

## INCORPORATING PROBLEM-ORIENTED POLICING METHODOLOGIES INTO THE SYLLABUS OF AN ENGLISH FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT COURSE

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### Abstract:

The emphasis on problem-solving as an effective strategy of community policing stems from innovative work on problem-oriented policing (POP) by the University of Wisconsin Law School, with SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment) as its most widespread model. The grouping of commonplace units of police business (incidents, complaints, crimes...) into larger units of analysis known as 'problems' allows for the implementation of a case study methodology that proves itself not only useful as an instructional format for trainee officers, but also provides an effective pedagogical tool for the English for Specific Purposes curriculum at the Spanish National Police Academy.

**Keywords:** ESP; English for Law Enforcement; Problem-Oriented Policing; SARA

### Resumen:

La investigación sobre el modelo de Policía Comunitaria Orientada a la Resolución de problemas (*Problem-Oriented Policing*) como estrategia para la colaboración policial nace a partir de un trabajo innovador de la Universidad de Wisconsin Law School sobre acción policial orientada a la resolución de problemas. Su modelo más conocido es el llamado SARA (siglas de *Scanning* (exploración), *Analysis* (análisis), *Response* (respuesta) y *Assessment* (evaluación)). El hecho de agrupar las diferentes actuaciones policiales en unidades de análisis más amplias llamadas *problemas*, permite a los policías en formación aplicar una metodología implementada en los estudios de caso. Dicha metodología es una herramienta útil en cuanto al formato instructivo de los agentes y, a su vez, es una herramienta pedagógica en el curriculum de Inglés para Usos Específicos en la Escuela Nacional de Policía.

**Palabras clave:** inglés para Usos Específicos; inglés para fuerzas policiales; SARA; Policía Comunitaria Orientada a la Resolución de Problemas.

### 1. Theoretical background

Policing is a profession based upon solving problems. Traditional policing is incident driven: the police receive a complaint, respond to it and clear the incident, although the underlying conditions are not addressed and therefore more complaints of the same kind are likely to proliferate (Cox, McCamey and Scaramella, 2013). Officers must be proactive and learn to look beyond a particular incident they may be facing at any given moment, to gain a larger perspective of the underlying community problem, which can then be targeted to reduce crime and guide police discretion (Thurman and Jamieson, 2015). Clarke and

Eck defined a problem as “a recurring set of related harmful events in a community that members of the public expect the police to address” (2005, 26).

The emphasis on problem-solving as an effective strategy of community policing stems from innovative work on problem-oriented policing (POP), undertaken by the University of Wisconsin Law School (Goldstein, 1990), and rooted in the theories of environmental criminology and situational crime prevention. SARA, which stands for Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment (Eck and Spelman, 1987), is its most widespread model, and was first used by the Newport News (Virginia) Police Department. The term “problem-oriented policing”, nowadays widely endorsed by American and British police, was conceived and coined in 1979 by the American professor of law Herman Goldstein (after whom the prestigious Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing is named) and, according to Eck (2006), it comprises three core principles: *empirical* (police have to deal with a wide range of problems), *normative* (police have to reduce problems rather than simply respond to incidents and apply the law) and *scientific* (police must take a scientific approach to crime problems) (Braga, 2014: 117).

Research showed that problem-oriented policing and problem-solving techniques could be implemented throughout a police department (Ikerd, 2007: 8). Other law enforcement agencies saw the utility of the strategy and started to design their own models shortly afterwards. Thus, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police adopted the CAPRA acronym for its problem-solving model, which stands for Clients, Acquire/Analyze information, Partnerships, Responses, and Assessment of action taken (More & More, 2012). It goes beyond SARA by incorporating two important components: clients (the citizens whose problems need addressing) and partnerships (working together with the community to solve problems). The model evolved to SCAPRA when the Police Corps in Baltimore added the S for the Safety of the officer, and later to SECAPRA, when the Mid-Atlantic Regional Community Policing Institute located at Johns Hopkins University added Ethics. Officers are encouraged by POP to take a holistic approach and work with citizens and other agencies to find solutions to recurrent problems (Cox, McCamey and Scaramella, 2013). Garner introduced an extension of POP he called solution-oriented policing (SOP), that “places the emphasis on the most important aspect of the police-community interaction: solutions” (2004, 44).

