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Book Review

Communicative Approach to the Teaching of English as a Second Language
by Pratima Dave Shashtri, Himalayan Publishing House, 2010, 190 pp.,
ISBN: 978-93-5024-543-9 (e-book)

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Talking about communication, it is important to have an impeccable understanding of a language. Language is a tool of communication that we all use in our daily life to convey information, tell a story, and put forth our views and arguments to others. To communicate effectively, one should understand different aspects of the language. NCF (National Curriculum Framework 2005) states that 'language is not only a means of communication; it is also a medium through which most of our knowledge is acquired. We need language to understand different disciplines as well such as science, history, social science, etc. Language skills, it is obvious, play a crucial part in this process. It has, therefore, been a core concern of language teachers that students should acquire proficiency in reading, speaking, listening, and writing.

It is not true that children don't know the language. They have their vocabulary and they come to school with a stack of thousand words that we might not know about it. What however needs to be taken into cognizance is that, if one focuses only on one skill, the others will lag. This is a common pitfall in teaching a new language. Mixing activities that target all four skills will work in our favor if we are aspiring to learn a new language. The question, however, is that how do we do these interestingly and effectively?

To answer this question, we will be discussing an important book- '*Communicative Approach to the Teaching of English as a Second Language*' by Pratima Shastri Dave. This book deals with the communicative approach of Language teaching that is being practiced all over India. This book extensively discusses all aspects of language; especially the emphasis is

on the teaching of the skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing with vocabulary and grammar.

The author of the book deals with the problem-solving activities that are set in the Indian context. This set of activities had two motives in her mind: (a) It will be easily identifiable by the learners; (b) It will promote the motto of 'learning by doing.'. This book discusses the theoretical understanding of language learning, language acquisition, and use of comprehensible input, teaching four skills, error analysis, and language testing.

Setting up the tone of the book, she firstly places the status of English in India. It has been recommended by the education department to use regional language as a medium of instruction at the primary and secondary levels. But this does not solve the problem. Rather it widens up the gap of language between English medium and regional medium learners. To address this problem, the author suggests make our learners autonomous learners. They should be allowed to use the language freely and fearlessly. This will lead to enhanced confidence and intimacy with language to be learnt.

The author has chosen a well-suited topic to work upon the intricacies attached to learning English as a second language. The fascinating part of this book is that what classroom strategies we should follow to acquire a second language is hardly addressed extensively in academics. The second interesting fact of this book is that it talks about activity-based learning in a language classroom. Keeping activity-based learning a central point of intervention, the author reflected upon how we can design a learner-centered activity with a purpose of helping them to become proficient in LSRW skills as well as imaginative and creative.

This book offers a discussion on the Communicative approach as the title suggests it investigates the communicative practices and it showcases the articulation of how the tasks can be set in real-life situations. This book has adopted activity-based learning to study how it will promote active participation as well as help in integrating all the four skills of LSRW. The author offers extensive lists of activities that will help teachers to use in a language classroom.

Learning English becomes difficult for learners because it has some dissimilarity. Author brings into the mainstream of discussion a valid point. She says what breaks the cycle of language learning in the case of Language 2 (L2) is that we start with reading, writing, and listening first and come to speaking skill at the end. But the natural order in learning the mother tongue, the Language 1 (L1) is otherwise. We are exposure to the language through listening and speech as a natural social process. She rightly pointed out that we should replicate the same scenario in L2 learning.

The author says that we should put our emphasis on communicative competence. What does she mean by communicative competence (CC)? CC refers to the capacity of using language for a purpose. The purpose can be different. We should try to create real-life situations where learners can use the language accordingly. We can make our teaching interesting by introducing language games and activities. We should allow our learners to make mistakes as the making of errors reflects their creativity. We should consider those errors as a part of developing linguistic competence. Give constructive feedback on those errors and that will help you to plan your strategies for remedial teaching.

Talking about teaching aid, she says a teacher must exploit all the available resources. Using audio-visual material in classroom teaching makes teaching more effective. It stimulates the learners and promotes active participation. Video can be used for listening and speaking skills. It will also help you to develop writing and reading skills where a teacher can prepare worksheets based on the video content. Plan your activities in such a way where it will not target only LSRW skills, but will also develop their questioning skill, creative and imaginative skills.

Teaching speaking skills are important for their existence. It is developed through exposure and practice. Speaking follows a cognitive process where we first formulate ideas; choose sentence structure and words to express them. She says while teaching speaking skills, we must keep in mind two approaches that will help in developing oral communication skills: (a) learning a language as a skill in the class, (b) Developing spoken skill through exposure and use. A teacher should prepare activities to make them speak and these activities should be problem-solving in nature. They can introduce a range of activities such as role-play, discussions, debate, guessing games, simple questions answer, etc. These activities will

provide learning through natural use in the communicative situation as well as will help them to inculcate listening skills, to work together, and to correct others.

Similarly reading skill is important because it helps learners to evaluate and appreciate literature. It is not only about the decoding of the graphic symbols, but it is a process of thinking. While teaching writing skills, it is important to keep in mind that a writer must follow a sequential process for writing. To write effectively, a teacher should teach their learners to express their ideas systematically. Writing is an art of saying- why, what, and how logical and clear you are in your thought.

Research studies in second language acquisition talk about three key elements associated with learning a new language. The first deals with *comprehensible input* (being exposed to listening and reading; something in the new language to understand it). The second deals with *comprehensible output* (it talks about ways of producing be it verbally or in written form), the last one deals with *review or feedback* (uncovering the errors and making changes in response). These three steps will work as a foundational block to give shape to our language learning and practice in all four skills of LSRW.

It has been seen in the Indian context that out of four skills, teachers give prominence to reading and writing in English language Teaching. Due to globalization, English has been a lingua franca. Hence, it is important to understand, speaking and listening skills are also important to communicate effectively. This book has sharply pointed out that we can teach any skill in isolation because all four skills are interconnected. To develop learners' proficiency, all four skills should be reinforced. But teachers should test all four skills independently to find out the gaps and areas of improvement. This book is aligned with the National Curriculum Framework and discussed the pedagogical strategies to overcome the common challenges faced by a teacher in an English Language classroom.