Task Based Learning

Contens

TBL Methodology - "What is Task Based Learning"?

Task based learning is a different way to teach languages. It can help the student by placing her in a situation like in the real world. A situation where oral communication is essential for doing a specific task. Task based learning has the advantage of getting the student to use her skills at her current level. To help develop language through its use. It has the advantage of getting the focus of the student toward achieving a goal where language becomes a tool, making the use of language a neccissity.

Why choose TBL as language teaching method? We have to ask ourselves that question, because if we, as language teachers, don't know which method we are teaching according to or if we do not think about teaching methodology in relation to the different types of learners, to levels, to materials and last but not least to the learning processes of the individual learner, we might as well not teach!

Therefore, when we choose TBL, there should be a clear and defined purpose of that choice. Having chosen TBL as language teaching method, the teacher thereby recognizes that "teaching does not and cannot determine the way the learner's language will develop" and that "teachers and learners cannot simply choose what is to be learned". "The elements of the target language do not simply slot into place in a predictable order" (Peter Skehan 19). This means that we, as teachers, have to let go of the control of the learning process, as if there ever was one! We must accept that we cannot control what each individual learner has learnt after for example two language lessons and as Peter Skehan says "instruction has no effect on language learning" (18).

In TBL the learner should be exposed to as much of the foreign language as possible in order to merely observe the foreign language, then hypothesize over it, and that is individually, and finally experiment with it.

One clear purpose of choosing TBL is to increase learner activity; TBL is concerned with learner and not teacher activity and it lies on the teacher to produce and supply different tasks which will give the learner the opportunity to experiment spontaneously, individually and originally with the foreign language. Each task will provide the learner with new personal experience with the foreign language and at this point the teacher has a very important part to play. He or she must take the responsibility of the consciousness raising process, which must follow the experimenting task activities. The consciousness raising part of the TBL method is a crucial for the success of TBL, it is here that the teacher must help learners to recognise differences and similarities, help them to "correct, clarify and deepen" their perceptions of the foreign language. (Michael Lewis 15). All in all, *TBL is language learning by doing.*

"TASKS are activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome" As defined by Willis. That means a task can be anything from doing a puzzle to making an airline reservation.
A Task-Based approach to Language

• allows for a needs analysis to be matched to identified student needs

• is supported by the research findings of classroom-centered language learning

• allows evaluation to be based on testing referring to task-based criterion

• allows for form-focussed instruction

So we should select topics that will motivate learners, engage their attention and promote their language development as efficiently as possible.
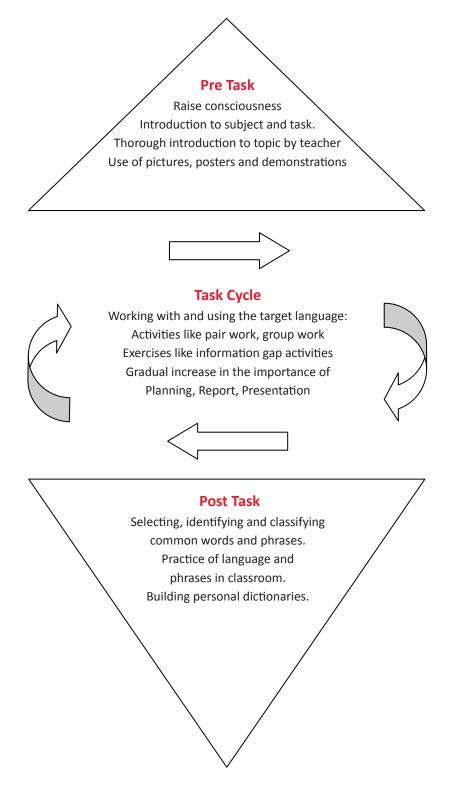
What are the advantages of TBL

1. Task based learning is useful for moving the focus of the learning process from the teacher to the student.

2. It gives the student a different way of understanding language as a tool instead of as a specific goal.

3. It can bring teaching from abstract knowledge to real world application.

4. A Task is helpful in meeting the immediate needs of the learners and provides a framework for creating classes, interesting and able to address to the students needs.

The structural framework of TBL

Just in order to see the TBL cycle, we are enclosing the following framework:

Pre Task

Raise consciousness
Introduction to subject and task.
Thorough introduction to topic by teacher
Use of pictures, posters and demonstrations

Task Cycle

Working with and using the target language:
Activities like pair work, group work
Exercises like information gap activities
Gradual increase in the importance of
Planning, Report, Presentation

Post Task

Selecting, identifying and classifying
common words and phrases.
Practice of language and
phrases in classroom.
Building personal dictionaries.

