TAKING IT TO TASK

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to our first issue of the second volume of *Taking it to Task!* From 2016 we have decided to change our regular publication to a digital newsletter format. We hope to be able to accept a greater variety of submissions than we did with OnTask, which will still include theoretical articles and practical lesson plans that were the heart of OnTask, but also opinion/think pieces, book reviews and TBLT-related news.

In this first issue of the second volume, we are pleased to include reports on the International Conference on TBLT by two members of the sig, Kurtis McDonald (Kobe College) and Natsuyo Suzuki (Waseda University), articles from Sarah Holland (Toyo University), Patrizia Hayashi (Meikai University), and Tyson Rode (Meikai University) as well as from Tatiana Bogachenko (Curtin University), and a lesson plan from Thomas Stinger (Konan University).

As you might be aware, the International Conference on TBLT is held biennially, and the most recent one took place in Barcelona, Spain this past April. A handful of the sig members attended the conference and gave presentations there. The two conference reports written by McDonald and Suzuki highlight the key aspects of the conference. We truly hope that you will enjoy reading them and that they might stimulate your appetite to attend the next one in 2019!

The first article by Holland et al. lays out the details of the Podcast Project and discusses how the students and the instructors perceived it from their respective perspectives. In the second article, Bogachenko discusses challenges and opportunities that an introduction of TBLT to the educational system in Ukraine might provide. Lastly, the lesson plan by Stringer spells out the plan in detail to introduce a four-lesson-long project with a goal of fostering students’ collaborative skills. All these three entries point to the importance of localizing our teaching practices to meet the needs of our students.

We hope that you enjoy reading this issue, and if you have a TBLT-related article, lesson plan, book review or opinion/think piece that you would like to submit for consideration in a future issue of *Taking it to Task*, please contact us at tbltinasia@gmail.com

Shoko Sasayama, Publications Chair
Justin Harris, Coordinator

ANNOUNCEMENT

**Workshop by Dr. Lourdes Ortega (Georgetown University)**

As most of our members will be aware, we hold a biennial “TBLT in Asia” conference, the next of which will be held in 2018. In 2017, we will hold a special mini-conference featuring a workshop by Dr. Lourdes Ortega (Georgetown University) and a poster presentation session on July 29, 2017. The event will take place at Temple University, Japan Campus, Osaka Center. More details of the event can be found here: http://www.tblsig.org/conference
REPORTS ON THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON TBLT

The 7th International Conference on Task-Based Language Teaching took place at the University of Barcelona (Spain) from the 19th to the 21st of April, 2017. As the two reports below illustrate, the conference was very well organized, and it gave the attendees a great opportunity not only to learn about the cutting-edge research on TBLT but also to reflect on their teaching practices, expand their repertoires of pedagogic and assessment tasks, and build new network with similar-minded colleagues around the globe. Below, you will find a conference report by Kurtis McDonald, the associate editor of this newsletter, and another one by Suzuki Natsuyo, one of the most dedicated members of the sig.
Enjoy!

REPORT BY KURTIS McDONALD (Kobe college)

The Seventh International Conference on Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT 2017) was held April 19-21, 2017, in Barcelona, Spain under the theme of “Tasks in Context”. Hosted this year by the Language Acquisition Research Group (GRAL), the Universitat de Barcelona served as a picturesque setting for the premier international conference on task-based language teaching, held biennially in locations around the world since its inaugural meeting in 2005. Due to the efforts of the local organizing team and student volunteers, the conference reviewers, and the support of the International Association of Task-Based Language Teaching (IATBLT), TBLT 2017 demonstrated again why the international TBLT conferences remain so highly regarded by those able to attend them.

As a now two-time attendee myself, I feel that the major strength of the international TBLT conference is that it is purposely small enough to remain focused and manageable, yet is still able to attract a relatively diverse array of participants. According to Conference Chair Roger Gilabert’s closing remarks, there were over 250 participants in attendance at TBLT 2017 and just over 140 papers presented. The affiliations of the presenters were included in the very helpful conference app along with the presentation abstracts (although they were missing from the printed conference program). Judging from those entries and from the people I met at the conference, attendance at TBLT 2017 seemed to parallel the popularity of the field; regions where TBLT has taken a hold were quite well represented while areas where it has yet to take root as firmly were largely underrepresented. Despite the inconvenient timing of the conference in relation to the start of the academic year in Japan, there seemed to be a noticeably larger contingent of both Japanese and Japan-based participants at the conference this year as compared to TBLT 2015. Perhaps that can be taken as a good sign for TBLT’s growing status in Japan and for JALT TBL SIG member participation in future TBLT conferences!
As in previous meetings, TBLT 2017 offered a varied program of one-hour plenary talks, two-hour colloquia, one-hour workshops, 25-minute paper presentations, and 15-minute show-and-tell demonstrations throughout the two and a half days of the conference. In line with the conference theme of “Tasks in Contexts”, the 144 presentations given at the conference provided a showcase of not only the diversity of topics that fall under the banner of TBLT, but the many different ways in which ‘tasks’ are defined, applied, and researched in various teaching and research contexts. The broad range of topics used to organize the presentation sessions included task assessment, needs analysis, implicit and explicit task-based instruction, focus on meaning and form, task complexity, motivation and engagement, tasks and writing, corrective feedback, pragmatics and discourse, pronunciation, sociolinguistics and interculturality, individual differences, and blended learning, among others. In line with the thematic focus on context, these topics were discussed in relation to all manner of learning environments (L1, L2, L3), modes (face-to-face, online, hybrid), proficiency levels (low proficiency to advanced), age ranges (children to adults), and settings (laboratory, classroom, real-world).

The four plenary talks were thoughtfully arranged to provide “bird’s eye views on the field” from each of the world-renowned expert’s own areas of interest, underscoring again the breadth of topics and contexts that fall within the purview of TBLT. After registration and a few words of welcome in the university’s majestic Paranimf hall, the conference began with John Norris’s highly informative survey of the growing body of secondary research (i.e., research syntheses and meta-analyses) on the effects of L2 task design on learner affect, attention, interaction, performance, production, and learning. Not only did this talk provide a great summary of the overall findings from the research conducted in this area to date, but it also pointed out dimensions of L2 task design that have not yet received their due attention as well as several key methodological considerations and reporting practices that all researchers should adhere to. Marta González-Lloret’s plenary concluded the sessions on the second day of the conference and served as an overview of technology-mediated TBLT, highlighting some of the key technologies in use, their integration into curricula, and suggestions of areas where further research is needed. The third and final day of the conference began with a joint plenary talk from Marita Schocker and Andreas Müller-Hartmann in which they very effectively argued for the need for contexts to be taken more seriously in both task-based teaching and research. Drawing on illustrative examples from their research in primary and secondary L2 contexts, Schocker and Müller-Hartmann made a very strong case for their own learner-/learning-oriented task model and how it can be integrated into more practically-minded teacher education efforts. Finally, María del Pilar García Mayo’s closing plenary stressed the importance of TBLT research conducted with school-aged children in L2 settings in order to better inform educational and policy decisions, citing findings from her recent research with children in classroom settings in Spain.
While the plenary talks provided great overviews of four distinct areas of the field, the impressive slate of other presentations at the conference offered attendees the chance to learn about current TBLT research and teaching methods from speakers ranging from veteran classroom instructors and well-known, established scholars to those just beginning their teaching and research careers. With seven to nine sessions running concurrently, deciding which presentations to attend was a bit of a challenge at times. My selections were guided primarily by my own interest in interactive L2 speaking development and assessment, and I had no trouble at all filling my schedule with sessions in this area. Although I was able to take away something worthwhile from nearly all of the presentations I attended, I was personally most impressed by Robert Stroud’s talk on task engagement and goal-setting and Agnes Albert, Lorand Papp, and Katalin Piniel’s joint presentation on the role of foreign language anxiety in oral task performances. For me, both of these talks not only raised my awareness to factors affecting L2 speaking performance that are perhaps not as widely discussed in the literature as they should be, but they did so by contextualizing their research very much within the realities of foreign language teaching and learning environments. These sessions, like many that I attended, also generated a great deal of insightful discussion among the audiences in attendance.

Beyond the traditional conference offerings of plenary talks and concurrent sessions, TBLT 2017 capitalized on its smaller, more intimate scale by providing ample opportunities for participants to interact socially both at the conference venue and outside of it. Included with the quite reasonable registration fees (early-bird fee: €195, full fee: €245, student fee: €145) were multiple fully catered coffee breaks and daily lunches in university’s beautiful gardens. Aside from making it very easy for participants to relax and recharge between sessions, these welcomed breaks provided excellent chances to meet, catch up, and get to better know other participants while sampling from an assortment of delicious Spanish tapas and desserts or enjoying a glass of cava on the last day of the conference.

