

## ASSESSING SPOKEN SKILLS

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### Review Article

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper is an outcome of the workshop that the trainers undertook for 25 secondary teachers' of English at Jaipur. This was conducted on account of the need analysis for making them aware and providing them hands-on-experience as they faced a lot of hurdles in assessing the spoken skills of the students. The biggest challenge faced by the teachers was the scarcity of time and lack of awareness regarding such engaging and interesting assessment modes. The assessment tools listed below invite greater participation on part of the students and make the whole language learning experience a joyful one. In-service teachers' demand more such workshops to enhance their conceptual and practical understanding with respect to the assessment tools leading to effective teaching-learning process.

### INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

One of the major responsibilities of any teacher working with English language learners is to enable students to communicate effectively through oral language<sup>[1]</sup>. With an increasing focus on collaborative classrooms, teachers are encouragingly incorporating pair and group activities in their daily execution of lesson plans. Many of these classroom activities have the potential for being used in the assessment. However, there are at least three challenges facing teachers who assess oral language in the classroom: taking out time, selecting assessment activities, and determining evaluation criteria. In reality, the teachers either they cannot find time or they do not have procedures or assessment activities that can readily be incorporated into their lesson plans. In addition to this, one major problem in assessing oral language assessment in the classroom has been a lack of authenticity. This implies that teachers need to use assessment tasks that are as authentic as possible in a classroom setting. This means: a) using authentic language in speaking activities; b) setting real- world tasks; c) giving students' opportunities to use language in situations based on everyday life.

Teaching-learning process and assessment goes hand in hand. This makes it crucial and pertinent for the teacher to assess the students in a continuous manner. Speaking as a skill and its assessment usually remains to some extent neglected and ignored for various reasons. Lack of opportunity made available to the students to express, interpret and negotiate can have a negative impact on the development of other skills. Along with this, it's also important to assess the speaking skill with the criteria shared with the students and using multiple tools and techniques for the same. For this, assessment literacy is needed on the part of the teachers. Since the pre-service teacher education program do not seem to train teachers adequately in designing alternative assessment tools/techniques, this workshop aims to provide teachers with knowledge, skills and hands-on practice in designing and using variety of assessment tools and techniques.

#### GOALS

By the end of the workshop, the teacher trainees will be able to:

- Gain a better understanding about various tools and techniques for assessing spoken skills of the students;
- Design assessment criteria/parameters with respect to spoken skills of the students;

- Share the assessment criteria /parameters with the students;
- Provide descriptive feedback to the students;
- Become more aware of their responsibility and potential to assess the spoken skills;
- Share their learning and act as nuclei through building teacher communities

## OBJECTIVES

In ABCD format (A- refers to Audience, B- refers to expected change in behavior, C- refers to context and D refers to degree)

- Given the opportunity to work in a group/team (C) the trainee (A) will be able to demonstrate (B) use of at least two tools/ techniques (D) for assessing the spoken skills of the students as measured
- Given the discussion related to various authentic spoken tasks (C) the trainee (A) will be able to decide on the criteria/ parameters (B) for at least two activities (D) for enhancing spoken skills of the students.
- Given the model demonstration by the trainer (C) the trainee (A) will be able to attach importance and practice in sharing the criteria (B) for at least two activities (D) in relation to spoken skills
- Given the opportunity for role play (C) the trainee (A) will be able to state (B) and provide descriptive feedback by designing at least four criteria (D).
- Given the prompt related to story composition, (C) the trainee (A) will be able to review (B) the responsibility of the teacher in a task and share at least four responsibilities (D) of being a facilitator.
- Given the review of the session done by the trainer (C) the trainee (A) will be able to share (B) at least two ways (D) of sharing the knowledge gained.

## PRE-WORKSHOP PREPARATION/READING

The trainers conducted the following activities among the group of secondary teachers' and provided them hands-on-experience to let them gauge the strength and weakness so that they could adapt the following keeping in mind the classroom context, students' needs and the purpose of the activity concerned.

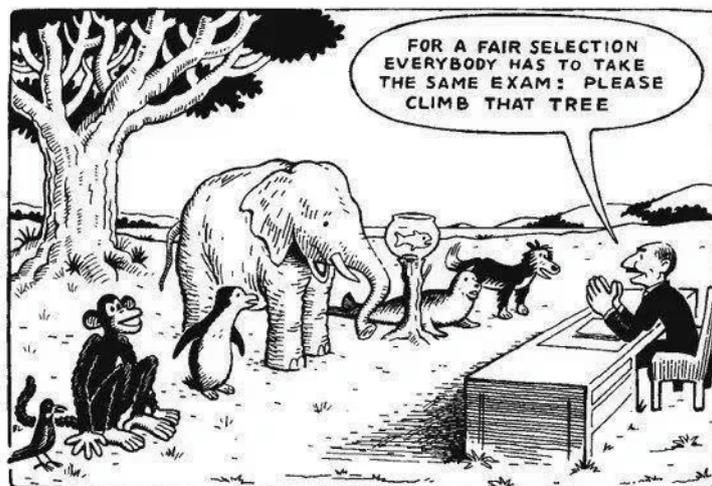
A. Before the workshop teachers were asked to go to the following link and read the article <sup>[2]</sup>.

## PRESENTATION OF THE TOPIC

**Step-1: Warm up Activity (A Discussion of Pre-workshop Reading Questions) (10-15 Minutes)**

**We teachers do teach, but how do we make sure that students learn???**

The instructor displayed an image or distributed the image among groups and asked the following questions as a lead-in to the warm-up discussion. (Think-Pair-Share) (Figure 1) <sup>[3]</sup>.



