

PROGETTO' 92 and Modular Planning: A new path for the teaching of ESP in Italy

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In this paper, I offer a brief analysis of the advantages of Modular planning for the teaching of English for Specific Purposes. Despite the difficulties, modules seem to suit ESP learners' needs and expectations, as well as the aims of the whole language theory. Modular planning definitely can provide both teachers and learners with a new path to successfully perform their roles at Vocational Schools.

1. Introduction

The Italian Educational System is undergoing drastic changes and lately, especially in vocational schools, teaching methods have been severely questioned. If the dichotomy between school knowledge and the abilities and competences required by the job market is still alive, this is because we teachers often tend to instruct our students and to fill them with data, rather than help them develop reasoning systems and abilities. This is even truer in vocational schools, where so far education has been considered as the art of teaching students just how to read and how to count. The new school system experimented by Vocational Schools in Italy, called Progetto' 92, is a forerunner of a wider reform, known as the "Riforma Brocca", which should put the whole educational system upside down.

2. ESP and Modular planning

This short introduction was necessary in order to better understand the relationship between ESP and Modular planning. First of all, let's see the characteristics of a foreign language taught for specific purposes:

i *GOAL DIRECTED*

Learners study English not because they are interested in the English language or culture, but because they need English for study or work purposes.

ii *AUTHENTICITY*

Exposure to authentic discourse - either written or spoken.

Elicitation of authentic language in classroom activities (student role plays, student-student interaction, letter writing).

iii *LEARNER CENTEREDNESS*

The teacher becomes a kind of assistant in the process, because the focus is on students' needs, interests, proficiencies and strategies.

Students participate in decision making and make use of their prior background knowledge as individuals, in pairs or in groups.

iv *DISCOURSE FOCUS*

The language used is above the level of single sentences. The focus is on language at the discourse, rather than sentence level.

There is a concern for language as a whole (e.g. the whole text).

v *TARGET SITUATION ANALYSIS*

Special attention is given to what and how language is used in the area of specialization.

vi *GENRES*

A language has many different forms. There is a concern for written genres typically used in that area of specialization.

3. The whole language theory

Before actually introducing the concept of module, we should ask ourselves if there is a language theory beyond it. It's the whole language theory, a professional theory according to which knowledge is socially constructed rather than received or discovered. The following are important points that should be underlined:

- Language is used to create meaning and for functional purposes.
- Any language curriculum demands that language functions always be authentic and meaningful, in order to suit authentic, real situations.
- Activities must be real and relevant to students' interests, lives and communities.
- Materials must be real. The things the students do must be done for the students and not for the teachers.
- In whole language classes students select their own topics.

All these ideas can be applied to module/projects. Students can be left free to choose which module/project, among those suggested by the teacher, they want to do, first because no module is diachronically propedeutic to the following one. There is really no linear development.

4. Modular planning

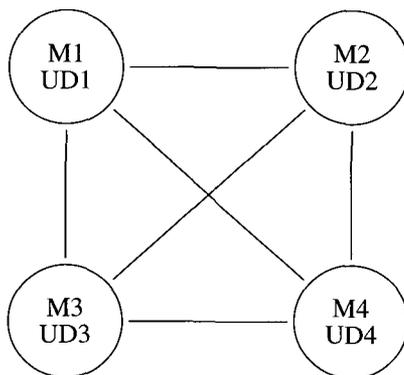
A module is a macro unit, a finished and self-contained block whose parts are in a relation of codivision among them. It is much better if it has a practical character (this is why modules have been specifically thought for E.S.P.) so that students have the impression that they are doing something concrete and useful.

Modular planning is a project based on modules. In it the relationship between each module is no longer a consequential one. It is a kind of net, where the concept of codivision is well evident.

In the traditional way there is a diachronic consequentiality:



The sequence is time based. There are diachronic hierarchies. It is the way in which teaching works in books.



Even if there is a starting point, the relationship between the units is the situation, the relationship is synchronic. We call it coherence. It is a mind map. Systemic learning, conceptual nets, is a system based on space. There are mainly synchronic relationships. It is the way in which teaching works on hypertexts. This way, students feel they can learn useful things and they see the end, the purpose of things.

Modules are completely independent from one another, but their inner organization is coherent.

5. Structure of a module

- **TITLE:** Name of the theme, which can be either monodisciplinary or interdisciplinary.
- **INDEX or SUMMARY:** Indication of contents, with the teaching units of which a module is composed.
- **MOTIVATION:** Why for those students, in that year, in that term, to which and how many students it was thought for, what practical applications, stages that can support it.
- **AIMS:** To introduce students, to let them know something, to develop, to offer, to allow them to do something...
- **OBJECTIVES:** Expressed in terms of knowledge, abilities, competences, mastering, being able to do, etc.
- **PRE-REQUISITES:** Not to be confused with the starting levels. While the formers are put by the teacher in order to know if it is possible to start a formative process, the starting level is something that is already possessed by the student, and it is only important at the very beginning. The pre-requisites must be acquired. If students do not possess them, the teacher should put in action some recovery strategies before starting the module.
- **CONTENTS:** The naked and crude list of the things to be done.
- **MEANS:** Whatever is physical: charts, evaluation charts, photocopies, etc.
- **TIME:** Prevision of average time duration of the module.

- **EVALUATION:** Indication of criteria and means of evaluation that the teacher wants to adopt in order to control the processes, measure tests and performances, attribute them evaluative judgements, evaluate the process and the product.

6. Conclusion

There are different reasons to prefer modules for the teaching of ESP. We can give the following:

- Human knowledge is progressing too fastly. Students should be given a flexible knowledge.
- A continuous progress of knowledge imposes the capacity of being able to do many microthings and the modules, even outside the school can be the right system of certification of the acquired abilities.
- Being short and structured, they can be objectively evaluated.

There also some problems teachers have to face while teaching with modules. For instance:

- Since the language is authentic, how can it be graded to be accesible?
- Is simplification inconsistent with the principles of a communicative approach to language teaching?

To your students the answer!