UNIT 8 SPEAKING ACTIVITIES

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8.1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, great emphasis has been placed on the development of oral skills in second language teaching in India. Materials writers and recent textbooks have focussed on the inclusion of interesting and varied activities which require a learner to respond orally. While relating the curriculum to the real life needs of learners, efforts are made by teachers, school authorities and educational system to build into the curriculum various real life situations which will systematically and efficiently help learners to acquire a repertoire of oral skills.

The need for learners to be actively involved in the classroom processes and not remain passive receptacles is nowhere more important than in a speaking activity. Researchers in English language teaching state that in an average English period, the teacher is speaking for 2/3 of the time. Needless to say, the learners, with hardly any opportunities for speaking, may leave school feeling nervous and under-confident about their oral skills.

Changes in the CBSE Course A, Classes IX and X syllabus have given weightage to conversation skills. In Class IX, 20% of the continuous assessment marks are allocated to conversation skills. There is a corresponding need to include the teaching of conversation skills at the primary and middle school level also.

8.2 OBJECTIVES

This unit will enable you to:
- familiarise yourself with the learner's needs for speaking skills;
- understand the nature and details of some major speaking activities;
• understand the role of the teacher in different kinds of oral skills development activities;
• understand the significance of using stories in building oral skills;
• explore a variety of activities which use story-telling such as theme stories, skeleton stories, etc.;
• understand the setting up, conduct and follow-up of activities such as discussion, debate, role play and radio show;
• identify real life situations, both in school and out of school, which can be exploited by the teacher and used for oral skills activity;
• understand the significance of time management in speaking activities;
• understand ways of integrating speaking with other skills.

8.3 LEARNER NEEDS

The specific speaking skills that a learner needs have already been described in Unit 7.

It suffices here to say that learners need to get practice in making short utterances such as a sentence or a few sentences. Teachers can use these utterances to reinforce grammatical structure.

Oral skills, however, concentrate on the learner needs to make longer utterances. Learners need to interact appropriately and competently at different levels and with different people in a variety of situations.

8.4 SAMPLES OF SPEAKING ACTIVITIES

In this unit you'll study samples of different speaking activities.

These are:
• using stories
• participating in a discussion
• participating in a class debate
• participating in a role play
• preparing a radio show.

Each of these activities will be dealt with at two levels viz;

• the description of the activity; and
• teacher's role

8.5 USING STORIES

Story telling is 'the most ancient and compelling of human activities' (John Morgan and Mario Rinvolucri, 1983). Story telling has a special role to play developing oral skills. It is an infinitely more interesting and involving activity than monotonous oral drill and bland role play.

8.5.1 Theme Pictures

The teacher chooses story and narrates it to the class. She then spreads the pictures on a table at the end of the room. Students are then asked to pick pictures that they associate with the story. Each student tells his or her partner or group the reasons for choosing a particular picture.
**Listening Comprehension and Speaking**

**Teacher's Role**

The teacher needs to collect a lot of pictures from magazines and journals. The pictures should be selected carefully. An adequate number of pictures which are related to the story and several others which are unrelated can be compiled.

This activity is interesting and useful. It brings out the fact that each student listens to the skeleton story and then creates his or her version. The personalisation of the story motivates the learners to participate enthusiastically in this activity.

**8.5.2 Skeleton Stories**

The learners can be given the skeleton form of the stories. The facts given should be clear and simple. Once the learners have heard the story they are asked to give their version of it. The story chosen must be one that can be interpreted in more ways than one.

An alternative is to tell an incomplete story. Students sit in groups of four and after the story-telling session, each gives his or her version of the ending. An example is given below.

**A strange/unknown visitor**

One of my mother’s friends wanted to go for a short holiday – didn’t want to leave her house empty and locked - requested my mother to stay for a few days - mother agreed - Saturday evening - mother watching T.V. - knocking on the door - mother opens - find a gentleman outside - he wants to see his daughter - mother explains - refuses mother’s requests to come in - friend returns - mother tells her of her father’s visit - friend refuses to believe - says her father ..................

(Adapted from Mary Underwood (1976); *What a Story*, OUP.)

**8.5.3 Using Sound Sequences**

In this activity, the teacher plays a recorded sound sequence on an audio cassette. *Sounds Intriguing*, a book by Alan Maley and Alan Duff (1975) has a most stimulating array of sound sequences. The students listen carefully. In groups of four or five, each student tells the group his or her interpretation of the story. The group finally selects the most interesting story and sends one story-teller from the group to tell the story to the whole class. An example from *Sounds Intriguing* by Alan Maley is given below.

**Sound script**


**Possible lines of questioning**

- What is the first sound you hear?
- Is the incident happening inside or outside.
- What kind of place is it.
- How many people are involved.
- How many types of animals are there.
- Is all the action happening in the same place.
- What is the explanation of the sudden loud noise towards the end of the sequence.
- What kind of an event is going on.

