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An alternative approach to teaching English

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Abstract
Nowadays, English teaching is based on a Communicative Approache. As it is established in The Organic Law 8/2013 of December 9th for the Improvement of the Quality of Education which modifies in its only article the Organic Law 2/2006 of Education, students must acquire a basic communicative competence in at least one foreign language. This communicative competence implies the apprpriate use of language in any communicative situation. To do so, bearing in mind this approache, throughout this article diverse controversial techniques are proposed, all of them coming from the teaching practice.
Keywords: communicative approach, learning stock, knowledge storage, mixture of languages, different learnings, sanwich techniques and motivation

Título: Un enfoque alternativo a la enseñanza del Inglés.

Resumen
Hoy en día, la enseñanza del inglés, está basada en un enfoque comunicativo. Como recoge la Ley Orgánica 8/2013 del 9 de diciembre para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa (LOMCE) que modifica en su artículo único la Ley Orgánica 2/2006 de Educación (LOE), los alumnos y alumnas deben adquirir una competencia comunicativa básica en al menos una lengua extranjera. Esta competencia comunicativa implica el uso apropiado de la lengua en cualquier situación comunicativa. Para ello, basándonos en dicho enfoque, a lo largo del artículo se proponen diversas técnicas derivadas de la práctica docente, algunas de ellas un tanto controvertidas.
Palabras clave: enfoque comunicativo, almacenamiento de conocimiento, mezcla de lenguas, técnica sándwich, sistema de almacenamiento, motivación y aprendizajes diferentes.

Nowadays it is widely thought that to teach English as a second language, teachers should use the English language in isolation. At the same time, students should be obliged to speak just in English.

These ideas correspond to the current trend which is present in our schools, and which is determined by our curriculum.

Although these facts have general acceptance, in this article I intend to oppose them with other views which I have developed during the course of my teaching.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS:

Although t he communicative approach has its origin in the sixties, following the theory of Hymes, it was put into practice with the Communicative Language Teaching method of Wilkins during the seventies, where communication was not just the final goal, but also the means to achieve it; the Council of Europe seeing the need to learn Languages to facilitate the mobility of European citizens through Europe, created The CEFR, which is a document prepared between 1993 and 2000 to encourage the acquisition of a good level of communicative competence in a variety of languages.

On the basis of this document, or current Organic Law 2/2006 of Education (LOE) modified by The Organic Law 8/2013 for the Improvement of the Quality of Education   amongst its articles, commits to this communicative approach and it establishes by the Royal Decree 126/2014 of February 28th which determines the curriculum for primary education nationwide, requires students' acquisition of a basic communicative competence in at least one foreign language.

PRACTICAL FOUNDATIONS

Based on this communicative approach, as mentioned above, the goal of our classes must be the acquisition of the student communicative competence. But what is the process needed to achieve that?

It is obvious that if our students talk in their mother tongue, they will not see the necessity to speak in English, so the use of English must be assumed by everybody.

But this perspective may lead to several problems:

First of all, at beginner level, where the stock of students' vocabulary is minimal, they are not able to communicate by using English in isolation, therefore, they can become discouraged with the subject.

Moreover, in some occasions where determined grammatical structure needs to be explained, its understanding could be threatened by the lack of English knowledge.

And finally, we have to bear in mind that our students only receive two or three hours of English at school, so they do not have a real English immersion.

Starting from these three facts, the following ideas can be affirmed:

THE NECESSITY OF A STOCK OF ENGLISH KNOWLEDGE:

With regard to the fact that students can be discouraged with English because of the lack of vocabulary, it is necessary to provide them with the appropriate tools which help them to cope with everyday communicative situations. For that purpose, during the first days of class, we will place various poster around the classroom with the sentences that students could need at a certain point of time, such as:

"How can I say…... in English?"

What does ………. mean?

Can I go to the toilet?

Sorry, I didn't understand that, can you repeat it, please?

