

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

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In this article is spoken about some effective methods of communicative activities in language teaching and changing role of a teacher as a leader in the classroom activities.

В этой статье говорится о некоторых эффективных методах управления коммуникативной деятельностью обучаемых иностранному языку и об изменении роли учителя как главенствующего лица на практических занятиях.

Introduction Many teachers in the Kyrgyz Republic have been trained using Soviet methodology and are not familiar with current methodological practice in other parts of the world, in which the focus is less on grammar and more on communicative competence, to refer to the ability of a language learner to deal with language interaction in a variety of situations, at several different pragmatic levels, and using a variety of language registers. This means that the learner must be competent not only in using grammatical structures and vocabulary, but in dealing with such aspects of language as politeness formulas, gestures, and cultural connotations.

In order to help language learners develop overall communicative competence in their language of study, communicative language teaching methodology was developed and introduced into language classrooms. Communicative language teaching, with its focus on using the target language communicatively, does not mean abandoning grammar presentations in the classroom, although some teachers have tried to experiment with that. What it does mean is that the focus of the classroom becomes using the target language to communicate information to the teacher and, more importantly, to other students in the class. In order for such a methodology to be implemented, a fundamental change in the organization of the classroom must take place. Rather than a **teacher-fronted/centered classroom** in which all the students focus their attention on a teacher at the front of the class who does most of the talking, there needs to be a shift to a **student-centered classroom** in which the students interact with each other in pairs or small groups, with the teacher taking on a less dominant role, perhaps as an organizer or facilitator of group activities rather than as a leader. Classroom activities are planned with the aim of getting students to communicate genuine information to each other, not simply to practice grammar or vocabulary. Presenting a broad range of these communicative activities so that teachers can use them as models to develop their own activities designed with their particular classroom situations in mind is a key aim of this article.

The aim of the article. While some teachers are familiar with communicative language methodology as a concept, in most they have not attempted to incorporate aspects of it into their lesson planning. Many teachers are simply unwilling to give up their dominant role in the classroom. It is, after all, this role of the teacher that they grew up with and that their students are used to. They fear that, in relinquishing their central position in front of the class, they will lose the respect of their students and, even worse, of their colleagues. The opposite often occurs, however, for while a student-centered classroom often appears noisy and chaotic and out of control, teachers soon realize that students enjoy the activities, the class time goes faster, and students are actually using the target language to communicate with each other, and telling others about how interesting their teacher makes the English lesson.

The following activity is designed to encourage teachers to evaluate their own perceptions about the role of a teacher and what teaching means, and to try to reconcile other views of teaching with their own.

Activity: Types of Teacher

The following is a list of several different types of teacher, adapted from DeGuerrero & Villamil (2000). Read the comments made by teachers below, then match each comment a teacher-type.

Coach	Nurturer	Co-constructor	Challenger
Gym instructor	Dictator	Repairer	
Knowledge provider	Artist	Innovator/Agent of change	

- I don't want my students to make a lot of errors, so I give them lots and lots of Grammatical exercises to practice, both inside and outside the classroom. Only then can they learn how to speak well.
- Students cannot be taught something. They have to learn it for themselves. I can only provide them a suitable environment and the materials they need. They have to learn on their own.
- The main role of a teacher is to keep students from making errors and, when they do make them, to correct them immediately. Otherwise, how in the world is anyone going to understand them when they try to speak English?
- I think my main purpose in the classroom is to be a resource person. I'm at the front of the classes because I know English better than the students do. I can show them the pitfalls in learning the language, as well as provide them with tips to make learning the language easier.
- Trying to learn to see the students as individuals, rather than as a class, is important to me. They don't all like to do the same things, and many times the things I liked and thought would work in the classroom failed miserably. I think it's important to find out what the students want to do, and then to work from there.
- Students are basically lazy. They tend to go for the easy way out. A lot of the activities in textbooks are boring for them because they don't have to think. That's why I believe it's important to include activities that encourage the students to think and to question. If the activities include a few elements of grammar or vocabulary beyond the students' level, because it makes them think.
- I'm a firm believer in showing the students who is "boss". If a teacher is the least bit flexible, the students walk all over him/her. The students don't know what they want. I'm there to show them.
- The reason why so many students hate learning languages is that the class is boring for them. They do lots of drills and controlled activities, and memorize long lists of vocabulary words, but are never free to express themselves. That's why I think it's important to encourage them to tap into their feelings and help them to express themselves. I try to get them to do that by including creative activities in the English lesson.

