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Using thematic units for developing speaking skills in esp course

Developing students' skills of participating in professional communication is a challenging task. Thematic units are suggested as a complex activity complementary to the tasks of the main textbook. According to D. Brinton [1:203] the thematic content stretches over several weeks of instructions and provides rich output for lessons that are either language based (i.e., with the focus on vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar) or skills-based (i.e., with a focus on listening, speaking, writing or reading). The thematic units used for training students at the department of the Hotel Management, Resort and Tourism are based on the thematic content of the student's modules and are designed to develop their speaking skills for professional communication in the target language.

The advisability of using the complex activity mentioned can be supported by the fact that the tasks mirror real life situations at the work place and have a real outcome outside the classroom. The activity a) helps to foster student's motivation as the students are involved in the preparatory work, have freedom in selecting materials and using various sources; b) stimulates cooperative work and helps to create a positive environment; c) allows active vocabulary and grammar recycle and be successfully mastered; d) uses the integrate skills approach; e) helps to develop abilities to creative and critical thinking; f) assists in developing cross-cultural competence.

The thematic unit 'Cruise trip' can be used as an example of complimentary complex activity to the textbook in the Module 'Types of Tours: Traveling by air, sea and road'. Before the activity the student and the teacher as a facilitator do the preparatory work and decide which cruise route and cruise company they select.

The internet is an ideal hunting ground for ideas. When the route is selected the students map it and present as a part of a cruise company brochure. The next stages can be suggested as follows: 1. Checking in for the cruise. 2. Designing and discussing the pattern (a daily guide to cruise activities). 3. Examination of the ship, facilities and services 4. Eating out on board. 5. Shopping on board. 6. Money matters. 7. Booking and making city tours. 8. Entertainment on board. 9. Checking out and guest departure.

Every stage of the complex activity is based on integrated skills: speaking is linked with reading or listening which provides students with active vocabulary and models (listening to the TV announcement from the cruise director, listening to the tour guides at the excursions, listening to the partners' remarks in dialogues, reading the cruise brochures, guides, patterns, menus, instructions etc). Speaking skills are developed at different levels of proficiency: question/ answer complexes – comprehension check responses – scripted dialogue related to typical professional situations – presentations – discussions/ debates. Participating in discussions / debates requires demonstration of the ability to enter the discussion and logically put your idea into the conversation, to evaluate the communicative situation, to demonstrate

abilities to behave as an independent and critical thinker as well as the abilities for cross-cultural communication.

1. Brinton, D. Content-based Instruction in Practical English Language Teaching. N.Y: Mc.Graw-Hill. 2003. – p.199 – 224.