LONGMAN HANDBOOKS –for– LANGUAGE TEACHERS

The *Longman Handbooks for Language Teachers* series is concerned with teaching techniques and problems at a practical level. It aims to provide teachers with guidance and assistance in the classroom, and is of great value to the experienced and inexperienced teacher alike.

A Framework for Task-Based Learning

A Framework for Task-Based Learning is a complete guide to the methodology and practice of task-based language teaching. For those who wish to adopt a genuinely learner-centred approach to their teaching, it offers an alternative framework to the "presentation, practice, production" model. This book is based on sound principles of language learning and combines the best insights from communicative language teaching with a systematic focus on language form. It explains and exemplifies each component in a typical task-based lesson, from setting up a new task, through the task cycle, leading into language focused work. This approach allows the natural integration of all skills and encourages in the learner a concern for both accuracy and fluency.

Key features of A Framework for Task-Based Learning are:

- a flexible but coherent framework
- a practical approach, with principles and rationale clearly explained throughout
- lesson outlines to show how the framework can be used to plan lessons
- photocopiable Focus Pages for use in teacher training sessions
- over 200 ideas for tasks for classroom use

A Framework for Task-Based Learning caters for:

- all learners from beginners upwards
- mixed level classes
- the teaching of any second or foreign language

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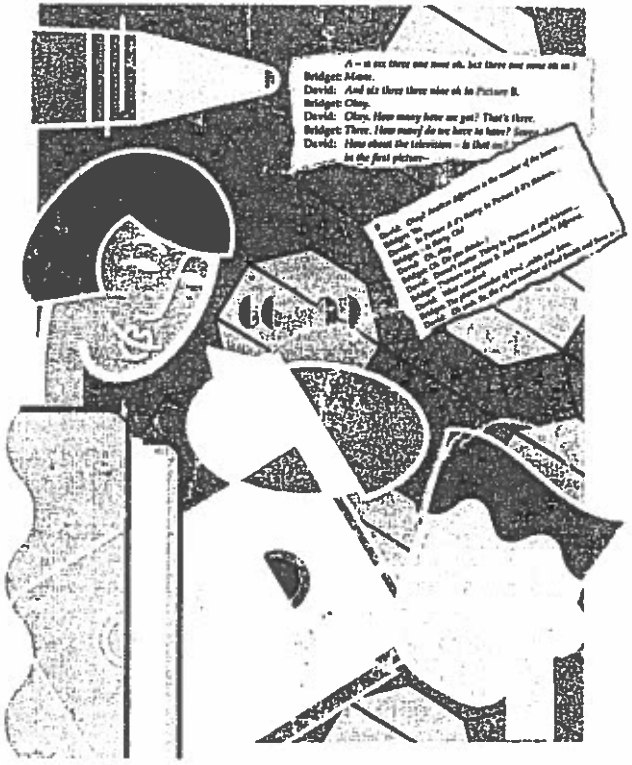

Jane Willis

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Longman Handbooks for Language Teachers

A Framework for Task-Based Learning

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PART A: STARTING POINTS

Language learning: creating the best environment

This chapter provides the rationale for task-based learning. It explores how natural language learning processes can enhance learning in the classroom.

We begin with a questionnaire which focuses on concepts and issues in foreign language learning. After discussing these, and the principles behind them, we consider different individual learning styles.

We then identify three basic conditions for natural language learning which, combined ideally with a fourth, instruction, provide an optimum learning environment.

Finally we show how the teacher-centred classroom tends to have fixed interaction patterns which inhibit natural learning. This underlines the need for alternative patterns of interaction which centre on the learner rather than the teacher. We suggest that task-based learning can fulfil this need.

1.1 Beliefs about language learning

We all have strongly held beliefs about the ways that foreign or second languages are learnt – beliefs which are based on our own experience as language learners and as language teachers. It is well worth examining those beliefs, together with the experience that lies behind them. This is what the questionnaire in Focus 1 is designed to help you do.

Most teachers who do this questionnaire find they agree with six or seven statements and disagree with three or four. But your answers may well be different because they are based on different experiences.

How does this examination of our beliefs help us to understand how people learn another language? Or, more importantly perhaps, to understand why people don't learn one? We will now discuss each statement in turn.

1 You can learn to speak a foreign language quite well without lessons.

Most of us know or know of people who have learnt to speak a foreign language quite fluently without any teaching at all: people who travel and work abroad a lot; people who stay in their own country but who mix with speakers of another language. Even quite young children, who drop out of school, often classed as 'unteachable,' become unofficial tourist guides and end up managing to communicate in several foreign languages. They are not always totally accurate, but they achieve a level of language ability that is entirely adequate for their needs.

What is it that helps people like this to learn? For one thing, they are usually very motivated – they have a pressing desire to communicate and to get their meaning across. They receive a lot of exposure – they hear the language in use and pick up expressions they need. And they have many opportunities to speak and experiment with the language. Their interlocutors do not expect them to be perfect, and will often support their attempts to communicate by suggesting words and phrases.

It is, then, quite possible for people to learn a lot without having lessons. Classroom instruction is not a necessary condition for learning.

2 Many secondary students who have studied a foreign language leave school unable to communicate in it.

Unfortunately this is often the case. In language schools all over the world the largest group of students consists of people who have studied English at school but who feel they know nothing and want to start again. Many British school leavers have failed to learn French or German in much the same way. They have a small battery of formulaic phrases, but are unable or too shy to put them to use. Although many of them pass their examinations successfully, they find they cannot cope in conversation with a fluent speaker.

One reason why this happens is because much of their exposure consists of written language at sentence level: they are used to reading textbook exercises and hearing carefully-scripted dialogues. Many have been exposed to little real spoken interaction other than instruction-focused teacher talk.

We can say therefore that some people learn a language naturally without classroom instruction. On the other hand, many people do not learn one in spite of being taught.

This is not to say that classroom instruction is useless; indeed there is evidence to suggest that instruction does help. For example, learners who have had formal instruction and who then spend time in the country concerned are likely to achieve a higher degree of accuracy than those who have not had formal instruction.[1] But language lessons on their own bring no guarantee of success. Formal instruction is rarely a sufficient condition for learning a language.

What is it that prevents students learning? Most teachers would say that lack of motivation is the main problem. Learners are often keen at the beginning of their course, but in the second and third years motivation drops. Students complain they find lessons boring, and get depressed when they lose marks because they make mistakes. In large classes it is difficult to give individuals enough chance to use the language naturally. Adults feel shy about talking in front of the class. Speaking is rarely tested, and exams based on grammar often result in a lot of direct grammar teaching with focus on form rather than meaning.

There are many more reasons, too, which will come to light gradually throughout this book.

3 Learners often go on making the same error even after being corrected many times.

You don't have to sit long in any staffroom before you hear the cry: 'But I've taught them that so many times and they are still getting it wrong!' Sometimes students seem to master a grammar point successfully in a lesson, and get it right when doing an exercise on it; they even reproduce it in a test or exam. But they often fail to use it correctly when expressing themselves freely. In other words, this temporary mastery seems to happen when they are paying conscious attention to form (i.e. the surface pattern), but not when they are trying to communicate and paying attention to meaning. There is, then, a lot of evidence that practice activities, such as drilling a particular language pattern, do not necessarily 'make perfect', especially when it comes to communication.

The distinction that Stephen Krashen, an influential American linguist, made between acquisition and learning is a useful one here. Acquisition is the subconscious process that happens naturally and leads to fluency; learning being the conscious process. In a situation like the one above, you could say that students have learnt the target form, in that they can reproduce it in a controlled situation when consciously applying the rule, but that they have not yet acquired it, in that it has not become part of their internalised language system. Few people now accept Krashen's claim that formally learnt knowledge will never become part of a learner's deployable language. But until a new item has been properly acquired, it will not be freely available for use. So until then, learners are likely to continue expressing their meanings in ways which are not in accordance with the grammar of the target language.[2]

The proverb 'Practice makes perfect', then, does not always apply to learning grammar. And this raises another question. Should we really be aiming at perfection in our learners? If their only aim is to pass a grammar test, then some exam practice, where conscious knowledge is applied, will probably pay off. But it is most unlikely to result in fluency. In other cases, instead of aiming at the unachievable goal of perfection and falling short, might it not be more realistic and useful to spend less time on practising isolated patterns and more on helping learners to increase their vocabulary (words and phrases being generally far easier to learn) and deploy the language they have?[3]

4 If students learn the rules of grammar they are quickly able to use them.

This depends partly on what we mean by the word 'grammar'. There are many ways in which this word is used. We can say that children have normally acquired the basic grammar of their mother tongue by the age of four. This is grammar as an internalised system, which is acquired subconsciously, and is difficult to describe in words even for adults. In fact, it is often impossible to explain precisely what the rules are. As N S Prabhu writes: 'Developments in grammatical theory and description had shown clearly that the internal grammatical system operated subconsciously by fluent speakers was vastly more complex than was reflected by, or could be incorporated into, any grammatical syllabus...'.[4]

People who write letters to newspapers complaining about split infinitives (e.g. *I want to totally ban them* rather than *want to ban them totally*) are basing their complaints on the prescriptive grammar rules they were taught at school. Grammarians, who set out to describe how a language system works by looking at how people actually use it, write descriptive grammars which are often used for reference purposes. Pedagogic grammars aim to classify language for teaching purposes, so the rules they give are attempts to simplify and generalise. These are the kinds of rules to which the statement above refers. There are often exceptions to the rules that are given in coursebooks and pedagogic grammars, as we shall see in Chapter 7.

It also depends on what is meant by the word 'learn' (see Statement 3 above). Sometimes even rules that are easy to explain and practise take a long time to acquire and thus to become incorporated into language use. The rule that there must be an *–s* ending on the verb in the third person singular of the present simple tense in English is simple, but even advanced learners sometimes say *She work,* or overcompensate and put *–s* endings where they are not needed. In English, the form of the possessive adjectives *his* and *her* relate to the gender of the possessor. In languages where nouns have genders they usually agree with the noun. Students quickly learn this rule but continue to say things like *His husband* for some time. Other rules are conceptually more difficult, like the uses of the present perfect tense in English, and learners require a lot of exposure before they begin to use such features correctly.

Explanation of rules only helps if the learner has sufficient experience of the target language to make sense of it, in which case there may be no need for the explanation at all. Sometimes learners begin to use new language to which they have been exposed without having had any rule explained or even any practice of the pattern. They just acquire it naturally.

What is interesting is that there are many common errors that all learners tend to make, no matter what their mother tongue is. Even more interesting is the evidence that shows that all learners seem to acquire grammatical features in a similar order regardless of the sequence in which they have been taught. For example, *–ing* forms come early on, but the third person *–s* very late.

So, one thing seems quite clear – a rule will not become internalised until the learner's developing language system can accommodate it. And, for individual learners, we have no way of knowing when that might be. So once learners have learnt to recognise and pronounce the new pattern, there is little point in trying to speed up the learning process by extra practice, which is what most coursebooks seek to provide. Classroom time may be better spent in other ways: increasing exposure, (which will provide more examples of patterns that learners may recognise), expanding their repertoire of useful words and phrases and getting them to use language themselves. This is what task-based learning is all about.

5 **You must use the language freely to learn to speak it, even if you make a lot of errors.**

Certainly this is how you learn to speak when acquiring another language naturally. Because you are in situations where meaning is paramount, you have to try to get it across, making use of whatever words and phrases you have at your disposal. In classrooms, many speaking activities involve students in producing a given form or pattern, or expressing a given function, rather than saying what they feel or want to say.