9GAG.COM/GAG/4735613

**Figure 1.** Source (9GAG.com <http://9gag.com/gag/4735613/our-education-system>) <sup>[3]</sup>.

Q1. What do you think is happening in this picture?

Q2. What is the leader expecting from the animals?

Q3. Do you think the expectation is appropriate in relation to the different abilities possessed by animals? If yes/ no. State the reason for the same.

Q4. According to you, what kind of tasks could have been assigned to different animals and why?

For the warm-up activity the class was divided into groups and each group brainstormed and responded to the questions. The instructor moderated the discussion and asked other follow-up questions like what should be the purpose of good assessment practices? The reading that was suggested to the participants was also discussed briefly through discussion. The purpose of the discussion was to activate participants' prior knowledge.

### **Step-2: (15 Minutes)**

Chalkboard Splash Following the warm-up discussion, the instructor gave a prompt 'ASSESSING SPEAKING' and participants in groups were given a chart paper and were required to answer three questions which were followed by a briefing and discussion. Participants had to respond to the following questions:

Q1.Importance of assessing speaking skills

2. How do you assess your students speaking skills?

Or

What are the criteria/parameters that you keep in mind while assessing speaking skills of students?

Q3. What are the problems/ challenges that you encounter /face while assessing the speaking skills of students?

### **Activities**

#### **Step-3:**

(40 minutes) Instructor distributed handouts of various tools like checklists, rating scales in the form of self-assessment, peer assessment having different formats in the form of yes/no statements, question/answer, rating scale, sentence completion etc. The participants were divided into groups and each group had to critically examine the above formats. One representative from each group presented and shared their views regarding the pros and cons and how would it actually help them in their own classroom context with the help of an example. (Members within group can also be assigned different responsibilities of being a timer, reporter, writer, and information gatherers)

The trainer with the help of the handouts explained and discussed the use and importance of these tools as alternative assessment strategies. For this a short video was shown to the teachers.

This was followed by a task of picture composition prompt wherein two groups were provided with pictures and a graphic organizer to frame the story around it. The preparation time was 6-8 minutes, while the speaking time was be 2-3 minutes and when the two groups were preparing, the other two groups were preparing criteria /parameter to assess the same using any of the assessment tool as discussed above. (Group members can be given responsibility). One representative from each group came and presented their story and the other groups were required to assess. If time is available groups can be swapped. The trainer invited any of the group randomly to share their assessment <sup>[4]</sup>.

The purpose of the activity was to give participants knowledge about how to frame criteria in relation to the task assigned. In this way, they will get aware regarding what kind of activities need to be assigned and what all specific criteria need to be kept in mind for true assessment..

#### **Step-4:**

(40 minutes) the trainer distributed the handouts related to what rubrics are and discussing both holistic and analytical rubrics as an assessment tool for spoken skills. Trainer divided the trainees into groups and asked them to brainstorm and exchange their ideas regarding the difference between the two types of rubrics. One member from each group was be invited to come forward and share the difference between the two types and asked to share at the same time an example of a speaking activity where they used either of the type of rubric and how.

Again the participants were being divided into groups. Two/Three group was told to imagine them as one of the products to be chosen from a fish bowl. They had to make a conversation with a prospective buyer. They were required to sell themselves as best as possible or convince the buyer why he should buy them. Preparation time was 8 minutes, while performance time was 2 minutes. While the two groups were preparing for the script, the other groups were preparing a rubric: holistic or analytical to assess the performance. After the performance, any representative from the group had to come and share their assessment with everyone. The other groups had to contribute by giving their ideas of making the rubrics in an effective manner for better feedback and objective assessment.

After this trainer asked him trainees to remember an activity for speaking skill which went quite well in the class and discuss

within their groups. Group chose one activity and prepared an assessment tool related to it and then it was discussed and feedback was provided by other trainees and the trainer.

#### **Follow-up to the workshop: (5 minutes)**

Each group of teacher-participants was asked to collaborate with their group members online, in their own time, and develop assessment tools. The participants were to discuss their tools at an appointed time/ place, email, Skype and work collaboratively on the same in relation to the activities decided by them. Trainees could also work in pairs and mail their work to other trainees who can provide feedback along with trainers' suggestion and inputs.

#### **Wrap-up (5/10 minutes)**

A quick revision of what was done during the session and the participants were asked to put forth any questions/queries, their observation /comments and to know if they would be able to incorporate variety of assessment tool and techniques in their classroom given their classroom limitations and how? Yes, a hands-on task of developing a rubric on speaking task was also provided that they wish to assign to their students and if time permits can ask them to select a text /poem from their course and can work in pair initially to collaborate their ideas, work together and create an individual rubric.

This was followed by Q-A session.

After the workshop, the presenter will distribute a feedback form for participant evaluation of the workshop.

## **EVALUATION PLAN**

Participant's reaction was evaluated through the technique of observation by making use of a checklist, or making them do Thumbs up/Down may be after the completion of two or three activities. Their learning was evaluated by asking questions verbally/ giving them a questionnaire or probably by conducting a focused group discussion. Their behavior was evaluated by enabling them to share their respective problems that they faced while assessing the spoken skills and how has this session helped them in overcoming the hurdles by adopting the strategy of quick write. The trainees were also asked to maintain reflective journals to record a true account of what happened in the classroom, their specific observations about students, linkage with theory, and their own suggestions for the same. Since we all will be connected through Google group so trainees can share their reflections and post their queries.

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