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EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN A SCHOOL WITHOUT BORDERS

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In the modern school mastering strategies for feveloping communication skills can bring about positive outcomes in varius aspects of learners' lives, including communication, relationships, conflict management, personal development, and professional success. This article tackles with honing valuable skills such as reflective listening, mindful listening, questioning skills, group discussion skills and role playing in order to develop learners as better communicators, empathetic listeners, and more effective collaborators in their personal and professional interactions.

Key words*: listening, development, strategies, communciation, role play, questioning skills, discussion*

Clear and concise communication in a classroom helps learners grasp new concepts more easily and enhances their understanding of the subject matter. In a school without borders, where students are engaged in developing learning outcomes internationally, such as eTwinning community, engagement in the communication process is crucial. Therefore selecting the proper strategies fo an enhanced motivation for communication can inspire and motivate learners to boost their confidence and willingness to learn. Moreover, by providing encouragement and constructive feedback teachers foster positive relationships thus creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Another point worth mentioning is the effects of clear communication strategies as they help identify and address misunderstandings or other possible challenges leading to more effective problem-solving and conflict resolution within the learning environment.

Studies reveal that the level of effective communication in educational settings has direct impact on the quality of learning process whereas poor communication skills have been a leading factor to miscommunication and conflicts in a school environment. [7, p.30] Research has found that not only is communication overviewed as leading factor in creating a positive learning environment for learners but also the effects such as confidence, academic achievement and increased self-esteem lack due to the focus of developing English as a foreign language communication skills rather than the peer help, bonding and increased feelings of belonging. [2, p. 56] Integrating effective communication strategies in the planning of the curriculum based individual lesson planning by including a diversity of methods and techniques contribute to an increase of positively affected learners who become prone to collaboration, cooperation and decrease in conflict engagement situations. [4, p. 25]

Effective communication strategies enhance understanding, trust and collaboration in an educational setting. ***Reflective listening*** strategy offers numerous advantages as it improves communication, enhances relationships, builds trust, hones conflict resolution, enhances problem solving and enhances personal growth. In a classroom setting reflective listening can be promoted by involving students in the activity where sharing, listening and communication becomes crucial in completing the task. Students are asked to work in pairs and read the paragraphs on paranormal happening "Noises in the Night" and "The Strange Object on the Hill". After the students read the paragraphs, they are to have a conversation with the partner about the predictions of the text they have read. By brainstorming the ideas, the students develop reflective listening skills as well as communicative input is valued.



Figure 1: Reflective listening activity, brainstorming

Once the students ahve finished their communication in pairs they are asked to read the texts for Student A "Noises in the Night" and Student B "The Strange Object on the Hill". After the texts are read, the students are asked to share their stories with their partner, and as feedback to ask their partner the questions on their retold stories as in the figure below:

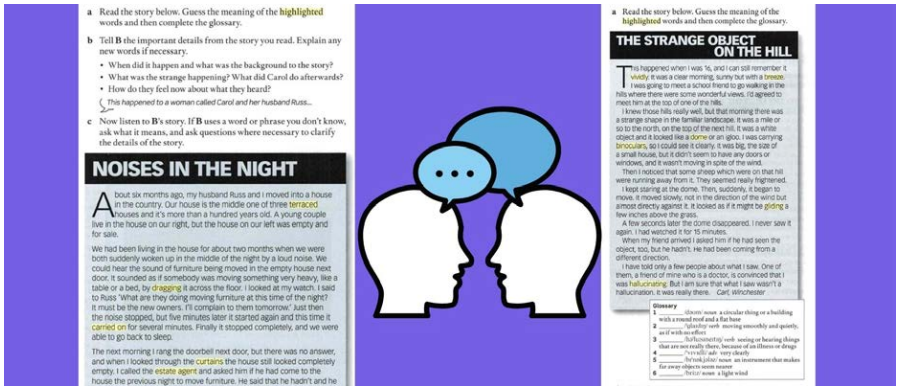


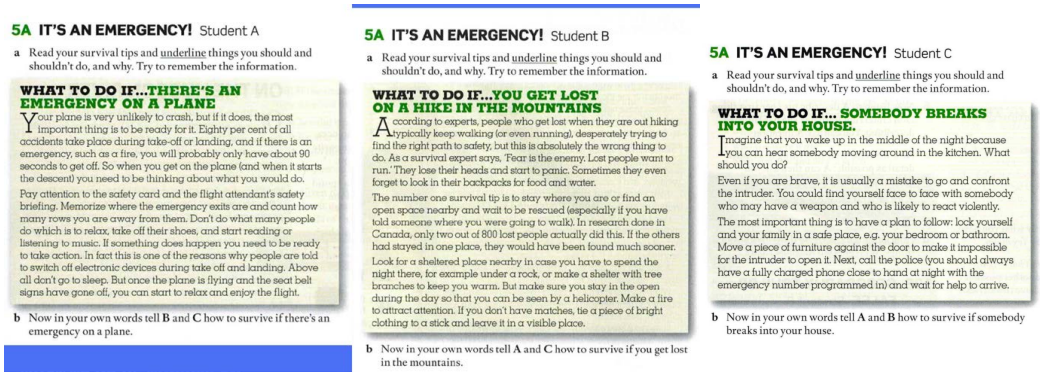
Figure 2: Reflective listening activity, pair work

By providing feedback learners learn to encourage their peers to acknowledge their input and offer guidance for improvement in a supportive manner which impacts learning and achievement as evidence show that peer feedback is used to enhance its effectiveness in classrooms. [3, p.125]

Cultivating ***mindful listening skills*** can bring about numerous advantages, such as promoting presence, focus or stress reduction. By incorporating mindful listening into daily classroom interactions, learners can nurture more meaningful connections, enhance their communication proficiency, and foster positive outcomes in various aspects of their personal and professional lives. The main benefits of mindful listening activities in a classroom setting are the enhanced presence, the improved focus and attention, the reduced stress and anxiety, empathy and self-awareness. [8, p. 67]

In a classroom setting groups of three students are to work on the activity "It's an emergency!"

Three situations are given to the students: What to do if there's an emergency on the plane, if you get lost on a hike in the mountains and if somebody brreaks into your house. Firstly students are asked to express their personal view on the matter, from personal experience if had one and discuss in the group. Students are guided into having a conversation of the possible risks of certain actions. After the discussion the students are asked to read the survival tips, on things that should be done, things that shouldn't be done and the reasons. After the texts are read, the students are to tell the partners in their own words on the survival tips.



5A IT'S AN EMERGENCY! Student A

a Read your survival tips and underline things you should and shouldn't do, and why. Try to remember the information.

WHAT TO DO IF...THERE'S AN EMERGENCY ON A PLANE

Your plane is very unlikely to crash, but if it does, the most important thing is to be ready for it. Eighty per cent of all accidents take place during take-off or landing, and if there is an emergency, such as a fire, you will probably only have about 90 seconds to get off. So when you get on the plane (and when it starts the descent) you need to be thinking about what you would do.

Pay attention to the safety card and the flight attendant's safety briefing. Memorize where the emergency exits are and count how many rows you are away from them. Don't do what many people do which is to relax, take off their shoes, and start reading or listening to music. If something does happen you need to be ready to take action. In fact this is one of the reasons why people are told to switch off electronic devices during take off and landing. Above all don't go to sleep. But once the plane is flying and the seat belt signs have gone off, you can start to relax and enjoy the flight.

b Now in your own words tell **B** and **C** how to survive if there's an emergency on a plane.

5A IT'S AN EMERGENCY! Student B

a Read your survival tips and underline things you should and shouldn't do, and why. Try to remember the information.