Free use involves a far broader range of language and gives learners richer opportunities for acquiring. They need chances to say what they think or feel, and to experiment in a supportive atmosphere with using language they have heard or seen without feeling threatened. They need chances to test the hypotheses they have formed about the way language works, to try things out, to see if they are understood. They are bound to get some things wrong at first. But they will gradually get more accurate as their repertoire of language increases. A task-based learning framework aims to provide opportunities for learners to experiment, both with spoken and written language.

6 **Teachers should always correct student errors.**

Most teachers disagree with this. If you actually tried to correct every error, including those of stress and pronunciation, the lesson would come to a standstill and learners would become demotivated. Many students say they won't risk speaking in or out of class because they are afraid of making mistakes or being corrected in public. So when will they ever get the chance to learn by speaking freely?

When children are learning to speak their first language, parents are usually encouraging, or even ecstatic, if their child comes out with a new expression, no matter how imperfect. Parents sometimes rephrase what children say but in a very positive way. They rarely respond by saying 'That was a good try but you made two mistakes, so say it again.'

Few teachers correct students when they are doing an activity in pairs or small groups aimed at confidence building and fluency. In those situations students rarely take in a correction anyway. In the privacy of a small group, with the teacher monitoring from a distance, learners are more likely to experiment and take risks with new language if the atmosphere is supportive.

There are, however, times when students need to be accurate. Apart from the obvious requirements of examinations, learners feel the need for accuracy when they perform in public, that is, if what they say is going to be recorded, or if they are preparing an oral presentation, or a piece of writing for public display. Preparing drafts gives them a chance to check things they are not sure about, and time to work out new and better ways of expressing what they mean. So it is important that learners are challenged to be accurate at times, because this helps them to consolidate and improve their language.[5]

Ideally, the classroom should be managed so that opportunities for both kinds of language use – private and public – are available and distinct from each other. Students should know when they can use language freely without worrying about getting things wrong, and when they need to be accurate.

7 Reading widely is one of the best ways to learn another language.

Teachers often feel strongly that extensive reading does help, although students often say they don't have time! Many successful learners find that reading is an excellent way of extending vocabulary, learning new phrases and consolidating grammar.

Like extensive listening, reading provides rich exposure to language in use. Both are valuable, but reading is more controllable than listening, and allows time for reflection. You can read fast or slowly; you can go back and read things again. Good students often treat texts as learning opportunities and go back over the same pages several times, working out meanings and noting down new words and useful phrases.

Some people manage to gain an excellent reading knowledge of a language but never learn to speak it. This is usually because they either have no need or opportunity to speak, or do not hear the language used. Conversely, other people never learn to read at all, but speak quite fluently. This is often the case when languages have different alphabets and learners rely on spoken input. The most successful learners make use of all the opportunities for exposure they are offered, and reading is usually one of them.

8 People of all intellectual abilities can successfully learn another language.

Everyone is born with an innate ability to learn a language. As we saw in Focus 1, the majority of the world's people have to learn two languages just to go about their daily life. Few fail in these circumstances. It is mainly in formal instruction (where the focus is on learning about the language rather than interacting in the language) that intellectual ability (aptitude) seems to matter.

It is worth remembering that some students are less sensitive to grammatical niceties but better at memorising, while others use more cognitive strategies. Either way of learning can be successful and some learners practise both. Research shows that high-quality teaching can nullify aptitude differences.[6] So we can hope that if we re-create natural learning conditions in the classroom, all learners will learn. This is precisely what task-based learning aims to do.

9 The younger you are the better you will learn another language.

Some experts believe that there is a 'critical period': that children who begin to learn a new language before puberty will learn better; that after puberty, it is more difficult to attain native-like fluency and pronunciation. In fact, it depends a lot on the circumstances.[7]

Adults usually learn faster to begin with because they use more cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Children have better memories and rely less on cognitive strategies. They are even less likely than adults to benefit from formal grammar teaching, though simple consciousness-raising activities designed as games or puzzles to suit their stage of cognitive development seem to help. With children, teachers often use more active methods, reflecting their ability to imitate and rote-learn and to speak without being self-conscious. Both adults and children benefit from involvement in games and problem-solving activities, but obviously of different types. Exposure and involvement are critical for all age groups.

10 Extroverts make better language learners.

Many people who write about second language learning make the point that language is intimately bound up with human behaviour and personality.[8] Language learning, therefore, requires investment of the whole person and positive attitudes to it are important. For the teacher, this means encouraging self-esteem, which in turn gives learners the confidence to adopt beneficial risk-taking learning strategies.

Extroverts often appear to be more active learners, and more willing to take risks with language; however, introverts who are silent in class are often listening well, thinking hard and learning as much – if not more. Other personality factors also come into play: people who are tolerant of ambiguities tend to do well, while shy or anxiety-prone students may do less well and will benefit from small group or pairwork, which is less threatening.

In this section we have examined some commonly held beliefs about learning and explored evidence for those beliefs. Some is evidence we have noticed ourselves as learners or teachers, some has been noted by researchers into language acquisition. Both kinds of evidence contribute to the theories we hold about language-learning processes.

1.2 How learners differ

We now turn from examining learning processes to examining individual learners and in particular how their ways of learning can be different.

Factors such as previous learning experience, cognitive style and motivation, as well as aptitude, age and personality, which were discussed above, may all affect an individual's learning style and strategies. Motivation will be dealt with separately in 1.3.3.

Research into these factors has produced conflicting findings and generated much controversy. It has not produced much in the way of clear guidelines for teachers.[9] Most of these factors cannot be changed by the teacher, anyway, but it is important to recognise them, and we can often rough-tune classroom activities to suit as many people as possible.

1.2.1 Learning strategies

Different types of learners adopt different strategies for learning successfully. Good learners tend to have more strategies than weak ones, and they use them more regularly.

It is generally agreed that good language learners have a strong reason for learning the language, and will:

- seek out opportunities to use the target language and make maximum use of them, focusing on communication of meaning rather than on form;
- supplement natural learning with conscious study, e.g. by keeping a notebook for new words;
- respond positively to learning situations, avoiding anxiety and inhibitions;
- be able to analyse, categorise and remember language forms and monitor errors;
- be prepared to experiment with language and be willing to take risks;
- be flexible and capable of adapting to different learning conditions.[10]

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) identified three main types of strategy: 'metacognitive' (e.g. organising one's learning, monitoring and evaluating one's speech, etc.); 'cognitive' (e.g. advance preparation for a class, using a dictionary, listing/categorising new words, making comparisons with other known languages, etc.) and 'social' (e.g. asking for help, interacting with native speakers, etc.).

Teachers can help by making students aware of such strategies, and encouraging their use. Previous educational experience may have resulted in learners having a very limited range of strategies. In cases such as these, students may benefit from actual training in particular strategies. Certainly encouraging students to become self-reliant will raise the quality of their classroom learning and make it easier for them to carry on learning after their course has finished. [11]

1.2.2 Analytic and holistic learners

Learners' cognitive styles may vary, too. A distinction is often made between analytic learners who prefer a deductive approach (give them a rule and let them deduce other examples from it) and holistic learners, who prefer an inductive approach (give them examples, and let them induce the rule). However, much research on cognitive styles and second language success is, in the end, inconclusive. Indeed, it has been suggested that learners should be exposed to a variety of approaches in order to broaden their learning styles.

Task-based learning, with its holistic approach, would seem, in its purest form, to favour the styles of holistic learners. The broader framework suggested in this book tries to take all types of learners into account. Chapter 9 will give advice on helping learners who have difficulties in adapting.

No matter what strategies or styles your learners use, it is generally agreed that there are certain essential conditions to be met that are vital for all language learners. These are outlined in the next section.

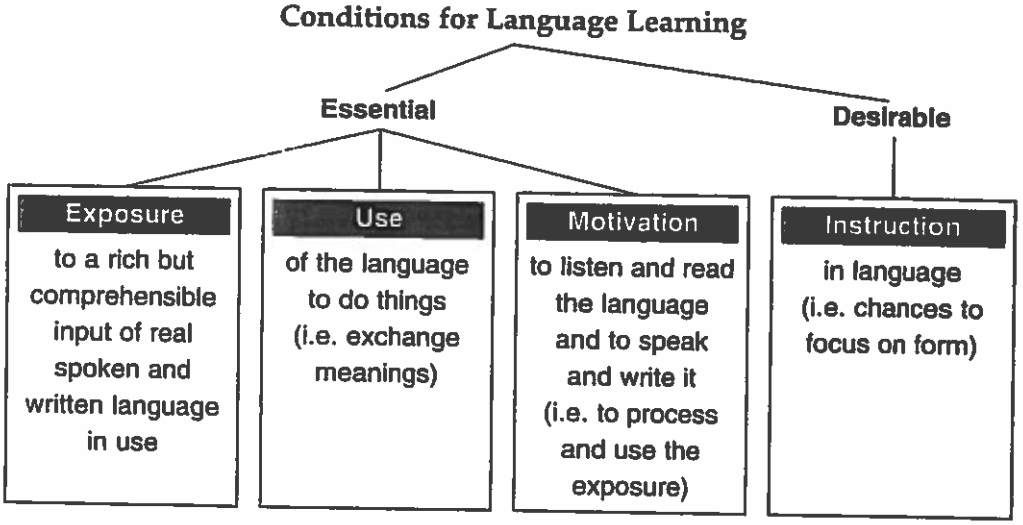
1.3 Four conditions for language learning

From now on I shall use the word 'learn' in its general sense, and not distinguish between acquiring and learning, unless otherwise stated.

The many research studies into foreign language learning have, to some extent, produced conflicting results. It is often argued that we don't yet know enough to be sure that one method is better than another. However, there are

certain basic principles that can help us select and devise useful classroom activities that are most likely to stimulate learning. So under what conditions does effective language learning take place?

Most researchers would agree that in order for anyone to learn a language with reasonable efficiency, three essential conditions must be met. These are basic enough to apply to all learners, regardless of their individual cognitive styles. There is also one additional condition that is desirable, though not essential. These conditions are summarised in the following diagram:



1.3.1 Exposure

All good language learners take full advantage of their exposure to the target language in use. This might involve listening, or reading, or both. It may be a conscious process, or largely subconscious. It involves grappling with meaning (trying to make sense of whatever they hear and read) and observing how others express the meanings that they want to be able to express. This leads on to noticing small chunks of language typically used in particular contexts, for example *It doesn't matter; I don't know; What I think is...* It involves isolating particular words and phrases, discovering what they mean and noting how they are used. It is only when such features are noticed, processed in the learner's mind and understood that they are likely to become part of their internalised language system.[12]

One important question is what sort of real language benefits learners most? For beginners, rich input such as randomly chosen radio programmes will just be noise. No matter how motivated, beginners are unlikely to be able to notice and pick out anything comprehensible, and therefore will not learn from them.

However, if learners initiate a conversation, they are likely to use strategies to adjust the input to suit their level of comprehension. For example, simply looking blank will often cause the speaker to rephrase and try again. Knowing what the topic and the purpose of the conversation are, the learner can make sensible predictions about meaning, and check anything they are not sure of having understood correctly. This modified exposure thus becomes comprehensible input and should help acquisition.[13]

If learners select a radio programme of a familiar type on a familiar topic and can guess at the kinds of meanings that are likely to be expressed, and how the

discourse will proceed, they will have a better chance of catching something they can understand and subsequently learn from. They are modifying their input by careful selection.

A similar kind of modifying can apply to reading too. By selecting a familiar genre and style of text on a familiar topic, and by reading and re-reading as we discussed in Statement 7 above, parts of the input become comprehensible. Deciphering instructions given in a foreign language is a good example of this, especially if they are relevant to some task in hand.