For participants interested in the conference’s social program outside of the conference venue, a different optional activity was available every day. On the first evening of the conference, a limited number of 120 pre-confirmed participants were able to attend the City Council of Barcelona’s free welcome reception and guided tour of the historic City Hall. Following that unique event was an optional walking tour (€18) of the city’s Gothic Quarter and El Born neighborhood, culminating with a tapa and drink at a local bar. TBLT 2017’s Gala Dinner (€45), of course another great chance to mingle and unwind with fellow participants, was held at the end of the second day of the conference at the Barcelona Maritime Museum’s Restaurante Norai. Those interested in skipping the long lines at one of Spain’s most popular attractions could join a guided tour of Gaudi’s Sagrada Familia (€24) during the afternoon.
on the final day of the conference. Finally, participants with a sense of adventure could choose to set sail on a three-hour catamaran boat trip (€47) on the Mediterranean Sea, snacks and drinks included.

TBLT 2017 was brought to its conclusion with the biennial general meeting of the IATBLT and the conference’s closing ceremony. Paid attendance at the conference granted all participants automatic membership in the IATBLT, the international, non-profit organization that oversees the TBLT conferences every two years and aims at promoting TBLT worldwide via its website <http://www.tblt.org/> and other means. After the executive board was acknowledged and a few official matters were reported, the board asked for input on some measures it was considering as well as any other suggestions offered by the participants in attendance. Several measures were approved by vote and others were tabled for further discussion. The general meeting also served as a chance to recognize the winners of two awards given by the IATBLT. The 2017 Research Article Award was granted to Andrea Révész, Monika Ekiert, and Eivind Nessa Torgersen for their 2016 paper published in *Applied Linguistics*. The TBLT Distinguished Achievement Award lived up to its name this year as both Michael Long and Peter Skehan were acknowledged for their many contributions. After brief remarks from the distinguished scholars, the general meeting concluded with the announcement that TBLT 2019 will be held in Perth, Australia, tentatively scheduled for early September of that year. TBLT 2017 was then officially closed by the Conference Chair after the work of the organizing committee and student volunteers was once again recognized by all in attendance.

All in all, the chance to take part in TBLT 2017 was an excellent experience that once again confirmed for me why the TBLT conferences continue to attract participants ranging from many of the preeminent scholars in the field to those just developing an interest in it. Although getting the most from the conference would likely be aided by greater familiarity with TBLT research, it is not at all required, and I would highly recommend participating in the conference to any instructor interested in the range of important issues raised within this very dynamic area of second language acquisition. It would be especially great to see an even greater presence of JALT TBL SIG members at TBLT 2019 in Perth. I hope to see you there!

Acknowledgement: My attendance at TBLT 2017 was supported by a grant from the Research Institute at Kobe College.
REPORT BY NATSUYO SUZUKI (WASEDA UNIVERSITY)

The 7th international conference on Task-Based Language Teaching took place in a beautiful venue, Barcelona, on 19-21 April 2017. Over 160 delegates participated in the conference, giving many intriguing research presentations on the conference theme, “Tasks in Context”, from a variety of standpoints. The brilliant organizers, including a large group of volunteers, successfully hosted this productive meeting where many fruitful discussions took place among researchers as well as MA and PhD students interested in different aspects of second language acquisition (SLA). All keynotes by the plenary speakers took place in the ‘Paranimf’ room, located within the massive architecture of the Universitat de Barcelona, which has a 657-year history of academia in the heart of Catalonia. It is interesting to reflect that although the study of SLA has emerged since the 1960s, this extraordinary, venerable setting somehow produced in me a sense of the greatness of pursuing our study within a historical context. In this report, I briefly introduce the keynotes, followed by presentations by speakers from varying backgrounds, and highlight some interesting topics.

PLENARY SESSIONS

Inspired by the 6th conference in Leuven, Belgium, 2015, on the theme of ‘Tasks for Real’, this year’s conference covered a variety of task research in different contexts reflecting growing social diversity (e.g., technology-mediated TBLT, content and language integrated learning (CLIL), English-medium instruction (EMI)), both within primary and secondary schools across Europe and Asia in English as foreign language (FL) contexts and outside of classroom contexts. Taking a cross-sectional perspective of the wide variety of contexts in which tasks are utilized to develop and facilitate learning in each language educational setting, the conference opened by outlining the basis and future direction of task research.

In the first plenary session, John Norris (Educational Testing Service, United States) presented synthetic empirical research findings based on statistical meta-analyses and discussed the importance of L2 educational task design which is more closely related to the social and cultural contexts of each specific purpose. In addition, Marta González-Lloret (University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, Unites States) addressed the challenge of technology-mediated TBLT curricula from the perspective of technology and tasks, with the aim of moving current research on technologies and tasks forward. Moreover, Marita Schocker and Andreas Muller-Hartmann (Pädagogisch Hochschule Heidelberg,
Germany) suggested a reconsideration of task research from the educational standpoint in order to make it applicable to school contexts and lead to teacher development in which exploratory practice and research can be carried out. Finally, María del Pilar García Mayo (Universidad del País Vasco, Spain) gave a talk about task-supported research with a particular emphasis on CLIL contexts for EFL young learners, suggesting an improvement of task-based language programs to provide a longer-lasting learning environment in which the benefits of meaningful negotiation and collaboration can take effect.

It appears that task research worldwide has much more work to do in order to develop language education further in a global context.

PRESENTATIONS

TBLT 2017 Barcelona organized four parallel sessions for presentations selected from among many high-quality abstracts:

Colloquia (2 hours each)

The topics presented covered a well-balanced range from individual learning contexts to learning environments.

- TBLT in English-medium instruction and regular language courses in an EFL context.
- TBLT in the 21st century: tasks in the Digital Age; creativity in task-driven learning environments.
- TBLT and individual differences involving working memory, language proficiency, L2 performance and language aptitude.
- Task learning in the context of writing.

Workshops (1 hour each)

A variety of topics were presented, featuring many useful and applicable designs and pedagogical implementations in TBLT contexts. The themes of the twelve workshops included:

- Complexity and sequencing of pedagogic tasks
- Systemic functional linguistics
- TBLT for heritage language speakers
- A virtual English course
- Creative testing
- Humour in context
- Authentic and task-based writing
- Awareness in intercultural negotiations
- Grammar in TBLT
- Tasks for online contexts
- Instructional supports in carrying out tasks
- L2 writing in TBLT
Individual Papers (30 minutes each)

Cutting-edge research containing insightful analysis and suggestions which covered almost all the areas of study of SLA and language education (e.g., assessment, focus-on-form/meaning, input & output, online tasks, eye-tracking, mobiles and tasks, task complexity, multimodal tasks, learners’ perceptions, pragmatics, motivation, implicit/explicit instruction, teachers and tasks, CAF, needs analysis, task repetition, theoretical reviews, pronunciation, noticing, feedback, LREs, speech processes, task engagement, young learners) was presented by prominent researchers, including PhD and MA students.

In addition to the scheduled sessions, active discussions took place in eight show-and-tell (a 10-minute talk plus a 5-minute Q&A) sessions which took the place of poster sessions.

Overall, TBLT conferences are always stimulating for the participants, mainly because the meeting motivates us to contribute to extensive research as well as to develop language education for future generations.

TBLT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Among the topics covered by TBLT 2017 Barcelona, I would like to mention my personal area of interest. As was pointed out in the plenary talk by John Norris, the study of task-based language teaching and learning has answered various questions about L2 learning, but the way to integrate tasks in instructed SLA contexts is yet to be clearly identified. Moreover, considering TBLT in a broader context, there is a need to think of tasks in the real world, in which social diversity and digital literacy prevail. Despite the rapid changes to learning environments, in addition to existing individual differences, TBLT has great potential to play the role of making language learning more creative through cooperation and collaboration. Kris Van den Branden, Jürgen Kurtz and Lourdes Ortega in the colloquia talk put emphasis on creative thinking in TBLT in- and outside of classrooms in order to involve real, complex tasks going beyond linguistic aspects and on updating the curriculum in terms of subject and content matter. I could not agree more: I believe that the more authentic the task becomes in a way which corresponds to the learners’ cognitive areas of mind, the better the chance that learners will engage in the task for emotional and motivational reasons. On a personal note, I hope that future studies will be undertaken in these areas, since it is a concern and a great challenge particularly for EFL contexts like Japan where uniform teacher training continues.

