
Reviews of Books

Kevin McClure & Mari Vargo. *Q: Skills for Success Listening and Speaking Book Intro*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. pp. xix + 182. ISBN: 978-0194756464

The integration of the four key skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – in English language education, has been shown to improve learner’s communication effectively (Oxford, 2001). The six-level *Q: Skills for Success* series consists of two strands, *Reading and Writing* and *Listening and Speaking*. The 10 units in each textbook provide sufficient material for one academic semester in courses where students attend two 90-minute classes per week. It is appropriate for university programs where listening and communication classes are taught in tandem with their reading and writing counterparts since the respective units are topically related and can provide more input for presentations, class discussions and role-plays. This review focuses on *Listening and Speaking Book Intro* intended for students with 0–343 TOEFL scores.

The rise of Japan’s economy and the need to become more international has led to many universities encouraging their students to be prepared to become “Global Citizens” (Nakamura, 2004). The series is cognitively challenging but linguistically suitable for pre-intermediate levels and simple topics are presented in an academic manner. For example, Book Intro chapters focus on: people, friendship, what makes a good grad school, food, lifestyles, and milestones. These topics are presented in a way that is beneficial for university aged learners of English.

The course avoids the introduction of too many vocabulary items in one unit and presents vocabulary in lexical sets with adequate review and recycling. A target vocabulary of 8–10 lexical items is presented in each unit. Two corpus-based word lists — the *Oxford 2000*TM (Oxford University Press, 2010) compiled for the *Oxford Basic American Dictionary for Learners of English* as a list of the 2000 most important English words, and the Academic Word List (AWL) (Coxhead, 2000) — are employed as the source of most of these lexical items. This ensures that the majority of this vocabulary is essential, frequent, and useful for academic study. Of the 177 items introduced in Book Intro, 11 are on either or both lists, 23 AWL and 144 *Oxford 2000*TM. There is a list with the newly introduced target lexical items reprinted at the end of each chapter with their association to AWL and *Oxford 2000*TM given. Vocabulary is further recycled in the *Q Online Practice* system and in chapter tests therefore in total approaching the lower end of the recommended 10+ repetitions necessary to have learning gains (Webb, 2007). Although vocabulary is taught, there is no specific TOEIC component in the first two books of the series. However, students may develop the cognitive skills to analyse TOEIC questions in the future. One might suggest supplementary materials could be added to assist students with their TOEIC examinations.

Listening skills are taught using relevant and easy to understand examples, following the principles of predicting content, listening for main ideas, details and for reasons (Wilson, 2002). In addition, communication skills are enforced: adding information, follow-up questions, giving opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, asking for repetition, and using open questions.

In addition to listening and speaking sections, each unit has explicit teaching of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. The covered grammar points are: *present of be*; *simple present affirmative state-*

ments, simple present, adjectives, adverbs + adjectives, verbs + gerunds and infinitives, subject and object pronouns, prepositions of location, adverbs of frequency, modals can and should, past of be, simple past affirmative statements and simple past with regular and irregular verbs. The pronunciation sections include intonation in yes/no and information questions, past tense —ed, reduced vowels, word stress, reduction of *be going to*, the 3rd person —s ending for simple present verbs, intonations in questions about choices, linkages of consonants to vowels, content word stress in sentences, and linking vowel sounds.

While this book provides material to teach listening and communication as well as other language skills, it has some drawbacks. The main shortcoming of *Q: Skills for Success Listening and Speaking* is the need to supplement with current authentic listening extracts. The grammar points are explained in too much detail followed by sometimes complicated exercises. Therefore grammar may become the focus of a communication class. So, if one decides to use this series the teacher may need to pick and choose from some sections or assign them as homework. However, despite these negative aspects, *Q: Skills for Success* series can be used as an effective source in a listening and communication class.

The *Q Skills for Success* series and its online components are clearly designed to help educators teach competently. The listening and speaking sections provide up-to-date thought-provoking topics, introduce carefully selected vocabulary, and teach listening and communication skills effectively making it a suitable textbook choice for any university program.

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Brooks-Young, Susan. *Teaching with the Tools Kids Really Use. Learning with Web and Mobile Technologies*. Thousand Oaks, CA, the USA: Corwin-Sage, 2010. 137 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4129-7275-8.

Coming from the pen of a teacher and technology specialist, this book with a seemingly playful title is, in fact, a thoughtful investigation of the world of modern technology and the ways it can effectively be exploited in teaching. Compared to other numerous publications on the matter, *Teaching with the Tools Kids Really Use* offers not so much instructions on how to use a particular tool but rather the incentive and encouragement to school administrators, teachers, and support staff to take a serious look at mobile technologies and Web 2.0 applications. The argument is that while students use these technologies and applications on a regular basis away from school the latter have not yet made their way into mainstream education. Brooks-Young emphasizes right at the beginning of the book that these inexpensive and sometimes free technologies and tools could be used to “revolutionize teaching and learning,” but so far they have not got widespread acceptance in educational circles.

The rationale for such a claim lies not only in the need to create engaging learning environments that mirror the real world but also in the fundamental mission of education to prepare students for their future successful professional and personal lives. Thus, the book opens with a snapshot of the skills required for the 21st century, with its acceleratingly advancing technologies and economic globalization. Brooks-Young derives the list of content knowledge and 21st century applied skills from three, basic in the USA, documents, namely, NCREL’s *enGauge 21st Century Skills for 21st Century Students*, the *National Educational Technology Standards for Students (NETS*S)* and the *Framework for 21st Century Skills*. Though these papers guide the American educational system, they are consistent with similar documents developed by other national and international committees, EU’s *E-Skills for the 21st century* (2007) for instance, as they all come up with a similar skill inventory, including such abilities as digital age literacy, inventive thinking, effective communication, creativity and innovation, collaboration, research and information fluency, critical thinking, problem-solving, digital citizenship and others. Since schools are increasingly faced with accountability issues, revising curricula and methodology towards meeting the skills agenda is becoming essential.