Teachers commonly modify their speech to suit their learners and help them understand. Repeating, rephrasing, stopping to explain a vital new word are all part of the natural co-operative communication process. Non-native teachers are generally much better at this than native speakers, because they have a greater appreciation of their learners' difficulties. Often this modification is done quite unconsciously, and it is beneficial so long as it is not carried too far.

There will, for example, be problems if everything is always said very slowly and clearly, for there are likely to be distortions of common intonation patterns, and learners will never get used to coping with natural speech. Some teachers, in their attempts to simplify, tend to address adult learners as if they were children. Other native-speaker teachers have been known to converge their speech so far towards their learners' systems that they produce ungrammatical and quite strange discourse – a kind of classroom pidgin. Obviously learners fed on a diet of impoverished input are not going to acquire anything resembling a nationally or internationally acceptable version of the target language. Neither will they be able to understand the language when they hear it used outside the classroom. So as teachers we must be aware of how we modify our classroom language.

An internationally acceptable version of the target language does not have to be a native-speaker variety. Well over half the people in the world who speak English are non-native speakers. Over half the world's business is conducted in English between people whose first language is not English.

What about the linguistic simplification of reading texts? This has been a controversial issue, and it depends very much on how the simplification is done.

There may be no overall advantage in simplifying texts. Systematic simplification removes certain features of a text, for example by rewriting complex noun groups or breaking up grammatically complex sentences into a series of two or more simple ones. Such simplification, by definition, deprives learners of the opportunity to become familiar with the original forms, which may occur frequently in the target language. Nor does simplification necessarily make the task of comprehension easier. Rewriting a complex sentence as a series of simple ones entails the omission of explicit markers like *because, so* and *although*. The price of grammatical simplicity, therefore, may be the obscuring of meaning. Finally there is the risk of the text becoming a distorted sample of the target language – one which learners subsequently have to unlearn.

It is essential that learners are ultimately exposed to the variety of language they will need to understand and use outside the classroom. This might be language they will need in order to study other subjects, to use at work, or for pleasure. If they need to write reports, they will need to read and study reports to find out how these are typically written. If they wish to become fluent in

informal, spontaneous conversation, they will need to experience samples of spontaneous conversation.

Some language students, especially younger learners, might not know what language they will need later. In this case it is best to select a range of materials that will give them a varied language experience, and to choose things they enjoy in order to sustain their motivation.

A final point is that in research on second language acquisition, the quality of the exposure has been found to be more important than the quantity. Quality does not just mean good pronunciation but a variety of types of language use, e.g. informal chat as well as formal monologue, and a range of different kinds of writing. In other words, exposure to a restricted diet of simplified or specially written texts, sentence-level examples and scripted dialogues is not enough. This is why the words 'rich' and 'real' appear in the diagram on page 11.

In 1.4 and 2.3 we will explore further the issue of 'quality' exposure and look more closely at the differences between classroom and non-classroom interaction and between spontaneous and planned language. In Chapters 5 and 7 we shall look at ways to select and exploit reading and listening texts.

1.3.2 Use of language

As well as input, output is now generally considered essential for language development, especially if learners wish to speak and/or write in the target language. If learners know that in class they will be expected to make real use of the target language themselves, this leads them to pay more attention to what they hear and read, and to process the input more analytically, noticing useful features of language. Thus output can encourage intake.[14]

Some teachers believe that real beginners need an initial silent period where they are not called upon to speak the language until they have had a certain amount of exposure to it. This gives them time to get the feel of it, and to acquire naturally, in an unpressured atmosphere, a stock of words and phrases they can then use when they do begin to speak. Some learners, however, feel frustrated by an imposed silent period and want to start speaking as soon as possible. Teachers should be sensitive, and accept but not force early contributions from their beginners (see Chapter 8).

As we discussed in Statements 5 and 6 above, learners need opportunities to communicate what they want to say and express what they feel or think. Using language for real purposes (for example to get things done, share experiences and socialise) gives learners chances to recall and use the language they know already. It is important, especially with less confident learners, to create a positive, supportive, low stress atmosphere that encourages creativity and risk-taking.

Through interaction, learners have the chance to acquire the range of discourse skills they need in order to manage their own conversations, and to control the level and kind of input they receive. These discourse skills include:

- opening and closing a conversation, i.e. introducing a topic and saying how it is relevant and 'winding down' a topic to prepare for saying good-bye and leaving;
- interacting and turn-taking, i.e. recognising possible pause points and ensuring that people will listen; even interrupting politely, to clarify or challenge what someone has said;

- organising the discourse in advance in order to sustain a longer speaking turn, e.g. *Well, I think there are two things you ought to think about. One is...;*
- reaching agreement co-operatively and shifting the topic.

Learners also need the experience of communicating in a variety of situations, for example in different size groups and for different audiences, since different linguistic strategies are appropriate in different circumstances.

There is evidence, then, that learners who are encouraged to communicate are likely to acquire a language faster and more efficiently. Teachers have also noted ample evidence that learners who are pushed or challenged to 'go public' will strive harder to improve and reach a higher level of accuracy.[15]

However, practice activities that are not meaning-focused, such as acting out dialogues, where the main aim is to practise specific forms and functions, have been found inadequate ways of promoting learning by themselves. All too often students do them on automatic pilot without really having to think about what they mean.

1.3.3 Motivation

The third essential condition students need is motivation to learn: motivation to process the exposure they receive, and motivation to use the target language as often as possible, in order to benefit from exposure and use.

Learners' motivation may be integrative (they may admire and identify with the target language and culture) or purely instrumental (they see the target language as a means to an end, such as further study or a good job) or it may be both. Other motivating factors include travel, seeking new friendships and simply acquiring knowledge.[16]

Even if language students have no personal long-term motivation, as is often the case in school, teachers can select topics and activities that serve to motivate them in the short term. If an activity can stimulate interest and involvement for, say, the next ten minutes of a lesson, students may learn something during that time.

Success and satisfaction are key factors in sustaining motivation. If students feel they have achieved something worthwhile, through their own individual effort, they are more likely to participate the next time. Hence the need for teachers to set achievable goals, and to highlight students' successes.

Early on, or when confidence is low, teachers may select simple communicative activities that students can achieve with success, for example, exchanging phone numbers in order to make a class telephone directory. Praise and encouragement will help to raise motivation. As we discussed earlier, there is no point in expecting accuracy early on, and to correct more than is absolutely necessary only undermines confidence and reduces motivation, especially when the focus is on trying to communicate.

Sometimes, though, students gain both confidence and satisfaction from activities like repeating after the tape or the teacher. In this case, spend a little time each lesson doing such activities. Children especially enjoy learning songs, poems and even dialogues by heart. Adults sometimes feel this helps them to improve their pronunciation. It may help them to notice new sounds and intonation patterns, which could raise their awareness of phonological features. Later, learners will benefit from activities presenting a higher degree of challenge, both cognitive and linguistic.

Obviously, if students can be motivated sufficiently to seek out opportunities for exposure to and use of the target language outside the classroom, so much the better. Writing to pen-friends, reading, and even playing computer games in the target language will give learners valuable language experience.

Exposure, use and motivation, then, are three essential conditions for language learning. One without the others, or even two without the third, will not be sufficient. All three can be met outside the classroom, as we saw above. Learners can learn a language quite successfully by living, working or socialising in an environment where the target language is used, simply because these three conditions naturally coincide.

However, the level of accuracy thus attained depends greatly on the uses to which such learners need to put their language. Some become almost indistinguishable from native speakers; others, however, manage to communicate but with poor syntax, simply because in their social or professional circles this level of language attainment is acceptable. Such learners are likely to fossilise and cease to improve unless they have a reason to become aware of language form.

So, we have a fourth condition: instruction, which, although not totally essential, is highly desirable.

1.3.4 Instruction

It is generally accepted that instruction which focuses on language form can both speed up the rate of language development and raise the ultimate level of the learners' attainment.

What instruction does not seem to do is change the learners' developmental sequence (see Statement 4 above). In other words, students will not necessarily learn what we teach them when we teach them. Neither does it change the order in which linguistic features begin to occur accurately in spontaneous talk, which is why students often do not appear to learn from error correction. However, given adequate exposure and the right conditions, their language systems will develop along similar lines to those of people who acquire the language naturally.

So, would one solution be to construct a syllabus that reflects the natural order of acquisition? This unfortunately presents many problems. Firstly, we do not yet know enough about it; studies are restricted to certain morphemes, like *–ing*, *–ed* and *–s* endings, and some developmental sequences involving negatives, interrogatives and relative clauses.[17] But language involves far more than this and we have little idea of the order in which other features may be acquired. To restrict learners to those features we know are learnable at each stage would seriously distort the sample of language to which they were exposed. And besides, how do we know which learners are at which stage? Learners in the same class may well be at different stages in the developmental sequence, and so would not benefit from such restricted input or focus.

This last problem occurs with any lockstep approach to teaching grammar where students are expected to produce the target structure themselves. Spending twenty minutes on presenting and practising one single structure to perfection is likely to benefit only the very few learners who happen to be ready to use it. Some may know it already and it might be beyond the grasp of the rest. For these students, such practice is largely a waste of time.

The same is probably true of narrowly focused pronunciation drills. For most students, improving pronunciation is a slow organic process. They need to be aware that particular sounds exist, but not made to feel stupid if they cannot yet distinguish or produce them.

In what ways, then, can instruction help? It can certainly help students notice specific features of the target language. It can give students the opportunity to process grammatical and lexical patterns, and to form hypotheses about their use and meaning. Learners are then more likely to recognise these features occurring in the input they are exposed to. For example, once they have had their attention drawn to the use of the words *thing* and *things* in spoken phrases such as *The thing is...* they may start to notice other common phrases such as *The important thing is...* or *and things like that*. Subsequently, each time they notice a phrase with the word *thing*, they stand to gain a new insight into its use. These all become learning opportunities.

Sometimes they notice a new piece of evidence which disconfirms a hypothesis, and changes the whole picture they have of a particular form. For example, if they have learnt about the past simple, and have begun to recognise past tense verbs, they will use the past simple for everything that has happened in the past (a process that researchers refer to as overgeneralisation). Then one day, they notice verb phrases that seem also to refer to the past, but with *have / has* – the present perfect. So their former hypothesis about the past simple is disconfirmed. They now need to look out for examples of both tense forms, and examine evidence of when they are used. This leads to a restructuring of their current system to accommodate the new evidence, and drives their language development forward.

Activities aimed at promoting awareness of language form, making students conscious of particular language features and encouraging them to think about them are likely to be more beneficial in the long run than form-focused activities aimed at automating production of a single item.

If we offer learners as rich a language menu as they can cope with, we can give them plenty of opportunities to notice useful features.[18] We can help them by setting consciousness-raising activities (see Chapter 7) to highlight specific aspects of language that occur naturally both in their reading and listening texts. We can give them a chance to ask about other features they notice for themselves.

During such activities, individual learners' differences can more easily be catered for, and different levels of learners can be accommodated. Setting learners to investigate specific linguistic features allows them to process them in their own time, at their own level. Phrases and words that individuals want to remember can be written down, new words can be looked up; phrases and patterns that students think might come in useful can be practised quietly. Learners will probably all be learning something different.

We find, therefore, that activities that raise learners' awareness of and make them think about language form, together with activities like planning and drafting a public presentation, are likely to be more beneficial in the long run than activities automating the production of specific patterns. Michael Long summed this up nicely by recommending a focus on form (in general) rather than a focus on forms.[19] We must remember, however, that focus on form, or instruction is not an essential condition for learning.

In the next section we take a closer look at a typical teacher-centred classroom environment, to see to what extent the three conditions that are essential for language learning are generally met.

1.4 Classrooms as learning environments

This last section will reveal how the very nature of classroom interaction can easily restrict the learning opportunities open to the language learner – even though our whole teaching aim is to reproduce the essential conditions for learning, and thus to enlarge and open up those opportunities.

