COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

Communication activities involve the learners in tasks in which they need to collaborate in pairs or in groups to reach a consensus or complete a task in a given amount of time. The specific language focus is less relevant than their ability to communicate information, ideas and expertise and express themselves freely. The emphasis on real communication helps to bridge the gap between the real world and the artificial learning environment. The tutor does not exercise control over the language chosen and thus they can be seen as ‘freer’ language activities.

The range of activities is wide and includes discussions, role-plays or simulations (of meetings), guessing games, information-gap (where the learners have incomplete information and must communicate with others in the group to complete the task) and preparing presentations/reports.

Much of the work the tutor does in the language learning environment involves selecting materials to present or practise a particular language item and is therefore controlled by the tutor to some extent. The focus of this work tends to be on learning rather than on real communication. The ultimate aim of trade union learners, however, is to be effective communicators in the target language in the real world so the tutor must provide activities in which they are free to develop their communicative competence. By having the freedom to experiment with the language, learners can identify their own strengths and weaknesses and can gain confidence by ‘rehearsing’ situations they may find themselves in as part of their trade union responsibilities.

The ultimate aim of trade union learners, is to be effective communicators in the target language in the real world

The tutor can also help learners to develop and extend their language skills by providing appropriate feedback (see below).

Trade union learners are professionals who bring their own expertise, knowledge, personality and life-experience to the learning environment.
It is important that they are allowed to express themselves in a natural way to help foster good rapport, develop personal relationships, enhance group dynamics and increase learner motivation, which are all essential elements in providing a successful earning experience. Communication activities provide an opportunity for this to happen.

Setting up the activity

The first responsibility of the tutor is to set up the activity carefully, for on this depends its successful outcome. To ensure this the learners need to know why they are doing it, what their role is, what the other roles are, what the task involves, what they are expected to achieve, who they are working with and the time in which they have to complete the task.

- Clear instructions should be given by the tutor, who should also use check questions to ensure that learners have understood what is expected of them.
- The tutor should set up the pairs or groups clearly so that the learners know exactly who they are working with and what their role is within their group.
- In order that communication is most effective, tables and chairs should be moved so that learners are facing each other and as far away from other groups as possible.
- The tutor should also ensure that before expecting the learners to take part in the activity, they have been taught appropriate language such as `Right, who's going to take notes?' or `OK, you start' etc.
- The more care that is taken in the setting up of the activity, the more successful it will be.

Monitoring the activity

The second responsibility of the tutor is to monitor the progress of the activity. As these are 'free activities', the tutor should not be involved in the activity once it has begun. It is important for the tutor not to be drawn into the work of any particular group as the focus of the activity can be re-directed towards the tutor rather than encouraging the learners to develop their own communicative strategies. The role of the tutor should be to monitor the groups, observe and note down areas of difficulty for later discussion at the feedback stage, and not to give instant correction.

Giving feedback

The third responsibility of the tutor is to provide the learners with feedback. Learners need to know that although the activity is 'free' inasmuch as they are using all the language at their disposal, it will
ultimately be a learning experience. They often feel frustrated that they are not being corrected and are merely reinforcing their own errors, so the tutor needs to end the activity by giving some feedback.

The obvious (and easiest) type of feedback to give is to focus on areas of grammatical or lexical inaccuracy. This can be done by writing a list of inaccurate statements on the board and asking learners to identify what is wrong in each case. This avoids focusing on the learner who made the error.

It can also be done on a personal basis either by giving individual feedback sheets to learners or by videoing the activity and focusing on individual errors in a session or in an individual tutorial.

However, giving feedback on linguistic accuracy tends to move the focus away from communicative ability and fluency and can lead to learners being inhibited about their language. It is therefore good practice to vary the type of feedback given after advising the learners what the focus of the feedback is going to be, for example, pronunciation, information, appropriateness, inventiveness, and reformulations, where the tutor gives learners alternative and more effective ways of saying things.

Written feedback can be given either individually, if the group is small, or perhaps more usefully to all the learners using a positive/negative feedback sheet. The tutor notes down good language items and problem areas from all the groups, makes photocopies and distributes them. In this way the learners will get the benefit of language used in other groups as well as their own. This method of giving feedback is particularly useful for discussion or meeting-type activities.

Reformulation is an invaluable way of providing feedback and using video is an excellent way of presenting this. The tutor can pause the video, (or ask the learner to pause the video at a point where they are searching for the best way to express themselves) and offer alternative language. This sharing of expressing ideas is very effective in making the learners feel they are improving their communicative effectiveness.
Example activities

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

All Levels

EXAMPLES

Activity 1  Your town or region

Where are you from?
Where do you live now?

- Explain what part of your country you come from.
- Draw a map to help your colleague understand the location.
- Show your colleagues some photographs and describe your town or region.
- Talk about the history and the economy of your region.
- Are there any special products, food and drink and do you have any samples?

Activity 2  Study tour

Visit a local town or villages with a group of colleagues and prepare a poster to report back to the other members of the class.

Examples of things you can include:
- interesting buildings
- tourist attractions
- shops
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- cultural activities
- signs in English
- unusual aspects of life.

Activity 3  A survey

Find out how many nationalities are represented on this course and how many people there are from each country.

- What is the average age of the course participants?
- What is the most common hobby in the group?
- What is the most common dislike in the group?
- Are there any things members share in common?

Activity 4  The problems of part-time work

An increasing number of people, both men and women, work part-time today.

Study the points below, which give some of the disadvantages and problems of part-time work. List them in order of priority beginning with the most serious problem. Then compare and discuss your list with a partner.

