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COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES FOR LARGE MULTILEVEL CLASSES IN SECONDARY STATE SCHOOLS

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*To the best man along the History,
Jesus Christ*

1. INTRODUCTION.....	4-5
2. JUSTIFYING ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL INTEREST OF THE TOPIC	5-6
3. OBJECTIVES	6-7
4. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND.....	7
4.1. Coping with factors that affect learning.....	7
4.1.1. Motivation	7-9
4.1.1.2. Recent Trends in Motivation.....	9-10
4.1.2. Attitude.....	11-12
4.1.3. Aptitude.....	12-14
5.1. Coping with large multilevel classes.....	14-17
6.1. Teaching techniques for developing communicative purposes.....	17-18
6.1.1. Developing productive skills in the classroom.....	19
6.1.2. Speaking Skill.....	19-20
6.1.3. Writing skill.....	21-22
5. METHODOLOGY.....	22
5.1. Description of the target group.....	23
5.2. Description of the structure where the material will be included...	23-24
5.3. Description of the creative process.....	24
5.4. Description of the material and/ or activities typology.....	24-25
6. RESULTS.....	25-36
7. CONCLUSION.....	37
8. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	38-40

1. INTRODUCTION

It is clearly stated that for the teaching learning process takes place, learning conditions must be favorable inside the classroom. Besides, the teacher is required to assume his role as a facilitator, a mentor, a guide, a planner and a resource developer, and mainly to facilitate and create a positive and affective atmosphere with the learners. Carl Rogers (1969: 105-106) says that:

The initiation of such learning rests not upon the teaching skills of the leader, not upon scholarly knowledge of the field, not upon skills of the leader, not upon use of visual aids, not upon the programmed learning used, not upon lectures and presentations, not upon an abundance of books, though each of these might at one time or another be utilized as an important resource. No, the facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities that exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner.

It is not surprising that affective factors are seminal aspects to take into account in the ESL classroom when considering English language teaching.

Watson (1930) mentioned once: "Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist..." Any teacher would like to be in such situation, although it is not possible at present, there still exist ways to create better conditions inside the classrooms for meaningful learning, and the teacher should be the first person to get involved in order for this process to carry out.

It is already said that the greatness of teaching learning process requires commitment, passion, vision and mainly love to be effective and remarkable. But how to do so when teachers lack of teaching strategies and do not know how to cope with large multilevel groups in reduced areas where learning conditions do not seem to be favorable? How to motivate students when teachers are not motivated? How to improve quality of teaching with the absence of visual aids material?

Teaching English in multilevel classrooms represent a big challenge for any teacher, even more with large multilevel groups. What it is surprising, is that each student learns in different ways depending on his / her innate abilities when they are born. This makes teaching learning process more complex but at the same time more interesting and challenging.

Experience shows that creativity besides the qualities mentioned above could be the key to open one of the most beautiful experiences in the humankind “meaningful learning”. The human being has done countless things to survive and to learn along their history. Indisputably, each brain assimilates what it is new for it depending on the ability, capability, reasoning and knowledge each person has. From here, it is assumed that different Intelligent Quotients exist around the world.

Taking this point as a reference, the same happens in the classroom: each learner shows different abilities depending on the cultural, educational, social, backgrounds. These factors produce as a result multilevel groups and consequently it entails to get a better professional and academic development by teachers in order to cover educational expectations in the educational attainment process.

The main aim of this project is to create meaningful and lively tasks to help students to develop productive skills. As a result of this, English teachers will be benefited from the variety of these multi-tasks in order for them to improve their quality of teaching, to help them to cope with factors that affect the English language learning as well as to provide some tips and strategies to classroom management relating to indiscipline cases.

2. JUSTIFYING ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL INTEREST OF THE TOPIC

State schools in the south of Mexico, specifically in Tabasco, are facing a low English level because of three following factors: Poor learning conditions because of lack of support from the government regarding to teaching aids equipment (infrastructure); large multilevel groups (45 or 50 students around); and scarcity of methodological foundations from teachers to cope with these kinds of groups. Consequently, teachers have lost the commitment and their motivation levels have decreased substantially.

It is the intention of this project to benefit teachers from state schools in such a way that they widen their methodological knowledge and at the same time to put it into practice in order to facilitate meaningful learning through communicative activities in the classroom in spite of the factors mentioned above.

In addition to this, the National Development Plan in Mexico (2007) states the following in the National English Program in Basic Education (NEPBE):

To foster and develop communicative competence in English as a foreign language, as well as to focus on the teaching of social practices and activities of the language, instead of the formal knowledge of the linguistic system from a normative perspective; giving priority to the teaching of social practices and activities of the language.

For this reason, a well-prepared and committed teaching staff is required for the English program goals to run effectively in certain way. Nevertheless, The Secretariat of Public Education turns a blind eye in spite of the drawbacks that most of the schools face nowadays relating to infrastructure issues as it was explained above. For this reason, a design of simple tasks for improving productive skills with this type of audience in classrooms settings is intended to be done.

The reason why I decided to work on this project is because one year ago I was hired by The Secretariat of Public Education after getting a 7th place in the English National Evaluation for teaching in a State school in the city of Cardenas, Tabasco Mexico. This new experience in a public sector with teenagers had a big impact in my personal development and in my quality of teaching in the sense that learning conditions did not seem to be favorable in any way as students not only differed in language acquisition ability, but also in motivation, intelligence, self-discipline, literacy skills, interest and attitude. Besides, it is worth to mention the reduced classrooms or spaces where large groups of 45 students and up are held with temperatures of 40° C. This way, I strove to motivate students and mainly to improve their English levels as I was pressured to give good academic results.

For this reason, it is necessary that teachers prepare more attractive classes and interesting places for learning, so that all students can have opportunities to share their experiences and knowledge about reading, writing, and oral exchanges in the English language. By doing so, they will identify linguistic aspects and uses of English, as well as similarities and differences between English and their mother tongue as the National English Program in Basic Education states. (Consider this paragraph)

3. OBJECTIVES

The objectives I aim to pursue for this piece of work are:

- ✓ To share teachers meaningful and suitable tasks for large multilevel classes for developing communicative purposes in a secondary state school with inappropriate learning conditions.
- ✓ To improve quality of teaching henceforth in the local school where I teach according to what the New Reform of Education in Mexico states with the implementation of The National English Programme.
- ✓ To improve productive skills through lively and communicative activities.
- ✓ To promote pairwork and groupwork activities for speaking skills improvement.
- ✓ To design activities for communicative purposes.

4. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

4.1 Coping with factors that affect learning.

Starting with the strong belief that some students are better language learners than others, it is of paramount importance to take into account that there exist significant differences between individuals and the language learning context. These differences have a deep impact in the teaching learning process and it is the role of the teacher to take advantage of it and exploit the best resource in the classroom: “our students”.

Rod Ellis says (1997:11) “Language is such a complex phenomenon that researchers have generally preferred to focus on some specific aspect rather than on the whole of it”. Thus, there could be a great number of factors that could block the second language learning. However, affective and cognitive influences on language learning such as motivation, attitude and aptitude will be mentioned along this chapter.

4.1.1 Motivation

“Your talent determines what you can do. Your motivation determines how much you are willing to do. Your attitude determines how well you do it.”

Being the motivation factor one of the most discussed, but essential and complex phenomenon in any kind of learning environment, it could not be isolated. Motivation is seen as the spark in the teaching learning process. Anyone could be encouraged without being motivated. Whatever the purpose may be, success will not be carried out unless there exists an intrinsic force to inspire or encourage a person. According to Moore (2001:222) Motivation implies a stimulus or force which provide us energy and lead us to act in the way we do everything. Rod Ellis (1997) describes motivation as the attitude and affective states that influences the degree of effort that learners make to learn an L2.

Motivation is not necessarily something that learners bring *to* school; it can also arise from environmental conditions *at* school. When we talk about how the environment can enhance a learner's motivation to learn particular things or behave in particular ways, we are talking about situated motivation (Paris & Turner, 1994; Rueda & Moll, 1994) Lightbown and Spada (1999) define motivation in terms of two factors: "Learners' communicative needs and their attitudes towards the second language community".

Whatever the purpose may be, success will not be carried out unless there exists an intrinsic force to inspire or encourage a person. Rod Ellis (1997:76) expresses that "*Motivation is dynamic in nature; it is not something that a learner has or does not have but rather something that varies from one moment to the next depending on the learning context or task*". Nida (1956) claimed that motivation was the most important factor in a person's learning of a foreign language.

Working with teenagers is one of the most remarkable and difficult challenges for any teacher. As a result of life stages, teenagers experiment a series of hormonal, physical and cognitive changes which indisputably have an impact in their learning process. For this reason, motivation could be the key to awaken students' interest through affection strategies.

Deeping more this context, the motivation in the classroom setting represents a big challenge for teachers nowadays, due to the immersion of social networks and technology

advancements, young learners' minds and attention have been trapped daily in such a way that they have lost the interest of studying in most cases. In such situation, it is the moment when teachers have to assume their real roles in order for students to express interest in the subject and participate actively in class to activate cognitive process. Motivation affects what learners pay attention to and how effectively they process it. (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002)

According to Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1972) considered the pioneers in this field, there exists different types of motivation in language learning:

- ✚ Instrumental motivation: it is when learners bear in mind to learn an L2 to achieve a professional goal. It is called functional reason.
- ✚ Integrative motivation: it refers to language learning for personal growth and cultural enrichment.
- ✚ Intrinsic motivation: it means internal – psychological. That is, when learners want to learn by pleasure.
- ✚ Extrinsic motivation: it is derived from external sources; it comes from outside the learner.

It is believed then that these types of motivation are quite related to success in second language learning. Motivation is something that energizes, directs, and sustains behavior; it gets students moving, points them in a particular direction, and keeps them going. We often see students' motivation reflected in personal investment and in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral *engagement* in school activities (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Maehr & Meyer, 2004; Reeve, 2006).

4.1.1.2 - Recent Trends in Motivation.

Dias Barriga (2005:1) asserts that the role of the teacher is not merely informative but also formative. The action of education imply complex interactions, which involve affective, communicative, social and highly valued issues.

Recent research seems to have come up with some solid evidence that success and motivation are strongly related to one another. William and Borden (2000) say that Motivation can be constructed as a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, which lead a conscious decision to act and which give rise to a period of sustain intellectual and physical

effort in order to attain a previously set goal. That is, individuals who are highly motivated show more self-confidence and are keen to achieve what they have in mind.

In addition, Qin Xiaoqing (2003) asserts that motivation is strongly related to success or failure in second language learning. In other words, motivation strengthens affective factors and incites learners to use learning strategies, willpower of learning, goal setting, and the persistence of learning.

On the other hand, Ellis (1997:75) puts into question the assertion of Skehan whether motivation is a determinant factor for succeeding in L2 based on two immersion cases of studies from two groups of foreign learners in two different contexts to learn French and English, she claims that "... learners who experience success in learning may become more, and in some cases, less motivated to learn...".

In short, SLA researchers have also been concerned with the role of the motivation in the learning process. Even though, research studies (e.g. Gardner & Lambert 1959, 1961; 1972; Anisfeld and Lambert 1961; Feenstra 1969; Spolsky 1969) have found that motivation is one of the main aspects to take into account when teaching. In other words, teachers ought to focus not only on cognitive, physical and psychological factors but also on affective factors through specific strategies such as empathy, negotiation, and others to increase motivation. To motivate students as much and effectively as possible will undoubtedly contribute to create a better and positive classroom atmosphere. Eugene Bell Jr. said sometime "*Teachers should aspire to inspire before they expire*".

Briefly, motivation can be tackled from different aspects as it is aforementioned. There could exist some affective areas which it will probably be impossible to reach or treat with our students when talking about intrinsic motivation for learning a second language, as learners' background and life experiences differ one another. For this reason, it is of paramount importance to prepare appropriate lessons and procure to create the better learning conditions in order for students to feel motivated and awaken their interest to learn a second language.

4.1.2 Attitude

Attitudes are related to cognitive and affective factors according to Brown (2000). It is believed that for people to find pleasure when doing or learning something, a good attitude is required. At contrary, a bad attitude generates apathy and conformity in the people's performance and consequently a low interest of doing things properly are perceived. In addition to this, Gardner (1985) describes the attitude as a component of motivation, which refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language.

