

From language practice to language use tasks

Teaching tips for oral communication:

- Continually build on the language structures previously taught
- Provide lots of opportunity for learners to combine familiar contexts with less familiar contexts
- Frame tasks around a scenario, then change/tweak the scenarios to provide opportunities to transfer language to new settings/context
- Provide plenty of opportunities to practice the structures (Q and A) in an unpredictable order (barrier games, inside/outside circle, drawing straws [pop sticks with questions], talking dice etc)
- Let students know when you want them focus on accuracy of form and/or when to focus on meaning making
- Gradually remove the structure and scaffolding around the task to give space for creativity and originality
- Explore how questions could be asked in different ways
- Mix the combinations of learners working together all the time. At language practice stage, form groups/pair combinations randomly. At language use stage, use your knowledge of learner backgrounds and facilitate learners of similar abilities to work together
- Monitor learners during practice stage and provide continual feedback on their language and skills
- Record learners progressing from language practice to language use (as a tangible measure)
- Focus on how to communicate (strategies) as well as what to communicate (content)

Development of communication strategies:

- Teach **survival language** phrases as early as possible with beginner learners eg *Can you repeat that? Sorry I didn't understand – please speak slower, what does 'x' mean in English?, how do you say 'y' in (the target language)*
- Teach learners how to **guess** and **anticipate meaning** by listening out for question words and keywords
- Teach phrases to **negotiate meaning**. Those that **request clarification** eg *What is that? What do you mean?*, and those that **check comprehension** of the other speaker eg *Do you know what I mean? Right? You know?*
- Encourage **non-verbal gestures** to reinforce, enhance or substitute verbal meaning making
- Explore and encourage the use of (target language sounding) **fillers** to provide **thinking time** eg *so... um... er...* and **appeals for assistance**, which ask the other person to help you find a word eg *whatchamacallit? whatshisname?*
- For more advanced learners develop their skills in **circumlocution**, that is, finding another way to express meaning if they can't remember a word eg *my father's father (grandfather), end their career (retire) and approximation* eg *kind of, sort of, like...*