

Making the Speaking Class a Real Learning Experience: The Keys to Teaching Spoken English¹

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INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS—S*A*F*F*I*R*E*S*

The theme of this Conference is "Master Keys: Unlocking Potential", and in keeping with this theme, I decided to try to formulate for myself what I see as the keys to teaching spoken English. Drawing on my theoretical knowledge, and on my 27 years of ESL classroom experience, I asked myself the following question: How do you make the speaking class a real learning experience? I came up with eight keys which, when taken together, can open the door to treasure. The treasure is in the form of SAFFIRES (please excuse the spelling), which hold the keys to teaching spoken English. SAFFIRES is an acronym representing the eight key ingredients that are essential to the successful teaching of spoken English. Each key ingredient is represented by one of the eight letters in the word SAFFIRES:

SUPPORTIVENESS

AWARENESS

FUN

FEEDBACK

INTEREST

RELEVANCE

ENTHUSIASM

STRATEGIES

It is true—keys **can** open the door to treasure, and that is what we must surely strive for—but, **keys can imprison**, so that for every one of the eight "**keys to treasure**" that I will be discussing, I will also be addressing the danger and warning against an "**imprisoning key**".

This, then, is how our SAFFIRES, our keys to success, can be imprisoning keys:

Without **SUPPORTIVENESS**, the speaking class is **SCARY**.

Without **AWARENESS**, the speaking class is **ALIENATING**.

Without **FUN**, the speaking class is **FEEBLE**.

Without **FEEDBACK**, the speaking class is **FRUSTRATING**.

Without **INTEREST**, the speaking class is **INTOLERABLE**.

Without **RELEVANCE**, the speaking class is **RIDICULOUS**.
Without **ENTHUSIASM**, the speaking class is **ENERVATING**.
Without **STRATEGIES**, the speaking class is **SENSELESS**.

EIGHT KEYS TO TEACHING SPOKEN ENGLISH

Key #1. Supportiveness

The ESL classroom must be seen as a training ground—as a sheltered environment or place for trying thing out, for taking risks and for testing hypotheses about how the language works. It must be a place where the teacher *and* the student's peers help, provide feedback, and *support* the efforts of the student. There has to be a supportive atmosphere in which the student is praised for trying, even when his or her efforts are unsuccessful. Anxiety level must be kept under control. (See Scovel, 1978.)

The whole notion of being supportive is very important in teaching ESL, and particularly in teaching speaking. Affect is a very significant factor influencing the degree of success people have learning second languages. If they feel inhibited, put down, overwhelmed or uncomfortable, a barrier goes up, and students close their minds to what it is they are supposed to be learning. Krashen (1983) calls this barrier the "affective filter". (For a discussion of the role and importance of affect, see Brown, 1973 and Schumann, 1978. For an example of classroom activities that take this factor into account, see Moskowitz, 1979.)

In order for this supportiveness to be there, some very important ground rules have to be established with the class from the very outset:

- * Students have to feel and believe that the teacher and all their peers are there to help them.

- * There has to be an explicit, stated commitment from the teacher that he or she will never laugh at a student, and, as far as this is in the control of the teacher, neither will any of the other students.

- * Students have to feel that this is a learning experience, and a place to try things out, and that everyone will *help* them to do so, and this help will always include feedback from everyone on what they did.

- * Students have to be encouraged and given "Brownie Points" for trying, even when they are wrong.

- * There has to be an understanding that everyone in the class will help everyone else, and that there is no shame in seeking this help.

Without supportiveness, the speaking class is scary.

Our goal in the Communicative Language Teaching paradigm is to get the students to try to communicate at all costs. If we aren't supportive, we can have precisely the opposite effect, and this can not only condemn the speaking class to being a non-learning environment, but can have a really negative effect on the second language learner. This was borne out in a discussion I held recently with my advanced-level students at York University about speaking up in their non-ESL classes—they spoke of being "terrified" to do so. So it is pointless if the ESL speaking class itself is scary. This will tie directly with the eighth key—*strategies*, and its negative counterpart—*senseless*, in which I will be arguing that we have to make sure that the speaking class is valuable as a learning experience, not just more of the scary, threatening experience that our students have outside of our classes.