Attitude can be modified by experience, that is, a student who has had a bad experience at learning a second language; such experience could make him /her reduce his / her level of motivation and interest, as well as to show a lack of self-confidence. That is why teachers should put forward and implement new strategies inside the classroom in order to maintain a well-balanced lesson through meaningful activities whose main purposes are to reduce students' anxiety and increase their motivation.

Additionally, Lightbown and Spada (1999:56) express that "Depending on the learner's attitudes, learning a second language can be a source of enrichment or a source of resentment."

Heretofore, it is noticeable how the attitude factor becomes seminal in any teaching-learning process. One of the most crucial aspects nowadays, which every teacher should pay a lot of attention is about "students' attitude" as it is mostly negative as a result of the poor quality of teaching or lack of strategies from many teachers to make good lessons. Consequently, it causes dropping out of school and make students lose the interest of studying in such a way that they become to think that education is something like to be in middle of four walls where authoritarian teachers are the only ones to have the reason and have students enforce rules.

Another reason why students' attitude is affective is due to extensive and tedious syllabus or programs to be covered every term combined with frustrated and mechanic lessons taught by uninterested educators who are pressured by their head principal or coordinator to carry out effective classes, which all this result in teachers' and students' frustration, lack

of interest and motivation. This way, teachers' attitudes change considerably by having a negative impact first of all in themselves and their methodology.

Noels *et al.* (2003) says that negative or positive attitudes, they both could have an inverse result in learners depending on the own characteristic of him / her. That is, there have been cases where students start learning a second language with low levels of motivation and a negative attitude. However, in the course of this process, they find out pleasure for it and their interest is awoken through meaningful and lively tasks which help them to improve and change their attitude about their own beliefs or thoughts they are clung at the very beginning of their learning process. It is of paramount importance that teachers assume their role and prepare meaningful activities to gain students' confidence and establish affective bonds to favor a better classroom environment.

4.1.3 Aptitude

Aptitude and attitude differ one another. It is believed to be in part related to second language acquisition, but it is also considered to be in part distinct. In fact, Krashen (1981:19) said "It is possible to have high aptitude and low attitude, low aptitude and high attitude, or both high, or both low".

Dr. Charles Stansfield in his article "*Language Learning and Testing Foundation*" defines Language aptitude as a natural ability that largely determines how quickly and easily an individual will learn a language in a language course or language training program and it can be possessed to varying degree.

Aptitude and intelligence seem to be related but they are not the same. Whereas aptitude according to Ellis (1985) seems to be a difficult term to define precisely because its measurement and definition depend to a large extent upon underlying language teaching theories and interpretations of the language learning process. Cohen (2013) defines intelligence in his article: "What is intelligence and how is it measured?" as "The general mental ability to learn and apply knowledge to manipulate your environment, as well as the ability to reason and have abstract thought which it is believed to be in part related to general".

Patsy M. Lightbown and Nina Spada (1999) say that: "There is evidence in the research literature that some individuals have an exceptional "aptitude" for language learning". They report the experience of a man whose abilities to learn several languages in short periods of stay in different countries were simply amazing and remarkable. The aforementioned evidence has caused that the aptitude factor become a topic of discussion for many researchers in the mainstream education. A number of developing tests have been designed and set in order to foresee whether individuals will be efficient learners of a second language in a classroom setting. As examples of these tests are the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) and the Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery (PLAB) which show strong assertions about the importance of aptitude in the second language learning. Carroll and Sapon's MLAT (1967) identified four main components in language aptitude:

- ✚ Phonemic or phonetic coding ability, which is the ability to identify and memorize sounds.
- ✚ Grammatical sensitivity: It is the ability to recognize different grammatical functions that words perform in a sentence. (i.e. the subject and object of a sentence)
- ✚ Inductive language learning ability, which consists of inferring rules and meanings.
- ✚ Rote learning ability: to relate new words with mother tongue, as well as assimilating new vocabulary.

In addition, for Pimsleur's LAB (1966), the language consists of three components:

- ✚ The first is verbal intelligence, by which is meant both familiarity with words (this is measured in the Language Aptitude Battery by the "Vocabulary" part) and the ability to reason analytically about verbal materials (this is measured by the part called "Language Analysis").
- ✚ The second component is motivation to learn the language.
- ✚ The third component... is called "auditory ability".

So far, it is noticeable how the aptitude factor also plays an essential role in the SLA. In addition, there exists some approaches such as the grammar translation and the audio-lingual method which state that aptitude is a determinant factor in the English language learning. Skehan (1989) agrees that "Aptitude is consistently the most successful predictor of language learning success".

Recently, research involving language aptitude has strongly proved a meaningful relationship between aptitude and success in L2. The higher scores the learners get on language aptitude tests, the higher levels of L2 proficiency and learning are achieved unlike of those learners who obtain lower scores.

A fair amount of the research has been carried out to prove that aptitude is pivotal factor in SLA. This way, teachers should be oriented to promote skills related to aptitude as well as to bear in mind the existence of learners with different capacities and abilities in their classrooms.

By and large, factors such as motivation, attitude and aptitude have been a bone of contention, however, some authors seem to be in favour of such tenets (whether it is a correct term to use) and they agree that each of the factors aforementioned facilitates the Second Language Acquisition.

5. Coping with large multilevel classes

Let us start defining what large multilevel class stands for: although there does not exist an exact definition of large multilevel class, a closer meaning to it is: where learners' cognitive, affective and physical skills vary considerably from one another inside the classroom, besides, cultural background, language and literacy skills. It is known that language classes tend to be highly heterogeneous, that implies that each learner learns, perceives, restores, and processes the information in a different way depending on the factors such as age, learning styles, attitude, aptitude, motivation and personality. There is not a specific number of students which could represent a large multilevel class. Hess (2001) describes some examples of large multilevel groups taught by experienced teachers with groups from sixty to one hundred students.

Although, many teachers seem to avoid large groups due to the implications and drawbacks, these groups could represent a good way of promoting interaction when teaching. Working with large groups could benefit the class in relation to a better classroom interaction, that is collaborative and cooperative learning is more easily carried out, variety

of opinions and learning styles, independent learning and learner autonomy encouragement, dynamic and funny classes where meaningful learning flourishes naturally.

