

## VI. COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH: Introduction by Diane Larsen-Freeman

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1. The primary goal of language teaching is enabling students to use the language to communicate. Communication involves using language functions as well as grammar structures.
  2. Language is used in a social context and should be appropriate to setting, topic, and participants.
  3. Students should be given an opportunity to negotiate meaning, i.e., to try to make themselves understood.
  4. Students should be able to express their opinions and share their ideas and feelings, i.e., learn to communicate by communicating.
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**Video Presentation:** You may have noticed that originators of the methods demonstrated on these videotapes take as their primary goal, students communicating in the target language. Many of these same methodologists emphasize the acquisition of linguistic structures or vocabulary. In the last method we will observe, the **Communicative Approach**, it is acknowledged that structures and vocabulary are important. However, adherents of the **Communicative Approach** feel that students must master the functions or purposes to which it is put before they will be able to truly use the language. Watch how this view of language influences the way the teacher designs the lesson. The **Communicative Approach** will be demonstrated by my colleague, Alex Silverman.

[Video Demonstration of the Communicative Approach by Alex Silverman: See Communicative Approach Materials following Commentary.]

**Commentary:** In the lesson we just observed, we saw the students learning to make a case. The vehicle the teacher used to have students practice making their cases was a role play. This gives the language they are to use a social context, a characteristic of all communicative events. It also gives the communication a purpose. Moreover, the role play gives the students an opportunity to practice using language forms that are not only linguistically accurate, but sociolinguistically appropriate as well, appropriate to the settings, topics, and participants.

By working in small groups, communicative interaction and cooperative relationships are encouraged. Such occasions give students an opportunity to work on negotiating meaning or trying to make themselves understood. They thus learn to communicate by communicating. As the students role play, the teacher moves from group to group acting as an advisor or a facilitator, instead of as a director.

During the last activity, the “parents” are given the opportunity to report their decision. Students are thus given an opportunity to express their opinions and to share their ideas on a regular basis. When they do so, errors of form are tolerated by the teacher and are seen as a natural outcome of the development of communication skills. The teacher may choose to draw attention to common errors in subsequent lessons, but for now the focus is on fluency and reinforcing the message that communication is primary.

This concludes the second tape of this two-tape video series on language teaching methodologies. You may wish to spend a few minutes reflecting on what you have seen. Try to identify techniques or principles which you find helpful and think about how you might adapt them to your own teaching situation. Of course, even those techniques or principles which you did not find useful will help you clarify your own beliefs about the teaching/learning process. For instance, what does your rejection of them tell you about our own teaching practice?

Being clear about why you do what you do will give you a firm foundation from which to sift through the methods demonstrated here. We have presented some options; now it is your responsibility to hold them up to the filter of your own beliefs, experience, and the needs of your students.

I wish you well.

**[End of Commentary]**

## VIDEO DEMONSTRATION LESSON PLAN

### Teaching Points

1. The discourse strategy of building and argument in American English “making a case.”
2. Specific formulas illustrating the strategy sequence: *Opening, Strengthening, Closing*.
3. Vocabulary relating to:
  - Types of living environments (small towns, cities, the country, etc.)
  - Categories of locations
  - Qualities of these environments

### Objectives

1. The students will be able to build an argument or “make a case” for something they believe, using the typical three-phase strategy in 2 above.
2. The students will master appropriate formulas (“to begin with,” “moreover,” “finally,” etc.) to implement each of the three phases of argumentation.
3. The students will gain practice and improve their skill in realizing the important function of *persuading*.
4. The students will master vocabulary relating to:
  - Categories of geographical locations in America
  - Qualities of the physical environment
5. On the cultural level, the students will gain familiarity with A) the variety of considerations (cultural, geographic, recreational, esthetic) that middle-class Americans consider when selecting a place to live, and B) the geographic dispersion typical of many American families.
6. On the interpersonal level, the students will gain practice in giving and backing up a point of view in a small-group situation.

### Video Lesson Steps in Sequence

1. The teacher introduces the function to be worked with in the lesson: *Persuasion*, as well as the topic selected to illustrate the function: *Choosing a Place to Live*.

2. Using a map, the teacher illustrates where he and members of his immediate family now live, placing this within the context of the general geographical dispersion of American families.
3. The teacher elicits from the students possible reasons for this dispersion.
4. The teacher summarizes the types of geographical locations each member of the family lives in.
5. The teacher explains the decision-making task facing his parents: selecting a place to live in (from among those represented by the three children).
6. The teacher explains the small-group task: the role-playing members of the teacher's family must arrive at a decision on a place to live.
7. The teacher announces the task to be done prior to small-group decision-making: learning about and practicing persuasion, using the students' own beliefs about the topic.
8. The teacher elicits from the students the advantages of big city life and notes these on chalkboard.
9. The teacher illustrates the three-part "making a case" strategy by presenting the case for the big city (based on the students' input).
10. The teacher reviews the structure of making a case, highlighting each phase.
11. The students practice the strategy by following the presented structure to make a case for one of the locations.
12. The teacher mentions various settings in which the strategy can be used.
13. The teacher sets up a family role-play introduced earlier by describing the roles to be taken on by members of each group and the steps to be followed in the activity. The sequence of tasks is also displayed on a sheet of paper (prepared before class).
14. The teacher announces he will be available to answer questions during the role-play.
15. The students divide into groups of four and receive role-play cards from the teacher. Each role-play card states which member of the family the person is to play.
16. Each group carries out the role-play, with the students making a case for the various locations followed by the "parent" in the group selecting the most persuasive argument. The teacher circulates, listening to the groups' discussions and answering questions. The teacher also enforces the sequence of steps.
17. In the large group once again, the "parent" from each group reports his or her decision and the reasons behind it, thus *making a case* for this location. The teacher keeps track of the votes.

