17 Practising new language items

A Warm-up

Read the following texts and answer the question. Share your ideas with a partner.

1 Do you think that either of these experiences compares to the experience of learning a language? For example, what is the role of practice?

I remember having tennis lessons. We would spend ages just practising one shot – hitting backhands over and over again, or volleying at the net, or whatever. My coach was trying to make that one piece of my game perfect. The lessons would always finish with a short match, though, where I had to use all the shots I could play – that was probably the bit I liked best.

For me, being a chef is just my dream job – I love cooking so much. I would always go into the kitchen when my mum was cooking and I watched everything she did. She then let me start to help – chopping stuff up, that sort of thing. And then one day I just said, 'I'll cook this' – and she watched me do it all. If I got something wrong, she'd gently tell me, but it was really just all me. When I started, nothing was quite as good as she would have done, but I just kept cooking things and learning as I went along.

2 Read the quote below. In your own experience of learning a second language, was practice useful? If so, what kinds of practice were helpful?

> Practice gets a raw deal in the field of applied linguistics … For some, the word conjures up images of mind-numbing drills in the sweatshops of foreign language learning, while for others it means fun and games to appease students on Friday afternoon. Practice is by no means a dirty word in other domains of human endeavour, however. Parents make their kids practise their piano skills at home, and the world's most famous performers of classical music often practise for many hours a day, even if it makes their fingers hurt. If even idolised, spoiled, and highly paid celebrities are willing to put up with practice, why not language learners, teachers, or researchers?
>
> Robert DeKeyser, 2007

B Controlled oral practice

1 Look at the lesson transcript below and answer the questions that follow.

Teacher: Listen. She's been to Spain. She's been to Spain. Now you. Repeat.
Class: She's been to Spain.
Teacher: Good. Again.
Class: She's been to Spain.
Teacher: Good. Cinzia, can you say it?
Cinzia: She has been to Spain.

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Teacher: OK – but put 'she' and 'has' together – 'she's'.
Cinzia: She's been to Spain.
Teacher: Excellent. Roberto ...

a What are the advantages of this type of repetition exercise?
b What are the drawbacks?
c Why might the teacher choose to start with choral repetition (the whole class responding)?
d Do all new language items need to be drilled?
e Do all learners in the class need to say the new item individually?

2 Look at an alternative drilling technique below – known as 'backchaining'. What is the purpose of backchaining?

Teacher: Listen. She's been to Spain. Repeat after me – to Spain.
Class: to Spain.
Teacher: been to Spain.
Class: been to Spain.
Teacher: She's been to Spain.
Class: She's been to Spain.

3 Work with a partner to practise backchaining. Trainee A should use model sentence A, with trainee B responding, and trainee B should use sentence B.

A: I'm going to paint the house in the summer.
B: We'll call you when we arrive.

C Controlled written practice

1 Read exercises a–c and explain how they differ.

a Complete the sentences with the words in the box.

applied	bought	finished	invited	messaged	went

1 I ..... to the supermarket yesterday and ..... some bread, coffee and pizzas.
2 Paula ..... me yesterday and ..... me out to dinner.
3 She ..... the course and ..... for a job in LA.

b Complete the sentences with the correct form of the words in the box.

apply	buy	finish	go	invite	message

1 I ..... to the supermarket yesterday and ..... some bread, coffee and pizzas.
2 Paula ..... me yesterday and ..... me out to dinner.
3 She ..... the course and ..... for a job in LA.

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c Complete the sentences by putting one word in each gap.

1 I ..... to the supermarket yesterday and ..... some bread, coffee and pizzas.
2 Paula ..... me yesterday and ..... me out to dinner.
3 She ..... the course and ..... for a job in LA.

2 Explain how these practice exercises are different from drills. What advantages do you think they have? What can you conclude about providing practice?

D Interactive and communicative practice

1 Read the activities and complete the chart that follows by ticking the appropriate boxes.

A. Dialogue practice (to practise the past simple)

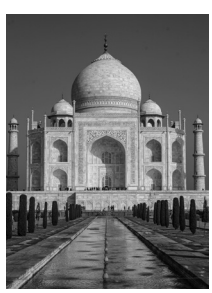
1 In pairs the learners practise the following dialogue:

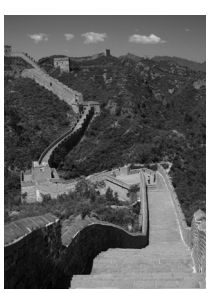
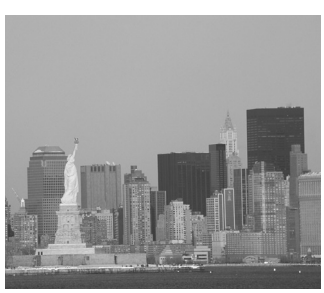
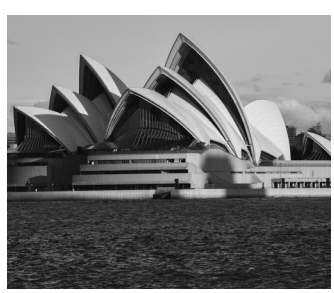
A: Hello Pat, did you have a nice weekend?
B. Yes. I went *skiing*.
A: That sounds like fun. What was the weather like?
B: It was fantastic. What about you? What did you do?
A: I stayed at home. We had a *barbecue*.
B: Was that fun?
A: It was until *I burned myself!*

2 They change the elements in italics to make a new dialogue, and practise that.

B. Circle drill (to practise the present perfect)





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The learners sit in a circle. The teacher shows the first picture (the Eiffel Tower) to a learner and asks, *Have you ever been to France?*. The learner answers; the teacher gives the picture to the learner who turns to the next learner and asks the same question and then passes the picture on. The teacher then continues with the other pictures, so that all the pictures are travelling around the circle with the learners asking and answering questions.

C. Find someone who ... (to practise *can*)

Learners stand up and mingle, asking questions so as to find people who can do the different activities. They then report back to the class.

FIND SOMEONE WHO ...
can swim
can speak more than three languages
can juggle
can play the piano
can sing
can drive a car

D. Write five sentences (to practise the present simple)

The learners must write three true sentences about themselves, using the new item of language (in this case the present simple) and two which are not true. They read their sentences to a partner, who must guess which are true.

	Dialogue practice	**Circle drill**	**Find someone who ...**	**Write five sentences**
There is built-in repetition: the activity gives learners opportunities to use the new language item on several occasions.				
The language is contextualized.				
Learners interact and/or take turns.				
Learners communicate – they must both speak and listen to what is said.				
The language is personalized.				
The activity is fun and playful.				

2 Choose two of the criteria from the left-hand column and say why these things are useful in a practice activity.

3 Work in pairs. Write two exercises to practise *used to* + base form, as in *He used to do magic tricks*. Which sequence would you recommend the activities be used in? Why?

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E Putting it together

Think back to what you know about presenting new language items, as well as how to provide practice. Work in pairs. Complete the lesson plan, using the boxes a–j below.

1 Below is part of a lesson plan on using *used to* + base form to express past habits. Try to complete the plan, matching the boxes a–j below with boxes 1–10 in the plan.

Lesson aim: Expressing past habits with *used to* + base form.

Stage	Activity
Building context	1
2	Teacher says, *David used to play football.*
Highlight meaning	3
4	Teacher asks, *Did he play football in the past?* (Yes) 'Does he play football now?' (No)
Highlight spoken form	5
6	The teacher writes the model sentence on the board. Draws a box round *used to* and writes *base form* over *play*.
Summarize 'rule'	7
8	Learners choose an activity they enjoyed as children and then walk round the class asking if other people used to do the same thing.
Report back	9
10	The learners discuss their memories of their first school in small groups.
Report back	The teacher asks some individuals what they talked about. Afterwards, she highlights good uses of language and writes some errors she heard on the board and asks learners to correct them.

a The teacher draws a timeline on the board, showing a period in the past with several crosses within it.
b The teacher repeats the model sentence with natural linking, stress and intonation. The class repeats.
c Highlight written form
d The teacher asks some individuals how many people shared their interest and corrects errors if they are made, as well as praising good examples of language use.
e The class talks about what things they enjoyed doing when they were children.
f Teacher says, *used to + infinitive can be used to talk about things we regularly did in the past, but don't do now.*
g Practice 2
h Model sentence
i Practice 1
j Checking understanding

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KEY WORDS FOR TEACHERS

Check you know the meanings of these terms.

- *controlled (restricted) practice*
- *choral repetition*
- *individual repetition*
- *drill*
- *interaction*
- *communication*

REFLECTION

Think about the following questions. When you are ready, work in groups and discuss your answers.

1 Why do learners need to practise language if they already know the 'rules'?
2 How would you respond if learners made errors in the sort of activities you have seen in this unit?
3 As well as the sort of practice activities you have seen in this unit, what other types of practice activity would you need for a balanced lesson?
4 Is there a correct order for sequencing practice activities? What factors might influence a teacher's decision as to which practice activities to use, and when?

Reference

DeKeyser, R. (2007) *Practice in a Second Language: Perspectives From Applied Linguistics and Cognitive Psychology.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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