Let us have a brief explanation about the different phases:

The pre-task phase introduces the class to the topic and the task, activating topic-related words and phrases

The task cycle offers learners the chance to use whatever language they already know in order to carry out the task, and then to improve the language, under teacher guidance, while planning their reports of the task. In the task stage the students complete the task in pairs and the teacher listens to the dialogues. Then the teacher helps to correct the completed tasks in oral or written form. One of the pairs performs their dialogue in front of the class and once the task has been completed the students will hear the native speaking teachers repeat the same dialogue so they can compare it with their own.

The last phase in the framework, language focus, allows a closer study of some of the specific features occurring in the language used during the task cycle.

The teaching techniques required for task-based learning are not very different from those of ordinary language teaching. The differences lie in the ordering and weighting of activities and in the fact that there is a greater amount of student activity, and less direct, up-from teaching.

Issues concerning task based learning

It is important to be aware of some pitfalls concerning the use of task based learning. Since it encourages students to use their own langauge and vocabulary, it is neccessary for the teacher to help students expand these. Otherwise students will not learn new phrases or words by them selves, but only increase skills in using the language the student already possesses.

This can also be solved by having students change who they work with, so that the stronger students can work with the students who are at a lower level. Where the stronger student should be told to focus on using more advanced words and phrases. This does not help the stronger students though, for that they will need the aid of the teacher.

Another very important thing to remember is that even though after the task cycle is complete, the learning process is not. The evaluation part is critical for the students to become selfaware of the learning they have just gone through. Put crudely there are two parts in the learning process of task based learning of equal import. The first is to do the work and go through the tasks, the second is to get the student to think about what it is he or she has just gone through. If you the teacher do not follow up in the post task, half of the task based learning process is wasted.

TBL activities - examples

Good advice

- Use the foreign language as much as possible.

- Use only mother tongue when necessary for explanation of exercises.

- The pre-task is meant to help create a good atmosphere for learning without anxiety. Give words and supporting sentences for students to use.

- The pre-task must supply words, phrases, ideas to support the individual student in the main task.

- Remember that a pre-task can be anything from for example:

  o   audio text
  o   a video clip
  o   a brainstorm activity
  o   a small exercise (cloze, cross word etc.)
  o   photos (what do you see?)
  o   webpage (what do you see?)

- Anything that will promote the foreign language and set the minds of the students into a certain context and atmosphere.

- The main task must facilitate a process where each student can activate and use his/her own strategies.

- Teacher role in the main task: monitoring the processes of the students working with the main task.

- Remember the importance of the last step, the consciousness raising activities:

  o   Students repeat their process and their work with the main task – must be per-formed in class – the process will make students realize that language is diverse and that many different structures and words give meaning and can be used for communication.

  o   The teacher **must** pick up and draw attention to relevant grammatical and se-mantic points in this last phase of the TBL-cycle.

Beginner's level - English for special purposes – technical English

Tools: "What's this device?"

Pre-task

Ask students to give names of tools. Write them on the blackboard. Add also standard sentences such as "this is a hammer", "this is a spanner" etc.

Bring a tool box and show real tools to the student. Say or make students say "This is a hammer" and so on.

If you can, show a short instruction video, where some typical tools are used and where the language is not too difficult. Let students add new names to the tools on the blackboard.

Prepare a memory game with selected tools (10-15). The memory game must consist of pictures and written names of tools.

Split the class into groups of 3-4 students and let two groups play against each other in the memory game. Do not play the game with only two students in the game. This may create a lot of fear and anxiety for the individual student who cannot remember all the tools and will do the contrary of what is intended with the pre-task – namely to create a good and safe learning environment.

Ruler		**Hammer**	
Screwdriver		**Saw**	
Pliers		**Tester**	
Jack		**Drill**	

Follow the memory game with a "What's this device" exercise for the whole group. This exercise should be run by the teacher.

Let the students see one sentence at a time. They should read and understand each sentence. Let one student read a sentence out aloud, and let others help in the translation, so that this becomes a joint exercise.

When all sentences have been exposed, the students can hopefully guess the name of the device/tool.

Main Task

What' this device?

1. This device is longer than it is wide

2. This device can be held in your hand

3. This device is made of wood and metal

4. This device can have many different sizes

5. This device is used to put other things in place

6. You have to use energy for this device

7. You have to lift your arm and make it fall to use this device

8. You need this device to put something on the wall

9. You use this device to hammer on things.

Try to guess the name of this device.

The student should now be split into groups of two-three people. Each group must now produce their own "What's this device" exercise. They have to choose a tool from the memory game. The teacher should leave help-sentences and phrases on the blackboard for students to use if they need to. The teacher monitors the process of the production in the different groups and helps only when it is really needed. The student exercise should be written down, so that it can be used as either an oral exercise or a reading exercise. When all groups have finished an exercise and are satisfied with the result, the groups must test the exercise with other groups.

