

Who is the Winner in the Fight of Virtual and Real Communication?

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Abstract

Is it possible to persuade the teenagers to make fun of themselves in front of the classroom full of superstars and fashion models who are stuck either on the mirror or PC? What could be so attractive on the shopping dialogue that everybody has been listening to it breathlessly? What is humorous on the emergency phone call? Could you meet Macbeth in the medieval castle ruins in Slovakia?

Performing classic national fairy tale –boredom or enjoyable event full of fun?

How would you feel being John Quincy Adams performing his speech about freedom and against slavery in front of the US senators opposing his opinion? And what about the interview with your ICT teacher in quite unconventional situation ? Have you ever heard of a PC game called „Romeo and Juliet“?

The DVD presentation of various activities done on the English lessons with secondary school students would like to prove the fact that combination of multimedia and good old drama methods in ELT can lead into great creativity improvement, self-presentation confidence and explosion of teenagers` imagination.

Drama techniques implemented into ELT help students to use the English language textbooks vocabulary in situations copying the real life language use – improvisation.

Teenagers are not eager to do role plays in front of the class. In case they have to present / express themselves as real people ,they are uncertain , shy , not behaving naturally .The situation changes when they get a chance to be hidden behind the „ mask „ / i.e. they express somebody else`s problems /.

Secondly, teenagers love fun, doing and watching crazy things .In this case drama sketches are just the proper activities for them.

Thirdly, drama activities in combination with use of modern technologies / digital camera and digital projector, web pages /can help teachers of English to attract students

- a) *for reading English literature ,*
- b) *for watching films based on the classic English / American literature*
- c) *for stage performances*
- d) *for work on their own DVDs*

„Mark or not to mark” such activities ? Marking criteria will be introduced together with students` opinions on this sort of ELT methods.



1. If You are not on the Net You are Dead?

E-mails, text messages, blogs, Yahoo and Google browsers, social networks Twitter and Facebook, Skype calling and web video-conferences seems to replace the traditional or "out-dated" real face-to face communication soon.

Where is the role of traditional" real" communication among all those sophisticated inventions? Where is my task as a teacher of languages?

Should I teach how to use the ICT? Should I teach my students to communicate or how to express themselves? Is there any difference between communication and personal self-expression? Do the modern systems of communication help the individual to express itself or do they "kill" the real self-expression?

Is the beginning of the 21st century the era of "New Barbarians" ,"the homines novi" [1] who prefer... "gliding to depth "," speed to thought" , "sequencing to analyses", "multitasking to specialization", "communication to self-expression"... [1]

I was invited to Facebook by several people –relatives, colleagues, friends, former and present students. Based on the information how the system works I decided not to join it.I personally prefer face-to-face communication to Facebook statuses,

calling people personally to texting them, "choco-chats over a real cup of black tea and dark chocolate to Internet video-conferences .

At secondary schools in Slovakia we can see the sort of boom of the debate clubs .But why? The attendants of these seminars have learned that sitting and writing anything to anybody on social networks is a false "freedom" and it does not work in real life. Students being 15-19 yr. feel uncertain and shy opening the gates of the world of adults. It is the period of life when they should start to build up their self-confidence and improve the self-presentation in public. Instead of that many of them happily hide themselves behind the masks of false identities while in real life they remain uncertain and not-willing to find and express their real themselves.

After 1st year of leading debate seminar, the number of the applicants for this school year doubled. In our school curriculum the debate seminar is planned only for 1 year. The students who attended the seminar last year, were willing to continue in our debates even though they had to face a very critical auditorium of their classmates. For those who experienced the debate seminars ,the real discussion over some topic was a sort of challenge, a sort of "words fight "for their own ideas and they experienced sweet victory that they were able to communicate their opinions in foreign language. Presentation ones own ideas in public brings more stress even if you are naturally talkative person, because you not only have to concentrate on your body language and voice intonation but also on what to say and how to say which means not only be careful with your pronunciation but also your sentence structure should be sensible.

2. Come-back of the good old drama methods in ELT.

Why there are thousands of mini-video sketches on youtube made by individuals or groups? It is not only me who thinks they want to express themselves in front of the virtual public –visible but not in real interaction –as they do not feel to be experienced in it – and maybe, they are afraid of getting hurt in face-to-face communication or even jeered by their peers.

Is it possible in the era of global nets to feel comfortably while performing in front of the real people?

For more than 15 years I have enjoyed fun on the English conversation lessons together with my students of English at the secondary school: Gymnázium Sv Tomáša Akvinského in Košice, Slovakia. After passing some drama in ELT courses I learned that combination of language, humour and drama brings success in communication skills improvement and great explosion of students' creativity. Secrecy of success in the English language conversation lies in natural creativity of young people which was "awaken" with the help of drama techniques.

