Teachers’ task implementation: a longitudinal case study

Jeanne Rolin-Ianziti
(The University of Queensland)

ABSTRACT

Although research on Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has described the principles of the approach (Long 1985; Ellis 2003) and offered recommendations on how to implement TBLT (Willis & Willis 2007), there are only a few studies investigating teachers’ use of tasks in the classroom environment (Samuda 2009). The present paper reports the findings of a case study that examines how two teachers of beginning French at tertiary level implemented two similar tasks into the classroom at two distinct moments in the academic year. The tasks are extracted from a task-based textbook, namely Rond Point (Labascoule et al. 2004). The purpose of the study is not, however, to assess the worth of the textbook but to investigate which pedagogical practices the teachers developed around the tasks in order to adapt them to the classroom context. The study analyses data collected through classroom observations as well as pre- and post-class time discussions in which the two teachers planned and assessed their teaching. The findings reveal an evolution in the teachers’ procedures over the academic year from teaching to the “task-as-work plan” (Breen 1987) (or following the instructions in the textbook) to developing a pedagogical approach to teaching with tasks. The study concludes by stressing the importance of the teacher contribution to TBLT implementation, though it concedes that the findings cannot be generalised before additional teacher research is carried out in other educational contexts.

Introduction

Examining how teachers proceed when using tasks is important in the light of criticisms that have been addressed towards Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Sheen 1994; Swan 2005; Van den Branden 2006). Such an examination not only allows us to assess the pedagogical worth of TBLT (Samuda & Bygate 2008), but, more importantly, helps uncover the measures practitioners deem necessary in order to work successfully with TBLT. An examination of practitioners’ use of tasks is particularly needed now in view of the recent appearance of commercial textbooks that claim to implement TBLT. These textbooks typically require that practitioners reflect on how to adapt designed tasks to instructional settings. The purpose of the present article is to report the findings of a case study
investigating which actions two teachers undertook when introducing two similar tasks into their teaching context.

At the outset of this report definitions are needed in order to clarify terms such as “task” and “task-based language teaching”. In the case of task, there are so many definitions of the term (among others Candlin 1987:10, Long 1985: 89, Ellis 2003:9-10, Samuda & Bygate 2008:69, Skehan 1998:95) that deciding on the meaning of the concept is a challenge in itself. For our purpose, the term will refer to a student-centred activity the performance of which encourages students to play an active role in their learning and involves the use of all aspects of the second language (vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, discursive features), thus engaging the learners in “real world” language use – that is in communication as it is practised outside of the classroom. Therefore a task has a primary focus on meaning and not on form as in traditional grammar exercises or role-plays that aim at practising previously introduced grammatical points or communicative functions. Finally, a task must have a clearly defined outcome, which is specified in the task instructions and which the students must present in public after task completion. Although for some researchers (Long 1985:89) the outcome may be non-linguistic (for example a piece of music), for us a task outcome must be communicative and includes for example the presentation of an oral report.

The notion of task may be the main organising principle of syllabus design. If such is the case, the content of the syllabus is not organised around a series of preselected grammatical items (grammar syllabus) or a number of previously chosen communicative functions (Communicative Language Teaching syllabus). Instead the task is the central unit of TBLT, the syllabus of the approach being organised into a series of tasks regrouped into teaching units. Consequently the organisation of a TBLT textbook typically includes various types of tasks, each task mainly comprising input (usually oral or written documents) and instructions to learners on what to do with the input (Ellis 2000:195).

1. Previous research on tasks
There are broadly two main research areas on tasks. The first is in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). It investigates the potential of task features (level of cognitive demands on learner) or task conditions of implementation (planning or repetition of the task) to elicit certain types of language performance (Bygate & Samuda 2005; Yuan & Ellis 2003; Robinson 2001; Skehan 1996; Swain & Lapkin 2001). Studies of this kind usually require learners to perform tasks in dyads outside of the classroom environment. To our knowledge only one study (Samuda 2009), aimed at showing the impact on students’ L2 development of the teacher’s introduction of ‘form focus instruction’ (Doughty & Williams 1998), has correlated the use of a task to L2 acquisition within the classroom environment. Our study, however, is not situated within SLA but within a second area of research that deals with TBLT implementation in educational contexts. Within this second area, which concerns more directly language teaching itself, a number of books have advocated the use of tasks either as support to engage learners in communication while using other teaching approaches (Ellis 2003), or as the central unit of syllabus organisation and instruction (Nunan 2004; Van den Branden 2006; Willis & Willis 2007).

