

## Considerations for Teaching Speaking

Next let's explore how to approach teaching speaking. Although we have divided this chapter into teaching two skills, listening and speaking, it is impossible to separate the two. Much of the listening we do in real life occurs as part of a two-way conversation that requires speaking in response. Even many of the so-called one-way listening text types, such as TV shows, movies, and cartoons, actually depict two-way conversations. For many reasons, speaking is often considered a very difficult language skill to learn to do well. As Pinter (2006) points out, "This is because to be able to speak fluently, we have to speak and think at the same time. As we speak, we have to monitor our output and correct any mistakes, as well as planning for what we are going to say next" (p. 55). In addition, for many people, speaking out in a classroom or interacting in everyday conversations, even in the native language, is not easy. There are affective factors that can create anxiety in students that will prevent them from speaking out. In addition, in some cultures around the world speaking out in class is not customary or valued. For example, a Japanese proverb reflects the value of not speaking out: "He who speaks has no knowledge and he who has knowledge does not speak."

We will look at considerations for teaching speaking as an integral skill working in tandem with listening for oral communication. In addition, the activities we will explore will include oral presentation skills:

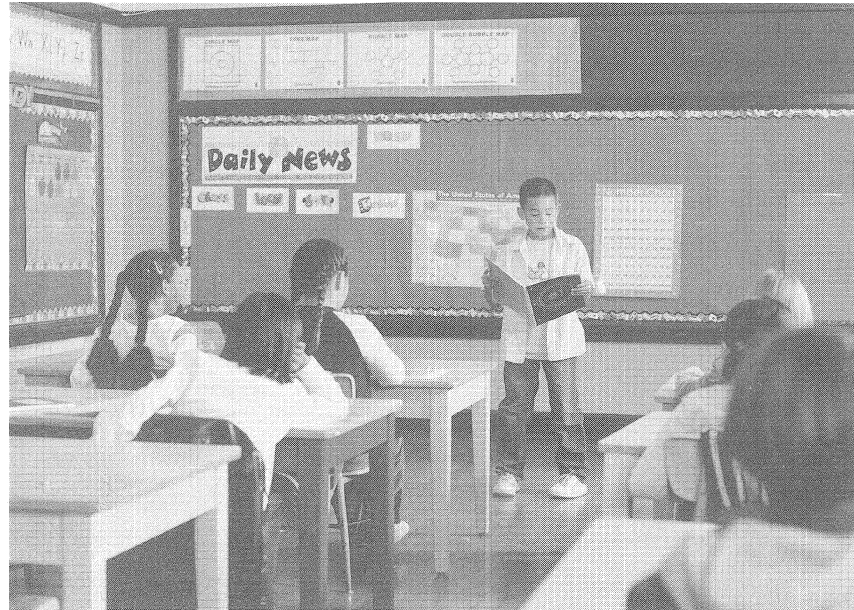
- What is speaking?
- Fluency vs. accuracy
- Principles for teaching speaking to YLs

### *What Is Speaking?*

“A mouse saved her young from a ferocious cat by barking “bow-wow.” After the cat ran away, the mouse said to her offspring “See, children, it pays to know a second language.”

— *Efstathiadis*

This story illustrates the power of being able to speak another language, even if it is only one word. If you understand the context, know the appropriate use of the word,



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and can pronounce it well, then you can communicate effectively and achieve your objective!

For most people, speaking is the language skill that represents the main mode of communication. In the native language, the first skill parents work on teaching their babies is speaking. It is the skill that helps children become an interactive part of a family and a community. In most cases the point of speaking is two-way oral communication. Young learners are still learning how to communicate effectively in their native language, and when they are VYLs, they are still working on their ability to respond appropriately to questions and explain their ideas. Therefore, EYL teachers have to consider what kinds of oral communication are appropriate activities for learners at certain ages, in addition to helping them communicate orally in English. Teachers should check with YLs' regular classes to see what kinds of speaking skills are expected at different age levels (Pinter, 2006).

