IDENTIFYING VARIOUS FORMS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING LANGUAGE SKILLS

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Abstract: *The article is about identifying various forms of language learning activities in teaching language skills and there are given some activities.*

Key words: *mechanical, meaningful, and communicative activities, functional communication activities, information gap or solve a problem.*

The distinction between mechanical, meaningful, and communicative activities is similar to that given by Littlewood (1981), who groups activities into two kinds:

Pre-communicative activities	Communicative activities
Structural activities	Functional communication activities
Quasi-communicative activities	Social interactional activities

Functional communication activities require students to use their language resources to overcome an information gap or solve a problem. Social interactional activities require the learner to pay attention to the context and the roles of the people involved, and to attend to such things as formal versus informal language.

Information-Gap Activities are important aspect of communication in CLT. This refers to the fact that in real communication, people normally communicate in order to get information they do not possess. This is known as an information gap. More authentic communication is likely to occur in the classroom if students go beyond practice of language forms for their own sake and use their linguistic and communicative resources in order to obtain information. In so doing, they will draw available vocabulary, grammar, and communication strategies to complete a task. The following exercises make use of the information-gap principle:

Students are divided into A-B pairs. The teacher has copied two sets of pictures. One set (for A students) contains a picture of a group of people. The other set (for B students) contains a similar picture but it contains a number of slight differences from the A-picture. Students must sit back to back and ask questions to try to find out how many differences there are between the two pictures.

Students practice a role play in pairs. One student is given the information she/he needs to play the part of a clerk in the railway station information booth and has information on train departures, prices, etc. The other needs to obtain information on departure times, prices, etc. They role-play the interaction without looking at each other's cue cards.

Jigsaw activities are also based on the information-gap principle. Typically, the class is divided into groups and each group has part of the information needed to complete an activity. The class must fit the pieces together to complete the whole. In so doing, they must use their language

resources to communicate meaningfully and so take part in meaningful communication practice. The following are examples of jigsaw activities:

The teacher plays a recording in which three people with different points of view discuss their opinions on a topic of interest. The teacher prepares three different listening tasks, one focusing on each of the three speaker's points of view. Students are divided into three groups and each group listens and takes notes on one of the three speaker's opinions. Students are then rearranged into groups containing a student from groups A, B, and C. They now role-play the discussion using the information they obtained.

The teacher takes a narrative and divides it into twenty sections (or as many sections as there are students in the class). Each student gets one section of the story. Students must then move around the class and by listening to each section read aloud, decide where in the story their section belongs. Eventually the students have to put the entire story together in the correct sequence.

Many other activity types have been used in CLT, including the following: *Task-completion activities*: puzzles, games, map-reading, and other kinds of classroom tasks in which the focus is on using one's language resources to complete a task.

Information-gathering activities: student-conducted surveys, interviews, and searches in which students are required to use their linguistic resources to collect information.

Opinion-sharing activities: activities in which students compare values, opinions,or beliefs, such as a ranking task in which students list six qualities in order of importance that they might consider in choosing a date or spouse.

Information-transfer activities: These require learners to take information that is presented in one form, and represent it in a different form. For example,they may read instructions on how to get from A to B, and then draw a map showing the sequence, or they may read information about a subject and then represent it as a graph.

Reasoning-gap activities: These involve deriving some new information from given information through the process of inference, practical reasoning, etc. For example, working out a teacher's timetable on the basis of given class timetables.

Role plays: activities in which students are assigned roles and improvise a scene or exchange based on given information or clues.

Most of the activities discussed above reflect an important aspect of classroom tasks in CLT, namely that they are designed to be carried out in pairs or small groups. Through completing activities in this way, it is argued, learners will obtain several benefits:

➢ They can learn from hearing the language used by other members of the group.
➢ They will produce a greater amount of language than they would use in teacher-fronted activities.
➢ Their motivational level is likely to increase.
➢ They will have the chance to develop fluency.

Teaching and classroom materials today consequently make use of a wide variety of small-group activities.

Since the language classroom is intended as a preparation for survival in the real world and since real communication is a defining characteristic of CLT, an issue which soon emerged was the relationship between classroom activities and real life. Some argued that classroom activities should as far as possible mirror the real world and use real world or "authentic" sources as the basis for classroom learning. Clarke and Silberstein (1977, 51) thus argued:

Classroom activities should parallel the "real world" as closely as possible. Since language is a tool of communication, methods and materials should concentrate on the message and not the

medium. The purposes of reading should be the same in class as they are in real life. Arguments in favor of the use of authentic materials include:

➢ They provide cultural information about the target language.
➢ They provide exposure to real language.
➢ They relate more closely to learners' needs.
➢ They support a more creative approach to teaching.

Others (e.g., Widdowson 1987) argued that it is not important if classroom materials themselves are derived from authentic texts and other forms of input, as long as the learning processes they facilitated were authentic. Critics of the case for authentic materials point out that:

➢ Created materials can also be motivating for learners.
➢ Created materials may be superior to authentic materials because they are generally built around a graded syllabus.
➢ Authentic materials often contain difficult and irrelevant language.
➢ Using authentic materials is a burden for teachers.

However, since the advent of CLT, textbooks and other teaching materials have taken on a much more "authentic" look; reading passages are designed to look like magazine articles (if they are not in fact adapted from magazine articles) and textbooks are designed to a similar standard of production as real world sources such as popular magazines. Certain activities, exercises, and games can teach children to communicate better. In most settings, adults decide the communication style and social norms. The rules of etiquette are also decided by adults. These days, it is revolutionary to teach communication skills in "kid terms" with room to advance the skills as children develop. Imagine a world where every adult practiced their face-to-face communication.

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