

Effective Team Teaching Using the Presentation, Practice, Production Method

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1. Introduction

The Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET Program) is a key feature in English language education in Japan. With almost 4000 Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) participating on the JET Program as well as many non-JET ALTs, most Japanese teachers of English (JTs) are involved in Team Teaching (TT) with ALTs on a regular basis in primary and secondary schools. The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Technology (MEXT), however, provides very little direction with regards to TT. This paper suggests a formulaic yet flexible way in which team teaching can be conducted within the framework of the Presentation, Practice, and Production (PPP) method. It is based on the literature as well as personal experience using the PPP method in a private English school setting and teaching English on the JET Program as an ALT.

Despite the high profile of the JET Program, MEXT has in large part, refrained from prescribing a specific model for TT. Some teachers might find this lack of direction to be inadequate. However, given the wide variety of factors which influence TT in practice, including the differing teaching styles and personality of teachers, it is not appropriate to prescribe one specific model of TT for all situations. (Smith, 1994; Hogan, 2004; Marchesseau & Kaneshige, 2005). Gillis-Furutaka (1994) suggests that any success that the JET Program has seen has come about from the hard work of JTs and ALTs working in schools. Perhaps the apparent limited involvement of MEXT has not been a detriment to the success of the JET Program, but a pre-cursor to it. The purpose of this article is not to impose a singular model for TT on all teachers or to espouse the PPP method unilaterally, but to share a loose framework for TT which teachers might draw upon, depending on their individual circumstances or the purpose of a specific lesson.

2. The PPP Method

This section outlines the PPP method, summarized by Maurer (1997). Personal experience is further drawn upon, since I also received training in the PPP method at the beginning of my career upon coming to Japan to work at a private English conversation school.

Each lesson starts with a target which students may or may not have been exposed to before. The target is usually a specific language feature or form. Specific grammar targets are common, but other examples could be /r/ vs. /l/ pronunciation or distinguishing between different pragmatic levels of politeness. The method also does not preclude functional targets such as writing a cover letter or ordering food at a restaurant but it is generally considered to be based on form (Ellis, 2003). Each lesson is broken down into three parts, presentation, practice and production, outlined below. The ultimate goal of the lesson is for students to learn the target to the point where they can use it in communication. Generally, the activities move from being more teacher-controlled and drill-focused, to being more students controlled and communicative, as summarized by Takashima (2005), in figure 1.

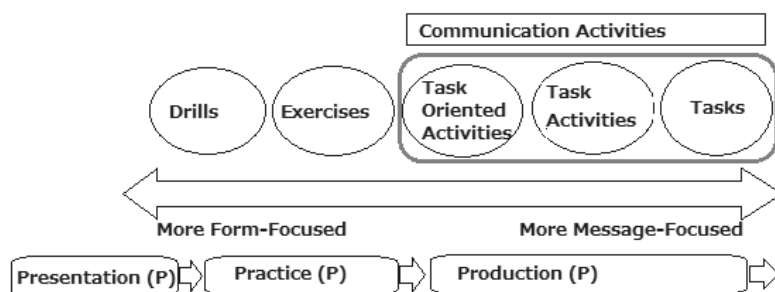


Figure 1. The flow from form-focus to meaning focus in PPP and TBLT

2.1 Presentation

In the presentation, the goal is to present and teach the target. This is when the JT may want to provide explicit instruction about the rules of the target using Japanese (L1). For example, the teacher may want to explain how the expression “going to” can be combined with a verb to express future intent. In large part, the presentation will be teacher-centered and L1 may be used.

There is, however, also room for communicative use of the language in the presentation. Rather than just beginning the lesson by addressing the class in Japanese with explicit instruction, teachers can model the language in some form of meaningful context and then try to elicit the target back from the students. For example, the JT and ALT might have a conversation about their weekend plans, as indicated below:

JT: So, Gerry-sensei, what are you going to do this weekend?

ALT: Oh, actually I'm going to go hiking on Mt. Tsurugi.

JT: Wonderful! Mt. Tsurugi is very beautiful.

ALT: What are you going to do, Mitani-sensei?

The JT might ask students if they could understand the content and then try to elicit the actual form from the students. By modeling the target in this way, students might better understand the connection between form and meaning when the teacher subsequently explains the grammar.

2.2 Practice

Here, students are given time to practice the target form in a controlled setting. The types of drills and exercises found in textbooks are often suitable at this stage. What distinguishes a practice activity or exercise from meaningful interaction is that the language is controlled, being dictated by the material or the teacher, rather than coming from the students to express their own information. There is a pre-determined *answer* that the student tries to reach. The amount of teacher control may vary. Repetition practice is a type of practice activity with a high level of teacher control. Pair work or group work obviously entails less teacher control, but the important element is that students are aiming at producing the correct answer. Information gap activities also represent practice activities if the information is not related to the real world and if the output is convergent to being a pre-determined, correct answer. The common strategy is for teachers to arrange the practice activities from tightly controlled towards more student centered activities in preparation for the production stage when students will be using the language in an uncontrolled setting.

