

Andrea Littlewood Hyland Language Centre TESOL Spain 41st Annual Conference Madrid We're talking primary! ideas and activities for *real* communication. yls@hylandmadrid.com

The spotlight is on primary learners! How can we ensure they make progress with their English and help them deal with a complex world where clear communication is essential? In this workshop we will look at what successful communication involves and strategies and activities to help our children communicate positively and meaningfully. Realia, anecdotes and course books at the ready!

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So why this talk?

The beginning of a school year is busy: course content and aims are confirmed and last minute changes are made. Unfamiliar names may appear on class lists and clarification is sometimes needed to determine a child's gender, language and nationality. We need to remember that Ting You Chen in our infants class prefers to be called Leo when he's at school, that Claudia's sugar levels have to be tested half way through the class and that Dani has to leave class early every Monday . What about the last whatsapp message from a colleague? *I'm ready* Is she angry because she's waiting for me, or pleased that she's finished her work on time? There's no emoticon or emoji to help me understand the real meaning of her message. There are so many moments when clear communication is essential for any community to work successfully and yet it is easy for information to be misinterpreted, for hasty decisions to be made and communicated inappropriately.

As educators we have a certain responsibility to define "successful communication" and remind ourselves that children learn by example by looking, listening and experimenting. We need to provide them with guidance on how, when and what to communicate *and* how to do so in English with the necessary language support.

The workshop looks at how strategies and activities to promote successful communication can be integrated into our lessons to help children take steps towards gaining essential life skills.

What's communication all about?

Try starting a class with a chant to get the children working together. Say each line and do the action. For example, really stare at the class so that the meaning of the word is clear. Get the children to repeat each line after you.

Every stare, everybody wink, everybody wave, everybody blink, everybody whisper, everybody shout , now breathe in and breathe out.

It's interesting to speak with your young learners about how these actions can have a meaning. When do we stare? How does it make you feel if someone stares at you? When do we shout? Do we only shout when we are angry? Do we need to shout if the person we are speaking to is near us? We can breathe in to help ourselves feel calm and ready to speak. We're probably unaware of how often we blink but if we decide to take control and blink quickly when we speak to someone it could make the listener feel uncomfortable.

Decide how you would complete the following sentence **A good communicator**..... We might say: listens, looks at the person who is talking, looks interested, asks questions, thinks before speaking, takes turns to speak, uses appropriate body language, uses language that the other person can understand, asks politely for clarification if a message is unclear. Good communication is rarely a skill that comes to us naturally. It requires understanding and practice. Speak to your young learners about how to become a good communicator. Start with the basics. Do you look at the person who's speaking? Do you look interested?

What do we understand by *real* communication.

The "me now " and the "future me".

Real communication for an eight year old involves interacting with people such as family, friends, teachers, baby sitters and dentists. We can call this "Me now" communication. However, children are always looking at adults around them for their future roles. They enjoy role playing shops and being teachers. We should include this focus on "the future me" communication to prepare them with the life skills they will need when communicating with a much wider range of people in more diverse situations.

Emphasis on questions

Who? What? When? How? Ask lots of questions! Let's start now!

Get the children to make a "little book of questions" they can add to over the year. Each small page has a question word on one side and an example of the question and the answer on the other. The question book should be kept handy so the children have some support when asking questions about a photo in their books or when asking follow up questions in a conversation or a role play.

Recognising and reacting - *communication close ups!*

Encourage the children to react to snippets of conversations (a line from an imaginary conversation) Who is speaking? How is the person speaking? Where are they? What does the second person say?

For example. Draw an outline of the faces of two people looking at each other on the board. Explain that you've heard one of them saying "*I haven't seen you for ages!*" (a conversation snippet) Ask the class who the two people could be and answer the questions above so that the class create a clear context of two old friends who bump into each other. This is a useful way of feeding in language and seeing what the children are trying to say to create a realistic conversation between two people who are really pleased to see each other. One example of a conversation one class came up with was *Hi Tina /Hi Tom/I haven't seen you for ages!/Yes, it's great to see you ?/How are you?/I'm fine/Would you like to go for lunch? /Yes, good idea. Let's have a pizza. We've got lots to talk about.*

Strategies to help

1 Notice what they need

Classroom phrase books. Classroom language is essential if we want to promote the real communication that goes on in a classroom context. We might all use "*Can I have a rubber, please*" but look out for what the children really want to say *Like this, Andrea? I'm not sure about this. Can you help me? I think....I think so too. What have you got for number one? Really! That's cool. You're joking! I've nearly finished! I haven't finished yet! I've just finished. I need to check my answers. Can I help you? Do you need any help?*

You can help the children become more familiar with certain language by creating a password of the week to come into class. Mime last week was "*Hi Andrea . I haven't seen you for ages!*"

2 Start soon. Start simple. Keep it going

Make the most of those simple interactions eg when the children hand out material *Here you are. Thank you.* Practise with the *swapping objects* activity. Each student has three objects/flashcards and they exchange what they have with their partner by asking and answering as above.

