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**TEACHING SKILLS: TEACHING SPEAKING**

**Course Outline**

* Introduction
* Reasons for teaching speaking
* Speaking to the whole person
* The role of speaking in language learning
* The role of the teacher in speaking activity
* Classroom speaking activities ( + more speaking suggestions)
* Correcting speaking mistakes

**Introduction**

However good a student may be at listening and understanding, it does not necessarily mean that he will speak well. A discriminating ear does not always produce a fluent tongue. There has to be training in the productive skill of speech as well. In many cases, listening should lead naturally on to speaking.This is particularly so at the phonological level where it is essential to develop an ability to recognise a sound before success in producing it is possible**.**

It has been pointed out earlier that there is much in common between the receptive skills of listening and reading, and the productive skills of speaking and writing. There are controlled, guided and free phases of production in both oral and written work. The speech produced by the student should be tightly controlled at first by the teacher, then as progress is made there should be less rigorous guidance, culminating in situations where the student is free to produce utterances appropriate to the situation. This progression applies to each teaching point at all levels of achievement, though clearly at beginner stages there will be heavy emphasis on controlled and guided practice, and more and more freedom at advanced levels**.**

**1.Reasons for teaching speaking**

There are three main reasons for getting students to speak in the classroom. Firstly, speaking activities provide *rehearsal* opportunities - chances to practise real-life speaking in the safety of the classroom. Secondly, speaking tasks in which students try to use any or all of the language they know provide *feedback* for both teacher and students. Everyone can see how well they are doing: both how successful they are, and also what language problems they are experiencing.And finally, the more students have opportunities to *activate* the various elements of language they have stored in their brains, the more automatic their use of these elements become. As a result, students gradually become autonomous language users. This means that they will be able to use words and phrases

fluently without very much conscious thought.  
 Good speaking activities can and should be extremely engaging for the students. If they are all participating fully - and if the teacher has set up the activity properly and can then give sympathetic and useful feedback - they will get tremendous satisfaction from it.

We need to be clear that the kinds of speaking activities we are looking at here are not the same as controlled language practice, where, for example, students say a lot of sentences using a particular piece of grammar or a particular function. That kind of speaking is part of *study* .The kind of speaking we are talking about here almost always involves the *activate* element in our ESA trilogy (E: Engage, S:Study ,A:Activate phases). In other words, the students are using *any* and *all* of the language at their command to achieve some kind of *purpose* which is not purely linguistic. They are practising what Scott Thornbury, in his book *How to Teach Speaking*, calls *speaking-as-skill***,** where there is a task to complete and speaking is the way to complete it. In the same way that ‘writing-for-writing’ is designed to help the student get better at the skill of writing ,so the activities in this lesson are designed to foster better speaking, rather than having students speak only to focus on (and practise) specific language constructions. As with any sequence, however, we may use what happens in a speaking activity as a focus for future *study,* especially where the  
speaking activity throws up some language problems that subsequently need fixing.  
 Scott Thornbury suggests that the teaching of speaking depends on there being a classroom culture of speaking, and that classrooms need to become ‘*talking* classrooms’ In other words, students will be much more confident speakers (and their speaking abilities will improve) if this kind of speaking *activation* is a regular feature of lessons.

2. **Speaking to the whole person**

Working in an interactive mode means giving your students the opportunity to talk about themselves in personally relevant ways. In doing this you will be adding a new dimension to the language learning process. You will be moving beyond intellectual and appealing to the emotions as well. Whether your students are adults, adolescents, or children, they will all respond to your interest in them. But working with the dimension of feelings has constraints. First of all you must feel comfortable in talking about feelings and opinions. Second, you must check that your students also feel comfortable in sharing their feelings and opinions. Some cultures do not consider it appropriate to talk about oneself, or to share deeply held values with those who are not members of the immediate family. Third,you must create a classroom environment which is accepting and non-judgmental. To achieve this,you should take on the role of an impartial facilitator: one who listens and acknowledges, but who does not impose views. If you expect students to trust you by talking about matters which are important to them, then you must show that you respect their right to express their opinions, even if you do not agree with them. It should also be acknowledged that your students have certain rights. They may opt out of certain discussions, and should not be forced to speak; they should be heard and respected; and they should extend the same courtesy to their classmates. Fourth, the overall focus on feelings and opinions in discussions and activities should be constructive. This is not to say that you should deny expressions of negative feelings. Many of your students may be

living in difficult conditions. Their problems are real and should not be avoided. But while allowing time for consideration of the negative, you should also be prepared to move in positive directions. You can do this by asking questions such as "What do you like about yourself and your life?", rather than asking the kind of questions which focus on "What do you not like about yourself and your life?

Interactive speaking activities which revolve around your students' feelings and opinions can be used at almost any time.

