

M Y T H

4

Practice makes perfect.

In the Real World

This is Steve. Remember the old joke? A tourist asks a New Yorker, “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?” The New Yorker answers, “Practice, practice, practice.”

Practice is important, but not if we conceive of practice simply as doing a series of unfocused communicative tasks meant to exemplify a linguistic structure, as I’m afraid sometimes happens. Just engaging in communicative practice is not enough. As Lightbown (2000, 443) put it, “Research evidence shows that communicative practice in the classroom, as valuable as it is, is not sufficient to lead learners to a high degree of fluency and accuracy in all aspects of second language production.”

In cognitive psychology, the classic account is that practice helps declarative knowledge (knowledge of rules, for example) become procedural knowledge (knowledge of how to do a specific thing). When I taught at the University of Pittsburgh, our office doors had combination locks instead of keys. The ELI administrative staff’s offices also held libraries of textbooks and reference materials, so sometimes someone would need to get into an office. The person would ask for the combination, and you could never remember it. The best you

could do was to perform the actions of pressing the relative locations of the three letters or pairs of letters on your palm while the other person watched. When you first got your office, you had declarative knowledge of your combination: A, J, B, D; then you proceduralized your knowledge and didn't need the "rule" any longer. So too with language. We think of verb endings, and then we use them with less effort, and, if we get really good, our knowledge is automatized. It is practice that drives this process. This is a simplified view of a complex topic that is beginning to attract even more attention, but my point is that few would deny that practice is a key part in learning a language.

There have, of course, been disagreements over what constitutes good practice. When I was in high school, practice consisted of drilling structures and memorizing dialogues. We don't do that much anymore. What I want to look at in this chapter is practice that is focused, what is often called Focus on Form, though I don't want to enter the debates around the definition of that concept here. What we will look at are activities that focus on linguistic forms while also attending to meaning. Ortega (2007) argues that for L2 practice to be effective, it should be interactive, meaningful, and focused on task-essential forms. This chapter is about the third of those requirements, looking at research on whether drawing learners' attention to forms will help them progress in their development of a particular grammatical form. We will first look at the concept of attention since it is foundational to understanding the goal of the research and then look at five ways that researchers have tried to call learners' attention to particular language forms in the classroom: input enhancement, processing instruction, planning, repetition, and output. Each section will consider research on whether each technique, all of which provide practice with using a second language, results in improvement in particular language forms. Recasts fit into this general topic, but correction is discussed in Myth 6. The five uses of attention differ in how they draw the learner's attention to form. Input enhancement and processing instruction are input-based and use a variety of techniques to draw the attention of the student to the existence of the form in the input. Planning activities can draw attention to specific forms before students do a task or can lead to a more sponta-

neous focus on forms by the students as they plan. Because they have thought about what they will say before doing the task, students have more cognitive resources when they do the task itself. Repetition also allows for a spontaneous focus on forms; as learners realize the gaps in their performance on the first try, they may attend to those forms more carefully the second and third times they do the same task. Output also shows students the gaps in their knowledge.

What the Research Says

Attention

Richard Schmidt kept a diary of his acquisition of Portuguese during a semester-long stay in Brazil (Schmidt & Frota, 1986). He did not have time to study Portuguese before moving to Brazil, though he had studied other languages and was a professor of linguistics. Schmidt at first had a difficult time scheduling a Portuguese class, but after three weeks, he was able both to take a class and start to interact socially with Brazilians. The combination lasted five weeks. For the last 14 weeks of his stay, he stopped taking classes and just interacted with a group of friends in Portuguese.

Schmidt's teachers explicitly taught grammar and drilled the students extensively, yet he did not learn all that was taught. He had extensive interaction with native Portuguese speakers, who answered his questions and sometimes even corrected him. Despite forms being in the input, he did not acquire them (for example, articles are quite frequent, but Schmidt routinely dropped them in his own speech). However, when he was taught the form, then heard it used and made links, or when he heard a form used enough to notice it, he usually subsequently acquired it.

