

PPP Alternative - Teaching Tips

What is Engage, Study, Motivate?

Foreign Language Acquisition

Move a child into a foreign language environment surrounded by adults and other children using the same foreign language and that child will quickly 'pick up' the foreign language. Comprehension will come first but production will soon follow, starting with one word responses and utterances. The child's comprehension will develop and her production will become more complex until, after just a few years, she will use the foreign language in much the same way as native-speaker children of her age group.

If children (and, to a lesser degree, adults) can acquire a foreign language without the need for formal instruction, why do we need to give lessons?

The child described in the first paragraph will have massive exposure to the foreign language – ten hours each day or more! The child also has a very strong 'survival motivation' to acquire the new language. Only through that language can she eat, drink, make friends and play games.

In our normal schools, we cannot reproduce those conditions (although some experiments have attempted to do this!).

If we can't reproduce the conditions of 'natural acquisition', we are forced to adopt a system of 'graded exposure' to the foreign language, and a similar graded presentation and explanation of the systems of the new language. In fact, we have to develop a language learning syllabus.

The language learning syllabus is made from a series of language learning events (lessons) which, traditionally, are equal in duration, take place at fixed times and locations and follow a regular weekly pattern.

How do we structure our teaching?

(a) Presentation, Practice, Production

Most teachers plan three phases in their lessons according to the PPP model of Presentation, Practice and Production.

During **Presentation**, new language is presented perhaps as a grammatical pattern or more frequently within some familiar situation.

During this presentation phase, the teacher is often very active and dominates the class doing more than 90% of the talking.

During **Practice**, the new language item is identified, repeated and manipulated by the students. Unless the teacher is using pairwork or a language laboratory, the teacher also dominates this phase of the lesson occupying more than 50% of the talking in class.

During **Production**, the students attempt to use the new language in different contexts provided by the teacher.

(b) Engage, study, activate

Since the PPP model has functioned more or less effectively for generations, you might ask why we should be looking at different models. PPP works well provided that your syllabus is based only on giving students 'thin slices' of language one slice at a time. The PPP model does not work nearly so well when teaching more complex language patterns beyond the sentence level or communicative language skills.

Another basic problem with PPP is that it is usually based on segments of the one-hour lesson. In this way, lessons are designed with a single focus.

In **How to Teach English** [Longman 1998] Jeremy Harmer proposed a different three stage model, the ESA model: Engage, Study, Activate.

The three stages of engage, study, activate

(a) Engage

During the **Engage** phase, the teacher tries to arouse the students' interest and engage their emotions. This might be through a game, the use of a picture, audio recording or video sequence, a dramatic story, an amusing anecdote, etc. The aim is to arouse the students' interest, curiosity and attention. The PPP model seems to suggest that students come to lessons ready motivated to listen and engage with the teacher's presentation.

(b) Study

The **Study** phase activities are those which focus on language (or information) and how it is constructed. The focus of study could vary from the pronunciation of one particular sound to the techniques an author uses to create excitement in a longer reading text; from an examination of a verb tense to the study of a transcript of an informal conversation to study spoken style.

There are many different styles of study, from group examination of a text to discover topic-related vocabulary to the teacher giving an explanation of a grammatical pattern.

Harmer says, 'Successful language learning in a classroom depends on a judicious blend of subconscious language acquisition (through listening and reading, for example) and the kind of **Study** activities we have looked at here.

(c) Activate

This element describes the exercises and activities which are designed to get students to use the language as communicatively as they can. During **Activate**, students do not focus on language construction or practise particular language patterns, but use their full language knowledge in the selected situation or task.

Lesson Structure

(a) The ESA lesson

A complete lesson may be planned on the ESA model where the 50-60 minutes are divided into three different segments. It is very unlikely that these segments will be equal in duration. **Activate** will probably be the longest phase but **Study** will probably be longer than **Engage**.

In this format ESA would appear to be little different from PPP.

(b) The ESA, ESA, ESA lesson

Teachers of children and younger teenagers know that their students cannot concentrate for long periods. They can still use the ESA model but the model may be used repeatedly, producing a larger number of shorter phases.

This repeated ESA model also works well with older teenagers and adults and gives lessons a richness and variety which students appreciate.

It would be wrong to give the impression that **Engage**, **Study** and **Activate** are each single activities. They are phases of the teaching/learning process which may contain one or more activities.