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PROCEDURES OF COMMUNICATIVE TEACHING

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The guiding principle of communicative methodology is that learners need a purpose for listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Presenting an activity as “something we are going to do today” is not purposeful enough. The students must have a reason for participating, and all activities must be relevant to the students’ lives. Communicative activities give the students a higher level of motivation to learn the language. The ultimate goal in this method is to communicate with others. The principal reason one learns a language is to be able to communicate with others. Communicative activities provide the students with a great number of opportunities to develop positive relationships with other students and with the teacher. The following are three communicative teaching procedures, which can be organized into various activities and to which a variety of relevant materials and subjects can be applied.

Problem solving is an effective communicative teaching procedure that can be incorporated into various activities. In this procedure pairs or small groups of students work together to arrive at a solution to a problem. The process requires learners to analyse problems, think of solutions, and explain the solutions. Each student’s proposal adds to and influences the other students’ ideas until a final solution is reached.

Problem solving can take many forms. The task may involve arranging a list of items in order of priority. An example would be having students organize a sightseeing tour of their own town by arranging a list of ten locations in order of importance. Reasons for the order must be explained. Another problem-solving task is to have students reach a consensus. For instance, students can be asked to decide which of four variously qualified candidates should get the job for which they are all applying. Again, reasons must be stated. Another vehicle for the problem-solving procedure is conflict resolution. Advice columns in newspapers contain many good examples of personal problems for which students can suggest solutions. Each pair or group of students must share its solution with others. A problem-solving task or a discussion activity are very effective, because they involve all students, make them think, express and share their opinions, participate in discussions.

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The information-gap procedure is based on the principal that, as a rule, communication takes place because one person has information that another person wants. In this procedure, one person or group must seek information, and another person or group must provide it. For example, student A might have a sheet that contains information that student B needs, and vice versa. The sheets might list certain supermarkets, with each student having information on some supermarkets’ locations, products, specialities, and prices. Before making a decision on where to shop, students A and B would have to get all the facts from each other (i.e., close the information gap).

Similarly, a newspaper, an audiotape, or a video can be used as a source of information. Learners can read a newspaper to find times and locations for a movie before they make a date. Songs can be used to transform the information gap into a listening activity if learners are provided with the lyrics, minus verbs or adjectives, or if they listen for the answer to a question. Clearly, there are many activities and subjects to which the information-gap can be applied.

Making inferences is a third procedure to which various activities can be applied and through which the four language skills can be practised.

To make inferences in a reading activity, learners have to go beyond the literal-comprehension stage. For example, a simple literal-comprehension question might be, “What did the character in the story do?” An inference question might be, “Why did the character act that way?” Inferring is important in reading letters to the editor. Learners can be asked to describe the letter writer’s attitude (e.g., serious, sarcastic, humorous) and opinion. Close passages (texts with every nth word missing) are another vehicle for using the inferring procedure in reading or writing. Learners must make inferences about both grammatical structure and abstract meaning in order to supply missing words.

Another important use of the inferring procedure is in the comprehension of nonverbal behaviour. For example, is the person who is shaking his or her head disagreeing, simply not understanding,or agreeing? Making inferences about gestures can be practised in the course of activities such as role playing and watching videotapes.

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