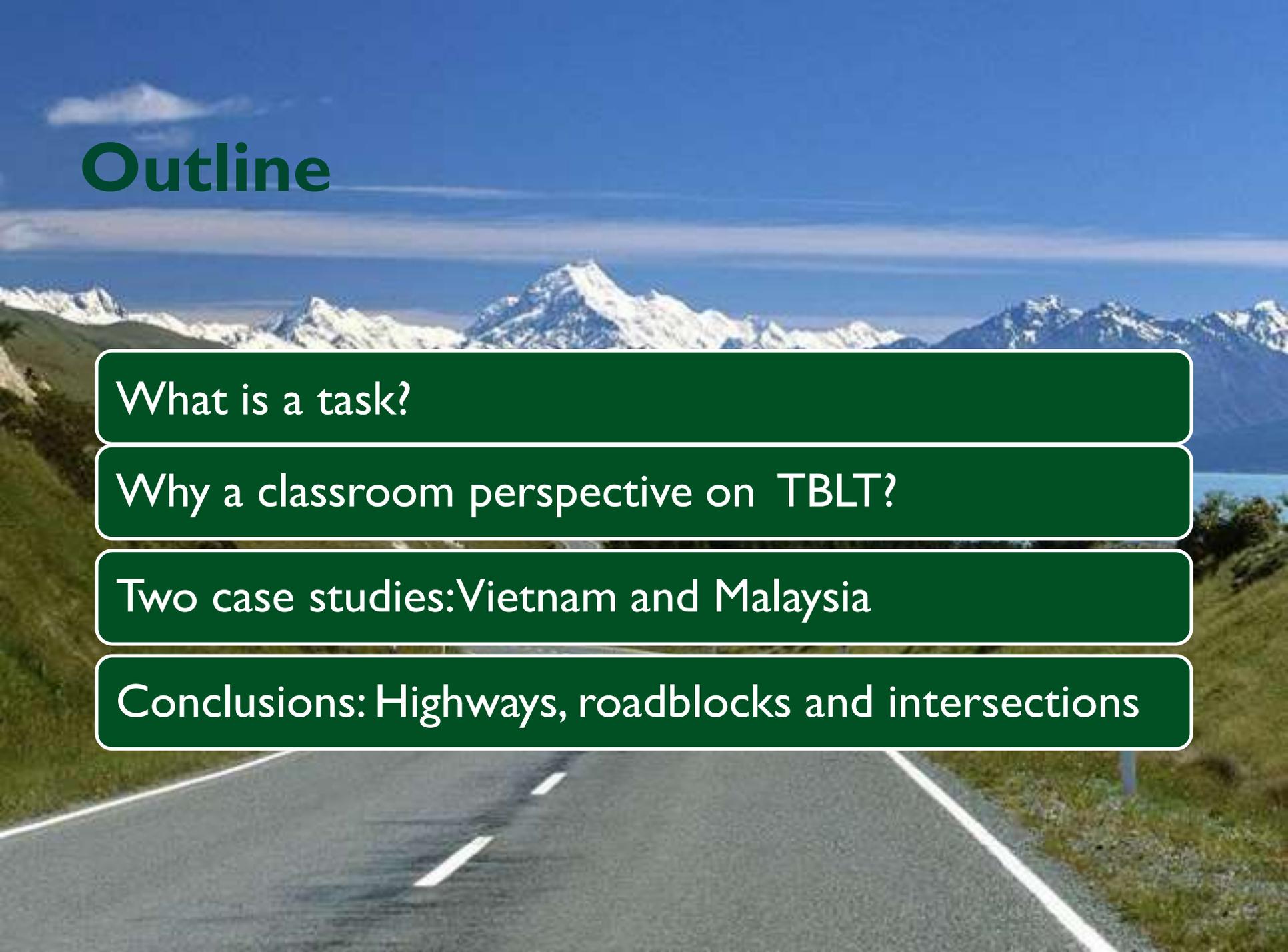


RELC Regional Seminar 2015
'Transcending Boundaries'
Singapore,
20 March 2015

Teaching through tasks: Highways, road blocks and intersections

Jonathan Newton
Victoria University of
Wellington
jonathan.newton@vuw.ac.nz

Outline

The background of the slide is a scenic landscape. In the foreground, a paved road with white dashed and solid lines leads towards the horizon. The middle ground shows rolling green hills. In the background, a range of mountains with significant snow cover is visible under a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds.

What is a task?

Why a classroom perspective on TBLT?

Two case studies: Vietnam and Malaysia

Conclusions: Highways, roadblocks and intersections

WHAT IS A TASK?

