

Book Review

Developing ESL Students' Speaking Skills Online¹

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(Bogart, P. S. H. (2020). *Teaching Speaking Online: What every ESL teacher needs to know*. University of Michigan Press.)

Teaching Speaking Online: What every ESL teacher needs to know (Bogart, 2020) is a 111-page eBook that aims to help teachers solve issues of engagement and participation in their language classes. In this book, the author not only provides a large variety of tips and strategies, but she also illustrates their use in three different contexts: elementary and secondary schools teaching, university instruction, and adult workforce education (Adult Ed.).

Speaking is important to most language learners, as it enables them to communicate using the new language they are learning. To develop speaking skills in any language, it is essential to negotiate meaning and produce output in the language (Long, 2017). In other words, learners need to interact through their new language and practice speaking it. However, with the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, many teachers had to quickly adapt their teaching strategies to an online setting which was unfamiliar for some. Given the lack of time to plan for this sudden switch and the constraints of online teaching (Bogart, 2020, p.14), the number of speaking opportunities in many online classes may have been more limited.

As I teach English as a Second Language (ESL) online now, I have seen how technology has, to some extent, been a hindrance to practicing speaking skills. Throughout the past year, I had to renounce some familiar activities involving Total Physical Response and use more traditional games which could easily be integrated into this new online setting, such as *Kahoot* (www.kahoot.com) or *Quizlet* (www.quizlet.com). Some of my students responded positively to these changes, but some others seemed disengaged, turning their webcam and microphone off and barely participating during class.

As I was looking for a solution to help them feel more motivated, I came across Pamela Bogart's eBook *Teaching Speaking Online* (2020) and it immediately caught my attention. The author is immensely qualified to write this book. She teaches academic and professional English communication and language pedagogy at the University of Michigan English Language Institute. Her teaching background seems to transpire in this book's layout as it specifically covers practical issues educators will likely encounter in an online teaching setting.

Well organized, *Teaching Speaking Online* (2020) starts with an introductory chapter describing why the author wrote this book. In explaining the book's focus on asynchronous teaching, Bogart uses three scenarios that are referenced throughout the book: a teacher in the USA K-12, a professor in a college or university setting, and an instructor in adult and workforce (Adult Ed) education. While few specific examples of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes are given in the book, the content and message are still of great interest to any teacher whose classes have been moved online, especially classes with a focus on oral communication.

The introduction is followed by seven chapters, each answering a typical question about teaching a speaking class online (see below). At the end of the book, readers can find a helpful glossary and reference section. This format highlights the author's goal: To assist teachers in setting up a successful online speaking class. Thus, readers can find guidance on transferring their traditional face-to-face strategies to an online setting or rely on new activities specifically tailored to this new context. Each chapter ends with examples illustrating the implementation of different strategies in the three different teaching contexts mentioned in the introduction, as well as a section encouraging readers to reflect on the aforementioned examples.

Chapter 1 answers the question "How can I establish the rapport that is a prerequisite to effective speaking classes?" In this chapter, the author focuses on why teachers should foster trust and build a good rapport with students, and how they can do so online. Building this rapport between the instructor and learners is essential for students to feel safe and motivated, which in turn promotes participation and negotiation of meaning. The strategies in this chapter revolve around finding ways for the teachers to appear more present

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in an online context. This is an important skill to develop, as studies have shown that online students identify teacher presence as one of the most important factors in making an online course better (Chakraborty & Nafukho, 2015; Martin & Bolliger, 2018). To this end, the author provides many suggestions for establishing presence effectively in an online speaking class using videos. For example, the author suggests limiting the length of videos to ten minutes to increase students' likelihood of watching them, and collaboratively establishing behavior guidelines to promote constructive participation. Asking students to create their own netiquette, the appropriate way of communicating on the Internet, justify their choices, and regularly revisit these guidelines can allow everyone to feel more heard and included. This collaborative aspect is also developed in the K-12 example found at the end of the chapter, in which a third grade teacher creates a weekly polls activity that allows students to interview family, friends, or neighbors on topics suggested by the students. In this first chapter, the author also provides great resources to help teachers make their content universally accessible. Readers are reminded of a basic tenet of all good teaching, whether face-to-face or online: Be sure to take into consideration the different needs of all students. This consideration is important because a lack of accessibility for students with disabilities is often associated with a higher attrition rate and low achievement (Rice, 2018). Therefore, to promote fairness it is vital for online teachers to make their class content accessible to all.

In Chapter 2, the author answers the very basic but difficult question "How can I teach speaking online?" by emphasizing the importance of providing a variety of input to the students. In explaining how this variety can be accomplished in an online setting, Bogart provides a list of recognizable suggestions, such as *YouTube*, Podcasts, and Audiobooks, but also cautions that digital content may not always match "real conversational speaking" (p. 39). For example, movies and shows are usually scripted, and thus may not reflect naturally occurring conversations. To remediate the situation, the author suggests different tools that teachers can use, especially in an asynchronous setting, to expose students to more diverse types of real language input. Some of these tools give access to more authentic input, such as might be found in a corpus, and can serve as a basis for activities promoting exposure to real conversational speaking as well as opportunities for natural exchanges instead of scripted ones. Tools allowing teachers to provide a more authentic type of input are detailed in the examples found at the end of the chapter. One of them goes over the use of video discussions on *FlipGrid* (www.flipgrid.com) to help adult learners diplomatically raise concerns with their employers. In this example, the instructor created role-play conversations by first modeling a diplomatic conversation, and then switching roles with their students.

