

DESIGNING TASKS ACCORDING TO C 1 DESCRIPTORS OF PERFORMANCE

Next I am going to identify some CEFR descriptors and some tasks I used in order to instil those abilities in students.

A writing activity that I worked on with my students and that can be found in Their textbook, “Upstream Advanced”, on page 118, involves writing a **for- and- against essay** on a topic like using technology in class, for example.

The general objective of the activity was for students to “write clear, well-structured expositions of complex subjects, underlining the relevant salient features” and “expand and support points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples” (CEFR, 2017, p.76)

ACTIVITY 1: Pre- task

AIM: Students “*can cope linguistically to negotiate a solution*” (CEFR, 2017, p.80)

The pre-task includes a listing activity in which they think of three reasons why technology is considered to be useful in class. Then, they might do a comparing activity in which they compare different technological tools that might be used (the computer or the phone) and are given a problem solving activity: What to do with the computer when it breaks down. After doing each activity, they share their results with their partners and they also take notes which are going to be used when they do the writing task. In order for students to get more knowledge and make things clearer, the teacher might tell them about a personal experience or they could watch/ listen to someone else talking about a personal experience.

ACTIVITY 2: Task

AIM: Students “*can expand and support points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples*” (CEFR, 2017, p.76)

During the *task* students write one or two paragraphs about the topic using all the information discussed so far and present it to the rest of the class. Then, they share ideas about how to improve their written productions, including things about structure, layout, ideas, etc. and then report these to the class.

ACTIVITY 3: Post task

AIM: Students “*can have a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome*” (CEFR, 2017, p.81)

The post- task focuses on language points or discusses things to be included in such an essay so that students might write a similar essay as homework.

The topic of the first unit in the textbook, “Something to Shout About” was events in a person’s life. Therefore, after finishing the unit, I got students to do a writing activity in which they write about personal memories. The activity is called “*I remember....*” and I adapted it from Perego, Suzanne and Boyle, 2013. The main aim of this task was the same as above, that is students should be able “*to write clear, well-structured expositions of complex subjects, underlining the relevant salient features*” and “*expand and support points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples*” (CEFR, 2017, p.76)

ACTIVITY 1: Pre- task

AIM: Students should “*express himself/ herself fluently with a good command of a broad lexical repertoire*” (CEFR, 2017, p. 82)

Students start with a **pre-task** to activate their knowledge about the topic. At this point, they also think about words they might need to use. These words are elicited by the teacher through a series of questions. Students have write down five things that happened to them starting with the phrase “I remember...” and then, they share their ideas with a partner. Then, they write down a name they associate with each event, one sense (smell, sight, etc.) and in the end, choose the event they would like to write about, the part of the memory that makes it memorable and share that memory with the rest of the group. Students also make connections between their ideas to get a detailed presentation.

ACTIVITY 2: Task

AIM: Students should “*expand and support points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples*” (CEFR, 2017, p. 76)

The task involves students using all the information brainstormed above and writing about the memory as much as they can in 10’ without worrying about punctuation or spelling and then share it again within the group. After this, in groups, students discuss each student’s piece of

writing and help him edit it. Even if the time is limited, at their level, they should be able to “employ the structures and conventions of a particular written genre” (CEFR, 2017, p. 69) in order to get well- structured pieces of writing.

ACTIVITY 3: Post- task

AIM: Students must “consistently maintain a high degree of grammatical accuracy” (CEFR, 2017, p.133).

The post- task is the part where students focus on language. The teacher uses students’ pieces of writing to analyse, together with the students, mistakes or grammar structures relevant for a successful achievement of the task. In this case, they could focus on Past Tenses.

Another productive skill that I students practised a lot was speaking. At C1 level the CEFR sets different objectives. Students must show the ability to “produce extended stretches of language with ease and with little hesitation”, by having “relevant, coherent and varied contributions”, and using “a wide range of cohesive devices and discourse markers” (CEFR, 2017, p.82). These were the objectives of the activity I am going to present next. It focuses on speaking and involves a problem- solving because it requires students to produce things about a perfect society.

This is an activity I worked on with my students at the end of unit 4 in their textbook, “Upstream Advanced” which dealt with problems in society and ways of solving them.

ACTIVITY:

AIM: Students should be able to “cope linguistically to negotiate a solution”, and also to “use vocabulary with no significant errors” and “ have a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome”.(CEFR, 2017, p. 83) to produce a well-developed plan for an ideal society.

First, I showed them some pictures with different social problems (unemployment, vandalism, crime, and others). I asked them to discuss the pictures with a partner and say what solutions to these they can find. When reaching an agreement, they write down some ideas and swap partners and do the same. The swapping should continue until I said stop. The idea is that in a limited amount of time, they gather as many ideas as possible. Then, I introduced the task of creating an ideal country. I gave them a blank map where they are supposed to place the institutions they consider necessary. Together with their group students have to decide and

justify their decisions. After filling the map, they had to think of other points (name of the place, 5 laws, flag, weather, customs, and others). They designed the country on a A 3 piece of paper which was then presented to the rest of the class.

At home, students had to write an essay providing solutions to global warming, another problem in society.

Another activity that focused on speaking and whose objectives were similar to the ones discussed above involved talking about strict parents and it is based on a model proposed by David and Jane Willis.

ACTIVITY:

AIM: Students must be able to *“use language flexibly and effectively for social purposes, including emotional usage and cope linguistically to negotiate a solution”*, and show that they *“can use vocabulary with no significant errors”* and *“can have a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome”* (CEFR, 2017, p. 87)

At first, I told students about my own childhood experience and then, I gave them a questionnaire that they had to discuss in groups of 3 or 4. The questionnaire included questions to which they were supposed to answer yes or no.

