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Eigo Note as a Teaching Tool

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Introduction

This article presents a strategy to use Eigo Note (EN) in an effective way. All of the public schools that I teach at require me to use EN. From the ETJ internet community, I have found that many of us felt that EN is difficult to implement as an effective English teaching resource. For me, the primary difficulties are 1) EN is written mostly in Japanese and 2) the lesson plans are questionably structured. I don't read Japanese well and I found trying to decode the lesson plans from the little English that was provided to be a difficult task. Without being able to read the Japanese, I have found an effective way to use EN by integrating the information provided with a commonly used method of lesson planning in an EFL environment which consist of the following: 1) establishing a target,

2) Presentation of the material, 3) Practice, and 4) Production. The last three points are commonly referred to as the PPP model.



Establishing a Target

EN is structured so that there is a macro target with each lesson and then a micro target in the hour-by-hour lesson plans. You can find the target from the "scripts." Make certain you understand the

macro and micro targets. If you teach in a situation like me, where I do not teach the same class every week, this is critical because the homeroom teacher (HRT) teaches alone on weeks I am not there. I must be sure that the lessons complement the previous lesson and the next lesson. If you want to modify the target, be absolutely clear to the HRT why you want to modify it and what your plans are. The reasons I have modified the target were because I felt either the lesson target was too easy, such as counting to ten, or too difficult, like introducing “I like...” and “Do you like...?” at the same time.

Make sure the target is reachable and reasonable. The point is to challenge the students so they are always reaching but able to achieve the goal with some guided effort. With every lesson, you should always be able to complete this statement, “By the end of this lesson, the students will be able to...”, for example, “By the end of this lesson, the students will be able to ask and answer, “What do you like? I like...”



Presentation

The first P in the PPP model is the presentation phase. In this phase, the teacher(s) speaks ninety percent of the time. The main direction of information is from teacher to student. We all know that learning a second language is most effective when the material can be linked to personal experiences. The topic should be brought up in a way the students can tie to their own experience and then introduce the students to the target language in English. EN seems to present a lot of English in the presentation phase. I have found that introducing the topic with the HRT in Japanese (L1) to be effective at getting the subject and target off the ground smoothly. If you are teaching on your own then either give visual support or use some Japanese key words to orientate the kids. Even if the students cannot understand the English, at least they will know what you are talking about. This establishes a clear connection to the students of the English they will learn and how it concerns them.



Practice

The practice phase is the chance for the students to use their English speaking muscles. Language in the practice phase is fifty percent teacher talk and fifty percent student talk. The target language should be clearly defined so students know what is expected of them to complete the language task. Accuracy is emphasized over fluency.

EN often suggests using a lot of English at the start of the Practice phase, either through a listening exercise or dialog between the HRT and ALT or the ALT and the students. I have found that doing a short say and repeat drill of the target (about five minutes) before the suggested activities greatly increases the activity effectiveness and likelihood of the students participating. The students are used to the say and repeat type drills and it helps students to separate the target language from the peripheral language.

Concerning listening exercises, EN seems to suggest launching into them suddenly and then back track to explain the unknown. I do the opposite. After the drill, I explain the target. We open the books and observe and discuss the page. Give the students a chance to guess the task. Explain or demonstrate the task then I, or the HRT, will ask concept check questions in L1 before starting the listening exercise. For example, “What do I write next to this picture?” (L2 only teachers can point to the picture, hold up a pencil and scratch your head). I play the recording a minimum of three times. The first playing is for students to complete as much as they can on their own. The second playing is paused after each answer and checked with the whole class. The third playing is for confirmation and fluency.



Production

The production phase is where the students are now placed in the driver's seat. The flow of information is generally from student to student, student to teacher, or student to teacher to student. Hopefully, the students are doing more talking than the teacher. Students get a chance to use the language from a controlled setting to a less controlled setting. This is when games are usually being implemented but

games can be implemented during the practice phase and transformed into the production phase with very subtle changes to the rules.

EN tends to mix up the practice and production phases where activities go from structured to unstructured and back to structured or, worse yet, from unstructured to structured. Be aware of the flow of information. Always ask yourself, are the students capable of handling this next phase?

If the PPP model was set up properly, by the end of the lesson, the students should have a sense of accomplishment and ownership of some level of English, however small. I always review the material at the end of class. This doesn't take more than a few minutes but I found a review helps to anchor the target.



Conclusion

EN can be an effective means of introducing and teaching English. I found that in its current form, I need to make modifications for it to be effective for me to teach. As long I keep the PPP model in mind, I have a clear and effective strategy. EN then becomes a tool that I can work into my strategy with less effort than coming up with my own lesson plans from scratch. Also, the HRT can take comfort that my targets and methods are consistent with EN so they can follow along. My goal with EN is to stay true to the target and flexible in the approach. In using EN, I find, most of the parts are there, I just need to make minor adjustments to make it work for me. This strategy has worked for me and I hope this helps you.



I would like to thank Ellen Head for her editing input.

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