Hess (2001) suggests eleven principles of coping with this kind of groups. However, it is not expected to study all the principles in depth but the most relevant according to the purpose of this piece of work.

A) PRINCIPLE ONE: SCARLETT O'HARA.- It is the name of a character in a book called *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell. O'Hara (a heroine), had a special mantra when things got too tense: "I will think about it tomorrow," It refers about the normal conditions that all teachers face every day or have faced once or more than once in the classroom: it is about some "bad days" when nothing seem to work out well. Where frustration, stress, pitfalls capture us and we feel that we are useless as teachers. Hess (*Ibídem*) proposes that we should learn to take the control of the situation and see it as natural hindrances and they are to be dealt with. And the most important to smile and expect the following day to teach a very good lesson. Working with large multilevel groups represents a big challenge as the class is usually uncooperative, and the harder we try, the more complicated and unproductive our efforts seem to be.

B) PRINCIPLE TWO: VARIETY.- Considering the different styles that large multilevel groups have. Teachers should be aware of the importance of varying activities and techniques during their lessons according to students' level. At doing so, the classes will flourish better and the interaction of the class will be more productive.

C) PRINCIPLE THREE: PACE.- To handle each activity according to students' response during the tasks is also important to consider when teaching. Class observation, monitoring and establishing the specific time and momentum to set the tasks are essential factors as well to an optimum students' performance.

D) PRINCIPLE FOUR: INTEREST. - It is perhaps one of the main principles that teachers should take into account. Students usually feel frustrated and bored due to boring and monotonous lessons. With large groups, interest is particularly important as students who lose their interest; they are likely to either cause trouble, distraction or make mess during

the lesson. Hess (*ibídem*) suggests three fundamental characteristic aspects of topics for bringing students' interest:

- ✚ Arise students' curiosity.
- ✚ Tap into meaningful existential questions.
- ✚ Touch students' lives.

Hess (*ibídem*) suggests the following activities for all levels of ESL/EFL:

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| ✚ Management of time | ✚ Animals |
| ✚ Family relations | ✚ Latest news |
| ✚ Management of money | ✚ Home |
| ✚ Friendships | ✚ Travel |
| ✚ Food and eating habits | ✚ |

Moreover, dynamic classes where students get involved through game-like activities with clear goals and motivating processes are of paramount importance to create real student interest.

E) Principle five.- COLLABORATION: Hess (2001) mentions that "Students therefore must soon learn to use one another as language." In large multilevel classes, collaboration is a requirement. It is almost impossible to assist all the students' needs at the same time, mainly when teachers are obliged to foster independent learning since the first week of classes. For this reason, collaborative learning helps learners to negotiate meaning, they become better risk-takers and more efficient self-monitors and self-evaluators. As a result of this, classroom atmosphere and efficiency improve considerably as does student's self-esteem. Pairwork and groupwork activities favor the interaction among learners and weaker and faster finishers can be benefit through these kinds of teaching strategies.

In short, we have focused our attention on some of the problems associated with teaching heterogeneous classes. The importance of this factor in teaching context is of paramount importance mainly for state schools where teachers lack of strategies and methodological process to develop effective lessons. The greatness of heterogeneity as Penny Ur calls it, resides in as weaker and stronger students could be benefitted in their learning from the

most suitable teaching strategies inside the classroom. It is undoubtedly a topic of discussion for any teaching practice.

6. Teaching techniques for developing communicative purposes

With the immersion of communicative approaches, the English language teaching has suffered constantly shifts. Early methods such as Grammar Translation, Audiolingual, Total Physical Response and Humanistic approach were not completely filled and convincing enough to support and assert how languages are learned, at contrary they provided much more evidence and research in the study of the Second Language Learning and helped linguists to take a close look at in this field. We cannot ignore that early methods were and still are essential and determinant to improve the ESL teaching, however, the Communicative approach marked a new era in the teaching learning process. These shifts have become so assertive in CLT in such a way that learners are seen as an individual whose main role is to become responsible of his /her own learning. (Learner-centered approach). Indeed, the learner plays the role as a negotiator – between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning – emerges from and interacts with the role of joint negotiator within the group and within the classroom procedure and activities which the group undertakes. The implication for the learner is that he should contribute as much as he gains, and thereby learn in an independent way. (Bren and Candlin 1980:10)

As a result of this, the role of the teacher instead of being the only transmitter of mere knowledge in their earlier roles. He became a multifaceted educator and facilitator of learning, a guide, a classroom supporter, a provider, a mentor a leader. Nevertheless, it implies serious and tremendous commitment from teachers to encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning. In addition to this, it is responsibility of teachers to create and adapt suitable strategies, activities and tasks that favor meaningful learning in the classroom in order for learners to be able to develop language skills, be it productive and receptive skills.

This chapter presents some practical teaching techniques for communicative purposes in a context of large multilevel classes.

- ✚ GRADING TASKS: Considering heterogeneity of large multilevel classes, it is important to grade the activities to be set in the lessons according to the students' level. Use different colors depending on the level of the activity. Example: Blue for strongest students; middle-level group, green; lowest-level group, yellow). This technique can be use not only for listening purposes but also for communicative purposes (picture dictation, describing pictures or celebrities after watching a video or part of a movie).
- ✚ SELF ACCESS (that is, allowing learners to choose their own activities, then monitor and check their own progress) it is important that students choose something that they like doing to ensure that their motivation is kept up.
- ✚ GROUP WORK: to encourage collaborative and cooperative learning.
- ✚ USE OPEN-ENDED ACTIVITY TYPES: The purpose of these activities is that students perform at their own level. The greatness of this technique is that learners can work individually, in pairs or groups at their own level on the same task.
- ✚ ACTIVITIES WITH DIFFERENT RESPONSES: These activities favor productive skills (writing or speaking) at some point and all of them are based on groupwork. Some examples are: project work, roleplays, bilingual roleplays and drama.
- ✚ REMEDIAL WORK: recycling activities whose main purpose is to review and consolidate linguistic elements such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

Ur suggests other classroom-based simple teacher-designed activities such as brainstorm, recall and share, doing your own thing, fluid pairs and passing it round. Current studies such as Communicative approaches promote activities where learners are encouraged to demonstrate their ability to greet some-one, complain, talk about recent events, plan, invite, apologize, and order a meal in a restaurant. Bowman, Brenda and others (1992:61).