Lastly but certainly not least, as one of the delegates, I would thank to the organizers, programme committee and volunteers who successfully organized the biennial international conference. I look forward to TBLT 2019 Perth.
ARTICLES

Student-Produced Podcasts: TBLT in Action

Sarah Holland – Toyo University
Patrizia Hayashi – Meikai University
Tyson Rode – Meikai University

ABSTRACT

This paper explains how three university educators designed, introduced and evaluated podcast task-based language teaching projects with Japanese university students. In the podcast projects the students researched a topic, wrote a podcast script, practiced reading their scripts with a focus on pronunciation, and then recorded their podcasts. The podcast files were uploaded to a password-protected shared website ready for the final stage. Finally, the students listened to their classmates’ work and shared feedback on the podcasts. After the what, why, and how of the podcast project is explained, technical necessities and useful insights are also discussed, followed by a task evaluation in terms of the following four criteria: the roles of the student and teacher, the complexity of classroom organization, the authenticity of the task, and the integration of the task into a syllabus (Nunan, 2004); student evaluations are also considered (Ellis, 2003). The authors conclude that podcast projects effectively demonstrate an example of task-based language teaching that is compatible with English language learning in a Japanese university.

INTRODUCTION

Students become podcasters, in English. From the students’ point of view this is one of the most exciting parts of the podcast task project. From the teachers’ perspective, when students plan, research, practice, produce and then finally, listen to their ‘English’ voices in their podcasts, all a part of the task-based language teaching project, there are many other benefits, in addition to the excitement. However, the excitement the projects generate is certainly also a rewarding element.

In this paper we, three university educators, explain how we designed, introduced and evaluated task-based podcast projects with Japanese university students. First, we explain why
this project was implemented and how the podcast tasks were set up. Secondly, we will discuss the technical aspects of the podcast tasks. Although the tasks are called ‘podcasts,’ it should be noted that the podcasts were ‘protected podcasts’, insofar as the accessibility was restricted. Thirdly, we give an explanation about the assessment procedures we adopted. Lastly, we present an evaluation of the task as a whole and describe how the podcast tasks can easily be adjusted for a wide variety of language proficiency levels and adapted for various topics. Furthermore, we suggest how the student-produced podcast tasks can facilitate English language learning.

**THE PODCAST PROJECT**

Podcast projects can be valuable tasks for language learning. Naseri and Motallebzadeh (2016) reviewed the use of podcasts in language learning research and offered several language learning implications: Podcasts can improve learner’s listening comprehension abilities; podcasts support language learning not only in terms of speaking and listening, but in other skill areas such as pronunciation, lexicon, and grammar; learning vocabulary through podcasts may be more effective than traditional EFL (English as a foreign language) learning methods alone.

Podcast projects were implemented at our universities for several reasons. First, making a podcast necessarily involves the four skills of language learning: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. For instance, students research a topic of their choice related to their particular podcast theme and then write a script in English for their podcast, tasks necessitating reading and writing. They read the script aloud to the teacher and receive feedback mainly on their pronunciation and the structure and sequencing of the content included. Students then practice reading their corrected scripts until it is time to record them. Finally, the students listen to each other’s podcasts actively and give feedback. These aspects of the task necessitate speaking and listening.

Second, podcasts are flexible. Teachers may choose to focus on pronunciation accuracy, fluency development, or both of these and more. There are many aspects of the project which teachers can have the students work on and assess.

A third reason podcast projects were implemented was to improve students’ digital literacy skills. In the project, students have to learn how to use their smartphone to research on the internet, send an email with an attached photo, and access and listen to other students’ podcasts on a password-protected shared website. Having digital literacy skills provides students with opportunities to engage in more meaningful communication in the social world
and thus makes language learning more authentic than by focusing on paper-based literacy skills alone (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011).

The podcast projects were set up in the following way. Three class periods of ninety minutes each were set aside for the podcast project. The teachers undertook this project with both first-year and second-year English major classes in an integrated English four skills course. The themes used for the projects included cities, festivals and heroes.

In the first class, students received a worksheet for the project (see Appendix A). The worksheet laid out the goal of the project, the schedule, the form of assessment, and a space to write the script. Together with the students, the teacher reviewed each of the goals of the project as listed. Furthermore, any particular textbook vocabulary for a specific theme was reviewed. For example, for cities, students learned words such as population, pollution, and climate, and were encouraged to incorporate this vocabulary into their scripts.

The schedule was then reviewed, so that students understood clearly what they were required to complete in each class and what they needed to have ready for the next class. This was a good opportunity to remind students of the importance of attending class. The basic schedule was the following: class 1 was an introduction to podcasts and research; class 2 focused on finalizing the script, practicing the script and recording; class 3 was presentation day as students listened to each other’s podcasts and gave feedback.

In the first class, the teachers ensured that students understood what a podcast was by defining it and playing an example. We were able to present a few of the podcasts done previously by other students, which made it easier for students to understand the task. While some of the podcasts were done individually, for more research-intensive topics, we paired students. Although the themes were tied to the textbook units we had studied, students still had a wide range of latitude in choosing the subjects of focus. Research could be done in a computer lab, on a student’s smartphone, or set for homework.

A teacher alone can implement this task, but there are advantages to teaming up with another teacher, especially for class 2. In this class, it was important for the teacher to be particularly organized as there were a variety of tasks that occurred at the same time and needed to be completed (as much as possible) by the end of the class. Students came to class with different stages of the task completed. As soon as the class began, the students were divided into those who had completed their scripts and those who hadn’t. Those who hadn’t needed to get the scripts finished as soon as possible. For those who had finished, the teacher needed to check the scripts over for appropriate length, vocabulary and grammar. Particularly in this second class, having a collaborator (e.g., another teacher) would help manage all these activities.
successfully within a single class. Ideally, the entire podcast should run a minute to two minutes long. If it only lasts less than a minute, it is as if the podcast was over before it had even started.

Once the teacher had checked the script, the student practiced it over and over. The teacher at this point had the students engage in some exercises in fluency practice, intonation and pronunciation, depending on the teacher’s emphasis and time. When the student or student pair was ready to go, the next step was recording. The teacher recorded the students or in the case that students were absent, they recorded on their own and sent the audio files to the teacher. The advantages and disadvantages of each of these methods will be discussed in the technical necessities section.

Along with the recordings, students needed to send the teacher a photo that represented their topic, such as a picture of the city or festival they had researched. In order to improve future podcasts, we recommend that students cite the sources where they copied the photos from or use Creative Commons licensed sources intended for public use. However, for this project, students were not required to cite the photo sources as the podcasts were only uploaded to a password-protected website and were not publicly accessible. The first time we did the podcast project, we had students send us the photo in the last class. This created a lot of stress as some students forgot to send the photo. The next time we did the podcast project, we asked students to choose a photo on the first day when they had decided on their topic. We found this worked better and enabled us to get the photos up on the website faster.

In class 3, we all gathered to listen to the podcasts. Students received a listening feedback sheet (see Appendix B) in which they were required to listen to their classmates’ podcasts for basic information on the topic, answer some brief questions such as “Would you like to attend this festival/city? Why or Why not?”, and in the end, write a self-reflection on their experience with the project. To maintain privacy, students were told to give themselves an alias that would be used on the website. The website is password protected, providing an additional layer of security (see Appendix C).

As mentioned, this entire project was designed to be completed in three 90-minute classes, which is a tight frame and requires good organizational skills on the part of the teacher. The project could be stretched out by devoting only half the class to it over a longer period of time or by adding an additional day to enable greater focus on pronunciation and intonation. A large number of students in a class would also most likely require additional days.
TECHNICAL NECESSITIES

In this section, technical aspects of the podcast project are explained. First, the steps taken in the podcast project in this paper are given. Next, some of the various methods of recording podcasts are briefly examined and some of the advantages and disadvantages are compared and discussed.

The steps taken to implement the student-created podcast project at our university will now be outlined. The first step was to create a password-protected website to host the students’ podcasts and to make them accessible to everyone participating in the course. Depending on the educator’s personal preferences, a website builder (i.e., blogger.com, wordpress.com, weebly.com etc.) can be used to get the site up and running quickly. The authors use several of these website builders depending on the task-based project at hand. Weebly.com was selected for this project because its drag and drop user interface allows for quick uploading of audio and image files and thus it was thought to be appropriate for our particular purposes. Due to our institution’s privacy protection policy, it was decided by the teachers that password protecting the website would indeed be necessary. There are many functions provided by Weebly.com, however, not all of them are free. The free website builder is called Weebly Free and there is also Weebly Starter, but they do not include audio and video players, or password protection. Weebly Pro and Weebly Business provide these services and more, but at an annual fee. Weebly Pro was selected for the podcast project because it provided password protection of the website at the lowest cost.