In groups of four try to work out a concerning explanation of the incident.
When all the groups have finished, discuss the exercise.

**Teacher's Role**

The teacher has to make arrangements so that the recording is heard by all. She may like to work on some vocabulary connected with the sounds they would be hearing, without taking away the interest of the task. Vocabulary training as an enabling exercise can be done prior to the listening period to make the students' story-telling more effective.

Students find this an engaging exercise and are most willing to work out a skit, a dialogue based on their group's story.

This activity integrates efficiently with a writing activity.

**8.5.4 Dictation**

The practice of dictation can be made purposeful by integrating it with an oral activity. In 'Once Upon a Time' Morgan and Rinvolucri (1983) have given the following example:

A set of words such as the following are dictated to the class.

- schoolmaster
- bachelor
- mother
- death
- funeral
- obsession
- psychiatrist
- hypnotise
- seven roses
- throw away
- improvement
- success
- button hole
- faded

Once the words are dictated, the group appoints one person as the secretary. The words are written on the board. Each group constructs a story from the list, following the order given. Students are then asked to tell their story to the entire class.

**Teacher's Role**

In case the teacher feels that the class cannot carry out this activity efficiently, then a more 'definitive' version may be given by the teacher. The words can be expanded into short phrases so that it gives more support to learners.

e.g., A man, 38, schoolmaster, self contained
mother dies,
very fond of mother, ---

While compiling the list of words for dictation the words chosen should be rich in content so that students are stimulated to think.

**8.5.5 Picture Composition**

The teacher draws an incomplete picture on the board. Students are divided into groups. Each group is given a turn to add to the picture. Once all the groups have taken turns at drawing, each group tells their version of the story to the whole class.

**Teacher's Role**

The teacher can make the first drawing if none of students volunteer. The picture space has to be large so that the different groups can contribute. The drawing should not become too crowded. This activity encourages learners who may not be very good at speaking to make their contribution to the group. It fosters feeling of confidence which can be nurtured by the teacher.
8.5.6 **Telling Anecdotes**

A popular and natural form of building oral skills is by relating anecdotes. The teacher can incorporate suitable anecdotes in day to day teaching. These help in providing a model for the learners.

**Teacher's Role**

Practise telling anecdotes effectively. Invite learners to relate their own anecdotes. Some of the possible topics for anecdotes are:

a) being late for school, losing one's bag, getting caught by the authorities, etc.

b) fear of things, people, places, imaginary things.

c) accidents in the house, on the road, etc.

d) remembering events in the past connected with joining school, transfers to cities, etc.

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**Check Your Progress**

**Notes:**

a) Write your answers in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1. How can story-telling be used in the development of oral skills?

2. What is the meaning of theme pictures?

3. What does a 'Skeleton Story' mean?

4. What is meant by a sound sequence? How can it be used for developing learners' speech skills?

5. Describe how dictation can be used for story-telling and developing learners' speech skills.
8.6 PARTICIPATING IN A DISCUSSION

Most textbooks incorporate activities which necessitate student interaction whether in pairs, groups or the class as a whole.

At times units are especially designed, to have separate sections for each skill.

Discussion can precede or follow reading texts. In the first case, discussion can prepare students for the reading task. In the second, the reading text can enable learners to delve into the theme and thus participate more effectively in the discussions that follow. The reading text can give a fillip to the imagination of students and also give the less confident learners support in terms of content.

Teacher’s Role

The teacher’s role, while the discussion is on, is of an observer, a manager and a facilitator. If the speaking activity focusses on the use of specific language structures, then the teacher can direct the attention of learners in advance to these structures. They may be listed in the text. Once the discussion begins, however, the teacher could allow it to develop, rather than arbitrarily call the attention of learners to grammatical details.

The teacher can move about unobtrusively observing and monitoring the groups. Common errors in grammar and usage can be noted for remedial work to be done later on. At times the dominating student can be tactfully advised so that each student in a group gets a turn. The teacher can, if need be, join a group.

The discussion must lead to a clear task. Very often, discussions tend to wilt and collapse, if they are not planned out meticulously. The activity must have a sense of completion. Nothing is more demotivating for learners than to be left to drag on a discussion interminably, without a clear purpose and goal.

The activity or discussion can be rounded off by inviting one member from each group to report on the group’s discussion. If sufficient time is not available, then some groups may be asked to put up posters with a summary of their group’s ideas. An oral activity which is well planned, organised, executed efficiently, timed correctly, with a feedback and follow up session gives the learners a sense of achievement. This in turn, will motivate them to participate wholeheartedly in the oral activities in future.

