

Novoseletska S.V.

A "Sense of Community" as One of the Factors that Enhances Language Learning

*Novoseletska Svitlana Volodymyrivna, PhD in Psychology, Associated Professor,
Dean of the College of Romance and Germanic Languages, Ostroh Academy National University, Ostroh, Ukraine*

Abstract. Communicative language teaching requires a sense of community – an environment of trust and mutual confidence wherein learners may interact without fear or threat of failure. Good teachers have long recognized the value of community in all learning environments and have found ways to encourage group cohesiveness and responsibility. Communicative language teaching depends on these traits. Without community there can be no communication. Where there is a strong sense of community, trust, high self-esteem, and good instruction, students have higher achievement.

Keywords: *communicative, sense of community, learning environments, encouragement, positive psychology, self-esteem*

Introduction. When teaching a foreign or second language, we want our students to be able to use the language communicatively to express their ideas in speech and writing and to understand what they are hearing and reading. As teachers, we all know that there are optimal conditions for a learner to acquire the target language. Communicative language teaching requires a sense of community – an environment of trust and mutual confidence wherein learners may interact without fear or threat of failure. Good teachers have long recognized the value of community in all learning environments and have found ways to encourage group cohesiveness and responsibility. Communicative language teaching depends on these traits. Without community there can be no communication. Where there is a strong sense of community, trust, high self-esteem, and good instruction, students have higher achievement.

Adult students who use English in their jobs can find it challenging when they have to socialize in English with colleagues or clients. Given the dominance of the communicative approach in language teaching, we assume that grammar explanations and grammar exercises will be well contextualized and discourse-based. Such an understanding can only be arrived at by examining many authentic tokens of the target form occurring in natural contexts and by doing a discourse analysis of these tokens.

Psychological and emotional well-being. The common concern is to address the issue of children's psychological and emotional well-being, rather than focusing, as schools traditionally have, on academic matters. Students will learn that there is an inextricable connection between their healthy mind and their healthy body. They will learn how to feel well and happy, not just in the short term, but which will serve them well for the rest of their lives. Optimism and gratitude are central features. We encourage the students to reflect each day on people or events for which they are grateful. Doing so gradually converts a pessimistic outlook into an optimistic one. We also encourage them to feel and express gratitude to others, recognizing that giving to others is the most sure way of receiving enduring happiness.

The students will learn more about the central value and importance of good relationships to their lives. Ask any child what makes them happiest – they will respond "their friends" (and less often as they grow older) and "their families". Yet children are not taught how to build and maintain the good relationships that sustain them, or how to avoid those that cause them pain and difficulty. Fortunate children of course learn from their parents about building good relationships, but many do not, which is where these classes

will fill the gap. The formation and maintenance of loving relationships is the best guarantor of a happy and fulfilling life, and the best safeguard against depression. Current state of the theory of training in foreign languages and the accumulated knowledge makes necessary to return once again to the concept of communicative training. Taking into account the prospects of economy development and social sphere, it is important to create new professional and personal qualities, such as creative thinking, ecological, information culture, language and communicative competence, ability to the conscious analysis of activity, independent actions in the conditions of uncertainty today. Owing to the fact that it can be reached only by communicative approach, the purpose of which consists in teaching, to be guided independently in the foreign-language environment and to be able to react adequately in various situations.

Communicative training in foreign languages represents the teaching organized on the basis of tasks of communicative character, i.e. communication. The communicative focused training aims to teach foreign-language communication, i.e. communication in a foreign language, using all tasks and examples necessary for this purpose. In reality training on the basis of only communicative tasks practically does not exist. Therefore, "communicative training" and "communicative focused training" gradually become synonyms. Now an ultimate goal of training in foreign languages is training in the foreign-language environment and the ability to react adequately in various communicative situations. To learn communication in a foreign language, it is necessary to create real life situations (i.e. that is called the principle of authenticity of communication) which will stimulate studying of material and develop adequate behavior.