To put briefly, a vast number of strategies or techniques exist to cope with large mixed ability groups. Surprisingly, whatever the strategy is, teachers should be aware of classroom management, personal body language, tone of voice, presence and suitable cognitive and affective strategies to promote self-confidence and good interaction with the whole class.

6.1. Developing productive skills in the classroom

Productive skills are speaking and writing. It is intended to learners are able to produce communicative language competence fluently in different situational contexts, making use of a good level of vocabulary and accuracy aspects.

Indeed, the development of productive skills in classroom settings should be the interest of educators and even though in any institutions. In some universities, ESL is taught only for specific purposes making emphasis in receptive skills (listening - reading). In addition to this, a great variety of publishing houses promote and offer functional language and practical communication as well as integrate speaking practice course books to improve productive skills. Nevertheless, developing these kinds of skills in the classroom implicate more than a merely use of a coursebook. Spada (1990) noted that even programmes described as “communicative” were found to provide limited opportunities for students to practice communicating to each other”.

6.1.1. Speaking Skill

Speaking could be the most controversial skill of all the four to teach. Hymes (1971) asserts that some components of speaking effectiveness are that L2 learners know not only the linguistic knowledge, but also the culturally acceptable ways of interacting with others in different situations and relationships. He also claims that communicative competence consists of the interaction of grammatical, psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and probabilistic language components.

Moreover, interaction is presented as the key to improving EFL Learners’ Speaking abilities. This way, it is the role of educators to provide learners opportunities for meaningful communicative behavior about relevant topics by using learner-learner interaction as the key to teaching language for communication because “communication derives essentially from interaction” (Rivers, 1987).

On the whole, interaction is pivotal for communicative purposes. This way, some strategies are presented as follow to develop the speaking skill:

- ✚ Group work: offers opportunities to negotiate meaning which bring authenticity to the activity and this is increased in mixed ability groups.
- ✚ Task-based activities: work out well in groups of pairwork to achieve an objective which is usually expressed as an observable result, such as brief notes, a drawing, etc.
- ✚ Problem solving: it is not only a good way to apply language skills, but also is one of the key elements to develop thinking skills as well.
- ✚ Questions and answers: Learners are able to talk about daily routines or ongoing situations, describing a classmate, etc.
- ✚ Debates / discussions: these activities promote critical thinking and abilities to defend students' viewpoints.
- ✚ Stories and storytelling: these activities develop creativity and awaken students' interest.
- ✚ Communication games: learning by games has a positive impact in the teaching learning process. Students enjoy the activities and are keen to participate and collaborate all together.
- ✚ Dialogues: They are good to reduce students' anxieties and have learners get self-confidence. Moreover, dialogues can be a good opportunity to learn specific vocabulary in a great variety of lively contexts such as, at the supermarket, at the gas station, in the mall, etc...

As we can see, these are some of many strategies to use in order to improve speaking skills. Recent research on second language acquisition (SLA) suggests that more learning takes place when students are engaged in relevant tasks within a dynamic learning environment rather than in traditional teacher- classes (Moss & Ross-Feldman, 2003). In addition to this, Ur (1996) says “unlike reading, writing and listening activities, speaking requires some degree of real-time exposure to an audience...”

Finally, attention should be paid to the type of tasks and activities teachers use in classroom settings as if these ones are not suitable according to students' levels, it could cause learners feel unmotivated and lose the interest of the class.

6.1.2. Writing skill

It is generally assumed that writing is the most difficult skill for L2 learners to master. What it makes this skill difficult is the way how ideas should be organized into a second language. In addition, a good writer is required to have good skills related to punctuation, spelling, grammar patterns, word choice etc. In fact, the writing process implicates four main stages: planning, drafting, revising and editing.

White and Arndt (1991:1) views about the teaching of writing as “The capacity of written language to transcend time and space that makes the teaching and learning of writing such an important process”. Through writing we are able to share ideas, arouse feelings, persuade and convince other people. We are able to discover and articulate ideas in ways that only writing makes possible”.

This research pretends to provide simple but meaningful activities to be set in classroom contexts in order for the educators to implement them, and in this way their quality of teaching improves considerably with mixed abilities classes.

Let us show some activities to improve writing skill according to Ur (1996:165)

- ✚ Write report of a book of students' preferences.
- ✚ Writing a recipe of a meal you yourself know how to do well.
- ✚ Describe embarrassing situations
- ✚ Describe ongoing events or situations
- ✚ Describe a celebrity you look up to or a person you know very well.
- ✚ Describe professions
- ✚ Write a letter of complaint, thanks, and an invitation.
- ✚ Write your timetable.
- ✚ Fill in a form
- ✚ Read a newspaper article reporting a piece of news, and notice the kinds of information provided.
- ✚ Imagine your ideal school. Describe it.
- ✚ Prepare your birthday party. Make a list of the stuffs you are going to need.

Although these activities seem to be ideal and of students' interest, we cannot ignore the essential role of the teacher during the developing of this skill. It is probable the most time consuming skill as it requires a meticulous orientation and guide. However, guided activities and controlled activities, as well as self, peer and teacher's feedback in conjunction are essential to improve writing.

5. METHODOLOGY

Much research has provided strong foundations on how to cope with large Heterogeneous classes, as well as to promote concise and meaningful teaching strategies in order for teachers to succeed. As a difficult as it could seem to be, heterogeneous classes are a good opportunity to promote interaction among students and the teacher, provided that classroom activities are well prepared and managed by the professor. Consequently, enlightening and refreshing lessons will be fostered and carried out into the classroom and students are able to enjoy classes and get meaningful learning.

This piece of work pretends to provide and design simple tasks or activities to promote, most of the time, pairwork and group work interaction through simples activities where learners are exposed to diversity, the development of self-confidence in young people, the development of willingness to learn, activities based on collaboration, individualisation, problem-solving and a boost towards harmony in social relations as it is established in the National Curriculum for Basic Education in Mexico. Some strategies to be used for favoring communicative purposes are cutting up activities, flashcards, cloze tasks, role-plays, dialogues, drama, in specific context to awaken students' interest and foster motivation and participation. The board will be also an important tool to take into account despite the drawbacks aforementioned as the school does not have the facilities to use CALL activities.

