

THE THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS
OF COMMUNICATIVE TASK DESIGN FOR INFANT AND
INTERMEDIATE COURSES

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*“Just love your audience;
the most important thing is
not what you tell them
but how you do it.”*

1. The purpose of the report is to show the reader how I teach, what I teach and why. All these questions are very important and problematic ones for me. From the very beginning of my teaching activity I came to the conclusion that it is necessary to find something new in the process of teaching, to find fresh approaches in methodology of teaching the children. Looking through various resources, listening to colleagues, visiting workshops of American and Kazakhstani teachers, I realized that only teaching of communication gives the learners the real ability to speak and to know a foreign language properly. To speak means to know. Together with the other methods, communicative approach is the most productive and useful in reaching this goal. Alongside the practical aspects of the subject, I try to deal with theoretical issues such as the theory of methods and techniques of different methods. Of course, I'm very far from finding the "right method" for teaching. I'm sure it's impossible to find such one. I think that every teacher uses a combination of various techniques and devices while working with the learners, so do I. The main goal for me is to teach the learners to listen, to speak, to read, and to write. The most important ability or skill is to speak a foreign language. There is a great amount of modern methods. They are: Audio-lingual Method, Silent way, Suggestopedia, Community Language learning, Total physical response, Communicative approach. All of them have some specific aspects. I do not intend to describe all of them, but they all have one common feature. The main goal is to teach communication. While teaching communication, I use various techniques: grammar and language games, role plays, question and answer work, chair work, dialogue memorization, pair and group work, questionnaires, puzzles, problem-solving, jigsaw tasks, discussion, brainstorming, word-clustering, gallery-

work, etc. Now it's relevant to notice that I have a lack in choosing good authentic materials for teaching. There is a problem: What texts or other materials can be called authentic ones? Authentic materials are oral or written texts that occur naturally in the target language (English, for us) environment and which have not been created or edited for language learners. Where can we find examples of such materials? – TV, radio, video news, sport, advertising, entertainment shows, newspaper articles, editorials, letters to the editor, interviews, maps, brochures, documents, food recipes, menus, labels, etc. In language teaching, non-authentic texts can give a false impression of common usage of words or phrases, even structures. So, I can make a survey, such as:

- authentic materials provide more variety and spontaneity;
- a.m. present different vocabulary and structures;
- a.m. can give a truer perception of common usage
- a.m. can be used to focus on all the skills: reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar, conversation.

Summarizing all these I may say that all this theory helps me to understand how to teach, what to teach. I see that there is a close link between theory and practice. Theory should be derived from practice. Such orientation allows theory to be integrated with practice.

2. In this chapter, I'd like to give a brief analysis of my teaching activity. From the first years of my teaching activity, I noticed my great wish to work with children in primary school. I realized that I can teach children of this age more successfully than the others. First, the children of 4-7 years are lively, active, and interested during the whole process of the lesson. Second, children are eager to take part in all that is taking place around them. All my lessons I begin with something unusual. It may be a

toy, a puppet or a song. Every lesson I start and finish with a kind smile, I use everyday phrases, greetings, rhymes, action-songs, etc. My children and I prepare a gallery work, pictures which help the kids imagine various things while speaking English. A year ago, I got acquainted with the teaching programme, "Step by Step". According to it, children are involved into the activity which is a combination of the learning of English and making of different types of activity such as singing, dancing, drawing, taking care of animals and plants, etc. I know that language is an interactive process, children learn language and play, dance, sing at the same moment while developing vocabulary and structures. My children and I like to play at "Toy Shop," "The Zoo," "Sorry, I'm late," "Tomorrow on Sunday," etc. Here we drill different structures and patterns. My American colleagues from Peace Corps gave me good cassettes of American action songs and games. All of my children prepare a set of lexical cards for various topics: "Food," "My Pets," "My Family," etc. All these help us to prepare frameworks according to every theme. All my children enjoy games and stories. I prepared a "language story" about a hungry caterpillar. Children are interested in investigating nature, animals, insects, plants. I painted a caterpillar, a butterfly, a little egg, a cake, ice-cream cone, a sausage, cheese, watermelon, etc. And presented all these pictures to the kids. I drilled and practiced all the words, then the structures and at the end of the whole story about the life of the insect. From lesson to lesson the children could perform the whole story and act it. The parents and the teachers prepared costumes for the play. We composed a turn and sang the caterpillar chant.

This story contains the days of the week, numbers (1-5) and the vocabulary for the topic, "Food." It was a review lesson where the children acted and

sang songs. At the end of the story, the caterpillar emerged as a colorful butterfly. The kids and their teacher painted beautiful butterflies, it was a nice gallery work. Next lesson we played an alphabet bingo using vocabulary from the story. It was the cycle of the lessons where I fulfilled some educational and teaching goals, such as: to practice new vocabulary, patterns, structures, to develop the kid's love of nature, to take care of small animals, to distinguish what is good or bad.