3.**The role of speaking in language learning** Ask yourself, what is the role of interactive speaking in my lessons? What do I want my students to be able to do in interactive speaking activities? You may well come up with a list which includes the following goals: participation ,interaction ,fluency, confidence , communication strategies

**3.1.*Participation***

Most of your students will participate in your English lessons if you select activities which involve them. However, a word of warning: some students may resist your efforts to involve them. They may be used to drills, which do not require much thought beyond a mechanical manipulation of the language, and they may suspicious of your efforts to change their level of involvement. But there are ways of loosening up your students. To do so, you need to make your classes fun, but also to underline the benefits of your approach. Make sure that your students understand you are covering the school curriculum and you are serious about your intention to help them succeed in learning English. Introduce interactive speaking activities with issues and topics which are personal, but also light-hearted.As a teacher, one needs to build trust in classroom though it takes time.

**3.2.*Interaction***

Interaction can be stimulated if you give your students the opportunity to talk to each other about is important to them. As you know, if you are working with adolescents, the teen years are often marked by an unevenness of mood, by dramatic swings in energy levels, by immense physical and mental changes. One way of helping adolescents to cope is to create opportunities for them to speak out and to be heard.

**3.3*. Fluency***

In the communicative approach**,** fluency takes some priority over accuracy. Basically, being fluent means being able to keep the language coming. There may be mistakes, fillers and repetitions, but there are no unusually long pauses in the flow of talk. In interactive speaking activities you are trying to get your students to communicate their own ideas, opinions and wishes. They are fully aware of the meaning they wish to convey, but the exact content of their message is unpredictable, and you, the teacher, cannot give them the exact language they need to communicate. As a result your students will not always be accurate in their use of the language, but this is not important, so

long as the speakers are able to be understood.

**3.4.*Confidence*** How can you reduce some of your students' fear of looking foolish and build up their confidence and pleasure in using English? How can you give them the confidence to start taking control of themselves as speakers of English?

The Natural Approach and Total Physical Response you have learnt emphasize reducing learner anxiety and increasing confidence by providing comprehensible input and by not pressuring students to talk before they are ready**.** A very practical way of putting these two principles into practice is though storytelling, role play and drama. The comprehensible input comes from you, telling a story for instance. And while not pressuring your students, especially your beginners, to speak before they are ready, you can still build in an escalating degree of involvement.

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Second language students can easily become absorbed in the dramatic playing out of their own experience or experiences they can identify with. Through this playing out, inhibits their learning and can build their self-confidence.

Role play can be another way of building confidence, particularly if you focus on problem solving situations where students have to define their own roles and use their judgment to determine a course of action. This kind of role play is referred to as socio-drama. The enactment is open-ended and centers around a clearly stated conflict which is relevant to students.

**3.5. *Communication strategies***

Your students should be aware of the need to develop two major communication strategies: active listening and managing conversation.

Active listening is a good strategy for those students who shy away from speaking. And being a good listener in *English* conversations will build the confidence necessary to taking a more active role in communication. Good listeners use phrases which encourage the speaker, such as: "Yes," Of course, "Is that so?"

List these phrases for your students, and give them opportunity to practice them, along with the correct body language-the smile, the nodding of the head, the eye contact. If your students have contact with native speakers of English, encourage them to observe these listening strategies and to mimic the body language when speaking English. As good non-native listeners of English, your students will also need the phrases necessary to ask a speaker for help repetition, or slower speech. Phrases such as the following will help: "I'm sorry, what was that again?" Could you speak more slowly please?"

Practice in the communication strategies for managing a conversation should be woven throughout your lessons. Everyone uses these strategies when speaking. Your task will be to make your students conscious of these strategies and of how much they use them in their native language, and then to help them use these strategies when speaking English. There are many basic communication strategies, some of which are:

* Encourage your students to take the initiative and select the topic of conversation
* *Paraphrase*:Encourage students to use words they do know to replace words they do not.
* *Gesture*. Using gestures to get meaning across is a simple but most effective strategy.
* Ask for *feedback:* This can be done directly "How do you say \_\_\_?" or "What does \_\_\_ mean?" Or it can be done indirectly by constantly watching the other person's reactions, or speaking with a rising, questioning intonation to check that what was said was understood.
* *Reduce*:Simplifying, changing, or even abandoning those parts of speech which are too difficult to handle is an important skill, especially for a beginner. The longer the sentence, the more complicated the message, and the greater the danger of not being understood.

**4.The role of the teacher in a speaking activity**

Some teachers get very involved with their students during a speaking activity and want to *participate*( a participant) in the activity themselves! They may argue forcefully in a discussion or get fascinated by a role-play and start ‘playing’ themselves. There’s nothing wrong with teachers getting involved, of course, provided they don’t start to dominate. Although it is probably better to stand back so that you can watch and listen to what’s going on, students can also appreciate teacher

participation at the appropriate level - in other words, not too much!

Sometimes, however, teachers will have to intervene in some way if the activity is not going smoothly. If someone in a role-play can’t think of what to say, or if a discussion begins to dry up, the teacher will have to decide if the activity should be stopped – because the topic has run out of steam - or if careful prompting can get it going again. That’s where the teacher may make a point in a discussion or quickly take on a role to push a role-play forward. *Prompting* is often necessary but, as with correction, teachers should do it sympathetically and sensitively. When students have completed their activity, it is necessary too to allow them to assess what they have done (*a feedback-provider*).

