

PAUSE PROMPT PRAISE APPLIED TO JAPANESE LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

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Introduction

This is a report of an action research project currently under way at a university in Japan. The aim of this project is to develop the reading skills of junior high school students through tutorial sessions led by trained university students using principles and procedures of a reading programme, *Pause Prompt Praise* (PPP), developed in New Zealand. The first author is the programme leader, and the other two authors are external project consultants.

The authorities at Junshin Catholic University in Nagasaki have sought to enhance the academic relationship between the university and all the schools with whom they are associated. In this connection, it is considered highly desirable for teaching in these institutions to be more closely linked. To this end, approval has been given for a series of joint projects, one of which is a programme by which university students assist junior and senior high school students in the development of their reading skills in English.

The university students concerned are in their third year of a four-year programme, at the end of which they will be qualified as junior high school teachers. Part of their professional training in the third year is a two-semester course in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). The programme leader will select some of these students, on the basis of high grades and motivation, to act as tutors in this reading programme. Both school and university authorities have agreed that the theoretical and procedural foundation of the programme should be that of *Pause Prompt Praise*.

Therefore, as an integral element of their TESOL course, students will be trained to carry out reading PPP tutorial sessions with learners from one of the affiliated high schools. This will in-

volve each student undertaking to work with one or two tutees in fifteen-minute sessions three times a week at times to suit their mutual convenience. Tutors and tutees will commit themselves to a minimum schedule of thirty sessions between October and December, 2004.

Pause Prompt Praise

Pause Prompt Praise is a widely used reading tutoring programme developed in South Auckland. A team of researchers worked intensively with parents of a group of 10 to 12 year old low-progress readers to develop a training booklet and video published by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (McNaughton, Glynn, Robinson, Quinn, 1981). Subsequent research with the programme led to its being republished in the U.K. under the title *Pause Prompt and Praise* (McNaughton, Glynn & Robinson, 1987). The programme was subsequently offered as a resource to Maori staff members of the New Zealand Specialist Education Service (now part of the Ministry of Education). Following acceptance by Maori staff from the Tauranga region, the programme was explored and trialled in a Maori cultural context (Maori language immersion classes at an urban primary school) and re-developed in Maori language. It is known as *Tatari Tautoko Tauawhi* (Berryman, Bidois, Furlong, Atvars & Glynn, 1995; Harawira, Glynn & Durning, 1993).

The aim of PPP (and TTT) is to break into the cycle of reader dependence, in which many low-progress readers encountering unknown words have learned to rely exclusively on letter / sound information contained within each word. Many have over-learned the strategy of breaking the word down into component sounds, or "sounding it out"; this tends to focus the reader's attention on phonemic elements, instead of learning to *make sense* of what they are reading. PPP tutors are trained to give priority to strategies that focus the reader on understanding word and text meaning. They learn to provide the reader with prompts that might draw on any of the following: (i) the reader's background knowledge of the story, (ii) the reader's familiarity with the language structure of the text, (iii) the meaning contained within the context of each sentence or paragraph.

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These prompts are introduced in addition to other prompts that draw the reader's attention to (iv) the letter-sound information within words.

However, only *after* readers' responses indicate that they have some understanding of the meaning of what is being read does the tutor resort to prompts about letter and sound information within words. Tutors are encouraged to tell the reader the correct word only as a last resort and only after two prompts have been tried. This is aimed at preventing many low-progress readers from simply "cuing" tutors to tell them the correct word. Through skilful use of a variety of prompts strategies, tutors can assist readers to become independent problem-solvers when they encounter unknown words in their reading from texts.

There has been considerable evidence reporting on the effectiveness of Pause Prompt Praise in improving children's reading performance when used by either parent or peer tutors (Glynn, 1995; Glynn & McNaughton, 1985; Houghton & Bain, 1993; Houghton & Glynn, 1993; Wheldall & Glynn, 1989; Wheldall & Mettem, 1985). Of particular relevance to the Nagasaki project are those studies which occurred between *tuakana* (older and more skilled students) and *teina* (younger and less skilled students) using *Tatari Tautoko Tauawhi* (Glynn et al., 1993; Glynn et al., 1996).

Initially, the *tuakana* were trained to implement the TTT strategies; they readily showed that they increased their rate of pausing following reader errors, and increased their use of specific praise, although this was already considerable. They also increased their use of prompting and reduced their rate of simply telling the readers the correct word. The observation and recording of tutor feedback procedures developed from the PPP model proved effective in this context of students learning Maori as a second language.