It describes typical features of classroom interaction showing how this differs from real-world interaction. It shows how and why teachers may need to change typical teaching routines to give learners a fairer share of the interaction with more opportunities to acquire discourse skills and to experiment with the target language themselves.

1.4.1 The power of the teacher

Which of these two exchanges is more typical of a language classroom?

Excuse me. What's the time?	*Okay. Who can tell me the time? Yes? Ana.*
Erm... Five past five.	*Erm... Five past five.*
Thanks.	*Good. Five past five. Yes.*

Most people immediately recognise the second as being a classroom exchange. In fact, classroom interaction is typically made up of three-part exchanges in which the teacher initiates, a student responds, and the teacher gives some feedback. And if the teacher gives no feedback, the learners take this as a negative sign and go on trying to answer until some feedback occurs.

There are many ways in which classroom interaction differs from everyday, real-life conversation. Let's start by looking at the normal roles of the teacher as exemplified by the second exchange above.

- The teacher alone has the power to nominate a topic: *Okay. Who can tell me the time?* (Imagine if a student started by saying *Okay* to the teacher!).
- The teacher controls the turn-taking, by nominating a student (*Ana*), or selecting by gesture or eye contact and saying *Yes?*
- The teacher initiates most exchanges, which may involve:
  - informing the class about something
  - directing students to do or say something
  - eliciting a response (asking a question that she normally knows the answer to – these are often called display questions)
  - checking that something has been done.
- The teacher finally evaluates the response, in this case: *Good.*

In other words, it is the teacher who controls the openings and closings of every classroom topic or activity, who controls the turn-taking, and who initiates almost every exchange.[20]

For teachers this power is reassuring. It allows them to exert a large measure of control over the language produced by students. However, for the student trying to learn a language for the purposes of communication, it is another matter. It is true that they will get a fair amount of exposure if the teacher uses the target language for most of the lesson, but this exposure will be of a limited nature. And what opportunities will students have to use English for themselves and to acquire discourse skills such as those described in 1.3.2?

1.4.2 The constraints on the student

It is true that students occasionally ask questions to check meanings and spellings, but research based on hours of classroom recordings, even recordings of so-called conversation classes, reveals that the role of the student in teacher-led classroom interaction is generally that of responding.

Since responding is one third of the typical three-part exchange, and since all students share this one third between them, an average student in a class of 30 will get half a minute's speaking time in a 45-minute lesson. With 4 x 45 minute lessons a week for 36 weeks a year, each student will get one and a quarter hour's talking time a year. This is in fact a generous estimate; it does not allow for times in class where the teacher is in 'lecture' mode, or when students are reading, writing or listening.

If 10 minutes of every lesson is used for pair interaction (all pairs working simultaneously), this allows each learner an extra 20 minutes' speaking a week or 12 hours per year, making a total of around 13 hours. This at least is some improvement.

We also need to consider the quality of student talking time. In how many of those responding moves will students be actually communicating, i.e. saying what they think or feel? Often responding involves learners in repeating a pattern, or saying a word or phrase to show they know it. Even in pairwork, much of the talking is based on form-focused exercises or dialogues from textbooks, where students practise the target forms or display linguistic knowledge.

We see, then, that most of the opportunities for language use are taken by the teacher. Generally, learners in a teacher-led classroom get hardly any chances to manage their own conversations, exercise discourse skills, or experiment with, and put to meaningful use whatever target language they can recall.

1.4.3 Changing the balance

In task-based learning, communication tasks (where language forms are not controlled) involve learners in an entirely different mental process as they compose what they want to say, expressing what they think or feel.

Tasks remove the teacher domination, and learners get chances to open and close conversations, to interact naturally, to interrupt and challenge, to ask people to do things and to check that they have been done. Much of this will involve composing in real time. The resulting interaction is far more likely to lead to increased fluency and natural acquisition than form-focused exercises that encourage learners to get it right from the beginning.[21]

If students are to learn how to communicate efficiently, it is vital for them to have more equal opportunities for interaction in the classroom. Teachers need to find ways to relinquish much of the linguistic control and to motivate students to interact more freely and more often in the target language. Learners need more chances to use the target language with each other, not just to practise forms, but also to achieve results. These chances constitute learning opportunities. The teacher dominated initiation – response – feedback pattern needs to be used less often.

In order to meet fully the three essential conditions for learning, then, we need to create more opportunities for students to use the target language freely in the classroom, and thus to provide a more even balance of exposure and use. Carefully selected tasks will provide the stimuli for learners to take part in complete interactions and help to meet the third condition, motivation.

1.5 Summary

This chapter began by examining various beliefs about foreign and second language learning and appraising those beliefs in the light of recent research. We found out why learners often fail to learn what we teach them. We found that learning is a gradual, organic process and, given the right conditions, will happen even without a teacher.

We looked at strategies successful learners use, examined some ways in which learners differ, and suggested that they may benefit by becoming aware of a wider range of learning styles and strategies.

We said that to create an effective learning environment in the classroom, we need to meet three essential conditions: the provision of exposure to the target language; the provision of opportunities for learners to use the target language for real communication; and the provision of motivation for learners to engage in the learning process. In addition, focused instruction – drawing attention to language form – will help learners to improve more rapidly and to continue improving.

We finally reflected on the quality and type of language that learners typically meet and use inside a teacher-centred classroom. We found that the typical routine of teacher-initiated three-part exchanges offered learners an impoverished language input, and very little chance to use the target language individually other than in single responses.

This chapter illustrates some of the principles underpinning a task-based approach to language learning. It focuses on conditions in which people do and do not learn, and argues the need to depart from traditional classroom routines.

The task-based learning framework that is described in the following chapters aims to help you to manage classroom interaction so as to maximise opportunities for learners to put their limited language to genuine use, and to create a more effective learning environment.

Reflection

1 Look back at the questionnaire in Focus 1. In the light of what you have read and thought about in this chapter, do you now feel you would like to change any of your answers? Which and why?

2 What are the implications of what you have read here for your teaching situation? List three things you will try to do next time you teach a class or start with a new group. If possible, compare your list with someone else's.

3 If you have learnt a foreign or second language, think back to that experience. What learning strategies did you use? Which might you use now? How would you rate yourself in terms of cognitive style, motivation and aptitude?

4 In his book *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, H. Douglas Brown summarises the six broad learning strategies employed by the good language learners that were studied by Naiman *et al.* (1978):

   1 Find a learning style that suits you.
   2 Involve yourself in the language-learning process.
   3 Develop an awareness of language both as a system and as communication.

4 Pay constant attention to expanding your language knowledge. Make guesses about things you do not know, check your beliefs against the language you hear and read.
5 Develop the L2 as a separate system. Do not relate everything to the L1.
6 Recognise that learning is very demanding both in effort and psychologically.

Compare the above list with the list in 1.2.1. What similarities are there? Are there any differences?

5 Naiman *et al.*'s 'good language learner' research is based in North America. How far do you believe it is representative of students you have taught?

Observation

1 Observe a lesson from the learners' point of view to calculate the balance achieved between exposure, free use of language, and instruction focused on language form. Use a three-column layout as in the example below. Write down in the appropriate column what the students are doing. Tick the activities that seem to motivate most students. Sometimes, for example in pairwork, where they are talking and listening, you will use more than one column. Make a note of the times at which students change what they are doing.

Lesson Observation

Exposure	*Use of Language*	*Instruction*
(Ss listening/reading)	*(Ss speaking/writing freely)*	
10.03 T. explains what lesson is about, and what ss will be doing. Ss listen.		
10.06 T. introduces topic and class brainstorm on ideas in picture.		*a few new words (class pronunciation practice)*
	10.09 Six ss, J F D R P, D, A, offer comments about picture.	
10.14 T. writes words and phrases on board and chats about some.		*Pronunciation of some of words and phrases. Ss write some down. S queries, e.g. 'Can we say...?'*
10.22 T. gives final task instructions.		
	10.23 Ss start task in twos.	

2 Draw a large plan of the class, making a square for each student. Each time a student speaks, put a dot for a single word or short phrase, a short line for a longer utterance or a longer line for a sustained turn, i.e. several sentences.

9 Changing to task-based learning

Discussion Points

- Remind yourself of the conditions for learning
- Which conditions for learning are likely to be fulfilled by each component in the framework? E.g in the pre-task phase, students get exposure to the teacher talking about the topic, some opportunities to use the language to suggest words or to ask questions, and some instruction when new words and phrases are introduced.
- Discuss how you might explain the rationale behind TBL to *a)* students, *b)* parents, *c)* colleagues.

Conditions for learning

Exposure
to the target language.

Opportunities to use
the language, both spontaneously and planned.

Motivation
to listen and talk, read and write, study and reflect.

Instruction
Focus on language form

(See Chapter 1 section 3).

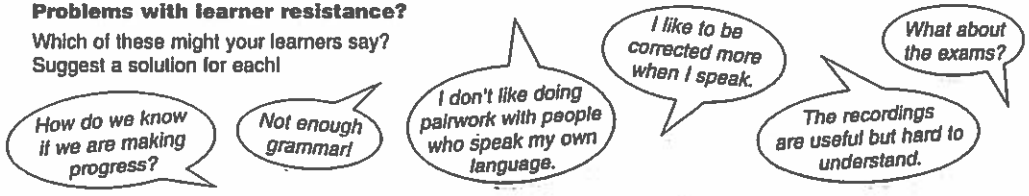
The TBL framework

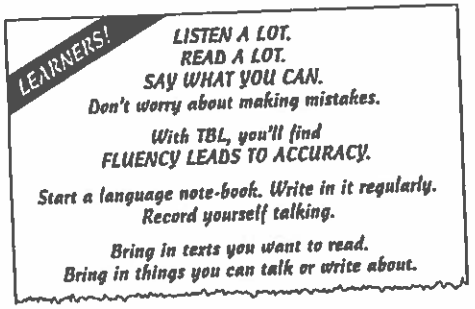
Pre-task
Introduction to topic and task.

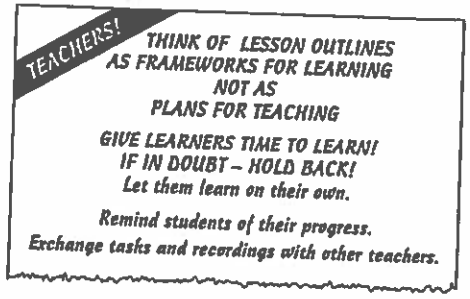
Task cycle
Task
Planning
Report
Students hear task recording or read text.

Language focus
Analysis and practice
Review and repeat task

Problems with learner resistance?
Which of these might your learners say? Suggest a solution for each!







Add one more piece of advice to each poster.

9 Adopting TBL: some practical issues

The aims of this chapter are to set TBL against the background of common language-teaching practice, and to address some of the issues that face the practising teacher and trainer when attempting to introduce a new approach which centres on the learner. After showing how TBL can benefit classes preparing for exams, it lists a variety of ways in which teaching materials can be geared towards TBL and finally summarises the advantages of a task-based approach.

9.1 PPP and TBL

This section will show in what ways TBL is essentially different from another very common paradigm for language teaching – that of presentation, practice and production, often known by its initials as PPP. The aim of a PPP lesson is to teach a specific language form – a grammatical structure, or the realisation of a particular function or notion.

9.1.1 The PPP paradigm

A typical PPP lesson normally proceeds like this:

Presentation stage
Teacher begins by presenting an item of language in a context or situation which helps to clarify its meaning.
Presentation may consist of pattern sentences given by teacher, or short dialogues illustrating target items acted out by teacher, read from textbook, or heard on tape.

