

TASK-BASED INSTRUCTION TO LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Task-based instruction or learning (TBI) uses tasks or stand-alone activities which require comprehending, producing, manipulating or interacting in the target language. Students are given a task to perform and after its completion the teacher discusses the language that has been used, makes corrections if necessary.

The primary focus of classroom activity is the task and language is an instrument which students use in order to complete it, they are free to use any language they want. All activities reflect real life. Playing games, discussing/solving a problem, sharing information etc. are considered relevant tasks. An activity without a problem-solving element, without a goal to reach isn't a TBI activity.

A Task-based lesson/activity follows certain stages:

- the pre-task stage: introduction to topic and task
- the task stage: task, planning and report
- the language focus stage: analysis and practice.

At the pre-task stage the teacher introduces the topic to the students, gives instructions on what they should do at this stage, helps them to revise words and phrases that can be useful for the task. This stage can also include playing a recording of other people doing the same task. Thus the students are given a model of what is expected of them.

Example: Pre-task

The teacher may provide students with the following:

- a short written passage (a letter, a newspaper article, an email etc.) with the main vocabulary or grammar structures highlighted in bold
- listening material
- audio/video material (a recording or a film)
- a combination of the above mentioned.

During the task stage the students complete the task in pairs or groups using the language resources they have while the teacher monitors and offers encouragement. Then the students plan how they will tell the class what they did, how it went etc. They practice what they are going to say in their groups. If the students have any language questions, they have the opportunity to ask the teacher for advice. Finally, they report on the task either orally or in writing to the class.

Example: Task

1. Find out and make a list of what your friends do in their free time, what their hobbies are

2. In groups students find out what the five most popular books/films/songs etc. are in their class, then draw a graph and present their results

3. Students write a short review on a book they have read or a film they have watched, then they read their reviews in groups and discuss what book/film they would like to read or watch.

At the language focus stage the students examine and discuss interesting features of any listening or reading text which they have looked at for the task. The teacher may also select the language the students used during the report for analysis. Finally, basing upon the students' needs the teacher chooses language structures that the task has provoked to practice. And the students do practice activities.

The advantages of Task-based instruction are numerous:

- the students are free of language control. In all stages they have an opportunity to use all their language resources rather than just practice one given structure
- a natural context is developed from the students' experience; the language used is relevant to them
- a varied exposure to language: the students are exposed to a great number of phrases, collocations, patterns etc.
- the students' language needs dictate what will be discussed at the lesson rather than the teacher's decision
- the students spend a lot of time communicating.

Task-based learning is rather flexible. The lesson may contain several mini cycles/stages: a pre-task, a task and a feedback, another pre-task, a more difficult task followed by a language focus session; one pre-task and a lot of mini tasks.

Unlike the Presentation, Practice, Production approach whose aim is to lead from accuracy to fluency, the aim of Task-based learning is to integrate all four skills and to move from fluency to accuracy plus fluency. The range of tasks available (reading texts, role plays, problem-solving, questionnaires, quizzes etc.) offers a great deal of flexibility in this approach and leads to more motivating activities for students.

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