

NEWSFLASH

Mark Fletcher
David Birt

Edward Arnold
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NEWSFLASH is designed for intermediate and advanced students. The aim is to exploit their interests in current problems, be they international (e.g. hijacking) or more personal (e.g. planning a honeymoon) and to encourage them to produce solutions, primarily through discussion work in small groups. The instructions to the students in each of the book's 20 units are clear and they give the students specific facts and figures to use to reach a conclusion.

Each unit is divided in the following sections:

- (1) A picture story is presented, accompanied by key vocabulary items. The pictures themselves are, in the authors' words, "open-plan" to encourage the students to see the story as a whole, and not just as a series of boxes. The students working in groups have to tell the story and one student, acting as group secretary, writes down a sentence or two for each picture. This section provides a necessary vocabulary review before the real discussion work can begin.
- (2) Interviews One student in each group is the interviewer for current affairs program. The others take the roles of people in the picture story. Here, a few minutes should be given to the interviewer for the preparation of a list of suitable questions.
- (3) Discussion In this less structured activity students are encouraged to express their own opinions, using the linguistic material already presented. One specific aspect of the story is set aside for discussion e.g. after the presentation of the story of an earthquake, students have to discuss the question: "How would you organize a fund-raising campaign for such a disaster?"
- (4) Roleplay The students in each group play a role in a situation - based on the picture story. For example, after the earthquake story, roles connected with relief operations are assigned to individual students and they have to produce arguments as to why their organization should be given money. Finally, a Relief Committee divides \$200,000 between them all.

- (5) Tasks These are designed for small groups. Each group is required to produce a solution to a specific problem within a strict time limit. The tasks include the planning of a week-end menu on a deserted beach, the compilation of a list of 30 essential English phrases for refugees, and planning how to spend a big win on the football pools.

When using NEWSFLASH, teachers can assume the role of guide, participant or observer. As a guide the teacher checks to see instructions and vocabulary have been understood, encourages the students to play their role actively, and, most importantly, tries to make the situation as vivid as possible. Once the roleplay is under way the teacher can take part as an ordinary member of the group if the students need to see how to play a role. Or he can be an attentive observer of language content, maintaining an on and off stimulus if he feels it necessary.

Suggestions

As with most materials produced for advanced students, these situations can be adapted by the teacher to suit the needs of her class. Elements of the situation such as location and time allocation can easily be changed. Since these situations are based on fairly typical news items, teachers can refer to recent events of which the students are aware. When we used the roleplay about an earthquake, we changed the location from an imaginary one to a real one (Algeria), and in a refugee situation, we used the example of El Salvador. When we used real situations, it was possible for students to work with more concrete facts and figures.

We consider NEWSFLASH to be a valuable supplement within an advanced course. The problem solving approach adapted by the book encourages oral production, as the students have to work under time pressure to reach definite objectives.

John Saunders
 Enrique Michel
 Rogers Ifall
 Mérida, Yucatán