A task is a holistic activity which engages language use in order to achieve some non-linguistic outcome while meeting a linguistic challenge, with the overall aim of promoting language learning, through process or product or both.

(Samuda & Bygate, 2008)

Task features (Ellis, 2009)

The primary focus should be on meaning

There should be some kind of gap

Learners need to rely largely on their own resources to complete the activity

The task has a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language

An example of a task (Malaysian secondary school English textbook)

B Plan a trip to the Paya Indah Wetlands.

- 1 Discuss in groups of five:
 - the date and day of the visit, giving reasons for your choice
 - the transport arrangement
 - the cost for each student
 - the activities you intend to do there
 - the preparations you have to make before departure, e.g. letters of permission from the Education Department, parents and guardians, lodging arrangements, etc.
 - the teachers accompanying.
- 2 Present your group's suggested plans to the class.
- 3 Complete the following form.

Itinerary	
Place : _____	
Date of visit : _____	
Time of departure : _____	
Time	Activities



WHY A CLASSROOM PERSPECTIVE ON TASKS?

‘Negotiation: Negotiating what?’

My paper at the 1991 *SEAMEO RELC Conference*

The main point:

Studies of task-based negotiation of meaning to that point were overly concerned with count data and failed to account for task type effects on the *quality* of negotiation.

Negotiation: Negotiating what?

Four adult ESOL learners performing an information gap task

S5 yeah is a reptiles

S6 /dektɪl/ what is this ?

S5 r. e. p.

S6 r. e. p.

S5 t. i. l.

S6 t. i. l.

S8 reptile

S7 ah hang on, r. e. p. t. i. l.

S5 l? e. s. yep reptiles and uh opposite this reptiles...

S6 l. e. s. yep reptiles yes

S7 yes reptiles

S8 reptiles

S7 reptiles

Negotiation: Negotiating what?

The same learners performing a problem-solving task

S7 do you know what is number nine? yeah

S5 this one? dolphins, you know dolphin? .. dolphins
yeah

S7 what animal's that?

S5 yeah sometimes they show it in the performance

S8 like swimming pool

S5 yes' swimming pool they jump up and they catch
the-

S8 -yes-

S5 -ball-

S7 just something fish?

S5 like a shark but they are not dangerous

S8 oh yeah it's funny

Progression in the field

The role of non-linguistic problem solving in language learning
(Prabhu, 1987)

What types of tasks generate the most negotiation of meaning?
(Michael Long, 1981)

How do task implementation variables (e.g. planning time) effect learners' language production? (Foster & Skehan, 1996)

How should tasks be sequenced? (Robinson 2001)

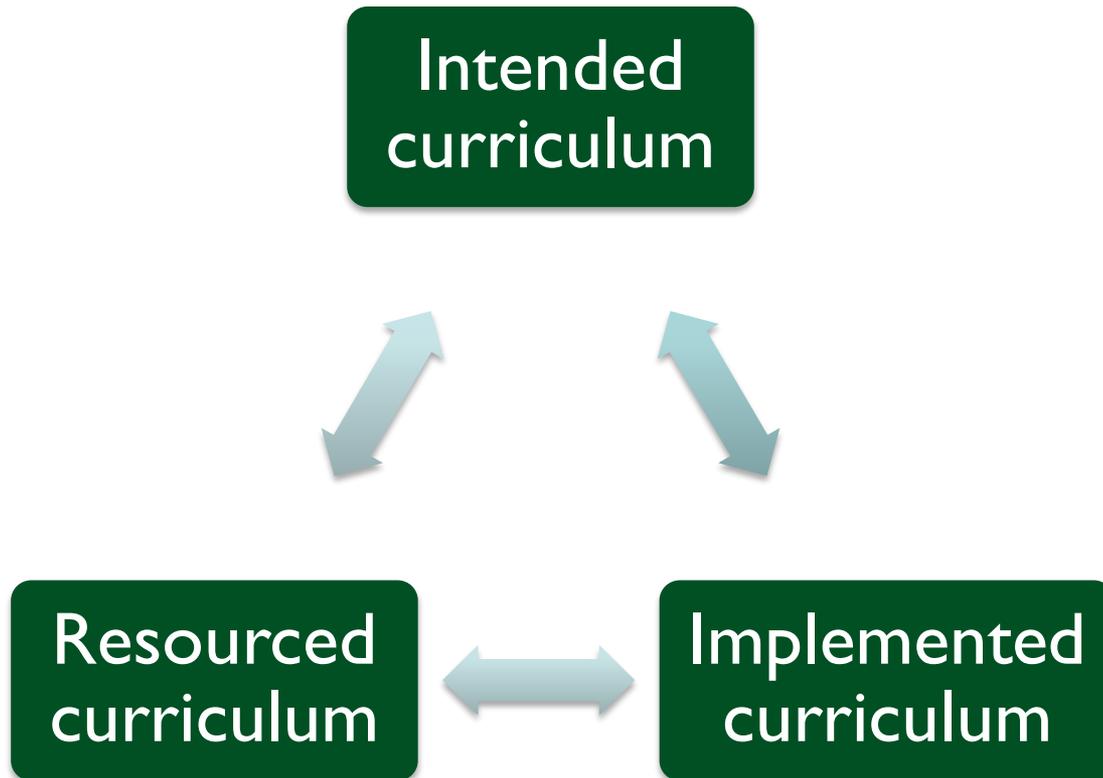
What are teachers doing with tasks in real classrooms? (Van der Branden, 2006)