Majority of you remember the role-plays about shopping, booking a hotel room, interview for a job or doctor / patient dialogues .Could we find something interesting on traditional role-plays and attract young people of 21 century to perform them with enthusiasm ?The hook and belief that everything is possible and accepted leads to miracles. It is nothing special. Just count on teenagers' natural creativity and their sense of humour and practical jokes....and sometimes also on some good authors like Jerome Klapka Jerome ,William Saroyan or Leo Rosten or creative authors of the English language textbooks...But do not forget to use your own creativity!

Let me give you some recipes from creativity cookery book to make the English conversation lessons tasteful:

2.1 Shopping dialogue:

a/ You need one shop assistant whose task is to sell a pair of socks –one black and one white and persuade the customer that it is the latest fashion trend of Versace.

b/ What about to sell a banana peel as a cosmetics miracle for your pimples?

2.2 Booking a hotel room:

a/ You need a receptionist who is sad or permanently coughing or just bored and a hotel guest who is extremely happy or willing to go to the loo urgently

b/ And what about the receptionist using rappers speech rhythm and the hotel guest who is a foreigner not speaking native language correctly.

2.3 Interview for a job:

Take one interviewer and one applicant for a job.

a/ Maybe you need a bodyguard for mafia boss.

b/ Or you need a new Queen or the President ?

2.4 Talk show:

Variety of TV talk shows can offer you "inspiring" ideas for dialogues:

a/ Talk with your ICT teacher –in psychiatric clinic.

b/ Talk with talking parrot and his interpreter

c/ Talk with a fortune-teller.

2.5 Emergency phone call:

a/ A man in at Moscow Red Square wants to help to somebody very old. He calls to emergency office.

b/ A young lady after the car crash speaking to mobile operator.

2.6 Fairy tales:

Take a traditional fairy tale, turn it upside-down. You also need a cook who can cook only noodles, a boxing princess,3 princess loving rock and hip-hop music and just watch.

2.7 Historical events:

Can you kill the boredom coming out of thick folios on English speaking countries history or literature? Well, you need:



- good film based on historical events like Amistad / by S. Spielberg / from the history of slave trade,
- plus well-informed auditorium –like the USA Embassy representatives born in the South,
- and a brave student acting as ex-president Quincy Adams and tearing into pieces the Emancipation Proclamation at the USA Supreme Court.

2.8 Shakespeare plays:

And what about dear Willie? Could we avoid teaching Shakespeare dramas? Of course, not!

a/ So take one bloody tragedy –Macbeth is the best. Go for a trip to the ruins of medieval castle and make own movie.

b/ If you want to update Willies most popular tragedy Romeo and Juliet and turn it to PC game. You do not need to teach your students 16th century English. Simple expressions will work : Fire! Shoot! Your score is...Congratulations! Go to level 3!

/ All the above-mentioned activities were recorded./

3. ICT as a Tool Improving Creativity and English Communication Skills.

In above-mentioned sketches we were working with digital camera, digital projector, PC software for making films and burning DVDs and we used the comfort of web-pages browser to get some inspirations from youtube or search for information.

But here majority of time spent working on the sketches was used for real communication in foreign language with real and visible classmates , not being stuck at PC.

I do agree with effective use of ICT for learning languages –but not like nowadays in quite a lot of schools in Slovakia where implementing of ICT into teaching process has been introduced like something which brings miraculous effectiveness and if you protest that e-learning is not the “top” methodology how to learn / teach foreign language communication skills, your colleagues look at you as the representative of out-dated ways of teaching.

4. Could We Mark Creativity?

If you want your students to speak foreign language freely and without stress, you have to break inside them the invisible psychological barrier. The older your students are the thicker the communication barrier is. If your students are under stress of possibility to get poor marks based on their oral answers then majority of them will never speak fluently. But try to attract them for performing funny sketches or involve them into interesting debate about some “hot theme”. Do you need some “score” of their speaking skills ?If yes, what do you think about this marking system?

Never check only single words knowledge. Attract your students for performing funny sketches .Let them write their own ones. Mark only the best sketches. If the sketch is very short and with a lot of mistakes in basic vocabulary, ask them to improve it. Discuss topical news and themes interesting for them .If you need to involve shy people into debate –let them prepare their discussion contributions at home. Power Point presentations help students to learn self –confidence presentation in public.

After the presentation or debate give your students feedback about the mistakes they made in general not personal way. Praise them a lot. Laugh with them at the sketches they intended to be humorous. Join them to role-play with them.



5. Who is the Winner in the Fight of Virtual and Real Communication?

If you are a teacher of languages, your students should benefit from both –virtual and real communication in a balanced way. Texting, mailing, blogging should not “kill” the real “choco-chat “face-to-face debates . Facebook statuses should not predominate real meetings or dating, twinkling diodes of your PC should not attract you more than the eyes of your beloved person. Voices on Skype should not sound friendlier than the real voices of your friends and relatives. Touch of PC mouse will never be warmer than the touch of human being hand is.

Yes, the modern ICT technologies invented and developed by us are great and miraculous, but nothing can replace the choir of human voices singing Verdi operas choruses.

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