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# Effective ways of teaching speaking with confidence in primary schools

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When we ask teachers of primary schools about their aspirations for their pupils English language abilities, 'speaking English with confidence' is almost always at the top of their wish list. Yes, they want their pupils to read well, have a wide vocabulary and a firm understanding of English grammar, but mostly they want to hear them speak and speak with confidence and enjoyment. Yet, as those of us who have ever tried to learn a language know, when it comes to speaking skills, confidence and enjoyment are often hard-won, especially if you are shy or introverted.

So how can teachers or educators help make the transition to speaking English with confidence a little easier for children?

## *By Games*

The gratification of education divides opinion. Good games seem to promote learning effortlessly, and children 'gamify' life all the time. Games can be used to promote speaking in two ways. First, by providing opportunities for direct practice: from a simple game of [\*I-spy Opens in a new tab or window\*](#) in the car to a more challenging game of [\*Pictionary Opens in a new tab or window\*](#). Second, games can stimulate very fruitful discussion. Ask children to talk about their favorite game, be it [\*Angry Birds Opens in a new tab or window\*](#) or [\*Minecraft Opens in a new tab or window\*](#), and get them to talk through what they are doing. The enthusiasm for communicating the game's purpose will quickly overcome any inhibitions they may feel about speaking in English.

## *By Stories*

Stories provide children with a context for speaking English. This is especially valuable if they aren't able to experience an immersive language-learning environment (try getting a monolingual class of children to speak only English, and you will understand the struggle). Experiencing a story together in English places children in a small world where English is a given. The storyteller (either a parent at home or a [\*teacher in class\*](#)) reads a line and pauses. If the child is familiar with the story after having heard it a few times, she will be able to assume the role of storyteller. A practiced storyteller will also sense when to pause and ask questions; not just simple questions like 'What color is this flower?' and 'What is the bear doing?' but more challenging ones that get the child to make predictions ('What will the mouse do next?'), reflect ('Why do you think the boy looks sad?') and explore their own emotions ('Have you ever felt like that?').

## *By Songs*

Songs and rhymes give children the chance to play with spoken English in a stress-free way. By listening to songs and singing them, children begin to hear the sounds of the language and experiment with the way the mouth works to produce those new sounds. They notice relationships between words that sound similar through the rhymes at the end of the lines, and how words in combination create rhythm. Speaking and singing while clapping — a familiar activity in any primary school — reinforces this understanding. When children sing or chant with the lyrics in text form in front of them, they start to notice

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the fascinating (and sometimes frustrating) relationship between spelling and sound.

### *By Video*

Many teachers worry that screen time is not only wasted time, but detrimental to the healthy development of a child's learning. However, used in moderation, video can be a pleasurable and stimulating English language learning tool, especially in situations where a native speaker model is unavailable. Other video platforms like You Tube are a great source of child-friendly material, but the barrage of adverts and potential exposure to offensive comments or external links means that learning with a teacher or parent is preferable. Like games, videos help children improve their speaking and can stimulate discussion, singing and reading.

The stories have subtitles and narrated audio that can be turned on and off. Children can develop speaking confidence in the following stages:

1. Audio and subtitles on — The child can start by listening to the audio and reading the story, joining in when they hear and see familiar words and phrases.

2. Audio off, subtitles on — As they become more confident they can turn off the audio and read the subtitles themselves.

3. Audio and subtitles off — Finally they may choose to turn off the subtitles too and tell the story in their own words, using only the animated images as a prompt.

To help make this journey to independent story(re)telling easier, each video comes with a 'listen' and 'record' activity which allows children to listen to short words and phrases in isolation from the main video. They can also record themselves to compare their pronunciation with that of the narrator. In addition, each pack of videos comes with games that consolidate spelling, vocabulary, grammar or simple comprehension.

Teaching at primary level can cause many teachers, particularly those who have trained to teach adults, a variety of problems and generate a range of worries.

Unfortunately, it is common for teachers to be asked by their institution to teach young learners even though they don't have specific training. Those first lessons with the class, which are quite probably in a different institution to your regular work, can seem daunting. In this work we've analyzed some advice on how to deal with starting work with primary level students and we've given ten top classroom management tips.

- o Before you begin to teach find out who your pupils are

- o Talk to the class teacher and find out if the children are complete beginners in English or have already learnt a little.

- o Are there any bilingual children in the class? If so, use them as your helpers.

- o Do any of the children speak another language?

- o You will find that the children will be highly motivated and excited about learning a foreign language. Your main aim is to maintain this initial motivation and sustain their curiosity and interest so that they develop a real desire to learn the language, even if you don't feel they are learning very fast. You need to be realistic and so do the children about how much they can learn in the relatively short time you will spend with them.

- o It is quite normal for children to take some time before they actually start producing much language as they will need time to familiarize themselves with you — very probably the first speaker of English they have met — and assimilate the language before they feel ready and confident enough to produce any.

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o Be patient and don't be afraid of repeating things again and again — children need and enjoy lots of opportunities to hear the language. Just remember to be natural.

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