Work on simple reactions in short conversations. Give the children stem sentences such as *Did you know that I can _____ Did you know that I 've got _____* The information they choose doesn't have to be true. They work in pairs saying their sentences and reacting with short expressions such as: *Really! That's interesting! I didn't know that! Cool!*

3 Create your context and give support

Ask the children to write down the following information: 1 The name of a country 2 The name of an animal 3 The name of a famous person 4 Something you like to eat 5 A name of a TV programme 6 a number between 2 and 10

The children are then given an outline of plans for a holiday (practising going to) and they fill the spaces with their information above eg I'm going to _____ I'm going to take my pet _____ with me. I'm going to meet _____ I'm going to eat _____ for breakfast every day I 'm going to watch _____ on TV every afternoon. I'm going to take _____ suitcases.

The children exchange their information react as suggested earlier. Really! You've helped them to create a "crazy information exchange". They can mingle with their conversations and decide who has got the funniest or most unusual answers.

4 Add a game element

Collecting points

The children fill in the sentence I love ____ because ____ I hate _____ because _____

The rules are: Only speak in English and finish the sentence with a good reason. For example: *I love going to the cinema because I think films are very interesting. I hate cheese because when I eat it I feel sick.* You get 2 points to you if you keep to the rules If you don't, your partner gets the two points.

Mind reader - language practice in a "real" context

Choose a few flashcards you want to focus on. The children must know which flashcards they are. Shuffle the cards in front of the class and place them on the table face down. Ask a volunteer to turn over the first one without you looking at it Use your powers to decide what it is. I know, it's a ____ The children reply with either *No, I'm sorry. It isn't a ____ Try again or Incredible!. You're right etc* This outlines serves as a model for the children to try out in front of the class and then in pairs.

I know ... It's a _____

No, I'm sorry. It isn't a ____ Try again! / Incredible. You're right!

Ok. Is it a _____ ?

No I'm sorry. It isn't a _____ Try again!

Is it a _____ ? (The children could offer help here by miming what they see.)

Yes it is. Here's your prize.....

Thank you very much.

Echo games

Make sure the children really listen and see what they can remember. Hand out a "pyramid" of words they have seen before. (as shown in the session) In pairs one child says one word and the second child repeats. The first child then says the two words and the second repeats. It becomes more difficult as the number of words increases. Orange. orange banana, orange banana , apple etc.

Echo and add game

Use the same procedure in a dialogue where the listener has to echo the information. Eg I'm really tired/Oh, so you're tired/ Yes, I went to bed late/So you went to bed late etc.

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Who said what?

Four children stand facing the board. The rest of the class close their eyes. You whisper to each child. Say to only one *It's your turn to speak* The child says the expression you want the class to recognise and practise and the rest of the class have to guess who has said the sentence.

5 Heads Together. Present your ideas and Learn from feedback

Dogs/cats/hamsters/turtles are the best pets!

eg The Dogs team think of their three points and write each point on a piece of paper. They then decide the order they are going to speak. *Who's going to speak first, second and third.* They practice their sentences. First of all, dogs...What's more...Finally...So, we think dogs are definitely the best pets. When they are ready to present their ideas in a clear voice the rest of the class listens and gives feedback: two things they liked and if necessary, one thing they could do better (eg stand up straight when speaking) This feedback technique is often called "Two stars and a wish".

Plan a day together in (your home town) with visitors

Encourage the children to share their ideas and knowledge using the social norms of turn taking and politely agreeing and disagreeing. *I think we should go to the.... first because...What do you think (name) ? I agree with you. /I think so too because...Use a pen/ball/microphone to pass to the next person to speak. Get them to make their own microphones.(Take a piece of used paper and scrunch it up into a ball and stick it on a wooden ice lolly stick!)*

As a class, prepare a check list for a good communicator. Give the list to a child who can tick off whether the group/pair are keeping to the norms of good communication eg Look at your partner. Listen to their ideas. Use an interested face. Ask questions to understand their ideas. *Can you tell me more? If you agree say I agree because ...*

6 I can see you. I can't hear you but I know what you're saying.

Body language can constitute 50% or more of what we are communicating - posture, gesture, eye contact Times Educational Supplement. Give the children the chance to read a dialogue (eg from their course book) and decide how they are going to stand and how they are going to look at their partner. Play the recording and ask the children to pretend they are speaking but focus on how they are speaking. Do they look angry, excited, worried?

Get the children to mime messages to each other eg *I really need to blow my nose. Have you got a tissue? or I'm freezing. Can you close the window. Thanks.* The class decides what the child is trying to say.

It's worth speaking about what gestures we use to say Yes or No.(Does everyone nod their head to agree?) Come here! Quiet please! Ok! The children can find out if the gestures would be clear to all cultures?

7 Give them a reason to really want to talk

Show your young learners photos that will get them to think about the world around them. eg photos of chaos caused by recent bad weather. When focussing on a sports lesson, take in photos of an unusual sport or a person who has won a special race eg Maria Lorena Ramirez, the 22 year old woman from Mexico's Tarahumara indigenous community who won a 50km ultra marathon wearing sandals. Help them see how we can be taken in by fake news. The session focuses on an article which is made up. Can they see why it isn't true?

8 Say it again - building confidence through task repetition

Try repeating dialogues as different characters eg an old man, a clown. or with puppets and masks.