2.3 Production

In the production activity, we hope that students will show a command of the new target in the context of real communication with their peers, and/or

teacher. Essentially, a production activity should emulate real-world language use in some way. An ideal activity would be a task, in which students communicate meaningful information, drawing on their own linguistic resources to reach a pre-determined goal. For example, if the target of the lesson is ‘ordering food at a restaurant’, a roll-play activity which emulates the real experience of going to a restaurant could be conducted. To make the activity as realistic as possible, teachers could download real menus from the internet and provide authentic material to recreate a restaurant environment in the classroom. Other examples of tasks might be communicative games where the focus is on using the language to reach a communicative goal, rather than just winning the game or getting a point. For a more complete review of tasks and task-based language teaching, see Ellis (2003), Nunan (2004), and Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011). There is also considerable research in Japanese, including Takashima (2000; 2005).

A production activity does not have to conform to a definition of “task”. In the real world language is used to communicate information, whether factual, or personal feelings or some other type of message. Any activity where the focus is on the information or message (meaning), rather than the grammatical or linguistic items (form) is appropriate. Other ways of achieving this would be through Content-Based Instruction (CBI), (Stryker & Leaver 1997) or Content and Language Integrated Learning (Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2008; Dale & Tanner, 2012). These references provide a good starting point for further research into those areas.

2.4 Caveat of the PPP Method

It is not argued that a PPP lesson represents the *best method*. I do not wish to advocate the method per se, but to present it as a possible framework to facilitate smooth TT. Indeed, there are many criticisms of the method. Over the last thirty years, as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) developed, strong-form CLT advocates suggested that the PPP method is inherently flawed since it is based on a synthetic approach in which language is broken down into structural components. Krashen (1982) and Willis (1996) suggest that this is not how languages are learned in the real world. Essentially, those who advocate a strong form of CLT argue that the PPP method is not communicative enough.

To be certain, the PPP method reflects a weak form of CLT, with the final P,

the production activity, being the truly communicative part of the lesson. It can be seen as a compromise between CLT and traditional approaches. Since it starts with a linguistic target, it is easy to see how it can be used with textbooks or incorporated into a traditional syllabus, which presents language in bite-sized chunks, providing our targets. There is also ample space for textbook or traditional drills within the practice section. Much of the appeal of the PPP method lies in the compromising nature of it. It can be a quick way to make a traditional curriculum more communicative. As others have pointed out, however, it is also important for teachers to draw from a variety of methods and approaches, rather than being confined to one or another formulaic method (Criado, 2013).

3. Why Does the PPP Framework Fit Well for TT?

3.1 Adaptability to traditional textbooks

ALTs often play games in class, which may be designed to review the textbook material and bring the language to life a bit, but are often only loosely related to what the JT is doing in class. Many JTs have trouble incorporating the ALT into regular lessons (Wada & Cuminos, 1994). This is a problem because many schools have a permanent ALT position and if teachers are not comfortable using the ALT in their regular lessons, ALTs will be underutilized. This situation has been well-observed by the author and noted in the literature as well (Ohtani 2010).

PPP lessons function very well with a textbook while adding an additional communicative component to the lesson. The foundation of a textbook is a predetermined set of forms (grammar, vocabulary and other items) which is presented in sequence. The targets for PPP lessons derive directly from the form in the textbook. Moreover, textbooks often provide explanation, which teachers can draw on in the presentation, and exercises which can be used as practice activities. Teachers might then develop a production activity or task to augment textbook learning.

3.2 Roles of JTs and ALTs are easily defined and intuitive

Knowledge of L1 (Japanese) is beneficial when presenting or teaching the rules of the language and ensuring that students understand. JTs are trained to teach the mechanics of the language and are obviously better equipped to

communicate using L1, therefore it is natural that the Japanese teacher play the main role in the presentation. The ALT's role is also important, however, in modeling the language. The target is often modeled at the beginning of the lesson, and here the two teachers can work together, engaging in a conversation. In JT-taught classes, students rarely have the opportunity to see their teacher actually using English to perform an authentic communicative function. By using English for communication in this way, JTs also present themselves as a role-model for students.

In the practice activities, JTs are also likely to play the main role, since L1 may be useful for more teacher centered activities, and the textbook (which is largely in Japanese) is also likely to be used in this section. The ALT can support students and their role is likely to become more important as the activities become more student-centered. In the production activity, the ALT role becomes more important since the focus is on communication using the target language. The JT can also play an important role by modeling the production activity with the ALT, making sure the students understand the instructions, and participating in the activity with the students. Competent ALTs can probably be left to plan a production activity on their own.