**First language listening and speaking skills** It is important to check what kinds of listening and speaking skills are expected at different ages. In the United States, teachers have a set of standards they can refer to known as the Common Core Standards. They show the knowledge and skills school-age students should be able to master at each grade level in the U.S. Similar standards in your country could be helpful to figure out what children are capable of. With respect to oral communication (listening and speaking), here are the standards for a kindergartener versus a fifth grader:

## Common Core Standards—Listening and Speaking

Kindergarten	5th Grade
<p><b>Comprehension and Collaboration</b></p> <p>SL.K.1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about <i>kindergarten topics and texts</i> with peers and adults in small and larger groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others and taking turns speaking about the topics and texts under discussion).</li> <li>– Continue a conversation through multiple exchanges.</li> </ul> <p>SL.K.2. Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.</p> <p>SL.K.3. Ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.</p>	<p><b>Comprehension and Collaboration</b></p> <p>SL.5.1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on <i>grade 5 topics and texts</i>, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.</li> <li>– Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles.</li> <li>– Pose and respond to specific questions by making comments that contribute to the discussion and elaborate on the remarks of others.</li> <li>– Review the key ideas expressed and draw conclusions in light of information and knowledge gained from the discussions.</li> </ul> <p>SL.5.2. Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.</p> <p>SL.5.3. Summarize the points a speaker makes and explain how each claim is supported by reasons and evidence.</p>
<p><b>Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas</b></p> <p>SL.K.4. Describe familiar people, places, things, and events and, with prompting and support, provide additional detail.</p> <p>SL.K.5. Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions as desired to provide additional detail.</p> <p>SL.K.6. Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.</p>	<p><b>Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas</b></p> <p>SL.5.4. Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.</p> <p>SL.5.5. Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, sound) and visual displays in presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.</p> <p>SL.5.6. Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, using formal English when appropriate to task and situation.</p>

Clearly these standards for English language arts cannot be used as standards for the English as a foreign language class. However, they can show a teacher what students at a certain age or grade level are capable of in terms of communication. These Common Core Standards could be useful to gauge what kind of oral communication students at each grade level should be able to do at their cognitive level. To find out more about the Common Core Standards as an example, see <http://www.corestandards.org>.

When teaching oral communication skills, teachers should not forget how complex the process of communication can be. As Cameron (2001) notes, “Listening can be seen as the active use of language to access other people’s meanings, whereas speaking is the active use of language to express meanings so that other people can make sense of them” (p. 40). When using English as an international language to communicate across cultures, it increases the difficulty in understanding one another. Read the passage below written by French writer Bernard Werber (in both French and English).

*Entre ce que je pense, ce que je veux dire, ce que je crois dire, ce que je dis, ce que vous voulez entendre, ce que vous entendez, ce que vous croyez en comprendre, ce que vous voulez comprendre, et ce que vous comprenez, il y a au moins neuf possibilités de ne pas se comprendre.*

*Between what I think, what I want to say, what I think I am saying, what I say, what you want to hear, what you hear, what you think you understand, what you want to understand, and what you understand, there are at least nine chances that we will not understand each other.*

Mixed into this message are the different steps of communication, including what you think and want to say, how to encode the thoughts into language, how the listener decodes what you have said, and all the mishaps that can happen based on the intentions and expectations of both sides. Even when there are two people who are native speakers of the same language, there can be many opportunities for misunderstanding. In addition to teaching how to listen and speak, to improve oral communication skills, teachers also have to give students skills to negotiate meaning and clarify any misunderstandings.

***Fluency vs. Accuracy*** With speaking as a productive skill, the main concerns are issues of fluency versus accuracy. Teachers are always concerned with both, and with young learners there is no exception. We want our students to speak accurately with respect to grammar and pronunciation and to speak fluently with respect to speed and natural flow of the language. Brown (2007) states that “The fluency/accuracy issue often boils down to the extent to which our techniques

should be message oriented (or, as some call it, teaching language use) as opposed to language oriented (also known as teaching language usage)” (p. 324). With young learners, our approach is not focused on grammatical explanations, so the approach should be more message-oriented or based on meaningful activities within a realistic context. At the beginning levels, the language being taught is in small chunks, so the possibility of repetition and drilling for accuracy is just as possible while doing activities to build vocabulary and practice meaningful expressions. It is possible and necessary to teach YLs short, fixed chunks of language. As Pinter (2006) explains, “The first building blocks that allow children to move from listening to speaking and to begin to participate in interactions with others are so-called ‘unanalysed chunks’” (p. 56). This is also known as “formulaic language” (Brewster, Ellis, & Girard, 2004, p. 105) or “formulaic sequences” (Cameron, 2001, p. 50). For example, “How are you?” is a fixed chunk that can be taught as a greeting and repeated at the beginning of class. Students don’t have to analyze this fixed chunk of meaning and understand it when the teacher uses it every day to greet the class. The teacher can get students to respond with another chunk, “Fine, thank you.”

