

Classroom strategies for modelling speaking and listening

Arguing and presenting a point

Showing the pupils two or more adults having a discussion where a topic is being discussed can then allow for an examination of what skills were used. If there are two adults in a classroom, they can prepare and model a discussion about a topic. It may look a bit stilted, but it will still get the point across. They can plan to show, for example, how a point is made; how someone might challenge that point; how questions are asked; how evidence is used to back up a point; and what language is used. They can 'perform' this for pupils, perhaps just asking pupils to listen or giving a checklist of things to look out for. If it is not possible to have two adults in the room then a video can be made of such a discussion. This may be preferable in any case, as you then have a resource to use again.

Making a speech or presentation

With the focus in the new National Curriculum on spoken English, with a key role for presentation to others, teachers can again model for pupils how they might present a topic or an idea in a relatively formal way. Sometimes this may just be about explicitly unpicking skills teachers use in a typical lesson, but presenting something discrete may be more interesting for the pupils. If asking pupils to present their work or ideas formally, the teacher could do a mini version of this first for them, being explicit about, for example, why she chose the PPT slides she did, how she practised at home, how she recorded her notes, how she planned for audience interaction, how she uses a visual aid and so on. If the teacher is a confident performer, there's endless scope to ham it up in a humorous or overstated way to make a point, but something relatively formal will also be valued.

Groupwork

Groupwork is perhaps the most common form of talk that happens in the classroom, and if pupils are able to participate in this fully then there is enormous potential for learning. It is unlikely that a group of adults are able to model talk for pupils (though again, a video resource may be possible). One idea may be for the teacher to assume a role within a pupil group for the rest of the class to watch and unpick. The teacher could tell the class they are going to adopt a certain role; for example, 'I am someone who is nervous in group work: I don't feel confident expressing my views.' The group has a topic to discuss (perhaps one the pupils choose, one they know something about and are interested in, or one that is provided for them). The group must work on a task about this topic and try to think of ways to involve the teacher participant. The rest of the class watch and comment on how successful this is.

These are just some simple suggestions of strategies which can be used across age phases and across different subjects. English lessons are a natural place for oral skills to be taught, but I'd argue strongly that if other subjects are using talk as a learning strategy then teaching pupils how to use talk well is essential. Teachers are usually excellent talkers as oral communication is one of the key tools of the trade. We are walking examples to our pupils as to how oral skills can be put to good use. Finding explicit ways to draw pupils' attention to such skills costs nothing and is easily built into lessons; the potential benefits are enormous.