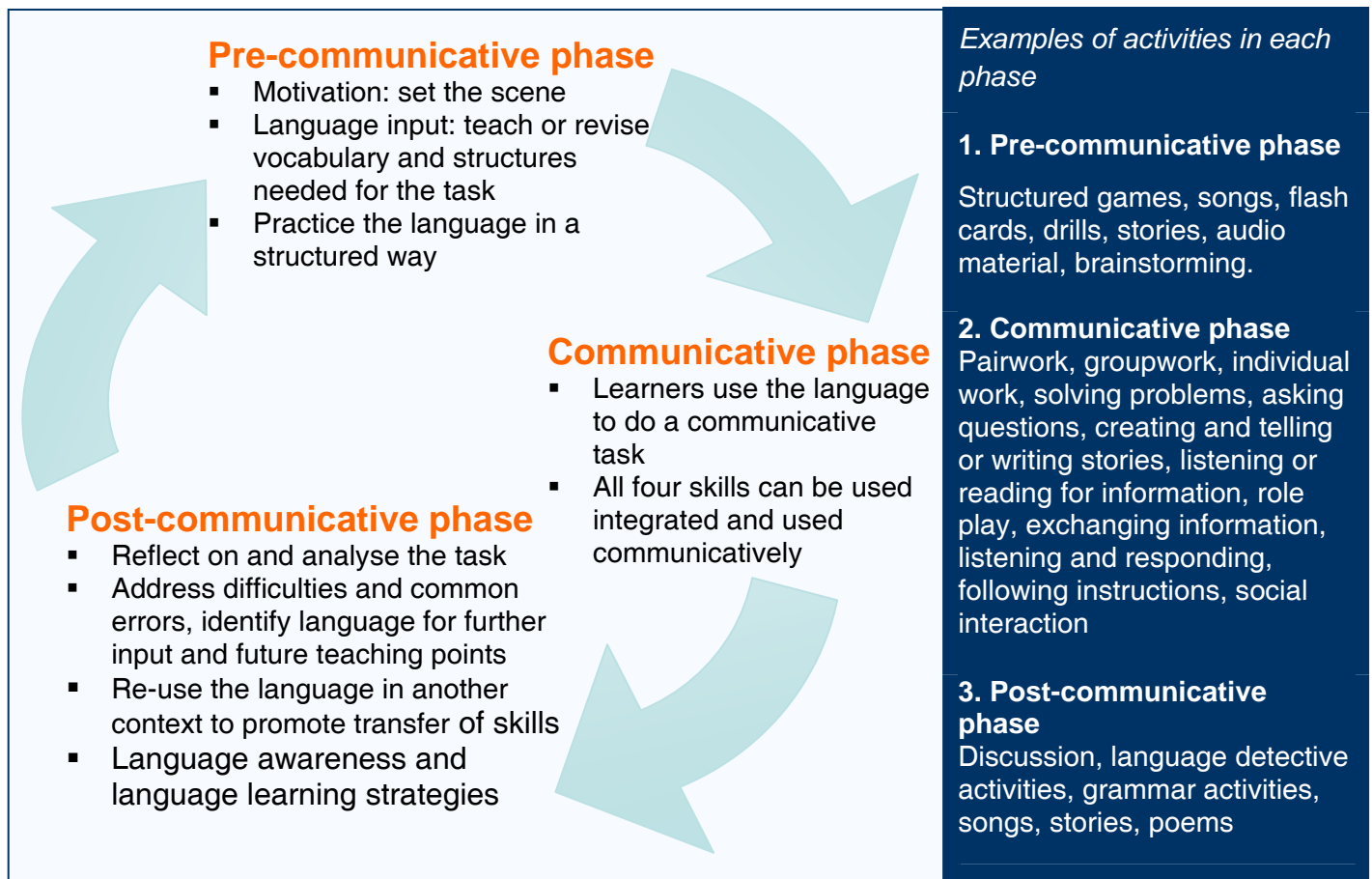


The communicative approach

The communicative approach is an overarching approach to the teaching of languages, which is learner-centred and emphasises communication and real-life situations. It is not a particular teaching methodology, but rather the teacher uses many methods, strategies and activities to reflect how learners learn in a wide variety of ways.