Out of his experiences, Schmidt concluded that "a second language learner will begin to acquire the target-like form if and only if it is present in comprehended input and 'noticed' in the normal sense of the

word, that is, consciously" (Schmidt & Frota, 1986, 311). Since then, noticing has become an important topic in SLA, part of a larger cluster of concerns with attention and awareness, and something that underlies all of the methods considered in this chapter.

The information-processing approach uses "attention" in several senses (Robinson, 2003). Listeners attend to speech and readers to print; they select information in the environment of speech or text. Attentional resources help us to focus when thinking. We "pay attention" to our task. We try to sustain our attention to a task like reading a textbook.

Input becomes intake and learning occurs, according to Schmidt, when we pay attention to input and have the subjective experience of "noticing" it (Schmidt, 1983, 1995, 2001). Psychologists agree that attention is basic to learning. We must attend to something in order for it to reach our long-term memory. Otherwise, the stimuli stay in short-term memory for a few seconds and then disappear. What is noticed is not what Schmidt calls "the raw data of the input (the phonetic stream of speech)." Input is interpreted through what we already know, the representations stored in our long-term memory. People notice examples of the linguistic system, "but not the principles of the system itself." Noticing is thus "the first step in language building, not the end of the process." (Schmidt, 2001, 31).

How conscious does noticing have to be? How aware does the learner have to be? Robinson (1995, 296) says that attention exists on a continuum. He defines noticing as "detection plus rehearsal in short-term memory."

Leow (1997) tested if awareness indeed contributes to learning. Beginning U.S. university students of Spanish completed a crossword puzzle with examples of stem-changing verbs (irregular verbs that change vowels in the stem in third person, simple past). They did so while thinking aloud. The crossword's intersecting clues made for conflicts. To be successful at completion, the students would have to realize that the verbs were irregular and change their spelling (this is also an example of a task where correct use of the verb form was task-essential). The students then took tests to see if they had learned the correct

forms while doing the puzzle. Leow looked at the transcripts of the recorded completion of the crosswords and discovered that learners who approached the task with meta-awareness were much more accurate on the test. Meta-awareness occurred when the learners developed hypotheses while doing the task (*Oh, maybe the stems change*) and/or figured out the rule. Students who did not approach the task this way were less successful at learning. Leow's findings give support to Schmidt's noticing hypothesis, as did Leow's (2000) replication of this study.

Input Enhancement

How do we get students to notice? The first way we will consider of drawing attention to forms is called input enhancement. Perhaps if learners' attention is directed to a certain form in the input, they will spontaneously develop the focus on that form that teachers would like them to. Teachers have experimented with forms of written input enhancement—typographical cues like bolding, underlining, and font changes.

In Leow (2001), first-year students of Spanish were exposed to the formal imperative through a short text on how to live a happy life. The verbs were underlined and the verb endings, which mark the form, were bolded. Students thought aloud. "Noticing" was counted when students translated, marked, or referred to the verbs. Simply reading the sentence aloud did not count as noticing. The group that received the enhanced text did not notice more than the group that received the unenhanced text. Overall, only about 60 percent of the forms were noticed (though it's difficult to know just what is really noticed). Both groups showed a significant correlation between noticing and recognizing the form on a later test. There were no differences in comprehension between the two groups. Leow says that enhancement in reading may not be effective because students use a variety of strategies to read, including in this case translation. Problem-solving tasks like the crossword puzzle might make better use of noticing because they involve learners in specific steps, not holistically, as reading does. So, we can

take away at least two things from this study. Noticing leads to learning. Input enhancement in reading may not be the most effective way to draw attention to forms.

Similar results were found in Leow, Egi, Nuevo, and Tsai (2003). The students who read the enhanced text did not notice more than the students who read the unenhanced text. In this case, 55 percent of the targeted forms, the present perfect or present subjunctive in Spanish were noticed. The present perfect form was noticed more, probably because it is formed with two words (much like the English *have lived*) while the subjunctive simply has a verb ending. There was also no effect on comprehension for enhancement. There was a significant relationship between what was noticed and later recognition of the forms. Thus, the research ties noticing to learning, but students in non-enhanced conditions also seem to be able to notice.