▼

Practice stage
Students repeat target items and practise sentences or dialogues, often in chorus and/or in pairs, until they can say them correctly.
Activities include pattern practice drills, matching parts of sentences, completing sentences or dialogues and asking and answering questions using pre-specified forms.

▼

Production stage
Students are expected to produce in a 'free' situation language items they have just learnt, together with other previously learnt language.
This 'free' situation can be a role play, a simulation activity or even a communication task such as those in this book.

So a PPP paradigm begins with the presentation and practice of a small sample of language, with the focus on a particular form. The language is tightly controlled, and the emphasis is on getting the new form correct. When the teacher asks a question, the reply is often required to conform to the target pattern. Finally, the students are given a chance to produce the new pattern in a 'free' situation. It sounds very sensible.

9.1.2 Some problems with PPP

There are, as experienced teachers are well aware, several problems with this paradigm:

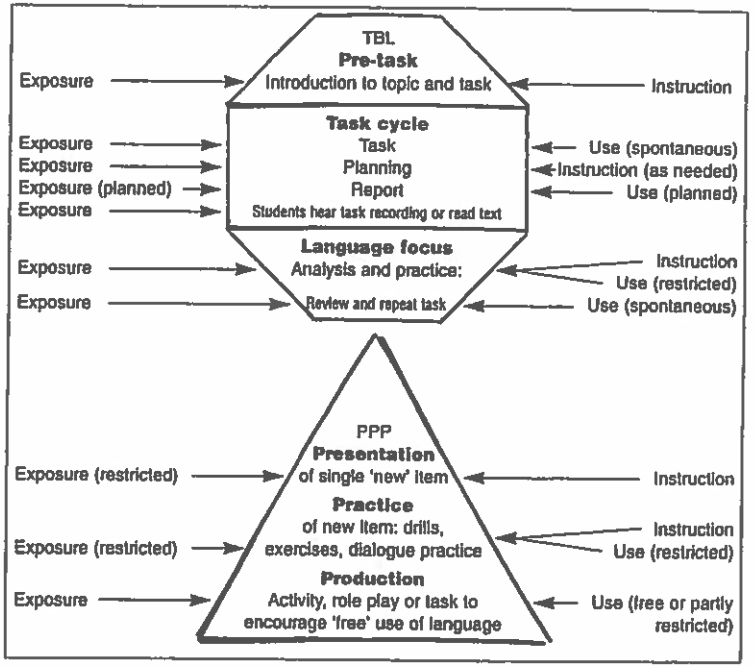
- Sometimes learners manage to do the task or role play at the production stage without using the target form at all. This may be because their own developing language systems are not yet ready to cope with its use, or because they don't need the new pattern to express the meanings they want. They can, after all, use what language they like at the 'free' stage.
- Sometimes they tend to overuse the target form, and make very stilted and unnatural conversation, e.g. *What will you do tomorrow? Tomorrow I will go to my aunts' house. I will go by bus. I will see my cousins. I will play football with them.* Learners who do this are probably still 'in practice mode' – they are trying to display control of the new form rather than express their own meanings. They are not actually concerned with communication.
- PPP gives an illusion of mastery as students can often produce the required forms confidently in the classroom, but once outside, or in a later lesson, they either do not use them at all or use them incorrectly.

The PPP cycle derives from the behaviourist view of learning which rests on the principle that repetition helps to 'automate' responses, and that practice makes perfect. This research has now been largely discredited, as far as its applications to language learning go. As we showed in Chapter 1, language learning rarely happens in an additive fashion, with bits of language being learnt separately, one after another. We cannot predict and determine what students are going to learn at any given stage. Instruction does help, in the long term, but it cannot guarantee when something will be learnt. Rich and varied exposure helps language develop gradually and organically, out of the learner's own experience. Unfortunately the PPP cycle restricts the learner's experience of language by focusing on a single item. By relying on exercises that encourage habit formation, it may actually discourage learners from thinking about language and working things out for themselves.

The irony is that the goal of the final 'P' – free production – is often not achieved. How can production be 'free' if students are required to produce forms which have been specified in advance?

9.1.3 Comparing PPP and TBL

The following diagram allows us to compare a typical PPP lesson with a typical TBL one, bearing in mind the key conditions for learning.



TBL, as we have explained, offers a holistic language experience where learners carry out a communication task, using the language they have learnt from previous lessons or from other sources. Only after the task cycle is learners' attention directed towards specific features of language form.

One question that many trainees ask is whether TBL is like PPP but in reverse order. At first glance, it might appear so, but the TBL framework offers far more opportunities for free language use and the linguistic content of the language focus phase is far richer.

The way students use and experience language in the task cycle is radically different.

- All three components (task, planning and report) are genuinely free of language control and learners rely on their own linguistic resources.
- The task supplies a genuine need to use language to communicate, and the other components follow on naturally from the task.
- In all three components language is used for a genuine purpose – there are outcomes to achieve for the task and the purpose of the drafting, rehearsal and practice at the planning stage is to help learners adjust their language for the report stage.
- The report allows a free exchange of ideas, summarising learners' achievements.
- The planning stage encourages learners to consider appropriateness and accuracy of language form in general, rather than the production of a single form.
- There is a genuine need to strive for accuracy and fluency as learners prepare to 'go public' for the report stage; it is not a question of either accuracy or fluency at any one point in the cycle.

The teacher's roles and approach to lesson planning are also different (see 9.1.4).

Some people may argue that all you need to do is to add planning and report components to the end of the production stage in the PPP cycle. But as we saw in 9.1.2, if production in the form of a task follows a presentation stage where one single structure is focused on, there are likely to be problems.

The TBL framework solves another general language-teaching problem – that of providing a context for grammar teaching and form-focused activities. PPP and TBL procedures are different here too.

- In a PPP cycle, with the presentation of the target language coming first, this context has to be invented. In a TBL framework, the context is already established by the task itself. By the time learners reach the language focus phase, the language is already familiar.
- The process of consciousness raising used in the TBL language focus activities encourages students to think and analyse, not simply to repeat, manipulate and apply.
- Listening and reading – both part of the TBL framework – provide a more varied exposure to natural language than examples made up to illustrate a single language item as in a PPP cycle.
- The exposure in the TBL framework will include a whole range of words, collocations, lexical phrases and patterns in addition to language forms pre-selected for focus. Students will realise there is more to language than verb tenses and new words.
- In a PPP cycle, it is the teacher who pre-selects the language to be taught. During the TBL analysis stage, learners are free to ask about any aspects of language they notice.

- A PPP cycle leads from accuracy to fluency; a TBL cycle leads from fluency to accuracy (combined with fluency).
- In TBL, all four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – are naturally integrated. PPP only provides a paradigm for grammar and form-focused lessons; it needs to be supplemented by skills lessons to give learners practice in listening and reading and more exposure to language.

To summarise the comparison so far, we can say that TBL begins by providing learners with a holistic experience of language and then helps them analyse this language in order to help them learn more efficiently. PPP provides discrete language items in a vacuum and then looks for some activity to practise them.

9.1.4 From PPP teaching plan to TBL learning framework

It follows from 9.1.3 that the teacher's approach to lesson planning will necessarily be different.

A PPP lesson plan typically sets out a narrowly predetermined set of objectives and procedures for the teacher, and is usually seen and discussed from the teacher's point of view. A TBL lesson outline offers a more flexible framework, enabling learners to move from language experience to language analysis.

In a PPP lesson, except during the final production stage, teachers are at centre stage, orchestrating the class. In TBL, teachers have to learn to set things up and then to hold back, intervening only when needed, and reviewing each phase at the end. The way the lesson outline is written (and the way the lesson is discussed or appraised) should reflect this.

This change of roles can be a problem for teachers switching to TBL. Many feel they are not doing their job unless they are centre stage, teaching, or giving advice. But professionalism in TBL comes from selecting and sequencing tasks, setting up optimum conditions for learning, recognising quality learning opportunities and judging when and how to intervene and when to move learners on to the next phase.

9.2 Introducing TBL

All learners, young and old, come to their first foreign language class with a set of expectations. These may be based on the kind of teaching they have had before, or on what other students have told them about language classes. A task-based approach may not immediately fit in with their views of classroom learning, so introducing TBL will not always be easy. The first time round there are bound to be some problems. But students who have experimented with TBL in many parts of the world have reported that:

- they gain confidence in speaking and interacting quite soon after beginning a task-based course;
- they enjoy the challenge of doing tasks and find many of them fun;
- they are able to talk about language itself in addition to other topics;
- they can cope with natural spontaneous speech much more easily, and tackle quite tough reading texts in an appropriate way;
- they become far more independent learners.

Teachers and trainers who have also experimented with TBL report that:

- with mixed-level classes a TBL approach works far better than a PPP one;
- learners bring their own experiences to lessons and often come up with interesting and original ideas;

- by the end of the course they are often surprised at how much their learners have achieved.

9.2.1 Helping learners adapt

To adapt to a TBL approach, learners need to understand both the principles behind it and the purpose of each component. They need to understand why it is different, and how they are likely to benefit in the long run.

At the beginning of the course it is certainly a good idea to talk to the class about the process of learning, and the rationale behind the classroom activities that will be used. You may need to do this, or get someone else to, in their mother tongue. (Although this is not necessary with very young learners, you will almost certainly have to explain to their parents.) Many schools using TBL methods prepare a written handout for their new students.

Explain that TBL might be a new experience for them, and different from other styles of teaching they know, but that if they take an active part in the lessons they will begin to improve very quickly, and learn to communicate. Their grammar will develop naturally and later on they will concentrate on accuracy as well as fluency. Remember that many will have been unsuccessful learners and will already feel nervous about starting a new class. Some will have learnt at schools where they had little chance to hear the target language spoken or to speak it themselves. However, with clear orientation, most learners will soon respond positively to TBL.

Below is a list of things you could do to help make the transition to TBL run smoothly. If you are in a monolingual situation, much of this could be done in the learners' mother tongue.

a *Find out about your learners*

Find out why they are learning the language, e.g. is it for travel, to understand TV or to talk to foreigners? Do they need it for their studies, their work or just to pass exams? What kind of topics are they interested in? Their answers will help you select suitable materials and tasks for them to do.

b *Explain how people learn languages*

Explain that people learn a language most effectively if the four conditions are met. Write these on the board and explain them (see Focus 9).

With remedial beginners, discuss why they haven't succeeded before. This is often not because they are lacking in some way, or 'not good at languages', but because all four conditions were not being met sufficiently well in their former language classrooms.

Explain that in the TBL classroom the aim is for learners to take an active part in the learning process. They must be prepared to use whatever language they have. Language learning means getting involved, experimenting, taking risks. Emphasise that errors are an inevitable part of learning and that learners will not be penalised for them. But there will be specific times when they must try to be accurate, and you as teacher will help them.

c *Introduce the TBL framework*

In advance, plan a sample task-planning-report cycle. Choose a simple task with an obvious outcome, like exchanging names and telephone numbers to assemble a class phone list. There should be a related listening or reading text before or

after the task. Select some language items for the language focus component (see Chapter 7).

Show students a diagram of the TBL framework so that they will be able to identify the stages in a task cycle. Take students through this, and after they have done the task, react positively. Spend some time helping them with the planning stage, so they feel confident and able to report. Review their reports positively – list some things they did well.

At the language focus phase, use the listening transcript or reading text for analysis work, so that students can see that grammar is dealt with, and in context. After the analysis, do some practice activities, for example, choral drilling to practise pronunciation and bring the class together again. End on a positive note.

Finally, suggest that students write down new phrases and patterns they want to remember in language notebooks, and practise them. Later you could suggest ways to organise their notebooks.