A CLASSROOM PERSPECTIVE ON TASKS

How are teachers making sense of
tasks in real classrooms?

A situated view of tasks from the
'ground up' - understanding the
evolving shape of task-based teaching in
local contexts

‘While policy makers and education ministries may set directions and form proposals, it is what teachers do in classrooms which directly affects the success of any reform agenda (Carless, 2015)





CAMBRIDGE

Coron
and Jan

Learning

John B.

Task-Based Language Teaching from the Teachers' Perspective

Martin East

Edited by Michael Thomas and Hayo Reinders

Contemporary Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching in Asia

WILEY-BLACKWELL

Research on TBLT in Asia

Growing body of research on TBLT in Asian contexts (Adams & Newton, 2009; Butler, 2011; Thomas & Reinders, 2015)

- **China** (Davison, 2014; Deng & Carless, 2009; Zhang, 2007)
- **Hong Kong** (Adamson and Davison, 2003; Carless, 2002, 2007, 2008; 2015)
- **Japan** (Romanko, 2012)
- **South Korea** (Jeon & Hahn, 2006)
- **Thailand** (McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007)
- **Vietnam** (Barnard & Nguyen, 2010; Nguyen, Newton & Crabbe, 2015)

TBLT in Asia: Research themes

1. Teachers' understanding of TBLT and teachers' belief systems
2. Students' understanding of language learning
3. External context factors (e.g. high stakes exams)

(Butler, 2011; Ellis, 2015)

TWO CASE STUDIES OF TASKS IN ACTION: VIETNAM AND MALAYSIA

Main focus:

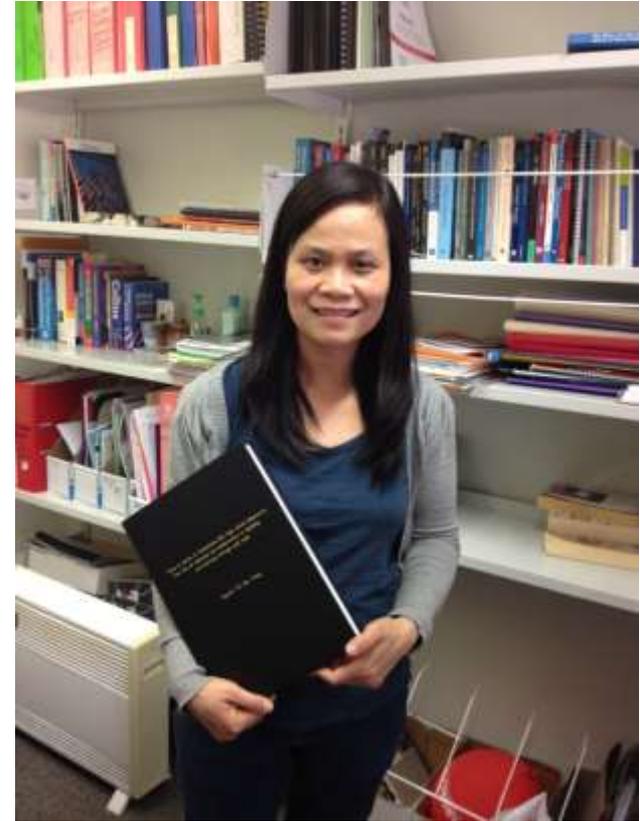
Teachers implementing textbooks

How do teachers implement textbook tasks in their classroom practice and what factors influence their decision making?

In particular, in what ways do teachers **'taskify'** or **'de-task'** textbook activities and why?