- Many part-timers work unsociable hours
- Many part-time workers do not think union membership is important
- Part-timers often have little contact with each other and the rest of the workforce
- Many part-timers are on temporary contracts
- When there are problems the part-time workers often lose their jobs first
- Management often reduces the hours of part-timers without consultation
CARRYING OUT AN INSPECTION

Safety representatives have to identify health and safety problems in the workplace on a regular basis. It is common practice to have a checklist, like the one below, to assist in the identification of problems. However, this example is not intended to fit all circumstances and safety reps will develop checklists in accordance with their own requirements.

**Inspection Check-list**

**Housekeeping**
1. Are all work areas kept clean and tidy?
2. Are accumulations of dirt and refuse removed at least daily from floors?

**Overcrowding**
3. Is there a risk of injury from overcrowding or poor workplace layout?

**Temperature**
4. Is the temperature reasonable?

**Lighting**
5. Is the lighting sufficient and suitable?

**Sanitary accommodation**
6. Are there sufficient and suitable sanitary conveniences?

**Guarding of dangerous machinery**
7. Are dangerous parts of machines securely fenced?

**Training and supervision**
8. Do all workers receive sufficient training in their jobs, especially where machinery is involved?
9. Are all young workers properly supervised?

**Noise**
10. Are there problems with noise?

**Safety of floors, stairs etc**
11. Are all floors, steps, stairs, passages and gangways:
   - free from obstruction?
   - free from slippery substances?

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Fire
12. Has the alarm been tested in the last three months?
13. Are all the fire exits properly maintained and free from obstruction?
14. Are all flammable materials properly stored?

Welfare
Are there suitable:
15. washing facilities?
16. seating facilities?
17. canteen facilities?

First aid
18. Are there adequate first-aid facilities?

Dust, fumes and substances hazardous to health
19. Are workers protected against exposure to dust and fumes and substances hazardous to health?

Recording of incidents
20. Are all accidents, dangerous occurrences, near misses and cases of occupational disease specified and recorded?

(Adapted from Hazards at Work, TUC.)

1 Discuss this checklist. Would it be appropriate for an inspection of your workplace? Would you need to add or delete any sections? For example, add a section on lifting weights.

2 Read the following report of a health and safety inspection and discuss its relationship with the above checklist. Can you identify the observations in the report with the appropriate sections of the checklist?

Example: observation (J) corresponds to section 3 on overcrowding.
Health and Safety Report tabled for discussion at Safety Committee Meeting.

Following an Inspection by the Union Health and Safety Representative we noted the following:

A Many parts of the offices were not kept in a clean state. The cleaning of desks, cabinet tops, window sills, etc. needed improving. Also, the floors of filing areas needed sweeping.

B Fire precautions needed improving in parts of the offices. Many persons questioned had not been instructed regarding the routine to be followed in case of fire. In some areas staff were unsure who were fire marshals.

C Additional operating points for the fire alarm system are required by certain doors so as to enable the fire alarm to be sounded without exposing persons to undue risk. The alarm was last tested four months ago.

D Appropriate means for fighting a fire in liquids (e.g. dry powder CO2) are needed where highly inflammable photocopying fluid is used. It was also noted that cans of duplicator fluid were not kept in fire resistant tins.

E It was noted that the fluid was used as a cleaning solvent by typists. This liquid is toxic and highly flammable and we advise that a safer method of cleaning is used.

F Hot water was not provided at certain washing facilities. It was noted that most of the plugs at wash hand basins in the men’s lavatories were missing.

G Glare from bare lamp fluorescent light fittings was understood to be trouble in some offices.

H There are tripping HAZARDS in some offices:
   • telephone and computer cables
   • torn carpeting in a number of areas
   • files left on the floor

I The blade of a hand-operated paper guillotine has had a safety guard removed.

J Additional filing space is necessary to reduce dangerous overcrowding. In one filing room the gap between the racks was only 14” near the entrance door.
3 Working in pairs carry out an inspection of an area of your own workplace, or one agreed with your trainer, using the above checklist with any additions or deletions appropriate to your circumstances.

4 Compare the findings of your inspection with another pair and pick one or two common problems which seem particularly important. Ask each other questions about these (e.g. how, why, when, where, what).

5 Prepare a memo to management expressing your concern about these problems and requesting a meeting to discuss them. You may wish to use some of the expressions of concern noted below.

**Expressions of Concern**

- We regret to have to point out that . . . . .
- It is with regret that we . . . . .
- Regrettably we have noticed that . . . . .
- Unfortunately it has come to our notice that . . . . .
- It has been brought to our attention that . . . . .
- We are anxious to inform you . . . . .
- It is a cause of great concern to us that . . . . .
- We are very concerned about . . . . .
ABC is a multinational company based in the Netherlands and with branch plants in the UK and other European countries. The company is in a highly competitive market and it has been committed to an investment programme in new technology. As a result it wishes to ensure that machinery is utilised to the full and so it has introduced continuous shift production at each of its plants.

It has a good working relationship with the trade unions in each country and it has established a European Works Council. It has agreed to discuss working time with the unions at the next Works Council meeting. It refuses to negotiate detailed working time arrangements at the European level as it argues that local management must have the right to respond to particular circumstances. However, it has indicated that it will listen to the views of the unions in relation to establishing a European-wide framework agreement. The company is particularly concerned about the impact that the European Union Working Time Directive will have on member states.

You are to attend a meeting of the Works Council which is to discuss this issue and prepare the union case. Your delegation has been asked to run a briefing session for all the union members of the Works Council to indicate to them the most important areas of the Working Time Directive.

1. Discuss and agree an agenda for the Works Council Meeting.

2. Using your agenda (or one the tutor has prepared) run the meeting of the works council.
   - Someone should chair the meeting.
   - Someone should act as minutes secretary
   - Participants at the meeting should be ready to raise comments or ask questions.

The meeting should conclude with a resolution to put to ABC’s managers regarding the maximum length of the working day and week.