- I like trying out new activities in the classroom, things I've never done before, but think the students might enjoy and benefit from. I'm an experienced teacher and have a core of tried-and-true activities to draw on in the classroom, but I still attend teacher development sessions and browse new textbooks for ideas. I'm a teacher, but I'm also a life-long learner and that, I believe, makes me a much better teacher.

PREPARING A LESSON PLAN

A lesson plan is useful in getting you to think about **what** you're going to do in the class, **why** you're going to do it, **how** you're going to do it, and **with what** materials. It helps you to organize your lesson into a logical sequence, but it is a flexible guide, not something fixed in stone: if an activity in the lesson isn't working for some reason, you need to go on to something else. It is there to help you, not restrict you. A lesson plan also allows others who observe your lesson understand your intentions.

The first thing to do is think about the students. (Who are they? How old are they? What is their level of proficiency? Are they motivated?) and the physical background (Can the desks be moved around? What resources are available in the class? Is there a textbook?).

What is **the overall goal** of the lesson? What do you hope to have accomplished by the end of the lesson? Be specific; general statements *like will do a reading or will practice listening* don't say very much. Examples of more specific goals: *To familiarize the students with the endings of regular verbs in the simple past. To help the students distinguish between /k/. And /g/ in minimal pairs. To ensure that the students can ask directions to a place. To make the students aware of the different situations in which 'should' and 'ought to' are used.*

What will you try get the students to do during the lesson? These are called **performance objectives**. They're really the things your students will do to reach the overall goal you have set. For example, if your overall goal is to make sure your students can ask directions to a place, you might have several smaller goals leading up to it: 1. *Students will recall prepositions used in giving directions.* 2. *Students will practice using phrases such as 'Excuse me, where is...?' or 'Can you please tell me how to get to...?'*

The next stage in the lesson plan is writing **the procedures** (the detailed steps involved in reaching the goal) and the approximate time of each step. In this section, write what the teacher does, what the student does, and the nature of the interaction (T-S, T-Ss, S-S(pairs), small groups). To do this, you need to think about what you're going to do:

- How are you going to begin?(with a story, a question, a picture?)
- How are you going to present and explain the topic clearly?
- What materials are you going to use?
- How are the students going to practice?
- How are you going to go from one activity to another? (transitions)
- How are you going to give clear directions for each activity you want the students to perform?
- How fast are you going to keep the class moving? (pace-not too fast, not too slow; seek a balance that addresses both slow and rapid learners)
- How fast are you going to keep the class interesting : variety in grouping (sometimes T-S, sometimes S-S) and atmosphere (settled or stirred up; intense or relaxed) and skills (e.g., receptive, then productive; in most cases, two silent readings, one right after the other, would not be a good idea) and focus (sometimes the goal is accuracy, sometimes fluency)?
- How fast are you going to end (with a summary, review, comprehension check)?

Other points you should consider:

- Is your lesson sequenced logically?
- How is the class arranged?
- Who talks more, the T or Ss?
- When are you going to give time for students to ask questions?
- How (if at all) are you planning to correct the errors?

The next section of the lesson plan is the **assignment or home task** for the students.

Then comes a section on **contingency plans** (what you can do if the lesson is not working for some reason).

