

ASOCIACION EX ALUMNOS DEL PROFESORADO EN LENGUAS VIVAS "J.R.FERNANDEZ"
DEPARTAMENTO DE ALUMNOS LIBRES



Teachers' Centre

AEXALEVI *Forum*

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AEXALEVI *Forum*

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Longman Children's Picture Dictionary and Young Children's Picture Dictionary Pearson Education. 2007.

Vocabulary learning can be fun. In this issue, we look at two dictionaries for younger learners.

Task-based Learning

How can I make my classroom feel task-based?

Certain traits typically associated with the Communicative Approach can be seen in the task-based classroom. The process is learner-centred. There is a lot of groupwork going on. There is a concern for genuine communication. The students carry out tasks. The evaluation is ongoing. The teacher acts as a monitor. The learner is an active participant. In fact, Task-based learning, just as the Communicative Approach, is also concerned with learning a language for communication while the students take active part in the class. Where does the difference lie?

Present-Practise-Produce

To be able to see the difference more clearly, I suggest that we revise the most basic steps in the paradigm Present-Practise-Produce, which has proved to be the most predominant model through which the Communicative Approach has been implemented. Language is first presented, then it is practised in controlled exercises that focus on form and finally the students are given opportunities for free production. The assumption underlying this procedure is

that the students need to learn about the language before they use it freely. The Communicative Approach, in its strongest versions, advocated genuine communication through lots of exposure to authentic texts and little instruction. As opposed to this, Present-Practise-Produce has provided teachers with a practical framework within which they have been able to address the problem of having to teach large classes with only a few periods a week allotted to English.

Task-based learning in its strongest versions considers that language is learnt while the students are engaged

in tasks. All tasks are communicative by definition. If an activity is not communicative, it cannot be regarded as a task. Instruction may occur but it is not seen as essential because it is believed that learners will acquire language as they go along through exposure and use.

This description certainly reminds us of what we said before about the strongest versions of the Communicative Approach. Approaches seem to start by being strong, extreme positions about language learning but then, at some point along the way, teachers need to come to terms with the reality of the classroom. Exposure and use are all right, but how long would it take our students to learn a language? This is when the weaker versions of an approach try to take a shortcut and sort out the problem. The shortcut for Task-based Learning has meant broadening the concept of task to encompass all kinds of activities, communicative and form-focused. After all, say the representatives of these weaker versions, our students need to learn the language in order to perform the tasks. Needless to say, the supporters of more radical task-based learning positions would completely disagree with this opinion. But the truth is that for us, teachers working in foreign language contexts, it is

necessary to focus on the language at some point.

What makes it task-based?

If you wish to make your classroom task-based, you may start by planning a project for the students to do at the end of the unit. This project should be motivating and engaging for your learners. You need to make sure that throughout your students see the link between the activities they do in class and this final project they will have to do. In class, instead of presenting language, you will need to engage your learners in communicative tasks, which will ensure they have the opportunity to be exposed to rich input, to use language and to start noticing how it works. Later on, you will focus on form by having the students become aware of the language they need to express certain ideas through consciousness-raising tasks. You can have a spot of practice here, but then you will need to engage the students in more tasks because it is through them that your learners will construct their idea of how the English language works. Students should be able to discover the rules that apply to the language they have explored in the tasks.

Does Task-based Learning work?

We know very little about how task-based learning works in foreign language contexts. Many teachers are trying to implement it at least partially in their lessons. Task-based Learning has been thought of for second language contexts as it is usually the case with all methodologies. It has a lot in common with Communicative Language Teaching, but the difference is that it looks at the process from the point of view of the learners working in a community while they construct their knowledge of language. The students

use the language right from the start and this makes them feel motivated to learn. As the students are busy doing tasks, we do not see much up-front teaching. Whether it works or not still needs to be seen. It surely works for some people in some contexts. We need to know the approach in depth to be able to implement it, but at least we can borrow some ideas like, for example, using tasks before students focus on language or having the students discover the rules. Perhaps we could apply some ideas in our lessons so that they will feel task-based.

Join us in the Forum in our website.

Within the topic of Authenticity, we are discussing task-based learning and sharing material.

