

Newsletter No. 3

Workshop in July

“The Neuroscience of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Tips for Making Your Own”

Date: July 9th, 2022 10:30-12:00, 13:00-14:30

Venue: NUFs Meieki Campus (BIZrium Nagoya)

Presenter: Curtis Kelly (Professor emeritus of Kansai University)

Bio: Having written textbooks for Cambridge, Pearson, National Geographic Learning, MacMillan, and other publishers, the presenter has developed a set of key principles for TBLT activity design. The principles provide guidance in engaging students, controlling language targets, and solving typical class management problems, such as keeping learners in the target language.



Abstract:

Last year, listening to Neuroscientist David Badre on the Brain Science Podcast, I had a revelation in regard to Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT). I found out what makes it so special, and more than an “alternative” way to teach English, a “mandatory one. We will start by trying a TBLT activity, and then analyze key principles in its design and how TBLT fits our brains. Then everyone will design their own TBLT tasks and try them out.

The number of participants: 36

1. Interesting activities you might want to use in your class. Why?

- TBLT activities where students have to figure out how to do the activities in the language they want to acquire with minimal instructions.
- I enjoyed the activity of ‘Killer’. I felt good when I completed it. And I want my students to have the feeling of achievement.
- Task-Based Language Teaching itself. ‘What’s in the bag’ activity was very convenient and easy for the beginners and it is very motivating that students can get the real outcome. I will try it on Monday.

- In the task, students/learners will be active to say something. I found it is students-centered, they will know the gap of their language and target language without any punishment. I think it is a key to develop language ability.
- We tried making our own task-based activities. It seemed difficult at first but it was fun working in pairs. Trying other teachers' activities was a lot of fun and got a lot of ideas.



2. What you learned from today's workshop

- Learning by doing: In the afternoon session, we made an activity which include main characteristics. It took me longer time than Prof. Kelly had expected. However, he didn't give up pushing the people who struggled doing and gave us extra time. In the end, most of us finished doing. I want to give the same learning experiences to my students. I'd like to have a strong belief of learning by doing and high expectation toward my students.
- TBLT is not option, but mandatory. Knowledge, including vocabulary and grammar, is not doing. Learning is by doing; i.e. medical practice. It trains cognitive control, orchestrating our goals into actions, and many more.
- I like the concept of 'learning by doing'. Using language is not just about knowledge, but language is something to utilize, so from now on, I want to always remind myself of this 'learning by doing' whenever I teach.
- It was the first time to make my own TBLT work sheet. When I used it and tested it, I found more information and styles that I need to change to make it better. It was fun anyway.
- I'd never been aware of the idea of 'learning by doing', and at first I had thought it would be difficult in certain classes such as reading. But in fact, I planned an activity for a reading class with a partner today and I now think it is possible to apply the idea into any classes.

TBLT Lesson Design Principles Checklist

For Main Activity:

1. Make activities that PULL not PUSH
2. Design the task so that no one fails, no one left silent. (Multiple tasks that get harder)
3. Don't trust PPP. (PPP means: Present, Practice, & Perform)

For Language Scaffolding

4. Provide just enough language, not the whole paradigm.
5. Offer negotiation of meaning language too. (What? Do you mean....?)
6. Use Effective Learning principles. (Emotion, repetition, deep processing, novelty)
7. Use Minimal instructions. ("Read this. Match. Check the boxes.")
8. Don't skip the Pilot.

3. Questions and Answers

Thank you so much everyone for your warm comments. I almost cried. Well, my eyes got wet. I am so grateful to Chihaya and Kazu, and of course you for being such a fine audience again and again. Ten years! I hope to meet again, but if not, please subscribe to our free magazine that connects brain science to language teaching.

<https://www.mindbrained.org/subscribe/>

My true passion is the brain more than teaching methods, but the two are connected.



Q (1): Two video clips you showed us were very moving and I'd like to appreciate it if you share the list of the clips with us.

Here is my folder. Enjoy. Watch the first two and #5 for sure.

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/dgtakljwj55fmmt/AAC7WJ-TY4rqr17s1F4cv7YOa?dl=0>

Q (2): How do you scaffold the materials so that students can succeed, especially when many students expect PPP lessons or are afraid of making mistakes?

This is an excellent question. I found that when I used these materials with 1st yr Kandai Shogakubu students, 70 per class, it helped to start with a couple very easy mysteries and for me to do the first task with a student as an example. The mysteries I gave you were more complicated. Also, if you look in the handout there is a "Field Work Starter" that helps the students start the mystery.

Once my students got the hand of it, they never wanted to go back to regular study materials. Ever. There were a few students who were struggling or quiet but I put them in groups of 3 or 4 with partners who were skilled at bringing them out. We also changed partners every week.

Of course, these are not your students and yours might be different.

Q (3): How can one implement this method when the school's curriculum is focused on having students pass exams?

Excellent question, and one I think you have to answer. My Japanese wife is a public jr high teacher, and for her classes, even What's in the Bag was not usable. A teacher giving something to students is not allowed. But she found other simple tasks related to the lesson she could use. Just little tasks. It's hard, but please develop some and share them with us.

Q (4): I didn't understand why PPP is not an effective way to learn or teach.

Good question. I won't say it is always ineffective, but lots of research shows that the gains might be greater sometimes, but usually temporary and only when measured by related tests.

The main problem is that our brains are built to only learn things it needs, and needs at that moment. So, we must create language needs to have that teachable moment. That does not happen when you have students memorize vocabulary (present), without them having an immediate need to know that vocabulary, and then do exercises (practice), and only then do a performance task that creates the language need. Then again, if PPP is mixed up with the performance instead of being done in separate steps, or the performance is done first to create the language need, I think it works.

Here is what Michael Long wrote, though it is a bit dense. By Focus on Form, or "implicit" he means TBLT and Focus on Forms, or "explicit" he means PPP.

Focus on form works, and the gains it produces in the learning of grammar and vocabulary are not statistically significantly smaller than those achieved by traditional focus on forms,... The results from a combined total of well over 140 empirical studies and several statistical meta-analyses of the issue to date in these two areas alone should suffice to meet critics' demand for "compelling evidence."

Results show that explicit procedures often do as well as, and sometimes slightly better than, incidental, online focus on form, but as noted above, usually only with simple linguistic targets, only on immediate posttests, and only using discrete-point measures, and that improvements achieved that way tend to deteriorate over time (Doughty, Reference Doughty, Doughty and Long2003). In contrast, while the jury is still out, results to date suggest that incidentally and/or implicitly learned L2 knowledge is more durable and tends to increase over time

AR Discussion

Date: July 9th, 2022, 14:45-17:30

Venue: Meieki Campus, MW 10, 11, 12

Title: Group discussion on action research

Advisers: Kazuyoshi Sato, Duane Kindt, Kevin Ottoson (NUFS)

The number of participants: 14