Key #2. Awareness

In my "SAFFIRES" acronym, I've used the term "awareness", meaning awareness by the student of what it is that is being done. But, in fact, it must include a great deal more than that—it must include *involvement* and *consciousness raising*. The main reason why I see *awareness* as being one of the eight keys to the successful teaching of speaking, is that I believe that students learn best when they are fully aware of what it is that they are doing, and why they are doing it. This ties directly with the idea of collectively establishing the ground rules from the outset—those ground rules of being supportive and never laughing at anyone. In addition, it should be discussed and established from the outset that there will always be *feedback* on what has been said or done, and that this feedback will be given by peers as well as by the teacher—this will be discussed in detail when discussing feedback below. These things should be discussed with the students, and their ideas, opinions and suggestions respected, and, where possible, taken into consideration. We have to bear in mind that our students, particularly adult learners, have very clear and strong opinions that need to be heard. Carlos Yorio (1982), in a study carried out some 10 years ago, referred to the ESL learner as "a consumer with opinions". (See also Brookfield, 1986 and Tsui, 1992).

Students should be made aware of *what* it is that is being taught at any specific point, and *why* it is that that is being taught and why in that way—this is what I mean by *involving* the students in the learning process. It is particularly important to involve and inform the students in an area like ESL since we often use an approach, like the Com-

municative approach, which in many ways runs counter to everything they did at school, and in fact looks like "playing" or "non-serious stuff" rather than real learning. By involving students and making them aware, students develop a sense of ownership of the learning, rather than seeing it as something being imposed from above. They will also be more accepting of what might otherwise look to them like revolutionary, if not "silly" methodologies. This discussing, explaining, and involving may prevent some of them from reacting very negatively to what we are doing.

Consciousness-raising is the final part of this key that I've called *awareness*: part of our responsibility as teachers of spoken language is to teach the students the sociolinguistic rules of language use. As Dell Hymes (1972, p. 278) said in his seminal paper "On Communicative Competence": "There are rules of [social] use, without which the rules of grammar would be useless." In other words, to know the grammatical rule without knowing when something is or is not appropriate to be used, is of little or no value. Much of our social behaviour that accompanies and is inseparable from our language behaviour, is unconscious—we don't normally spend long periods of time thinking about whether we are in the habit of making eye-contact with our interlocutors, how loudly we speak, or the nature of our hand and body movements. Nor, I am sure, do we spend a lot of time thinking about how the social rules we use differ from the rules in other countries and cultures. However, some of the social rules of language use of our students may be inappropriate in English, and this inappropriateness might, and in fact often does, make our students' speech ineffective, and even may be perceived as being offensive in this culture. Only if this is brought to a conscious level will we be able to change in our students those aspects that are totally inappropriate, and that are sending different signals from the ones intended, or are even offensive. The sociolinguistic literature makes too much of the "offensive" examples which, in reality, are very rare. Much more important than those are the ineffective features. For example, if a student's culture does not call for direct, engaging eye-contact when speaking to someone, or with numerous people when speaking in or to a group, the student's speech can be really weakened by this lack of eye-contact.

In addition, there is the issue of the social rules of how to conduct ourselves in terms of such things as "small talk" and how "conversation management" rules work. For example, what do we do in the way of making "polite conversation" as opposed to keeping quiet; what topics should we focus on, and what topics are taboo, etc. In terms of rules of conversation management, we need to think about how people

handle themselves in group discussions: how do we signal we want to speak; how do we maintain the floor when someone is trying to take it away from us; how do we speak; how do we signal we want to leave or we want someone else to leave? There are, for example, students from certain cultures who often linger in my office too long, not knowing how to leave politely, and not picking up my signals that I would like them to leave. Or, carried *ad absurdum*, we might be confronted with the crisis faced by Stephen Leacock's (1940) character, Melpomenus Jones, who does not know how to leave, and ultimately becomes a "prisoner" of his hosts, and dies there. All of this, if we are to address it, as I firmly believe we must in the speaking class, *has to be brought to a conscious level*, and students have to become comfortable talking about these things—not only are they things we seldom give any thought to, but most of us even lack the metalanguage to discuss them.