Case study I: EFL classes in a Vietnamese High School

(Nguyen, Newton &
Crabbe, to appear
2016)



The school context

Nine classes:

- A prestigious high school in Vietnam, from three grade levels (grades 10, 11 & 12)
- Students aged 15-18

Nine teachers:

- 22-47 years of age
- 11-23 years teaching experience
- Trained in how to use the new textbooks

Curriculum & textbooks designed on TBLT principles

The data set

- Analysis and coding of textbook tasks
- 45 classroom observations (5 per teacher)
 - . video & audio recorded
 - . unstructured field notes
- 60 hours of interviews including stimulated recall

Key questions

1. How closely did the teachers follow the prescribed textbook tasks?

2. In what ways did they diverge from the textbook tasks?

3. Why did they diverge from the textbook tasks?

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Results: Teacher use of textbook tasks

Action	Grade10 (n=3)	Grade11 (n=3)	Grade12 (n=3)	Total (n=9)
Retained	0	5	4	9
Adapted	2	5	4	12
Replaced	19	9	15	43
			Total ->	64

n = number of teachers

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3. **Why** did they diverge from the textbook tasks?

Two aspects of divergence

1. They adapted or replaced textbook tasks
2. They adopted innovative task implementation procedures

ACTION I

ADAPTING OR REPLACING

TEXTBOOK TASKS

Task 2. *Work in groups.*

Read the seat plan. Decide the best seat for each person, using the information in Task 1.

Conduct a conversation like this:

A: *I think Mary should sit in section B.*

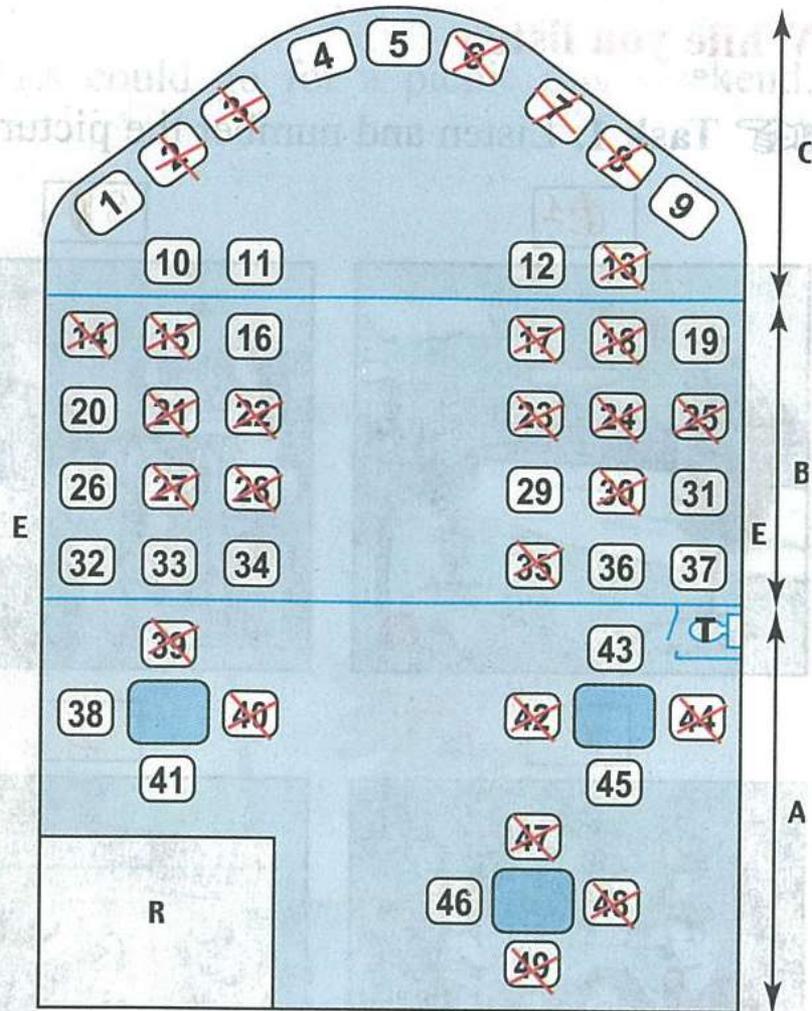
B: *Yes. Put her in seat 16.*

...: *No. That's not a good idea because Susan wants to sit near her.*

...: *OK. Seat 37 would be better.*

.....

*badly
replied by*



Key:

A air-conditioned

B non air-conditioned

C sundeck

E exit

R refreshments

T toilet

X occupied

Task 3. *Work in pairs.* Which seat do you think is the most suitable for you? Why? Use the information in Task 1 as suggestions.

