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COMMUNITY-ORIENTED ACTIVITIES IN THE TEACHING OF ESL

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ABSTRACT

Community-Oriented Activities in the Teaching of ESL is a selection of projects developed to expand communicative competence among ESL students. Through such experiential learning, in which the students become involved with the target language outside the classroom, the reinforcement of survival skills and an opportunity for actual communication with native speakers are provided.

Each activity is divided into four parts; a description of the objectives; a section on information to collect; a section which gives the student practice in using the language in situations; and follow-up suggestions upon completion of the activity.

Student participation in a variety of social interactions can serve the following purposes: the teaching of American culture; vocabulary building; developing awareness of and familiarity with institutions in the society; practice of structures taught in the classroom; and preparation for dealing with situations the student will encounter daily as a member of a community.

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INTRODUCTION

I have developed a selection of community-oriented activities to be used in expanding communicative competence among ESL students. Through such experiential learning by doing, in which the students become involved with the target language outside the classroom, real communication and survival skills are enhanced. The community in which the students are studying serves as a resource, supplying many interaction activities that prepare a non-native speaker to participate fully and confidently in his/her new environment.

Communicative competence includes knowledge of the linguistic elements of the language, or grammar. It also requires an awareness of when, how and with whom it is appropriate to use the varying forms. Direct participation in a variety of social interactions can be a beneficial educational experience and a motivating factor in mastering the target language; a way to learn the type of language appropriate to different situations. Other benefits include the teaching of American culture; vocabulary building; developing awareness of and familiarity with institutions in the society; practice of structures learned in the classroom; and preparation for dealing with situations the student will encounter daily as a member of an American community.

I have defined several of the terms used above to clarify the goals of this project, as follows:

experiential learning - going beyond the sometimes artificial situation of the classroom (drills, exercises, texts, pattern practice) into the community where the language is used "naturally" by native speakers. The student is experiencing, or coming into

contact with the language in its everyday, natural form, especially where listening and speaking skills are concerned.

real communication - using the target language in a meaningful way to convey information and ideas, as opposed to pattern practice, repetition drills, etc. The student is "on his own", so to speak.

interaction activity - a situation in which the student is communicating in the target language with members of the community who are usually native speakers; may be in the form of question/answer type interviews, or discussions, involving the exchange of information and ideas.

appropriate use of the language - sociolinguistic knowledge that various forms (polite vs. informal, for example) are used, depending on differing circumstances. Americans tend to be more casual in their speech than other cultures, but they do observe certain "rules" of behavior and speech according to the situation in which they are speaking -- with friends vs. strangers, or applying for a job vs. buying groceries.

FORMAT OF THE ACTIVITIES

Each activity has been divided into four parts. The first is a description in which the nature and objectives of the activity are stated, with suggestions to the teacher for introducing it to the students.

The second part consists of a list of questions regarding general information/facts to be gathered on the visit. These questions provide a framework for the activity, and may be adapted according to the interests of the students. They are encouraged to add questions or collect information not included in the lists. The teacher should review these with the students prior to the visit to check for new vocabulary or clarify any doubts the students might have about the task assigned. These questions familiarize the students with the basic aspects and functions of a particular institution, and thus enable them to use it successfully. The questions may be answered by asking employees who work there, by consulting signs and booklets in the building, by telephone calls, etc.

The third part allows the student to use the language in the context of a specific situation. In many of the activities, the polite request ("I would like...", "May I have...", "Could you tell me...") rather than the imperative form is practiced when requesting information or buying something. The situations in this section are presented as guidelines for the student to follow on his/her visit, but he/she is free to add others. It may be helpful for the student to write down the answers to these situations before returning to the next class.

The teacher is free to exploit any of the structures or vocabulary that appear in the questions and situations; for example, an exercise on the comparative and superlative (nearest/farthest, cheaper/ more expensive) could develop from the Post Office activity. The teacher may choose to work with them in class either before or after the activity has been completed by the students. These special elements (vocabulary items, primarily) are briefly noted at the end of this third section.

