

# Employing Task-based learning

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# ACTIVITY 1

Before we begin, think about the following — **click the link above the video to share your views if you haven't done so yet**

1. Dictionaries define a **task** as:

- a usually assigned piece of work often to be finished within a certain time
- something hard or unpleasant that has to be done
- duty, function

Can you think of another possible **meaning**?

# ACTIVITY 1

2. People often use the word **task** together with:
- **Verbs** like *assign, take on, undertake, carry out, accomplish, complete...*
  - **Adjectives** like *challenging, demanding, difficult, easy, repetitive, impossible, major...*

Can you think of other **verbs** and **adjectives** that could be used together with the word **task**?

# ACTIVITY 1

3. In the **ELT field** we often encounter the terms ‘communicative tasks’, ‘language tasks’, ‘learning tasks’, ‘study tasks’, ‘routine tasks’, ‘pedagogic tasks’, ‘isolated tasks’, ‘real life tasks’...

Can you think of a ‘**communicative task**’ or a ‘**real life task**’ in an English language classroom?  
Can you make one or two examples ?

# ACTIVITY 1

4. Watch the video “**Prof. Rod Ellis on Task-based Language Learning**” where Ellis, a well-known researcher, provides a brief introduction to task-based language teaching and learning

<https://youtu.be/5OLySXzZY-4>

Does Rod Ellis mention any examples similar to the **ones you had thought of**?

**Remember — click the link above the video to share your views if you haven't done so yet**

# Tasks

- **Tasks** have become important elements in **syllabus design, classroom teaching** and **learner assessment**
- A task is an activity where **the target language is used by the learner** for a **communicative** purpose in order to achieve an **outcome** (J.Willis, 1996)
- **Tasks** can be the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play and in between

# Tasks

- In the **CEFR** (Common European Framework of Reference) , a **task** is defined as **any purposeful action** considered by an individual as **necessary** in order to achieve **a given result** in the context of:
  - a problem to be solved
  - an obligation to fulfil
  - an objective to be achieved
- This definition covers a **wide range of actions**
- All actions where **language is used to do something, not to show how you use it!**



# Tasks: An action-oriented approach

- The **CEFR** claims to adopt «an **action-oriented approach**» in so far as it views users and learners of a language primarily as ‘**social agents**’, i.e. members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action
- “We speak of ‘**tasks**’ in so far as the actions are performed by one or more individuals strategically using **their own specific competences** to achieve a **given result**” (CEFR, 2001: 9)



# Pedagogical tasks 1

- When they are transformed from **the real world** to the classroom, tasks become **pedagogical in nature**
  - A **pedagogical task** is an activity or action which is carried out **as the result of processing or understanding language**, for example, drawing a map while listening to a tape, listening to an instruction and performing a command may be referred to as tasks
  - Tasks **may or may not** involve the production of language.
  - The teacher specifies what will be regarded as **successful completion of the task**
  - The use of a variety of different tasks in language teaching makes language teaching more communicative
- (adapted from Richards, et al. 1986: 289)

# Pedagogical tasks 2

- Learners **doing tasks** don't just speak to practise a new structure e.g. doing a drill or practising a dialogue or asking and answering questions using 'new' language items studied
- These are primarily **form-focused activities**, designed to practise language items that have been presented earlier, **not tasks**
- Learners doing tasks (i.e. **focusing on meanings**) will use the English they can recall to express the things that they really want to say or write in the process of achieving the task goal

(Adapted from Jane Willis, 2008)

# Pedagogical tasks 3

**Activities having the potential to become effective tasks:**

## **1. Listing and brainstorming**

You can list places, things, actions, events, issues, everyday problems, things to do in various circumstances etc.

Example:

*In pairs, agree on a list of 3 or 4 famous people that contributed to improve human life and provide one reason for including each of them*

# Pedagogical tasks 4

**Activities having the potential to become effective tasks:**

## **2. Ordering and sorting**

Sequencing, ranking or classifying events, actions...

Example:

*In pairs look at four pictures of a story. They are mixed up. Put the four pictures in a sequence so that they tell the story.*

# Pedagogical tasks 5

## What kind of activity is a task?

You can use the following **6 questions** as a way to decide whether an activity is a Task

1. Will the activity engage learners' interest?
2. Is there a primary focus on meaning?
3. Is there a goal or an outcome?
4. Is success judged in terms of outcome?
5. Is completion a priority?
6. Does the activity relate to real world activities?'

(adapted from Willis & Willis, 2007)

# ACTIVITY 2

**Click the link under the video to do this Activity and share your views**

- Read the activity below and use the **6 criteria** we discussed to decide whether it is or it is not a task

Think of the busiest day you have had recently. Work in pairs.

Tell your partner all the things you did. Decide which of you had the busiest day, then tell the class about it. Decide who in the whole class had the most hectic day (and say why). Finally, from memory, write a list of the things one person did on their busiest day and, without revealing their name, read it out to the class (or display it on the wall) to see how many people can remember whose day it was.

