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**TEACHING ENGLISH TO ADULTS
IN THE EXTRAMURAL EDUCATION SYSTEM
(SECONDARY ECONOMIC SCHOOL)**

"Panta rhei.

You can never step into the same water."

Heraclites of Ephesus

"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day.

Teach a man how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

Chinese proverb.

Life is never stable and as long as we live we must be prepared for constant change and new problems, we must deal with them and solve them.

Since the school authorities in Poland established some new types of schools where English is required to be taught, a great number of new target groups have appeared and no regular coursebooks have been designed to suit their needs so far. The teachers who deal with such groups have found themselves in an urgent necessity of adapting the existing approaches to new situations, which often means teaching large groups of different levels, age and motivations.

Among those new groups extramural students appear as probably the most challenging ones. Apart from the need for effective communication and cross-cultural awareness, which

is common in the world of the 1990s where political, economic and cultural barriers are rapidly disappearing for the sake of the United Europe of the 21st century, this specific group of learners needs English for their different jobs and careers, dealing with customers in business and commerce, using computers or travelling.

A great number of very special needs and problems make the teacher look for new programme enriching techniques and solutions for how to teach English efficiently in extreme circumstances of having approximately 16 hours per semester (2 hours fortnightly) in large, mixed-ability groups of adults. In such a situation although the teacher and the students do as much as possible during the lesson, most of the work must be pushed towards the students' homework, especially as far as more practice and production activities are concerned.

Learning can be more effective when learners take the initiative and have some control over their own learning. Students who are responsible for their own learning can continue to learn outside the classroom and apply their learning strategies to other subjects. Therefore they need training and help to get the confidence to become more independent in the classroom.

This project is intended to help the students to learn English autonomously at their homes. Therefore, they are provided with some additional materials containing self – study activities. It is also intended to provide the students with basic elements of communication and make them familiar with the vocabulary useful in their future jobs.

It will be vital for the students to distinguish between formal and informal English in theory and practice so some culture elements should be brought to make the students aware of some differences in customs and habits in order to avoid possible misunderstandings or embarrassing situations in their contact with native speakers of English. Moreover, the culture elements raise the students' interest in English and help them to learn the language.

As far as the target language is concerned general English is assumed to be taught on the whole, however, some business area vocabulary is intended to be introduced step by step by focussing on specific real-life situations such as meeting people, arranging appointments, making orders, dealing with customers and office supplies. To help the students learn what they are supposed to do in the classroom or at home and in order to avoid any misunderstandings, the teacher's explanations, comments and instructions are made bilingually i.e. each English instruction is translated into Polish and Polish is used as far as grammar points are concerned. However, more and more English is going to be introduced during the successive lessons as the students are getting familiar with the instruction and classroom vocabulary.

Although there are many different methods of teaching a foreign language an ideal method does not exist. It is a truism to say that the main function of using any language is to communicate so the most important purpose of learning languages is to be able to get and give information. The term "language functions" has appeared along the development of the communicative approach which focuses on the function of language, not on a language as a set of structures.

The concept of language functions and Minimal Adequate Grammar, which *says* that a student does not have to possess more knowledge that is sufficient to meet fundamental and urgent communicative needs seem to the author to be the only right approach in the case of this particular target group.

It is assumed that from the very beginning the students'/ teacher's attention should be shifted from the correctness of the language structures to the adequacy of the used utterances. Therefore, grammar is going to be taught only as "a short cut", however, depending on the students' needs and interests (which will be seen in their answers to the

needs questionnaire) the proper notional and situational syllabus will be created for the next semester.

Some elements of the new humanistic approach to foreign language learning will be adopted as well. It treats a student as a "whole person". As language teaching is not just about teaching language but it is also about helping students to develop themselves as people, the teacher and the students become partners in even a broader dimension than in the communicative approach. In the light of the theory of humanistic approach the teacher is the person trying to help the students to develop themselves not only intellectually but also spiritually. The self-instructional model of learning is thought to achieve that aim as well.

Throughout the paper emphasis is placed on the communicative skills, therefore the activities incorporated into the lessons will enable the students to practise listening, reading and writing at home as well. The "Check and self-assessment" section enables the students to test and monitor their own progress. The self-study materials provide extra practice of important grammar, communication and vocabulary areas as well as include simple reading texts and special exercises to develop the writing skill. All the exercises are clearly labelled in sections and are destined for consecutive days of the week.

The programme is designed for students in the first year of studying English, at the false-beginner level. Owing to the political situation and common access to world-wide mass media such as television, radio, films, advertising or pop music the knowledge of English as a major world language became far more popular, and therefore, is much more in demand that it could have been not only 50, but also 15 years ago.

Some students have already had contact with English without learning it consciously, whereas others had regular English lessons in the past while attending primary or vocational schools. Those who are absolute beginners, must have been taught at least one other foreign language, which may help them in learning English. Moreover, as adults, those

students are aware of main grammar rules functioning in their own language, which helps them to use the newly learnt language consciously.