The cornerstone of positive psychology is scientific research on the brain and on moods, as well as a rigid adherence to 'grounded optimism', which is basing the optimistic outlook on real strengths within each individual as opposed to wishful thinking. We do so in the belief that the whole well-being agenda is one that should affect adults in schools as well as children. Not only will they perform better and enjoy their work more if they are in a psychologically intelligent environment: they will also be able to teach the skills of well-being and happiness with far more conviction to the students.

A foreign language learner's motivation. A foreign language learner's motivation is very important in language teaching, it can be influenced by many factors: social, psychological, educational, and economical, to name a few. In spite of the complicated situation, teachers can still do a lot to motivate their students by being ob-

servant, understanding, informed, and tactful. By reflecting on 30 years of foreign language teaching experience, plus observing my colleagues' and students' behavior, and reading professional literature of foreign language teaching, I came to realize that one of the things that we can do to greatly motivate our students is to modify our evaluation methods. A good teacher is viewed as someone who is responsible, stern, knowledgeable, authoritative, and respectable. The sad thing is that a teacher's good will and extra effort frequently bring about negative and harmful effects on the students. A teacher who is unrealistically demanding and only begrudgingly gives praise will take away confidence and self-esteem even from high-achieving students. Students lack the power or ability to make an accurate judgment of their own performance and are easily influenced by their teacher, who is the authority. By focusing solely on mistakes and errors, and thereby ignoring the successful attempts of students, the teacher gives them the false impression that they are failures. In fact, by simply adjusting his methods of assessing students' performance, a teacher can make foreign language learning interesting, pleasant, and fruitful. Here are a few techniques classroom teachers can use to modify their evaluation procedures and thereby increase student motivation. One reason for their reluctance is that they feel too much anxiety about language learning. They are not accustomed to a communicative classroom and feel insecure about speaking in English. A second reason is that they think they won't need English when they graduate; thus, it is not relevant to their future. Third, they have poor skills in English; they may have studied it for many years or may know English grammar backwards and forwards, but they still have trouble composing sentences and holding a conversation in English. Fourth, cultural differences may exist between foreign native speaker teachers and their students, both in communication styles and in classroom practices. Finally, teachers and students often have different expectations of what a language class should be. Several factors can impede creating an environment of trust and mutual confidence in the classroom and a sense of community for communicative language teaching and learning. Also, many of us struggle with inadequate lighting, poor ventilation, and noise, all of which make it difficult for students to listen to and talk with each other.

Evaluating students' performance. When evaluating students' performance, instead of looking at it with the critical eye of an authoritarian, the teacher should examine the ways his students have been successful. This shift in point of view will change a self-centered teacher who is always worrying about his authority into a teacher with empathy and appreciation. In foreign language teaching this shift is vital. If a teacher looks at his students' performance overcritically, he will never be satisfied because errors and imperfections are a sure part of learning a foreign language. However, if the teacher focuses on his students' successes, he will be surprised to find how much they are learning and how hard they are trying. There will always be things for the teacher to be proud of. In a language class, communication in the target language is much more important than finding correct answers. The benefits of focusing on successes and achievements are manifold. Such a focus can build rapport between teachers and students, help students develop positive self-

esteem, make learning pleasant, and, finally, lead to greater effort and success. Showing appreciation of students makes it easier for students to like their teacher, and once that happens, they will take a liking to the subject. The teacher should be observant and give genuine, well-deserved praise in appropriate ways, keeping in mind the cultural values of the learners.

In the long run, students develop positive self-esteem and confidence and the ability to accurately judge their own knowledge and skills. Objectives-referenced evaluation should be an integral part of the everyday teaching process, because it evaluates teaching results by referring to instructional objectives laid down during the planning stage. A competent teacher will not only pace his teaching properly, but also frequently check whether his teaching has been effective or not. Teachers should not set unrealistic demands or judgment criteria for their students, but rather depend on objectives referencing to evaluate both their students' performance and their own teaching. If objectives are realistic and appropriate and if teaching activities are effective, most students should be able to meet the requirements, and thus experience success and achievement, despite any ability gaps within a group. In addition, objective-referenced teaching and evaluation encourage everyone to try to reach the set goals. When teachers evaluate students' performance, it should be done as one of several means to help students succeed in learning. Therefore, evaluation is an integral part of the overall teaching process. Through thoughtful, analytic assessment and checking, the teacher can enable himself and his students to see what has been successfully learned and what needs further work.