# Task-based Learning 1

## TBL is a teaching and learning approach

- TBL is an **approach** to teaching a foreign language which has developed **from communicative language teaching** approaches
- This approach is considered to be a **humanistic** one as it focuses **on the learners' needs** (Ellis 2003: 31)
- The emphasis is on **interacting in the target language** — a precondition for learning to communicate in that language (Nunan 2007: 1)
- The notion of the **target language** is now being reconsidered in order to include new instantiations of English — **English as a lingua franca (ELF)**

# Task-based Learning 2

- **Authentic texts** are used to ensure that the language used **inside** the classroom is **connected** with the language used **outside** the classroom
- Another important aspect is the **learners' personal experiences** which should be strongly linked to classroom learning.
- Learners' personal experiences outside the classroom are usually with **varieties of English in use** and often with **non-native speakers of English**—these should thus be taken into account when planning EL learning paths



# Task-based Learning 3

Nunan summarized **7 principles** which have to be followed in the frame of task-based language teaching:

1. “Scaffolding”
2. “Task dependency”
3. “Recycling”
4. “Active learning”
5. “Integration”
6. “Reproduction to creation”
7. “Reflection”

(Nunan, 2007: 35ff)

# Task-based learning 4

## Let's revisit some of the 7 TBL principles in an ELF-aware perspective

- The 1st principle, **scaffolding**, claims that the chosen lessons and materials have to ensure that learning can take place. Thus, the learners have to be provided **the language** they need in order to complete the task (Nunan 2007: 35).
- The 3rd principle – **recycling** – corresponds to the students' recycling of **language** by which language learning is optimally facilitated.
- The fourth principle, **active learning**, focuses on the premise “learning by doing”. As language learning is best guaranteed if the **target language** is actively used, the teacher should play a more passive role as far as possible.

In the above TBL principles **language** is always central, but the ‘language’ provided – and expected to be used by learners - is usually determined by teachers & coursebooks based on **native speakers’ (NSs) norms** — In real life, ‘authentic’ English is very different, it is owned and used almost always by **non-native speakers (NNSs)**

**In an ELF-aware perspective, exposure to ‘authentic’ English in use should include NNS uses and ELF for learners’ scaffolding, recycling and active learning**

# Task-based learning 5

- *The fifth principle: **task-based language teaching** has to ensure that **linguistic form, communicative function and semantic meaning** are integrated into the learning process*
- *The sixth principle, **reproduction to creation**, demands that **creative language use** develops from reproduction of **language models**. That means, the students first **reproduce the language provided** by the teacher, a tape or a text and as a next step, they are **capable of using similar language items** more creatively.*

Once more, TBL principles' underlying notion is that of **native speakers' language** regarded as the only authentic model, thus ignoring or devaluing the notion of authenticity and ignoring what is currently used by the great majority of English speakers as, for example: English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

As English teachers, we should now explore the **reality** of English in the contexts we teach and in the experiences our learners have, where they are asked to carry out 'authentic' tasks

# TBL in an ELF-aware perspective: More than meets the eyes – 1

- TBL focuses on the **use of authentic language in use** and on requiring students to complete **a meaningful task** in the language they usually encounter
- **TBL assessment** is based primarily on the completion of the task rather than on the language form, thus **on an acceptable language in use**
- In a task based learning approach our goal is to make sure the students aim **at finishing the task** regardless of grammatical errors that arise during their conversations
- Task based learning helps learners **connect to** the language they are learning to their real daily life

# TBL in an ELF-aware perspective: More than meets the eyes – 2

- Emphasis is laid on learning to **communicate** through **interaction**
- **Authentic texts** are introduced into the learning situation
- Opportunities to **focus** not only on language but also **on the learning process** itself are offered to learners
- **Learners' own personal experiences** are valued as important contributing elements to classroom learning
- Classroom language learning is **linked with language use outside the classroom**
- Learners are involved in authentic **language search and use** outside the traditional, coursebook language input teachers too often rely upon
- Teachers' roles change since they need to take the **outside world into the classroom** in order to involve learners in **real life** interactions
- **Spoken language** is central in the learning process!

# ACTIVITY 3

Click the link under the video to do this Activity and share your views at the Forum of this section

1. Watch the video “**Teaching speaking with Task-Based Learning**” where there is an example of conversation development in a multilingual classroom

Can you identify **elements** in this lesson that **you** may use in a **TBL approach**?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QirhNeIwQ0w>

# ACTIVITY 3

2. Think of what you have learnt so far, go through the following **sample pedagogical activities** and decide if they are:

- **Not TBL tasks** (no communication , no real life)
- **Traditional TBL tasks** (real-life outcome, focus on meaning and on NS norms)
- **ELF aware TBL tasks** (real-life outcome, focus on meaning and on interaction with NNS)

Explain what made you provide your answer

# ACTIVITY 3

**Sample 1:** Read the conversation between a bus driver and a tourist, then rehearse the same conversation with your partner.