Better results for enhancement were found in Lee (2007). Lee exposed the subjects to a longer training session than most of the previous studies but also admits that the subjects had been exposed numerous times to the structure (the English passive voice) in school. Lee shows that those in the textual enhancement condition outperformed the non-enhancement group on a grammar test. However, disturbingly, the enhancement group recalled significantly fewer ideas from those texts, suggesting that their comprehension was affected by the enhancement they chose form over meaning. This, incidentally, has been found in other studies. Lee and Huang (2008) found a small negative effect ($d=-0.22$) on reading comprehension when input enhancement was used to teach grammar.

In a study of vocabulary acquisition comparing the effects of various combinations of glossing (defining in the margins) a word's meaning, asking for a translation, and bolding, Rott (2007) found that once learners saw the word glossed, multiple boldings of the same word had a positive effect on comprehension, but multiple enhancements had no effect on learners' ability to produce the words. Overall, in fact, enhancement was the least effective of the methods.

Ellis and Sagarra (2010) talk about "learned attention." Learned attention may be a reason that L2 acquisition is difficult for adults. We

learn to pay attention to cues in L1, and, at least initially, transfer those cues to L2. For example, Ellis and Sagarra point out that we know that time words like *yesterday* are available in other languages and our reliance on their availability may block acquisition of past-tense verb morphology. This depends partially on our native language; if we have a language rich in morphology, we may be better able to focus on verb endings, because we are in this case using an L1 cue. Ellis and Sagarra show that pedagogical interventions, including input enhancement that draw the learner's attention to forms help learners overcome their L1 processing style.

VanPatten (2007), using different theoretical assumptions, comes to similar conclusions.

Processing Instruction

The second method of calling attention to particular grammar forms that we will look at is called processing instruction (PI). PI is a pedagogical method that is backed by VanPatten's (2007) theory of Input Processing. Here's VanPatten's argument. Comprehension is necessary for acquisition; acquisition depends on learners making connections between forms and meaning. When we try to comprehend a foreign language, we may use our L1 processing strategies. We may assign syntactic roles based on the way our L1 is put together. That is, we may try to figure out who is doing what to whom based on our processing of our first language. Comprehension, especially at first, is difficult in L2 because our processing capacity is limited and, because we are processing according to our L1, inefficiently. An effective strategy for learners who find themselves trying to understand a second language is to catch the content words first and ignore the function words and inflections/grammatical endings. Often, the information in a sentence is redundant (the *s* on *three girls*, for example), but other times grammatical markers do need to be processed. For example, the *-ing* in *The baby is sleeping* tells us that the state is ongoing. At bottom, when we attempt comprehension, we are focused on what is meaningful in the sentence. Thus, learners need to have their attention directed to forms.

At this point, VanPatten (2007, 122) has posited a number of processing strategies (such as seeing the first noun in the sentence as the subject) but says that it is unclear whether certain processing strategies are universal or whether transfer is in play. For example, L1 English speakers learning Spanish have a difficult time with the structure *A Juan lo detesta María* (María hates Juan), thinking that it is Juan who hates María (because Juan is the first noun, English speakers think Juan is the subject of the sentence). Would Italians, who have a similar structure, have less trouble? Of course, the real world also intervenes in processing. A student hearing *The dog was petted by the girl* would likely not think that the dog was doing the petting, because that's not the way of the world.

Input processing, according to VanPatten (2007), is not a theory of acquisition. It is not the same thing as processing instruction, but it informs it. PI is a type of focus on form or input enhancement that pushes learners away from "nonoptimal processing strategies" (VanPatten, 2002, 764). In PI, learners are given information about a form; they are informed about a processing strategy that might have an adverse effect on their comprehension or acquisition; then they are pushed to process in a certain way by doing activities that focus on the target form.

Others question whether PI works beyond the limited number of structures and languages it has been used for. VanPatten counters that the number of structures and languages is indeed adequate to support PI. From a theoretical level, researchers criticize VanPatten's model of attention (he sees it as limited; others see attention as being less limited, perhaps unlimited) and his model of processing (what gets processed, when). (For the debate, see DeKeyser, Salaberry, Robinson, and Harrington, 2002, and Van Patten's response, 2002.)

