

## Speaking to communicate: Some practical ideas for low level learners

*By Kim Paterson.*

**Speaking** includes.....

- Pronunciation
- Intonation
- Stress
- Register (polite/impolite suitable language?)
- Fluency
- Accuracy
- Using language to convey meaning
- Vocabulary
- Grammatical knowledge
- Single utterance –chunking-Formulaic language –generating
- Collocations
- Scripted
- Unscripted

### Principles:

***Know your learner:*** family, interests, work, hobbies, daily life routines, interactions, personality, who they want to interact with and be accepted by.....

***Know what your learner needs/wants to say?*** (Find out by spending time with them, discussing, using questionnaires\* etc)

***Know what you can do to help them????***

### Do:

- Encourage them to get a lot of **exposure** by listening to English e.g. television, DVDs, library books with accompanying cassettes, interacting with native speakers.....)
- give them a **model** to follow (either use yourself or recordings, friends/family, TV,...)
- develop their **vocabulary** (using high frequency and high interest/relevant words/collocations, 1000 High frequency word list provides 84.3% of all words found in general conversation (Nation, P 2001)
- provide many and continued opportunities for **fluency development** by practising/rehearsing/revising (to keep this interesting change an aspect of what you are doing e.g. record them, impose a time restraint, put them in a real situation ,find another audience.....etc) \* Make a real phone call ...
- **pre-teach** the words/phrases needed

- teach **strategies** to support learners in their attempts at communicating verbally, manage the interactions, and sustain conversations (thus providing greater opportunity for learning whilst empowering the learner),
- develop **confidence** and give encouragement (reassure they don't have to understand everything and mistakes are ok especially if not impacting on meaning)
- give positive and useful **feedback** (Don't correct everything at one go/Can they hear/notice their own error? Is it a vital error especially in relation to meaning?)
- keep it **real, meaningful and interesting** to engage your learner
- practise **pronunciation** incl. Stress (length and strength of syllables) and intonation (rise and fall of words/sentences)
- where needed distinguish between polite and impolite forms, formal informal (manner of delivery and actual words used i.e. **Register**)
- Have **fun!!!**

**An ideal session consists of:**

Setting goals and having a lesson plan with:-

- 25% **speaking and writing**
- 25% **listening and reading**
- 25% practising what is already known to improve **fluency**
- 25% **language focus** (e.g. pronunciation, vocabulary development, grammar etc)

(Nation, I.S.P. 2001)

*TRY to ensure that the conditions for learning are present:*

- **Meaningful** and relevant language
- **Interesting** to the LEARNER
- **New language** is not too much to overburden learner\*\*
- **Understands** most of the language with only a few new items
- **Stress free, safe and relaxed** learning environment (Nation, I.S.P and J. Newton, 2009)

**Don't** overburden the learner by giving too much new information at once (or all the alternatives). Establish one item firmly first before introducing something new.

Strategies that could help :-

- Using non-verbal language (facial expressions/body language to show interest, understanding, empathy)
- Rehearsal (allow time to rehearse prior to having to do it under pressure)

- Repetition/revision (do it several times with gradually longer gaps over several sessions)
- Repair (encourage self correction, to start again, e.g. to use "Sorry I mean .....")
- Shadowing (repeating part of what has been said allows time to think, allows pronunciation practice and checks comprehension)
- Back channelling (keep in the conversation with Uhhhs, ahhs, wow, really, oh no.....etc Shows interest level, empathy etc)
- Clarification questions
- Guessing from context
- Predicting
- Place holding (some sound/word that allows you to think while showing you want to continue without another person taking over, eg Well/You know/ummm.....)
- Using a model
- Techniques for managing interactions\*
- Using notes
- Visual aid cues\* (to recall/retrieve the form/words e.g. pictures, dashes, Cuisenaire rods, diagrams)
- Starting a conversation/Finishing/leave taking .....