After the TBL lesson, summarise what students have done, showing them how each step helped to create suitable conditions for learning. Help them to recognise that much of their learning will be subconscious, and that it may be some time before they notice any improvement.

With learners from traditional grammar-oriented backgrounds, you may need to adapt your explanation of TBL a little, to coincide with their ideas of what language teaching is about. For example: *First we'll revise/learn some new words and phrases for the topic (pre-task); Then you'll have a chance to use them, first in small groups and then with the whole class (task-planning-report). After that we'll listen to the tape/read the text, and study some of the grammar from it (language focus).* This is a somewhat distorted description of the task cycle. But when grammar-oriented students hear the learning process couched in familiar terms, they are more likely to recognise that the whole framework is purposeful.

d *Show how TBL works with their course materials*

In a later lesson, you will need to introduce students to the materials you will be using with them. This could take the form of a familiarisation session with the textbook: perhaps an overview of the whole book and then one early unit, identifying the steps of the TBL cycle as you go through it. Or you may have to explain that you will be using the textbook in a different way, omitting or adapting some parts (explain why).

Early on in the course, for each task cycle, announce the components as you start and finish each one. Be explicit about what the purpose of each step is. Students will begin to feel secure, knowing what to expect next. At the end of each unit of work, review their achievements and help them perceive their progress. Highlight what they have learnt.

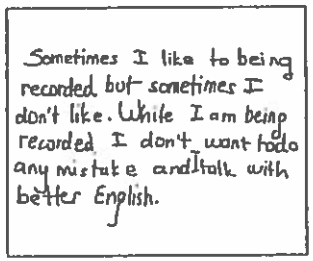
Encourage learners to continue to learn outside class. To increase their exposure and extend their vocabulary, they could borrow readers or magazines, or listen to target language radio programmes or cassettes while travelling to school or work.

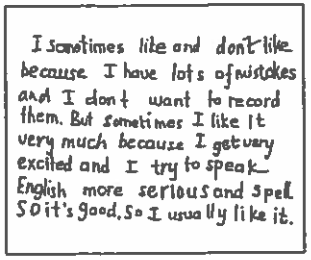
It is well worth asking your class for regular feedback, either on anonymous slips of paper or in the form of learner diaries that they write after each lesson or block of lessons and that you read regularly. Then you will get to know how individuals are reacting, and if there are any problems, you can negotiate

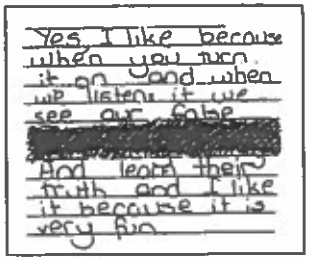
possible changes before they become demotivated and give up.

There is bound to be an initial experimental period while you are getting to know a new class, when some things don't work so well. If this happens, don't panic; reflect and investigate instead. Try alternative ways. Use simpler tasks. Make sure you can explain or demonstrate the purpose for each activity. Be clear about what you expect of your learners at each phase.

Here are some comments from a group of secondary school students who had been introduced to TBL a few weeks earlier. Their teacher wanted to find out if they liked being recorded at the report stage and whether this would make them more aware of the need for accuracy.


Sometimes I like to being recorded but sometimes I don't like. While I am being recorded I don't want to do any mistake and talk with better English.


I sometimes like and don't like because I have lots of mistakes and I don't want to record them. But sometimes I like it very much because I get very excited and I try to speak English more serious and spell So it's good. So I usually like it.


Yes, I like because when you turn it on and when we listen it we see our [redacted] and learn their truth and I like it because it is very fun

After an initial orientation period most learners take easily to TBL. You will soon notice the progress they make, and take pleasure in their increased confidence. However, some learners react quite strongly against TBL no matter how enthusiastic the teacher is. It is to these we now turn.

9.2.2 Countering learner resistance

Learners from certain educational backgrounds and cultures have such different classroom expectations they may well need more rigid teacher control to begin with. Students sometimes expect to be 'seen and no. heard'. If they do say something, it is often a repetition of the teacher's actual words. They love choral drills and copying from the board, because these are 'safe' activities. They may wonder why your classes do not make extensive use of rote-learning techniques. They may feel they are not 'being taught' enough.

This section pinpoints the most common student problems, gives possible reasons for them, then offers solutions that have worked with many teachers.

Problem: 'We don't do enough grammar.'

Earlier versions of TBL tended to play down explicit grammar instruction, or ignore it altogether. Some teachers feel that practice activities are out of place in a TBL cycle and avoid them.

Sometimes learners do not recognise consciousness-raising activities as a relevant substitute for being taught 'proper grammar'. They are used to the security of a teacher-led PPP cycle and being given rules (even though many of them don't work).

Possible solutions

- Highlight the time spent on the language focus component and do extra practice activities.
- Summarise the main language points at the end of each session. Discuss any useful rules or guidelines.

- Ensure learners always have written transcripts of recordings to study. This gives a feeling of security.
- Include some choral repetition of short sections of the tape, and rote-learning of parts they find useful.
- Ensure students keep language notebooks. Encourage them to add extra examples from out-of-class reading. Check the notebooks regularly, and show an interest in them.
- Set relevant exercises from a student grammar book for homework or self-access time. Go over them in class.

Problem: 'We'd like to be corrected more when we speak.'

Learners coming from a teacher-centred class are used to a constant focus on accuracy, and may not realise that correction is likely to be more effective at some times than at others.

Possible solutions

- Make clear the distinction between exploratory talk at the task stage and planned talk at the report stage.
- Encourage learners to correct each other at the planning stage.
- Hold a 'language clinic' after some report stages. Write corrected versions of common errors on a wall poster.
- Individual learners who are keen to perfect their spoken language may record themselves doing tasks or presenting reports. Encourage them to listen carefully to their recordings and write down any bits they are not sure about to check later.

Problem: 'We've been doing this course for some time and don't feel we're making progress.'

Progress in a language is often imperceptible to learners, because so much is acquired subconsciously. New language has to be assimilated and internalised before it becomes available for use (see Chapter 1 Statement 3).

Students used to a grammar-oriented PPP style think they are making progress because they are covering a lot of grammar very explicitly. But although they seem to master a grammar point at the time of learning it, they often find later they can't use it.

Possible solutions

- Help students to keep records of items covered in their language notebooks. They should also keep vocabulary books. Every few weeks, hold a 'review' day: students review their language notebooks at home and produce a test to give each other in class. Each team can take responsibility for one text or unit.
- Have a 'repeat task' day. Get students to repeat, with different partners, some of the tasks they have recently done or parallel ones. (Warn them in advance which tasks you might ask them to do, then they will revise useful lexis, etc.)
- Ask an outsider to visit the class once or twice a term. The outsider doesn't need to be a teacher – just a good speaker of the language. The visit may work better if you do not remain in the class. The outsider, who knows about the topics and tasks your students have covered, can

talk to students, set repeat tasks, be interviewed by your class and report to them informally on their progress.
- Record pairwork regularly (say every six weeks). This allows you to assess long-term progress, but requires organisation and time to play back material.[1]

Problem: 'We find the recordings of natural speech hard to understand.'

As we saw in Chapter 2, spontaneous spoken English is very different from written English and from dramatised, idealised dialogues recorded by actors in a studio.

Possible solutions

- Explain that it is likely to be hard at first. But it will get easier, and enable them to understand more when they meet speakers of the target language, and to do better in listening and oral exams.
- Break the recording up into shorter sections. Find a simple thing for students to listen for each time.
- Let students follow the transcript and listen at the same time. Ask them to underline each important message-bearing word, and then to identify and practise useful phrases.
- Set cloze tests on the transcripts so learners have to listen again to identify the missing words or phrases. (They can make these tests for each other by blacking out the words on a copy of the transcript.)
- Encourage them to listen to target language speakers outside class.

Problem: 'We don't like doing pairwork with people who speak our own language.'

It feels unnatural to start with and they are afraid of picking up bad habits from fellow students. There may also be students they don't like being paired with.

Possible solutions

- Establish the target language as the main means of communication in your lessons, and this feeling of unnaturalness will wear off after a while.
- Research suggests that learners learn a lot from each other even if they do share a first language. This has been borne out by student feedback.
- Make sure learners change partners fairly regularly. They will learn different things from different people.

9.3 Assessment and TBL

Another very common worry often voiced by students new to TBL is 'What about the exams?' Many students and teachers worry that a TBL approach will undermine students' chances of success in exams, especially if these put more emphasis on grammar and accuracy than on ability to communicate appropriately. Exams – school exams, university entrance exams or external public exams – are often the student's main motive for studying a language. Anything not directly connected with them is felt to be a waste of time. If their exams do not test oral communication, students wonder about the relevance of taking part in oral tasks.

9.3.1 How TBL can help with exams

Language exams set out to test students' knowledge of the language, and ability to perform in it. So how can TBL help students to do well?

The TBL framework, together with a balanced selection of texts and tasks, aims to give students enough breadth of language experience and practice in language use, to attain both the knowledge and the skills required in most kinds of exams. Rich experience of the language in use will help learners to 'get the feel' of what sounds or looks right, making them more likely to pick or supply a correct answer intuitively.

The task stage of the TBL cycle will certainly help students in any oral test, and give them confidence to deploy what language they have, which will also help with fluency in writing. The planning and report stages will aid the production of accurate language and train students in editing and self-correction skills. The language focus phase will increase students' understanding of grammar. It also gives them a chance to select patterns and lexical phrases useful for their own areas of interest which can be incorporated into their writing. As the exams get nearer, planning and report stages can be done increasingly against the clock, to simulate exam conditions. Dictionary support can be withheld and students can begin to produce written work individually rather than co-operatively.

Exam technique is certainly important and students improve with training. Tackling the various types of questions can be done as a 'crash course' in the term leading up to the exam, although some students may feel more secure if it is brought in earlier. Traditional styles of exam practice can be adapted to groupwork, with students making up more testing items along the same lines as those in the exam.[2]

9.3.2 External exams with tasks

For EFL, there are many different types of external public exams available. As you will see in Appendix F, many of these now contain task-based components.

Pair and group tasks are commonly used to test a student's ability to communicate and co-operate in spoken interaction. Many set a variety of reading and listening tasks based on authentic materials. Some use the same reading materials for all levels, but grade the level of difficulty of the tasks. Since such exams reflect the practices commonly used in the TBL classroom, students will require much less in the way of exam technique training.[3]

If you feel that the exam you are required to teach for is not suitable for your students, talk to other teachers about the possibility of changing it. Write to examining boards for specimen copies of papers that you think might be more relevant to your learners. Circulate these among colleagues to show them what is available (addresses of examining boards are also given in Appendix F).

9.3.3 Progress testing with TBL

Suggestions for ways of helping students to monitor their progress were made in section 9.2.2 above. Informal tests are often useful.

'Review' day tests (see page 141) encourage students to review recent coverage by re-reading texts, and going through their language notebooks. 'Repeat task' days (see page 141) are another way of encouraging students to review their work and assess progress.

Pairs can either be asked to perform in front of the class, one after another, or two or three pairs can work concurrently at opposite ends of the classroom while the rest of the class (and the teacher) observe and make notes. Feedback may consist of three good things and one piece of advice for each learner. If you want to record the test tasks, ask for two volunteers to operate the cassette recorders. This leaves you free to organise the change-overs.

If you have a class of twenty-four, and you have done six main tasks since the last test, divide the class into four blocks, A, B, C and D. Number the students in each block 1–6. Ask the four number 1 people to make up two pairs to do task 1; the number 2 people to form pairs and do task 2, and so on. Each block observes their own learner and makes a note on their performance. If you do each task concurrently, at either end of the classroom, with quick change-overs, this could take as little as 15–20 minutes. Even if you do them one at a time, at two minutes a task, this will take around 30–40 minutes with quick change-overs. Keep public feedback till the end. To prepare for this kind of testing session, all learners will need to revise all the tasks.

