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Communicative Language Teaching

Communication lies at the heart of the human existence. Each interaction with another person relies on communication and communicative skills, whether they are verbal or non-verbal. A simple nod of the head can indicate understanding much as a hearty “yes” or “no” does, the same way a shrug of the shoulders indicates confusion or admits not knowing. Non-verbal communication is used most effectively when both parties of the conversation understand one another, both linguistically and culturally. While effective, non-verbal strategies can only take one so far in a conversation. In order to make progress and delve deeper, the participant must be able to use language – to employ vocabulary and manipulate grammar in order to produce coherent expression.

As teaching strategies move away from grammar-based instruction methods, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) techniques are valued due to their focus on communication between individuals. Based on the principle that the purpose of language is to communicate with others, CLT esteems using real-life situations as teaching tools in order to expose students to authentic language usage, such as newspaper clippings, websites and songs in the target language, as well as role playing of day-to-day interactions, for example shopping at a farmer’s market or checking into a hotel. In turn, these real-world reenactments bolster student motivation by proving how the second language (L2) may be used outside of the classroom.

CLT is a holistic approach to language instruction. It encompasses multiple teaching techniques in order to both appeal to various types of language learners and exercise different skillsets throughout the class. CLT distinguishes itself from other approaches first due to its focus on communication and active interaction and second, due to its inherent lack of strict definition or guidelines. To engage in CLT is to pull from a variety of methods and resources. What was once respected need not be cast aside in entirety; it may be retooled and incorporated into lesson plans once more. As our society evolves, incorporating more and more technology and offering seemingly unlimited access to information, so must our language instruction progress to accommodate students of the twenty-first century. Communication today is not the same as it was when the Grammar-translation Method was popular in the 18th century. Our students are not only using their phones for standard text messaging, they are reading the news, watching television and interacting through a variety of applications that are beginning to rewrite the basic principles of what it means to communicate. CLT is able to keep up with these changes by keeping the material fresh and relevant.

Finally, through exposure of the target language in an immersion context in the classroom, students are surrounded in the language from Day 1 and must use inductive and deductive skills in order to follow along and communicate with the instructor. As a result of this L2 immersion, students are able to acquire a working knowledge of grammatical structures without explicit explanation. In turn, they are able to use what they already know in order to make assumptions in context and push themselves further along their path of language learning.

Communicating allows humans to relate to one another. Learning a foreign language enhances our ability to make these connections. The Communicative Language Teaching approach breaks down language instruction into one simple goal and offers students the opportunity to break through linguistic barriers in order to carry out meaningful conversation.