The fourth part includes suggestions for follow-up activities in the classroom, such as role plays, student-initiated dialogues, oral and written presentations and reports, and class discussions, all based on what was accomplished during the visit. These activities serve a dual purpose: they help the students to judge the success of the project, and create an opportunity for reinforcement of the material learned; and they provide the teacher with criteria for evaluation.

The activities are aimed primarily at intermediate to advanced level classes. Because they require a large degree of student investment in terms of initiative and independent work, the teacher should be careful to clarify the activity before it is undertaken, and generate student interest in the project.

ACTIVITY I - THE BANK

DESCRIPTION

This activity is designed to familiarize the student with a bank. Before introducing the questions on information to collect there, the teacher might begin by asking the students to contribute what knowledge they already have from using banks in their own countries. The questions should be reviewed carefully, as there is probably a lot of new vocabulary, but the teacher should avoid providing the answers, which the student himself will be attempting to discover on his own through his visit to the bank.

INFORMATION TO COLLECT

1. What is a checking account? a savings account?
2. What does "withdrawal" mean? Deposit? Balance?
3. Can you take money out of a savings account at any time?
4. What is interest? What bank gives the highest interest in the area?
5. Does your bank have 24-hour banking services? How is this accomplished?
6. How do you open an account?
7. How many types of checking accounts are there? What are the differences between them?
8. What other services do banks offer?
9. What are the hours of the bank?

USING THE LANGUAGE

1. You want to open a checking account. Who will you speak

- to in the bank? What kind of questions does this person ask you?
2. You want traveller's checks. Where will you go in order to get them? What must you do with them before you leave the bank?
 3. Ask how money can be transferred directly from your country to your account at this bank. Is there a waiting period before you can draw on it?

Structures emphasized: Polite requests are practiced, i.e., "I would like to open an account."

Useful vocabulary items: withdraw, take out, deposit, overdraw, balance, statement, interest, account.

FOLLOW-UP

Students can role play in pairs the situations which they encountered at the bank. For example, one student could request to open an account and his partner could be the bank officer who asks questions and assists him with the forms.

Blank checks and deposit and withdrawal slips could be brought in to provide practice in correctly filling these out. Again, students could role play situations involving customer and teller in various transactions.

Students can write brief dialogues in pairs, based on the previous situations, or on a possible problem, such as an overdrawn account or a lost checkbook, or an error in a statement received.

ACTIVITY 2 - ENTERTAINMENT

DESCRIPTION

This activity acquaints the students with various kinds of local entertainment available in their area. Depending on the size of the city, the possibilities may be almost limitless. Much of the information may be gathered from newspapers, in which case part of the activity will be a reading exercise. The teacher can suggest that students also check bulletin boards, libraries, the local college or university, markets, TV and radio, etc. for announcements regarding movies, concerts, museums and sports events. Because there are so many types of entertainment, usually available, the students may choose to divide the activities among themselves according to their interests, and report back to the class to share information on their specific project.

As a way of introducing the subject, the teacher might ask the students to share with the class the kinds of entertainment popular in their own countries (are these different for men and women, and various age groups?), and perhaps compare these to what is popular in the U.S.

INFORMATION TO COLLECT

1. How many movie theaters are there in the town?
 - a. What films are playing this week at two of the theaters?
 - b. At what times are the films shown?
 - c. How much is admission for children? for adults?
 - d. What do the letters G, GP, R and X stand for?
2. If there is a university, what kinds of entertainment are available there? Where is the ticket office?

3. What are the hours of the local museum? What kinds of exhibits can you see there?
4. Where can you go to see plays and musical concerts? How often are performances given? Why do the prices of the tickets vary?
5. Is there a park in the city? What kinds of entertainment can you find there? What sports facilities are available to the public?
6. How many discotheques are there in your town? How late are they open? How old do you have to be to drink alcoholic beverages in this state? What kind of clothes do people wear in the disco?
7. Is there a sports stadium in your town? What kind of events are held, and when? How much do tickets cost?

USING THE LANGUAGE

After collecting as much information as possible from the telephone, newspapers, notices and people in the town, a practical (and hopefully enjoyable) opportunity to use the language would be in the form of field trips in small groups to the various places researched. Following are suggested activities and situations for practice.

