How a task-based approach fosters critical thinking

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Overview

- 1. Critical thinking

- 2. Task-based language learning

- 3. Example: academic discussions course

- 4. Conclusion

- 5. Q & A

1. Critical thinkers …

- 1. raise vital questions and problems (clearly and precisely);

- 2. interpret relevant information (effectively);

- 3. reach well-reasoned conclusions (against relevant criteria);

- 4. recognize and assess assumptions & implications (open-mindedly);

- 5. produce solutions (collaboratively and effectively).

(adapted from Paul and Elder, 2008)

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- activities have a clearly-defined **outcome other than the use of language**, where …

- learners have to rely largely on their **own resources**, and …

- the primary **focus** is on **meaning**.

(adapted from Ellis, 2009)

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- learners have to rely largely on their **own resources** [2,4], and …

- the primary **focus** is on **meaning** [1,5].

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Students **identify and learn** the **language they need themselves,** by:

1. "comprehending input (i+1)", (Krashen, 1982)

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2. "noticing differences" (from own way), (Schmidt, 1990)

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3. "negotiating meaning" (Long, 1983)
   by "pushing" themselves to use new language. (Swain, 1985)

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- … authenticity [1,2],

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3. Academic Discussions course

Participants (C1-level):

1. research topic (e.g. ProCon.org, Debatepedia),
 share in groups, and discuss (recorded).

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2. listen to own and C2-speaker discussions, noting any
 "useful language", then compare in class.

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3. give & receive feedback on performance, and do
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4. write argumentative essays, peer-review,
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→ next topic (return to step 1).

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2. listen to own and C2-speaker discussions, noting any
"useful language", then compare in class **2,3,4**.

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3. give & receive feedback on performance, **3,4** and do
additional "foci on form/s" **1,2,3,4,5** based on this.

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3. Assessment = learning objectives

A good academic discussant (C1+)...

- demonstrates initiative,

- is very well informed,

- relates well to the topic and to others,

- provides good support and examples,

- develops, highlights, rounds-off points appropriately,

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3. Results – course outcomes

- improvement of every student's overall grade.

- fewer mistakes and broader range of g&v and pronunciation (reduced number of corrections).

- improved knowledge concerning all topics (excellent grades for essay content).

- In most cases, better flow and interaction.

- improved motivation, autonomy, self-awareness, critical thinking (results of student questionnaires).

3. Student feedback on discussions

Great, well-argued discussions.

Possibility to hear different perspectives.

Very helpful!

A real situation – the aim of language learning! Good!

Puts your skills to the limit and forces you to apply them.

You have to figure out what you want to learn – that's a thing I appreciate a lot!

Very helpful to speak freely.

Sometimes hard to concentrate and understand.

Discussions were great! Maybe a little longer?

Mind-bogglingly good! I am definitely going to sign up for another course with assessed discussion.

3. Student feedback on course

I really felt my improvement from one discussion to the next.

The fact that it's assessed acts as an incentive.

Recording the discussion was helpful.

It's good to be aware of the way subjects are broached in other countries.

The comparison with C2 speakers was helpful – learning by looking and listening.

The writing phase to go deeper into the subject is a very good idea.

The writing was useful, with more experience, to build the argumentation.

Essays allowed us to collect our ideas and those we picked up in the discussions.

I learned so much about the topics as well as improving my English.

4. Conclusion

Course designers should:

- develop **'tasks'** (see Ellis, 2009) …

- … as the basis for a whole course

(**'task-based'**, not 'task supported'),

- adhere to theoretical principles,

- include pre- and post-tasks, and foci on form,

- and link assessment to tasks, in order to …

… **foster critical (and creative) thinking !**

5. Q & A

Over to you …

Thank you.

References

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