"SPANGLISH", A USEFUL TOOL TO COMMUNICATE:

Nevertheless, if they want to say something and they do not have the vocabulary needed, a useful way to motivate them to speak is to allow them to use a mix between Spanish and English so that they can build sentences using the English words they already know, completing them with Spanish words. However, when a student says something by using this mix of languages, it is of prime importance to correct them and to make them repeat it entirely in English.

"THE SANDWICH TECHNIQUE":

Another important idea to address is the fact that we should use the "sandwich technique" when we are explaining grammar at beginner level:

This involves telling our students something in English, then repeating it in Spanish and later telling them it in English again. We do not always have to use this method, but we should do so at least once, when we are introducing a new grammatical structure.

CREATION OF AN APPROPRIATE STORAGE SYSTEM:

Another important point to take into account is the creation of an appropriate storage system, which our students may easily access as many times as is necessary . There are several ways to create this:

Firstly, classroom storage, secondly, personal storage and finally digital storage for those students who are keen on technology.

What does that consist of?

Classroom storage:

This is a way to ensure all the students have access to the vocabulary told. Every week there will be a student responsible for copying everyday's new vocabulary on a piece of paper on the wall. There are three important points to consider, to avoid misunderstanding:

Firstly, to date the entries.

Secondly, to give the student a double entry chart.

Finally write the words in capital letters. (Using a red pen to write those letter which actually have to be written in capital letter for example the first letter of the days of the week).

Personal storage:

This consists of a personal notebook where students must record the vocabulary learnt every day. For appropriate use, the following rules are unavoidable:

    a)   Our students will have to verify the spelling, by using either the classroom storage of the week or the digital storage.

    b)   They must record the vocabulary as follows:

Each page must be dated in the top right corner with a red pen, (one page for each day).

English words with a blue pen in capital letters. As is above mentioned, (Using a red pen to write those letter which have to actually be written in capital letters like the first letter of the days of the week).

Spanish words with pencil in lower case.

    c)   Students have to keep it in their schoolbags every day and as soon as the English class starts, they will place it in the corner of their tables, open on that day's page and they will have to write the date.

Digital storage:

This kind of storage is useful because it does not just provide an easy and quick way of access from anywhere but also it is highly motivating for our students.

It involves uploading onto The Internet (Google Drive) the vocabulary learnt every day, so students may have access to it anywhere.

MOTIVATION, ALWAYS PRESENT.

Motivation must be present in every task so we have to get our students to be participants in all of them by means of motivating activities which take into account their own experiences and interests.

Therefore we should always start our lessons with an icebreaking activity consisting of speaking about the day before, the weekend, their experiences related to the topic to be addressed in the unit or even asking them about the learning of the last lesson.

It is also very important, to tell our students what we are going to do every day, trying to leave the last minutes available to do some motivating games to keep their interest.

"WE ARE DIFFERENT, WE LEARN DIFFERENTLY"

As has been shown by diverse theories, each student has their own learning pace, therefore we should adapt our level of requirement to them. Whereby the "Spanglish" mentioned above is a helpful way to make our students speak because each one speaks according their own level.

In addition, any attempt by our students to speak in English must be positively recognized.

"THE THREE ONES"

In each formative unit, we will just introduce "the three ones":

The first one: Vocabulary related to one semantic field.

The second one: Just one grammatical structure.

The third one: A phonic sound.

This is due to the fact that if we introduce more than one structure, a sound or a semantic field in the same unit, our students will probably end up mixing everything. So before introducing any new knowledge, they need to have consolidated the previous one.

WHAT HAVE I LEARNT?

Finally, the last two or three minutes of the class should be dedicated to speaking about the learning of the day:

What have I learnt today?

And what is this useful for?

To conclude the article, it is important to highlight that these ideas have been developed as a result of actual classroom experience. Therefore they could vary depending on the students. Nevertheless, these can be considered as a tool to aid our daily teaching practice.

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