Alternatively, you could record some pairs doing repeat tasks one week, and different pairs the next week. Play back the recordings, comment on the good parts, and give a few suggestions for improvement (see suggestions for handling feedback in 4.4.1).

9.4 Textbooks and TBL

While there are a number of task-based resource books on the market, there are as yet few genuinely task-based coursebooks. However, several coursebooks have tasks in, and teacher's books often suggest additional tasks. Text and resource books save teachers a lot of hard work, and serve as useful reference points for students. This section suggests how they can be appraised, adapted to and supplemented by TbL.

9.4.1 Appraising coursebooks for TBL content

It is important to analyse the contents with your students' needs in mind.

First of all, read the Introduction – this is usually in the Teacher's Book – to discover how the book is meant to be used, and what principles lie behind it. Many introductions state that a coursebook is 'communicative', but unfortunately this may just mean that there are pair activities where students practise using pre-specified forms but very few opportunities for true communication. Some resource books containing tasks which do stimulate real communication lack language-focused work, and fail to supply recordings which will help students improve their spontaneous spoken language.

Then look at the range and type of exposure to the target language in the Student's Book and on the cassettes. Ask questions such as those posed in Chapters 5 and 6, for example:

- Is there a balance of spoken and written, spontaneous and planned text?
- Is there a sufficient range of types of text?

Find how many activities in a typical unit give learners a chance to use the target language. Analyse these into two categories, asking:

- How many activities are intended to stimulate practice of specified forms – either on their own or alongside other language?
- How many activities are communication tasks – ones which require learners to use language freely to attain a goal or achieve an outcome?

Analyse the approach the material takes to language-focused work, asking:

- Is the grammar taught on its own? How is it contextualised?
- What about lexical phrases, collocations, and vocabulary building?
- Are there analytic consciousness-raising language exercises?
- Is spoken language studied as well as written?

You might need to adapt the balance of exposure (written and spoken) and

activities promoting language use. Adaptation can involve omitting things as well as supplementing them. It can also involve finding a different way to exploit what is already there.

9.4.2 Adapting textbook materials to TBL

Opportunities for task-based learning can be provided by making minor changes in the way the original textbook materials are used.

- You could change the class management. For example, if you are planning to use a sequence of questions (either from the book or asked by you):
  - Instead of asking the whole class a question and inviting one student to respond, you might ask learners in pairs to consider the answer for thirty seconds or one minute, and then volunteer a reply. This in fact makes a series of mini task-planning-report cycles. You won't have time to ask so many questions, but you'll get far higher-quality responses, and a greater proportion of learner composing and talking time.
- You may simply need to change the order of two activities. Two examples follow.
  - If there is a reading text or a listening comprehension followed by a series of questions, introduce the topic then ask students to cover the text and predict answers to the comprehension questions before they read or listen (task). Students then tell each other their predictions (report), and read or listen to find out who guessed most accurately. Withhold the answer for as long as possible to promote student discussion and to encourage them to re-read the text or recording transcript to resolve any problems.
  - If your book follows a PPP cycle, you might begin with the free production activity – and use it as the basis for a task-planning-report cycle, introduced by a pre-task activity, doing some language focus work afterwards. You can select from the language presented in the book and show how it could have been used in the task. You may be able to supplement listening material by making a task recording beforehand (see Chapter 6). Learners can then study the language of the transcript, too. Set some controlled practice activities for homework instead of taking up valuable class time.
- You could change the balance of study in a given section.
  - For example, spend less time on practising and perfecting learners' production of the target pattern. Spend more on exploiting language from the texts or recording transcripts, or highlighting useful language that students have used in their own writing or in their task reports.
- You might try some activities with books closed. This introduces an element of fun and turns the original activity into a memory challenge task.
  - For example, list three things you can remember about one person/place/event in the story/text/picture.

9.4.3 Supplementing textbook materials with TBL

TBL features can also supplement existing textbook materials.

- Look out for good starting points for tasks (see Appendix A). For example:
  - With any picture or diagram play games like Memory challenge, 'True or not true?', 'Guess what is in this picture' (see 8.2.4).
  - Take the unit or reading text topic and think of a task based on personal experience related to it.
- Exploit reading and listening skills lessons for text-based task cycles. There are lots of ideas in Section 4 of Chapter 5. For example:
  - Ask learners to write their own prediction questions before they read or listen, as suggested for Text A in Focus 5. They then read each other's questions. After reading or listening to the text, the class discuss whose questions were answered.
  - After reading or listening, teams of four learners set other teams comprehension questions or quizzes. Encourage responding teams to give their evidence by quoting from the text.

Exploiting the texts and listening activities in this way maximises student spoken interaction, and increases motivation to read and listen several times, each time for a different purpose. It often leads on to a relevant writing activity, too.

- Exploit useful language from the texts for language focus work. Chapter 7 gives examples and detailed guidelines for this.
- Ensure writing activities have a purpose and an audience. Many writing sections in textbooks set out to give students practice in writing for its own sake, rather than in communicating through writing. Exam practice often entails writing for display, i.e. to show how much language a learner knows. In Chapter 4, section 5 we looked at the place of writing in the task cycle, and at ideas for ways of writing for a wider audience. Chapter 5, Section 4 offers many suggestions for using writing as a follow up to text-based tasks. Make writing activities purposeful.
  - Turn the preparation phase for a piece of writing into a group task – brainstorming, then ranking and sequencing the best ideas. Groups then plan how to do the writing, share it out and read and edit each other's work. Finally the writing is passed to other groups who have written on a similar topic to read and compare content.
  - Turn the writing activity into an opportunity to produce a reading puzzle for other students. Ask learners to include in their piece of writing a sentence that is either totally irrelevant or quite untrue. Other groups then read it to 'spot the stranger'.
- Ensure speaking activities give learners a purpose for communicating. Sometimes a 'discussion' activity can be developed into a task. For example a role-play or simulation such as: *Pretend your class is going to have a party. Say what you would like to eat and drink* can be turned into a more challenging and engaging problem, such as: *If you were given a budget of £20 to organise a party for your class, how would you spend it? Work in groups. Compare menus and reasons for your choices. Vote on the most original menu.*

Speaking activities, such as those in resource books, will often benefit from being followed by a planning and report stage, and from a recording of fluent speakers doing the same activity. This recording can then be exploited for language focus work.

Business language resource books often contain case studies and simulation materials to replicate business situations and stimulate the types of communication that are typical of business encounters. These often contain a spoken or written report stage. You could add to the learning opportunities here by recording learners' oral reports, and playing them back for appraisal.

9.4.4 Planning TBL input

Whether you are adapting or supplementing parts of your textbook to provide opportunities for task-based learning, it is important to look ahead over a week's or month's work, so that you achieve a good overall balance of exposure and language use.

You may decide that the texts themselves offer rich language opportunities but activities that stimulate talk are lacking. By inserting mini task cycles based on the texts and recordings, you can postpone or even omit some of the PPP language cycles. If the language on the syllabus doesn't occur, and you feel it is vital, cover it rapidly at the end of a cycle, and ask students to look out for further examples. You may have noticed some examples of the target structures in texts they have read previously, or in future texts; collect these for later and then set an analysis activity on them.

You may discover that your textbook offers a rather limited range of texts, or very little in the way of natural language. In that case you will need to introduce a greater variety of styles, text types and language by bringing in extra texts and recordings (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7 for guidelines).

Decisions about selecting texts and specifying language to supplement the textbook take us into the realm of syllabus design, a far wider issue, and one which is, sadly, beyond the scope of this book.

Summary

In conclusion, here is a list of the main advantages of adopting TBL.

- A task-based framework for language learning aims at stimulating language use and providing a range of learning opportunities for students of all levels and abilities.
- The role of tasks is to encourage learners to activate and use whatever language they already have, both for comprehension and for speaking and writing.
- The role of the task-planning-report cycle is to stimulate a natural desire in the learner to improve upon that language.
- Tasks based on texts and recordings of spoken language provide learners with a rich exposure to spoken and written language in use. This provides an environment which aids natural acquisition.
- The language focus component enables learners to examine that exposure, and systematise their knowledge of language structure.
- The texts and recordings used in task cycles form a pedagogic corpus of data for use in class. This provides a clear and familiar context for the teaching of grammar and other language features.

Adopting TBL is not a question of acquiring new teaching techniques – most of those necessary are already practised on teacher training courses. Neither is it a question of tacking TBL onto what is done already ('I already do tasks in my classes').

TBL is more a matter of perceptive and sensitive management of the learning environment. It involves examining existing beliefs and trying to look at learning and teaching in a realistic light. It entails coming to terms with the principles that underpin the components in a TBL framework and using them to create the right conditions for language learning. This in turn entails seeing the lesson outline as a framework which accommodates sustained learner activity.

In fact, for the teacher who has just introduced and set up a task-based cycle for the first time, the biggest challenge of all is possessing the strength of mind to stand back with confidence, and to let learners get on with their own learning.

Further reading

See *Challenge and Change in Language Teaching* by J and D Willis (eds), 1996, Heinemann ELT, especially the following papers:
T Woodward *Paradigm shift and the language teaching profession*
K Jennings and T Doyle *Curriculum innovation, teamwork and the management of learning*
D Ozdeniz *Introducing innovation into your teaching*
S Wharton *Testing innovations*

Notes

1 M Bygate in J and D Willis (eds), 1996.
2 L Prodromou, 1995.
3 S Wharton in J and D Willis (eds), 1996.

Appendix A: Six types of task

This classification, which does not claim to be exhaustive, will help you generate a variety of tasks on whatever topic you have selected. For each type of task, it gives the outcome, broadly analyses the processes involved, then suggests some specific starting points and examples that you can adapt and build on.

Simple tasks may consist of one type only, such as listing; more complex tasks may incorporate two or more types, such as listing then comparing lists or listing then ranking. Problem solving may include listing, comparing and ranking.

After the starting points and examples, this classification also suggests follow-up tasks. All tasks involve speaking and listening. Many also entail reading and note-taking. All tasks can lead into a more formal oral or written presentation.

The task types classified here are introduced in Chapter 2. A more detailed breakdown of task types for use with texts can be found in Chapter 5, Section 4. Tasks specifically for beginners and young learners can be found in Chapter 8, Sections 2 and 5. Meta-communicative tasks, i.e. tasks that focus on language itself, are termed 'language analysis activities' in this book and are illustrated in Chapter 7.

1 Listing

Outcome

Completed list or draft mind map (see Focus 5).

Processes

Brainstorming, fact-finding

Starting points

Words, things, qualities, people, places, actions, job-related skills:

- international English words, e.g. in sport, in pop songs
- things found in particular places, e.g. in the kitchen, on the beach
- everyday things, e.g. that you carry with you or that you often forget or lose
- qualities looked for in a product, e.g. a good pen, a stereo system
- qualities needed for particular jobs, e.g. teaching, being prime minister
- personal characteristics, e.g. of a TV celebrity, an astronaut
- features of a place, e.g. a holiday resort, a language school, a sports complex
- things you do to, e.g. prevent crime, plan a party, move house
- ways of doing things, e.g. remembering new words, cooking rice, saving money
- common questions, e.g. that guests ask hotel reception staff, that tourists ask tourist guides

Follow-up tasks

- Memory challenge games (lists and sources can be hidden and students asked to recall as many items as possible in a specified time).
- Ordering and sorting tasks (type 2) and comparing tasks (type 3) can be based on lists that students have made.

