

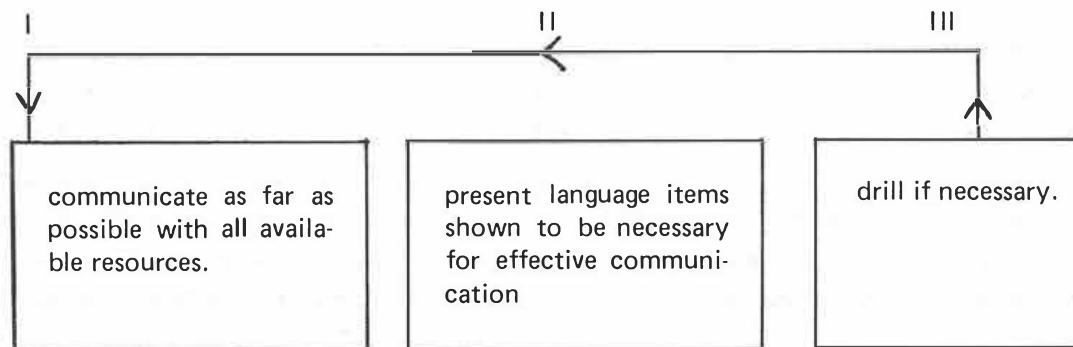
# Communicative



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The communicational syllabus with its emphasis on language use presupposes sufficient linguistic competence on the part of our pupils in order to participate in communicate activities. A teacher of weak language pupils will no doubt shout "most of my pupils cannot even make proper sentences (ie. well formed grammatical sentences). They are unwilling to talk. How can I then get them to communicate?" I am not discussing here the theoretical basis to communicative approaches to language teaching (please refer to Hymes, Labov, Halliday, Widdowson, Alwright et al.) but would like us to consider a few reasons for setting up communicative settings in which pupils can carry out language functions.

Fluency, learner-centredness, the learning process, appropriacy of response are some of the numerous underlying communicative approaches to language teaching. Chomsky in describing the native speaker's performance as "records of natural speech will show numerous false starts, deviations from rules, changes of plans in mid-course and so on" (Chomsky: 1965) could well be describing the second language learner. Psycholinguists in describing language of speakers of mother tongues as 'chunks' and not as carefully chosen bits would support the current view that second language learners should be linguistically exposed as much as possible. Communicative activities if carried out in a warm, non-threatening atmosphere allow pupils to make mistakes in a safe situation. Christopher Brumfit has in his diagram below suggested a procedure that could be followed in our classrooms.



Therefore I would suggest that teachers of English be more confident in carrying out communicative tasks (adapted to the level of our classes) and now and then abandon the prescribed text.

We communicate in order to obtain information or confirm our opinions. Communication then, being a process of negotiation, will always include elements of uncertainty and unpredictability. Ideally the selection of communicative activities should possess the characteristics of information gap (transfer of information), choice of responses, feedback during the interactive process and the provision of context. However not all activities (eg. some of the board games) can fulfil all the conditions and leave themselves open to criticism as being 'pseudo-communicative' activities. But most of them would allow the use of language functions like asking, instructing or directing others to do something, expressing agreement or disagreement, reporting etc. Pupils will be involved in doing something and will be working usually in pairs or in groups.

The activities more familiar to us are the ones involving brain teasers, puzzles, cartoons, mime, role play, role-simulation, jigsaw and comprehensive language games and the board games. The activities which do not involve so much time and visual aids may, however, be more appealing to the classroom teacher.

### Activity I – Group work

Sentences of one paragraph are separated and each sentence is written on a strip of paper. These strips are all put in an envelope and given to the group leader. He will hand one strip to each group member. The task here is to discuss the contexts of the strips, come to a consensus and make a coherent paragraph.

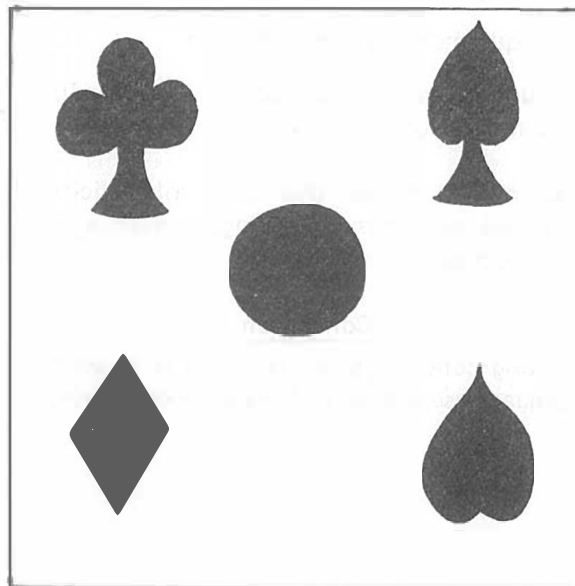
Another exercise can be devised by giving each group member a sheet containing (a) questions, answers to which can be found in the paragraph on his sheet (b) questions, answers to which he has to obtain from his fellow group members. The group then discuss the topic by combining the information.

### Activity II (paired work)

Describe and draw activities are also popular.

One member of a pair is given a diagram (eg. diagram A) and he describes it to his partner who is supposed to reproduce the diagram on a piece of paper.

Diagram A



### Activity III

Writing exercises can also involve problem solving.

#### Techniques

i) Dictation

The pupils are given a general idea of the whole passage orally or a set of notes. Then the teacher dictates the first sentence. The pupils are asked to predict and write the second sentence and so on.

ii) Inserting pieces of information

Pupils are given a paragraph and then a list of points (not in order). Their task is to insert these into the original passage.

iii) Changing functions in the paragraph

From a descriptive passage pupils are asked to write a passage giving a set of instructions

### Activity IV

Project work can be organised at the end of each term when simpler communicative tasks have been attempted. The choice and scope should depend on the level of the class. Suggestions for topics are as follows:

- i) Malaysia — as a tourist attraction
- ii) Popular games/sports.
- iii) Reading habits of schoolmates.
- iv) Traffic count in the school
- v) What makes the ideal prefect/monitor?

Each topic may be divided into sub-topics to be covered by different groups in the class, eg. Popular Sports as a project could have the following sub topics —

- i) The origin of the game.
- ii) The rules and equipment used in each game
- iii) popularity count of games in the school — information to be shown in pie-charts or percentages etc.

Each group will be engaged in tasks that will involve eliciting information; making summaries, comparisons and contrasts, reporting; converting information into non-verbal devices like pie-charts, diagrams, graphs; etc.

### Conclusion

The aim of promoting communicative activities is to activate the learners' knowledge of language and language use instead of language-like behaviour.