Even though some of those books (Van den Branden 2006) include studies investigating how TBLT works within particular teaching contexts, additional classroom research is nevertheless needed for two main reasons. First it is generally recognised in research that task users (students and teachers) transform tasks planned by designers when they enact them in a specific setting (Coughlan & Duff 1994; Ellis 2000; Samuda 2009). In Breen’s words, the teachers convert “task-as-work plan” into “task-in-action” in the classroom (Breen 1987:24-25). A second reason for more research concerns criticisms that
have been levelled against TBLT by some educators (Sheen 1994; Swan 2005). For TBLT sceptics, the approach has been imposed from above by theoreticians, and its pedagogical worth should be questioned. However, those sceptics do not consider the teacher’s mediation role, which has not been fully investigated so far. Only further studies on the teacher’s contribution can help assess the pedagogical value of TBLT, as such value partly depends on the procedures teachers introduce in the classroom to ensure the effectiveness of the approach.

The main purpose of the present study is to look into those procedures through an examination of how two teachers implemented two similar tasks into the classroom environment, with the tasks being introduced at two distinct moments in the academic year. Using the framework of a case study, which presents those procedures from the teachers’ perspective, and looks at how they implemented TBLT in a particular context, the study investigates:

1. how the two teachers interpreted the two tasks prior to teaching;
2. which pedagogical practices they developed around the tasks’ instructions and why they made the decision to develop those practices and;
3. how they assessed the pedagogical worth of their task implementation after teaching.

2. The study

2.1 Context
The study was conducted in an introductory French course taught in an Australian university. The course aims at developing basic proficiency in the four language skills and is taught by three to five teachers in charge of approximately 200 students divided into groups of 20 to 25. Two teachers participated in the study: T (coded name for “teacher”) and TR (coded name for “teacher-researcher”). T, a novice teacher, was selected on a voluntary basis and was teaching the course for the first time. TR (the author of this article) was an experienced teacher (about 40 years of teaching) as well as the researcher who designed and conducted the study.

2.2 Data

2.2.1 The tasks
The two tasks come from two distinct teaching units of the same commercial textbook Rond Point published in Europe through a French-Spanish collaboration: task 1 is extracted from unit 2 and task 2 from unit 9. In the introduction to the textbook (Labascoule et al. 2004:2), the authors claim to have implemented the task-based approach (la perspective actionnelle) recommended in the Common European Framework of Reference. Moreover, they state that the textbook objectives are to develop language acquisition by fostering “authentic communicative processes” through having recourse to “a didactic sequence based on communicative tasks” (Labascoule et al. 2004:2). A look at the body of the textbook, in which each teaching unit lists about 12 tasks, each of which contains pictorial, written or oral documents with instructions to learners on what to do with the documents, suggests that the textbook does meet the objectives stated in the introduction.
2.2.2 Data collection
The classroom data were collected at two different periods over the year 2008. The following table summarises the collection methods, dates and the data used for the study.

Table 1: Database

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Rond Point Materials</th>
<th>Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observation 1</td>
<td>9 &amp; 14/4/2008</td>
<td>Task 1</td>
<td>Audio-taped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transcribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post discussion 1</td>
<td>16/4/2008</td>
<td>Task 1</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson plan</td>
<td>13/10/2008</td>
<td>Task 2</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation 2</td>
<td>15/10/2008</td>
<td>Task 2</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post discussion 2</td>
<td>15/10/2008</td>
<td>Task 2</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two periods of data collection, both including TR classroom observations of T and a post discussion between T and TR, occurred in 2008: one in April when T was teaching task 1, then a second in October when T was covering task 2. In addition, the second set of data contains the recording of the discussions leading to the lesson plan prepared by T and TR prior to the teaching of task 2. All data were audio-taped and transcribed.

2.3 Data analysis
As is commonly done in qualitative research (Duff 2008:159-163), we established categories of analysis that allowed us to observe teaching practices during class time, and also to code the transcripts. In order to select the categories, we first had recourse to the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching Scheme (COLT Scheme), devised by classroom researchers to observe language instruction (Spada & Fröhlich 1995). We chose three main categories from the Scheme: the on/off category, the pedagogical activity category and the participant organisation category.

The on/off task category was selected in order to observe the students’ classroom behaviour and to assess the degree of student involvement in task performance. Students were classified as either “on-task” when they interacted in groups or with the teacher about the task, or “off-task” when they talked about topics unrelated to the task or performed individually assigned tasks such as consulting the dictionary to make up vocabulary lists.