It is necessary to train students for participation in the process of foreign-language communication created in a class. It also defines essence of communicative training that is the communication process model. Communicative approach is motivated: its purpose consists in making trainees interested in learning a foreign language by means of accumulation and expansion of their knowledge and experience. This approach attracts trainees by concentration on the subjects interesting for them and representation of the possibility of text choice and the program objectives achievement. Communicative ability of trainees is developed through their involvement in the solution of a wide range of significant, realistic, sense-making and achievable tasks, successful completion of which brings satisfaction and increases their self-confidence. Communicative training in language emphasizes the importance of development of students' ability to use foreign languages for effective communication. The communicative technique promotes fast mastering skills of informal conversation. It is provided due to assimilation of different types of the monological speech, standard dialogues and forms of language modeling. Communicative approach in training is most accurately expressed in the provisions reflecting essential regularities of educational activity, serving for creation of the theory of training, for development of the corresponding method and reference point due to organization of the training activity. Such provisions get the status of training principles.

Communicative training in foreign language is carried out by means of "speech activity" which, in turn, serves for the solution of problems of productive human activity

in the conditions of "social interaction" of the communicating people. Participants of communication try to solve the real and imagined problems of joint activity by means of a foreign language. This principle is detailed in the following basic provisions. The activity essence of the communicative focused training in foreign languages is carried out through "activity tasks". They are realized by means of methodological exercises. Activity tasks for the communicative focused training in foreign languages are based on games, imitation and free communication. The activity essence of the communicative focused training in foreign languages increases the importance of the methodological organization of training process. There are three techniques for improving how we evaluate our students' work: diachronic evaluation (follow a student's development and make comparisons between different stages in his learning process to decide whether he is improving or not; specify the areas and extent of improvement), split method (notice each learner's strengths as well as weaknesses. Never label a student as "poor," "slow," or "hopeless"), and dynamic view (each day be sensitive to any changes in your students' attitudes, feelings, and accomplishments. Let them know your feelings in an appropriate way. Classes are dynamic and so are students. They can see if their teacher cares about them and wants them to succeed).

Constant encouragement. It is necessary to remember that the benefits of becoming skilled in working with other people are highly valued by employers and will serve you well throughout your career. Now is your chance to develop skills such as teamwork, leadership and the ability to be lead. Choosing tasks for group work where things are done better by a group than by individuals working on their own is of high importance. Such tasks include tracking down sources of information, planning written work, testing yourself, and brainstorming ideas. Besides, it is recommended to avoid the feeling of competition. The aim of working as a part of a group should be that all members of a group benefit from cooperation. Remember for example that when you explain a topic to other members of a group, the person who does the most productive learning is you. Finding the words in which to explain something is one of the best ways of coming to understand it. Avoidance of 'cheating' is an essential element too. The purpose of working as part of a group should not be to make it possible for individuals to do less work. If all members of the group submit identical pieces of work for assessment, no one is likely to get credit or credibility. However, the group can plan a piece of work, then allow the members to prepare the final version in their own way. 'Some ground rules' need to be established. These can lay down acceptable standards – for example, punctuality, level of contribution to the group, and the constructive nature of critical comments. Moreover, make the group 'task-driven'. Agree an 'agenda' for each meeting of the group, so there is always a sense of purpose. In addition, the leadership should be rotated. It is a good idea to have different 'leaders' for different tasks, so that all members of the group take on responsibility for aspects of the group work. 'Chores' are to be shared out. For example, share out the task of tracking down information, or collecting resources for the task. This can help make better use of the time of all members of the group,

avoiding each member spending time chasing after identical books, papers and references. Making 'contracts' with the group would be extremely beneficial. Set deadlines for completing a task on behalf of the group. Make agreements regarding the different kinds of contribution to be made of the group by each of its members. Finally, flexibility should be maintained. Even though the group will normally have "an agenda", retain some time at each meeting for the group to address 'spontaneous tasks' or 'matters arising'. This helps the group develop a 'proactive' ethos, rather than simply a 'reactive' one.