The second step was to have the students record their podcast. The majority of students in our classes use iPhones, therefore it was decided to use the Voice Memos recording application included for free with the iOS iPhone operating system. If the students were using an Android smartphone or did not have the Voice Memos app on their iPhone, they were required to download a voice-recording app or borrow a classmate’s phone. For group podcasts, the teachers informed the students that at least one student in each group should have the Voice Memos recording app or an equivalent. Students recorded their podcasts in an empty, quiet classroom that was set aside for recording purposes. After students were satisfied with the final product, they saved the recording and sent it to the instructor via e-mail. Students were also required to send one image representative of their podcast to the instructor’s e-mail as well as the title of the podcast and an alias.

Next, upon receiving the podcasts, it was necessary to convert the podcasts from MP4 format to MP3. This was due to the fact the Weebly audio player only plays MP3 files and the Voice Memos app records in MP4. An online file converter, Zamzar.com, was used to convert the files.
The files are uploaded from one’s computer to the site, converted, and downloaded through a link provided in e-mail. On a couple of occasions students using Android smartphones sent their podcast not in MP4 or MP3 format, but in other formats such as the .RAR file extension; however, these podcasts were extracted successfully. (Extracted files are those which have been unzipped from a zipped or locked folder.)

There are various methods for recording podcasts. Some of these methods include, but are not limited to: using the Voice Memos recording application on an iPhone, using an MP3 recorder, using a smartphone application designed specifically for recording podcasts, using recording software such as Garageband or Audacity, or recording the podcast on presentation software such as PowerPoint or Keynote. The possible methods are extensive and each will have its advantages and disadvantages, some of which will be discussed in comparison with using the Voice Memos application on student smartphones below. When selecting a recording method for a podcast project, it is important to keep in mind factors like, the facilities / equipment available (i.e., Is there easy access to computer labs, MP3 recorders? etc.), the class time available to spend on the project, the number and language level of the students participating, any privacy issues or university policies that may affect how the project will be conducted, and the thematic content of the unit and how it can be best represented through a podcast.

The advantages of having students’ use the Voice Memo recording application of their iPhone to record podcasts are ease of access and familiarity of use, independent recording is possible, and recording can be done fairly quickly and almost anywhere. The majority of students in our institution have smartphones. There were some cases in which students did not have a smartphone; however, both instructors and classmates were happy to help these students. When informally surveyed by the instructors, some students said that they felt more comfortable using their smartphone than a computer. Other students said that they did not have a computer at home or that their access to a computer was limited. Also, reserving a computer lab is not always possible, due to the popularity of these facilities. In the end, although using computer programs to record the podcasts such as audio recording software or presentation software originally seemed ideal to the instructors, limited computer access and the lack of familiarity with computer software made recording with smartphones much more appealing. Although class time was set aside for students to record their podcasts, students could also use this class time to focus on improving their scripts and/or receive extra pronunciation help from the instructor. Students who chose not to record during the allotted class time recorded their podcasts independently outside of class at a location of their choice.

Using the Voice Memo recording application on the iPhone and then hosting the files on a password-protected website had some disadvantages: lack of authenticity, the need to convert
files, the sound quality of some recordings, and collecting the podcasts from students. Lack of authenticity is an issue. Podcasts are typically downloadable and transmittable to numerous digital devices and are accessible to numerous people on the Internet. In our podcast project, accessibility was restricted to the students participating in the course and an online audio player was used to stream the podcasts. Although it is possible to have downloadable files on the site, the instructors didn’t want students to freely download and distribute copies due to privacy concerns. The site password is changed with each new course and the site activity monitored. In situations where greater authenticity of the final product is desired, a smartphone podcasting application (e.g., Opinion) can be downloaded from the App Store. Such applications give users greater control in editing the podcast and allow them to publish their podcasts directly to the World Wide Web.

Another disadvantage of having students record their podcasts via the Voice Memos app is the need to convert the files from MP4 to MP3, which can be time consuming depending on the number of students participating in the course. In retrospect, this could have been avoided by having the students download an MP3 recording app to their smartphones straight away. However, even if the students save their recordings as MP3s, it is necessary for instructors to demonstrate proper recording of an audio file through the smartphone in the first class. Several of the student recordings had low audibility. This can be improved through making sure that students are speaking into the microphone on their smartphone at an appropriate distance for recording. Collecting the podcasts from students can also be difficult, so formal instruction on how to save and send attachments via e-mail is also necessary.

Another option to record the students’ podcasts is to use an MP3 recorder instead of a smartphone voice recording app. MP3 recorders are quick, efficient, and produce high quality audio recordings when used correctly. There are many kinds of MP3 recorders on the market. Recently, the instructors have been using several Sony MP3 IC Recorders which plug directly into a computer’s USB port and make uploading podcasts to the website fast and efficient. So far, in smaller classes this has been working well. Nonetheless, for larger classes, student smartphones may still be more favorable because of cost of MP3 recorders and the class time required to record.

The final step was to upload all of the students’ podcasts and images to the website. Once this was completed, a feedback lesson was conducted in the classroom with audio-visual equipment and an Internet connection. The students listened to their podcasts as a class through large speakers for clear playback while looking at the images they had chosen projected on a screen. A full explanation of the type of feedback that the students received is given in the following section.
ASSESSING THE PODCAST TASKS

Next, how the podcast tasks were assessed is explained. One substantial advantage of the podcast tasks is that there is a clear outcome that can be readily assessed. As well as the podcast recording itself, it is also possible to assess the podcast script, and/or if desired, the students’ listening skills. The worksheet included in Appendix A shows how the cities podcast was assessed. When we conducted the cities podcast task, like all of the podcast tasks, it was one of a series of four tasks which made up the assessed course work in an integrated English course. The assessment focus for this task was the quality of the information, language accuracy and appropriate topic-related vocabulary and, as mentioned above, pronunciation. The ‘bonus’ point shown on the worksheet is useful for discretionary credit; for example, when a student has made an exceptional effort, or when the teacher wants to recognize the production process rather than just the final outcome, which may not in every case turn out to be outstanding. Each student also received individualized feedback on their performance written on their worksheet. Stating the assessment criteria explicitly on the worksheet enables the students to understand exactly what is expected of them and how they can earn credit. Apart from the criteria mentioned above, the podcast projects lend themselves to a variety of other assessment possibilities that the teacher is able to select depending on the particular focus required. For example assessment possibilities include research skills for podcast content, writing, as in the podcast script, use of target language, especially for structures and vocabulary specified in a course textbook. It is also possible to assess listening skills during the final podcast listening session (see the example worksheet in Appendix B). Although in that case the quality of the student podcasts needs to be monitored to ensure that the listening assessment is fair. As these possibilities suggest, podcast assessment criteria are flexible and can be adapted for the requirements of particular lesson objectives.

AN EVALUATION OF THE PODCAST TASKS

Once a task has been designed and implemented it is good practice for teachers (and students) to evaluate the task. Not only does a task evaluation clarify the teachers’ perceptions, the process can also aid development by pinpointing areas for necessary modifications for future task-based language teaching. For the evaluation of the podcast project we followed Nunan’s (2004) criteria for task evaluation with further criteria based on student-evaluation adapted from Ellis (2003). Nunan posed a series of questions to facilitate task evaluation; these questions are based on a task’s goals and rationale, input, procedures, roles and settings, implementation, grading, integration— into the syllabus and assessment. The goals, rationale, procedures and assessment for student-produced podcasts have been described above;
therefore, we concentrate on the four other aspects most relevant to the podcast tasks: the roles of student and teacher, the complexity of classroom organization, the authenticity of the task, and the integration of the task into a syllabus. Lastly, in this section, a student-evaluation of the podcast task and the task’s potential for language learning are discussed.

As in all task-based language teaching, the expectations for the role of the student are for an active, motivated and relatively independent learner. This is one of the most attractive features of the podcast task: it encourages these very qualities. The task helps to develop student autonomy. Once the specific topic is decided, to a great extent, the task becomes student-directed; the focus is on individual students to provide the content of the podcast, so the students autonomously decide how much effort to put into the task. However, knowing that the final podcast is for ‘public’ consumption is also an effective motivator. Although some of the final podcasts our students produced were not necessarily remarkable, nearly all of the students made a stupendous effort.