Chapter 3 "How can we include pronunciation in an online speaking class?" covers the potential challenges which come with the teaching of pronunciation, whether it occurs through explicit instruction or via pronunciation clarity feedback. Pronunciation is a skill that is assumed to be better addressed in the context of speaking (Firth, 1993), and given the many resources that can be found to teach this skill in an online context; the author made the right decision in devoting an entire chapter on pronunciation in this book. The author discusses four key insights for pronunciation teaching: pronunciation implicates identity, pronunciation teaching should be informed by quality research, segmentals and suprasegmentals are part of a language sound system, and extensive pronunciation learning can be done independently. While these insights are discussed in the first part of the chapter, the second part aims at providing strategies to help students improve their pronunciation skills in both synchronous and asynchronous contexts. Notably, the use of automatic speech recognition (ASR) platforms provides a great opportunity to practice comprehensible output with students of all ages. Activities involving the use of ASR platforms are also considered less anxiety-triggering than speaking with human beings (Bashori, et al., 2020). At the end of this chapter, the author describes how the strategy of shadowing, defined as the practice of "reading a slightly longer segment of an accurate transcript at virtually the same time as a video or audio-recorded speaker" (p.61), can successfully be integrated into an online graduate course.

Chapter 4 answers the question "How can I realistically use video conferencing with my speaking students?" While the book mainly focuses on asynchronous teaching (Bogart, 2020), this chapter offers an interesting discussion of live speaking opportunities via video conferencing. As appealing as video conferencing might be, it also has its own difficulties not only for the teacher but also for the students. For example, students might face challenges with finding a quiet space, or having a stable Internet connection. This is a great reminder that the reason why students are not complying or participating as much as they should is not always a lack of motivation or engagement. If video conferencing is possible, then the second part of this chapter presents readers with a practical list of seven tips or "effective practices to consider" (Bogart, 2020, p. 75). One of these tips is to keep students active, which is exemplified by a third-grade teacher who helped

his students feel more comfortable on camera with a breakout room activity in which they made up a three-head animal producing three different yet loud noises.

Teachers who are accustomed to teaching speaking classes face-to-face and have had to switch to online classes will find Chapter 5 *How Can I Transform a Face-to-Face Speaking Course to Online?* particularly interesting. This chapter explores different course components which are easily transferable to an online setting, as opposed to those which might require some reconfiguration. Accordingly, Chapter 5 is not about discovering new teaching strategies or activities, but about adapting the readers' usual teaching ways to this new online context. If the readers are wondering whether their course objectives, homework, or assessments need to be changed or whether they can adapt their usual peer collaboration activities to online settings, this chapter can offer constructive guidance in these important teaching decisions. The three examples given at the end of the chapter illustrate how a college professor can maintain course objectives in an undergraduate class, how a K-12 teacher can successfully adapt certain classroom tasks, and how an adult education ESL instructor can minimize printed materials, by replacing them with video or audio instructions and assignments.

Teaching online is neither all good nor completely easy, and educators will most likely need assistance at some point. Chapter 6 *Who can help me?* and Chapter 7 *The Big Picture: What May Be Lost and Gained in a Speaking Class Online* cover the limitations of online teaching. Teachers who have had to switch to this new online environment will need reliable support, and Chapter 6 provides a list of people they can turn to when in need. The author also provides a list of all the tools and platforms mentioned in the book, which makes it easier for the readers to find a resource that they are interested in if they did not bookmark it during their reading. Chapter 7 covers the huge differences between face-to-face and online speaking classes. The author discusses the potential benefits (e.g., individualized experiences for the students) and disadvantages of online language learning (e.g., areas such as community-building will require greater investment from the teacher and students; the definition of teachers' role will change). Although adapting to a new teaching environment can be challenging, the author reminds her readers that neither face-to-face nor online learning is superior to the other.

Pamela Bogart's book is filled with practical tips and strategies to teach online speaking classes to English learners, most of which can be used with both younger and adult learners and in a variety of different contexts (e.g., ESL, EFL, K-12, Adult Ed). The large variety of strategies and tips allows teachers to choose which ones they feel most comfortable using and which ones are most appropriate for their students' needs and proficiency level. However, some readers may find some of the technology tools mentioned throughout the book challenging to use, unless they are fairly tech savvy or willing to seek help. One of the most interesting aspects of this book is how the author used three distinct scenarios with students of different ages throughout the book, to illustrate how some of her strategies and tips could be implemented in different teaching situations. The reflection questions found at the end of each chapter are also very engaging and encourage the readers to stop and think about what strategies can be used in their classes. The glossary provided at the end of the book is also a great way to help teachers who might be unfamiliar with some terminology.

In sum, this book would definitely be helpful to anyone who teaches a speaking course online or would like to promote speaking development in their online class. Even if readers are already familiar with online teaching, the diversity and variety of currently available tools discussed in the book make *Teaching Speaking Online* a great resource for asynchronous, and to some extent, synchronous online contexts.

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