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**Teaching Beyond the Regular Curriculum**

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**Introduction**

This paper attempts to explore the importance of teaching beyond the regular curriculum with special emphasis on adopting communicative and cooperative learning strategies.

Learning a second language has become unavoidable particularly in the case of English. No matter to what speech community, to what society one belongs to, there is every chance that one may face English. In every walk of life we choose, whether education, business, travel, etc., it has become an essential requirement to learn English. The concept of learning English as the second language is not novel. Much work has been done. The complexity and challenge involved in teaching English as a second or foreign language has kept this field still active and interesting.

In spite of a long list of teaching approaches and methods, the innovations and improvements have not yet helped totally to overcome the difficulties in the acquisition of a second language. No doubt that every method, old or new, promotes second language learning to some extent. However, the problem lies with the fact that how well these approaches and methods are being utilized. It is also evident made clear that adhering to any one single method is insufficient to fulfill the requirements of every learner.

## **Importance of Practice**

Language learning is like driving a vehicle, once the basic things are understood no more theory is necessary, for what is then needed is practice. Through proper practice one gains mastery and becomes an expert. The more one practices the better his performance. When learners have unlimited exposure to practically learn and use the target language it does more than what theoretical teaching could do. It does not matter how many hours we teach them, what really matters is that how much they are made to speak. It is only through their attempts and reattempts, their ability of communicating can be charged up.

## **Let Us Not Blame the Methods!**

It is high time that we should stop blaming the language teaching methods since, it is clear that none of these methods has been disregarded. We would have made no where without the influence of one method over another. Every stage has been a key to move further and explore. These methods whether traditional or modern when used accordingly to the accurate purpose, appropriate situation and right audience they have never proved ineffective. Early Instructional methods like Grammar-Translation, Audio lingual are still being widely used today.

We are to blame both the teachers and learners for their lack of interest and effort particularly in Indian educational context. Some teachers are not even familiar about these language teaching methodologies, and those of whom who know little are not clear with the application of such theories. There are exceptionally few teachers who are trained to deal with such language difficulties in the language teaching classrooms.

## **Need to Re-focus**

Moreover, in educational institutions in India teachers primarily devote their time for the completion of the curriculum rather than to worry about what they could do to develop the learners' communicative ability. The curriculum has no more than one or two subjects that are meant for language training (in some cases not even one). It is this inadequacy and the result of insufficient practice which has paved way for the learners' inability to attain the communicative competence in spite of years of formal education.

## **Teaching Beyond the Regular Curriculum**

The field of second language teaching has experienced innumerable changes. Every suggestion, every incorporation, every modification, best or worst, has been successful in shaping the area to an acceptable level. Without these research findings, experiments and turning points it would have been impossible to reach the present state.

For the success of any course, a well designed curriculum is a must. Unless we possess a little understanding of things like learner levels and requirements, their expectations, learner difficulties, time length, objectives, authentic materials and methodologies, it is, indeed, difficult

to design a suitable curriculum. In this way an effective curriculum takes several things into consideration. It depends on 'what is needed.' The curriculum has to be planned and designed.

### **Communicative Approach**

Many language teaching professionals around the globe are trying to make the curriculum as much communicative as possible. After the introduction and influence of the communicative approach, it has become a fashion to integrate activities that would trigger interaction. Not only it is important to make our curriculum communicative, but it is also necessary for us to maintain and monitor its effectiveness regularly. It is important that we make the learning process go beyond the subject matter. That is, we should concentrate on 'extra-teaching' especially with the objective of developing communicative skills of the learners.

Specifically with the teaching situation associated with the educational institutions in India, where teachers manage to devote the entire time for the curriculum alone, reaching out to matters beyond the regular curriculum has become a must for shaping our learners well-suited for the competitive world. Stuffing the knowledge without creating any opportunities that would provide the learners to enhance their communicative capability is useless. The approach and method that enable our learners to apply the techniques they have learnt successfully out in the real world under any circumstance are superior to mere subject teaching.

