

# Appendix B: Overview of the TBL framework

## Pre-task (including topic and task)

### The teacher

- introduces and defines the topic
- uses activities to help students recall/learn useful words and phrases
  - ensures students understand task instructions
- may play a recording of others doing the same or a similar task

### The students

- note down useful words and phrases from the pre-task activities and/or the recording
- may spend a few minutes preparing for the task individually

## Task cycle

### Task

#### The students

- do the task in pairs/small groups. It may be based on a reading/listening text

#### The teacher

- acts as monitor and encourages students

### Planning

#### The students

- prepare to report to the class how they did the task and what they discovered/decided
- rehearse what they will say or draft a written version for the class to read

#### The teacher

- ensures the purpose of the report is clear
- acts as language adviser
- helps students rehearse oral reports or organise written ones

### Report

#### The students

- present their spoken reports to the class, or circulate/display their written reports

#### The teacher

- acts as chairperson, selecting who will speak next, or ensuring all students read most of the written reports
- may give brief feedback on content and form
- may play a recording of others doing the same or a similar task

## Language focus

### Analysis

#### The students

- do consciousness-raising activities to identify and process specific language features from the task text and/or transcript
- may ask about other features they have noticed

#### The teacher

- reviews each analysis activity with the class
  - brings other useful words, phrases and patterns to students' attention
  - may pick up on language items from the report stage

### Practice

#### The teacher

- conducts practice activities after analysis activities where necessary, to build confidence

#### The students

- practise words, phrases and patterns from the analysis activities
- practise other features occurring in the task text or report stage
- enter useful language items in their language notebooks

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

## TBL

### Pre-task – task cycle – language focus >> presentation – practice – production

Definitions of a 'task'

Ellis, Rod: *Task-based Language Learning and Teaching*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, First Edition 2003, 2006

Nunan, David (1989)

A communicative task is 'a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right'

Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2001)

'A task is an activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective'

Willis, Jane: A Framework for Task-Based Learning, Essex: Longman, First Edition 1996, 1999, p. 36

'A goal-oriented communicative activity with a specific outcome, where the emphasis is on changing meanings not producing specific language forms'