Without awareness, the speaking class is alienating.

The student will feel angry, frustrated and short-changed in the class. He or she will not really understand what is going on or the value of what they are being asked to do, and will become resentful and alienated. We should always bear in mind the introspective study that the psycholinguist John Schumann and his wife, Francine, did a few years ago (1977) when living overseas and learning a foreign language—they report a strong sense of alienation through not being aware and involved, and that this really turned them off and caused them to have a very negative feeling about their language learning.

The last thing that we want in our speaking classes is to alienate our students. Sadly, it has been my experience in Toronto, multicultural though it is, that the students have all too many alienating experiences, and we should be providing a counter-balance to this, not contributing to it.

Key #3. Fun.

Note: Much of what will be said here will tie directly with, and in many ways is inseparable from, what I will be saying below under Key #5—Interest.

My basic premise when dealing with this key to success is that I believe that the speaking class should be fun. Many of our students have difficulty with the idea that serious learning can, at the same time, be fun. It is foreign to them from their previous learning experience. However, I see no contradiction between something being

fun, and serious learning taking place—in fact I believe the opposite—if it is fun and not a "drag", then I believe *more* learning will take place.

The question then is, how do you make it fun?

* by prudent choice of materials. There is no point in choosing materials that have been brilliantly designed linguistically or pedagogically, if they are dull and boring. Such materials are a real turn-off.

* by using humour. The teacher must use a lot of humour and, in my opinion, there should be a lot of laughing, providing, as I said above, it is not laughing *at* someone, but rather laughing *with* someone. The students should also be encouraged to use humour, provided that care is taken to teach them the sociolinguistic rules as to when humour is inappropriate.

* by keeping things moving along at a fairly rapid pace. This is not to suggest that the teacher should get students panicky or anxious, but the pace should be fast enough to keep the adrenalin moving and to keep people interested—what Scovel (1978) in his research on anxiety as a factor in second language acquisition calls "facilitating anxiety".

* by stopping an activity *before* it begins to drag. We have a tendency to let an activity go on too long, particularly when it's a good one or one we've put a lot of work into. We must stop while students still feel "I would have liked a little more of that". We must also be willing to stop something that is not working *even if we have put a lot of work and preparation into it*. It may not be working for any one of a number of reasons, but we should always be ready to "cut our losses", difficult though that may be.

* by varying and changing activities several times in the same speaking class. We must always *work at* making the class fun and interesting, and we should never take the motivation and interest for granted.

* by avoiding letting the lessons take on a set form or format. Neither should we be following a textbook's set formula, however good a textbook might be. There are numerous textbooks on the market, many of them very good, but each and every lesson or unit follows the identical pattern or format. If we follow this pattern, it will soon cease to be fun!

* by allowing digressions. Of course, the amount of digression should be kept under careful control by the teacher so that the goal of the lesson and the course is not lost.

* by injecting surprise, fun activities into the lessons from time to time—such things as word games, spontaneous speeches, etc. I believe that it is perfectly legitimate and desirable to do this, even though these may not fit exactly with your very carefully planned curriculum.

Without fun, the speaking class is feeble.

We have to be sensitive to the situation of our students. Their language classes are long, and if they aren't fun, it is going to be very demotivating, and turn into a feeble non-learning experience. The speaking class must not be allowed to develop into a "ho-hum" event—everybody should be involved, and, as far as possible, enjoying themselves while learning.

Key #4. Feedback

Of all the "keys" I have listed, *feedback* is one of the most important. And coupled with feedback is the question of how to ensure the provision of meaningful feedback in the speaking class.

Providing meaningful feedback is particularly important because of my commitment to teaching students *how to speak* and not being satisfied simply having them speak. If the speaking class merely provides opportunities for speaking without teaching the students how to do it, then we are *testing* and not teaching. Our task is *not to test* speaking, but to teach it—we have to begin our teaching of speaking, as with any other teaching, by analyzing and diagnosing what the level of the students is, and what it is that we want to help them to do. Then, it is our responsibility to teach them how to do it. An integral part of the teaching of speaking, in my opinion, is the provision of meaningful feedback as to what the student is doing well, and what the student's weaknesses are. (See Mendelsohn, 1990).