1. Go to a film of your choice in a local theater. Ask if there are smoking and non-smoking sections. Ask when the film will end.
2. Visit a discotheque or night club. Order something to drink. Ask someone to dance. How would you politely refuse if someone asked you to dance?

3. Attend a play or musical performance. At the ticket office, ask the prices and location of seats and choose the ones you want.
4. See a sports event (baseball or football game, for example). Buy tickets at the box office. Ask which teams are competing.

Useful expressions and vocabulary:

"How much are tickets for _____?" "How long does _____ last?"

"Which seats are better?"

casual, formal dress; intermission; orchestra, balcony, mezzanine, dress circle.

FOLLOW-UP

If the various activities are divided among the students, a useful follow-up would be oral presentations to the class in which the students describe their visits, i.e., what they saw; how the entertainment differed from a similar event in their own country; a synopsis, if it involved a movie or play; whether they enjoyed it or not, and so on.

As a follow-up writing activity, those students who saw a movie or play could describe the story and characters in a composition to be shared with the class. Those who attended a sports event could explain the rules of the game.

Role play situations may be developed from the experiences students encountered on their visits; for example, one student asking another to dance and being refused; requesting information about prices and seating in a box office and purchasing tickets.

ACTIVITY 3 - VISITING A SCHOOL

DESCRIPTION

This activity is designed to introduce students to the American educational system through the direct observation of a classroom. With the co-operation of the local grammar or high school, the teacher could arrange visits for several students or the entire class. (The activity has the added advantage of providing American students with the opportunity to meet and speak with foreign students who could perhaps share something of their culture with the class they visit.) In collecting answers to the information questions, the student will be using the language as well as the teacher and students of the school as informants.

With the school teacher's permission, a useful speaking exercise for the foreign student could be a short presentation to the class on his/her country.

INFORMATION TO COLLECT

1. What hours do the students attend school each day?
How long is each class? How many classes do the students attend?
2. What subjects do the students study? Is religious instruction included?
3. Do the students wear uniforms? If not, how do they dress?
4. How much interaction is there between the students and the teacher? Do the students often speak and ask questions, or does the teacher do most of the speaking?

5. Can you tell what kind of relationship there is between the students and the teacher? Does it seem friendly or formal?
6. Describe the classroom. What kind of equipment is there? How is it decorated?
7. Do the students have much homework and many tests?
8. How many breaks are there during the day? How long is the lunch break?
9. What kinds of extra-curricular activities do the students participate in?
10. What do the students know about your country?

USING THE LANGUAGE

In this activity, the student has the opportunity to use the language as he/she interviews the members of the class for the above information. If the student gives an oral presentation on his country, further speaking practice is provided. A useful activity, if possible, would be for the foreign student, as a guest visitor, to act as an informant for the class, answering any questions spontaneously that they might wish to ask about his/her country, customs, educational system, etc.

Useful vocabulary:

curriculum, recess, principal, elective, credit

FOLLOW-UP

Oral or written reports on their visit would enable the students to organize their impressions and share them with each other. This activity lends itself to a comparison of American schools and those in the students' own countries, and can develop

into a discussion of how certain aspects differ, according to what the students observed on their visits. They should feel free to discuss their feelings while on the visit and contribute any criticisms they may have.

ACTIVITY 4 - THE LIBRARY

DESCRIPTION

This activity is especially appropriate for college-bound students who will need to know how to use a library once they have undertaken an academic course of study. The tasks are designed to familiarize the students with the general resources available in a library, and to allow them to gain first-hand experience in using these resources.

Often libraries can arrange tours for ESL classes which give the students an overall introduction to how the library operates and what is available there.

The students would benefit from a general discussion of the main procedures and resources in a library, preceding the visit.

INFORMATION TO COLLECT

1. What are the hours and days the library is open?
2. What do you need to do in order to receive a library card?
3. How long may you keep books on loan? Is there a fine for overdue books? How much is it?
4. How do you locate periodicals and newspapers which are not on the shelf?
5. How do you locate books? How are the card catalogues organized?
6. Does the library lend records and cassettes?
7. What system of classification does the library use for books?