The last section is for **evaluation and comments** about how the lesson worked or didn't work, and why. Did you meet your overall goal? Was the lesson directed to students at all levels of ability? Did all the students have a chance to participate?

GETTING STUDENTS TO TALK.

1. **Pictures.** Give pairs/groups of students a picture and them talk about every aspect of the picture imaginable (description of location/background, of people and the clothes they're wearing, of activities being performed, of events that might have led to the situation in the picture, etc.). Color pictures work best. Look for pictures with lots of things happening.

2. **Lists of Words.** Give students a list of words and have them work together in pairs or small groups to do various things to those words, such as:

- grouping words under appropriate headings. For example: *colors* under categories of *hot/warm/cool/cold*, or *occupations* under headings of *safe* and *dangerous*.
- finding out common feature words share: What do the following words all have in common: *color jewelry program traveling theater*
- finding the odd one out:

Find one word in each set of words that does **not** belong to the group:

- coffee books summer basketball sunbathing*
- swam walked drank slept broke*
- flock gang crowd set swarm*
- weight sight bye pie height*

Note: Answers do not have to be the ones indicated. Students often see relationships different from the 'intended' answer. The purpose is to get the students to discuss with each other, not to find the answer the teacher intended.

3. **Problem-Solving.** Give students problems to solve by working in pairs or small groups:

- Decide which item in each pair the world could do without, and justify your choice:

birds flowers
schools hospitals
socks underwear

- Think of as many ways as possible to stay warm in winter without a heater.
- There is a bowl of water on a table. Think of as many ways as possible to get the water out of the bowl without touching the bowl with any part of your body.
- Your best friend has borrowed your favorite jacket for a party she wants to attend. Several days later, she returns it and thanks you. After she leaves, you discover that there is a cigarette burn in it. What would you do if you in this situation?

4. **Information Gap Activities.** In this type of activity, students working in pairs or small groups have differing information, and have to share that information with the other member(s) of the group. Some

examples follow (see the section on information gap activities under the section on grammar for still other examples):

- Crossword puzzle with half the answers written in. Student must ask a partner for a clue to fill in the remainder of the puzzle.
- Jigsaw readings or listenings. One group gets one passage, the other group, a second passage. The members of a group help each other with difficult words or concepts. When everyone in the group understands the passage, the pair up with a member of the other group and report what they've learned. Topics might include the feelings one has about growing up in a large family vs. the feelings one has growing up as an only child, two different stories about how a married couple first met, interviews with two people who collect very different things, and so on.

5. One-Minute Topics. Give students a list of topics and have them choose one. Give them several minutes to think about what they're going to say, then ask them to speak for at least one minute on the topic without stopping (speak to partner, small group, or whole class.)

Possible topics might include:

- 3 difficult things about learning English
- 3 reasons to get married (or not to get married)
- 4 ways to show someone you love them.

6. Longer Discussion Topics. These could be fairly innocuous questions such as *Can one person change the world? Why or why not?* or more controversial questions, such as *Should people be allowed to hunt wild animals as a sport? Why or why not?*

7. Presentations. Ask four students to prepare a 2-3 minute presentation on a topic of their choice before the next class, the following lesson, divide the class into two groups. Ask two of the four students to make their presentation/ one to each group. The other members of the group jot down notes and ask questions. After both presenters have finished, pair them up and also pair up other students, one from each group. Each pair summarizes what was said in the presentation. This activity gets all the students talking! The reason for having four students prepare rather than just two is that experience has shown that if only two agree to prepare something, only one might show up for the next class prepared. Having four students prepare pretty much guarantees that at least two will be ready.

Conclusion A lot of the students have great potential as language learners. I see my job as one of encouraging students to give everything they have to the task at hand. It goes without saying that practice is a big part of my classroom, but I also show them techniques that enable them to use their abilities to the fullest. When I see a student making only half-hearted attempts to learn, I really get after him/her. Everyone can do much, much more than they think they can.

Literature

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