Language consciousness activities

When the groups have tried out their exercise several times with different groups, the teacher must ask for the attention in the class room again and take over the process. The teacher must now point out a group and ask the group to repeat their exercise and show each sentence on the black board. The aim is to give full attention to the language production of this particular group, to look at the sentences, the choice of words and the grammatical structures. At this point the teacher can pick out good examples from the student production and can at the same time open up for specific grammatical points. Other groups can add suggestions and ask questions.

This is also the time and place for the teacher to draw attention to some things that have been monitored by the teacher during the group work. This activity should be repeated and at least two or three groups should be asked to present their exercise. In this way teaching grammar becomes a lively and relevant activity for the students, because they have all delivered and taken part in the examples that are used for explaining grammatical rules.

Intermediate level – working with texts

You can easily use the method TBL for working with texts at an intermediate level. All you have to do is to be creative and to simply think of a way to turn text reading into a task for the students. Have a pair of scissors, glue, photos maybe and an open and creative mind ready.

Pre-task

- audio text

- a video clip

- a brainstorm activity

- a small exercise (cloze, cross word etc.)

- photos (what do you see?)

- webpage (what do you see?)

- matching exercise with new and difficult vocabulary from the text

The most important thing in the pre-task is to focus on the preparation of the main task. To prepare the students for learning new vocabulary, new phrases, new contexts and areas of investigation. The pre-task should always make students feel ready and comfortable before working with the main task and when working with texts, it is always important to include the main theme of the text and new vocabulary from the text in the phase of the pre-task.

Main Task

Non fiction, example:

Split the text into different sections and give the sections numbers. The sections must be divided according to the content. You must hand the text to the students with the marked sections and numbers. You must also hand out another piece of paper with a specific format, like the one below.

You must read the text and fill in the format. Look at the sections in the text and write down the most important information from each section in the first column.

Write down your own experience, opinion, knowledge about the information you find in the text in the second column.

The text	Your own opinion/experience/ knowledge

You can let the students work together or alone when they read and fill in the format. When everybody has finished with the text and the format, students should be given time to tell each other what they have chosen to write down in the format.

The motivating element here is that it becomes a choice of the student which information to put into the format and that each student will have to make a case for his/her choice when talking about the text in class.

When students tell each other what they have chosen to put down in the format, they are also given a time to work with difficult words and phrases from the text. Here they can ask each other about meanings without being exposed to the attention of the whole class and they can ask the teacher about words and phrases that they did not understand fully in the reading process.

The teacher can walk around in the class room and monitor the students reading and filling in the format and the teacher can listen to the students when they talk about they own work with the text. This phase leaves the teacher with a chance and opportunity to listen in and pick up good examples, but more importantly, to pick up problems and misunderstandings related to the text and the specific language.

Language consciousness activities

You can choose to let different students write their own result from the format on the black board. It should never be only one student alone at the black board. It must always be more than one student who delivers the examples for the consciousness raising activities. Remember that it is always motivating to see for yourself what other students have come up with – especially when you have chosen your own answers for specific reasons and put an effort into it. You must use that feeling as motivation factor in your classes.

You can also choose to do the same activity as an oral activity, where you ask students to read what they have written down in their format. You must then yourself write down some relevant examples on the black board.

It is important to pick up the relevant grammatical points in this phase of the TBL cycle. This is a crucial moment for documenting the necessity of extra work with specific grammatical elements for the students at this level. And you have the full attention of the students, because they have delivered the examples that you work with jointly in class for language consciousness raising activities.

Fiction – short stories, example of:

When you work with fiction and if a text has a straight forward plot, it is easy for you as a teacher to clip up the text and turn the text reading process itself into a common task between a group of students.

The following example is meant to be a main task, but can be expanded with a task like the one described about, using a format for students to fill in. Obviously the following example should not stand alone, but should be included into a full TBL-cycle, like the one described above.

- Divide the text into small sections – logical in relation to the story plot.

- Take a pair of scissors and cut up the text into the sections you have chosen. It should not be more than 4-6 sections.

- Mark each section with letters or numbers.

- Divide the class into groups that match the number of sections.

- Lay the pieces of text (the different cut up sections) on the table, text down, in front of each group and let each student in a group pick up one of the pieces.

- Ask the students to read their own piece of text by themselves.

- When all students in a group have read their own piece of text, they must give tell the rest of the group what the text says.

- Everybody in a group must tell about his/her piece of text.

- The group must now try to put the story into the right sequence.

Short story   Adjectives/descriptive language

Main character	
Other characters	
Setting 1	
Setting 2	
Problems/Themes	