3 The four phase model

3.1 Aim and method of the four phase model

Since the amount of English lesson time is restricted in primary education, the five healthy language components are offered within the four phase model in a set order. In this way the effective learning time or child time (the time that the pupils themselves speak English in the lesson) is improved and maintained. Lessons are based around themes.

The aim of the four phase model is to prepare pupils in a safe way for communication in English. The four phases are the building blocks of the lessons. The phases are not all offered in every lesson, but across a series of lessons based on a theme or project: a phase is not a lesson and a lesson is not a phase. Each series of lessons comprises the following phases and components:

- introduction phase (phase 1): preparation input/strategies
- input phase or presentation phase (phase 2): input, processing form and content, strategies
- practice phase (phase 3): pushed output, strategies
- transfer phase (phase 4): pushed output, strategies.

3.2 Phase 1: introduction phase

The aim of phase 1 is to familiarise pupils with and prepare them for the new theme and the language which they will learn. During this phase, the pupils do not yet practise. Phase 1 comprises four components:

1. Activating prior knowledge: this consists of words, sentences and experiences which the pupils have heard, learnt or had outside the school. The teacher starts each theme by checking the pupil's point of departure; for the pupils it clarifies what they already know and consequently the new subject matter can be adapted to this. The teacher writes down what the pupils mention; the pupils do not yet need to write.

2. Motivating the pupils: explanation of the aims and objectives of the theme.

3. Repeating 'old' subject matter: words or structures (sentences) from previous chapters or themes are reviewed as required for the new theme; repetition of material from prior lessons.

4. Applying strategies: as preparation for the input text from phase 2 by prediction or guessing.

3.3 Phase 2: input phase

The aim of phase 2 is to offer new language (words, sentences) to the pupils and give them opportunities for processing. Phase 2 comprises at least five parts:

1. Listening to (for more experienced pupils also read) the input text: the input offered matches the criteria of variation in type of text, consists of authentic and comprehensible English, level inter language + 1, connects to the pupils' fields of interest, varied amount of subjects, processing of the input, with visual support, comprises the core dialogue.
2 Processing the input (input text, new words, core dialogue) on form and content: by means of directive questions, preferably in English, before the pupils listen to the input, on form (how do you say that in English?) and content (what is happening?).

3 Offering new words: both receptive vocabulary which pupils should be able to recognise and productive vocabulary which they should be able to use. Words are offered in context with visual support without translation.

4 Offering the core dialogue (one or more) needed to speak to each other in phase 3: at the pupils' level, offered in context and directly usable, with no further explanation of grammar rules.

5 Using various strategies to process the input. This is the silent period: the pupils are working on receptive processing assignments. Use of the target language ensures additional input. The input text is always the start of the input phase.

The input text, core dialogue and words are offered in a fixed sequence in order to prevent mistakes:

- a prediction about the input
- b looking at directive questions
- c listening to input without text
- d answering directive questions, looking at new ones
- e listening to input without text again
- f using listening and reading strategies
- g class and individual repetition (core dialogue, words), reading (along), copying.

3.4 Communicative approach

The communicative approach is also known as the functional-notional approach (F-N approach). These concepts are discussed in this chapter:

1 Communicative situation: a situation in which you discuss with others (at the restaurant, at school).

2 Core dialogue: a standard discussion the pupils learn to use, with functions or notions, with various roles.

3 Functions: a speech act or description of what someone wants to say or do in a particular communicative situation (such as how to say what you would like to drink).

4 Fixed and variable notions: an expression or English sentence linked to a function (‘I’d like a coke’). The English sentences in the core dialogue are the notions: ‘I’d like’ is a fixed notion and the words which can be varied (a coke) are the variable notions.

5 Variations: application of English sentences which pupils have previously learnt (‘A coke is great’).

6 Creative construction: the pupils make or transform new sentences or parts of sentences from prior language learning from inside and outside school (‘A small tin of diet coke, please’).

7 Fillers: words which give pupils time to think about the answer (‘Well... let me see’).
3.5 Phase 3: practice phase

The aim of the practice phase is to practice the new material from closed (no variation) to semi-closed (little variation) exercises, both orally and in writing, with a gradual increase in level of difficulty. Phase 3 comprises five sections:

1. Practice with the core dialogue with notions: automate the core dialogue at the start of phase 3.
2. Practice with the variable notions: carry out various closed assignments with the variable notions.
3. Practice with the core dialogue with functions: in closed to semi-open exercises the pupils fill in the English notions for the functions given, possibly also with some variations.
4. Exercises with a plus dialogue: a more extensive (core) dialogue with functions, as a preparation for the more free assignments in phase 4.
5. Practice with strategies: use of speech and writing strategies.

The assignments move from reproductive to productive exercises: in phase 3 the teacher can predict what the pupils will say and how they will say it. Games are an ideal way to practice fixed and variable notions, since they automatically contain an information gap. When asking questions ('Can you play table tennis?') the pupils' answers are always the point of departure ('Yes, I can'). The level of difficulty is built up from answering questions (from yes/no answers to more open answers) to being able to ask questions. There is little to no differentiation in this phase. The teacher guides the learning process and can rectify any frequently made errors through extra practice.

3.6 Phase 4: transfer phase

The aim of phase 4 is to prepare pupils for English communication outside of the school. Pupils should be able to apply prior knowledge if the teacher creates realistic assignments in appropriate contexts. Learning is extended for all pupils; there is plenty of space for differentiation: the teacher cannot predict what the pupils will say. Phase 4 comprises four sections:

1. Final oral assignment with a description of the situation: pupils have a role with a realistic problem or question, without functions or notions, or they play a more open game.
2. Written final assignment: is linked to and complements the final oral assignment.
3. Strategies: the pupils may look things up if they get stuck (time out); application of all strategies they have learnt.
4. Evaluation: the teacher gives feedback on the execution of the final assignment and stimulates the pupils by complimenting them on their effort and performance.

Back to the hypothesis: five components are required for good language education and the limited time in primary education necessitates a fixed sequence. The learning process is thus partially followed and the hypothesis is partially true.