



LET'S TALK

SAL MCKEOWN EXPLAINS HOW SHIFTING THE FOCUS FROM WRITING TO SPEAKING, AT LEAST FOR A WHILE, CAN HAVE MASSIVE BENEFITS FOR SEN STUDENTS...

Writing is still the main vehicle for assessment in schools. So much effort is devoted to grammar, spelling and punctuation – but even today there are more jobs which require people to talk than to write. If you work on young people’s communication skills, then, you make them more literate, better behaved and improve their employment opportunities; and two upcoming events which give you the chance to try things out are No Pens Day Wednesday (5th October) and Dyslexia Awareness Week (November 3-9).

So if pupils are not going to be picking up a pen and writing notes or doing essays, and teachers are not going to be writing on the interactive whiteboards, how will they manage?

“Smartphones,” recommends Russell Prue. “These have brilliant free apps for recording and playing speech. The advantage of this sort of technology is that it offers pupils a chance to talk, to play back their sound samples, to listen, and to record again and again.”

Mobile phone technology is familiar and personal and works especially well for those pupils who are not at their best with a pen in their hand. It also offers opportunities for young

FURTHER INFORMATION

+ Dyslexia Awareness Week runs from November 3 to November 9 2014. This year’s theme is Dyslexia Matters, and will cover everything from creating a dyslexia friendly environment, supporting and encouraging those with dyslexia, and the ongoing campaign to include dyslexia awareness in initial teacher training. See tinyurl.com/dyslexiaweek.

+ The Communication Trust’s No Pens Day Wednesday takes place nationally this year on 15th October 2014, though schools can get involved whenever works best for them. The event provides free resources for schools including lesson plans and activity ideas to focus lessons for a whole day on speaking and listening. Find out more at tinyurl.com/nopenswed.

people to get a quick first draft recorded while ideas are fresh in their mind. This often acts as a tool for developing vital communication skills, as well as a safety net for reluctant writers.

Russell Prue is usually billed as an ‘independent ICT evangelist and broadcaster’ and he has strong views on the power of the spoken word. “Spontaneous speech, doing a live broadcast where there is no undo or delete button, there is nothing quite like it,” he enthuses. But he also sings the praises of technology that lets learners rehearse, record and redo. In Russell’s experience, children with

special needs, such as speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), can shine when it comes to broadcasting because it is new. They do not have a history of failure, therefore, and it gives them a chance to show different skills sets.

His advice for schools willing to be adventurous is to experiment. He suggests putting pupils into vertical year groups for some lessons so that years 7, 8 and 9 all work together and learn from one another. They can collaborate in small groups on a topic they have covered. Get them to articulate, repeat and explain.

Pupils with dyslexia may have developed very good imitative skills as a way of compensating for their shortcomings with the printed word. Lessons for modern foreign languages often have games and other fun activities and young people who may be self-conscious about performing in

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front of others can be quite articulate and fluent when it comes to being the voices for puppets or for characters in a radio play.

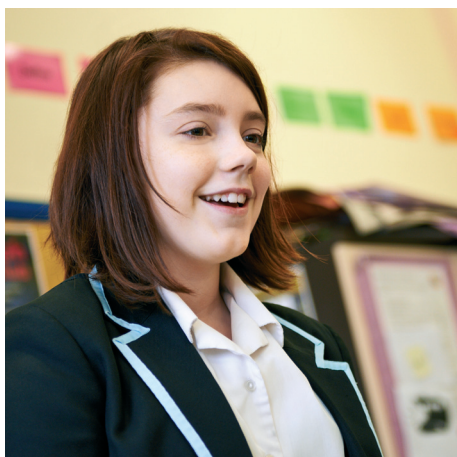
While there are advantages to having free software such as Audacity or Vocaroo, schools that are serious about improving speaking and listening would do well to consider Audio Notetaker, which won the special needs category of the Education Resources Awards earlier this year. It is a great tool for editing and navigating round audio in just the same way that pupils might edit a text file.

Modern Foreign Languages expert Suzi Bewell has created some sample files for Audio Notetaker so pupils learn to make links between sound and spelling. The software lets you slow down the audio so pupils can distinguish sounds more easily and have good clear models of

pronunciation to copy. She has also recorded some French tongue twisters and speeded them up. These make a very entertaining ice breaker.

Suzi also recommends using Audio Notetaker's 'presentation mode', which is like PowerPoint with bells on. She is keen to develop intercultural awareness [see pages 40 and 41 of this issue], and has found Audio Notetaker is a good way to create multimedia presentations about different countries. Activities such as these let pupils make active use of their language skills for a clearly demonstrable purpose.

Russell Prue is an enthusiastic advocate of all these activities. "Good talking [in English, as well as other languages] should be part of the ethos of your school," he insists. "The technology is powerful and can help you to achieve amazing results – so stop using it in old fashioned ways."



★ 5 WAYS TO PROMOTE EFFECTIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM TALK

1 Encourage collaborative, purposeful discussion. Small group dialogue allows students to discuss their ideas, clarify understanding, question one another and reflect on their learning. Model language during whole class discussion that enables these skills.

2 Use talk to support independent learning. We all use self talk to help us to complete tasks independently. Reporting or presenting on completed tasks can ensure that language is built into independent activities.

3 Ask open and reasoning questions to develop thinking and problem solving skills. Open questions allow students to explore their ideas and elaborate and justify their views, for example 'How did you know that?' Just asking 'Why...' can really develop pupils' use of language for thinking.

4 Support vocabulary development by using strategies to explicitly teach the meaning of important vocabulary and use of key words for learning (words like 'compare', 'analyse' and 'define') and for subject specific vocabulary. Encouraging students to use the new vocabulary they've heard. This will facilitate understanding and allow it to become 'their own'.

5 Encourage young people to say when they've not understood – acknowledge the importance of making mistakes and of seeking clarification when unsure. Whole group plenary discussions following group work can be used as a way to allow students to check their own understanding and correct any misunderstandings.

(source: The Communication Trust)

