The English Experience
An experiential approach to learning English

“Tell me and I’ll forget;
Show me and I’ll remember;
Involve me and I’ll understand.” (Chinese Proverb)

Experiential Educational Methodology and Language Application

Now, think about educational experiences (not necessarily just language classes) that you remember the most. Weren’t they experiences when you were involved and engaged? Weren’t they out-of-the-ordinary learning situations? Maybe, it was a field trip where you experienced the subject or topic, first-hand and all of your senses were excited. Maybe it was a special project that you worked on with a group of your peers. Maybe, it was something where you were able to use your own creativity and explore areas of interest, or perhaps you applied knowledge that you already had to real-life situations.

We believe that experiential learning opportunities provide an enriching environment where students gain English competency while acquiring valuable life lessons. Each course is specifically designed around the learners’ needs and abilities and allows the language to come alive!

While certainly learning basic rules of a language and building vocabulary are valuable components of language acquisition, there is one language the orists that suggest other means of learning a second language that move away from traditional pedagogy (Prabhu, 1987; Nunan, 1989; Willis, 1996).

Task-based Learning

Task-based learning focuses on having students apply their language skills in real life situations instead of having them focus on isolated components: structure, function or a specific set of vocabulary. As well it pushes students to use a wide variety of communication skills. The concept, originally developed by N. Prabhu in Bangladesh, Southern India, is based on the belief that students often learn more effectively when their minds are focused on an activity (or task), rather than on the language they are using.

Sinking Islands!

Example for merging English teaching with experiential education Material:
• Rope or chalk to make island boundaries
• Sheets of paper (enough for each student to have one)
• Tasks or activities often require the students to combine skills to comprehend, produce, manipulate, and interact with the language in an authentic manner

Task-based approach

WELLER - “SOUND OF NATURE”

One of my favorite sounds in nature is the sound of a flowing stream. I love to find a secluded place next to a stream in the mountains, take off my shoes, walk in the icy cold water, and then sit on a big rock or log and just listen to the sounds of the rushing water and watch all the life that revolves around a stream.

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The Traditional Model

Think about your own foreign language classes in school. Maybe it’s rather difficult to remember what you actually learned in them, what you do remember, it’s not very pleasant, maybe? It involves sitting in a classroom, listening to your teacher go on and on about the importance of grammar rules and loadings of vocabulary. It’s monotonous and often you are bored or trying to translate words or sentences that don’t relate to your life. Listening to recordings of hard-to-understand people talking and on occasion you had the opportunity to speak or apply what you had learned.

Activity

Using a story explain that 2 groups of international scientists have been researching the effects of global warming on some small islands in the Pacific. To their amazement, the sea level is rising much faster than they expected and soon the 2 small islands where they are working will be flooded. In order to escape from danger (not to mention the water is filled with hungry sharks!), they need to get both teams to safety on the big island. Each member receives a small raft boat that can only be placed in the water once (not moved) and will float away if it is not in constant contact with someone.

Other Rules

Students must communicate in (English) in order to come up with a solution and reach the final goal. If someone speaks a language other than English, then a penalty can be assigned of various degrees if someone touches the water then they will have to be taken back to the small islands for first aid treatment! If a raft boat is left without contact, then it float’s away (is taken). Rules must be applied carefully as not to discourage the group’s overall success.

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Not just a Language Course!

Having the students focus on and improve their English is a central focus of the English Experience programs but it is not the only thing! The subject matter English, is made applicable to the students when they leave the program. Students might earn and explore and in the process, be providing an emergency shelter plan; camping a trip, or examine the health of a local river. Activities that encourage students to work together require good communication, and experience leadership and cooperation. As well, the students are provided with the environment to use their language.

The instructors also bring their own special touch to the program no matter if it be the use of international music, Native American storytelling, or adventure stories and skills which enhance the student’s experience.

In the end, the students hear the students, not the teacher, tell the story, plan the activities and communicate with each other. And if we forget to mention that FUN is a big part of the experience?

Stay Tunded!

Visit the Blog from the OeAV English Experience Camps I and II. After each of the camps in August 2007, well post journal entries, photos, and stories about the camp — written of course by the students!

http://oeav-englishcamp.blogspot.com