A crucial part of the teacher's job when organizing speaking activities is to make sure that the students understand exactly what they are supposed to do .this involves giving clear instructions and,where appropriate ,demonstrating the activity with a student or students so that no one is in doubt about what they should be doing.

**5.Classroom speaking activities**

The following activities are also helpful in getting students to practise ‘*speaking-as-a-skill’*. Although they are not level-specific, the last four will be more successful with higher-level students (upper intermediate plus), whereas the first two, in particular, are highly appropriate at lower levels (but can also be used satisfactorily with more advanced classes)

**5.1. Information-gap activities:** an information gap is where two speakers have different bits of information, and they can only complete the whole picture by sharing that information - because they have different information, there is a ‘gap’ between them.

**5.2. Telling stories:** we spend a lot of our time telling other people stories and anecdotes about what happened to us and other people. Students need to be able to tell stories in English, too

**5.3. Favourite objects:** a variation on getting students to tell personal stories (but which may also involve a lot of storytelling) is an activity in which students are asked to talk about their favourite objects (things like MP3 players, objects with sentimental value, instruments, clothes, jewellery, pictures, etc). They think about how they would describe their favourite objects in terms of when they got them, why they got them, what they do with them, why they are so important to them and whether there are any stories associated with them. In groups, they then tell each other about their objects, and the groups tell the class about which was the most unusual/interesting, etc in their group**.**

**5.4. Meeting and greeting:** students role-play a formal/business social occasion where they meet a number of people and introduce themselves.

**5.5.Surveys:** surveys can be used to get students interviewing each other. For example, they can design a questionnaire about people’s sleeping habits with questions like ‘How many hours do you normally sleep?’, ‘Have you ever walked in your sleep or talked in your sleep?’, ‘Have you ever fallen out of bed?’, etc. They then go round the class asking each other their questions**.**

**5.6.Famous people:** students think of five famous people. They have to decide on the perfect gift for each person. We can also get groups of students to decide on which five famous people (living or dead) they would most like to invite for dinner, what they would talk about and what food they would give them.  
**5.7.Student presentations:** individual students give a talk on a given topic or person. In order for this to work for the individual (and for the rest of the class), time must be given for the student to gather information and structure it accordingly

**5.8.Balloon debate:** a group of students are in the basket of a balloon which is losing air. Only one person can stay in the balloon and survive (the others have to jump out). Individual students representing famous characters (Napoleon, Gandhi, Cleopatra, etc) or professions (teacher, doctor, lawyer, etc) have to argue why they should be allowed to survive.  
**5.9.Moral dilemmas:** students are presented with a ‘moral dilemma’ and asked to come to a decision about how to resolve it. For example, they are told that a student has been caught cheating in an important exam. They are then given the student’s (far-from-ideal) circumstances, and offered five possible courses of action – from exposing the student publicly to ignoring the incident - which they have to choose between.

**6.Correcting speaking** It will probably be necessary for teachers to correct mistakes made during speaking activities in a different way from those made during a study exercise. When students are repeating sentences, trying to get their pronunciation exactly right, then the teacher will often correct (appropriately) every time there’s a problem But if the same teacher did this while students were involved in a passionate discussion about whether smoking should be banned on tourist beaches, for example, the effect might well be to destroy the conversational flow. If, just at the moment one of the students is making an important point, the teacher says ‘Hey wait, you said “is” but it should be “are”, beaches are ... repeat’,  
the point will quickly be lost. Constant interruption from the teacher will destroy the purpose of the speaking activity.  
 Many teachers watch and listen while speaking activities are taking place. They note  
down things that seemed to go well and times when students couldn’t make themselves understood or made important mistakes. When the activity has finished, they then ask the students how they thought it went before giving their own feedback. They may say that they liked the way Student A said this, and the way Student B was able to disagree with her. They will then say that they did hear one or two mistakes, and they can either discuss them with the class, write them on the board or give them individually to the students concerned. In each case, they will ask the students to see if they can identify the problem and correct it.  
 As with any kind of correction, it is important not to single students out for particular criticism. Many teachers deal with the mistakes they heard without saying who was responsible for them.  
 Of course, there are no hard and fast rules about correcting. Some teachers who have a good relationship with their students can intervene appropriately during a speaking activity if they do it in a quiet non-obtrusive way. This kind of *gentle correction*might take the form *of* ***reformulation*** where the teacher repeats what the student has said, but correctly this time, and does not ask for student repetition of the corrected form. Some students do prefer to be told at exactly the moment they make a mistake; but we always have to be careful to make sure that our actions do not compromise the activity in question.  
 Perhaps the best way of correcting speaking activities appropriately is to talk to students about it. You can ask them how and when they would prefer to be corrected; you can explain how you intend to correct during these stages, and show them how different activities may mean different correction behaviour on your part.

**Main Resource**

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