I would offer the following eight basic principles on the provision of feedback:

* Feedback should be given and received in a mood and with a rapport that will make the student in question responsive to the feedback, whoever is giving it. As I have already stated, this requires setting ground rules and establishing a norm where there is going to be feedback given, and where the rapport and trust is such that it will be accepted as positive and worthwhile; the ground rules should also lead to a readiness to take correction from peers and not just from the teacher, without this being seen as betraying friends. However, it is important to remember that if we are going to get into such an enterprise, it is essential that we recognize that we all have fragile egos, and we *must* teach students the appropriate softeners when giving feedback, to protect their egos.

* Feedback should be on the good as well as the weak parts of what the student did. Too often we only point out the bad. I would recommend that we start with the good, and then go on to the bad.

There is no doubt in my mind that there is as much, if not more, for the class to learn from that which was good as from that which was bad. All too often in ESL teaching, we subconsciously assume that our students learn best from observing the breaches in the code, when, in fact, they should also be learning from the observance of, and correct use of the code.

* Feedback should include linguistic, sociolinguistic, content, and conversation management features. Traditionally we only worried about linguistic features—about grammar. We must also work on features of content which are too often neglected. Too often do we respond to linguistic and perhaps sociolinguistic features and not respond in any way at all to the content—not to how much content there is, nor to the organization or validity of the points being made. Responding to content is particularly important in advanced level, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or credit ESL programmes. There is, of course, always a need for sociolinguistic feedback, too—feedback on the social rules governing language use, appropriateness of paralinguistic features e.g. eye contact, use of voice, how much touching is allowed, etc., and feedback on conversation management issues—how to maintain the floor when challenged, how to signal you want to speak, etc. By working all of this out with the class and developing a feedback instrument (see below) covering these different parameters, there will be less focus on form, and greater focus on these other features.

* Feedback should be selective, and thereby, systematic. Too often, the feedback we do give is totally haphazard and arbitrary, and also we try to give feedback on everything. Woods (1989) points out that we often correct the things we feel most confident about and have routines for. This is not a satisfactory criterion. For example, we should not focus on correcting errors on Gerunds/ Infinitives because we feel comfortable with explaining that, and avoid dealing with the "current relevance" use of the Present Perfect because we don't feel comfortable explaining that. In addition, we must avoid causing information overload by trying to provide feedback on everything. We must be selective, and by doing this, we can try to have a system for our choice. So what *should* we select to provide feedback on? The following principle is my answer to this question:

*Feedback should be productive. By this I mean that we should select productive forms—forms and items that the students will be able to use extensively. As far as is possible, given the pressure of time under which this selection has to take place, we should try to avoid esoteric items.

* Feedback should be constructive. It should be constructive in the sense of "constructive" as opposed to "destructive" criticism. This depends largely on the way it's presented, and appropriate handling of it can be made possible by using the feedback instruments discussed below. Without such an instrument, students will have very little to offer about other students' efforts. The teacher and student should work on the problems highlighted, a record should be kept, and follow-up discussion should be held on whether any progress has been made on these difficulties.

* Feedback should be detailed and specific. Students lack the meta-language to talk about people's speech, and certainly have seldom given this sort of thing a lot of thought. This calls for the use of what I call a feedback instrument—a checklist—a document in sections or categories that you feel should be addressed in thinking about the student's speech. I recommend that the creation of the feedback instrument should be a class project. In this way its very creation raises consciousness, develops a sense of ownership, and, in a credit programme, becomes a document to help the teacher be accountable when grading, and a document that the students can refer to when thinking of a presentation that they have to give. (For a detailed discussion of feedback instruments, see Mendelsohn, 1991.)