Not only is the role of the students quite demanding the demands on the teacher can also be quite tough. Classroom organization can become complex; students work at different paces and they become spread out at various stages in the production process. Keeping tabs of at which stage everybody is, and who needs help with what, demands persistence, patience and an acceptance of temporary classroom disarray on the part of the teacher. The importance of setting deadlines is stressed. Yet, it is the change of pace, the change in location, when students use a computer room, and the change provided by the stages that lend the task variety and interest for the students. For teachers, handling the technical side can also be challenging. On an encouraging note though, the second time around, the podcast task becomes easier.

The ‘real-world’ authenticity of the task can be questioned. Students are unlikely to have to make podcasts in English outside of the classroom (but you never know!); even so, the sub-skills involved in completing the task have a real-world significance. The podcast task is a rich multifaceted learning task that encompasses a wide variety of sub-skills: listening to instructions and the final podcasts, reading, researching, note-taking, writing, revising, and reading aloud, which in turn includes practicing pace, rhythm, pronunciation, elision, stress and vocal expression. The podcast task can be justified in terms of interest, variety, language learning potential and the development of sub-skills, even though the actual task may not be perfectly authentic. At the outset of the task, some students did not seem familiar with the phenomenon of podcasts; downloading and listening to podcasts may not be as ubiquitous in Japan as in other countries, in which case learning about and producing a podcast had the additional benefit of developing some cross-cultural awareness.
Integrating the podcast task into a set syllabus was not a problem for us. At the university where the task was implemented, we do not have a fully-fledged task-based syllabus, yet we are fairly free to introduce various teaching methodologies within the curriculum. In all cases, our podcast tasks were based on topics from the designated textbooks. Another advantage of the podcast task is that it can be adapted to suit any number of topics and, with appropriate planning, integrated into an existing syllabus. If the task is fully and clearly explained and the students are ‘on board’, it should be possible to conduct podcast tasks in different teaching situations (given the technology is available) and with students of differing language proficiencies. The use of technology allows high degrees of differentiation, so that a wide range of proficiency levels can be accommodated by the task, and all students can, and in our experience did, produce something.

Student evaluations of task-based language teaching are also an important consideration (Ellis, 2003). Students’ reflections help teachers gain a more well-rounded perspective of tasks. In addition to a brief vocabulary exercise on the podcast worksheets for the projects (Appendix B), students were asked to respond to a question asking them what they had learned during the project. As an indication of the type of student comments we received, we present extracts from four examples of student-answers. The comments have not been edited and appear exactly as the students wrote them.

**Student 1:** I have to read slowly, because I heard myself .... I have to practice to read and have to learn to reading technic, so I want to podcast again.

**Student 2:** I thought other group’s podcasts were wonderful. Their pronunciation was good.

**Student 3:** Honestly speaking, I didn’t want to record my voice, because I was very shy to record and listen my voice, but after I recorded and listened my voice I realized some bad points of my pronunciation.

**Student 4:** I can know world’s festival.

We selected these examples because each one highlights a slightly different aspect of the podcast task from a students’ point of view. Student 1 was able to appreciate that speed of delivery is very important for comprehension, while for Student 2, an appreciation of her classmates work and pronunciation was significant. Similarly, Student 3 commented on pronunciation. Student 3’s comment highlights that for students listening to themselves speak in English can in fact be quite a rare occurrence, and even though for some it can be personally
embarrassing, it can also be publicly productive. In contrast, Student 4 commented on how the content of the podcasts was the most interesting aspect for her. The only negative comments made by students were not about the podcast task itself but related to features of their own performances. Especially their pronunciation or voice clarity, which they were able to evaluate by listening to their own voices, received negative remarks. In general, the students were positive about their English podcast experiences, and, naturally, it is encouraging for teachers when students voice a desire to repeat a task.

In addition to students’ positive comments we all thought that the podcast tasks motivated the students to produce work to a higher standard than is often apparent in some of their other work. For instance, there were students who came to the teachers’ room outside of class time to have a teacher check their pronunciation; what-is-more, there was even a case when a student asked to re-record his podcast because he was not satisfied with his first attempt. Some of the students’ written scripts were longer than written work produced in other activities and evidently showed considerable time and effort spent in revising. The inspired students wanted to produce the best recording possible. Moreover, the podcast task created an active context for relevant vocabulary building in the topic area. The enhanced student effort was apparent across all the language proficiency levels at which we carried out the podcast tasks. These features we took to suggest higher than usual levels of learner involvement and thus indications of effective language learning (c.f., Willis & Willis, 2007).

**CONCLUSION**

In this research paper, we discussed the methodology, assessment, and evaluation of a digital language learning task—the podcast project. The teachers conclude that the podcast project is an appropriate task for L2 classrooms at a Japanese university because it offers students the opportunity to delve deeper into a target theme. Furthermore, the project is believed to have several benefits: it enhances student motivation, provides practice with all four language skills, allows for pronunciation training with respect to both accuracy and fluency, utilizes digital literacy skills, and promotes both autonomous and collaborative learning through research, script writing, and active listening and feedback sessions.

The podcasts themselves provide a database of L2 learner recordings, which, along with the student scripts, could be applied to future research in areas such as phonology, academic writing, and corpus-based approaches to curriculum design. Due to the language learning benefits and potential research depth that podcasts offer, it our sincere recommendation that educators try this type of task in their own L2 teaching contexts.
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sarah Holland is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English and American Literature at Toyo University. She is interested in classroom dynamics and in teaching and researching TBLT and L2 writing.

Patrizia Hayashi is a Professor and Coordinator of the Plurilingual and Pluricultural Education Center at Meikai University. Her research interests included TBLT, particularly with a digital component, and curriculum design.

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REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Student Worksheet From the City Podcast Task

Podcast Project

Name: ..............................................................................................................

Podcast Project

You will work on a podcast. A podcast is a digital audio recording.

You will:
- plan and produce a podcast
- describe a city (see Unit 7 in Textbook name)
- Write a podcast script of about 100 words
- include a photo to promote your city and podcast
- include detailed information about the city.

For example: ☆ where the city is ☆ ...................... ☆ ......................
☆ ...................... ☆ ...................... ☆ ......................

Project Schedule

Date: .................................................................

Class 1: Learn about the podcast project. Decide on the CITY for your podcast.
Start planning and researching information.

Date: .................................................................

Class 2: Plan, produce (record) and practice your podcast.

Date: .................................................................

Class 3: Listen to the classes’ podcasts. Give feedback. Hand in your final podcast
script.

Title of your Podcast: .................................................................

Photo of .................................................................................................

Your Grade: (10 = 3 x 3 +1)
- Good city information included □
- Good language/vocabulary □
- Clear pronunciation □ Bonus! □

Comment: .................................................................................................
### Podcast Project Feedback

**Name:** ..................................................  **Date:** ..................................................

**Podcast Project – Festivals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Festival Name</th>
<th>Interesting Information</th>
<th>Would you like to attend this festival? Why or why not?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What 5 new vocabulary items did you learn through this project?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td>podcast A digital medium that consists of a series of audio recordings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>played on a computer or another digital device.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What did you learn through doing this project?**

........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
APPENDIX C
Screen Images of the Podcast Tasks Website

Student alias: Watson and Holmes
Podcast title Venice
Student-selected city photograph – an appealing focus while listening
Introduction

In the last few decades, educators in general and language teachers in particular have been experiencing a strong push for change. This impetus can be attributed to the need for local education to become internationally competitive in a globalised world. In addition, findings in psychology, social sciences and linguistics within the last few decades have altered the long-held understandings about the mechanisms of language acquisition. This process is no longer considered to be identical to learning any other academic subject such as Maths or History. A number of teaching approaches including task-based language teaching (TBLT) – used here as an umbrella term for a variety of ways that “task” can be utilised in the classroom – have been developed to assist language educators in this transition (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Long & Norris, 2009). In particular, these approaches help create opportunities for students to develop relevant skills applicable in their everyday life and effectively use language in practice (Nunan, 2004; Samuda & Bygate, 2008). Due to the fact that access to and exchange of information have become available to people anywhere in the world, these innovations are spreading with an unprecedented pace. TBLT alone has now been applied in a variety of contexts and locations in Europe, Asia, Australia, and the Americas. However, the implementation has not been without challenges (for instance, noisy classrooms or lack of resources) and it has been pointed out on many occasions that a change like thisat needs to be appropriately managed (e.g., Carless, 2003; East, 2012a; Markee, 1997; Shehadeh, 2012).