Indeed, the purpose of English language teaching in basic education is for students to get the necessary knowledge to engage in social practices with written and oral language to interact with native and non-native English speakers by means of specific competencies with the language. This entails using activities that involve the production and interpretation of spoken and written texts –of a familiar, academic and literary nature– so students will be able to satisfy basic communication needs in different every day, familiar, and known situations.

5.1 Description of the target group.

The context of the project will be carried out in a State School from a large multilevel group of first grade in the afternoon shift which takes three English sessions per week. The classroom conditions of this group are quite inappropriate to work properly as school equipment such as chairs, boards and desks are useless in many cases. In addition to this, the classroom area is not equipped to hold between 40 or 45 students in middle of temperatures of 40 Celsius Degrees or up where air conditioning equipment does not work properly. Consequently, teachers feel frustrated to work in these conditions in such a way that they have adopted negative attitude to face these drawbacks instead of seeking solutions to improve quality of teaching –learning process.

Additionally, the level of the tasks presented in the course book called TEENS CLUB is higher than the target group aforementioned. It is important to mention that the current book used in this school was designed to monitor the National English Program in Basic Education since the first levels of English in Preschool and Primary. Thus, the course offers activities to develop receptive skills with lively articles and texts which students are required to master basic level of vocabulary in context without making emphasis in communicative purposes.

5.2 Description of the structure where the material will be included

The activities to be done have the intention to improve teaching contexts as well as to promote meaningful learning in the classroom through a variety of individual, pair work and group work tasks which awaken students' interests. It is not the intention of this research to replace the English coursebook, although it does not fit properly for the group, but to help teachers to widen teaching strategies in the classroom settings whose main purpose is to succeed with large multilevel groups through the best suitable techniques, strategies and tasks for improving productive skills in learners.

According to The National English Program in Basic Education (2011) in its Cycle 4 mentions:

Cycle 4, unlike previous cycles, focuses on a single communicative skill in each environment. This does not imply that the other skills are not included in the

development of specific activities with the language. Moreover, skills related to oral language (speaking and listening) are emphasized in the familiar and community environment... At the same time, these contents are characteristically flexible since their use depends on the specific characteristic of the groups they are addressed to. Therefore, the teacher has the freedom of deciding which contents to teach and to what extent in order to make students' learning meaningful, focus on common goals and achieve the purposes of the cycle.

5.3 Description of the creative process

For the description of this process, some steps were taken into account:

The first one was to identify students' cultural and academic background, learning styles, students' needs such as what their expectations are from the course, what are their goals, and identify learning factors inside the classroom.

The second step was to analyse the main goals of the English Framework for first grade and define the type of activities and tasks to be done with the audience aforementioned in relation to the students' needs and at the same time intending to achieve the stated goals in the English framework.

Finally, the material was designed considering the characteristics of the target group; such activities were well prepared and thought to run effectively in lessons of 50 minutes. All the tasks and activities were based on teaching large multilevel classes, and such activities are encouraged to promote communicative purposes. Nevertheless, this piece of work does not pretend to show a bank of resources for a whole course but to enhance methodological procedures in teaching contexts in order for teachers to be aware of the importance of planning, varying and adapting their lessons considering students' learning factors with the purpose of succeeding in the classroom.

5.4 Description of the material and/ or activities typology

The adopted material was previously designed with the intention to fit large multilevel classes for improving oral production. Each task and procedure was minutely arranged in order for students to get acquainted and find it interesting according to their English needs. In addition to this, the variety of activities are also thought to avoid teachers time consuming when grading the activities, as well as to reduce the numbers of photocopies per class, as it could represent expensive costs during each lesson. Moreover, short but meaningful and lively graded tasks in real contexts are one the characteristics of the presented material

considering the time of each stage of lesson in reduced classrooms with the characteristics of the target group aforementioned.

It should also be pointed out that during the creation of the material it was taken into account one of the most important aspects when planning lessons, it is “anticipated problems” according to Jeremy Harmer (2008) who says that “A good plan tries to predict potential pitfalls and suggests way of dealing with them. It also includes alternative activities in case teachers (we) find it necessary to divert from the lesson sequence we have hoped to follow”.

It is firmly believed that planning helps teachers to think about the lesson in advance in order to “resolve problems and difficulties, to provide a structure for a lesson, to provide a “map” for the teacher to follow and to provide a record of what has been taught” (Richards, 1998:103). At doing so, it is assumed that quality of teaching will be improved and learning will indisputable take place.

6. RESULTS

Most the activities were designed considering the following aspects: the first one is the nature of the group and the second one is that the course book provided by Secretariat of Education at the very beginning of the year is allocated to a class of Level A1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), it implies that the students should have already taken at least, more than 150 hours of effective lessons. However, 90 percent of students lack of knowledge of the English Language Learning. Furthermore, it is of paramount importance to take into account the students’ book contents in order to achieve the English Language Programme Goals and create new lessons as most of the English students’ level corresponds to beginners or false beginners. In addition, considering the 50 minutes of each lesson, these activities were designed in detail to maintain a properly pace and timing paying a lot of attention to productive skills (writing - speaking), as well as to have students’ attention. The intention of each activity is that students are able to produce and develop individual competence through pairwork and groupwork through significant and attractive topics according to their age.

The nature of the activities are focused on Communicative approaches

In a Communicative Approach learners are encouraged to demonstrate their ability to greet someone, complain, talk about recent events, plan, invite, apologize, order a meal in a restaurant, read a train schedule, express their feelings, give instructions, and write letters to the newspaper. (Bowman, Brenda *et al.*, 1992:61)

The authors here mention the importance of promoting lively and real tasks for learning takes place inside the classroom, besides these types of activities foster a good learning environment and interaction with the whole class. Yet, through individualization, collaboration, personalising and open-ended cues teaching strategies teachers have the opportunity to promote independent learning in such a way that students are able to manage and even design their own activities during their teaching-learning process.