First steps towards

VOCABULARY BUILDING

It is common ground practice to present grammar and then to consolidate it through controlled exercises. When it is the time to give the students a test, we generally spend some time revising grammar and practising for the exam. However, when it comes to vocabulary learning, we tend to present the new words in an appealing way and then maybe play a couple of games from time to time to revise vocabulary if we are working with younger learners. In the case of teenagers and adults, it is often taken for granted that they will study the vocabulary on their own. There is nothing wrong with these practices, of course. But what else can be done to give vocabulary more prominence in the classroom and to help our students build up their learning?

Vocabulary Size and Depth

It is expected that students should be able to enlarge their vocabularies in the foreign language as they make progress in their learning. This is referred to as “vocabulary size”. It has been found that word knowledge entails having access to several aspects of vocabulary such as spelling, pronunciation, use, collocation and meaning. Every time students encounter a word, they process it at a deeper level by having access to some of these aspects. Students do so at the

level of recognition first and production later. Therefore, they need to encounter the same word a number of times to be able to deepen their knowledge of that word in particular. This is referred to as “vocabulary depth”. This process is so complex that while some aspects of a word may be only recognized by students, some others may be fully productive for the same word.

Vocabulary Building

In the light of what we know about the nature of vocabulary learning, we can

take a few but essential steps to help students build it up.

- We need to allot time in our lessons for vocabulary learning. This would imply not only presenting new words but also creating opportunities for consolidation, recycling and revision just as we do with grammar.
- It has been proved that a lot of information is lost after we leave a class. One way of dealing with this loss is to have word spaced practice. We can make flashcards with the new words written in a collocation on one of the sides and a picture on the other. We could even have our students prepare the flashcards as a class activity. These flashcards can be kept in a box, a bag or a big envelope and they can often be revised in class. They can also be displayed on panels in the classroom and be replaced by new ones from time to time.
- We can encourage our learners to identify and produce chunks of language. Instead of having the students identify isolated words like “book”, we can aim at presenting and eliciting “a book” or even “a big book” or why not “a book about animals”. This work can be extended to simple

sentences. This will prepare our students to think about language in terms of phrases or sentences. It is expected that attention to discourse, even in small chunks, should lead to a more fluent production both orally and in writing. We need to be careful, then, about how we write vocabulary on the blackboard. Next time you are about to write an isolated word, write a collocation instead.

- Every class we could have a spotlight on a certain word. This word could be written on the blackboard in suitable collocations and produced actively in class that day.
- We generally work on vocabulary by organizing it in lexical sets. We teach all the names of animals together under the heading “animals”. We teach all the parts of the body under the heading “body”. And so on. Our students will probably learn some animals but not all. They will remember some parts of the body and will not know what to do with them. Think about how unproductive it is to know “ear, eyes, nose” in isolation. The same can be said of “lion, tiger, elephant”. Here we need to apply the principles of vocabulary expansion and

vocabulary use. So if in one class we deal with animals, the next class we could ask our students to place animals in their habitat, and the following classes we could describe them, say what they eat, what they do. Children will naturally profit from exposure to rich input. We will be surprised at how much they can understand. Every time they encounter the animals, they will be expanding their vocabularies and learning how to use them. The same principles can be applied with older students. So if the characters in the textbook go to a party, why not talk about kinds of parties, clothes to wear to each kind, food and drink, kinds of music, gifts. The list could be endless. The point is not to restrict the vocabulary we teach to a few nouns organized in a lexical group. The point is to expand on that and make the students use the vocabulary. At the same time, they will be practising grammar.

- We could also use diagrams, webs, flow charts, grids, scales or any other visual aid you can think of to organize vocabulary as it is learnt in class. Visuals help students see connections between words more clearly. It is always possible to go back to

these visuals in class or at home and expand them by adding fresh links to new vocabulary.

- With adults and teenagers, we could try giving them control over part of their vocabulary building by asking them to keep a record of new words. This could be done by having them write down the vocabulary they would like to learn in relation to a topic and then finding out how to say it in English to be reported in class, by asking them to keep a record of “words that I need to remember, that I find troublesome, that I have heard or seen this week” or whatever you think may be useful for your students.

First steps

The first steps may turn out to be the hardest to take. Perhaps it can help a lot if we think about vocabulary and grammar as immersed in each other instead of looking at them as two separate things. One thing is certain, it is worth a try.

WRITING AWARDS

**Would you like to have your students participate
in a writing contest?**

**We would like to invite your students
to take part in a writing contest .**

- **Who can participate?**

Students currently doing Sixth Year and Seventh Year.