Summing up, the target group can be treated as multi-levelled false beginners who are supposed to reach the elementary level in a very short time (i.e. within one semester) and then move towards the intermediate level during their first year course.

It is assumed that during that period of time the effort which the particular students must make is not equal. The absolute beginners will have to work very hard, while the others have an opportunity to revise some things. The self-study materials are organized in a way which enables any student to choose things s/he is not self-assured about yet and to revise them at his/her own speed. Thus the students are given a great deal of independence as far as learning vocabulary is concerned according to their needs and interests, provided that they will have learnt 60% of it.

However, at some point of the learning process the necessity of revising and systematizing what the students should already have acquired is essential and encourages the learners to make the individual effort and development.

This project has been divided into 4 consecutive lesson units plus lessons 5 (mid-term test), – a half of the planned semester work which is assumed to be taught (according to the school schedule) during a 90 minute-class fortnightly. The author of the paper imagines the lessons to form the project organized around the same characters involved in their social and business situations, which would serve to create the course unity.

The lessons are organized in such a way that the first part (20 mins) serves as a revision for things learnt during the previous lessons and at home to give the students as much chance for speaking as possible. During the lessons the teacher uses flashcards for important structures and grammar explanations. The flashcards are going to be put on the wall to stay there for revision and practice until the end of the school year.

The project is designed to cover half of the whole semester work, presuming 8 teaching hours and about 80 hours of homework to catch up with a full-time day school program. Therefore the students are equipped with materials for self-instruction.

According to Leslie Dickinson (Self-instruction ... 34) "self – instruction may mean a learner working in isolation, but it is more likely to describe a situation in which learners undertake the responsibility for a part of their learning. Also, it may mean a learner using materials which are designed to guide his every step and leave little freedom of choice, or it may describe a situation in which the learner designs his own course and makes decisions about when and how he is going to be assessed."

This particular target group must be placed just half way as far as their freedom is concerned, as the choice of materials is restrained by the school requirements and schedule. However, the students are going to be given a remarkable amount of freedom at home or at least their choice will be getting wider and wider as they become more responsible learners.

"Self-instruction seeks to give to the learner as much responsibility for his/her learning as s/he can cope with at any particular time. When a learner achieves self- direction then s/he accepts responsibility in four areas: s/he is aware of the aims and objectives of the course and accepts them, monitors the development of the course, assesses him/herself and has a reasonable idea of his/her level of proficiency, and s/he takes an active role in learning" (Dickinson, Self-instruction... 34).

A feature of the preparation for self-directed learning proposed by L. Dickinson and Carver is "trouble shooting" - a regular classroom session in which students are encouraged to specify just what they find difficult in their learning. This is likely to be a positive motivating factor in general since it demonstrates concern on the part of the teacher for the individual learner's problems so increasing her/his sense of self-worth; and in particular it is likely to be motivating in that it helps to remove barriers to the smooth

progression of learning" (Dickinson, Self-instruction... 33). In this project problems still existing are dealt with during the lessons and they are a constant part of every self-assessment questionnaire as well.

Perhaps the most important justification for self-instruction in learning foreign languages is the need to help people to learn how to learn – the most basic and important educational objective, no matter what teaching/ learning mode is adopted. The only educated man is the man who has learned how to learn; the man who has learned how to adapt and change; the man who has realized that no knowledge is secure, that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security.

Teaching materials and aids used throughout the course have been taken from books available on the market as well as made by the author of the paper. They are explicit in a language understood by the learner (i.e. in Polish or bilingually) and contain clear objectives, learning instructions with examples and advice about how to go about the job of language learning.

Moreover, the self-instructional materials provide the learners with ways of assessing their achievement at regular intervals of two weeks. The learners are also provided with some grammar and pronunciation explanations in Polish and two cassettes : a class cassette to revise or make up for the previous lessons if absent, and a student's cassette for the self instructing learner. As far as some feedback is concerned the teacher is going to check the students' homework after the lessons 1 and 3. The students will be given the answer key for the lessons 2 and 4. During the last two hours (lesson 5) the students are supposed to sit a regular half-term test covering the whole material taught so far. It is going to be the basis for their future "zaliczenie."

By the end of the project the students should be able to communicate in some social situations like greetings, introductions, asking for and giving information, asking for

repetition, expressing regrets, apologies and showing politeness. They should also be able to express themselves orally and in writing in the real-life situations such as meeting new people, making appointments, filling in forms, writing a letter, etc.

A note should be made about the way the students' progress will be evaluated. Apart from the mid-term test, they will also be assessed on their class activities, for example they will be given "pluses" for taking an active part in the lessons.

However, the main source of information for the teacher as for their progress will be the tasks meant as homework exercises. Moreover, the additional self study materials will be equipped with some self-assessment which is intended to help the students to keep aware of their progress and their difficulties as well.

The long-term aim of the project is to make the students learn the language autonomously and feel responsible for their own learning.