8.7 CLASS DEBATE

Most often students’ oral skills are assessed in inter-class, inter-school debates. It would be useful to first organise these debates at the class level.

Teachers can take up relevant topics for debates which are linked to the student’s life at school and home. As students move into middle school and their knowledge of the words increases, learners can debate on wider issues.

Short reading texts, letters to the editor, a newspaper cartoon and all kinds of verbal and visual stimulus can be used to start off the student’s thinking processes.

Teacher’s Role

The teacher can involve the learners in not only participating in the debate, but also at the organisational level.

Once the debate is organised, the teacher can include the learners in the panel of judges who will assess the debaters. The criteria of judging a debate can be spelt out, or elicited from the students at the very beginning. The participants can prepare for the debate keeping the criteria in mind. Thus weightage for content, ideas, delivery of speech, intonation and pronunciation can be collaboratively finalised.

Once the debate is over, the teacher can declare the results. Later, useful feedback can be given.
**8.8 ROLE PLAYING**

The teacher allots a role card to each student. The card has some points which a student can take up in the course of the activity. It is important to ensure that learners have understood very clearly what they are supposed to do.

*Initially, a short demonstration in which the teacher and a few students work out some role play can be useful.*

The information in the role cards is in incomplete sentences or phrases. These are take off points for students to use while participating in the role play. Students are not strictly bound to the role card.

While selecting role play tasks, relationship to the learners' experience is important. But it is equally challenging to have a role play based on a strange and unfamiliar situation.

**Teacher's Role**

The teacher's role is in clarifying what a role play entails. Some materials have role play built in along with the themes. But the teacher can select suitable role play from other texts keeping the difficulty level and interest of her learners in mind.

While the role play is proceeding, the teacher observes and monitors the activity. If she has designed the role cards herself, then she can take decisions whether the role play cards or the activity needs to be modified in some way.

**8.9 RADIO SHOW**

This activity can be planned by tapping various resources for example, television advertisements and radio. One of the most useful resources is the Times FM. It provides a good model for learners. Of course, the focus being different, the Radio Show prepared by the learners will have less recorded music.

Very often students may use incidents taking place at school as subjects for reporting for example, school projects, class projects, school events, inter-school events, sport news, interviews of teachers and students.

The radio show also enables students who are less confident in contributing to the radio show by coordinating the music or by playing instruments.

**Teacher's Role**

The teacher can introduce the radio show by playing an already recorded sample of a radio show (see Class IX Course A CBSE). The radio show need not follow a rigid or set pattern.

Students are divided into groups. Each student in a group is given an equal chance to
participate. The recording can have short excerpts of music, preferably played by the students.

Listening sessions can be held in which students listen to the radio shows recorded by different groups. Before the listening session, students can be asked to comment and give suggestions. Comments on overall performance, presenters and students voice, expression, sense of humour, interest level, clarity of speech can be elicited from the students.

An interesting variation can be asking students to discuss in groups of five or six. What kind of a programme they would like to put up on Teacher's Day / Inter House Competition etc. give a time limit which each group has, ask groups at random to present their items in front of the class.

(You can also set the items that they have to include - like a skit, a joke, a small report on something that happened in school. The students decide on who does what and takes responsibility for the item. The skit can be done by the whole group).

8.10 BUILDING UP A RESOURCE FILE ON SPEAKING ACTIVITIES

Once a teacher has gained insight into the rationale behind organising speaking activities and the tremendous potential in using oral activities to develop learner’s skills in the target language, it is not a difficult step to build up one’s own resource file on speaking activities.

These activities can be built up by using the following as a stimulus:
- school events, e.g., a fete - allotment of stalls
- interviews for selection as Prefects and Editorial Board Members
- school trips
- current topics of interest at the national and international level
- newspaper clippings/ reports/ letters to the editor/ cartoons/ school trips can be planned having a language focus in advance. For example, the train journey can be used to recite and compose poems on trains bringing out the rhythm of the train’s movement. Visuals such as a cut tree can become the focus of a small group discussion and lead students through discussion to compose a poem, voicing their interpretation of what had happened.

Newspaper cuttings can be pasted on a sheet of paper. The steps for the activity can be written out systematically. The activity can then be tried out. Subsequently, necessary changes can be made. The activity is then filed in a Resource File under the correct heading. These activities should be easily accessible and can become a resource to be shared by the teachers of the English Department.

Check Your Progress
Notes: a) Write your answers in the space given below.
       b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

7. Describe how you will organise a role play session as a speech activity with your students.

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8. What is meant by a resource file?

8.11 TIME MANAGEMENT

In organising oral activities one of the major constraints is the break up of an activity into various phases.

In the first phase the teacher sets up the activity. The oral activity may stem from a reading text or listening input. The activity should be clearly defined by the teacher.