18. The teacher gives a homework assignment, asking the students to make a case for their own place of residence in a one-page composition.

## **TEACHER-TRAINING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BASED ON THE VIDEO**

1. What appears to be the major focus of the students' effort and attention in the small group work? What does this suggest about how the Communicative Approach views language?
2. How would you characterize the spirit or atmosphere of the class? What specific things does the teacher do to foster this atmosphere?
3. Describe the patterns of communication in this class and their relative importance (student-to-student, teacher-to-student, student-to-teacher).
4. How would you characterize the students' motivation or interest in the tasks? What lesson elements contribute to student interest?
5. Why does the teacher choose a situation from his own life to introduce the target function?
6. Why did the teacher choose to pursue the discussion of family choices in small groups after presenting the problem to the large group?
7. What different roles or functions did the teacher assume during the course of the lesson? What did each of these functions contribute toward the students' accomplishment of the objectives?
8. In this lesson, the teacher asked students to role-play members of his family, rather than having them talk about their own family situations. Why was this done? Do you think it resulted in a loss of student investment?
9. Why does the teacher illustrate each stage of making a case with several formulas?
10. Identify which steps in the lesson correspond to the following phases of a traditional structural lesson:
  - teacher input
  - teacher explanation on focus and form
  - controlled practice
  - free practice
  - transportation (use of form in a different context)
11. How does the teacher go about verifying the students' understanding of the targeted function? The students' ability to use the function correctly?
12. What is the cultural content of the lesson? Give specific examples of:
  - cultural information (facts)
  - cultural patterns (generalizations and interpretations)

13. What opportunities are given for the students to create, communicate, and get feedback on individual messages?
14. The first “parent” to report in the large group fails to use the formula for making a case. Why doesn’t the teacher ask him to do this? What does this reveal about handling incomplete or imperfect learning in this approach?
15. In each group, the students are asked to make the best possible case for their location, and the “parent” then selects one. In other words, somebody in the group wins. Do you feel this element of competition jeopardizes harmonious group dynamics and the spirit of cooperation?
16. What are the purposes or objectives of the homework assignment in the form in which it was given?
17. Why did the teacher assign roles (and thus viewpoints) rather than simply allowing students to debate the merits of the various locations from their own perspective?

## **TEACHER-TRAINING ACTIVITIES BASED ON THE VIDEO**

1. Select a document incorporating a different discourse strategy:

- taking/holding the floor
- polite interruption
- choosing/avoiding topics, etc.

The document could be one of the following:

- a dialogue from a text
- a segment of a video or movie
- an extract from a book or magazine article
- an original piece written by the teacher-trainer.

2. Identify the overall discourse strategy or strategies, analyze the components (such as the three phases of “making the case”), and provide additional examples of each component. In other words, organize the raw material for a unit using a discourse strategy (as opposed to a grammatical point) as the point of departure.
3. Plan and enact the sequence of the video lesson (or parts thereof), using a different function as the teaching point. Each participant does this, then the group addresses the questions:
  - What was hard/easy in the planning phase?
  - What was hard/easy in the teaching phase?
  - What conclusions do you draw from these observations in terms of your own previous training, abilities, beliefs, teaching style?

4. Review the video, paying close attention to student output:
  - Within the context of the objectives of the lesson, what constitutes an “error”?
  - Within the framework of traditional grammatical accuracy what errors do you observe?
  - Which of these would you wish to follow up on?
  - What criteria did you use?
5. Design an activity that would enable students to work on these grammatical problems but remain consistent with the communicative approach.
6. Select another function or discourse strategy:
  - Determine the differences in how the function or strategy would be realized in a formal versus an informal situation.
  - Create two distinct roleplays on the specific function or strategy that explicitly reflects the formality differences.
7. Design a vehicle or vehicles that will allow you to assess the students’ mastery of the objectives of this and similar lessons. Can the same vehicle be used to assess grammatical accuracy?
8. From Teaching Points 1 and 2, design a different activity or series of activities to teach these same points (a debate, a game, a simulation, etc.).
9. Develop a plan to address the same teaching points as the video lesson, but using an information-gap approach to the information which the students need to conduct the role-plays.

## **EXTENSIONS OF THE DEMONSTRATION LESSON: INTERACTIVE/COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES**

### **[Add the formulas]**

Ask the students to work in groups or individually. Give them texts of sample arguments, in written form but with all transitional markers removed. Their task is to provide cohesiveness and direction to their texts (sample arguments) by adding appropriate connectors. (They should choose the ones used in the video demonstration lesson.)

### **[Scrambled Paragraph]**

This is a variation of the above, but the argument itself consists of scrambled sentences which the students must first re-arrange in order before providing the formulas.

### **[Summarize an Argument]**

Ask the students to listen to a detailed presentation of an argument in favor of some proposition. Their task (written or oral, group or individual) is to capture the principal points by summarizing the presentation in the three-part “making a case” format. When done orally and spontaneously, this exercise is good practice in paraphrasing and synthesizing.

### **[School Council]**

Ask the students to take a current issue with which they are all confronted in their school or institution. Arrange a mock Student Council where the students speak Pro and Con (for and against) the issue. They should use the “making a case” format and reflect their actual convictions.

### **[Cultural Lesson]**

After the students do the lesson as demonstrated on the video using the U.S. cultural context, ask them to imagine how the situation and decision might be altered if the context were their own culture. Relevant questions might be:

- Is geographical dispersion of family a reality?
- What determines where people live?
- Under what circumstances do people move?
- What underlying cultural patterns emerge from differences in living/relocation patterns?

### **[End of Lesson Materials]**