Overcoming the classroom barriers. Students may not feel comfortable asking a question in front of a large class because of their anxiety and insecurity using English. For all these reasons, and others, it is often very difficult initially for students to actively participate in their English classes. Although we encourage our students to participate actively in class by asking questions and engaging in discussions, we also offer tutorials so that language learning can continue while students and teachers overcome the classroom barriers set up by any clash of expectations and classroom cultures. We have found that community building is easier to accomplish in tutorials because they offer students a more informal, supportive environment. The word tutorial is used in many different academic settings to describe a variety of situations.

Even though tutorials require more time and effort from teachers, the benefits they provide to students and teachers alike make this work worthwhile. We have found that students in classes with tutorials are more confident and achieve more. Because teachers get to know their students' needs better, they can try more accurately to meet those needs. The truth is that many of them are finding it difficult to adjust to an English-medium university where they have to rely on their limited English proficiency to find their way around. Through individual and small group tutorials we have discovered how important trust is as an element of language learning, and how ideal tutorials are as a way of building trust. Compulsory tutorials for individuals are those tutorials that students must attend as part of their work for the course. These are scheduled by a sign-up sheet. For some courses, they are held during class time, and for others, they are held during a time mutually agreeable to both the teacher and the student.

It is very important that individual tutorials take place in a private, quiet place. Our first-year students often ask questions about the university, course requirements, study habits, and other more personal topics. Tutorial time gives them the opportunity to ask about anything. We set a specific focus for tutorials. Other questions will come up, but students need to know clearly what the purpose of the tutorial is, especially if they are being asked to come to a tutorial outside of regular class time. In composition classes for English majors, compulsory tutorials are held after students receive back a draft of their research essays. At this stage, the focus of tutorial sessions is to work with students on incorporating others' ideas into their own writing and examining discourse problems, such as unclear reasoning, in their writing. We have found that research skills can be taught in a composition class, but students often experience confusion when they begin to use sources in their own writing. Tutorials provide an environment in which the teacher can focus on a student's paper and give specific guidance.

We often notice that after our first round of tutorials with both kinds of classes, students come to class more at ease with the teacher, the assignments, and each other. The conversational tone of a tutorial helps students become more comfortable using English.

Non-compulsory small group tutorials are those that students in general English courses may attend. They are not mandatory, but participating in them can help students improve their English. The majority of students usually participate in these tutorials because they realize that more opportunities to use English will help them with all of their classes. Students in an EFL environment usually benefit from more exposure to the target language. Non-compulsory small group tutorials are designed with this in mind. They can be understood as a “ring of discussion” involving a maximum of 12 students in a small meeting room. The objective of these tutorials is to give students more exposure to English and more opportunities to express themselves in English. Students can read whatever they want, but if they have trouble finding material, a suggested reading list is provided. The list contains mostly articles from newspapers and magazines. The idea is to have current material easily accessible and to allow some group reading and discussion without the threat of performing for grades in the regular classroom. Having the tutorials scheduled outside of class time emphasizes the informal nature of the gathering and discussion that takes place there.

The teacher’s role in these tutorials is simply as a facilitator. The group reports on what they found interesting in their reading. At this point most of the students are enthusiastic about what they have read and the shyness they usually have in the classroom setting does not affect them any more. They give a short summary of a news article they have read, others who have read it also comment on it, and the group discusses issues raised in the article. Sometimes the discussion is not connected to a text at all, but is based on something of interest to the students. One recent tutorial discussion centered on whether or not students should have parttime jobs. The power of a good discussion topic spurs them to speak English and express themselves freely. In this small setting, most students have enough confidence to share with other students what their reading is about and even to add a sentence or two on how they feel about what they read. Weaker students are helped by better ones in their choice of vocabulary and their sentence constructions.