2 Ordering and sorting

Outcome	Set of information or data that has been ordered and sorted according to specified criteria			
Processes	**Sequencing**	**Ranking**	**Categorising**	**Classifying**
Starting points	Jumbled lists/sets of instructions/texts/news reports	Personal experience of methods/things/features that can be sorted according to specific criteria/personal values	Headings/half-completed tables/charts followed by sets of statements, data from various sources	Everyday things or events, lists of items, words
Sample tasks	• Put the days of the week into the correct order. • Order the instructions for making an international phone call/the steps for doing a magic trick. • Rewrite this news report putting the events into chronological order.	• Agree on the best ways to learn a new language/travel between two places/pass a driving test. • Rank these items in order of, importance/interest/usefulness/value for money.	• Group the statements under these headings: agree, disagree, undecided. • Complete this chart/table with information from the text.	• How many ways can you find to classify the food you eat daily/the things you do at home/the things you read regularly/the countries in this list? • Think of five ways to classify the clothes you wear/the animals in the picture.
Follow-up tasks	• 'Spot the missing item' – Students remove one item from a sequence, and read the list out for other pairs to spot it.	• Groups present their rankings for the class to reach a consensus through discussion and debate.	• Students justify their decisions to the class, or give an oral presentation of their completed table or a section of it.	• 'Odd one out' – Students make up sets of four or five similar items and add one that doesn't match. They exchange sets and see if other pairs can spot it.

3 Comparing

Outcomes	Vary according to the individual task goals, but could be the items appropriately matched or assembled, or the identification of similarities and/or differences.		
Processes	**Matching**	**Finding similarities**	**Finding differences**
Starting points	Information from two different types of source (e.g. visuals and text) that can be matched in order to identify someone or something	Two or more sets of information on a common theme (from personal experience/visuals/texts) that can be compared to find similarities	Two or more sets of information on a common theme (from personal experience/visuals/texts) that can be contrasted to find differences
Sample tasks	• Descriptions Listen to/read these descriptions of different people/places and identify which person/place is which. • Narrative accounts Read/listen to these accounts, e.g. of a car accident, and say which of the four diagrams most accurately portrays what happened. • Following instructions Match this text to the map or diagrams, e.g. to trace a route on a map, to complete a floor plan of a house, to assemble a model.	• Compare, e.g. two characters in a TV series, reports of the same event from different newspapers. • Compare your own version with the official or original version, e.g. compare your story ending with the original story, your solution with the one in the text. • Compare ways of doing things in different towns or countries, e.g. funding the arts, making coffee, cooking rice.	• 'Spot the differences', e.g. between two pictures, two story endings, two accounts of the same incident. • Jigsaw viewing, e.g. contrast a film/video sequence with a written account containing factual errors. Half the class see the video, half read the text, then they come together to identify the factual errors. • Contrast systems, e.g. of education in different countries, of lending libraries.
Follow-up tasks	Students design parallel tasks based on their own data, or make their own changes to the original data		
	• e.g. after matching text to diagrams, students make floor plans of their own homes and describe these for their partner to draw.	• e.g. after finding similarities in news reports, students bring in other current newspapers with parallel news items.	• e.g. after finding differences between pictures, students change three things in their picture, rewrite the text including different factual errors or three additions and play 'Spot the differences'.

4 Problem solving

Outcome
Solution(s) to the problem, which can then be evaluated

Processes
Analysing real or hypothetical situations, reasoning and decision making

Starting points	Short puzzles, logic problems	Real-life problems, personal experience, hypothetical issues	Incomplete stories/poems/reports; visuals/snippets of audio or video recordings; concealed pictures, clue words for prediction and guessing games	Case studies with full background data, business and computer simulations
Sample tasks	• Cutting the cake What is the minimum number of straight cuts you must make to divide a round cake into eight equal pieces? • Crossing the river An old lady wants to cross the river with a wolf, a goat, and a cabbage. She only has a small boat and can only take two things at a time with her. How does she do it?	• What advice would you give in response to this letter from an advice column? • Decide on the best two places – cheap but safe – for a young person travelling alone to stay in your capital city. • Plan a dinner menu for overseas guests within a given fixed budget. (Other constraints, such as diet, can be added later to increase the challenge.)	• Make up your own version of the missing section/ending of the story/report. • Work out a possible story-line from these clue words/phrases/pictures/audio/video snippets. • Fill the gaps in this text with appropriate phrases. • Guess what's in this (covered up) picture/(closed) bag.	• Social study of young offenders Decide on the best action to take to stop them reoffending. Previous solutions and statistics for reoffending are given. (Offenders' family backgrounds to be initially withheld.) • Aid for development Decide on three appropriate ways for your company/country to give aid to this developing country. • Product testing Play and report back on computer simulation games.

Follow-up tasks
Students do a comparing task, presenting, justifying and discussing their solutions for the class to vote on the best one(s).

5 Sharing personal experiences

Outcome
Largely social and far less tangible than with other tasks. Sharing personal experiences is something we do very often in daily life: we may simply be passing the time of day, being sociable or entertaining or hoping to get to know others better. This kind of casual social talk can happen naturally during other task types and, because it is so common outside the classroom, should be encouraged.

Processes
Narrating, describing, exploring and explaining attitudes, opinions, reactions

Starting points	Anecdotes:	Personal reminiscences:	Attitudes, opinions, preferences:	Personal reactions:
	• on given themes, e.g. terrible journeys, silly accidents. • about people, e.g. eccentric friends or relations, funny things done by children you know. • about things you own(ed), e.g. a favourite toy, old shoes, memorable presents.	• about past routines and experiences, e.g. early schooldays, traditional festivals and celebrations, friends you used to spend time with. • about single events you remember most clearly, e.g. moving house, visiting elderly relations, times of political/financial crisis. • about past regrets, e.g. three things you most regret doing/not doing.	• Find out what others think about films or TV programmes, personalities, current concerns and/or professional issues. • Talk about your preferences and find people with similar ones, e.g. in leisure activities, places to shop, clothes.	• to situations, e.g. heights, frightening things, extremes of climate. • What generally makes you, e.g. most annoyed, very happy, highly stressed, most relaxed. • Quizzes, e.g. personality ones from quiz books.

Follow-up tasks
- Students select the funniest/most vivid/most memorable experience they have heard, tell the class and give reasons for their choice.
- Students tell another anecdote or personal story but it need not be true. Can the class guess whether it is true?
- Learners identify and summarise the reminiscences/opinions/reactions they found they shared with others.

A FRAMEWORK FOR TASK-BASED LEARNING

6 Creative tasks

Outcome

End product which can be appreciated by a wider audience. Creative tasks tend to have more stages than the usual classroom tasks. They can involve out-of-class research and are often referred to as 'projects'.

Processes

Brainstorming, fact-finding, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem solving and many others

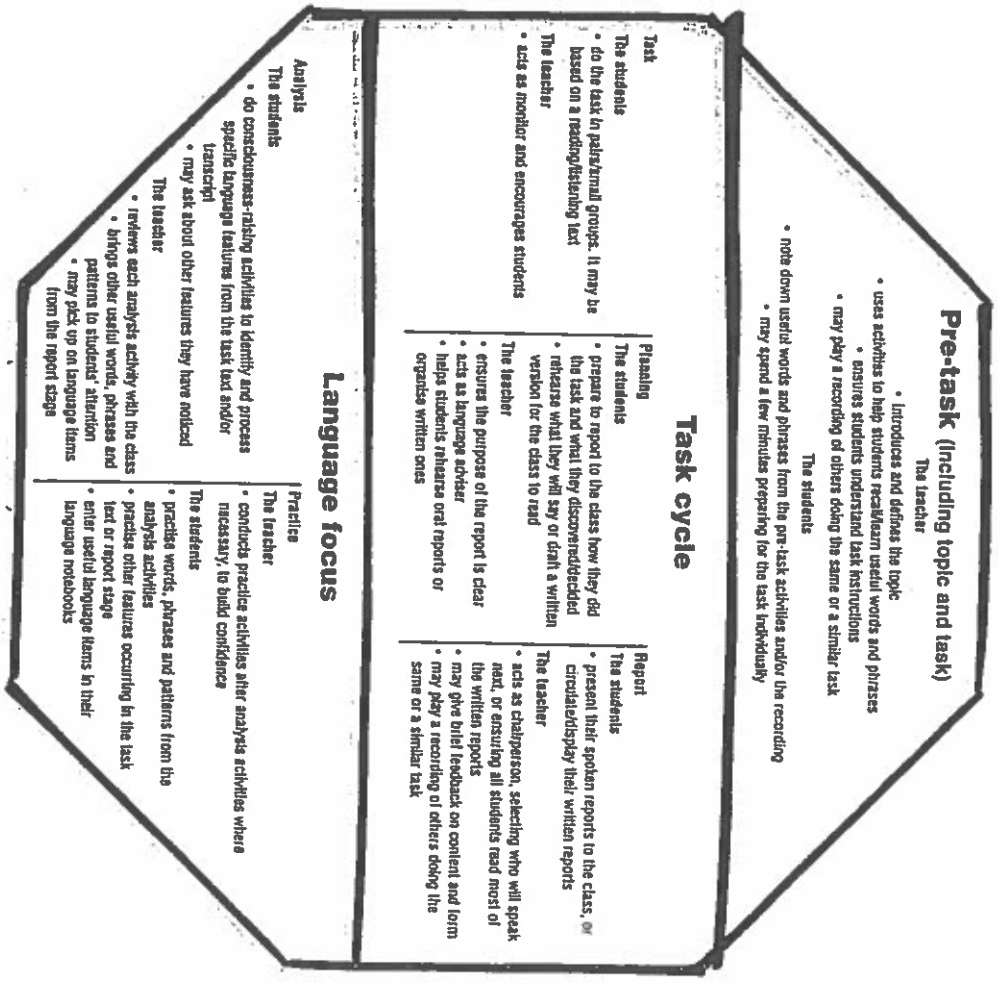
Starting points	Children's activities: done in small groups who then describe the process, e.g.	Creative writing and similar activities	Social/historical investigations and links	Media projects for the school or local community	Real-life rehearsals
Sample tasks	• make a model, paint a picture, prepare snacks. • do a science experiment, test and report on makes of colouring pens. • take part in a dressing-up competition, put on a show for other groups.	• Write a poem, short story, song or play, based on a literary text students have read or arising out of a programme they have seen. • Write diaries, e.g. for personal use, and/or to be read by the teacher but not by other students.	• Plan visits to local places, e.g. airport to interview passengers, company premises to report on products/processes, tourist office to investigate local tourism opportunities. • Talk/write to older inhabitants about changes to their lives, e.g. past customs, games they used to play, changes in eating/leisure habits over three generations. • Internet and email links, e.g. with twin towns overseas, overseas schools, research areas of interest on World Wide Web.	• Produce a class magazine or newspaper (one-off or regular issue). • Set up a display, e.g. on a local or topical issue or exhibition, e.g. of students' photographs. • Design and write a leaflet, e.g. for visitors to the school or town, or an advert, e.g. for a local product/entertainment. • Design, produce and record a short programme on audio or video, e.g. a local news documentary or a short drama.	• Students predict, script and perform an interaction that might occur in specific real-life situations, e.g. making a hotel booking, asking for directions or instructions for being interviewed for a job. These are then compared with spontaneous recordings of parallel situations or real-life circumstances.

Follow-up tasks

- Other groups write a review of the end product.
- Learners keep a diary describing their progress on the project, and use this to write a report of how they achieved their product and what they learned, with an evaluation of their work.
- Groups make a poster advertising their end product.

NB: Many other types of task can be adapted for young learners.

Appendix B: Overview of the TBL framework



NB: Some time after this final phase, students may like to repeat the same or a similar task with a different partner.