VanPatten's research has often taken the form of comparing PI to "traditional" instruction. The study that is most often cited as the example is VanPatten and Cadierno (1993). This was a study of second-year university learners of Spanish in the United States. A PI group was compared to traditional instruction (TI), which was traditional grammar teaching plus a series of exercises, from drills through com-

municative practice. The target grammar was object pronouns (*A Juan lo detesta María*). Students in the PI condition listened to or read sentences. They responded by checking *yes* or *no*, *agree* or *disagree*, but did not produce any sentences. The PI group outperformed the TI group and the control group on a comprehension test and was as good as the TI group on a production test. (DeKeyser & Solkalski, 1996, discussed in Myth 3, is a replication and critique of this study.) Since both PI and TI groups received explicit instruction on the form, it was unclear if the input processing or the explanation given helped more. VanPatten and Oikkenon (1996) looked at this issue. One group of high school learners got explicit information about the target structure, another got PI only, without the explanation, and a third got both PI and explanation. In the comprehension test, both PI groups did better than the explanation group. In the production test, the group that received both did better than the explanation group. This led VanPatten and Oikkenon to conclude that it was the structured input that was effective. Things are not completely clear, however, as the structured input group got *yes/no* feedback on the correctness of their responses, a form of additional instruction, and the explanation group got no practice at all (DeKeyser, Salaberry, Robinson, Harrington, 2002).

The effectiveness of input enhancement in general has still to be conclusively proven. Han, Park, and Combs (2008) provide a useful overview of research. Two particularly interesting suggestions are that the effectiveness of IE may depend on prior learner knowledge of the form and whether the form is meaningful. Lee and Huang (2008) performed a meta-analysis of IE effects on grammar learning. They found a very small effect size for IE ($d=0.22$), but noted that the comparison groups often received significant amounts of input, which in itself is good for learning. In comparing two good methods, we in essence diminish the strength of each.

Planning

The third way of drawing students' attention to forms is through giving students time to plan what they will say. R. Ellis in his (2005a) review of planning research, says we can distinguish two kinds of planning—pre-task planning and within-task planning. Pre-task planning includes rehearsal (which is doing a task before presenting it to the class, for example, or repeating a task) and strategic planning (discussing the task at a more metalinguistic level, thinking about how you are going to do the task). Planning is thought to make tasks easier to do in that attentional resources are freed up by the planning, and the students do not have as much on their plates when they do the task itself. A largely unspoken assumption is that planning leads to noticing, and noticing facilitates learning, though the research thus far has looked only at short-term gains in accuracy, fluency, and complexity of language.

The effects of planning have been measured in a number of ways. Table 3 provides some of the measurements.

TABLE 3: Target Measures in Planning Research

accuracy	Often measured as percentage of error-free clauses, or number or ratio of correct forms.
fluency	Often measured by absence of pauses or absence of silence, lack of repetition of single words or phrases/false starts, syllables per minute
complexity	Often measured by presence of subordinate clauses or other difficult grammar; sometimes measured by lexical or syntactic variety

Let's view two studies of pre-task planning in some depth. Skehan and Foster (1997) looked at three kinds of tasks, two planning conditions, and two post-task conditions. Their three task types were a personal information exchange, a narrative task, and a decision task. The personal information exchange asked students to tell their partners what surprised them about living in the U.K. The narrative was a cartoon description task. The decision was based on giving advice. The two planning conditions were "no planning" and "ten minutes to plan." The final condition was plus or minus knowledge of a post-task; those in the post-task condition were told they would have to repeat

the task in front of the class. Planning was found to increase fluency, accuracy (for the personal and narrative tasks) and complexity (for the personal and decision tasks). The clearest results were for fluency. Knowledge that there would be a post-task largely didn't influence fluency or complexity, and neither did it unambiguously help accuracy.

