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THE CONTENT OF "TASK-BASED LEARNING" APPROACH TO TEACH ENGLISH

Key words: teaching, task-based learning, approach, English, foreign languages.

What is a Task?

By task, J. Willis means a goal-oriented activity with a clear purpose. Doing a communication task involves achieving an outcome, creating a final product that can be appreciated by other [1]. Examples include compiling a list of reasons, features, or things that need doing under particular circumstances; comparing two pictures and/or texts to find the differences; and solving a problem or designing a brochure.

Tasks can be used as the central component of a three-part framework: "pre-task", "task cycle" and "language focus". These components have been carefully designed to create four optimum conditions for language acquisition, and thus provide rich learning opportunities to suit different types of learners [2].

The following framework outlines the roles of the teacher and learners during a task-based learning (TBL) lesson. Note especially the degree of teacher control, and the opportunities for learner language use.

Table 1. Task-Based Learning Framework

Components of a TBL Framework
PRE-TASK PHASE
INTRODUCTION TO TOPIC AND TASK
Teacher explores the topic with the class, highlights useful words and phrases, and helps learners understand task instructions and prepare. Learners may hear a recording of others doing a similar task, or read part of a text as a lead in to a task.

	TASK CYCLE	
TASK Students do the task, in pairs or small groups. Teacher monitors from a distance, encouraging all attempts at communication, not correcting. Since this situation has a "private" feel, students feel free to experiment. Mistakes don't matter.	**PLANNING** Students prepare to report to the whole class (orally or in writing) how they did the task, what they decided or discovered. Since the report stage is public, students will naturally want to be accurate, so the teacher stands by to give language advice.	**REPORT** Some groups present their reports to the class, or exchange written reports, and compare results. Teacher acts as a chairperson, and then comments on the content of the reports.

Learners may now hear a recording of others doing a similar task and compare how they all did it. On the other hand, they may read a text similar in some way to the one they have written themselves, or related in topic to the task they have done.

LANGUAGE FOCUS	
ANALYSIS Students examine and then discuss specific features of the text or transcript of the recording. They can enter new words, phrases and patterns in vocabulary books.	**PRACTICE** Teacher conducts practice of new words, phrases, and patterns occurring in the data, either during or after the Analysis

Sometime after completing this sequence, learners may benefit from doing a similar task with a different partner

Learners get *exposure* at the pre-task stage, and a chance to recall things they know. The task cycle gives them speaking and writing exposure with opportunities for students to learn from each other.

The task cycle also gives students opportunities to *use* whatever language they have, both in private (where mistakes, hesitations, and approximate renderings do not matter so long as the meaning is clear) and in public (where there is a built-in desire to strive for accuracy of form and meaning, so as not to lose face).

Motivation (short term) is provided mainly by the need to achieve the objectives of the task and to report back on it. Success in doing this can increase longer-term motivation. Motivation to listen to fluent speakers doing the task is strong too, because in attempting the task, learners will notice gaps in their own language, and will listen carefully to hear how fluent speakers express themselves. A *focus on form* is beneficial in two phases in the framework. The planning stage between the private task and the public report promotes close attention to language form. As learners strive for accuracy, they try to organize their reports clearly and check words and patterns they are not sure of. In the final component, language analysis activities also provide a focus on form through consciousness-raising processes. Learners notice and reflect on language features, recycle the task language, go back over the text or recording and investigate new items, and practice pronouncing useful phrases.

People have often been under the impression that task-based learning means, "forget the grammar". This would not be a wise move. The aim of analysis activities is to encourage learners to investigate language for themselves, and to form and test their own hypotheses about how language works. In the task-based cycle, the language data comes from the texts or transcripts of recordings used in the task cycle, or from samples of language, they have read or heard in earlier lessons. Having already processed these texts and recordings for meaning, students will get far more out of their study of language form [3]. Analysis activities can be followed by quick bursts of oral or written practice, or dictionary reference work (see Willis & Willis, 1996 for specific ideas). Finally, students need time to note down useful words, phrases, and patterns into a language notebook. Regular revision of these will help vocabulary acquisition.

Conclusions

TBL offers a change from the grammar practice routines through which many learners have previously failed to learn to communicate. It encourages learners to experiment with whatever English they can recall, to try things out without fear of failure and public correction, and to take active control of their own learning, both in and outside class.

For the teacher, the framework offers security and control. While it may be true that TBL is an adventure, it can be undertaken within the safety of an imaginatively designed playground.

References

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3. Willis, J. (1996). *A framework for task-based learning.* Harlow, U.K.: Longman Addison-Wesley.