

# Six Phase Program – background philosophy

## **The *Growing Participator Approach* to “Language Learning”**

### **and the *Six-Phase Programme***

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## **The Growing Participator Approach**

The GP approach emphasises the sociocultural nature of language learning, while also paying attention to the cognitive processes involved, and the spiritual role of language and language learning in reconciling people in all the earth to one another and to God.

### *The sociocultural nature of language learning:*

Language is not separate from the way of life (culture) that it supports and that it depends on, nor is it separable from the concrete activities of the people, nor from their specific interpersonal relationships. To learn a language is to be nurtured or apprenticed into the life-world of individual host people and groups. Therefore, in this approach we commonly speak of “growing participators” rather than “language learners”. As beginning participators in a new life-world, newcomers are dependent on one or a small number of relationships for their early growth, and over time, branch out into a wider range of relationships in normal life contexts of the host world. The earliest relationships are unusual ones for the host world, being aimed at bringing the newcomer into that life-world as quickly as possible. Over time, the relationships become less and less unusual, as the newcomer is able to participate more and more richly and naturally in the lives of host people. Host people who especially help growing participators to grow we call “nurturers”. We grow into host life by participating in it. However, participation at the right level for early growth is only occasionally possible. In order to get more of it, we hire nurturers who will give us rich concentrated opportunities to participate in their world. Our sessions with such nurturers we call “supercharged participation sessions”.

### *The cognitive processes involved:*

The fundamental cognitive process involved is listening comprehension. It develops through experience, and provides the cognitive foundation for developing the ability to produce speech, as well as for literacy ability. Typically, the earliest activities of growing participation (perhaps lasting two weeks) do not involve the newcomers producing speech, but rather, involve them in listening and responding non-verbally. They begin verbal interaction through specially designed activities (called information gap activities). Over time, the growing participators are able to listen to increasingly complex discourse, until they understand normal conversational speech between host people, and other public speech and writing. The growing richness of understanding feeds into increasing richness of speaking.

In connection with the process of learning to understanding host people, strong emphasis is placed on vocabulary learning, but brute memorisation of vocabulary is strongly discouraged. Heavy emphasis is also placed on learning the life-world of host people as essential to understanding their speech, since the two are inseparable.

It is recognized that the development of native-sounding speech includes much more than grammar, and that grammar may not even be the main factor. Thus, although some activities draw the growing participators' attention to grammar, this plays a smaller role than many people are accustomed to from language courses they have taken.

*A mindset of steady change:*

In connection with the sociocultural nature of language and the cognitive processes involved, we have emphasised the fact that growing participation is a process of steady development and change. This means that the supercharged participation activities will change in nature over time. What we do with a nurturer in month one will be radically different from what we do in month three or month seven. The nature of our personal relationships and spiritual participation will also keep changing. We keep these facts always in mind and very deliberately take them into account as we reflect on how our life among host people is developing.

## **The Six Phase Programme**

A large number of language learning methods could be developed that would follow this general [Growing Participator Approach](#). The Six Phase Programme is one concrete example. People following the [Growing Participator Approach](#) may want to modify the Six Phase Programme or replace it altogether, as suits them.

### ***Phase One: The Here-and-Now Phase (one to two months, ideally)***

For approximately the first thirty hours of supercharged participation sessions, the growing participators listen to instructions and questions and respond non-verbally, while learning to understand about three hundred vocabulary items, and many simple grammar constructions. This happens in the context of an embryonic relationship between the growing participators and the host person or people who first begin nurturing them into the host world. An additional approximately seventy hours of Phase 1 activities involve more activities like those of the first thirty hours, but also activities that require verbal interaction. By the end of this phase, the growing participators are familiar with approximately 800 vocabulary items and many simple grammar constructions and common expressions needed for survival. Communication ability is, of course, still highly limited and heavily influenced by the home language and culture of the growing participators. However, they are ready to start growing into increasingly genuine communication. Likewise, the nature of their relationship with the host nurturer is still embryonic, but will steadily become richer, wider and deeper.

## ***Phase Two: The Story-Building Phase (six to eight weeks, ideally)***

For the first approximately fifty hours of Phase 2 supercharged participation sessions, the growing participators work hard to “loosen up their tongues”, speaking more and more freely, with the help of a supportive host nurturer. The primary activity at this time employs wordless picture stories. Then for an additional fifty to eighty hours, they interact with a host person (or people) who likewise creates stories from wordless picture books (and possibly other techniques, such as using toys). In the interaction, the growing participators help to guide the story somewhat, and clarify aspects of the pictures that the host nurturer does not fully understand. Since the stories are largely created by the host nurturer, it is at this point that the growing participators begin, in a small but real way, to see these stories from host people’s point of view. Finally, for approximately twenty hours of this phase, the growing participators and their host nurturer build their own autobiographical picture stories, through which their relationship moves from the embryonic level to the level of infancy! Some Good News Stories are also brought into the relationship during Phase 2. Cognitively, the growing participator has grown from the point of being able to understand simple individual utterances to being able to follow sequences of many utterances that are connected with one another to form a story. They have also gone from being able to say very little to being able to express themselves more creatively, though they still struggle greatly.