The pedagogical activity category was chosen because it allowed us first to observe teacher behaviour when implementing the tasks’ instructions, and then to understand how T converted those instructions into teaching categories. The COLT Scheme considers the category of “activity” as the basic unit of instruction stating that “activities […] constitute the instructional segments of a classroom” (Spada & Fröhlich 1995:14). The Scheme provides a list of examples for the category including “a drill, a translation task, a discussion or a game” (Spada & Fröhlich 1995:14). However, we did not find those examples in our data (probably due to the innovative features of TBLT) and we had to refer to other classroom research in order to analyse the pedagogical activities the teachers implemented during task performance in our context. In particular, Canadian scholar Claude Germain’s work (1999) provided us with a number of theoretical constructs to describe teaching activities such as teacher presentation or correction. Other categories emerged from our data during the classroom observations and the analysis of the transcripts. The final scheme of activities is shown in Table 2. While the left column lists the categories previously defined by research, the right column comprises the categories that emerged from the data:
Table 2: scheme of activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous categories</th>
<th>Data-driven categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Giving instructions:</strong> one participant (usually the teacher) instructs on how to perform the task.</td>
<td><strong>Searching for information:</strong> participants (usually the students) gather information through reading or listening documents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exploiting a document:</strong> one participant (usually the teacher) asks questions about a written or oral document.</td>
<td><strong>Planning a class report:</strong> participants (usually the students) plan a report to be delivered to the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presenting new linguistic items:</strong> one participant (usually the teacher) introduces new vocabulary items, grammar points, communicative functions or pronunciation rules.</td>
<td><strong>Reporting to class:</strong> one participant (usually a student) reports the outcome of an activity to the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Correcting errors:</strong> one participant (usually the teacher) corrects erroneous utterances.</td>
<td><strong>Performing the task:</strong> participants (usually the teacher and the students) perform the task together.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third category labelled “participant organisation” or “the way in which students and teacher are organised” to communicate in the classroom (Spada & Fröhlich 1995:14) was selected so that we could analyse our data with a view to uncovering the classroom organisation for each of the pedagogical activities implemented in the classroom. The aim was also to assess to what extent some activities were more successfully performed in groups than others or, vice versa, which ones required a teacher-led organisation to be successful. The category was partly redefined during the observation and data analysis processes and we ended up with the following sub-categories:

- Teacher to the class: the teacher interacts with the whole class (T > class)
- Teacher to student: the teacher speaks to an individual student (T> S)
- Students in groups to teacher: students work in groups and some ask questions to the teacher; the teacher presents new items upon student request (SSS1 SSS2… > T)
- Student to class: an individual student speaks to the class including the teacher (S > class + T)

The application of the two categories of “activity” and “participant organisation” to our data revealed a sequence of pedagogical activities with corresponding classroom organisation that the two teachers developed from task 1 and task 2 instructions. The results are reported below in Tables 4, 5 and 6. As for the analysis of the pre- and post-teaching discussions, we selected key passages in the transcripts where T and TR plan T future teaching and/or reflect on T’s previous teaching.

3. Findings
To present the findings, we will follow up the actions that T and TR took over the year in order to implement tasks 1 and 2 in the classroom. These actions are in part formulated at the outset of the present study (see above). They include; first T’s and TR’s interpretation of the two textbook tasks; second, T’s teaching to “task 1-as-work-plan” – that is, following the textbook instructions for task 1; third, T’s and TR’s lesson plan writing prior to teaching task 2 (after an assessment of T’s teaching to “task 1-as-work-plan”); and, finally, T’s implementation of the task 2 lesson plan in the classroom.
3.1 Teachers’ interpretations of the two tasks
Before teaching, T and TR interpreted Rond Point task 1 (Labascoule et al. 2004:22-23) and Rond Point task 2 (Labascoule et al. 2004:92-93). The two tasks, labelled in the textbook tâches ciblées (final tasks), were both situated at the end of their respective teaching units after the students had performed a number of tasks. For us, those tasks had provided the students opportunities to develop the linguistic resources needed to complete task 1 and task 2. Both tasks were therefore building upon previous tasks, and the success of their completion depended on the performance of the previous tasks. This interpretation is clear in T’s following statement to the class when introducing task 1:

Extract 1:
T: the target task is at the end when you use everything you have learned over the course of the unit (Observation 1).