To investigate the ways educational change can be better contextualised before it is introduced into the given educational setting, a doctoral study was conducted in state schools of post-Soviet Ukraine. In particular, the study focused on change management issues in relation to a prospective TBLT implementation. Based on innovation literature and research findings, the present article discusses some ways to make sense of TBLT as an innovation in the kaleidoscope of teaching contexts. A few key points to be considered by language educators facing change are then briefly summarised at the end.

TBLT and the teaching context

Although TBLT sprung out of communicative language teaching (CLT) in the 1980s, a few decades later it is still considered as an innovation in many teaching contexts around the world. One of the reasons for this is that TBLT has been introduced into these educational settings only in the last decade or so (e.g., see Carless, 2007 for the case of Hong Kong secondary schools; East, 2012b, 2014 for the case of New Zealand secondary schools; McAllister, Narcy-Combes, & Starkey-Perret, 2012 for the case of a
university in France; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007 for the case of a university in Thailand). Most importantly, however, TBLT requires a change in understandings about language teaching that prevail in many educational traditions (e.g., the use of holistic tasks where language is treated as a whole instead of teaching discrete language items as in synthetic approaches).

These changes occur at a number of levels and therefore are so significant that they can jeopardise the innovation process altogether (Markee, 1997). More generally, for instance, tasks can appear incompatible with high stakes exams and methods of day-to-day assessment in the classroom. This may occur in the settings where exams do not incorporate communicatively oriented activities, so students are drilled with grammar in the classroom to be able to perform well in a grammar-based test (a so-called backwash effect). At the classroom level, it can be difficult to conduct communicative meaning-based activities with large groups of students (especially where class sizes exceed thirty-forty students); learners might be used to the explicit grammar instruction and drilling, and prefer this type of activities to less focused ones. There can also be a lack of resources to support task-based lessons, especially given the need to prepare additional teaching materials to accommodate the needs of various learners (Brandle, 2008; Zhang, 2007). Furthermore, the teacher’s role becomes more demanding as it changes from knowledge transmission to facilitation. This may require higher levels of language proficiency and improvisation on behalf of the teacher, as well as the need to deal with noisier classrooms. It may also cause major difficulties with discipline and an undesirable increase in the use of the first language (L1) by the learners (as found, for instance, in the studies by Carless, 2002; Hui, 2004; Jeon & Hahn, 2006). The readers might identify with some of these concerns related to the use of tasks in their classrooms.

At the same time, however, it has been argued that TBLT is a flexible approach. For instance, Willis (2004, p. 3) refers to it as being “multifaceted.” Rather than a set of rules to follow in order to achieve “correct practice,” or a one-size-fits-all method, TBLT is widely believed in the field to be a broad approach guided by the universal principles such as teaching based on student needs, the use of authentic materials, and relating to students’ own experiences. In addition, it offers a variety of possible combinations with other activities through task-supported learning. For practitioners, this means that “researchers and theorists can provide teachers with a basic recipe of the tasks that are performed in TBLT. However, depending on the context, teachers may want to change some of the ingredients or add some local elements” (Butler, 2011, pp. 49-50). For instance, it is not required of teachers to fully abandon grammar instruction – a concern of many – but there are ways for explicit grammar instruction and language practice to be incorporated in the task cycle while retaining the main focus on meaning so that the nature of a task is not compromised (Ellis, 2003, 2009b; Ellis & Shintani, 2013; Newton & Kennedy, 1996). One way to do it is through a temporal shift in focus to language forms that occurs in the course of meaningful communication (known as Focus on Form, see Long, 2015). Another possibility is the use of focused tasks, where students find themselves in need of a particular language in order to accomplish the task (e.g., they will have to use the past tense to refer to what happened yesterday). It has also been claimed that tasks can be used alongside other activities and in a variety of different
syllabus types. For example, situated TBLT allows for a focus on language forms in the pre-task stage and the use of tasks within the present-practise-produce (PPP) cycle (Carless, 2007).

Considering both challenges and opportunities, Markee (1997, p. 39) argues that if a decision has been made that TBLT is “a worthwhile innovation” in a particular setting, then this process should be properly managed. If TBLT offers a number of options, what is the best way for the educators to use this flexibility in their classrooms? What can assist with decisions for successful educational change? Research in and documented practices of innovation, and educational change in particular, can provide some insights into the ways to support this process.

**WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE INNOVATION THEORY**

The literature on innovation warns against approaching the change process as a linear transfer of new ideas from one setting to another. As Fullan (1999, p. 64) puts it, “...there is really no such thing as easy product transfer in social reform. Innovation is not a pill, a widget or a silver bullet.” New methods and ideas are developed in a particular context under certain conditions and are usually a product of years of work, trial-and-error, and therefore come more naturally in this same context. However, things might get complicated when an innovation is transferred to a different setting. That is because “no two places are alike... Each has a distinctive ‘personality’ in the form of its cultures and histories” (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, p. 51). Therefore, a careful consideration of the different aspects of the new teaching approach on the one hand and the local setting of implementation on the other hand is required to inform decision-making. The flexibility of TBLT has been briefly discussed above, but what aspects of the local context should be considered?

Successful educational reforms, according to Fullan (1999), are those that address the local need. It can be either a need or a gap in current local teaching, or a potential need. Once this need or a gap is identified, then the innovation is analysed as to whether it can provide a capacity to address it. When the new curriculum is developed based on the real needs of teachers and learners, it is considered to be more ecological and locally sensitive. Markee (1997) also suggests considering taking into account such aspects as feasibility of an innovation, its compatibility with the current teaching ideas and practices, and advantages over these current practices. It is helpful to start with the questions such as: “Can we give a principled justification for the innovation?” and “Do we actually need it?” (White, 1988, p. 144).

What this means is that the implementation of TBLT would not necessarily require a significant or total turnaround from previous practices. Rather, the extent of modification would be context-dependent. Instead of expecting educators to make changes in a number of areas including the way they teach grammar, teacher roles, level and modes of student cooperation, materials, and assessment, what is changed would depend on the local educational goals and needs of the stakeholders. This can be exemplified with the concept of group work. Although group and pair activities are often utilised in TBLT courses to create favourable conditions for interaction, these are not vital for the approach (Ellis, 2009a). Tasks using individual and whole class modes have also been practised in classrooms and described in
the literature (e.g., Prabhu, 1987). At the same time, Widdowson (1998) argues that while it is important to adjust an innovation to the context, the case might be that certain change or development is desirable by the stakeholders. Whether teachers should increase group and pair work with the help of tasks will depend on whether this is something they would want to see happening more in their lessons, whether these are the skills they want (or prompted by the policies) to develop in their students. The degree of pair work would also vary according to the preferred teaching and learning styles, and might increase with the time.

Further, it is helpful if an innovation can not only benefit but also build upon the existing beliefs and practices (Wedell, 2009, p. 22). In other words, there might already be some practices that can be used as a starting point to help the change develop more naturally. These can increase a chance to successfully implement an innovation without unnecessary challenges. One example of this could be adjustment of the teaching materials already integrated into the course where it is suitable to do so, instead of having to purchase new ones. It can also be the case that practitioners are already utilising some of the elements of a new approach without explicitly identifying them as such.

How does this apply to the potential use of tasks in your classroom? Or if you have already integrated tasks, to what extent have you changed your practices? Below I provide some examples from the study in Ukraine where documents, policy makers, teachers and teacher educators were consulted, and lesson observations were conducted to investigate how TBLT can be better contextualised to meet the needs of local foreign language teaching (FLT).