WHAT TO DO IF...YOU GET LOST ON A HIKE IN THE MOUNTAINS

According to experts, people who get lost when they are out hiking typically keep walking (or even running), desperately trying to find the right path to safety, but this is absolutely the wrong thing to do. As a survival expert says, 'Fear is the enemy. Lost people want to run.' They lose their heads and start to panic. Sometimes they even forget to look in their backpacks for food and water.

The number one survival tip is to stay where you are or find an open space nearby and wait to be rescued (especially if you have told someone where you were going to walk). In research done in Canada, only two out of 800 lost people actually did this. If the others had stayed in one place, they would have been found much sooner.

Look for a sheltered place nearby in case you have to spend the night there, for example under a rock, or make a shelter with tree branches to keep you warm. But make sure you stay in the open during the day so that you can be seen by a helicopter. Make a fire to attract attention. If you don't have matches, tie a piece of bright clothing to a stick and leave it in a visible place.

b Now in your own words tell **A** and **C** how to survive if you get lost in the mountains.

5A IT'S AN EMERGENCY! Student C

a Read your survival tips and underline things you should and shouldn't do, and why. Try to remember the information.

WHAT TO DO IF... SOMEBODY BREAKS INTO YOUR HOUSE.

Imagine that you wake up in the middle of the night because you can hear somebody moving around in the kitchen. What should you do?

Even if you are brave, it is usually a mistake to go and confront the intruder. You could find yourself face to face with somebody who may have a weapon and who is likely to react violently.

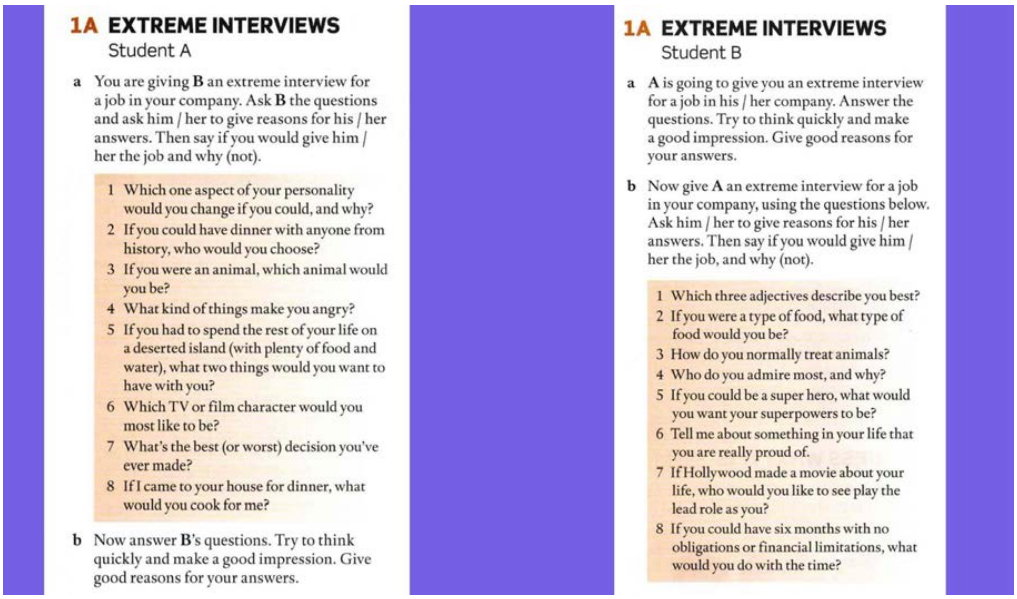
The most important thing is to have a plan to follow: lock yourself and your family in a safe place, e.g. your bedroom or bathroom. Move a piece of furniture against the door to make it impossible for the intruder to open it. Next, call the police (you should always have a fully charged phone close to hand at night with the emergency number programmed in) and wait for help to arrive.

b Now in your own words tell **A** and **B** how to survive if somebody breaks into your house.