After teaching a couple of the textbook units, however, we realised that the final tasks could be implemented in the classroom independently from preceding tasks in the unit. Some linguistic resources but not all those needed to accomplish the final task were introduced through the completion of the previous tasks. Above all, both tasks had similar sets of instructions and documents. They also required students to accomplish similar actions. Similarities are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Interpretation of textbook tasks 1 and 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task 1 input</th>
<th>Task 1 instructions</th>
<th>Task 2 input</th>
<th>Task 2 instructions</th>
<th>Tasks 1 and 2 actions</th>
<th>Tasks 1 and 2 skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written and pictorial documents on wedding guests</td>
<td>Match written passages with pictures</td>
<td>Written document on a French city’s problems</td>
<td>Underline problems in written document</td>
<td>Selecting information in written document</td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation on wedding guests</td>
<td>Listen to the conversation on wedding reception seating</td>
<td>Radio survey on inhabitants opinions on city problems</td>
<td>Listen to radio survey and take notes</td>
<td>Selecting information in oral document</td>
<td>Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information selected from written and oral documents</td>
<td>Decide on wedding reception seating</td>
<td>Information selected from written and oral documents</td>
<td>Decide on 4 most important problems</td>
<td>Use the information to make decisions</td>
<td>Writing Speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information selected from written and oral documents</td>
<td>Decide on wedding reception seating</td>
<td>Information selected from written and oral documents</td>
<td>Decide on use of city budget to remedy problems</td>
<td>Use the information to make decisions</td>
<td>Writing Speaking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A horizontal reading of Table 3 shows similarities in input (columns 1 and 3), and in instructions (columns 2 and 4) for each task. Students are first instructed to read documents – the written and pictorial descriptions of guests invited to a wedding for task 1, and a newspaper article describing the imaginary French city Villefranche-sur-Garence for task 2. Then they match each guest’s written and pictorial description in task 1 and underline the urban problems (pollution, traffic, criminality) reported in the article in task 2. The second row indicates that students are subsequently directed to listen to an oral document (a
conversation in task 1 and a radio survey in task 2) and to take notes on the wedding reception seating (discussed in task 1 conversation) and on the city inhabitants’ opinions on which problems are most important (task 2). The third and fourth rows show that students reuse the information previously collected in the documents to make decisions: in task 1 they must decide on the seating for the wedding reception, and in task 2, firstly, they select which of the city problems are most severe and second, they plan the Villefranche-sur-Garence city council budget allocating out money to solve each selected problem.

A vertical reading of columns 5 and 6 highlights the similarities as well as the sequential organisation of both tasks. There is a progression in the instructions in relation to which language skill is being practised, as well as to which action the students must accomplish. First, the students work on reading and listening, and perform simultaneously the actions of selecting information from the written and oral documents. They subsequently develop writing and speaking in order to accomplish the same action – that of reusing the selected information to make decisions (on table seating for task 1 and on the degree of the city problems’ importance and budget for task 2). There is also a similar progression in terms of learning and actions. While students have the opportunities to acquire L2 through exposure to input when gathering information, they reuse the L2 linguistic resources introduced via reading and listening when engaged in accomplishing the decision-making tasks. As for actions, students first inform themselves about the wedding guests (task 1) and city problems (task 2) before deciding on table seating or prioritising the problems and allocating money to correct the problems. The sequence is chronologically organised around instructions that help develop acquisition (L2 appropriation before L2 production) and that progress from receiving information to making decisions with the information.

### 3.2 Teachers’ teaching to “task 1-as-work-plan”

As the instructions seemed logical to us, we decided to teach to the “task-as-work-plan” when implementing task 1 – that is to follow the sequence of textbook instructions. While teaching to “task 1-as-work-plan” in the classroom, T performed a recurrent set of pedagogical activities (see table 4 middle column) involving two main types of classroom organisation (see table 4 right column).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task 1 instructions</th>
<th>Pedagogical activities</th>
<th>Classroom organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Match written passages with pictures</td>
<td>Giving instructions</td>
<td>T &gt; class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performing task</td>
<td>SSS1 SSS2… &gt; T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presenting new items upon student request</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to the conversation on wedding reception seating</td>
<td>Giving instructions</td>
<td>T &gt; class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performing task</td>
<td>T &gt; class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decide on wedding reception seating</td>
<td>Giving instructions</td>
<td>T &gt; class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performing task</td>
<td>SSS1 SSS2… &gt; T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presenting new items upon student request</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4: Pedagogical activities and classroom organisation for task 1**
When following task 1 instructions (reproduced in the left column), T performs three similar pedagogical activities. First, she instructs the class on how to complete the task (“giving instructions”); second, she moves around the room when the students “perform the task” in groups and “presents” new linguistic items when the students request her assistance; third, she performs the task with the class. The students then perform the task twice in two different classroom organisations: first in groups with the help of T, and second in a teacher-fronted classroom organisation when they answer T’s questions about the task. The following extract from our data in which T leads the discussion on table arrangements, illustrates how T interactively “performs the task” (see Table 4: last activity, last row, middle column):