Two problem-solving processes have since been used in the United Kingdom. One, adopted by the Home Office after Paul Ekblom’s research, is a development of SARA called the Five I’s for Intelligence, Interventions, Implementation, Involvement, and Impact (Clarke and Eck, 2013). The other, employed by the London Metropolitan Police, involves a long process with the following steps (Cordner, 2007: 1157): identification of the source of the demand; demand; overview of the problem; aim in general; problem; personal aim; research; analysis; options; responses (to negotiate and initiate action plan); evaluation (was the aim met?); review (what went well?); and success (to share good practice).

All these models have proven that following a uniform format enables a systematic review of a problem to achieve well-developed, targeted responses. After these successful experiences, the U.S. Department of Justice established in 1999 the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing to advance the practice of POP in democratic societies. Its web site is currently supported by The School of Criminal Justice, at State University of New York (Albany).

## 2. Research question

The grouping of commonplace units of police business (e.g., incidents, complaints, crimes) into larger units of analysis known as ‘problems’ (Scott, 2003) allows for the implementation of a case study methodology that proves itself not only useful as an instructional format for trainee law enforcers (Anderson, Krathwohl and Bloom, 2001). Additionally, it provides an effective and innovative pedagogical tool for the EFL curriculum at the Spanish National Police Academy, a Centre adscribed to the University of Salamanca.

## 3. Method

The ESP syllabus of the second course of the Executive Scale of the Spanish National Police (CEFR B1 level, experienced *subinspectores* in the promotion course, 40 year olds in average) includes target language input focused on case-based reasoning as a problem-solving paradigm. Problem-based learning (PBL) suits student officers well, since it is “active learning, oriented to adults and focused on practice in professional contexts” (Wilkinson, 2008: 58).

English lessons occupy only two hours in the trainee officers’ weekly schedule, and the task-based methodology for such a limited curriculum must necessarily be student-centred, dynamic and practical, closely connected to actual police functions. Further, it must apply a discipline enculturation process by means of strategies such as the use of authentic materials, target situations, role plays, simulations and case studies with clear outcomes and progress perceived by members of the group as well-grounded expectations on their part. Applying these methodologies helps overcome the initial reluctancy of trainee law enforcers to learn a foreign language, since it is commonly perceived as being far from their career and professional practice.

In the course syllabus, case studies are dealt with by students, who in groups identify the topic or ‘problem’ (e.g., bullying, domestic violence, radicalization, burglary, hooliganism, riots, drugs sale near schools, child pornography, sexual slavery), analyse it using POP models, respond to it using their own practical knowledge and authentic police-related materials, and present their conclusions to their classmates. The rest of the class contributes to peers’ presentations, assessing them and providing feedback. A response to a situation is not unique: students discover fresh insights from the experience of colleagues who have tried different approaches to solving a problem that every officer can recognise as familiar, and also see the usefulness of English as a means of real communication.

The three-stage procedure is articulated as follows:

1. At the beginning of the year, there is an initial lockstep lead-in stage where trainee law enforcers activate their prior professional knowledge when the English teacher elicits from them the concepts of incident versus problem. The trainer briefly proposes several average incidents or cases, as short written paragraphs first read out loud and then provided to trainee officers, and students individually suggest the problem behind them. As a follow-up activity, the class watches some film clips and video excerpts of news bulletins taken from TV channels like CNN or BBC, and brainstorms the problems underneath the

actual items depicted or reported. With the visual backup (both images and closed captioning) and their own knowledge of the field, they can easily get the gist of the texts.

Finally, in the same class period, groups of three to five students, in no more than ten lines, compose a real life critical incident they have witnessed or heard about (e.g., a man entered a kindergarten with no apparent reason for being there, which created alarm among parents and teachers). Each group reads its scenario aloud to the rest of the class, and together the students seek to detect the problem/s (in this example, it could be a case of child abuse, child pornography, abduction...). Thus, in a PPP (Presentation – Practice – Production) sequence, the four major skills are integrated in the lesson in a balanced way.

