. What follows are sensible ways the same four moves could work in other subjects and classes: worth trying, not proven.

Subject	How the structure could translate
History	Give small groups a real stakeholder persona from the decision you're teaching, then debate with the same researcher / counter-arguer / speech-maker roles.
English	Personas become characters arguing a text's central dilemma; the evidence box becomes "which line proves this."
Science	Stakeholder roles around a real dilemma (e.g. a pesticide ban); the evidence box forces a citation of the data, not just an opinion.
Geography	Named stakeholders (farmer, developer, resident) debate a land-use decision using the same four moves.
MFL	Personas and paired rehearsal happen in the target language before a whole-class share; the evidence box becomes a vocabulary bank reference.

Adapt it to the class in front of you

Quiet or reluctant

Lean hardest on paired talk before public talk: the lowest-risk way in, and what got almost every pair's hand up here.

Boisterous, talks over others

Lean on named roles plus a hands-up, teacher-calls protocol: channel the energy into a job.

Top-set, high-attaining

Push the evidence box further: demand two sources and a prepared rebuttal, not just an opinion.

Foundation, EAL or SEND

Keep personas concrete and add sentence starters ("I think... because...") for the paired-talk stage.

One teacher's account, not a tested method

Early signal

This rates the evidence's firmness, not our endorsement of the idea. One trainee teacher's own account of one class: a promising set of moves, not a proven method.

- One class, one teacher, one topic (Roman history): we don't know if it plays out the same in a different subject or room.
- No comparison class and no before/after test, so we can't prove the moves alone caused the shift in views; something else about the topic or the week could have played a part.
- By her own account she had no systematic way of recording the talk, so the 26-of-31 is her count on the day and the usual level of about ten speaking up is her estimate, not a measured baseline: the jump is real, but its exact size is approximate.

What that means for you: treat this as a promising set of moves worth trying and watching closely in your own room, not a method to roll out unchanged.

TRY IT THIS WEEK

Your first small step

THIS WEEK

Before your next class discussion, give 60 seconds of paired talk before taking hands up.

Try it and watch: notice who speaks up who usually doesn't. That's your own evidence, not ours. The trainee teacher behind this account changed her approach mid-sequence for exactly this reason, adding an evidence box after noticing learners citing claims with no source.

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