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Communicative Language Activities

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A B S T R A C T

This article deals with communicative language activities.

A R T I C L E I N F O

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Communicative activities include any **activities** that encourage and require a learner to speak with and listen to other learners, as well as with people in the program and community. **Communicative activities** have real purposes: to find information, break down barriers, talk about self, and learn about the culture. Adult English language learners at all proficiency levels, including literacy- and beginning level learners, need to speak and understand spoken English for a variety of reasons. Immigrant adults need English for daily life to communicate with the doctor, the school, the community, and the workplace. Learners at all proficiency levels can communicate, and they appreciate being encouraged and challenged to further their skills. They participate in interactive, communicative activities in all facets of the class—from ice-breaking activities, needs assessment, and goal-setting to life-skills, phonics, and spelling. This is especially true where there is a strong classroom community that supports natural language production. Communicative activities include any activities that encourage and require a learner to speak with and listen to other learners, as well as with people in the program and community. Communicative activities have real purposes: to find information, break down barriers, talk about self, and learn about the culture. Even when a lesson is focused on developing reading or writing skills, communicative activities should be integrated into the lesson. Furthermore, research on second language acquisition (SLA) suggests that more learning takes place when students are engaged in relevant tasks within a dynamic learning environment rather than in traditional teacher-led classes (Moss & Ross-Feldman, 2003). Benefits of Communicative Activities Some immigrants, such as parents, elders, or people who work in isolated environments (like housekeepers and babysitters) may feel lonely and experience depression or have low self-esteem. They may begin to feel that they will never learn English or never feel comfortable in the United States. Offering well-designed and well-executed communicative activities can help turn the English classroom into an active, safe, and enjoyable place where literacy- and beginning-level learners can learn what they need and want to learn. Challenges Most English language learners have had access to some schooling in their native countries. Their school was probably very teacher-directed. Learners were expected to be quiet and listen to the teacher and then, when asked, to respond to the teacher in unison with the one correct answer. Because of this, some adult English language learners may be initially disconcerted when their English teacher begins asking them to get up and move around, work in pairs or groups, and talk to one another. It also may be difficult for learners to realize that there can be more than one correct response to a question and many ways to ask a question. However, many, if not most, learners adapt and prosper with increased interactivity and independence.

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However, many, if not most, learners adapt and prosper with increased interactivity and independence. Activity II–1: Class Survey Highlights: Class surveys are fun and not overly challenging. They are very effective as icebreaking activities, especially at the beginning of a course. They also let learners know that class will be more than sitting at a desk and copying the teacher's words. It is important to do something with the survey information. Otherwise, there is no intrinsic reason for gathering the information. Therefore, plan ways to process the information. Note: Make sure the survey questions are appropriate to the class. For example, if everyone in the group is from Mexico, then asking, "What country are you from?" will not be pertinent. Similarly, asking a group of elderly seniors, "How many of your children go to school?" may not be appropriate. Watch for American cultural taboos about age, money, religion, etc. Also, make sure not to inadvertently ask about an uncomfortable topic. Objective: Learners gather information about a particular topic. They increase proficiency and confidence in asking one or more questions at the same time as they are increasing graphic literacy skills. Context: This class survey activity is especially useful for beginning levels because not much information needs to be asked or recorded and only one or two questions and answers need to be learned. Surveys can be used with higher levels if more complex questions and answers are required. Surveys are suitable for general ESL classes, but can also be tailored to a workplace (see examples that follow). Estimated time: Time varies according to how much information is gathered. In the literacy- or beginning-level class, a survey might consist of one question that simply requires students to ask and record the name of every person in class (either first or last, but probably not both at once). In a more advanced class, a survey might require students to ask and record the names of television shows watched and time spent watching these shows in the past week. In both of these cases, the time to do the survey will vary according to how many learners there are in the class, and how long it takes for the spelling and the recording to take place. Note: If information gathering takes more than 20-30 minutes, you might consider debriefing during the next class session. Materials: The teacher needs to make a survey form so learners can easily ask the question or questions and record answers. If the information is going to be gathered into a simple bar graph or pie chart, or recorded on flip chart paper, this needs to be ready in advance. Procedure: 1. Build on what learners already know (e.g., the common question, "Where are you from?"). Therefore, pre-teach and practice the questions and vocabulary needed to answer the questions. For example, in a class where learners are collecting information about native countries, record the names of those countries in advance so that students have the information available to them. 2. Hand out the survey forms and explain the task to learners. (They need to walk around the room asking everyone the question and recording the answers). 3. Model the procedures with one or two learner volunteers and check comprehension of instructions. For example, ask, "What are the questions on the survey form?" "How many people will you talk to today?" 4. Once learners begin to complete the survey, monitor the process and be ready to assist learners if they ask for help. Note: Don't be alarmed if you see someone copying from another's paper or someone writing

information down right on the questioner's sheet. The main idea is to get authentic communication going, and it is good for people to help each other. Do watch out for one person overpowering a quieter or less comfortable person; this would defeat the purpose of the exercise and be counter to the egalitarian structure of the class. 5. Discuss the information with the class. Using the information from the surveys (see Sample Surveys, page II–45), you can ask questions such as, "How many people are from El Salvador? Bosnia? China?" or: "How many people watched TV more than 10 hours last week? What shows were watched the most frequently?" You can have learners work in small groups to categorize information, create graphs, or write sentences summarizing the information. Evaluation: Circulate and listen to the questions and answers. Collect the information sheets to look for writing issues. Note: The sample survey on the next page would typically be used at the beginning of a class cycle. Not only is it important for every student to know all the other learners' names (and at least an approximation of the pronunciation), but asking each other the question "What is your first name?" helps learners begin to navigate first name, family name issues, as a real life skill. Furthermore, in all facets of life learners must spell their names so they need to be familiar with the phrase "spell it, please." As learners spell their names and hear others spell theirs, they may solidify their alphabetic knowledge. Particularly with native Spanish speakers, understanding and applying the changes in vowel sounds from Spanish to English may take some time, but this survey provides a good start. After the learners have written down all the names (including their own names), there are several ways to process the information: 1. The teacher can pass out another blank list and ask learners to work in pairs or small groups to alphabetize the first names and then to transcribe them again in alphabetical order. As the teacher demonstrates the process using several examples, the learners are continuing to memorize their classmates' names at the same time they are working on the basic skill of alphabetizing. Learners will be much more interested in this activity than if they were asked to alphabetize a list of words that had no meaning for them. 2. As an alternative, the teacher and the class can work through the alphabetizing as a group activity at the board or on an overhead or poster. In the same class period or in the next class session, the teacher can demonstrate that she knows everyone's first name (a teacher needs to know all of the learners' names and be able to pronounce them by the end of the second or third class meeting). Then, teacher can ask for volunteers to see if they can say each classmate's name. This can be challenging, but several learners usually do volunteer and successfully remember all the names. This is an important activity because it validates skills that many literacy-level learners employ—careful observation and good memory. Follow-up activities might include conducting the survey using the last names, often a slightly more difficult task or reviewing questions in a line dialogue.

Used literature

1. www.ziyonet.uz
2. www.worldliterature.com
3. www.aboutliterature.com