

TASK-BASED LEARNING IN A NUTSHELL

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Nowadays task-based learning (TBL) has become an important part of communicative language teaching and learning. TBL is a learner-centered approach, which differs from the project based-learning (PBL) in terms of the nature of the task. In PBL learners are expected to solve a problem, whereas TBL has primary focus on the task completion, uses analytical approach and specifies learners' real-life communication needs. Nunan (2004) introduces the vision of the task as (Fig.1):

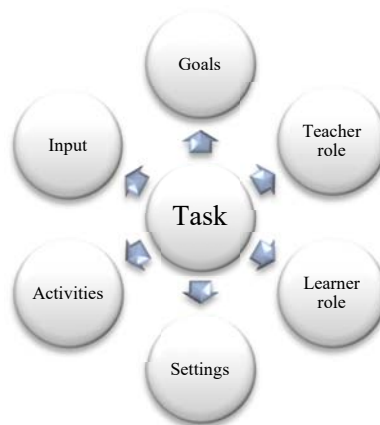


Fig. 1. Components of a task (adapted from Nunan, 2004)

As it is seen from Fig. 1, the task components include task goals i.e. communicative purposes from learner's perspective as well as aims and objectives from teacher's perspective; an input (messages in the target language), the task cycle, including task-setting and activities performed to complete a task. The task, according to Nunan, requires clear learner's and teacher's roles setting, which, in turn, calls for shifting from traditional teacher-centered model to an active learning. The teacher behaves as facilitator, observer and mentor. Willis (1996) outlines the *task* in TBL as a

set of activities used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome. It should be noted that outcomes in TBL usually have an output e.g. a written email, discussion, poster etc.

Nunan (2004) introduces TBL in the following framework (Fig.2):

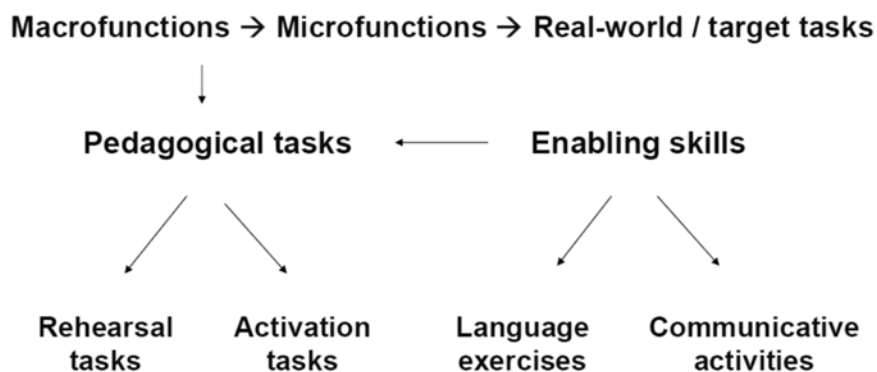


Fig. 2. TBL framework (adapted from Nunan, 2004)

Let us consider a real-world (life) task: *call your colleague to rearrange a staff meeting (remind him/her about the staff meeting, give reason of rescheduling, write a follow-up email informing other colleagues about new date of the meeting)*. Thus, “*to call your colleague to rearrange a staff meeting*” will be a core task around which the teacher will build sub-tasks and/or activities to reach the outcomes. Rehearsal and activation tasks for achieving the outcome might include a role play (e.g. *telephone conversation between two colleagues*), language exercises might include vocabulary exercises on business vocabulary for meetings, telephoning as well as practicing functional language; if learners are not acquainted with the structure of *a follow-up email*, activities and exercises for developing writing skills should also be included.

TBL lesson is a process of scaffolding within a certain framework, which is provided by the teacher and based on learners’ needs. At the beginning of the learning process learners are not expected to produce language that had been explicitly taught. The task cycle in TBL requires a well-balanced flow of sub-tasks and activities, which build upon the previous ones. Recycling and active learning within the TBL framework

help learners to use language-through-doing activities and tasks, to see the clear relation between the grammar form, communicative function and semantic meaning. Learners focus on both learning process and language content. TBL is a framework that creates an opportunity for teacher to get more effective reflection from the learner, which is really beneficial for the learner as the result is seen from the produced output and it is easier to reflect on the task itself.

However, there are some obstacles for TBL. Creating a productive TBL environment requires a deeper needs analysis to find out real-world tasks specific for the learners, completing a task within a TBL framework usually takes more than one lesson, so it is not always easy to use this approach with university students, where the number of contact hours is limited. It may also take time for learners to adjust to a new framework as they may feel confused by performing tasks without being pre-taught some vocabulary or grammar.

In conclusion, despite some disadvantages listed above, TBL provides a solid ground for meeting specific learners' needs in a more effective way and to build a clearer picture for learners to achieve their outcomes.

Resources:

1. Harmer J. *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (3rd ed.) / Jeremy Harmer. – Essex : Pearson Education, 2001. – 384 p.
2. Nunan D. *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom* / David Nunan. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. – 224 p.
3. Willis J. *A Framework for Task-Based Learning* / Jane Willis. – Longman, 1996. – p. 183