### **Situations in the Real World**

Situations are not readymade in the real world, they are 'on the spot' activities. When the case is such, learners should be capable enough to handle them boldly, comprehend them properly and respond successfully. Learners should understand that language is not just communication it is but proper communication. So, it becomes necessary for the teacher to train the learners to the best of their ability by providing ample real-life situations side by side with their regular teaching. Deviating from the curriculum may sometimes appear disturbing considering the time factor, so as an alternative if sixty percent of the curriculum may be designed to meet the communication aspect it would literally prove very effective. To make this practically possible we can rely on Communicative language teaching and Cooperative language learning methods through which it is much easier to develop the interaction level of the learners. These methods are well-suitable for all types of communicative exercises. We shall now see concisely about these instructional methods and examine how well they facilitate interaction among the learners.

### **Communicative Language Teaching Approach**

The concept of Communicative language teaching (CLT) is a remarkable turning point in the history of language teaching. It is only after the arrival of this revolutionary notion the entire aspect of communication met with a change. The words of Brown (1994:77) clearly express this need and shift as follows:

Beyond grammatical discourse elements in communication, we are probing the nature of social, cultural, and pragmatic features of language. We are exploring pedagogical means for 'real-life' communication in the classroom. We are trying

to get our learners to develop linguistic fluency, not just the accuracy that has so consumed our historical journey. We are equipping our students with tools for generating unrehearsed language performance 'out there' when they leave the womb of our classrooms. We are concerned with how to facilitate lifelong language learning among our students, not just with the immediate classroom task. We are looking at learners as partners in cooperative venture. And our classroom practices seek to draw on whatever intrinsically sparks learners to reach their fullest potential.

This shift was very much needed because the output of both Grammar Translation and Audio lingual instructional strategies were unsatisfactory in the sense that they failed to concentrate on the communicative aspect of the learners. It was the time when the knowledge of grammar was considered to be mandatory to master a language, until it was properly realized later that a mere grammatical knowledge is insufficient in enabling learners' communicative capacity.

It was argued that learners learn a language through the process of communicating in it, and that communication that is meaningful to the learner provides a better opportunity for learning than through a grammar-based approach. [CLT Today, Jack C. Richards]

Here is how Lightbown and Spada (1999: 172) define CLT:

CLT is based on the premise that successful language learning involves not only a knowledge of the structures and forms of the language, but also the functions and purposes that a language serves in different communicative settings.

It is clear that communicative competence is favoured in place of grammatical competence. The idea behind CLT has attracted many and has come up to a state where this approach has been implemented all over the world making it an unquestionable success. According to David Nunan (1991:279) the five basic features of CLT are:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on the language but also on the learning process itself.
4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom.

Activities in CLT mirror real-life situations. It is by introducing varieties of activities the teacher creates an interesting and interactional environment on which the learners could operate on their own and communicate in meaningful ways. It is important that the teacher always maintains his role as a facilitator, a motivator and as a participant also. Initially, while conducting activities it becomes necessary for the teacher to encourage the learners to speak more and build confidence in them. Learners could learn better only if there is a proper communicative purpose in an

activity. Hence, it is essential to use apt activities in the classroom. The following exercises serve as a sample of how a communicative activity will look like:

### **The Reporting Exercise**

In this activity, the teacher instructs the learners beforehand to observe any real-life situation. It could be a meeting, a function, a public speech or any other event. Once the learners are done with the observation, the teacher may direct the learners to deliver their oral-report individually. In order to facilitate easier communication the teacher might write out some general questions concerning the activity on the board.

1. What is your event about?
2. Who was the speaker?
3. What did he say?
4. What were the things discussed in the meeting?
5. What did you learn?

After each presentation, the teacher could initiate a general discussion among the learners regarding the report. If the reports are interesting it is possible to notice more interaction in the class.

### **The Teaching Activity: (A kind of role-play)**

In this activity the teacher is supposed to tell the situation clearly and briefly like this:  
Students, I am going to present to you a situation now: Person A is a man who wants to learn driving so he meets person B who is the driving instructor. Make out a conversation between the two and enact it as realistically as possible.

In the beginning it is good to introduce such simple activities. In this way, the teacher could provide variety of situations so that it would be exciting as well as interactional. The most important thing to note is that the teacher should never allow the learners to communicate in any language other than the target language. When it appears to the teacher that the learners have picked up confidence and control over their language he might move on to teach them how to appropriately use the non-verbal expressions. Likewise, it is vital that the learners also learn and master the presentation skills in order to excel in their communication.

