Speaking Module 1 (SM1)

Resource 5: Further tips for developing target language

Further tips for developing target language

* Not all students have the confidence to speak out in front of the rest of the class. Try to provide plenty of different types of talking to allow for these students and to encourage them to develop the confidence to be able to contribute. Build in plenty of pair and group work to practise using the target language in smaller settings.
* Students sometimes complain that everything goes too fast. People speak too fast and language lessons rush from topic to topic without really securing new language. It is worth remembering to slow the pace a little so that time can be taken to explore and play with new language as well as to enjoy the content of the lessons too. That may mean reacting to the humour or sadness or profundity of a comment in the target language. This will act as positive reinforcement for use of spontaneous language and as a way of demonstrating the impact of language on others. This requires good listening and responding skills in staff and emotional intelligence. Most other subject teachers find time to relate to their students on a human level but language teachers may often find themselves caught up in a web of guilt about chat about day-to-day matters as the class is arriving or for brief moments in the lesson. Using the target language for social interaction is important here for both the language learning and human relationships.
* Provide different types of speaking opportunities including e.g. running surveys around the class, doing presentations with notes or by using photos or pictures to describe something. Look at some of the opportunities in drama lessons and see which types of situations could be imported into language learning, both scripted and unscripted.
* Not only does this level of target language use, as the norm for social communication, mark a step on from primary language learning for many students, it also prepares them for progression into KS4 and beyond. It is much easier to continue using target language as the norm when students are 12, 13 or even 16 or 17 than it is to introduce it suddenly at those ages. If students are to succeed in their public examinations at 16 or 18, they need plenty of practice in listening and responding naturally to the target language over a period of years. Spontaneity and fluency cannot be revised the night before an exam!
* Most students enjoy phatic language and the little fillers which allow (native) speakers a pause to find the right idea or phrase e.g. *whatsit / thingy / right / like / well... / you know...* etc. All those little, meaningless words which make the speaker sound more convincing are often fun to learn and use, as well as being useful in giving students authentic ways of buying time to order their thoughts and language.
* Teachers may need to adapt the way they speak with students so that the students feel that the language they use is communicating something which has emotional engagement for the teacher and is not merely a meaningless exercise to fit the words into the right order. Think of a music analogy where it would be easy to do gap-fill exercises to complete bars of music so that it fits the time or key, but this would be a soulless exercise if the music was not meant to communicate something emotional. The same is true of languages. It is easy enough to complete exercises which fit the rules of syntax but this does not make for good memorable learning or emotional engagement.

Some colleagues may want to take this on further and could usefully look at further work on this subject:

* *You Speak, They Speak: focus on target language use* by Barry Jones, Susan Haliwell and Bernardette Holmes (Classic Pathfinder 1, CiLT 2002)
* *Something to say? Promoting spontaneous classroom talk* by Vee Harris, James Burch, Barry Jones and Jane Darcy (CiLT, 2001)
* The section from the KS3 Framework for languages on using the target language: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110809101133/http://nsonline.org.uk/node/193023>
* Exemplification of the Framework for languages, especially section 1.4 (Talking together) on pp 14–18: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110809101133/http://nsonline.org.uk/node/193023>