Table 1 summarizes the various roles that JTs and ALTs might take in the various stages of a PPP lesson.

3.3 PPP lessons are practical and easy to prepare

Because the roles are relatively easy to define, preparation can be divided along the same lines if both teachers understand the framework. At this point personal experience will be drawn upon to provide an example of what planning a PPP lesson might look like. As an ALT from 1998 through 2001, I worked with many JTs at three schools. Generally, each JT had their own idea of what TT should look like. Some JTs preferred to play a very dominant role while others preferred a passive role. As an ALT, the JTs which were the most satisfying to work with strived for a roughly equal role. The planning process with one such JT who will be referred to as Mitani-sensei is described below. The day before class Mitani-sensei and I would meet briefly and our conversation would be something like this:

Mitani-sensei: "Gerry-sensei, we have a class tomorrow. We're on page 23."

Gerard: "Page 23. That's using 'going to' to describe the future, right?"

Mitani-sensei: "Yes, so we should talk about our weekend plans at first?"

Gerard: “Good idea. Then you can use parts of our conversation to explain the grammar. Students will probably need some practice with it.”

Mitani-sensei: “Yes. There are some exercises in the book. Can you plan a task or game for them to talk about their weekend or something.”

Gerard: “No problem. I have some ideas. So I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Mitani-sensei: “Great. See you.”

Table 1: Roles for JTs and ALTs, following the PPP framework

	Role of JT	Role of ALT
Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the target in a natural conversation with ALT • See if students could understand the content (by asking content questions in Japanese or English). Repeat if necessary. • See if students could hear the target • Explain the target using metalanguage, probably but not necessarily using Japanese (L1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the target in a natural conversation with JT • Work as an assistant, repeating the conversation if necessary • The ALT is available to provide further examples of the target in use • Assist the teacher, providing examples of the target in use if necessary
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The JT may play the dominant role since there will be a more teacher-centered focus on form and L1 may be useful • Prepare practice activities or drills to practice the target • Textbook exercises often provide suitable practice activities. • Provide any explanation or additional support as required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist students individually • Working with students one-on-one, using English to engage students in authentic interaction while they complete less authentic drills or practice activities

Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist with facilitating the communicative activity, providing student support or additional instructions, etc. • Model the activity together with the ALT (instead of providing excessive instruction) • JT may also choose to work directly with the students as a participant in the activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ALT may play the dominant role since the focus will be on communication using the target language (English). • Prepare a task, content-based activity or some type of game that requires communication in English • Remember that modeling is often better than providing lengthy instruction
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We can see that the lesson which Mitani-sensei and Gerard discussed follows the PPP pattern very closely. Before we begin planning, we establish a target directly from the textbook. At the beginning of the lesson, we model the target using casual and authentic, but focused dialogue. The JT then goes on to explain the target as part of the presentation. The textbook exercises provide students with practice using the target. Additional practice activities may be provided if necessary, often at the discretion of the JT. The production activity is then primarily the ALT’s responsibility.

After having a short chat to develop a plan, the JT and ALT can prepare individually on their own time. JTs are very busy and ALTs are also likely to be working with several JTs over the course of a day or week so it is very difficult to secure time to plan together. If both teachers have a similar framework in mind, it can make planning much easier. I had had experience with the PPP method before becoming an ALT. Whether or not Mitani-sensei had directly studied PPP is unclear, but the method has been fairly ubiquitous over the past 30 years (Craido, 2013) and is also intuitive for the experienced teacher who has to balance form and textbooks with communicative goals. This pattern of planning was typical with this specific JT and it was very efficient and effective. What is necessary is that both teachers have an understanding of the framework and a certain degree of trust. Providing additional training for both ALTs and JTs may be necessary to bridge any gaps in this respect.

4. Conclusion

The PPP method presents JTs and ALTs with a framework which can help facilitate efficient and effective TT. While it is not argued to be a *best method* which all teachers should use all of the time, it can be an important tool or reference point for TT (as well as other circumstances). The PPP method is compatible with textbook-based learning. The targets, as well as many of the practice activities can be drawn directly from the textbooks. Moreover, it brings a communicative component into English classes which can be excessively form-focused, otherwise. The language comes to life in the production activity as students communicate using the newly-acquired form. Most importantly for our purposes, the PPP method can be an effective solution to the dilemma of TT. Lessons are quick and easy to plan, and both teachers have important and complimentary roles in planning and delivering the lesson. Having an understanding of the PPP method can go a long way toward making the awkward situation of having to team teach with a partner, much easier and rewarding for all of those involved.

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