- **What do they have to do?**

They have to write a story, not longer than a page, suitable for the level they are in, like the kinds of stories they write in their final exams.

- **How many students per institute can submit their compositions?**

Only one student per level. Each institute should first carry out a selection of compositions and submit the winning story by e-mail not later than August 18th, 2009.

- **What award will the winners be given?**

There will be one winner per level and each will receive a prize and a diploma from Asociación Ex alumnos del Profesorado en Lenguas Vivas "J.R.Fernández".

- **Why participate in a writing contest?**

For some students, the writing contest will mean a challenge and they will feel motivated to learn how to write. For the teacher, the contest will imply making room in the class for the teaching of writing.

**Write to us if you have a question about the writing contest.
We will be glad to assist you in anything that you may need.**

GUEST WRITER

Prof. Graciela Louzán

Graciela has sent us very useful information about the use of technology in the classroom.

Why using technology in the classroom?

Firstly technology assists language learning and secondly it assists -global communication

What is a PODCAST?

A podcast is a series of digital media files, usually digital audio, that is made available for download via internet.

Where does the term come from?

The term comes from the words "iPod" and "broadcast", the Apple iPod being the brand of portable media player for which early podcasting scripts were developed, allowing podcasts to be automatically transferred from a personal computer to a mobile device after they are downloaded. Podcasting began to catch hold in late 2004. Many individuals and groups have contributed to the emergence and popularity of podcasts.

Why are PODCAST an interesting tool to include as part of language learning?

- ✓ They help students process different forms of spoken English
- ✓ They help students to improve their listening skills by "training their ears"
- ✓ They introduce variety in the type of work students do at home
- ✓ They help students develop their speaking skills
- ✓ They promote students' autonomy

How to work with PODCASTS?

You can ask students to try to get an idea of the content by just listening to it twice without reading the transcript; then if necessary they can try a third time, while reading the text.

In their next class, and as feedback, they should share the following:

- what the listening was about
- how many times they had to listen to it before reading the transcript (in case they had to, they usually do)
- how many words were not known beforehand and learnt after the activity
- they also should score the activity from 1 to 10, being 10:very difficult and hard to do and 1:very easy and enjoyable

Websites

<http://www.listen-to-english.com/>

<http://www.betteratenglish.com/category/levels/intermediate/>

<http://www.podcastsinenglish.com/index.htm>

<http://www.eslpod.com/website/>

Thank you, Graciela!

***Please send us your ideas and suggestions.
We will be glad to have you as our guest writer.
Contact us at:
teacherscentre@aexalevi.org.ar***

Self-evaluation

THE CHECKLIST

In our educational system pervaded by the tradition of leaving evaluation in the hands of the teachers, it is really difficult to make room for the students to assess their own work. We, teachers, wish for that of course. But our learners are used to being told how good or how poor their work is. They are certainly not asked to say what they think about themselves as learners. When they **are** asked, they find it extremely hard to judge their production.

The good side of self-evaluation

Self-evaluation relies on the development of certain skills that are called “metacognitive”. These are the skills that enable us to reflect about the way we learn. While we are engaged in self-evaluation, metacognitive skills such as monitoring, planning and evaluating are at work. Every step we take towards self-evaluation is indeed a step towards autonomy. The more autonomous we become as learners, the more independent we are in relation to the assessment of our work. A truly useful tool for life.

For further reading, see Baxter, A. (1997). *Evaluating your Students*. London: Richmond.

The hard side of self-evaluation

Self-evaluation involves complex skills that need to be developed over time. As teachers, we can use different strategies to bring our learners closer to what it means to evaluate their own work. In some textbooks, authors include self-evaluation charts for the students to check their progress. This is the case of *New Snapshot*, which we will have as an example here.

Just like charts, the checklist can prove to be a straightforward tool for self-evaluation. Let us have a look at it.

Abbs, B., Freebairn, I., Barker, C. (2003). *New Snapshot*. Elementary. England: Longman.

What is a checklist?