There are three phases in a communicative lesson:



Tips to remember

- ☑ All the phases are important, but they won't all take the same amount of time. In some lessons you will spend most of the time teaching new language to be used in the next lesson. In others the children will be engaged in a long task for most of the lesson, and in others you will focus on analysing structures and helping the children develop language learning strategies.
- ☑ Make sure the learners will have enough time to complete the task. This ensures success and enhances motivation.
- ☑ During the communicative phase your role is as a facilitator. Move about the class, observe and listen, help out when needed. Note progress and areas of difficulty to be addressed in phase three.
- ☑ Think ahead. Plan what language the students will need to complete the task. You can't predict everything however: here's where the facilitator role is very important.
- ☑ Differentiate for ability and learning style. Don't expect every child to complete the same task
- ☑ There is a role for error correction and teaching grammar in the communicative approach. We need both a pool of vocabulary and knowledge about how to construct sentences to communicate effectively.
- ☑ Revise and recycle. Teach the same structure multiple times, but in different contexts and different ways, so that the learners really understand and acquire it.



Key features of communicative language teaching

☑ Focus on fulfilling communicative needs, e.g. *giving and asking for information, expressing an opinion or describing something*. These are called **language functions**.

☑ Learners need something to communicate about, so build lessons around **topics** or **themes**.

☑ When **planning**, consider both the topic and also the functions that the learners will be learning, and using.

☑ Start with the **learner's interests** and practical functions that they can relate to ... that express things they want to say, or to hear, read or write about.

☑ Learner **involvement** is important. Think about allowing your students to **choose** what they would like to learn to do or say next, with relation to a topic or theme.

☑ Plan for **progression** in the functions the learners can use. e.g. *infants learning Irish will relate to talking about themselves. They might want to be able to say their name, identify body parts and feelings. Sixth class children might be interested in talking*

about their personalities and characteristics –perhaps linked to zodiac signs. Students learning a modern foreign language might like to learn how to talk about feelings and relationships. You could use lyrics of relevant songs they downloaded from the internet to support this.

☑ Always work towards a specific **language objective** e.g. *to be able to express likes and dislikes, to understand and give information, to follow instructions.*

☑ In real life we use the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in an **integrated** way. Try to duplicate this in lessons, and teach the skills in an integrated manner.

☑ You will find that the approach is rewarding and motivating for learners, as they have achieved something tangible, and can use what they have learned in an active way.

☑ Teach **grammar in context**. Use grammar activities to address common errors. Allow the learner the opportunity to work out rules, and to use the structures in additional activities.

Curriculum Links

The following curricula and syllabuses are all based on the communicative approach.

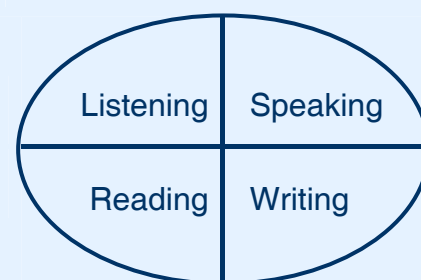
Primary schools

- Curaclam na Gaeilge
- Modern languages: Draft Curriculum and Teacher Guidelines
- Nuatheangacha i mBunscoileanna: Dréachtchuraclam agus Treoirlínte
- English as an Additional Language: Guidelines for Teachers

Post-primary schools

- Junior Cycle syllabus for Irish, French, German, Italian, and Spanish
- Senior Cycle syllabuses for Irish, French, German, Italian, and Spanish

Four integrated skills



Language awareness ...

involves engaging learners in reflecting how language is learnt, on similarities and differences between known and unknown languages and the conventions of language.

Further reading and information

This information sheet is part of a series of online resources developed through the work of the NCCA's Primary School Network. It summarises key points from a podcast about the communicative approach to language teaching which you can listen to at www.ncca.ie/en/podcasts.

You can find more information about the Primary School Network on www.ncca.ie/curriculumoverload.