8. Where are general reference books located? (encyclopedias, dictionaries, atlases, phone books, almanacs, etc.)
9. Using two reference books and one book found in the card catalogue, locate information on your country. Write down the bibliographical data for these resources.
10. Using the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, find two magazine articles about your country. Write down the necessary bibliographical data.
11. What is the difference between fiction and non-fiction?
12. Where do you go if you have a specific question to research, but are not sure how to look it up?

USING THE LANGUAGE

1. You want to know the population of Caracas. Call the reference desk by telephone and ask for the statistic.
2. Ask the librarian if there are any ESL books in the library.
3. Ask if there are books in your native language.
4. If there is microfilm equipment in the library, ask a librarian for assistance in operating it.
5. At the information desk, ask if you may apply for a library card.

Useful vocabulary:

librarian, reference, resource, periodical, overdue, check out, Dewey Decimal, Library of Congress, stacks, due date, index, microfilm.

FOLLOW-UP

Once the students have a feel for the library and know where to go for information, the teacher may assign reference projects as an exercise to reinforce what they have learned. Various topics could be handed out or, more effectively, the students could select their own, and find the information using various reference materials. They could then report back to the class on the outcome of their searches. One possibility would be for the students to look for information on each other's countries and share their findings with the class.

Role play situations could include a student asking a librarian for assistance with a reference question; requesting a library card; or returning an overdue book.

Note: Richard Yorkey's Study Skills for Students of ESL has an excellent section on using the library, which includes tasks for practice with the card catalogue, Reader's Guide and general reference books.

ACTIVITY 5 - THE POST OFFICE

DESCRIPTION

This activity is designed to help the student find out useful information about the post office and the services it provides. A visit to the local post office will provide the answer to the questions on information to collect. The teacher might want to point out the availability of various directories and notices in the buildings where students can find some of their answers.

INFORMATION TO COLLECT

1. Where is the post office nearest to your school?
What are its hours? Are there other branches in town?
2. What is a zip code? Why is it useful? How can you find zip code numbers for other parts of the state and country?
3. How is the price of stamps decided?
4. What are aerogrammes? Are they cheaper or more expensive than air mail letters?
5. How is the cost of mailing a package determined?
6. What does it mean to insure a letter or package? Up to what amount can a package or letter be insured? How much is the insurance?
7. What is a money order? What is the limit on the amount you can send? What is the cost of buying one?
8. Can you send telegrams from the post office?
9. How many slots are there for mailing letters? How

are they labeled?

10. How is this post office different from one in your own country?

USING THE LANGUAGE

1. You want to buy some stamps. How would you ask the clerk for three stamps that cost 15¢ each? For stamps to mail letters to your country?
2. You need to know the zip code for a certain street in your town. How would you ask for this information?
3. You want to know how much it would cost to insure a package to your country. How would you ask the clerk?

FOLLOW-UP

This may be in the form of a role play involving pairs of students. One could take the role of clerk, the other could purchase stamps or request information. Students could also write short dialogues based on the above situations or others which they may have encountered on the trip.

ACTIVITY 6 - TRANSPORTATION

DESCRIPTION

This activity provides the student with practical experience in making travel arrangements and familiarizing himself with various means of transportation available in his/her area. If a homestay is featured in the ESL program, it would be especially useful in preparing the students for their trip.

Destinations of towns in the area, or of sites within a city will of course depend on the students' area, and should be adapted accordingly. I have used the San Francisco area as an example.

INFORMATION TO COLLECT

1. What city bus would you take from Union Square to Fisherman's Wharf? What is the fare? Will the bus driver give you change?
2. What BART (subway) line would you take from Downtown San Francisco to Berkeley? How is the price of a ticket determined?
3. From where in San Francisco do you catch a bus to the airport?
4. How much does a round-trip plane ticket cost from San Francisco to Los Angeles? a train ticket?
5. How many daily flights are there from SF to LA? How long is the trip?
6. Where can you rent a car?
 - a. How much does it cost to rent a car per day? Per week?
 - b. Do you have to have a U.S. driver's license to rent

a car? a credit card?