In terms of pronunciation, we have established that young learners have an advantage because they are excellent imitators. Their ability to repeat after a model accurately is one aspect of speaking that should be easy to develop with YLs. So providing them with plenty of models and chances to imitate is important. Repetition is very important for YLs, but teachers have to make it fun, engaging, and as meaningful as possible through activities like songs, chants, rhymes, and games to help them start to memorize new chunks and use them correctly.

***Principles for Teaching Speaking to YLs*** In EYL classes teachers find it challenging to build a nurturing and comfortable environment for YLs that is motivating and encourages maximum participation from students. The teacher needs to find every opportunity to build real communication into the classroom since EFL contexts have a shortage of opportunities for communication in English outside the classroom. Teachers of our youngest learners have to create fun activities that keep learners active; even if they use repetition, it has to be meaningful. Remember that our goal is to build a classroom that is English speaking, provides plenty of opportunities for practice, and is engaging for YLs.

When designing speaking activities for young learners, it is important to remember the following seven principles:

1. Build classroom routines in English.
2. Use speaking activities that reflect real-life communication.

3. Use speaking activities that are developmentally appropriate.
4. Use a variety of activities to improve both accuracy and fluency.
5. Build classroom interaction by giving students plenty of opportunities to participate.
6. Keep the speaking environment active—do not correct errors explicitly.
7. Equip your YLs with negotiation strategies.

**1. Build classroom routines in English** Young learners need to speak out in order to build their oral proficiency in English. It is important to give time every class for all students to practice speaking. Building classroom routines in English will ensure that every day you have students using the language communicatively, such as greeting you and each other, saying the day's date, sharing what they did yesterday, and saying farewell to everyone. If the classroom is a warm, inviting place to learn, and the teacher sets up routines to communicate in every class, then students will feel more comfortable and confident about speaking out and trying to communicate in English. YLs will remember these routines in English better than some course content because of all the repetition in a meaningful context. Here are some examples of classroom language for what Winn-Smith (2001) refers to as “social rituals” (p. 22).

Hello!  
 Hi!  
 How are you?  
 I'm fine. And you?  
 Who is missing?  
 Where is Adam?  
 Good-bye!  
 See you tomorrow!

**2. Use speaking activities that reflect real-life communication** Appropriate text types for YLs will be the same as the list given in the listening section. That list included songs, chants, rap, storytelling, plays, TV shows and commercials, news and weather reports, announcements, cartoons, movies, documentaries, jokes, riddles, and dialogues. These are all oral text types that teachers can use to encourage students to practice speaking. In most EFL classrooms, teachers use lots of dialogs to practice speaking, particularly ones found in the textbook. These dialogs usually reflect real-life tasks, like greetings, buying something at a store, visiting a doctor, asking for directions, asking for the time, etc. In addition, the different modes of one-way input, like TV shows and commercials, news and weather reports, and movies, are actually models of communication among two or

more people. For YLs, who like to be active and move around, it is very helpful to use role play and drama to practice the language. These scenarios can be brought to life and practiced in a way that mirrors real life.

**3. Use speaking activities that are developmentally appropriate** As stated before, if activities are developmentally appropriate they will be more intrinsically motivating to students. All activities, both listening and speaking, should take into consideration learners' age, background knowledge, and interests. As Cameron (2001) explains, "Discourse in young learner classrooms should follow patterns children find familiar, from their home and family, or from their school experience, and should not demand more of children than they can do, in terms of imagining someone else's state of mind or expressing causes and beliefs" (p. 53). Checking out the standards and expectations for communication at each grade level in the native language can be helpful in defining realistic expectations for what kinds of interaction YLs are capable of. It is also important to consider the types of conversations and discussions young learners would be having at their age or would find interesting:

- Conversation with friend about favorite things: "What is your favorite . . . ?" (color, animal, season, etc.)
- Asking someone for directions: "Where is the . . . ?" (school, grocery store, library, etc.)
- Games like Telephone, 21 Questions, or Jeopardy
- Discussion about a shopping list for a classmate's birthday party

There are also one-way speaking presentations that young learners like that can give them plenty of practice with the language. Activities like songs, chants, and plays provide good practice based on clear models. In terms of extended discourse, narrative and description are the discourse types considered most appropriate for YLs based on their cognitive level (Cameron, 2001). In addition, presentational activities that are about YLs' personal lives are very appropriate because they are still at a very egocentric stage. The following are some good activities for one-way speaking practice:

- Sing a fun song (as a whole class, small group, or individual)
- Retell a story (narrative)
- Show and tell presentation (description)
- Make a presentation to class about the members of your family, your favorite celebrity, etc., with a picture or poster (personalization)

These are just some examples of different speaking activities, both interactive and presentational, that are appropriate for YLs.