It is of prime importance that the teacher calculate realistically the time to be allotted for discussion, role play or any other oral activity.

The time allotted should be specified clearly to all groups. If a group has finished early, the teacher can plan in advance what they should do next.

The pace of the lesson should be active and brisk. The teacher has to be alert, watchful and take decisions quickly.

8.12 INTEGRATING SPEAKING WITH OTHER SKILLS

Speaking activities can themselves arise from reading texts or listening inputs. Once the speaking activity is over, the teacher may find it very useful to integrate the activity with a writing task. The group report can be given to the students as an assignment in the form of a speech to be made in a suitable context.

For example students read a small text on problems of wild life conservation in India. They then discuss in groups of four how poachers and affluent tourists pose a threat to wild life in protected areas/wild life reserves. They then write down the points they have discussed in two columns under the headings:

a) Poachers
b) tourists.

Next they go around the class and compare their points with other groups. In a whole class discussion the teacher writes down the important points of agreement on the blackboard.

(Source : Spectrum : Reader 8; Sultan Chand and Sons, 1997, New Delhi.)

Very often writing assignments are given in isolation without much preparatory work done in class. Speaking activities give impetus and enable learners to write competently on a theme they have collaboratively explored in class.

Check Your Progress

Notes:

9. How will you design speaking activities for your class?
10. How will you manage time in a speaking activity?

11. How will you integrate other skills with a speaking activity? Describe with the help of an example.

8.13 LET US SUM UP

This unit has brought into light the different kinds of speaking activities and the role of teachers in involving the learners in these activities. You as a teacher, can play an important part in organising these activities so that the learners get practice and can actively involve themselves in the classroom processes. The activities mainly discussed are stories, discussions, debates role play, radio shows. At the same time there is a need to integrate speaking with other skills such as reading texts or listening inputs. Time management in this is important because each activity has to be broken up into various phases with appropriate time allotment.

8.14 KEY WORDS

cue cards : cards given to learners in a role play game to tell them which role they are to play, and what they are to do (Cue cards are sometimes called role cards).

incomplete story : telling a story without completing it, inviting and stimulating students to give their own version of the ending.

radio show : a radio show is a programme which is recorded or presented live consisting of contributions made by a group of students — a presenter, items on topics of interest, excerpts of music, advertisements.

resource file : a file consisting of newspaper cuttings, cartoons, role cards compiled by the teacher for use in class.

skeleton story : giving the main events of the story in telegraphic language to be used by students for building a detailed story.

sound sequence : a set of recorded sounds, arranged in a sequence to be used as a stimulus for students to build a story on.

theme pictures : listening to a story, selecting pictures, matching it to the story and giving reasons for the choice.

8.15 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Story telling is an activity which children can relate to most naturally and effectively. It can be used in various ways to build up oral skills for e.g., by telling an incomplete story where students can be asked to provide the ending.
2. Theme pictures are a set of pictures, some of which are related, and some not related to the story told by the teacher. Each student gives his/her reason(s) for the choice of pictures.

3. A skeleton story consists of a set of bare facts, in the form of phrases or very short sentences, the students use these as clues to tell their version of the story.

4. A sound sequence consists of a recording of sounds arranged in a sequence. Students listen to the sound and give their own interpretation of what is happening in the form of a story. When students try to explain what each sound means to them, they are compelled to speak.

Sound sequence can be integrated with speaking because students interpret it to tell their own story. It can later be integrated with writing a dialogue, skit, description or story.

5. The practice of dictation can be made purposeful by integrating it with an oral activity.

6. Class debates can become a rewarding experience if the topic is chosen carefully. The students may themselves suggest a topic that they wish to discuss and make all arrangements with the guidance of the teacher. The class debate has to be organised carefully.

7. Open-ended.

8. A resource file is a file compiled by the teacher in which cartoons, newspaper articles, slogans, posters are systematically arranged. Each of these is mounted on a sheet of paper and the steps of the oral skills activity are written systematically. These activities are used by the practising teacher and shared by other members of the English department.

9. You can design your own speaking activities by being alert and compiling cartoons, newspaper cuttings and building activities on them.

10. Time Management is of crucial importance in Speaking Activities. At times the discussions may continue too long, or may be stopped abruptly if the teacher has not been realistic in her estimate of the time needed for the discussion. Groups need to be made aware of the time allocated for each phase of the activity. If the discussion takes too much time, other important aspects such as feedback and follow up by the teacher will get neglected.

11. Speaking activities are closely linked to listening. Reading and Writing can also be integrated with speaking activities. A debate topic may lend itself to further reading. Writing is an activity which students shy away from in most cases. The speaking activity supports learners by giving content and focus to the writing exercise.

8.16 SUGGESTED READINGS