The activity is repeated at least twice in the following class periods until students are familiar with it and a range of different social problems have been identified and discussed. The teacher may suggest a given problem if it is relevant and the students have not focused on it yet. The incidents or cases serve as the framework for learning and are kept in a portfolio as classroom materials to be used again.

2. In the second stage, the trainer gives input on problem-solving methods used by police forces all over the world, hands out instances of cases analysed with a specific method taken from a shortlist of recommended bibliography with online access, and asks the trainee law enforcers, as team work, to retrieve the incidents they composed in the last months and respond to them with a POP model of their choice from the ones introduced by the teacher. Both SARA and SECAPRA are commonly preferred by students since they are simple, versatile and practical models. However, students must be aware that with complex problems the process may not be always linear and follow the separate steps in order: some steps may occur simultaneously, or progressing to the next step may require going back to the previous one to develop it more in depth (Weisburd & Braga, 2006: 134). Finally, the groups present their responses to the rest of the class and there is an “assessment of response” phase as a whole class discussion that is conducted orally to get benchmarking. The trainer’s role is to guide and channel the discussions, to keep them fluent without letting some students dominate while others are reluctant to speak up, and to move them towards a productive conclusion.

3. The third stage is twofold and ongoing throughout the academic year: Groups conduct a search in the internet for case-study police guides, investigate other existing POP models, contact the English-speaking country police forces that mainly employ them to explore strengths and weaknesses, and finally at the end of the course as project work, develop their own problem-solving model, trying to use an acronym to denominate it and designing a template to structure and facilitate the assessment of responses to critical incidents. Models are presented by each group to the whole class and are evaluated by the teacher and the peers. Each group then self-assesses its own model and how well they conducted their explanation. Finally, following a “reaching a consensus” communicative technique, each class chooses the best model of all to be presented to other classes.

When using problem-oriented methodology in the ESP course, it is essential to be aware of the difference between the classroom and real life. As POP exercises are conducted in a classroom environment, the resulting decisions may differ from those made on the spot by law enforcers confronted by stressful circumstances that include community, administration and peer group pressure.

A procedure like this engages and motivates student officers, since it links classroom activities with the real use of language in Law Enforcement environments, both in English-speaking situations and in their own prior professional experience in interactions carried out in Spanish.

Problem-oriented e-folios elaborated by trainee law enforcers can be uploaded online for the perusal of prospective students in the following years, and be exploited as exchange materials for other police training schools all over the world where English is studied as a foreign language.

#### **4. Results**

On linguistic terms, incorporating POP methodologies into the ESP syllabus of a police academy provides meaningful input for introducing relevant specific subject matter language, reinforces long-term retention of vocabulary and is an adequate backdrop for carrying out police-related communicative activities that enhance fluency.

Beyond the linguistic benefits derived from it, this approach creates a positive atmosphere in the classroom, as it improves students' motivation, self-awareness and self-confidence, builds relationships, and involves learners effectively in their own learning process. It increases the trainee law enforcers' enjoyment of the topic and hence their desire to communicate in the target language. It encourages broad research and provides relevant input for police professionals, linking the classroom with real life. Besides, it supports both autonomous, self-directed lifelong learning and cooperative team work and strengthens key skills such as content area knowledge acquisition, genre elaboration, critical thinking, reflexive practice, professional judgment, information gathering and analysis, as well as interaction and presentation skills. It is also compatible with our expanding global society, and favours intercultural competence, since student officers get an overview of the social contexts where foreign police forces operate and can establish a comparison between the responses applied to the same problems law enforcers face in different parts of the world, which may vary to accommodate to the characteristics and needs of the community.

#### **5. Conclusions**

Problem-oriented methodologies, which have revealed very helpful for community safety and response to crime, are also a highly beneficial resource for the ESP classroom in a law enforcement syllabus and are entitled to find their way into any police academy curriculum. Other ESP areas such as Health Sciences or Law could also benefit from integrating this approach in their foreign language courses.

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