Figure 3: Mindful listening skills activity

Practicing asking ***open-ended questions*** encourages speakers to elaborate on their thoughts and feelings. Honing your questioning skills can bring a range of benefits, including promoting learning and understanding, critical thinking, and decision-making. By mastering the art of asking thoughtful and strategic questions, students can enhance their ability to gather information, engage with others, navigate challenges, and foster growth and success in various aspects of their life. [1, p. 78] in a classroom setting the activity "An Extreme Interview" can ensure a successful mastering of open-ended questions strategy. Students are asked to imagine that they are to give an extreme interview

for a job in their company. They are to ask their partner questions and to give reasons for their answers. After the interview completes, the student who set the interview has to provide the feedback of giving the job and reasons to be set as well. This activity helps in facilitating learning and understanding of their partner's verbal and nonverbal communication process, promotes critical thinking, improves communication skills, strengthens relationships and encourages innovation and creativity.



1A EXTREME INTERVIEWS
Student A

a You are giving **B** an extreme interview for a job in your company. Ask **B** the questions and ask him / her to give reasons for his / her answers. Then say if you would give him / her the job and why (not).

1 Which one aspect of your personality would you change if you could, and why?
2 If you could have dinner with anyone from history, who would you choose?
3 If you were an animal, which animal would you be?
4 What kind of things make you angry?
5 If you had to spend the rest of your life on a deserted island (with plenty of food and water), what two things would you want to have with you?
6 Which TV or film character would you most like to be?
7 What's the best (or worst) decision you've ever made?
8 If I came to your house for dinner, what would you cook for me?

b Now answer **B**'s questions. Try to think quickly and make a good impression. Give good reasons for your answers.

1A EXTREME INTERVIEWS
Student B

a **A** is going to give you an extreme interview for a job in his / her company. Answer the questions. Try to think quickly and make a good impression. Give good reasons for your answers.

b Now give **A** an extreme interview for a job in your company, using the questions below. Ask him / her to give reasons for his / her answers. Then say if you would give him / her the job, and why (not).

1 Which three adjectives describe you best?
2 If you were a type of food, what type of food would you be?
3 How do you normally treat animals?
4 Who do you admire most, and why?
5 If you could be a super hero, what would you want your superpowers to be?
6 Tell me about something in your life that you are really proud of.
7 If Hollywood made a movie about your life, who would you like to see play the lead role as you?
8 If you could have six months with no obligations or financial limitations, what would you do with the time?

Figure 4: Setting open-end questions activity

Developing strong ***group discussion skills*** can provide significant advantages in various social, academic, and professional contexts as they offer numerous advantages, including improved communication, collaboration, confidence, cultural sensitivity, and academic or professional development. [6, p. 18] By honing these skills through regular practice and constructive engagement in group discussions, students can enhance their social, academic, and professional competencies, leading to personal growth, effective communication, and success in various collaborative settings.

In a classroom setting group discussion is valuable due to its impact on the learners self awareness and self confidence. "First Aid Quiz" is an activity that can be used for academic and personal development due to its actuality and life skills purposes. Students are asked to work in groups are are to develop a list of situations that wre prone to risk and ways of applying first aid in situations of danger. After brainstorming the topic and collaboration students share their findings with the other groups as to enhance not only public speaking skills but their social competencies as well. After the compeltion of the activity students are asked to go through the "First Aid Quiz" and comment on each situation as to identify the mistake. After discussion, students are either provided with the correct answers or if the activity is to be extended are sked to research for the correct answer.