**4. Use a variety of activities to improve both accuracy and fluency** In order to give YLs plenty of practice that also builds both accuracy and fluency, teachers should use a variety of activities. These activities can be classified as controlled practice, guided practice, and independent activities (see Chapter 3). Speaking activities that focus on accuracy can be quite mechanical or controlled, which means students are practicing structure, but it is not necessarily meaningful. For example, repetition is considered very mechanical. When a teacher says “Repeat after me. It’s a horse.” and then students repeat “It’s a horse,” it is possible for students to practice pronunciation of “It’s a horse” without knowing the meaning. Even with flashcards showing the meaning of the word horse, this would be considered a very mechanical drill. This is the most controlled type of activity, practicing accuracy of sentence structure (It’s a . . .) and pronunciation (horse). The responses are completely predictable, with very little chance of making a mistake, and the use of target language structures is completely controlled by the teacher. Activities that are still structured but give students some choice are considered guided. See the Sample Lesson Plan later in this chapter for an example of guided practice.

At the opposite end are independent or free activities that are open-ended and do not have predictable responses. These are message oriented and more focused on meaning and communication than correctness. Free activities help build fluency and give students a chance to be creative with the language on their own. This is the most challenging because there are more chances for error. For example, the teacher might have students do a short presentation role playing a farm animal. The model would be: “I am Dorothy Duck. Quack quack. I live on a farm. Quack quack. I am in the pond. Quack quack!” In this example, learners get a chance to choose their own animals and create with the language based on what they have learned. These activities usually come after students have had a chance for more controlled and guided practice; they encourage real-life communication. Once students can use the language independently, it is important to give them opportunities for speaking activities that are applied to real-life, authentic situations or to personalize.

**5. Build classroom interaction by giving students plenty of opportunities to participate** In EFL settings, usually the only place where students can use and practice English is in the classroom. If this is just once or twice a week, then teachers need to make sure that they provide as much opportunity as possible for students to practice using English in the classroom. The teacher should have as a goal that

every student has a chance to speak out and practice during every class. There are a number of teacher-directed, whole-class techniques and student-centered, cooperative learning activities that can be used.

The teacher-directed, whole-class techniques are more controlled and can be used to check comprehension and for controlled practice in speaking. The following techniques are based on a content-based proficiency-oriented approach by Ron Schwartz (book in preparation). Look at the following examples based on a map of a town:

- **Repetition:** The example below shows a controlled interaction with students repeating after the teacher. The teacher is providing a model of the Q&A interaction.

T: *Repeat after me. Where is the school?*

Ss: *Where is the school?*

T: *It's on Main Street.*

Ss: *It's on Main Street.*

- **Question and answer (Q&A):** Below are three examples of the different types of Q&A teachers can encourage students to do: teacher to student(s), student to student, and students to teacher.

Teacher–Student(s)

*The teacher is getting everyone involved by asking them to repeat the student's answer.*

T: *Marwa, where is the library?*

M: *It's on Center Street.*

T: *Everyone, where is the library?*

Ss: *It's on Center Street.*

Student–Student

*In order to encourage paired interaction that is controlled, the teacher can break students into pairs at the beginning of class: Partner A and Partner B. Then you can encourage quick paired Q&A any time during the class.*

T: *Class, where is the museum?*

Ss: *It's on Pratt Street.*

T: *Partner A, ask Partner B "Where is the museum?" Partner B, answer.*

Students–Teacher

*The student-to-teacher interaction can help the teacher give a new model. See the example below, where the teacher cues students to ask a question.*

T: *Class, ask me, "Where is the mall?"*

Ss: *Where is the mall?*

T: *It's on the corner of Pratt and Charles.*

- **Paraphrasing:** Students can practice multiple ways of answering the same question. The teacher can give multiple examples and models, so students can try using their own words instead of exact repetition.

T: *See the mall? It is on Pratt Street [point to Pratt Street on map], and It's on Charles Street [point to Charles Street]. Where is the mall?*

S: *It's on Pratt and Charles.*

- **Giving examples:** The teacher can elicit examples from students based on their lives. This is a way that they can participate with new information.