The presented activities are focused on and created for unit 1 called “English is funny” whose main object is to promote productive skills, as well as to eradicate students’ strong beliefs about the nature of the language. Besides this, such activities seek students to find themselves, through easy and dynamic lessons, that they are able to produce basic but meaningful language such as “Tell me your phone number”; “Guess my nationality”; “Fill in a form”, making a reservation, etc.

I. Write the countries below each pictures.

Japan – Mexico – Spain – The United States – Germany – Australia – China – France – Italy – England



II. Complete the list with the countries above.

Country	Nationality	Language
1. Spain	Spanish	Spanish
2.	American	English
3.	English	English
4.	Australian	English
5.	Mexican	Spanish
6.	German	German
7.	Japanese	Japanese
8.	Chinese	Chinese
9.	Italian	Italian
10.	French	French

III. Getting acquainted.

Hello! My name is Raul
I am from China. I am
Chinese. I speak
English, French and
Chinese.
And you...?

Hi! I am David
and I am Spanish.
I speak English

IV. Introducing yourself.

Hello! My name is ____
I am from _____. I
am _____. I speak
_____ and _____
And you...?

V. "Guessing nationalities"

Aim: Students will be able to practice nationalities.

Procedure: Hand out students a small flashcard at random and they have to ask each other until they guess their partners' nationalities.

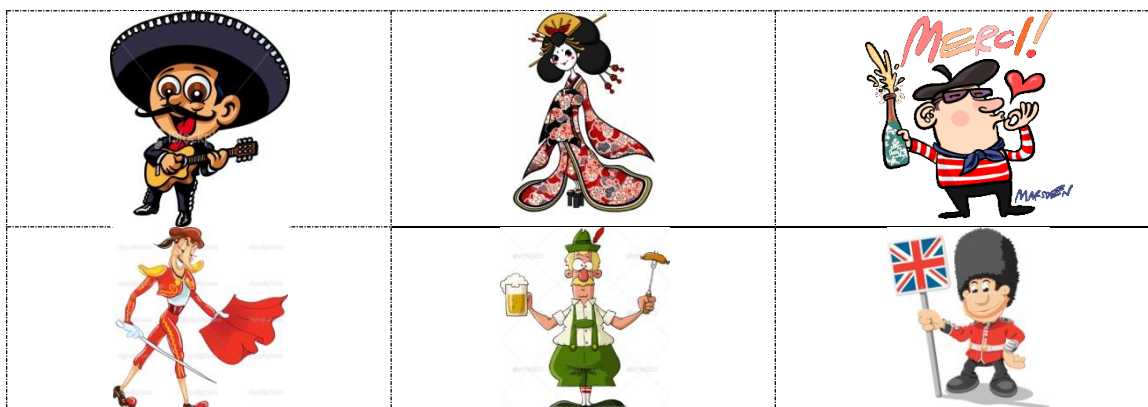
Language focus: Are you German? Yes, I am / No, I am not.
Are you...

Variation: Provide students two sets of the printed flashcards for each couple. Then, each couple mixes up the sets and plays in pairs **MATCHING GAME**. When a student finds the pair of the flashcard, he / she must say the country and nationality of the corresponding pictures he / she faced up.

"Guessing nationalities"



VARIATION: MATCHING GAME



CONSOLIDATION



VI. Consolidation

Situation 1: You are going to travel to another country. And you are interviewed by the consulship to fill in a form.

Student A: Provide his personal information.

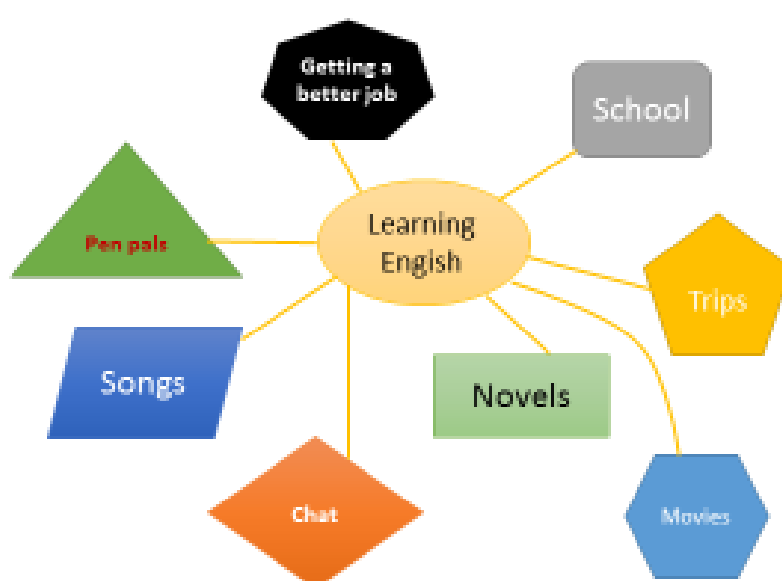
Student B: You are the Consulship. Provide student A personal information questions.

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

A WORD WEB

I. Why is it important to learn English?

Draw a word web where you show what the English language is useful for?



Excuses for not Learning a Second Language

It is difficult.	I am too old
I am not good at learning languages.	When I am an adult
It is a waste of time.	
I don't have time.	
There aren't good teachers or schools to teach English well.	

Make a list of the benefits of studying English nowadays.

✓ 1.

✓ 2.

✓ 3.

✓ 4.

✓ 5.

✓ 6.

✓ 7.

Work in teams of 4 and Design a flyer where you foster the importance of learning a second language.

The aim of this activity is to promote critical thinking skills in students.

PAIRWORK

Put students into pair and give each student personal information questions. Explain they are going to ask each other in turns.

Student A

How are you?
What's your first name?
What's your last name?
How do you spell it?
How old are you?
Where are you from?
What's your nationality?
Where do you live? What is your address?
Do you have a cell-phone number? What is it?