Task type did make a difference. Planning was very effective in increasing the complexity of language in the decision task. In the narrative and personal exchange tasks, planning was very effective in increasing accuracy. There's a potential trade-off between accuracy and complexity; as students attempt more complex language, they may not have control over it. However, there is a disagreement as to whether trade-offs are inevitable.

Foster and Skehan (1999) addressed the source of planning. Intermediate-level college students engaged in a debate over who would be thrown overboard to save the rest as a punctured hot air balloon descended to earth. The conditions were focus of planning (language and content) and source of planning (teacher-led or group-led). There were also control no-planning and solo planning conditions. In the first condition, the group was taught modals and conditionals by the teacher. In the second condition, they worked as a group without the teacher to brainstorm ideas and check their own language for accuracy. In the third condition, the teacher led a discussion of the content of the task. In the fourth condition, the group did the planning. Both teacher-led conditions produced a reasonably balanced performance; they had the highest levels of accuracy, along with reasonable complexity and fluency. The solo planning group also did well, producing complex and fluent language. Group planning did not fare well; the language of the members of those groups was less fluent, less accurate, and not very complex.

How much planning is needed? Crookes (1989) found that giving students ten minutes to plan a monologue resulted in significantly more complex language (as measured by words per utterance and number of subordinate clauses) than that of a group that did no planning. The planned condition also produced a significantly greater number of words. Mehnert (1998) gave learners one, five, or ten min-

utes to plan a message to leave on another person's phone. One minute of planning led to improved performance on fluency, lexical density, and accuracy measures, compared to no planning. Giving students five minutes of planning time led to increased fluency and lexical density scores. Ten minutes of planning led to improvement over five minutes in fluency, lexical density, and complexity. Accuracy, in other words, improved with one minute of planning and didn't get better after that. Complexity didn't increase until planning time was increased to ten minutes.

What do learners do when they plan? Ortega (1999) found that most of her subjects rehearsed the content, focusing on main ideas over details. In a study of group planning, Truong and Storch (2007) also found that students were most concerned with content. Mochizuki and Ortega (2008) compared no planning, unguided planning, and guided planning (which gave information about English relative clauses and pointed out that they might be useful in doing the story-retelling task). Neither planning condition had an effect on complexity or fluency, but guided planning led to increased and more accurate use of relative clauses. Ortega (2005, 106) argued that during planning time learners are able to attend to both form and meaning, and do, "simultaneously holding in long-term memory considerations regarding the message to be conveyed and the essential formal resources to convey it." In Sangarun (2005), the students in the group that was focused on both form and meaning outperformed those who were focused on one or the other.

Thus far we have looked at pre-task planning. R. Ellis and Yuan (2005) is a study of within-task planning, which is a function of time on task. What Ellis and Yuan call "careful within-task planning" means that learners got little pre-task planning time (only 30 seconds at best), but were allowed as much time on task as necessary. Their pressured planning condition forced students to complete an oral story retelling in five minutes, with a set number of required sentences, and a written narrative in 17 minutes. Careful within-task planning led to greater syntactic complexity and accuracy than the pressured condition for the

oral task, and greater complexity, lexical variety, and accuracy in the written task.

Ellis (2009) surveyed 19 studies of strategic planning and found an overall positive effect on fluency. The effects of planning on complexity were more mixed than for fluency, but positive overall. Planning had mixed results on accuracy but generally was more effective for lower-proficiency students.

Repetition

The fourth method of drawing attention to the forms in the input is through repetition. Repetition can be thought of as a special sort of planning, a form of rehearsal. A task is done multiple times. Bygate (1996) reported on a study of one learner immediately retelling the story of a cartoon after viewing it on two occasions, three days apart. The student did not know that she would be asked to do so on either occasion. Bygate found that, on the second telling, the student improved in the range of vocabulary used, the accuracy of the language, and in fluency. There was a decrease in the number of errors, although a small one. The student used more past tense verb endings, more transitions, and more adjectives and adverbs the second time. She was also more precise in her word choice. Bygate (2001) found strong effects for repetition (in fluency and complexity) when students repeated a task after ten weeks (though in the interim, they had practiced similar tasks, but not repeated the exact one). However, effects of repetition do not necessarily transfer to a different task.