An example

	TASK	Characteristics
Textbook	<p>Read the seat plan and the information about the participants provided. Work in groups, deciding on the best seats for each of the participants</p> <p><i>(Speaking task 2, Unit6, English 10, pp.66-67)</i></p>	<p>Closed</p> <p>Convergent</p> <p>Input-dependent</p> <p>Non-personalized</p> <p>More remote</p>
Teacher	<p>Work in groups of four, discussing what you are going to do in the next 3 days off</p> <p><i>(Teacher 110A)</i></p>	<p>Open</p> <p>Divergent</p> <p>Input-independent</p> <p>Personalized</p> <p>More immediate</p>

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	TASK	Characteristics
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Teacher	<p>Work in groups of four, discussing what you are going to do in the next 3 days off</p> <p><i>(Teacher 110A)</i></p>	<p>Open</p> <p>Divergent</p> <p>Input-independent</p> <p>Personalized</p> <p>More immediate</p>

Task design modifications

	Design feature	Definition
1. Input-dependence	input-dependent	TxB - Task is based on textual input
	input-independent	Tch - Task has little or no textual input
2. Open-endedness (Ellis, 2003)	Convergent	TxB - Task requires students to agree on a solution
	Divergent	Tch - Task does not require students to agree on a solution
3. Solution type (Ellis, 2003)	Closed	TxB- Task requires a single, correct solution (or a limited range of solutions)
	Open	Tch - Task has no pre-determined solution

Design feature	Definition
4. Personalization	non-personalized TxB -Task does not involve students talking about themselves
5. Immediacy	personalized Tch -Students talk about themselves (more) remote Txt -Task does not relate to the students' immediate world. (more) immediate Tch - Task is relevant to the student's world

Summary - teacher & textbook tasks

Design Feature		Teacher		Textbook		χ^2 (1, n =71)	p
		n	%	N	%		
1	Input-independent	28	73.7	8	24.2	17.273	0.000*
	Input-dependent	10	26.3	25	75.8		
2	Divergent	27	71.1	17	51.5	2.861	0.091
	Convergent	11	28.9	16	48.5		
3	Open	32	84.2	20	66.6	5.021	0.025*
	Closed	6	15.8	13	39.4		
4	Personalized	29	76.3	14	42.4	8.494	0.004*
	Non-personalized	9	23.7	19	57.6		
5	More immediate	28	73.7	11	33.3	11.616	0.001*
	More remote	10	26.3	22	66.7		
6	More situational authenticity	30	78.9	16	48.5	7.184	0.007*
	More interactional authenticity	8	21.1	17	51.5		

*p < 0.05

Inter-coder reliability: k = 0.966 for teacher tasks

k = 0.950 for textbook tasks

Key questions

1. How closely did the teachers follow the prescribed textbook tasks?

2. In what ways did they diverge from the textbook tasks?

3. **Why** did they diverge from the textbook tasks?

Why?

Data from stimulated recall sessions and interviews.

From this data a corpus of key words the teachers used to explain their task choices was compiled and analysed.

The socio-affective dimension of teachers' talk about tasks

<i>Teacher 110A</i>	Fun, interesting, relaxing, flexible, graceless, meaningless, worthwhile, motivating, close to student life, 'hot', instant, immediate, sad, creative, understanding, real
<i>Teacher 210B</i>	Dry, poor, heavy, monotonous, relaxing, enjoyable, sad, practical, too specific, free, new, refreshing, 'out of textbook', passive, active, creative, cooperative, (un)willing, fun; student expectations, interests, likes and dislikes
<i>Teacher 310C</i>	Confusing, dry, complex, tiring, too heavy, boring, not worth, suitable, relevant, engagingly, wholeheartedly; student likes & dislikes, student psychology, emotional feelings, interests, age, classroom atmosphere, student interests, student life

The teacher's view

“This textbook task? Boring and graceless! I used this task before, students were not interested, not eager, not enthusiastic; the atmosphere was sad; students only stood up and talked about seats for certain people on the boat, not much language produced. Students used Vietnamese to complete the task as quickly as possible.

If given a chance to talk freely about what they are going to do, students will search for more words, they will talk more, talk better and it will be more enjoyable.”(110A)

Back to question 2

1. How closely did the teachers follow the prescribed textbook tasks?

2. In what ways did they diverge from the textbook tasks?

3. **Why** did they diverge from the textbook tasks?

ACTION 2
ADOPTING INNOVATIVE
TASK IMPLEMENTATION
PROCEDURES

Teachers consistently adopted a **rehearsal to performance** model of task management.

i.e. learners rehearsed in pairs/groups and then performed in front of the class.