Before we proceed to the following parts of the book, which deal with specific tools enhancing the development of the required 21st-century skills, I’d like to attract, with the current chapter, attention to the composition of the book. After providing the snapshot of the skills, mentioned above, the author outlines common objectives to teaching these skills, looks at how the viewpoints to skills have changed, outlines the strategies for classroom use, and provides some practical suggestions, discussion points, and references for books, web sites and online reports and articles, where the issue of skills can be explored in further detail. This, rather thoughtful, arrangement is applied to all eleven chapters of the book, which is divided into three parts, *Mobile Technologies*, *Web 2.0 Tools*, and *Digital Citizenship and Decision-Making Model*. The *Skills* chapter stands separately, though, preparing the foundation for further discussion.

The following *Part I, Mobile Technologies*, deals with cell phones, MP3 players and netbooks. Adher-

ing to the structure described above, Brooks-Young first gives a scoop on the technology under discussion, outlines common objections to this technology at schools, shows how the negative attitudes are changing to more positive viewpoints, and offers some strategies for classroom use together with practical suggestions and discussion points.

Let's focus on one chapter of this part, "Cell Phones," dealing with the most controversial mobile technology in the academic context. The implication of the author's comparison of cell phones to chewing gum on campus is quite clear — the same ineffective use of time and effort to fight something, which is destined to stay. She makes a powerful statement on the issue of cell phone use in education: "It is far better to find positive ways cell phones can be used as tools for teaching and learning by identifying and enforcing realistic parameters within which students may have cell phones in their possession than to fight what is ultimately a losing — and unnecessary — battle" (p. 15).

After this ground-staking introduction, the chapter then proceeds to a very short outline of how cell phones developed, followed by the overview of PC-like capabilities of modern smart phones, which allow some manufactures to believe that smart phones will eventually replace laptops in classrooms. But when the author turns to the common objections to cell phone use on campus, this hope seems to face a difficult, uphill battle. Brooks-Young gives a snapshot of various ways students misuse their cell phones and some examples of national legislatures, which, in reaction to such misuse, ban student cell phones. But the views are changing, and the writer stresses that when educators enable their students to view cell phones as tools instead of toys, it is possible to introduce classroom activities that are both engaging and instructive.

The part that addresses strategies for classroom use is not built as a list of directives for the teachers what to do with cell phone. Rather it is an invitation to speculate on the reasons why we often experience annoyance and discomfort of cell phone misuse in everyday life and that it should be the task of educators to teach students digital etiquette. The latter, together with digital literacy, is a valuable workplace skill, and it is in this area, preparation for today's workplace, where schools, according to the author and her research, are not meeting the expectations of their clients, students.

As for practical suggestions how cell phones can be used to make a positive difference in behavior and learning, Brooks-Young is quite elaborate. She suggests to establish a contract between students and institutions on the meaningful use of the technology prior to its introduction into the learning process and then proceeds to some useful suggestions of practical teaching activities based on using cell phone cameras, podcasting "on the go," doing online surveys, or downloading research and study aids.

A useful contribution to the chapter is the list of discussion points for teachers to explore and references for further investigation of the subject. The fact that the suggested resources comprise mostly free websites and easily retrievable online reports and articles presents yet another attractive practical feature of the book designed to facilitate the interest of educators in the technologies that students like to use.

In a similar way, Brooks-Young treats other students' choice tools, both mobile, such as MP3 players and netbooks, and online ones, such as social networks, virtual worlds, writing online, gaming and creating online photos and videos. Parts One and Two follow exactly the same pattern.

Part Three, *Digital Citizenship and Decision-Making Model*, is different though, as it addresses more general issues in its two final chapters, *Digital Citizenship* and *Decision-Making and Implementation Model*. In Chapter 10, the author analyzes the issue of digital citizenship, stressing that the problems of technology misuse arise not from the fact that nowadays kids have changed, but it is their environment, with its ubiquitous access to a variety of technologies, that has changed; and many adults are seriously legging behind in this environment. Inappropriate behavior with technologies is similar with kids to other mistakes they make as part of growing up. Therefore teachers and parents need first of all teach youngsters three basic principles of digital citizenship: 1) respect yourself; 2) respect others, and 3) respect outside limits (rules and laws). Along these lines, Brooks-Young deals with such issues as online privacy, cyber-bullying,

cheating, plagiarism and such and suggests some ways and resources for teaching digital citizenship skills.

The last chapter is probably the most practical of all. Here Brooks-Young suggests a detailed model of decision-making with regards to reviewing and implementing emerging technology tools for classroom use. The model is of six steps — from clarifying the issues to evaluation — and each step is supplied with an appropriate worksheet, or a form, to be completed during information gathering and discussion. Instead of conclusion, the chapter, and the book, ends up with an optimistic encouragement from the author: “This is an exciting time to be an educator. The possibilities for reaching and engaging students are growing daily. ... All that’s required is the will to move forward.”

Finally, two useful appendices should be mentioned — a glossary of terms used in the book and a 4-page list of web sites presented by topic. Those include many educational sites relevant for the topics discussed, such as 21st-century skills and digital citizenship, as well as those, which support creating content and images, using cell phones, MP3 players, virtual worlds, and so on. This addendum is also composed in the spirit of the book — it is not a random selection of the most popular sites for downloading or communication. It is yet another incentive for educators to build an alliance with the tools and technologies their students have already endorsed.

Reference

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