**Let me start with a small introduction about myself. My name is Mai Abdo, I teach in Jabal Mukaber, in a junior high school, this year I have taught the 7th graders which means the age of 12, 13**

**I have a master’s degree in English methodology from Birzeit university and I am currently doing my second master in translation studies at Alquds university**

**Today I will share with you the before and after experience I had in teaching my students the speaking skill**

**With before I mean the activities I held with my students before they were put into a real life situation where they had to speak with native speakers and with after I mean the changes that took place on those activities after the experience**

**The speaking skill and enhancing it is of course greatly related to the theme of the conference**

**Language begins with listening**

**The key word for that skill is practice**

**In an Arab speaking school practice can only be made during the English lesson.**

**Having over 30 students per class**

**45 minutes per period**

**Other skills to teach**

**Make the calculations and the answer is: not that much time**

**What about the parents? Do they make practice an easy task? Meaning do they speak with their kids at home in English or help them in their English assignments**

**The answer is No and that is simply because they don’t know English, to them the second language is Hebrew, they know Hebrew and they prefer to add Hebrew words while speaking with their children, most of them also listen to Hebrew songs and can even sing them by heart. They get the newspaper in Hebrew, they listen to the news in Hebrew. So practicing English has no status at home, which makes our job harder**

**One rule I made and was sure to follow was that any word learnt in English must never be spoken in Arabic again. Even if it is the only word the student knows in the sentence he/ she is about to say. So in a spoken sentence a student might have one English word and five Arabic ones for instance. That goes for all students no matter what the age or level I am teaching. For example this year I was given the special education class, ( ages between 7 and 8) and I made that rule and it did its magic with them. Even if I were to make a mistake and say a learnt word in Arabic they would immediately scold me and say**

**Hey you said Shukran,,, you must say thank you**

**And anything they would want to say , is simply put into cute English Arabic sentences like the example**

**( A student would say :-Ana bidi hut book fi bag. Meaning I want to put the book in the bag) so any word learnt in English is put in what we call the safety deposit in our brains and then this word comes out of the safety deposit any time we need to us it.**

**Now here is a summary of the activities I followed in teaching the speaking skill. The BEFORE activities. After which I will come to the personal experience which made me rethink all those activities.**

1. **Drama acts: they can be lots of fun. Students can pick any text and turn it into a drama act, they can even make it into a song, and make the music they want, they usually tap their fingers, clap, hit the desk for music. Those are the instruments we have.**
2. **Simple conversations: here the students simply love to use their imagination. They take the role of a famous singer or actor and talk about them as if that person was them. A ball is thrown to the student and who catches the ball answers the phone**

**And it can start like this: hello, is this Nancy Ajram? They can pick any other character. This year students excelled in picking characters from the ongoing famous Turkish soap operas and they would just give information on the series events, the way they want it t happen. By all means they love to watch them, so why not just simply make use of them**

1. **Picture discussion and for this activity any picture can be brought into class and a discussion is made on it. We can also divide students into groups with a photo for each group and then move around the students making sure they are making their discussions in English. I found out that students react really well when it comes to their photos, I try to take photos of them in all activities, fun ones ,field trips and then I use them in the discussion. For instance this photo was taken for them while on a field trip in the old city of Jerusalem. When I displayed it for discussion they spoke about so many things, they mentioned the dresses, a ball one student saw and wanted so much to buy for her little brother, a handsome guy, they noticed that one lady had beautiful nails,,, so many things were said when I put this photo out. As for this one, it brought so much laughs, especially that I displayed it after they had this activity in about a month, the topic discussed was if they were to get engaged how would they like their fiancé to be like. Tall, handsome, dark etc……… here the students are free to speak their mind and to say whatever they want, they do use some Arabic words though. This coming photo is one taken on a school trip, now since I bring the photo out for discussion after a while, students would often start with oh yes, I remember, we saw…….., we did and on and on they would go with a huge smile on their faces as they get back the old memories (may I just add here that in a place like Jabal Mukaber not everyone is privileged to go out on field trips with the family and as such a school trip is something big for them**
2. **General comprehension questions: now these can be made on a daily basis, we can use five minutes or less from every lesson in asking the questions, the teacher can pick up a different student each time to answer questions asked by the teacher or the students can take turns in picking students and asking them questions that can cover different topics like: hobbies, siblings, travel ( now to the travel theme, since not all students travel, in fact almost none have, a simple game is made , the student picks a place she wants to go to, and gathers certain information about the place from the net (we are after all in the digital age) and then talks about that place as if she was there.**
3. **Speaking games and they are many like: getting the full story. One student says I have been reading a very interesting story but gives no details except in response to questions for example: who are the characters? What are their names? Where do they live?**
4. **Likes and dislikes: a very interesting game where students get to say their likes and dislikes and they can add what their peers or parents likes and dislikes are. I like Mansaf and I dislike Pizza. Fatima likes pizza.**

**Now let’s move to the after part.**

**On Thursday 7-3-2013, I managed to arrange a special visit for the students to the America house, the director at that time Fadi Haddad (an American Lebanese) promised to show them the America house and to give them a good time. March is the women`s month, we have the woman day, mother’s day and so Fadi prepared for them a beautiful presentation on famous women who had positive influence on the world. He had also prepared a guest speaker for them. So he began with a tour around the different rooms at the America house and by asking the students to introduce themselves. Something they did a lot at school but yet a few mistakes were made when they had to stand up in a totally different environment. Let’s take a look at this clip**

**After that the students were introduced to a nice guy by the name of Eric who wanted to share with them his experience in Jerusalem and in learning Arabic in a way to show them that learning a foreign language is important. After Eric finished Fadi thanked him and asked them to give him a hand and at that moment they all went daaaaaaaa and took a quick look at me like saying:**

**Why does he need help? And why are we all to help him … what does he want us to do? And that was the moment I realized common used idioms must be taught to the students , it is not enough to teach them how to speak we must always try to add common idioms for them. Imagine it was raining hard and one was to say: it is raining cats and dogs.. Now that would have brought quite a reaction upon my students**

**Fadi started his interesting presentation using different clips and different songs (so far the songs I had been teaching my students were: old MacDonald had a farm, the people in the bus and so on) the idea of teaching them modern songs actually scared me because I did not know how to do it and I didn’t know if they would be happy learning such songs or if they would be able to learn them. He showed them few songs with the verses and asked them to read the verse and then I noticed that they enjoyed the songs ( a few examples)**

**So I learned my lesson from this simple visit which was supposed to be for one hour but lasted for an hour and a half**

**The lesson I learned was do my best to put them in real life situations**

**Use different songs in my English lessons**

**I started implementing my new strategies and students were getting me songs of clips they liked, they learned tell me why, and other songs**

**After a while I was told that celebrity chef ART SMITH is interested in visiting the school and talking with the girls**

**That was another test both for me and my students. They were more relieved (maybe one of the reasons was that he was at their school a comfort zone for them) but still they spoke with the chef about the food they like, they even asked him a few questions on cake recipes and they were so comfortable with the language that they sang a song for him**