

USING GROUPS FOR PRACTISING LANGUAGE ORALLY IN FORM I

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In Malaysia, English is taught more as a 'foreign' language than as a 'second' language, particularly in rural schools. This indicates a need for each lesson not only to present a new piece of language in a situation which makes its meaning clear, but also to provide within the lesson the practice necessary to establish the form of that piece of new language (among other established pieces of language) so that it may be accurately recalled. Drill is a common way of doing this.

The reason why so much drill is ineffective is that it is not provided in the right way. The fact that language is an individual thing – that only the pupil himself can learn the language for himself – ought to be immediately apparent. Since learning involves a great deal of repetition, it becomes obvious that the best sort of practice is by the student himself individually.

The problem is to arrange that drill so that each child has the necessary amount of practice – much more commonly done in written exercises than orally. The following proposal meets this need. However, there are some caveats to be considered at the outset:

- (a) 'Practice makes perfect', but equally, practice of the wrong thing makes one perfectly wrong! Hence a need for a clear, meaningful presentation, and some device in the lesson to ensure that at least some of the pupils have comprehended the new material.
- (b) Group work becomes effective and efficient only after some experience at working in a group. Children find this experience initially quite upsetting and may be boisterous or sullen, hyperactive or very nervous, dominating or totally passive, to begin with. The experience has to be undergone several times before the class will settle down and the process can be seen working. So don't despair at first – chaos is normal for three or four attempts.

- (c) The teacher's role changes rapidly and significantly during these lessons but at no time can the teacher relax because, although what the teacher does at each stage of the lesson differs, at all time he must be in control of the class.

It is unlikely that you will want to use groups in the first few weeks with the class. Use the time to get to know the pupils. Notice which are the alert, dominant children (regardless of ability) for these will be your group leaders. When you are ready to try out groups with your class, first list the pupils in order of alertness. If there are very quiet, retiring *clever* children, however, they should be placed high on your list. Now divide your class. In a class of 35 pupils, have 5 groups of 7 pupils, so select every fifth pupil starting with the first pupil. This is one group. Repeat this process five times and you will have five groups. Each group will have some of the more alert, able pupils and some of the slower pupils. Now, place each group as far apart as possible within the room – say, one in each corner and one in the middle.

Number each group : begin with the most alert pupil as '1' and go on down your ranking to the slowest pupil '7'. These numbers will be the practice order and need to be remembered and used by the children.

When groups are ready, the leader, number one, begins. For example, if it is simply making a correct sentence from a 'frame' on the blackboard, then number one begins by making one sentence; number two follows, making a sentence, then number three, and so on round the group, with number one following number seven.

Of course, with several groups in the classroom there will be both movement and noise. There will also be a great deal of learning, and the opportunity will exist for the teacher to move around the room to listen to each child. The structure of the pupil's language and the accuracy of his understanding will be immediately apparent.

It will be obvious that this arrangement increases the possible amount of oral practice in the class significantly — by a factor of five, in fact. However, it decreases the presence of the teacher.

As the teacher can be with only one group at a time, it follows that four of the groups are, in effect, unsupervised. Nevertheless, given that the earlier lesson steps have been effective, you should find that your 'number one' pupil makes a good monitor and will not only control the organisation of the group but will also check the accuracy of the other group-member responses. This is the reason for having the groups of mixed ability.

During group practice, the teacher moves from group to group to listen/correct/help as necessary. In all teaching the teacher must distinguish between noticing the error (marking) and the making of it correct (correction). When a teacher hears an error, he should draw the child's attention to it and give him the opportunity to attempt to say the sentence correctly before the teacher 'helps' him. If the child cannot correct the sentence without help, the teacher might ask him to listen to a classmate and then try again, or he may say the sentence in a situation and also get the pupil to repeat it. When the pupil gives a correct sentence, he should say another sentence about a similar situation to confirm his knowledge. Of course, the teacher keeps a roving eye on the other groups and moves where needed. Obviously the teacher normally stands outside the group being visited in such a way that all the other groups are 'under the eye'.

This organisation of groups allows for the efficient use of visuals — all groups may refer to a chart/diagram/picture on the blackboard; or they may have a smaller chart/diagram/picture for themselves, or objects/models may be used. If each group is to have a visual, or a kit of objects, then five such visuals or kits will be needed, though they need not be the same for each group. Oral practice is best if it is given in short intensive bursts frequently — 7 minutes practice twice a day is more effective than one 15 minute session.

For most oral activities, the children, when in these groups, can remain standing. If using visuals

or a kit of objects, it is more convenient to be standing, and the practice moves more quickly than when pupils are seated. The same groups should be used for all oral drill activities when groups are needed but, of course, there will be times when you want to use pairs, or to have games with the class in teams.

These groups can be used on occasions for written work also but you must remember that they are of mixed ability and, as written work is often devised for groups of pupils of the same ability, you may need to arrange the pupils differently.

A lesson involving these groups might well have the following format:—

(Unit 10(a) Questions and Answers about past events).

Aids: A set of pictures each showing the outcome of an event. A similar set of, say 6, pictures ready for each group.

1. Presentation

The teacher indicates the first picture and says: 'Rosli was drinking water because he was thirsty.' He repeats this sentence twice more.

A child comes to the front of the class. The teacher asks, 'Why was Rosli drinking water?' and helps the child to answer, 'Because he was thirsty.'

The teacher indicates the second picture and says, 'Noraini was wearing a coat because she was cold.' He repeats this twice.

Then he asks the child, 'Why was Noraini wearing a coat?' and the child answers, 'Because she was cold.' The teacher repeats the question and the child repeats the answer.

Another child comes to the front. The teacher gets this child to ask the question, and the first child answers.

The teacher indicates the third picture and says, 'Ahmad was hitting the dog because it chased the chickens.' The second child asks the question, 'Why was Ahmad hitting the dog?' and the first child answers, 'Because it chased the chickens!'

The teacher indicates the fourth picture and says, 'Asnonah was crying because she cut her hand.' The first child asks the question and another child comes to the front to answer it.

The teacher indicates the second picture. The new child asks the question, 'Why was Noraini wearing a coat?' and another child comes to the front to answer it.

The teacher indicates the fourth picture, and various children ask the question and answer it.

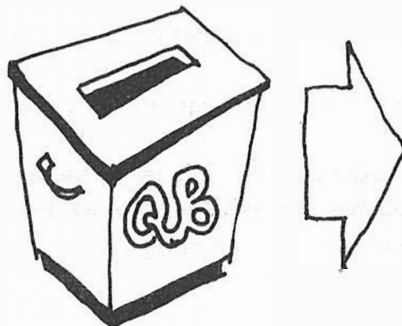
(This part of the lesson takes 5 minutes.)

2. Demonstration of Group Practice Using Group Leaders

The teacher calls the group leaders to the front. One child points to the first picture and asks the question; the second child answers it. Then the second child points to a picture and asks the question, and the next child answers it. And so on for eight or nine times.

(This part of the lesson takes 2 minutes.)

If you have any queries or problems on the teaching of English write to:



'Question Box'

The English Teacher

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