

Reviews

The Principled Communicative Approach

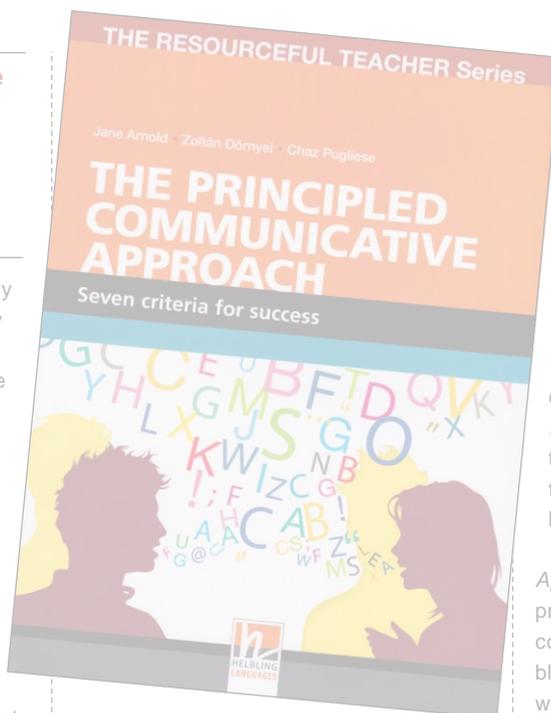
by Jane Arnold, Zoltán Dörnyei
and Chaz Pugliese
Helbling Languages 2015
978-3-85272-938-1

I believe that nowadays the vast majority of schools and teachers would certainly prefer to follow the communicative approach – rather than, for example, the grammar translation method or even a pure version of audio-lingualism. And the reasons are obvious: with rare exceptions, most people who decide to learn another language expect to be able to *communicate* with others, so adopting such methodology makes more sense.

However, as a teacher trainer, I can confidently say that the idea that explicit grammar rules must be avoided at all costs, that drilling is a thing of the past and that formulaic language is a crime against communicative language teaching is still, unfortunately, very much out there. Since there is no single authority on what the communicative approach really is and what the principles really are, many professionals, with the best of intentions, end up creating their own variants of the approach. These are not always based on sound theory and therefore, at times, risk jeopardising learning. It seems to me that there are quite a few misconceptions about communicative language teaching that need to be clarified and that a revitalisation of the approach is also in order.

The Principled Communicative Approach, a slim volume which is part of Helbling's *Resourceful Teachers* series, might have done just that. Based on current psycholinguistic research and on the idea that modern language teaching should follow broadly communicative principles, the theory behind the book is that:

- teaching should be meaning-focused, learner-centred and personally significant to the students;
- explicit input helps language automatised;
- controlled practice activities are vital to help students internalise L2 structures;



- there should be a clear focus on form/structure;
- teaching formulaic language is essential;
- students should be exposed to large amounts of L2;
- students should be given plenty of opportunities to practise the language in an interactive way.

The book is divided into seven chapters, each with a brief explanation of one of the aforementioned principles followed by an average of ten classroom activities that, as the authors put it, '*embody the seven principles*'. What I particularly like about these activities is that they are very practical and many of them require little or no preparation. This is extremely useful because we teachers already have a lot on our plates, so having a book like this in the staffroom is a real time-saver.

It's worth mentioning that the activities cater for a variety of learners, that is, visual, kinesthetic, musical and the like. I was also pleasantly surprised to find that many of the good old exercises we used to use in the past (and which seem to have been forgotten in recent years, mainly because all the emphasis is now on technology and computer-based activities) have been brought back to life.

Having said that, though, in order to keep up with the 21st century, the book also suggests a number of useful websites and links that can be used in class. Although the activities in the book were designed for students at A1 to B2 level on the CEFR scale, some of them could easily be adapted and used with more advanced students. Finally, at the back of the book there is also an extremely helpful *Teacher's Quick-Reference Guide*, showing the lesson time, the level and the focus of each of the 75 activities. Again, a real help for busy teachers.

The Principled Communicative Approach, in my opinion, does what it promises: giving a fresh take on communicative language teaching with a blend of sound theory and practice. I would definitely recommend this book, not only to language teachers but also to teacher trainers.

