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Task-based activities as an effective method of communicative-based language learning

Nowadays communicative-based language learning is considered to be of high effectiveness and is being widely used in teaching English. This kind of learning is defined as "any structured language learning endeavor which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task" [4]. Communicative language teaching may be organized around or include: instruction that emphasizes cooperative learning such as group and pair work; opportunities for learners to focus on the learning process with the goal of improving their ability to learn language in context; substantive content, often the major course from non-language disciplines [4].

Communicative learning method includes task-based learning, which is a language learning method popularized by N. Prabhu. He figured out that his students could learn language just as easily with a non-linguistic problems as when they are concentrating on linguistic questions. Skehan suggests that a **task** is an activity in which: meaning is primary, there is some communicative problem to solve, there is some sort of relationship with real-world activities, task completion has some priority, the assessment of the task is in terms of outcomes [4].

Jane Willis broke task-based learning into three sections. The **pre-task** (an introduction to the topic and to the task), the **task cycle** (the task itself, planning, and a report), and the **language focus** (an analysis and practice) [2]. We will distinguish between two main task-based activities: projects and motivating activities. The main difference between them is that the later are strictly limited to the classroom, while the former are extended beyond the classroom. It is better to start with motivating activities, which can be controlled by the teacher, and then move to projects, which include "free" use of language [3]. The examples of motivating activities are role

plays, mini real-world tasks, simulations, working with authentic materials brought to the class and small projects. The teacher should make sure that: the learners are actively involved; the environment is democratic; the activities are interactive and student-centered; students are encouraged to be responsible and autonomous [2].

Most often a project will undergo the following **stages of development**: 1) stimulus (initial discussion of the idea); 2) definition of the project objective; 3) practice of language skills; 4) design of written materials; 5) group activities (gathering information); 6) collating information; 7) organization of materials (developing the end-product); 8) final presentation[3]. Depending on the project, the teacher may use the following **assessment strategies**: oral discussions; KWL(H) Chart (*What we know, What we want to know, What we have learned, How we know it)*; mind mapping, hands-on activities, testing [2].

As in Universities teachers deal with grown-ups already, it is important to steer them (teachers) away from traditional roles, such as a controller. The best **roles for facilitators** to support students are: modeling, coaching and scaffolding [2]. Although project work is of high value for the students, as it gives the opportunity to put into practice what has been learnt through formal teaching and develops the students' creativity, it causes some **problems for the teacher**: 1) organization (extra work, additional commitment); 2) monitoring (as most of the work is done outside the classroom, it is difficult to assess fairly each student's performance); 3) personal problems (the teacher should be ready to help the students, who have lack of interest or motivation; are afraid of failing with the new language demands, etc.) [3].

Although the project work does not impose upon the students a fixed language pattern to be followed, it does offer them the opportunity of practicing in the classroom the language they are likely to require outside. But the main advantage of project work is that the students become responsible for their own learning.

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