**Extract 2:**

T: on va regarder la table d’honneur. On a Thierry (writing on the board) et Irène
S: et Colette et Jean-Luc
T: Colette et Jean-Luc (writing on the board)
S: et Denise et Pierre
T: (writing on the board) Denise et Pierre. D’accord. Alors Thierry et Irène sont à la même table. Pourquoi?
S: parce qu’ils
T: parce qu’ils parce qu’ils. Parfait. Moi je demande pourquoi Thierry et Irène. Et vous répondez (writing on the board) parce qu’ils sont parce qu’ils sont parce qu’ils sont amoureux. […] (reading what is on the board). Thierry et Irène parce qu’ils sont amoureux. (Observation 1)

As she performs the task with the class, T first writes the seating arrangement for *la table d’honneur* on the board under student dictation and then instructs students to give reasons why they have decided guests such as Thierry and Irène should be seated at the same table: “moi je demande pourquoi Thierry et Irène. Et vous répondez”. Then she (not the students) gives the outcome of the task (the reason for the seating): “parce qu’ils sont amoureux.”

Teaching to the “task-as-work-plan” had three effects on students’ and T’s behaviour in the classroom. It affected first the students’ motivation; second, the students’ engagement with the documents; third, classroom management. We will consider each point.

The observation of the students’ behaviour in class revealed an uneven engagement with task completion; this was especially the case when students were doing group work. While about half of the students were on task asking T many questions; the other half was off task: they were, for example, talking among themselves in English about matters unrelated to the task or they were individually drawing up vocabulary lists. The reasons for the uneven level of motivation were discussed in the follow up interview. One reason given by T relates to the difficulty of monitoring large classes:

**Extract 3:**

T: it is impossible with a class of twenty people, when they are in small groups, to make sure that everyone is staying to the task and actually doing what they are asked to (Discussion 1).

Another reason for the mixed motivation was that some students had insufficient linguistic resources to enable them to meet the task requirements. The lack of linguistic resources meant that some students could not complete the task, nor could they interact in L2 when working in groups. Thus T was in the difficult position of having to present models for questions and answers during group work, to help students speak French and reduce a high amount of L1 use. She also had to simplify the task on the spot, for example by discouraging
the students from writing full sentences. Such was the case when the students were working in groups on the seating arrangements:

**Extract 4:**
T: I actually had to present most of the time the way you would respond to the question and the kind of questions you would ask. I was trying to have students give reasons why they would put people together. A lot of them were trying to construct in written French the full sentence. But I told them to focus on the idea of parce que to give reasons and not so much on the entire sentence (discussion 1).

In addition to an uneven engagement with the task, there were cases of wrong engagement with the materials. Some students did not have the necessary learning strategies to complete the task in L2. This was particularly the case when they read written documents. Instead of reading selectively to meet the task requirements, they translated the text word-for-word, as did one student whose behaviour T describes in the following words:

**Extract 5:**
T: I remember seeing a girl […] she would say ‘Eric Laffont frère du marié brother of the groom 30 ans thirty years old célibataire single.’ So she knew exactly the meaning in French but she felt the need to translate aloud in English what everything meant, which I thought was quite strange because if she already knew what they meant in English or French why would she need to translate? (Discussion 1).

Teaching to the “task-as-work-plan” also had an effect on classroom management. The pace of the class was slow, as a large amount of time was spent on group work (the students spent 20 minutes on the matching task and 57 minutes on the seating arrangement). This large amount was in part due to difficulties related to the presentation of new linguistic items: T had to teach the same rules to different groups (for example she taught the distinction between ils ont and ils sont seven times during the seating arrangement task). The classroom organisation, in groups, also constrained her to go back and forth from talking to a group to talking to the whole class. When she was asked why she did this, T answered:

**Extract 6:**
T: With the going back and forth during the group stage, I do that to cover points that either I have been asked a few times for an answer to it [sic] (so I go and put it on the board so everyone knows it), or if they ask me a question about a word that I know that they have not learned. Because I was quite surprised: a lot of them do not ask questions. There were a lot of words that they had never seen before and not many of them asked me the meaning (Discussion 1).