All my children like English customs and traditions. Everybody knows that through knowledge of customs the teacher develops deep interest of the learners to the studying of a foreign language. My junior students enjoy such holidays as Halloween, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas. This year I worked out and prepared a lesson-dramatization dedicated to Christmas. The children played the roles of Santa Claus, his helpers – reindeer and the other animals from the zoo. It was a review lesson about English traditions and grammar structures (Past. Ind.)

Every teacher knows the English proverb, "A good beginning makes a good ending." Usually I pay a lot of attention to the warm up activity. This type of work involves the learners into the process of the lesson easily and quickly. Some of the activities are short and could be used as a quick warm up – others may take longer. My students and I enjoy different warm up activities. Among them are: home circle, names crossword, blackboard bingo, brainstorm round the word, controversial sentences, correcting mistakes, jumbled sentences, likes and dislikes, martian, etc. All of these activities can be used as a practice of grammar, lexics. As for vocabulary review in the primary courses, there is a very easy game, "Name Circle." The students sit in a circle. The first student introduces him/herself. The second student introduces himself, but also the first student, and so on around the circle. The last student will have to remember all of the information about everybody in the group. This warm up activity is suitable at the beginning of the year or if a newcomer appears in the class. The next warm up is called "Controversial Statements." This type of activity is for

the advanced level of students. I make up cards with controversial sentences or proverbs. Each student agrees or disagrees with this or that idea. Then I find out what the majority opinion on each is, by vote. Here are some examples of such statements:

Beauty is only a matter a taste.

Riches are for spending.

Punishment never does any good.

It is necessary to study foreign languages

People work better if they are paid more

These activities are used for developing mental and speaking abilities. Pupils are taught to argue about this or that problem. Such work or correcting mistakes encourage monitoring by students of their own mistakes. The next activity deals with forming grammatical sentences, it is called "Jumbled Sentences". I write a sentence in a jumbled order and the students have to write them in the right order.

My students enjoy playing, "Martian." He/She pretends that he does not know what food, cars, planes, music are. The children should try to help the Martian understand what each object or idea is. The Martian asks a question: What is a car? The pupil answers: People travel in cars, etc. All children of junior grades enjoy drawing and making various things. I use all these abilities of the children. I'm sure of the fact that whatever the activity, getting the students to "bring, cut, draw, paste, make, put up, and clean up" doubles the learning opportunity of them. While practicing the topic, "food" and the simple present tense each student of 3-4 grades brought to the lesson a sheet of ads from a shop. Then practice: "How much do apples cost in "Arai"? Each student makes a shopping list based on his needs, so they find where the best place is for them to shop for this or that.

The next grammar activity with pictures is the following: Each student brought a picture or a photo with his favourite dish. They exchange the pictures and discuss what each student likes best. Then the students give the recipe for his or her dish using such skeleton: "You need the following ingredients...", "First you...", "Then you...", "Finally you...", "now your

dish is ready." Usually I like to use group work and the students enjoy working in groups and then teaming up and discussing something or do some work together. During my lessons, they argue about different problems. Eg group n 1 hates holidays, rest, etc. I divide the class into groups of four or five. Then I designate one person in the group as a group artist. Then I give a picture to the group of the students. They describe to the artist what is in the picture so that he or she can make a copy. After 20 minutes or so, each group shows the original and the copy of the artist, they compare the pictures and discuss them. The next work is the following. I divide the group into pairs and give them a postcard with a landscape. One student has to write a letter to his/.her parents about his holidays in the camp. The other student has to guess where the writer has spent his holidays, with whom did he do it and how. So, he has to give a detailed description of his opponent's rest, his mood and feelings, etc.

3. Of course, I can continue the list of various activities for developing communication skills and habits, because I pay particular attention to this aspect of the teaching. While teaching primary students I came to the conclusion that communication is a complex skill requiring the simultaneous use of different abilities which often are generally recognized in analysis of the speech process. They are: a. pronunciation, b. grammar, c. vocabulary, d. fluency, e. comprehension. Everybody knows that the teacher is a key-figure in the teaching process. I realize the great role of mine in it. It is a disputable question: "What is the best age for teaching a foreign language?" I can answer the question easily: as early as possible. It depends upon the psychological and mental abilities of the child. The infant age is the best period for beginning of the process. Before I finish, I'd like to add that learners who are loved are most likely to learn. So, I'd like to come back to the words at the beginning of my report. I'm sure that the real teacher has to love his students first of all. As for me, I know that luckily teachers don't have to have all the answers, they don't even have to have most of the answers. So, do I. But, I shall try to find them.