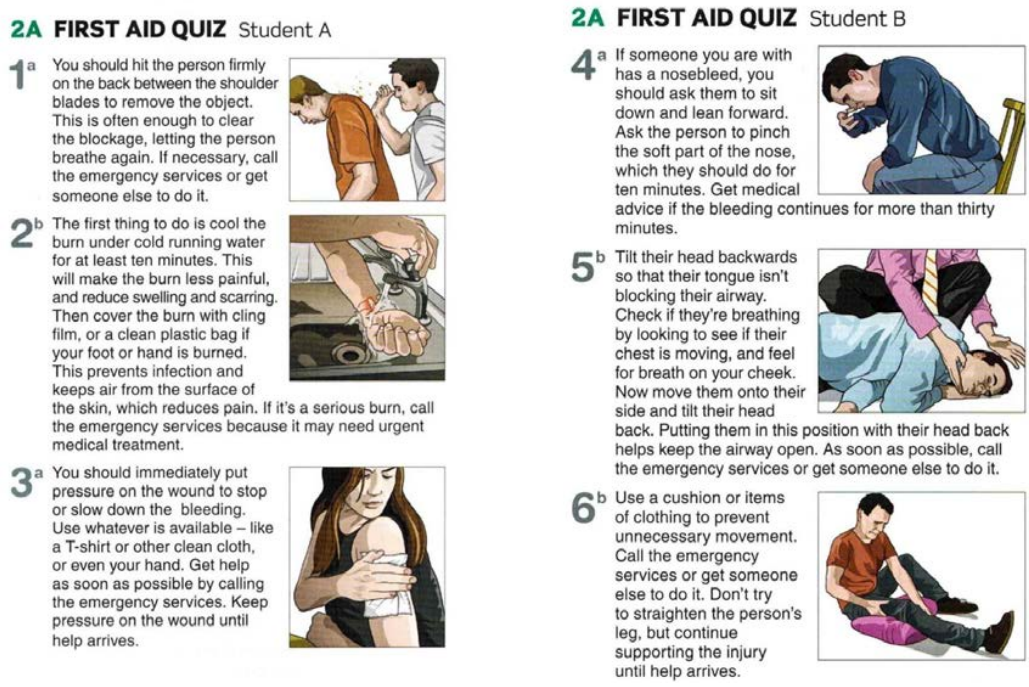


Figure 5: Group discussion activity

Role-playing is an activity that offers a dynamic and interactive way to develop communication skills by enhancing not only verbal communication and conflict resolution abilities but also non-verbal communication awareness, active engagement, and skill transferability. [5, p.35] By incorporating role-playing into communication skill development programs or training sessions, students can benefit from practical, experiential learning that prepares them for effective communication in diverse settings.

In a classroom environment the activity is to be done in groups of 4 participants "the MacBride family" and "the O'Neill family". The MacBride family: Your family are on holiday in France with the O'Neill family. You like to get up early in the morning and make the most of the day, but your friends like to sleep in a bit. One of the highlights of the trip was to visit a famous castle nearby, but your friends took so long to get out of bed this morning, and then so long to get ready, that when you got to the castle, it was closing for lunch. What's more, it won't open this afternoon, and tomorrow is a national holiday in France, so you've completely missed out. You and your kids were so looking forward to visiting this castle. *Your position: You think the O'Neills should know how you feel. You start the conversation.* The O'Neill family. Your family are on holiday in France with the MacBride family. You like to sleep in a bit in the morning – you're on holiday, after all! But your friends like to get up at the crack of dawn. They made a lot of noise as you were trying to have a lie-in this morning. Today, you all wanted to visit a famous castle nearby, but by the time you'd got up, had your showers and your breakfast, and got to the castle, it was closing. Sadly, you won't get another chance to visit it

on this trip, but hey – worse things happen. It's no big deal. *Your position: You think the Macbrides should chill out and worry less. The Macbrides will start the conversation*. [9, p.178] The students are to tackle with the situation from their perspective and engage in communication with reasons by applying reflective listening skills, active engagement and skill transferability.

In a classroom without borders where wtudents are prone to communicate with peers from around the world it is the role od educators to encourage leaenrs to convey genuine interest in the communicative act as to demonstrate respect and attentiveness. This way empathy and understanding towards learners' perspectives and feelings cultivate in trust and rapport. By applying effective strategies of developing communication in the classroom encourages students in bonding and building healthy relationships with their peers, providing positive and construcitve feedback that acknowledges leaenrs' input and offers guidance for improvement in a supportive manner. Overlall, by incorporating the above mentioned strategies into communication interactions teachers foster a supportive learning environemnt that promotes engagement and academic success.

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