A checklist is a simplified version of the syllabus. It is a version that can be easily understood by the students with examples of the linguistic forms that have been studied in a unit. After having taught several units or right before the end of the term, we may ask our students to help us produce a list of the things we have studied. The idea is to make the list in class together with the students so that they can assess what they have studied. Once the checklist is ready, we ask our students to say how confident they feel in relation to each of the items on the list. To do this, they have to use a confidence rating like the one below. Notice that the confidence rating has four choices. Even number of choices are used to prevent the students from choosing the score in the middle as it would mean no commitment. Once the students have given themselves a confidence mark for each of the items on the list, we can have a whole class report on results. We could take down notes of the items in which most of the students have a 0 or a 1 and we could use this information to plan a revision. Sometimes it is not possible to revise everything in the syllabus before an exam. The checklist can prove to be a practical way of organizing the revision. The students with a 2 or a 3 in some of

the items could be asked to explain something in connection with these items as part of a group discussion activity, in which students with lower marks in those items could profit from the explanations and examples.

SAMPLE CHECKLIST: UNIT 7 IN NEW SNAPSHOT ELEMENTARY (Abbs,Freebairn & Barker, 2003).

Past Simple of regular verbs
Arrived, looked, asked, opened

Past Simple of verb *to be*
Was / wasn't were / weren't

Past Simple in Positive Sentences
The man visited Compton Hall last October.

Past Simple in Negative Sentences
He didn't park the car.

Questions in the Past Simple and short answers

Did he take a photo of the girl?
Yes, he did No, he didn't

Spelling changes
Stop stopped hurry hurried

Sounds
*Shopped / t /
Climbed / d /
Wanted / id /*

Possessive pronouns
Mine, yours, hers, his, ours, yours, theirs

Questions with whose
Whose bag is this? It's mine.

SAMPLE CONFIDENCE RATING

- 0:** What's this? I don't remember!
- 1:** I am not sure about this.
- 2:** I am quite sure about this.
- 3:** I remember this very well!

The checklist and self-evaluation

While engaged in a checklist, the students are doing self-evaluation. They are becoming aware of what they have studied in the last few units by making it explicit in the checklist. They

are saying how confident they feel in relation to the syllabus. They are working on weak and strong areas by means of revision activities.

The checklist is easy to implement and it is a practical way of having the students participate in thinking about their learning.

POEMS

Prof. María Antonieta Castagna, Head of Leader Institute, is proud to say that her 3rd year students can be very romantic when it comes to creating their own Acrostic Poems.

Future with you
Race for your love
Evening dinner to see you
Everyday I remember your words
Day for meeting your love
Old kiss is going to be always in my heart
Morning romantic kiss at breakfast.

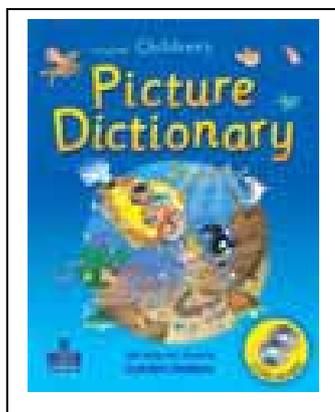
Gianfranco Lamberti & Tomás Desideioscidi

Life is beautiful
One for all and all for one
Visit the world, it is going to be a fantastic place
Everyone finds true love.

Brenda Pisanu & Carolina Lamberti

Thank you!

Highly recommended



Longman Children's Picture Dictionary

Longman Young Children's Picture Dictionary

Pearson Education. 2007

It is very difficult for us, teachers, to make our students go to the dictionary and to find the way to introduce the use of dictionaries in class. With younger learners, the problem is even bigger as it is really hard to find material that the students can learn from while they are having fun. The Longman Children's Picture Dictionary and Young Children's Picture Dictionary are user-friendly. They certainly will not scare our students away as ordinary dictionaries do. You will find that while the students use the Longman Children's Picture Dictionaries, they will be engaged in playing games, reading stories, saying chants, singing songs, acting out dialogues and doing lots of activities that the Activity Resource Books provide. Vocabulary is presented and developed in thematic units, each contextualized in the most appealing

way for younger learners. The students do not learn words in isolation. They learn the names of fruit as part of the story of Little Red Riding Hood and the fruit for Grandma that she carries in her basket. They study the names of the musical instruments in the context of an animal orchestra. They learn the names of the animals in their habitat. They come across the names of the planets in a space adventure. They see colours and patterns while describing sea creatures. They learn food and drink while Goldilocks helps herself to something to eat at the Bears' house. Every page you turn is an opportunity to learn language. These dictionaries can be used alongside any textbook. They can prove a wise investment as the students can use them over several years. For further details, see the link in our Forum.