Gass, Mackey, Alvarez-Torres, and Fernandez-Garcia (1999) report on a speaking task done by students of Spanish at a U.S. university. One group watched the same video three times, then watched and described another, while another group watched three different videos, and then described the same fourth one as the repetition group. Based on a holistic assessment of the language used, the "same content" group improved more than the "different content" group.

Lynch and Maclean (2000) look at a classroom activity, the "poster carousel." Students in an English for Medical Purposes class worked in

pairs to develop a poster. One stayed at the poster to explain it while the other rotated to ask questions of other students. Students at the poster thus explained the same basic content to a number of different partners. Lynch and Maclean present the results from the most and least advanced students. Both students whose work is presented improved during the activity. The least advanced student, for example, was able to change her ratio of correct to incorrect usage of subject-verb order from 3:6 to 8:2. She was fluent, producing words in the last rounds that she searched for in the first. The language of the most advanced student became more precise and more complex. She was able to refine her explanation of a statistical concept, first expanding it to make it clearer and then contracting it to make it more precise. Lynch and Maclean (2001) analyzed three more of the students from the first study. Of the five total, all improved in phonology and vocabulary; four of the five improved in semantic precision and three of the five in syntax.

Discourse, specifically framing, is another possible area of development. Bygate and Samuda (2005) did a detailed analysis of the production of three learners out of a larger group and saw that all increased in the amount and specificity of framing in their narratives as they repeated their task. That is, they moved from disjointed stories to more tightly expressed ones, with, for example, better sequence markers, better coordination, and more interpretations of the characters' actions.

Probably the most basic repetition technique was developed by Maurice (1983). He called it "Fluency Workshop." Students line up in two lines facing each other, pairing off. They have a set time (originally four minutes) to deliver some information to their partner (what he or she is going to do this weekend, for example). One speaks, and then the other. One of the partners moves to the left. They repeat their information to a different partner, but this time have a reduced amount of time (three minutes). There is one more change of partners and the time reduces to two minutes.

Arevart and Nation (1991) tested the efficacy of the technique. They changed it so that speakers repeated their role immediately.

Arevart and Nation note that the change in partners eliminates any pressure to add more information to keep the partner interested during repetition. They also note that the reduced time has a similar effect on limiting new information. The repetition has an effect on fluency because the speaker is familiar with both the form and content of the message. Arevart and Nation found that what they called 4/3/2 produced significant gains in fluency in their sample of learners from a variety of backgrounds. The number of words per minute increased an average of 21.5 percent from first to third delivery and the number of hesitations per 100 words decreased 22 percent.

What would happen if you combined Ellis and Yuan's careful within-task planning with task repetition? Ahmadian and Tavakoli (2010) tried to answer this question and found that the combination had no effect on accuracy, compared to careful planning without repetition, but did have a positive effect on fluency and complexity.

These studies show that repetition seems useful, but there are questions. Does it simply provide a good result for a particular task, or does it lead to acquisition? More research is needed.

Output

The last way of drawing language learners' attention to form in the data considered is broad but basically involves asking learners to produce specific types of language. This section expands on the idea of output introduced in Myth 3 and places the idea of output in the context of noticing. Remember that Swain (2005) said that output has four functions: production; hypothesis testing; a metalinguistic or reflective function; and noticing.

Noticing may occur in two ways. Learners may notice a hole in their knowledge (for example, a word they need but don't know) or they may notice a gap between what they produce and what a more competent user of the language produces.

Williams (2001) looked at attention to form that arises spontaneously during classroom activities. She analyzed language-related episodes (LREs), discourse in which learners talk about or question

their language use, or in which teachers or other learners talk about or ask about a learner's problem or error.