7. How many possible routes can you take if you drive from S.F. to L.A.? Which route is the quickest?
8. Who can you call for information about local bus transportation within the city? to points outside the city?

USING THE LANGUAGE

1. Ask a city bus driver for directions to Golden Gate Park by bus. Ask if you must transfer.
2. Visit a car rental agency and find out the requirements for renting a car.
3. Plan a trip to another city in the area by bus, BART or train. Make the travel arrangements at the station ticket office.
4. If you have a car, go to a gas station for a map of the area or state, and ask for directions to a point of interest in the area.
5. Call an airline or visit a travel agency and ask for information about a flight from your town to another city in the U.S. Do the fares differ according to the time of day or week you leave? What is the cheapest way to fly? How could you ask for this information?

Useful vocabulary:

reservation, fare, transfer, timetable, itinerary,
schedule, arrival, departure, excursion

FOLLOW-UP

A practical direction-asking and giving exercise in class could result from the trips students made earlier. With the aid

of timetables and maps (road, bus lines, air routes, for example) students could explain to each other how they accomplished their excursions, or how they would plan an itinerary for a future trip. They could compare cost and time differences for alternate methods of transportation from one place to another.

Role plays may center around a traveller requesting information in a travel agency; buying tickets in a ticket office; a passenger asking directions in a city; tipping a taxi driver; losing luggage on a flight; or missing a connection.

ACTIVITY 7 - RENTING AN APARTMENT

DESCRIPTION

This activity is designed to aid students in their search for housing, and to provide practical experience through actual apartment hunting. The information section introduces terms and abbreviations used in ads and in leases. The classified section of the local newspaper is a good place to start as an introduction to the vocabulary which applies to apartment renting. Bulletin boards, rental agencies and a college housing office are other sources.

INFORMATION TO COLLECT

1. How many ways are apartments to rent advertised?
2. These abbreviations are found in the newspaper in the classified section under "Apartments to Rent." What do they mean?
 - a. furn.
 - b. mo.
 - c. util. incl.
 - d. lg.
 - e. opt.
 - f. first, last and dep.
 - g. xlnt
 - h. AEK
3. What is a security deposit? Is it returned to you? When?
4. What does "utilities included" mean?
5. What is a lease? What are some of the conditions in a lease? What is the usual length of a lease?
6. Are children or pets allowed in most apartments?
7. What does "sublet" mean?
8. What is the difference between a landlord and a manager?

USING THE LANGUAGE

1. You want to rent an apartment. Using the newspaper or local bulletin boards for listings, call several of the numbers and make appointments to see the available apartments.
2. Visit a rental agency or housing office. Ask what is required to receive the listings. Is there a fee for this service?
3. After you have arranged an appointment, meet the landlord of an apartment you are interested in. Ask for the following information:
 - a. Are pets allowed?
 - b. For how many months is the lease?
 - c. What are the conditions of the lease?
 - d. Are utilities included?
 - e. Is the building generally quiet?
 - f. When will the apartment be available?
 - g. Are laundry facilities located in the building?

Useful vocabulary:

vacancy, security, utilities, deposit, lease, landlord, listing

FOLLOW-UP

The teacher can bring copies of a sample lease to class and discuss the various terms with the students. A written quiz on the material would enable the teacher to check for comprehension and serve to reinforce the material for the students.

Role plays or dialogues can involve the following situations:
a student meeting with a landlord to see an apartment and discuss
the terms of the lease; calling for information from newspaper
ads; inquiring at a rental agency or housing office for available
rentals; interviewing a roommate to share an apartment.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

The possibilities for using the local community as a resource are extensive, and will vary according to its size and character, i.e., whether it is a metropolitan city, a suburb or a rural town. I have listed further suggestions which the teacher may wish to develop on his/her own and adapt with a particular community in mind.

1. Telephone calls
2. Shopping (Supermarket, Department Store)
3. Interviewing businessmen
4. Hospitals/Health Services
5. Attending a church service
6. Restaurants

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