**Sample 2:** A partner class from another country will visit yours; together with a school-mate prepare an interview to be carried out on Skype with the visiting students. You want to find out more about their habits, preferences etc.

**Sample 3:** Listen to a telephone conversation between a client and a clerk in a Lost & Found office. Complete the dialogue script filling in the blanks with verbs and politeness formulas.

**Sample 4:** Try to find out three things that your grandparents' and your partner's grandparents' lives had in common. What was the biggest difference between them?



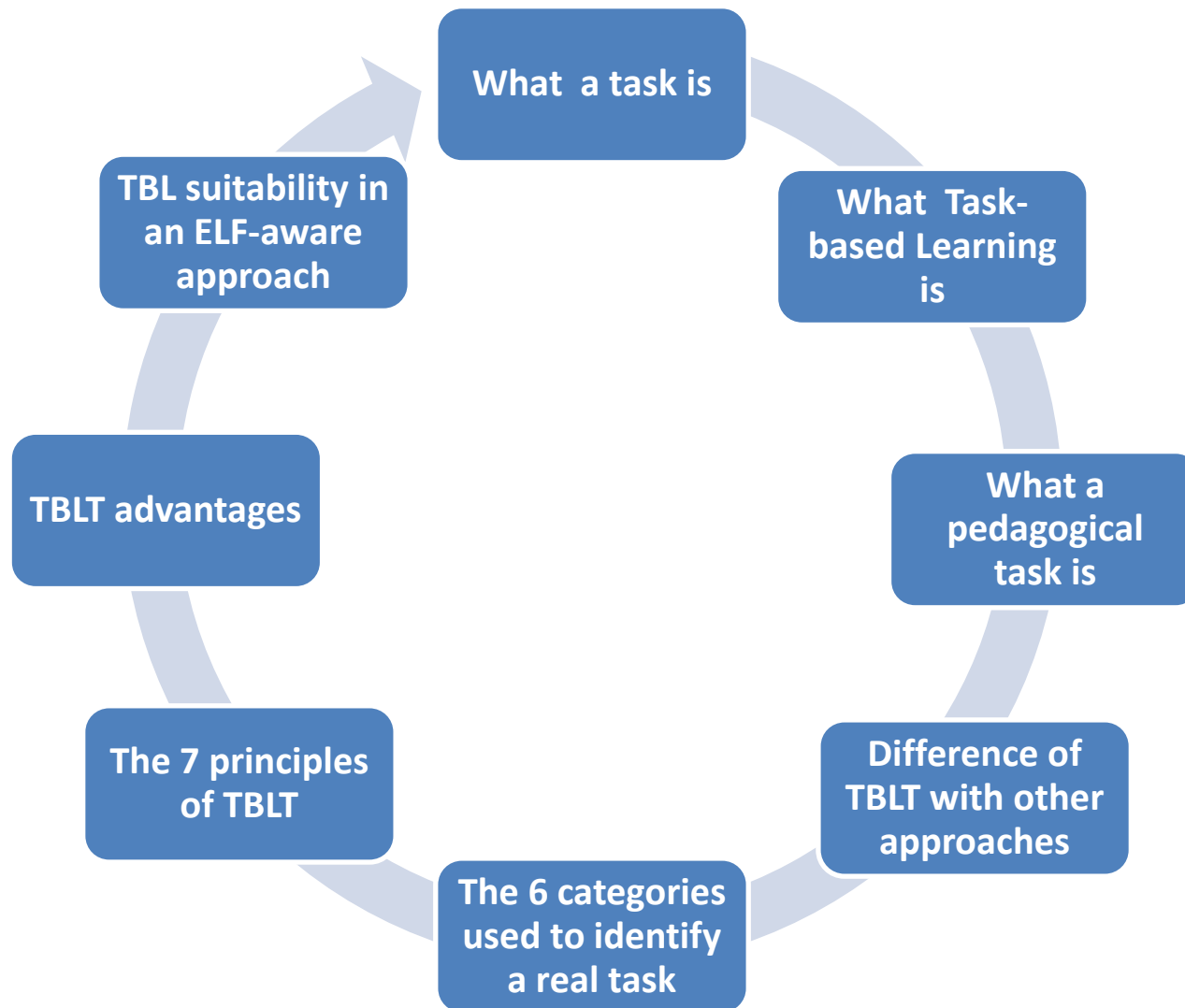
# ACTIVITY 4

Based on your own knowledge and experience as a teacher, as well as what has been discussed in this and other sections you have gone through:

- To what extent is integrating TBL from an **ELF-aware** perspective **appropriate** in your own teaching context? **Why?**
- If it is appropriate, what kind of **ELF-aware tasks** could you employ? Provide one or two brief examples.

Remember—click the **link** under the video to share your views at the **Forum** of this section

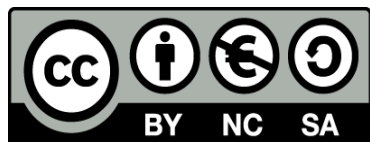
# What have you learnt about TBL?



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