Why?

The teacher's view

“Public performance is the stage where students appear, they want to be good in other people’s eyes, they have to make learning endeavours while they are doing the task in their own group, ... and some do want to impress the audience through their presentation. Otherwise, you know, it’s not easy, because no oral task or exams, or tests, no speaking outside the classroom, a shared LI in the classroom, etc.”

Learner performance of a task

The task:

Discuss your plans for your future and specifically your career plans



Student rehearsal in pairs

S1: What do you want to be?

S2: I want to be a teacher?

S1: Why?

S2: **Neu toi tro thanh mot giao vien** (If I were a teacher,)

S1: If I were a teacher (*gives the English expression for the meaning S1 wants to express*)

S2: **If I were a teacher**, I would teach students many erm ... **kien thuc la chi?** (what is the English word for 'kien thuc'?)

S1: Knowledge

S2: **Knowledge**, erm ... **good knowledge** and erm ... I want to erm **gan gui la chi?** (what is the English word for 'gan gui'?)

Contd..

S1: **Closer**

S2: I want to closer to my students, and erm ... **tam su la chi?** (what is the English word for 'tam su')?

S1: Whisper?

S2: Khong phai, do la thi tham roi (No, that's speaking in a soft voice!)

(Laughter)

S2: Cai chi ma con .. con (Something sounds like /kn/ .. /kn/)
confide, confide in erm... What do you want to be?

Public performance

S1: Hi, N.

S2: Hi, H.

S1: What do you want to be?

S2: I want to be a teacher.

S1: Erm...Why?

S2: Because I like it! (*big laughter from the audience*)

S1: Could you show me the reasons?

S2: Because if I were a teacher I would teach my students many
erm good_knowledge and erm erm I can confide in with
my students

S1: Could you tell me some good points of the job?

S2: A good point of a teacher is to teach children, and bad point is
low salary. And, H, what erm what do you want to be?

Public performance

S1: Hi, N.

S2: Hi, H.

S1: What do you want to be?

S2: I want to be a teacher.

S1: Erm...Why?

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S1: Could you tell me some good points of the job?

S2: A good point of a teacher is to teach children, and bad point is low salary. And, H, what erm what do you want to be?

Main claims

1. Engagement in rehearsal fosters collaborative self assessment and improvement. It is a powerful learning process
2. Personal performance is a high motivator in language learning
3. A task is not a script but a vehicle for creative performance opportunities that are personal and linked.

The learners LI – a roadblock?

In this classroom, the first language was a powerful mediating tool which the learners used **to resource** their second language performance.

But the value of LI was only realized through the motivating energy created by the anticipated performance.

Three insights

1. To fully exploit learning opportunities latent in tasks, learners need to be actively managing their learning.
2. When they do so, they are ‘better equipped, and therefore more likely, to manage learning opportunities **outside** the classroom.’ (Crabbe, 2007: 120)
3. Tasks usually offer many more learning opportunities than are exploited.

Conclusions – the Vietnam study

1. TBLT appears to be alive and well in the Vietnamese high school we investigated.
2. Teachers were highly *agentive* in their engagement with the textbook.
3. They frequently diverged from textbook tasks making decisions which were *local* and *situated*.
4. When diverging from the textbook they showed a strong preference for tasks that were more *open-ended, personal & real* to the students.

Study 2: Malaysia



Key questions

1. The *resourced* curriculum

- What affordances do activities in Malaysian primary school ESL textbooks offer for task-based teaching?

2. The *implemented* curriculum

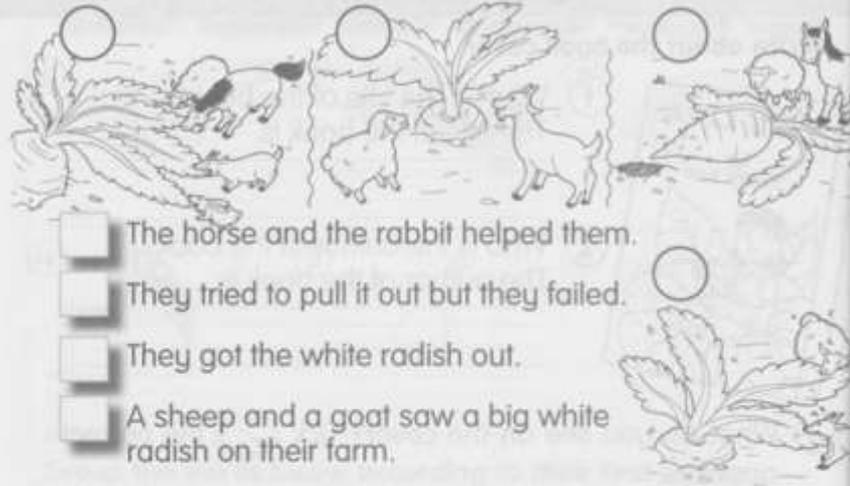
- Do implementation decisions by teachers 'taskify' or 'de-task' activities from the textbook?