The group work setting made the presentation of new items not only difficult to manage in the classroom space (going from the group to the board) but also necessary, as T had to cater to the needs of the students who did not ask questions.

### 3.3 Teachers’ planning task 2
As our assessment of task 1 implementation led us to the conclusion that there had been uneven motivation, wrong engagement and management issues, we made the decision to
write a lesson plan prior to the teaching of task 2 in the second semester. While writing the lesson plan, we took action on two main issues, first establishing a chronology of pedagogical activities, then deciding which classroom participant would enact each pedagogical activity, as shown in extract 7 from our data:

**Extract 7:**
T : oui t’as raison c’est « lisez et identifiez en soulignant »
TR : alors on a le problème d’établir une chronologie à partir de cette tâche.
T : est-ce qu’il faut peut-être lire le texte avant et puis reprendre le texte pour trouver les problèmes ?
TR : oui je crois. Alors qui va lire le texte ?
T : moi. D’habitude je le faisais seul. Oui je peux le faire et puis en groupes, ils peuvent discuter les problèmes peut-être. Et puis on peut faire une mise en commun (Lesson plan).

In this extract, TR reads the instructions for task 2 (read a newspaper article on Villefranche-sur-Garence and underline the city’s problems in the written document) and interprets the instructions as requiring the students to accomplish two actions: the students “doivent faire deux choses [...] lire et puis souligner les problèmes.” T then proposes to introduce a chronology of three related pedagogical activities (“lire avant”, puis “trouver les problèmes”, “et puis faire une mise en commun”). Then T and TR assign roles to classroom participants for enacting the three activities. TR raises the question of who will read the written document? In her answer, T specifies which participant will accomplish each activity: she will read the text (“moi […] je peux lire le texte”), the students will search for the information in groups (“en groupes ils peuvent discuter les problèmes”), the whole class will discuss the accuracy of the information collected in groups (“et puis on peut faire une mise en commun”).

As shown in Table 5 below, we coded the three pedagogical activities as “exploiting the written document”, “searching for information in the written document” and “reporting the information” (”mise en commun” is French for “report”). All T’s and TR’s lesson plan decisions have been similarly analysed. Table 5 shows the final version of the lesson plan, including the sequence of pedagogical activities devised for task 2 (middle column) and the classroom organisation for each activity (right column).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Lesson plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task 2 instructions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underline city’s problems in a written document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading document aloud Exploiting the document</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In comparison with the sequence for task 1 (see Table 4), the sequence of the lesson plan includes two sets of extra pedagogical activities: first, teacher-led activities (exploiting the documents, presenting expressions for making decisions) and, second, student-centred activities (reading aloud, planning and reporting decisions). T and TR introduced both sets to correct the learning and managerial issues observed during task 1 teaching. While the addition of an activity in which the teacher exploits the documents intends to help students develop reading and listening strategies (as well as select the right information), the introduction of the teacher’s presentation activity aims at preparing the students linguistically to plan and report decisions. As for the three added student reports, their goal is to motivate students to engage in the preceding group activities (searching information and planning decisions). In the reports the students present to the class the outcome of the task they have just completed in groups. It was hoped that the expectation of having to deliver the task outcome to their peers and to the teacher would increase the students’ motivation to complete the task when working in groups.

When writing the lesson plan, T and TR also raise another issue – that of time constraints. They show eagerness to complete task 2 and worry about lacking time (mentioned seven times during the hour and a half long discussion) to introduce all pedagogical activities. In extract 8 (from the end of the lesson plan), this concern led them to consider possible cuts in the first phase of task 2 when the class is instructed to read the written document and underline the city’s problems:

**Extract 8:**

T: j’ai peur qu’on n’ait pas assez de temps pour faire tout cela
TR: qu’est-ce qu’on pourrait couper alors?
T: (referring to the first phase of the task 2) on peut identifier les problèmes pendant qu’on lit le texte.
TR: moi je supprimerais une activité
T: ah d’accord. Laquelle?
TR: Là (pointing to the sequence of pedagogical activities in the lesson plan) […] il y a «lecture des étudiants, exploitation du professeur». Moi j’éliminerais la lecture des étudiants (Lesson plan).