* Using the feedback instrument, feedback should be given by everyone in the class—by the individual himself or herself, by the student's peers, and by the teacher. This calls for trust, and for the active participation all the time by everyone either as participant, or as provider of feedback, making it a learning experience even for the onlookers. In fact, they cease to be onlookers, and become active learners in this way, even when they themselves are not doing the speaking. If everyone should provide feedback, I would begin, when possible, with the speaker himself or herself. This calls for the use of a video camera—a very valuable tool for the teaching of speaking. (See Geddes & Sturtridge, 1988.) Using the feedback instrument and video camera, I would start by playing back the video, have the speaker himself or herself provide the first feedback, then the rest of the class, and then, and only then, the teacher.

Without feedback, the speaking class is frustrating.

I have already cautioned against testing which pretends to be teaching, and will develop this further when talking about Key #8, Strategies. But it must be mentioned here that failure to provide meaningful feedback virtually guarantees frustration!

Key #5. Interest

For the purposes of my acronym, SAFFIRES, I have called this key *interest*, but, in fact, what I will be dealing with as part of *interest* is everything related to motivation. What is more, interest (motivation) links directly with Key #3—*fun* and Key #6—*relevance*.

Studies over the past twenty years have shown motivation to be a very important variable in how well or poorly people learn second and foreign languages—this is clearly documented and empirically validated in the literature. (See Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Strong, 1984; and Gardner, 1988, Chapter 3.) Coupled with motivation, and inseparable from it, is *attitude*, all of which will be subsumed under the heading, *interest*.

My basic premise when considering motivation in the speaking class is that we should *never, under any circumstances, take motivation for granted*:

- * not when there is a captive audience, for example in a compulsory course, in a military college or in a prison

- * not when it is a credit course and the grades are very important and therefore we might think motivation will follow

- * not when we are teaching a group of adult learners who desperately need to learn the language for survival, making a living, etc.

- * not when we are teaching in a programme that costs the students a lot of money and we might therefore think that if they're paying such a lot of money for the course, they are bound to be motivated.

In none of these cases, nor in any other I can think of or have come across in my many years in the profession, can we, or should we in fact, take motivation for granted.

Motivation is a particularly important variable in determining how well or poorly a learner will learn English, because it is one of the few affective variables that have been proved to be of very major significance, in which we, the teachers, can have an influence and effect change. With motivation, we *can* do something about it—we can cause motivation to be greater or less, and therefore it is very important.

I believe, students will be motivated:

- * when they are aware of why they are doing something and are committed to it (discussed in Key #2)

- * when they have been involved in determining what it is they need to learn, and how to achieve their learning goal

- * when they are enjoying doing it (discussed in Key #3)

- * when they believe that what they are doing is helpful to them, and they feel that they are learning

- * when they feel challenged, but not overwhelmed.

Arguing that students must believe what they are doing is helpful to them and that they must feel that they are learning, relates to the approach and the method being used, and how they feel about it. It does not work simply to tell the students, "I know what's best for you—trust me, even if it looks silly, or not what you would have expected in an ESL class." The Communicative Approach is very foreign to many learners of English from many different parts of the world. They are not used to the interactive nature of the lessons, group work, the fun component, the absence of rote learning and the formal teaching and learning of grammar, and they have to be eased into this new approach slowly and gently. Otherwise, the students will not feel that what they are doing is important, or that they are learning, and this will result in affective resistance to what the teacher is doing, and this will, indeed, block learning.

For motivation to be high, students must also feel challenged, but not overwhelmed. This relates to the notion of anxiety. Scovel (1978) makes the crucial distinction between "debilitating anxiety" and "facilitating anxiety"—clearly, we must strive to achieve a situation of facilitating anxiety in our students, so that they will be challenged without feeling desperate or overwhelmed. A major contributing factor to achieving this is pitching the lesson at the appropriate level. Following Krashen (1983), I would advocate that we set our level at what Krashen calls "i + 1"—where "i" is the comfort level of proficiency of the students. This means that the level should be one notch higher than the "comfort level", thereby stretching the students without overwhelming them.

Without interest (motivation), the speaking class is intolerable.

Not only does the speaking class become intolerable, but, as I stated above, there develops affective resistance to learning, which can very quickly and effectively block any learning at all getting through.