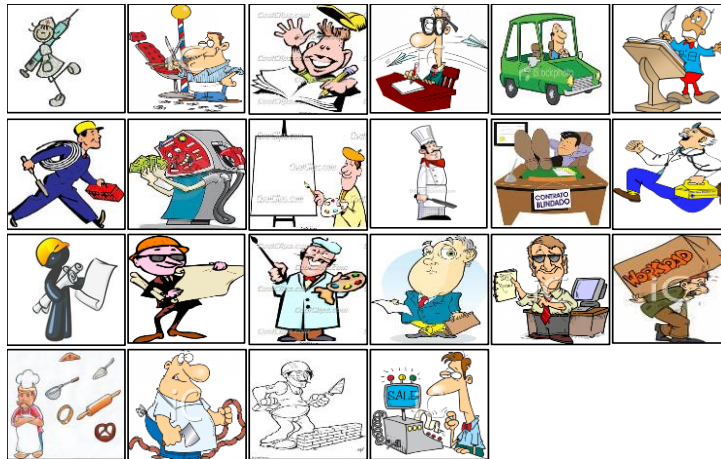
Student B

How are you?
What's your first name?
What's your last name?
What do you do in your free time?
Do like school?
What is your favorite subject?
What is your sport?
Do you like music?
What music do you listen to?

What's my job?

Language Focus: Simple present (Third person of singular)

PROCEDURE: Provide students the cutting-up activities and they will be working into pairs by dividing the numbers of small cards equally (in two halves). Then, each student will read the description of the job or profession and his / her partner has to guess it.



It's the person who plays in a band and plays a musical instrument A musician	He/she works in a school and teaches students A teacher	This person rescues people from burning buildings and helps put out fires A fireman	This person works in hospital and helps doctors. A nurse	He defends people's rights in court. A lawyer	It's the person who flies an airplane. A pilot	He / she takes people's orders in a restaurant and serves them food. A waiter / waitress
This person who works in a police station and maintains public security. A policeman	It's the person who works in a bank and keeps records of money.	It's the person who works in a hospital and treats patients.	It's the person who answers phone calls and does office work for his/her boss.	It's the person who drives a taxi.	It's the person who reports news on TV, radio or Newspaper.	This person does the cooking in a restaurant or hotel.
It's a person who cuts the hair A hairdresser	It's the person who manages the affairs of a company or business.	It's one who does business. A businessman A businesswoman	It's the a man / woman who acts in a movie. Actor / actress	It's the person who goes to school and does homework A student	It's the person who makes bread. A baker	It's the person who builds houses A builder

PAIRWORK ACTIVITY

Length: 5 minutes

The teacher gives each student a small card and they make the question.

Ask your partner about his / her daily routines.

STUDENT A

Ask your partner about a typical day on the weekend.

STUDENT B B

GROUPWORK

DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY:	Teachers provide each student a phone number. Then in group of four students ask each other the corresponding phone number. Variation: Students can use their real phone numbers written down by themselves in small cards provided by the teacher
LEVEL	BEGINNERS
LENGTH	10 MINUTES
AIM:	Students will be able to practice the numbers by saying their phone numbers.

93-73-05-58-06	99-31-56-79-80	60-58-50-37-39
93-71-34-62-08	91-76-44-22-91	55-52-23-56-98
55-78-25-09-00	38-09-46-79-88	555-467-9002

LEVEL 1 -
EASY

Board game



**SPEAK FOR 15
SECONDS...**

1 Start	2 Introducing yourself	3 Your daily routine	4 Describe your classroom	5 Free	6 Likes
16 What do you usually have for breakfast?	15 Your favorite subject and why	14 Describe yourself	13 Go back 3 spaces	12 Describe a member of your family	7 Go forward 3 spaces
17 the music you like..	20 Miss a turn	FINISH 		11 Dislikes	8 Start again
18 Say the month of the years	19 Describe your house			10 Says the day of the week backwards	9 Count from 1 to 20 backwards

LEVEL 2 -
DIFFICULT

Board game



**SPEAK FOR 30
SECONDS...**

1 Start	2 Introducing yourself	3 A typical day in your life	4 Describe your classroom	5 Free	6 Your best friend 's likes and dislikes
16 What do you usually have for breakfast?	15 Your favorite subject and why	14 Describe a celebrity	13 Go back 3 spaces	12 Describe a member of your family	7 Go forward 3 spaces
17 the music you like..	20 Miss a turn	FINISH 		11 The best film...	8 Start again
18 Your favorite TV program	19 Describe your bedroom			10 Spell your name backwards	9 talk about your pet

UNIT 1 - PROJECT 1

PHOTO ALBUM

Create a photo album of your favorite celebrities. You must include the following aspects: Name, last name, country, nationality, age, profession or job, hobbies.

Example:



This is David Garret. He is German. He is 34 years old. He is a famous violinist. He likes reading and playing tennis.

This is Malala Yousafzai. She is Pakistani. She won the Nobel Prize 2014. She is 17 years old. She is a student. She loves reading.



7. CONCLUSION

Early attempts to come up with reasonable and comprehensive strategies to cope with large multilevel classes have been made by important researchers. However, any groups can be the same. Each one will be distinguished by its variety in students' learning styles, language background and so forth. The activities presented along this study are just one alternative of the many things educators can do when preparing their lessons to get effectiveness and good performance in classroom settings. Undoubtedly, the material designed has the intention to improve communicative contexts. In addition, the strategies and techniques exposed were done in order for teachers to strive for getting successful lessons. No matter the kind of pitfalls teachers could face in the classroom, if they are aware of the importance of what teaching learning process represents in the educational sphere they will indisputably improve their methodology.

Continuity of tasks will facilitate learners in being able to take over portions of the task and become independent learners. They have the intention to instil collaboration and participation through short but lively and real activities where learners have the opportunity to spread vocabulary in context, as well as to improve oral production. Furthermore, each activity was designed to favor interaction with the whole class. Practicality is one of the main aspects to be considered when designing the material for avoiding exhausted tasks revision but giving the teacher the opportunity to monitor each stage of the lesson easily and practically considering the large audience. This way, "scaffolding and differentiation of instruction are necessary. This requires a great deal of planning and often the ability of the teacher to provide a variety of materials at different levels to address the needs of the learners in the classroom." DelliCarpini (2006).

The well use of teaching strategies and techniques as well as the most suitable activities for mixed abilities groups are of seminal importance for the good development of the lessons. As evident as it may seem, the relationship between the former and the latter do not guarantee success in teaching contexts, unless teachers are able to devote time to improve learning contexts and show passion, commitment, responsibility and love for teaching.

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