\*Control the speaker/Manage the interaction by: \*(see hand out)

- Sorry I don't understand?
- Excuse me what does XXXXX mean?
- Can you repeat that slowly?
- Could you write that down?
- Sorry I couldn't hear what you said?
- Did you mean.....?
- Is this the same as.....?
- Could I interrupt you.....?
- How do I say/pronounce this.....?
- 

Feedback

- Focus on mistakes or gaps with follow up exercises written and/or verbal etc
- Encourage learner to notice the gap by playing recordings of themselves or native speakers OR
- Repeat what is wrong with a quizzical look keep repeating trying to seek self correction OR
- Gently rephrase with correct model immediately after error is made

- If possible don't interrupt a free speech exercise let it flow and feedback later (note down some areas that need work during the activity)
- Don't correct everything at one time (look for key communication inhibitors and work on these first)

\*Useful short utterances for daily life:-

- Sure
- Cheers
- Thank you/Thanks
- OK
- Really
- Excuse me
- Sorry
- All right
- Yes/yeah/yep
- No/nah
- Wow
- Oh no!
- Awesome
- Cool
- Sweet as
- Just looking
- Right
- Why?
- What?
- Absolutely
- Just a minute please.
- Me too.
- .....
- .....

Activities

Small talk practice (greetings, weather, sport, etc)

\*Practise formulaic language using relevant dialogues

\*Substitution tables

Recounts (of weekends, personal events, news, stories, history.....)

Retell a story

Summarise what you hear or read

\*Practise recalling learned patterns of speech with visual aids e.g. Personal information queries, problems (health/house maintenance etc; Would you mind doing me a favour.....?)

Photos/picture prompts to spark discussion

\*Same or different (compare pictures)

\*Split information

\*Surveys/questionnaires

Who am I?

What is it?

\*20 questions (Yes/No answers only. Start: Is it animal, mineral or plant? Do you find it..... etc)

Sentence starters: (If I won lotto.....I used to.....One day I would like to..... I am trying very hard to.....)

\*\*Weekly catch up: - (helps you to keep up with changes/events in the life of your learner and respond accordingly .....

- Personal news (good/bad/a problem?)
- National
- International

\*Convert pictures to words/aka provide a sound track

- Provide/pre-teach key words /phrases
- You model it first
- Learner's turn
- Revise (several times)

Change a text to dialogue

\*Progressive deletion/disappearing dialogue\*

\*Oral Gap fill/dialogue cloze \* (You give a recount/tell a story and leave out the odd word learner has to guess/ fill it in ..)

\*4-3-2; 3-2-1 (depending on level of learner) (for fluency)

1-2-3: 2-3-4 (to push output, challenge and increase vocabulary use)

Best recording (learners choice listen to themselves 3x)

\*\*\* Board games

- What, Where, How???
- Tell/Ask
- What's the matter? What's wrong?
- Superlative practice: The best/the worst,,,,,,
- Who am I? (physical descriptions)
- [Make your own !!!]
- .....

Song Talk (CD) by Nicky Riddiford

How's it going? Don McGlashan, The Front lawn

(Songs can aid pronunciation, develop vocabulary, aid fluency, word structure etc and provide models for speaking)

Teach structures to follow for the different types of language use: - (What might your learner need now? future?)

Instructional talks

- What you need?
- What you do?
- Possible problems?

E.g.

Change a tyre

Changing the oil (car)

Recipes

Flax weaving

Hobby/craft

Sales Pitch

- Describe the item
- Its features
- Cost

E.g. Use adverts for furniture, cars, small appliances, real estate etc

Presentations /short talks

- Introduction
- Main points/ideas
- Conclusion

E.g.

My country

My culture

Specialist knowledge

**Make your own scripted dialogues for your learner (or contact your resource person): (Listening to NZ Beginners has scripts in the back)**

Cover: -

meetings/greetings/partings/requests/apologies/explanations/instructions/orders/invitations/small-talk/recounts/debates/queries.....

**Keep it real!**

<u>Contexts</u>	<u>Vocabulary</u>	<u>Script</u>
At the supermarket	•	•
At the coffee shop	•	•
At the shoe shop	•	•
At the restaurant	•	•
On the telephone (incl. emergency services calls 111)	•	•
At the school	•	•
At home	•	•
On the bus	•	•
At work	•	•
At the hair dressers/barbers	•	•
At the doctors	•	•
At the hospital	•	•
At the dentist	•	•
At the tailors	•	•
With the neighbours	•	•
With the police	•	•
At the bank	•	•
At the post office	•	•
With the electrician	•	•

<u>Contexts</u>	<u>Vocabulary</u>	<u>Script</u>
With the plumber	•	•
With Housing NZ/the City Council	•	•
At a party/bbq	•	•
At a meeting	•	•
With friends	•	•