Given that this is a dimension over which we do have some control, we hold this key very firmly in our hands, and must therefore be very prudent in our planning in this area.

Key #6. Relevance

This ties in very closely with *interest*—the previous key.

When talking about relevance, what I am addressing mainly is the issue of the content of the class, i.e. the material. Some people do not see this as an important feature, arguing that if the material provides practice, then that's all that is needed. I would disagree, since the

content and relevance of the material being used is, from my experience, an important component of motivation.

I believe that material is most motivating when it is:

- * appropriate in linguistic level (discussed above)
- * appropriate in maturity level
- * interesting to the learner
- * perceived by the learners as being relevant to their needs.

The maturity level must be appropriate. All too often with adults we use material intended for children. Part of the reason is simply because it was available, and part is that some teachers argue that if it is for younger learners, then it will be "easier". Even if this is true, using such material is very demotivating, and even patronizing. It is very easy for us ESL teachers to slip into this serious fault of being patronizing to our students, because their poor language skills make them very dependent. I, personally, see being patronizing as a very serious flaw in a teacher—in fact, among the more serious faults we can perpetrate. I cannot accept the argument that adults can learn from childish material just as well as from any other language data. It is true that they *can*, but in my opinion, it is certainly not ideal. To borrow a term from testing, it lacks face validity. The learners do not see it as relevant to them, to their experiences or to their needs, and therefore are demotivated. The reverse is also true for material that is too sophisticated for younger learners—but in this case, the effect is that it probably overwhelms them and they become discouraged and give up.

The material must be interesting to the learner. All too often, we do not pay enough attention to this question. We need to ask, not what is interesting to *us*, but what will be interesting to our students. A very common example of this is the omni-present unit in ESL textbooks on "Learning Second Languages" or "Successful Language Learners" or the like. It is true that this is really interesting to us, and we feel comfortable talking about it because we know something about the topic, but my informal research has shown that the average second language learner is not that interested in this topic. So, being interested in something ourselves, and/or us knowing about it is not sufficient.

Finally, the material we choose should be seen as relevant to the students' needs. This is a "litmus test" we should be applying always. We should try to ensure that the material we are using, provided we have any say at all in its choice, is as relevant as possible to the students. This requires, first and foremost, that we know what the needs of these students are, and this can only be ascertained by doing a careful *needs analysis* at the beginning of the course. (For a

discussion of the importance of carrying out a needs analysis, see Munby, 1978 and Yalden, 1983. For a good example of a needs questionnaire, see Richards, 1990.)

When we have determined the needs of the students, we must try to meet these needs—to create a situation in which students feel that what we are doing is not just using a "vehicle for language practice", several removes from their actual language needs, but rather is *directly* relevant to them. For example, if they are high school students, we should try to work in conjunction with the subject-area teachers and do some of the reading or writing from the content-area with them. For my university students, we read actual textbook material, and not only then train our students to write academic essays, but work with them on their essays for their regular academic courses.

Without relevance, the speaking class is ridiculous.

Very soon the students become bored by irrelevant material, and this becomes a real "turn-off" for them.

Key #7. Enthusiasm

This key ties with many of those already dealt with, but warrants being allocated its own "key", because I think it is very important and often forgotten.

What I feel about enthusiasm is very simple: *if we are not enthusiastic about what we are doing, we can be almost certain that our students will not be, either.* Whether we are very enthusiastic or not so enthusiastic, we must be perceived to be enthusiastic—we hold this key, and, as I mentioned above, this is an area over which we have some control. Therefore, we must ensure that we seem committed and positive about what we are teaching. Of course there are things we have to teach due to curriculum requirements, that we aren't that interested in, but if we let on to the students about this, we can rest assured that they will not be enthusiastic.

