

Repetition vs. Repetitious by Carol Gaab

There is no disputing that repetition of the Target Language is a key factor in successful language acquisition. However, repetition is only effective if it is comprehensible and engaging. To keep repetition comprehensible, teachers should:

1. Establish meaning of new structures first! Verbalize meaning; post meaning, gesture meaning; use a visual. Treat vocabulary introduction as a game of “Show & Tell.” Involve as many senses as possible!
2. Post vocabulary structures on the board (neatly) with the meanings written below (in a different color).
3. Speak slowly as you begin to use new structures.
4. Gesture them, as you teach them.
5. Point to new structures as you say them.
6. Limit the number of new structures– no more than three at a time.
7. REPEAT the same structures in an interesting (non-repetitious) way.

The more emotionally engaging (and comprehensible) teachers make input, the less repetition will be needed AND the more likely students will ‘hang on’ to the end of your lesson. One trick for sustaining student engagement is a marketing concept called a ‘hook’, a technique that Dave Burgess, author of ‘Teach Like a Pirate,’ describes in his book. (You will have the opportunity to hear Dave firsthand, and if you read the newsletter, you will know WHERE!) I, too, have a special ‘hook’ but it is NOT something that I can share here, since it’s probably not appropriate for email. Maybe it’s not appropriate at all... Nevertheless, I’ll share it with you at the end of this article...

The more emotionally engaging (and comprehensible) teachers make input, the less repetition will be needed. I call this elimination of the need for repetition the “*Fudge Phenomenon*.” It works like this: Driver #1 is driving a red car. Driver #2 is driving a green car. Driver #2 suddenly and unexpectedly stops his green car in front of Driver #1. Driver #1 slams on the brakes and shouts, “Oh ji%@\$!!” ...while toddler is sitting in the back seat. Twenty-five minutes later toddler drops his cookie in a puddle and shouts (with exact same emotion and voice inflection), “Oh ji%@\$!!” Acquisition required only ONE repetition, because the ‘introduction’ was emotionally engaging and was based on a manageable amount of new vocabulary. Case in point: The more emotionally engaging and cognitively possible we make instruction, the less repetition will be necessary.

Although the Fudge Phenomenon can eliminate the need for a repetition, it’s application is limited, since not all vocabulary lends itself to an emotionally charged introduction. Some vocabulary requires an ample amount of repetition– more than one would think. Teachers generally provide enough repetition to bring students to a level of ‘knowledge.’ They remember the word or phrase when they hear it or read

it (Receptive Language Skills), but they can not spontaneously recall the vocabulary to initiate or sustain a conversation (Productive Skills). Essentially, providing *sufficient* repetition of CCCI (Compelling, Contextualized, Comprehensible Input) is the catalyst that allows students to *internalize* (narrow & deep learning of) vocabulary structures and to subsequently develop FLUENCY.

The caveat is this: Repeating the same few vocabulary structures in the same way, in the same context and with the same activities makes instruction feel repetitious. Repetitious instruction gets boring and even annoying! The following are a few tips for breaking up the monotony of repeating the same language structures over and over:

- Consider a different platform for PQA. Try a poll or survey and discuss the results. Play Four Corners or Four Square (vote with your feet activities). Write a few questions on the board and have partners or small groups use them as a source for partner/group discussion. Have students (individual, partners or small groups) invent questions based on the Target Language Structures of the day. Have them write their questions on post-it notes and stick them to the board. Use STUDENT questions as your source for questioning.
- Consider a variety of story sources: legends, fairytales, news stories, jokes, songs, historical events, culture-based stories, research-based information, TV commercials, movie shorts, movie trailers, etc.
- Use technology to spice up your instruction: Photopeach, Animoto, Makebeliefscomix, Blabberize, Goanimate, Dvolver, etc.
- Use a HOOK to help students tolerate repetition and to 'hold on' to the end of your lesson.

Oh yeah, I almost forgot MY hook! I'm not sure if I should divulge it now... I'm not sure if this is the right time... I am a little reluctant to just blurt it out... Ok, here goes... For more ideas, watch my 20-minute session entitled "How to Provide Repetition without Being Repetitious," **FREE for those of you who read to the end of this month's Teaching Tip.** Thanks for reading!

FREE SESSSION:

<http://fluencymatters.com/video/how-provide-repetition-without-being-repetitious>