William Chaves Gomes
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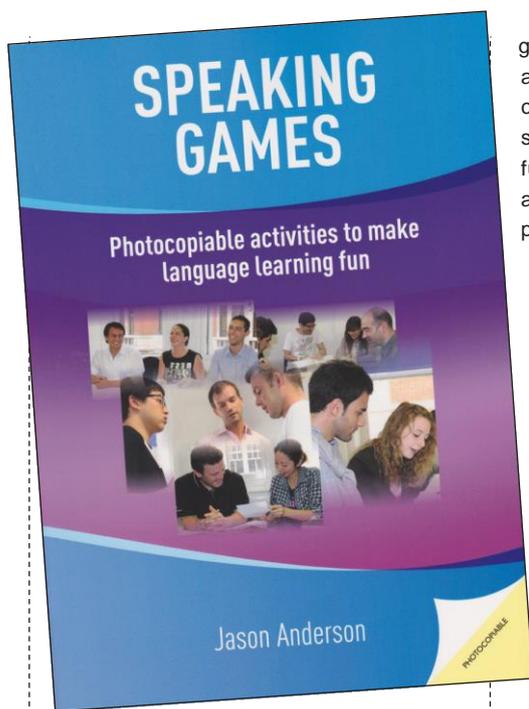
Speaking Games

by Jason Anderson
DELTA 2014
978-1-905085-98-9

In his article 'The uniqueness of gameplay' in Issue 96 of ETP, Jason Anderson follows Henry Widdowson in asserting that authenticity is '*not a quality of the materials we use, but a context-dependent interaction between individuals within a community*'. He points out, therefore, that the use of language in the course of playing a game (*in-game* language use) and the use of language in class in order to allow a game to be played, eg negotiating the meaning of the rules, commenting on the action, etc (*around-game* language use) both have a claim to authenticity.

This book is structured to embody this principle, and each of the 50 photocopiable speaking games has not only a section of teacher's notes to help

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teachers set up and run the activity successfully, but also a 'Rules of the game' section to be given to the students. This section has the dual function of providing both an authentic reading opportunity – comprehension is demonstrated by how well they play the game as a result of reading it – and a handy reference to promote greater autonomy during the game. The 'Rules of the game' section is divided into *Preparation*, *How to play* and *How to win*, with an additional *If ...* section, which gives more detail about what action to take within the game if certain situations arise and also goes some way towards dealing with the kind of unforeseen eventualities which can occur in the course of games.

The worksheets and their accompanying notes are so clear and easy to use that it would be possible to plunge right in and pick an activity for immediate use in class, but I would recommend that you read the short but illuminating introduction to the book first. It contains a sound rationale for the use of games, an explanation of how to find the game you need by using either the Contents pages (which contain full information about levels and language focus, including sub-skills, functions,

grammar and lexis) or the three indexes at the back (where the games are categorised according to grammar/structure, topic/vocabulary and function/sub-skill), and ideas for adapting the games to suit the preferences of your students.

An interesting and useful feature of the book is the provision of a 'Resource bank' with pages to photocopy and cut up into cards. These are designed for use with a number of different games, giving a general resource for teachers to draw upon when needed, and allowing for the possibility for the games in the book to be adapted or for entirely new games to be devised.

The games themselves, which are placed in four categories (*Board games*, *Card games*, *Secrets and lies*, *Puzzles and challenges*) are well

thought-out and attractively presented. Many of them are fresh treatments of tried and trusted ELT games which teachers will already be familiar with. For example, 'Crime Scene Investigation' is basically a 'Spot the difference' activity, but it is given an extra angle in that some of the differences between two pictures can be used to decide which two people in the pictures committed a bank robbery and how they did it and got away.

'Who wants to be an 'Idiom'aire?' is a clever take on a well-known TV quiz. In deciding on the meaning of certain English idioms, teams who don't know or are unsure of the correct answer have three lifelines, each of which can only be used once. These are: the option of asking the teacher, using a dictionary or having answers removed so they have to choose between two possible answers rather than four

I believe that teachers who wish to encourage speaking in their lessons and to ensure the enthusiastic participation of the whole class will find this an invaluable resource.

**Helena Gomm
West Meon, UK**

Subscribers can get a 12.5% discount on this book. Go to the ETP website and quote ETPQR0314 at the checkout.

ENGLISH TEACHING professional

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