The data

- Detailed analysis and coding of the activities in four sample units from the Years 2 & 4 textbooks (completed)
- Observations in Malaysian primary school classrooms (underway)
- Interviews with teachers and pupils (underway)

A task-like activity (from the Yr 4 KSSR textbook)

Listen to the story. Number the pictures.
Number the sentences.



The horse and the rabbit helped them.
 They tried to pull it out but they failed.
 They got the white radish out.
 A sheep and a goat saw a big white radish on their farm.

Write the sentences in the correct order.

① Once upon a time, _____

② _____

③ _____

④ At last, _____

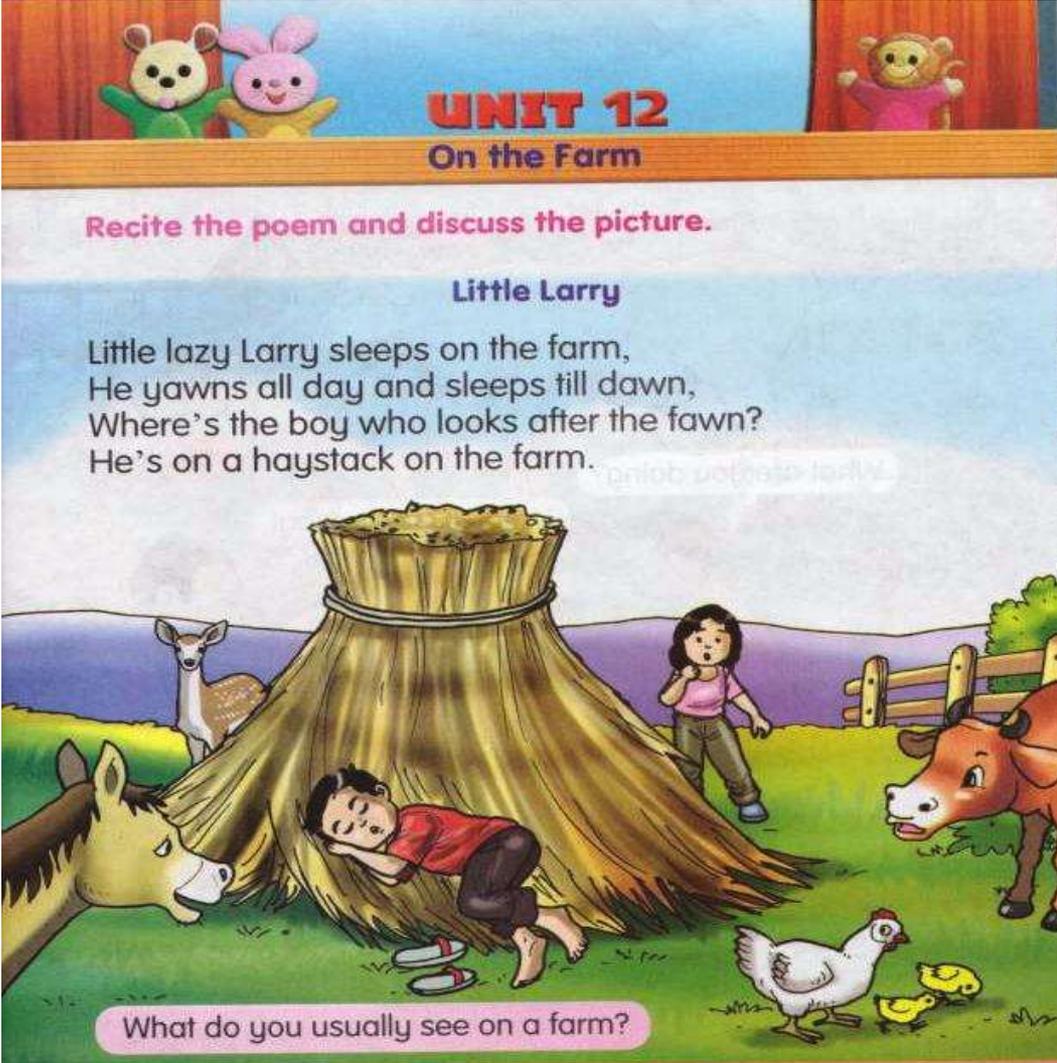
2.2.3
2.1.1(c)

Read the story "The White Radish" from the textbook. Ask the pupils to number the pictures in the correct order. Read the sentences and ask the pupils to number them in the correct sequence.
TR pages 26, 27 and 28

20

A meaningful activity?

