

Classroom talk: Strategies to build communication

Teacher talk

Salter's (1989) observation that language 'practice' should lead to language 'use' but doesn't, sums up neatly the last 30 years' experience of languages teaching and learning in England. Recent classroom studies suggest that **planned speaking** implicates a different skills set from **unplanned speaking**; that both have an important place but that teachers might benefit from exploiting more fully the opportunities for spontaneous or unplanned target language talk as this has perhaps been a somewhat neglected aspect of pedagogy in the early years of language learning. There is the idea that an over emphasis on the first two 'Ps' (presentation and practice) limits the development of the 3rd P (production / use). This in turn suggests a pivotal role for the teacher in supporting the development of classroom talk.

The 5 Cs

- Consistent
- Clear / concise
- Communicative
- Checks understanding
- Creative



Opportunities provided by teacher talk

Recent studies (Hawkes, 2005; 2010, 2012) have shown that the teacher is able to create interactions with students that provide learning opportunities that are not to be found, in the same way, in pair and group work. Such interactions provide:

- a source of high quality language input for acquisition
- contingent feedback
- sensitive co-construction
- the creation of a 'safe place' for trial and error
- the broadening of a learner's interactional repertoire
- the inclusion of humour
- talking to mean and implicit reflection on form

Not every teacher-led interaction works in this way. The talk needs to:

- hand over the role of primary knower to the student
(*Que penses-tu? Quel est ton avis? Pourquoi? Comment?*)
- have a predominance of open questions so that, even when closed in form, questions are open in function
(*e.g. Comment s'appelle-t-il? E.g. when class is hypothesising an identity for someone*)
- feature conversational responses to learner utterances, characterised by an interested tone of voice, phatic echoes, repetitions with raised intonation, and exclamations
(*Ah bon? C'est à dire..? Vas-y. D'accord ..*)
- help to 'buy' learners time to construct their response; the teacher holds the interactional frame and fills pauses with padding
(*Alors ... + repetition of question / rewording*)
- contain any correction with implicit re-casts, so that the conversational frame remains intact for as long as possible
- include humour, both from teacher and students
- be inviting; students need to want to take part, feel they can initiate and take part. The teacher needs to actively solicit learner opinions and contributions
(*C'est à vous. Qu'en dites-vous?*)
- include (ideally) a stable topic of conversation, but allow for the unpredictability of individual contributions

Asking questions

- 1 Students can initiate in the classroom as soon as they know the individual question words, so teach these with gestures asap!
- 2 Introduce question-generating tasks, even when students can only produce individual question words.

¿Qué pregunta es?

Juego al fútbol.

?

en Comberton.



¿Qué pregunta es?

Juego al fútbol.

¿Dónde?

en Comberton.



3 Use a range of tasks to elicit questions:

- (i) What are the questions?
- (ii) Find someone who
- (iii) Picture talk
- (iv) Hotseating

Exploiting routine communications and incidental language

- 1 Interaction language needs teaching. Introduce key structures and encourage students to use and re-use them often.
- 2 Present the language, using images to support the meaning. It often works to use gestures to 'fix' the language in memory and to prompt students to recall it
- 3 Work to embed the language by removing the written word and eliciting the key language from the visual prompt or gesture.
- 4 Students can also work in pairs to practise the language, using cards.
- 5 As well as teacher insistence, incentivise students to use the TL, using merits or other rewards.
- 6 Exploit any moments of 'communicative need' that present themselves. Students who have something they want to say are optimally placed to acquire new language (much more so that when they are following our plan for the lesson!) It is not just the communicating student who is receptive to this learning – the unpredictability of the talk motivates all learners.
- 7 Have a routine for recording the incidental language (e.g. Teacher establishes meaning with students through gesture, example and writes up the TL on the board. Students write down the TL and add the English meaning in the back of their exercise books.)
- 8 Integrate the incidental language with scheme of work language as often as possible, in starter or other activities, so that students do not see them as separate, and in order to recycle new language as often as possible.

Pair and group work

- 1 Keep the language of pair and group tasks more straightforward than teacher – student talk.
- 2 There can be a mixture of language 'practice' and 'use' tasks.
- 3 Tasks can be collaborate as well as competitive.
- 4 Use a variety of tasks, as appropriate to the age, ability and interest of the group:
 - (i) tandem
 - (ii) speed-dating
 - (iii) speaking lines
 - (iv) brainstorming
 - (v) give one, get one
 - (vi) target talk
 - (vii) telepathy
 - (viii) pair share
 - (ix) say something else
 - (x) spend the words