After answering the questions by deciding together, students discuss whose parents were the strictest and then one person in the group, or the whole group, reports to the class.

The discussion is followed by the language focus stage where they analyse different structures after a short summary of what the groups reported and after hearing any comments they might have.

Then students were asked to underline all the phrases in the questionnaire that mention what they were obliged to do. Then, they are given another copy of the questionnaire with words in the questions missing and they should try to remember them without looking at the original ones. When, they finish, the teacher writes a list of numbers on the board and tells students to try to remember as many questions as they can. Then, they compare results. The words that are removed can be grammar structures. In order to complete the task, the teacher can help by having students listen to the questions again without writing, and at the end, they try to fill in what is missing.

The next step involves using the forms they focused on by practising them. They can do this by completing sentences containing the structure or by a listing activity.

Receptive skills like reading can be taught using the same pattern using the three stages that are supported by the action- oriented method of teaching. The objectives for the next reading activity were the ones that are mentioned by the CEFR for C1 level, that is, students “*can express themselves fluently and spontaneously*” and “*can understand in detail lengthy, complex texts, whether or not they are related to their own area of speciality*”(CEFR, 2017, p.53)

ACTIVITY 1: Pre- task

AIM: Students must be able to “*use language flexibly and effectively for social purposes, including emotional usage and cope linguistically to negotiate a solution*”, and “*follow films using a considerable degree of slang and idiomatic use*” and “*understand in detail the arguments presented*” (CEFR, 2017, p.65)

First of all, students’ knowledge is activated by the teacher asking questions including their making predictions about the reading content. Then they are also shown a video related to the text after which they learn some new vocabulary that appears in the text through a matching activity.

ACTIVITY 2: Task

AIM: Students should be able to “*understand in detail lengthy, complex texts, whether or not they are related to his/ her own area of speciality*” (CEFR, 2017, p.53)

In order to do this activity, students work on the text on page 82, called “Judgement Day” in Upstream Advanced.

The task enables students to check their predictions and asks them to do some activities on the text like: gap filling. Students are given the text split into numbered sections and another sheet of paper with two requirements: 1. Read the text sections and write the most important information in each one; 2. Write down your opinion, experience about the information in each section. Then, put the section in the correct order to make a complete text. After they finish, they discuss their answers. Another possible scenario is to cut the text into parts and number them. The class is divided into as many groups as the parts. Each student in a group picks one part and reads it. After reading it, they tell the others what it is about and, together, they try to write the story in the right order that includes main/ second characters; first/ second/ third event and themes.

Finally, students can be told to retell the story by using some selected key words. In order to make it more fun, only one student reads or is told the story while the others in the group have their ears covered. Then, one student uncovers his/ her ears and the students, who read the story, retell it using the key words selected. Then, the next student uncovers his/ her ears and the second students try to remember as many things as possible and they are given points for using the key words correctly and so on, until everybody in the group has retold the story. The teacher keeps track of the correctness of students' stories and grants the points.

ACTIVITY 3: Post- task

AIM: to “*express himself/ herself fluently and spontaneously*”(CEFR, 2017, p.54)

In the post- task stage students express their opinions and reactions to the text by being asked comprehension questions or a problem- solving like: Imagine you are a writer and think about a pen name that you would like to use. Explain its meaning and the reason for which you have chosen it.

Last but not least, I am going to present an activity that students particularly liked and was very useful in improving their speaking skills. It is related to the second part of the Speaking Paper in the CAE exam.

For the activity, I have chosen the pictures in “Cambridge English Advanced 2”, on page 169, showing people celebrating something. The objectives of this activity are the ones identified by the CEFR which states that C1 students should “*produce extended stretches of language with ease and with little hesitation*”, by having “*relevant, coherent and varied contributions*”, and using “*a wide range of cohesive devices and discourse markers*”. (CEFR, 2017, p. 82).

After a short warm –up, I showed students some pictures of their colleagues during different celebrations and I asked them to pick one picture some questions: Where are the people?; What they are doing?. Students had to answer these in pairs, then check with the person in the picture. Next, I asked students to write down words and phrases they need to talk about celebrations.

Then, with the partner they identified, they have to say what is the connection between the pictures on page 169 and compare and contrast two pictures of their own choice using all the information gathered so far. After finishing the task, they report it back to the class.

The post- stage involved drawing students' attention on some language point: how to use language of approximation because it is necessary for their exam preparation.

During the implementation stage, besides the textbook, I have also used other materials like songs, documentaries, videos and movies. These are, as Horner says “fun and motivating and can be used to teach structures; they are perhaps the leading reason why teenagers throughout the world become interested in English” (Horner,1993, p.24). They are also a source of English culture and they also create awareness about specific issues. Every time I planned to use one of this resources, I announced the topic of the next lesson and I let students choose and provide the material they would like to work with. They can be used for a wide range of activities especially for developing listening skills and vocabulary.

At the beginning of each unit of the Upstream Advanced textbook, I tried to use videos on the topic of the unit. First, I announced the topic of the unit. Then, students tried to come up with things they know about the topic and possible questions they have and things they would like to find out about the topic. They do this in pairs. Next, I gave them a spider web containing different aspects of the topic and, together they fill it in. After finishing, they share ideas with other pairs by talking and then, they are given 2’ to add things to the web.

The next step involved presenting the video. Students watch it and check their guesses, answer their previous questions. Next, they are given some sentences some of which are not correct. So, they watch the video again and when the teacher pauses the recording, in pairs students correct the sentences. Then, they watch the next part and answer some multiple-choice questions. At the end, they check answers with the class and they are given a problem-solving task connected with the things in the video.

This is the way I used videos most of the times and students found it useful and attractive at the same time.

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