**Ukraine Case**

Ukraine is an Eastern European country which is considered to be “developing” and “non-Western” particularly due to its recent history as a post-Soviet state. It is experiencing an on-going social and educational change with a high demand for advanced levels of foreign language proficiency among its population. In my doctoral study, TBLT was utilised as a possible innovation because the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, a guideline for educational policy makers in Ukraine, provides contains a description of tasks as a suggested practice. The study sought to provide insights into whether this change would be of benefit to these schools. It also touched upon the ways in which it could be made more appropriate in this particular context. A qualitative and exploratory design aimed to provide a rich description of the current FLT policies and practices as observed by the researcher and understood by the local practitioners – teachers, teacher educators, and policy makers. The project included three phases, starting with the description of the current FLT curriculum and practices in Ukraine, then moving on to the teachers’ feedback on the presentation about TBLT, and finally focusing on three different classrooms (micro-contexts) through the case studies. As a result, a number of areas where TBLT may benefit the local context and where challenges might occur were identified. In this paper, I will summarise the main findings related to the ways TBLT can be adjusted to better facilitate the local FLT.
At first it seemed that TBLT is incompatible with the local educational system in Ukraine. One of the most significant challenges was the lack of awareness among participants not only about TBLT as a teaching approach, but also about theories and recent developments in applied linguistics in general. While teachers were expected to implement CLT in their lessons, many still followed the principles of grammar-translation and audio-lingualism in that their lessons reflected behaviourist views evolving around drills, including a large number of translation activities, repetitions, choral responses, and grammar exercises with explicit and detailed explanation of language rules. Students were rarely if ever seen cooperating while doing activities, and teachers preferred a more teacher-centred classroom to retain discipline and avoid much noise. There also appeared to be a lack of resources in schools, and practitioners reported high levels of workload.

At the same time, some areas of desired change or development were also identified. For instance, in line with the main goal of the local FLT that is the development of communicative competence, the participants expressed a desire to help their students not be afraid of speaking. It was not clear for them, however, how this could be done within their existing pedagogy. One teacher, Olga, specified her concern about her seven-graders: “Sometimes I experience difficulties with the development of my students’ speaking skills ... with teaching them to not be afraid of making mistakes.” Along with this struggle, the participants were willing to retain a possibility to provide explicit grammar instruction, but were not sure how this can be balanced with the use of language for meaningful interaction. In addition, these teachers wanted their lessons to be more reflective of real life language use and situations. They strived to teach in a way that is more meaningful and relevant for their students who now have numerous opportunities to travel and participate in student exchanges. They explained how they would like their teaching to be more embraced of modern technology and more motivating for the children they teach. Finally, the participants wanted to break from the authoritarian stereotypes of a teacher and create a cooperative environment, helping students to successfully interact and work with their peers. Anna, a teacher educator, explained it this way: “We do not have this [type of collaboration] where a strong student helps a weak student. Our children do not know how to work in teams ... everyone wants to be a leader but not everyone can share and help if they know the subject.”

In the light of these needs, TBLT tasks appear to offer opportunities for these teachers to address the identified gaps and achieve desirable practices. First, given that they encourage interaction and focus on meaning, tasks are considered to be an effective tool for the development of communicative competence in a way that motivates students and facilitates their cooperation (Nunan, 2004). Second, utilisation of the focus on form during the meaning-focused activities provides teachers with an opportunity to combine meaningful language use with explicit teaching of grammar/vocabulary, and avoid stigmatising mistakes. Third, designed on the basis of needs analysis and by utilising authentic materials, tasks may help make classroom learning more reflective of real life. In addition to this, task framework may help Ukrainian teachers move away from their authoritarian role (Long, 2015).

Interestingly, it was found that although Ukrainian teachers were not using TBLT and tasks per se, some elements of this approach did take place in their lessons. First, their choices of resources and activities stemmed from basic needs analysis as they were aware of their students’ interests, hobbies, as well as...
strengths and weaknesses. They also had frequent contact with parents and so-called class teachers to develop a better understanding of their students’ learning. Practitioners were also aware of the opportunities their students now have such as travelling and student exchanges, where they would need to use language in practice. In addition to the needs awareness, teachers used some meaning-focused activities such as warm-up discussions at the beginning of the lesson about their hobbies, weekend, school activities, friendship and so on. They also started introducing project work. Although mainly done individually and at home, both students and teachers were familiar with the demands of creative real-life projects. There was a tremendous interest and motivation for this type of activities. This means that if tasks are introduced in these schools, the teachers will not need to start from scratch. Instead, they can extend or further develop some of their existing practices. For instance, teachers can extend the genuine conversation they have with their students at the beginning of the lesson rather than stopping it after the first five minutes and shifting to text translation and drills. This will help them create a meaning-focused lesson with a focus on form at some point(s) in the task cycle.

Overall, the study suggests that TBLT can potentially benefit Ukrainian schools in a number of ways. Given it is not currently prescribed by the curriculum documents and policies, it is up to the teachers to decide to what extent they are willing to change or extend their practices to facilitate those aspects of TBLT that can meet their particular needs.

**SOME QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING**

Three important conclusions can be drawn from the discussion above. First, identifying the current gaps in teaching and utilising tasks (or other activities) that can address these gaps will increase a chance of successful implementation. Given that there is a variety of ways tasks can be used in the classroom, identification of current gaps will also inform the choice of tasks that can better meet the needs of your classroom. Second, a decision to implement an innovation does not necessarily mean implementing all of its components. Whether you increase the amount of group work or decrease explicit language instruction will depend on the degree of change that is desirable. Third, to ensure that changes occur more naturally they could utilise some of the existing practices, such as project work and warm-up discussions both of which can be developed into tasks as described above. Some of the questions that might be helpful to inform decision-making are provided in Figure 1 below.
What are the present or potential needs and gaps in (my) teaching context?

What changes are desirable (in my classroom)?

Can tasks/TBLT facilitate those changes?

What are the potential benefits and challenges of implementation?

Is the change worthwhile?

Yes

No

Which version of TBLT can best benefit (my) context?

What can be done to minimize challenges?

What existing practices (in my classroom) can TBLT build on?

*Figure 1. Decision-making suggestions for TBLT innovation*

It should be noted that in some occasions, the answer would not be as straightforward. Even when the decision has been made in favour of a change, it can still be later rejected on various grounds. Nevertheless, this procedure might help reduce the initial pressure of change as being “imposed” on yourself and your students, provide ideas regarding the ways to better orchestrate the desirable adjustment, and eliminate a number of potential difficulties in the future.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The aim of this paper was not necessarily to generalise the findings of the qualitative study, but rather to illustrate the principles of change management, namely selective and flexible implementation of TBLT, addressing the existing gap in pedagogy, selective and flexible implementation, and building upon the teaching practices that are already in place. It is up to the reader to make conclusions about the relevance of the ideas presented here to their specific situation. Whatever the case, it is the hope that this paper provokes critical discussions about TBLT implementation, and in doing so, it facilitates a more locally friendly innovation, increasing the chances for teachers and students to get the benefit they deserve.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Tatiana Bogachenko is a Sessional Academic and a Research Assistant at Curtin University, Western Australia. Her research interests include language teaching, educational change, and comparative education. The overarching goal of her research is to promote positive educational practices and experience exchange, and to facilitate provision of better opportunities for underprivileged and challenged communities around the world.

REFERENCES


LESSON PLAN

Global Topics Project Outline: Energy

Thomas Stringer – Konan University

- **Key words**: academic skills, critical thinking, presentation skills, collaboration
- **Level**: Intermediate and above
- **Age**: Advanced high school
- **Preparation**: Around 5 minutes per lesson.
- **Lesson Time**: 4 x 50 minutes
- **Class size**: 20 students
- **Materials**: PowerPoint, projector, A3 poster paper, coloured marker pens, magnets, timer, classroom computers or personal devices for accessing the Internet.

**INTRODUCTION**

This project prepares students to collaboratively engage with a global issue. Although for this project I selected the topic of energy, this could easily be substituted for any appropriate topic. The learning objective is for students to collaborate in small groups to brainstorm, research and plan, then create and practice a poster and script for a short group poster presentation and Q&A session. The project provides an opportunity for extended integrated skills practice, critical thinking and reflection. Students will use presentation skills and academic skills such as brainstorming, summarizing, note taking and citation. I developed the framework for the project, comprised of four 50-minute lessons, as the penultimate assignment of a two-year, skills-based, high school Debate course. That series of four lessons successfully prepared the students to engage in the culminating event of the course, a debate tournament on the resolution “Japan should switch to 100% renewable energy by 2030”. The overall structure of the project, and the flow of activities therein, were created in reference to the task cycle:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre Task</th>
<th>Lesson 1: Article</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre Task</td>
<td>Lesson 2: Task Preparation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Lesson 3: Performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post Task</td>
<td>Lesson 4: Reflect and Revise</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The skills required for the project had been introduced, practiced and refined repeatedly over the course. The skills are listed in the pre-main task section below. At this stage, the students were highly familiar with how to apply these skills when researching, creating and making presentations.
The framework presented here could easily be scaled down to a project lasting fewer lessons, indeed even to a single lesson, allowing for adjustments for considerations of time, level appropriateness or a need to increase focus on a particular lesson area. For instance, it could be given as a final project on a similar, presentation-based course for an intermediate level university class. In either context, this project requires extensive pre-teaching of skills like brainstorming, source identification and effective group work.