Eight students in an intensive English program, two at each of four levels, were taped in their classes twice a week for 45 minutes over eight weeks. LREs were analyzed, and students were given tailor-made tests to assess their knowledge of the words and structures that were the basis of the LREs. Results showed that indeed LREs were linked to performance on delayed tests, suggesting acquisition. The items that got discussed were learned. LREs had a stronger effect as proficiency increased. Who finally provided the information made a difference. At the beginning level, students did not pay much attention to their peers; they relied on the teacher and the teacher's information was effective. This balance shifted until at the highest levels peers were supplying more information than the teacher and the effectiveness was about the same. Learners could also figure out the answer themselves and, when they could, this was effective.

Izumi (2002) compares noticing output to input enhancement. Both focus learners on target structures, but the former is internal and the latter external in origin. Izumi studied the acquisition of English relative clauses. Subjects were students enrolled in ESL programs at U.S. universities. Students read a text and took notes (Izumi's measurement of noticing). There were four experimental groups: output and enhanced input, output and no input, input and no output, and neither output nor input. The two groups that received enhanced input (one that produced output and one that didn't) noticed more—in the sense that they took more notes. However, the group that only had to produce output, and received no enhanced input, improved most in their knowledge of relative clauses. They outperformed the input only group on measures of both production and comprehension.

Izumi speculates that input enhancement works at a fairly shallow level of processing (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). Output may require a greater depth of processing, which in turn may leave a better trace in long-term memory. Input enhancement may have to be used in conjunction with other tasks. Furthermore, other studies (Izumi, Bigelow, Fujiwara, & Fearnaw, 1999; Izumi & Bigelow, 2000) suggest that more

than one output session is necessary for improvement to be seen. Once is not enough.

Swain and her colleagues (e.g., Kowal & Swain, 1997) have used the dictogloss technique (Wajnryb, 1990) to encourage students to reflect on their own output. Learners hear a short text read at normal speed and take notes using words and phrases. They then work together to reconstruct the text from their shared resources. Finally, the various versions are compared.

Lesser (2008) used dictogloss in a study comparing output to input. Second-year students in U.S. Spanish classes listened to two passages. The output group took notes and reconstructed the texts while the input group answered questions about the passages. Learners in the output condition reported more noticing of nouns and more total words but did not particularly notice the verb forms that were the targets of the study. The output group comprehended more information as well. On writing tests, the output group decreased their mistakes and increased their attempts at using the target past-tense forms from the pre-test to the post-test. Thus, even though their notes did not show noticing of the verb forms, the fact that they increased their attempted use of the forms in their writing samples led Lesser to claim that there was some noticing of forms.

Inspired by Schmidt's noticing hypothesis, teachers and researchers have tried a number of ways to get students to notice forms. All the ways have been successful to the degree that students noticed some (though by no means all) of the forms. However, some of those who were not pushed to notice did notice, suggesting that this is something that can't be turned off. Is noticing something learners do anyway, something that we don't need to emphasize in the classroom? I think it's too early to say that with any certainty.

Drawing attention to forms, or giving learners a chance, through planning, repetition, or communicative activities, to develop spontaneous focus on a particular form, seems to have an effect on recognizing that form later. Overall, there does seem to be a connection between noticing and at least short-term learning. However, no long-term studies have been done, and even delayed post-tests are rare (see

Table 4). It seems as if this will remain an area of interest in SLA for the foreseeable future, and we look forward to clarification of a number of issues.

TABLE 4: Noticing

Input enhancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overall, those who notice can recognize the structures later.• A little over half of the forms are actually noticed.• Those without input enhancement also notice.• There are possible task effects.
Processing instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• VanPatten & Cadierno (1993): PI more effective than traditional instruction.• VanPatten & Oikkenon (1996): Structured input itself most effective part of PI
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positive effects for fluency• Overall, positive effects for complexity• Mixed results for accuracy• Possible effects for task and source of planning
Repetition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effective for phonology, vocabulary, syntax, discourse• Effects don't necessarily transfer to other tasks
Output	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Output effective in learning vocabulary and structures (Williams, 2001)• More effective than control group (Izumi, 2002; Lesser, 2008)

What We Can Do

1. Put noticing in context.

Many teachers use some form of Present-Practice-Produce. The target is introduced, either inductively (let students figure things out from example input) or deductively (explicitly explaining and later providing examples). There is some sort of controlled practice with the form. Finally, the students are turned loose and do a communicative activity for which the form is useful; whether the form is used or not depends on many things.