TR suggests cutting the student reading aloud activity (See Table 5 « reading aloud; exploiting document ») whereas T plans to merge the two activities of “exploiting written document” and “searching for information” into one activity.

3.4 Teachers’ implementation of the lesson plan: “task 2-in-action”

Because of time constraints, changes occurred during the implementation. Table 6 outlines the sequence of pedagogical activities (with corresponding classroom organisation) that T enacted in the classroom when teaching with task 2.

### Table 6: Task 2 in action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task 2 instructions</th>
<th>Pedagogical activities</th>
<th>Classroom organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underline the city’s problems in a written document</td>
<td>Giving instructions</td>
<td>T &gt; class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exploiting the document</td>
<td>T &gt; class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performing the task</td>
<td>T &gt; class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to radio survey and take notes</td>
<td>Giving instructions</td>
<td>T &gt; class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exploiting oral document</td>
<td>T &gt; class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presenting expressions for decision making</td>
<td>T &gt; class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decide on 4 most important problems</td>
<td>Giving instructions</td>
<td>T &gt; class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning decisions</td>
<td>SSS1 SSS2… &gt; T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reporting decisions</td>
<td>S &gt; class + T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decide on use of city budget to solve problems</td>
<td>Giving instructions</td>
<td>T &gt; class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning decisions</td>
<td>SSS1 SSS2… &gt; T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Correcting</td>
<td>S &gt; class + T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reporting decisions</td>
<td>T &gt; S + class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Changes included the deletion of some pedagogical activities but also the addition of a key teaching activity. Whereas the lesson plan (see Table 5) had the students search for information in the written document, T led the entire exploitation of the written document in class. Moreover, the students were asked to give two reports out of three designed in the lesson plan. Besides the reduction in the number of pedagogical activities, T enacted in the classroom a teaching activity that she did not perform when implementing task 1 – “correcting” students’ productions. Whereas T’s correction of students’ errors was carried out within each group during task 1, the whole class participated in the correction during task 2. The addition of student reports created the opportunity to promote in the classroom environment not only an important pedagogical activity (correction), but also a particular type of classroom interaction an example of which is reproduced below. In this example, the student presents to the class her group decisions on the four most important city problems after the planning activity:
Extract 9:
T: Et euh S? Qu’est-ce que vous avez? Quel est le problème fondamental?
S: nous croyons que le problème fondamental c’est que la ville manque de vie culturelle et la population s’ennuié (wrong pronunciation: /ã̃µe/)
T: euh
S: Il faut augmenter le nombre de musées, cinémas et installations de loisirs
T: très bien oui. S a dit que ‘la population s’ennuié beaucoup’ (showing the expression previously written on the board during group work). Ça veut dire en anglais is bored. Parce qu’il n’y a pas assez d’installation de loisirs comme des cinémas ou des théâtres ou d’installations sportives aussi. (Observation 2)

In this example of post-task interaction, T provides different types of feedback. First she corrects at an individual level S’s pronunciation and/or grammatical error of the third person of “s’ennuyer” through the recast of the whole utterance “la population s’ennuié.” Second T teaches to the whole class a vocabulary item, the verb “s’ennuyer” (T: “Ça veut dire en anglais is bored”) that she first introduced at the group level to S. Finally, T reformulates S’s ideas about the most important city problem into a syntactically more complex sentence in which she uses the subordinate clause: “parce qu’il n’y a pas assez d’installations de loisir.” In short, the report activity opens in the classroom an interactive space where T provides students with feedback on the outcome of their work after the students have been engaged with meaning when performing the task.

In the follow up discussion, T assessed positively her teaching to the lesson plan. She said:

Extract 10:
T: je suis contente parce qu’ils [the students] ont bien travaillé aujourd’hui. Ils étaient engagés dans [sic] ces activités.
TR: alors est-ce que tu crois que c’est grâce au livre ou grâce à toi ou grâce aux deux?
T: je crois que c’est grâce au livre parce que ces activités sont assez bien faites. Mais c’est aussi grâce à moi et toi parce qu’on a fait le lesson plan. Et je crois que j’étais très organisée comme ça je savais combien de temps j’avais. J’avais prévu combien de temps je voulais passer sur toutes les activités. Parce que si j’étais pas prête je crois que j’aurais passé beaucoup trop de temps sur cette activité (referring to the first activity ‘underline city problems in a written document’). Parce que j’aurais laissé les étudiants se débrouiller tout seuls.
TR: donc tu crois que c’est plus efficace d’avoir cette phase ou tu exploites le document et présentes du vocabulaire?
T: oui c’est ça-
TR: enfin on est d’accord
T: moi je suis d’accord que c’est un problème du livre qui parle tout de suite à l’étudiant et qui donne l’impression que cette phase de présentation n’est pas nécessaire (Discussion 2).