**LESSON 1: ARTICLE**

The learning objective of the first lesson is to activate the students’ schema around the project topic, energy, using a level-appropriate article. I found the article that I used online, a link to which can be found in the appendix, alongside a word bank, fact sheet and an overview of the following lesson, which I created.

Start by showing relevant topic imagery to the class using the PowerPoint. Whilst giving hints, try to elicit what the students think the general area of the new debate resolution might be. Once the class arrives at the idea of energy or renewable energy, use the PowerPoint to announce the new debate resolution: ‘Japan should switch to 100% renewable energy by 2030’. Have the students copy down the resolution. Ask the class for a show of hands, stating whether they agree or disagree. Select a few students to give reasons to support their opinion. Initially clarifying the goals of a pedagogical activity in this way constitutes the kind of instructional scaffolding that can continually support task completion when it is frequently restated (Sharma & Hannafin, 2005).

Then follows the main body of the lesson, a reading comprehension activity using the online article that functions as schema activation on issues around the topic. The article I selected (link found in the appendix) was about the world’s largest solar power plant (Aljazeera, 2016). A vocabulary bank of target language and a series of comprehension questions accompanied the article. Instances of the target language in the article were underlined. Set the comprehension questions as homework if the students are unable to complete them during class time.

**LESSON 2: TASK PREPARATION**

Review the target language as a class. Now have the students pair-share their answers to the comprehension questions on the fact sheet with those of their neighbour. Allow an appropriate amount of time to review the answers as a class using the PowerPoint, and check comprehension. Remind the students that so long as their answers included all the relevant information from the article, they should not worry too much about their particular phrasing or if they did not manage to use all of the target language this time.

In this lesson, the students are going to plan, research, and create group poster presentations, which they will make for the class in the following lesson. This will be followed by a Q&A session for each
group presentation. The pre-task activities in Lesson 1 and the homework review at the start of Lesson 2 serve as a method of reducing the linguistic and cognitive demand of performing the presentations, the main task (Ellis, 2010). For instance, language items introduced in the article, given as homework and reviewed at the start of the lesson, may reduce the students’ linguistic demand during later task performance. Furthermore, the article given for homework activates the students’ schema on energy, and the accompanying fact sheet questions serve as model for both the kind of information to include during task performance, and how to organize that information. This availability of a model may also reduce the cognitive demand associated with task performance.

Explain that in this lesson the students are going to prepare and make short group poster presentations on one of the following topics:

1. The three countries with the largest solar industries in the world
2. How solar panels make electricity
3. The main causes of poor air quality
4. Problems with solar power
5. The main ways electricity is made

Make student groups depending on class size, assign a topic from 1-5 above, and distribute pens and paper to each group. Explain the activity. The students will brainstorm ideas for their topic in groups, select the best ideas and start researching sources online using classroom computers or personal devices. The students previously have been taught how to identify appropriate and non-appropriate English language sources on several occasions. They have also practiced doing this many times with academic and popular online sources available through Internet searches. For example, the students know to avoid sources without a date or author, that are too old or that show obvious bias. Finding sources that show relevant examples, give useful explanations, provide expert opinions or include statistics has been encouraged in previous lessons.

Allow an appropriate amount of time for students to plan and create their group poster and plan their script of what each group member will say in their notebooks. The poster and presentation should be clear, easy to understand and should inform, persuade or entertain the audience. Using the PowerPoint, briefly review the skills that you want the students to use.

Academic Skills:
- Brainstorming
- Citing examples, data or expert opinions
- Effective poster making
- Note taking
- Scanning & Skimming
- Summarizing
• Structuring information
• Teamwork

Presentation Skills:
• Voice
• Eye contact
• Posture
• Gestures
• Feeling

Critical Thinking:
• What is the topic of the presentation?
• Why are we making the presentation?
• Who are we presenting to?

Have the students start working. Monitor and support their progress. At this stage, I find students are likely to need assistance. Encourage the students to use the pre-taught target vocabulary from the word bank, help them summarize complex sources into simpler English and to divide work equally between group members to increase efficiency. Using a countdown timer helped the students to remain focused. Set homework for the students to complete all written preparations for their project outside of class before the following lesson.

LESSON 3: PERFORMANCE

Allow the students an appropriate amount of time for group reading practice at the start of class, taking care to leave yourself enough time for the main body of Lesson 3, the group presentations. During reading practice time, remind students to think about presentation skills, have them practice performing their presentations out loud inside their groups. Monitor and assist the students with challenging pronunciation.

Now start the presentations. One by one, each student group has a few minutes to make their presentation to the entire class. The groups can attach their posters to the whiteboard using the magnets. The audience, consisting of the groups not presenting, should be taking notes by hand on the presentation. After each presentation, there is a short Q&A session in which each group in the audience has to ask at least one question to the presenting group about their presentation.

After all groups have made their presentations, engage in reflective brainstorming with the class. On the whiteboard write, “What went well?” Elicit responses for the brainstorm from the class about what they feel went well in their presentations. Aim for at least 10 student ideas, and add your own if required. Have the students copy down the brainstorm ideas into their notebooks. Now explain the homework.
Each student should do a brainstorming activity in their notebooks about the presentation, with at least 10 ideas. The topic of the homework brainstorm is “What was difficult?”

**Lesson 4: Reflect and Revise**

At the start of the Lesson 4, first review what went well as a class. Next, using the students’ homework, write a list on the whiteboard of what the students felt they struggled with. Following that, as a class, try to identify some improvement strategies for overcoming the difficulties encountered. Doing so can highlight particular areas in which the students can improve their use of the target language, or areas in which their application of performance, academic and critical thinking skills could be better. Finally, the students can revise, improve and redo their presentations. When the students redo their presentations, rather than have them perform again for the whole class, have them perform for just one of their neighbouring groups. This will alleviate the need for everyone to listen to all the presentations again, which could be tedious. Furthermore it will allow a chance for more intimate feedback to be given between each pair of groups.

**Concluding Remarks**

The project allows students to review a wide variety of collaborative, academic, critical thinking, and presentation skills. These skills are applied during all project stages from pre-task, through task performance and post-task reflection. The flexible framework allows the instructor to adjust the project to student needs with relative ease. However most importantly, I found that with appropriate topic selection the students really enjoyed the opportunity to express themselves while discussing a global issue.

**About the Author**

Thomas Stringer currently teaches at Konan University in Hyogo, Japan. He holds an MA in TESOL from the Institute of Education: University College London, UK. He previously taught for 3 years at Sumiyoshi Senior High School in Osaka, Japan, where he developed this project. His main research interests are professional development and task-based pedagogy.

**References**


Appendix
Online Article, Word Bank, Fact Sheet, Overview of Next Lesson

Online Article

Word Bank

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>unveil ～ solar</th>
<th>power plant</th>
<th>on schedule</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>～を発表する 太陽光の</td>
<td>発電所</td>
<td>予定通り</td>
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<td>cover an area of ～square km</td>
<td>funded by ～</td>
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<td>air quality</td>
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<td>環境保護団体</td>
<td>空気の質</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pollution level</td>
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<td>汚染レベル</td>
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</table>
Fact Sheet

What is it? ________________________________

Where is it? _______________________________

When was it built? __________________________

Why is it getting publicity?
_________________________________________
_________________________________________

Important statistics:

cost: ________________________________

size: ________________________________

capacity: ________________________________

context: ________________________________

Long term energy goals in India:

_________________________________________
_________________________________________

Why is it important for India to achieve these goals?
_________________________________________
_________________________________________
Overview of Next Lesson
In the following lesson, you are going to prepare a short group poster presentation on one of the following topics.

Topics
1. The 3 countries with the largest solar industries in the world
2. How solar panels make electricity
3. The main causes of poor air quality
4. Problems with solar power
5. The main ways electricity is made

Lesson Schedule
1. Brainstorming, start research.
2. Make the poster and plan what each person will say.
3. Practice reading.
4. Make the presentation.

Skills
We want you to use all of the skills you have learned so far in Debate.
- Brainstorming
- Explanation
- Giving examples, data or expert opinions
- Making posters
- Presentation skills: voice, eye contact, feeling...
- Scanning & Skimming
- SPA
- Structuring information: Introduction, Body, Conclusion
- Summarizing
- Teamwork

You are free to choose what kind of information to use, the format of the poster, and how you make the presentation. However your poster and presentation should be clear, easy to understand and should inform, persuade or entertain your audience.