Sometimes the teacher throws the students into the deep end, so to speak, and develops the presentation out of the errors made during interaction.

Ranta and Lyster (2007) argue for a sequence of awareness, practice, and feedback. In the awareness phase, attention is drawn to the target language form, and students have an opportunity to notice the gap. Practice is based on communicative drills that involve repetition of the form. Learners get feedback on their performance while performing the tasks or after completion. Lyster (2004) argues that what he calls prompts work well with form-focused instruction (prompts are explored in much more detail in Myth 6). Prompts provide feedback on the forms that students produce, and include clarification requests (*Sorry?*); repetitions of the error with rising intonation (*He run?*); metalinguistic clues (comments, information); and elicitation (direct questions or pauses like *In —?* following the student utterance).

Let me address the issue of communicative drills. Some people say they hate drills and use only communicative activities. Mechanical drills (*I go the store. She. She goes to the store. They. They go to the store.*) require production of language, but allow it to be divorced from meaning, and probably should be avoided. (However, I can see some uses for them in some cases. I'm thinking of pronunciation, for example.) Communicative drills are another matter. Think of your speaking textbook's pair work activities. Take the example of a map pair work in which one student has to tell the other how to get to a series of places. The same basic structure (the imperative, *Turn right/left*) is used in each exchange. I would say that's a communicative drill. The emphasis is on meaning, but the structure is being practiced in a narrow way.

2. Use recycling and activity frames.

Don't be afraid to do an activity more than once. You may get bored, but I doubt your students will. They want to become proficient. The key is to do communicative activities and change partners. If students are communicating, preferably about their own lives and not the lives of some fictional people in the textbook, the information will change while the language forms stay the same. Try the procedure by Maurice (1983) (see pages 71–72).

Marc Helgesen and I have worked for a number of years on what we call activity frames. These are simply activities that can be used for a wide variety of structures. Here are two, in hopes they inspire you to think of the things that activities have in common.

CIRCLE DRILL

1. Students work in groups; ten or twelve is a good number.
2. The first person says a sentence. The second repeats and adds another. The nomination of the next speaker belongs to the students. I usually bring a ball or a wadded-up ball of newspaper. The speaker throws the ball to the next speaker.
- 3 This works with almost any structure. Here's an example using frequency adverbs: *I'm Juan and I always go shopping on Saturdays. He's Juan and he always goes shopping on Saturdays. I'm Maya and I never eat fish.*

DO-IT-YOURSELF FIND SOMEONE WHO

1. This can be a whole-class activity.
2. Students write information about themselves on slips of paper. The teacher collects the slips and redistributes them. Students try to find someone for whom that's true. It doesn't have to be the original writer.
3. To get started, dictate four stem sentences like *I enjoy —ing. I want to —*. Again, many structures can be used.
- 4 As students find someone who, they go on to another slip of paper. You can either give out all four at once, and the winner is the one who gets rid of all four first, or you can simply ask the students to come and get a new slip each time one is needed, and award one point for each.

Using the same activity frame frequently, with different content, eliminates one of the problems of the communicative classroom: it often takes longer to set up an activity than it does to do it. Notice also how both of these activities are drills.

3. Use dictogloss to provide opportunities for reflection.

Dictogloss has been used in studies of output as a research tool, but it's also a good classroom task. Students work together to reconstruct a short text (five or six sentences) that they've heard. In the process, their attention is directed to target words or structures. You can write your own texts, seeding them with whichever forms you are interested in practicing, by finding human-interest stories on the Internet. Failed bank robberies, meetings of long-lost twins—any sort of odd story works, as long as it is interesting. I wouldn't do a dictogloss on a G-8 meeting, for example.

This is the dictogloss procedure (Wajnryb, 1990):

1. Read the text twice at normal speed.
2. Students write what words and phrases they can.
3. In groups, students pool their words and reconstruct the text to the best of their abilities. The reconstruction won't be 100 percent correct.
4. Class discusses, and then compares answers.