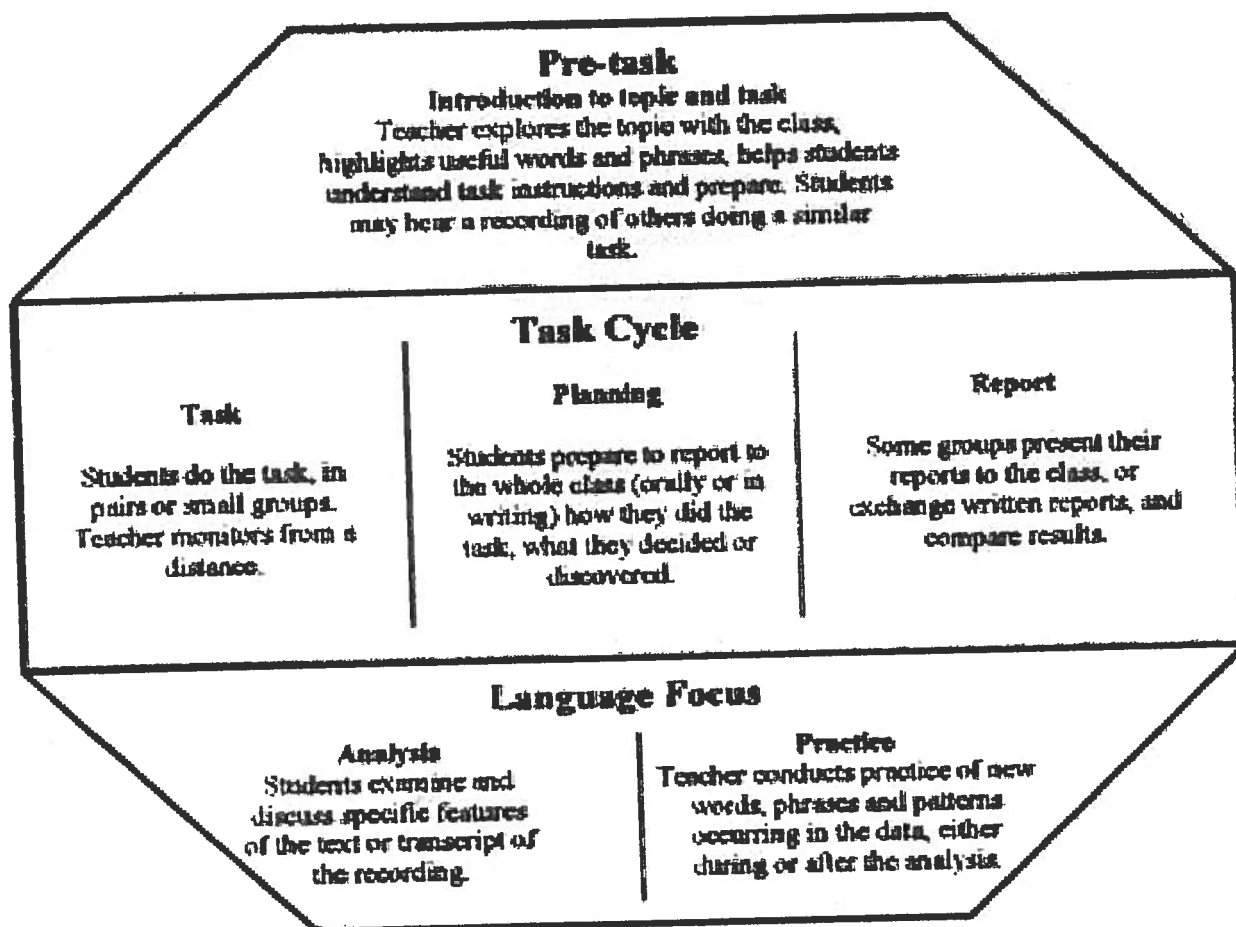


Table 1: Components of the task-based learning framework (adapted from Willis, 1996, p. 38).

## 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:

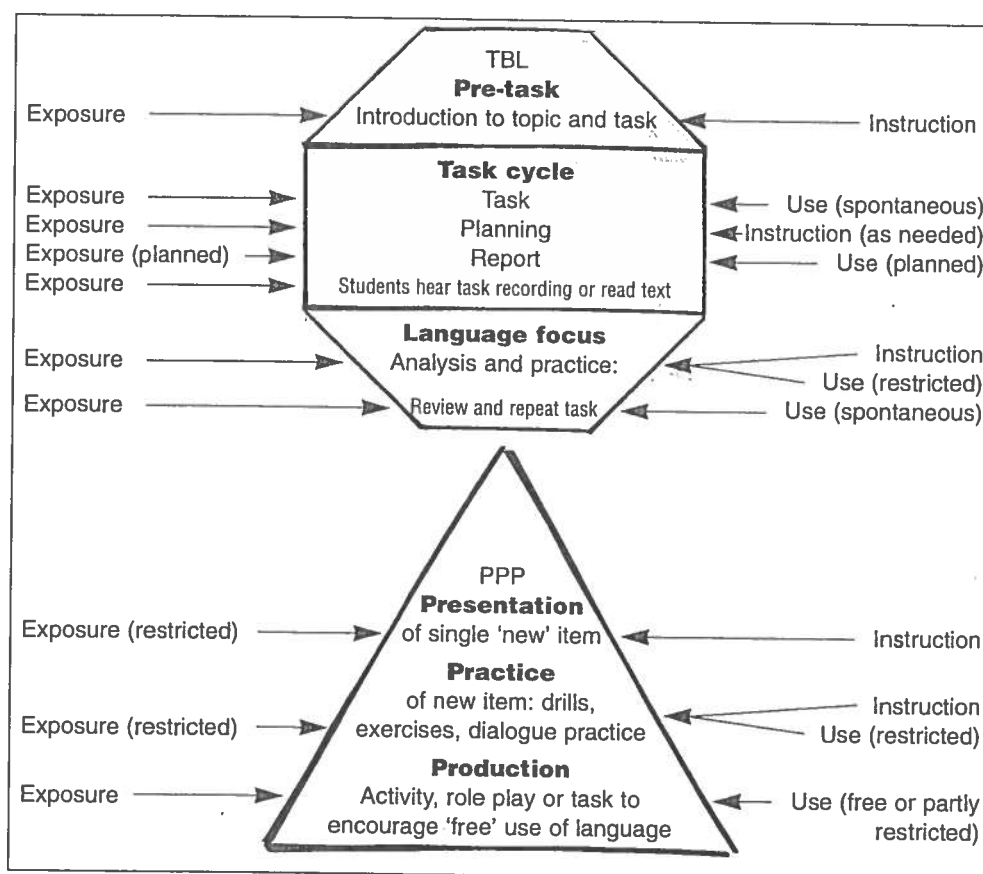
- Sometimes learners manage to do the task or role play at the production stage without using the target form at all. This may be because their own developing language systems are not yet ready to cope with its use, or because they don't need the new pattern to express the meanings they want. They can, 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.