Students provide scaffolding for each other, and all learn new and varied ways to use English. Helping each

other within the tutorial provides the basis for a sense of community, which often carries back to the classroom and students feel more at ease speaking up in class. Perhaps the most important benefit of these tutorials is that students get to know one another, including their likes and dislikes. In building a classroom community, teachers need to structure “opportunities for students to present who they are to their classmates” and the ring of discussion is one way to give them this opportunity. The tutorials also enable the teacher to learn more about the students. Finally, students are able to see their teacher as one more participant in the discussion, rather than as a force in front of the classroom.

“A learning space needs to be hospitable not to make learning painless but to make the painful things possible, without which no learning can occur— things like exposing ignorance, testing tentative hypotheses, challenging false or partial information, and mutual criticism of thought.” Our tutorials express our hospitality and invite students to show what they know as well as what they don’t know, to experiment with language, and to learn to agree and disagree with each other. The types of discussions that occur in our tutorials, among students and between the teacher and individual students, create an environment of trust and confidence, which is necessary for successful communicative language teaching and learning. In addition to language learning, in the trusting environment of tutorials, true communication can occur.

Conclusion. As teachers, we want to create a sense of community in our classrooms among students and between students and ourselves. In many ESL/EFL classrooms, a student community develops to a certain extent, but a bond between the teacher and students does not happen, despite our desire to include ourselves as a member of a cohesive and supportive community as well as a guide. Even though English is now seen as a language of international communication and many people say they want to learn it, we still encounter reluctant learners. Learning a foreign language is a long and complex task. Learners need constant encouragement, and one of the best forms of encouragement comes from a sense of community, achievement and success. With a keen eye for achievement, an admiring eye for efforts, and a tolerant eye for differences and individuality, a skillful teacher can manage to enable the majority of his students to enjoy learning. A shift in the way we evaluate learners can work wonders.

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Новоселецкая С.В.

“Восприятие сообщества” как один из факторов улучшения изучения языка

Аннотация. Коммуникативное изучение языка требует восприятия сообщества – среды доверия и взаимной уверенности, где учащиеся могут общаться без страха или угрозы неудачи. Хорошие учителя признали важность сообщества в процессе обучения, и нашли пути взаимодействия и ответственности в группах. Коммуникативный метод обучения языка зависит от этих характеристик. Без коллектива не может произойти общение. Только там, где есть сильное чувство сообщества, доверия, высокой самооценки и качественная методика обучения, студенты имеют высокие достижения. Преподаватели должны стремиться сформировать восприятие сообщества в аудитории со студентами и между студентами и нами. В аудитории, где изучается язык, студенческое сообщество развивается, но отношения между преподавателями и студентами не происходит, не смотря на желание быть частью этого сообщества и в то же время оставаясь руководителем. Даже сейчас, когда английский является языком международного общения, и многие люди желают его изучать, мы все еще имеем дело с студентами, имеющими большие трудности в общении. Одна из причин этих трудностей – это волнение в процессе изучения языка. Изучение иностранного языка – это длительный и трудный процесс. Изучающим нужно постоянное стимулирование, и одной из лучших форм есть восприятие сообщества, достижение и успех. Только понимая достижение, восхищаясь усилиями и уважая различия и индивидуальность, опытный преподаватель сможет организовать изучение языка студентами, доставляющее удовольствие. Многогранность оценки результатов студентов может творить чудеса. Студенты будут учиться понимать ценности и важность хороших взаимоотношений. Формирование умения строить хорошие взаимоотношения – это самое лучшее условие счастливой и удовлетворяющей жизни и самый лучший защитник от депрессии. Важнее психологическое и эмоциональное благосостояние студентов, чем концентрированность на академических результатах, что происходит традиционно в университетах. Важно, чтоб студенты понимали необходимость взаимоотношений между здравым смыслом и здоровым телом. Оптимизм и благодарность – это важные компоненты, так же как и формирование у студентов понимания стать хозяином собственной жизни. В процессе обучения иностранного языка мотивация имеет большое значение, и здесь важны многие факторы, среди них – это социальные, психологические, образовательные, экономические.

Ключевые слова: коммуникативный, восприятие сообщества, среда обучения, мотивация, позитивная психология, самооценка