

How to be communicative

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Статья посвящена вопросам повышения эффективности обучения языку детей, в условиях ограниченного времени (34 час/год) и домашнего обучения.

«Learning is more effective if the learners are actively involved in the process. The teacher may stimulate a good atmosphere by introducing both warming-up exercises and jigsaw tasks. »

Frederick Klippel

It is important for teachers to see their students as «whole persons», where their feelings, intellect, interpersonal relationships, protective reactions, and desire to learn are addressed and balanced. The teachers aim is to motive learners to act as «childishly» as possible. Communicative activities prevail throughout a language course focusing on a wide range of activities including games, role-plays, dialogs, group work and discussions. These activities help language learners become motivated to speak.

The teachers have to help the learners become more self-reliant and active learners; encourage peer support and correction. Your task will be to make the students «suggestible», and therefore able to utilize their maximum mental potential to take in and retain new material.

Some authors recommend to use soft comfortable chairs and dim lighting in the classroom (other factors believed to create a more relaxed state of mind). Students typically sit in a circle, with the teacher (as counselor) outside the ring. Language learning activities, using pair and group work are a useful technique for guiding the language learners towards better and easier communication. This type of practice gives the whole class maximum opportunities for practicing the language.

Language teachers need to help language learners to become more independent from the teacher, and to become more active learners, thinking for themselves, and helping and learning from other learners. This will help the learners in situations where there is no teacher.

My personal credo (motto): «Teach, don't always test» and my students motto is: «tell me and I forget, teach me and I learn, involve me and I remember».

Communicative language teaching methods help us a lot with dealing with mixed ability classes, and it is important to remember that all classes are mixed ability in some ways. All learners can have different language needs, so it is more helpful to see mixed ability as a challenge to be worked with, and not a problem.

I borrow ideas from the book «Keep Talking: Communicative Fluency Activities for Language Teaching (Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers) » by Frederick Klippel which contains over one hundred different fluency-building activities for the language teacher to use either directly, or with modification, in her language classroom. Each activity has a well-defined purpose, whether it is functional or structural, and is categorized according to language level, skill and student arrangement, stating clearly whether preparation is necessary or not, and how long the tasks typically take. It must be remembered that students differ greatly, not just in age but also in mentality, thus they may respond differently to any given approach to language teaching. Because of different learning styles, the effective teacher must be prepared to adapt his or her teaching to the needs and preferences of each class. My advice is to «find yourself» with respect to the approaches listed below. That said, don't be afraid to experiment with and/or adapt your style of teaching. In the end, you may discover that the best approach is eclectic in nature and includes bits of this and bits of that. Some examples are listed below.

1. Warming-up activity

1.1 Three adjectives

Aims	Skills-speaking. Language - making conjectures agreeing and disagreeing, giving reasons. Other — getting to know each other better.
Level	Intermediate
Organization	Individuals, class
Preparation	None
Time	10-15 min
Procedure	Step 1: On a piece of paper each student writes down three adjectives which he feels describe himself. All the papers are collected. Step 2: The teacher (or a student) read out the papers one after the other. With each set of adjectives the group speculates who wrote them. The student concerned should be free to remain anonymous.
Variations	This activity can also be used to assess the atmosphere in a group at a particular time. Then each student is asked to write down three adjectives which characterize his state of mind.
Remarks	It may be advisable to revise suitable adjectives beforehand. The following adjectives are likely to be known after two or three years of learning English.
Samples	<i>Active, alive, angry, awful, bad, beautiful, big, black, blond, dangerous, dark, dead, deep, difficult, dirty, easy, empty, exact, exciting, expensive, fair, famous, fantastic, far, fast, fat, fit, free, friendly, funny, gold, good, great, green, grey, happy, hard, high, hungry, ill, intelligent, interested, international, late, loud, lovely, lucky, nasty, nice, noisy, rough, rude, strange, stupid, tall, terrible, thick, thirsty, tiny, tide, unfair, unhappy, warm, weak, wet, wild, wrong, young</i>

2. Guessing games

As the person guessing has a real urge to find out something, guessing games are true communicative situations and as such are very important for foreign language learning. They are generally liked by students of all ages because they combine language practice with fun and excitement.

2.1. Lie detector.

Aims	Skills-speaking. Language - asking questions, giving reasons. Other - observation.
Level	<i>Intermediate</i>
Organization	<i>Group of six to seven students each.</i>
Preparation	<i>None.</i>
Time	<i>10-15 min.</i>
Procedure	<p><i>Step 1: The students are divided into groups. One member of each group leaves the room. In their absence the groups decide on a set of five to eight questions, they want to ask the students. These can either be personal (e.g. «What do you feel about corporal punish-ment?») or factual questions.</i></p> <p><i>Step 2: The students who went outside now return to their groups. They have to answer all questions, except one, truthfully, in on case they may lie. The rest of the group has to decide which answer was a lie. They have to give reasons to justify their opinion. The student tells them if they were right</i></p>

2.2. Questioning activities. What would happen if ... ?

Aims	Skills-speaking. Language - if - clauses, making conjectures, asking for confirmation. Other - imagination.
Level	Intermediate
Organization	Class
Preparation	About twice as many slips of paper with an event/situation written on them as they are students
Time	10-15 min
Procedure	<p>Every student receives one or two slips of paper with sentences like these on them: 'What would happen if a shop give away its goods free every Wednesday?' 'What would you do if you won a trip for two to a city of your choice?'. One student starts by reading out his question and then asks another student to answer it. The second student continues by answering or asking a third student to answer the first student's question. If he has answered the question he may then read out his own question for somebody else to answer. The activity is finished when all the questions have been read out and answered.</p>
Variations	<p>The students can prepare their own questions. Some more suggestions:</p> <p>What would happen If everybody who told a lie turned green? If people could get a driver license at 14? If girls had to do military service? If men were not allowed to become doctors or pilots?</p>

	<p>If children over 10 were allowed to vote?</p> <p>If gold was found in your area?</p> <p>If headmasters had to be elected by teachers and pupils?</p> <p>What would you do</p> <p>If you were invited to the Queen's garden party?</p> <p>If a photograph of yours won first prize at an exhibition?</p> <p>If you got a love letter from somebody you did not know?</p> <p>If you suddenly found out that you could become invisible by eating spinach?</p> <p>If you invited somebody to dinner at your house but they forgot to come?</p> <p>If you forgot you had asked for people to lunch and did not have any food in the house when they arrived?</p> <p>If you could not sleep at night?</p>
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Teacher's goal is to focus on fluency and engendering a communicative atmosphere. There are a lot of ways. Try to find your own one and follow it with confidence.