At the end of ten weeks of *tuakana-teina* peer tutoring, data showed that readers increased their correct reading rate and decreased their incorrect reading rate; they also self-corrected more of their errors. In the 1993 study, tutors, who in their own independent reading were already displaying higher correct rates than readers, did not further increase this. However, like the readers, the tutors reduced their incorrect reading rate. The 1996 study indicated statistically significant gains by both readers and tutors – in English as well

as Maori. These results are consistent with those from other research studies reporting gains for tutors as well as tutees in English language peer-tutored reading contexts (Glynn & Glynn, 1986; Houghton & Glynn, 1993; Limbrick, McNaughton & Glynn, 1981; Medcalf & Glynn, 1987; Tang & Moore, 1992; Tavener & Glynn, 1989).

Pause prompt praise applied to Japanese students

On the basis of such studies, it is felt that a PPP programme could be applied to Japanese students learning to read English as a foreign language. Central to the success of the peer-tutoring projects in New Zealand is the relationship between tutor and tutee. Within a Maori worldview, the *tuakana-teina* relationship carries with it more than just the connotation of peer tutoring or buddy support. It also carries cultural meanings to do with the caring relationship of an elder sibling towards a younger sibling; including the rights and responsibilities, that each has towards the other within the *whanau* (the extended kinship relationship).

In this respect, *tuakana-teina* has affinities with Japanese *kohai-sempai* relationships. These are an integral element of Japanese society, both in schools and throughout working life. The relationships usually begin when students enter junior high school, although they may start earlier – particularly in elementary schools where sports teams or club activities are prevalent. The word *sempai* in the Japanese Kanji alphabet comprises two elements; the first can be understood as ‘before’ or ‘ahead’, and the second as ‘companion’. As such the word can mean “a person who proceeds or leads”, while *kohai* can be construed as “a companion who is behind” (Rohlen, 1991, p.21). The image created by these twin concepts is of two friends with one in front being closely followed by the other; this reflects the hierarchical nature which permeates Japanese society; senior, older people are given respect and authority and younger people are expected to defer to their *sempai*.

The relationship is usually based on an age difference, with the *sempai* being between one and three years older than the *kohai* - although it is possible for a greater age difference to occur. These relationships tend to be limited to the same sex, but this is not always

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the case: mixed relationships can be found particularly in sporting activities and teams. As indicated above, while the foundations of sempai-kohai relationships are built in schools, they apply throughout working life. This close association with one another – between an older and younger person, one who has more experience and is more established than the other depicts an ideal working association – one that, according to Rohlen (1991, p.23) is “secure, beneficial, reciprocal and selfless (to a degree)”. Such an ideal relationship is similar to that which should occur between tutoring dyads in a PPP programme.

The aims of the Nagasaki project

The immediate purpose of the project is to measure the extent to which tutors as well as tutees make gains in their reading skills as a result of participating in the tutorial sessions. All participants will be measured at the end of the programme against baseline data obtained at the start. Tutees’ reading development will be measured by standardised instruments derived from PPP studies carried out in New Zealand: oral readability scores, reading accuracy (and inaccuracy) measures, cloze tests, etc. The same instruments will be applied to tutors, and their progress will also be assessed by other tests of reading competence derived from studies of Japanese university students (Aikou, 2003).

In addition, attention will focus on the development of relationships within the project.

In sociocultural terms, this project at Nagasaki can be conceived as a series of Zones of Proximal Development – ZPDs (Vygotsky, 1978). The principle behind the ZPD is that the less able partner (*kohai*) is assisted to achieve a potential level of achievement with the assistance of the more able partner (*sempai*) than he or she could achieve alone. Guidance within a ZPD is usually referred to as scaffolding (Woods, Bruner & Ross, 1976; Mercer, 1995; Van Lier, 1996), key elements of which are establishing a challenging but safe learning context, the provision of assistance contingent upon the developing ability of the learner; and the final handover of the task to the learner.

The first of these zones is that which occurs, and is intended to be bridged, between the tutee and tutor; in this case, the tutee makes gains in English reading skills with the scaffolding of the tutor - the more able partner; in this relationship, the learning is reciprocal because the tutor not only gains pedagogical skills but also extends her own reading ability to a higher potential level. A second ZPD is that which occurs between the trainee tutor and course leader; through these interactions, the trainee tutors become more proficient in their pedagogic skills - and the course leader, in turn, becomes a more proficient trainer, and by monitoring the tutorial interactions also acquires a greater understanding of the difficulties faced by struggling readers. Within the framework of the training programme, other ZPDs occur where groups of trainees scaffold each other's knowledge and implementation of the principles and procedures of PPP. Another ZPD is that which occurs between the project leader and the external consultants, in which understanding is co-constructed through joint action in the different phases of the project. A more abstract ZPD can even be conceived at an institutional level, where the school's understanding of how to improve its English language teaching is enhanced as a result of the structured interaction required by this, and other projects with the more senior partner, the university; in this reciprocal interaction, the university extends its own awareness of the needs of the school, and how it may assist the meeting of those needs. The entire process can thus be seen in terms of a series of *sempai-kohai* or *tuakana-teina* relationships.

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