T: *What streets are in our neighborhood?*

Ss: *Al Khan Street! Al Arouba Street! Corniche Street! Jumeirah Street!*

T: *Where is our school?*

Ss: *It's on Al Khan Street.*

- **Personalizing:** The teacher can elicit examples based on students' personal lives. This is a way to check comprehension and give them a chance to express something about themselves.

T: *Where is your house?*

S: *It's on Jumeirah Road.*

In addition to teacher-directed techniques to increase classroom interaction, student-centered, cooperative learning activities can be used to increase the amount of time students speak English. These are best utilized for less controlled, more independent activities. First, it is important to realize that YLs do not have long attention spans and cannot focus their own learning. The younger they are, the less independent they can be. Therefore, cooperative learning activities need to be short in length and monitored carefully. In addition, students need to have clear instructions and a model to follow. Teachers may have to explain instructions for a cooperative activity in the native language in order for students to spend their time in class practicing the target language instead of wasting time trying to figure out what to do. See the box for tips for teachers to meet with success when using cooperative activities.

## TEYL Tips—Success with Cooperative Learning

- Choose a short activity with a clear goal and end product.
- Avoid complicated activities with multiple steps.
- Plan groups in advance and select groups rather than letting students select them.
- Give each group a fun name, e.g., name them after words from a previous lesson, like Sun Group, Moon Group, Star Group, Sky Group.
- Give clear instructions, written and verbal if possible.
- Give instructions with pictures and examples.
- Give clear models that show the end product.
- Give a time limit.
- Use a signal to indicate the start and end of the activity (e.g., alarm, whistle, lights off, bell, etc.).
- Assign roles when necessary (e.g., reader, recorder, time keeper, presenter, etc.).
- Monitor the groups; walk around the classroom and check progress.
- Always share end products after the activity, e.g., for assessment purposes and to hold students accountable for quality of product.

**6. Keep the speaking environment active—do not correct errors explicitly** Because the language output should be message oriented or meaning focused, it is not a good idea to correct errors of individual YLs explicitly. First, if the activities are focused on meaning more than form, as is customary for an EYL classroom, then making frequent grammar or pronunciation corrections can interrupt the flow of class. In addition, although children can be less inhibited compared to adults and will speak out in class more readily, they also have fragile egos and can close up if you embarrass them in front of their peers. Since YLs learn a foreign language best by mirroring first language acquisition and building an English-speaking environment, teachers should create a classroom atmosphere that makes YLs comfortable speaking out and working with the language. If correction is necessary for a common error or a difficult word, then a teacher can use choral repetition instead of individual repetition, so everyone gets practice and no one is singled out.

**7. Equip your YLs with negotiation strategies** For speaking, students need strategies for negotiation of meaning. For the EFL classroom, this includes use

of classroom language and knowing how to ask questions and make clarification requests. Young learners can learn these chunks of language to help them clarify meaning with the teacher in the whole class or when working with peers in cooperative groups for less controlled activities. Here are some ideas:

I don't understand.  
I don't know.  
I'm sorry, could you repeat that?  
Can you help me, please?  
Can/could you repeat that?  
Can/could you say it again?  
I have a question.  
What does \_\_\_\_ mean?  
What does it mean?  
How do you say \_\_\_\_ in English?  
How do you spell \_\_\_\_?  
What do you think?  
What do you mean?  
Really? Why?  
Really? Then what?

These are typical classroom expressions that help promote the learning process and are good strategies for real conversations when students use English outside the classroom. Of course, teachers can encourage students to use “Excuse me . . .” before each expression to be more polite.

### **TEYL Tips—Real Language for Responding**

Teachers often forget to teach YLs to give responses to conversations. Usually they follow a strict Q&A routine, such as:

- Student A: “What’s your favorite food?”
- Student B: “It’s pizza!”

Teachers can liven up the classroom and teach real language to give a response. These are fun and mirror real-life conversations:

- Really? Me, too!
- Really? That’s interesting!
- Really? That’s terrible!

*(Continued)*

- That's great!
- That's funny!
- Wow, that's cool!
- Wow, that's too bad!
- Oh, I see!
- Oh no, really?
- No way!
- Great!
- Super!
- Excellent!

So the Q&A above would become:

- Student A: What's your favorite food?"
- Student B: It's pizza!
- Student A: Really? Me, too!