

The awesome power of voice.

Crista Hazell

According to the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child, every child has the right to be heard, and what greater gift can we bestow upon young people but to give them the power of using their voice in more than one language. The importance of speaking in language classrooms is not to be underestimated and the fact that Ofqual has decided that Speaking will just be an 'endorsement' for the 2021 GCSE season, does not mean that we can and should not develop learners oracy, **because** the power of learning how to speak in an international language gives an innate sense of progression and confidence, whilst giving every learner a skill for life.

Speaking forces learners to think on their feet, in order to answer a question, give their opinion, explain how they are feeling, or indeed to communicate that they have completed the task set or need assistance to do so; increasingly confident orators are required; confident speaking is a major asset of cultural capital. If we allow this vital skill in language classrooms to be sidelined we will be doing a disservice to every learner within it.

Interactivity and discussion with learners about their tasks and work (sometimes in the Language we are teaching) helps learners to understand your expectations and develops their speaking skills but also helps to build important relationships.

So, what can we do to ensure that learners speak and listen, while keeping themselves and their teachers safe? Not everything can be recorded in advance, but these few ideas might just help.

1. Teachers could pre-record long or extensive speaking tasks

- a. Present new vocabulary or chunks of language, using your Sanako Study system, or Apple clips, QuickTime player or Audacity to record the vocabulary you want to present. The repetition exercises and drilling you usually do in class can be pre-recorded to ensure that projecting your voice, as we all do when presenting, is not a problem.
- b. Once you have these files digitally you have them forever and can edit them to create longer revision vocabulary lists, or of course post them on your school server, YouTube channel, or on Show my homework, if you use that.

2. Set speaking homework for learners. This can be pre-recorded prior to the lesson and submitted digitally and form part of a speaking portfolio. With timely feedback it can be developed either at home or in school as part of the lesson activities; the final submission can be assessed and be clear evidence of progression and development of learners' oracy in language learning.

- a. Developing long sentences with a range of elements (opinions and reasons, complex phrases etc)
- b. Roleplays
- c. Photocards
- d. Reading an authentic text aloud to focus on pronunciation, intonation, emphasis, liaison and speed. Of course, this could be a sentence, poem, short text, tongue twister, paragraph from an article or a translation.
- e. Translation – Pupils translate the text and read it aloud, record their piece and send in to you.

3. Learners collaborate on developing speaking skills outside of the classroom. Pair up learners (or allow them to choose a partner), be clear that a digital device (or access to their Sanako account) is

required and share your expectations, assessment criteria, what are you focussing on, and prepare a model to show them what a great recording sounds like:

- a. Encourage roleplays to be learned, practised and read out (not necessarily entirely learnt by heart). Learners can then perform their pieces in the privacy of their own home or socially distanced with friends.
- b. Issue photocards with questions and encourage learners to answer one question fully using essential elements (connectives, opinions, reasons, timeframes) and once they can do this well add adjectives, intensifiers and extra detail until there is a fully developed response to the question. Traditionally there are five questions following the photocards so work through the questions, so you know learners are fully prepared for what they look like and how to tackle them.

Teachers should not feel the need to limit teacher talk or their learners speaking: this is an integral part of language learning, one of the four language skills and we must ensure it is not diminished by excluding opportunities for speaking when it is a vital skill – however we do have to respond to the context by behaving safely and appropriately.

My experience of creating digital opportunities for learners is extremely positive – making an impact on learners’ perceptions of speaking as well as on the complexity and challenge of the language and their wellbeing. Learners feel that they are overcoming the challenges of pronunciation and intonation because they can self-assess and self-edit. The things they love the most about it are the freedom to use their voices, self-reflection and the performance aspect. They are also developing the depth and range of their language skills beyond just in speech, which definitely isn’t a bad thing! The impact on their confidence makes it absolutely worth it!

Crista Hazell is an SLE in MFL, international education consultant and Development Manager for ALL.