(from the Yr
4 KSSR
textbook)



UNIT 12
On the Farm

Recite the poem and discuss the picture.

Little Larry

Little lazy Larry sleeps on the farm,
He yawns all day and sleeps till dawn,
Where's the boy who looks after the fawn?
He's on a haystack on the farm.

What do you usually see on a farm?

A language practice exercise

(from the Yr 4 KSSR textbook)

Phonemic Awareness

Say the sounds - ue, aw
Say the words.

The Ball in the Air

Join It

Sound the letters in each word.

Beware the Claw

saw	2	paw	4
5	6	clue	glue
straw	10	yawn	
13	14		16

jaw... 'j' 'aw'

blue
clue
glue
sue
true

claw
dawn
draw
fawn
jaw
lawn
paw
raw
saw
straw
yawn

1.1.1(g)
2.1.1(a)
2.1.2
2.1.3

Teacher's Notes

In **The Ball in the Air**, introduce the phonemes /u:/ for **ue** and /ɔ:/ for **aw**.
In **Join It**, divide the pupils into groups. Each pupil joins the sound cards to form a word. Then the pupil blends the word. Award points to the group that finishes first.
In **Beware the Claw**, divide the pupils into two groups. A member of the first group picks a card. The pupil flips the chosen card, reads and segments the word. Award marks for the correct answers. If the pupil chooses a card with the picture of a claw on it, no marks are awarded. A member of the second group then plays.

All page 72

94

Initial findings

1. The Malaysian primary textbook offers a *limited* starting point for teachers interested in teaching through tasks.
2. Many activities fell short of ‘tasks’, notably because they lacked a *communicative outcome* & structured opportunities to engage *cognitive processes*. i.e. they were typified by lower order thinking skills

On-going research focus

This raises two questions:

1. To what extent do teachers intuitively ‘taskify’ non-task activities or ‘de-task’ task-like activities in the textbook, and why?
2. What impact would *raising teacher awareness* of the design features of tasks have on teacher’s implementation decisions?



CONCLUDING COMMENTS: HIGHWAYS, ROAD BLOCKS AND INTERSECTIONS

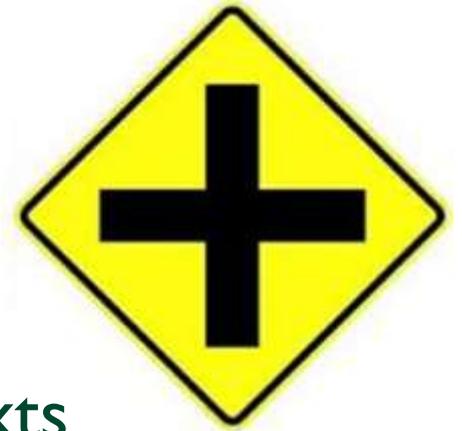


Highways

Insights from these classrooms

1. Teachers in both contexts engaged with textbook tasks in complex, context-sensitive ways.
2. Understanding task-related decision-making by teachers is fertile ground for research.
3. Such research offers an avenue for dialogue between policy makers, curriculum/textbook designers, teachers, teacher educators and TBTL theorists, leading, ultimately, to better alignment between policy aspirations and classroom outcomes.

Intersections – transcending boundaries



TBLT is a broad approach

- Able to be adapted to suit local contexts
- Meaning + form
- Synonymous with CLIL
- Shares with the language arts an emphasis on *performance, creativity and purposeful activity*
- Valuable for promoting ‘HOTS’

Roadblocks?



Roadblocks



1. The legacy of CLT

A task = a communication task \therefore Task = language production.

2. 'A task' (countable) – the task as a stand-alone entity

The result: Insufficient attention to task cycles (Willis & Willis, 2007)

Oxford Handbooks for Language Teachers

DAVE WILLIS & JANE WILLIS

Doing Task-based Teaching

Roadblocks



3. Division of labour

NS teachers teach with 'tasks'; the local teachers teach the 'hard stuff'

Task = 'fun' activity & so trivialized

Back to the conference theme of ‘**transcending
boundaries**’

CONCLUSIONS

What boundaries need transcending to address the roadblocks? How?



Gordian Knot. Carrara Marble "Ordinario", Carved at Arco Arte, Carrara October 2004

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