T’s criterion to assess the class relates to the students’ engagement in task completion (“ils ont bien travaillé aujourd’hui”). Both teachers also explain why student behaviour had improved. Apart from the quality of the task (“ces activités sont assez bien faites”), T attributes the improvement to better time management due to prior planning (“j’avais prévu combien de temps je voulais passer sur toutes les activités”). TR emphasises rather the sequential organisation of the pedagogical activities in which the addition of teacher-led
activities (“exploiting documents” and “presenting expressions for decision making”) before
the performance of student-centred activities (“planning” and “reporting decisions”) increases
teaching efficiency (“tu crois que c’est plus efficace d’avoir cette phase où tu exploites le
document et présentes du vocabulaire?”).

TR’s classroom observation 2 also revealed an improvement in students’ behaviour:
the high majority of students were on-task, an improvement in relation to the teaching of task
1. However, there were still instances of low student participatory behaviour such as in the
following example in which T describes two students’ conduct:

**Extract 11:**

T: des étudiants ont fait un groupe de quatre parce qu’il y avait deux filles qui ne
voulaient pas travailler. Quand ça arrive on dit “nous sommes avec eux” et on
présente à la classe ce qu’ils ont fait si bien qu’on a pas besoin de travailler soi-
même (discussion 2).

T’s remark indicates that the implementation of the learner centeredness principle, crucial in
the theory of TBLT, requires further teacher intervention such as for example stressing the
importance of group work to the class or, as TR suggests in the discussion, taking extra time
to ensure that students have formed proper groups.

**Conclusion**

Our study hopefully offers some insights into teacher contribution to task implementation in
the classroom. The evolution in the two teachers’ procedures over the year from teaching to
the work-plan with task 1 to teaching to their lesson plan with task 2 confirms previous
research findings indicating that teachers transform tasks (Breen 1987). It even suggests that
they must shape tasks in order to meet the pedagogical requirements of the classroom. Even if
the task directs the students to accomplish a coherent set of actions (as with the two decision-
making tasks in our study), the teacher still needs to devise a pedagogical approach that suits
the features of the instructional environment. In our context, the two teachers found out after
teaching to the work-plan that they had to play a role at two key moments: prior to teaching
and during class time. Before teaching, they had to develop a lesson plan specifying a
progression of pedagogical activities in parallel to the task’s instructions, assigning roles to
classroom participants and taking time constraints into account. In class, the students’
increased engagement in task completion could partly be attributed to the lesson plan, which
might have contributed to the resolution of managerial problems. Moreover the sequencing of
pedagogical activities in which initial teacher-led activities provided linguistic and strategic
assistance to students, might have better prepared students to work autonomously
subsequently, thus enlisting their participation. The two teachers also realised that they had to
play an active role in the classroom in areas in which they could not prepare beforehand. For
example, they had to motivate further students to work in groups. They also had to
orchestrate classroom interactions resulting from the implementation of new pedagogical
activities. This was the case for example for the interaction in which a student reports the
group decisions and in which teacher and students work retrospectively on the accuracy of
students’ expression.

The findings of our study, however, are not necessarily generalisable to other
contexts. Even though there might be echoes of teaching issues encountered in other contexts
implementing TBLT – such as the issue of motivating students to engage in task performance
or the one of introducing new language (Samuda & Bygate 2006: 193) – the findings reported
in this paper nevertheless represent the experience of two specific teachers with TBLT. This
experience may well not reflect that of teachers working in other educational contexts or even that of all teachers working in our context. Other teachers may not share the views of T and TR, particularly their interpretations of both task 1 and task 2 as decision-making tasks. They might not agree either with T and TR’s decision to rewrite task instructions into a sequence of pedagogical activities. They might not wish to emphasise as much as TR the need to provide students with teacher guidance before they embark on group activities. As no generalisation is possible from the findings of one case study, additional teacher research is needed to bring to light other teachers’ experience with TBLT. Only further research in this area will help deliver sounder conclusions concerning the pedagogical worth of TBLT, and the role played by teachers in implementing the approach.
REFERENCES