## ***Phase Three: The Shared Story Phase (ten to fifteen weeks, ideally)***

This is the phase when the growing participators can be said to be developing “conversational ability”. They are moving from understanding simple narrative speech to understanding complex narrative speech, but only when the content is largely familiar, as when they hear a story that they already basically know (not that they know it word for word, but they know the overall plot and basic details of the story). There are three common types of activities in this phase: 1) hearing detailed descriptions of familiar daily activities, such as using a bus; 2) hearing stories that are already familiar (in the sense mentioned); 3) hearing “reminiscences” of shared experiences (such as an outing that the growing participator went on together with the host person—the host person then reminisces about the experience with the growing participator). The second type of activity mentioned (hearing familiar stories) has many variants, starting typically with world stories (bridge stories) that are known in many cultures, and leading to host stories that are first known through translations or simple summaries. The Old Testament is a common source of these bridge stories. Another important development in this phase is that the growing participators are developing an increasing ability to understand not just narrative speech, but explanatory speech (also called expository discourse). Finally, because of the fact that real conversational ability is emerging, there is increasing freedom to engage in other communication activities (relationship building activities) besides the common three types mentioned above.

## ***Phase Four: Deep Life Sharing (four to six months)***

This is the phase when relationships start to go really deep. Activities include ethnographic interviewing related to everyday life and the exploration of host people’s life histories through

discussions with them. The growing participators also continue sharing from their own backgrounds and experiences. Spiritually motivated growing participators can use some of this time for learning about host beliefs and comparing those with one's own beliefs in discussions aimed at mutual understanding. In sharing their own beliefs, the growing participators can also begin using a "chronological Story telling" approach. However, the primary emphasis is on learning the host world broadly and deeply by learning individual lives broadly and deeply.

### ***Phase Five: Native-to-Native Discourse Phase (four to six months).***

This phase involves a great push into realms of host people's talk that the growing participators still find especially challenging. In the case of major languages, it may involve discussions of literature, movies, radio talk shows, etc. In the case of less major languages, where such resources are not available, there will be a need to create extensive recordings of host people talking to host people on various topics, in various settings, and for various purposes. The growing participators are hoping to develop their "recognition vocabulary" (words they understand when they hear them in context) to as many as ten thousand items. (Their speaking vocabulary—words the growing participators use freely in their own speech—will still be much smaller). The growing participators will be learning about a wide range of areas of life that are commonly discussed, and participating in those discussions credibly. They will also be giving special attention to different language styles (formal, informal), and the socially appropriate ways to carry out various functions of language. The recorded native-to-native discourses that are a key resource in this phase will include some that are related to the work-role that the growing participators will be fulfilling in the host world, preparing them for fuller participation in that role.

### ***Phase Six: Self-Sustaining Growth***

If Phases 1 through 5 have gone well, the growing participators may have high ability to understand host speech. If they then continue to participate heavily in host life, always understanding most of what they hear being said around them, then their familiarity with the language/culture will continue to steadily grow for many years, and in turn, their ability to speak, interact, read and write will also grow, always reflecting their increasing familiarity with the language/culture. The growing participators will soon come to be accepted among particular groups of host people (such as work place groups, or leisure-activity groups) as "more or less one of us", which will also greatly facilitate further growth.

**To Guide a Growing Participant  
Into Deep Involvement Within a Community  
(version 2.0)  
Six Phases of Super-Charged  
Participation Activities**

	1. Beginners	2. Beginners	3. Beginners	4. Intermediate	5. Advanced	6. Advanced
	Here-And-Now Phase	Story-Building phase	Shared-Story Phase	Deep-Life-Sharing Phase	Native-To-Native Discourses Phase	Self-Sustaining Growth In Community
Hours In Sessions With A Language Helper	first 100 hours (6% of total Language Sessions)	150 more hours (11% of total Language Sessions)	250 more hours (17% of total Language Sessions)	500 more hours (33% of total Language Sessions)	500 more hours (33% of total Language Sessions)	sessions as needed
Approximate Vocabulary Gain	first 750 words	1500 more words	1750 more words	2500 more words	3500 more words	increasing by the thousands
Communities Of Practice	Goals in this Aspect of the Socio-Cultural Dimension: To become richly integrated into communities of practice <sup>1</sup> , the smaller networks of relationships within the larger language community. To develop continuity between times spent in a "super-charged" community of practice (my language sessions), and times spent in other communities of practice which allow me opportunities to develop.					
Understanding Ability	Goals in this Aspect of the Cognitive Dimension: To understand most of what all people around me are saying. To be someone to whom people will want to talk.					
Talking Ability	Goals in this Aspect of the Cognitive Dimension: To be able to express my ideas with my own words in culturally and contextually relevant ways. To be someone to whom people will want to listen.					
Grammar and Phonetic Issues	Goals in this Aspect of the Cognitive Dimension: To become aware of certain aspects of grammatical form first in comprehension. To use this awareness to make my speech become more <i>native-sounding</i> .					
Culture Learning, Pragmatics	Goals in this Aspect of the Socio-Cultural Dimension: To know the world as much as possible as it is experienced by host people, in able to fully share life with them through language.					

*Note:* Communities of Practice are networks of relationships with native speakers, within which I can grow in my language abilities as I take on a unique and gradually enriching identity. They may be made up of one native speaker and myself, or be groups of any size. It takes time to build depth in these communities. Relationships and roles within any community of practice will develop and change over time.