It is bad enough when we are unenthusiastic about a particular piece of reading or listening—for example when I taught EFL in high school many years ago, I was required to teach some very dated Nineteenth Century essays. But even worse than not being enthusiastic about certain required selections, is when a teacher is unenthusiastic about one or more of the skill areas. I have worked in multi-skill programmes, in which certain of my colleagues really were only interested in one particular skill, and were definitely *not* interested in the others. This lack of enthusiasm was quickly picked

up by the unfortunate students who needed all the skills. What is more, those teachers, quite unfairly, taught very little of the skills they were unenthusiastic about, thereby disadvantaging their students. I believe that this lack of enthusiasm for a particular skill is often a cover for insecurity and not knowing how to teach a particular skill. A common example from my experience is pronunciation, particularly intonation, which is often neglected, I believe, for this very reason.

Without enthusiasm, the speaking class is enervating.

When a teacher lacks enthusiasm, it saps the energy of the students and certainly makes them unenthusiastic.

Key #8. Strategies

The eighth and final key to making the speaking class a real learning experience is *strategies*. I believe we must teach our students *how to do something*—in our case it is to teach them how to express certain communicative functions. It is not sufficient just to give students a lot of opportunity to speak—we must teach them how to do it. And I see this *how to* as being at the very root of good ESL teaching in all the skill areas. We need to ascertain at the beginning of the course what our students need to learn to do in the particular course (by needs analysis discussed above), and also to ascertain their level, and where their strengths and weaknesses lie (by diagnostic testing). Having done this, we must train them in the use of *strategies* as to how to do what they need to do with language. As has already been stated, this is also the difference between *teaching* and *testing*: If we simply create situations and opportunities for practice in our classes without teaching the students how to do that which we are teaching, then what we are doing is not teaching at all, but rather testing. I am not suggesting that there is no value or place for practice, but surely we should first be teaching students before we give them this practice.

Strategies, then, are techniques that will assist the students in their efforts to communicate—for this reason, I like to call the methodology that I advocate in teaching ESL, a "strategy-based" methodology (Mendelsohn, 1992). This can be clearly exemplified if we consider the communicative function of "interrupting"—or, indeed, any of the speech acts or communicative functions. Students need to be taught strategies as to how to interrupt successfully and appropriately in English. They need to be shown how to do this, and given *training exercises* that will train them in the different ways of interrupting

effectively. They are not born with an innate ability to interrupt appropriately in English, nor are these functions necessarily realized in a universal way over different languages. *They have to be taught.* Then, and only then, can we expect the students to improve with practice.

The same holds true for anything that we want our students to learn to do in our classes. The function of "disagreeing" is another example: if we want to teach our students *how to disagree* in English, we must analyze first and foremost how native speakers do it, how the strength of the disagreeing can be expressed, how we can disagree politely and tactfully. Having analyzed this, we can then plan how to teach it.

So, I see the stages that we have to go through as follows:

- * determine what it is the students need

- * teach them strategies as to how to do this

- * provide training exercises in the different components of these communicative functions

- * then, and only then, provide a lot of practice, coupled with a lot of appropriate feedback.

Only if we do this, are we actually teaching and not testing. When we devise a plan to teach student strategies as to how to do something in the spoken language, and then teach them how to do it, our teaching in the speaking class acquires a direction, and we teach to a careful pedagogical plan and syllabus rather than simply providing opportunities for rather random and haphazard speaking. (On teaching strategies, see Jones, Palincsar, Ogle & Carr, 1987; Oxford, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; and Wenden & Rubin, 1987).

Without strategies, the speaking class becomes senseless.

One of the major roles that I see for the ESL teacher is that of strategy trainer. And, without accepting this role, we diminish the value of the speaking class to less than a real learning experience.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

I have tried in this paper to offer what I see as the eight *keys to teaching speaking*.

Too often is the speaking class an unstructured, untutored chance for the students to speak. While there certainly is some value in that, I believe that we can do better than that—we can make the speaking class a very important learning experience. We can open the treasure chest if we bear the S*A*F*F*I*R*E*S in mind:

**SUPPORTIVENESS
AWARENESS
FUN
FEEDBACK
INTEREST
RELEVANCE
ENTHUSIASM
STRATEGIES.**

NOTES

1. This paper was originally delivered as a plenary address at the ATESL Conference (Alberta Association of Teachers of English as a Second Language) held in Calgary, November 1991.

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