### **Cooperative Language Learning**

While CLT is flexible to different settings and situations, cooperative language learning method on the other hand is extremely fit for any type of group interaction. The beauty of this method is that it provides an opportunity for the learners to work in groups, communicate one to one and help each other to understand the subject creating an opportunity to learn,

- a) How to work in groups
- b) How to cooperate within a group
- c) How to communicate within a group

d) How to work together to achieve the goal

CLT and CL have almost dismissed teacher-to-students learning model replacing it with student-to-student language learning. The activities that come under CLT and CL instructional methods are not teacher dependent and teacher controlled. Teacher is only a facilitator and learners take control of the entire learning process. Thus, it is known to be learner-centered models of language learning.

What makes cooperative language learning special is that its capability to create a friendly atmosphere making the learners to share their ideas and intentions without any fear and need of working alone. In such a condition, the learners understand that each member of the group has the responsibility to contribute their share for the success of their group. Such a chance of combined effort reduces the risk of feeling the differences existing among the learners as they work as a team.

Cooperative learning helps students feel successful at every academic level. In cooperative learning teams, low achieving students can make contributions to a group and experience success, and all students can increase their understanding of ideas by explaining them to others (Featherstone, 1986).

Additionally, Cooperative language learning also makes the group process a pleasant experience in which the relationship among every member of the group is not competitive but cooperative in nature. The success of the group rests on every member making the learners to realize that each of them are unique and it is their collective knowledge that counts under a cooperative learning condition.

There is much difference between ordinary group works and cooperative learning groups. To understand what makes cooperative learning different, it is essential to comprehend the five elements of cooperative learning as suggested by Johnson and Johnson (1984):

1. **Positive Interdependence:** Every member of the team must depend on one another in order to achieve success.
2. **Individual Accountability:** In cooperative learning, each member contributes his/her share for which they are held accountable.
3. **Face to face (Promotive) Interaction:** Each member is responsible for the progression of the group. Promotive interaction makes it possible for the members to support and encourage one another so that the overall performance rate of the group is high and effective.
4. **Appropriate Collaborative Skills:** In a cooperative learning condition it is necessary for the learners to practice and master leadership, decision making, manage interaction, conflict management and trust building.
5. **Group Processing:** The ability to monitor and modify things whenever necessary for the proper functioning of the group is important. Ability to identify and rectify the problems is the responsibility of every member of the group.

Activities in cooperative learning similar to communicative language teaching places focus on interaction. In a cooperative learning situation learners work together in heterogeneous groups to accomplish their common goals. Listed below are some sample activities that could be made use of in a cooperative learning situation.

### **The Reading Activity**

Once the selection and separation of groups are over, the teacher might assign various topics to each group. The topics could cover things like essays, poems, novels etc. The teacher should instruct them group-wise to read the assigned topics and present them as a group. This type of activity not only enables to share a lot of information but also promotes more interaction in the classroom.

### **The Short-Film Making Exercise**

This is an interesting activity in which the groups are supposed to perform and stage a short film that could last for five or ten minutes. First, the group must take charge of selecting a theme that could be performed. Once the selection of theme is done, the group members could assign the required character roles among themselves and start practicing using a simple script. Once they are satisfied with their performance the group could make use of someone to video-tape their final performance before staging it up. When it is over, the group could display their film in front of the other groups. This activity is not only interesting but also enables the learners to learn to interact, cooperate, make suggestions, act, decide and evaluate themselves.

### **Conclusion**

While the task of learning and mastering a second language could be lengthy and time consuming, it is very obvious that the complexity of the task can be reduced if proper language learning steps are undertaken. With what has been discussed above, it is clear that if we may try to incorporate as much as practical exercises beyond the limits of the curriculum, it would be really possible to produce effective communicative capability among the learners. The amount of additional teaching has to be specifically focusing on training the learners' target language development. Under such an opportunity, the learners have high chance of boosting their communicative performance and academic quality as well.

The above suggested two instructional methods, namely CLT and CL, are suitable for such an objective. There is no doubt that learners when taught under the exposure of communicative language teaching and cooperative language learning strategies, would definitely attain the communicative competence. It is my strong belief that learners exposed and trained under such communicative conditions would pick up the target language extremely well at which point it would also be possible for them to overcome all sorts of learning difficulties.

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