

ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES OF THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

COMMUNICATIVE LESSONS ARE—

(1) Task-Oriented

- an exercise: has a purely linguistic application (*often practice for practice's sake*)
- a task: has a real world outcome which the language helps achieve

Implications of task orientation:

- ° focus of a lesson is not on the present progressive tense, but on “*talking about plans*”—plans that learners could well make themselves—and ideally, plans they will actually carry out
- ° with pair or group work, there should be some resulting outcome that can be used in the next phase of the lesson, not just practice for practice's sake, e.g., “*you will practice this activity in pairs in order to...*”

(2) Needs-Based

- when designing curriculum: how are my students most likely to use English?
- when modifying curriculum: how would my students most likely use this language?
- for data: query students, other teachers, former students—observe interactions that people like your students engage in (*be they native or non-native speakers*)

(3) Learning-Centered

- transparency: show why we are doing this and why we are doing it in this particular way
- personalize whenever possible
- exploit materials to the fullest and scaffold learners so that they always get to use the language “*off the page*” as well as “*on the page*”
- running notes can help teachers respond to “*what actually happened*” as well as “*what was in the lesson plan*”

(4) Contextualized

- relate to learner experience
- relate to course objectives and previous and future lesson features
- make lesson activities inter-related, as well having all activity items in the same context

(5) Authentic

in discourse (*language presentations and all subsequent activities*)

- use discourse that wasn't created only to teach language
- develop topics and situations as we really interact in them

in communicative events

- engage in the kinds of things we really do with language in the real world
- ensure that the activity's discourse structure is faithful to reality
- choose situations that learners can easily imagine themselves engaging in

in learning experiences

- appeal to a variety of learning strategies and styles
- structure activities to correspond to our notion of what effective learning is

(6) Aligned with Course/Instructional Objectives

- great activities alone typically do not result in great lessons (See “Contextualized” above)

(7) Situated in Discourse (Gee: “Discourse is language plus all that other stuff”)

- just getting the language right isn’t enough—we have to get the behaviors, conventions, roles, and practices that go with the language right as well.

(8) Sources of Comprehensible, Negotiated Input

- maintain a high ratio of language use in relation to time spent talking about language
- pair and small group problem-solving increases interaction and negotiation
- activities are structured so that students have opportunities to experiment with language (*at the appropriate moment in the lesson—you need a foundation before you can experiment*)
- scaffolding is highly valued
- debriefing is encouraged

(9) Recursive

- lexical items are reintroduced in and across lessons
- attention is paid to reintegrating previously taught features into later lessons

(10) Sequenced with Attention to Learning and Acquisition

- **Movement from Inductive Learning to Deductive Learning** (*from discovery and deduction to clear explanation and models to practice/application of the models*)
- **Movement from Acquisition Activities to Learning Activities** (*to Acquisition Activities*)
 - **Acquisition activities:** engage in rich, authentic discourse for its own sake; the teacher scaffolds the student discovery process rather than following an explicit, directed, and pre-established activity structure
 - **Learning Activities:** are clearly sequenced and follow explicit explanation and models: they support the student’s learning and allow them to access structures and language they may not yet have acquired.
 - **Provide students with the language, skills, and strategies necessary** to successfully carry out the activities (*e.g., you need a lot more than the present perfect tense to be able to carry out an authentic job interview role play*).

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR CONTENT-BASED LESSONS

Key question: How would your way of teaching this lesson to your English Language Learners be different from how you teach this same lesson to mainstream students?

Partial answer: Study the lesson's language so that—through both learner discovery activities and explicit exposition (*inductive and deductive learning, remember?*)—learners' attention can be called to the language that is used to present the content. Learners need first to **notice** this language and then to *practice it* through learning the content.

Note: with content-based instruction, **authenticity** may be less of an issue (*successfully communicating about content matters is a very authentic goal*), or **acquisition** (*by definition, processing content instruction is an acquisition activity: learners explore a rich piece of discourse for its own value*). Our goal as language teachers is to be sure that lesson language is focused on in an explicit, directed way (*i.e., more a language learning orientation*) so that learners can control the language they need to manipulate the content.